

Parents' Perception of Infant Temperament: A Psychometric Study*

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This paper reports the results of a study of the psychometric properties of a questionnaire designed to measure parents' perceptions of their baby's temperament, the Perception of Baby Temperament Scales (PBT). The PBT consists of 54 items, six items for each of the nine categories identified in the New York Longitudinal Study. Mothers and fathers from 28 families each completed the PBT a total of six times (at six-week intervals), beginning when their babies were 19 weeks of age and terminating at 49 weeks. According to the results of factor analysis, the nine temperament categories of the PBT lack internal consistency. The possibility that certain aspects of baby temperament are context specific was also demonstrated.

The New York Longitudinal Study, NYLS, (Thomas, Chess, & Birch, 1968) has generated considerable research and clinical interest in the role of temperament in child development (Cameron, 1977; Carey, 1972). Defined as "the way in which an individual behaves," an infant equivalent of behavioral style, and conceived as consisting of nine distinctive categories, temperament has been related to the development of behavioral disorders, socialization difficulties, and problems in school achievement (Thomas & Chess, 1977, p. 9).

The interview and observational methods utilized in the NYLS for the measurement of temperament, however, require intensive training, and, because of their subjective nature, are fraught with

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problems of reliability and validity. To enable researchers and practitioners in child development to focus on temperament as a critical variable in the study of child development, a reliable and valid questionnaire that could be completed in a few minutes by parents is needed. The purpose of this paper is twofold: (a) to report results of a study of the psychometric properties of a recently designed questionnaire for the measurement of parents' perceptions of baby temperament, the Perception of Baby Temperament Scales (PBT), developed by Pedersen, Anderson, and Cain (1976); and (b) to suggest directions for refinements in the assessment of infant temperament.

METHOD

Sample

The sample consisted of 28 middle SES families—mother, father, and first-born child, who were participating in a longitudinal study of parent-infant interaction (Gordon, Soar, & Huitt, 1980). The families were recruited via local radio, newspapers, television, and pediatricians.

Procedure

Each of the families was videotaped for seven observations, scheduled six weeks apart, beginning when the infant was 13 weeks of age and terminating at 49 weeks. At each visit the parents were presented with a task thought to be age-appropriate from Gordon's (1970) *Baby Learning Through Baby Play*, which they were to attempt with their infant. Following each taping, beginning with 19 weeks, father and mother individually were asked to complete the PBT.

Instrument

The PBT consists of 54 items, six items for each of the nine NYLS temperament categories (see Appendix). The first three items for each category relate to one end of a continuum for that category, while the last three items relate to the opposite end and are reverse scored. Each item represents a baby activity and/or situation that is commonly observed in infancy. Following the Pedersen, Anderson, and Cain (1976) procedures, items were randomly ordered and presented individually on 3 x 5 cards. Each parent was asked to sort the items into three categories indicating the extent to which the statements described their child: "Very much like my baby"; "Sometimes or occasionally like my baby"; and "Not at all like my baby."

TABLE 1. Correlations Between Mother/Father in Same Family

Category	Pedersen, Anderson, & Cain (N = 26)			
	19-31 wks	37-49 wks	19-49 wks	
I. Activity	.43*	.50**	.55**	.59**
II. Rhythmicity	.41*	.44*	.63**	.59**
III. Adaptability	.49*	.36	.28	.33
IV. Approach	.08	.44*	.37	.46*
V. Threshold	.53**	.48**	.63**	.62**
VI. Intensity	.32	.63**	.40*	.62**
VII. Mood	.57**	.61**	.55**	.69**
VIII. Persistence	.38	.04	.004	.001
IX. Distractibility	.13	.40*	.18	.32

** < .01

* < .05

Parents were instructed to assign items not applicable to them to a "Have no experience" category.

RESULTS

Examination of Table 1 reveals that agreement between mother and father during the early weeks (19 through 31 weeks) was generally of the same magnitude as reported by Pedersen, Anderson, and Cain (1976) for their parents who were describing their babies at 5 months of age, with the notable exceptions of approach (.44 versus .08), distractibility (.40 versus .13), and persistence (.04 versus .38). Changes in parent agreement from the early months (19 through 31 weeks) to the later months (37 to 49 weeks) increased substantially for rhythmicity (.44 to .63), threshold (.48 to .63) and decreased for adaptability (.36 to .28), intensity (.63 to .40), and distractibility (.40 to .18).

