

SPECIFICITY OF ATTITUDES TOWARD PATERNAL AND NON-PARENTAL AUTHORITY FIGURES

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Psychologists have been in considerable agreement that attitudes toward authority are (*a*) generalized, and (*b*) stem from childhood experiences with parental authority. As Burwen and Campbell have pointed out: "Writers with as varied orientations as Freud, Piaget, Rogers, Newcomb, Kretch and Crutchfield, etc., all agree in positing attitudes toward parental authority originating in the family situation which generalize and manifest themselves as attitudes toward superiors in later social situations" (2, p. 24). Despite this unanimity of opinion, experimental data in this area are limited and contradictory.

Stagner (8), from a study with 575 subjects, found that attitudes toward authority were generalized, and that subjects who accepted authority were characterized by acceptance of strict discipline from the father, while those who were hostile toward authority perceived parent figures as repressive and inhibiting. Burwen and Campbell (2), assessing attitudes toward authority of 155 servicemen, failed to find any evidence for the generality of authority attitudes or of attitudes toward parental authority generalizing to non-parental authority figures. The findings of Stern (9), with 60 psychoneurotic male veterans, tend to agree with those of Stagner, but indicate that there may be marked differences in the extent to which attitudes toward authority are generalized. In studies of politically radical and conservative adults, Lasswell (6), Krout and Stagner (5), and Adorno *et al.* (1), found consistent relationships between attitudes toward the father or parents and attitudes toward impersonal sources of authority such as the state.

The lack of consistency in research findings appears to result from: (*a*) failure to distinguish between attitudes toward personal and impersonal authority, (*b*) differences in assessment devices and the level of behavior being measured, and (*c*) failure to ascertain which, if either, parent had the actual (or perceived) authority position in the family and to relate attitudes toward this parent to attitudes toward other authority figures. Also adding to the confusion are differences in population characteristics, e. g., age, military service, emotional adjustment, and failure to determine whether attitudes toward authority (personal or impersonal) are different from attitudes toward non-authority figures or toward social processes not backed by authority.

The present study stems from the preceding discussion. The speci-

fic hypotheses under test relate to attitudes of submission or opposition toward personal authority of young adult males and are:

1. There is a positive relationship between attitudes toward different non-parental authority figures, namely, teachers and employers.

2. There is no positive relationship between attitudes toward authority and non-authority figures, e.g., between teachers and peers.

3. There is a positive relationship between attitudes toward paternal authority and attitudes toward non-parental authority figures. Attitude toward authority or non-authority figures is operationally defined in terms of the way the individual believes he would respond to various conflict situations along the dimension of submission-opposition.

METHOD

Instruments. A modification of Sargent's Insight Test (7), a projective technique for personality assessment, was developed. It consists of 29 forced-choice items in which *S* is required to select from four alternatives the one he believes comes closest to the way he would react in certain situations.¹ Eleven of the original 40 items were deleted for lack of internal consistency. In each item, the alternatives represent four steps along the continuum of submission-opposition to demands, expectations, or restrictions imposed by one of five role figures: father (F), mother (M), teacher (T), employer (E), and non-authority (N-A). Five subscores were obtained, one for each role figure. However, in the preliminary evaluation of the scales, the M scale proved to be unreliable and was not used further. Four sample items follow:

F-scale: A young man has acquired religious and political opinions away from home which are in direct conflict with his father's ideas. He is home for a visit and religious and political subjects are discussed. The young man probably

- 0 indicates agreement to avoid argument.
- 3 states his own opinions and challenges those of his father directly.
- 2 gives his own opinions but is willing to consider his father's arguments.
- 1 mentions his ideas but does not indicate they are his own.

T-scale: A student is rather severely graded down by the teacher for handing in an important paper late. He probably

- 1 accepts the situation, but gripes about it to other students.
- 2 asks the teacher to reconsider the grade.
- 0 believes the teacher was being fair.
- 3 puts up a big fight about the teacher's unfairness.

