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## AUTHORITARIANISM IN POLICE COLLEGE STUDENTS AND NON-POLICE COLLEGE STUDENTS

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The proper policing of a community requires unusual qualities in people who perform this service, particularly in these days of tension and unrest. Day after day police are compelled to make instant decisions which could easily cause irreparable harm and damage to individuals and the community. They not only need a high degree of intelligence, judgment, courage, impartiality, and honesty, but also require a personality structure which is flexible enough to function judiciously and with understanding with respect to minority group unrest, mass demonstrations, and riots. Police training authorities recognize that the complexity of police work is such that the quality of police service will significantly improve only when higher educational standards are required. (Pres. Comm. 1967)

The requirements for police recruitment in New York City and many major cities include a high school diploma or a high school equivalency certificate. At present, this bare minimum is sufficient for supervisory or higher level promotions in New York City.

The John Jay College of Criminal Justice, a senior four year college, has been set up in New York City, to meet the needs of the police who work on rotating shifts and who want to attend college. Basic in the philosophy of the college is the intention of developing knowledge and skills in its students so that they may be more effective as policemen and more effective as members of the larger society.

In this connection, a number of questions arise concerning the drive for higher education on the

part of upward oriented police. If higher education is not tied up with promotional opportunities, as is the case in New York City, most police who take advantage of the availability of college attendance do so without the hope of immediate on the job reward. The authors contend that with respect to authoritarianism, there are personality differences between the college oriented police and the non-college oriented police, which are not only basic to their attending college but also affect their decision making in crucial and sensitive situations. To date, little has been written on authoritarianism and the personality of the police.

In 1967 an article was published by the above authors (Smith, Locke, and Walker) dealing with authoritarianism in college and non-college oriented police as measured by the Rokeach (1960) and Piven (1961) scales. It was found that while the scales measured different facets of personality, the college policemen tended to be less authoritarian than the non-college police and that among college police the older group is more authoritarian than the younger group.

These findings suggested other questions which should be investigated. One of these questions was concerned with a comparison of attitudes toward authoritarianism of the newly entered college police and a comparable civilian group of average college freshmen. However, initially, there were no "civilian" students in attendance, and this research could not be undertaken. Their enrollment came about in the following way.

In 1965, when the John Jay College of Criminal Justice was opened (it was then known as The

College of Police Science), registration was restricted to police and other law enforcement personnel. Class schedules provided choice of day and evening classes so that the police students could attend classes when the hours of their tours of duty were changed. The college quickly learned that 60% of the students attended evenings and 40% days, leaving about 100 seats vacant. Accordingly, about 100 freshmen students (non-police) were admitted whose attendance was restricted to day classes. These students were similar in religious and ethnic background, and had attended parochial high schools in about the same proportion as the college oriented police.

With the addition of freshmen students (non-police) it became possible to investigate differences between them and college police and thus answer the question that was previously posed. Namely, are there differences in attitude toward authoritarianism between non-police freshmen and newly entered police college students?

#### PROCEDURE

Two groups of subjects were selected. The first group was made up of 122 newly appointed policemen of whom 58 were between the ages of 21 through 24, and 64, between 25 through 29. The second group consisted of 89 non-police freshmen students whose ages ranged between 17 and 20.

To test for authoritarianism two scales were combined: a modification of the Dogmatism scale developed by Rokeach (1960), and a scale following Piven (1961). Both scales were aimed at charting different aspects of authority; Rokeach with attitude toward socialized authority, Piven with the authoritative responses of social workers to clients. The Rokeach scale was employed rather than the one developed in *THE AUTHORITARIAN PERSONALITY* (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levenson, and Sanford, 1950) which has been criticized because its main measuring instruments focused on Fascist authoritarianism. Rokeach was aware of this criticism when he planned his instrument, explaining:

... if our interest is in the scientific study of authoritarianism, we should proceed from right authoritarianism not to a re-focus on left authoritarianism but to the general properties held in common by all forms of authoritarianism. . . . What is needed is therefore a deliberate turning away from a concern with the one or two kinds of authoritarianism

that may happen to be predominant at a given time. Instead, we should pursue a more theoretical ahistorical analysis of the properties held in common by all forms of authoritarianism regardless of specific ideological, theological, philosophic, or scientific content.

Of the 57 items chosen for the instant questionnaire, 40 came from Rokeach and 17 from Piven.

