

The authoritarian personality, 1950, 1973, 2008

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ABSTRACT

Whitten (1976) employed the California F-scale to assess authoritarian attitudes in 1950 and in 1973. He was also able to draw some conclusions about the changes between attitudes found in 1950 and those of 1973. He explained the changes as an evolution of patterns in social phenomena. The study replicates the Whitten (1976) study utilizing the same survey methodology. This paper employs comparative analyses across the 1950, 1973 and 2008 data to draw inferences about the current attitudes based on the California F-scale. The paper reports that young adults in the most recent period are more authoritarian than the 1973 group, and are even more authoritarian than the 1950 group. There was no significant differences between men and women in terms of authoritarian personality factors. High academic performance (a proxy for intelligence) is associated with lower authoritarian tendencies.

Keywords: Authoritarian Personality, Fascism

INTRODUCTION

Norman Whitten, Sr. completed a survey assessing authoritarian attitudes among college-age people in the U.S. in 1950. His survey was in response to the publication of *The Authoritarian Personality* by Adorno, Frankel-Brunswick, Levinson, and Sanford (1950), attempting to better understand the underpinnings of fascism's emergence pre WWII. Whitten replicated his survey in 1973 in order to update the attitudinal findings post-Kent State. Because of the events at Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan and Abu Ghraib Prison in Iraq, which were highly publicized, the authors decided to conduct yet another replication of the Authoritarian Attitude survey among young adults to track changes in authoritarian attitudes. The authors also wanted to follow the replication by relating additional personality constructs to the dimensions of authoritarianism. Whitten's gap between 1950 and 1973 was 23 years -- a generation. The present replication and expanded data span approximately another generation. Therefore, this survey is approximately one more generation removed from the original survey. In addition, this paper also examined the roles of age, gender, and GPA with respect to authoritarian personalities.

This paper investigated the following research questions:

1. Is the current generation of young adults more authoritarian than the 1950 and 1973 groups?
2. Are men more authoritarian than women?
3. Is academic performance (intelligence) associated with an authoritarian personality?
4. Are the authoritarian submission and authoritarian aggression related differently to intelligence?

METHOD

Participants

The authors administered the Whitten survey to 377 undergraduate students from two Midwestern U.S. universities enrolled in management classes. These 377 students answered the Whitten survey; however, for research purposes, the authors administered the survey twice. Whitten's survey results were based on a 4-point Likert response set. However, because the authors also wanted to place the constructs of authoritarianism within a broader study of personality constructs, the authors administered the survey a second time utilizing a 7-point Likert response set. Employing a 7-point scale introduced more variation, which should produce a clearer picture of the relationship of authoritarianism to other personality constructs (that were also captured using a 7-point response set).

Among 377 students, only 355 students reported their gender (216 men, 139 women). The sample in this paper to compare with the 1950 and 1973 groups was 377 students. However, to test differences in the authoritarian personalities between genders, the authors used the sample of

355 due to the missing observations. To examine the relationship between GPA and the authoritarian personality, the authors used the sample of 183 for the same reason.

Measures

To measure the overall authoritarian personality, the authors summed the scores of each question. The scores are calculated as follows: 1 for “Strongly agree or accept”; 2 for “Tend to agree or accept”; 3 for “Tend to disagree or reject”; and 4 for “Strongly disagree, certainly reject.” A low score indicates higher authoritarianism. To ensure the validity, the authors asked the same questions with the 7-point Likert scale.

The students’ ages were self-reported, as were their GPAs.

Data Analyses

Cronbach’s alpha (Cronbach, 1951) for the 4-point Likert scale and the 7-point Likert scale were 0.7772 and 0.7903, respectively. The 7-point Likert scale showed a slightly better Cronbach’s alpha than the 4-point Likert scale. However, because Whitten used a 4-point response set, the comparisons with his 1950 and 1973 groups were based on the 4-point Likert scale.

To examine the first question, the authors replicated Whitten’s Table 1 and Table 2 (1976) with the addition of the current survey. Consistent with Whitten (1976), the authors calculated the percentages of students who had chosen “Strongly agree or accept,” “Tend to agree or accept,” “Tend to disagree or reject,” and “Strongly disagree, certainly reject.” The authors then calculated the changes in each percentage with the 1950 and 1973 groups.

To explore the second question concerning gender differences in the authoritarian personality, the authors used t-tests. Since the number of females was smaller ($n = 139$) than that of males ($n=216$), the authors used unbalanced t-tests. The authors also compared gender differences in the six authoritarian personality factors in Whitten’s surveys (1950, 1976): Destructiveness and Cynicism, Authoritarian Submission, Conventionalism, Authoritarian Aggression, Power and Toughness, and Anti-intraception.

