

Relevance of the research

The construct of Authoritarianism has been revived as an explanation for racism, xenophobia, and discrimination because of the social transition in Europe.

The syndrome »Authoritarian Personality«

According to the classical study by Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson & Sanford (1950) the phenotype of the Authoritarian Personality comprises 9 facets, forming a syndrome, that renders the person receptive to antidemocratic propaganda.

From 9 to 3 - Authoritarianism light

The most prominent approach to authoritarianism research in the outgoing 20th century by Bob Altemeyer (1981) reduced the nine conceptual facets to the three most robust subdimensions authoritarian aggression, authoritarian submission and conventionalism:

Right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) is operationalized through the unidimensional RWA-scale ignoring the underlying theoretical threefold structure.

Deconstructing the RWA-scale

As a logical consequence of this conceptual »trinity« it seems almost trivial, that the items of the RWA-scale should produce three highly correlated but distinct factors.

If truth be told, they actually do not.

From Deconstruction to Reconstruction

If we intend to test more specific hypotheses with a higher resolution we have to divide the indivisible Gordian knot and to separate the subdimensions from one another - in other words we need to develop and apply more sophisticated measurement models.

It is proposed here to elaborate structural equation models which account for the theoretical structure and for possible method effects.

Obstacles on the way

It was a promising result, that the enhanced measurement model fits the data far better than the common average-aggregation. However, this loading pattern applies only to pure items.

Here we run into severe problems and have to decide, which item belongs to which construct, and how to deal with double loadings, if two or more constructs are confounded in the item.

Theoretical consequences

If the analytical separation of the subdimensions turns out to be successful, we obtain an instrument to test hypotheses about a typology of diverse »authoritarians« or various attitudinal and behavioral styles of authoritarians. Moreover, situational influences could be studied in their potential, to force a person to switch e.g. from submission to aggression.

Empirical application of the enhanced model

The enhanced model has been applied successfully in three studies dealing with voting behavior, racial prejudice and attitudes towards the conflicts in Kosovo and Chechnya. The discriminant validity of the authoritarian subdimensions (in contrast to the global average score) is obvious because of differential effects on various external criteria (prejudice, approval of military interventions etc.)

The next steps

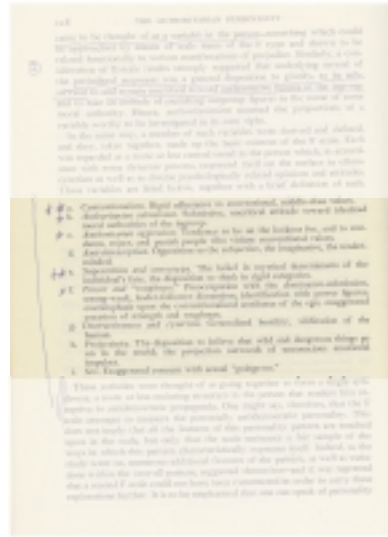
Current research is focused on the specification of measurement models for double barrelled items. The most interesting field, however, is the development and testing of hypotheses assuming differential effects of the subdimensions on external criteria or the interaction with the situational framework.

»Is it all worth it?« - Finale and Outlook

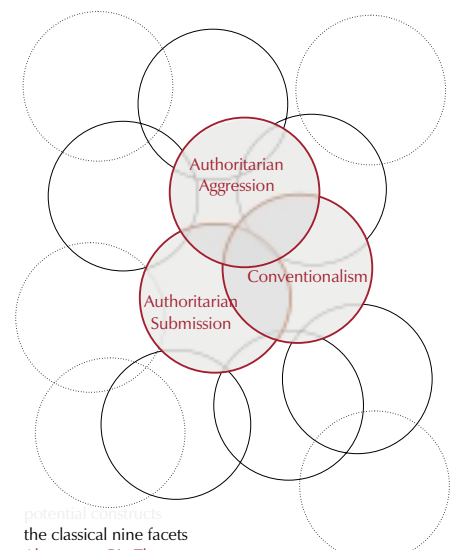
The results justify a cautious optimism:

- The three-dimensional measurement model with method effects is clearly superior to the common aggregation in average scores.
- This allows the reanalysis of recent studies with thousands of participants from several countries.
- First studies with the enhanced measurement model reveal differential effects, which would have remained covered in the global authoritarianism-score.

The authors of the classic »The Authoritarian Personality« (1950) deduced 9 facets of the authoritarian syndrome from narrative interviews. None of them are a necessary nor sufficient condition.



Bob Altemeyer reduced the syndrome to the three most robust dimensions and created the (statistically) one-dimensional Right-wing Authoritarianism Scale (RWA).



the classical nine facets Altemeyers Big Three

The default setting of SPSS™ extracts 6 factors in a principal components analysis, which is clearly an overfactorization.

At a first glance, however, it seems that we might have been right in our assumption:

The first component comprises a lot of aggression-items, component 2 seems to be a collection of conventionalism. The weak factor 3 is slightly mixed up.

