

In ordained ministry there is neither male nor female? The personality profile of male and female Anglican clergy engaged in multi-parish rural ministry.

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Abstract

Robbins, Francis, and Rutledge (1997) documented the personality profile of Church of England clergymen and clergywomen prior to the ordination of the first women to the priesthood in 1994, drawing on Eysenck's three dimensional model of personality. They found that the personality profiles of clergymen and clergywomen were indistinguishable. The present paper reports a comparable study conducted in 2004 among 182 clergywomen and 540 clergymen serving in similar parochial posts in order to examine whether the ordination of women to the priesthood had impacted the overall personality profile of Anglican clergy. The data suggest that little change had taken place between the two cohorts of clergy studied. Once again clergywomen and clergymen appeared to be formed in the same image.

Keywords: psychology, religion, personality, Eysenck, clergymen, clergywomen, Anglican

Introduction

Various empirical strands of personality psychology routinely report significant differences in the personality profile of men and women. The case is demonstrated for example by the dimensional model of personality proposed by Hans Eysenck and his associates who argue that individual differences in personality can be most adequately and economically summarised in terms of the three higher order dimensions of extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1991). According to this model, it is the two dimensions of neuroticism and psychoticism which most consistently reflect stable differences between the personality profiles of men and of women.

The Eysenckian neuroticism scales assess a dimension of personality which progresses from emotional stability (at the low scoring end), through emotional lability, to the precursors of neurotic disorders (at the high scoring end). The high scorer on the neuroticism scale is characterised by the test manual as an anxious worrying individual, who is moody and frequently depressed, likely to sleep badly and to suffer from various psychosomatic disorders. In the test manual, Eysenck and Eysenck (1975) suggest that if the high scorer on the neuroticism scale 'has to be described in one word, one might say that he was a *worrier*; his main characteristic is a constant preoccupation with things that might go wrong, and with a strong emotional reaction of anxiety to these thoughts' (p.10). Eysenck and Gudjonsson (1989) characterise the higher scorer as anxious, depressed, tense, irrational, shy, moody, emotional, suffering from guilt feelings and low self-esteem. The low scorer on this dimension is characterised by the absence of these traits. A thorough review of studies reporting gender differences on the Eysenckian neuroticism scales make it clear that women generally record higher scores than men on this dimension of personality (Francis, 1993).

The Eysenckian psychoticism scales assess a dimension of personality which progresses from tendermindedness (at the low scoring end), through toughmindedness, to the

precursors of psychotic disorders (at the high scoring end). The high scorer on the psychoticism scale is characterised by Eysenck and Eysenck (1976), in their study of psychoticism as a dimension of personality, as being cold, impersonal, hostile, lacking in sympathy, unfriendly, untrustful, odd, unemotional, unhelpful, lacking in insight, strange, with paranoid ideas that people were against him/her. In the test manual. Eysenck and Eysenck (1975) draw particular attention to the characteristic absence of certain emotions from high scorers on the psychoticism scale: 'empathy, feelings of guilt, sensitivity to other people are notions which are strange and unfamiliar to them' (p.11). The low scorers are empathetic, unselfish, altruistic, warm, peaceful and generally more pleasant, although possibly less socially decisive individuals. The test manuals consistently demonstrate that men record higher scores than women on this dimension of personality (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975; Eysenck, Eysenck, & Barrett, 1985; Eysenck & Eysenck, 1991).

Bem (1981) proposed the significant insight that a model of personality could describe both the differences in personality profiles between men and women and also within the two sexes. Thus Bem's two personality constructs of psychological masculinity and psychological femininity not only distinguished between men and women (with men routinely recording higher scores of psychological masculinity and women routinely recording higher scores of psychological femininity), but also demonstrated considerable variations in psychological masculinity and psychological femininity within both men and women. A series of subsequent studies, most recently summarised and extended by Francis (2007) confirmed the view that there are clear links between the constructs proposed by Bem and the constructs proposed by Eysenck.

The ordination of women to the priesthood in the Anglican Church, in England and elsewhere, was (and remains) a matter of considerable controversy (Francis & Robbins, 1999). Arguments for and against the ordination of women to the priesthood were based on

psychological, as well as theological, doctrinal, historical and practical principles.

