FELONY OFFENSES RELATED TO PERSONALITY TRAITS

THESIS

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By

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The problem with which this investigation is concerned is whether relationships may exist between personality and type of offense in a felon population. The Eysenck Personality Inventory, which measures extraversion-introversion (E), neuroticism-stability (N), and includes a lie scale (L), was used to determine subject's personality traits. Offenses were divided into crimes against persons, crimes against property, and crimes against the morals of the state. Subjects consisted of 751 adult male felons.

The product-moment correlation was computed for each offense-variable EPI pair. A negative association between E and crimes against persons, together with a positive association between L and crimes against persons, were found to be statistically significant at the 0.05 level, although quite low. It was concluded that results obtained should be guardedly interpreted in view of the minimal amount of variability accounted for, though of possible value in suggesting future research.
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FELONY OFFENSES RELATED TO PERSONALITY TRAITS

Inquiries into the etiology of criminal behavior have stemmed from a variety of theoretical frameworks. A recent trend has been toward the development of a personality typology linked to criminal behavior. The present study examines the differences between various types of criminal behavior with regard to certain personality dimensions. It is suggested that the discovery of relationships which distinguish between different types of criminal behavior may prove to be of greater value in organizing known data, in suggesting further research, and in planning efficacious intervention and treatment programs than those which consider criminality as a general class of behavior.

Early attempts to explain criminal behavior evolved from the biological and medical traditions of the previous century. These explanations take two forms: those based on the genetic transmission of antisocial traits and those that sought to relate antisocial behavior to such structural constitutional characteristics as body type, neural organization, and mental capacity. Underlying both the constitutional and genetic approaches was the supposition that psychological tolerance, ability to delay reinforcement, and motor orientation were traceable to primarily
biological roots. Lombroso (1876/1912) and Sheldon (1949) are some of the better known biopsychological theorists.

Later biopsychological theorists include Cleckly (1959) arguing for brain pathology; Jarvik, Klodin, and Matsuyama (1973) looking at chromosomal anomalies; with Riesen (1961) and Sluckin (1965) suggesting that critical-period phenomenon could be responsible for psychopathy.

The study of moral behavior from the cognitive viewpoint was initiated by Piaget (1948) who saw moral values as having two stages: moral realism and moral relativism. From a literal, inflexible interpretation of rules and blind obedience to a higher external authority, the child progresses to an understanding, at about age eight, of the situational and motivational elements of an act and to internalize rules. Kohlberg (1963) later studied the stages of moral development in greater detail than Piaget and concluded that true understanding of morality and justice does not develop until adolescence.

A major attempt to explain the social origins of aggressive behavior was the frustration-aggression hypothesis of Dollard, Miller, Doob, Mowrer, and Sears (1939), which assumed that frustration always led to some form of aggressive reaction whether explicit or implicit. This hypothesis has been criticized as incomplete by Bandura and Walters (1959); however, most investigators agree that
although reactions to frustration may vary under certain conditions, aggression is a highly likely response. In a way related to Dollard's position is that of Megargee (1966) who suggested that violent crimes, especially murder, are oddly enough associated with overcontrol of hostility. This sort of oversocialization could lead to a build-up in frustration since the person would be unable to express the normal hostilities and aggressive feelings at all, and would explode in violent behavior.

The influence of the family and early family experiences on the development of delinquent or criminal behavior was studied in the attempt to find pathological situations. The results were mixed--some studies found one or more situations common to antisocial subjects, other studies found different situations. Further, large numbers of normal subjects could be found with the same early histories (Buss, 1966). Attempts have been made to define the complex subtle aspects of family interaction and family breakdown which are thought to be of particular significance in predisposing an individual toward antisocial behavior.

Findings by McCord, McCord, and Zola (1959) indicate that while cohesive homes produce fewer criminals, a quarrelsome and neglectful home is more conducive to criminality than a broken home. Support for these findings is offered by Toby (1957). This influence is dependent upon the age of
the child, with preadolescents being more affected by family breakdowns than adolescents. Further findings (McCord, McCord, & Thurber, 1963) show a high correlation between delinquent behavior and an unstable family with a working mother.

