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Development of a New Scale for Evaluating Authoritarianism

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ABSTRACT: Despite the existence of multiple scales purporting to measure degree of authoritarianism as a personality trait, there exists disagreement within current research as to whether these measures reliably measure the three hypothesized domains of authoritarian submission, aggression, and traditionalism. This study focuses on the development of a new scale in response to methodological and validity concerns of previously-used measures. The new scale provides a reliable measure of authoritarian belief within the tested sample of college-aged students. Factor analysis of responses to the items of the new measure also provides evidence of the multidimensionality of authoritarianism as a construct. Further, significant correlations are found between Graham and Haidt's Moral Foundations model and the dimensions of authoritarianism as measured by this scale. Analysis also reveals a significant relationship between authoritarianism and vertical collectivist and individualist belief. These findings reaffirm current theoretical belief in the tridimensional model of authoritarianism and provide a new, reliable measure of the authoritarian personality.

KEYWORDS: authoritarianism; moral foundations theory; political identification; dark triad; collectivism

INTRODUCTION

Authoritarianism, in the context of psychological personality research, refers to a particular personality trait that causes individuals to submit to authority figures (Altemeyer, 1996). These personality features include submission to “established, legitimate authorities”, aggression “in the name of these authorities”, and conventionalist beliefs (Altemeyer, 1996). In this context, followers of authoritarians are often referred to as “right-wing authoritarians,” though it should be noted that “right” refers not to a political position, but rather to behavior considered by individuals to be lawful or correct.

Authoritarianism is currently measured via several scales, the most common of which is the Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) Scale developed by Altemeyer. Altemeyer’s scale is distinguished from its successors in that it measures the construct through the lens of a single dimension by assessing three clusters of attitudinal behavior: submission, conventionalism, and aggression (Altemeyer, 1981, 1988, 1996). Originally described in the 1950s following World War II, authoritarianism as a pattern of behavior initially comprised nine factors: destructiveness and cynicism; projectivism; sex; superstition and stereotyping; power; anti-intracception; authoritarian aggression; submission; and conventionalism (Adorno et al., 1950.) Altemeyer collapsed the latter three categories of behavior into a single dimensional scale, which to this day is considered the standard in assessing authoritarianism (Funke, 2005.) The general consensus within the discipline is that of a multidimensional construct of right-wing authoritarianism. This idea of authoritarianism comprises three distinct traits: authoritarian aggression, conservatism, and traditionalism. Thus, authoritarians are primarily characterized by a lack of critical attitude towards an ideological ingroup, directed aggression (believed to be sanctioned by authorities) towards certain groups, and strict adherence to conservative, conventional values (Duckitt, 2010).

The unidimensionality of Altemeyer’s RWA scale has been contested. Altemeyer contends that the three components of the scale have been written into each of its twenty-two items, with each item assessing at least two of the three dimensions. This method was justified by claims that the conceptualization of authoritarianism is inherently an overlap of its three main components, thus necessitating items that tapped two or three factors at once (Altemeyer, 1981). This technique, however,

complicates the practice of extricating any single causative factor behind responses to items, and clouds objective judgment as to whether the concept is truly unidimensional (Duckitt, 2010). Scholars in the field have also leveled criticism at the scale’s content validity, claiming it to be nothing more than another conservatism scale (Ray, 1985.) These psychometric concerns have prompted other researchers to posit construct of authoritarianism to be psychometrically composed of more than one dimension, with the literature varying on whether it is in reality comprised of two or three.

