NOTE ON PREJUDICE AND PERSONALITY

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Summary.—The relationship between prejudice and personality was examined in a sample of 101 high school Ss. Contrary to prediction, no significant correlation of prejudice with repression (.18) or anxiety (.05) scores was observed.

A number of investigators have commented on relationships between psychodynamic characteristics of the individual and racial prejudice. Allport (1954) and Adorno, et al. (1950) have pointed to the important role of repression in defending against the conscious awareness of sexual and aggressive impulses. Highly repressive individuals may alleviate such unconscious tendencies by projecting them on to a convenient scapegoat target. Bettelheim and Janowitz (1964) have suggested that the prejudiced person may also be low in conscious anxiety.

... the greater the underlying anxiety of a person, the more prejudiced he is, because the pressure of his anxiety weakens his personal controls. Thus weakened, he seeks relief through prejudice, which serves to reduce anxiety because prejudice facilitates the discharge of hostility and if hostility is discharged, anxiety is reduced. Prejudice reduces anxiety because it suggests to the person that he is better than others, hence does not need to feel so anxious (pp. 54-55).

The present study examined the predicted positive relationship between prejudice and repression and the predicted negative relationship between prejudice and reported anxiety. Two scales which have been derived from the MMPI, Welsh's (1960) Factors A and R, were administered to 101 high school students as measures of anxiety and repression, respectively. Harding and Shuman's Reaction Questionnaire (1963; see also Robinson, Rusk, & Head, 1968) was also administered as a measure of prejudice and scored using Rubin's (1967) code. The A and R scale items were mixed together and half the Ss took these scales first and half took the Reactions Questionnaire first.

The results indicated that prejudice scores were not strongly correlated with either anxiety ($r = .05$) or repression ($r = .18$, $p < .10$), and that, as expected, the anxiety and repression scores were independent ($r = -.17$). Although the measures individually did not predict prejudice scores to any significant extent, it is possible that the effect of one variable depended on the level of the other.

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To examine this possibility, high and low anxiety and repression scores were defined by median splits and a $2 \times 2$ analysis of variance with unequal cell frequencies was performed. The resulting main and interaction $F$s were nonsignificant, which also indicates a failure to confirm the often assumed personality-prejudice relationships.

A different method for further examining the personality-prejudice relationships would be to examine changes in anxiety and repression scores following prejudice-reducing or prejudice-increasing experiences. For example, is an increase in prejudice associated with a decrease in anxiety as Bettelheim and Janowitz (1964) predict?

REFERENCES


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