

MAKING sense of PEOPLE

Decoding the Mysteries
of Personality

A graphic illustration of a group of stylized human figures. The central figure is a solid white silhouette of a person. Behind it, there are several other figures in a lighter, semi-transparent yellow color, some appearing as simple circles for heads and others as more complete silhouettes. The background is a solid bright yellow.

SAMUEL BARONDES

Making Sense of People

Also by Samuel Barondes

Cellular Dynamics of the Neuron

Neuronal Recognition

Molecules and Mental Illness

Mood Genes

Better Than Prozac

Making Sense of People

Decoding the Mysteries of Personality

Samuel Barondes

Vice President, Publisher: Tim Moore
Associate Publisher and Director of Marketing: Amy Neidlinger
Acquisitions Editor: Kirk Jensen
Editorial Assistant: Pamela Boland
Operations Manager: Gina Kanouse
Senior Marketing Manager: Julie Phifer
Publicity Manager: Laura Czaja
Assistant Marketing Manager: Megan Colvin
Cover Designer: Sandra Schroeder
Managing Editor: Kristy Hart
Senior Project Editor: Lori Lyons
Copy Editor: Krista Hansing Editorial Services, Inc.
Proofreader: Language Logistics, LLC
Senior Indexer: Cheryl Lenser
Senior Composer: Gloria Schurick
Manufacturing Buyer: Dan Uhrig

© 2012 by Samuel Barondes
Pearson Education, Inc.
Publishing as FT Press
Upper Saddle River, New Jersey 07458

FT Press offers excellent discounts on this book when ordered in quantity for bulk purchases or special sales. For more information, please contact U.S. Corporate and Government Sales, 1-800-382-3419, corpsales@pearsontechgroup.com. For sales outside the U.S., please contact International Sales at international@pearson.com.

Company and product names mentioned herein are the trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective owners.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, in any form or by any means, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

First Printing July 2011

ISBN-10: 0-13-217260-7

ISBN-13: 978-0-13-217260-8

Pearson Education LTD.

Pearson Education Australia PTY, Limited.

Pearson Education Singapore, Pte. Ltd.

Pearson Education Asia, Ltd.

Pearson Education Canada, Ltd.

Pearson Educación de México, S.A. de C.V.

Pearson Education—Japan

Pearson Education Malaysia, Pte. Ltd.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Barondes, Samuel H., 1933-

Making sense of people : decoding the mysteries of personality / Samuel Barondes. -- 1st ed.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.

ISBN 978-0-13-217260-8 (hardback : alk. paper)

1. Personality. I. Title.

BF698.B31837 2012

155.22--dc22

2011001026

For Louann

And for my grandchildren:

Jonah Lazar

Ellen Ariel

Asher Lucca

This page intentionally left blank

Contents

	Introduction	I
Part I: Describing Personality Differences		
1	Personality Traits	7
2	Troublesome Patterns	29
Part II: Explaining Personality Differences		
3	How Genes Make Us Different	57
4	Building a Personal Brain	77
Part III: Whole Persons, Whole Lives		
5	What's a Good Character?	99
6	Identity: Creating a Personal Story	123
7	Putting It All Together	139
	<i>Endnotes</i>	<i>151</i>
	<i>References</i>	<i>177</i>
	<i>Index</i>	<i>219</i>

This page intentionally left blank

Every man is in certain respects

(a) like all other men,

(b) like some other men,

(c) like no other man.

—Clyde Kluckhohn and Henry A. Murray

This page intentionally left blank

INTRODUCTION

When Intuition Isn't Enough

All of us are personality experts. Ever since childhood, we've been paying attention to people's distinctive ways of being in hopes of figuring out what to expect from them. We depend on this information to get along.

The innate ability to size people up is an amazing gift that we take for granted. With it, we form an instantaneous impression of the personality of everyone we meet. This rapid intuitive process works so well that we learn to rely on it. Most of our assessments of people are formed in this automatic and unconscious way.¹

But there are times when we want to consciously evaluate someone's personality.² We may, for example, want to understand what it is about our boss that makes us avoid her. We may want to sort through the reasons we don't approve of our teenage daughter's boyfriend. We may want to decide if the person we're dating has the right stuff for a permanent relationship.

That's when the going gets tough. The difficulty mainly arises because few of us have been taught a systematic way to assess personalities. Instead, we are constantly bombarded with a contradictory mishmash of religious, moral, literary, and psychological ideas that are hard to apply in an orderly

manner. Imagine how we would struggle to do simple arithmetic if we kept getting contradictory instructions on how to work with numbers. Yet we're expected to make sense of people without having been taught a coherent arithmetic of personality.

This lack of education may be responsible for some of our biggest mistakes. It can lead us to pick the wrong suitor, take the wrong job, or misguide our children. It can cause us to misinterpret a coworker's intentions and become inappropriately defensive, or compliant, or aggressive. It can keep us from building satisfying relationships, gracefully avoiding conflicts, or developing plans to protect our interests by fighting back.

In this book, I describe a system for thinking about personalities that may help you avoid such mistakes. Based on decades of research, each chapter will make it easier for you to organize the data you already have about particular people and to start noticing characteristics that you may have overlooked. Sorting through this information will give you a clearer sense of each person and how to relate to them.

To get started, I will show you how to combine two vocabularies that professionals use to organize their observations. One breaks down personality into five well-defined general characteristics, such as conscientiousness and agreeableness, each of which has several components. This makes it easier to think things through using a well-defined set of words.

The other vocabulary shifts attention from these general traits to ten potentially troublesome patterns of behavior, such as compulsiveness or paranoia. Mild versions of these

patterns may simply be notable parts of a well-functioning personality. But some of us have inflexible and maladaptive versions of one or a few of them, versions that frequently bring grief to those we deal with—and to ourselves. More than the rest of us, such people are prisoners of personality who are locked into ways of being they seem unable to escape.

