

Authoritarianism Among Border Police Officers, Career Soldiers, and Airport Security Guards at the Israeli Border

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ABSTRACT. Several personality theories focusing on specific personality variables involved in career choice and job satisfaction are based on the assumption that individuals choose certain career choices because they believe that they may be able to meet their emotional needs (J. L. Holland, 1977). The author of this study investigated the personality traits of border police officers, career soldiers, and airport security guards in Israel. The participants were 160 men—40 border policemen, 40 career soldiers, 40 airport security guards, and 40 control participants—who filled out a demographic questionnaire and a Hebrew version of the right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) shortened scale (B. Altemeyer, personal communication, February 2000). The present hypothesis predicted that the RWA scores of border police officers would be the highest, followed by those of career soldiers, airport security guards, and control participants, in that order. Statistically significant differences in RWA scores occurred between these groups in the predicted order, with the exception of the career soldiers' RWA scores, which did not significantly differ from those of the airport security guards.

Key words: authoritarianism, authoritarian personality, personality

SEVERAL PERSONALITY THEORIES focusing on specific personality variables involved in career choice and job satisfaction are based on the assumption that individuals choose certain career choices because they believe that they may be able to meet their emotional needs (Holland, 1977). Roe (1956) found that family background and career choices are linked, suggesting that children whose parents were sensitive to their needs and maintained warm and satisfying relations with them choose people-oriented professions. According to Holland, there are six personality types—realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and

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conventional—and people of the same personality type tend to flock together and create a work environment that fits their type (e.g., artistic individuals create a work environment that rewards creative thinking and behavior). An individual usually has a combination of personality types (e.g., realistic–investigative, artistic–social). Therefore, individuals will probably consider occupations in more than one category.

Empirical evidence indicates that people of different professional sectors are characterized by different personality patterns (Tokar, Fischer, & Mezydlo-Subich, 1998). Hysterical individuals are attracted to literary and theatrical careers and greatly enjoy leisure activity that enables social interaction, use of intuition, and emotional and experiential expression. Obsessive individuals prefer professional and leisure activities and occupations in which technological skills are required and obsessive traits are rewarded. Engineers are highly obsessive, accountants are highly paranoid, theater and drama students are highly hysterical and narcissistic, and medical students are highly narcissistic (Silver & Malone, 1993). Engineering and hard-science students are also highly obsessive, art and social-science students are sociable and sensitive to sensory experiences, and accuracy is typical of hard-science students (Harris, 1993). Physicists are more introverted, reserved, cautious, and unsociable than are professionals in industry, research, or instruction (Wilson & Jackson, 1994). Ambition, need for achievement, and low affection are typical of marketing students (Matthews & Oddy, 1993). Three Israeli studies show that engineering and natural-science students are more authoritarian than psychology and philosophy students (Weller & Nadler, 1975); natural-science students are more authoritarian, religious, and right-wing than are social-science students (Rubinstein, 1997); and design students are significantly more creative and less authoritarian than are both behavioral-science and law students (Rubinstein, 2003).

Authoritarianism

Authoritarian personality describes a syndrome of conservative attitudes; religious, nationalistic, or attitudinal intolerance; inflexibility at the cognitive and emotional levels; and personality traits that stem from deep personal conflicts and are reflected in compulsiveness, inordinate recourse to defense mechanisms, and distorted satisfaction of repressed drives (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950). The aforementioned theorists of the syndrome have argued that people who tend to be influenced by fascist propaganda developed early childhood hostility for authority figures (parents) that could not be expressed under any circumstances. According to this theory, reaction formation effects a replacement of this hatred by love and by a tendency to conform to authority, and the aggression originally developed toward the parents is displaced onto weak groups, such as ethnic minorities or people who deviate from social norms (e.g., homosexuals). Over the years, a consensus has been

reached that prejudices against ethnic or other minorities constitute a generalized attitude of authoritarian individuals (Gilbert, Fiske, & Lindzey, 1998).

