



Temperament & Personality Development

Health Psychology (CMED2006)

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Learning Objectives

At the end of the lecture, student should be able to

- Describe the Big Five personality traits
- Outline the main dimensions of temperament
- Describe the nature and nurture factors that affect personality development



Part 1

Individual Differences vs Group Differences



Individual Differences

Individual differences refer to any characteristics by which individuals may be distinguished from one another

We can talk about the difference in physical characteristics (e.g., height, weight, appearance, etc.) between different people, but in psychology we often talk about things like intelligence and personality – as well as possible factors that drives these differences (e.g., difference between men and women)



Men, Women & Anyone In-between

Men—Women and Male—Female are historically one of the most common way to divide people (and things, and even words)

There are definitely differences between men and women, but note that a lot of the differences are the result of social factors rather than biological factors



Group Differences

Characteristics of men and women overlap quite a lot, so that it is often not very useful when we deal with individuals

Similarly, even if differences between groups are, on average, quite significant, that might not apply to individual members

Grouping/labelling can be convenient and comforting, but can lead to insensitivity and prejudice



Part 2

Temperament



Definition of Temperament

“The basic foundation of personality, usually assumed to be biologically determined and present early in life, including such characteristics as energy level, emotional responsiveness, demeanor, mood, response tempo, behavioral inhibition, and willingness to explore.”

(APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2nd edition)



Temperament

Temperament is the basic set of behavioural and emotional predispositions present at birth – and which would eventually affect one's personality

In terms of infants, the most basic classification would be “easy children (40% of infants)”, “difficult children (10% of infants)” and “slow-to-warm-up children (15% of infants)” – the rest of infants being a combination of these



4 Key Dimensions of Temperament

Young children have less clear and less stable personality, but differences in temperament can still be observed

Note that like personality, temperament describe a child's tendencies to behave, rather than describe a type of children



4 Key Dimensions: Activity

A tendency to move often and vigorously rather than to remain passive or immobile

Opposite to passivity and inactive



4 Key Dimensions: Approach

Also sociability

A tendency to move toward rather than away from new people, situations, or objects, usually accompanied by positive emotion

Opposite to inhibition and anxiety (a tendency to respond with fear or to withdraw from new people, situations, or objects)



4 Key Dimensions: Irritability

Also negative emotionality / anger

A tendency to respond with anger, fussiness, loudness, or irritability; a low threshold of frustration

Opposite to positive emotionality and calmness



4 Key Dimensions: Task Persistence

Also effortful control

An ability to stay focused, to manage attention and effort

Opposite to indolence and distractable



Development of Temperament & Personality

Temperament and personality are affected by different factors:

Hereditry & Gender differences

Environment (including parenting style) – both behaviours and experiences affect how our brain develops (also see Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development)



Goodness of Fit

Compatibility between parent and child is important

Problems might arise if the parent's behaviour, demands, and expectations do not match the child's temperament and abilities

Parents (and indeed anyone working with young children) need to be sensitive to the difference in children's temperament



Tool 84: Dimensions of Temperament

A person's (especially a young person's) behaviour might be explained by their temperament and the goodness of fit between the person and those they are interacting with

One's temperament can ultimately affect their personality – both are the results of interactions between nature and nurture factors



Part 3

Personality & Personality Traits



Definition of Personality

“The enduring configuration of characteristics and behavior that comprises an individual’s unique adjustment to life, including major traits, interests, drives, values, self-concept, abilities, and emotional patterns.”

(APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2nd edition)



Definition of Personality Trait

“A relatively stable, consistent, and enduring internal characteristic that is inferred from a pattern of behaviors, attitudes, feelings, and habits in the individual.”

(APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2nd edition)



Personality

Characteristics of a person, relatively stable

Tendencies, not types (e.g., the pseudoscience of enneagram, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator & zodiac sign personality)

Develop through the interaction between nature (temperament) and nurture (environment & experience)



Five-Factor Personality Model (FFM)

Most widely used taxonomy of personality is the Big Five personality traits / five-factor personality model, which states that individual differences in personality can be described through five main dimensions (OCEAN):

Openness to experience; Conscientiousness;
Extraversion; Agreeableness; Neuroticism



Openness to Experience

One's tendency to be open to new aesthetic, cultural, or intellectual experiences

Associated with rich vocabulary, vivid imagination, interest in abstract ideas, willingness to try new and unconventional things, risk-taking behaviours, etc.



Conscientiousness

One's tendency to be organized, responsible, and hardworking

Associated with being organized, being prepared, having and following a schedule, paying attention to details, paying attention to one's duties, etc.



Extraversion

An orientation of one's interests and energies toward the outer world of people and things rather than the inner world of subjective experience

Associated with interacting with people, fond of talking, comfortable around people, drawing attention to oneself, needing more stimulation, etc.



Agreeableness

One's tendency to act in a cooperative, unselfish manner

Associated with being considerate and kind, being helpful to others, sympathize with others' feelings, being less competitive, being interested in other people's problems, etc.



Neuroticism

A chronic level of emotional instability and proneness to psychological distress

Associated with being easily stressed, frequent mood swings, worried about things, easily disturbed, less easy to relax, etc.



Notes about Personality

The five dimensions of personality (and also most scientific theories of personality) are descriptive of a person's tendency to behave – and not prescriptive, nor are there moral judgement

People are NOT divided into personality types – for each dimension, most people are around the middle; and it is the combination of traits that make up a person's personality



Tool 85: Five-Factor Personality Model (FFM)

A person's behaviour might be explained by their personality, which could be described according to the five dimensions of the five-factor personality model

The five dimensions being openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism



Part 4

Explaining Behaviours



Scenario 1

How should a caretaker/parent interact with a child with the temperament below so as to help the child perform?

Activity—Passivity

Approach—Inhibit

Irritability—Calmness

Task persistence—Distractable



Scenario 2

How might we encourage a diabetic patient to adopt a healthier lifestyle if they have a high level of each of the factors below?

Openness to experience

Conscientiousness

Extraversion

Agreeableness

Neuroticism



Part 5

Conclusion



Conclusion

- It is tempting to divide people into broad groups and overestimate the differences between one person and the next (or underestimate the differences between two people in the same group)
- Temperament is the basic set of behavioural and emotional predispositions present at birth (activity, approach, irritability, task persistence)
- Personality is the enduring configuration of characteristics and behavior that comprises an individual's unique adjustment to life (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism)



Reading / References

- Boyd, DR & Bee, H (2019). Lifespan development (8th ed.). Chapter 6.4: Personality, Temperament, and Self-Concept; Chapter 8.2: Personality and Self-Concept; . Boston, MA: Pearson.



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