

## PERSONALITY, MARITAL SATISFACTION, AND DIVORCE

H. J. EYSENCK<sup>1</sup>

*University of London*

*Summary.*—Some 1,500 married or divorced men and women were interviewed and administered the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire. Comparisons between the married and the divorced suggested that divorces are more frequent among the psychiatrically abnormal (high Psychoticism, high Neuroticism), particularly among the women. Extraversion was also related to divorce, but only among the men. Within-group correlations largely confirmed these between-group comparisons. Personality appears to be one of many factors involved in marital satisfaction and divorce.

Much recent research has been devoted to the topics of who marries whom (4) and who divorces whom (7). Marriage seems to be contracted between people similar in intelligence, education, and socioeconomic status (assortative mating) but neither similar nor dissimilar in personality. Divorce and marital dissatisfaction generally seem more likely in persons psychiatrically somewhat abnormal (5), a finding already anticipated by Terman (6). Of other factors investigated or hypothesized, family background seems to provide evidence for only a slight association between parental marital unhappiness and offsprings' marital unhappiness, and there is no evidence that parental divorce is a predictor of offsprings' divorce. Family structure, too, has little influence on marital outcome. Social mobility has not been a significant correlate of divorce, but courtship proved important—long courtships are more favourable than short ones, and opposition by the parents increases risk of divorce. Sexual difficulties seem to be correlated with general dissatisfaction. Religious values lessen the risk of divorce, particularly when both partners are church-goers. These results (7) are perhaps not out of line with reasonable prediction (3).

In this paper we present a more detailed examination of some of the data collected in the Thornes and Collard study of divorce than were presented in the book authored by them. Details of the samples, interviews and techniques, and major results are given in the book referred to; briefly, married and divorced probands (the latter largely petitioners in the divorce proceedings) were interviewed and given the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (2). In addition, there were a number of spouses of the probands who were also studied. In all, there were some 750 female members of the sample and a slightly smaller number of male members. Ages of the various groups were reasonably similar, with means in the high 30s or low 40s. Sampling was done very carefully and resulted in a reasonably representative scale. All necessary details are given by Thornes and Collard (7).

As regards personality, the book has an interesting table which shows the proportion of female and male informants who experienced certain fears and

<sup>1</sup>Institute of Psychiatry, De Crespigny Park, Denmark Hill, London SE5 8AF, England.

difficulties to an extreme degree during their adolescence. Divorced women, as compared with still married women, showed considerably more of these fears. They tended to be shy with the opposite sex, worried about appearances, quick-tempered, disliked school, lacking in confidence, unable to concentrate at school, showing nerves, suffering from repeated depression, having difficulties in making friends, and prone to wet the bed. These are mostly dysthymic symptoms (high Neuroticism, low Extraversion). For men, curiously enough, differences did not appear on these points. These results suggest that marital breakdown is to some extent mediated by neurotic behaviour in women, but that the male's degree of Neuroticism is less influential in the success or failure of the marriage.

The personality questionnaire administered to the samples gives scores on four major dimensions of personality: P (psychoticism), E (extraversion), N (neuroticism), and L (a lie or conformity scale). Mean scores and standard deviations for the various groups for these variables are given in Table 1, together with two-tailed estimates of statistical significance. No data are given

TABLE 1  
MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR FOUR PERSONALITY FACTORS,  
SEPARATELY FOR MALES AND FEMALES

Scale/group	N	M	SD	<i>p</i>
Psychoticism				
Female Divorced Informants	331	2.89	2.23	<.001
Female Married Informants	354	2.10	1.80	
Male Divorced Informants	180	3.34	2.77	<.001
Male Married Informants	193	2.82	2.49	
Male Divorced Spouses	35	4.59	2.85	<.001
Male Married Spouses	326	2.84	2.43	
Neuroticism				
Female Divorced Informants	331	14.66	5.04	<.001
Female Married Informants	354	12.56	5.25	
Male Divorced Informants	180	10.53	5.16	<.05
Male Married Informants	193	9.44	4.96	
Male Divorced Spouses	35	11.63	4.63	.01
Male Married Spouses	326	9.13	5.31	
Extraversion				
Female Divorced Informants	331	11.87	5.06	
Female Married Informants	354	12.08	4.72	
Male Divorced Informants	180	13.11	4.62	
Male Married Informants	193	12.13	5.29	
Male Divorced Spouses	35	13.96	4.76	0.5
Male Married Spouses	326	11.91	5.10	
Lie				
Female Divorced Informants	331	11.90	4.65	
Female Married Informants	354	11.49	4.69	
Male Divorced Informants	180	11.07	5.11	0.5
Male Married Informants	193	9.77	4.70	
Male Divorced Spouses	35	8.31	5.03	0.5
Male Married Spouses	326	10.10	4.64	

for the sample of divorced female spouses because the number was too small ( $N = 14$ ) to make statistical comparisons meaningful.