	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
P_A_17	.777	-.249	.112	.117		
P_ASC_32	.746	.308				
P_A_21	.723		.123		.218	
P_ASC_23	.704	.397	.125	.144		
P_A_28	.686	.406	.187	.248	-.203	
P_ASC_7	.685	.200	-.225	-.218		
P_AC_5	.672	.310		.104		
P_AC_15	.643	.266	-.253			
P_AC_34	.631	.248	.276		-.289	
P_A_11	.594	.219	.244		-.283	-.270
P_S_30	.587	.182	.182	.397	-.140	
P_SC_9	.554		-.258	-.469		
N_C_13	.513	.662		.167		
N_C_10	.480	.654	-.229	.185		
N_C_6	.432	.645		.247		-.124
N_SC_8	.427	.620	.257			
N_C_25	.420	.609	.112	.140		.274
N_C_19	.400	.510	.117	.479		.140
N_SC_20	.412	.468		.384	-.123	-.466
P_ASC_2	.397	.450		.211		-.305
P_S_3	.312		.654		.086	-.124
N_SC_29	.318	.312	.397	.191	-.296	
P_SC_12	.431	.158	.666	.303		
N_C_22	.421	.304	.211	-.225	-.466	
N_C_24	.244	.401	-.444	.388		
P_C_18	.384	.308	.436	-.274	.126	-.147
N_SC_27	.314	.240	.152	.670	.141	.227
N_C_16	.394	.454	.154	.527	-.222	-.149
N_C_31	.155	.223	.448	.494		
N_C_14	.127	.388		.499		.348
N_A_4	.188	.122	.114		.279	.078
N_C_33	.112	.369	.422		.537	
P_AC_1	.275			.245	-.527	-.342
P_A_26	.228			.193	.134	.599

The appearance is deceptive:

The data want to tell us another story - it is the story of item wording effects. If we force a two-factor solution, it becomes as clear as daylight: All positively worded items have their primary loadings on the first component.

	Component	
	1	2
P_A_21	.884	
P_A_17	.845	
P_ASC_32	.842	
P_A_28	.787	
P_AC_23	.746	
P_AC_34	.733	
P_ASC_7	.704	
P_A_11	.669	
P_S_30	.662	
P_AC_15	.661	
P_AC_5	.641	
P_SC_9	.595	
P_SC_12	.454	
P_C_18	.431	
N_C_22	.734	
N_C_19	.724	
N_C_25	.687	
N_C_10	.657	
N_C_24	.651	
N_C_16	.638	
N_C_6	.621	
N_SC_8	.621	
N_C_14	.616	
N_C_13	.612	
N_C_31	.563	
N_SC_29	.552	
N_SC_27	.497	
N_SC_20	.484	
N_C_33	.309	

Altemeyer's solution:

»... the answer is, that the three components are thoroughly intertwined among the items on the test. All of the items tap at least two [...].

It would therefore be high impossible to find, say an authoritarian submission factor in such a tangle. (But the tangle is consistent with the definition of right-wing authoritarianism as the covariation of the three.)«

The common practice of aggregating item responses is summing them up or calculating the arithmetical mean. This practice does not account for different item weights nor for the theoretical three-dimensional structure.

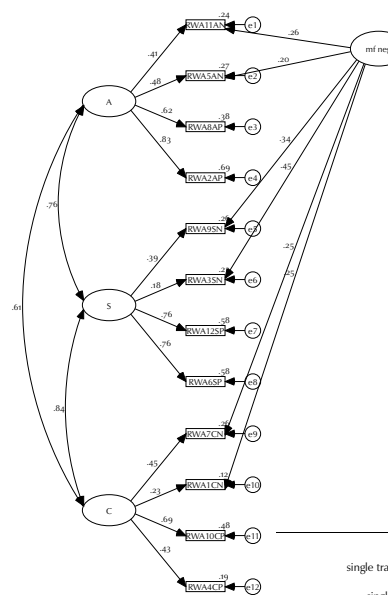
In order to reconstruct an enhanced measurement model we have to introduce our *a priori* knowledge about the items and translate this information into adequate measurement models.

Four alternative models have been tested:

- 1 vs 3 correlated factors
 - with vs no method factors
- Both modifications of the common practice are superior.

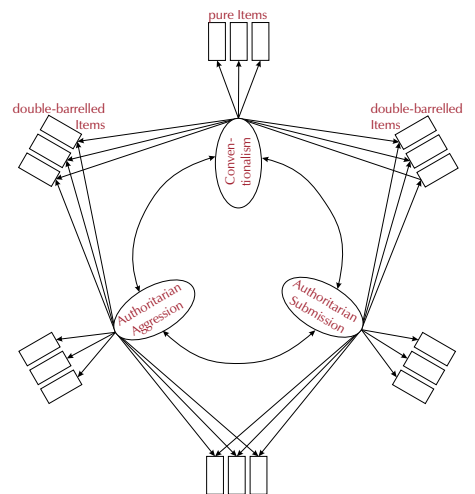
The best fitting model is the three-dimensional model with a method factor.

