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Individual Differences - Stress Response

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There have been many studies conducted that focus on the individual differences in the stress response. According to Friedman & Rosenman, every individual belongs to either of the two types of personality: Type A or Type B. On the other hand, Suzanne Kobasa relates "hardiness" and personality to stress response. Dr. Albert Bandura, however, introduced "self-efficacy" as an important related factor to stress response.

We all know that each of us is a unique person, and that our personalities are so vast that more mysteries of the mind are still to be studied by psychologists. Everyone has his own life experiences, which can never be exactly the same as that of another person's. While life experience is one of the major factors that affect stress response, an individual's personality, as well as hardiness and self-efficacy levels greatly influence his or her methods on responding to stress.



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Type A & Type B Personality

Famous researchers Friedman & Rosenman believed that people belong to either two basic types of behaviour or personality: Type A and Type B. According to the researchers, a person with a Type A personality is competitive, desires to be recognized, longs for development and advancement, wants to achieve goals and therefore, tends to rush in order for him to finish the tasks assigned to him. He is typically active and alert both mentally and physically.

The person with a Type B personality is the complete opposite of the Type A person. Why? It's because the Type B personality includes the apparent lack of motivation, drive, urgency, competitive spirit, and even ambition or desire. The person with a Type B personality is described as calm, relaxed and non-competitive. A third type, Type C, is described as a personality which involves passion for work and desire to achieve goals (typical of Type A), but when faced with stress, the person becomes apathetic (typical of Type B).

So What does This Have to Do With Stress Response?

In 1974, Friedman and Rosenman conducted a longitudinal study to prove their own theory of personality. The study involved 3200 male participants who were asked to answer questionnaires. Based on their responses, they were classified into three groups: Type A, Type B and Type C. The participants were then included in the second part of the study eight years later; that is, to know how they responded to stress in a matter of eight years. The results showed that 257 of all the participants had suffered from coronary heart diseases, a group of illnesses wherein stress is the most common cause.

What's alarming is that 70% of the 257 participants had a Type A personality. This means that people who are classified in Type B respond to stress better than those in Type A.

Hardiness

Another researcher, Suzanne Kobasa, initiated a study of hardiness, in which the "hardy personality" possesses the three C's: Control, Commitment, and Challenge. According to Kobasa, hardy people reflect on themselves as the managers of their environment and not the other way around. Also, she argued that hardy individuals are committed to face problems and won't stop until they find resolutions to these. In addition, hardy people view change not as a threat, but as a challenge.

In her study, Kobasa found out that hardy people rarely experience being ill compared to non-hardy individuals, which means that if a person is classified as a hardy individual, he can respond to stress in a more positive way in that his health is maintained rather than damaged.

Self Efficacy

Coined by Dr. Albert Bandura, self-efficacy refers to the sum of the internal beliefs of an individual on their capacity to influence that have an effect on his life. In relation to stress, self-efficacy refers to how you perceive yourself in terms of dealing with stressful situations.

According to psychologists, high self-efficacy levels tend to decrease negative stress feelings due to the increase in the person's sense of control of the stressful situation. On the other hand, low self-efficacy levels may result to stronger negative feelings towards the stressful experience, and ultimately to inability to cope with the stress in a positive manner.

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