In order to test the internal consistency of these dimensions a factor analysis was performed. An intercorrelation matrix (communalities in the diagonals) of the 54 PBT items was computed using the data from all six ratings by both parents (i.e., a total of 336 data points for each item) and a principal axis solution obtained. Nine factors were rotated to the Varimax criterion; five interpretable factors emerged, accounting for 25 percent of the total score variance and 48 percent of the common variance. Only one item loaded on more than one factor (I. Activity, 6. - Factors I and IV). Factor I (Table 2) was comprised of ten items (cutoff = .35) from six different temperament subscales—three from the Threshold subscale, two from Adaptability, two from Intensity, one from Persistence, and one Approach

item. These items were dramatically similar in that they *all* refer to the infant's reactions in the feeding situation. Factor II (Table 3) consists of five of the six items developed by Pederson et al. to measure Rhythmicity. These items refer to food and nap situations. Factor III (Table 4) was comprised of seven items, three from the Approach subscale, two from the Distractibility subscale, and two from the Persistence subscale. Five of these items dealt with the infant's response to a toy, one to playing a game, and one to the infant's response to visitors. Factor IV (Table 5) consisted of six items, three Activity subscale items loading positively and three Persistence subscale items loading negatively. Factor V (Table 6) consisted of three items from the Mood subscale, two dealing with reactions to naps, and one concerned with reactions to people.

TABLE 2. Factor I: Reactions to Foods

<i>PBT Category</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Loading</i>
V. Threshold	3. Does not show strong reaction to temperature of <i>food</i>	.70
V. Threshold	4. Reacts noticeably to temperature of <i>food</i> (reverse scored)	.71
V. Threshold	6. Mix <i>food</i> she likes with one she doesn't like, she notices difference (reverse scored)	.51
VIII. Persistence	1. <i>Feeding</i> several foods, she wants her favorite	.51
IV. Approach	5. Given new <i>food</i> , she hesitates (reverse scored)	.48
III. Adaptability	5. Given <i>food</i> she doesn't like at first, will accept later	.45
VI. Intensity	3. When I'm <i>feeding</i> her, and she's full, she lets me know it in active ways	.40
I. Activity	6. When <i>fed</i> solid food, she tends to sit quietly (reverse scored)	.36
III. Adaptability	1. Changed her <i>feeding</i> schedule, adjusted to new routine within a day or two	.36
VI. Intensity	4. When I'm <i>feeding</i> her and she is full, she lets me know in little ways (reverse scored)	.36

TABLE 3. Factor II: Rhythmicity

<i>PBT Category</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Loading</i>
II. Rhythmicity	4. Unpredictable when she likes to be fed (reverse scored)	.75
II. Rhythmicity	3. Likes to be fed at about same time every day	.72
II. Rhythmicity	1. Goes to sleep at about same time every day	.65
II. Rhythmicity	5. Unpredictable in the time she will awaken from nap (reverse scored)	.60
II. Rhythmicity	2. Takes same amount of food each day	.44

TABLE 4. Factor III: Approach/Distractibility/Persistence (Toys)

<i>PBT Category</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Loading</i>
IV. Approach	3. Give her new <i>toy</i> , she takes it right away	.53
IV. Approach	4. Doesn't play with new <i>toy</i> right away (reverse scored)	.53
IX. Distractibility	4. Cries when she's hungry, not easily distracted with <i>toy or cuddling</i> (reverse scored)	.51
VIII. Persistence	5. <i>Toy</i> she wants gets out of reach, usually lost interest in a few minutes (reverse scored)	.46
IV. Approach	2. Visitor comes over, shows a lot of <i>interest in the person</i>	.40
VIII. Persistence	2. When playing <i>game</i> like Peek-A-Boo, and we have to stop she often wishes to continue	.38
IX. Distractibility	3. If crying because of hunger, can usually be quieted if <i>picked up or given a toy</i>	.36

