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# The Authoritarians

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Find and read the original at: <http://members.shaw.ca/jeanaltemeyer/drbob/TheAuthoritarians.pdf>

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*[The author often uses phrases that are particularly apt, and are included below. I have replaced offsetting quote marks (but not ellipses) with underlines to make these direct quotes more readable. An even-more readable version, without even the underlines is available. ]*

## Introduction

John Dean is well known for blowing the whistle on Watergate. While writing his best-selling book, *Conservatives Without Conscience*, he plowed through academic social science literature and became especially interested in, and supportive of, my research work on authoritarianism.

You should learn about authoritarianism for three reasons. (1) ...a radical right-wing segment of the population [has begun] taking control of the government.... (2) There is experimental evidence available that transcends stereotypes, personal opinion, and rhetoric. Behavioral experiments show that some people ...can act nobly, fairly, and with integrity... but that others will not. The results are scientific, reliable, and consistent. (3) Finally, we should want to *understand* why these groups of people think and act in such different ways. Why will so many even act against their own best interests?

Authoritarianism is created by the (often unacknowledged) relationships of those who become leaders and followers. Authoritarian followers have been studied extensively since World War II; their leaders, only just recently. The foundation of their relationship is too much submission, trust, leeway granted to leaders. Fascist and communist dictators are typical, but not exclusive, examples. Their followers believe things that have been thoroughly disproven and too-easily believe falsehoods. Their leaders turn out to be crooks and hypocrites. Both tend to aggression and hostility.

How can this be? This book explores the nature, effects, and consequences of the authoritarian mind and the resulting authoritarianism. This is important to understand

because ... the greatest threat to American democracy today arises from a militant authoritarianism that has become a cancer upon the nation.

## **Chapter 1 - Who Are the Authoritarian Followers?**

Although the term “authoritarian” is often applied to autocrats and despots, we shall always have all those with us those who yearn to play tyrant. Some will turn their powerlessness into bullying. Others will have easy access to money and influence or benefit from unlikely opportunities or historical circumstance.

In societies, we deliberately, properly, and temporarily vest certain people, including secular, religious, and political leaders, as authorities. But, authoritarianism always also involves followers who submit to, and even seek-out, authority. There are two flavors.

“Right-wing” authoritarian followers have a personality that demonstrates a high level of conventionalism, a high degree of submission to conventional authorities, and are willing to exhibit high levels of aggression in the name of their authorities. In North America, these folks often turn out to be political conservatives. “Left-wing” authoritarian followers might support a revolutionary leader or some *chosen* authority. These are fairly rare in North America at this time. So, unless otherwise noted, I am referring to right-wing conservatives.

I employ an evaluation tool called “The Right-Wing Authoritarianism” (RWA) scale. This survey uses 22 statements. The respondent assigns a number from -4 through +4 to indicate his/her level of disagreement or agreement. Typical statements include: “Women should have to promise to obey their husbands when they get married” and “Gays and lesbians are just as healthy and moral as anybody else.” Like all self-administered evaluations, the results are less-precise about individuals, but provide a powerful tool for characterizing groups.

### **Authoritarian Submission**

Interestingly, right-wing authoritarians pick and choose their leaders. People who scored high on the RWA demonstrated loyalty to Hitler, Nixon, and George Bush, but not Bill Clinton. We all submit to authority to some degree but loyalty has sticking power. Some people go way beyond the norm and submit to authority even when it is dishonest, corrupt, unfair and evil.

Authoritarian followers ... do not see laws as social standards that apply to all. Instead, they appear to think that authorities are above the law, and can decide which laws apply to them and which do not--just as parents can when one is young. In one study, when faced with issues of pornography, school prayer, and drugs, many high-RWA students agreed that it would be sensible to repeal the U.S. Bill of Rights. Ironically, the Bill of Rights was added by the founding fathers to prevent tyranny *by the government*.

### **Authoritarian Aggression**

High RWAs generally favor punishing the bejabbers out of misdoers. ... they believe more in the beneficial effects of punishment. ... They get off smiting the sinner; they relish being “the arm of the

Lord.” This ... suggests authoritarian followers have a little volcano of hostility bubbling away inside them looking for a (safe, approved) way to erupt.

But they proved less likely than most people to punish a police officer who beat up a handcuffed demonstrator, or a chief of detectives who assaulted an accused child molester being held in jail. In a famous study by Stanley Milgram, subjects were ordered to inflict painful electric shocks to others. Tom Blass subsequently found that high RWA students blamed the experimenter less and the victim and themselves more. Authoritarian followers usually would go easy on authorities who commit crimes, and they similarly make allowances for someone who attacks a victim the authoritarian is prejudiced against.

Authoritarian followers aggress when they believe right (supported by their chosen authority) and might (a large advantage) are on their side. It’s striking how often authoritarian aggression happens in dark and cowardly ways. ... Even more striking, the attackers typically feel morally superior to the people they are assaulting in an unfair fight. In the student shock experiment, the higher the subject’s RWA scale score, the stronger the shocks delivered.

High RWA people often also score high on evaluations that test for prejudice. Prejudice has little to do with the groups it targets, and a lot to do with the personality of the holder. ... Authoritarian followers dislike so many kinds of people, I have called them “equal opportunity bigots.” These individuals also show a greater willingness to join “posses” to help enforce hypothetical laws against groups such as communists, homosexuals, religious cults, and selected journalists. They proved more willing to persecute even the movements they liked than did others.

High RWAs tend to feel more endangered in a potentially threatening situation than most people do. In simulated war games, the high RWA teams... responded aggressively to ambiguous moves by the other side and, in the end, ... made ten times as much threat as the low teams did, and usually brought the world to the brink of nuclear war.

### Conventionalism

Conventionalism means mean believing that everybody should have to follow the norms and customs that your authorities have decreed. ... Authoritarians get a lot of their ideas about how people ought to act from their religion, and as we’ll see in chapter 4 they tend to belong to fundamentalist religions.

After Mikhail Gorbachev lifted restrictions on psychological research, American and Russian universities cooperated on matching studies about Cold War policy beliefs. We found that ... the most cock-sure belligerents in the populations on each side of the Cold War, the ones who hated and blamed each other the most, were in fact the same people, psychologically. ... Gidi Rubinstein similarly found that high RWAs among both Jewish and Palestinian students in Israel tended to be the most orthodox members of their religion, who tend to be among those most resistant to a peaceful resolution of the Middle East conflict.

## Unauthoritarians and Authoritarians: Worlds of Difference

In another research test, large groups of High- and Low RWA students played separate instances of a "Global Change Game." They were not told that they had been specially selected or that there was to be another group playing their own game. "Elites" volunteered by standing up. They were taken aside and given control of regional bank accounts and also informed that they can discretely put some of their region's wealth into their own pockets, to vie for a prize to be given out at the end of the simulation to the World's Richest Person. The game ran for about 2.5 hours, which was enough for a simulated 40 years.

