



NOTES AND SHORTER COMMUNICATIONS

Personality and attitudes towards marginal social groups

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Summary—The authors tested the hypothesis that high scorers on the EPQ extraversion scale express more tolerant and humanitarian attitudes towards marginal social groups whereas the high scorers on psychoticism take a more repressive position. The data collected among 249 Polish subjects by means of Eysenck and Eysenck's (*Manual of the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire*, 1975) EPQ questionnaire and the scale measuring attitudes towards different marginal groups confirmed the assumption. The results are discussed in reference to the role of personality of people responsible for social policy in terms of support or repression aimed at various marginal groups.

INTRODUCTION

The recent growth of interest in the psychology of social perception and attitudes, particularly towards ethnic minorities, religious, and social subgroups, raises a research question concerning the relationship between personality predispositions and social evaluation or social support. Social evaluation indicates personal biased preferences for such persons as prisoners, the homeless or mentally disturbed. Also it may be the basis for supporting social programs aimed at different special groups.

Recent publications stress the problem of control of marginal groups, for example people with AIDS, due to their 'dangerous' behaviour (Kaplan, 1990). On the other hand various marginal groups fight for their rights within social systems. Thus, the controversy over the 'marginal' is also a psychological issue.

According to attribution theory (Weiner, 1986), stressing the causal ascriptions (controllable vs noncontrollable), some of these individuals would be pitied and helped by others, whereas others would view them as deserving of punishment or isolation from society, e.g. imprisonment. However, this clearcut pattern of treating them can be affected by the assessor's individual characteristics, such as sensitivity to others' fate, moral attitudes and education level. It is reasonable to assume the same relationship between such attitudes and personality traits as put forward in Eysenck's theory of personality.

There is a great amount of literature covering the issue of the relationship between personality and asocial (criminal) behaviour (e.g. Eysenck, 1970a), however, in this paper the accent is laid on the personality characteristics of those who may decide on the policy of supporting those who appear as bothersome for society (useless) or act against the social rules or law. Eysenck's theory of personality allows for an assumption that constitutional traits make people take different stances towards others. In general extraverts are more open to other people whereas psychopaths are more reserved and have less feeling for others. Similarly they can have different views as to how to treat special groups that are bothersome to society.

Within these special groups, often called socially marginal groups (meaning both that they are different from the average standards, and that they are relatively fewer), one can include various people. The criteria of classification fall into many categories, including dependence on others, causal attributions of character, e.g. controllable vs uncontrollable, usefulness vs uselessness, behaviour causing damage or harm to others, legality and the applicability of lawful condemnation. Out of many such cases, three groups were formed for the purpose of the study reported in this paper.

The first group included the mentally ill, elderly dependent persons, and the incurably ill (e.g. AIDS victims). Individuals in this group are dependent on society, need constant care, and are often regarded as a burden on society.

The second group included drug addicts, prostitutes, and money/art counterfeiters. The conduct of these individuals is reproachable, immoral or illegal, although some people feel that they are useful to a certain extent and may be deemed by society to receive some positive rank on a utility scale.

The third group included those who cause direct harm to others, such as recidivists, child abusers, rapists, thieves and police informers (in the totalitarian system).

Although this distinction is based on different, though not mutually exclusive criteria, they cover a wide range of marginal social strata.

It is reasonable to assume that more positive and sympathetic attitudes would be held concerning the individuals in the first group, as compared to the third group. Yet, these attitudes might be affected by their personality predispositions. According to Eysenck's (1970b) theory, assessors with high extraversion scores (E) should be more lenient towards these particular social groups, whereas those scoring high on psychoticism (P) should be less lenient towards the marginal groups. The nature of neuroticism (N) did not lead to any clear assumption, although one could think that neurotics may shy away from strange individuals. Keeping in mind the different categories of marginal groups previously described, determining the role of personality characteristics in assessing these labelled individuals is an empirical question that has been addressed in this study.

METHOD

A total of 249 respondents took part in the study, mean age being 27.4 yr, 116 men and 133 women, representing a wide range of professions. They responded to the Polish version of the Eysenck and Eysenck (1975) EPQ questionnaire, adapted by the first author to the Polish population (Zaleski & Eysenck, 1992).

Table 1. Correlations between Extraversion, Neuroticism, and Psychoticism and attitudes toward the marginal groups ($N = 249$)

| | Group 1 | Group 2 | Group 3 |
|--------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Extraversion | -0.09 | -0.21** | -0.11 |
| Neuroticism | -0.18* | 0.06 | 0.01 |
| Psychoticism | 0.31** | 0.21** | 0.11 |

* $P < 0.01$, ** $P < 0.001$.

In order to measure the Ss' attitudes towards marginal groups, a questionnaire was developed in which Ss expressed their attitudes on a four-point scale (1—positive, 4—negative), concerning what should be done with members of each marginal group (see Appendix).

Twelve representative marginal group members were listed, who for further analyses were grouped into three categories: (1) socially dependent (uncontrollable causation) items: 1, 5, 6, and 9; (2) socially independent, partially 'useful' but morally repulsive, items: 3, 4, 7 and 8; and (3) antisocial, destructive, socially, morally and legally corrupt, items: 2, 10, 11, and 12.

RESULTS

The general means for the three groups were $M_1 = 1.44$, $SD = 0.52$; $M_2 = 2.91$, $SD = 0.56$; and $M_3 = 3.60$, $SD = 0.62$, revealing the most positive attitudes towards the first groups and the most negative attitudes toward the third group (all the pair differences were significant at the $P < 0.01$ level).

