Trait Theories & Informal Approaches to Personality

Personality Traits and Personality Temperaments
Another way of analyzing an individual's personality is in terms of personality traits. Trait theories are actually formal assessment tools, researched and designed by such famous psychologists as Allport, Cattell, and Eysenck (O--allpsych.com). These theories are often applied in an informal manner, however, which is why they are described in this course as "informal approaches" to personality.

A **trait** is a quality individuals have in common with each other, though one person may have more of this quality than another. Examples of traits are friendliness, outgoingness, sensitivity, trust, and many others.

A **temperament** is generally thought of as a set of personality characteristics, or traits, a person may have, as may be exhibited in behavioral patterns. An example might be extraversion, which is a tendency for a person to be energetic, friendly, and sociable. Temperament is often presented in psychology as innate, or occurring at birth, with a given temperament pattern continuing throughout the lifespan. The Keirsey Temperament Sorter (O-Keirsey.com), similar to the popular Myers-Briggs Type Indicator test (O-Myers-Briggs.org), is an assessment tool measuring a person's tendencies toward four temperament patterns. If interested in using the Keirsey tool, follow the instructions on the website and use it more for fun than for self-diagnosis. You will need to register before completing the 70-item Keirsey test but there is no cost to do so.

**Personality Types**
Sometimes people's personalities are described through generalized personality types; you may already be familiar with the **Type A** and **Type B** personality types, for instance. The stereotypical Type A personality is characterized by impatience, aggression, anger, hostility, and the need for control over situations. Individuals labeled as "Type A" may experience more cardiovascular complications (high blood pressure, heart disease, e.g.) than an individual who does not exhibit these personality characteristics. The Type B personality type is associated with patience, being "laid back" or calm, and much less time-urgent. The **Type C** personality type fits the person who may be very busy and task-driven, but who may also have a tendency to be passive and hold anger inside. Psychtreatment.com provides a little more information on differentiating Type A, Type B, and Type C personality types (R).

Are you Type A? If interested, take a test to **assess your Type A tendencies** at the Body Mind Queendom Page (O). Please use this test not as a diagnosis, but as an understanding into the components which make up the "Type A" personality. (O)

**Attitudes**
The attitudes we exude to friends, family, acquaintances, and strangers often reveal a lot about who we are. An example of an attitude is the optimist/pessimist point of view. An optimist usually has a positive bent on potentially stressful situations, while a pessimist usually has a negative outlook. As many may already be familiar, an optimist considers a glass filled halfway as "half full" while a pessimist considers the same glass "half empty." Optimistic and pessimistic attitudes not only demonstrate the effects on a person's outlook on life, but may also affect a person's state of health. Travel to EHE & Me's website to learn more about how **optimism and pessimism** impact health (R). Hilary Tindle, a University of Pittsburgh Assistant Professor of Medicine, writes about **Why Pessimism is Hazardous to Your Health** (O-NextAvenue.org, 6/27/13)..