The 67 Low RWA players had 10 volunteer elites stand up. They immediately called a summit and agreed to meet again for big issues. Regions worked on local problems. Armed forces declined and there were no wars or formal threats of war. Regions volunteered funds to meet an unexpected global ozone crisis and cooperated on other international issues. There were some regional disasters, but the homogeneity of the Low RWA participants was cited by the researchers for a "highly successful run." Low RWAs do not typically see the world as "Us versus Them." They are more interested in cooperation than most people are, and they are often genuinely concerned about the environment. ... The game's facilitators said they had never seen as much international cooperation in previous runs of the simulation. With the exception of the richest region, North America, the lows saw themselves as interdependent and all riding on the same merry-go-round.

The 68 High RWA game had all males volunteer as elites. The Middle East doubled the price of oil. Latin America, although warned about ecosystem vulnerability, planted high-value single-species trees. Authoritarians ignored warnings against the consequences of ignoring birth control. The former Soviet Union invaded North America, which retaliated with nuclear weapons which killed 7.4 billion (everyone on earth) and almost all other forms of life. The facilitators turned out the lights, explained the consequences, turned the game clock back two years and allowed it to resume. This time, the former Soviet Union invaded China and killed 400 million. The Middle East called for a United Nations meeting, but no agreements were reached. When the global ozone crisis occurred, only Europe took any action. Poverty spread widely and quickly in undeveloped regions. Elites in developed regions began forming alliances, jockeying for power and protection. At the end of 40 years, the world was divided into hostile armed camps, threatening each other with nuclear weapons. Over 2 billion people died.

### Notes:

The Libertarian Party poll also solicited opinions on a variety of social issues and economic attitudes. RWA scale scores correlated highest with attitudes against same sex marriage, abortion, drugs, pornography, women's equality, unconventional behavior and free speech, and with support for the Patriot Act and America's "right" to spread democracy by military force. In contrast, the relationships with economic issues (taxation, minimum wage, the public versus private sector, free trade) proved much weaker. The data thus indicate, as do a lot of other findings, that high RWAs are "social conservatives" to a much greater extent than they are "economic conservatives."

## **Chapter 2 - The Roots of Authoritarian Aggression, and Authoritarianism Itself**

Anyone who follows orders can become a murderer for an authoritarian regime. But authoritarian followers find it easier to bully, harass, punish, maim, torture, “eliminate,” “liquidate,” and “exterminate” their victims than most people do. While on the surface high RWAs [a “gold standard” psychological assay of “Right-Wing Authoritarianism”] can be pleasant, sociable, and friendly, they seemingly have a lot of hostility boiling away inside them that their authorities can easily unleash. Indeed, this authoritarian aggression is one of the three defining elements of right-wing authoritarianism.

### **The Instigator**

Authoritarian followers have been found to score high on the “Dangerous World” scale. Their generalized fear may have multiple possible contributing factors, but both these individuals and their parents say that they were raised by their parents to be afraid of others. These parents warned their children, more than most parents did, about kidnapers, reckless drivers, bullies and drunks. ... Many things, ... say to them, “This is the last straw; soon we’ll be plunged into the abyss.” So probably did, in earlier times, women’s suffrage, the civil rights movement, sex education and Sunday shopping.

Events like the attacks of 9/11 can drive large parts of a population to being as frightened as authoritarian followers are day after day. In calm, peaceful times as well as in genuinely dangerous ones, high RWAs feel threatened. They have agreed on the RWA scale, year after year since the 1970s, that sinfulness has brought us to the point of ruin. There’s always a national crisis looming ahead. All times are troubled times that require drastic action.

### **The Releaser**

If you’re an average human being, you’ll think you’re a better than average human being. Almost everybody thinks she’s more moral than most. But high RWAs typically think they’re way, way better. They are the Holy Ones. They are the Chosen. They are the Righteous. ... And self-righteousness appears to release authoritarian aggression more than anything else. In their minds, their certain rightness empowers them, by the power of their Authority, which often is God Himself, to personally intervene in the lives of others to set matters right. Their fears include fear of deviation, which morphs into hate of difference, and hatred of those who are different.

By the way, it is easy to observe that fear can increase submission as well as aggression. ... Most people seem spring-loaded to become more right-wing authoritarian during crises. I have only seen an exception when a repressive government that assaulted nonviolent protestors (which I have termed “the Gandhi trap”).

Some fearfulness may be transferred genetically. We know from breeding experiments [and observation of twins] that one can turn out increasingly dominant, or increasingly submissive offspring by controlling who mates with whom. However, we find a stronger influence on fearfulness in upbringing, early environment, peers, and culture. In fact, if a group of first-year university students tells me of their experiences in life thus far, ... I can make pretty sharp predictions of how they will score on the RWA scale.

As children, we are required to submit to authority, often under threat of punishment. We are trained to behave as an authoritarian follower. We do what we are supposed to do – or else. For some people, this compliance and group acceptance provides safety and sufficient gratification.

I have discovered in my investigations that, by and large, high RWA students had simply missed many of the experiences that might have lowered their authoritarianism. They simply had not met many different kinds of people. ... Instead they had grown up in an enclosed, rather homogeneous environment – with their friends, their schools, their readings, their amusements all controlled to keep them out of harm's way and Satan's evil clutches. They had contentedly traveled around on short leashes in relatively small, tight, safe circles all their lives.

Adolescence and young adulthood, however, bring new impulses, experiences, and a desire for independence that may override any previous indoctrination. Some of us begin to think independently, form our own opinions, make our own choices, and discover satisfaction and success not associated with membership in a closed group. For some, nurturing and supportive parents facilitate this transformation while maintaining a (relatively) safe environment. They seek to prepare their children to participate fully in a changing world.

A low-RWA child has recognized that authority is not always right and may properly be criticized for their errors and faults. ... she quickly spots incompetence in teachers, unfairness in employers, and dishonesty in politicians, and she'll let you know about it. She was not raised with well-defined in-groups, nor was she taught that "different" people were probably dangerous and evil.

### The "Middles"

The results of RWA assessments typically follow a bell curve distribution, with a large mass of moderates in the middle instead of two distinct and entirely separate extremes. These folks may have been raised by parents with differing opinions, been exposed to only moderately-differing experiences and cultures, or tried making independent choices but without consistent success.

An individual's RWA assessment may be dynamic over time. Difficulties in life may cause one to withdraw to the comfort and consistency of a former authoritarian community.

Becoming a parent and raising a family can produce a slight rebound. On the other hand, exposure to more-diverse communities or a liberal (more than an “applied”) education typically reduce a person’s dependence on, and reflexive submission to, an authoritarian belief system.

Notes:

George Lakoff, in *Moral Politics* (1996) proposed that conservatives and liberals think differently because they use different moral systems based upon different ideal family types. ... I am happy to report that some of what he proposes is supported by my own findings.

Conservatives, it is proposed, grew up in a family featuring “strict father morality.” Fundamentally, life was seen as difficult and the world as dangerous. Typically the father had primary “responsibility for supporting and protecting the family as well as authority to set overall family policy. He taught children right from wrong by setting strict rules for their behavior and enforcing them through punishment.”

