Review Article

Hans Eysenck — Contributions & Controversies

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Introduction

Hans Eysenck was born in Germany on 4th March, 1916 and died on 4th September, 1997 at the age of 81 years. His parents were actors. He was brought up by his grandmother. He had left Germany and came to England because of his dislikes to the contemporary Nazi government.

He was the student of British educational psychologist Cyril L. Burt. He was the founder of department of Psychology in the University of London Institute of Psychiatry and served there for more than 47 years (till his death). He was also the founder of “Journal of Personality and Individual Differences” in the year 1980. At the time of his death, he was the living psychologist who was most frequently cited in science journals. He had written about 80 books and 1600 articles in different journals. His contribution to psychiatry and psychology is unforgettable. During his life time, he was immensely praised as well as hugely criticized in different issues.

Contribution to psychiatry

Eysenck’s had contributed largely in the field of psychotherapy, intelligence, personality and behavior therapy. One of the major contributions of Eysenck in psychiatry is his postulates about personality. He emphasized on the biological basis of personality. As per Eysenck, personality is not merely an recognizable behavior that can be manipulated or altered, rather a reflection of basic brain behavior. Eysenck mentioned about three dimensions of personality and named them as neuroticism, extraversion and psychoticism. Eysenck postulated that differential cortical arousal is responsible for different personality domains. Eysenck had done extensive research in the field of personality and tried to quantify and qualify personality dimensions. He developed instruments like EPQ (Eysenck’s Personality Questionnaire) and EPI (Eysenck’s Personality Inventory) which are commonly used in psychiatry clinical practice. Biological / genetic processes result in behavior changes and vise versa which clearly denotes that the relation of cause and outcome are bidirectional. To further explain this association, Eysenck had given the example of association of aggressive and sexual behavior with that of testosterone level where cause and result are bidirectional, one results in the other. Eysenck’s approach to personality dimension is different from the approach of Raymond Cattell, however both agreed on existence of general personality traits in consistent association with defined behaviors.

Eysenck had designed an instrument named “Junior Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (JEPQ)” which contains four basic elements – Extraversion, Neuroticism, Psychoticism and Lie. It is used for assessment of personality in adolescents. JEPQ also attempts to assess the association of personality factors with problematic behaviors. Eysenck had also given the concept of criminal personality. According to his theory criminal behavior is the result of interplay of several factors like biological, psychological and social. Eysenck’s emphasized more on the biological aspects of personality. He attributed the major dimensions of personality to two important brain circuits naming “Reticulo – cortical circuit” and “Reticulo – limbic circuit”. These circuits control cortical arousal and emotional arousals respectively. Extraversion - Introversion is associated with arousability of reticulo-cortical circuit and Neuroticism is related to arousability of the reticulo-limbic circuit. As per Eysenck, Psychoticism (P), Extraversion (E), and Neuroticism (N) are the basic and fundamental
personality constructs from which all personality traits are derived. They Psychoticism construct of Eysenck's Personality Questionnaire represents the possible genetic predispositions in the development of schizophrenia and manic-depressive psychosis. Though Eysenck emphasized on learned habits as a major reason for differences in personalities, but at the same time, he also attributed it to genetic configurations of individuals.

Eysenck also described the overlapping psychological traits of "Psychoticism" with "Creativity". As per Eysenck, creative individuals score high on psychotism scale, but it does not mean that psychosis and creativity are interrelated and overlapping.

Eysenck had a major contribution to the concepts of human intelligence. His focus was on the biological basis of intelligence. He had tried to measure different aspects of intelligence by means of different tests. He had given the concept of intelligence A, B and C. Intelligence A is decided by genetic pool and physiologically mediated which can be measured by different cognitive task performances and Electroencephalogram (EEG) and positron emission tomography (PET). Intelligence B is generated with time after environmental influence on the genetically determined intelligence (Intelligence A) which is difficult to be measured. Intelligence B is also known as social intelligence. Intelligence C is derived from sampling of Intelligence B and A. Intelligence C can be measured by psychometric tests as "Intelligence Quotient (IQ)".