E-scale: A young man, working in a small firm, feels he is entitled to a promotion which his employer gave to another man. The young man probably

- 2 tries to convince the employer of his right to the promotion.

¹Copies of the Insight Test and the Parental Authority Questionnaire have been deposited with the American Documentation Institute. Order Document No. 6618 from ADI Auxiliary Publications Project, Photoduplication Service, Library of Congress, Washington 25, D. C., remitting in advance \$1.25 for microfilm or \$1.25 for photocopies. Make checks payable to: Chief, Photoduplication Service, Library of Congress.

- 1 feels he is being treated unfairly but decides to wait it out.
- 0 does nothing, judging that the employer knows best.
- 3 demands the promotion from the employer.

N-A-scale: A young man learns from hints she has dropped that a girl he cares for doesn't like his taste in clothes. He probably

- 3 refuses to change his taste, a "take me as I am" attitude.
- 1 wears the clothes she likes only when with her.
- 0 changes his taste to suit her.
- 2 tries to point out the merits of his own taste to her.

The number before each alternative indicates its position on the submission-opposition dimension from 0, for extreme submission, to 3, for extreme opposition.

No attempt was made to validate this instrument against some outside criterion since all that was sought was to test certain hypotheses from one frame of reference—that of the *S*'s perception of his own behavior. Two measures of reliability were obtained. Inter-rater reliability was determined by having six judges rank the alternatives of each item along the submission-opposition continuum. Agreement was perfect on 30 items, and on the remaining 10 items none of the rankings of an alternative varied more than 1 point. Test-retest reliability for each subscale separately was determined by Spearman's rank-difference method. Reliability on the mother scale was considered too low for this scale to be included in the final data collection. Reliability on the remaining four scales ranged from .60 to .79.

In addition, a questionnaire was administered consisting of routine items (age, marital status, and socio-economic background) and eight questions designed to ascertain which parent, if either, was the dominant authority figure, i.e., had ascendancy and power, administered punishment, was most feared, and assumed major financial responsibilities for the family. A parent was considered dominant when seven to eight of these questions elicited responses directed toward that *one* parent. Absence of a dominant parent was assumed from responses of "both parents," "neither parent," or the inclusion of one parent as often as the other in the eight critical questionnaire items. On the basis of these criteria, 33 *Ss* were considered to have dominant fathers; 7, dominant mothers; and 13, no clearly dominant parent. The remaining 47 *Ss* revealed varying degrees of maternal and paternal dominance.

Subjects. Two preliminary groups of *Ss* were used in the refinement of test items and the determination of test-retest reliability. In the experiment proper 100 male students enrolled in Introductory Psychology at the University of California at Los Angeles were used. Their mean age was approximately 20 years, with a range from 17 to 26; 92 were single and 8 married. They were predominantly Protestant and Jewish, with a minority coming from Catholic homes and homes having either mixed or presumably no religious affiliation. Fathers were predominantly in the professional and managerial class.

Procedure. *Ss* were administered the test and the questionnaire. To insure privacy and frankness of response, *Ss* were assigned alternate seats and instructed not to put their names on the test. They were told that the results would be used for scientific purposes and their full cooperation was requested.

To test hypotheses 1 and 2 the *Ss*' reactions on the four scales were inter-related. The use of a non-parametric method seemed indicated. The continuous scores obtained were divided as evenly as possible into highs (opposition) and lows (submission). The frequencies in the low and high portions of the four scales were compared with each other in a four-cell contingency table by means of chi square to determine whether there were significant differences between the obtained frequencies among the four scales. Inspection of the contingency tables of those variables which proved to be significantly related, revealed the direction of the relationship.

Three steps were involved in testing hypothesis 3: (a) Determination of whether a relationship existed between attitudes toward paternal and non-parental

authority figures in all *Ss*. The statistical treatment was the same as in the testing of hypotheses 1 and 2. (b) Computing χ^2 values between scores on the F and E scales and the F and T scales for the 33 *Ss* whose father appeared to be the dominant parental authority figure. (c) Same procedure as (b) for *Ss* who revealed no dominant parental authority figure. However, since only 13 *Ss* fell in this group, Yates' correction for continuity, as suggested by Guilford (4), was applied.