Liberals, on the other hand, seemingly came from a “nurturant parent” family background, which featured “being cared for and cared about, having one’s desires for loving interactions met, living as happily as possible, and deriving meaning from mutual interaction and care.” Supposedly liberals had more secure and loving attachments to their parents, which leads them to develop nurturing, empathetic social consciences.

It now appears that adult authoritarianism begins to coalesce as an organized set of attitudes during adolescence, where (to be sure) it sometimes follows the furrow plowed by the parents. But it also can take off in quite a different direction depending on the child’s experiences in life.

### **Chapter 3 How Authoritarian Followers Think**

In Chapter 2, we developed the observation that followers have mainly copied the beliefs of the authorities in their lives. They have not developed and thought through their ideas as much as most people have. Thus almost anything can be found in their heads if their authorities put it there, even stuff that contradicts other stuff.

In this chapter, we will examine how research reveals that authoritarian followers drive through life under the influence of impaired thinking a lot more than most people do, exhibiting (1) sloppy reasoning, (2) highly compartmentalized beliefs, (3) double standards, (4) hypocrisy, (5) self-blindness, (6) a profound ethnocentrism, and--to top it all off – a (7) ferocious dogmatism that makes it unlikely anyone could ever change their minds with evidence or logic.

## Illogical Thinking

In student tests combining measures of “Right-Wing Authoritarianism” (RWA) and cognitive ability, startling correlations appear. In a jury simulation, high RWA students (representing strong authoritarian tendencies) had more trouble remembering details of the material they’d encountered, and they made more incorrect inferences on a reasoning test than others usually did. Overall, the authoritarians had lots of trouble simply thinking straight.

To refine the results, inference tests were administered to two large samples of students at my university. High RWA students particularly had trouble figuring out that an inference or deduction was wrong. Typically, in a series of syllogistic ( if/and if/therefore ) statements, they were more likely to think that ... the reasoning was sound because they agreed with the last statement. If the conclusion is right, they figure, then the reasoning must have been right.

This is ...quite dangerous, because it shows that if authoritarian followers like the conclusion, the logic involved is pretty irrelevant. The reasoning should justify the conclusion, but for a lot of high RWAs, the conclusion validates the reasoning. Such is the basis of many a prejudice, and many a Big Lie that comes to be accepted.

Authoritarians also have trouble deciding whether empirical evidence proves, or does not prove, something. They will often think some thoroughly ambiguous fact verifies something they already believe in. ... Not only do authoritarian followers uncritically accept conclusions that support their religious beliefs, they have a problem with evidence in general. In a survey of issue-resolution processes, I found that when faced with an issue, instead seeking comparative data, they primarily turned to peers or other authorities to seek *reassurance*.

In contrast, low RWA students overwhelmingly said they had tried to figure things out for themselves. ... They exposed themselves to both yea and nay arguments, and then made up their minds. They were willing to take a chance on a two-sided search.

## Highly Compartmentalized Minds

It’s easy to find authoritarians endorsing inconsistent ideas. Just present slogans and appeals to homey values, and then present slogans and bromides that invoke opposite values. Take a pair of statements from one survey, for instance: “Parents should first of all be gentle and tender with their children,” and “Parents should first of all be firm and uncompromising with their children; spare the rod and spoil the child.” The yea-saying authoritarian follower is likely to agree with all of them. They don’t seem to scan for self-consistency as much as most people do.



## Double Standards

When your ideas live independent lives from one another it is pretty easy to use rationalization and double standards in your judgments. You simply call up the idea that will justify (afterwards) what you've decided to do.

In mock trials, authoritarians will punish a panhandler who starts a fight with an accountant more than an accountant who (in the same situation) starts a fight with a panhandler. ... On the other hand I have found it difficult to catch low RWAs using double standards. [They] seem to operate by principles which they apply in even-handed ways.

## Hypocrisy

In one study of censorship, I submitted a list of controversial proposals to students' parents for their response. Half were offensive to liberals and half were offensive to conservatives. It turned out that authoritarian followers wanted to impose more censorship in all of these cases – save the one involving the sex education teacher who strongly believed all premarital sex was a sin.

How can this be? It happened because the lows seldom wanted to censor anyone. They apparently believe in freedom of speech, even when they detest the speech. Authoritarians on the other hand, spring-loaded for hostility, seem all wound up to clamp right down on lots and lots of people.

## Blindness to Themselves

High RWAs think they had lots more integrity than others do. Similarly when I asked students to write down, anonymously, their biggest faults, right-wing authoritarians wrote down fewer than others did, mainly because a lot of them said they had no big faults. And, high RWAs led everyone else in saying, no, they were completely honest with themselves.

High RWAs show little self-awareness when making these comparisons. For example they agree more than most people do with, "I like to associate with people who have the same beliefs and opinions I do." But they have no idea how much they differ from others in that way. And most of the time they get it quite wrong. ... when I give feedback lectures to classes about my studies and describe right-wing authoritarians, it turns out the high RWAs in the room almost always think I am talking about someone else.

## Profound Ethnocentrism

Authoritarians see the world more sharply in terms of their in-groups and their out-groups than most people do. They are so ethnocentric that you find them making statements such as, "If you're not with us, then you're against us."

Most of us associate with people who agree with us on many issues. But this is especially important to authoritarians, who have not usually thought things out, explored

possibilities, considered alternate points of view, and so on, but acquired their beliefs from the authorities in their lives. They then maintain their beliefs against new threats by seeking out those authorities and those who have the same beliefs.

Because authoritarians depend so much on their in-group to support their beliefs (whereas other people depend more on independent evidence and logic), high RWAs place a high premium on group loyalty and cohesiveness. ... Authoritarian followers want to belong, and being part of their in-group means a lot to them. Loyalty to that group ranks among the highest virtues, and members of the group who question its leaders or beliefs can quickly be seen as traitors.

The ethnocentrism of high RWAs makes them quite vulnerable to unscrupulous manipulators. ... High RWAs tend to ignore the many devious reasons why someone might lie and say something they find agreeable. They're just glad to have another person agree with them. It goes back to their relying on social support to maintain their ideas...

Low RWAs are downright suspicious of someone who agrees with them when they can see ulterior motives might be at work. They pay attention to the circumstances in which the other fellow is operating. So, suppose you are a completely unethical, dishonest, power-hungry, dirt-bag, scum-bucket politician who will say whatever he has to say to get elected. Whom are you going to try to lead, high RWAs or low RWAs?

The authoritarian follower makes himself vulnerable to malevolent manipulation by chucking out critical thinking and prudence as the price for maintaining his beliefs. ... And the very last thing an authoritarian leader wants is for his followers to start using their heads, to start thinking critically and independently about things.

Dogmatism: The Authoritarian's Last Ditch Defense

Authoritarian followers are also quite dogmatic. By dogmatism I mean relatively unchangeable, unjustified certainty. I measure dogmatism with a response survey that includes statements such as, "The things I believe in are so completely true, I could never doubt them" and "It is best to be open to all possibilities, and ready to reevaluate all your beliefs."