DISCUSSION

The results of our study of the psychometric properties of the PBT raise important questions concerning the conceptualization and measurement of temperament. Even though there was substantial parent agreement for five of the nine temperament dimensions postulated by Thomas and Chess (1977), factor analysis of the 54 items of the PBT did not reveal those dimensions. The only dimension for which there was substantial support for internal consistency was rhythmicity, and this for only two sampled situations, food and sleeping/napping. The one item dealing with bowel movements did

TABLE 5. Factor IV: Activity/Persistence

<i>PBT Category</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Loading</i>
I. Activity	4. Usually lies still during <i>diapering and dressing</i> (reverse scored)	.72
I. Activity	3. During <i>diapering and dressing</i> , usually squirms and kicks	.71
I. Activity	6. When fed solid <i>food</i> , she tends to sit quietly (reverse scored)	.39
VIII. Persistence	4. Doesn't like to spend more than 10 minutes in <i>one place or doing one thing</i> without change (reverse scored)	-.40
VIII. Persistence	3. Once settled in interesting activity, will usually <i>play alone</i> for half an hour	-.37
VIII. Persistence	6. Her attention moves quickly from one <i>toy</i> to another (reverse scored)	-.36

TABLE 6. Factor V: Mood (Waking from Nap)

<i>PBT Category</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Loading</i>
VII. Mood	3. When she wakes up from a <i>nap</i> , she almost always smiles and seems happy	.67
VII. Mood	4. When she wakes up from a <i>nap</i> , she often is a bit fussy (reverse scored)	.61
VII. Mood	2. Sometimes <i>people</i> come over whom the baby has been around fairly often. She generally is friendly and laughs or smiles at them	.41

not load on this factor. However, there is partial support for a combined activity/persistence dimension as three activity items loaded positively on Factor IV while three persistence items loaded negatively on that factor. There is also weak support for a mood factor, although two of the three items loading on this factor involved waking from nap. Factor III was composed of items from three separate dimensions (five out of seven of which involved toys), while Factor I contained items from six (all involved food). The dimensions of adaptability, threshold, and intensity received no support as items from these dimensions loaded only on the factor involving food. These results are summarized in Table 7, which shows how each item was classified and on which factor (if any) it loaded.

TABLE 7. Classification of PBT Items and Factor on Which Each Loaded

<i>Category</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Activity/Situation</i>	<i>Factor</i>
I. Activity	1.	Bath	
	2.	Toys	
	3.	Diapering	IV
	4.	Diapering	IV
	5.	Sleeping/Napping	
	6.	Food	I
II. Rhythmicity	1.	Sleeping/Napping	II
	2.	Food	II
	3.	Food	II
	4.	Food	II
	5.	Sleeping/Napping	II
	6.	Bowel Movements	
III. Adaptability	1.	Food	I
	2.	Sleeping/Napping	
	3.	Diapering	
	4.	Diapering	
	5.	Food	I
	6.	People	
IV. Approach	1.	Shopping Trip	
	2.	People	III
	3.	Toys	III
	4.	Toys	III
	5.	Food	I
	6.	New Activity	
V. Threshold	1.	Diapering	
	2.	Loud Noises	
	3.	Food	I
	4.	Food	I
	5.	Loud Noises	
	6.	Food	I
VI. Intensity	1.	Restless	
	2.	Playing (general)	
	3.	Food	I
	4.	Food	I
	5.	Food	
	6.	Diapering	
VII. Mood	1.	Bath	
	2.	People	V
	3.	Sleeping/Napping	V
	4.	Sleeping/Napping	V
	5.	Food	
	6.	Fussy period	

TABLE 7 (continued). Classification of PBT Items and Factor on Which Each Loaded

<i>Category</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Activity/Situation</i>	<i>Factor</i>
VIII. Persistence	1.	Food	I
	2.	Playing (general)	III
	3.	Playing alone	IV
	4.	Playing alone	IV
	5.	Toys	III
	6.	Toys	IV
IX. Distractibility	1.	Toys	
	2.	General Caregiving	
	3.	Toys	III
	4.	Toys	III
	5.	Food	
	6.	Toys	

The lack of substantial internal consistency for the proposed dimensions may be an artifact of the PBT due perhaps to the limited range of activities from which to sample during the early months of infancy or to the extent to which certain situations were sampled.