Combining these two easy-to-learn vocabularies will not only help you make clearer assessments of everyone you meet. It will also raise questions about the reasons people get to be so different from each other. In the second part of the book, I will describe the development of the brain circuits that control our distinctive combinations of traits and patterns. I will also show that the decades-long developmental process that builds these brain circuits is strongly influenced by the two great accidents of our birth: the specific set of genes we happen to be born with and the specific world we happen to live in.

But there's more to a personality than traits and patterns. In the third part of the book, I will turn to the values and goals that give meaning and purpose to people's lives. To flesh out this view, I will show you how to apply universal and culture-specific standards of morality to assess a person's character. I will also encourage you to pay attention to the stories people tell about themselves, which will help you figure out what they stand for and their sense of identity.

Systematically organizing all this information about traits, patterns, character, and identity will help you make sense of anyone. It may also influence the approach you choose to engage with them. In some cases, this may encourage you to

shrug off their disquieting idiosyncrasies in favor of forgiveness and compassion. In other cases, it may alert you to telltale signs of danger so that you can take protective actions. In still other cases, it may open your heart to warm feelings of love and respect. In all cases, it will enhance your appreciation of human diversity in the same way that those who know a lot about wine, or music, or baseball get the added pleasure that comes from thoughtful attention to the details. Augmenting your pleasure in understanding and dealing with people, whether you like them or not, is the main aim of this book.

This page intentionally left blank

ONE

Personality Traits

When I was in high school, I signed up for the student newspaper. To get me started, the editor offered some standard advice on how to write a story. He said I should be sure to answer five questions: What happened? Who was involved? When? Where? Why? He said that knowing about these “five Ws” served as a check for completeness because novices sometimes left out one or more of them. He then assured me that I wouldn’t need them for long because answering these questions was something I was already inclined to do intuitively.

Intuition is also what journalists rely on when they size up people. Through years of practice, they develop a knack for identifying distinctive personality traits and finding the words to describe them. The gifted among them are so good at it that they can create a revealing portrait in a single paragraph. Consider, for example, Joe Klein’s description of the personality of an American politician:

There was a physical, almost carnal, quality to his public appearances. He embraced audiences and was aroused by them in turn. His sonar was remarkable in retail political situations. He seemed able to sense what audiences needed and deliver it to them—

trimming his pitch here, emphasizing different priorities there, always aiming to please. This was one of his most effective, and maddening qualities in private meetings as well: He always grabbed on to some point of agreement, while steering the conversation away from larger points of disagreement—leaving his seducee with the distinct impression that they were in total harmony about everything. ... There was a needy, high cholesterol quality to it all; the public seemed enthralled by his vast, messy humanity. Try as he might to keep in shape, jogging for miles with his pale thighs jiggling, he still tended to a raw fleshiness. He was famously addicted to junk food. He had a reputation as a womanizer. All of these were of a piece.¹

Notice that Klein needs only a handful of evocative words to highlight the main characteristics of his subject: *carnal*, *needy*, *messy*, *maddening*, *fleshiness*, *addicted*, and *womanizer*. To round out his description, he uses a few short phrases, such as “his sonar was remarkable,” “high cholesterol quality,” and “aiming to please.” When he can’t find a simple word or phrase to describe something that he considers particularly revealing, he makes up a whole sentence: “he always grabbed on to some point of agreement, while steering the conversation away from larger points of disagreement—leaving his seducee with the distinct impression that they were in total harmony about everything.” By using words and phrases that all of us can understand, Klein tells us a great deal about the personality of an extraordinary public figure: Bill Clinton.

The combination of words and phrases is, of course, critical. There are other people who are needy but who are neither carnal nor womanizers. Some of them may also have remarkable sonar but without being messy or maddening. What makes Klein's description so recognizable is that, as he points out, all the traits "were of a piece."

So how did Klein do it? Was he intuitively asking himself a set of questions that are as obvious to him as the five Ws? Did he leave out anything important? Can we learn a technique to make our own descriptions of people more incisive and complete?

Words from the Dictionary

The development of a simple technique to describe personalities was set in motion in the 1930s by Gordon Allport, a professor of psychology at Harvard. Although Allport was well aware of the uniqueness of each individual, he also knew that scientific fields get started by breaking down complex systems into simple components. Just as understanding the great variety of chemical compounds depended on identifying a limited number of elements, understanding the great variety of personalities may depend on identifying a limited number of critical ingredients. But what exactly are those ingredients?

Allport's answer was traits: the enduring dispositions to act and think and feel in certain ways that are described by words found in all human languages. Just as chemical elements such as carbon and hydrogen can combine with many others to form endless numbers of complicated substances,

traits such as being outgoing and being reliable can combine with many others to form endless numbers of complicated personalities. But how many traits are there? And how could Allport find out?

To answer this question Allport and his colleague, H.S. Odbert, made a list of the words about personality from *Webster's New International Dictionary*.² By analyzing this list, they hoped to identify the essential components of personality that were so obvious to our ancestors that they invented a great many words to describe them. Instead of just concocting an inventory of personality traits out of their own heads, Allport and Odbert would be guided by the cumulative verbal creations of countless minds over countless generations, as recorded in a dictionary.³

It soon became clear that these researchers had bitten off more than they could chew. The list of words "to distinguish the behavior of one human being from another" had 17,953 entries! Faced with this staggering number, they whittled it down using several criteria. First, they eliminated about a third, such as *attractive*, because the entries were considered evaluative rather than essential: "[W]hen we say a woman is attractive, we are talking not about a disposition 'inside the skin' but about her effect on other people."⁴ Another fourth hit the cutting room floor because they describe temporary states of mind, such as *frantic* and *rejoicing*, rather than the enduring dispositions that are defining features of personality traits. Others were thrown out because they were considered ambiguous. In the end, about 4,500 entries met the researchers' criteria for stable traits.

This doesn't mean that personality has 4,500 different components; many of the words on the list are easily identifiable as synonyms. For example, *outgoing* and *sociable* are used interchangeably. Furthermore, antonyms, such as *solitary*, describe the same general category of behavior, but at its opposite pole—instead of saying “not sociable” or “not outgoing,” we might say “solitary.” In fact, a wonderful feature of natural language is that it lends itself so well to a graded (or dimensional) description of specific components of personality, from extremely outgoing at one pole to extremely solitary at the other, with modifiers to specify points in between. Put simply, the ancestors who gradually built our language—and all languages—left us with many choices for describing ingredients of personality.