Methodological variables have confounded the results from these studies of authoritarianism. Issues with wording items either negatively or positively can falsely give the impression of the concept having two factors; this problem is common in Likert self-report measures (Funke, 2005). Other studies, by contrast, have found there to be three distinct factors of RWA. Duckitt et al. argue that “measuring RWA as a set of three related ideological attitude dimensions may better explain” certain phenomena than the current unidimensional model developed by Altemeyer (Duckitt et al, 2010). Duckitt’s work follows that of Kreindler, who also advocated for a tridimensional model of authoritarianism (Kreindler, 2005), as well as that of Van Hiel et al., whose comparison of several authoritarianism scales found that the results were best explained by a tridimensional model as opposed to a one-factor solution (Van Hiel et al., 2007). Other studies provide further support of the tridimensional model. Both Passini (2008) and Mavor (2010) found the three-dimensional solution to provide the best fit for existing data when compared to other one- and two-dimensional models. Mavor notes that existing problems with the scales prevent unbiased measurement of all three proposed components, e.g., biases in pro- or con-trait wording based on the dimension being assessed (Mavor, 2010).

These findings have all prompted the construction of new scales intended to measure only a single dimension per item. Products of this research include the scales developed by Duckitt et al. (2010) from New Zealand, Funke (2005) of Germany, and Zakrisson (2005) of Sweden. These scales, though they differ in the precise methods used to deconstruct items from the RWA scale, all seek to clearly define and test the three separate hypothesized dimensions. Duckitt (2010) developed his scale by dismantling two- or three-barreled items to create three separate subscales, while Zakrisson (2005) modified the language from the original scale to be

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shorter and less extreme in terms of language. Funke's (2005) approach, though similar to that of Duckitt, is differentiated by a greater focus on creation of separate subscales while keeping Altemeyer's original language largely intact.

These scales, constructed to reflect what the authors believed to be the tri-dimensionality of right-wing authoritarianism, pose additional methodological questions for consideration: does the construction of a scale explicitly meant to be tridimensional impact the dimensionality of the resulting data? Do geographical considerations bring into question the validity of such scales? Given the current contentious political climate, these queries bring brings the uncertainty inherent in the literature to the forefront. Though scholars disagree about the exact nature and dimensionality of authoritarian belief, it is possible to elucidate this issue via comparison of multiple scales purporting to measure the same concept.

This study, intended to create a new scale to measure levels of authoritarian belief, is a follow-up to a prior study conducted in the spring 2018 semester. The prior study, which assessed Dark Triad personality traits (i.e., Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy) in conjunction with collectivism and individualism and Haidt & Graham's Moral Foundations Scale, served to pilot the potential questions for the new authoritarianism scale presented here. Data gathered from the initial participants were used in this study to assess the validity of the new scale questions and were compared to the results obtained from prior authoritarianism scales. These results are discussed in detail below in conjunction with those from the current study.

By conducting this analysis, we hope to create a scale that more accurately assesses levels of authoritarian belief. Existing scales, though widely-used, do not conform to present understanding of authoritarian beliefs due to issues with wording as well as inability to fully measure all three dimensions of authoritarianism. In summary, current research disagrees on the exact nature of authoritarianism as well as the number of dimensions it comprises. That is, the construct of authoritarianism as it is currently seen in the literature comprises several sub-components. Prevailing theory suggests that it is either unidimensional (i.e., authoritarianism is a concept unto itself that can be measured with a single scale) or tridimensional (i.e., composed of the separate spheres of belief, and as such, should focus on measuring all three

hypothesized components) (Funke, 2005). If completed, this new scale will allow for better understanding of the complexities of this concept, which is more salient than ever in the midst of current divides between political groups.

METHOD

Participants

The main participants of this study were 592 college students, who volunteered to take part in exchange for course credit. Of the 592 participants, 323 were female and 296 were male.

Prior to analysis, data determined to be irregular either based on lack of response variance or lack of meaningful response was removed from consideration, resulting in $n = 418$ responses being used for analysis. Of these participants, 230 were female and 188 were male, with an average age of 20.41 years old. Within this sample, 56% of respondents identified as white, 21% as Hispanic, 10% as African-American, 6% as Asian, and 4% as multiracial. In terms of political identification, 43% identified as Democrats, 26% as Republican, 21.2% as independent, and 8.6% as Libertarian.