Andry (1960) has suggested that the physical or psychological absence of the father is an important etiological factor in criminal behavior. Mischel (1961) concurs, pointing out that absence of the father is highly correlated with the demand for immediate gratification (a characteristic found in severe delinquents) in 8- and 9-year-old children. However, this relationship was not observed in 11- to 14-year-old delinquents.

Bandura and Walters (1959) proposed a theory concerning the social learning of deviant behavior. They suggest that a child may model himself after the aggressor when violence is sanctioned by the culture or significant adults, as well as when the child is exposed to violence during the period of his growth when imitation and identification are important. The importance of an adult model with whom a child can identify was pointed out by Rohrer and Edmonson (1960).

The relationship between the community and antisocial behavior has also been investigated. Maccoby, Johnson, and Church (1958) found communities with high delinquency rates to be lacking in integration, with people expressing less
concern for one another. Similar work by Lander (1954) pointed to instability of jobs, short residences, and lack of networks of friends and relatives as reasons for the concentration of delinquency in lower-class neighborhoods.

Psychodynamic theories of antisocial behavior attempt to define the complex affective elements significant in the development of an antisocial act. They insist that the nature of a particular antisocial act alone offers no necessary indication as to the personality structure of the individual, but essentially represents a symptom. Early formulations of these theories (Freud, 1930/1955) focused principally on the needs being gratified by acting-out behavior. More recent formulations have addressed themselves to those elements of the personality which screen, control, and direct the impulses, and to the nature of the needs themselves. Redl and Wineman (1952) have described patterns of acting-out in delinquents in whom certain ego functions are well developed and serve the need for survival in an environment seen as threatening or unsatisfying. Erikson (1950) has gone a step further with his concept of negative identity (defined as an effort by the ego to achieve stability and structure through integration into a role opposed to society).

A more recent typological attempt is Eysenck's (1964) formulation of a behavioral theory of criminality which
seeks to relate certain personality characteristics to particular underlying physiological mechanisms which determine the subject's ability to acquire classically and instrumentally conditioned behavior. Degree of neuroticism and position on the extraversion-introversion continuum are, in Eysenck's view, the two discrete and fundamental dimensions of personality reflected by these mechanisms. He suggests that neuroticism is a function of the subject's capacity to acquire classically conditioned responses and that the autonomic nervous system (ANS) is the physiological mechanism which determines that capacity. Position along the extraversion-introversion continuum, it is also suggested, is related to the subject's ability to learn instrumentally conditioned behavior. This ability is said to be a function of the central nervous system (CNS), and more specifically, the subject's inhibitory potential or excitatory potential.

The ANS is thought to be a relatively separate part of the nervous system which functions to create and transmit emotional impulses and to maintain control over the involuntary body functions. It serves to regulate a variety of largely involuntary functions including heartbeat, breathing, size of the pupil, glandular secretions, and perspiration. The autonomic system is further delineated into two antagonistic parts--the sympathetic and the parasympathetic systems. The sympathetic system is devoted to fight-or-flight
reactions. When activated, it serves to gear the organism toward the greatest possible efficiency by such actions as stopping digestion, increasing respiration, dilating the pupil, increasing perspiration, and accelerating the heart-beat. The parasympathetic system, on the other hand, acts to counterbalance the sympathetic system. It is an energy-conserving maintenance system which allows the organism to pursue its normal functions uninterrupted. According to Eysenck, the individual who is subject to strong emotions, even under conditions which would not evoke such strong emotions in the normal person, has been endowed, probably by heredity, with an autonomic system, the sympathetic branch of which is particularly reactive to external stimuli.

It is Eysenck's view that conscience, or the force which acts to discourage an individual from committing an antisocial act, is a classically conditioned response brought about through the contiguous association of autonomic displeasure (the unconditioned response) via the punishment (the unconditioned stimulus) with the situation defined by the commission or temptation to commit antisocial activities. The development of a conscience is aided by the process of stimulus generalization and by the labeling of various activities deemed inappropriate by society as "bad" or "evil." Thus, the development of a conscience is the gradual acquisition of a repertoire of conditioned fear
responses to a varied set of behavior patterns, all of which have one thing in common—they are disapproved of by society and have frequently been associated with punishment and, therefore, with the consequent autonomic upheaval. It follows that the balance between temptation to commit an antisocial act and deterrence is determined essentially by the amount of conditioning which has taken place.