Recognizing that *outgoing* and *solitary* both refer to aspects of an identical trait, how many other words also fit into this category? When I looked up *outgoing* in my thesaurus, I found these synonyms, among others: *gregarious*, *companionable*, *convivial*, *friendly*, and *jovial*. When I looked up *solitary*, I got, among others, *retiring*, *isolated*, *lonely*, *private*, and *friendless*. This tells me that the group of experts who put together this thesaurus decided that all these words belong in a box that can be labeled Outgoing–Solitary. Needless to say, each word in the box may also have some special spin of its own. For example, *solitary*, *lonely*, and *private* don't mean exactly the same thing, and writers such as Joe Klein may mull them over to get just the right one. Nevertheless, we all know that these words have a lot in common. To psychologists such as Allport, they all refer to a single overarching trait.

Beyond Synonyms and Antonyms

Does this mean that we can identify the essential building blocks of personality by simply getting a list from a dictionary and then lumping together the synonyms and antonyms from a thesaurus? Can we base a nomenclature of personality on the analysis of professional lexicographers? Or can we use a more open-source approach that pays attention to the ways ordinary people employ words to describe personalities?

The answer psychologists settled on was both. First, professionals reduced the list to a more manageable number—about a thousand. Then they asked ordinary people to use these words to describe themselves and their acquaintances. To get an idea of the way this was done, please apply the ten words in the following list to someone you know well. In expressing your opinion, use a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 indicating that the person ranks very high, 1 indicating that the person ranks very low, and the other numbers indicating that the person falls somewhere in between.

- | | |
|----------------|---------------|
| 1. Outgoing | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 2. Bold | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 3. Talkative | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 4. Energetic | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 5. Assertive | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 6. Reliable | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 7. Practical | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 8. Hardworking | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 9. Organized | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 10. Careful | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |

I have no way of knowing what numbers you selected. But chances are good that they will have a characteristic relationship: The numbers you picked for the first five items probably are similar, and the numbers you picked for the second five items probably are similar. Furthermore, I can say with confidence that most people who give someone a certain score for *outgoing* give them a similar score for *bold*, *talkative*, *energetic*, and *assertive*; and that the score they give someone for *reliable* is likely similar to the one they give for *practical*, *hardworking*, *organized*, and *careful*. Even though none of the words in each quintet are synonyms, people who are ranked a certain way on one word from each tend to get similar scores on the others. In contrast, people's scores on the first quintet are independent of their scores on the second quintet. This implies that these non-synonymous words are grouped together in our minds because each refers to some aspect of a related component of personality.

Could any other words be lumped together with *outgoing* or *reliable* to flesh out these two big categories? How many other groupings like this would be discovered if people were asked to make judgments using all the thousand words that the original list was pared down to? And what statistical techniques would be needed to identify these categories? In making the list, Allport set the stage for research on these questions.⁵

Bundling Traits

A statistical technique for studying the relationships between these words was invented in the nineteenth century by Francis Galton, a founder of modern research on personality,

whom you'll read more about later. The technique is used to calculate a correlation coefficient, a number between 1.0 and -1.0 that measures the degree of sameness (positive correlation) or oppositeness (negative correlation). Although Galton invented the technique for other purposes, he also happened to be interested in categorizing the words that we use for personality traits,⁶ and he would have been pleased to learn about this application.

To get a feel for this calculation, let's think about the positive correlations we would find if we asked people to rank someone on *outgoing*, *sociable*, and *gregarious* by using a scale of 1 to 7. Knowing that these words are synonyms, we would expect to find that if John ranks Mary a 6 on *outgoing*, he likely will rank her around 6 on each of the others. If he then ranks Jane as a 4 on *outgoing*, he likely will rank her around 4 on each of the others. And if Jennifer ranks Jim a 1 on *outgoing*, she likely will rank him around 1 on each of the others. Plugging these scores into Galton's formula would indicate a great deal of sameness.

Now what sort of correlations would we find between the words in the first non-synonymous quintet (outgoing–bold–talkative–energetic–assertive)? Studies show that these words are correlated strongly, but not as strongly as synonyms, and similar positive correlations are found among the words in the second non-synonymous quintet (reliable–practical–hardworking–organized–careful). In contrast, when we compare the scores for words such as *outgoing* from

the first group with words such as *reliable* from the second group, we don't find a correlation. This comes as no surprise because we all know that being outgoing and being reliable are not intrinsically related.

Determining the correlations among five or ten words is fairly easy. But determining the correlations among a thousand words was stalled until researchers could turn it over to a computer. To get the raw data, thousands of ordinary people were asked to apply each of these words by ranking their applicability to themselves or another person using a scale of 1 to 7. The mass of data was then analyzed with a more advanced statistical technique, called factor analysis, which measures the correlation between each word and all the others and organizes the correlations into clusters. In this way, some words were identified as highly correlated to each other, making them good representatives of a particular cluster, which psychologists call a domain.

By the early 1980s, the results were in: The words that describe personality traits can be boiled down to just five large domains (see Table 1.1), which Lewis Goldberg named the Big Five.⁷ Each of them has been given a reasonably descriptive name: Extraversion (E), Agreeableness (A), Conscientiousness (C), Neuroticism (N), and Openness (O). If you have trouble recalling these names at first, as I did, you can use the acronyms OCEAN or CANOE to jog your memory until they become second nature.

TABLE 1.1 The Big Five: Representative Words

	High	Low
Extraversion vs. Introversion	Outgoing, bold, talkative, energetic, assertive	Withdrawn, timid, silent, reserved, shy
Agreeableness vs. Antagonism	Warm, kind, cooperative, trusting, generous	Cold, unkind, uncooperative, suspicious, stingy
Conscientiousness vs. Disinhibition	Reliable, practical, hardworking, organized, careful	Unreliable, impractical, lazy, disorganized, negligent
Neuroticism vs. Emotional Stability	Tense, unstable, discontented, irritable, insecure	Relaxed, stable, contented, imperturbable, secure
Openness vs. Closedness	Imaginative, curious, reflective, creative, sophisticated	Unimaginative, uninquisitive, unreflective, uncreative, unsophisticated

Using the Big Five

After the Big Five was discovered, it became the foundation for assessing individual differences in the ways people interact with their social and physical worlds. Three domains—Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism—mainly relate to ways of interacting with other people. The other two—Conscientiousness and Openness—are more general.⁸

- **Extraversion is the tendency to actively reach out to others.** People high in Extraversion are stimulated by the social world, like to be the center of attention, and often take charge. They also like excitement and are inclined to be upbeat, fun loving, full of energy, and to experience positive emotions. People low in Extraversion are less interested in interpersonal interactions and tend to be reserved and quiet. But their relative lack of interest in being with people need not indicate that they don't like them, or that they are socially anxious or depressed; they may just prefer to be alone.
- **Agreeableness is the tendency to be altruistic, cooperative, and good-natured.** People high in Agreeableness are considerate, compassionate, helpful, and willing to compromise. They truly like people and assume that everyone is decent and trustworthy. People low on Agreeableness are more self-interested than altruistic, more competitive than cooperative, and likely to be skeptical of others' intentions. They also tend to be cold, antagonistic, and disrespectful of the rights of others.
- **Conscientiousness is the tendency to control impulses and to tenaciously pursue goals.** People high in Conscientiousness are orderly, reliable, hard-working, neat, and punctual. They tend to plan ahead and think things through. They are more interested in long-term than short-term goals. People low in Conscientiousness are more spontaneous, less constrained, less dutiful, and less achievement-oriented. Although

Conscientiousness shows up prominently in the performance of tasks, it also influences interpersonal relationships.

- **Neuroticism is the tendency to have negative feelings, particularly in reaction to perceived social threats.** People high in Neuroticism are emotionally unstable, tend to be upset by minor threats or frustrations, and are often in a bad mood. They are prone to anxiety, depression, embarrassment, self-doubt, self-consciousness, anger, and guilt. People low on Neuroticism are emotionally stable, calm, composed, and unflappable. But their freedom from negative feelings does not imply that they are particularly inclined to have positive feelings.
- **Openness is the tendency to be imaginative and to enjoy novelty and variety.** People who are high in Openness tend to be artistic, nonconforming, intellectual, aware of their feelings, and comfortable with new ideas. People low in Openness prefer the simple, straightforward, familiar, and obvious to the complex, ambiguous, novel, and subtle. They tend to be conventional, conservative, and resistant to change. Although people who are high on Openness enjoy the life of the mind, Openness is not identical with intelligence. Highly intelligent people can be high or low on O.

After you've mulled over the broad meanings of these five domains, you can get a better sense of them by applying them to someone you know. You might start by asking yourself how outgoing, good-natured, reliable, moody, and

creative that person is compared with others. In doing this, you will notice that the person's relative rankings vary somewhat depending on the situation.⁹ For example, a person may be outgoing with friends but shy with strangers, so you have to decide on the average scores by summing up the many observations you've made.¹⁰ From this, you will come away with a profile of the person's basic tendencies, such as moderately extraverted, very agreeable and conscientious, a little neurotic, and very open. Although this is no more than a rough summary of how you regard this person, the Big Five framework will have helped you put your intuitive assessments into words. You will then be in a position to more thoughtfully compare this person with others by seeing his or her differences more clearly.¹¹

Big Five 2.0

Having made such assessments, you may find that your ideas about each category are still fuzzy. To sharpen your appraisal of a person's profile of traits, it helps to move from a holistic impression to a more meticulous examination. To do this, you need to learn more about the details of the Big Five.

Paul Costa and Robert McCrae have done the most to clarify these details. Working together at the National Institutes of Health in the 1980s, they developed a questionnaire called the NEO-PI R, which uses phrases rather than adjectives.¹² The big advantage of using phrases is that you can design them to eliminate some of the ambiguity that is inherent in single words. For example, in place of the word *insecure*, a component of Neuroticism, Costa and McCrae

use phrases that spell out certain aspects, such as: “In dealing with people, I always dread making a social blunder” and “I often feel helpless and want someone else to solve my problems.”¹³

Another reason for the popularity of the NEO-PI R is that it sharpens the assessment of each of the Big Five by subdividing them into six components, called facets. This ensures a more complete evaluation and helps focus attention on specific individual differences. Consider for example, these phrases that assess facets of Extraversion:

- I find it easy to smile and be outgoing with strangers. (Warmth/Friendliness)
- I enjoy parties with lots of people. (Gregariousness)
- I am dominant, forceful, and assertive. (Assertiveness)
- My life is fast-paced. (Activity)
- I love the excitement of roller coasters. (Excitement-Seeking)
- I am a cheerful, high-spirited person. (Positive Emotions/Cheerfulness)

The advantage of using these facets is that it may help you make distinctions that you might have glossed over. For example, many people with an average E score are not average across the board. Some may be somewhat higher on warmth, gregariousness, and positive emotions than on assertiveness, activity, and excitement-seeking; others may have a different balance of tendencies. The same is true for the other major

traits. In each case, you should pay particular attention to facets that stand out as clearly higher or lower than average. Because the whole point of the exercise is to compare people with each other, you're really looking for these distinguishing characteristics. You may also take note of particular situations in which these distinguishing characteristics are expressed.

To get a feel for the facets of the Big Five, I encourage you to take a free computer-based personality test that resembles the proprietary one devised by Costa and McCrea, at www.personal.psu.edu/faculty/j/5/j5j/IPIP/ipipneo120.htm. Developed by a group of distinguished personality researchers¹⁴ and overseen by John A. Johnson¹⁵ at Pennsylvania State University, it uses different names for some of the facets but covers similar ground. This free test, called the IPIP, can be taken anonymously in about 20 minutes. If you take it, you will receive an automated e-mail report that shows your relative rankings on the Big Five and its facets by comparing your scores with those of the hundreds of thousands of other people who have already taken it.

