Political Psychology, Vol. 22, No. 1, 2001

The Authoritarian Personality, 50 Years Later: What Lessons Are There for Political Psychology?

John Levi Martin
Department of Sociology
Rutgers—The State University of New Jersey

Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford's The Authoritarian Personality *is probably the most deeply flawed work of prominence in political psychology. The methodological, procedural, and substantive errors of this study are well known, but they are frequently simply attributed to poor methodological judgments, issues of scaling (such as response set), or Freudian theories that legitimated circular interpretations. But a more fundamental bias arose from the attempt to empirically verify the existence of a "type" of person whom the researchers thought dangerous and with whom they did not empathize. This attempt involved two dangerous procedures: (1) the fusion of nominalist research procedures (in which empirical results were used to type respondents) with a realist interpretation of types (in which some people "just were" authoritarians and others not), and (2) a theoretically rich critique of the authoritarians and a lack of interest in the psychodynamics of liberals. This combination led to an intrinsically biased interpretive project that could not help but accumulate damning evidence about authoritarians. These subtler problems have haunted contemporary work in political psychology that avoids the methodological problems of Adorno et al.; Altemeyer's work on authoritarianism, which not only is free from the defects of the Adorno et al. study but also involves some methodologically exemplary experiments, is similarly distorted by asymmetries. The same fundamental problems seem to be at the heart of the weaknesses of the theory of symbolic racism to which critics have pointed. Political psychologists should regard* The Authoritarian Personality *as a cautionary example of bias arising from the choice of methodological assumptions.*

KEY WORDS: authoritarianism, authoritarian personality, Adorno et al., symbolic racism.

The Authoritarian Personality, by Theodor Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel J. Levinson, and R. Nevitt Sanford (1950), was perhaps the first major work in political psychology to combine theoretical claims with methods similar to those

Published by Blackwell Publishers, 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148, USA, and 108 Cowley Road, Oxford, OX4 1JF, UK.

now used in the social sciences. In the 50 years since it was published, its influence in political psychology has waned greatly. But for this very reason the work is worth renewed attention, for the exaggerated nature of its interpretive flaws makes it an ideal site to identify standard forms of distortion that enter into political psychology, distortions that can be found in greatly attenuated form in contemporary researches. I assert that the fundamental weaknesses of *The Authoritarian Personality* (hence *TAP*) came from its attempt to empirically validate a typology that made categorical distinctions between types of persons, and that similar problems may affect much more empirically grounded studies; consequently, the strictures recently proposed by Tetlock (1994) may not prove sufficient to prevent the degeneration of political psychology into politicized psychology. Some of the same interpretive problems can be seen in Bob Altemeyer's recent work on authoritarianism, despite the methodological sophistication of his approach and his efforts to the contrary. Finally, these same basic problems seem to be at the heart of the weaknesses in the theory of symbolic racism, to which critics have drawn attention.

The Study

Throughout this paper, I will refer to the authors of *TAP* (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford) as AFLS, although different portions were written by different persons. While the main argument of AFLS is well known to political psychologists, it may be useful to briefly state their theoretical claims and their substantive vision, as summarized in the book's conclusion:

> A basically hierarchical, authoritarian, exploitative parent-child relationship is apt to carry over into a power-oriented, exploitively dependent attitude towards one's sex partner and one's God and may well culminate in a political philosophy and social outlook which has no room for anything but a desperate clinging to what appears to be strong and a disdainful rejection of whatever is relegated to the bottom . . . [and] the formation of stereotypes and of ingroup-outgroup cleavages. Conventionality, rigidity, repressive denial, and the ensuing break-through of one's weakness, fear and dependence are but other aspects of the same fundamental personality pattern, and they can be observed in personal life as well as in attitudes toward religion and social issues. (p. 971)

The central project of *TAP* was to administer scales designed to tap ethnocentric, authoritarian, or pre-fascist attitudes; to examine those high or low on these scales; and to show that those high-scoring persons (henceforth referred to as Highs) did in fact have the other components of the alleged authoritarian syndrome, whereas low scorers (henceforth Lows) had the other components of the alleged anti-authoritarian syndrome, and that the histories of Highs and Lows were compatible with the genetic account given above. Most important was a demonstration that those high on the authoritarian scale were also ethnocentric, for the authoritarianism

scale was originally intended as an indirect measure of ethnocentrism, given that anti-Semites and racists might not reveal their true feelings.

These theses had a remarkable impact on social psychology and what we would now refer to as political psychology (see Titus & Hollander, 1957), and they still resurface both in specific studies (e.g., Lewis & Maltby, 1995) and in more general discussions of the relation between power and personality (e.g., Chancer, 1992, p. 15). Some recent reviews of the theoretical underpinnings have been positive (e.g., Baars & Scheepers, 1993; Hopf, 1987; D. Smith, 1996, pp. 213–217; M. Smith, 1997; Stone, Lederer, & Christie, 1993), and it has been used in studies of political psychology in South Africa (Duckitt, 1983a, 1983b; Heaven, 1983, 1984), Turkey (Neel, Tzeng, & Baysal, 1983), and the former Soviet Union (McFarland, Ageyev, & Abalakina-Paap, 1992). And, of course, the main theoretical claims live on, although criticized and refracted, in the work of Young-Bruehl (1996).

The claims of *TAP* were never accepted without controversy and critique. But aside from the initial debates in the social sciences, most critiques have dealt with largely peripheral issues. As Billig (1977) and Smith (1997) have noted, *TAP* is often treated simply as a 900-page test manual for the F-scale. Accordingly, critiques of AFLS' theory have often focused on this scale and largely ignored the clinical data from which the theoretical claims were derived. (For some methodological critiques, see Ray, 1984, 1985, 1988a.) As these methodological critiques are well known, they will not be reviewed here; the best treatment is that of Hyman and Sheatsley (1954, e.g., pp. 72–73).[1]

Methods of Analysis: Typologizing the Typologizers

What the critics did not focus on was AFLS' attempt to construct a psychodynamic theory that would apply to types of persons in the general population—indeed, a recent review in these pages (Smith, 1997, p. 160) proposed that this attempt constitutes the main contribution of *TAP*. In contrast, I will argue that this was its undoing; in particular, AFLS attempted to construct a typology that would "get at" phenomena they believed they *knew* to take place, leading to an asymmetric interpretive strategy that was invisible to the authors. Much critical attention has been given to the F-scale, and less to the fact that AFLS used it to categorize respondents as Highs and Lows, eliminating those in the middle from most analyses. In so doing, AFLS, like all such researchers, were using a nominalist

[1] Critics also pointed to the problem of AFLS making statements about the form of belief (e.g., rigidity) and supporting these with data on belief *content* (Durrheim, 1997, especially p. 633; Shils, 1954; cf. Dorn & Long, 1972; Lichter & Rothman, 1982; Rothman & Lichter, 1978, p. 545). Yet this line of critique—reasonable as it is—necessarily leads to the paradoxical position of judging those who strongly believe that all should be open-minded to be more ideologically rigid than those who weakly believe that there is only one true answer to every problem.

definition of Highs—a High is a subject in the top quarter of the F- or E-scale distribution. These Highs were then treated as a type; they were not merely higher on these scales, they *were* Highs, and they were psychodynamically different from Lows. To demonstrate this, AFLS used various other data, such as thematic apperception tests (TATs), projective questions, and clinical interviews covering the respondents' life histories. These methods were consciously combined so as to best present a typology of authoritarians and non-authoritarians, using two exemplars, a High ("Mack") and a Low ("Larry").

Many wits have begun talks by saying, "There are two classes of people in the world, those who divide people into two classes and those who do not. Among the former . . ." Like other good jokes, this one stays with us because it cuts a bit too close to home. More particularly, in political psychology and social psychology, there has been a tradition of claims that agree (to some extent) that there are two classes of people in the world, those who divide people into two classes and those who do not. The former are said to be intolerant of ambiguity and prone to various intellectual and personality shortcomings. But as the researcher has begun by dividing up the world into two classes, the researcher seems placed in the "problem" class.

AFLS noted that stepping into this paradoxical position increased the dangers of their theoretical reliance on typology, which they understood would be greeted with suspicion by most social scientists in the first place. Their response was to rest their case on the *realism* of the basic typology, appealing to

> the increasing rigidity according to which our society falls into two more or less crude opposing camps. . . . The critique of typology should not neglect the *fact* that large numbers of people are no longer, or rather never were, "individuals" in the sense of traditional nineteenth-century philosophy. . . . There is reason to look for psychological types because the world in which we live is typed and "produces" different "types" of persons. (pp. 746–747; emphasis added)

Of course, the "fact" that types existed in the world did not imply that the types as empirically constructed and theoretically interpreted by AFLS—that is, the types resulting from their *nominalist* definition given the F-scale—were the same as the actually existing types. In response to this, AFLS merely indicated that they felt that their typology had "hit upon something."