As you might expect by now, high RWAs strongly agree with the first set of items, and strongly disagree with the second set. ... When you haven't figured out your beliefs, but instead absorbed them from other people, you're really in no position to defend them from attack. Simply put, you don't know why the things you believe are true. ... You have to know a lot nowadays to stake out an intelligent, defensible position on many issues. But you don't have to know anything to insist you're right, no matter what.

Perhaps one should admire such conviction. One person's dogmatism is another person's steadfast commitment. But if authoritarian followers are mistaken about something, will they ever realize it? Not likely, for they appear to have been inoculated against catching the truth when they are wrong.

#### Notes

I want to remind us that none of the shortcomings we have discussed ... only afflicts high RWAs. They just have extra portions of quite common human frailties. The difference in their inability to discover a conclusion is false, in the inconsistency of their ideas, in their use of double standards, and so on are all relative, not absolute.

Experiments show authoritarian followers are turned off by blatantly racist appeals. A skilled demagogue knows you play the "race card" best by disguising it as something else, like law and order.

Once someone becomes a leader of the high RWAs' in-group, he can lie with impunity about the out-groups, himself, whatever, because he knows the followers will seldom check on what he says, nor will they expose themselves to people who set the record straight.

I try to develop testing situations that will let both high and low authoritarians show their virtues or their warts, and sometimes the low RWAs look bad too. I always report those findings. But so far they're pretty rare, especially compared with the high authoritarians'.

When the Watergate revelations were sinking his ratings in the polls, Richard Nixon pointed out to his chief of staff, H. R. Haldemann, "I think there's still a hell of a lot of people out there...[who] want to believe. That's the point, isn't it?" "Why sure," Haldemann replied. "Want to and do." (Conversation of April 25, 1973 recorded on the "Watergate tapes," reported by the New York Times on November 22, 1974, p. 20.)

## **Chapter 4 - Authoritarian Followers and Religious Fundamentalism**

The Religious Fundamentalism scale is another useful research measurement tool. It also takes responses from -4 to +4 and contains mixed statements such as, "God has given humanity a complete, unfailing guide to happiness and salvation, which must be totally followed" and "No single book of religious teachings contains all the intrinsic, fundamental truths about life." Bruce Hunsberger and I tried to measure a person's attitudes toward whatever beliefs she had, trying to identify the common underlying psychological elements in the thinking of people who were considered fundamentalists of any religion.

### Fundamentalists and Evangelicals in America

In America, "fundamentalism" grew within Protestantism during the last century as a defensive backlash against both scriptural analysis and criticism and new scientific

theories. “Evangelicals” extended their responsibility to, not just hold or defend but, actively proselytize their fundamentalist doctrines. These generic terms apply most often (but not exclusively) to Christian denominations.

### Fundamentalism and Right-Wing Authoritarianism

It is correct to infer that religious fundamentalists usually score very high on the RWA (Right-wing Authoritarianism) scale. Since authoritarianism can produce fundamentalism if one grows up submissively in a religiously conservative family, and (conversely), fundamentalism can promote authoritarianism with its emphases on submission to religious authority, dislike of out-groups, sticking to the straight and narrow, and so on, one immediately wonders which is the chicken and which is the egg. The evidence indicates authoritarianism is more basic.

### Fundamentalism as a Template for Prejudice

When asked to describe themselves, fundamentalists almost always identify strongly with their religion – even more than gender or race. This identity is effectively transferred from parents to children, defining an ethnocentric us/them distinction. A four-year old readily believes and repeats prejudicial attitudes and slurs.

Yep, it’s Us versus Them. Religious prejudice ... [is] still dynamite looking for a place to explode because it’s so often accompanied by the self-righteousness that releases aggression. And it runs deep in Christian fundamentalists. ... News that they score relatively highly on racial prejudice scales often stuns white fundamentalists. They will usually reply, “You must be mistaken. We’re not prejudiced. ... But fundamentalists still hold more racial prejudices than most people. ... they still like best, by a long shot, the people who are most exactly like themselves.

### The Mental Life of Fundamentalists

Mark Noll, an evangelical history professor at evangelical Wheaton College, begins his book, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, with a pithy thought: “The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind.” ... “In the United States” he writes, “it is simply impossible to be, with integrity, both evangelical and intellectual.”

... almost all of the findings in the last chapter about the authoritarian follower’s penchants for illogical thinking, compartmentalized minds, double standards, hypocrisy and dogmatism apply to religious fundamentalists as well. For example, David Winter at the University of Michigan recently found that fundamentalist students, when evaluating the war in Iraq, rejected a series of statements that were based on the Sermon on the Mount – which is arguably the core of Jesus’ teachings.

In contrast, when groups of atheist parents were asked if they would support a law requiring teaching in public schools against belief in God and religion, 70-100% say that

this would be a bad law. Fundamentalists often say morality cannot exist without belief in God, but the atheists seem much more principled than the fundamentalists do on this issue.

If fundamentalists have added one thing to the authoritarian follower's armor of compartmentalized thinking, double standards, rationalization, and so on, it is a preference for selective ignorance. ... As a consequence I have had fundamentalist university students in my classes who had apparently managed to avoid all instruction in genetics in their lives, and who did not know what a gene, or a mutation was.

### Happiness, Joy and Comfort

Fundamentalists get their joy in life much more from standing firm and believing what they stand for than from exploring and discovering. While most people tell pollsters they are happy, highly religious people number among the happiest of us all. You can see why they would. They believe they know the meaning of life on its deepest level. They believe they are in personal touch with the all-good creator of the universe, who loves them and takes a special interest in them.

In another research tool, called the Zealot scale, fundamentalists are especially likely to say their religion colors and shapes almost everything they experience in life, that it is the solution to all of humanity's problems, that it is very important to them to support the leaders of their religion, that they are learning everything they can about their religion, that nothing else is as important in their life, and no other outlook could be as true and valid.

### Keeping the Faith, Not

My research has found that placing great emphasis on the family religion does not always produce the desired result, and may even backfire. Despite all that childhood emphasis on the family religion, and given all the enriching rise-and-shine happiness that comes from being a fundamentalist, [most] people raised in that environment walk away.

When Bruce Hunsberger and I interviewed university students who had very religious up-bringsings but then left the family religion, ... they mainly said they left because they just couldn't make themselves believe their church's teachings any more. ... many a fallen-away fundamentalist told us that the Bible simply proved unbelievable on its own merits. Secondly, science made too much sense and had pushed traditional beliefs into a tight corner.

Still the decision to leave was almost always wrenching, because it could mean becoming an outcast from one's family and community. Also, fundamentalists are frequently taught that no one is lower, and will burn more terribly in hell, than a person who abandons their true religion.

Their church had told them it was God's true religion. ... But that emphasis can create in some people a tremendous valuing of truth per se, especially among highly intelligent youth who have been rewarded all their lives for getting "the right answer." So if the religion itself begins making less and less sense, it fails by the very criterion that it set up to show its superiority.

