Eysenck, Hans J. (1916–1997)

Eysenck was born and educated in Berlin, Germany, openly opposing Hitler and his requirement of Nazi Party membership for university admission, and moving to England in the late 1930s in protest. He received his BA in 1938 and PhD in psychology in 1949 from the University of London. In 1946 Eysenck became senior research psychologist at Maudsley Hospital, a year later becoming head of the psychology department, founded by him within the Institute of Psychiatry at that hospital. For over 30 years he was professor of psychology at the University of London and director of the psychology unit at Maudsley Hospital. Hans J. Eysenck died on September 4, 1997 at the age of 81.

Eysenck has been described as one of the most influential, provocative, and controversial psychologists of his generation. He was a persistent critic of psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, and projective assessment, and a moving force in the establishment of clinical psychology and behavior therapy. As a behaviorist, he advocated scientific methods of personality assessment and denied the theory of the subconscious, denouncing Freud as a charlatan in the process. Eysenck applied research methods traditionally used in the study of intelligence to the study of personality, utilizing factor analysis and discriminant function analysis to identify major factors. He attempted to develop hypotheses linking those factors to widely accepted psychological and physiological concepts. This approach to the treatment of scientific data was a general theme throughout his research.

Eysenck was a pioneer in defining the structure of personality, attracting students and collaborators from around the world with his analysis of the layers of personality. (*Dimensions of Personality*) and (*The Structure of Human Personality*) provide explanations of his theory of personality, identifying the measurable areas as intelligence, neurosis, psychosis, extroversion, and introversion, all later components of psychological tests. In the behaviorist tradition, Eysenck was unconcerned about aspects of personality that could not be measured, claiming that what was not measurable did not exist. His belief in interventions based on unlearning maladaptive behaviors that had been learned, drew criticism that he was merely treating symptoms of mental disorders, not the diseases themselves. He argued, however, that the symptoms were the disorders.

The most heated controversy of his career was prompted by Eysenck's publication of an article in *The Harvard Education Review* (1969), arguing that the difference between scores of Blacks and Whites on intelligence tests was due to genetic as well as environmental factors. At the height of this controversy, he was attacked by students calling him a racist and fascist while attempting to deliver a lecture, and he was accompanied by a bodyguard to ensure his safety.

Generating further criticism, Eysenck's book, *Smoking, Health and Personality*, was published in 1965. In it he described the “cancer-prone”-type personality, one characterized by feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, and depression, unable to express emotions and reacting inappropriately to stress. He argued that smoking itself does not cause cancer, and that both smoking and cancer are merely symptoms of the same personality disorder, one most likely of genetic origin.

During his career, Eysenck published some 80 books and 1,600 journal articles dealing with a vast array of subjects. In *Decline and Fall of the Freudian Empire* (Eysenck,), he proposed that Freud was “a genius, not of science, but of propaganda,” and despite his rationalism, in his later work he concluded that
powerful evidence exists to support extra-sensory perception and found a significant correlation between personality and the position of the planets. His self-help books such as Check Your Own IQ sold in the millions, and he founded two journals, Behavior Research and Therapy and Personality and Individual Differences. In 1990 he published his autobiography, Rebel With a Cause.

References


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