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## How To Understand Personality Differences... For Happier Relationships

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You are so disorganized.

No, I'm not. I'm flexible. You're just being *inflexible*.

Which is it? Disorganized or flexible?

I've heard it both ways.

Here's the thing. We're always looking at the world through the lens of our personality style. And since people have this self-affirming bias, there is a tendency for them -- a healthy one really -- to value characteristics that they perceive in themselves. If I'm organized, I tend to view it as a valuable thing.

Since "organized" is one lens through which I view the world, it's also quite natural to view people around me on a continuum of more-to-less organized. So, if I value being organized and I see someone who is quite different from me in that respect, then I tend to describe them as *disorganized*. They lack a quality I view myself as having.

There's another way to approach these kinds of differences. In the realm of personality type -- as measured in the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) -- we understand personality preferences as characterized by categories that are *complementary* opposites. A judging approach to life and a perceiving approach to life are, for instance, complementary opposites.

To continue our previous example, judging types often value an organized approach to life. Because of this value, it's not uncommon for a judging type to look at a perceiving type and observe what seems to be the logical opposite of organized behavior. They see the perceiving type as being *disorganized*.

But if you talk to someone who has a perceiving style, they view themselves first and foremost as flexible. They tend to value flexibility and try to live life in a way that fulfills that value. They respond to emerging opportunities (say, a fun movie offer from a friend) and don't mind juggling other things to make that happen. Though they certainly can be organized in areas that are important to them, they are not motivated by being organized.

Rather, they are motivated by something completely different. They are motivated by opening things up and by being curious, (i.e., what are all the exciting places we could go for vacation) rather than by getting things settled and planned (i.e., let's decide where we're going for vacation). Both, by the way, are valuable approaches to life.



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So, a judging type who views someone else as disorganized is telling us about their own values -- not the values of the person they are observing. Obvious I know, but it bears saying.

In similar fashion, perceiving types tend to value flexibility, spontaneity and curiosity. Thus, when a perceiving type looks at a judging type, they often see the logical opposite of their own values -- or the lack of something they value. They see *inflexibility* and *nonspontaneity* -- or lack of curiosity. But the judging type orients around being organized and planful. So the perceiving type is telling us about his or her own values, not about the values or motivations of the judging type.

In the field of personality type, the qualities that characterize the two sides of a preference pair are referred to as psychologically opposite -- not logically opposite. Thus, we talk about such complementary opposites as "organized" (how judging types experience themselves) versus "flexible" (how perceiving type experience themselves).

Learning to view ourselves and others in this way -- as having different motivations -- goes a long way toward creating better relationships. When I understand your motivations are different from mine, rather than believing you lack something fundamentally valuable, then I can stop trying to turn you into another version of me (a "mini-me", mu-ha-ha).

Here are some other fun ones. Play with them. Look at one, come up with the logical opposite and apply it to the other side. See how that word might demean the other person's view of the world and self?

**Extravert** - Active <----> **Introvert** - Reflective  
**Sensing type** - Realistic <----> **Intuitive type** - Imaginative  
**Thinking type** - Logical <----> **Feeling type** - Compassionate  
**Judging type** - Organized <----> **Perceiving type** - Flexible

If I'm an extravert, for example, I may view someone opposite me on that preference as *inactive* at best -- and passive at worst. An introvert, in contrast, may experience him or herself as considered and reflective -- not inactive.

Let's say your partner and you are going to re-do your living room She keeps coming up with different ideas, different looks, all the possible ways you might approach it, and what you might include. But from your perspective, if you did everything she said, then you'd never get it done. She is so unrealistic.

See what I mean?

Okay, now I'll leave you with something to chew on. What if we're both perceiving types? Well, then I'm flexible. But you? You're just downright irresponsible.

Go figure.

There's that self-affirming bias again.



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