Psychologically nuanced arguments in favour of the ordination of women to the priesthood included the view that women would bring different gifts to ministry, assuming some fundamental differences between the personality profile of women and men. Psychologically nuanced arguments against the ordination of women to the priesthood included the view that women were less temperamentally suited to the demands of ministry, again assuming some fundamental differences between the personality profiles of women and of men.

Although these views were never consciously voiced within the explicit categories proposed by Eysenck's dimensional model of personality, the model lends itself well to formulating some clear hypotheses regarding the anticipated differences in the personality profiles of women priests compared with male priests, if indeed the personality profiles of Anglican clergy reflect the personality profiles of women and men in general. An argument in favour of the ordination of women as priests proposes that a priesthood comprising both men and women would represent a wider and richer range of personality and hence a wider and richer range of approaches to ministry. The fact that women record higher neuroticism scores and lower psychoticism scores can be given a positive interpretation in this context. Higher neuroticism scores could predispose women priests to display a greater empathy with the emotional turmoil of human existence and consequently display greater insight into the condition and experience of some of their parishioners. Lower psychoticism scores could predispose women priests to take a more tenderminded and tolerant attitude toward issues of plurality and diversity among their parishioners. These self-same qualities could, however, be interpreted to support the opposite view that women were less suitable for ministry than men. On this account, higher neuroticism scores might predispose women priests to become too emotionally involved with the problems of their parishioners and so lose the distance of

objectivity. Lower psychoticism scores might predispose women priests to experience difficulty in taking tough decisions and in managing and implementing parish policy.

These wide-ranging and broad-sweeping hypotheses, however, rest on the (as yet) untested assumption that the personality profiles of male and female Anglican priests reflect the personality profiles of men and women in general. The first published study to challenge this assumption was reported by Francis (1991), drawing on data provided by 155 male and 97 female Anglican ordinands. Contrary to the general view that women recorded higher scores than men on the neuroticism scale, this study found no significant sex differences in neuroticism scores. Contrary to the general view that men recorded higher scores than women on the psychoticism scale, this study found no significant sex differences in psychoticism scores.

Two important caveats might, however, apply against generalising too readily from the findings of Francis (1991). First, the study was conducted among clergy in training, rather than among those actively engaged in parish ministry. Second, the data were collected over several years in the second half of the 1980s, a period during which the Church of England had agreed to ordain women to the diaconate, but not to the priesthood. This was a generation of women entering Anglican ministry often prepared to forge the way as pioneers preparing the ground for the ordination of women as priests.

Five years later, Robbins, Francis, and Rutledge (1997) published a second study, based on 373 male and 560 female Anglican stipendiary clergy. This time data were provided by practising clergy rather than by ordinands, but once again these data were gathered just prior to the first ordinations of women to the priesthood in 1994. Two main conclusions came from this second study. First, no significant differences emerged between the personality profile of male and female clergy in terms of scores recorded on the psychoticism scale or recorded on the neuroticism scale. Second, comparisons made between the scores recorded

by the clergy and the population norms published by the Eysenckian scales helped to interpret the features that underpin the lack of significant differences between male and female clergy. In terms of neuroticism scores, the female clergy recorded significantly lower scores than women in general and scores comparable with men in general. In other words, on this dimension of personality, female clergy recorded a characteristically masculine profile. In terms of psychoticism scores, the male clergy recorded significantly lower scores than men in general and scores comparable with women in general. In other words, on this dimension of personality, male clergy recorded a characteristically feminine profile.

These findings may help to interpret the personality profile associated with and hence characterising ordained ministry in the Anglican Church (both male and female). Ordained parish ministry attracts individuals who score relatively low on the psychoticism scale. In other words, Anglican ministry may tend to lack the more tough-minded and the more masculine cutting edge of leadership. Ordained leadership may, overall, experience particular difficulties in taking tough decisions, with managing disruptive individuals, and with holding fast to strategic policies. At the same time, churches shaped by tenderminded leadership styles may experience particular difficulty in attracting men into membership. This is consistent with Calam Brown's (2001) shrewd analysis concerning the feminisation of the churches in Britain and the erosion of support among men.

Overall, Anglican ministry also attracts individuals who score relatively low on the neuroticism scale. In other words, Anglican ministry may tend to lack the more empathetic and the more feminine attitude of pastoral care. Ordained leadership may, overall, prefer to model ministry on teaching, preaching, liturgy, and forms of social action, rather than on close pastoral involvement. At the same time, churches shaped by emotionally flat leadership styles may model a quiet English reserve which keeps more emotionally labile parishioners at a distance.

