

A comparison of the common-sense and 'scientific' conceptions of extroversion-introversion

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Abstract

From research on the organization of implicit personality theory, and on the fakability of psychometrically sophisticated scales a general argument about the conceptual overlap between implicit personality theory and 'scientific' theories of personality is developed. This is tested in the case of the common-sense conception of extroversion-introversion, and that of Eysenck. The convergent validity of these two conceptions are found to be high enough to support the argument. The implications of the argument are discussed in relation to the correspondences between implicit personality theory and personality theory, and the functions of personality theory in psychology and implicit personality theory in everyday life.

INTRODUCTION

The study reported here is concerned with the comparison of normative everyday conceptions of extroversion-introversion with a 'scientific' conception of it, namely that of Eysenck (*cf.* 1970a, b; Eysenck and Eysenck, 1976). Posed in a simple form the question addresses an empirical problem, namely: if subjects naive to psychology were asked to describe what they understand by extroversion-introversion, would their account correspond to that offered by Eysenck as long as a viable method for the comparison were obtained? However, there exist social psychological reasons which make the question a theoretically relevant one.

A number of investigations (e.g. D'Andrade, 1965, 1974; Mulaik, 1964; Shweder, 1975, 1977; Shweder and D'Andrade, in press) have argued that when responding to psychometrically sophisticated scales which involve descriptive-evaluative-responses (Semin and Rogers, 1973) such as the

Eysenck-Personality-Inventory (Eysenck and Eysenck, 1976), subjects do so on the basis of the semantic similarity of the items. These studies basically show that the perceived semantic similarity between items accounts for approximately 60 per cent or more of the variance of the inter-item correlations of questionnaires concerned with such diverse personality theories as children's social behaviour, adult social behaviour in groups, maternal socialization processes, and psychopathology (*cf.* Shweder, 1975). Although the semantic similarity model does not offer any particular proposition as to why or how the conceptual links are mediated above and beyond a general notion of perceived semantic similarity, it does imply that there exist normative everyday conceptions which guide ratings of trait co-occurrences, or item similarity in a variety of personality inventories.

A second set of research findings related to the problem addressed here comes from a number of studies arising from the psychometric philosophy underlying the fakability of personality scales entailing descriptive-evaluative-responses (Semin and Rogers, 1973). This literature illustrates what may be called a 'psychometric paradox', namely, that 'good' scales are extremely susceptible to response set biases induced by instructions to simulate a specific role or type, e.g. a salesman, an extrovert, etc. (*cf.* Braun and Gomez, 1966; Gomez and Braun, 1967; Power, 1968; Semin and Rogers, 1973, *inter alia*). Further, a related 'paradox' is demonstrated by studies which show that such scales also have the characteristic of containing items which are easily detectable by subjects as belonging to the trait category concerned (*cf.* Power and MacRae, 1971). Thus, when provided with the category extroversion for example, subjects can easily and accurately identify the items in the EPI belonging to the category.

From these two sets of findings the following conclusions are drawn. First of all, even without the provision of an explicit external criterion for categorization, subjects are able to categorize person terms (may these be items, adjectives, references to behaviour, etc.) into consistent and systematic groupings. Furthermore, since these groupings appear to be relatively consistent between subjects they should have to be made on the basis of a *consensually* shared implicit personality theory, which provides an intersubjective frame of reference. Additionally, if a category for classification of items is provided it is found that subjects sort items consistently and accurately by the criterion. Finally, the results obtained from the examination of response set effects show that the relationships between the items remain consistent, the main change being modifications of 'self-presentation'. All this points to a common basis between the conception of personality typologies and common-sense based implicit personality theory, suggesting that the 'scientific' and common-sense conceptions of personality may indeed be highly related in at least their phenotypic accounts of personality. In order to examine this, two preliminary studies were conducted to obtain conceptions of extroversion-introversion held by subjects naive to psychology. These were then compared in the main study with the conception of extroversion-introversion as developed by Eysenck.

METHOD

Overview

Two preliminary studies were conducted with two independent samples. In the first study common-sense everyday descriptions of extroversion-introversion (EI) were obtained. In the second study the content analysed descriptions were presented to two groups of subjects in itemized format and subjects had to judge how typical each item was for an extroverted (introverted) person. A common-sense EI Likert scale was constructed using the twelve most typical items for an extroverted person, and the twelve most typical items for an introverted person. Thirty-three subjects participated in the main study. Each subject received the common-sense EI scale and the Eysenck-Personality-Inventory (EPI) (Eysenck and Eysenck, 1976; Eggert, 1974), and filled it out from a self-perspective. The two conceptions of EI were compared through convergent validation.

