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## **Personality and Religious Maturity**

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**Abstract** A sample of 226 students attending seminaries, theological colleges, and bible schools completed Newton Malony's Religious Status Inventory (as a measure of religious maturity) alongside the short-form Revised Eysenck Personality Questionnaire. The data demonstrated some ways in which stable toughminded extraverts projected higher levels of religious maturity according to some of Malony's criteria.

**Keywords** Religion, Personality, Eysenck, Religious Status Inventory, Maturity

### **Introduction**

The Religious Status Inventory (RSInv), designed by Newton Malony (1985, 1988) and his doctoral students (Hadlock, 1987, 1988; Massey, 1987, 1988), set out to define and to operationalize a model of religious maturity, building on theory proposed by Pruyser (1976). Pruyser's original assessment criteria of religious functioning embraced seven categories which were defined as: awareness of God; acceptance of God's grace and steadfast love;

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being repentant and responsible; knowing God's leadership and direction; involvement in organized religion; experiencing fellowship; and being ethical. To these seven categories Malony added an eighth: affirming openness in faith.

In its original form, as printed by Massey and Hadlock (1988), the Religious Status Inventory comprised 20 items to represent each of the eight categories of religious functioning. The scale has been employed, for example, by Hall (1995) to explore the long-term religious functioning in adult Christian women who had been sexually abused as children, by Porter (1995) to explore the relationship between religious maturity and preferred modes of religious experience, and by Sell (2000) to examine the levels of religious maturity recorded by youth members of "The Family", a New Religious Movement formerly known as "Children of God." Information on the factor structure of the Religious Status Inventory has been provided, for example, by Jackson (1992) and by Lehtsaar, Lukaszewski, and Malony (1998). A short form of the Religious Status Inventory (RSInv-10) has been proposed by Francis and Pocock (2007).

The notion of religious maturity is, however, an elusive and controversial concept, both theologically and psychologically. As yet there is a lack of empirical evidence regarding the way in which Malony's theologically-derived model of religious maturity is related to a psychologically-derived model of personality. The aim of the present paper, therefore, is to address this issue by examining the scales of the Religious Status Inventory alongside Eysenck's dimensional model of personality (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1985).

Eysenck's dimensional model of personality maintains that individual differences can be most economically and adequately summarized in terms of the three higher order factors which he defines as neuroticism, psychoticism, and extraversion. The first two of these factors reflect Eysenck's fundamental view that abnormal personality is not discrete from, but continuous with normal personality. Accordingly, neurotic disorders lie at one extreme of a

dimension of normal personality, ranging from emotional stability, through emotional lability, to neurotic disorder. Similarly, psychotic disorders lie at one extreme of another dimension of normal personality, ranging from tendermindedness, through toughmindedness, to psychotic disorder. Therefore it is possible to define and operationalize the dimensions of neuroticism and psychoticism so that they appear to be orthogonal and independent of each other. Eysenck's dimensional model of personality adds a third orthogonal dimension to these dimensions of neuroticism and psychoticism. The third dimension, which is not in itself concerned with psychological disorder, ranges from introversion, through ambiversion, to extraversion. Eysenck's measures of these three major dimensions of personality also routinely include a lie scale.

Eysenck and Eysenck (1975) defined high scorers on the neuroticism scale as being anxious, worrying, moody, and frequently depressed individuals who are likely to sleep badly and to suffer from various psychosomatic disorders. They are seen as overly emotional, reacting too strongly to all sorts of stimuli, and finding it difficult to get back on an even keel after emotionally arousing experiences. Strong reactions interfere with their proper adjustment, making them react in irrational, sometimes rigid ways. Highly neurotic individuals are worriers whose main characteristic is a constant preoccupation with things that might go wrong, and a strong anxiety reaction to these thoughts.

Eysenck and Eysenck (1976) define high scorers on the psychoticism scale as being cold, impersonal, hostile, lacking in sympathy, unfriendly, untrustful, odd, unemotional, unhelpful, lacking in insight, and strange, with paranoid ideas that people are against them. Eysenck and Eysenck (1976) also use the following descriptors: egocentric, self-centered, impersonal, lacking in empathy, solitary, troublesome, cruel, glacial, inhumane, insensitive, sensation-seeking, aggressive, foolhardy, making fools of others and liking odd and unusual things. Eysenck and Eysenck (1975) maintained that emotions such as empathy and guilt are

characteristically absent in people who score high on measures of psychoticism.