But this assumption justified AFLS then fusing their nominalist typology to the hypothesized realist typology. This fusion then led them to an asymmetric research process, which was necessarily an agonistic attempt to "trap" the Highs in two senses. In the first sense, AFLS hoped to trick Highs into revealing their morally objectionable characteristics, which they would not directly state (the whole reason for the reliance on the supposedly indirect F-test instead of a direct test of racism and ethnocentrism); in the second sense, they hoped to successfully place some of the respondents in the "authoritarian" category, despite their best

attempts to wriggle out. Here, psychoanalytic theory served AFLS well in justifying their dismissal of all countertheoretical evidence as some form of "denial." However, psychoanalytic theory was not necessary for such dismissal.

This is because in their typological efforts, AFLS concentrated on *one* of the two types and left the other largely (though not wholly) residual, an asymmetry they attempted to justify by insisting that "high scorers are generally more 'typed' than the lower scorers" (p. 751). Because their theoretical focus was on authoritarians, their procedures were designed to pick up evidence of those psychodynamic deficits of authoritarians. Unless "liberals" had the *same* pattern of psychodynamic deficits (should there be any) as authoritarians, they would tend to be given a clean bill of health. These two facets of AFLS' approach—a fusion of nominalist procedures and realist interpretations, and an asymmetric definition of one type as "marked"—led them to "set up the board" in a way necessarily leading to confirmation bias. Specifically, it led to differential interpretive strategies by which they imputed inconsistency to the Highs as opposed to listening to them, and were unable to see the disconfirmation present in their data. I first demonstrate that AFLS never considered it part of their research to actually take seriously the views expressed by Highs, then that they in fact dismissed statements made by Highs when it furthered their theoretical agenda, and finally that the statements of Lows were never subjected to critique, even when it was warranted.

The Imputation of Contradiction and Inconsistency

AFLS seemed to have no reservations when it came to attributing inconsistency to all those who simply held different opinions than did they themselves, and hence had no hesitation in correcting their subjects as to the implications of their beliefs. Thus, a rather consistently Stalinist subject who hated Hoover, tolerated Roosevelt, admired Soviet Russia, and criticized the United States for not stopping the fascists sooner was introduced as an example of the "amazing irregularity" one would find in the political ideology of Highs.[2] As a result, instead of actually understanding the political ideology of those they categorized as Highs, AFLS worked to dismiss it as phony. Most famously, AFLS denied that authoritarians might actually simply be conservatives, and hence motivated by age-old political values as opposed to the new pathologies of mass society. They introduced the idea of "pseudoconservatism" to explain the Highs' combination of conservative moral

[2] This subject was also somewhat anti-Semitic—which presumably AFLS assumed could not coexist with admiration of the Soviets. Similarly, AFLS (p. 679), analyzing a woman who claimed that she was a Democrat because "The Democrats have tried to give the working class a break," opined, "The phoniness of this subject's proposed progressiveness comes out in the section on minorities where she proves to be a rabid anti-Semite." Again, a tolerant religious Low who disapproved of Gandhi's radicalism *must* be inconsistent, given that AFLS were tolerant and also approved of Gandhi: "Her church affiliations make it impossible for her to draw the political consequences from her tolerance idea" (p. 742).

values and a desire for change (p. 50), with, of course, the elaboration that "the psychological structure that corresponds to pseudoconservatism is conventionality and authoritarian submissiveness on the ego level, with violence, anarchic impulses, and chaotic destructiveness in the unconscious plane" (pp. 675–676). Real conservatism, in contrast, was held to be a respect for the old orders without such desire for change.[3]

But it was not simply in political views that the Highs were determined to be bogus—it was in *every* characteristic that might imaginably be seen as having morally positive or neutral valence. Thus, the Highs were said to possess a "pseudo-masculinity" because they had "less admission of passivity" (p. 428). High women also had pseudo-femininity, in contrast to the outright discomfort with the feminine role experienced by many Lows. In turn, we also see the introduction of "pseudodemocratism," "pseudopatriotism," "pseudointellectuality," and "semi-erudition," and AFLS commented that the term "pseudoconservatism" can "often be replaced by pseudoliberal and even pseudoprogressive" (p. 682), demonstrating that the essence was in the "pseudo." Now there are many problematic aspects to the theoretical proliferation of ersatz ideologies, but the most striking is the simple refusal of AFLS to listen to the Highs. This turns out to have been a crucial part of AFLS' interpretive strategy.

How to Prove Theories and Falsify Respondents

In *TAP*, interpretation generally came down to the coding of open-ended responses to, for example, depth interviews: Did a response indicate the personality theoretically attributed to Highs, or did it indicate that of a Low? The many coding problems of *TAP* are well known, and consequently will not be recounted here. What is important to bear in mind is that for almost all of the analyses, the coders either knew who was High and who was Low, or had coded an entire interview (see AFLS, p. 530; Hyman & Sheatsley, 1954, pp. 77, 81, cf. p. 89, note 25). Thus, even when a coder did not "see" that a subject was a "High," he or she seems to have made a heuristic decision for the purposes of coding an interview, leading to a striking non-independence of codings across items (Christie, 1954, p. 187).

As a result, the same statements received dramatically different interpretations depending on who had made them. For example, AFLS argued that Highs have to lean on external authorities to tell them what is right and wrong, as opposed to possessing "genuine, intrinsic values and standards" like Lows. Here is a typical example: "If you don't harm anybody else, it's all right. . . . If you break a man-made law, it's OK if you don't harm anybody else—the law is made to protect people."

[3] However, a respondent who blatantly affirmed that he hadn't forgiven Russia, Mexico, not even France "for her revolution" and that "I still believe in the Old Order" (meaning the *ancien regime*) was also judged only pseudo-conservative (p. 679); it is hard to imagine what *would* be taken as genuine conservatism!

But this was not an example from a Low, it was an example from a High, and was considered evidence *supporting* AFLS' claims, despite the clear sense that the subject had the ability to make internal decisions that override rules.

Of course, sometimes the data were not ambiguous enough to be stretched to fit a point. In these cases, AFLS simply ignored what falsifies their scheme. Most instructive is the treatment of the exemplary cases, Mack (High) and Larry (Low). These cases, chosen to illustrate the power of the F-scale scoring system, instead defeated it, leaving AFLS with one of two possible logical conclusions: Either the scales did not measure authoritarianism, or Mack was not more authoritarian than Larry. AFLS, however, avoided either of these concessions.

Instead, they concluded that the real problem was with *Mack*—he was simply not responding correctly. In particular, Mack did not agree with the following: "What this country needs is fewer laws and agencies, and more courageous, tireless, devoted leaders whom the people can put their faith in." Commented AFLS, "It seems likely that for some of the truly submissive subjects, like Mack, the item is too open, comes too close home [sic], so that in responding they go contrary to their strongest feeling" (p. 275).

This pattern of dismissal was used in the interpretation of the "clinical data" as well. In brief, AFLS refused to believe anything Mack said that did not fit their scheme—they simply erased these data and replaced them with those that they would have liked to see. Mack, asked what he admired about his father, replied "Mostly, his attention to us kids was very admirable" (p. 788) (because "Father spent all of his time with us after mother died"); AFLS instead claimed that Mack's father was silent and distant—putting "distant" in quotation marks (p. 795) as if it were Mack's word, although it was not—and concluded:

> In summary, it seems that the nearest we can come to an estimate of what the father was like in reality is to say that he was a defeated man who, in an authoritarian manner, held up conventional moral standards for his son without being able to show by example that adherence to these standards actually led to worthwhile ends; after the death of his wife he seems to have tried to take over some of the maternal functions in his relations with his children but because of his own personality problems he was unable to be understanding or affectionate toward his son. (p. 792)

None of this is found in Mack's interview, except that the father "tried" to take over "some" maternal functions (although Mack implied he succeeded). AFLS knew this, so they dismissed Mack's words: "Mack's references to his father's devotion and attention can be better understood as expressions of a wish rather than as statements of what the father was like in actuality" (p. 795).

