

Why Him? Why Her?

excerpted from the book, *Why Him? Why Her?*

by Helen Fisher, Ph.D.

Temperament and Love

We have many inborn tendencies. Indeed, scientists now believe some 50 percent of the variations in human personality are associated with genetic factors. We inherit much of the fabric of our mind.

In recent decades human behavior geneticists have added substantially to the list of traits linked with our DNA. Scientists now know that groups of interacting genes act together to create *behavior syndromes*.

After doing extensive research on the biological underpinnings of personality, I believe that each of us expresses a unique mix of four broad basic personality types. Moreover, our primary personality type steers us toward specific romantic partners. Our biological nature whispers constantly within us to influence who we love.

The Biology of Personality

Who are you? Why are we naturally attracted to particular mates? My investigation of these mysteries started over the Christmas holiday in 2004.

Dopamine. I began with this brain chemical because I had studied the activities of this powerful and ubiquitous neurotransmitter for several years.

Some of the personality traits associated with specific genes in the dopamine system were: the propensity to seek novelty; the willingness to take risks; spontaneity; heightened energy; curiosity; creativity; optimism; enthusiasm; mental flexibility. I called



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men and women who expressed these traits, *Explorers*.

Individuals who have inherited particular genes in the serotonin system tend to be calm, social, cautious but not fearful, persistent, loyal, fond of rules and facts and orderly. They are conventional, the guardians of tradition. They are skilled at building social networks, and managing people in family, business and social situations. I dubbed them *Builders*.

Testosterone. Although testosterone is often associated with males, both men and women are capable of expressing particularly strong activity in this neural system. Those who inherit this chemistry tend to be direct, decisive, focused, analytical, logical, tough-minded, exacting, emotionally

contained and good at strategic thinking. They get to the point. Many are bold and competitive. I named these people *Directors*.

Estrogen. Women and men with a great deal of estrogen activity tend to see the big picture: they connect disparate facts to think contextually and holistically, expressing what I call *web thinking*. They are imaginative. They display superior verbal skills and excel at reading postures, gestures, facial expressions and tones of voice, known as *executive social skills*. They are also intuitive, sympathetic, nurturing, mentally flexible, agreeable, idealistic, altruistic and emotionally expressive. I christened this type *Negotiators*.

Other chemical systems play a role in personality, of course. We have as many as a hundred different kinds of neurotransmitters (smaller molecules) and some fifty types of peptides in the brain. But most keep the heart beating or orchestrate other basic functions. It is increasingly apparent that these four chemicals—dopamine, serotonin, testosterone and estrogen—play lead roles in producing aspects of personality.

Two others should be mentioned, though. Norepinephrine, a chemical closely related to dopamine, undoubtedly contributes to some of the Explorer's traits, especially their energy and impulsivity. And oxytocin—a chemical synthesized, stored and triggered (in large part) by estrogen—most likely plays a role in the Negotiator's compassion, nurturing, trust and intuition. In fact, *families* of



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chemicals produce the Explorer, Builder, Director and Negotiator. The specific activities of any one chemical are not as significant as the *ratios* and *interactions* among all of them and several other neural systems.

Nevertheless, only dopamine, serotonin, testosterone and estrogen have been directly associated with a wide range of personality traits. So variations in these four chemicals most likely form the foundation of these four basic styles of thinking and behaving.

But how does an individual on an Internet dating site scan through an array of photographs and essays (profiles) and select individuals of a particular biological type?

As it turns out, our faces and words say much about who we are. Subtle messages about temperament are signaled in our eyes, the structure and shape of our face, the smoothness of our skin, the fullness of our lips, the nose, the chin, the forehead.

The Lure of Words

Explorers, Builders, Directors and Negotiators signal their particular temperaments with their words.

This proposition has a history, known as the *Lexical Hypothesis*. In the 1930s, psychologists proposed that when individuals describe themselves they choose words and phrases that emphasize traits they regard as central to who they are. With time, these words become encoded in their speaking habits.

So, using the statistical sample of 178,532 men and women on Chemistry.com, I launched my *Word Type Study*. I composed a list of 170 words and examined how often each personality type used these words as they described themselves and what they were looking for in a mate.

Adventure is the word most often used by Explorers. The other nine of their top ten most used words (in descending order) are *venture*, *spontaneity/spontaneous*, *energy*, *new*, *fun*, *traveling*, *outgoing*, *passion* and *active*.

Family is the most-used word among Builders. Following this, Builders are particularly partial to the words *honesty*, *caring*, *moral/morals*, *respect*, *loyal*, *trust*, *values*, *loving* and *trustworthy*.

Intelligent and *intelligence* together top the list of words used by Directors. They also favor *intellectual*, *debate*, *geek*, *nerd/nerdy*, *ambition*, *ambitious*, *driven*, *politics*, *challenge/challenging* and *real*.

Can you guess the favorite words of Negotiators? *Passion* and *passionate*. These men and women also prefer *real*, *heart*, *kind/kindness*, *sensitive*, *read/reader*, *sweet*, *learning/learn*, *random* and *empathetic/empathy*.

Words, words, words. As Mark Twain said, "The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug."

Dr. Helen Fisher will present
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