Eysenck and Eysenck (1975) define high scorers on the extraversion scale as sociable individuals, who like parties, have many friends, need to have people to talk to, and prefer meeting people to reading or studying alone. The typical extravert craves excitement, takes chances, acts on the spur of the moment, is carefree, easy-going, optimistic, and likes to “laugh and be merry.”

## **Method**

### Sample

The questionnaire was distributed to students attending a number of seminaries, theological colleges, and bible schools throughout the United Kingdom. A total of 226 thoroughly completed questionnaires were returned. The sample comprised 54 women and 172 men; 4 were under the age of 20; 78 were in their twenties; 70 were in their thirties; 51 were in their forties; 19 were in their fifties; 2 were in their sixties; and two failed to disclose their age.

The following main denominations were represented: 71 Anglicans, 40 Baptists, 31 Methodists, 27 Roman Catholics, 20 Presbyterians, and 13 Pentecostals. Smaller numbers of respondents represented a number of other denominations, including the Salvation Army and the House Churches. Only 3 of the respondents claimed to attend church less often than weekly. One in ten of the respondents (23) held a higher degree, a further 72 held a first degree, and 44 held a non-graduate professional qualification.

### Instruments

*Religious Status Inventory (RSInv-S10).*

The 80 items of the short-form Religious Status Inventory, proposed by Francis and Pocock (2005), are rated on a five-point scale, agree strongly, agree, not certain, disagree, and

disagree strongly. The instrument comprises eight ten-item scales intended to assess: awareness of God; acceptance of God's grace and steadfast love; being repentant and responsible; knowing God's leadership and direction; involvement in organised religion; experiencing fellowship; being ethical; and affirming openness in faith.

#### *Revised Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQR-S).*

The 48 items of the short-form Revised Eysenck Personality Questionnaire, proposed by Eysenck, Eysenck, and Barrett (1985), are rated on a two-point scale: yes and no. The instrument comprises four 12-item scales intended to assess extraversion, neuroticism, psychoticism, and the tendency to fake good (lie scale).

#### Data analysis

The data were analyzed by the SPSS statistical package (SPSS, Inc., 1998) using the frequencies, correlation and reliability routines.

#### **Results**

Table 1 presents the scale properties of the eight indices from the Religious Status Inventory

- insert table 1 about here -

(RSInv-S10) and the four indices of the Revised Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQR-S) in terms of the alpha coefficients, means and standard deviations.

Table 2 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients between the eight indices of the

- insert table 2 about here -

RSInv-S10 and the four indices of the EPQR-S.

#### **Discussion**

Malony's first marker of religious maturity is defined as *awareness of God*. Individuals who record high scores on this scale report that they stand in awe and wonder of God their creator, that they would find it hard to refrain from worshipping God, that they feel a desire to worship God throughout the week, and that God is more important than anything else in their life. According to Malony (1985):

Mature Christians worship God as an expression of reverence and of love toward God. Mature Christians pray as a means of spiritual sustenance and communion with God and as a way of honestly expressing concerns. (p. 31)

Scores on the scale of awareness of God are unrelated to extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism, and negatively correlated with lie scale scores. High scorers are individuals who are unconcerned by the constraints of social conformity.

Malony's second marker of religious maturity is defined as *acceptance of God's grace and steadfast love*. Individuals who record high scores on this scale report that they feel safe and secure knowing that God loves them, that knowing God loves them gets them very excited, that God will bring good out of all their painful situations because God loves them, and that because God forgives them they want to go out of their way to help others. According to Malony (1985):

Mature Christians view God as loving them unconditionally. Mature Christians see God's love and forgiveness as an impetus for new life and responsible action. Mature Christians appreciate God's love and manifest this through a sense of joy and gratitude. (p. 31)

Scores on the scale of acceptance of God's grace and steadfast love are unrelated to extraversion, psychoticism and the lie scale, and negatively correlated with neuroticism. High scorers are individuals who enjoy a higher level of emotional stability.

