

Overview Paper

Internal incongruence among personality mechanisms
as a constant 'sore point'

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Temperament is shaped early in life. Other personality mechanisms develop later in the life span and must be "matched" to those that were developed earlier (or simultaneously). These mechanisms are then included within the system of personality that has already been shaped. Individual's subordination to social demands exceeding his/her resources associated with temperament leads to development of personality mechanisms which are at variance with these resources. Henceforth, the Person – Environment misfit becomes internalized.

The Roots of the Internal Incongruence

People more or less try to avoid direct social pressure by subordination to social expectations. The data show that going against social expectations demands an internal strength. It turns out that reactivity, a dimension of temperament, plays a crucial role in the development of the need for achievement and Type A (Elias, A., 2001).

Data were collected by Wieczorkowska and Elias within the Eighth Polish General Social Survey (PGSS). Research was carried out on a representative national sample. The analyses were based on the responses of 852 participants (481 women and 371 men) aged from 18 to 66, with a mean age of 50. The assumptions were the following: a) Social norms for achievement depend on gender; b) Financial success is more important for men than for women.

Respondents answered two sets of questions relevant to the present study:

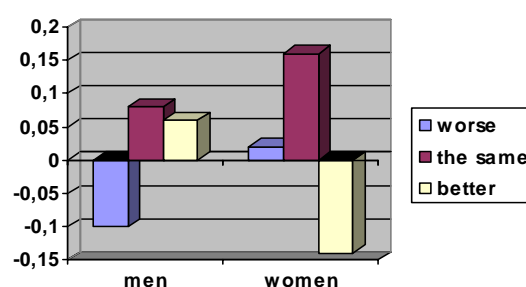
First, **reactivity** was measured by a specially developed scale based on the Pavlovian Temperament Survey (Strelau, Angleitner & Newberry, 1996). Higher scores indicate higher levels of reactivity. This dimension includes such characteristics as sensitivity to weak stimuli and endurance under strong stimuli. The term reactivity, coined by Strelau (1983), as used here, is equivalent to the term *strength of the nervous system*. Reactivity is strongly associated with need for stimulation; the higher the reactivity, the lower the need for stimulation and *vice versa*.

Second, as a **measure of financial success** we used comparison of participants' material status to that of their fathers'.

To extract the effect of the socio-demographic factors, we used the residuals of the regression as variables in the analyses (reactivity, age, education level in years, and gender). Based on the answers to this question and taking into account the gender of the respondents, we divided participants into 6 groups. ANOVA's revealed a significant interaction effect of reactivity by gender.

The outcomes show that there are two groups who did not comply with gender norms: **Men** whose achievement was **lower** than their fathers' and **women** whose achievement was **higher** than their fathers' were **lower in reactivity** than the rest of the respondents. Data confirm that going against social expectations necessitates an internal strength, i.e., low reactivity in this case. The outcomes are in concert with the results of my previous study.

high-reactivity



Participants' Ach./Fathers'

low-reactivity

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The Side –effects of Internal Incongruence

The study was carried out by Elias and Klonowicz as part of the Warsaw Area Study, with a representative sample of Warsaw residents – 1004 respondents (men – 47%, women – 53%), aged 20 – 62.

The burden resulting from stimulating behavior, e.g., behavior associated with Type A, manifests itself under the reactivity – Type A mismatch. Taking this into account, we expect different consequences of the fit *versus* misfit between reactivity and Type A. Short scales were developed to assess reactivity and Type A.

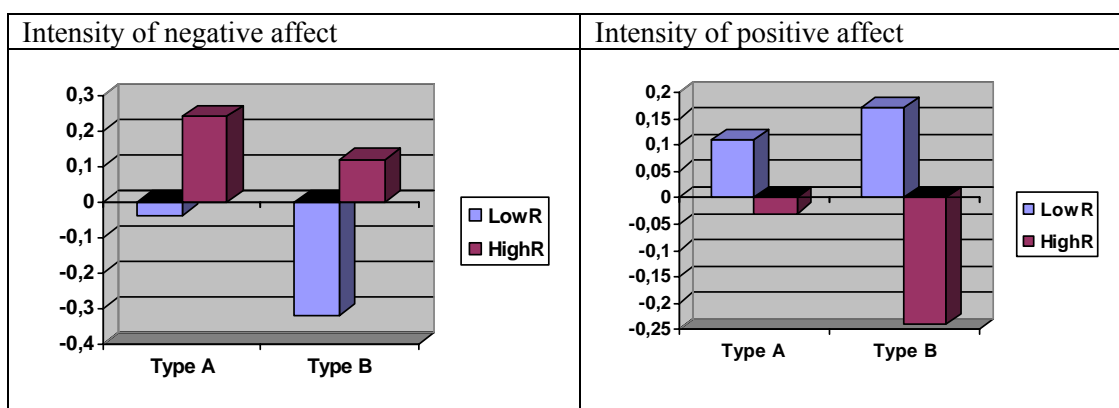
We also assessed life satisfaction, satisfaction with one's health, and subjective health. General psychic tension was assessed indirectly: we examined the so called 'welfare mentality' - the expectation that the state has to supply the minimum wage and full employment.