Eysenck further suggests that those organisms having a highly reactive autonomic system are more likely to develop anxiety or fear reactions, while those having a less highly reactive autonomic system are more likely to develop a strong conscience. As evidence, he cites several studies involving conditioning of emotional and unemotional animals which have indicated that the emotional animals do indeed include a far larger proportion of nonintegrative (succumbing to temptation or being overly deterred) reactors. With regard to humans, Eysenck believes that the highly neurotic or emotional individual is less able to acquire normal integrative behavior and is, therefore, more likely to be labeled by society as criminal, delinquent, or psychopathic.

Greater emphasis, however, is placed on the extraversion-introversion dimension which he believes to be much more closely related to social as opposed to antisocial behavior. With regard to the extraversion-introversion dimension, the
concepts of excitation and inhibition assume an important role. Excitation is the process through which an incoming stimulus succeeds in firing the neurons which link, through a system of synapses, the sensory surfaces to the cortex. Without excitation, no learning (in fact no behavior) can take place. The concept of inhibition was derived to explain reminiscence or the temporary rise in retention without intervening practice which occurs in learning tasks. Inhibition is explained by Eysenck as a kind of neural or cortical fatigue, probably centering in the ascending reticular formation, which acts as a negative drive.

When considered within the context of the widely accepted formula--performance = habit x drive--it is seen that the higher the degree of accumulated inhibition, acting as a negative drive, the poorer one would expect performance to be. It is also generally accepted that people differ in the rate of build-up of inhibition, the strength of inhibition which is tolerated, and the speed with which inhibition dissipates. In particular, Eysenck suggests that extraverts build up inhibition quickly, show high degrees of inhibition, and dissipate inhibition slowly. On the other hand, introverts build up inhibition more slowly and to a lesser degree, and dissipate it more quickly. Eysenck cites high correlations between psychometric measures of extraversion-introversion and laboratory measures of specific behavioral
responses obtained from eye-blink tests, puff-of-air tests, galvanic-skin-response tests, vigilance tests, etc., in support of these postulates. Accordingly, extraverts, who accumulate a good deal of inhibitory potential during the process of instrumental conditioning, would be less likely to condition well and strongly than introverts, who accumulate relatively little inhibition. As a result, extraverts are poorer learners and are, therefore, less likely to develop adequate controls than the introvert who learns more readily and is more likely to be overcontrolled.

It would be expected, according to Eysenck's theory, that a high degree of emotionality and a tendency toward extraversion would be the combination most likely to result in antisocial behavior. To test this hypothesis, Eysenck employed the Eysenck Personality Inventory (EPI) to obtain measures of neuroticism \((N)\) and extraversion \((E)\) among various normal and poorly integrated groups. In line with his predictions, his findings indicate a consistent elevation of both \(E\) and \(N\) among criminal, psychopathic, and delinquent groups.

**Hypothesis**

The present study types felon behavior in a prison group into one of three categories: crimes against property, crimes against persons, and crimes against the morals of the state. Type of offense is then correlated with
subject's E and N scores as measured by the EPI. Comparison of these scores to normal populations is of questionable value due to various contaminate variables found in felon populations but absent in the general population. It was suggested that comparison between subgroups of a criminal population might lead to more useful relationships. It was assumed that personality factors which would tend to dispose an individual toward one type of antisocial behavior would not necessarily dispose him toward another. It was further hypothesized that these disposing factors may be reflected in subject's E and N scores.

Method

Subjects
Subjects consisted of 751 adult male felons of the Powhatan Correctional Center, a maximum security state prison located in Goochland County, Virginia. The Eysenck Personality Inventory was included in a battery of psychological tests administered by psychologists, students training in psychology, or by certain inmates (specially trained by psychologists) to secure cooperation of some inmates who would not be willing to volunteer for the tests if only administered by "outsiders." All testing was supervised by qualified psychologists, and all subjects were on a volunteer basis. For the illiterate, the tests were read
and recorded by the examiner. Both the EPI and offense
data were available for 617 of these subjects.

