



Foundation for a temperament-based theory of antisocial behavior and criminal justice system involvement



Matt DeLisi ^{a,*}, Michael G. Vaughn ^b

^a Iowa State University, 203A East Hall, Ames, Iowa 50011-1070, United States

^b Saint Louis University, Tegeler Hall, 3550 Lindell Boulevard, St. Louis, MO 63103, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Available online 30 November 2013

ABSTRACT

Background: Temperament has been shown to be associated with behavior for millennia but has not been explicitly used in a theory of crime.

Methods: This state-of-the-art review incorporates theory and research from over 300 studies from developmental psychology, psychiatry, genetics, neuroscience, and criminology to introduce a temperament-based theory of antisocial conduct with criminal justice system implications.

Findings: Two temperamental constructs—effortful control and negative emotionality—are significantly predictive of self-regulation deficits and behavioral problems in infancy, in toddlerhood, in childhood, in adolescence, and across adulthood.

Conclusion: Unlike other theories that focus merely on explaining problem behaviors, our temperament approach also explains negative and aversive interactions with criminal justice system practitioners and associated maladjustment or noncompliance with the criminal justice system. A program of research is also offered to examine and test the theory.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Contents

Introduction	10
A brief history	11
Effortful control	12
Negative emotionality	13
Effortful control and negative emotionality dynamism	14
Evocative rGE	15
Family Environments	15
Preschool and school environments	16
Human service/criminal justice environments	16
Agenda for research	17
Neighborhood/SES	17
Cross-national research	18
Criminal justice system	18
Prevention and intervention	18
Discussion	19
References	21

Introduction

Criminological theories come in three general varieties. One approach centers on individual-level characteristics that are believed

to increase the liability for antisocial conduct. A second approach points to environmental conditions, often of a structural nature, that are believed to moderate behavior and increase the likelihood that an individual will become antisocial. The third approach points to social processes as the primary causal reason why persons end up engaging in antisocial behavior. All three approaches have merit and substantial empirical support, but most of these approaches lack qualities that

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: delisi@iastate.edu (M. DeLisi).

would provide a unified understanding of antisocial conduct. To do so, we believe a theory must meet two essential requirements. First, the theory must be able to advance a construct that can explain antisocial conduct irrespective of setting or developmental stage. The theory must have predictive validity across the life course because its fundamental explanatory construct has omnibus power. Even though conduct problems in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood are not identical, they share an elemental nature (heterotypic continuity) that theory can capture and articulate. Second, and most criminological theories give short shrift to this point, the theory must be able to explain the criminal justice system consequences that are produced by the same phenomenon that drives the underlying antisocial conduct. The same *thing* that manifests in crime and related personal dysfunction also manifests in maladjustment to and noncompliance with the justice system.

In the social and behavioral sciences, the study of temperament yields the greatest potential for a unified theory of lifelong antisociality and subsequent criminal justice system behavior. The reason is that temperament, which we define as the stable, largely innate tendency with which an individual experiences the environment and regulates his or her responses to the environment, is a construct that instantiates the interaction of person and environmental influences on behavior.¹ In other words, temperament is multifactorial and blends the person, structural/status, and interactional traditions of criminological theories described earlier.

Temperament is heritable, meaning that variance within a sample or population is partially attributable to genetic factors, relatively stable from birth throughout childhood, and apparent in adulthood when it is often referred to as personality (Bates, 1989; Goldsmith et al., 1987; Kagan, 1998; McCrae et al., 2000; Thomas & Chess, 1977). In this way, temperament constructs provide explanatory power whether examining conduct problems during toddlerhood, delinquency during adolescence, or recidivism while on correctional supervision during middle age (see Fig. 1).

