

Record: 1

Title: Adjustment (psychology).

Authors: Ferguson, Grace

Source: Salem Press Encyclopedia of Health, 2016.

Document Type: Article

Subject Terms: ADJUSTMENT (Psychology)
ADAPTATION level (Psychology)
PSYCHOLOGY
PERSONALITY
ADAPTABILITY (Psychology)

Abstract: Although modern society has made significant advances in many scientific fields, psychosocial issues and the quest to personally adjust in society have not declined. The popularity of personal development books and self-realization programs reveal the need for solutions to everyday problems. However, adjustment requires more than external self-help devices, as it is both a psychological and behavioral process. In order to cope with psychosocial stressors, one must successfully adapt to the pressures of everyday life. These stressors can stem from divorce, relationship problems, death or illness of a loved one, personal health issues, financial problems, loss of employment, or other life-changing events. Individuals who have a tough time coping may develop an adjustment disorder, which is a group of symptoms, such as hopelessness and sadness, arising from the inability to cope with a stressful event. There is an intrinsic connection between one's coping flexibility, which is defined by personality, and adjustment.

Accession Number: 87323437

Database: Research Starters

Adjustment (psychology)

Although modern society has made significant advances in many scientific fields, psychosocial issues and the quest to personally adjust in society have not declined. The popularity of personal development books and self-realization programs reveal the need for solutions to everyday problems. However, adjustment requires more than external self-help devices, as it is both a psychological and behavioral process. In order to cope with psychosocial stressors, one must successfully adapt to the pressures of everyday life. These stressors can stem from divorce, relationship problems, death or illness of a loved one, personal health issues, financial problems, loss of employment, or other life-changing events. Individuals who have a tough time coping may develop an adjustment disorder, which is a group of symptoms, such as hopelessness and sadness, arising from the inability to cope with a stressful event. There is an intrinsic connection between one's coping flexibility, which is defined by personality, and adjustment.



Breakfast at Sunrise. Seeking and eating food is a basic adjustment to the physiological state of hunger. Alfred Jacob Miller [Public domain or Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons



Old Man Grieving, by Vincent van Gogh. Vincent van Gogh [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

Background

At the root of adjustment disorders are personality differences, which vastly influence the way people cope with situations. Personality theorists have long claimed that in order to comprehend individual behavior, patterns of behavior must be broken down into discernible traits. Among these assumptions is Paul Costa's and Robert McCrae's popular Big Five personality classification model, which includes extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience.

A person with extraversion traits is sociable, proactive, and gregarious, instead of shy and quiet. One who is agreeable is warm and cooperative, rather than cold and antagonistic. A conscientious person is organized, reliable, and industrious, instead of indolent, undependable, and disorganized. Emotional stability is characterized by self-confidence and calm, rather than anxiousness and insecurity. An individual who is open to experience is curious and creative, instead of practical and narrow-minded. Several of these traits are linked to career attainment. For example, extraversion and conscientiousness are favorable predictors of occupational success while emotional instability is a negative predictor. Other traits can be linked to health and mortality. For example, emotional instability is associated with major mental disorders and physical illnesses while conscientiousness is linked to fewer illnesses and lower mortality rate.

The Big Five framework has become the leading personality model in modern psychology. However, some theorists argue that simply identifying traits is not enough to explain the differences observed in human personality. Further, early trait theories overlooked situational variables and process, which explain how specific

traits lead to particular outcomes. Thus, contemporary researchers have adopted a broader, more integrative approach to studying personality. Under the integrative model, personality is described as an amalgamation of the person's psychological processes. The individual's dispositions—such as attitudes, emotions, thoughts, and expectations—shape the way he or she responds and adjusts to stressful situations.

Historically, different theorists have applied the word *stress* in different ways. Some regarded stress as an event that causes tough situations, such as a divorce; others viewed it as the reaction prompted by a difficult occurrence. Contemporary researchers are increasingly regarding stress as a unique blend of the two—a stimulus-response event in which the person feels threatened or undergoes harm or loss. These threats, whether real or perceived, are strenuous to the person's coping abilities.

Overview

Psychology is a science and a profession that concentrates on behavior and associated physiological and mental processes. Adjustment is an extensive area of psychology that deals with how individuals capably or ineffectively deal with the demands and stresses of everyday life. Although early theorists and contemporary researchers have had conflicting views on the definition of stress and personality structure, the general consensus is that there is a correlation between stress, personality, and adjustment.

