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What Has Personality Got to Do With Relationships?

People seem not to see that their opinion of the world is also a confession of their character.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882)

There's nowt so quare as folk.

—(Yorkshire saying) [translation:

“There is nothing quite so odd or unpredictable as people.”]

Given what I have proposed as a new way to look at relationships—as connected to social order, as based in language and performance, as connected with identity and the persuasion of others, as about the presentation of preferred ways of looking at the world as a whole in the hope of having other people accept those views, as a form of action based on symbols—then several key issues arise. First, what happens to the view that relationships are based on similarity of personality? What is personality, and how does personality influence choice of friends or romantic partner? Second, given that a lot of the research reviewed briefly so far considers the influence of self, attitudes, personality, and disclosure of one’s inner being and private thoughts, how does the new way connect to such a concept as personality? Third, given that many of us believe that our personality is formed to a large extent in childhood, how do our early experiences influence later—apparently free—choices in relationships?

What Is Personality Anyway?

I am not going to spend very long demonstrating that certain types of personality are just more attractive in a given society/social order than others are.

That really is something that common sense gets right. Your society tends to value sociable, outgoing personalities, and people are appreciated for being friendly, affable, agreeable, smiley, approachable, open, happy, and gregarious. Shy, hostile, withdrawn, pugnacious, aggressive, unfriendly, sad, depressed, lonely Scrooges need not apply. It's just obvious to you that society prefers outgoing types, unless you happen to be a shy or withdrawn person who appreciates a bit of peace and quiet most of the time, and finds the noise and hurly-burly of an outgoing style too much to handle much of the time. Some people might typically seek out other quiet folks who will not overload your social experience, although you might like the occasional party with an outgoing, loud friend so that you can get some "secondhand sociability" once in a while; you let him or her do most of the entertaining and loud socializing. You can enjoy being part of it without having to do a whole lot to make it continue or develop. Also, you know that he or she can be counted on to fill awkward silences. So, the shy person is satisfying some human social needs but keeps a bit of a lid on it. Although most human beings like some contact with other people from time to time, some people like more of it more of the time with more people than others do (Bradshaw, 2006). And that brings us to another set of related thoughts about personality and relationships.

If some people are shy and don't generate lots of social interaction or busy social lives, then this is another way of saying that personality might affect the numbers of people that they find attractive in the first place. It also states the obvious, that your personality affects the kinds of people you like. For example, if you are a secure, trusting, and outgoing person, then you will find almost anybody attractive—or at least worth a second look. If you are a nervous sort of person, then you might be attracted only to transparently trustworthy and upright people or may distrust most people and be wary and vigilant in company.

Personality and Connection to Others

Rephrased, this means that your personality affects your ability to connect and also the range of people with whom you can connect. Many people would like to end up with a partner who is at least as socially capable and outgoing as they are (or perhaps a little more so, for shy people). Even so, you tend to see human personality as made up of not just general human needs (Weiss's "provisions," as discussed in Chapter 1) (Weiss, 1974) but also the "spin" given to that by your own personal experiences in life. So if all human beings have needs to connect with other people and personality support is one such need, then you each need some general and some specific support.

In other words, you might get together with other people in order to have your personality shored up and confirmed in *both* a general human way *and* in ways specific to your own experience and way of viewing in the world. Personality is social and personal, and it creates specific relational needs.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Take a look at TV shows such as MTV's *Parental Control* and write down the ways in which personality of the candidates is viewed as likely to influence relationship success or acceptance. Why does our culture—hint, a Western culture—emphasize the importance of personality in relationships?

In Chapter 2, I pointed out that personal orders, relationships, and the world at large are open-ended experiences, unfinished business. What that means is that one of the main problems for us all as human beings who have to interact with other human beings, then, is how to keep understanding others' behavior and how to respond appropriately in light of what turns out in the future. As your experience develops, and as your partners and your relationships unfold, so you know the world differently in these open-ended adventures that affect what you know and how you know it.

Because relationships are unfinished business, no one knows for sure how things will ultimately pan out, and you do not know what conclusive or final sense to make of a partner's behavior at a given time, so you keep talking and trying to uphold a way of seeing the world. It takes time to make sense of people, and you can change your mind about people, fall out of love or fall into reconciliation and forgiveness, come to admire someone you disliked or become bitter enemies with a previously close friend.

Personality Types. Really?

Hold those thoughts and I will connect them to what I have covered in the preceding chapter. Chapter 2 showed you that relationships are ways of knowing the world and that you filter your knowledge through the contacts that you have with other people, connecting your personal order to the social order. The chapter also set up the next step by saying that personality is a way of knowing (that is, a personal order), a way of seeing and simultaneously a way of *not* seeing. A person with paranoid tendencies, for example, sees people and events in a way that is different from the way in which others see them. Paranoids suspect others' motives and see people as threats; extraverts love being with other people and see them as fun and not as threats. In other words, a person who is an extravert knows and experiences the world in a way different from the way a paranoid knows and experiences the world. One way of seeing (the world) is not the other way of seeing (the world).

"Extravert" and "paranoid" are only two sorts of overlay on personality. You have many other overlays, some focusing on how someone behaves (outgoing, reserved); some on how someone feels about other people (friendly, shy);

some on someone's needs (dependent, submissive); and some on someone's general psychology (neurotic, obsessive). Because you use lots of different ways to see or represent a person's layers of personality, any answer to the opening question about personality and relationships therefore has to take a look at these different ways to see what personality is so that you can connect it to relationships.