To gain more experience with the facets of the Big Five (Table 1.2), you may also use the online questionnaire to assess a person you know. Scoring the person on this list of items not only will sharpen your view of him or her. It will also increase your familiarity with this technique. As you become more familiar with the Big Five, you will learn to make such judgments in your head without relying on a questionnaire.

Table 1.2 Facets of the Big Five*

Extraversion

Warmth/Friendliness (makes friends easily)

Gregariousness (likes the company of others)

Assertiveness (likes to take charge)

Activity (likes to be busy)

Excitement-Seeking (likes thrills)

Positive Emotions/Cheerfulness (is prone to feel happy)

Agreeableness

Trust (assumes people have good intentions)

Straightforwardness/Morality (is candid, avoids deception)

Altruism (finds helping others rewarding, is not exploitative)

Compliance/Cooperation (prefers compromise to opposition)

Modesty (is not boastful)

Tender-Mindedness/Sympathy (is kind, compassionate)

Conscientiousness

Competence/Self-Efficacy (can accomplish things)

Order/Orderliness (is well organized, makes plans)

Dutifulness (is highly reliable)

Achievement-Striving (works to achieve excellence)

Self-Discipline (has willpower)

Deliberation/Cautiousness (takes time making decisions)

Neuroticism

Anxiety (is prone to fearfulness)

Angry Hostility (is prone to feel resentful)

Depression (is prone to feel discouraged, pessimistic)

Self-Consciousness (is shy because of fear of rejection)

Impulsiveness/Immoderation (has difficulty resisting urges)

Vulnerability (loses poise under pressure)

Openness

Fantasy/Imagination (tries to create a more interesting world)

Aesthetics/Artistic Interests (loves beauty in art and nature)

Feelings/Emotionality (is aware of own feelings)

Actions/Adventurousness (is eager to try new activities)

Ideas/Intellect (likes to play with ideas)

Values/Liberalism (is ready to challenge convention)

*When the facets have different names in the proprietary (NEO PI-R) and nonproprietary (IPIP) tests, I've listed both.

Rethinking Bill Clinton

Another way to get a feel for the Big Five and its facets is to keep it in mind while re-examining the paragraph from Joe Klein's book that I cited at the start of this chapter. Klein tells us much more about Clinton's personality than he packed into this paragraph. But for our purpose, I mainly stick to those 165 words:

There was a physical, almost carnal, quality to his public appearances. He embraced audiences and was aroused by them in turn. His sonar was remarkable in retail political situations. He seemed able to sense what audiences needed and deliver it to them—trimming his pitch here, emphasizing different priorities there, always aiming to please. This was one of his most effective, and maddening qualities in private meetings as well: He always grabbed on to some point of agreement, while steering the conversation away from larger points of disagreement—leaving his seducee with the distinct impression

that they were in total harmony about everything. ... There was a needy, high cholesterol quality to it all; the public seemed enthralled by his vast, messy humanity. Try as he might to keep in shape, jogging for miles with his pale thighs jiggling, he still tended to a raw fleshiness. He was famously addicted to junk food. He had a reputation as a womanizer. All of these were of a piece.

As we noted before, Klein built his description by calling attention to a few key traits. But now we can translate the information that Klein provides into the language of the Big Five. Needless to say, much more is known about Clinton, and other observers have painted a somewhat different picture than Klein did.¹⁶ But let's stick with the paragraph and some other information from his book to illustrate how the Big Five and its facets can help us organize our thoughts about Clinton's basic tendencies. To do this, I will concentrate on facets in which his scores are notably high or low.

Starting with Extraversion is particularly fitting when considering Clinton because he loves to be the center of attention. Klein emphasizes this with evocative terms for his public appearances, such as "embraced audiences" and "aroused by them," which translate into very high scores on gregariousness. Clinton is also obviously high on assertiveness, which led him to the most powerful leadership roles, and "womanizer" can be considered partly a reflection of high excitement-seeking. From this and everything else Klein tells us, Clinton ranks high on all facets of Extraversion, and his overall score is at the top of the chart.

Klein also gives us some information about Agreeableness, but Clinton's score isn't quite so obvious. From the paragraph, you may first get the impression that he ranks high on A because he is "always aiming to please." But as you read on, you will realize that he's just telling his "seducees" whatever they want to hear. In the course of his book, Klein gives many other examples of Clinton's deceptiveness, which gives him a low score on straightforwardness. Klein also presents evidence that Clinton's womanizing is exploitative, which lowers his score on altruism and sympathy. When taken together Clinton's Agreeableness, which appears very high on first meeting him, is lower than it seems.

The information we get about Conscientiousness is limited but revealing. The part about jogging indicates an effort at self-discipline. But this impression is tempered by "try as he might to keep in shape," "raw fleshiness," "addicted to junk food," and "womanizer," which are hardly testimony to high C. So even though Klein's paragraph leaves out Clinton's very high achievement-striving, the lower scores for dutifulness, cautiousness, and deliberation that he documents in other parts of the book combine to give a lower than average ranking on Conscientiousness.

Klein's paragraph tells us little about Neuroticism except for a hint about "messy humanity." Other sections of the book tell us that Clinton can get very angry and out of control, but there's no reason to think of him as being especially prone to negative emotions. In fact, he is unusually capable of brushing off criticism that would make most of us crumble, and he can be cool under extreme fire. When taken together Clinton ranks below average on Neuroticism.

Openness to experience is also not explicitly considered. This omission is not unusual in brief descriptions of people, even though it may turn out to be a distinguishing feature of their personalities. But Klein makes up for this in the rest of the book by providing us with persuasive evidence that Clinton ranks high on most facets of O.