Materials

Materials utilized in this study included several surveys administered to college-age participants. After collecting demographic information (including questions regarding political party), the study then directed participants to complete the Funke (2005) authoritarianism scale, discussed previously. Funke's 12-item scale, scored on a 5-item Likert scale, consists of items adapted from Altemeyer (1996). This scale has been found to be fairly reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.80 and 0.86 in two separate samples (Dunwoody & Funke, 2016).

This survey was followed by the 24-item modified authoritarianism scale as developed by the authors. This scale consisted of 24 Likert items, 12 pro-trait and 12 con-trait, each meant to measure one of the three subscales of authoritarianism: authoritarian aggression, submission, and traditionalism. Items were expressly designed to test only a single dimension in order to mitigate the wording issues as seen in prior scales. Participants responded to the items on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Responses were then summed and scored in terms of each of the three

subscales.

Participants then completed both portions of Haidt & Graham's Moral Foundations Questionnaire (2007). The first portion, which consists of 16 items, requires participants to rate on a Likert scale from 0 to 5 how relevant certain considerations are to their moral judgment process. This part is then followed by 16 items asking participants to rate, using the same scale, their agreement with statements about moral values (e.g., "Justice is the most important requirement for a society"). Higher scores within a dimension indicate a greater tendency to consider this dimension when making a moral judgment. These tendencies have been shown to differ depending on political leaning – liberals rely mostly on domains 1 and 2 (Harm and Fairness), while conservatives use all five (including ingroup loyalty, authority, and purity) in order to make decisions (Haidt & Graham, 2007). Cronbach's alpha for each of these subscales are as follows: 0.69 (Harm), 0.65 (Fairness), 0.71 (Ingroup), 0.74 (Authority), 0.84 (Purity) (Graham et al., 2011).

Following the Moral Foundations Questionnaire, participants completed the 27-item Dark Triad Scale (Paulhus, 2013). Participants were asked to indicate their agreement on a 5-point Likert scale for each of the three subscales, each meant to measure one of the three Dark Triad personality traits: Machiavellianism (items 1-9), narcissism (items 10-18, and psychopathy (items 19-27). The coefficient alpha reliabilities for each subscale were 0.34 for Machiavellianism, 0.42 for narcissism, and 0.57 for psychopathy.

Lastly, participants completed the Triandis & Helmand (1998) scale in order to assess horizontal and vertical collectivism and individualism. This 16-item scale asks participants to rate on a 9-point Likert scale their agreement with various statements relating to the following four dimensions: horizontal individualism (i.e., "I'd rather depend on myself than others"), vertical individualism ("Competition is the law of nature"), horizontal collectivism ("I feel good when I cooperate with others"), and vertical collectivism ("It is important to me that I respect the decisions made by my groups"). For each subscale, the Cronbach's alpha values were as follows: $\alpha = 0.60$ (horizontal individualism), $\alpha = 0.62$ (vertical individualism), $\alpha = 0.68$ (horizontal collectivism), and $\alpha = 0.65$ (vertical collectivism) (Khouri, 2006).

Procedure

All analyses were conducted via SPSS with data collected from a prior study. For comparison purposes, data from this prior study were used in various analyses of scale validity, including demographic information and responses to Funke's 2005 authoritarianism scale. The first analysis conducted was inter-item reliability in order to determine Cronbach's alpha. This analysis also generated various other statistics of interest, including Cronbach's alpha if each scale item was deleted, as well as an F-test of scale reliability.

Analysis of the factor structure of authoritarianism, as measured by the modified scale, was done via unconstrained promax factor analysis. Factor analysis was exploratory, as the exact factor structure of authoritarianism remains disputed. The authors then conducted extensive analysis of the pattern and structure matrices from this analysis to determine which items failed to load factor coefficients above 0.3. The resulting three factors were then saved as separate variables (referred to as Factors 1, 2, and 3, respectively.)