Development of the common-sense EI scale

Two preliminary studies were conducted in order to obtain the material employed in the main study. Seventy-eight subjects from the University of Mannheim who were naive to psychology participated on a paid voluntary basis in the first preliminary study. Thirty-nine of these subjects were asked to describe what they regarded the attributes of a *typical extrovert* to be. The remaining thirty-nine subjects were asked to do the same thing for a *typical introvert*. The question was open-ended and the answers were provided in written form. The descriptions thus obtained were content analysed and a total of 58 individual items were obtained. In the content analysis each description was taken *verbatim*, except that all duplications of meaning were omitted. It is noteworthy that after the tenth or eleventh subject the additional information provided by further subjects proved highly redundant. This in itself points to the normative and shared nature of the everyday conceptions underlying extroversion-introversion. The 58 individual items referred to behaviours, behaviours in contexts, traits, or preferential activities.

Forty subjects from the University of Mannheim participated in the second preliminary study. Again, the subjects were naive to psychology as was the case in the first study. They were paid volunteers. The 58 items obtained from the first study were given to two independent samples of 20 persons each, in a randomized order. Subjects were asked to judge each item on a seven-point scale of typicality. Each scale position was identified with a label. These labels were taken from a study on verbal labelling of scale intervals and known to be equidistant (Rohrman, 1978). The endpoints were labelled *typical* and *atypical*. This particular procedure was adopted in order to minimize subjective variations in the interpretation of scale positions. The judgmental criterion in the one group was that of an *extrovert*, and in the other that of an *introvert*. Of the 58 items, 24 were selected for the common-sense EI scale, namely the 12 most typical for an *extrovert* and the 12 most typical for an *introvert*. These items with their mean typicality judgment ratings are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. The typicality judgments for the common-sense EI scale items

	\bar{X} Typicality extroversion	\bar{X} Typicality introversion
Extroversion items		
1. Seeks others to communicate to them	2.00*	5.00
2. Likes talking	2.00	5.40
3. Can't keep anything to him/herself	2.30	4.35
4. Impulsive	2.30	4.80
5. Likes to be the centre of attention	2.50	5.30
6. Easily accessible as a person	2.55	5.70
7. Expresses his/her feelings easily	2.75	4.70
8. Can't stand long periods of solitude	2.80	5.05
9. Does not have any anxieties in his/her dealings with others	2.85	4.40
10. Adapts easily	2.90	5.05
11. Searches others to discuss his/her personal problems	2.95	5.80
12. Is not reserved in new situations	3.05	5.35
Introversion items		
1. Thinks often about himself/herself	4.55	1.90
2. Attempts to solve his/her problems on his/her own	5.30	2.15
3. A person who ponders for extended periods on problems	4.75	2.20
4. Sensitive	3.95	2.20
5. Does not wish to reveal him/herself	5.00	2.35
6. Is not noticed in groups	5.00	2.45
7. Inaccessible	5.35	2.55
8. Appears distanced	5.55	2.95
9. Placid	5.10	3.05
10. Likes playing chess and reading books	4.45	3.15
11. Does not like giving information	5.60	3.33
12. Isolated	5.75	3.48

*Low values indicate high typicality, high values low typicality on a seven point scale.

Note: These items were reformulated for the common-sense scale to the self-referent form (first person singular).

The main study

Thirty-three students at the University of Mannheim who were non-psychology undergraduates participated in this study on a paid voluntary basis. They were given the common-sense EI scale which was constructed in a seven-point Likert scale format with the endpoints being labelled as *Applies to me* and *Does not apply to me*, and the A-form of the EPI (Eggert, 1974) with standard instructions. The item order in the common-sense scale was randomized and the order in which the two scales were filled out was counterbalanced across subjects. Subjects filled out both scales from a self-referent point of view.

RESULTS

The main argument that there is a high degree of conceptual overlap between the common-sense conception of EI and the scientific one developed by Eysenck

Table 2. Item-whole correlations for the common-sense scale and Cronbach (1951) alpha

Item type and no.	Item-whole r	Alpha if item deleted
Extr. 1*	0.55	0.84
Extr. 2	0.49	0.84
Extr. 3	0.44	0.84
Extr. 4	0.56	0.83
Extr. 5	0.56	0.83
Extr. 6	0.71	0.83
Extr. 7	0.62	0.83
Extr. 8	0.29	0.84
Extr. 9	0.36	0.84
Extr. 10	0.14	0.85
Extr. 11	0.47	0.84
Extr. 12	0.42	0.84
Intr. 1	-0.08	0.86
Intr. 2	0.53	0.83
Intr. 3	0.08	0.85
Intr. 4	0.34	0.84
Intr. 5	0.44	0.84
Intr. 6	0.56	0.83
Intr. 7	0.65	0.83
Intr. 8	0.50	0.84
Intr. 9	0.31	0.84
Intr. 10	0.37	0.84
Intr. 11	-0.12	0.86
Intr. 12	0.37	0.84