PERSONALITY AS A GHOST IN THE MACHINE

Philosopher Gilbert Ryle (1949) famously attacked Descartes's belief that each person consisted of a body and a mind, creating a dualism that made people into something parallel to a ghost in a machine. If we see "personality" as something separate from the body in which it exists, then we are making the same mistake. Let's see why.

Are you tense, nervous, quiet, ambitious, lazy, pessimistic, weak, sympathetic, agreeable, confident, strong, adventurous, or self-reliant? When you think of "personality," it is most likely to be in terms of answers to such questions. You may expect to answer yes or no to each possible label and that someone will add up your answers at the end and say "You are an extravert." They might offer some insight into the traits that you possess, indicating that you have certain personality properties or tendencies revealed by the test.

In short, you commonly think about personality as a compilation of sets of characteristics that people have. For example, you know you are thinking about personality when you ask whether someone is optimistic, introverted, or reliable. You also assume that a set of personality characteristics makes the person what she or he is—that it depicts his or her identity. Also, you make judgments about the sort of personality that somebody has, preferring some types to others ("happy" is better than "whiny"!). You also tend to make evaluations of the acceptability of these personality characteristics and use them to decide whether you like the person or not and would like to date or befriend them.

SO WHAT IS PERSONALITY?

People have been trying to work this out for hundreds of years and have come up with lots of different answers. The topic represents a whole field in psychology, so what I say here is necessarily a caricature. But bear with me for a while, because a discussion of the issues helps to change the way you think of personality in relationships.

There have been many ways of looking at personality, and an early observation by Gordon Allport, a key figure in the field, was that "personality is less a finished product than a transitory process. While it has some stable features, it is at the same time continually undergoing change" (Allport, 1955, p. 19).

An important point that this suggests is that the many ways of looking at personality are not necessarily exclusive. In much the same way that you can describe a house as “contemporary” or “ranch style” and also as “facing south” or “well-maintained,” so you can describe a personality in terms of needs, behaviors, ways of thought, or emotional tendencies. You can also see it as an open-ended work in progress for each person.

In broad terms, personality is usually seen by psychologists as a constellation of behaviors and attitudes that are characteristic of a particular individual. Other people see personality as simply an extremely handy way of describing apparent consistency in a person’s behavior—a way for an outsider to see a person as consistent and predictable. In other words (remember Burke’s view of motives from Chapter 2), it is a linguistic tool for observers rather than a wired-in feature of persons being described. So personality is not understood this way as a set of features that a person *has* or the way he or she *is*, so much as a way for outsiders to describe the perceived underlying consistencies in someone’s behavior. Indeed, research (Heider, 1958; Ross, 1977) often shows that you tend to describe others’ behavior in terms of their personality (“She did that because she is just a mean person”), but you are willing to describe your own behavior in terms of situational factors (“I behaved carefully over money in that situation, not because I am an essentially stingy or avaricious person but because I know that my bank balance is low at the moment”).

So, in the modern world, you usually see personality as some sort of ghost that operates your body. When you look shy, it is because the little rabbit inside your head makes you feel insecure; when you are dominant, there is a personality inside of you that operates the switches in a way that makes you masterful, or a “firefighter” part that gets activated to deal with emergencies that you see as threatening.

PERSONALITY AND BODY TYPE

It was not always like this, and in the early 1800s, “character” was thought to be so fixed that it could be easily detected from a person’s physical characteristics. Ancient Greeks and Romans thought that personality came from your stomach or from the various liquids that make up your body—your “humors” (“melancholy” translates as “black bile,” for example). In the early 1800s, Francis Gall presented an atlas of the head, indicating his belief that the development of a person’s brain was the seat of his or her personality and that such development could be detected in the bumps in the shape of his or her skull. This technique (phrenology) supposed that it was possible to detect a person’s degree of, say, ambition by feeling the relevant area of the skull; the bump of ambition would be detected by those skilled in the art of reading such bumps.

The degree of development of the bump and its prominence relative to other areas of the skull alerted the skilled observer to the relevance of ambition to the overall character of the person whose skull was being assessed. Don't laugh. You can still buy phrenology maps and busts on eBay™.

In a somewhat similar idea, Lombroso (1918) supposed that criminal skulls were deformed in ways that indicated a criminal mind. In particular, criminal character was physically represented, Lombroso suggested, by the shape of the skull, beetling brows, length of forehead, and so on. In a modern version of a related idea, people still subscribe to similar beliefs that the face tells you a lot about a person's internal character, a notion that assumes a relationship between mental/behavioral inclinations and physical ones. Lombroso thought that the shape of people's heads and physical characteristics would tell you whether they were criminals; the characteristics that make people criminals would show up on their faces. Think about today's police bulletins and you'll see that unusual facial features (such as scars or deformities) are most often identified when the police are looking for a suspect. When people are armed and dangerous, you expect them to *look* armed and dangerous. When

people who looked quiet and placid beforehand carry out violent acts, then you are apparently more shocked than when violent-looking people do them. So if looks could kill, they probably do!

So you still accept the broad idea that physical characteristics might represent the personality inside. Every time you make a judgment

that somebody who looks good on the outside might have a good personality and be an interesting and likable person, then you are also making the same kind of judgments about personality that Lombroso did. So, again, don't laugh. The idea is one you still use in modified form.