### Shortfalls in Fundamentalists' Behavior: Hypocrisy

Ronald J. Sider, a theologian at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, ... observed that, despite Jesus' unequivocal stand on the permanence of marriage, evangelical Christians divorce as often as others do. And despite Jesus' great concern for the poor, the political agenda of prominent evangelical political movements rarely includes justice for the impoverished. ... We have seen that fundamentalists do indeed think they are morally superior. But hypocrisy comes easy to compartmentalized minds.

Gentle pieties get shoved back into their files all too easily in fundamentalist minds when a chance to unload on some despised group pops up. ... professor of theology, John G. Stackhouse Jr., as follows: "Many evangelicals lie, cheat, and otherwise sin against others in an 'already-forgiven bliss' with an attitude of 'I'mcool-'cause-Jesus-loves-me-and-so-I-don't-owe-you-a-thing.'" ... The hypocrisy does not escape the notice of others.

So why do fundamentalists think they sin so much less than everyone else? The answer may involve how they have learned to handle guilt, thanks again to their religious instruction. ... Most Christian fundamentalists who have answered these questions in my studies said they ask God for forgiveness and that makes them feel remarkably cleansed. No admission of wrong-doing to injured parties is required, no restitution, and no change in behavior.

Since fundamentalists insist the Bible is the revealed word of God and without error, you would think they'd have read it. But you'd often be wrong. On the average, the high fundamentalists said they had read about twenty of the books in the Bible--about a third of what's there. So they may insist that the Bible is totally accurate in all that it teaches, but most of them have never read a lot of what they're so sure of. (Most of the non-fundamentalist parents had not read even one chapter.)

Isn't there something profoundly strange about the fact that so many fundamentalists have apparently skipped over so much of the Bible? Wouldn't you read the Bible, cover to cover, over and over, until the end of your days, if you really thought this was the revealed word of God?

Notes:

One is always tempted to make such over-generalizations when a string of findings all come out pointing in the same direction. ... I recently looked to see if Christian

fundamentalists had a double standard about Mormons proselytizing door-to-door. They did not. Most of them (52%) said no restraints should be placed on such activity, and only a very few (6%) said it should be forbidden. So it is not true that fundamentalists use double standards in every judgment they make.

## **Chapter 5 - Authoritarian Leaders**

The Social Dominance Orientation Scale is yet another research tool. People who rate high agree with statements such as "Some people are just more worthy than others," and disagree with "We should try to treat one another as equals as much as possible." This and the Right-Wing Authoritarian (RWA) scale are the best predictors of prejudice although they correlate with each other only weakly.

The explanation is straightforward. Since dominators long to control others and be authoritarian dictators, and high RWAs yearn to follow such leaders, most social prejudice was therefore connected to authoritarianism. ... You don't have to be a genius to grasp why someone would want to lead armies of people dedicated to doing whatever he wants.

Also, they both tend to have conservative economic philosophies ... and they both favor right-wing political parties. But huge differences exist between these two parts of an authoritarian system in (1) their desire for power, (2) their religiousness, (3) the roots of their aggression, and (4) their thinking processes.

### **Desire for power**

If asked, "How much power, ability to make adults do what you want, do you want to have when you are 40 years old?" ... social dominators in each of two studies I ran wanted to have much more than most people did. Authoritarian followers did not. ... social dominators ... thrill to power in and of itself. They want to control others, period.

High scorers in a related Power Mad scale are inclined to be intimidating, ruthless, and vengeful. They scorn such noble acts as helping others, and being kind, charitable, and forgiving. Instead they would rather be feared than loved, and be viewed as mean, pitiless, and vengeful. They love power, including the power to hurt in their drive to the top.

### **Empathy**

Social dominators agree with statements such as "I don't spend a lot of time feeling sorry for people less fortunate than me," ... and they disagree with, "I have a lot of compassion for people who have gotten the bad breaks in life."

### **Religion**

Social dominators do not tend to be religious fundamentalists. But they can easily pretend to be religious, saying the right words and claiming a deep personal belief. They also score

high on another measure called the Exploitive Manipulative Amoral Dishonesty “ExploitiveMAD”) scale. Social dominators thus admit, anonymously, to striving to manipulate others, and to being dishonest, two-faced, treacherous, and amoral. ... Furthermore, while the followers may feel admiration bordering on adoration of their leaders, we should not be surprised if the leaders feel a certain contempt for their followers.

#### Roots of hostility

High RWAs are especially likely to aggress when they feel established authority approves of the aggression, when they are afraid, and because they are self-righteous. Similarly high RWAs are more likely than social dominators to impose stiff sentences in the Trials situation, and more likely to help the government persecute radicals when it's time to round up a “posse.”

Unlike high RWAs who fear an explosion of lawlessness, social dominators already live in the jungle that authoritarian followers fear is coming, and they're going to do the eating. ... when they meet someone, ... they ask, “Is there any reason why I should not try to gain the upper hand with him right now?” Dominance is the first order of business with them in a relationship, ... and vulnerable minorities provide easy targets for exerting power, for being mean, for domination.

And as for self-righteousness, it's pretty irrelevant to people as amoral as most social dominators tend to be. They may speak of the righteousness of their cause, but that's usually just to assure and motivate their followers. Might makes right for social dominators. Their image of themselves as the good people leaves no room for believing they are cold-blooded, ruthless, immoral manipulators after power at almost any cost.

Social dominators might incite authoritarian followers to commit a hate crime, but the dominators [act] as an act of intimidation and control; the follower out of fear and self-righteousness in the name of authority.

#### The mental life of the social dominator

Persons who score highly on the Social Dominance scale do not show weak reasoning abilities, highly compartmentalized thinking, and certainly not a tendency to trust people who tell them what they want to hear. They've got their head together. The “soundness” of their thinking hardly means you can believe them, however. They are quite capable of saying whatever will get them ahead. After all, they hold that there's no such thing as “right” and “wrong.” It all boils down to what you can get away with.

Social Dominators believe that natural forces inevitably govern the worth of the individual. And people should have to earn their places in society, not get any free rides. ... The poor



can pull themselves up by their bootstraps if they really want to. ...they believe “equality” is a sucker word. They admit a great many more beliefs along this line, and it only gets worse.

It doesn't bother the social dominator that masses of people are poor. That's their tough luck. And some racial groups are just naturally inferior to others, he says. Justice should not be applied equally to all. The rich and powerful should have advantages in court, even if that completely violates the concept of justice. Who cares if prejudice plays a role in the justice system? He certainly doesn't. The “right people” should have more votes than everybody else in elections. And so on.

### Personal Origins of the Social Domination Orientation

Where do social dominators come from? Attempts to find shaping experiences have uncovered a few “beginnings.” High social dominators say it has been their experience that: Deceit and cheating were good tactics because it led to what they wanted. Taking advantage of “suckers” felt great. They've enjoyed having power and having people afraid of them. “Losers” deserved what happened to them. It's smart to use whatever power you have in a situation to get what you want. Life boils down to what you can get away with.

We'd be foolish to dismiss the genetic possibilities here. In most animal species social dominance determines who will reproduce and who will not, So some people may just be born with a greater tendency to try to intimidate and dominate others. If these attempts pay off, these “natural bullies” will be on their way.