In order to test the hypotheses, both correlational and differential analyses were performed. The correlations between the personality dimensions E, N and P and attitudes towards marginal groups are listed in Table 1.

Single negative relationships were observed between Extraversion, Neuroticism and attitudes toward punishment (r_2 signif. for E and r_1 signif. for N at $P < 0.001$ and $P < 0.01$ level, respectively), whereas two positive relationships were found between Psychoticism and attitudes toward punishment (r_1 and r_2 being signif. at $P < 0.001$). As expected, extraversion was related to more tolerant opinions, whereas psychoticism was related to more severe opinions. Neuroticism was linked in a reverse way to that stated in our weak exploratory assumption.

In order to specify these relationships, the mean attitude ratings in high and low scorers on E, N and P scales were calculated and compared. The results are listed in Table 2.

The high vs low extraverts had more positive attitudes towards each marginal group. As far as Neuroticism is concerned, high vs low neurotics expressed nonsignificant, somewhat more positive attitudes (at $P < 0.10$) with regard to the first marginal group, while no differences were found in the attitudes toward the other two groups. It could be suggested that the tendency of more lenient attitudes of high N scorers to the first marginal group may be based on their perception of similarity to themselves and their psychological problems, but this suggestion should be regarded critically. In general Neuroticism did not appear as a significant determinant of the attitudes. In contrast, the high vs low scorers in Psychoticism had stronger negative attitudes towards all three groups, the difference being highly significant. In summary, Extraversion predisposes one to more humanitarian treatment of socially marginal individuals, while Psychoticism leads to harsher treatment.

Table 2. Mean scores in attitudes for high and low scorers on EPQ scales

| | | Low ($N = 71$) | High ($N = 62$) | $t(131)$ | P |
|---------------------|----|------------------|-------------------|----------|-------|
| <i>Extraversion</i> | | | | | |
| Group 1 | M | 1.45 | 1.28 | 2.16 | 0.033 |
| | SD | 0.50 | 0.38 | | |
| Group 2 | M | 3.10 | 2.74 | 3.61 | 0.000 |
| | SD | 0.60 | 0.55 | | |
| Group 3 | M | 3.66 | 3.44 | 2.42 | 0.017 |
| | SD | 0.44 | 0.63 | | |
| <hr/> | | | | | |
| | | Low ($N = 72$) | High ($N = 80$) | $t(150)$ | P |
| <i>Neuroticism</i> | | | | | |
| Group 1 | M | 1.62 | 1.38 | 2.55 | 0.072 |
| | SD | 0.65 | 0.49 | | |
| Group 2 | M | 2.93 | 3.01 | 0.88 | n.s. |
| | SD | 0.58 | 0.61 | | |
| Group 3 | M | 3.66 | 3.64 | 0.17 | n.s. |
| | SD | 0.50 | 0.81 | | |
| <hr/> | | | | | |
| | | Low ($N = 64$) | High ($N = 67$) | $t(129)$ | P |
| <i>Psychoticism</i> | | | | | |
| Group 1 | M | 1.27 | 1.72 | 5.04 | 0.000 |
| | SD | 0.34 | 0.63 | | |
| Group 2 | M | 2.83 | 3.12 | 3.13 | 0.002 |
| | SD | 0.48 | 0.55 | | |
| Group 3 | M | 3.54 | 3.79 | 2.58 | 0.011 |
| | SD | 0.57 | 0.44 | | |

DISCUSSION

The attitudes found in this study are the results of the combination of the target characteristics of marginal group and of the evaluator's predispositions. Eysenck's paradigm of personality sheds light on which traits predispose a person to a rather supportive or repressive attitude toward outcasts from 'normal' society. Thus biologically endowed personality can to some degree determine the social processes.

In the light of these relationships, it is quite important to consider the profiles of those in charge of social policy, those who vote on relevant issues, those who deal with the extremes, and those who teach and form social opinion about the social ways of dealing with marginal groups, fighting with prejudice and unjust treatment. The question of deciding on marginal groups by high scorers on Psychoticism can be extrapolated on a policy concerning ethnic minorities, extermination of ethnic groups as in the holocaust of World War II. One is tempted to ask whether Hitler would have scored high on this scale. These findings though limited in its nature, make one think in much broader social, political and historical perspectives. Thus, in addition to the theoretical value of the results, one must consider the practical aspect of the study in forming social policy that deals appropriately with all members of society, especially minorities and marginal groups.

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APPENDIX

Scale for Measuring Attitudes Towards Persons from Marginal Groups

In each country there are persons who for various reasons are a burden upon society. There are many varied opinions concerning them. Some think that these people should be isolated from society, for example convicts were sent from England to Australia in the eighteenth century and in Greece they were secretly killed. Others think that these people need help and care. In Poland we also have to deal with people from marginal groups. Once you have consulted the statements express your opinion by drawing a circle around the proposition that most accurately reflects your attitude toward each marginal group shown in the table below.

1. Use any means to give them the necessary conditions for living.
2. Give them partial social, medical and financial support.
3. Leave them to resolve their problems alone.
4. Totally isolate them from people and places within society.

Here are the marginal groups

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Seriously psychiatrically disordered | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. Recidivists | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. Prostitutes | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. Drug addicts | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. Elderly | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. Incurably ill | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. Forgers of money, art paintings, documents | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8. Black marketeers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9. Mentally retarded | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10. Rapists, child abusers, gangsters | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 11. Thieves, robbers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 12. Police informers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |