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Abstract

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In order to test the effectiveness of teaching in modifying moral judgments, 200 students were administered a test of moral judgments in mitigating circumstances. Two of the five classes received instruction about the authoritarian personality, while three classes served as controls and received no such information. In a pretest-posttest design, with effects of pretesting statistically analyzed, it was found that the students who were taught about the authoritarian personality made significantly less severe moral judgments (p's $< .001$). In addition, females were more moralistic than males, and first born females were more moralistic than later born women. The results somewhat contradict Jacob (1957) on the effects of teaching, and suggest that moral judgments can be experimentally manipulated to be less severe.

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Teaching About the Authoritarian Personality: Effects on Moral Judgment[1]

Russell Eisenman

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The conceptual focus of this paper is twofold: (a) the effectiveness of college in modifying "attitudes" and (b) opinion change regarding moral judgments. With respect to the first point, Jacob (1957) concluded that college instruction does not change students' values to any great extent. He claimed that greater homogeneity observed after four years of college should more appropriately be termed "socialization" rather than "liberalization". Those who do not find college to their liking drop out, (estimated at perhaps 50 per cent by Jacob) and the remaining students are relatively homogeneous and have to make only minor changes in their present value system to conform to that of the college. Also, a second important point made by Jacob is that the formal educational process contributes little to the observed change, so that the effectiveness of the college teacher is seriously questioned. Jacob (1957) has done for college teaching what Eysenck (1952) did for psychotherapy, namely, question the effectiveness of something which had been uncritically accepted by many. Since educational institutions are highly valued aspects of our current society, it is not surprising that Jacob's controversial claims met with immediate rebuttal and attempts at disconfirmation of his basic hypotheses. However, the studies done were often inadequate to assess Jacob's conclusions. For example, Gottlieb and Hodgkins (1963) had students report whether or not they had changed during college. While there are other aspects of this study which are important and meaningful, the self-report data are highly suspect, given the tendency of subjects to distort or lack

adequate self-insight. A more adequate test of the Jacob position would be to assess the effects of teachers' efforts in much the same way that opinion change is assessed in social psychology research. The present study sought to study opinion change with respect to moral judgments.

The second focus of this paper concerns that area of moral judgment. Some biases can be noted in contemporary research in the area. The first bias is the tendency to study moral judgments in children. A wealth of research has arisen on children's moral judgments, with comparatively little research on moral values in older subjects. A second bias concerns what could be termed the linear assumption with regard to moral values. Sociologists have been criticized (Rosow, 1965; Wrong, 1961) for over-emphasizing the value of socialization, as if maximal socialization was most optimal. Psychologists studying crime and delinquency may fall into the same erroneous reasoning, since research consistenly shows that criminals reject certain middle class values (Landis & Scarpatti, 1965). Generalizing from crime and delinquency research, one might conclude that more intensive socialization, designed to bring about middle class values in deviant populations, would result in less crime. Regardless of the accuracy or inaccuracy of such a position, it is important to note that a curvilinear model rather than a linear model probably best summarizes the optimal employment of the severity of moral judgment.[2]

Piaget (1948; Flavell, 1963) in The Moral Judgment of the Child, stated that at an earlier stage of development, children are severely moralistic, and regard an offense the more immoral the greater

the damage. At a later stage of development, the child is able to consider the motivation behind the act. Unlike the younger child, the child at the more advanced stage can take account of mitigating circumstances. Fifteen glasses broken by accident is more immoral to the younger child than 10 glasses broken intentionally because the harm is greater; the child at the more advanced stage of development considers the motive and would call the breaking of 10 glasses more immoral, since it was done on purpose. Perhaps something like an inverted-U, with severity of moral judgment on the abscissa and some measure of optimal health on the ordinate, best reflects the point to be derived from Piaget; moral judgments lead to optimal health as they increase up to a certain point, but after this point they are harsh in a non-functional way. The curvileaner conception would also be consistent with psychoanalytic beliefs about neurotic guilt, since guilt can stem from or be correlated with extremely severe moral judgments. On the other hand, the Freudian emphasis on replacing id with ego is more consistent with the linear emphasis on (Freud, 1933). Perhaps this can all be summarized by saying that when we deal with criminals or undersocialized children, we tend to adopt a linear framework for viewing moral judgments, since it seems that these subjects need to increase the severity of their moral judgments. But, if we take a broader view, we appreciate that after a certain point, moral judgments can become unnecessarily severe.