Except for the intolerance of ambiguity, AFLS' analysis of Larry was quite different. His basic materialism (supposedly a High attribute) was recast as his openness—"his readiness to accept the material help which he expects will be offered to him." He identified with his mother, "in crucial contrast to Mack . . . who

cannot possibly come close to or be identified with the mother . . . because she is conceived as too weak or inconsequential" (pp. 812–813). (Of course, as we recall, the problem for Mack was that she was too dead.)

Despite several portions of Larry's interview that must have served as red flags to such Freudian theorists,[4] his comments were never subjected to the critical and dismissive scrutiny that Mack's were. It seems that Lows were in effect handed a "Get Out of Neurosis Free" card, as can be seen in AFLS' interpretation of Larry's view of gender relations, which were plainly stereotyped, superficial, morally rigid, unashamedly egotistical, and put adherence to conventional morality above inner feeling: all High traits.

Here is Larry: "I feel a girl should remain a virgin until 21 or 22 anyway . . . if she is a career girl or doesn't want to get married, then an affair with an unmarried man is O.K. if they keep it quiet and secluded so the moral standards of others are not lowered." "I lost respect for the women I slept with. I know that's selfish, but I guess that's the way most fellows are." His ideal wife "should have a good reputation, be attractive, not taller than I, nor too short, say 2 or 3 inches shorter…." (pp. 810–811). Similarly, Larry's description of a good husband and father fits AFLS' materialist-succorance pattern far better than does any of Mack's statements: "[The ideal husband] should give her happiness, through security, home, car, enjoyment and entertainment; money to travel, and so on. He should be a good father to the children, shouldn't give the wife any worries; he shouldn't get drunk, and he should be faithful to his wife. He should be devoted to his children, give them the proper clothing, food, education," etc. (p. 811).

Projecting Projection

These biases in interpretation were, not surprisingly, greatest where there was most room for free play, namely in the codings of the life histories and the TATs. But because of the very flexibility with which AFLS reversed the actual differences between Mack and Larry, even to the point of attributing to Mack those pathological characteristics found only in Larry's TATs (see, e.g., pp. 531–540), it is difficult to retrieve any principles of AFLS' interpretive strategy. More instructive is their treatment of structured projective questions. Such projective questions are designed to be analyzed according to the assumption that what the respondent says is not an answer to the literal question posed by the experimenter, but an answer to the question, "Who are you in your heart of hearts?" The idea behind projective questions is reasonable, and one can easily imagine answers that would *have* to be interpreted projectively, because of their specificity and detail (e.g., when asked "What is the worst crime someone can commit?," answering "Gut and clean every

[4] "[My mother's] main threat was not 'I'll spank you,' but 'I'll tell your father.' Her own spankings were so mild that we almost enjoyed them. . . . I still have unpleasant dreams. . . . One was that my leg was getting amputated" (p. 810).

last stockbroker in the NYSE like a fish before burning the whole place down"). But not all answers seem to be projective, and AFLS in fact did not treat all as projective.

Although AFLS—like other researchers of the time—had no clear standard to determine when an answer was projective and when it was not, they were not without a rule of thumb, for they simply seem to have refrained from interpreting Lows' responses as projective. And far from being an occasional deviation from a procedure reasonable in principle, such biases were an essential part of their use of the projective questions. Rather than deductively testing whether projective tests did in fact reveal the psychologies imputed to Highs and Lows, AFLS simply examined the data from a subsample of each group and came up with post hoc categories that could best be used to pigeonhole persons (p. 567). And the *interpretations* that went along with these categories were such as to build into the very coding scheme the principle that High answers were projective and Low responses were not. When a High like Mack answered that the worst crimes one could commit were murder and rape, he would be (and was) assumed to be projecting his own desires into the response; hence, Highs *wanted* to rape and kill, possessing personality elements that are "relatively primitive, destructive, unsocialized" (pp. 568, 593–594). But when a Low answered that the worst crime would be "racial persecution and the enforced militarism of a country during peacetime," AFLS did not conclude that he had barely suppressed racist and fascistic urges, nor when another answered "cruelty to helpless things" was he suspected of repressing his own sadism. The coding *manual* said otherwise.

Now it is indeed true that the psychoanalytic theory held by AFLS supported such differential interpretations. Yet it is not the case that their analytic approach was a foregone conclusion upon embracing psychoanalytic theory. First, although the particular version of psychoanalytic theory embraced by AFLS justified treating the claims of authoritarians with skepticism, if AFLS indeed knew a priori that (nominally defined) Highs *were* authoritarians, the entire research project would be a waste of time. Their methods, then, assumed what they had set out to prove. Further, nothing in the fundamentals of psychoanalytic theory could be used to break this vicious circle, nor lend support to the general contention that Highs (but *not* Lows) use psychological defenses of repression and projection.[5]

[5] The particular schools of psychoanalytic theory embraced (to different degrees) by AFLS seem to have been, on the one hand, the Frankfurt interpretation of working-class authoritarianism of Fromm (see Samelson, 1986) and on the other hand, Henry Murray's attempt to make a scientifically acceptable version of psychoanalysis, a project that, Sanford (1986, p. 210) recalled, he swallowed "hook, line, and sinker." Regarding the Frankfurt half, one may reasonably say that rather than the adoption of the

Bad Traits or Good Confessions?

In sum, AFLS treated the answers of Lows differently, and this is because—to speak somewhat crudely—they were only hunting Highs, and so only those responses were subject to a disbelieving critique. No parallel effort was made for the responses of Lows, so the least believable responses (in hindsight) were treated as the most credible. The Lows were allowed to choose their presentation of self, and AFLS gave them "face." This reached its acme in a differential interpretation strategy by which anything "good" said by a High (but not by a Low) was evidence of the suppression of its opposite, and anything "bad" said by a Low (but not by a High) was taken as evidence of a healthy acceptance of one's shortcomings. Negative evidence, as a consequence, could not appear (cf. Hyman & Sheatsley, 1954, p. 99). Thus, Larry stressed self-interest in his politics and getting ahead, whereas Mack "stresses the conventional ideal of unselfishness in order, we may suppose, to disavow his underlying interest in power" (p. 49). After claiming that Highs are interested in status when choosing their friends (as opposed to their "intrinsic worth"), AFLS pointed out that

> low-scoring subjects, on the other hand, not only tend to emphasize the intrinsic worth in their friends but tend explicitly to deny the importance of status. There may be, in some of these cases, an underlying concern with status, but the fact that they disclaim it shows that they have at least some inclination to resist conventionalism. (pp. 418–419)

Lows, apparently, do not "deny," they only "disclaim."

AFLS, of course, believed that Highs are actually more likely to use denial as a psychological defense (p. 595). But they had no *independent* way to ascertain whether this is in fact the case, because their methodological approach was to discount statements of denial when they were made by Highs but take them as legitimate information when they were made by Lows. AFLS did not simply count explicit denial as denial (a defensible if dangerous tactic for the psychoanalytically inclined); they counted the *absence* of corroboration of their hypotheses (by Highs) as itself denial, contrasted to the healthy "admission" of these same (supposedly High) traits by Lows. Indeed, all sexual inadequacies, pathological relations with parents, and "homosexual tendencies" confessed to by Lows (but not Highs) were

Frommian perspective explaining AFLS' interpretations (let alone excusing them), this adoption itself calls for explanation. It was certainly just as plausible from an orthodox Freudian perspective to expect greater repression and neuroses among (as it turned out) middle-class persons with weak identification with the same-sex parent, more sexual difficulties, and more leanings toward homosexuality than among working-class persons with strong same-sex parent identification and greater sexual satisfaction. Regarding the American half, it is worth emphasizing that Murray's (1938, p. 388) chief concern was that, even though some analysts might indeed possess great insight, "this, however, does not make science." Any appeal to analytic expertise in determining when a statement had to be read as its opposite violated the core principles of Murray's approach.

taken—despite the Freudian orientation of the researchers—not as evidence of neuroses but of the healthy democratic spirit of the Lows, because of their "frankness" (pp. 394, 595, 796). It was simply assumed that Highs had all of these in spades, but kept their hand to themselves. Instead of "admitting" their sexual passivity as did Lows, Highs seemed inordinately proud of their prowess or popularity. AFLS did not appreciate *this* frankness—instead, they condemned these "crude and unsocialized sex impulses" (pp. 396, 426, cf. p. 952).