Materials

The EPI (form A) was used to measure two dimensions
of personality labeled Extraversion-Introversion (E) and
Neuroticism-Stability (N). Each of these measures is
derived from 24 questions to which the subject responds
"yes" or "no." In addition, an 18-item lie scale (L) is
included for the purpose of detecting individuals who are
"faking good."

E and N are purported to measure two uncorrelated and
independent dimensions of personality (Eysenck, 1956). As
support for this, Eysenck and Eysenck (1968) offer correla-
tions between E and N of -0.04 in a normal group and -0.09
in both a neurotic and a psychopathic group. Wells, Egeth,
and Wray (1961) confirm the independence of the two scales
in a study which found a -0.08 correlation between E and N.
Findings by Farley (1967), based on seven separate English
samples with a total sample size of 1478, were again sup-
portive of an orthogonal relationship between the scales in
normal subjects.

The lie scale (L) was adapted primarily from the L-
scale of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory.
Eysenck and Eysenck (1968) report that this scale is "valid,
reliable, and useful in detecting individuals 'faking good,'"
and further suggests that "tendency to have high L scores may in itself be an interesting personality trait" (p. 20).

The Eysencks (1968) report test-retest reliabilities running between 0.84 and 0.94 for the complete test, and between 0.80 and 0.97 for the separate forms. Findings were based on two groups of normal English subjects with elapsed times of 1 year for one group and 9 months for the other between test and retest.

Split-half reliabilities of 0.72 for the N scale and 0.41 for the E scale were reported by Wells, Egeth, and Wray (1961). Eysenck's interpretation of these findings is that both forms should be used if individual decisions are to be made on the basis of the EPI, but that one form alone may be sufficient for experimental studies.

Validity of the scales by nominated groups was investigated by Eysenck and Eysenck (1968). Independent judges were asked to label subjects as extraverted or introverted and stable or unstable prior to being administered the EPI. Differences on the scales were found between the respective extreme groups which indicate that individuals who impress others as showing introverted or extraverted behavior patterns, or as being stable or unstable in their behavior, show corresponding scores on the E and N scales. Further evidence of the validity of the E scale was offered by Vingoe (1966), who had subjects rate themselves on a 7-point
introversion-extraversion scale. Dividing the subjects into introverts and extraverts on the basis of the self-ratings and also dichotomizing the EPI extraversion scores yielded criterion groups significantly different from each other. Other studies by Kramer (1969) and Eysenck and Eysenck (1963) offer similar findings employing self-ratings and judgements of extraversion-introversion.

Results

The data were rendered accessible to automated data processing equipment and the analyses were electronically computed. The data were converted to standardized scores on the bases of the sample raw score mean and standard deviations. These scores were expressed as T-scores to avoid having the mean score as zero for computational convenience. The sample E and N means are plotted against various other normative groups (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1968) in Figure 1.

The product-moment correlation coefficient was computed for each of the offense-variable EPI pairs. The results of these analyses are shown in Table 1. As can be seen, the range of correlations between EPI scores and offense variables was -0.1275 to 0.1010. Two of the correlations were statistically significant under the .05 criterion.
Figure 1. Graphic presentation of selected groups on dimensions of extraversion-introversion and neuroticism-stability.
Table 1
Correlation Coefficients between EPI Scores and Offense Categories

<table>
<thead>
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<th>EPI Scores</th>
<th>Against Persons</th>
<th>Against Property</th>
<th>Against Morals</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>-.1275*</td>
<td>.0241</td>
<td>.0118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>-.0543</td>
<td>-.0569</td>
<td>.0096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>.1010*</td>
<td>-.0763</td>
<td>-.0550</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Statistically significant at the .05 level.

The means, standard deviations, and number of available observations for each variable are shown in Table 2. Where different numbers of observations were available for each variable of a correlation pair, the number of pairs used was the lower of the two.

It should be noted that the meaningfulness of the correlations found is limited by the trivial amount of variability accounted for \( r = 0.128 = 2\% \); \( r = 0.101 = 1\% \). At best, these results may be useful only to document a possible further relationship.