The present study employed a test of moral judgments in mitigating circumstances to investigate the effects of teaching college students about the authoritarian personality. Since any full-scale review of

authoritarianism (Adorno, Frenkel,-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Byrne, 1966) involves the harsh moralism believed to accompany authoritarianism, it was hypothesized that teaching about authoritarianism would tend to lower scores on the moral judgments test, where a lower score means a more accepting (less morally severe) judgment. Controls for different teachers and for the effects of pre-testing were utilized.

Method

Subjects

Ss were 200 students in undergraduate psychology classes at Temple University, Philadelphia. There were 115 males and 85 females. There were 60 first born males, 49 first born females, 50 later born males, and 30 later born females. The 5 only child males and 6 only child females were excluded from the analysis, since the lumping together of first born and only child Ss is a very questionable procedure (Eisenman & Taylor, 1967; Platt, Moskalski, & Eisenman, 1968).

Test

The measuring instrument was a test of moral judgments in mitigating circumstances (MJMC) devised by James F. Smith (Eisenman, 1968a; Eisenman & Smith, 1967;). Ss are presented with six examples of behavior, and must rate on a scale of 1-to-7 how they evaluate these behaviors with 1 representing "totally right" and 7 representing "totally wrong". Each behavior in question is commonly considered immoral in one way or another, but mitigating circumstances are presented in the items. Eisenman (1968a) found sex differences when extreme scorers were used, with females making more severe moral judgments;

regional differences between Temple University and University of Georgia students were minor and not significant. Birth order has not been previously studied, but is relevent in view of Adler's (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1959) belief that first borns are more conservative, with evidence by Altus (1966) providing some support for this view. The six items, each rated on the 1-to-7 scale, are as follows:

1. R.M. cheated on a school exam because he had to graduate that quarter due to the financial burden on his family.
2. C.L. stole a loaf of bread to eat because he was very hungry and had no money.
3. R.B. took his buddy's girl out behind his back because he and the girl had fallen in love.
4. D.T. lied to his mother about his lack of studying at school because he didn't want her to worry about his problems.
5. L.H. didn't take his little brother to the show when he promised because the little brother was nasty to him that day.
6. J.F. broke a date with a girl to the biggest dance of the year because he had a headache.

Procedure

Students were tested in five classes. Two classes dealt with the authoritarian personality as part of the course content, and three classes did not. The two classes dealing with authoritarianism were the experimental classes; in one of these classes students were administered the MJMC test three weeks before the authoritarianism material was covered and re-tested three weeks afterwards. This was the pretested experimental group. In the other experimental class,

the non-pretested experimental group, MJMC was administered only once, three weeks after instruction regarding authoritarianism was completed. One teacher spent approximately three weeks on authoritarianism, while the other spent about one week on the subject. Two of the three control classes did not receive a pretest, but were administered the MJMC test after approximately the same number of weeks as the other classes received the posttest MJMC. The initial testing was introduced as research on students' judgments of various situations, whole the post-testing in the two classes was introduced as reliability data. Only 8 Ss were lost by being present during pretesting but not during posttests.

Experimental design

Since pretesting may influence the behavior of S in opinion change studies (Campbell, 1957; Lana, in press, Soloman, 1949), Campbell's (1957) extension of the Soloman (1949) four-group design was employed. The Soloman four-group design involves a pretested experimental group; a non-pretested experimental group; a pre-tested control group; and a non-pretested control group. The present study utilized a fifth group as well, which was a non-pretested control group. Campbell (1957) recommended a 2 X 2 analysis of variance design, comparing pretested vs. unpretested and experimental vs. control groups. Such an analysis of variance was utilized for the present study, with the fifth (unpretested control) group combined with the other unpretested control group when a t-test indicated no significance difference between them in scores on the MJMC test.

Results

"Insert Table 1 about here"

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations for the variance conditions in this experiment. There is remarkable consistency,

with Ss tending to score just under 5 on the MJMC test prior to the course coverage of the authoritarian personality. After such coverage, the mean ~~rankings~~ ratings for the two experimental classes were 2.81 and 2.89, both of which are highly significant decreases (p's $< .001$) indicating more acceptance of the behaviors on the MJMC test. Comparison of the various rankings via t-tests indicated that both experimental posttest means are lower than the pretest means in the experimental and control pretest classes, and also lower than the control posttest means (all p's $< .001$).