Of course, much about Clinton doesn't show up in this Big Five profile. But to illustrate the usefulness of this way of describing him, let's compare it with a similar assessment of another president, Barack Obama, as a way of thinking about their differences. Although Obama has not been in the public eye as long as Clinton, we have already learned a great deal about him from seeing him in action. His two autobiographies fill in many blanks.¹⁷

In making this comparison, Openness doesn't tell us much. Although Clinton and Obama differ in their scores on certain facets, their overall rankings are both high. But their relative scores on Extraversion, Neuroticism, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness are informative. When taken together, very different profiles emerge.

Extraversion is particularly notable because Obama's overall score is not only lower than Clinton's, but also lower than the scores of most other successful politicians. Although Obama ranks very high on assertiveness and activity, he is not particularly warm or gregarious. Nor does he show much evidence of positive emotion, even when winning a historic election or a Nobel Prize. Klein, who now covers Obama, offers evidence of his low E from a politician who helped coach Obama for debates during the presidential campaign:

“He is a classic loner Usually you work hard at prep, and then everyone, including the candidate, kicks back and has a meal together. Obama would go off and eat by himself. He is very self-contained. He is not needy.”¹⁸

This low neediness is another sign of Obama’s difference from Clinton: his very low Neuroticism. Whereas Clinton deserves credit for generally controlling resentment and discouragement, Obama doesn’t seem to feel them at all, even in the face of strong setbacks. In fact, his remarkable emotional stability, which many admire, has also been criticized as Spock-like. Maureen Dowd, another journalist with a gift for describing personalities, calls him “President Cool” and “No Drama Obama.”¹⁹

This coolness might also be taken as a sign of low Agreeableness. But Obama clearly ranks high on several of its facets, especially straightforwardness and cooperation. Although he does not exude either altruism or tender-mindedness, his behavior suggests that they are at least average. So unlike Clinton, Obama is higher on Agreeableness than he might seem.

Obama’s high marks on all six facets of Conscientiousness also distinguish him from Clinton. He ranks especially high on deliberation, examining all sides of a problem. As with other personality traits, this can be seen as a mixed blessing, bringing him praise for his thoughtfulness but criticism that he is too professorial and indecisive.

Considering Obama and Clinton in this way shows how the Big Five can help us organize our intuitive observations by making them explicit. Although the profiles that it

generates are sketchy, the process focuses our attention on the full range of basic tendencies, including some that we might otherwise have overlooked. And as you will see, the findings we make in this way provide a framework for describing the personality patterns that I will consider in the following chapter.

INDEX

A

abuse in childhood, antisocial behavior and, 87-90

Adams, John, 119

adenine, 66

adolescence, brain development during, 93-95

Agreeableness

advantages/disadvantages of, 73-74

Barack Obama example, 27

Bill Clinton example, 24

defined, 17

dependent personality pattern and, 48

facets, 22

low Agreeableness patterns, 38-44

Allport, Gordon, 9-13, 105, 121, 173

personality trait research, 9-13

separating character and personality, 105-106

American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-IV), 30

amygdala, 71, 80, 86, 94

animal breeding, natural selection and, 58, 61

antisocial behavior, childhood abuse and, 87-90

antisocial personality pattern

as character flaw, 107

defined, 30

examples of, 38-41, 44

opinion of self and others, 51

apoptosis, 81

Apple, 134

The Audacity of Hope (Obama), 147

autonomy in culture-based values, 115-117

avoidant personality pattern

as character flaw, 107

defined, 30

example of, 46-47
 opinion of self and others, 52

axons, 79-81

B

Bardem, Javier, 43

Beck, Aaron T., 50

Big Five domains, 16

Bill Clinton example, 23-27

Barack Obama example, 26-27

discovery of, 15

descriptions of, 16-19

facets of, 19-22

stabilization of, 96

borderline personality pattern

as character flaw, 107

defined, 30

example of, 48-50

opinion of self and others, 52

Bouchard, Thomas, 64

brain development

critical periods in, 82-84

during adolescence, 93-95

epigenetic effects on, 90-93

gene-environment dialogues
 in, 87-90

MRI studies of, 94

remodeling in, 80-81

stabilization in, 95-96

Brando, Marlon, 37

breeding animals with different personalities

dogs, 59

mice, 68-70

foxes, 161

Bush, George W., 39

C

Caspi, Avshalom, 96

Chamberlain, Lisa, 40

**changes in personality, 96,
 148-150**

character

Benjamin Franklin's, 117-121

changes in, 148

culture-based assessment of,
 115-117

importance of, 121-122

moral instincts and emotions,
 108-112

in personality appraisals,
 143-144

six core universal virtues,
 113-114

three main components, 114
 separation from personality,
 103-108

characteristic adaptations, 172

Chess, Stella, 84

**childhood abuse, antisocial
 behavior and, 87-90**

Childhood and Society
(Erikson), 77

children

- personality development in, 77
- predicting what they will be like, 84-86, 165
- temperaments of, 84-86

Clinton, Bill

- comparison with Barack Obama, 26-27, 140-148
- facets of Big Five personality traits, 23-27
- Joe Klein's description of, 7-9
- personality appraisal of, 140-148

Cloninger, Robert, 114

conduct disorder, childhood, 86

community in culture-based values, 115-117

compassion, 110

compulsive personality pattern

- as character flaw, 107
- defined, 31
- example of, 44-45
- opinion of self and others, 52

cognitive therapy, 50

Conscientiousness

- advantages/disadvantages of, 74
- Barack Obama example, 27
- Bill Clinton example, 25

defined, 17

facets, 22

- high Conscientiousness pattern, 44-45
- representative words, 16

conscious and unconscious personality appraisals, 1, 151

contempt, 111

cooperativeness, as major component of character, 114

correlations among personality traits, 12-15

Costa, Paul, 19, 32

courage

- analysis of Benjamin Franklin's, 119
- as a core universal virtue, 113

Covey, Stephen, 117

Crashing the Party (Nader), 40

critical periods in brain development, 82-84

cultures

- influence in personality appraisals, 143
- specific values in, 115-117

cytosine, 66

D

Dallas, Jason, 57

Darwin, Charles, 58, 61-62, 76, 108, 112

Darwin, Erasmus, 61
 DeFries, John, 68-69
 dendrites, 79
 dependent personality pattern
 as character flaw, 107
 defined, 31
 example of, 47-48
 opinion of self and others, 52
The Descent of Man
 (Darwin), 108
 de Waal, Frans, 109
 dimensional and categorical
 patterns, 32, 156
 disgust, 111
 divinity in culture-based values,
 115-117
 DNA
 building blocks of, 66
 sequencing, 69, 71, 162
 domains, Big Five, 16
 Bill Clinton example, 23-27
 descriptions of, 16-19
 discovery of, 15
 facets of, 19-22
 dopamine effect on personality,
 70-71
 Dowd, Maureen, 27
 DRD4 gene, 71
Dreams from My Father
 (Obama), 146