The table shows that for Psychoticism the divorced males and females have higher, i.e., more abnormal, scores than the married groups. The same is true of the married female spouses, as compared with the divorced female spouses; their respective means are 2.43 and 2.92. Differences between married and divorced persons are larger for female than for male informants; this may suggest that the personality of the female is more important in this respect for the break-up of the marriage than the personality of the male. The data do not suffice to establish the point, of course; replication would be necessary to render the fact acceptable.

As regards Neuroticism, again the divorced have higher, i.e., more abnormal, scores, and again female informants show greater differences than do male informants. This is in line with the data already quoted of pre-marital, neurotic tendencies and supports the view that females' personal abnormalities may be more damaging to the marriage relation than males'. Again, the data should not be overinterpreted; replication would be needed in order to establish the point.

With respect to Extraversion, we observe exactly the opposite trend; here it is differences between the married and divorced males which are more important than differences between the females, which are quite slight in fact. Extraverted males tend to be more likely to get divorced than are introverted males; for women the difference is very slight, and if anything in the opposite direction. This agrees with expectation, insofar as extraverted males are more promiscuous (1), and promiscuity is likely to lead to divorce. It is not clear why extraversion in females, with its attendant tendency toward promiscuity, does not have this effect; the answer may lie in the generally lower extraversion and promiscuity of women. This generalization too, requires replication of the study, of course, before it can be taken too seriously.

Scores on the Lie scale are not very different for married and divorced persons, although the divorced have slightly (and significantly) higher scores; we may perhaps conclude that insofar as these scores measure dissimulation, there are no marked differences between groups. This is reassuring as otherwise observed differences in personality scores might have been associated with social desirability. In fact, the results if anything go counter to this possibility.

Relationships reported so far are *between* groups; correlations were also calculated *within* groups between personality variables and the interview data, quantified in a manner described by Thornes and Collard (7). Most of these correlations are disappointingly small, although many are statistically significant because the numbers involved are large. Correlations were calculated for all the different groups comprising the total sample, as well as for larger groupings.

It would not be useful to print all the hundreds of correlations calculated. Instead a few, only the most relevant, correlations which appear regularly in all or nearly all the subgroups are presented.

Most important are all the relations with marital happiness, particularly in the groups still married. In connection with the comparisons between married and divorced groups, it might be contended that perhaps the divorce itself and the stresses and strains involved might have produced changes in personality which are caught by the investigator. This does not seem to be so; our groups show regular correlations in the neighbourhood of .2 between marital unhappiness, on the one hand, and Psychoticism and Neuroticism on the other. These figures thus bear out the major findings of the between-groups comparison.

Age at marriage is another interesting variable which shows regular negative correlations of between  $-.1$  and  $-.2$  with Psychoticism and Neuroticism; in other words, the more psychiatrically abnormal tend to marry earlier. It is thus possible that the observation that early marriage is related to divorce may arise because of the relationship of early marriage with personality; personality may thus act as a mediator and produce both early marriage and divorce.

The only fairly regular correlation for Extraversion is with the number of "steadies." This agrees well with the previous findings of Eysenck (1) that extraverts have intercourse with more different members of the opposite sex. The correlation in this sample is small ( $r = .15$ ), but it is significant. Here as elsewhere we must reiterate the warning that the figures are suggestive only; replication is required to make the findings fully acceptable.

In summary, we would suggest that personality factors play a definite though not overwhelmingly strong part in driving a couple to divorce. In particular, the more psychiatrically abnormal personality traits of Psychoticism and Neuroticism work in that direction, mainly as far as women are concerned; Extraversion tends to work in the same direction, but only for men. It must, of course, be borne in mind that our divorced respondents were largely petitioners, i.e., responsible legally for initiating proceedings; the personalities of their partners might or might not be similar. This point should be investigated in another sample.

#### REFERENCES

1. EYSENCK, H. J. *Sex and personality*. London: Temple Smith, 1976.
2. EYSENCK, H. J., & EYSENCK, S. B. G. *The Eysenck Personality Questionnaire*. San Diego: Educational Testing Service, 1975.
3. EYSENCK, H. J., & WILSON, G. *The psychology of sex*. London: Dent, 1979.
4. MURSTEIN, B. I. *Who will marry whom?* New York: Springer, 1976.
5. SZOPINSKY, J. Personality of the marriage bond. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 1980, 1, 93-94.
6. TERMAN, L. M. *Psychological factors in marital happiness*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1938.
7. THORNES, B., & COLLARD, J. *Who divorces?* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979.

Accepted December 4, 1980.