Reliability coefficients: Alpha = 0.85

Standardized item alpha = 0.84

*The item numbers refer to the order in which the items are presented in Table 1, going from high to low typicality within the respective category.

was examined through computing the correlation between the EI scale score of subjects on the EPI and the total score on the common-sense EI scale, on which the introversion items were reversed in computing the total score. The mean EI score over subjects on the EPI was 13.39 (SD = 4.51) and 92.48 (SD = 17.99) on the common-sense EI scale, the correlation between the two being 0.51 ($p < 0.001$). This coefficient compares well with the convergent validity coefficients reported for the German version of the EPI (Eggert, 1974) which vary between 0.55 and 0.70, particularly in view of the fact that the construction of the common-sense scale was guided by criteria of normative conceptions and not by psychometric ones. The implications of this will be discussed below.

Further, Table 2 provides the item-whole correlations and the Cronbach α coefficient (1951), which is 0.85. As can be seen from Table 2 the internal consistency of the common-sense scale is very high, lending support to the highly normative nature of the everyday conception of extroversion-introversion.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings of these three studies support the argument that there is conceptual overlap between the normative and the 'scientific' conceptions of extroversion-introversion. This overlap suggests that the differentiations made between people in everyday life with respect to the categories extroversion-introversion are comparable to those made within the Eysenck typology (*cf.* 1970, Eysenck and Eysenck, 1976). The common-sense conception was obtained through the general descriptions given by subjects to the two person categories, which when applied in itemized format show considerable overlap in self-descriptive representations between the common-sense scale and the EPI. Reversing the argument, it can be maintained that the everyday usage of person descriptions relevant to the categories extroversion-introversion allows individuals to communicate with relatively high degree of accuracy differential information about perceived behavioural inclinations of others and self.

Furthermore, the present studies show that there is a high degree of consensual agreement in the usage of extroversion-introversion related descriptors/person terms. This is evidenced not only through the high degree of redundancy among descriptions obtained from the first preliminary study but also the high degree of internal consistency of the common-sense scale. This scale was constructed merely on the basis of judged degree of typicality of the extracted statements for the respective criteria of extroverted and introverted persons, and not through any systematic and sophisticated psychometric dimension extraction such as factor analysis, etc. which are the means through which 'bad terms' are typically weeded out. In fact, in view of the present findings and also those reported by Shweder (Shweder, 1975; Shweder and D'Andrade, *in press*) it can be argued that of the various concepts of reliability in psychometrics as they pertain to scales with descriptive-evaluative-responses (Semin and Rogers, 1973) those concerned with the internal consistency of scales primarily refer in psychological terms to the perceived semantic organization of various descriptors, the reliability term reflecting the relative consistency of these in terms of the extent to which they belong to a particular category. Similarly, the social psychological translation of factor analytic studies of personality can be regarded as representations of implicit personality theory.

One of the implications of the present studies concerns an ambiguity present in considerations about implicit personality theory (Bruner and Tagiuri, 1954; Schneider, 1973) with respect to its idiosyncratic *versus* nomic (*cf.* Semin and Manstead, 1979) quality (*cf.* Hamilton, 1970; Schneider, 1973; Rosenberg and Sedlak, 1972). The present study supports the view that implicit personality theory is highly consensual, thus nomic in its organization and representation (*cf.* D'Andrade, 1965, 1974; Kuusinen, 1969a, b; Shweder, 1975, *inter alia*). This assumption is further supported by considerations pertaining to the communication and interpretation of specific person terms or descriptors. If such terms are to be consensually meaningful then this can only be achieved through reference to a commonly shared frame of reference, namely an intersubjective implicit personality theory. This obviously does not exclude a considerable range of idiosyncratic constructions of others that we are capable of and have, although one needs to resort to some commonly shared frame of reference in

order to be able to communicate this content. Indeed, there exist some excellent idiographic case analyses (*cf.* Rosenberg, 1977; Rosenberg and Jones, 1972) and some attempts to construct systematic personality and self models from an ordinary language analysis point of view (*cf.* Bromley, 1977, 1978).

A further point requiring clarification is whether or not the two categories of extroversion-introversion are used in a dimensional manner in everyday life. Employing an attribute inference paradigm Semin and Rosch (research note 1) have shown that when subjects were given information about a target person possessing an attribute known to be typical of extroverts (or introverts) through pilot studies, then subjects infer that attributes typical of the stimulus attribute category are applicable (e.g. attributes typical of extroverts) and that attributes typical of the bipolar opposite category (e.g. attributes known to be typical of introverts) do not apply to the target person. Basically, this study demonstrates that subjects use the two categories in a bipolar manner, supporting the notion that these categories are represented and processed dimensionally.

