

Fraternity Membership and
Authoritarianism ✓

Louis A. DeCola Jr.

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Louis A. DeCola Jr.
Miami University

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Abstract

Following the psychoanalytically-based research of Adorno ^(year?) et al., this study set out to show that fraternity members are more authoritarian than nonmembers using the balanced F (fascist) scale. The scale is designed to measure such components as conventionality and conformity. It was hypothesized that fraternity members are more conforming and conventional than nonmembers, so they were predicted to score higher on this test; a higher score represents a more conforming and conventional individual. Thirty male college students at Miami University between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two were tested with fifteen members representing each of the two groups. An independent sampling design t test was done and the result was significant. It therefore supported the hypothesis that fraternity members are more conforming and conventional than nonmembers. Recommendations for future research are presented.

Title

In the original volume, The Authoritarian Personality (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson and Sanford, 1950), the authors wanted to develop a measure of an individual's susceptibility to antidemocratic ideology. This construct was measured by the Fascist scale (F scale). Included in the measuring instrument were items designed to tap the composite

beliefs thought to be associated with the authoritarian syndrome. This syndrome was conceptualized as indicative of individuals who would rigidly adhere to conventional values (conventionalism), obeying proponents of these values (authoritarian submission), and advocating punishment for violators (authoritarian aggression). Also, the authoritarian would be likely to exhibit an overly negative view of mankind (destructiveness and cynicism), oppose any reliance on subjective feelings (anti-intuition), and readily accept supernatural determinants of behavior and categorical thinking (superstition and stereotypy). The authoritarian is preoccupied with power relationships and exhibits a power and toughness orientation. Overly concerned with issues regarding sexuality, the authoritarian projects his own sexual and aggressive motivations onto those around him (projectivity). It was these nine components of the authoritarian syndrome that the California F scale was intended to tap.

The theoretical underpinnings for the subcomponents were primarily psychoanalytic and were supported largely by interview and projective data. Authoritarians were thought to be individuals with strict superegos controlling a weak ego. The superego was the chief structure underlying the adherence to externally imposed conventional standards and the author-

itarian submission to individuals who impose these standards. The outgroup was the target of hostility resulting from this particular aberration of superego functioning. A weak ego, not completely in control of behavior and unaccepting of the responsibility for feelings and actions, was the structure assumed to underlie rigid categorical thinking, rejection of feelings as a basis for action, and the projection of sexual and aggressive motives onto others. Both the conventional superego and weak ego share the blame for the power and toughness espoused by the authoritarian and the cynical view he has of mankind. Finally, the authoritarian was thought to be plagued by unresolved Oedipal complexes. Id impulses could be expressed only indirectly as exemplified by the authoritarian's exaggerated concern with sexuality and with hostility toward those who violate the mores of the ingroup.

was most of this information out of Adams?

A monumental number of studies have been devoted to the correlation of the F scale with other attitudinal and personality measures. ^{*Should provide references for this.*} For example, The Authoritarian Personality reported strong correlations of the F scale with measures of conservative economic and political views (.52). Elms and Milgram (1966) demonstrated that obedient subjects scored higher on the F scale than defiant ones. In terms of religious participation, high authoritarians are more likely than equalitarians to attend church regularly (Jones, 1958) and

frequently (Byrne, 1974).

This experimental study is aiming at showing that people who will join fraternities are disposed to conventionalism and conformity. Why are conformity and conventionalism important with regard to fraternity membership? Some examples will serve to show how conformity and conventionalism are important in fraternity membership.

All fraternities have some type of an initiation process. Potential members have to submit to this experience, usually dangerous or humiliating, if they want to join. This ties in with the work of Elms and Milgram (1966) on obedience.

The conventionalism of fraternities is exemplified by fraternity handbooks warning about the dangers of communism (Hoover, Note 1). Similarly, The Authoritarian Personality reported strong correlates of the F scale with conservative economic and political views.

Fraternities hold formal meetings regularly and many end with a prayer. Also, before the brothers eat dinner, they always say grace together. Related to this are the studies cited earlier showing that high F scale scores are associated with regular and frequent church attendance.

This experiment will use the balanced F scale because it is a better measuring device of authoritarianism than

Need for structure

→ an external authority

A POSS. continuation of a past hierarchical authoritarian structure of home etc ("BROTHERS" "SISTERS")

I have, and they want those rules "get me out of here" 5 minutes - 5000000

al out with the scale

conventional

This may just show that frat members follow rules. { the rules of the fraternities }

Initiation related to

Authoritarian Submission

(+ aggression) Dynamics of both related to authoritarianism

the (California) F scale. The F scale has been criticized because it confounded authoritarianism with acquiescent response biases. Empirical support for such a bias was provided in a study by Bass (1955) which attributed a larger proportion of the variance in the F scale scores to acquiescence than to the authoritarian content of the scale. It is possible to measure authoritarianism while eliminating the confounding influence of acquiescence by using the balanced F scale devised by Byrne (1974); the correlation of this scale with the original F scale is .84.

