Authoritarianism and arranged marriage in Bangladesh and Korea

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ABSTRACT

The relationships between authoritarianism and attitudes about arranged marriage were studied in Bangladesh and Korea. According to regression analyses ($N = 417$), authoritarianism was positively related to support for arranged marriages in closed-ended and open-ended responses. Authoritarianism was also negatively related to open-ended discussions about the importance of love in selecting a partner and in the importance of emotional connection in establishing a relationship. Replicating prior results from the US on women, authoritarianism was related to desires to marry individuals who were gender-typed, traditional, and with narrow interests. Despite some differences in patterns of relationships due to gender and country of origin, the findings support the general hypothesis that authoritarians are invested in maintaining the traditions of their culture.

1. Introduction

For over 60 years Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford's (1950) construct of authoritarianism has helped social scientists understand the role of individual differences in organizing political beliefs (e.g., see Funke, Petzel, Cohrs, & Duckitt, in press). Major correlates of authoritarianism include racial and ethnic prejudice, obedience to authority figures, uncritical support for a nation's entry into war, and aggression in the face of threat (e.g., see Brown, 1965, chapter 10, and Winter, 1996, chapter 7, for textbook summaries of authoritarianism). Some of the more recent work on authoritarianism has been cross-cultural in nature, beginning with the studies of McFarland, Ageyev, and Abalakina (1993, see also, McFarland, Ageyev, & Abalakina-Paap, 1992), who showed how Russian authoritarians were prejudiced against capitalists whereas US authoritarians expressed dislike for communists. Those who score high on authoritarianism seem preoccupied with maintaining the economic and cultural status quo of their nation (see also, Krauss, 2002).

Given the importance of understanding vexing social issues like prejudice and war, it is not surprising that most researchers studying authoritarianism have focused efforts on studying relationships with political activity (e.g., for recent work see Cohrs, Kielmann, Maes, & Moschner, 2005; Cohrs, Moschner, Maes, & Kielmann,

2005; Duckitt & Sibley, 2010; Duckitt, Wagner, du Plessis, & Birum, 2002; Duriez, Van Hiel, & Kossowska, 2005; Feldman & Stenner, 1997; Hetherington & Weiler, 2009; McFarland, 2005; and Sibley, Wilson, & Robertson, 2007). However, in recent years a number of investigators have turned their attention to the nonpolitical correlates of authoritarianism, examining the relationship of authoritarianism to individual identity (Duriez & Soenens, 2006), acculturation (Peterson & Plamondon, 2009), parenting (Duriez, Soenens, & Vansteenkiste, 2007), cognitive styles (Cornelis & Van Hiel, 2006; Van Hiel, Pandelaere, & Duriez, 2004), and leisure interests (Peterson & Pang, 2006). In particular, the relationship between authoritarianism and gender roles has been the focus of several studies.

1.1. Authoritarianism and gender

Peterson and Zurbriggen (2010) reviewed much of the work on authoritarianism and gender, and reinforced the argument made by Duncan, Peterson, and Winter (1997) that men and women high on authoritarianism live in gendered worlds where male and female roles are narrowly defined. Early work in this area by Haddock and Zanna (1994), for example, showed that high authoritarian men (as compared to low authoritarian men, and high and low authoritarian women) disliked women labeled as feminists. Similarly, Sibley, Wilson, and Duckitt (2007) showed that men's authoritarianism was correlated with benevolent forms of sexism, albeit not hostile sexism (see also, Christopher & Wojda, 2008). Authoritarianism also influences women's attitudes and life outcomes. Duncan, Peterson, and Ax (2003) found that authoritarianism in young women was associated with clear preferences for masculine (and not feminine) men as dating partners. The pattern

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of results in Duncan et al. (2003) showed that authoritarian women at midlife were uncomfortable managing dual responsibilities in their career and family lives, and felt less confident with the need to exercise power in the workplace.

Taken together results like these suggest that people who score high on authoritarianism think of gender as a bipolar construct (Kelly, 1955/1963), whereby men and women possess immutable differences consistent with traditional gender roles. That is, men are dominant, unemotional, and career oriented whereas women are submissive, emotional, and family oriented (Peterson & Duncan, 2007). As argued by Peterson and Zurbriggen (2010), men and women high on authoritarianism seem loathe to transgress traditional gender norms, which is consistent with Adorno et al.'s (1950) argument that rigidity characterizes authoritarian thinking.

Thus, authoritarianism, a post-World War II variable designed originally to understand the rise of fascism across the globe in the 1930s, also influences the personal and interpersonal lives of contemporary men and women. In the current study we continue to investigate the nonpolitical correlates of authoritarianism in two important ways. First, we examine the relationship between authoritarianism and marriage. Second, we move out of a Western social context and query samples from two Asian countries: Bangladesh and Korea.