We could also interpret some of Lombroso's approach in a different way from the point of view of this book. Perhaps if someone has a certain set of physical characteristics, then the person may experience the world in a particular way. For example, if a man has a scowling face, then other people may respond to him on the basis of his facial appearance and the fact that he looks hostile and aggressive. Such men may therefore end up being treated as aggressive even if they are actually kind and gentle people. In other words, their facial appearance may lead to particular ways in which they get treated by others, and this may feed back to affect the way in which they actually experience themselves. Perhaps they get used to being treated by other people as if they were aggressive and so the way in which they move about the world may bring about

Listen in on Your Own Life

Listen for police descriptions of wanted suspects. How far do they confirm or challenge the idea that physical features are connected to criminality?

a self-fulfilling prophecy. Responses from other people based on their facial appearance may lead to persons seeing themselves in a particular way. Of course, this would be an example of what was discussed in Chapter 1, namely, that a person's way of being in the world influences his or her way of knowing and vice versa.

The Body and the Ghost Inside

Personality has also been linked to whole body type beyond the shape of the head alone. In such approaches to personality, it is presumed that personality is related to overall bodily structure and that collections of personality characteristics go with and are connected to physical form. A variety of these techniques was available in the work of such theorists as Kretschmer (1931) and Sheldon (1940). Before I describe these approaches, first briefly think whether you would classify yourself as (a) thin, tall, and fragile; (b) soft, round, and fat; or (c) muscular and athletic in build. Now indicate whether you are also (a) nervous, tense, and quiet; (b) dependent, agreeable, and sympathetic; or (c) strong, adventurous, and self-reliant.

Think about your favorite movies and novels. Write down the names of these favorites and then read on. Have you ever thought about the way in which the leading characters in novels and movies are characterized? Start listing the number of such leading characters who are fat or ugly.

Sheldon (1940) came up with an approach to personality that was called **somatotypes**, or body types. The body types corresponded to three predominant types of personality character: *ectomorph* (thin, tall, fragile—seen as tense, nervous, quiet, ambitious, pessimistic); *endomorph* (soft, round, fat—seen as lazy, weak, sympathetic, agreeable, and dependent); and *mesomorph* (muscular and athletic—seen as strong, adventurous, and self-reliant). Sheldon's work linked body type with characteristics of personality, but did this directly and in a deterministic way. That is, he supposed that body shapes linked directly and inescapably to personality. If Sheldon had read Chapter 1 here, then he might consider the possibility that bodily physique affects the ways in which you experience and know the world instead of it determining what people are like. For example, a muscular person can afford to encounter the world in an adventurous and self-reliant way that tall, skinny, fragile people may not be able to do.

Although Sheldon's approach to personality as a physically based feature of persons has few supporters nowadays, stereotypes about it are broadly accepted even today. When you read in William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* that "Yon Cassius has a lean and hungry look; such men are dangerous" (*Julius Caesar*, Act 1,

Scene 2, 193–196), you perhaps do not read it immediately as an endorsement of Sheldon’s stereotypes, nor do you ascribe the view that “fat people are jolly” to the same source, but the underlying stereotype is nonetheless connected. As you shall see later in the book, there is an assumption that personality has some connection to physique, even if it is not an overridingly strong one. For example, people still describe an authoritarian boss as “a *little* Hitler,” making the connection between small stature and an urge to dominate. (In fact, Adolf Hitler was somewhat above average in height, as is evident from contemporary photographs. It was the French Emperor and General Napoleon Bonaparte who was both short and aggressive, and equally unpleasant.)

You also (perhaps too easily) assume that, for example, physically attractive people will have very nice personalities (that they’ll be socially outgoing, lively, fun, and pleasant, for example). There are also negative contrary stereotypes that claim that if someone is too attractive, then she must be “a bitch” or he must be “a player” (Norwood, 2007).

Thus, although many of you would reject the idea that physique *determines* personality, you might still be willing to endorse the idea that physical characteristics have some bearing on how a person behaves—which, after all, is what personality is about. Personality is something that you *do*, and this connects to the idea of performance, which was introduced in Chapter 2. It might also be about how people communicate and about how you know and deal with the world. For example, a simple way of knowing the world (“I can beat it”) might simultaneously lead you to be self-confident and also to work out and develop strong muscles. From that, you would, in fact, physically become a mesomorph with those personality traits and behavioral or performative characteristics.

Is Personality a Way of Knowing?

Let’s take the example of the mesomorphs, connect it to the discussion about personality and the themes in Chapter 1, and try to see how physical shape could connect to a way of seeing and not seeing (“a way of knowing”). Another way of thinking about it is that if you are muscular and strong, perhaps people treat you with a bit more respect than if you are thin, feeble, or delicate. Putting this into the terms introduced in this book, mesomorphs may be more adventurous because that’s the way they get treated by other people—as the sort of muscular persons who will take risks because if other people get in the way, they’re able to brush them aside.

On the other hand, the thin, weak, nerdy people get more experience being disrespected and treated badly by others and therefore become more suspicious of them and reserved in their company. Napoleon Dynamite was a good example. Lacking a strong physical presence, he tended to be an outcast

at school and one who was bullied and treated disrespectfully—vote for Pedro! Many people resonate with this experience, and it would not be surprising that ectomorphs would behave in these ways that reflect not only their physical structure but the way in which they get treated by other people who do not fear them but regard them as odd and feeble. It is a short step to suggest that ectomorphs are lacking in confidence and social power because that's the way other people have treated them when they lack a powerful physical presence. They come to see the world in a particular way because that's how the world treats them.

BODY OF KNOWLEDGE?