Following exploratory factor analysis, the significance of these factors was then assessed via correlational and one-way ANOVA testing using demographic data. These analyses, along with the three authoritarianism factors, were tested alongside the averages of Funke's three subscales, Moral Foundation Theory averages, and vertical and horizontal collectivism and individualism averages.

RESULTS

Scale Reliability

Overall, the modified authoritarianism scale was found to be highly reliable in measuring level of authoritarian belief ($\alpha = .90$). Additionally, the mean value of item-total correlation for the 24-item scale was 0.49, with values ranging from -0.07 to 0.68. Though two items, if deleted, would have resulted in a higher value of Cronbach's alpha, the difference of 0.02 was determined to not warrant their exclusion from further analysis, as this omission would result in the subscales no longer being balanced.

Factor Analysis

Principal components factor analysis revealed three factors that explained 32%, 8%, and 5% of the variance,

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respectively. Further, five eigenvalues had a value above 1 ($\lambda_1 = 7.70$, $\lambda_2 = 1.97$, $\lambda_3 = 1.42$, $\lambda_4 = 1.12$, $\lambda_5 = 1.03$.) Due to previous work on the psychometric properties of the three-dimensional model of authoritarianism, the first three factors, which together explained 46.19% of variance, were selected. The pattern matrix of the promax rotation revealed that only items 10 and 16 did not load with coefficients above 0.3 for any of the first three factors. The correlations among factors ranged from 0.11 to 0.57, indicating that the factors do not strongly correlate and are measuring distinct ideological components of authoritarian belief.

Relationships with Related Constructs

Comparison of the modified authoritarianism scale with the established 2005 Funke scale found that the correlation between the scores correlated significantly with the three subscales of the latter ($p < 0.01$). The scale average also correlated significantly with all five dimensions of the Moral Foundations model, with negative relationships with both Harm ($r_{(419)} = -0.31$, $p < 0.01$) and Fairness ($r_{(419)} = -0.68$, $p < 0.01$), and positive relationships with the other three dimensions (Loyalty, Authority, and Purity) typically associated with conservative ideology. Additionally, scores on the modified authoritarianism scale correlated significantly with both vertical individualism ($r_{(419)} = 0.24$, $p < 0.01$) and vertical collectivism ($r_{(419)} = 0.26$, $p < 0.01$) scores, but negatively with horizontal individualism ($r_{(419)} = -0.10$, $p < 0.05$) and horizontal collectivism ($r_{(419)} = -0.52$, $n.s.$).

To further compare the two scales, a one-way ANOVA with political party as the grouping factor was conducted; and results indicated that the three factors of the modified authoritarianism scale returned higher F-ratios ($F(3, 404) = 48.00, 68.66$, and 31.73 , $p < 0.01$) than those of the three subscales of the Funke scale ($F(3, 404) = 32.40, 18.24, 28.33$, $p < 0.01$). Further, the average across all twenty-four items of the scale returned a significant result in this one-way analysis of variance ($F(3, 404) = 66.05$, $p < 0.01$).

Overall, the scores for the modified authoritarianism scale averaged 2.53 ($SD = 0.63$), with 418 overall observations used in calculation of descriptive statistics.

DISCUSSION

Results indicate that the proposed scale is a reliable measure of right-wing authoritarian belief, with high

internal reliability between items. The significant correlation between the constituent factors and measure of vertical collectivist and individualist belief further demonstrates the construct validity of the modified scale. Further, this result reveals interesting implications regarding the relationship between authoritarianism and this ideological paradigm. Specifically, the positive correlations between level of authoritarianism and both vertical collectivism and individualism are of interest, as this indicates that those who are more authoritarian respond more to the idea of well-defined hierarchical distinctions between people, as opposed to a specific ideology's beliefs about society. This belief reaffirms authoritarianism as a construct relatively independent of ideological boundaries; that is, authoritarianism in itself is a response to societal hierarchical differences rather than differences in political beliefs.

