



ATTITUDES TOWARDS AUTHORITY
AMONG TERTIARY STUDENTS IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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A Thesis submitted for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in The University of Adelaide
Department of Psychology

October, 1975

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SUMMARY

This study has two primary aims: to determine the degree to which attitudes towards authorities are generalised among tertiary students over a range of authority figures; and, secondly, to examine two hypotheses that have been proposed regarding the relationship between attitudes towards authorities and supposedly relevant personality variables.

A variety of relevant attitude scales were developed using data obtained from students at the South Australian Institute of Technology (S.A.I.T.) and the University of Adelaide (U. of A.). The scales included five balanced or approximately balanced Likert-type scales to assess attitudes towards the police, the army, teachers, the law and symbolic authority; a special type of test, the Independence Scale, to assess attitudes towards the authority of graduating students; and a Likert-type scale to measure the extent to which students were prepared to support proposals involving social change (the Radicalism Scale). The Likert-type scales were shown to possess a high degree of internal consistency; the Independence Scale was minimally satisfactory in this respect. In addition, Eleven-point Rating Scales were devised to provide an overall measure of feeling tone in relation to each of the particular authorities assessed by the Likert-type authority scales and also towards "authority in general".

The Likert-type attitude to authority scales proved to be significantly intercorrelated, using two groups of tertiary students, 180 from S.A.I.T. and 80 from the U. of A. The Eleven-point Rating scales, completed by the U. of A. subjects, also intercorrelated significantly. Concurrent validity was demonstrated for each of the Likert-type attitude to authority scales by means of significant correlations with relevant Eleven-point Rating scales.

The generality of attitude towards authority across the five authorities assessed by the Likert-type scales is therefore strongly supported. Correlations between the Independence scale and each of the Likert-type attitude to authority scales for 121 of the S.A.I.T. students were not significantly different from zero, but those between the Likert-type pro-authority measures and Radicalism were significant (in the negative direction) for both S.A.I.T. subjects and U. of A. subjects. The general nature of the attitude assessed by the Likert scales therefore appears to be unrelated to the non-institutionalised authority of graduating students, but closely associated with radicalism.

To provide a stable and general measure of attitude towards authority, scores from the Likert-type attitude to authority scales were standardised and combined to form a Composite Authority Scale (C.A.S.). The validity of this measure was supported by the confirmation of predictions relating to three types of criteria: (1) the Eleven-point Rating Scale assessing attitude to "authority in general"; (2) the personal assessments of orientation towards authority by close acquaintances; and (3) scores derived from autobiographical reports of relevant behaviour, such as taking part in demonstrations and attending Church. These criteria correlated in the predicted direction with the C.A.S.

In the second part of this study, two sets of hypotheses were formulated on the basis of suggestions in the literature on student radicalism and on authoritarianism concerning the relationship between attitudes towards authority and supposedly relevant personality variables. The first set of hypotheses postulated a linear relationship, with the more pro-authority students tending to be more intolerant of ambiguity, more dogmatic, more cognitively simple, less creatively independent and less emotionally activated.

The second set of hypotheses postulated a curvilinear relationship such that extreme pro- and anti-authority subjects resemble each other in being relatively intolerant of ambiguity, dogmatic, cognitively simple and low in both creative independence and emotional activation compared with persons who occupy intermediate positions on the attitude to authority continuum. These hypotheses were tested using groups of students from the S.A.I.T., and (with respect to the variables of creative independence and emotional activation only) a group of U. of A. students.

The following personality tests were administered: to assess intolerance of ambiguity, Budner's Intolerance of Ambiguity test, the Complexity sub-scale of the Omnibus Personality Inventory, and the Photo Ambiguity Test specially developed for this study; for dogmatism, Ray's Dogmatism Scale; for cognitive-simplicity, a modified version of Bieri's Cognitive Complexity test; for creative independence and emotional activation, Rump's Adjective Check List. Because of the extensive testing program involved, subgroups of subjects varied in the extensiveness of tests taken. A total of 87 S.A.I.T. students formed a core sample which completed all tests.

In general, the obtained relationships between the attitude and the personality measures were consistent with the linear hypotheses. Among the S.A.I.T. samples, all the correlations with the C.A.S. were significant and in the predicted direction, although not all the correlations with individual attitude scales were significant. The highest correlations with the C.A.S. were with the Complexity sub-scale of the O.P.I. ($r = -.47$) and with Ray's Dogmatism scale ($r = .40$). With the exception of Emotional Activation, all the correlations between the personality variables and Radicalism were significant and, as predicted, in the opposite

direction to those found with the pro-authority C.A.S. In a partial replication with U. of A. subjects, significant correlations in the predicted direction were found between Creative Independence and C.A.S. (and Radicalism), but correlations with Emotional Activation were not significantly different from zero for either C.A.S. or Radicalism. An examination of trends for curvilinearity provided no clear support among groups of S.A.I.T. subjects for the curvilinear hypotheses. Among U. of A. subjects the curvilinear hypothesis was supported with respect to the Emotional Activation variable only.