### An Experiment Combining Social Dominators and Right-Wing Authoritarians

In a series of experiments that simulated real-world business decisions about profit and pollution, social dominators in management positions with authoritarian followers in subordinate relationships usually decided to move a manufacturing operation to an area where they could get away with polluting. This is now called the “lethal union” in this field of research. When social dominators are in the driver's seat, and right-wing authoritarians stand at their beck and call, unethical things appear much more likely to happen. And of course this lethal union is likely to develop in the real world.

### Double Highs: The Dominating Authoritarian Personality

Between 5 to 10 percent of my samples score highly on *both* tests (Social dominators and Right-Wing Authoritarianism). These “Double Highs” tend to combine a capacity for exceptional prejudice with militancy, as measured on a “Militia” scale I developed after the Oklahoma City bombing.”

These Double Highs... are “religious” social dominators. They usually had much more religious upbringings than social dominators typically had, or they may have “got religion” as adults. ... they go to church much more than most people in my samples do. Ditto for being religious fundamentalists. Ditto for being religiously ethnocentric.

Double Highs score way way up there when it comes to exploitation, manipulation, and so on. Their (anonymous) answers to two items in particular wave a huge red flag: “The best reason for belonging to a church is to project a good image and have contact with some of the important people in your community.” And, “It is more important to create a good image of yourself in the minds of others than to actually be the person others think you are.”

Double Highs, however, have a big head start over ordinary social dominators in politics, because they are the consummate leaders of a readily-formed army of zealots longing for a great warrior. ... He comes packaged as “one of our own,” one of the in-group. ... He’ll know the code words of the movement.

Ex-president Jimmy Carter, in describing the fundamentalist movements that have taken control of the Republican Party, recently wrote, “Almost invariably, fundamentalist movements are led by authoritarian males who consider themselves to be superior to others and, within religious groups, have an overwhelming commitment to subjugate women and to dominate their fellow believers.”

**An Experiment Testing the Interaction of Authoritarian Leaders and Followers**  
When I ran the Global Change Game experiment in 1994 comparing a low RWA world with a high RWA one, I had not screened the players for social dominance. So in 1998 I ran the game once more on two consecutive nights, only this time high RWAs covered the earth on both nights. However on the first night the world had no Double Highs lying in the weeds, whereas on the second there were seven.

At the beginning of the “Pure RWA, No Double Highs” game, this group of followers was slow to produce volunteer leader/elites. During the game, these elites interacted very little and were even dismissive with each other. They tended to be unimaginative, focus on local problems, unyielding on the issue of birth control, and failed to address the global ozone crisis when it was introduced. There were no wars, but the players were overwhelmed; 1.9 billion died – a record for game runs without wars.

On the following night, seven male Double-Highs were salted into an otherwise pure RWA group – with one assigned in each region. Four of the seven jumped at elite status immediately. One later forced himself into becoming a decision-making lieutenant. One later led a revolution. The elites maintained frequent rounds of negotiations. No one ever offered free assistance, not even to solve the global ozone crisis. The regions increasingly militarized and an all-out nuclear war was imminent when the game ended at 40 years. Overall, 1.6 billion died of starvation, disease, and war.

The Double Highs’ strong need to dominate led to bullying, military build-ups, and warfare. They showed no signs of being guided by moral principles and they certainly had no

interest in charity or in serving the common good of the planet. They thus proved as insular as ordinary RWAs, and their world failed almost as badly. Interestingly, the elites chose to invest all their funds in retaining power and did not put much money in their private accounts.

### Perspective and Application

Tom Delay and George W. Bush are analyzed as examples of Double High (Right-Wing Authoritarian plus Social Dominance). In both cases over-reaching backfired. Power, the Holy Grail of social dominators, remains an almost uncontrollable two-headed monster. It can be used to destroy the holder's most hated enemies, such as Saddam. But it often destroys the dominator in the process. Lord Acton put it succinctly with his famous statement that "Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely."

### Notes:

George W. Bush gave his version of this famous statement at a Gridiron Club Dinner held in March 2001 when he quipped, "You can fool some of the people all of the time, and those are the ones you want to concentrate on." This annual dinner features jokes and political satire, so the president probably did not mean to be taken seriously. The trouble is, it's pretty hard to find evidence that he doesn't truly believe it.

If the Democratic Party had been swarmed by authoritarians the way the Republican Party has been, I would be talking about it now rather than the GOP. I want the Republican Party to be recaptured by its Grand Old Principles and go back to presenting the conservative options to the American people, not imposing the authoritarian one.

## **Chapter 6 - Authoritarianism and Politics**

### RWA, Social Dominance, and Political Preferences Among Ordinary People

The personality traits of Right-Wing Authoritarianism and Social Dominance connect only moderately to the political preferences of ordinary people. Many are simply political drop-outs. Others are true Independents. Still others are associated with a political party but have no idea what it actually stands for. Nonetheless, studies show that the more interested people are in politics, the more likely their party preference will correlate with their authoritarianism.

That implies the connection ought to be strongest among the biggest party animals among us, politicians. ... I sent the RWA scale to at least one chamber of forty-two of the state legislatures in the United States, mainly between 1990 and 1993. I also sent surveys to most of the legislatures in Canada, including the federal House of Commons. The discussion of this research will lead us to the biggest development in American politics in the past twenty-five years, the growth of the "Religious Right."

## Authoritarianism among American State Legislators

I only heard from 1,233 (or 26%) of the 4,741 U.S. legislators I sent surveys to. ... a self-selection sample bias certainly compromises my lawmaker studies. The numbers I obtained are “low balls.” Rightwing authoritarianism probably packs a bigger punch in American state legislatures than my data will show.

Although the “right-wing” in right-wing authoritarianism refers to a psychological trait that endorses submission to established authority (see chapter 1), not a political ideology, the Republicans scored almost 40 points higher than the Democrats on the average. First, the Democrats landed all over the place. The Republicans on the other hand crowd together, and very few Democratic caucuses posted RWA scale scores as high as most of the Republicans did. Finally, with the inevitable exceptions, southern legislators posted the highest [authoritarian] scores.

The problem, as I see it, does not arise from Republicans per se but from the right-wing authoritarians on both sides of the aisle. But the data make it quite clear that when you see a bunch of Republican lawmakers huddling, you’re probably looking at mainly high RWAs, whereas when (non-southern) Democrats cluster, they’re probably a pretty unauthoritarian lot overall.

## Double Highs in the Legislatures?

I noted in chapter 3 that designing despots will usually slither over to the political right, not just because their hearts and minds lead them there, but because that’s where the “easy sell” high RWAs congregate, wanting to play follow-the-leader. It’s the easiest place to pick up a loyal following cheap, especially if you’re a Double High. Authoritarian followers probably don’t run for public office very often. Thus when you find someone in a legislature who scores highly on the RWA scale, it figures that he’s probably a Double High, as this study indicates.