Prior research by others on authoritarianism in Asian countries exists. For example, Lee, Ashton, Ogunfowora, Bourdage, and Shin (2010) showed that authoritarianism was related to personality traits like low openness to experience in Korean, Canadian, and US populations. Similarly, Na and Loftus (1998) showed no significant differences on levels of authoritarianism between Korean undergraduate students, Korean law students, and US undergraduate students (although US law students scored lower on authoritarianism than the other three samples). There were cultural differences in legal attitudes; however, the relationships between authoritarianism and questions about law and prisoners were similar across the two countries. Results like these suggest that authoritarianism, which has proven to be a robust variable for making sense of the lives of citizens in the West, has conceptual meaning for individuals growing up in Asia. In the current paper we provide further evidence that authoritarianism organizes the thinking and attitudes of Asian men and women. In particular, we focus on how authoritarianism might influence the expectations of men and women for marriage.

1.2. Arranged marriages and interpersonal relationships

Clearly there are many differences between Bangladesh and Korea. For example, in terms of religious affiliation, Bangladesh is primarily Muslim while Korea has many adherents of Christianity and Buddhism. Despite demographic, economic, political, and religious differences, however, both countries have ancient traditions governing the arrangement of marriage between sons and daughters by family elders (usually parents). Marriage might be codified in different ways by Islamic law (e.g., as a legal contract) or Confucian rite (e.g., as an obedience), but current citizens of the two countries might very well expect their marriage choices to be governed, in part, by parental preferences and obligations (e.g., see Chowdhury, 1995; Park & Cho, 1995). Rather than focus on countrywide differences in the practice of arranged marriage in this study, we will cast a wider net and examine broad trends likely to cut across both cultures.

As argued by many researchers (e.g., Altemeyer, 1996, pp. 123–130; Duncan et al., 1997; McFarland et al., 1992), authoritarians support tradition. They do not embrace change lightly, and focus efforts on maintaining the conventions of their particular culture. Authoritarians in two very different cultures could easily hold opposing beliefs (e.g., during the Cold War Soviet authoritarians despised Americans, even as American authoritarians hated Soviets). If a culture had a tradition of arranged marriage, we would hypothesize that those scoring high on authoritarianism would be more likely than those scoring low to endorse an arranged marriage for themselves and for others. This preference for an arranged marriage is not an evaluative statement; reasonable arguments by proponents and opponents of arranged marriage have been made and can be found on various worldwide web sites. Our point is that an arranged marriage would be one example of how traditional values in Bengali and Korean cultures are exerted, and thus should be preferentially valued by those scoring high on authoritarianism.

Because we are studying the topic of marriage using variables and techniques developed in the US (e.g., authoritarianism as assessed through Likert scales), we operationalize arranged marriages in both closed-ended and open-ended ways. Participants, therefore, will be given an opportunity to express their thoughts about marriage in their own words. Again, authoritarians should write about the importance of arranged marriage for their own lives. They should not focus on love as a criterion for marriage. Instead, they should discuss the importance of parents in helping them find a marriage partner. In addition, they may focus on matching a potential spouse on economic, educational, family, and regional background. Prospective grooms and brides interested in this kind of fit seem to be relying on an older tradition of matchmaking consistent with parental sanctioning of a marriage.

We also ask participants to tell us how they go about establishing a close relationship with someone they find attractive. We expect that more authoritarian individuals will be less likely to approach a potential romantic partner directly. The separate spheres that men and women and boys and girls traditionally inhabit should lead high authoritarian men and women to be less comfortable in the presence of a potential romantic partner. Thus, love and other positive emotions that lead people to approach one another should be downplayed in favor of passivity or even avoidance.

Finally, we plan to replicate in an Asian context findings from the US regarding what men and women find attractive in each other. In the US, authoritarianism in women is correlated positively with preferences for husbands described as masculine, conventional, and not feminine (Duncan et al., 2003). In the current study we attempt to replicate these results for Asian women. We also hypothesize that more authoritarian men will value potential wives who are feminine and conventional. In addition, we examine the extent to which authoritarian men and women want to avoid partners who have "wide interests". As noted by Altemeyer (1996, chapter 3), authoritarians tend to travel in tight circles of like-minded individuals. This might manifest in spousal selection as well; authoritarian men (and women) should prefer potential wives (and husbands) possessing narrow rather than expansive interests.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedure

Participants were students at eight universities in the countries of Bangladesh ($N = 119$; $n = 81$ men, $n = 38$ women) and Korea ($N = 298$; $n = 101$ men, $n = 197$ women). The three universities in Bangladesh were located in the capital city of Dhaka. The five universities in Korea were clustered around the capital city of Seoul. Surveys were administered by Smith College students who hailed from these countries. In the case of Bangladesh, the survey administrator was also accompanied by a Caucasian American student. Surveys were handed out with the permission of faculty instruc-