DSM-IV (*American Psychiatric
 Association's Diagnostic and
 Statistical Manual*), 30
 Dunedin study, 87-89

E

Eisenhower, Dwight D., 150
 elevation, 110
 Elkind, Peter, 136
 Ellis, Joseph, 120
 emotional contagion, 109
 emotions, moral instincts and,
 108-112
 environment, shared, 64-66
 environment, nonshared,
 160-161, 167
 environmental impact
 on epigenetic differences,
 90, 93
 on gene variant selection,
 72-75
 on genes, 87, 90
 epigenetic changes, 91
 accumulation with age, 92
 as a stochastic process, 167
 by acetylation of histones, 167
 by methylation of DNA, 91-92
 Erikson, Erik, 77, 124-125,
 130-133
 ethics of autonomy, 115-117
 ethics of community, 115-117
 ethics of divinity, 115-117

Extraversion

- advantages/disadvantages of, 73
- Barack Obama example, 26
- Bill Clinton example, 24
- defined, 16-17
- facets, 22
- Mark Zuckerberg example, 174
- representative words, 16
- high Extraversion pattern, 36-37
- low Extraversion patterns, 33, 36

F**facets of Big Five personality traits, 19-22**

- Bill Clinton example, 23-27
- Barack Obama example, 26-27

factor analysis of personality trait correlations, 15**family environment. *See* nature versus nurture****female brain development, 81****Fischer, Bobby, 35****Franklin, Benjamin, 99-104, 117-121**

- assessment of character, 117-121
- self-improvement program, 100-103
- list of thirteen virtues, 100-101

Freud, Sigmund, 74**G****Galton, Francis**

- distinguishing nature and nurture, 61-63
- personality trait correlation analysis, 13-14

geese, imprinting, 82**“generativity versus self-absorption” (middle adulthood stage), 132****genes**

- epigenetic changes of, 91
- interactions with environment, 87-93
- mutations, 60, 67
- natural selection and, 60
- structure of, 66-67
- regulation of expression of, 66-67, 161
- variants, 67

influence on mouse personality, 68-69

influence on human personality, 70-71

genetic testing, 71, 162**glucocorticoid receptor, 91****glucocorticoids, 90****GnRH (gonadotropin-releasing hormone), 93****Goldberg, Lewis, 15****Goldman, Ron, 42**

gonadotropin-releasing hormone (GnRH), 93

Gore, Al, 39

gratitude, 110

guanine, 66

H

Haidt, Jonathan, 111

Hare, Robert, 42-43

heritability, 64, 159-160

"The History of Twins As a Criterion of the Relative Powers of Nature and Nurture" (Galton), 62

histrionic personality pattern

as character flaw, 107

defined, 31

example of, 36-37

opinion of self and others, 51

humanity

analysis of Benjamin Franklin's, 120

as core universal virtue, 113

hypothalamus, 81

I

identity, 123-125

changes in, 149

Oprah Winfrey's story, 125-129

in personality appraisals, 144-147

selective reconstruction in, 129-133

Steve Jobs' story, 133-137

If I Did It (Simpson), 43

I Hate You, Don't Leave Me (Kreisman and Strauss), 49

"I'm detached" opinion, 50-53

"I'm right" opinion, 50-53

"I'm special" opinion, 50-53

"I'm vulnerable" opinion, 50-53

imprinting of baby geese, 82

"integrity versus despair" (late adulthood stage), 133

internet personality test, 21

"intimacy versus isolation" (young adulthood stage), 132

IPIP (International Personality Item Pool Representation of the NEO PI-R), 21-22

IQ, heritability, 94

Isaacson, Walter, 118, 132

J

Jobs, Steve, 133-137

Johnson, John A., 21

justice

analysis of Benjamin Franklin's, 119

as core universal virtue, 113

defined, 101

K

- Kagan, Elena, 125
 Kagan, Jerome, 85
 Kissinger, Henry, 83
 Klein, Joe
 description of Barack Obama,
 26-27
 description of Bill Clinton,
 7-9
 Kluckhohn, Clyde, 139

L

- life stories. *See* personal stories
 loners, examples of, 33, 36
 Lorenz, Konrad, 82

M

- Madoff, Bernard, 42
 male brain development, 81
 MAOA gene, 88-90
 McAdams, Dan, 124, 137
 McCrae, Robert, 19, 32
 Meaney, Michael, 90
 melanin, changes in, 60
 mercurial style, 49
 Millon, Theodore, 44
 mirror neurons, 170
 monoamine oxidase-A, 88
 Monroe, Marilyn, 37
 moral instincts, emotions and,
 108-112

- moralistic anger, 111
 moral judgments in personality
 appraisals, 143-144
 Morris, Lois 49
 mouse research on heritability
 of personality traits, 68-69
 Mundy, Lisa, 146
 Murray, Henry, 139
 myelin, 81
 Myers-Briggs Type Indicator
 (MBTI), 154