Finally, brief consideration will be given to the relationship between first-order theories of personality (e.g. Eysenck's conceptualization of extroversion-introversion) and second-order theories of personality (e.g. common-sense conceptions of extroversion-introversion). Clearly, first-order models are based upon and derived from second-order theories (*cf.* Schütz, 1953; Whitehead, 1917). It would appear however that at least in their phenotypic accounts the scientific and common-sense theories do not differ in their accounts of extroversion-introversion. Should this generally be the case, then the question of the status of at least the phenotypic account of personality theories derived from psychometric methods arises. Should the argument and the evidence developed be *generally* valid, then such personality theories can be regarded as systematic representations of aspects or specific categories existent in implicit personality theory. In view of the current debate surrounding personality theory and the issue of whether or not stable behaviour dispositions or traits exist, and the overwhelming evidence failing to provide confirming support in this regard (*cf.* Bowers, 1973; Ekehammer, 1974; Endler and Magnusson, 1976; Magnusson and Endler, 1977, *inter alia*), the issue becomes one of inquiring what use person classifications have in everyday life. A concern similar to the one developed in the domain of personality theory has received attention in person perception research, namely that perceived relationships between traits reflect actual covariations among traits in people. The studies to date provide ambiguous evidence on this, some supporting the notion that implicit personality theory does not reflect experience (e.g. D'Andrade, 1965; Norman, 1963; Mirels, 1976; Passini and Norman, 1966; Shweder, 1975, 1977, *inter alia*) and others suggesting that there is a relationship between actual co-occurrence and implicit personality theory (e.g. Lay and Jackson, 1969; Stricker, Jakobs and Kogan, 1974). Generally, the proponents of the recent research which have not been able to find a relationship between implicit personality theory and actual covariation of traits have related their findings (e.g. Shweder, 1977) to the general biases of 'illusory correlation' (Chapman and Chapman, 1967, 1969) and the representativeness heuristic (Kahneman and Tversky, 1973; Tversky and Kahneman, 1974). However, in examining the cognitive organization and use of implicit personality theory, a more fruitful

research strategy might be to examine the function of implicit personality theory in everyday life, which may not necessarily be a predictive one, but a predicative one. Throughout, the general orientation has been to equate personality with science and science with prediction. Similarly, the tendency has been to extrapolate from this assumed relationship to the function of implicit personality theory as used in everyday life. This assumption in itself may however be based on an illusory correlation requiring closer scrutiny, suggesting a research development concerned with the functions person terms serve in their use in everyday life.

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RESEARCH NOTES

Semin, G. R. and Rosch, E. 'Bipolar prototypes as organizing principles for attribute inferences in the person domain'. Research manuscript, 1980, under editorial consideration.

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RESUMÉ

On soutient ici la thèse qu'il existe un recouvrement conceptuel entre une théorie implicite de la personnalité et les théories 'scientifiques' de la personnalité, thèse fondée sur les recherches portant sur l'organisation d'une théorie implicite de la personnalité et la 'falsifiabilité' des échelles psychométriques raffinées. On met cette idée à l'épreuve pour le cas de l'extraversion-introversion; la conception du sens commun d'une part, celle de Eysenck d'autre part. La validité convergente de ces deux conceptions est assez élevée pour étayer notre thèse dont on discute les implications; quelles sont les correspondances entre théorie implicite et théorie scientifique, quelles sont les fonctions d'une théorie scientifique de la personnalité en psychologie et les fonctions d'une théorie implicite de la personnalité dans la vie de tous les jours.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Ausgehend von der Forschung zur Organisation impliziter Persönlichkeitstheorien und der Forschung über die Verfälschbarkeit psychometrisch ausgeklügelter Skalen wird eine allgemeine Hypothese entwickelt über die begriffliche Überschneidung impliziter Persönlichkeitstheorien und 'wissenschaftlicher' Theorien der Persönlichkeit. Sie wird geprüft anhand des common-sense Begriffes der Extraversion-Introversion und des wissenschaftlichen Begriffes von Eysenck. Die ermittelte konvergente Validität zwischen diesen beiden Konzeptionen unterstützt die Hypothese. Die Implikationen dieses Befundes werden diskutiert bezüglich der Entsprechung impliziter and wissenschaftlicher Persönlichkeitstheorien und der Funktion der Persönlichkeitstheorie in der Psychologie und der impliziten Persönlichkeitstheorie im Alltag.

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