A factor analysis with rotation to an oblique factor solution was performed on the results of 87 S.A.I.T. students, for whom complete data were available. The two main factors extracted were: (1) a pro-authority factor, with positive loadings of greater than .40 for the Law Scale, the Army Scale, the Police Scale, the Teacher Scale and the Symbolic Authority Scale and a negative loading of -.64 for the Radicalism Scale; and (2) a personality factor, with loadings of .40 or greater for Budner's Intolerance of Ambiguity test, the Complexity sub-scale of the O.P.I. and Ray's Dogmatism Scale, and negative loadings of -.62 for Rump's Adjective Check List measure of Creative Independence and -.40 for Emotional Activation. This personality factor appears to reflect a strong dislike of uncertainty and a tendency to hold dogmatic beliefs, and to view oneself as not creatively independent or emotionally activated. The pro-authority factor and the personality factor correlated positively ($r = .48$), which is consistent with the linear hypothesis. A factor analysis of the correlations for S.A.I.T. students who completed at least two of the tests ($\bar{n}(h) = 168.3$) provided substantially similar results, confirming that the factorial structure of the larger set of data did not differ markedly from that obtained from the smaller complete set of results.

Throughout the study analyses were performed for each sex separately. In the development of the Authority and Radicalism scales slight but consistent differences emerged between the sexes. The Likert-type scales generally yielded higher indices of internal consistency for males, and subsequently the intercorrelations between the scales tended to be higher for males. It would appear that the scales, though valid for each sex, are somewhat more appropriate measures of attitude towards authority among males.

Comparisons between groups of students from the S.A.I.T. and the University of Adelaide indicate that in general the S.A.I.T. students were more favourably disposed towards authority than were the University of Adelaide students. An analysis of age trends at the two institutions on measures of attitude to authority in general failed to yield reliable or consistent trends.

The main results of this study, namely the predicted linear relationship between Attitude to Authority (and Radicalism) on the one hand, and Intolerance of Ambiguity, Dogmatism and Creative Independence on the other, have been replicated for both male and female tertiary students; and with respect to one measure of intolerance of ambiguity (the Complexity subscale of the O.P.I.) and two measures of Attitude to Authority (the Army and the Law Scale), the predicted linear relationship was found three years later (in 1975) with a sample of University of Adelaide students, despite significant shifts towards generally more favourable attitudes towards the Army, and less favourable attitudes towards the Law.

Finally, it is suggested that while existing psychological theory deriving from psychoanalytical sources and emphasising the ego-defensive function of authoritarian attitudes may account for the association between certain personality characteristics assessed

in this study and the strongly pro-authority tendencies of some students, it is inadequate to account for the attitudes of students with relatively anti-authority orientations. Such attitudes may perhaps be best understood in terms of a positive liking for novelty and complexity, the enjoyment of which authorities may be perceived as blocking.

STATEMENT

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text.

Signed *...Kenneth Rigby...*

Kenneth Rigby
November, 1976

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due first to the students at the S.A.I.T. and the University of Adelaide who answered the questionnaires and provided the data upon which this thesis is based. Acknowledgements must also be made to staff members of the University of Adelaide who at different times offered critical advice, particularly, Mr. E.E. Rump, Mr. P. Hornsby, and Professor A.T. Welford. Finally I would like to acknowledge the assistance of Mrs. Margaret Blaber who typed the manuscript.

PREFACE

Due to the diversity of related issues that are explored in this study, it may be useful to explain the organisation and lay-out of this thesis. It is divided, for convenience, into three parts, with Part One being concerned with the topic of the generality of attitudes towards authority among tertiary students; Part Two dealing with the relationship between attitudes towards authorities and certain supposedly relevant personality variables; and Part Three presenting a brief review of the entire study and a consideration of its general significance.

Part One consists of four chapters. In Chapter 1 a critical review is presented of psychological studies related to the issue of the general nature of attitude towards authority, and this is followed by a discussion of those authorities included in the study. Chapter 2 deals with the development of attitude scales to measure attitudes towards the chosen authorities, and, for wider comparison, a radicalism scale. In Chapter 3 correlations between those scales are examined and the degree and extent of the generality is assessed for samples of students from the South Australian Institute of Technology (S.A.I.T.) and The University of Adelaide. Chapter 4 examines the validity of the scales in relation to a variety of validating criteria.

Part Two begins with a survey, presented in Chapter 5, of the psychological literature in which (a) personality characteristics have been attributed to student radicals, and (b) the supposed nature of pro- and anti-authoritarianism, have been discussed. In the light of this survey two alternative sets of hypotheses appear tenable, one suggesting a linear and the other a curvilinear (second-order) relationship between certain personality variables

and attitude towards authority. In Chapter 6 the personality variables are discussed in detail and operationally defined. To test the proposed hypotheses, in Chapter 7 the relevant correlations are examined for both male and female subjects in overlapping groups of S.A.I.T. students, and for a group of students at the University of Adelaide. In Chapter 8 the attitude-personality trends are examined in more detail for evidence of systematic curvilinearity. Chapter 9 provides factor analyses of sets of personality and attitude scale data obtained from male and from female S.A.I.T. students.

The replication of a major finding of the study, the linear relationship between intolerance of ambiguity and attitude to authority, is presented in Chapter 10. In Chapter 11 a comparison is made of results obtained for each sex and institution, and age trends on attitude to authority are examined. The implications of the results concerning the relationship between personality and attitude to authority are examined in Chapter 12. Finally in Part Three (Chapter 13) the results of the entire thesis are reviewed and their general significance evaluated.