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## The impact of submissive versus dominant authoritarianism and negative emotions on prejudice

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### ABSTRACT

The two present studies tested the relationships between the negative emotions of fear, anger, and sadness and the social attitudes of right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and social dominance orientation (SDO). It was hypothesized that these specific emotions interact with the social attitudes exerting an influence on prejudice toward outgroups with varying status levels. The emotions studied reflected general predispositions to experience particular affective states (Study 1) or were evoked by the activation of various emotionally-laden episodic memories (Study 2). The results revealed that anger increases RWA based prejudice and fear increases SDO based prejudice when a low status outgroup is considered. Sadness enhances both RWA and SDO based prejudice when a high status outgroup is targeted.

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### 1. Introduction

It is well established that right-wing authoritarianism (RWA), defined as the covariation of conventionalism, authoritarian submission, and authoritarian aggression (Altemeyer, 1981) and social dominance orientation (SDO), defined as the extent to which “one desires that one’s ingroup dominates and be superior to outgroups” (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994, p.742), encompass more than half of the variance in prejudice, discrimination and related intergroup attitudes (e.g. Altemeyer, 1998; Van Hiel & Mervielde, 2002). An important question almost neglected in previous research, but addressed in the present paper is about the influence of negative emotions on the relationship between authoritarian beliefs and prejudice.

Duckitt (2001) suggested that RWA based prejudice relates to negative affect, whereas SDO based prejudice relates to lack of positive feelings experienced vis-à-vis outgroup members. Van Hiel and Kossowska (2006) addressed this issue empirically and their study confirmed the importance of emotions to explain prejudice. Still, it is worthwhile to note that previous studies (including the study of Van Hiel & Kossowska, 2006) on the relationship between authoritarian beliefs and prejudice have been based on a valence-based approach, contrasting effects of positive versus negative feeling states on prejudice (see: Elster, 1999). This approach faces one obvious shortcoming as it fails to specify whether various emotions of the same valence differentially influence prejudice.

It is, however, well-known that emotions of the same valence, such as fear, anger, and sadness influence prejudice in a different way and direction (see: Bodenhausen, Sheppard, & Kramer, 1994). Moreover, according to cognitive appraisal theories of emotions, the understanding of an intergroup situation triggers specific emotions (Smith, 1993). Further on, prejudice can be conceptualized as these discrete social emotions and their components. We share this theoretical assumption about the relation between emotions and prejudice and additionally propose to consider that stable individual differences in belief systems might be linked with a more frequent experience of certain types of emotions. These discrete emotions eventually can enhance the level of expressed prejudice towards particular outgroups.

Moreover, this differentiation between specific negative emotions is important for a correct understanding of prejudice against low vs. high status outgroups depending on the underlying RWA and SDO level. Usually, studies often only involve prejudice against a low status outgroup. Furthermore, in our previous study (Van Hiel & Kossowska, 2006) only participants’ reactions to low status outgroup were assessed. However, it is possible that same-status or superior outgroups may elicit a higher level of threat-control motivation, which may engender greater prominence of certain types of negative emotions such as fear or sadness but not of other emotions such as anger. Thus we decided to investigate the combined effects of authoritarianism and emotions on prejudice vis-à-vis low and high status outgroups in one single research design.

On the basis of previous studies (e.g. Dolińska & Falkowski, 2001) that investigated the content of stereotypes of different eth-

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nic groups in Poland, Gypsies and Germans were chosen as low and high status outgroups, respectively. It is reported that Poles perceive both Gypsies and Germans as threatening and dangerous for conventional norms and societal security, but Gypsies are seen as the socially disadvantaged, subordinate, and low in power, influence, and prestige outgroup, whereas Germans are seen as superior, competitive, and high in power. Hence, we expected that both RWA and SDO predict negative attitudes to both groups, although for different reasons.

Thus, applying Duckitt's recent findings (2006); (Duckitt & Sibley, 2007) and the results reported by Van Hiel and Kossowska (2006), we proposed the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1:** Anger, defined as a tendency to experience certainty and individual control, should increase prejudice toward the low status group among high RWA people. We expected that high RWA people should perceive Gypsies as the outgroup potentially undermining and threatening conventional values and norms, at the same time this outgroup is seen as a low status group that is easy to control.

**Hypothesis 2:** Fear, defined as a tendency to experience uncertainty and situational control, should increase this tendency among highly dominant people. People who score high on social domination compete for relative group dominance, power, and status and therefore tend to justify existing intergroup power and status differentials by disliking and devaluing Gypsies because they are low in status.