The number of items representing situations dealing with food, toys, sleeping/napping and diapering were the most heavily represented (16, 9, 6 items, respectively) and also had the largest number of items loading on a factor (13, 6, 4, and 2, respectively). Perhaps if there were more items representing the other situations, the temperament dimensions would show more internal consistency.

However, an alternative explanation is possible; that is, certain aspects of temperament acquire meaning only when related to specific contexts. The data from this study lend some support to this hypothesis as the two situations which were most heavily represented (food and toys) tended to cluster into context-specific factors. In addition, other areas of infant research have shown context to be an important influence on behavior (e.g., infant's sleep-wake patterns—Sander, Stechler, Burns, & Julia [1970]; parent-infant interaction—Soar, Huitt, & Soar [1980]), and it is certainly reasonable to expect infant temperament research to show similar results. For example, Plomin and Rowe (1979) found that individual differences in infants' social responsiveness (considered by them to be temperament quality) were situation-specific. Such specific contextual effects may be found for other temperamental traits.

One reason that more context-specific infant temperament traits have not been discovered to date may be that the consistency of a child's temperamental traits from situation to situation has not

been systematically investigated; it has been assumed. For example, central to the NYLS research is the assumption that the infant's typical behavior styles of responding can be determined from a sampling of responses to a variety of functional significant life situations (Thomas & Chess, 1977). The original source of data for the NYLS temperament categories was an inductive content analysis of parent interview protocols for twenty-two children. These parental responses were based on observations over a three-to-six month period. Consequently, the extent of variability in the child's temperament across situations and day-to-day fluctuations was lost in the mental averaging required for the parent to arrive at an overall assessment of the child's sleep or eating irregularities over a three month period. As Medley and Mitzel (1963) pointed out, the results of this process are of questionable validity since it requires raters to observe and store a large number of specific behaviors, then produce independent numbers using a procedure analogous to multiple regression. This seems to Medley and Mitzel to be an extremely difficult task.

An attempt was made in the NYLS to establish the validity of parental ratings of child temperament by comparing them to ratings derived from discrete observations of children's actual behavior over a period of two to three hours. However, the effect of context on the child's temperamental traits was obscured with this procedure as well, because the behavioral observations, like the parent interviews, were scored by determining an overall rating representative of the child's behavior across different settings (Thomas, Chess, Birch, Hertzog, & Korn, 1963).

Rather than real behavioral consistency, the PBT and other parent interview and rating scales may be indicative of a persistent halo effect, that is, parents may be consistent in overgeneralizing an unwarranted impression of their child. Halo effect is particularly likely when traits are not clearly defined and not easily observable (Kerlinger, 1973). This seems to be particularly true of several of the infant categories, such as Activity, Attention-Persistence, or Distractibility (Persson-Blennow & McNeil, 1979).

Future research should focus on at least three aspects of temperament: the development of reliable and valid measurements of a small number of temperamental qualities that are factorially distinct; the extent to which those dimensions are context-specific; and the extent to which those dimensions are developmentally stable.

Further work on the temperamental quality of rhythmicity definitely seems warranted. For example, rhythmicity was shown to be factorially distinct in this study as well as in the NYLS and a study of 209 British infant school children (Garside, Birch, Scott, Chambers,

Kolvin, Tweddle, & Barber, 1975). Analysis of the factors produced in the present study also offer some support, though weak, for the further study of an activity/persistence dimension and perhaps dimensions of mood and approach/persistence/distractibility. Mood and Withdrawal¹ were dimensions supported also by the two above-mentioned studies.