Additionally, significant relationships between authoritarianism and the latter three moral dimensions of Haidt & Graham's Moral Foundations model indicate that authoritarianism is related to what is seen as a more typically conservative moral profile. That is, each of the three proposed dimensions as measured by this scale correlated positively with the in-group, loyalty, and purity foundations. Conversely, these three dimensions were negatively correlated with the first two dimensions, fairness and harm, the main basis of liberal morality (as opposed to conservative morality, which relies on all five of the moral foundations). Though authoritarianism is not necessarily beholden to any particular political ideology, it is clear that in the current political climate, it is mainly associated with traditionally conservative values. This association makes sense in the context of a multidimensional model of authoritarianism at least partially characterized by traditionalist ideology (i.e., closely aligning with conservative political beliefs). These relationships elucidate how authoritarianism coexists with other paradigms of political belief.

Finally, the proposed authoritarianism scale was tested along with the Dark Triad to determine whether or not significant relationships existed with these personality traits. Ultimately, the data revealed no significant correlation with authoritarianism. These traits appear to have little impact on level of authoritarian belief, and vice-versa, implying that the incidence Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy in individuals remains independent of political leaning, similar to authoritarianism.

Given the discrepancy in prior research, an additional purpose of the scale development was to investigate whether the construct of authoritarianism was unidimensional or multidimensional. The 24-item measure was constructed with the tridimensional model in mind, and this perspective was taken into account when interpreting factor analysis results. That being said, factor analysis results did support a multidimensional model of authoritarianism. These results reaffirm recent research (Dunwoody & Funke, 2016). The resulting three factors correlated significantly with the three subscales of the Funke (2005) scale, which also measured authoritarianism as a tri-dimensional construct. The correlation between these factors and those of the Funke scale are encouraging in establishing overall validity for the modified measure. Overall, the development of this scale and the subsequent factor analysis adds to the growing body of literature affirming authoritarianism as multidimensional.

A hypothesized cause for these results is growing political polarization in the past decade. The wording of the scale items—either positive or negative—greatly affected which factor best explained them, even after controlling for whether the items were pro- or con-trait. The influence of social media and increasingly polarized politics has affected the political beliefs of American voters, especially younger people (such as the sample whose responses were used to analyze the validity of this scale). The potential effects of current events on political beliefs, especially one as salient as authoritarianism (which is frequently used as a buzzword to refer to certain political actors) may influence a study that investigates intrinsically political questions. In a hyper-polarized era of American politics, individuals' opinions may have grown more ideologically extreme in response. Though responses were skewed positively, with an average of 2.53 of a possible 5 and almost no responses over 4, this distribution may be a result of sample demographics. Despite the ethnic and racial diversity of the sampled population, age of participants averaged around 20, with a standard deviation of 4.2. Younger voters, especially American millennials, tend to be far more liberal by nature (Pew Research Center, 2018). This tendency predisposes them to score on the lower end of authoritarianism (given the previously-mentioned positive relationship with conservative ideology). Additional work should be done investigating the effects of polarization on levels of authoritarian belief in order to clarify the direction of this trend.

Further, though the sample used was both large and relatively diverse, the self-reported nature of this scale undoubtedly played a role in participants' responses. The newly-developed scale was administered following the Funke scale, leading to potential response fatigue, especially because many of the items were worded similarly or tapped similar concepts. As previously mentioned, current events may have impacted responses—the items used language that alluded to salient political events and issues, including immigration, mass incarceration, and political protests. Because these issues invoke strong feelings and emotions, answers may have been skewed strongly either in favor or strongly against the item in question.

Though the developed scale is both a valid and reliable measure of authoritarian belief, further work is needed in order to refine wording and ensure that the items are prompting accurate responses. The scale will continue to be used in future studies as development continues. Additionally, this study raises questions regarding the relationship between authoritarianism and various ideologies, particularly collectivism and individualism. Further work should be done in order to further elucidate these relationships and explore the connection between these constructs, as well as others.

