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SIR CYRIL BURT: PROMINENCE VERSUS PERSONALITY

H. J. EYSENCK

Institute of Psychiatry, University of London

Summary.—Prominent professors occasionally have defects of personality which cause them to behave towards their students in ways which are unethical and unacceptable scientifically. This short autobiographical piece recounts some such behaviours experienced by the author at the hands of Sir Cyril Burt, at the time probably the most prominent British psychologist.

As I have described elsewhere, I came into psychology pretty much against my will, my preference having been for the study of physics and astronomy (Eysenck, 1980). I was lucky in that I studied under Charles Spearman and Cyril Burt; the former had just retired and the latter had not yet been knighted. Both were exponents of the psychometric point of view, stressing statistical analysis and mathematical models, and these appealed to me very much, as being in line with my general scientific upbringing. Burt was one of the foremost exponents of this line of research and has made outstanding contributions in the fields of factor analysis, genetical analysis, and psychometrics generally. I still believe that his theories and methods were along the right lines, but, as the recent biography by Hearnshaw (1979) makes clear, the intellectual giant had feet of clay, and unfortunately these became obvious very early in my association with him. These difficulties may help to throw some light on the problem of the relationship between professors and students which has always existed and probably always will.

Burt's odd and contradictory personality has been well described by Hearnshaw; outwardly calm, very cooperative and helpful, he was inwardly very neurotic and showed hostility and paranoia to an extreme degree. He was also exceedingly devious and carried his suspicions and dislike of able students and colleagues to almost unbelievable lengths. My first experience of this deviousness was as a young student, in my second undergraduate year, when Burt was asked to review Thurstone's recently published monograph (1938) in which Thurstone reported the intercorrelations between 56 tests of intelligence and concluded from factor analysis that there was no general factor. Burt asked me to join him in the review, the idea being that I would re-analyse the matrix of intercorrelations using his group factor method, and he would write the text. I was pleased and honoured and agreed to carry out what in the days of hand-crank calculating machines was a gigantic task. He showed me his text, with both our names as authors, and it seemed very reasonable. The next I knew was that the article had been published, under my name alone (Eysenck, 1939), with a text greatly altered to include far more praise of Burt and criticism of Thurstone than had the original I had seen! This surely is a curious way of setting about things, but there was nothing I could do about it, of course.

Burt became more and more hostile as time went on; he complained that I was writing too many articles ("Eysenck," he said, "you publish too much. We don't do that in this country."). When I showed him some articles I had written on my factor analytic studies of humour (Eysenck, 1942, 1943), he said that it was unfair for me to publish these as another one of his Ph.D. students at the time, a Miss Asenath Schonfeld, had spent a long time working in the same field and was just ready to submit her thesis. Apparently my publishing my own work would upset this in some way. I hap-

pened to meet the beautiful Miss Schonfeld in an underground train shortly afterwards and asked her about her work on humour. She was quite surprised because she had in fact not worked on humour at all; having at first collected some cartoons she decided against it. This might be excused as a minor slip, but a few years later Burt quoted the (non-existent!) thesis on humour by Asenath Schonfeld in a published paper on aesthetics in support of his theories. This surely is rather more serious and indicative of a very unhealthy attitude to facts.

The same can perhaps be said about another episode. When my book "Dimensions of Personality" (Eysenck, 1947) came out, a very hostile review of it appeared in the *British Journal of Statistical Psychology*, under the name of a well-known and widely respected statistician. The review was incredibly vicious, and coming from such a source undoubtedly very detrimental to the scientific reputation of the author. Many years later I met the putative author of the review, who told me that he had in fact written a very complimentary one, but that Burt had completely rewritten it, and published it under his name, without ever showing it to him! This is just one of many examples of his deviousness and hostility.

Many other examples of Burt's odd behaviour will be found in Hearnshaw's book (1979); they include forcing students to rewrite their theses to include criticisms of me and to alter their printed papers in a similar direction (p. 143). There would be no point in multiplying examples; the important point that arises is really how we can guard against such behaviour on the part of all-powerful professors towards defenceless students. I have come across many examples of unethical behaviour on the part of professors towards students and have found it very difficult to suggest any action for the students to take. Even had they won a particular point, they would still be at the mercy of the professor in so many ways that it would probably be a Pyrrhic victory. In England and on the Continent of Europe the problem is particularly serious because there usually is only one Professor and Head of Department; in America there are usually several equally powerful Professors and the student can usually transfer if need be. But even there the problem exists and demands an answer. I believe that much of the student protests of the 1960s were based on problems of this kind; and I believe that protest is thoroughly justified. I think it is time the profession considered seriously ways of dealing with abuses of power, such as those exemplified by Burt's actions. Not all professors go on to fake their data, as Burt apparently did in connection with his work on twins, but behaviour of this kind towards students is surely an equally serious issue which is seldom raised in polite conversation.

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