About Face

We have seen the critique to which AFLS subjected the responses of Highs. Now let us briefly examine, as a comparison, the kid gloves with which they treated the answers of Lows. The contemporary reader is amazed at the frequency with which Low respondents gave answers that seem bizarrely inappropriate, as they took a wide variety of questions as opportunities to demonstrate their good, liberal, and tolerant perspective to the analysts, producing responses regarding the elimination of racial prejudice or the fight against fascism no matter what the question. For example, in response to the question on hard-to-control desires, Mack gave the simple response "anger," while Larry gave the response "When someone is persecuted unjustly, or to see a Negro serviceman endure unjust discrimination and prejudice" (note that there is nothing here having to do with desires or self-control). Low answers such as "To lash out at those people who voice an attitude of racial discrimination or an attitude of a dishonest intellect" and "Telling people about fallacies in our economic system" were taken neither as projection nor as self-promotion, but as indicative of (and coded as) "a principled opposition to fascism, militarism, discrimination, suppression, exploitation, autocracy, and the like" (pp. 551, 593).

Not only were AFLS uninterested in criticizing the motivation of the Lows, they positively went out of their way to give face even to those Lows who had not attempted such a self-presentation. For example, discussing mentally disturbed Lows, some of whom during the war "suffered acute conflict about the problem of participation," AFLS emphasized that "this was not primarily because of fear of physical injury or death but because of ideological reasons and a horror of being forced to kill." But their "illustrative case" sought psychological help because of anxiety and "several fears—of the dark, of physical injury, and of graveyards and mental institutions." His political ideas, in contrast, were "quite uncertain" (p. 953). The differential interpretation therefore functioned, as Goffman (1959) might say, as a protective strategy extended to those taken to be part of AFLS' "team."

Indeed, one of the characteristics AFLS repeatedly mentioned in their analysis of the Lows was their self-insight—that is, their capacity and willingness to enter as *co-researchers*, not subjects. Nor were AFLS misled to see the Lows as potential co-researchers (cf. Rothman & Lichter, 1978), since later research found the F-scale's predictive power to be *highest* when it came to an item AFLS never

considered—namely, actual willingness to participate in social research: Lows are much more likely to volunteer for psychology experiments than are Highs (Rosen, 1951). AFLS might have saved a great deal of expense in creating an indirect test of the "bad" personality by simply asking, "Who will come with me into the next room?"[6]

I began with the somewhat tired joke about the two classes of persons, one of which divides persons into two classes. But there is perhaps a more apposite division: Kingsley Amis, in his wicked satire on academic life *Lucky Jim*, has a character speak of the "two great classes" of persons in the world, "those I like" and "those I do not like." For AFLS, it is clear that these translated into Lows and Highs, and that this affected their strategy of interpretation. Little thought was given to a critique of those answers that seemed likable, and no credence was given to those from the unlikable.[7]

That Was Then, This Is Now

The serious flaws in AFLS' research strike us as so obvious that we would assume that there is no danger of their repetition. But even though times have changed, and methodological rigor has improved, social scientists still need to deal with problems that objectively involve high stakes, deep divides, and wide injustice. We are also likely to feel that we are in the possession of decent templates for at least the beginnings of an approach to these problems, and are hence likely to be more skeptical of the associative patterns put forward by those whom we deem wrong (if not morally implicated) than we are of those with whom we tend to agree. AFLS embraced psychoanalytic theory, but such theory is not necessary to dismiss the words of some (but not all) of our respondents, because we (quite reasonably) believe that not all responses *can* be taken at face value. But if our approach shares AFLS' attempt to "catch" one type in a morally loaded typology, then no methodological sophistication will necessarily protect us from asymmetric—and hence flawed—analyses.

To demonstrate this, I now turn to a contemporary analysis of authoritarianism, certainly the most credible accumulation of findings to date, namely the careful (and always wonderfully written) work of Bob Altemeyer. Although Altemeyer has made none of the methodological errors of AFLS and has produced many solid empirical findings, his overall interpretations still necessarily suffer from the

[6] The close link between the interpretation of responses and "team feeling" is humorously demonstrated in the treatment of responses to the projective question "What great people do you admire most?": Answers falling into the category "Social scientists, liberal-radical political figures" were considered a Low response. Although this is no less sensible than any of the other codings, it would be no worse to include a Likert "feeling thermometer" on Theodor Adorno, or to simply ask "How much do you like me?"

[7] Compare Christie's (1993, p. 88) fascinating admission of his ability to categorize subjects as Highs versus Lows on the basis of which ones he liked.

problems that arise when one fuses a nominalist definition of types to a realist interpretation, given that one has a theoretical interest in only one of the two types. Once again, the board is set in such a way that the winners and losers are clear from the start.

Altemeyer's Starting Points

Altemeyer's criticism of AFLS' procedures—and their Freudian justifications for differential interpretation—is among the best in the literature (see Altemeyer, 1981, pp. 10, 25, 36–39, 48, 52–55, 141, 259; 1988, pp. 136–137). Yet Altemeyer (1988, p. 329; 1996, p. 45) himself starts from a duly modified version of AFLS' " 'pre-Fascist' personality," restricted to the combination of authoritarian aggression, authoritarian submission, and conventionalism ["I have spent over twenty-five years trying to understand what Nevitt Sanford and his associates first uncovered because, like them, I suspect 'It *can* happen here' " (1996, pp. 282–283)].

To this end, Altemeyer has produced a balanced scale—the right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) scale—that performs far better than the fatally flawed F-scale, and he uses this to categorize respondents into High and Low types, as well as to look at the correlation of RWA score and various other responses. As a result of his careful work, Altemeyer has produced some extremely interesting and convincing findings that seem beyond reasonable criticism. For one, High undergraduates have more trouble remembering material they have heard (at least when the topic is one that they may not like very much), even though their grades tend not to be lower than those of Lows. Highs tend to be influenced in their judgment of someone else's morality by how similar that person is to them in terms of responses to the RWA scale, although Lows are not. Further, RWA scores correlate with sentences given to prisoners in hypothetical vignettes, and with the voltage given in shock experiments. Finally, there is some intriguing evidence that students who think their parents tried to teach them that the world was a dangerous place have higher RWA scores (Altemeyer, 1981, pp. 201–202; 1988, pp. 108, 146, 159; 1996, pp. 94–95, 140).

Despite these solid findings—and there are others—Altemeyer's work still suffers from some fundamental interpretive weaknesses; yes, Highs give longer sentences to suspects in hypothetical vignettes—but what exactly are they "High" in, and *why* do they give these longer sentences? The data do not give us all the answers, and many of the most important claims Altemeyer makes follow from his theoretical assumptions. Let us examine their results.

First of all, Altemeyer begins with a continuous scale; like AFLS, he arbitrarily considers those on one end to *be* right-wing authoritarians as opposed to those on the other end or in the middle, a nominalist definition of types. Of course, the actual data come in the form of a continuum, and Altemeyer (1981, p. 152; 1988, p. 4; 1996, p. 9) admits that Highs are not absolute in, say, their "submission" to authorities. But instead of stressing the continuum linking Lows to Highs, Altemeyer tries to

produce a continuum linking Highs to Nazis and Fascists. He comments that Highs "would be quite susceptible to the flattering proposition that they are members of a master race. Once you believe that, you cock the pistol for 'final solutions' to the 'problem of the inferiors' " (1988, p. 185). Similarly, the high RWA scores among some Canadian and American legislators lead him to argue that "Some (successful!) politicians in both these democracies appear strongly committed to an authoritarian ideology akin to fascism" (1988, p. 257). Finally, he even goes so far as to argue that "it would outrage many conservatives who condemned the Oklahoma City bombing to be told they are more different in *degree* than in *kind* from the neo-Nazis out to overthrow the American government. But the evidence in this book will show the similarities" (1996, p. 5).

If Altemeyer's RWA scale asked persons whether they supported policies or ideologies associated with Fascism or Nazism, this would be one thing. But only a few of the 34 items in the 1996 scale seem related to anything remotely like fascism (e.g., "What our country really needs is a strong, determined leader who will crush evil, and take us back to our true path"); others have to do with embracing free thinkers and radicals, with gender ideology and sexual morality, with respect for authorities, and with valuing diversity as opposed to fixedness of truth. So where does Altemeyer get these dramatic ideas regarding the prevalence of Fascist and Nazi ideology? It is because his most fundamental model is, despite his data and despite his better common sense, not a continuous one (more to less authoritarian), but a discrete typology: Some people just *are* authoritarians. Thus, he makes blanket statements such as "High RWAs . . . are indifferent to human rights issues," or that Highs have a latent "attitude, a state of mind, a willingness to see democratic institutions destroyed, which in some people may even be a desire." Although he rejects AFLS' psychodynamic theory, he still thinks that Highs have a qualitatively different personality structure ("We are digging deeper into the authoritarian's personality") (Altemeyer, 1981, p. 251; 1988, p. 6; 1996, pp. 8, 22; cf. 1988, pp. 127, 165 for other examples).