Malony's third marker of religious maturity is defined as *being repentant and*

*responsible*. Individuals who record high scores on this scale report that they are quick to ask forgiveness when they hurt someone, that they continue to wish the best for someone who has hurt them, that when they have done something wrong they try to do something to correct the situation, and that when someone asks them for forgiveness they are able to forgive.

According to Malony (1985):

Mature Christians accurately accept personal responsibility without denying other factors, such as the environment, in personal difficulties and in sin.

Mature Christians are aware of their inner impulses and accept them as a legitimate part of their humanness. (p. 31)

Scores on the scale of being repentant and responsible are unrelated to extraversion and the lie scale, negatively correlated with neuroticism, and positively correlated with psychoticism. High scorers are individuals who tend towards toughmindedness and emotional stability.

Malony's fourth marker of religious maturity is defined as *knowing God's leadership and direction*. Individuals who record high scores on this scale report that they expect some hard times in the future but trust God to help them through those times, that prayer helps them to make major decisions, that they feel good about how God uses them in what they do, and that they try to serve God through their work. According to Malony (1985):

Mature Christians express trust in God's leadership for life yet also recognise their role in that process. Mature Christians express an optimistic, yet realistic hope based on trust in God. Without denying present problems, mature Christians are confident that God is in control of life. (p. 31)

Scores on the scale of knowing God's leadership and direction are unrelated to extraversion, neuroticism, psychoticism, and the lie scale.

Malony's fifth marker of religious maturity is defined as *involvement in organized religion*. Individuals who record high scores on this scale report that they are very active in



church activities, that they volunteer for church positions, that they continue to give money to the church during times when it is hard to pay their bills, and that they constantly go to a church or religious organization twice a week or more. According to Malony (1985):

Mature Christians evidence active involvement in and commitment to religious activities. Mature Christians are involved in church or in a religious group as an index of their desire to grow in their faith. (p. 31)

Scores on the scale of involvement in organized religion are unrelated to extraversion and the lie scale, negatively correlated with neuroticism and positively correlated with psychoticism. High scorers are individuals who tend towards toughmindedness and emotional stability.

Malony's sixth marker of religious maturity is defined as *experiencing fellowship*. Individuals who record high scores on this scale report that they enjoy being around other people of different cultures or races, that they have close friendships with both Christians and non-Christians, that talking with people from different cultures helps them to have a broader view of life, and that it bothers them when religious differences keep people from becoming friends. According to Malony (1985):

Mature Christians identify positively with the family of God and have a sense of community with other believing persons as well as with people everywhere. Mature persons have a sense of community with all of God's creatures and with God's creation. (p. 32)

Scores on the scale of experiencing fellowship are unrelated to neuroticism and psychoticism, positively correlated with extraversion, and positively correlated with lie scale scores. High scorers are individuals who are sociable extraverts and who tend toward social conformity.

Malony's seventh marker of religious maturity is defined as *being ethical*. Individuals who record high scores on this scale report that they are trying to help change many things that are unfair in the world, that they consider themselves as being very active in

moral issues, that their concern for others is based on their love for God, and that they give a lot of money to social causes. According to Malony (1985):

Mature Christians follow their ethical principles in a flexible, but committed manner. Mature Christians' religious faith strongly underlies and guides their ethical behavior. Mature Christians show a concern for personal and social ethics. (p. 32)

Scores on the scale of being ethical are unrelated to neuroticism, psychoticism and the lie scale, and correlated positively with extraversion. High scorers are individuals who are sociable extraverts.

Malony's eighth marker of religious maturity is defined as *affirming openness in faith*. Individuals who record high scores on this scale report that their faith affects every aspect of their life, that they have read many books about their faith in the past year, that they have regular devotional times in order to grow in their faith, and that they have discussed their faith with others on many occasions in the past year. According to Malony (1985):

While expressing confidence in their own view, mature Christians show a tolerance for others' viewpoints and evidence a willingness to examine others' beliefs in an honest manner. Mature Christians' faith is differentiated and is composed of a relatively large number of categories and elements. (p. 32)

Scores on the scale of affirming openness in faith are unrelated to extraversion, neuroticism, psychoticism and lie scale scores.