Altemeyer (1981) presented a concept of authoritarianism that builds on *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno et al., 1950). Altemeyer's theory first appeared in his book *Right-Wing Authoritarianism* (1981), which included a critical survey of the literature and reported psychometric validation of the Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale (RWA) over the preceding years. Altemeyer formulated his results in terms of Bandura's (1977) social learning theory rather than in the framework of Freudian psychodynamics. Although Altemeyer's original three clusters—authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, and conventionalism—had already been included in Adorno et al.'s model (p. 228), Altemeyer (1996, p. 45) later added six-to-nine clusters. The RWA has undergone extensive empirical testing by Altemeyer himself in Canada, South Africa, and West Germany (Altemeyer, 1988, p. 14), and by other scholars in the United States (Zwillenberg, 1983) and Australia (Heaven, 1984; Ray, 1985). Hebrew and Arabic versions of the RWA have also proven to be valid and reliable in Israel among both Jewish (Rubinstein, 1995) and Palestinian (Rubinstein, 1996) participants. Despite a very critical review published recently about the concept of the authoritarian personality in general and of Altemeyer's (1981, 1988, 1996) work in particular, Martin (2001, p. 21) admitted that Altemeyer's work is "methodologically rigorous in substance." According to B. Altemeyer's (personal communication, August 2005) response, which the editors of the journal did not publish, the "Berkeley" effort came up short of its goals because its method involved well-documented errors and because its theory was muddled, often untestable, and poorly supported when tested.

Several authors have developed the concepts of *policemen's traits* and *police personality*, that is, personality traits that determine the behavior of police officers in general and their behavior in their work in particular (Balch, 1972; Genz & Lester, 1976; Sherman, 1980; Symonds, 1970). Those authors assumed that the use of physical force is essential in certain situations but that it also has the potential of police officers' violence (Bittner, 1970). Researchers use two basic orientations to try to understand violence among policemen: (a) the basic-tendency approach and (b) the socialization approach. By using the basic-tendency approach, Balch looked for common personality traits that characterize individuals who are attracted to police work (which are often found among other groups, e.g., prison guards). By using the socialization approach, Genz and Lester (1976) argued that police officers learn those common personality traits and others, such as suspiciousness and cynicism, during their formal and informal training and work experience. Furthermore, the perpetual on-the-job contact with the world of crime also contributes to police officers' potential violence and aggression (Kirkham, 1974; Niederhoffer, 1976; Tiff, 1974). Lambert, Burroughs, and Nguyen (1999) claimed that police officers believe in a *just world* in which good and bad individuals deserve what happens to them, so that the police officers blame the victims of crime.

Border Police Officers, Career Soldiers, and Airport Security Guards

In the security situation in Israel, terrorist acts by Palestinian Arabs, who live in the occupied territories, have become a part of everyday life. The Israeli border police form a military organization within the Israeli police force whose job is mainly to fight terror activities and maintain law and order in the occupied territories. Border police officers must be physically fit, disciplined, and determined. Their daily work involves much more aggression and violence than that of other combat unit soldiers. Frustrated and hostile Palestinian Arabs confront them daily. Therefore, choosing the career of a border police officer means becoming an aggressive and punitive warrior.

Career soldiers are usually officers who are motivated at a young age by (a) a will to excel and get high authority in a tough and hierarchical system and (b) a conviction that the military service has nationalist value in Israeli society. Choosing the career of a soldier means eventually moving to and staying permanently in a dual position of having power over other soldiers and also having to submit to higher authorities.

Airport security guards are typically young individuals who have just been discharged from their military service (3 years for men, 18 months for women). Most of them are students who are doing this rather low-paying job to support themselves financially during their studies. Unlike students in other occupations, airport security guards have power, which is sometimes a lot of power, over the people they inspect. The guards have the authority to delay the people and keep them from catching their flights. Like the occupations of border police officer and career soldier, that of airport security guard has belligerent aspects. However, unlike those occupations, it is only temporary. I chose these three groups for the study because their occupations necessitate different levels of aggression that are approved by the established authorities. Hence, their everyday practices entail both authoritarian aggression and authoritarian submission.

Hypothesis

On the basis of the aforementioned literature on career choice and authoritarianism, I hypothesized that the RWA scores of border police officers will be the highest, followed by those of career soldiers, airport security guards, and control participants, in that order.