You hear authoritarian leaders talk all the time about defending freedom, preserving freedom, exporting freedom and (somebody else) dying for freedom. They wear American flag pins in their lapels and give solemn renditions of the Pledge of Allegiance and the Star Spangled Banner. They may truly believe that they are the real, deep-down, freedom-fighter patriots. Despite their pronouncements ... high RWA lawmakers would like to pass laws that restrict freedom of the press, the right to protest, the right to privacy, the right to belong to the political organization of one’s choice, and they certainly would trample all over freedom of religion once they made the teaching of Christianity compulsory in public schools.

## Religious Conservatives and the Republican Party

These legislator studies are now more than a decade old, and any politician who did not like the results could argue “Things have changed a lot since then.” ... There are probably a lot more Double Highs in American legislatures now. In many states, the Double Highs and their minions appear to have formed the majority, and as we noted in chapter 5, have sometimes set about reducing the opposition to permanent impotence through unprecedented levels of gerrymandering, not to mention voter fraud.

... religious conservatives have taken control of the Republican Party, turning it into the first religious party in U.S. history and endangering everyone else’s rights, the future of the country, and that of the world. How did this happen? ... in the late 1970s a group of conservative political organizers persuaded Jerry Falwell to lead the Moral Majority, which found Ronald Reagan much more to its liking in 1980 than the Baptist (but moderately liberal) Jimmy Carter.

As Reagan’s second term drew to a close in 1988 the highly successful Christian broadcaster, Pat Robertson, marshaled his followers in a bid to become the Republican presidential nominee. ... The Christian Coalition, composed of thousands of members burning with zeal, began distributing hundreds of thousands of bulletins in churches to help elect approved candidates.

At the same time conservative Christians began taking control of state Republican organizations, by joining the party and showing up for meetings, from the precinct-level up, so that eventually they decided who would run for the state legislature, for governor, and for the Congress. In 1994 the hard-working religious conservatives played a pivotal role in electing a GOP majority in the House of Representatives. By 2000 they were able to make one of their own, George W. Bush, the Republican nominee for president.

By most estimates the religious right constitutes about 40 percent of Republican supporters nationwide, which means that most of the people who vote Republican do not belong to the movement. But ... the 40 percent constitutes by far the largest *organized* block of voters in the party, and in the country.

Authoritarian followers will thus do everything humanly possible to “get out their vote” and send more of “their kind” of people to the school board, state legislature, the statehouse, Congress and the White House. Unfortunately, “their kind” of candidates will usually be Double Highs--about the last people you would want in positions of power in a democracy.

## A Bit of Modest Speculation

One of the easiest mistakes to make when judging a threatening movement is to perceive it as being more unified and monolithic than it really is. So let’s do a little speculating here.

Let's suppose the Religious Right gains long-term control of the executive, legislative and judiciary branches of the federal government and accomplishes its common agenda. ... Would the victors then all clap each other on the back and live happily ever after in Taliban America? Maybe they would. But recalling what we know about the dominance drives and prejudices of Double Highs, wouldn't a subsequent ... struggle for control be just as likely?

## **Chapter 7 – What's To Be Done?**

Almost without exception, the findings about authoritarians in the previous chapters have been negative. ... It is one-sided if we conclude that authoritarians have no good qualities whatsoever, for they do. High RWAs are earnest, hard-working, happy, charitable, undoubtedly supportive of people in their in-group, good friends, and so on. Social dominators are ambitious and competitive--cardinal virtues in American society.

But the downside remains, and I want to emphasize that it's really there. The presentation of the research in this book has not passed through any kind of theoretical or ideological filter. In almost every experiment, low RWAs and low Social Dominators had as much a chance to look bad as their counterparts on the high end. But they seldom did.

### **Milgram's Experiments on Obedience**

Milgram ... studied mainly men recruited through newspaper ads in the greater New Haven, Connecticut area for a "study of memory." ... the Experimenter explains that his study is designed to explore the effects of punishment on learning. You will be paid \$4.50. One of you is going to be a Teacher, and the other subject a Learner. The two of you [the other guy is actually a research associate] draw lots, and (I promise you) you become the Teacher.

A large metal box on the Teacher's table has thirty toggle switches, labeled from 15 volts to 450 volts and "XXX." The Experimenter gives you, the Teacher, a sample shock of 45 volts so you'll get an idea what it feels like. When a switch is thrown you hear something thunk inside the box, a buzzer sounds, various lights go on, the needle lurches on a voltmeter, and the man in the adjacent room may scream.

First, the other fellow is given a list of word pairs to memorize. Your job is to ask the "Learner" a series of questions. Every time he gets the answer wrong, you are supposed to throw the next higher switch. As the voltages get higher and the Learner pretends to suffer more and beg you to stop, the Experimenter keeps urging you to continue, even past the point where the learner quits screaming and goes silent as if he were unconscious or dead.

In a series of 40 experimental runs, all 40 gave the "household voltage" 120 volt shock. Thirty-four went past the 150 volt mark where the Learner demanded to be set free ... Thereafter a few more people dropped out, one here and one there. Altogether fifteen men

got up the gumption to eventually tell the Experimenter, “No, I won’t.” But the other twenty-five men went to 450 volts and threw the switch over and over until the Experimenter told them to stop. That is 62%. Most of them continued to the point that their victim may have been killed! This experiment has been repeated, with many variations and with similar results, with many different populations in many different countries.

In a related experiment, the Teacher was allowed to choose shocks labeled “Slight” to “Very Strong.” At the end, the Experimenter told them to push a special button labeled “Danger: Very Severe Shock” as a punishment for Learner not trying hard enough. It took an average of four seconds for 86-91% of the subjects to comply. The possibility of saying “no” seems not to have occurred to them.

Why, then?

The vast majority of us have had practically no training in our lifetimes in openly defying authority. The authorities who brought us up mysteriously forgot to teach that. We may desperately want to say no, but that turns out to be a huge step that most people find impossibly huge.

The “Teaching Team” Conditions and Social Psychology’s Great Discovery

In another variation, the Teacher was paired as a team with another man who was actually in on the experiment and either participated fully or strongly objected. A full 92% went along with their team-mate shocking to the full 450 volts. When the confederate rebelled, 90% also refused to continue shocking. Isn’t it obvious that virtually everyone simply did what the people around him did? Obedience of authority is one of the “strong forces” in life, but so also is conformity to one’s peers.

How people acted depended very little on what kind of people they were, and very greatly on the situation they were in--particularly on what their peers did. So if we are tempted by all the earlier findings in this book to think that right-wing authoritarians and social dominators are the guys in the black hats while we fight on the side of the angels, we are not only falling into the ethnocentric trap, we are not only buttering ourselves up one side and down the other with self-righteousness, we are probably deluding ourselves as well. ... But it makes crystal clear why we have to keep malevolent leaders out of power.

Ordinary Men

Reserve Police Battalion 101 was a part of the “Order Police” formed in Hamburg Germany in 1942 to maintain control in occupied countries. It had eleven officers and nearly 500 men. They had worked on the docks, driven trucks, and moved things around warehouses for the most part prior to being drafted. At first the battalion rounded up Jews in various locations and send them off to camps. On July 11, 1942 they received orders to send the fit

Jewish males off to labor camps, and to kill the 1800 Jewish women, children, infirm and elderly who remained.