Even if there is a physical basis to personality, then, I reinterpret this by suggesting that physical characteristics actually affect the way in which other people treat you. Therefore, the ways in which you feel and act—and hence the way your personality comes across to others—are part of the ways of knowing the world based on your physical embodiment, your physical experience, and the way your social order interprets the personality that lies behind a particular physical frame. Of course, cultures differ in the way in which they treat people's physical appearance, but, interestingly, they also differ in the way in which they attribute personality characteristics to the physique. In particular, cultures differ in their interpretation of whether somebody is attractive or not, and the way in which they get treated as attractive may lead to them behaving in attractive ways. For example, in India, a woman with a roll of fat around her middle is seen as more attractive than a skinny woman, because she's healthy and wealthy enough to become fat, a fact emphasized by traditional Indian dress for women that exposes the midriff and so makes beauty and wealth physically visible.

Physical Structure and Social Orders of Attractiveness

Even within cultures, beliefs about attractiveness can change. Look back at the ways in which film stars from the 1940s and 1950s were seen as attractive, and yet their physical characteristics are different from the ones you would regard as attractive today—women were plumper and men were weathered and had slicked down, greasy hair. Ideal women's sizes in magazines change over time, but the point remains the same: being seen as attractive in a culture leads to a way of knowing the world.

Physical build affects the way the person approaches life and sees and understands it and justifies a whole chapter (Chapter 4) to fill out the detail. Thus, the factors also affect the way the person approaches other people in life and the relationships that can be had with them. It is therefore an example of

personal order of the kind noted in Chapter 2 and its direct connection to relationships. So, even if you see personality in physical terms, personality actually works in the same way as the personal orders that I described in Chapter 2. Physical features are influences on the ways in which you know, experience, and live in the world—the way you understand and perform your self.

Instead of seeing personality as physical or as a bunch of motives or needs or quirky ways of acting, I suggest seeing it as *an expression of what you know*. How a person acts is based on what the person knows as a human being in general and as a person with a background of particular experiences in childhood and beyond. This also affects the way you live in the world. Personality, then, can be seen as a way of knowing and being in the world. This raises two questions: Where do these views come from? and How do they affect our choices?

The Early Years: Formation of Personality and Relationship Style

The physical elements of personality are not the only part of personality relevant to relationships, and a huge influence on your personal order, on your *epistemic*, comes from what you expect other people to be like. This is, of course, something that you learn from interacting with them. Particularly important are your experiences with other people when you were a child.

WHAT CHILDREN LEARN ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE AND THEMSELVES

Another way of looking at personality is in terms of the personal orders that you form on the basis of your early experiences in childhood, first with your parents (or “caretakers”).

Early Life and Later Life Approaches to Relationships: Attachment

Psychologist John Bowlby (1951, 1969/1982) noticed that children brought in as “infant problems” to the hospital tended to react in several different ways to their caretakers. He also observed that the way in which their caretakers treated them was connected with anxiety levels. Most children, especially very young children, usually got distressed if the caretaker went away, although some were completely indifferent. Likewise, they were different in their reactions when the caretaker came back. Some reacted very positively to the reappearance of the caretaker and some were quite indifferent to it.

Children showed different kinds of distress patterns when the caretaker reappeared, some responding positively and some responding negatively or

indifferently. Bowlby's insight was to suggest that there were different attachment styles (i.e., different ways of connecting to other people) that infants learned from interactions with their caretakers.

The importance of the idea comes when it is suggested that these early learned behaviors transfer to later life and to relationships with other people even as adults (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). In short, the way in which children were treated by their caretakers leads to them expecting to be treated the same way by other people later in life when they have adult relationships.

What this comes down to is the idea that some children trust their caretakers and some do not, and that this is based on the way in which the parents have treated them as young children. In time, their personal order for seeing other people is based on how their caretakers treated them, because the caretakers represent the child's first experience of other people, of course. Secure and confident children know that when a caretaker goes away, the absence is temporary, and as soon as the caretaker comes back, he or she will be glad to see the child and will be supportive and loving. This feeling of security about the caretaker specifically tends to promote a broad confidence about the nature of relationships with other people when the child matures and launches out into a larger social context.

Other children may be more anxious about their parent's likely responses. The anxious-ambivalent ones tended to be more uncertain about whether the caretaker would return. They also seemed uncertain regarding what their parent would do when he or she returned, and the children seemed to be in doubt whether they would be treated lovingly. Hence, these children tended to become anxious and tense, and did not respond positively when the caretaker reappeared. They seemed uncertain about whether the parent would treat them well upon return, and they had a much greater level of anxiety about whether the parent's return would provide a warm and loving experience. These kinds of children appeared to have developed a sense of anxious concern about the unreliability and unpredictability of their caretakers. Unfortunately, it seems that they then became inherently suspicious about all sorts of relationships, even later in life.

Early Experiences as Terministic Screens

You do not enter adult relationships as open events; rather, you do so having been shaped by your previous experiences based on childhood. Do I hear "terministic screens" from Chapter 2? I hope so. You should be thinking about the way you have learned to understand other people through the terministic screens provided by this past experience. Your ways of seeing people have also become ways of *not* seeing them (e.g., seeing them as unreliable and *not* seeing them as unconditionally loving).

If you start out learning that you can trust that when parents go away they will come back and be loving and kind to you, then you form a much stronger impression about the likelihood of other people as a whole being trustworthy, and this carries over to later life relationships. If the romantic partner of a secure person goes away for a weekend, then the secure person doesn't worry much and is secure and will not be worried about whether the partner will come back. Secure folks just assume the partner will come back and will not have spent a weekend getting up to no good.

On the other hand, if you are an anxious type, then you may be less secure about the reappearance and may experience intense relational anxiety not only with parents in childhood but also with other adults later in life. One type (secure) feels safe in relationships and trusts partners quite easily, but the other two (anxious) types find it much harder. The anxious ones experience concern, distrust, and suspicion about their partners.

