

Personality and antisocial behaviour psychology essay



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Over the years, philosophers and psychologists have been attempting to find ways to understand how each one interpreted personality. Personality has various meanings. “ Personality is a stable set of characteristics and tendencies that determine those commonalities and differences in the psychological behaviour (thoughts, feeling, and actions) of people that have continuity in time and that cannot be easily understood as the sole result of the social and biological pressures of the moment”(Salvatore, 1976).

According to Eysenck (1967), personalities may be classified into four types. The two personality dimensions clearly stated by him were Extraversion (E) and Neuroticism (N). Extraversion includes traits such as excitability, sociability etc. On the other hand neuroticism includes traits such as instability, anxiety, moodiness etc. Eysenck later also introduced the third dimension Psychoticism (P) to his study. Psychoticism states the degree to which a person is antisocial and uncaring. Eysenck also figured out a relation between his stated theory on personality and antisocial behaviour. Eysenck proposed that a typical criminal would possess high levels of all three personality dimensions i. e. high in PEN. Eysenck’s theory produced four main types of personality, which he said resembled Galen’s Four Temperaments:

High (N) and Low (E) = melancholic type

High (N) and High (E) = choleric type

Low (N) and Low (E) = phlegmatic type

Low (N) and High (E) = sanguine type

Eysenck believed that trait differences were due to biological conditions. To support this theory Eysenck carried on a simulation hypothesis which stated that introverts are more easily aroused than extroverts. Therefore, extroverts seek more stimulation than introverts. Hormones associated with the nervous system are responsible for the level of arousal in individuals. An absence of these hormones or lack of arousal can lead to the creation of extreme extraverts. Due to this perpetual state, that individual seeks excitement and lacks restraint. A criminal who is labelled neurotic would be moody and would exhibit very emotional behaviour. A psychotic criminal would be someone who is impulsive, acts without thinking, and may also lack the ability to empathize with others (Monte & Sollod, 2003).

Eysenck's theory was remarkable in its scope but many psychologists saw it as flawed data. Later Costa & McCrae (1992) introduced a different model of personality known as the Five factor model. In their model of personality they suggested that there were 5 general personality traits. This model was later widely used for understanding the relationship between personality and various kinds of behaviour aspects. The five factors were Openness (O), Conscientiousness (C), Extraversion (E), Agreeableness (A), and Neuroticism (N) (OCEAN). Though Eysenck did argue that his approach towards describing personality was better than the way it is described in the five factor model (1992a; 1992b).

When it comes to criminality, psychologists had opposing ideas. Some related Neuroticism and crime whereas others linked criminality with Psychoticism.

Michael Eysenck proposed that individual with neuroticism is more likely to be a criminal due to the high level of emotional imbalance in their body.

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Many agreed and supported Eysenck's views such as Cale (2006). Cale said that N scale is directly proportional to offending. Neuroticism scores have also been shown to distinguish between different types of crimes. High scores on a neuroticism scale have been associated with increased incidents of rape, drugs and burglary (Bartol & Holanchock, 1979), causing damage (Laak et al., 2003), and the use of both psychological and physical aggression among men and women (Hines & Saudino, 2008). Heaven (1996) discovered that high neuroticism scores were also positively correlated with interpersonal violence among women and vandalism/theft. Despite the findings of positive associations between neuroticism and crime, there have also been studies that have reported contradictory findings among male offenders. Eysenck et al. (1977) attempted to distinguish between different types of offenders using personality factors. The analysis showed that violent offenders, 45 property offenders, and those convicted of confidence crimes had lower neuroticism scores than other types of offenders.

Eysenck & Eysenck (1992) also claimed that clinical condition of psychopathy and the personality trait psychoticism are related. Psychopathy included symptoms like superficial charm, manipulateness and extreme liars etc. Individual with more similarity with the traits of psychopathy were considered to be on the higher level of offenders. Millar and Lynam (2003) proposed that psychopathy was combination of Low AC, High E and High and Low forms of N (depression, anxiety etc.) According to the survey conducted by them they found out that psychopathy was related to drugs use and alcohol consumption and they also figured that it was directly related to violent crime and unhealthy sexual behaviour.

Similar study was carried out by Lang et al. (2002). In his study in the year 1956, 287 Swedish boys aged between 11 and 14 were closely observed and later in the year 1983 when they aged between 32 and 40. As per the results Lang came to a conclusion that children who stayed with abusive parents or been part of alcohol abuse and domestic violence were more likely to become violent offenders. Oliver et al. (2009) said that psychotic parents can have children with antisocial behaviour. In his study he mentioned that the personality of the parents and their way of upbringing the child may have great impact on whether the child will have antisocial behaviour or not. Oliver's study also suggested that mothers who were found to be high in conscientiousness were less likely to have children with antisocial behaviour and the father's personality had no relation with the child having antisocial behaviour. It was believed antisocial and aggressive behaviour that starts in childhood persist till the child grows up. Initially it started with school failure and lying and later it was advanced to stealing and non discipline and gradually it ended up with drinking problems followed by expulsions, arrests and drug use (Robins, 1986).