**Hypothesis 3 and 4:** Sadness will increase prejudice toward Germans among high RWA people and high SDO people. Forgas and Fiedler (1996) have demonstrated that when group relevance is high, sadness enhances intergroup discrimination. Therefore it could be expected that sadness increases prejudice in people who hold more authoritarian beliefs (since there is no evidence that RWA and SDO have different impact on prejudice) and in contexts in which they are exposed to higher status groups.

### 1.1. Overview of the studies

The present two studies were designed to test the relationships between RWA and SDO, discrete emotions (dispositional and momentary), and prejudice toward outgroups that vary systematically in perceived status. We concentrated on the emotions of fear, anger, and sadness, because these emotions have been proven to be important determinants of outgroup attitudes. Study 1 was a questionnaire study in which dispositional emotions were measured, whereas in Study 2 we conducted an experimental study in which momentary emotions were induced.

## 2. Study 1

### 2.1. Participants

One hundred and four students from humanistic faculties at Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland, participated in the study. They were, on average, 24.7 years old ( $SD = 5.2$ ); 78 were females, 25 were males, one person did not indicate his/her sex.

### 2.2. Method

**Authoritarian submission and dominance:** Participants completed an 11-item version of the RWA scale (Altemeyer, 1981, adapted by Koralewicz (1987);  $M = 2.46$ ,  $SD = .67$ ) and a 14-item SDO scale (Pratto et al., 1994, translated into Polish by Duriez, Van Hiel, and Kossowska (2005);  $M = 2.61$ ,  $SD = .59$ ). Both proved to be internally consistent (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .83$  and  $.74$  for RWA and SDO, respectively) (see: Cronbach (1951)).

**Emotional dispositions:** The emotion questionnaire (Diener, Smith, & Fujita, 1995, Polish version prepared by Wojciszke & Baryła, 2006) consists of 24 emotion words representing six discrete emotion categories: fear, anger, sadness, guilt, happiness, and love. Participants were asked how often they had felt each emotion during the past month on a scale ranging from never (1) to always (7). Since we focused only on fear, anger, and sadness in this study, we computed a score for each of these emotions by taking the sum of ratings on the four emotion words representing the relevant category and using them as indicators of the emotions in latter calculations. The fear, anger, and sadness scales ( $M = 3.06$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ;  $M = 3.25$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ;  $M = 2.37$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ) achieved acceptable levels of internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha s = .90$ ,  $.87$ , and  $.87$ , respectively).

**Prejudice:** Participants also completed the 16-item Kleinpenning and Hagendoorn's (1993) racism scale, which was translated into Polish and successfully administered in a previous study (Van Hiel & Kossowska, 2006). This scale covers "cold" as well as "hot" manifestations of prejudice. The scale was administered using two versions: one with Gypsies as the target outgroup, and one with Germans as the outgroup. Participants expressed agreement on 9-point scales. We calculated separate scores for prejudice toward both outgroups ( $M = 3.78$ ,  $SD = .98$  for Gypsies;  $M = 2.97$ ,  $SD = .86$  for Germans). The reliability of the scale achieved an acceptable level of internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha s = .82$  and  $.84$ , respectively).

**Procedure:** Participants completed a questionnaire that contained the measures of emotions, prejudice toward Gypsies and Germans, and authoritarianism (RWA and SDO). Only the parts of the prejudice scale were counterbalanced.

### 2.3. Results and discussion

Analyses demonstrated no systematic effects associated with participants' sex across the dependent variables. Consequently, sex was not included as an independent variable in the principal analyses.

Prior to running the regression analyses, correlations among all variables were calculated. As can be seen in Table 1, the correlations between RWA and the negative emotions of fear, anger, and sadness were strong and positive. The correlations between SDO, anger, and sadness were also strong and negative. With respect to the attitudes toward Gypsies and Germans, the relationships between emotions and prejudice turned out to be non-significant, except for a positive correlation between sadness and negative attitudes toward Germans. As expected, RWA and SDO turned out to be uncorrelated (see also Duriez et al. (2005); Van Hiel and Kossowska (2007)).

In order to conduct the moderator analysis we followed the recommendations of Aiken and West (1991). In hierarchical regres-

**Table 1**

Correlations between authoritarian orientations (RWA, SDO), general prejudice, negative attitudes toward Gypsies and Germans and emotions (fear, anger, and sadness)

	RWA	SDO	Prejudice to Gypsies	Prejudice to Germans
Fear	.88***	-.11	.09	.09
Anger	.40***	-.25*	-.16	.01
Sadness	.72***	-.25*	-.11	.20*
RWA	-	-.12	.42***	.35***
SDO	-	-	.27*	.35**
Prejudice to Gypsies	-	-	-	.14

\*  $p < .05$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

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