

# Type A and Type B Personality Types: An Evaluation in the Modern Organizational Psychology Scope

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The present paper evaluated Friedman's and Rosenman's Type A and Type B personality theory. According to the authors, Type A personality has been linked to coronary heart disease and other heart problems. After discussing the basic concepts of the theory, it was important to analyze different research papers that utilized the theory in different domains. Then the discussion moved forward to new personality types that have been discovered throughout the years (Types C, D, T). Then a summary of the criticism that the theory has received is included. Finally, future research ideas and limitations of the theory were included.

*Keywords:* personality, Type A, Type B, cardiovascular disease, Types C, D, T

## Type A and Type B Personality Types: An Evaluation

Personality is a concept that had its seeds established even in ancient Greece, with physicians such as Hippocrates and Galen discussing about its components. Moreover, Plato discussed that an individual's personality starts to develop in early childhood, a statement that is accepted today by contemporary research. The modern personality research and psychology as we know it today began back in the 1930's (Study.com, 2018). The pioneers and most famous contributors of the early 1930's were Carl Jung and Alfred Adler, both renowned for their theories and contribution on personality, innovations, and discoveries on the field of psychology. Furthermore, Gordon Allport in 1937 wrote a book on personality titled *Personality: A Psychological Interpretation*, which aimed to begin defining personality and create a more systematic way of research on it (Study.com, 2018).

For the present literature review, the focus will be on a renowned personality theory of the 1950's, the Type A and Type B personality theory. The structure will consist of the basic concepts and information about the theory and then proceed with discussing a selection of contemporary research done with the Type A and Type B personality types. Then, the contemporary personalities that have been discovered will be analyzed. After, the criticisms of the theory will follow. Finally, a discussion on the future research possibilities and the limitations of the theory as a whole is included. The goal of the present paper is to provide an explanation, evaluation, and analysis of the Type A and Type B personality theory and also discuss other personality types.

Before the basic concepts and history of the theory can be discussed, it is compulsory to firstly define what personality actually is. According to the American Psychological Association (APA), personality is defined as

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“an individual’s differences in patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving” (APA, 2022). Moreover, personality stems from the Latin word “persona” which means “mask”. Another explanation from psychologists is that personality is the factor that allows experts to predict behaviour and reaction in a given situation (Sharma & Jain, 2015). It is clear that not all psychologists and experts agree on one globally accepted definition of personality, but they do agree that it is a combination of relatively stable traits, through time (Sharma & Jain, 2015).

Another concept that needs to be defined in order to proceed with the Type A and Type B personality theory is stress, since it is the main factor that differentiates these two personality types as that will be explored later on in this paper. Stress is one of if not the most discussed topic by both researchers, psychologist, and managers worldwide. One of the most commonly utilized stress theories is that of Lazarus and Launier (1978), who defined stress as a situation which is unfavorable in terms of person-environment relationship. Furthermore, they identified that the coping procedure in order to alleviate and combat stress is depended heavily on the individual’s personality and thinking style (James & Sidin, 2017). In other words, in regard to employees and the workplace, personality is the main factor in stress management and coping styles.

### **Basic Concepts of the Theory**

The Type A and Type B personality theory was firstly developed in the 1950’s (1959) by two cardiologists named Friedman and Rosenman. They argued that people can have two different types of personality, Type A and Type B, with the first one being a significant predictor of developing coronary heart disease and a plethora of heart issues (Friedman & Rosenman, 1959). The main argument is that due to the increased stress that exists because of the Type A personality characteristics, the heart functioning can be heavily worsened and damaged, leading to heart disease and heart attacks. Since the two creators of the theory were not psychologists, they did not care about developing psychology as a science and were mostly investigating for medical reasons. Having said that, their work was significant in the development of the connection between the physical and psychological connection and of the Health Psychology field (Smith & Gallo, 2001).

