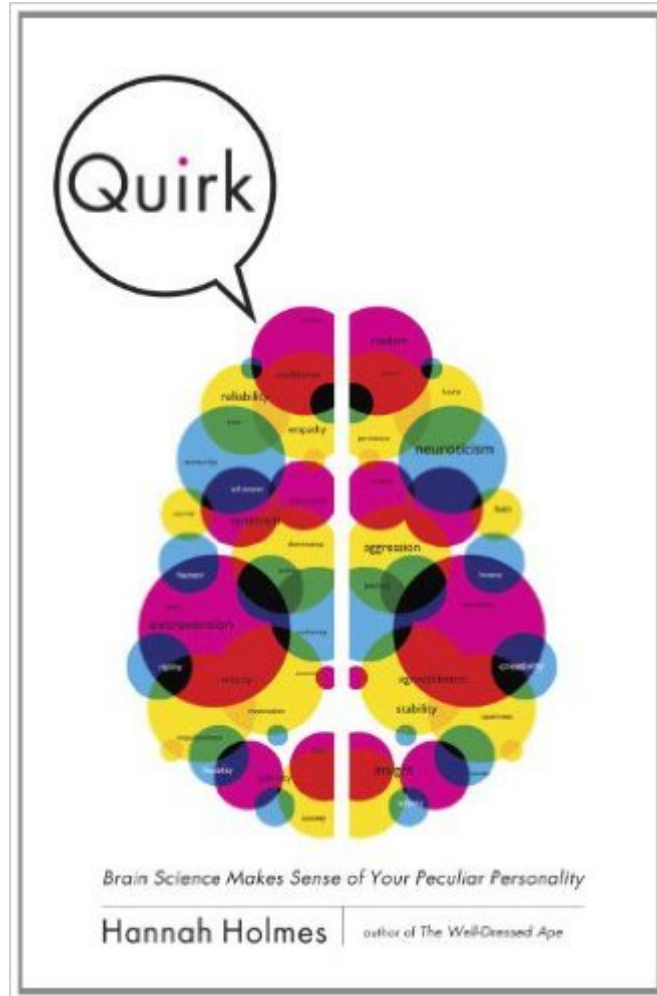


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Quirk: Brain Science Makes Sense Of Your Peculiar Personality



Synopsis

Who are you? It's the most fundamental of human questions. Are you the type of person who tilts at windmills, or the one who prefers to view them from the comfort of an air-conditioned motorcoach? Our personalities are endlessly fascinating—not just to ourselves but also to our spouses, our parents, our children, our co-workers, our neighbors. As a highly social species, humans have to navigate among an astonishing variety of personalities. But how did all these different permutations come about? And what purpose do they serve? With her trademark wit and sly humor, Hannah Holmes takes readers into the amazing world of personality and modern brain science. Using the Five Factor Model, which slices temperaments into the major factors (Extraversion, Neuroticism, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness) and minor facets (such as impulsive, artistic, or cautious), Holmes demonstrates how our genes and brains dictate which factors and facets each of us displays. Are you a Nervous Nelly? Your amygdala is probably calling the shots. Hyperactive Hal? It's all about the dopamine. Each facet took root deep in the evolution of life on Earth, with Nature allowing enough personal variation to see a species through good times and bad. Just as there are introverted and extroverted people, there are introverted and extroverted mice, and even starfish. In fact, the personality genes we share with mice make them invaluable models for the study of disorders like depression, schizophrenia, and anxiety. Thus it is deep and ancient biases that guide your dealings with a very modern world. Your personality helps to determine the political party you support, the car you drive, the way you eat M&Ms, and the likelihood that you'll cheat on your spouse. Drawing on data from top research laboratories, the lives of her eccentric friends, the conflicts that plague her own household, and even the habits of her two pet mice, Hannah Holmes summarizes the factors that shape you. And what she proves is that it does take all kinds. Even the most irksome and trying personality you've ever encountered contributes to the diversity of our species. And diversity is the key to our survival.Â From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

This is a great topic. It's basically the Five Factor personality model meets brain science meets evolutionary psychology. If you're not already familiar with all that ...The Five Factor model (also called the Big 5, OCEAN, and CANOE) is a way to parse out each individual's personality. Different factors include open-mindedness, conscientiousness (AKA orderliness), extroversion, agreeableness (AKA accommodation), and neuroticism (i.e., as opposed to Emotional Stability). It's kind of like Myers-Briggs, if you're familiar with that. The good thing about the Five Factor model, though, is that a lot of research went into it. It's typically recognized as THE model for serious research. Neuroscience means fMRI images and experimenting on mice to see which chemicals affect which parts of the brain to produce what behaviors, attitudes, and - finally - personality traits. Evolutionary psychology posits that some of the ways we behave and think and feel were selected through evolution. For example, humans evolved in an environment of limited nutritional choices. That's why we crave sweets, fats, and salt. While that was effective hundred of thousands of years ago, when these things were scarce in the natural environment, it's very unhealthy and counter-productive today, when these things are cheap and available everywhere. So, why three stars? It's less the topic (which I love) and more the style. I generally like books like this, books that take something pretty complex and boil them down a little and present them in an accessible way that the average reader can appreciate. Probably the prime example here is someone like a Malcolm Gladwell. Holmes attempts something similar. For me, though, she goes a little overboard.

This book has the apparent rhetorical objective of bringing personality theory and evolutionary

theory together to try to explain the elucidate individual personality by making sense of the Big Five model using informal examples selected by the author. Personally, it didn't work for me. One reason is that her adaptation explanations didn't make sense of the Big Five model in any consistent way as far as I could tell. The second reason is that I found her use of informal examples very confusing. They seemed like they could be interpreted in ways other than the author's interpretation, and that left me wondering whether she had really accomplished the objective at all. There is a feeling here in many places of ad hoc storytelling to try to make sense out of each of the facets predicted by Big Five theory. There is a lot of good information about the Big Five model and its subscales here, with examples, and if you are just looking for that, I think it is a worthwhile book, and there are few good books in that genre. However I'm much less enthusiastic about the attempted synthesis with evolutionary biology. And the gaps in an explanation of personality are notorious opportunities for our instincts for wishful thinking and stereotypes to slip in. Good features include the nicely thought out overall organization, the inclusion of both mouse and human research for each trait, and an attempted evolutionary rationale. Also the theoretical stance introduced in the beginning is very intriguing, suggesting that natural selection favors different personalities because there is no optimum behavioral strategy in every environment humans find themselves in historically.

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