Record: 1

Title: Temperament (psychology).

Authors: Ferguson, Grace

Source: Salem Press Encyclopedia of Health, 2016.

Document Type: Article

Subject Terms: TEMPERAMENT
MOOD (Psychology)
EMOTIONAL conditioning

Abstract: People have been curious about temperament for thousands of years, but scientific psychology did not always have the means to unravel its complexities. The twenty-first century has brought enormous advancement to this area of psychology. Despite the long-standing controversy regarding the true meaning of the word, the general consensus is that it refers to genetically based differences in an individual's emotional responses and behavioral style. These differences can be seen from early childhood and are demonstrated over time, across situations. There is a close tie between temperament and personality, with temperament serving as the emotional and biological foundation of personality. Differences in temperament develop during infancy and childhood, forming the essence of personality. Understanding the core facets of temperament can lead to deeper knowledge of oneself and human nature.

Accession Number: 89409110

Database: Research Starters

Temperament (psychology)

People have been curious about temperament for thousands of years, but scientific psychology did not always have the means to unravel its complexities. The twenty-first century has brought enormous advancement to this area of psychology. Despite the long-standing controversy regarding the true meaning of the word, the general consensus is that it refers to genetically based differences in an individual's emotional responses and behavioral style. These differences can be seen from early childhood and are demonstrated over time, across situations. There is a close tie between temperament and personality, with temperament serving as the emotional and biological foundation of personality. Differences in temperament develop during infancy and childhood, forming the essence of personality. Understanding the core facets of temperament can lead to deeper knowledge of oneself and human nature.

The Four Temperaments: Choleric, sanguine, melancholic, and phlegmatic. Charles Le Brun [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

Modified version of Four temperaments, with Responsive and Expressive Axes and mixed temperaments added. By Noe [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

Background

The concept of temperament (stemming from the Latin word *tempermentum*) can be traced back to ancient times and originally relates to the "Four Temperaments," which were built upon the ancient Greek medical concept of the "Four Humors." Humorism stated that there were four essential bodily humors and that sickness was the result of a disparity in them. Greek physician Aelius Galenus devised the terms *sanguine*, *choleric*, *melancholic* and *phlegmatic* to describe the impact of the Four Humors on personality. The sanguine person, in whom blood predominates, is optimistic and outgoing; the choleric person, with a high proportion of yellow bile, is irritable and easily angered; the melancholic person, in whom black bile predominates, is introverted and sad; and the phlegmatic person, with a high proportion of phlegm, is calm and easygoing. Throughout history, philosophers, doctors, teachers, clergymen and teachers have accepted this fourfold typology, and some psychologists have linked their theoretical approaches to it.

The centralized role of temperament in understanding personality was articulated in the early twentieth-century work of psychologist Gordon W. Allport, who defined personality as "the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his unique adjustment to his environment." This definition is in line with the study of common traits, which Allport also defined and which implies that personality is biologically based. Allport revealed the direct connection between temperament and personality through his emphasis on process, his consideration of adaptive traits that may be associated with evolution, and his regard for dynamic organization.

In the late twentieth century, the theory of temperament was made more accessible to the average individual through David Keirsey, a psychologist and the author of *Please Understand Me: Character and Temperament Types* (1984). Keirsey's temperament theory extends the concept of the Four Temperaments, assigning each of the four personalities an animal that sums up their character: Artisans (fox), Guardians (beaver), Idealists (dolphin), and Rationals (owl). The fox seeks freedom and the ability to have an effect on others; the beaver seeks responsibility and belonging; the dolphin seeks significance, meaning and his own identity; and the owl seeks self-control, knowledge and competence.

Overview

The theory of temperament pertains to individual traits that determine how people respond to their environment, and it is generally more concerned with how a person does something, rather than what they do. Child-oriented temperament theorists regard temperament as a component of personality, which comprises the person's abilities, motivations, defense mechanisms, values, standards and temperament. For this reason, when studying temperament, researchers examine personality as well.

According to acclaimed researchers and child psychiatrists, Alexander Thomas and Stella Chess, temperament deals with the how, or style, of behavior. Personality, however, pertains to why a person does something and the abilities and content of the behavior, such as what the person does and how well he does it. Both personality and temperament are widely overlapping areas of study, as temperament is regarded as the main biological foundation for the developing personality. While personality theories, such as those developed by Carl Jung, have been widely adopted and extended in modern psychology, Thomas and Chess's temperament approach remains the most influential of its kind in that it has established a landmark model that later theories have followed.

In developing their classic model, Thomas and Chess identified nine temperament traits. Activity level deals with how active the child is usually, such as whether he has problems sitting still or prefers quiet sedentary activities. Distractibility refers to how much attention the child exhibits when he is not very interested in a particular activity and how easily external stimuli interrupts his behavior. Intensity is the degree of positive or negative energy the child expends in his responses, such as whether he reacts dramatically or quietly when upset. Regularity pertains to the predictability of the child's natural functions, such as whether his sleepiness or appetite can be predicted. Sensory threshold relates to the child's sensitivity to touch, taste, and other physical stimuli, such as whether he reacts favorably or negatively to certain tastes or smells.

The sixth temperamental trait is approach or withdrawal, which examines the child's inborn responses to strangers or new events, such as whether he is slow to warm up or is comfortable with new situations. Adaptability refers to the ease with which the child adjusts to changes, as when switching from one activity to another. Persistence deals with the child's ability to continue activities when faced with challenges, such as whether he keeps working on the activity or gives up and moves on to something else. The final temperamental trait is mood, which pertains to how the child responds to the world, whether positively or negatively; for example, is he typically happy, or does he tend to focus on the more negative aspects of situations?

Although many personality experts support the belief that temperament is biologically based, they also maintain that temperament can change over the course of a person's life in response to environmental factors and personal experiences. For this reason, discussions among researchers in this field tend to focus on the extent to which temperament stems from biology and the extent to which it is fostered by the environment.

Bibliography

Dragan, Małgorzata, and Wojciech Dragan. "Temperament and Anxiety: The Mediating Role of Metacognition." *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment* 36 (2013): 246–54. Print.

Gordon, Allport. *Personality: A Psychological Interpretation*. New York: Holt, 1937. Print.

Lee, Eunju J. "Differential Susceptibility to the Effects of Child Temperament on Maternal Warmth and Responsiveness." *The Journal of Genetic Psychology* 174.4 (2013): 429–49. Print.

Losonczy-Marshall, Marta. "Stability in Temperament and Emotional Expression in 1- to 3-Year-Old Children." *Social Behavior and Personality: An International Journa* 42.9 (2014): 1421–30. Print.

Plomin, Robert, and Judy Dunn. *The Study of Temperament: Changes, Continuities, and Challenges*. Hillsdale: L. Erlbaum Associates, 1986. Print.

Smith, Walter. "The Association for Psychological Type." *NC Research Triangle Chapter* n. pag. 2008. Web. 29 Dec. 2015.

Thompson, Stephanie F., Maureen Zalewski, and Liliana J. Lengua. "Appraisal and Coping Styles Account for the Effects of Temperament on Pre-adolescent Adjustment." *Australian Journal of Psychology* 66 (2014): 122–

29. Print.

White, Fiona, David Livesey, and Brett Hayes. *Developmental Psychology: From Infancy to Development*. New South Wales: Pearson Australia, 2013. Print.

Source: Salem Press Encyclopedia of Health, 2016
Item: 89409110