



Bowing and kicking: Rediscovering the fundamental link between generalized authoritarianism and generalized prejudice



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ABSTRACT

Generalized prejudice (GP), biases expressed toward multiple outgroups, is typically explained by two aspects of authoritarianism: ‘bowing’ in the form of submission (i.e., right-wing authoritarianism, RWA); and ‘kicking’ in the form of dominance (i.e., social dominance orientation, SDO). Whereas contemporary approaches treat RWA and SDO as separate GP predictors, we statistically model the *commonality* between RWA and SDO reflecting an underlying tendency toward generalized authoritarian (GA). Re-analyzing data from an existing meta-analysis (Study 1), and modelling meta-analytic data from studies containing clear GP-relevant information (Study 2), we compare: (a) the standard approach of predicting GP based on RWA and SDO as unique predictors (Model 1); with (b) an alternative approach based on a latent GA factor indicated by RWA and SDO (Model 2). The alternative model provided stronger (and near-perfect) prediction of GP, along with specific associations between RWA and two types of prejudice (sexism, homophobia). These findings have fundamental implications for understanding authoritarianism and prejudice-proneness.

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German folklore has a drastic symbol for [authoritarianism]. It speaks of *Radfahrernaturen*, bicyclist’s characters. Above they bow, they kick below. (Adorno, 1951, p.291, footnote 25)

1. Introduction

The characteristics underlying the prejudice-prone person have long captured the attention of folk psychologists and academics alike. Indeed there is something intuitive in the notion that some traits or qualities make some persons more susceptible than others to intergroup bias, threat, and aggression. Historically, psychologists have focused on explaining individual differences in prejudice based on authoritarian characteristics, particularly submission to authority and dominance over others. Adorno’s (1951) bicycle metaphor encapsulates this concept powerfully – the image of a cyclist being subservient and submissive, hence “bowing” at the top, while simultaneously aggressive, domineering, and lashing out, hence “kicking” at the bottom. In contemporary approaches, these two aspects of authoritarianism, typically studied as right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance

orientation, respectively, are treated as independent predictors of prejudice. In the present work, we introduce a new approach in which the *commonality* between submissiveness and dominance is treated as a reflection of a generalized authoritarian tendency, and we examine this tendency in relation to generalized prejudice. We provide compelling new evidence that there is much to be gained in understanding the prejudice-prone person from addressing both the commonality between, and the unique aspects of, the bowing and kicking facets of authoritarianism.

1.1. Generalized prejudice

A generalized tendency to be prejudicial is an enduring and reliable finding in the prejudice literature. The concept of *generalized prejudice* (GP) refers to a broad underlying tendency wherein individuals who are more prejudiced toward one social category or outgroup (e.g., homosexuals) also tend to be more prejudiced toward others (e.g., Blacks, women, disabled persons; Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Altemeyer, 1998; McFarland, 2010). Historically, this concept has proven instrumental in establishing that, largely independent of context, some people are more prejudicial than others (e.g., Adorno et al., 1950; Allport, 1954; Altemeyer, 1981) – what Altemeyer (1996, p. 26) referred to as “equal-opportunity bigots”. Evidence of such a tendency is found in numerous studies reporting robust positive

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correlations among multiple types of prejudice (Akrami, Ekehammar, & Bergh, 2011; Ekehammar & Akrami, 2003; Ekehammar, Akrami, Gylje, & Zakrisson, 2004), based both on explicit (self-report) and implicit (e.g., Bergh, Akrami, & Ekehammar, 2012; Cunningham, Nezlek, & Banaji, 2004) measures. Accordingly, GP is typically operationalized using either a composite score aggregated across multiple ratings of various social groups (e.g., Ekehammar et al., 2004), or as an unobserved (latent) factor reflected in two or more separate types of prejudices (e.g., Akrami et al., 2011).

1.2. Right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation

Explanations for this broad prejudicial tendency have frequently focused on the notion of authoritarianism. In particular, there is a long tradition in prejudice theory arguing that GP is explained by personal characteristics rooted in submission and dominance (Adorno et al., 1950; Allport, 1954; Altemeyer, 1996, 1998; Duckitt, 2005; Duriez & Van Hiel, 2002; McFarland, 2010). Copious research conducted over the past half-century indicates that, among the most robust predictors of individual differences in prejudice, are two types of authoritarian tendencies: right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and social dominance orientation (SDO). RWA refers to individual differences in submission to authority, desire for conventionality and tradition, and punitiveness against those violating norms and jeopardizing system stability (Altemeyer, 1981, 1996, 1998, 2006). The second variant of authoritarianism, SDO, pertains to the propensity to desire hierarchical and unequal intergroup relations (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

RWA and SDO are considered to be relatively stable aspects of one's orientation toward the world (Altemeyer, 1996, 1998; Duckitt, 2005; Pratto et al., 1994), as supported by research demonstrating high temporal stability (Sibley & Duckitt, 2010) and considerable heritability in each (e.g., McCourt, Bouchard, Lykken, Tellegen, & Keyes, 1999; Stöbel, Kämpfe, & Riemann, 2006). Further, individual differences in RWA and SDO are moderately positively correlated (Roccatto & Ricolfi, 2005; Sibley & Duckitt, 2008), such that individuals who are higher in RWA also tend to be higher in SDO. RWA and SDO are also both strong predictors of multiple types of prejudices, including sexism and racism, as well as GP (Altemeyer, 1996, 1998; Costello & Hodson, 2011; Dhont, Hodson, Costello, & MacInnis, 2014; Duckitt, Wagner, du Plessis, & Birum, 2002; Ekehammar et al., 2004; Haddock, Zanna, & Esses, 1993; Hodson & Esses, 2005; Hodson, Harry, & Mitchell, 2009; McFarland, 2010; McFarland & Adelson, 1996; Whitley, 1999).