The data reported by Robbins, Francis, and Rutledge (1997) is now over a decade old. Women were first ordained to the priesthood in the Church of England in 1994. The welcome to women priests and the number ordained has varied considerably from diocese to diocese. For example, by 2000 19% of the stipendiary priests serving in the Diocese of St Albans were women, compared with 3% in the Diocese of Chichester (Roberts, Robbins, Francis, & Hills, 2006), but overall women priests are becoming much more visible within the Church of England. The aim of the present study is to re-examine the questions posed by Robbins, Francis, and Rutledge (1997) on survey data gathered in 2004 in a large study undertaken by Brewster (2007). This study provides a particularly useful basis on which to compare the personality profiles of male and female priests since the study focused on clergy working in similar kinds of ministry. The data were gathered only from clergy working in parish ministry with oversight of at least three churches. The comparison is being made, therefore, between male and female priests in one highly distinctive form of ministry.

Method

Procedure

A detailed survey was distributed to 1525 Anglican clergy who were identified through diocesan directories as being involved in rural ministry and with pastoral care for at least three churches. A response rate of 47% generated 722 thoroughly completed questionnaires.

Respondents

Among the 182 female respondents, 4% were in their thirties, 18% were in their forties, 50% were in their fifties, and 29% were aged sixty or over; 58% were in full-time stipendiary ministry, 7% were in part-time stipendiary ministry; 13% were in full-time non-stipendiary ministry, and 22% were in part-time non-stipendiary ministry. Among the 540 male respondents, 4% were in their thirties, 23% were in their forties, 39% were in their

fifties, and 34% were aged sixty or over; 84% were in full-time stipendiary ministry, 4% were in part-time stipendiary ministry, 4% were in full-time non-stipendiary ministry, and 7% were in part-time non-stipendiary ministry.

Instrument

Personality was assessed by the short-form Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Revised (EPQR-S: Eysenck, Eysenck, & Barratt, 1985). This instrument proposes four 12-item scales of extraversion, neuroticism, psychoticism, and a lie scale. Each item is assessed as a dichotomous scale: *yes* and *no*.

Results

The four scales proposed by the EPQR-S generated the following alpha coefficients: extraversion, .87; neuroticism, .83; psychoticism, .62; lie scale, .72. The alpha coefficients for extraversion, neuroticism and the lie scale are comfortably in excess of the threshold of .65 proposed by DeVellis (2003) while the poorer performance of the psychoticism scale is consistent with the well-known difficulties inherent in assessing this dimension of personality (Eysenck, Eysenck, & Barrett 1985).

Insert table 1 about here

Table 1 presents the mean scores of extraversion, neuroticism, psychoticism, and the lie scale for male and for female clergy separately. These data demonstrate that there are no significant differences between male clergy and female clergy in terms of extraversion scores or neuroticism scores. On the other hand, male clergy recorded higher scores than female clergy on the psychoticism scale, and female clergy recorded higher scores than male clergy on the lie scale.

Insert table 2 about here

Table 2 presents the mean scores of extraversion, neuroticism, psychoticism, and the lie scale for male clergy and female clergy alongside the norms established for the short-form

Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Revised by Eysenck and Eysenck (1991). The sample on which these norms were based comprised 'groups of students, teachers and other willing and varied subjects being approached to complete the questionnaire and return it by post.' The norms for extraversion, neuroticism, and the lie scale were based on 408 men and 494 women, while the norms for psychoticism were based on 693 men and 878 women. In view of the sample size the probability level was set at the 1% level. The statistics demonstrate that male clergy recorded significantly lower psychoticism scores than men in general, but did not differ from the population norms in terms of scores recorded on the extraversion, neuroticism, or lie scales. In comparison with women in general, female clergy recorded significantly lower extraversion scores, significantly lower psychoticism scores, significantly lower neuroticism scores, and significantly higher lie scale scores.

Discussion

The study published by Robbins, Francis, and Rutledge (1997) on data generated prior to the first ordinations of women to the priesthood in the Church of England advanced two main conclusions: that there were no significant differences between the personality profile of clergymen and clergywomen; and that clergymen differed from men in general in terms of recording lower psychoticism scores, while clergywomen differed from women in general in terms of recording lower neuroticism scores. In other words, the clergy personality profile was associated with stable tendermindedness.