However, as suggested by analysis of the results of the present study, one of the most important issues to be considered is the extent to which a specific trait is observable in a specific situation. In determining temperament scores on current instruments, the magnitude of the scores is dependent on the judgment that the trait is observable in a variety of settings. For example, on the PBT, high activity during diapering and low activity during eating would result in a moderate score of activity. For a high activity score, the child would have to be active in a majority of the situations sampled; information regarding high activity in a single situation, while perhaps highly significant for predicting behavior in certain contexts, is lost when assigned a numerical trait score. Also, certain traits might be observable only if they occur within certain contexts or during certain activities. For example, rhythmicity may be observable with respect to eating and sleeping, but not observable with respect to playing with toys or interest in people. During these latter situations it may be that approach, persistence and/or distractibility is important. For the practical purposes of parenting, it is important to be aware of the specific contexts likely to be associated with a particular response style and the particular response styles likely to be associated with specific contexts.

However, even if or when valid measures of infant temperament traits are produced, those traits may not be stable. Although an analysis of consistency was not done in this study because of the limited sample size, other researchers have found developmental influences. For example, Persson-Blennow and McNeil (1979) noted in their analysis of the NYLS data that temperament generally remained significantly consistent only for short time periods, suggesting slow changes rather than long-term stability. Variation in child behavior may also influence stability of trait measurement. In a study of temperamental characteristics as predictors of behavior disorders in 60 children, ages 3 to 7, Graham, Rutter, and George (1973) reported test-retest reliability coefficients ranging from .17 to .72 for the temperament traits over a one-month interval.

¹Withdrawal is the other end of the continuum or the reverse score of approach.

A final caution is probably warranted. When a particular infant behavior is found to be affected by a specific context, it cannot be assumed that different behaviors will be affected similarly, given the same context. For example, in a comparison of the vulnerability of different behaviors to situational effects, Moos (1969) concluded that behaviors differ markedly in their susceptibility to environmental influences. Consequently, if situational effects on specific temperament traits are discovered, these effects cannot be generalized to other traits.

CONCLUSION

The development of the Perception of Baby Temperament Scales (PBT) was an important step in the attempt to produce a relatively simple instrument for measuring infant temperament along the lines suggested by Thomas and Chess. However, results of a factor analysis of the PBT showed that the nine temperament categories lacked internal consistency. Of major importance was the finding that three of the five factors emerging from the analysis tended to be limited to specific situations, suggesting that infant temperament may be context-specific rather than transsituational in nature. Even though parental agreement was obtained on scores for the nine Thomas and Chess categories, this may have been the result of parents' attempts to summarize their infant's behavior across situations into convenient categories, rather than capturing infant behavior that is actually stable across situations.

Researchers interested in infant temperament should identify a small number of factorially-distinct temperament dimensions and determine the extent to which the various dimensions are stable or sensitive to contextual and/or developmental differences. Understanding the complex transactional process by which environmental and developmental factors interact with child qualities demands intensive longitudinal analysis of child behavior under carefully specified conditions. The generalizability of infant temperament should be treated separately from the questions of parents' perceptions and determined empirically by comparison of observations of the infant in different situations.

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APPENDIX

PERCEPTION OF BABY TEMPERAMENT SCALES

I. Activity

1. During a bath, she kicks, splashes and wiggles. She is full of activity at these periods.
2. Her play with toys is active; she often kicks her legs and waves her arms.
3. During diapering and dressing, she squirms and kicks much of the time. She is so active that I sometimes have trouble doing these tasks.
4. She usually lies still during diapering and dressing. She rarely squirms and kicks during these activities.
5. She usually lies fairly still during sleep. She awakens in just about the same position as when she fell asleep.
6. When I feed her solid food, she tends to sit quietly, she rarely squirms or kicks.

II. Rhythmicity

1. She generally goes to sleep at about the same time each day for naps and nighttime sleep. She does not vary more than a half hour from one day to the next.
2. She generally takes about the same amount of food (milk) each day. It is not hard to anticipate how much she will eat.
3. She likes to be fed at about the same time each day. Hungry times do not vary more than a half hour from day-to-day.
4. She is unpredictable in when she likes to be fed. Hungry times vary by more than an hour from one day to the next.
5. She is unpredictable in the time when she will awaken from a nap or nighttime sleep. Awakening time may vary 1-2 hours from one day to the next.
6. The time when bowel movements occur shows no particular pattern from one day to the next.