When Two Personal Orders Interact

Note also the interaction effects that go on here. If a secure person is with an anxious one or an anxious avoidant, then the same person—secure in all other relations—can be nervous with the anxious or anxious avoidant person because he or she becomes more aware of how he or she behaves and the way in which it may trigger anxious responses in the partner. Hopefully, the opposite is also true, that the anxious ambivalent person gets more secure with a secure partner. Often, in therapy, it becomes clear that anxious avoidant partners are paired with anxious ambivalent partners, and this creates stress in the relationship.

So, the first point that Bowlby established is that there are differences in infant responses to separation and that these appear to be lasting responses.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Collect people's earliest memories. How many of them would you say are connected to themes of acceptance, rejection, comfort, and insecurity?

PARENTAL BEHAVIOR AND LATER RELATIONSHIPS

As a second point, Bowlby discovered that the parents of these children actually do behave in different ways, and that these differences in behavior could be the important force that led to the different outcomes in the children's behaviors. Bowlby discovered a connection between the way the parents treated their

children and the way the children formed expectations about their relationships. In other words, you could read the parents' behavior as something that made the children secure or anxious—or, in my terms, created in them a personal order about their value to other people at large.

Parental Behaviors and Infants' Personal Orders

The parents of the anxious children behaved in ways that might make people feel anxious—for example, treating the children unpredictably and inconsistently, one minute being warm and loving and the next being distant and cold. The caretakers of the anxious children tended to be rejecting and would leave the children alone when they cried. They avoided physical contact, did not pick the children up, would not cuddle or hold them or investigate the children's needs, or correct any problems. In other words, they tended to be distant and also tended to be the ones who were more rigid and unresponsive to particular circumstances.

Parents of secure children, on the other hand, tended to be very responsive and adaptable, got deeply involved in play with the children, and responded to them appropriately as required by circumstances.

They were predominantly positive in a way that led the parents to be reliably engaged and helped the child to develop a sense of being loved and cared for. Secure caretakers tended to be more flexible in the way they dealt with the children's needs but always with an underlying message of caring and supportiveness.

In both cases, the children got treated in ways that modified their experience of the parents/caretakers and led to an extension beyond that to any relationships with other people, as the children developed a personal order about other people. They started to form also a personal order about their own value to other people and a terministic screen for relationships based on the lens offered by that personal order.

Parental Behaviors and Their Personal Orders

Bowlby managed to identify not only different ways in which babies were treated by their caretakers, but also three different personality styles that were connected with that treatment. His main insight was to recognize the very strong relationship between the behavior of the parent and the responses of the children, and to draw out the implication to the ways in which the children

Question to Ask Your Friends

Can you connect your friends' experiences of childhood to the way in which they see and experience adult relationships?

came to see themselves in the long term. In my terms, Bowlby discovered a fundamental element of an individual's epistemic about relationships—the person's way of knowing other people in close relationships.

Bowlby assumed that what was happening was that the children developed a working model of relationships based on their relationship with the caretaker. The children began to notice a pattern in the way they were treated, and they took that pattern into themselves and saw themselves as the kinds of people who create that kind of response in parents. They developed a working model of themselves and their value to other people one way or another. Secure children learn that they will be protected and cared for. When they go out into the world later in life, they expect that to be what happens to them, and lo and behold, they find that it is. In other words, their epistemic about their value to other people influences the way in which they are treated by other people in the future, because they have formed particular expectations and they evoke relevant responses in others.

Anxious people assume that they will be treated with disrespect by other people, and in later life, this leads them to believe that romantic partners could leave at any moment. Their underlying sense (epistemic) of insecurity develops into a comprehensive style of relationship behavior that leads to them treating and expecting relationships to be of unstable sorts later in life. Ultimately, Bowlby presents the proposition that relationships with people later in life are preconfigured by early experiences to a very large extent. In my terms, a personal order about what to expect is created in early life and remains as the basis of the personal order of expectation about what all relationships will be like.

EARLY ATTACHMENT AND LATER ATTACHMENT

A later psychologist, Kim Bartholomew (1990), pointed out that Bowlby is actually noticing *two* different points when he's talking about the working models: First of all, you have a model of self for other people, that is, you have a model of what other people think about you. Second, you also have a model of what other people are like (see Figure 3.1).

Your Model of Self and of Others

You have a model of yourself as a valuable being or not, and this value extends to your expectations about the way in which you will be treated by others. Your view of yourself as a worthy person depends on the way you feel that you have been treated by other people in the past. Your “model of self” is a model of your value to other people and is represented in the columns of the figure—positive view of self on the left and negative view on the right. The second part

of the model is your assumptions about the trustworthiness of other people, your “model of other.” These are the rows in the figure, positive on the top and negative on the bottom. By working out how these two different models intersect, you end up in a particular square, with one of the four possible types of attachment that Bartholomew identifies.

It is important to understand that these ways of knowing/being self and knowing others are independent: Your sense of your value to other people does not depend on your model of their trustworthiness, and likewise, your sense of the trustworthiness of other people does not depend on your sense of your own value. Therefore, you end up with four types based on the two different assessments.