Although given opportunities to be excused to alternate duties, at least 80% of those called upon to murder helpless civilians did so and continued to do so methodically until all the Jews from Jozefow had been killed. Judicial interrogations of some 125 of the men conducted in the 1960s indicated that the great majority stayed in ranks and later killed whoever was brought to them out of loyalty to those ranks, and to maintain their standing in their units.

Over time, as the battalion participated in more and more mass murders, it became much more relaxed and efficient in its deadly operations. These ordinary men got used to killing thousands of people at close range as part of their day's work. By the time their part of the "Final Solution" was completed in Poland, the battalion had shot at least 38,000 Jews to death.

### So What's Your Point?

I am saying that we as individuals are poorly prepared for a confrontation with evil authority, and some people are especially inclined to submit to such authority and attack in its name. Authoritarian followers, who have always been there but were usually uninterested and unorganized, are now mightily active and highly organized in American politics. They claim to be the "real Americans." Furthermore, if research on abolishing the Bill of Rights and tolerance for government injustices is to be believed, authoritarian followers frankly don't give a damn about democratic freedoms.

If being prejudiced makes it easier to commit atrocities, high RWAs rank among the most prejudiced people in the country. If obedience to malevolent authority makes one more likely to persecute others--hey, authoritarian followers can chant "We're Number One, We're Number One!" If wanting to belong, and loyalty to your group, and a tendency to conform play a role in attacks on others, high RWAs lead the league in those things too. If inclination to persecute any group the government selects counts for something, we know from the "posse" studies that right-wing authoritarians head up that line as well.

If illogical thinking, highly compartmentalized ideas, double standards, and hypocrisy help one to be brutally unfair to others, high RWAs have extra helpings in all those respects. If being fearful makes one likely to aggress in the name of authority, high RWAs are scared up one side and down the other. If being self-righteous permits one to think that attacks against helpless victims are justified, authoritarian followers have their self-righteousness super-sized, thank you. If being able to forgive oneself and forget the evil one has done make it easier to attack over and over again in the future, right-wing authoritarians know all about that kind of forgiving and forgetting. If being defensive, blind to oneself and highly



dogmatic make it unlikely one will ever come to grips with one's failings, authoritarian followers get voted "Least Likely to Change."

### What's To Be Done?

The more one learns about the problem, I think, the more one realizes how difficult it will be to change people who are so ferociously aggressive, and fiercely defensive. You're not likely to get anywhere arguing with authoritarians. Authoritarian followers might even cling to their beliefs more tightly, the wronger they turned out to be. Trying to change highly dogmatic, evidence-immune, groupgripping people in such a setting is like pissing into the wind.

### Reductions in Authoritarianism: Wishing for the Moon

Let's start with some obvious ways to reduce authoritarianism that are, nevertheless, probably doomed to failure because they require various people to act against their narrower self-interest. (But we can at least say we thought of them.)

- **Reducing fear.** Fear ignites authoritarian aggression more than anything else.
- **Reducing self-righteousness.** Self-righteousness is the major releaser of authoritarian aggression, and it is often based on theology and teachings that seem to bring out the worst in people.
- **Nipping the religious roots of ethnocentrism.** Fundamentalist parents could talk to their children about being God's children before talking about being Baptists.
- **Teaching children not to trust authorities automatically.** Parents in general could teach their older children that sometimes authorities can be bad and should be resisted.
- **Having authoritarians read this book.** But, high RWAs are so defensive and so unaware of themselves that when you tell them what high RWAs are like, they almost always think you're talking about somebody else.
- **Help the followers see how they're being played for suckers.** It's too important to them to believe otherwise, and just your raising the question will likely put you into their huge out-group and make them suspicious of you.

### Long-term Reductions in Authoritarianism: More Practical Solutions

**Wanting to be "normal."** Studies show they will moderate their attitudes and beliefs just from finding out that they're different from most people. Find civic work that you can agree on. You'll be amazed how bonding it is when four people wrestle an old washing machine out of the brown water that none of them could have managed alone. This is called a superordinate goal, and social psychologists can cite many studies that show it really does open doors between groups. ... So, go bother them. Reach out, looking especially for whatever moderates may be in their numbers.

**Visible minorities.** Along this same line, high RWAs misperceive how diverse America is. Minorities should speak out for their rights. If they don't, they are (among other things) helping a lot of the majority remain steeped in ignorance. People can learn, but they won't have a chance if the minorities remain invisible.

**Higher education.** Higher education can have a significant beneficial impact upon authoritarian followers that lasts a lifetime. It makes sense to keep our universities alive, vibrant and accessible. For all their faults, they can be the bastions of democracy they were meant to be.

**Laws.** Of all the people in a society, high RWAs are probably the most likely to obey laws they don't like. Anti-discrimination laws, designed to make sure everyone has the rights she is entitled to, can lead many prejudiced people to equal-footing contact with minorities.

**Modeling and Leadership.** Many times people know that something wrong is happening, but they don't do anything because they know other people are also aware of the situation. As a result, all can trap themselves into inactivity. Often one person can steel another, and another and another, until many are working together. You don't have to form a majority to have an effect.

**Non-violent protest.** Don't use violence as a tool to advance your cause. Most people are spring-loaded to become more authoritarian when violence increases in society.

**The Short Run Imperative: Speak Out Now or Forever, Perhaps, Be Silenced**

If they work, most of these suggestions will only produce changes in high RWAs in the long run. But we may not have a long run. We have to contain authoritarianism now lest it destroy us. We've got to act now. I do not think a fascist dictatorship lies just over our horizon. But I do not think we are well protected against one.

The biggest problem we have now, in my view, is authoritarianism. It has placed America at one of those historic cross-roads that will profoundly affect the rest of its history, and the future of our planet. The world deserves a much better America than the one it has seen lately. And so do Americans.

The social dominators and high RWAs presently marshaling their forces for the next election ... have the right to organize, they have the right to proselytize, they have the right to select and work for candidates they like, they have the right to vote. If the people who are not social dominators and right-wing authoritarians want to have those same rights in the future, they, you, had better do those same things too, now. You do have the right to remain silent, but you'll do so at everyone's peril.

Americans have, for the most part, been standing on the sidewalk quietly staring at this authoritarian parade as it marches on. You can watch it tear American democracy apart, bit

by bit, bite by bite. Or you can exercise your rights too, while you still have them, and get just as concerned, active, and giving to protect yourself and your country.

If you are the only person you know who grasps what's happening, then you've got to take leadership, help inform, and organize others. One person can do so much; you've no idea! And two can do so much more. But time is running out, fast, and nearly everything is at stake.

### Notes

Some high RWAs may be especially energized now because the backlash that is growing against their causes convinces them that they are being discriminated against.

Overgeneralizing the findings that reveal their shortcomings would indeed be wrong. But these highly prejudiced people appear to be performing another of their amazing mental gymnastics by seeing themselves as the victims of prejudice.