Accordingly, differences in degree are often turned into differences in kind. For example, when students are told about the results of Milgram's experiments on authority, and are asked who would be to blame for the shocks, only 62% of the Highs blame the authority figure, as opposed to 71% of the Lows (Altemeyer, 1996, p. 22). Yet it seems noteworthy that the majority of "authoritarians" blame the authority figure, and that not all Lows (anti-authoritarians) blame him. It is hard to see how such differences can support the stark interpretations Altemeyer often makes. Of course, it is always easier to discuss social scientific results in terms of types than it is to constantly qualify one's remarks with "tendency," "proportion," and "probability." Yet in this case, the presence or absence of such qualification seems of central theoretical importance.

This is because Altemeyer is attempting to use his differences in degree to support a typological model. He even, like AFLS, illustrates his theory via a contrast between an archetypal Low and an archetypal High, cutely named Lou

and Hugh.[8] But these are wholly imaginary constructs—unlike *TAP*'s Mack, Hugh is not really there to present evidence that confounds Altemeyer's (1996, p. 81) scenarios. In sum, to move from differences in degree (even if statistically significant) to differences in kind, Altemeyer seems to rely on the sort of blanket assertions that undermined AFLS' program, although any resulting distortions will be less obvious.

Like AFLS, Altemeyer proceeds in this way because he believes that his test has "caught" real right-wing authoritarians. Is this necessarily the case? First, by intentionally writing items that tap more than one of the key factors (submission, aggression, conventionalism), Altemeyer (1996, p. 320) makes it impossible to test whether or not they do congeal as a "type" or whether they are more independent of one another. Altemeyer (1981, p. 188; 1996, p. 15) seems to think that the psychometric properties of the scale disprove such a scenario, because he argues that these statistics demonstrate that the scale is measuring "one thing." But if, say, the presence of all three traits was needed to answer any item positively, there would be high intercorrelation between items even though there is no trait at all, simply a bundle of three traits.[9]

More important, inspection of the items suggests that whatever the covariation matrix, it is far from clear as to what traits the items tap. For example, Altemeyer considers "conventionalism" a key factor, and part of his discussion of this trait focuses on sex norms (which occupy a fair portion of the scale). He considers a stance against premarital sex "conventional" (although, of course, all indications are the opposite, and this is today an unconventional stance for college students), as opposed to the more obvious "morally conservative." Other indicators of "conventionalism" have to do with atheists, nudist camps, the Bible, and rules regarding modesty (Altemeyer, 1988, p. 64; 1996, p. 11). It is not clear why Altemeyer is convinced that the attitudes he evokes are "conventional" as opposed to

[8] Interestingly, the gendering here seems to follow AFLS' assumptions. As Young-Bruehl (1996, pp. 112–113) pointed out, AFLS clearly saw the authoritarian as a "he," even though most of their research population was female. Although their exemplary Low case, Larry, was a male, the only example provided by AFLS of a "genuine liberal" was a 21-year-old "girl" who, while "politically naïve like the majority of our college women," "is a handsome brunette with dark flashing eyes, who exudes temperament and vitality. She has none of the pretty-pretty femininity so frequently seen in high subjects, and would probably scorn the little feminine wiles and schemes practiced by such women. On the contrary, she is extremely frank and outspoken in manner, and in build she is athletic. One senses in her a very passionate nature and so strong a desire to give intensely of herself in all her relations, that she must experience difficulty in restraining herself within the bounds of conventionality" (pp. 782–783). She actually strikes me as quite similar to Altemeyer's Lou (with "her explorations, her experiments [that] have proved largely benign and fulfilling," according to Altemeyer) in her winning personality, although AFLS' "genuine liberal's" actual words demonstrate that she was a superficial, materialistic racist who judged people by their skin color.

[9] Further, no factor analysis can be counted on to separate these traits, because they are deliberately blended in each and every item.

part of Ray's (1988b) "old-fashioned" morality; it is also unclear why conventionalism is really a part of authoritarianism in the first place.

Further, Altemeyer's labeling of one trait as "aggression" confuses his theoretical claim as to the *causes* of certain responses and the content of those responses themselves. It is one thing to argue that rejecting the idea that freedom of speech extends to revolutionaries is motivated by the desire to aggress against those made vulnerable by authorities; it is another thing to *define* it as such. Similarly, he speaks of investigating the reasons for the "authoritarian's aggression toward homosexuals," although all he really has is general anti-homosexual attitudes (1988, p. 175) (only three of the 12 items involve anything like aggression or punitiveness).

This tendency to mix nominalist procedures and realist interpretations culminates in a process whereby Altemeyer puts words in the mouths of his respondents, and then uses these words to interpret the "psychology" of the respondents. Thus, in some experiments, Altemeyer (1981, pp. 233–234) asks students to sentence various offenders, and then asks them "How bad (repulsive, disgusting) do you consider the criminal in this case to be?" He finds that RWA score correlates with this measure of how "bad" the criminal was ($r = .48$), which is a solid finding. But he goes on to argue, "What is striking here is the tendency to see 'common lawbreakers' almost as a lower form of life ('repulsive, disgusting')," as if the quoted words were those of Highs. But the words were his, and he left no option for those who thought the criminals were bad but understood badness in a different way. Similarly, Altemeyer wonders "What is behind this absorption with, and of, the conventional?" (among authoritarians, that is); but of course, it is Altemeyer who is so absorbed with the conventional that he has made it an intrinsic part of his concept of right-wing authoritarianism: Highs have simply indicated a greater disapproval of nudist camps and premarital sex.

We have seen that Altemeyer, despite his careful construction of a decently performing scale, has tied the resulting categories to a theoretically loaded typology. Moreover, like AFLS, his typology is asymmetric—his theory tells him a lot about the Highs and little about the Lows, as Altemeyer (1988, pp. 262–263) admirably admits: "I had no preconception about what the other end of the dimension would be, and I have simply characterized low scorers as 'unauthoritarians' or 'Lows.' " As a result, most of his experiments are ones that do well at "pushing the buttons" of those who fall into the High end of the scale. Because he has a less well-developed understanding of the Lows (seeing them simply as "fair-minded, evenhanded, tolerant, nonaggressive persons" and "good democratic citizens"), even his noteworthy attempts to compare Low and High responses fall short. As a result, many of his analyses are asymmetric and biased, despite his efforts to the contrary. I first give some stark examples of Altemeyer's assumptions determining his interpretations, and then subtler examples.

Imputations of Inconsistency

Altemeyer's confusion between his mental prototype and his respondents leads him to impute wild inconsistency to the Highs, since he finds that Highs are more likely than Lows to say that they would help the government eliminate right-wing authoritarians—that is, assumes Altemeyer, themselves. But for his subjects, Altemeyer (1996, p. 30) defined right-wing authoritarians as "people who are so submissive to authority, so authoritarian aggressive, and so conventional that they may pose a threat to democratic rule." If he had more reasonably defined right-wing authoritarians as "those psychology undergraduates in the highest 25th percentile of the score resulting from those tests you always fill out," it strikes me as extremely unlikely that Highs would help in their elimination. Altemeyer's *assumption* that Highs may pose a threat to democratic rule—an assumption undemonstrated by his research—gets turned into a *definition* for the Highs.

And just like AFLS, Altemeyer (1996, p. 142) uses these definitions of *his* to impute inconsistency to Highs, although there is no reason to believe that they share these (non-obvious) definitions: "Authoritarian minds challenge our theories of cognitive consistency. For [people with high RWA scores], with all their inconsistencies, double standards, and blind spots make a mockery of the notion that people will feel 'dissonance' or 'imbalance' if their ideas do not fit together properly." But such claims require a benchmark as to what constitutes consistency, and this benchmark is supplied by Altemeyer (1996, pp. 115, 282), who simply declares that freedom and equality should not be separated, and that a double standard in gender ideology is wrong. Those who disagree with either of these (which would seem to include Tocqueville in the first instance and cultural feminists in the second) must have some "special kind of mind."

Comparisons

Were these the only problems, Altemeyer's rhetorical excesses could be removed from the work without too much alteration to the basic structure. Yet the problems go deeper, in that they affect many of his strong findings. That is because Altemeyer (unlike AFLS) has tried to come up with experiments that will fairly compare Lows to Highs in a number of respects. Yet the asymmetric nature of his typological construction leads to an asymmetry in the accumulation of findings, and hence a biased conclusion. Because the basic research design is set up to "catch" Highs, Altemeyer is not inspired to create reasonable counterexamples that would "catch" Lows. As a result, the psychodynamics that Altemeyer *does* demonstrate to exist among Highs are largely *assumed* not to be present among Lows.