(significant $\Delta\chi^2$ -Test)

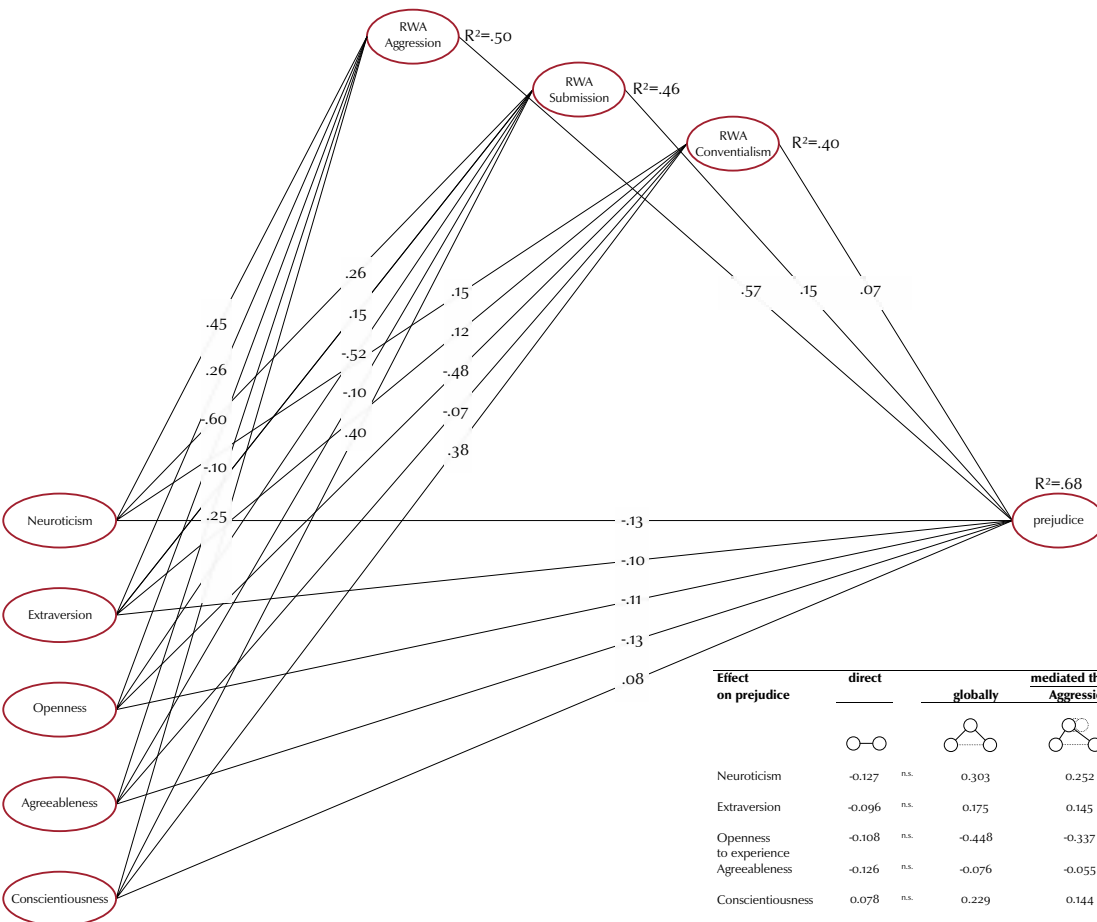


My suggestion (or vision) of a measurement model, which can explain the situation in the data more appropriately and still remains parsimonious and simple enough to communicate it to a big circle of colleagues:

It specifies three correlated factors allowing for double loadings of mixed items, and a method effect accounting for the negatively worded items.



	χ^2	df	ACFI	RMSEA
single trait / no method factors	409.89	54	0.831	0.106
single trait / method factor	354.55	53	0.849	0.098
three correlated factors / no method factors	307.63	51	0.868	0.092
three correlated factors / with method factor	244.67	50	0.895	0.081



It could be shown, that conscientiousness and (a lack of) openness are considerably related to prejudice. This relation, however, is a spurious one, as it is almost totally mediated by the authoritarian subdimensions.

A model restricting the direct effects to zero is not significantly worse than the more liberal one.

This empirical result is quite consistent with the theoretical assumption about the hierarchy of traits (NEO), generalized attitudes (RWA) and particular political opinions (prejudice against foreigners).

Effect on prejudice	direct	mediated through authoritarianism			
		globally	Aggression	Submission	Conventionalism
Neuroticism	0.127	0.303	0.252	0.040	0.010
Extraversion	0.096	0.175	0.145	0.023	0.008
Openness	0.108	0.448	0.337	0.078	0.032
Agreeableness	0.126	0.076	0.055	0.016	0.005
Conscientiousness	0.078	0.229	0.144	0.060	0.025