Using multiple linear regression, the possibility of improving the association between group membership variables and EPI variables was explored. Derived scores consisting of the squares of the EPI variables and cross-products
Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations, and Numbers of Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Study Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tr>
<td>EPI Scores</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>50.533</td>
<td>10.290</td>
<td>617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>50.765</td>
<td>10.159</td>
<td>617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>50.060</td>
<td>9.761</td>
<td>617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offense</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against Persons</td>
<td>.523</td>
<td>.500</td>
<td>751</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against Property</td>
<td>.262</td>
<td>.440</td>
<td>751</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against Morals</td>
<td>.130</td>
<td>.336</td>
<td>740</td>
</tr>
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between EPI variables were generated. Within the context of the regression analysis, the beta weights for these terms were not significant at the .05 criterion.

Discussion

This study found two very low, but significant, correlations: a slight negative association suggesting that those subjects having been convicted of a crime against persons may score lower on the E scale (-0.13, p less than 0.05), and a slight positive association between these types of subjects and the L scale (0.10, p less than 0.05).
Since the range of potential subjects was limited to only incarcerated felons, such slight relationships as were obtained might be meaningful. Such results, however, must be guardedly interpreted and should only be considered as suggestive of potential future findings.

The fact that the study variables purportedly measure emotional behavior, yet were not found to be strongly associated with type of offense, may also be viewed as congruent with the psychodynamic theories. According to these theories, the nature of the particular antisocial act offers no indication of the personality structure (e.g., degree of extraversion or neuroticism) of the individual, the act being merely a symptom of some intrapsychic conflict.

According to Eysenck, the slight negative association of E with crimes against persons would suggest a tendency for this group to be quieter, more retiring, more introspective, more reliable, and more self-controlled when compared to other inmates. Inasmuch as Eysenck suggests that the high extraversion typically associated with psychopathy shows a less-complete learning of (or potential to learn) emotional control. The very low negative association found between E and crimes against persons could suggest that this type of criminal is more controlled. This is in congruence with Megargee's (1966) position which suggests that it is the overcontrolled individual
(who is unable to avail himself of normal expressions of hostility) in which frustrations build to a point at which the aggressive act is finally committed.

This same relationship between E and crimes against persons does not lend itself well to the support of the frustration-aggression hypothesis of Dollard et al. (1939). This hypothesis suggests that it is the more extraverted individual, being less able to learn proper controls, who is more likely to become frustrated and, therefore, more likely to display aggression.

The slight positive association between L scores and the crimes-against-persons group may, according to Eysenck, indicate a greater tendency toward "faking good" among these subjects. This finding may also be explained in terms of the low correlations found between the understanding of morality as a cognitive function and moral conduct as overt behavior (Havighurst & Taba, 1949). This suggests that many incarcerated felons may view themselves as innocent or undeserving of punishment.

A possible flaw in the present study, and one which could account for the failure to show the results expected from Dollard's formulation, is that the classification system used may have led to overly heterogeneous membership within the offense categories. While there may have been stronger associations between the study variables and
actual offenses within each category, such associations may have been masked by the inclusion of multiple offenses in the category. Within the crimes-against-property category, for example, were included such varied offenses as burglary, automobile theft, forgery, arson, counterfeiting, and trespassing. While each may be a crime against property, they may, in fact, be etiologically dissimilar.

It should be noted that the data used were based on convictions, not arrests. Instances in which indictments for one crime were passed over in lieu of an indictment for a more serious offense could also have led to inappropriate offense classification. Plea bargaining, in which offenses of a more serious nature are ignored in the interest of obtaining of guilty plea for a lesser offense or the defendant's testimony, may also have led to inappropriate categorization in some instances.

The lack of significant correlations and the marginal nature of those correlations which were found may be viewed as supportive of the cognitive theories of antisocial behavior. The lack of strong associations seem to suggest that the study variables do not contribute highly to some differential in actual criminal behavior.

It should be noted that, contrary to what would be expected from Eysenck's previous findings, the present data indicate a tendency toward neither extraversion nor
neuroticism for this particular criminal population. It may be seen from Figure 1 that the tendencies are, in fact, in the opposite direction. Whether this particular anomaly is the result of an unaccounted for variation in data collection procedures or some actual personality differential is perhaps the most interesting question posited by the present study. Future investigations will, hopefully, shed some light on the matter.
References


Eysenck, H. J., & Eysenck, S. B. G. The validity of questionnaires and rating assessments of extraversion and