Fraternity membership is the independent variable, and those who are fraternity members should have higher scores on the balanced F scale (dependent variable); a higher score indicates a more conforming and conventional individual. The higher scores on the balanced F scale are expected from fraternity members versus nonmembers because they are hypothesized to be conventional and conforming. Because the independent variable cannot be randomly assigned, it should be kept in mind that favorable results do not necessarily establish a connection only between the independent and dependent variable; there may be other things related to fraternity membership that contribute to the high balanced F scale scores besides conventionalism and conformity.

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Method

Subjects

Male college undergraduate students at Miami University in Ohio between eighteen and twenty-two years of age participated in the study. Fifteen fraternity and fifteen non-fraternity members were used for a total of thirty participants. The treatment of the participants was in accordance with the ethical standards of the APA.

Apparatus

The balanced F Scale was used as the dependent variable.

(See Appendix for description of F scale).

Procedure

Subjects were approached individually either in their dormitory or fraternity house. They were told that the author had a statistics project to do, and collecting this information was part of the project. They were asked if they would help him out by completing a public opinion questionnaire. If they consented, they were handed three sheets of paper. The first sheet had instructions telling them that the best answer is their personal opinion, there are no wrong answers, and whether they agree or disagree with any statement they can be sure that many others share the same beliefs. The second page contained the actual questions, and the third page was the answer sheet. After completing the

questionnaire, subjects were debriefed. The two groups, fraternity and non-fraternity members had equal representation; fifteen from each group filled out the questionnaire.

Results

The means and standard deviations of the scores on the balanced F scale are presented in Table 1. An independent sampling design t test was done with significant results; $t(28) = 7.65, p < .005$. The data does not indicate at the .05 level that the assumption of equal variance is unfounded; $F(14, 14) = 1.66, p > .05$.

TABLE 1 F Scale Scores for Fraternity and Non-Fraternity Members

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Fraternity Members	89.33	9.65
Non-Fraternity Members	58.26	12.43

Discussion

Fraternity members scored significantly higher on the balanced F scale, a test designed to measure authoritarianism. Therefore, the hypothesis that fraternity members are more conforming and conventional (i.e., authoritarian) was supported in this study.

Future research should study sorority membership and authoritarianism; similar results are expected by this author.

This study, which uses intact groups, does not answer the question of causality. Does being in a fraternity increase authoritarianism? Are individuals who apply to fraternities more authoritarian to begin with? Or, do fraternities only accept authoritarian individuals? These questions are beyond the scope of this experiment and future research ^cshould address them through longitudinal studies.

Instructions to Subjects:

PUBLIC OPINION SCALE

The following sets of items are an attempt to assess the opinions of college students about a number of important personal, academic, and social issues. The best answer to each statement is your *personal opinion*. We have tried to cover many different and opposing points of view; you may find yourself agreeing strongly with some of the statements, disagreeing just as strongly with others, and perhaps uncertain about others; whether you agree or disagree with any statement, you can be sure that many people feel the same way you do.

Mark your opinion about each statement on the answer sheet (following the statements) according to how much you agree or disagree with it. Please mark every one.

1. There is hardly anything lower than a person who does not feel a great love, gratitude, and respect for his parents.
2. An insult to our honor should always be punished.
3. Books and movies ought not to deal so much with the unpleasant and seamy side of life; they ought to concentrate on themes that are entertaining or uplifting.
4. What the youth needs most is strict discipline, rugged determination and the will to work and fight for family and country.
5. No sane, normal, decent person could ever think of hurting a close friend or relative.
6. Young people sometimes get rebellious ideas, but as they grow up they ought to get over them and settle down.
7. The findings of science may some day show that many of our most cherished beliefs are wrong.
8. It is highly unlikely that astrology will ever be able to explain anything.
9. People ought to pay more attention to new ideas, even if they seem to go against the American way of life.
10. If people would talk less and work more, everybody would be better off.
11. A person who has bad manners, habits, and breeding can hardly expect to get along with decent people.
12. Insults to our honor are not always important enough to bother about.
13. It's all right for people to raise questions about even the most sacred matters.
14. Obedience and respect for authority are the most important virtues children should learn.
15. There is no reason to punish any crime with the death penalty.
16. Anyone who would interpret the Bible literally just doesn't know much about geology, biology, or history.
17. In this scientific age the need for a religious belief is more important than ever.
18. When they are little, kids sometimes think about doing harm to one or both of their parents.
19. It is possible that creatures on other planets have founded a better society than ours.
20. The prisoners in our corrective institutions, regardless of the nature of their crimes, should be humanely treated.
21. The sooner people realize that we must get rid of all the traitors in the government the better off we'll be.
22. Some of the greatest atrocities in man's history have been committed in the name of religion and morality.

Fraternity Member _____
Non-Fraternity Member _____

ANSWER KEY

- 1 = Strongly Agree
- 2 = Moderately Agree
- 3 = Slightly Agree
- 4 = No Opinion
- 5 = Slightly Disagree
- 6 = Moderately Disagree
- 7 = Strongly Disagree

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____
- 6. _____
- 7. _____
- 8. _____
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Reference Note

1. Hoover, J. E. Communism and the college student. Guideposts for Pledges, 1965, pp. 70-71.

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