AUTHORITARIANISM AND RACE ATTITUDES IN SOUTH AFRICA

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A. Introduction

The authors of *The Authoritarian Personality* (1) originally reported correlations ranging from .65 to .75 between authoritarianism and ethnocentrism in a series of North American samples. Subsequent research, reviewed by Titus and Hollander (9), substantially confirmed these findings, which may be taken to imply that about 50 percent of the variance in race attitudes can be accounted for in terms of underlying personality differences. The importance of this implication lies in the fact that attitudes which fulfil basic needs in the personality are characteristically rigid and are not easily changed. The specific function fulfilled by the race attitudes of authoritarian personalities, in terms of Katz and Stotland's (5) functional theory, is primarily ego defense, and ego-defensive attitudes have been found to be particularly resistant to all attempts to change them.

In societies characterized by high levels of culturally tolerated race prejudice, the relationship between authoritarianism and race attitudes is not clear. On the one hand, there is some reason to conjecture that such societies automatically display a correspondingly high incidence of authoritarianism (2, 7, 10), and thus the correlation between authoritarianism and race prejudice may be as high in these societies as in any others. However, too little is known about the genesis of authoritarianism to develop such an hypothesis fully.

On the other hand, there are reasons for formulating the opposite hypothesis, and for predicting low correlations between authoritarianism and race prejudice in highly prejudiced societies. In societies in which race prejudice is normally encouraged, the incidence of authoritarianism may be no higher than in other societies, but nonauthoritarian individuals may be expected to adopt prejudiced attitudes simply in order to be accepted as normal members of the society. If this hypothesis is correct, authoritarianism would be a poor predictor of race attitudes in such a society, and the prejudiced attitudes of many...
of its members would have a different theoretical status from similar attitudes in less prejudiced societies. In terms of Katz and Stotland's (5) theory, they would have to be viewed as instrumental or utilitarian, rather than ego-defensive.

Pettigrew (6) reported correlations between authoritarianism as measured by a Likert-type F scale and various measures of antinonwhite prejudice in white South African society ranging from .34 to .46. These correlations are lower than those normally recorded in the United States, but they may nevertheless be spuriously inflated by acquiescence response style, since all the F scale items were taken straight from Adorno et al. (1). The point is that in a highly prejudiced society it is something very much like "acquiescence" which may account for the prejudiced attitudes of many of its (nonauthoritarian) members. In South Africa, for example, "yea-saying" on questions of race is culturally rewarded among whites, and nonconformity may lead to social ostracism. This type of "acquiescence" is, of course, merely analogous to acquiescence response style, but it may account in part for Pettigrew's (6) results. In any event, no investigation of the relationship between authoritarianism and race attitudes in a highly prejudiced society has been conducted with the use of sophisticated measuring instruments.

B. Method

In an effort to eliminate acquiescence response style, a lateral forced-choice F scale was developed along the lines laid down by Strickland and Janicki (8). It consisted of 15 items, each containing an F-positive statement and a Christie and Garcia (2) reversal, separated by a six-point rating scale.

The instruments used to measure race prejudice were (a) two equivalent forms of a scale to measure attitudes toward Africans, constructed by means of the scale-discrimination technique described by Edwards and Kilpatrick (4), with a mean phi coefficient of .67 and $Rep = .85$; and (b) a simple social distance questionnaire of the Dodd (3) type, measuring social distance attitudes toward "urban Africans," "rural Africans," "Coloreds," and "Indians," these being the four major nonwhite groups in South Africa. The subjects to whom the scales were administered were 60 white students enrolled for the introductory course in psychology at the University of Cape Town.

C. Results and Discussion

The correlations between the forced-choice F scores and the scores from the two forms of the attitude scale and the social distance scale were found to be .23 (n.s.), .33 ($p < .05$), and .27 ($p < .05$), respectively. These results sug-
suggest that barely seven percent of the variance in race attitudes in this sample can be accounted for in terms of authoritarianism as measured by the forced-choice F scale. The correlations are strikingly lower than those found in the United States, and also somewhat lower than those found in South Africa by Pettigrew (6), who used a form of F scale susceptible to acquiescence response style.

The results of this study support a theoretical interpretation of prejudiced attitudes in societies characterized by high levels of culturally tolerated prejudice, which views such attitudes as serving a utilitarian rather than an ego-defensive function for many of its (nonauthoritarian) members. Since utilitarian attitudes are considered comparatively amenable to change in response to changing conditions in the objective social environment (particularly reference groups), one implication of these findings is that prejudiced attitudes in white South African society may not possess the intrinsic rigidity characteristic of prejudiced attitudes in the United States and elsewhere.

D. Summary

The relationship between authoritarianism and race attitudes in white South African society was investigated by means of a forced-choice F scale, a unidimensional and highly discriminating scale to measure attitudes toward Africans, and a social distance questionnaire. These instruments were administered to 60 white South African students, and the resulting correlations between authoritarianism and the prejudice measures were found to range from .23 to .33. The correlations are strikingly lower than those recorded elsewhere, and somewhat lower than previous correlations recorded in South Africa. These results are interpreted as suggesting that in a society in which race prejudice is encouraged, prejudiced attitudes serve a utilitarian function for many of its members, rather than an ego-defensive function. They are therefore probably not as incorrigible as prejudiced attitudes in other societies.

References


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