The third question involved whether students’ academic performance had an association with the authoritarian personality. Academic performance was used as a proxy for intelligence; however, it may also reflect compliance. The authors used ordinary least squares (OLS) regression. The sample size for this model was 183. The model is as follows:

$$\text{Authoritarian Personality} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{ Age} + \beta_2 \text{ Gender} + \beta_3 \text{ GPA} + \varepsilon$$

The authors also tested the supplementary analysis to determine whether academic performance is associated with the authoritarian submission factor (compliance) or authoritarian aggression factor (dominance). The authors used OLS regression to answer this question.

To ensure robustness, the authors tested the first research question with the sample of 377, the sample of 355, and the sample of 183. The first research question asks, “Is the current group

more authoritarian than the 1950 and 1973 groups?” The authors checked whether the sample of 183 and the sample of 355 show different authoritarian personalities than the sample of 377. The results were consistent across the different sample sizes.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics. The first set of analyses explored the differences in authoritarian personalities among the 1950, 1973, and current groups. Table 2 contains the results of these analyses. Table 3 shows the differences in the six factors of the authoritarian personality across the 1950, 1973, and current groups. Table 4 reports the authoritarian attitude differences between men and women. The results show that men are more authoritarian than women, but the sample size is small. The results were consistent when the authors tested the 4-point Likert scale, as well as the 7-point Likert scale. However, Cohen’s *d* (Cohen, 1962) was smaller than 0.48. Such a value means that the sample sizes were too small to determine any gender differences. While the authors find gender differences in the authoritarian personality within this limited sample, it is premature to conclude that men are more authoritarian than women.

Table 5 provides the results of two regression analyses. With respect to academic performance, the authors find that students with better academic performance tend to have less authoritarian personality. Age and gender, on the other hand, are not statistically significant. Unfortunately, the *r*-squares indicate relatively little explanatory power. The *r*-square was 0.0495 for the 4-point Likert scale and 0.1093 for the 7-point Likert scale. These values imply that there are other important factors connected to the authoritarian personality – not a surprising result. Table 6 shows the relationship between academic performance and authoritarian submission/authoritarian aggression. The authors find that only authoritarian submission is negatively associated with academic performance. The *r*-square for the model in Table 6 is 0.0894. Table 7 reports that the authors do not find an association with respect to the academic performance and authoritarian aggression factor.

DISCUSSION

The authors find three interesting results. First, the current group is more authoritarian than the 1950 and 1973 groups. The 1973 group was less authoritarian than the 1950 group. However, the current group is more authoritarian than either the 1973 group or the 1950 group.

Second, the authors did not find a gender difference. In the sample, the men seemed to be more authoritarian than the women. However, the effect size was too small to consider the difference as meaningful. Previous literature shows inconsistent findings with respect to the relationship between gender and the authoritarian personality. Denmark and Diggory (1966) report that male leaders show more authoritarian behavior than women. Other studies deny such a relationship between gender and styles of leadership (Maher, 1997). Maher (1997) shows that subordinates could not tell the difference in leadership style between men and women. Smith and Prothro (1957) also examined the association of sex with the authoritarian personality. In their study, sex did not have an association with the authoritarian personality. In sum, the literature

does not reveal a consistent relationship between gender and authoritarianism. The results do little to clarify a gender distinction.

Third, in the study, better academic performance is positively associated with lower authoritarianism. Previous studies also report that high intelligence is negatively associated with F-scale scores (Smith, Murphy, and Wheeler, 1964). The results confirm this finding. Lastly, academic performance, the proxy for intelligence, is negatively associated with authoritarian submission, but not with authoritarian aggression. It implies that people with higher intelligence are less likely to show the character of authoritarian submission. All of these findings were clearer when the authors used the 7-point versus the 4-point Likert scale.

It is important to note that the second and third findings show that gender differences in authoritarian personalities and the association of intelligence with the authoritarian personality are consistent with previous findings, even with the updated survey. However, authoritarian personalities in the U.S. have changed over different generations, indicating that this generation is more authoritarian than the previous two generations.

CONTEXT

In 1950, as Adorno et al. published their work on the authoritarian personality, (which included the California F-scale), the world had already entered a cold war; the Soviets tested their own nuclear device in 1949. The fear of a nuclear exchange was growing. Many families built fallout shelters in order to survive a nuclear war. Cities appointed civil defense wardens and identified buildings and natural structures that could serve as shelters during and after a nuclear exchange. These shelters were provisioned and drills were conducted to practice for the unthinkable.