CONCLUSIONS

This research adds to the growing body of literature addressing the nature of authoritarianism as a construct. Construction of this new scale takes into account prior viewpoints within the literature and sheds new light on the dimensionality of the authoritarian personality as well as its connections with other political and personality measures. Data analysis has found this measure to be both a valid and reliable means of assessing authoritarian belief in individuals, and reveals the multidimensionality of authoritarianism as a construct. This revised scale has the potential to be used in multiple contexts to measure levels of authoritarianism. This study also addressed the relationship between authoritarianism and collectivist and individualist belief, though there is need for additional work investigating the effects of political polarization on ideological affiliation and authoritarianism. As political psychology grows as a field, so does the salience of these issues. In our current era fraught with political strife, it is more important than ever to be able to accurately assess levels of authoritarian belief. The distinction between actual authoritarianism and political behavior of which we disapprove is an important one, thus highlighting the need for an objective scientific measure.

APPENDIX: ITEMS OF THE PROPOSED NEW AUTHORITARIANISM SCALE

1. Policy statements by the president should be supported by all Americans.
2. Protests and demonstrations are a sign of a healthy society.
3. Protests against the police make our society less safe.
4. America should be governed by modern ideas, not ideas from over 200 years ago.
5. Social revolutions can only lead to anarchy.
6. The police in our country are much too quick to use extreme force when performing their duties.
7. People should have great respect for the American flag.
8. A press that questions American values and policies actually makes us stronger.
9. People who defile the American flag should be punished.
10. Too many people in our country want to enforce their own views on sex and morality.
11. People who seem to always challenge authority are a danger to the nation.
12. We are much too quick to punish people whose views do not support traditional values.
13. The president is the embodiment of America. When the president acts, America acts.
14. There must always be a place of respect for those who question our fundamental values.
15. Using overwhelming force against countries that threaten us politically is the only way to guarantee our survival as a nation.
16. It is a mistake to view the president as the ultimate judge of right and wrong.
17. Professional athletes should stick to their role as athletes.
18. America has far too many people who are in prison.
19. There should be no place in our country for those who do not respect American values.
20. American young people should be taught that it is important to be willing to question the authority of elected leaders.
21. Our courts should be much stronger in upholding the laws of the US.
22. America should be much more welcoming to immigrants.
23. Entertainment personalities who insult our government should not have a role in the media.
24. Strict law enforcement is NOT helping our country.

Table 1: Factor loading table based on a principal components analysis with varimax rotation for 24 items for the proposed new authoritarianism scale

	Component		
	1	2	3
Item 1	.619		.411
Item 2			.657
Item 3	.546	.350	.324
Item 4		.582	
Item 5	.436		.434
Item 6		.735	
Item 7	.604	.389	
Item 8			.651
Item 9	.656		
Item 10	-.378		
Item 11	.549		.370
Item 12		.729	
Item 13	.508		
Item 14		.440	.376
Item 15		.375	.650
Item 16	.507		
Item 17		.672	
Item 18	.603		.356
Item 19		.694	
Item 20	.434	.347	
Item 21			.585
Item 22	.537	.376	
Item 23		.339	.458
Item 24	.630	.301	

Note. Factor loadings <0.3 are suppressed.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for the Proposed New Authoritarianism Scale

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Item 1	2.38	1.26
Item 2	2.58	1.18
Item 3	2.90	1.23
Item 4	2.17	1.14
Item 5	2.52	1.11
Item 6	2.43	1.24
Item 7	3.72	1.18
Item 8	2.23	1.05
Item 9	2.74	1.35
Item 10	2.22	1.17
Item 11	2.72	1.13
Item 12	2.17	1.08
Item 13	2.84	1.31
Item 14	2.21	0.93
Item 15	1.90	0.99
Item 16	3.69	0.91
Item 17	2.26	1.26
Item 18	2.30	1.26
Item 19	3.13	1.12
Item 20	2.37	1.14
Item 21	1.70	0.99
Item 22	2.46	1.40
Item 23	2.15	1.14
Item 24	2.87	1.23

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