III. Adaptability

1. When I changed her feeding schedule, she adjusted to the new routine within a day or two.
2. When we take her to a friend's house she doesn't seem to mind going to sleep in an unfamiliar bed or crib.
3. Usually when I interrupt her routine to change her diapers or clothes, she smiles or seems pleasant.
4. Usually she becomes a bit fussy when I interrupt her activities to change her diapers or clothing.
5. If I give her a food she doesn't like at first, she usually comes to accept it after one or two feedings.
6. She really doesn't like other people to feed or diaper her, even a familiar babysitter or grandparent.

IV. Approach

1. When I take her along on a shopping trip, she seems to enjoy the new sights and sounds.
2. When a visitor comes over and spends some time in our home, she shows a lot of interest in that person.
3. When I give her a new toy or other object to play with, she takes it right away and looks it over.
4. Often she doesn't play with a new toy or play object right away. She seems to warm-up to new objects gradually.
5. When I give her a new food, she usually shows a little hesitation.
6. When I try out a new activity with her, such as swinging or using a jumper or walker, she is usually a little apprehensive at first.

V. Threshold

1. She rarely fusses when she has dirty diapers. It doesn't seem to bother her at all.
2. Loud or sudden sounds don't seem to bother her much. Often, she doesn't even notice them.
3. She does not show a strong reaction to the temperature of her food. She eats vegetables and cereal as readily whether they are cold or warm.
4. She reacts noticeably to the temperature of foods. If her vegetables or cereal are too cold, she will not eat them.
5. When she is asleep, loud sounds will often awaken her.
6. If I mix a food she doesn't like so well with one that she does like, she notices the difference right away.

VI. Intensity

1. At times when she is restless and nothing seems interesting to her, she usually lets me know by crying fairly loudly.
2. When I'm playing actively with her, she usually squeals and laughs vigorously.
3. When I'm feeding her and she is full, she lets me know in very active ways such as crying loudly, spitting out the food or pushing the spoon away.
4. When I'm feeding her and she is full, she lets me know in little ways by such things as letting food drool from her mouth or quietly turning away her head.
5. During feedings, she has a good appetite but she takes her time drinking or eating.
6. When she is upset because she has on a soiled diaper, she usually makes quiet or whimpering sounds to show her discomfort.

VII. Mood

1. When I bathe her, she usually smiles or laughs. She seems to enjoy bathing times.
2. Sometimes people come over whom the baby has been around fairly often. She generally is friendly and laughs or smiles at them.

3. When she wakes up from a nap, she almost always smiles and seems happy.
4. When she wakes up from a nap, she often is a bit fussy.
5. When I feed her and I need to interrupt the feeding for such things as burping, she seems to fuss for a bit when these interruptions occur.
6. She almost always has a fussy period each day.

VIII. Persistence

1. If I'm feeding her several foods and she likes one of them more than the others, she usually isn't happy unless I let her have all that she wants of her favorite food.
2. When I play a game with her like Peek-a-Boo, and we have to stop, she often expresses a wish to continue the game longer.
3. Once I get her settled in an interesting activity I can often count on having a half an hour while she plays by herself.
4. She doesn't like to spend more than about 10 minutes in one place or doing one thing without a change. She seems to like a lot of variety in her activities.
5. If a toy she wants gets out of reach, she usually will lose interest in it within a minute or two.
6. Her attention moves quickly from one to another. Usually she plays with even her favorite toy for only a few minutes, before moving on to another one.

IX. Distractibility

1. I can usually persuade her to stay in her crib a bit longer when she wants to get out by giving her a couple of toys to play with.
2. When she's upset by some caregiving procedure, for example, cutting her hair or nails, I can usually quiet her and continue if I give her something to play with.
3. If she's crying because she's hungry, I can often quiet her at least for a few minutes by picking her up or giving her a toy.
4. When she cries because she's hungry, nothing satisfies her until she gets fed. At these times, she is not easily distracted by a toy or cuddling.
5. When she's hungry, she really concentrates on eating or drinking. It takes a lot to draw her attention away from her meal.
6. If you take something away from her that she's interested in, she fusses and usually won't accept a substitute right away.