For example, Altemeyer (1996, pp. 116–117) begins with a solid finding, that there is an asymmetry in Highs' feelings as to the legitimacy of entanglement of state with religion—almost twice as many see it as legitimate when Canadians teach Christianity as when an Arab nation teaches Islam. Lows, as might be expected,

have no asymmetry here, because they have no substantive interest in evangelism. But it stretches credulity to imagine that there are no issues on which the Lows could be equally tormented. For example, cultural liberals may have a similar struggle over whether it is acceptable to criticize—and perhaps sanction—nations with different cultural traditions for their violation of Western norms (for example, pertaining to the treatment of women), and if not, why it was acceptable for Northern whites or Canadians or Africans to criticize Southern whites' racist "culture."

In fact, Altemeyer (1996, p. 104) himself provides evidence that the "irrationality" of Highs is not a general psychological trait, but only comes into play when their buttons are pushed. In his test as to the ability of respondents to critically evaluate evidence, he finds vanishingly small relations between RWA score and gullibility for items not involving Christianity (e.g., ESP, ancient astronauts, reincarnation, ghosts), but "when it came to 'evidence' connected to Highs' religious beliefs, their critical thinking took a hike. They might have been as skeptical as others about ghosts, the Bermuda Triangle and ESP, but to their minds common legends about a big flood *proved* the story of Noah." If Lows cared as much about the Bermuda Triangle as Highs do about the Bible, this might uncover a similar susceptibility among Lows, but this equivalence is doubtful. More promising items, such as "the fact that separately raised identical twins frequently have very different IQ scores PROVES that intelligence is not hereditary," where the temptation to make an illogical jump would be greater, were not asked.

In sum, the asymmetric nature of the basic enterprise leads to the sorts of illogical imputations of illogicality that marred AFLS' work, despite Altemeyer's best intentions and his reasonable research designs. Further, Altemeyer (1988, pp. 111–113) has explicitly raised this consideration, namely that perhaps Highs aren't so, say, aggressive to those they don't like, "but only appear so because investigators such as I keep trooping Highs' favorite targets before samples tested in paper-and-pencil shooting galleries. Perhaps Lows would be just as hostile if we paraded a pantheon of their own devils before them." At this point, he provides an exemplary attempt to produce a truly symmetric case, in which both Highs and Lows judge their "own" side and the "other" side in the same vignette (gay rights protestor at anti-perversion rally, or vice versa). In this case, he still finds the tendency to favor the friendly side greater among Highs than Lows, a result similar to that which I cited above as one of Altemeyer's strong findings, namely that Highs are more influenced in their evaluations by homophily than Lows, who are—as far as we can tell—fairer. But similarly successful reversals were not used to confirm the other key findings.

As Altemeyer himself wrote, "To 'catch' Lows being more hypocritical than Highs, you have to turn the tables and put them in conflict over something they believe in. I have been searching for a situation that would do this" (1996, p. 120).

That this search was unsuccessful, however, may be due more to the strength of Altemeyer's convictions than to the immunity of Lows to such human foibles.[10]

Were he able to question his assumptions, some of his most theoretically important findings would disappear, especially those having to do with self-knowledge. For example, Altemeyer (1988, pp. 186–187) asked subjects, suppose under a truth drug you said, "I know I have a tendency to hurt people. I am often looking for permission, or good reasons, or excuses, to attack someone, with words or actions. And when I do it, it feels good." Who would accept that this information is true, and who would disown the admission? Altemeyer found no correlation between RWA score and response, and concluded "either Highs do not believe they are particularly aggressive, or else they know but will not admit it." That is, because he has operationalized "aggressiveness" in terms of prison sentences and shock values—and now ignores information about aggressive fantasies, which points in another direction (1988, pp. 139–144)—he *assumes* that Highs really are "particularly" aggressive, and then reinterprets the data as if he had asked persons whether they were "particularly" aggressive, or "above the mean." The actual question, however, was framed so that *all* respondents should assume that the truth is that they are aggressive, whatever their usual behavior (and, because all persons have some aggression, such a drug-induced revelation could not be dismissed by anyone). But to Altemeyer, the question was a different one, formally parallel to the old courtroom gag, "Have you stopped beating your wife yet?," and it is clear that it was designed only to "catch" Highs.

For another, even starker, example, Altemeyer (1988) asked, "How *prejudiced*, how *bigoted* do you think you are against the minority groups mentioned above, compared with the other students serving in this experiment?" (p. 187). Altemeyer thus gave the Highs no option to "tell it their way"—they are damned if they do and damned if they don't. But he never thought to ask Lows the kind of question a maliciously disposed High researcher might, such as "How *neurotically insecure*, how *knee-jerk* do you think your basic attitudes toward minority groups are?" As Altemeyer himself wrote, "The lesson was clear: if you describe right-wing authoritarianism to a group of people, most of the Highs in the group will think you are talking about somebody else" (1988, p. 316). But this should be taken as a critique of the typologizers, not the typologized.

In sum, like AFLS, Altemeyer has set up the board in such a way that the game is a *fait accompli*. Because *his* definitions are the ones that count, those who disagree must have something wrong with them. Those who oppose Canada's 1981

[10] Indeed, even when Altemeyer (1996, p. 99) turns self-critical, the resulting criticisms are not those that could be used to gain insight into this asymmetric approach. Although he asks himself, quite seriously, "how come I do not realize my own compartmentalized thinking?", the only example that comes to mind is his *sexist* thinking—that is, thinking that is associated with high RWA scores—and not any of the assumptions that guide his interpretive scheme, and which might be the basis for turning the tables on Lows.

Charter of Rights and Freedoms *cannot* be democratic, because to oppose increased civil liberties is always anti-democratic (Altemeyer, 1988, p. 271). But, of course, a High researcher could probably define democracy in a populist sense to demonstrate that (due to his strong commitment to the civil liberties of dissenters who flaunt their rejection of conventional moral standards) it was *Altemeyer* who had a "shallow commitment to democracy." Surely we can learn nothing on the basis of such definitions. Yet these flow from the asymmetric typology with which Altemeyer began.

What Do We Know?

In sum, Altemeyer has found out a great deal about how people with high RWA scores act, but he has not made a reasonable comparison to people with low RWA scores. This should not be taken to imply that a good comparison, by definition, is one that would find no differences between Highs and Lows. People are different in many ways—some of them really are gentler than others, some more honest, etc.—and it would be unscientific to demand that no such differences appear on average in this case. But before we can make a real comparison, we need to find whatever scale it is that "Lows" are *high* on; only then would we know what buttons to push, and whether there were a few such buttons for all Lows or whether they are a more diverse category.

Further, although we know that Highs and Lows differ, it is not clear what being High as opposed to Low is all about. Altemeyer argues that he is measuring right-wing authoritarianism. But the most obvious alternatives are that he is measuring either political conservatism or social/moral conservatism, or both. And here Altemeyer must walk a tightrope, demonstrating that his RWA measure is closely correlated with both of these, but not reducible to either. Altemeyer has, consequently, gone back and forth as to the overlap between right-wing authoritarianism and conservatism, at times arguing that they are totally different and at other times basically the same (see Altemeyer, 1981, pp. 202f; 1988, p. 8; 1996, p. 48). But his evidence is less ambiguous. In particular, upon administering his scale to professional politicians, he finds large differences between persons in different parties, and *extremely* high consistencies (interitem correlations) within the scale. This strongly suggests that rather than drawing deep-seated personality responses from legislators, these items are evoking the party line. Indeed, as Altemeyer himself pointed out regarding the Manitoba legislators from the (left) NDP, "these lawmakers who strongly agreed that citizens should not trust their governments, should not submit blindly, should be ready to protest against injustice, and so on *were* the government in Manitoba and had been for 10 of the past 14 years." Consequently, Altemeyer (1988, pp. 243–245, 256) here stressed that the dimension he was tapping "appears to be a more precise, and certainly more operational, definition of what the basic 'left/right' dimension really is." But this is to imply

that he is really examining a bipolar political continuum and not "the psychology of right-wing authoritarians."