Based on the aforementioned short job descriptions, the rationale for the Hypothesis was that border police officers were authoritarian warriors; that career soldiers chose a strict, tough, and hierarchical workplace but were not as involved in aggressive activities as much as were border police officers; that airport security guards chose a job in which they had a great deal of power over the people whom they inspected, but their jobs were only temporary; and that the control participants were students who chose other employment during their studies.

Method

Participants

Participants were 160 Jewish native Israeli men: 40 border police officers, 40 career soldiers, 40 students who worked as airport security guards, and 40 students who worked in other temporary occupations. The mean age was 27.21 years ($SD = 3.84$ years). Of all participants, 139 (86.5%) were single, 19 (12.1%) were married, and 2 (1.4%) were divorced. Of all participants, 16 (10.0%) had not completed secondary school, 56 (35.0%) were secondary-school graduates but had not started undergraduate studies, 79 (49.3%) were undergraduate students, and 8 (5.0%) had completed their undergraduate studies. Of all participants, 81 (50.7%) were of Sephardic origin, 75 (46.9%) were of Ashkenazi origin, and 4 (2.5%) were of mixed origin. Of all participants, 126 (78.8%) defined themselves as “secular,” 29 (18.1%) defined themselves as “traditional,” and 5 (3.1%) defined themselves as “orthodox.” Finally, of all participants, 122 (76.4%) were then or had earlier been enlisted soldiers, and 38 (23.6%) were then or had earlier been officers during their military service. The four groups were not significantly different from one another with respect to the above demographic variables.

Measures

Demographic questionnaire. The first page of the research form presented items on the aforementioned demographic variables and a few additional items on political affiliation, intentions for further studies, etc.

RWA Scale. I used a Hebrew version of Altemeyer’s 20-item short version (Hunsberger & Altemeyer, 2006) of his 30-item RWA Scale. The short version included 14 items from the full version and 6 new items. I translated them for the study and adapted them for the Israeli context. In an earlier study (Rubinstein, 1995), I found the Hebrew version of Altemeyer’s (1988) original 30-item version to be valid and reliable. Several researchers reviewed the Hebrew version of the six new items and back translated them with satisfactory results. The questionnaire asks participants to agree or disagree on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 5 (*completely agree*). Half of the items indicate pro traits (e.g., “The ‘old-fashioned ways’ and the ‘old-fashioned values’ still show the best way to live”), and the other half are con traits (e.g., “You have to admire those who challenged the law and the majority’s view by protesting for women’s abortion rights, for animal rights, or to abolish school prayer”). To adapt the scale to the Israeli society, the present author replaced, for example, the text on the abolishment of school prayer, which does not exist in Israel, with “reducing religion studies in the secular education system.” For the present study, Cronbach’s alpha (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955) was .83, with none of the items reducing internal consistency at this level.

Procedure

Several border police officers, career soldiers, and a student who was an airport security guard distributed the research questionnaires. I told the distributors that the purpose of the study was to investigate social attitudes that most Israeli citizens held to one degree or another and asked them to represent the purpose as such to the people to whom they gave the questionnaires. I also told the distributors to approach the youngest potential respondents possible (to minimize the possible effect of experience in each of the occupations). To achieve optimal similarity between the control participants and the members of the other three groups, the distributors asked each of the police officers, soldiers, and guards to hand an empty questionnaire to a close male friend who worked in a different occupation and had never served as a border police officer, a career soldier, or an airport guard. I used these friends as control participants in the study. The participants mailed the forms in sealed and prestamped self-addressed envelopes to ensure their anonymity. The response rates were 82% of the border police officers, 79% of the career soldiers, 89% of the airport security guards, and 69% of the control participants. I randomly selected the questionnaires of 40 respondents of each of the four groups to ensure identical group sizes in the data analysis.

Results

Results of an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), with RWA score as the dependent variable; the group as the independent variable; and age, education, religiousness, and military rank as covariates, provided support for the hypothesis. Table 1 shows the mean RWA scores of the four groups.