The 1960s were filled with civil rights protests (Graham, 1992). During this period, it became more and more acceptable to collectively oppose unjust laws and norms (Anderson, 1996). Anti-authoritarian sit-ins, boycotts, and protests filled the decade—culminating in riots in many American cities. Opposition to the Vietnam War also developed an anti-authoritarian component.

In 1973, the U.S. was divided over the Vietnam War. Even as the war was ending, young people in the country (potential draftees) were protesting it, especially on college campuses. This anti-authoritarian mood led to violent protests on many college campuses—occupying campus buildings, demanding concessions, even destroying property. On May 4, 1970, the campus of Kent State University (OH) was wracked by such a protest (President's Commission on Campus Unrest, 1970). The Ohio National Guard was sent to the campus to restore order. In their confrontation with students, National Guardsmen fired on unarmed student protesters, killing four students. Two more students were killed at Jackson State University in a similar protest two weeks later (Spoff, 1988).

On September 11, 2001, fear was again introduced into the collective psyche of the U.S. public (Faludi, 2007: 288). With the destruction of the World Trade Center, the U.S. was engaged in a new enemy—Muslim terrorists (Engle, 2004).

In 2014, the U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee reported that the Central Intelligence Agency had been withholding details of the severity of “enhanced interrogation” techniques. (Miller,

Goldman, and Nakashima, March 31, 2014). In 2004, it was disclosed that prisoners were tortured and humiliated at Abu Ghraib Prison in Iraq (Lewis, Lichtblau, and Fleck, 2004). At Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan, the U.S. public further discovered in 2005 that two innocent prisoners were systematically beaten to death over a period of several days (Grisham, August 11 2013). These examples show how aggressively the U.S. has acted in response to September 11th.

Perhaps even more revealing than these events has been the U.S. public's reaction to them. Acts that have been identified by treaty as torture (e.g., water boarding) have been the subject of debate with a large segment of the citizenry and media willing to accept these acts as morally consistent with the collective ethic (Ignatius, December 13 2012).

It should be apparent that this is the issue Adorno et al. (1950), set out to address. Viewing the atrocities of Nazi Germany, how do the authors understand these acts occurring in a civilized, developed society? Even more, how can others, not prone to extreme behavior, accept, condone, and ignore such behavior? The authoritarian personality and its dimensions examine the attitudes that may help answer such questions.

Placing the Whitten surveys (1950 and 1973) and the replication (2008) into this context can perhaps make the results more meaningful. Understanding the context allows one to see that the societal level of fear may predispose one to engage in or accept the behaviors of others who are acting to fend off a threat.

In 1950, Whitten examined authoritarianism using the California F-scale. The context that triggered his initial study included the August 29, 1949, explosion of a nuclear warhead by the Soviet Union, the Berlin blockade (1948-1949), and the publication of the Adorno et al. (1950) instrument to measure authoritarian attitudes.

Whitten's 1973 replication was a response to the Kent State and Jackson State killings, where young men (approximately the same age as that of the protesters) fired into groups of unarmed protesting students, very much akin to Milgram's (1969) subjects, who made an impact on a confederate learner on command.

The 2008 replication was a response to the events at Bagram Air Base and at Abu Ghraib Prison and their eerie similarity to the Stanford Prison Experiments (Zimbardo, 1971). This study updates Whitten's research (1950 and 1973) on the authoritarian personality. This paper utilized the same survey and examined the differences among young adults in 1950, 1973, (Whitten, 1976) and the present.

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TABLES

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the Authoritarian Personality 4-point Likert scale, 7-point Likert scale, gender, GPA, and age.

Variable	Mean	SD
Age	24.61	6.21
Female	???.39	0.49
GPA	3.18	0.44
4-point Q1	2.63	0.82
4-point Q2	3.47	0.69
4-point Q3	1.88	0.77
4-point Q4	2.99	0.72
4-point Q5	1.67	0.71
4-point Q6	2.71	0.81
4-point Q7	2.91	0.83
4-point Q8	3.33	0.77
4-point Q9	3.18	0.89
4-point Q10	2.69	0.95
4-point Q11	3.05	0.82
4-point Q12	2.25	0.87
4-point Q13	3.19	0.81
4-point Q14	2.54	0.85
4-point Q15	2.98	0.71
4-point Q16	2.42	0.84
4-point Q17	2.19	0.85
4-point Sum	46.00	6.49
7-point Q1	4.51	1.80
7-point Q2	5.86	1.39