The questionnaire which was self administered contained instructions which indicated that the responses were confidential. For each of the 57 items, the subjects were requested to react to a Likert-type scale based upon the response to each item in terms of several degrees of agreement or disagreement, as follows:

1. I agree a little
2. I agree on the whole
3. I agree very much
- 1. I disagree a little
- 2. I disagree on the whole
- 3. I disagree very much

Each item was set up in such a way that the most favorable response earned a value of +3 while the least favorable response was given a -3. For scoring, the responses were converted to values of 1 through 6, with 1 being least favorable and 6 most favorable.

To test for interest and motivation of non-police students (college freshmen) toward a career devoted to police work a five point scale was devised as follows:

1. Completely uncommitted
2. Somewhat uncommitted
3. Not sure, one way or the other
4. Somewhat committed
5. Completely committed

To avoid the selective factor of ordinal position of choices, one half of the non-police students were presented with the choices in the above order. For the remaining half the order of choices was reversed. The weight of each choice remained constant; the subject who exhibited no interest in police work was given a grade of "1" while at the other end of the continuum the subject's choice was scored "5".

#### RESULTS

An examination of the data presented in Table 1 reveals a set of results that should be quite disconcerting to those who believe in the common stereotype of the police officer as a highly authoritarian individual. When compared with the non-

Table 1  
Comparison of Police (N = 51) and Non-Police Groups (N = 89)

|                  | M    | $\sigma$ | $\sigma_m$ | D   | $\sigma$ diff | t      |
|------------------|------|----------|------------|-----|---------------|--------|
| A. Total Scale   |      |          |            |     |               |        |
| Police.....      | -.23 | 1.75     | .03        | .19 | .04           | 4.75** |
| Non-Police.....  | -.04 | 1.77     | .02        |     |               |        |
| B. Rokeach Scale |      |          |            |     |               |        |
| Police.....      | -.21 | 1.66     | .04        | .10 | .05           | 2.00*  |
| Non-Police.....  | -.10 | 1.84     | .03        |     |               |        |
| C. Piven Scale   |      |          |            |     |               |        |
| Police.....      | -.28 | 1.98     | .07        | .41 | .08           | 5.1**  |
| Non-Police.....  | .13  | 1.60     | .04        |     |               |        |

\* Significant at .05 level

\*\* Significant at .01 level

Table 2

POLICE-CAREER (N = 22) VS. NON POLICE-CAREER ORIENTED STUDENTS (N = 18)

|                       | M    | $\sigma$ | $\sigma_m$ | D   | $\sigma$ diff | t    |
|-----------------------|------|----------|------------|-----|---------------|------|
| Police Career.        | .06  | 1.73     | .02        |     |               | 1.05 |
| Non-Police Career.... | -.02 | 1.85     | .06        | .08 | .076          |      |

( $p > .001$ ) in "authoritarianism" than do a non-college oriented group of police officers of the same age level.

DISCUSSION

Despite the common assumption that police officers as a group tend to be more "authoritarian" in their attitude and behavior than the general population, the present study reinforces an earlier finding by the authors that this generalization may not hold true for a particular segment of the police population. In a prior study (Smith, Locke and Walker, 1967) it was demonstrated that the college oriented policeman is significantly less "authoritarian" than his non-college oriented fellow officer. The current study adds another parameter to these findings.

The present investigation demonstrates that the police officer enrolled in college scores significantly lower on the "authoritarian" scale than does his fellow student who is not a police officer. The implications of these results in terms of the role of these college educated police officers in dealing with the many social problems of the day cannot be overemphasized, and the provision of an opportunity for a college education for these police officers becomes a public obligation.

SUMMARY

In comparing the authoritarianism of police college students and non-police college students, it was found that as measured by the Rokeach and Piven scales the freshmen police officer college students tend to be less authoritarian than the

police officer college student, the young police officer enrolled in the same classes scores significantly lower ( $t = 4.75$ ) on the total scale. When the scale is broken down to its Rokeach and Piven components this same relationship holds although it is more marked in the case of the Piven items than for the Rokeach ( $t$ 's = 5.1 and 2.00, respectively).

When the 89 non-police students were asked to rate their interest in a career devoted to police work on a five (5) point scale twenty-two of them indicated a high level of interest, and eighteen indicated no interest whatsoever in police work. The data on the "authoritarianism" scale for these two groups are presented in Table 2. From this we note that while those who are apparently most motivated for a future career in police work score higher (more authoritarian) than those who would not consider police work as a career, this difference is not statistically significant.

When the data from the present study are compared with those of our earlier study we find that our college student police officers and non-police officer students score significantly lower

freshmen students who are not police officers. Further, that while the patterning of responses indicated a higher authoritarian score for the students most motivated for a future career in police work, nevertheless, as compared with the students not interested in police work, the difference was not statistically significant.

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