The RWA level of the border police officers was the highest, followed by those of the airport security guards, the career soldiers, and the control participants, in that order. The RWA differences between the groups were statistically significant, with the exception of the career soldiers, whose RWA mean score was not significantly different from that of the airport security guards, according to the Scheffé test. The effects of the covariates in this ANCOVA were as follows: for age, $F(1, 156) = 3.06, p < .10$, the higher the age was, the higher the RWA was, $r = .19, p < .05$; for education, $F(1, 156) = 5.13, p < .05$, the lower the education was, the higher the RWA was, $r = -.31, p < .01$; for religiousness, $F(1, 156) = 16.64, p < .001$, the higher the religiousness was, the higher the RWA was, $r = .45, p < .01$; and rank, $F(1, 156) = 8.28, p < .01$, the lower the rank was, the higher the RWA was, $r = -.20, p < .05$. In terms of size effects in descending order, the largest Cohen's d was between the means of border police officers and control participants, followed by those between the means of airport security guards and control participants, border police officers and airport security guards, border police officers and career soldiers, and career soldiers and airport security guards. The largest Cohen's d was also nonsignificant according to the Scheffé test. An item analysis

TABLE 1. Mean Scores, Standard Deviations, and *ds* of Border Policemen, Career Soldiers, Airport Security Guards, and Control Participants for RWA

Group	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>d</i>		
			2	3	4
1. Border policemen	2.99 _a	0.48	0.89	1.09	1.97
2. Career soldiers	2.47 _b	0.59	—	—	—
3. Airport security guards	2.67 _b	0.30	0.45	—	1.57
4. Control participants	2.12 _c	0.40	0.71	—	—

Note. $n = 40$ for all groups; $F(1, 156) = 12.13, p < .001$. Means with different subscripts differ significantly at $p < .01$, according to the Scheffé test. Each *d* value is the difference between the *M*s of the groups divided by the mean of their *SD*s. RWA = right-wing authoritarianism.

of the RWA measure indicated higher scores for the border police officers on the pro traits than on the con traits.

Because many previous studies have indicated that authoritarianism is related to both political affiliation and religiousness, I carried out two additional ANCOVAs. In the first one, RWA was the dependent variable; political affiliation was the independent variable; and age, religiousness, education, and military rank were covariates. I put the participants into three groups: participants voting for leftist candidates or positions, participants voting for rightist candidates or positions, and nonvoting participants. This analysis yielded statistically significant differences between the three political groups, $F(1, 133) = 8.87, p < .001$, the RWA level of the rightist-voting participants being the highest ($M = 2.70$), followed by that of the leftist-voting participants ($M = 2.39$), and finally that of the nonvoting participants ($M = 2.28$). The Scheffé test indicated that the RWA level of rightist-voting participants significantly differed from that of the nonvoting participants at the level of $p < .01$ and from that of the leftist-voting participants at the level of $p < .05$, and the RWA means of the leftist-voting participants and the nonvoting participants did not significantly differ. The effects of the covariates in this ANCOVA involved age, $F(1, 133) = 4.65, p < .05$, indicating a positive correlation with RWA level, $r = .20, p < .05$; education, $F(1, 133) = 21.20, p < .001$, indicating a negative correlation with RWA level, $r = -.31, p < .001$; religiousness, $F(1, 133) = 20.93, p < .001$, indicating a positive correlation with RWA level, $r = .45, p < .001$; and rank, $F(1, 133) = 5.36, p < .05$, indicating that the RWA level of the noncommissioned officers ($M = 2.57$) was significantly higher than that of the officers ($M = 2.40$).

When religiousness was entered into the ANCOVA as an independent variable; the RWA was entered as a dependent variable; and age, military degree, and education were entered as covariates, I found that the RWA level of the traditional

and orthodox participants (grouped together because only five participants defined themselves as orthodox; $M = 3.01$) was significantly higher, $F(1, 135) = 32.13, p < .001$, than that of the secular participants ($M = 2.41$). RWA was positively associated with age, $F(1, 135) = 4.31, p < .05$, and negatively associated with both education, $F(1, 135) = 19.59, p < .001$, and military rank, $F(1, 135) = 5.65, p < .05$.

Discussion

In the present study, I explored statistically significant RWA differences in the hypothesized direction among the groups investigated, with the exception of the difference between the career soldiers and the airport security guards, which was not significant. The Hebrew version of the short RWA scale was positively correlated with religiousness, was negatively correlated with education, and was internally consistent.