Q3	7-point	2.68	1.56
Q4	7-point	4.96	1.44
Q5	7-point	2.45	1.53
Q6	7-point	4.30	1.60
Q7	7-point	4.80	1.63
Q8	7-point	5.65	1.54
Q9	7-point	5.33	1.78
Q10	7-point	4.34	1.89
Q11	7-point	5.05	1.65
Q12	7-point	3.39	1.76
Q13	7-point	5.15	1.59
Q14	7-point	3.90	1.75
Q15	7-point	4.91	1.42
Q16	7-point	3.95	1.75
Q17	7-point	3.44	1.76
Sum	7-point	74.69	13.34
Factor 1	4-point	6.08	1.21
Factor 2	4-point	9.13	1.90
Factor 3	4-point	2.99	0.72
Factor 4	4-point	12.23	2.53
Factor 5	4-point	7.98	1.72
Factor 6	4-point	7.58	1.76
Factor 1	7-point	10.37	2.59
Factor 2	7-point	14.26	3.79
Factor 3	7-point	4.96	1.44

7-point Factor 4	20.38	5.19
7-point Factor 5	12.44	3.56
7-point Factor 6	12.29	3.73

Note: $n = 377$ for 4-point Q1~Q17, 7-point Q1~Q17, 4-point factor 1~6, 7-point factor 1~6.

$n = 355$ for gender

$n = 217$ for age

$n = 187$ for GPA

Table 2. Responses to the Anti-Democratic Trends Scale by 1950, 1973, and current Groups (Percentage)

Opinion		Degree of Acceptance			
		Agree		Disagree	
		1	2	3	4
1 Modern people are superficial and tend to lack the finer qualities of manhood and womanhood.	1950	.05	.06	.09	.00
	1973	.01	.25	.44	.30
	current	.08	.36	.41	.14
2 Most men are evil at heart and it is only the restraints of civilization that keeps their evil nature within bounds.	1950	.04	.02	.09	.05
	1973	.02	.07	.33	.58
	current	.01	.07	.34	.57
3 In our kind of society, a person's first duty is to protect himself and those dear to him from harm.	1950	.04	.03	.01	.02
	1973	.19	.48	.24	.09
	current	.33	.50	.14	.03
4 We would be better off if there were no psychoanalysts probing and delving into the human mind.	1950	.02	.04	.00	.04
	1973	.03	.08	.44	.45
	current	.03	.18	.56	.23
5 We ought to make the best of what we have if for no other reason than that there are plenty of people worse off than we are.	1950	.01	.00	.03	.06
	1973	.23	.45	.20	.12
	current	.46	.42	.11	.01
6 To revolt mentally against one's lot in life is wrong -- "God fits the burden to the back."	1950	.08	.06	.01	.05
	1973	.01	.09	.30	.60
	current	.06	.33	.44	.16
7 There would be no need of psychiatrists if we all did what we instinctively knew to be the right thing.	1950	.06	.00	.00	.04
	1973	.02	.11	.44	.43
	current	.07	.19	.50	.24
8 The minds of young people are being poisoned by bad books.	1950	.05	.01	.05	.09
	1973	.01	.05	.23	.71
	current	.02	.11	.37	.49
9 Our leaders should enforce a stronger code of censorship over the morality of books and movies.	1950	.04	.00	.02	.04
	1973	.01	.08	.27	.64
	current	.05	.18	.32	.45

1	0	195	.0	.1	.4	.3
		0	9	3	3	5
		1973	0	.06	.37	.57
		current	.12	.29	.36	.23
1	1	195	.0	.1	.5	.3
		0	4	2	2	2
		1973	0	.05	.42	.53
		current	.05	.16	.47	.31
1	2	195	.3	.3	.1	.1
		0	4	6	6	4
		1973	.19	.35	.26	.20
		current	.19	.45	.26	.09
1	3	195	.0	.3	.4	.2
		0	8	2	0	0
		1973	0	.04	.30	.66
		current	.03	.16	.40	.41
1	4	195	.1	.3	.4	.1
		0	1	3	0	6
		1973	.02	.19	.31	.47
		current	.10	.40	.36	.14
1	5	195	.0	.3	.4	.1
		0	8	0	7	5
		1973	.01	.09	.47	.43
		current	.03	.18	.58	.21
1	6	195	.1	.4	.3	.1
		0	8	0	0	2
		1973	.10	.40	.31	.19
		current	.14	.40	.37	.09
1	7	195	.1	.2	.4	.1
		0	4	8	0	8
		1973	.04	.19	.48	.29
		current	.22	.44	.28	.07

1 –“Strongly agree or accept”

2 –“Tend to agree or accept”

3 – “Tend to disagree or reject”