A host of temperament constructs exist, and in our view, they are all important. But to truly understand and explain the essence of antisocial behavior across the life span, two interrelated constructs are essential: effortful control and negative emotionality.² Drawing extensively on the temperament literature and cognate research in pediatrics, clinical psychology, developmental psychology, and the neurosciences, the current theoretical offering has four aims. First, we present the first criminological theory that explicitly and exclusively utilizes temperament as its central explanatory locus. Second, we increase the range of

temperament beyond its traditional place in childhood to extend into middle and even late adulthood. Third—and we believe most importantly—we articulate a theory that explains the usual criminal justice system experiences of criminal offenders who have demonstrated life-long conduct problems. Thus, variance in effortful control and negative emotionality not only produces antisocial conduct throughout life, but also explains failure in interacting with criminal justice practitioners and completing correctional sentences. A focus on the salience of interpersonal negativity and the aversive reactions it produces comports with the negative moral connotations of antisocial behavior generally (DeLisi, 2005; Wilson, 1997; Wilson & Herrnstein, 1985). In this way, our theory meshes with the philosophical debates in the study of antisocial behavior that relate to the moral response to conduct problems. Fourth, a program of research is proffered toward testing the validity of the theory.

A brief history

The starting point for the study of temperament can be attributed to the work of Hippocrates (460–377 B.C.E.) and the *four humours* typology of four distinct temperaments. These were composed of the *melancholic* person who was described as moody and anxious with a predominance of black bile, the *sanguine* person was described as cheerful, spirited, and good natured with a predominance of blood, the *choleric* person who was angry and irritable with a yellow bile, and the *phlegmatic* person who is slow to arouse and possessing substantial phlegm. Hippocrates believed in the importance of observable behaviors and in many ways his scientism foreshadowed Baconian empiricism. Other ancient scholars also studied what would today be understood as temperament. For instance, Theophrastus, who was arguably Aristotle's most accomplished student, developed personality sketches called “characters” that portrayed various temperamental/personality types. In the first century, Aretaeus believed that the four humours within the body were the basis for psychiatric disturbance, for instance, anger and rage were believed to “stir” yellow bile which increased the body's temperature and contributed to emotional states, such as irritability and excitability (Arikha, 2008; Millon, 2009).³

In the second century, Galen followed up on the work of Hippocrates by revising the four archetypal temperaments to correspond with an imbalance with natural elements of water, earth, fire, and air and the qualities including cold, dry, moist, and hot. The phlegmatic person corresponded to water, north, and winter. The sanguine person corresponded to air, east, and spring. The choleric person corresponded

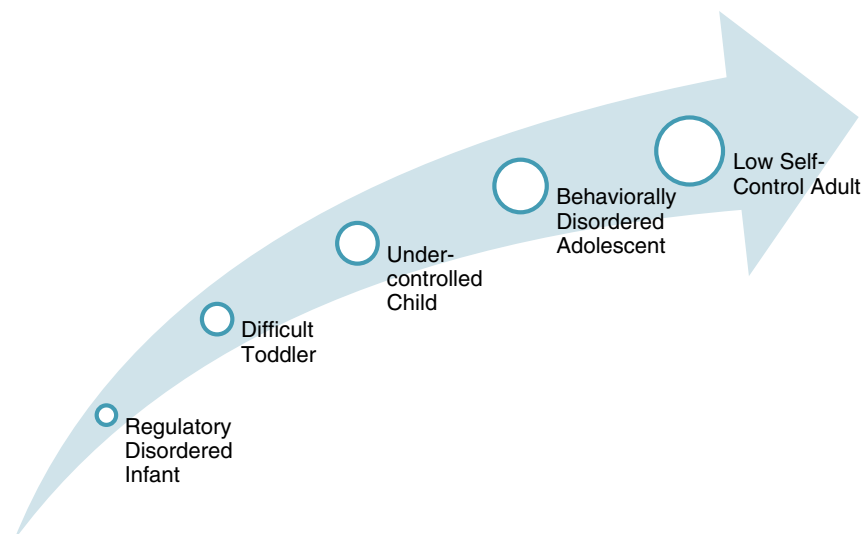


Fig. 1. Temperament and Self-Regulation Deficits across Life.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/882720>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/882720>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)