## **Conclusion**

The present study has examined the relationship between Newton Malony's theologically-derived model of religious maturity, as operationalized by the RSInv-S10, and Hans Eysenck's psychologically-derived dimensional model of personality, as operationalized by

the EPQR-S. The overlap between the two models is quite small.

Individuals who score higher on Eysenck's dimension of extraversion tend to record higher scores on Malony's scales of experiencing fellowship and being ethical. These findings suggest that Malony's standards of mature religious fellowship and mature religious ethical behaviour are more easily attained by individuals who prefer an extraverted rather than an introverted approach to life.

Individuals who score high on Eysenck's dimension of neuroticism tend to record lower scores on Malony's scales of acceptance of God's grace, being repentant and responsible, and involvement in organised religion. These findings suggest that Malony's standards of mature religious acceptance of God's grace, mature religious repentance and responsibility, and mature religious involvement in organized religion are more easily attained by individuals who enjoy emotional stability rather than emotional lability.

Individuals who score high on Eysenck's dimension of psychoticism tend to record higher scores on Malony's scales of being repentant and responsible and involvement in organized religion. These findings suggest that Malony's standard of mature religious repentance and responsibility, and mature religious involvement in organized religion are more easily attained by individuals who display toughmindedness rather than tendermindedness.

Individuals who score high on Eysenck's lie scale tend to record lower scores on Malony's scale of awareness of God and higher scores on Malony's scale of experiencing fellowship. These findings suggest that Malony's standards of mature religious awareness of God are more easily attained by individuals who show low regard for social conformity, while Malony's standards of mature religious experience of fellowship are more easily attained by individuals who show high regard for social conformity.

Further research is now needed for two purposes: (1) to examine the reproducibility of

the present findings among other samples, and (2) to explore the relationship between Malony's model of religious maturity and other models of personality. Meanwhile, however, the present data provide a clear indication that religious maturity, as conceptualized and operationalized by the RSIInv-S10, is related to individual differences in personality. In other words, some individuals may find it easier than others, by virtue of who they are, to progress towards this particular view of religious maturity.

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Table 1 Scale properties

	Alpha	Mean	SD
<i>Religious Status Inventory (RSInv-S10)</i>			
Awareness of God	0.72	44.4	4.1
Acceptance of God's grace	0.69	39.9	4.4
Being repentant and responsible	0.67	36.1	4.2
Knowing God's leadership	0.74	43.9	3.5
Involvement in organized religion	0.76	40.7	4.7
Experiencing fellowship	0.70	41.1	4.2
Being ethical	0.62	36.6	4.0
Affirming openness in faith	0.73	43.8	4.0
<i>Eysenck's Personality Questionnaire Revised (EPQR-S)</i>			
Extraversion	0.85	7.5	3.4
Neuroticism	0.78	4.7	3.0
Psychoticism	0.64	2.8	2.1
Lie scale	0.51	2.3	1.6

Table 2 Correlations between personality and categories of religious maturity

	Extraversion	Neuroticism	Psychoticism	Lie Scale
Awareness of God	-0.06 ns	-0.12 ns	+0.10 ns	-0.15 .05
Acceptance of God's grace	-0.03 ns	-0.20 .01	+0.12 ns	-0.08 ns
Being repentant and responsible	-0.00 ns	-0.33 .001	+0.25 .001	+0.05 ns
Knowing God's leadership	-0.05 ns	-0.09 ns	+0.09 ns	-0.10 ns
Involvement in organized religion	-0.02 ns	-0.13 .05	+0.16 .05	-0.07 ns
Experiencing fellowship	+0.20 .01	-0.05 ns	-0.01 ns	+0.17 .01
Being ethical	+0.13 .05	-0.05 ns	+0.03 ns	+0.04 ns
Affirming openness in faith	+0.02 ns	-0.09 ns	+0.08 ns	+0.02 ns