4- “Strongly disagree, certainly reject”

Table 3. Comparison by Factors

Factors	Current Group
	Disagree
1. Destructiveness and Cynicism (Items 1 & 2)	10% less than the 1950 group 11% less than the 1973 group
2. Authoritarian Submission (Items 3, 5, 6, & 7)	15% less than the 1950 group 33% less than the 1973 group
3. Conventionalism (Item 4)	6% less than the 1950 group 11% less than the 1973 group
4. Authoritarian Aggression (Items 8, 9, 10, & 11)	7% more than the 1950 group 20% less than the 1973 group
5. Power and Toughness (Items 12, 13, & 14)	14% more than the 1950 group 25% less than the 1973 group
6. Anti-intraception (Items 15, 16, & 17)	1% less than the 1950 group 26% less than the 1973 group
Average	8% less than the 1950 group 21% less than the 1973 group

Table 4. Authoritarian Personality and six Authoritarian sub-factors (4-point Likert scale and 7-point Likert scale) mean T-score differences between genders.

	4-point Likert Scale									
	Male ^a		Female ^b		t	df	p<	ES(d)	Male ^a	
	M	SD	M	SD					M	SD
AP	45.57	6.37	46.55	6.63	1.385	285.78	0.084	0.15	73.38	13.24
F1	6.00	1.15	6.25	1.23	1.916	279.97	0.028	0.21	10.06	2.68
F2	9.17	1.87	9.05	1.98	0.575	283.83	0.717	0.06	14.06	3.87
F3	2.94	0.74	3.05	0.67	1.514	313.42	0.066	0.16	4.73	1.51
F4	12.38	2.55	11.96	2.55	1.485	294.37	0.931	0.16	20.77	5.12
F5	7.81	1.70	8.24	1.69	2.297	295.88	0.011	0.25	12.15	3.64
F6	7.26	1.75	7.99	1.67	3.933	303.74	0.000	0.43	11.62	3.65

Note. AP = Authoritarian Personality. F1. Destructive and Cynicism factor; F2. Authoritarian Submission factor; F3. Conventionalism factor; F4. Authoritarian Aggression factor; F5. Power and Toughness factor; F6. Anti-intracception factor. A high score indicates a low authoritarian personality; df = Satterthwaite's degrees of freedom; H0: diff < 0 (men are more authoritarian); If ES(d) > 0.5, the effect size is good

^an= 216. ^bn=139

Table 5. Ordinary Least Squares Regression (OLS) model. Academic performance and authoritarian personality.

	Model	
	1	Model 2
Intercept	34.9945	42.7680
Standard error	3.6196	6.9468
<i>p</i> value	<0.0001	<0.0001
Age	0.0931	0.3255
Standard error	0.0857	0.1644
<i>p</i> value	0.279	0.0049
Female	0.2234	0.1482
Standard error	0.09953	1.9101
<i>p</i> value	0.823	0.938
GPA	2.6161	7.4422
Standard error	1.1269	2.1628
<i>p</i> value	0.021	0.001
R ²	0.0495	0.1093

Note. $n = 183$. Model 1 = 4-point Likert Scale. Model 2 = 7-point Likert Scale.

Table 6. OLS model. Academic performance and authoritarian submission factor.

	Model	
	1	Model 2
Intercept	5.0733	6.8566
Standard error	1.1091	2.1300
<i>p</i> value	<0.0001	0.002
Age	0.0260	0.0811
Standard error	0.0262	0.0504
<i>p</i> value	0.323	0.109
Female	-0.8057	-0.5350
Standard error	0.3048	0.5857
<i>p</i> value	0.009	0.362
GPA	1.1622	1.8345
Standard error	0.3453	0.6631
<i>p</i> value	0.001	0.006
R ²	0.0894	0.0681

Note. *n* = 183. Model 1 = 4-point Likert Scale. Model 2 = 7-point Likert Scale.

Table 7. OLS model. Academic performance and authoritarian aggression factor.

	Model	
	1	Model 2
Intercept	11.1606	14.0975
Standard error	1.4740	2.8831
<i>p</i> value	<0.0001	<0.0001
Age	0.0419	0.1047
Standard error	0.0348	0.0682
<i>p</i> value	0.231	0.127
Female	-0.6378	-1.8877
Standard error	0.4053	0.7928
<i>p</i> value	0.117	0.018
GPA	0.0567	1.3516
Standard error	0.4589	0.8976
<i>p</i> value	0.902	0.134
R ²	0.0188	0.0488

Note. *n* = 183. Model 1 = 4-point Likert Scale. Model 2 = 7-point Likert Scale.