Effects of These Models

On this system, then, there are two views that a person can take of self (the columns in Figure 3.1) and two views of other people (the rows in Figure 3.1). In my terms, this approach indicates that a person’s way of knowing the world (specifically, the part of the world that deals with relationships with other people) depends on ways of seeing self as a social object in the eyes of other people and also of seeing other people as emotional resources for oneself. As can be seen from Figure 3.1, a person with a positive view of self and a positive

Figure 3.1 Bartholomew’s Model of Attachment

		Model of Self (Dependence)	
		Positive (Low)	Negative (High)
Model of Other (Avoidance)	Positive (Low)	Secure	Preoccupied
	Negative (High)	Dismissing	Fearful

Source: Adapted from Bartholomew, K. (1990). Avoidance of intimacy: An attachment perspective. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 7, 147–178.

view of others will be secure and self-sufficient in relationships. The person has had no formative experiences that lead to a belief that one is *not* a valuable/valued social object and likewise has had no experience of others as being nonaccepting (it makes you sick, doesn't it?). Hence, the person sees self as valuable and also sees others as welcoming, and so the person approaches all relationships with confidence (security).

In contrast, the person with a negative view of self and a negative view of others has learned both that self is not valued and also that self derives its value only from the reactions of other people, who are regarded as largely hostile and unstable or disapproving in their judgments. Hence, this person views relationships with extreme distrust and negativity, preferring to avoid them if possible because they have only proved to be hurtful and threatening experiences in the past.

This person has a dilemma, in that self is undervalued and the person does not trust his or her own assessment of self. Hence, the person needs the judgments, preferably the positive judgments, of other people in order to establish self-worth (i.e., the person is highly dependent on other people for self-concept), needing to approach the very source that has produced only negative experiences in the past. These people (fearful avoidant) are in big trouble in the social world and can be expected to be suspicious yet dependent, and hence insecure and volatile in relationships. Ever met any? Perhaps now you can understand them a little better and be a little more forgiving. Their personal order sees relationships as threatening and of little value.

Emotion and interaction styles are both presumed to be affected by such epistemics/ways of knowing and so result in particular affiliative behaviors or tendencies in relationships. Dismissive and fearful people will avoid contact with others for the most part, although fearful people are torn. According to Bartholomew, these personality styles are directly related to the ways you interact with others and how they have interacted with you in the past. Your reactions are based on the ways you expect/know that others will respond to you.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Do you think it is reasonable to assume that experiences in infancy determine later relationships? Are we prisoners of our past, or can we make changes and reject our past, turn over a new leaf, and adopt a new style of relating? If attachment theory is right, should all of our experiences in relationships of the same type always be the same kind of experiences? In your own life, have all your romantic attachments been the same?

A REINTERPRETATION OF ATTACHMENT

We can put Bartholomew's system into the framework proposed in Chapters 1 and 2. In Chapter 2, I drew a distinction between action and motion: The way you behave toward others in relationships is a reflection of your ways of understanding them and the world. As such, your actions (which require thought and a framing exercise where you actually think about what is going on) are reactions to the beliefs that you have about what the world has in store for us. Hence, your performance of relating is a reflection of your knowledge and understanding of the world of relating and other people. See? Your performance depends on your assessments of others as welcoming or not. Therefore, an attachment style can be reconstrued as a form of *action* of the sort described in Chapter 1, rather than as simple reaction/motion.

Attachment as Unfinished Business

In this way, then, and starting only from the idea that personality is relevant to the ways in which we perform relationships, attachment styles are means of relating your own and also others' ways of thinking (i.e., a meshing of personal orders), and also fitting one's relational behavior into socially accepted formats (performing relationships within a social order). Any personality style is a mixture of performance and knowledge that frames and drives the performance, and so it involves particular communication styles as well. When you note that extraverts are loud and active and that introverts are sheepish and mellow, then you can recognize that the performance of these two styles of communication is, in fact, based on different understandings of the world of other people and how you should move around in it.

In short, you can reinterpret the attachment approach—and other forms of personality description—as being about ways of knowing the world. One's expectations of others are based on what one knows or has learned from experiences in the past. Thus, one's personality can be seen as a way of knowing and a way of representing the world (to others as well as to oneself). Which one are you? Actually, it is probably better for you to think about other people you know and where to categorize them or else you can go crazy trying to categorize yourself and live with the result. You can probably think of someone that you know who fits into these categories one by one. Secure people do not seem to worry about relationships, and mostly they are people who are happy with all the relationships they have got and so forth.

Attachment as a Personal Order

What does this have to do with the previous chapter and action versus motion? *Motion* is just the movements/behaviors of people, and *action* requires

that meaning is given to behaviors so that they are seen as having purpose or thought behind them. Well, you can see attachment style as a form of action. You could see personality just as motion (the instinctive way people act), and just notice that someone is muscular—or you could see it as action. It's the *meaning* that they put on being thin, being fat, being muscular, being rejected by other people, or being confident about their own value that makes the difference about how they experience the world epistemically. Also, you might think these could be healthier and more self-preserving choices that many may make. Attachment research suggests otherwise: that your reactions to relationships are *motion*, internalized reflex responses created by early experience.

In my approach, however, attachment style becomes an action and a way in which you understand how the world is. If people treat you in a dismissive kind of way, why not treat them in a dismissive way? If you feel confident that you're OK and people can't see it, well, screw them! So you become dismissive, and if you dismiss them, they dismiss you. Therefore, it becomes a way of action and a way of thinking and an epistemic in a way that compiles your personality. In short, it becomes something that is a way of thinking and a way of seeing and being in the world.

Of course, the way that you know about people's style is to listen carefully to what they say about life, relationships, and everything. When people tell you stories where everything comes out for the best or everything is a kind of fairy tale where those who go through hardships come out well in the end, you can be confident that you are listening to a secure person, where fantasy matches reality. On the other hand, the friend I mentioned before who keeps on telling me about all her problems in life, all the misfortunes that happen, seems to represent life as rejecting her and the world as a fearful place to be. Her account of being in the world is a fearful one, and it represents her personal order.

ARE CHOICES DRIVEN BY PERSONALITY?