The data from the present study suggest that by 2004, ten years after the first ordination of women to the priesthood in the Church of England, some development may have taken place, but essentially the picture has remained largely unchanged. According to the 2004 data, male and female clergy recorded identical profiles on the extraversion and neuroticism scales. The differences in terms of the psychoticism scale and the lie scale

remain trivial, although they are in the same direction as generally recorded in the population at large.

According to the 2004 data, male clergy differed from the male population only in respect of psychoticism scores. Just as was the case prior to 1994, male clergy recorded a significantly more tenderminded (more feminine) profile on the psychoticism scale in comparison with men in general.

According to the 2004 data, female clergy differed from women in general on the neuroticism scale and on the psychoticism scale in the same way as was the case prior to 1994. Female clergy continued to be profiled as more stable and more tenderminded than women in general. Among the female clergy, there were, however, two significant changes between the two sets of data, prior to 1994 and 2004. While prior to 1994 female clergy were no less extraverted than women in general, by 2004 female clergy were less extraverted than women in general. One interpretation of these data suggests that, prior to 1994, female clergy required extraverting capabilities in order to campaign for the acceptance of the ordination of women to the priesthood, but by 2004 the campaign was long since won and a greater number of introverted women may have felt comfortable in offering themselves for ordination. The consequence, however, is that the Church may be losing some of the particular gifts that would accompany more extraverts in ministry. While prior to 1994 female clergy recorded scores comparable with women in general on the lie scale, by 2004 female clergy recorded higher scores than women in general on the lie scale. One interpretation of these data conceptualises the lie scale as an index of social conformity. On this account, as the ordination of women has quickly become socially accepted, female clergy, far from being pioneering non-conforming women, have profiled themselves as a group more socially conforming than women in general.

Conclusion

The present study is the third in a series of studies designed to explore the way in which the ordination of women to the priesthood in the Church of England may have brought into ministry a wider range of personality characteristics. The data were collected in the late 1980s, in the early 1990s prior to the first ordination of women to the priesthood, and in 2004 a decade after the first ordinations of women to the priesthood. The main conclusion from the new 2004 study is that the ordination of women has not, as yet, made a significant impact on the overall personality profile of Anglican clergy. In terms of the Eysenckian three dimensional model of personality, the profile of clergywomen and the profile of clergymen are hardly distinguishable, unlike the profile of men and women within society as a whole.

More broadly speaking, the main finding from this series of three studies is the finding of no significant difference between the two distinct groups of individuals (clergymen and clergywomen). It is this finding of *no difference* that is important for two theoretical reasons. First, the finding of no difference challenges the view that with the ordination of women, clergywomen bring a different personality profile to the ministry from the profile well-established by clergymen. Second, the finding of no difference establishes that men and women serving in the ordained ministry within the Anglican Church do not reflect the established personality differences between men and women in the population at large. Here is an occasion when the publication of findings that report no difference is of theoretical value.

A further republication of this study in 2014 would enable the potential for future change and development to be monitored in respect of the personality profile of men and women recruited into and retained within Anglican ministry in England.

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Table 1

Mean personality scores for male and female clergy

	male		female		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> <
	mean	sd	mean	sd		
Extraversion	6.57	3.58	6.53	3.66	0.12	NS
Neuroticism	4.74	2.94	4.89	3.38	0.51	NS
Psychoticism	1.95	1.69	2.38	1.91	2.63	.01
Lie scale	4.53	2.61	4.07	2.61	1.97	.05

Table 2

Mean personality scores for clergy compared with population norms

	<u>clergy</u>		<u>population</u>		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> <
	mean	sd	mean	sd		
<i>Male</i>						
Extraversion	6.53	3.66	6.36	3.80	+0.69	NS
Neuroticism	4.89	3.38	4.95	3.44	- 0.26	NS
Psychoticism	2.38	1.91	3.08	2.20	- 5.74	.001
Lie scale	4.07	2.61	3.86	2.71	+1.19	NS
<i>Female</i>						
Extraversion	6.57	3.58	7.60	3.27	- 3.47	.001
Neuroticism	4.74	2.94	5.90	3.14	- 4.24	.001
Psychoticism	1.95	1.69	2.35	1.88	- 2.59	.01
Lie scale	4.53	2.63	3.69	2.55	+3.69	.001