

## Personality & Mental Health

Just a Few Highlights



## Early Influences

- Attachment style
- Early Emotion Regulation  
parental availability and warmth
- Bridge between childhood and adulthood  
development of schemas



## Biological Differences

- Temperament  
(emotion is the core of temperament)
- Stable over time  
.48 correlations in childhood  
.35 correlations between childhood and adulthood
- Emotional style also bridges childhood and adulthood



## Adult Personality

- Big 5 Personality Factors (Costa and McCrae)  
neuroticism (emotionality)  
extraversion  
openness  
agreeableness  
conscientiousness

Factor	Description
<b>O</b> verness	Being curious, original, intellectual, creative, and open to new ideas
<b>C</b> onscientiousness	Being organized, systematic, practical, achievement oriented, and dependable
<b>E</b> xtraversion	Being outgoing, talkative, sociable, and enjoying social situations
<b>A</b> greeableness	Being affable, tolerant, sensitive, trusting, kind, and warm
<b>N</b> euroticism	Being anxious, irritable, temperamental, and moody

- Extraversion correlates with reports of positive mood  
(careful, here... it's the way it is measured)  
[shall we talk about introversion too?](#)
- Agreeableness correlates with reports of positive mood
- Neuroticism correlates with measures of negative mood
- Neuroticism associated with hypersensitive limbic system
- Extroversion associated with low arousal

## Appraisal and Personality

- We construe our experiences in idiosyncratic ways  
personality shapes our appraisals  
  
more anxiety – more tuned into threats  
more happy – more expansive/ inclusive views
- Remember the Duchenne smiles of Mills College graduates?  
Results are consistent with models of temperament shaping life outcomes

## Mental Health - Childhood

- We cannot do justice to this field here ---
- Internalizing Disorders – negative internal states  
anxiety/ depression
- Externalizing Disorders – problematic behavior  
conduct disorder/ oppositional defiant disorder



### Role of Emotion??

- One view (Tompkins)  
in these disorders one emotion becomes prominent  
dominates other experiences
- Emotionally dysregulated  
poor effortful control over feelings and behavior

## Risks

- **Conflict Between Parents**  
exposure to prolonged conflict predicts externalizing disorders  
(of note, divorce is only related to this when it involves high conflict)
- **Parental Psychiatric Problems**  
parental depression predicts internalizing disorders  
  
even as babies, they react with depressed parents differently  
(gaze aversion)  
spouses & children suppress anger toward a depressed parent  
(learn the sadness stops anger)
- **Hostile/ critical Parenting & Abuse**  
predicts externalizing disorders
- **Poverty**  
\$50,000 – 14%  
below 10,000 – 35%

## What about multiple risks?

- Two risk factors increase child's risk by **4x**
- Three increases the child's risk **20x**



## Protective Factors

- Close, supportive siblings
- A loving adult outside the family who they are close to
- High achievement in school
- Secure attachment to at least one parent



## Mental Health - Adults

- Most common Disorders:
  - Depression –
    - Twice as common in women (21% versus 13%)
  - Anxiety –
    - 1/3 more common in women (30% versus 19%)
  - Substance Abuse
    - Twice as common in men (35% versus 17%)
- Often seen as continuation of childhood trends
  - boys more likely to have externalizing disorders*
  - girls more likely to have internalizing disorders*



## Stress and Disorders

- One study of 450 adults
  - 89% had a significant stress shortly before onset of major MH problem (based on life stress events measure)
- Types of events most predictive of problems
  - Losses—relationship/ job/ status
  - Humiliation – all types
  - Entrapment – stuck in adverse circumstances
  - Danger of future loss

## Other Risks

- Genetics – moderate predictive power (stress diathesis model)
- Prior mental health problems
  - kindling hypothesis – brain becomes sensitized to emotional events
  - future activation becomes more likely
- Early experience
  - early loss of a parent/ mother in particular
  - neglect
  - having depressed parents
- Attributional Style – cognitive risk for depression
- Appraisal Style – level of positive versus negative explanations
- Social Support – at least one good friend

## Body/ Mind Connections to Emotion

- Stress causes illness via HPA/ immune responses
  - Social support mediates this effect
- Students & Exams (Kiecolt-Glaser)
  - Lower immune response to vaccination
  - 40% less healing to wounds/ injuries that occur just before exams
- Stresses lasting more than 1 month most impactful
- Low emotion responses (alexithmia) – show more bodily symptoms and greater illness (recall Pennebaker here)

## More Mind Body

- Doll & Petro, 1981 demonstrated 80% of cancer linked to lifestyle smoking, diet, weight  
a link exists between stress and cancer but the mechanisms are unclear stress impacts cancers indirectly via the impact on lifestyle, most likely
- Type A Personality (hostility, impatience, competition)  
increases risk of heart disease – predominantly in those predisposed
- Marital Distress  
increases risk of heart disease – predominantly in those predisposed  
history of heart disease 3x more likely to have heart attack when in a distressed marriage

## Conclusions

- Emotions are integral to all aspects of experience
- Effective emotion regulation is key to mental health as well as physical health
- Early experiences and habits of adulthood shape emotional experience but are amenable to modification