Conclusions Drawn From the Study:

1. Surprisingly, high-reactive Type B individuals (internal match but at a low level of resources and a low level of functioning), are most **concerned with their health** (frequent somatic symptoms and low satisfaction with one's health);
2. High-reactive Type As (internal mismatch) display a high frequency of **somatic symptoms** and only indirectly manifest their tension expressed in welfare mentality, i. e., in the search for social security.
3. Low-reactive Type A individuals (internal match), **overlook signals of danger**, e.g., they manifest very low frequency of somatic symptoms and high satisfaction with own health. The data are in concert with the outcomes collected using the Time Sampling Diary developed by Brandstätter (Brandstätter, H., 2001). It turns out that in job-related situations low-reactive Type A individuals commit to their work at the expense of their organism's need. On the other hand, high-reactive Type A individuals do not draw their attention away from their biological needs, physical discomfort or ailments (Elias, A., 2001).
4. These data, as well as those related to the structure of Type A depending on temperament, confirm that there are **two kinds of Type A** - depending on whether Type A is matched or mismatched with reactivity.

One can conjecture that the emotional functioning manifested by Type B also depends on reactivity. Our recent data, collected by Wiczorkowska and Elias, concerning relations between reactivity and Type A/Type B, on the one hand and subjective well-being on the other, comes from the Polish General Social Survey. Emotional well-being was measured by the Modified Bradburn Scale. Type A personality was assessed by a short version of a questionnaire based on the short form of the Jenkins Activity Survey. Reactivity (R) was measured as stated above.

To extract the effect of socio-demographic factors, we used as variables in the analyses the residuals of the regression of positive and negative affect on age, education level and gender.



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I would like to focus on Type B since the data cannot be easily interpreted within the idea of match vs. mismatch.

As regards to **negative affect**, Type B low-reactives report very low negative emotional states. This result, which illustrates a positive aspect of emotional functioning, cannot be explained in terms of the reactivity – Type B fit. Clearly, Type B does not fit low reactivity. However, low reactive Type Bs can satisfy their need for stimulation and use their surplus of resources in many different ways. Let us look at the data concerning positive affect in high-reactive Type Bs. Here reactivity fits Type B, i.e. resources are matched with “unconcerned” functioning. A very low level of positive affect in our Type B high-reactives suggests that Type Bs are much less easy going than we believed.

We can see that there is a system of reciprocal relations. However, it seems that the construct of the internal match versus mismatch is more useful in the explanation of what happens when heavy demands are being made on individual resources, than in explaining the surplus of resources.

The study by Dorota Żołnierczyk (Żołnierczyk-Zreda, D., 2005) extends our earlier findings by providing data concerning self-esteem and demonstrates that high-reactive (Hr) Type B individuals have low self-esteem while low-reactive (Lr) Type B individuals have high self-esteem. As it turns out, there are no differences between Hrs and Lrs with Type A. Both of these groups present with average levels of self-esteem.

Therefore there are differences among people with Type B, who are sometimes described as “easy-going”. It is immediately evident that the adjective refers only to Lrs. Hrs Type Bs have the lowest level of self-esteem. This outcome agrees with the data acquired in my laboratory by Cofta (Elias A. & Cofta, L., 1992). As a reminder, high-reactives are people with a low need for stimulation and are first and foremost oriented towards social stimuli and that social stimuli have a strong regulatory power.

One can presume that high – reactive people who make decisions according to their own capabilities “listen to their hearts”, yet are internally split. This is because they do not – despite their own wishes – go along with what society expects of them. Their social environment failed in forcing Type A onto them, but managed to do so with their self-esteem criteria.

Therefore, their resistance to social influences is most likely incomplete and leads to internal incongruence, i.e., the choice of lifestyle that does not match their self-esteem criteria. This incongruence can bring about constant frustration. This would suggest also the existence of two kinds of Type B’s, depending on the level of reactivity.

Summing up:

1. Most probably, there are two kinds of Type A and Type B.
2. An internal mismatch among personality mechanisms associated with lack of resources acts as an internal, lasting “sore point”. This mismatch compels people to endless efforts directed at reducing the incongruence between resources and desires.

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