Regarding Type A personality type individuals, they are characterized by an aggressive nature, self-confidence, and irritability. Furthermore, Type As are very focused on achieving their goals, are determined, and sometimes can be seen unfriendly. Hyperactivity and aggression are also very common among Type As. Finally, they are seen as workaholics, highly competitive, and ambitious (Aabida, Dahar, & Yousuf, 2019). On the other hand, the Type B individuals are characterized by a stress-free way of operating. They are patient, relaxed easy going, and usually do not have conflict with co-workers. They maintain a stable personality and are almost always even tempered. Finally, they are able to adjust easily to new environments. Plenty of studies have found that Type A personality is a predictor of high academic achievement but nowadays conscientiousness appears to be a much stronger predictor. Type A personality still appears to have a positive effect on academic performance (Aabida et al., 2019). The Type B personality mainly lacks all the traits that characterize Type A. Type Bs might have difficulty in academic settings because they are characterized by procrastination, can be more casual than what is needed to succeed in a competitive setting, and can be unmotivated (YouTube, 2020).

### **Major Findings/Literature Review**

In order to get a better understanding of the differences between Types A and B, it is adamant to analyze some of the contemporary literature (2000 and after) identifying and elaborating on those differences. Since the

Type A and Type B personality theory is not a contemporary theory and has been criticized, there is not a very large database of research on it. At the same time there is enough research and meta-analyses in order to be able to conduct a thorough systematic review.

The first study that will be reviewed was conducted with a sample of more than 300 managers from Germany. The purpose of the study was to identify the effect of Type A personality characteristics and locus of control on both job satisfaction and occupational health. The article mentions that a plethora of different studies have investigated similar variables and have found similar results. In terms of stress, Type A personalities appeared to have an increased amount, especially when combined with an external locus of control. The findings indicate that due to this increased level of stress, there were negative consequences on the job setting in both physical and mental health. The article also mentions that in different studies that the researchers have analysed, Type A personality was correlated with increased stress and reduced job satisfaction (Kirkcaldy, Shephard, & Furnham, 2002).

The second article that will be discussed is a more recent article which focused on finding a connection between Type A personality and presentism. As the authors suggest, a connection between presentism “the act of being present in the job but not being productive because of physical or mental reasons” and Type A personality has not been established in previous literature. A sample of 157 employees was utilized in order to establish this connection. The findings indicate that Type A personality individuals/employees have an increased chance of presenteeism behavior in comparison to Type Bs. Moreover, the study found that presenteeism is more common in women than men, managers to employees and young to old people (Yavuz & Kayhan, 2020). A possible explanation regarding the connection that was established between Type A and presenteeism is stress. Since stress is related with mental and physical problems, which in turn are related to presenteeism, the connection can be made easily. On the other hand, it could be argued logically that the competitive and results oriented nature of Type A behavior would prevent individuals from presenteeism behavior. This thought could be a suggestion for future research in an even larger sample of employees.

The third article that will be discussed investigated more thoroughly than before, the relationship between academic performance and Type A personality. A sample size of 246 students from health sciences was selected for the purposes of this study. The study also utilized the Big Five Inventory traits and along with Type A, found high conscientiousness and openness to new experiences to predict high academic performance (Al-Naggar et al., 2015). Overall, most of the research conducted agrees that Type A personality does in fact assist in academic endeavours of individuals (Aabida et al., 2019).

The fourth and final article that will be discussed in this paper aimed to investigate the relationship between risk behavior and Type A personality in high school students. A sample of 300 high school students was utilized for this study. In general, many different studies have tried to connect personality traits with risky behavior, but not as many with the Type A and Type B personality theory. The results of the study revealed a strong correlation between Type A behavior and risky behavior. On the other hand, Type Bs scored very low on the same variable (Samadypoor & Kord Tamini, 2016). The risky behaviors mentioned in the study included smoking, alcohol, drugs, addictions, and unprotected sexual behaviors. It is very interesting how Type A traits can manifest in different ways depending on the individual and the situation they are in. The same traits that can lead to great job and academic performance could lead to unwanted negative behavior and lead to serious issues in the development of adolescents.

### **Contemporary Research/New Personality Types**

Overall, the discussed research papers and knowledge that psychologists have gathered on Type A and Type B personality types have been important, but as science progresses more personality types were identified. The new personality types that were discovered in the past years are Type C, Type D, and Type T and have distinct differences from the previously known Type A and Type B personalities.

#### **Type C**

The Type C personality is a new personality that has been proposed, mainly because the Type A and Type B personality types did not appear to include the main characteristics of personality types of all individuals. Type Cs are characterized by submissiveness and difficulty of showing emotions. These traits manifest in the difficulty for standing up for themselves, agreeableness, compliance, and more. Furthermore, they tend to sacrifice their own needs for the benefits of others. The difficulty in expressing emotions mainly manifests in negative emotions, anger, anhedonia, and inability to face difficulties and adversities that appear through one's lifetime. All these types of altruistic behaviors can cause a great deal of stress to the individual with Type C personality. Type C has also been linked with depression (Rymarczyk, Turbacz, Strus, & Ciecuch, 2020).