The main finding of the present study seems to be that border police officers scored highly on the RWA. This is not surprising because of their daily work—which involves aggressiveness, violence, and perpetual on-the-job confrontation with the frustrated and hostile Palestinian Arabs—and because of their role as aggressive and punitive warriors. Theoretically, their high RWA level could have been a result of their experiences as border police officers. But because the participants in the present study were freshmen in their undergraduate studies who were also in the three occupations, it is more likely that choosing the career of a border police officer, rather than experiencing this career, would be a more reasonable cause of their high RWA level.

The RWA differences between border police officers, career soldiers, airport security guards, and control participants also indicated that the shortened RWA scale is sensitive to different—and more subtle—levels of dominance. The nonsignificant RWA difference between the career soldiers and the airport security guards was the only part of the present results that did not support the Hypothesis. The reason might be the circumstance that the airport security guards were young students who had just completed their military service. The career of a career soldier is indeed more stable and longer than that of a part-time, temporary airport security guard. Hence, I expected the former to be more authoritarian than the latter. However, these two groups did not differ from each other in age, rank, or background. Hence, the nonsignificant RWA difference between them is understandable. Nevertheless, the RWA differences between three of the four groups not only supported the construct validity and the sensitivity of the Hebrew version of the short RWA scale but also contributed to researchers' better understanding of authoritarianism in general. The RWA difference between border police officers and career soldiers can shed light on two dimensions of authoritarianism: nationalism and authoritarian aggression. Border police officers in Israel fight directly against the terror activity of another people, the Palestinians,

and also practice *authoritarian aggression*, which Altemeyer (1988) defined as a general aggressiveness, directed against various persons, that is perceived to be sanctioned by established authorities. Bittner (1970) assumed that the use of physical force is essential in certain situations, but that it also has the potential of police officers' violence. Because Altemeyer (1988) found that the best predictor of people's RWA scores was their experiences in life, the highest RWA scores of the border police officers in the present study may reflect their experiences as border police officers as much as (or more than) the circumstance that their authoritarianism led them to seek a career in which they could be aggressive with the approval of established authorities. In considering this possibility, researchers should keep in mind the border police officers' ages and their amount of experience as border police officers. In contrast, the roles carried out by career soldiers are much more diverse, even though the activities of both the border police and the career soldiers involve *authoritarian submission*, defined by Altemeyer (1988) as a high degree of submission to authorities perceived to be established and legitimate. Evidence for authoritarian submission may be found in Feather's (1998) study, which showed that the perceived seriousness of the offenses committed by police authorities was negatively related to participants' RWA. The same was true for the RWA difference found between students who chose security-related occupations, which involve having authority over people and enforcing conformity according to strict rules, and students who chose other occupations as a source of income during their studies.

The present study involved Holland's (1997) approach, according to which a good match between a person's interests and occupational type predicts career satisfaction and longevity. Holland referred to this match as person–environment congruence, implying that career choice is dictated by personality traits. A competing but not necessarily contradictory approach presumes that people learn such traits and others—such as suspiciousness and cynicism in the case of police officers—during their formal and informal training and work experience (Genz & Lester, 1976). In a recent study (2003), I found the RWA level of Israeli law students to be the highest, compared with students of behavioral sciences and students of design, suggesting that people's RWA levels might be related to their dependence on established rules.

I also recommend a longitudinal study, detecting RWA changes during the professional training and work experience, to test the effect of professional socialization (Genz & Lester, 1976). Although border police officers, career soldiers, and airport security guards work in a hierarchical system in which they must submit to superiors and exercise authority over lower ranks, and although both authoritarian aggression and submission are included in the RWA, future researchers might also isolate these two dimensions of authoritarianism by using the Social Dominance Scale (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Also, because better internal consistency has been achieved by a 7-point or 9-point response scale (Altemeyer, 1988, pp. 39–42), future researchers might use this range in their appli-

cations of the RWA. Finally, future researchers might replicate the present study with a larger and more representative sample that is backed by the appropriate authorities of the border-police, military, and security professions to increase the internal and external validities of the present findings.

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