Antisocial behaviour primarily begins during the adolescence. There were also other factors involved such as inappropriate parenting, broken family bonds, single parenting (lack of a fatherly figure), psychopath mother, poverty, poor relation with peers and teachers etc. Not all crimes are antisocial in general sense of the term (Eysenck, 1977; 1984). As per Eysenck there could be crimes which were motivated due to pressures. Unwontedly individual get involved in crimes such as burglary or stealing just to fulfil its basic need. Eysenck not only believed that genetic factors were

responsible for antisocial behaviour but he also argued that there were differences in physical appearance of criminals and non-criminals. Lomboroso (1911) also concluded the same after he studied Italian prisoners and military personnel's. In his study he clearly stated that criminals had different physical attributes compared to non-criminals. The physical attributes observed by him in criminals were asymmetrical skull, flattened nose, ears of unusual size, excessive tattooing etc. Lomboroso also observed that criminals were immune to pain and had an acute eye sight and also lacked moral science. Lomboroso not only categorised criminals as different species but he also claimed that some people are born in a way that attracts them to behave antisocially. Lomboroso also thought there were various types of offenders and he categorized them into six different types. The six types of offenders suggested by Lomboroso were professional criminals (who broke the law repeatedly), born criminals, criminal of passion (patriotism), impulsive offenders, criminals with lack of morals and lastly hysteric criminals (psychological abnormalities). The study of physical differentiation between criminal and non criminal was not approved in Europe and it was disapproved by Goring (1913). Goring concluded that criminals and non criminals of same age, class and intelligence had similar physical and mental constitution. Goring also opposed the study of types of offenders done by Lomboroso. As per Goring there was no such thing as criminal types.

William Sheldon did a similar study as Lomboroso but instead of considering physical attributes he linked personality with physique. Basically Sheldon's idea was that there were three somatypes. The three types were Endomorphs (people who have fat deposition especially around the

abdomen), Ectomorphs (people who are thin and fragile) and Mesomorphs (people who are muscular). Sheldon tested his theory of physique and delinquency in 1939 by comparing 400 boys with group of male college students in terms of intelligence, family backgrounds and medical records for 8 years. After the test Sheldon concluded that there was link between somotypic differences among delinquent and non-delinquent males. Sheldon's results showed that delinquent were mainly Mesomorphic.

The role of genetics in association with crime was tested by Twin studies and Adoption studies. Twins are of two types naming monozygotic and dizygotic. Monozygotic twins are born from a single egg and therefore are identical whereas the dizygotic twins are born from two separate eggs and share half of the genes of the parents. Lange (1920's) studied 10 pairs of identical twins and found out that both the twins were criminals. The largest twin study was done by Christianson & Mednick (1881-1910). They concluded that if the twins were identical and if one of them was a criminal then there are 50% chances of the other one to be criminal too. Adoption studies were basically done to see if environment change can influence inherited traits. Mednick (1924-1927) conducted a test where he studied 14, 427 male and female adoptions. According to Mednick environment does play a key role and it can influence an individual to take part in antisocial behaviour.

There are various factors that lead to antisocial behaviour. One of the main reasons is Aggression. It can be defined as violent behaviour that can harm others. It can be used to reflect dominance and portray extensive anger.

There are two kinds of aggression, Overt aggression and Covert aggression.

Overt aggression can be difficult to cope up and can lead to violence.

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Whereas covert aggression would make an individual perform crimes of dishonesty. If psychological factors are considered then the level of the hormone testosterone in male is responsible for aggression. Arson, Wilson & Akert (2005) found out that the level of testosterone was higher in male prisoners who committed violent crimes compared to the ones who convicted non-violent crimes.

The factors leading to antisocial behaviour are Family Environment, Distorted Cognitions and widely due to Exposure to Violent Models. A family environment with conflicts, criticism and negativity can lead to antisocial behaviour in children (Reiss et al., 1995). This could be due to negligence by parents and lack of emotional attachment with the child. Television also can easily influence children. Firing guns and crashing of cars can later create curiosity leading to antisocial behaviour. Prevention of anti-social behaviour in adults is very difficult as they are less likely to accept their crime and instead describe themselves as “friendly, considerate, dependable and capable” (Sutker, DeSanto & Allain, 1985). But there are possibilities of its prevention in children. As described earlier that criminal behaviour starts in adolescence age so if proper education and right code of behaviour is taught to the child during its growing years then it could cross out the chances of the child suffering from antisocial behaviour.