Remember that one of the common beliefs that I used to open Chapter 1 is that people choose one another as partners on the basis of personality similarity (something also derived from Weiss's provisions)? Let's try to connect the previous sections to this idea by asking the question that titles this chapter. If we can reconceive personality as an embodied set of experiences (personal orders that are performed in everyday life) from childhood and later experiences, then does this revise our view of how choices are driven by personality?

Personality as a Personal Order

Personality is less a collection of traits than a personal order or way of knowing. In that case, personality and relationships are both about the major

need to establish the validity to others of one's rhetorical vision (personal order) of the world.

Given that there are general ways of thinking about relationships that satisfy broad human needs of both assistance and emotionality, what directs you toward particular other people with whom to form close attachments?

Interesting how something so common can also be complex and unfamiliar when seen in new ways! You have different multiplex relationships, but there is always uncertainty and ambiguity about them in some ways because of their open-endedness. There is continual tension between desire for inclusion and membership, on one hand (Weiss's provisions in Chapter 1), and a desire for autonomy and freedom on the other, both a need to be helped and the need to help without losing independence as a result of either process. You want and need other people, but you have a personal identity that you don't want cramped. There is a neat, impenetrable connection between the way you see yourself as a separate being and the way other people make you who you are. Both the "separate being" and the "who you are" are other ways of thinking about the notion of personality. What you need now, then, is a way to explore the role of personality in relationships. You *know* that personality is connected to relationships, so how does it work?

Personality in a Social Order

In a Western world, you are quite used to the idea that individuals are egos inside a bag of skin and that these egos are a personality that goes out into the world in search of "growth" and "self-development," and to better the world also through connection with other people (or personality support in Weiss's views, Chapter 1). The main challenges for people are to make sense of the world, better themselves, and connect with other people in the process, or, indeed, as a major part of those other two processes. It is generally assumed, then, that you start with a personality that develops and is improved by other people, and in turn can, through connection, serve the purpose of helping others to improve themselves as well.

Although people often break down in French cafés in an agony of existential angst and worry about who they really are, the notion of personality is clearly one that involves a consistency of *behavior* as well as of thoughts, expectations, and personal orders. Its ability to help you connect to other people also depends on the performance of characteristics that others will like.

Obviously, in contrast to my suggestion that life and relationships are both unfinished business, this view presumes that you are relatively stable in some ways and that you both possess and can let other people know that you possess likable traits such as a sense of humor, loyalty, or capacity for loving. In terms

Personality has not always been the basis for selection of friends and companions. In the agricultural economies of 400 years ago, people could be friends because they helped one another and not simply because they liked one another's personality.

of what I wrote in Chapter 1, that would be stability in terms of the way you know the world, present yourself to the world, and assume stability in others, even the weird ones. On this basis of optimism and stability, you set out on your journey of discovery of lovely partners. Common sense tells you that you will do it on the same basis—the basis of their personality.

Common sense is clear that there is some connection between personalities and relational success, but it bets both ways (for example, “birds of a feather flock together” says one piece of common sense, but “opposites attract” says something contrary). What sorts of “relationships” do you mean, anyway (romances, friendships, brothers, sisters, bosses, co-workers, in-laws)? Are you assuming that *all* kinds of relationships are influenced by personality in exactly the same way? Common sense does not tell us.

How Does Personality Connect to Relationships?

Even if you focus on personality in close relationships only, then obviously you have a lot of scope about types of relationships to think about because there are so many sorts of close attachments, such as parent-child attachments, romantic attachments, and friendship. In each of these, you need to think about possible stages of relationships as they progress and endure: starting, middle, and later stages or simply steady changes over the lifetime of the relationship. First dates, long-term dating, and marriage may all be stages in the same relationship, and you probably expect at least *some* different influences to be important at each stage. The sorts of personality characteristics that make someone an attractive date (lively, fun, gregarious) might be less important when it comes to marriage when you want someone who is basically reliable, supportive, and practical, and who could make a good, solid, reliable, devoted, involved parent.

ROMANCE AND ATTRACTION

Let's start with romance and attraction. If you think that personality can be relevant to the attraction stage of relationships at all, it is partly because few people nowadays would have much trouble believing it—even though some other societies (social orders) do not allow individual choice of romantic relationships and a partner's personality is less important than, say, status or duty

to parents, or religious or tribal or group membership. But limiting discussion to societies where freedom of choice is the basis for relationships, then you can look at ways in which such choice might be based on personality.

How Romance Is Kindled

Romance can serve as a working example to help you think through the way relationships start. You naturally tend to think that romance has a cause, such as physical attraction or personality or attitude similarity. If you look at the dating agencies, then many of these characteristics get emphasized in the profiles that people fill out in order to become members of the dating group. You think nothing of listing your favorite music, food, or films; your religious beliefs; your physical characteristics; your social preferences; and a number of other features that may display your personality and that you think may make you more attractive to someone else or help you to match them.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

How do you feel about the personality of Dr. Gregory House on the TV show *House*? He is obviously a grouchy, insecure, arrogant, insensitive person, but also a very gifted physician with some great one-liners. If he is such a bad person, then why do people watch the show?