Stress is an inevitable component of everyday life. While stress is often linked to major harrowing events such as floods, divorce, and terrorism, it can be minor in scope such as routine household obligations and everyday decision-making. According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, an essential feature of adjustment disorder is the development of clinically important behavioral or emotional symptoms in response to a recognizable psychosocial stressor. Failure to properly adjust to stressors spawns these behavioral and emotional symptoms, which are clinically significant in either of the following cases: marked distress that exceeds what is generally expected from exposure to the stressor, and considerable impairment in academic or social functioning.

Biological and environment factors—such as culture, gender, age, and social conditions—help shape personality. The American Psychiatric Association advises clinicians to take these factors into account when making clinical judgments about whether an individual's response to stress is dysfunctional or exceeds what is typically expected. For example, women are diagnosed with adjustment disorder twice as frequently as men, but the gender ratio is equivalent in adolescents and children. Culturally, the demands of daily living in modern societies and indigenous cultures are quite different—what is viewed as stressful and how people respond depends on their upbringing. In addition, people's evaluations of stressful occurrences are subjective, as some people are more inclined to feel threatened by life's challenges than others.

Human reaction to stress is complicated and multifaceted. The situations that induce stress affect people on various levels. From traffic frustrations to relationship problems to scheduling conflicts and more, stress often elicits strong emotional responses, such as annoyance, anger, envy, and guilt. Although stress is typically associated with negative emotions and distress, researchers have detected an association between stress, positive emotions, and adjustment. For example, researchers Annmarie Groarke, Ruth Curtis, and Michael Kerin assert that cross-sectional and longitudinal studies of breast cancer survivors show that optimism has a notable impact on emotional well-being.

Effective adjustment to life's stressors requires the application of good coping skills, which vary by individual. Positive coping skills may include exercise; reading; relaxation techniques such as meditation; taking personal time off such as a mini-vacation; enlisting the support of friends; taking care of a pet; using humor to lighten the situation; indulging in creative outlets such as drawing or writing; eating nutritional foods; or sleeping to allow the body to recover from the stressful event. Ineffective adjustment occurs when negative coping skills are used to

manage stressors, such as using illegal drugs, excessively drinking alcohol, storing or ignoring negative feelings, overworking, avoiding issues, and self-mutilation. Whether one adjusts positively to life's difficulties comes down to his or her method of coping.

Bibliography

"Adjustment Disorder: MedlinePlus Medical Encyclopedia." *Adjustment Disorder*. U.S. National Library of Medicine. Web. 4 Nov. 2015.

Cheng, Cecilia, Hi-Po Bobo Lau, and Man-Pui Sally Chan. "Coping Flexibility and Psychological Adjustment to Stressful Life Changes: A Meta-Analytic Review." *Psychological Bulletin* (2014): 1582–1607. Print.

Groarke, Annmarie, Ruth Curtis, and Michael Kerin. "Global Stress Predicts Both Positive and Negative Emotional Adjustment at Diagnosis and Post-Surgery in Women with Breast Cancer." *Psycho-Oncology* (2013): 177–85. Print.

Hales, Robert E., Stuart C. Yudofsky, and Glen O. Gabbard, eds. *The American Psychiatric Publishing Textbook of Psychiatry*. 5th ed. Arlington: American Psychiatric Pub., 2008. Print.

Heszen, Irena. "Temperament and Coping Activity under Stress of Changing Intensity over Time." *European Psychologist* 17.4 (2012): 326–36. Print.

Nelson, Debra L., and James C. Quick. *Organizational Behavior: Science, the Real World, and You* 7th ed. Mason: South-Western Cengage Learning, 2011. Print.

Sadaghiani, Nazila Seyyed Khorasani, and Mohsen Saghatyazad Sorkhab. "The Comparison of Coping Styles in Depressed, Anxious, Under Stress Individuals and the Normal Ones." *Procedia—Social and Behavioral Sciences* 84 (2013): 615–20. Print.

Weiten, Wayne, Dana S. Dunn, and Elizabeth Yost Hammer. *Psychology Applied to Modern Life: Adjustment in the 21st Century* 11th ed. Stamford: Cengage Learning, 2014. Print.

Copyright of **Salem Press Encyclopedia of Health** is the property of Salem Press. The copyright in an individual article may be maintained by the author in certain cases. Content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.

Source: Salem Press Encyclopedia of Health, 2016

Item: 87323437