RESULTS

The χ^2 values among the F, E, T, and N-A scales for the total sample of college males are given in Table 1.

TABLE 1. CHI-SQUARE VALUES SHOWING THE RELATIONSHIPS AMONG THE FATHER (F), EMPLOYER (E), TEACHER (T), & NON-AUTHORITY (N-A) SCALES

	E	T	N-A
F	.140	.098	.523
E		9.340*	3.123
T			.0003

*Significant beyond the .01 level.

These results pertain to our initial hypotheses as follows:

Hypothesis 1. This hypothesis, which assumes a positive relationship between attitudes toward teachers and employers, was confirmed, the χ^2 values for the E and T scales falling between the .01 and .001 levels of confidence.

Inspection of a 2 x 2 contingency table in which each cell contains the obtained frequencies, showed that the relationship is in a positive direction. That is, the lows on one scale tend to be low on the other; and the highs on one scale, high on the other.

Hypothesis 2. χ^2 values between F and N-A, E and N-A, and T and N-A scales are not significant. This finding supports hypothesis 2, indicating no significant relationship between attitudes toward authority and non-authority figures along the submission-opposition continuum. It would appear, then, that authority figures are discriminated from non-authority figures, are perceived differently and reacted to differently.

Hypothesis 3. This hypothesis, which assumes a positive relationship between attitudes toward paternal and non-parental authority figures, was not confirmed. The χ^2 values for all *Ss* relating the F and E, and F and T scales are not statistically significant. Reactions to the father as an authority figure are not generalized to teachers or employers.

Since this finding might have resulted from the fact that the father is not the dominant parental authority figure in many American homes, a second step was undertaken. χ^2 values were computed among the F and E, and F and T scales for the 33 *Ss* whose fathers appeared to be the dominant parental authority figure. Again the χ^2

values were not significant. Even when the father is the dominant parental authority figure, there is no generalization of attitude to non-parental authority figures.

Finally χ^2 values between these same scales were computed for the 13 *Ss* who revealed no dominant parental authority figure. The resulting χ^2 values again were not significant.

DISCUSSION

Our key finding is that attitudes of submission or opposition toward paternal authority are not generalized to non-parental authority figures. This finding adds further experimental evidence toward negating the prevalent view that, once acquired, attitudes toward paternal authority tend to generalize blindly to all kinds of later authority situations. Rather it would appear that people learn to discriminate between paternal and non-parental authority figures and between authority and non-authority figures.

The finding of a generalized attitude toward employer and teacher would appear to stem from a lack of adequate opportunity in our *Ss* to distinguish between these authority roles. *Ss* who have had greater personal contact with employers, might well differentiate between teachers and employers.

While differences in assessment devices and other factors make it difficult to compare the present findings with those of previous investigators, the findings are in agreement with one conclusion of Burwen and Campbell (2), namely, that attitudes toward parental authority are not generalized to non-parental authority figures.

From a theoretical viewpoint, the present findings, pointing toward specificity of attitudes in interpersonal relations, support a more cognitive, insightful, and active view of man's transactions with his world than is generally held in Freudian and behavioristic theory. This is consistent with the newer concept of human nature which is gradually emerging in modern psychology, the view of man as basically capable of rational self-direction rather than being entirely at the mercy of past and present environmental conditionings (3).

SUMMARY

Within the confines of the present experimental design, the following conclusions appear warranted: (a) Attitudes of submission or opposition toward the father as an authority figure—even when he is the dominant authority figure in the family—do not generalize to other

authority figures such as teachers and employers. (b) Attitudes toward certain non-parental authority figures, namely teachers and employers, are generalized. (c) Attitudes toward authority figures are not generalized to non-authority figures. These findings strongly suggest that the commonly accepted view that once acquired attitudes toward paternal authority tend to generalize to all kinds of later authority situations should be modified.

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