N

- Nader, Ralph, 39-40
 Napoleon, 41
 narcissism, invulnerable vs.
 vulnerable, 40-41, 157
 narcissistic personality pattern
 as character flaw, 107
 defined, 31
 example of, 38-41, 44
 opinion of self and others, 51
 natural selection, 58-61
 environmental influences on,
 72-75
 of moral instincts, 108-112
 nature versus nurture
 childhood abuse and antisocial
 behavior traits, 87, 90
 epigenetic effect, 90-93
 twins research, 61-66

negative moral emotions, 111

NEO-PI R, 19-22

neuroD2 gene, 58

neurons, 79-82

Neuroticism

advantages/disadvantages
of, 74

association with
compulsiveness, 45

Barack Obama example, 26

Bill Clinton example, 25

defined, 18

facets, 22

high Neuroticism patterns,
46-50

representative words, 16

neurotransmitters, 80

No Country for Old Men
(film), 43

Noitrix, 32-35

O

Obama, Barack

comparison with Bill Clinton,
26-27, 140-147

personality appraisal of,
140-147

obsessive-compulsive
disorder, 155

obsessive-compulsive
personality pattern. *See*
compulsive personality pattern

Odbert, H.S., 10

Oldham, John, 49

Openness

advantages/disadvantages of,
74-75

Barack Obama example, 26

Bill Clinton example, 25

defined, 18

facets, 23

representative words, 16

opinions of self and others,
50-53

Origin of Species (Darwin),
58-61

others, opinion of, 50-53

P

paranoid personality pattern

as character flaw, 107

defined, 31

example of, 38-41, 44

opinion of self and others, 52

parenting and peer effects on
personality, 164-166

perfectionism, 44-45

personality appraisal, conscious
and unconscious, 1-2, 151

personality appraisal,
methodical approach to,
140-148

personality development,
childhood predictors, 84-86

personality disorder, 32

personality patterns in

personality appraisals, 141-143

troublesome personality
patterns, 29-30, 33, 106

Agreeableness, low end of,
38-41, 44

Conscientiousness, high end
of, 44-45

Extraversion, high end of,
36-37

Extraversion, low end of,
33-36

Neuroticism, high end of,
46-50

opinions of self and others,
50-53

usefulness of, 53-54

personality styles (Oldham and
Morris), 156

personality test, internet, 23

personality traits

Big Five domains

descriptions of, 15-19

facets of, 19-22

changes in and stabilization,
96, 148-150

children's brain development
and, 84-86

defined, 9

gene variants and

environmental influences on
selection, 72-75

mouse research on, 68-69

human research on, 69-72

personal stories, 123-125

changes in, 149

in personality appraisals,
144-147

Oprah Winfrey, 125-129

selective reconstruction in,
129-133

Steve Jobs, 133-137

Peterson, Christopher, 113

positive moral emotions, 110-111

promoters (DNA), 67

prototypical personality
patterns, 156

psychopath, example of, 41-44

psychotherapy, 50, 149

puberty, brain development
during, 93

R

reciprocal altruism, 109

Reed College, 134

Roberts, Brent, 96

risk-taking, genes for, 57

Ross, Diana, 127

S

schizoid personality pattern

avoidant personality pattern
versus, 46

as character flaw, 107
 defined, 31
 example of, 33, 36
 opinion of self and others, 53

schizotypal personality pattern
 as character flaw, 107
 defined, 31
 example of, 33, 36
 opinion of self and others, 53

Sculley, John, 134-136

selective reconstruction in personal identity, 129-133

self, opinion of, 50-53

self-directedness, as major component of character, 114

self-improvement program, Franklin, 100-193

selfishness, overriding, 111

self-transcendence, as major component of character, 114

Seligman, Martin, 113

sense of identity. See identity

serotonin effect on personality, 69, 72

SERT gene, 70-71

Seven Habits of Highly Effective People (Covey), 117

sexual expression and Extraversion, 36-37

Shawn, Allen, 47

Shawn, William, 47

Shweder, Richard, 115-117

Simpson, Nicole, 42

Simpson, O.J., 42-43

skin color and sunlight, 60

SLC24A5 gene, 60

sociopath, example of, 41-44

songbirds, vocalizations of, 83

The Sopranos, 81

speech development, 83

stabilization in brain development, 95-96

statistical analysis of personality trait correlations, 13, 16

Steinem, Gloria, 37

stories. See personal stories

synapses, 79

synaptic signaling, 80

T

temperament, 85, 103

temperaments of children, 84-86

temperance
 analysis of Benjamin Franklin's, 120
 as core universal virtue, 113
 as defined by Benjamin Franklin, 100-101

testosterone, 81

Thomas, Alexander, 84

Top Ten, 30-33

colloquial names, 31
 dimensional vs. categorical
 view of, 32, 156
 thumbnail sketches, 30-31
 relationship to personality
 disorders, 32

thymine, 66

transcendence
 analysis of Benjamin
 Franklin's, 120
 as core universal virtue, 114

Trivers, Robert, 109

"The Trouble with Steve Jobs"
 (Elkind), 136

**troublesome personality
 patterns, 30-33**
 low Agreeableness patterns,
 38-44
 low Extraversion patterns,
 33-36
 high Conscientiousness,
 pattern, 44-45
 high Extraversion pattern
 36-37
 high Neuroticism patterns,
 46-50
 opinions of self and others,
 50-53
 in personality appraisals,
 141-143
 usefulness of, 53-54

twins research

brain differences among
 identical twins, 82
 by Francis Galton, 61-63
 epigenetic differences among
 identical twins, 92
 personality differences,
 identical vs fraternal,
 63-66, 159
 use in calculating
 heritability, 64

V

variants of genes, 67

effects on IQ, 94
 effects on personality traits
mouse research on, 68-69
human research on, 70-71
environmental influences on
selection, 72-76

virtues

Franklin's thirteen virtues,
 100-101
 six core universal virtues, 113

vocalizations of songbirds, 83

W

*Webster's New International
 Dictionary, 10*

Widiger, Thomas, 32

Winfrey, Oprah, 125-131

Winfrey, Vernon, 126

wisdom

analysis of Benjamin
Franklin's, 120

as core universal virtue, 114

Wish I Could Be There
(Shawn), 47

Wozniak, Steve, 134

Z

Zuckerberg, Mark 174