#### **Type D**

Similarly, to Type C, Type D personality is a personality type that manifested because Type A and Type B did not cover the whole spectrum of personality (Mols & Denollet, 2010). Type D personality is connected with "distress". It is a personality type characterized by negative emotions, sadness, low self-esteem/confidence, and in general a very pessimistic way of approaching life. Type D has been connected with artery problems, weakness in the immune system, and constant depression and anxiety (Mols & Denollet, 2010).

#### **Type T**

The final personality type that will be discussed is the T personality type. This type of personality has been connected by psychologists to thrill seeking and risk-taking behaviour. These risky behaviours can even include life risking activities such as mountain climbing, sky diving, and similar activities. Unfortunately, not a lot of research has been conducted on this type of personality, but it appears that it does not include health risks (heart problems), besides the risk that the activities bring forth by themselves (Self, Henry, Findley, & Reilly, 2007).

### **Criticism of the Theory/Importance**

The Type A and Type B personality theory has been criticized on many different grounds. The primary criticism attacks the main foundation of the theory, which is that Type A personality increases the possibility of developing coronary heart disease. There are many studies which tried to find a significant correlation between those variables but failed (Innes, 2010). Moreover, Friedman and Rosenman used a sample size that was large but uneven. They included mostly middle-aged men and did not include any information about the lifestyle and diets of the participants (Friedman & Rosenman, 1959). For those reasons the theory is considered obsolete in regard to contemporary psychology but still holds value in the fact that it began a discussion and research on different personality types, how they interact, and their differences. In general, most of the theories that are now considered obsolete hold significant value since they paved the way for knowledge to be acquired by refuting and challenging what was and is known at the current times.

### **Future Research/Limitations of the Theory**

Overall, personality research is very important since it is the basis of psyche. Understanding the differences between personality types can and people can give us a better understanding of humans and in turn lead to a better society and humanity. In regard to the Type A and Type B personality theory, some concepts should be revisited. While the theory might be considered obsolete, there are still valuable lessons to get from future studies. Firstly, if we can clearly group individuals into personality categories, we could possibly assist them in contexts of therapy, work “both finding the best match for them and for creating a greater working environment”, interpersonal relationships, and everyday life. More extended research and efforts to categorize and understand personality types is necessary. Secondly, more work/research should be conducted on Type T personality since it is very unique and interesting and not much research has or is being conducted on it. Finally, it would be important to combine medical and psychological research on personality, similarly to the case of Friedman and Rosenman, in order to be able to develop both fields at the same time and combine knowledge for an even better result. This combination could lead to creating connections between the psyche and the body that were never thought of or discovered before.

Regarding the limitations of the Type A and Type B personality theory and the potential of researching personality in general, they mostly stem from the nature of personality itself. This means that all personality theories accept the premise that personality can be categorized and grouped into clusters that share very similar characteristics. But grouping people into very small categories can be problematic since every person has a different personality and even though they do share common characteristics, one is not the same to another. Similarly, an individual’s psyche is very complicated and a single or a few personality tests “that usually are given to a participant of a study/experiment” cannot provide the researcher with the full picture of the person’s personality. Thus, categorizing people into groups with just a psychometric or personality test can be dangerous and lead to inaccurate results and conclusions. This limitation could be alleviated if research was focused on a very small part of an individual’s personality each time. For example, Type A behavior consists of different characteristics, but recent literature proposes that only the hostility part of it is responsible for coronary heart disease and not the whole spectrum of the personality type (Innes, 2010). If personality traits and their manifestations can be viewed separately, the results will be more accurate and the potential of research more specific and dependable.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The goal of the present paper was to provide an evaluation and analysis of the Type A and Type B personality theory and discuss the other personality types that have emerged (C, D, T). The literature indicates that the Type A and Type B personality theory has been utilized in many contexts even if its current status is that it is mostly obsolete by today’s standards. Still, the basis of the theory which separates individuals into different personalities is very important. What remains to be seen is if it is possible to separate the complex structure of a personality and an individual’s characteristics into different types and categories.

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