Finally, the asymmetry of Altemeyer's orientation may not simply have affected his interpretations, it may have also affected the responses, if students were aware of what constituted the "locally" desirable answers. In particular, this might account for some (but not necessarily all) of the findings Altemeyer (1996, p. 141) sees as indicating selective High inattention to "bad news" about themselves. Altemeyer asked half his students to imagine an experiment showing that they were *more* prejudiced than others in the class, while the other half were asked to imagine that they learned they were *less* prejudiced. He then asked whether the students would want to see the results. Among Lows, 76% wanted to see the results when they were more prejudiced (i.e., bad news) and 71% wanted to hear the good news that they were less prejudiced. In contrast, among Highs, while 74% wanted the good news, only 56% wanted the bad news. But given that it is Altemeyer who decides what constitutes "prejudice," and that the Highs may have learned that his definitions [according to which conservatives are not conservatives because they do not wish to "conserve" civil liberties (Altemeyer, 1988, p. 273)] do not have much to do with theirs, I find it surprising that a majority were at all interested in more scientific findings regarding their shortcomings.

Moreover, it is worth considering that we know rather little about how the climate of moral judgment may affect tasks intended to measure cognitive processing. Brown (1953) presented strong evidence suggesting that at least some of the supposed cognitive correlates of authoritarianism were contextual [in brief, when the pressure was off, they relaxed (cf. Christie, 1993)]; recent experimental work by Lovaglia, Lucas, Houser, Thye, and Markovsky (1998) confirms that responses can be significantly altered by the tension aroused when one fears that test results may be used against one.

In sum, Altemeyer's work, although methodologically rigorous in substance, still suffers from the same interpretive flaws that marked *TAP*. Despite Altemeyer's (1996, p. 303) conviction that any such bias will be uncovered by later researchers, it seems reasonable that if the same basic flaws are present 50 years after *TAP*, they will not disappear of their own accord. I will be the first to admit that this is a selective presentation of Altemeyer's work (although I believe it is a fair one), work that I consider to be a valuable contribution to political psychology. Despite my emphasis on where he goes from differences in degree to differences in kind, Altemeyer (e.g., 1996, p. 112) himself frequently gives reminders to the readers that Highs and Lows are only "somewhat different" and not "completely different." It is because Altemeyer displays such methodological care and common sense that his work can demonstrate the fundamental nature of the interpretive asymmetries that arise from the use of a morally loaded typology, and the strength of the temptations that come with these asymmetries.

Further, even if we *were* to see the balanced replication of all these tests constructed by a maliciously disposed High researcher, I believe that many (though

not all) of his findings would prove robust. But the force of Altemeyer's work comes not from the findings themselves, which may be interpreted in a number of ways, but in the interpretive model he hangs on them. And it is this model, based on an asymmetric typology, that must be treated as suspect.

Conclusions

Are two beliefs inconsistent? Does a political position espoused by a set of respondents follow from a value they hold, or do they claim to hold some value merely to legitimate their position? These and many other questions are continually at the heart of political psychology, and any answer, whether or not it can be seen as related to explicit political values or to psychological theories held by the analyst, will involve an assessment of the "integrity" of the subjects. But as Kurzman (1991) has shown, when analysts like and identify with respondents, they accept their self-explanations, and when they do not, they explain them away.

In many cases, we are positively called to make such judgments. One obvious example is the racial attitudes of white Americans. Experimental evidence leaves us no doubt that strong social desirability effects lead a significant portion of whites to understate their dislike of blacks in general and affirmative action in particular (Sniderman & Carmines, 1997). Hence, any direct attempt to measure racism will not "catch" all the racists; accordingly, there have been various proposals for tests of "new" or "symbolic" racism (e.g., Kinder & Sears, 1981; McConahay & Hough, 1976). Experimental evidence suggests that these measures can indeed pick up durable orientations to blacks that an explicit measure of "old-fashioned" racism would miss (see McConahay, 1986, for a review). And, while space forbids a real examination, it strikes me that the internal validity is rather good for the interpretation of some such scales (but not all) as tapping generalized antipathy toward blacks, at least in the public sphere (for a recent example, see Sears, van Laar, Carrillo, & Kosterman, 1997). But if—as we are often tempted—we try to use these to "catch" racists, we end up dismissing what the respondents themselves say about their beliefs, ignoring them when they claim to be individualists, laissez-faire liberals, or what have you.

It is worth noting that early uses of the concept of symbolic racism were quite explicit in distinguishing it from generic hostility to blacks; indeed, McConahay and Hough (1976) defined it as a reaction to the extension of the civil rights movement, an extension that seemed illegitimate to those holding the "American civil Protestant" ethic—more or less the same argument that Sniderman and Carmines (1997) have made. Indeed, there is broad agreement that opposition to many legislative efforts to help blacks is motivated by both political values and generalized antipathy—the question revolves on how we interpret this, whether political values and antipathy to blacks are necessarily interconnected, and whether we should take seriously other considerations that respondents may raise having to do with their perception of self-interest (Bobo, 1983; 1988, p. 105). Theories of

symbolic racism, while differing in their particulars, answer that there is a fundamental *fusion* of this racist antipathy and traditional values.

As a result, the theory has come in for some rather strong criticism. Although it has occasionally led to the attribution of such antipathy to blacks on the basis of little more than opposition to certain policies, the theory has not (as opponents sometimes suggest) simply claimed that symbolic racists are bigots disguising their racism under a cloak of values (see Sears, 1988, pp. 66, 70), but has instead postulated a coherent, and in principle testable, fusion between the two.[11] Why, then, is there a problem?

The problem arises, as might now come as no surprise, from the asymmetric definition of a morally suspect type, a combination of nominalist procedures and realist interpretations, and the agonistic attempt to trap "Highs." Like Altemeyer and AFLS, Kinder and Sears (1981) began by assuming that deviation from their own prescriptions must be explained, and explained away as a psychological property, not a serious argument ["The signs of white *resistance* to change in the racial status quo are unmistakable, but how might such *resistance* be understood in *psychological* terms?" (p. 414, emphasis added)].

Like Altemeyer, Kinder and Sears claimed the existence of such a psychological property, but this leads to the difficulty of demonstrating that symbolic racism is neither the same thing as old-fashioned racism nor unrelated to it. Like Altemeyer, they tended to combine rigorous studies with sweeping theoretical claims that were too deeply burrowed into their definitions to be testable. Like Altemeyer, they established the existence of their theoretically central trait largely by defining the phenomenon in advance, by writing "questions that deliberately mix racist sentiments and traditional American values, particularly individualism" (Kinder, 1986, p. 156; cf. Sniderman & Tetlock, 1986b, p. 181). Even though this makes sense given a deductive theory-testing framework, it is a practice that makes it a priori impossible to find some people whose motivations are based solely on values, and others whose opinions are based solely on racism (cf. Sniderman & Tetlock, 1986a, p. 132). Indeed, the presence of *either* type in the population will tend to be taken as evidence in *favor* of the claim that there is currently an inseparable combination of the two.

Finally, in a few cases, analysts have put the cart before the horse and assumed that opposition to certain programs itself measures symbolic racism. Although it is reasonable to believe that anti-black sentiment is sufficient to lead to opposition to, say, enforced busing, it is less reasonable to propose [as Sears (1988, p. 57) seems to] that it is *necessary*. In so doing, the researcher substitutes definition for

[11] Kinder and Sears clearly intended to be laying out a supportable theory of the development of specifically symbolic (and not masked, subtle, or indirect) racism, in which the response of a non-black to some policy designed to aid blacks would be mediated by an abstract symbol of blacks in the public sphere, and the dispositions held to that symbol. However, because no work specifically focused on the creation of this symbol or demonstrated its existence, attention shifted from the "symbolic" half to the "racism" half (cf. Kinder, 1986, p. 155).

analyses by taking the definition of symbolic racism as, for example, opposition to affirmative action and enforced desegregation in education, to dismiss the justification of these positions by their adherents as "rationalizations of the negative feeling about blacks lying behind such policy preferences." Such dismissal is fundamentally based in the researcher privileging his own judgment of the situation, according to which the respondents are simply exhibiting "indifference . . . to many of the facts" (Sears, 1988, p. 74).[12] But as we have seen, ignoring what respondents say is a dangerous game, precisely because it is one the researcher always wins.

Fifty years later, the unsound nature of *TAP* is so blatant that this essay almost seems unsporting, yet it originally was taken quite seriously. Although methodological critiques were made from the earliest days, I have seen no categorical dismissals. Presumably, there was sufficient broad agreement that there were "bad guys" out there who deserved no quarter, and the dismissal that seems minimally appropriate by today's standards appeared excessive then. Might we, then, also be in the middle of constructing research that, 50 years hence, will only shame us?