Such features might include “lively” or “outgoing” or “happy” or certain kinds of attitudes and preferences that display your nature (conservative, religious, freewheeling, vegetarian). Physical characteristics often get mentioned, too, but mostly it’s about the sort of profile of your personality or personal preferences (personal orders). You would not feel surprised if people said that they make romantic or friendship choices on the basis of the other person’s personality characteristics, some of them stated directly (introvert) or some inferred from other activities that get identified (“likes quiet walks in the forest”). In life’s mating game, such personality characteristics are often offered as the basis for your choices (“We share the same values”). Much research, going back decades, supports the idea that some types of personality characteristics are attractive in general, particularly outgoing good humor (Hendrick & Brown, 1971), or that similarity of personality predicts long-term stability of relationships (Levinger, 1964). eHarmony™ and other dating agencies use the matching of personality characteristics and values as the basis for pairing with potential partners and you just *know* it works. You talk of good matches and bad matches, and a bad match is with very dissimilar people.

Relationships Other Than Romance

You can see that this doesn't necessarily apply to family as compared to romance, where life's lottery just *gives* you the family members with whom you have to associate. In fact, you often don't have choices at all about family members. Although you can massage the depth of the relationship with them and whether it is close or not, you cannot alter whether you have a relationship with your parents in the first place. You show up and they are parents. End of story. All you can influence is the depth of affection that characterizes the relationship and the way in which it is performed. Personality might be relevant to that: for example, parents can be loving or distant, harsh or kind, authoritarian or permissive, and children can be obedient, aggressive, truculent

teenagers. All of these adjectives are pretty handy descriptions of personality characteristics. But the personality characteristics that make someone a desirable date may not be the same personality characteristics that make him or her a good parent or an appealing family member (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2006).

I was recently appointed to the Iowa Johnson County Livable Community and Successful Aging Advisory Committee, and we talked about ways to help older people stay connected. One obvious way that came up in the course of the conversation was to set up a virtual community where members could communicate with one another over the computer/Internet. Can you guess the crucial point that did not strike us until quite late in the conversation? What a TFG! Many people in their 70s and older *never learned to type* and so cannot easily or usefully employ a computer to communicate with others. Most men of that generation gave typing work to (female) secretaries, but most women of that generation did not work outside the home in the first place or at least did not work in offices. The assumption that everyone can type because we have always been used to typing is a TFG built into the use of computers and the assumption that communication over computers is available to everyone.

LIFESPAN CHANGES

A related question about change in relationships is the fact that personal needs can alter over the life span (Blieszner, 2006). Even if personality got you into a particular relationship in the first place, some of these needs that are satisfied by relationships are not just about personality (as you saw in differentiating close attachments and instrumental affiliations). The person's ability to meet those can be modified by the process of aging. For example, physical needs and service needs change with age: Babies need a lot of physical care, whereas adults need less of that sort of "service" until they become sick or very old and then might need it

again. Friendships can also be based on the circumstantial needs of the times, so, for example, when people have children, they tend to become friends with the parents of their own child's playmates (Reisman, 1981). Of course, this can help two sets of parents to share child management, for example, by baby-sitting for one another or taking the other couple's child for a sleepover when that couple needs to go out of town for a night, but beyond this instrumental purpose, the friendship may also be based on other factors.

Changing Needs Over the Life Cycle

People change their needs and the kinds of companionship that they seek as they age, even if their choice of target relationships at any of these times is still particular rather than general. Teenagers want dates, old people want help, new parents often need physical assistance and advice from friends who are dealing with comparable issues about children, retirees need a new community to replace work companions, and so on.

So the expectations that you have about relationships are subject to change over the course of life and in the way you live in it—or daily reality. The subtle point that you can think about for later is that these changes in needs can be seen as changes in personal orders, that is, changes in ways of knowing the world. Teenagers looking for sex really do know the world in a different way from the way they knew it as a hormonally unstimulated child; old people who cannot do what they used to do really well now know the world differently; the widow from Chapter 1 really does know the world differently now that she is alone. Of course, it is not just the past tense that matters, and much of an epistemic is about the way you know the world at present or expect it to turn out in the future.

Relationships and Personal Orders Again

On the other hand, although your general personal needs may change like this, they are not all that makes you choose particular partners. Pam hangs out with Gordana (who has no kids) rather than with Stella (who does) and with Rachel, rather than other possible choices in the same environment. Some of the choices made in the environment are based on personal preferences connected to personal order and personality. There are definitely some sorts of personality that your social order prefers, so the mixing of personality (personal orders) with relationships is still played out against a social order, even when it gets personal.

To sum this up, personal orders are ways of knowing the world, based on physical experience, childhood impressions, and the unfolding familiarity of

everyday life. These are projected in everyday chatter through the display of rhetorical visions, and they are developed with other people within a social order that calls people to account. Personality is a catch-all term for your way of knowing the world and can be presented in different ways (rhetorically). When you find that you both agree about a personal order, then this kind of similarity of personality lays the basis for a relationship. If, on the other hand, you disagree about personal orders—then you assume that dissimilar personalities would create poor relational dynamics and so you avoid potential relationships. If the dissimilarities are not viewed as something you can overcome and yet are integral to the relationship, then you reject the other person as a possible relational partner.

The Answer

All that, then, to answer the chapter's question, is what personality has got to do with relationships.

PEDAGOGICAL EXERCISES

EXERCISE

Write down a list of your friends and acquaintances. List the qualities of these friends and acquaintances in terms of their personality characteristics. Beside the name of each of these people, indicate whether they are fat or thin. Does your list appear to reflect the same kinds of approach to somatotypes as is discussed in this chapter?

ETHICS QUESTIONS

Is it okay to laugh at fat people? If not, then why are such movies as *The Nutty Professor*, *The Klumps*, *Just Friends*, and other “fat suit” movies popular?

MEDIA ISSUES

How do the media portray people who are either very fat or noticeably thin? Do they attribute particular characteristics to individuals of different sizes and shapes, do they encourage us to prefer one to the other, and are they right?

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