Eysenck criticized "Meta-analysis" in psychotherapy research in his paper entitled "Meta-Analysis: An Abuse of Research Integration". He mentioned that in most of the cases meta-analysis is useless and counterproductive.

Eysenck had initiated the approach of science or evidence based psychotherapy. In his article "the effect of psychotherapy: an evaluation", he criticized the practice of American psychologists. He had written his first book in 1953 in the name of "Uses and Abuses of Psychology", which was a bestselling book of that era. He was the founder of two important journals in psychology - Behaviour Research and Therapy (1963) and Personality and Individual Differences (1980).

**Contribution beyond psychiatry**

Hans Eysenck had also left his footprint in the extra-psychiatry domains like parapsychology, astrology and graphology. He had more than 35 publications in these domains. He had belief in paranormal activities and he supported the existing evidences about paranormal activities. Eysenck worked with Mayo and White to see the relationship between sun signs with that of Extravert score of EPQ. He had plotted the E scores of sample taken against their sun signs and got a zig-zag pattern curve, which was also mentioned in astrology. He had tried to establish the scientific basis of astrology.

**Controversies about H J Eysenck**

Controversies developed when Eysenck's article "The effect of psychotherapy: An evaluation" was published in a prestigious journal of psychology in 1952. In that article, he concluded that psychotherapy is a complete ineffective treatment modality which was based on his review of about 24 contemporary studies on effectiveness of psychotherapy in different group of neurotic patients. Regarding this article Eysenck said on the August edition of Current Contents under the section "This Week's Citation Classic" in 1980 that he had visited USA in 1949 during which he observed psychotherapy was used in the treatment of neurotic disorders without much evidences in favor of it.

Eysenck had written a series of articles criticizing the American Psychological Association regarding its promotion of clinical psychology practice, described psychotherapy as a baseless, ineffective treatment modality. In the conclusion of his article "The effects of psychotherapy: An evaluation", Eysenck stated that Freudian psychoanalytic psychotherapy was ineffective in treating neurotic disorders. He had also stated that there exists an inverse correlation between psychotherapy and recovery which means recovery is better if psychotherapy intervention is less. The impact of this article was severe enough to raise questions on effectiveness of psychotherapy and it lasted for approximately next 25 years, till the large meta-analysis conducted by Smith and Glass in 1977, who convinced that psychotherapy is definitely effective.
Eysenck's emphasis, belief and comments on the "Psychoticism (P)" in personality theory are again a matter of controversy. Eysenck had mixed up his beliefs related to phenotypic and genotypic elements in his scale – Eysenck’s Personality Questionnaire – Psychoticism (EPQ-P), which created a lot of confusion, so it was criticized and was considered grossly invalid. Other reasons to get criticisms for the tool EPQ-P are – Psychosis (Schizophrenia) patients show slightly increased score on the “P” value where as criminals, antisocial personalities, substance abusers and violent people score very high on “P” value. Eysenck was highly criticized for his introduction of racism into intelligence. Jansen, a student of Eysenck had written a paper showing difference in intelligence on the basis of racial differences and concluded that those differences in intelligences may be due to difference in genetic pool, which was strongly supported by Eysenck.

Eysenck had criticized the Freudian concept of psychoanalysis as a therapeutic modality in the treatment of psychiatric disorders. He had written a book criticizing Sigmund Freud entitled – “The Decline and Fall of the Freudian Empire” in 1985.

Impact of Eysenckian thought in psychotherapy

The critical comment given by Eysenck regarding the effectiveness of psychotherapy in treating neurotic disorder had significant impact in the field of psychiatry, which persisted for more than two decades, till Smith and Glass’s meta-analysis disproved it. The good thing about the classic article of Eysenck was that it had stimulated a lot of creative research works in the next few decades that proved psychotherapy as an effective modality of treatment in psychiatry and established the foundation of evidence based psychotherapy.

Conclusion

Eysenck’s was a well-known academician, scientist, researcher with huge contribution to the world of psychiatry and psychology. His life had crossed through lots of ups and downs. Controversies created on his comment about “Effectiveness of Psychotherapy” led to rigorous research in this area, which strengthened the evidence based practices in psychiatry. His developments in personality inventories are of great significance.

References

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