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Charles Kurzman, four anonymous reviewers, and the editors for their comments and critique that have led to the improvement of this paper. It also seems fitting to acknowledge here the influence of my teacher Herbert Hyman, who insisted that true tolerance is a matter of common sense and human decency, not philosophy. Correspondence concerning this article should be sent to John Levi Martin, Department of Sociology, Rutgers—The State University of New Jersey, 54 Joyce Kilmer Avenue, Piscataway, NJ 08854-8045. E-mail: jlmartin@rci.rutgers.edu

REFERENCES

Adorno, T. W., Frenkel-Brunswik, E., Levinson, D. J., & Sanford, R. N. (1950). *The authoritarian personality*. New York: Harper and Row.

Altemeyer, B. (1981). *Right-wing authoritarianism*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.

Altemeyer, B. (1988). *Enemies of freedom: Understanding right-wing authoritarianism*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Altemeyer, B. (1996). *The authoritarian specter*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Baars, J., & Scheepers, P. (1993). Theoretical and methodological foundations of the authoritarian personality. *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences, 29,* 345–353.

[12] Furthermore, as critics pointed out, the same variables that could be used to tap symbolic racism were at other times seen as effects of symbolic racism. This suggests that the term "symbolic racism" could be dropped from the analysis without loss of explanatory power, and that it is simply tapping an extremely proximate ideology as opposed to a deep aspect of personality.

Billig, M. (1977). The new social psychology and fascism. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 7,* 393–432.

Bobo, L. (1983). Whites' opposition to busing: Symbolic racism or realistic group conflict? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 45,* 1196–1210.

Bobo, L. (1988). Group conflict, prejudice, and the paradox of contemporary racial attitudes. In P. A. Katz & D. A. Taylor (Eds.), *Eliminating racism: Profiles in controversy* (pp. 85–114). New York: Plenum.

Brown, R. W. (1953). A determinant of the relationship between rigidity and authoritarianism. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 48,* 469–476.

Chancer, L. S. (1992). *Sadomasochism in everyday life*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Christie, R. (1954). Authoritarianism re-examined. In R. Christie & M. Jahoda (Eds.), *Studies in the scope and method of "The authoritarian personality"* (pp. 123–196). Glencoe, IL: Free Press.

Christie, R. (1993). Some experimental approaches to authoritarianism: I. A retrospective perspective on the *Einstellung* (rigidity?) paradigm. In W. Stone, G. Lederer, & R. Christie (Eds.), *Strength and weakness* (pp. 70–98). New York: Springer-Verlag.

Dorn, D. S., & Long, G. L. (1972, May). Sociology and the radical right: A critical analysis. *American Sociologist,* 8–9.

Duckitt, J. (1983a). Authoritarianism and adjustment in an authoritarian culture. *Journal of Social Psychology, 121,* 211–212.

Duckitt, J. (1983b). Culture, class, personality, and authoritarianism among white South Africans. *Journal of Social Psychology, 121,* 191–199.

Durrheim, K. (1997). Theoretical conundrum: The politics and science of theorizing authoritarian cognition. *Political Psychology, 18,* 625–647.

Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York: Anchor.

Heaven, P. C. (1983). Individual vs. intergroup explanations of prejudice among Afrikaners. *Journal of Social Psychology, 121,* 201–210.

Heaven, P. C. (1984). Afrikaner patriotism today: The role of attitudes and personality. *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism, 11,* 133–139.

Hopf, C. (1987). Zur Aktualität der Untersuchungen zur "autoritären Persönlichkeit." *Zeitschrift für Sozialisationsforschung und Erziehungssoziologie, 7,* 162–177.

Hyman, H. H., & Sheatsley, P. B. (1954). "The authoritarian personality"—A methodological critique. In R. Christie & M. Jahoda (Eds.), *Studies in the scope and method of "The authoritarian personality"* (pp. 51–123). Glencoe, IL: Free Press.

Kinder, D. R. (1986). The continuing American dilemma: White resistance to racial change 40 years after Myrdal. *Journal of Social Issues, 42,* 151–171.

Kinder, D. R., & Sears, D. O. (1981). Symbolic racism vs. threats to "the good life." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 40,* 414–431.

Kurzman, C. (1991). Convincing sociologists: Values and interests in the sociology of knowledge. In M. Burawoy (Ed.), *Ethnography unbound: Power and resistance in the modern metropolis* (pp. 250–268). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Lewis, C. A., & Maltby, J. (1995). Authoritarianism and projection. *Psychological Reports, 77,* 362.

Lichter, S. R., & Rothman, S. (1982). The radical personality: Social psychological correlates of new left ideology. *Political Behavior, 4,* 207–235.

Lovaglia, M. J., Lucas, J. W., Houser, J. A., Thye, S. R., & Markovsky, B. (1998). Status processes and mental ability test scores. *American Journal of Sociology, 103,* 195–228.

McConahay, J. B. (1986). Modern racism, ambivalence, and the modern racism scale. In J. F. Dovidio & S. L. Gaertner (Eds.), *Prejudice, discrimination, and racism* (pp. 91–125). New York: Academic Press.

McConahay, J. B., & Hough, J. C., Jr. (1976). Symbolic racism. *Journal of Social Issues, 32,* 23–45.

McFarland, S. G., Ageyev, V. S., & Abalakina-Paap, M. A. (1992). Authoritarianism in the former Soviet Union. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 63,* 1004–1010.

Murray, H. A. (1938). *Explorations in personality*. New York: Wiley.

Neel, R. G., Tzeng, O. C., & Baysal, C. (1983). Comparative studies of authoritarian-personality characteristics across culture, language, and methods. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 7,* 393–400.

Ray, J. J. (1984). Alternatives to the F scale in the measurement of authoritarianism: A catalog. *Journal of Social Psychology, 122,* 105–119.

Ray, J. J. (1985). The punitive personality. *Journal of Social Psychology, 125,* 329–333.

Ray, J. J. (1988a). Why the F scale predicts racism: A critical review. *Political Psychology, 9,* 671–679.

Ray, J. J. (1988b). Sexual liberation, old-fashioned outlook, and authoritarianism: A comment on Kelley. *Journal of Sex Research, 24,* 385–387.

Rosen, E. (1951). Differences between volunteers and non-volunteers for psychological studies. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 35,* 185–193.

Rothman, S., & Lichter, S. R. (1978). The case of the student left. *Social Research, 35,* 535–609.

Samelson, F. (1986). Authoritarianism from Berlin to Berkeley: On social psychology and history. *Journal of Social Issues, 42,* 191–208.

Sanford, N. (1986). A personal account of the study of authoritarianism: Comment on Samelson. *Journal of Social Issues, 42,* 209–214.

Sears, D. O. (1988). Symbolic racism. In P. A. Katz & D. A. Taylor (Eds.), *Eliminating racism: Profiles in controversy* (pp. 53–84). New York: Plenum.

Sears, D. O., van Laar, C., Carrillo, M., & Kosterman, R. (1997). Is it really racism? *Public Opinion Quarterly, 61,* 16–53.

Shils, E. A. (1954). Authoritarianism: "Right" and "left." In R. Christie & M. Jahoda (Eds.), *Studies in the scope and method of "The authoritarian personality"* (pp. 24–49). Glencoe, IL: Free Press.

Smith, D. N. (1996). The social construction of enemies: Jews and the representation of evil. *Sociological Theory, 14,* 203–240.

Smith, M. B. (1997). *The authoritarian personality*: A re-review 46 years later. *Political Psychology, 18,* 159–163.

Sniderman, P. M., & Carmines, E. G. (1997). *Reaching beyond race*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Sniderman, P. M., & Tetlock, P. E. (1986a). Symbolic racism: Problems of motive attribution in political analysis. *Journal of Social Issues, 42,* 129-150.

Sniderman, P. M., & Tetlock, P. E. (1986b). Reflections on American racism. *Journal of Social Issues, 42,* 173–187.

Stone, W., Lederer, G., & Christie, R. (Eds.) (1993). *Strength and weakness.* New York: Springer-Verlag.

Tetlock, P. E. (1994). Political psychology or politicized psychology: Is the road to scientific hell paved with good moral intentions? *Political Psychology, 15,* 509–529.

Titus, H. E., & Hollander, E. P. (1957). The California F scale in psychological research: 1950–1955. *Psychological Bulletin, 54,* 47–64.

Young-Bruehl, E. (1996). *The anatomy of prejudices.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.