

Hans Eysenck and his Theories of Temperament

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### **Hans Eysenck and his Theories of Temperament**

Hans Eysenck was a renowned psychiatrist who wrote 75 books before his death in 1997. His personality tests are among some of the most widely used in psychology. The primary basis of Eysenck's theory includes physiology and genetics. According to the author, our genetic inheritance plays a crucial role in our personality differences. For this reason, the study of temperaments took his primary interest. Essentially, Eysenck identified two general aspects of temperament, which are neuroticism and extraversion-introversion.

#### **Neuroticism**

An individual's sympathetic nervous system governs one's neuroticism. According to Eysenck, people tend to have different responses. While some people remain calm in emergencies, there are others who express emotions and considerable fear. Also, some individuals get terrified not only during emergencies but also in minor events. The latter category of people is believed to have various neurotic disorders as they portray signs of sympathetic hyperactivity (Revelle, 2016). A stable person's nervous system is viewed as less likely to react to stressful scenarios. They are under the category of people that remain calm and level headed. On the other hand, unstable individuals are high in neuroticism. Overreaction to stimuli is observed in this category of people. They may express feelings of fear, anger, or worry among other emotions. Overreactive individuals have a hard time overcoming these emotions. It is believed that the autonomic nervous system (ANS) of neurotic individuals is quickly responsive to stress. Therefore, Eysenck's theory became widely-popular in psychology and psychiatry.

#### **Extraversion-Introversion**

To study these traits, Eysenck referred to people who are sociable and outgoing. He described them as the ones who crave for excitement and change. Extraverts are impulsive and

optimistic. They usually stay carefree, which is confirmed by their tendency to take risks and seek thrills. According to Eysenck, the inherited nervous system of extroverts is under-aroused. This causes them to seek stimulation, which helps restore the level of optimum stimulation. Introverts, on the other hand, are quite the opposite of extroverts. They tend to be quieter and more reserved. Eysenck argued that their nervous system is usually over-aroused, causing them to avoid sensation and stimulation (Revelle, 2016). Introverts are able to control their emotions and always make sure they plan their actions. Unlike extroverts, introverts are known to be pessimists.

Eysenck also looked into the interaction between the two categories and various psychological problems related to that. He discovered that introverted people are likely to suffer from disorders such as phobia and OCD. Extraverts related to disorders such as conversion disorders and dissociative disorders. After these researches, Eysenck furthered his studies to mental institutions, where he developed a factor called psychoticism.

### **Psychoticism**

Eysenck described people with psychoticism as those lacking empathy, being aggressive, and troublesome. Psychoticism is believed to be caused by high levels of testosterone in such individuals. Persons who exhibit higher amounts of testosterone generally have more psychotic tendencies, according to the psychologist. Eysenck also argued that creativity could be a precondition to psychoticism. He clarified that not all creative people can be labeled as psychopaths and neither do they develop a psychotic disorder. He viewed creativity as more of a risk factor towards developing such diseases. However, the reverse of this claim argument is not true. In other words, not all people with such disorders are creative.

References

Revelle, W. (2016). Hans Eysenck: Personality theorist. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *103*, 32-39.