Despite their parallels, RWA and SDO are typically conceptualized as separate and unique constructs, an approach that has proven very fruitful. Some studies stress that RWA and SDO have different antecedents (Altemeyer, 1998; Duriez & Van Hiel, 2002; Hodson, Hogg & MacInnis, 2009; Sibley & Duckitt, 2008) and dissociable predictive relations with distinct types of prejudices (Ekehammar et al., 2004; Hodson, Rush, & MacInnis, 2010). For example, according to the Dual Process Model (Duckitt, 2000, 2005, 2006; Duckitt et al., 2002), RWA is fed by social conformity and predicts attitudes toward threatening groups; in contrast, SDO is rooted in tough-mindedness and competitive contexts, and predicts attitudes toward competitive or low-status groups. Consistent with this emphasis on their unique aspects, researchers frequently study RWA and SDO as separate influences on prejudice – for example, by specifying RWA and SDO as correlated but unique predictors of GP. In such studies, RWA and SDO typically explain between 40% and 50% of the variance in measures of GP, with each contributing substantively and uniquely (Altemeyer et al., 1998; McFarland, 2010). Thus, although RWA and SDO are typically conceptualized as two forms of authoritarianism, in practice emphasis is given to their unique aspects, particularly with respect to their separate roles in predicting prejudice.

1.3. Generalized authoritarianism

We recognize the unique and non-overlapping aspects of RWA and SDO. Yet, RWA and SDO also share something in common, as reflected in their covariation. Indeed, meta-analyses suggest average RWA-SDO correlations of 0.32 (Roccatto & Ricolfi, 2005) and 0.37 (Sibley & Duckitt, 2008). From one perspective, these moderate correlations indicate that RWA and SDO share only a modest amount of variance (10% and 14%, respectively). Such findings are consonant with the typical treatment of RWA and SDO as separate constructs, since they have considerably less common variance than unique variance. Yet, from a 'common factor' perspective, these same moderate correlations translate into pairs of substantial loadings (approximately 0.60 in magnitude) on a single latent factor (i.e., $\sqrt{0.32} = 0.57$; and $\sqrt{0.37} = 0.61$, respectively). From this alternative perspective, RWA and SDO could be considered joint indicators of a more general underlying tendency.

Given that RWA and SDO are widely considered to be two types or forms of authoritarianism (e.g. Altemeyer, 1998; Duckitt, 2000; Duriez & Van Hiel, 2002; Van Hiel, Pandelaere, & Duriez, 2004), it is reasonable to propose that this underlying tendency may be a *generalized authoritarianism* (GA) which is manifested in both RWA and SDO. This proposal provides a modern realization of Adorno's (1951) historical cyclist metaphor wherein GA represents an underlying tendency toward bowing and kicking, with RWA particularly relevant to the bowing aspect (i.e., conformity, social control), and SDO particularly relevant to the kicking (i.e., domineering competitiveness, mean-spiritedness). Accordingly, GA could be understood as an individual difference construct reflecting concerns with (ingroup and/or societal) conformity pressures, submissiveness to recognized authorities, and aggression against those threatening the ingroup or status quo.

Such an underlying tendency would likely not account for all of the variances in RWA and SDO, respectively. Rather, a substantial amount of their variances may be unique to RWA and SDO, as each are distinct in several ways, as reviewed above. As such, RWA and SDO can load on the same factor without equating these constructs, or ignoring past findings that they may correlate divergently with other variables (e.g., Duckitt et al., 2002; Henry, Sidanius, Levin, & Pratto, 2005; Thomsen, Green, & Sidanius, 2008). Accordingly, RWA and SDO are likely to be characterized by shared variance, due to the underlying GA tendency, as well as by unique variance that is independent of GA.

1.4. Generalized authoritarianism and generalized prejudice

Importantly, the GA concept provides an alternative perspective for understanding individual differences in GP. From this alternative perspective, RWA and SDO may not be direct predictors (or causes) of GP; rather, each could be cast as a manifestation of a more general underlying authoritarian tendency, and it is this GA tendency that particularly gives rise to GP. This alternative model has yet to be examined in extant studies predicting generalized prejudice. Indeed, absent from the literature to date is discussion of the possibility that the association between RWA and SDO may itself reflect a meaningful and important component of an explanatory model of prejudice. Yet given its generalized nature, GA may provide a robust prediction of GP. Indeed, the most robust prediction of attitudes is often provided by predictors assessed at the same level of generality as the criterion (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). In the present context, this 'compatibility principle' (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993) suggests that a generalized GA tendency may be a better predictor than its indicators (RWA and SDO) of a generalized outcome such as GP. To test this notion, GA could be modeled as a latent factor manifested in (i.e., indicated by) RWA and SDO, and the latent GA factor could then be specified as a direct predictor of GP. If GP was also modeled as a latent factor (e.g., Akrami et al., 2011), such an approach would allow for estimating the association of interest controlling for measurement error in GA and GP. Doing so should increase the size of the observed association, which, in theory, is likely to be attenuated

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