In order to test the effects of pretesting a 2 (pretesting vs. no pretesting) X 2 (experimental classes vs. control classes) analysis of variance was conducted. The only significant F was for experimental vs. control classes ($F=12.68$, df=1/188, p $< .001$). No significant effect was obtained for pretesting ($F=1.91$, df=1/188, ns) nor for the interaction of pretesting X experimental vs. control classes ($F=0.18$, df=1/188, ns). This analysis of variance is consistent with the above-mentioned t-tests, and suggests that the experimental manipulation had the hypothesized effect independent of any effects as a result of pretesting.

The close similarity of the posttest means of the two experimental groups in Table 1 as well as the similarity of the means of the pretest experimental and control group and the posttested control groups suggest that there was no differential instructor effect independent of the experimental manipulation.

"Insert Table 2 about here"

Table 2 presents means and standard deviations for the birth order-sex groupings. Analysis of variance for two levels of birth order (first born vs. later born) and two levels of sex (males vs. female

indicated that sex was significantly associated with intensity of ranking on the MJMC test, with females having higher mean scores than males, indicating more severe moral judgments. (Sex $F=9.66$, $df=1/177$, $p < .001$). There was no significant effect for birth order ($F=1.88$, $df=1/177$, ns) but the interaction of birth order X sex was significant ($F=7.12$, $df=1/177$, $p < .01$). As can be seen from Table 2, and as indicated by t-tests, this interaction is greatly due to the first born females making the most severe moral judgments. Thus, females made moral severe moral judgments than males, and among the females, first born Ss made more severe moral judgments than later born Ss.

Discussion

The present study employed an opinion-change paradigm to test the effectiveness of instruction about the authoritarian personality in one area: reduction of the severity of moral judgments when mitigating circumstances are present. Berkowitz and Walker (1967) have shown that both peer influence and telling Ss that behavior is illegal can increase the severity of moral judgments. The present study suggests that instruction about a moralistic group, authoritarians, can result in lowered scores on a test of moral judgments of acts commonly considered immoral, but involving mitigating circumstances.

The design permitted assessment of the effects of pre-testing, and of employing different teachers. Neither had a significant effect. It is possible that the two teachers who taught about authoritarianism would have brought about reduced moral judgments even if they had not taught about authoritarianism, while the three control teachers would not have induced less severe judgments even if they had taught about authoritarianism. This seems unlikely since the topic of

authoritarianism, while partly covered because of the teacher, was covered in the text book used in the two experimental classes. Since the teachers were assigned to their classes on the basis of their perceived qualifications for teaching them the selective nature of who taught what seems limited. In any event, if the results were due to the teachers in some way and not to the actual coverage of authoritarianism, the study still suggests the effectiveness of the teacher in modifying moral judgments.

Contrary to Jacob (1957) it would appear that teaching can have an influence in changing students' opinions. Although the long-lasting effects are unknown, as well as the extent of change induced, it would seem that the results present a more optimistic picture than that presented by Jacob regarding teacher effectiveness. Perhaps the divergence of the findings from those anticipated from reading Jacob (1957) is due to Jacob's failure to distinguish clearly between values and attitudes (Eisenman, 1968b). While such a distinction is by no means obvious, values seem to be more general and reflect less of a disposition to act, relative to values. Many people may have values in common (e.g., "Negroes deserve equal rights") but will diverge when more specific values are considered (e.g., "This Negro couple should/should not be permitted to move into my neighborhood"). By focusing his conceptualization on values to a great extent, Jacob may have biased his results in favor of a view of American college students as homogeneous and relatively unchanging over the four years of college. In contrast, the present study used moral judgments with

mitigating circumstances involved, where opinions about right and wrong might differ. In fact, to the extent that students may not be highly involved with moral issues of right vs. wrong (Eisenman, 1968b), it may be possible to induce opinion change quite readily. It would remain to be seen whether or not students could be influenced by their instructors so readily on attitudes more strongly held. This discussion implies another distinction: attitudes vs. opinions, with opinions denoting less intensely held beliefs, and less of a tendency to act. Further research is necessary to test the assumption made here than opinions can be changed more readily than attitudes, which in turn can be influenced more readily than values. Of course, a drawback to such research is the difficulty of clearly distinguishing among opinions, attitudes, and values.

The results regarding sex differences are consistent with an earlier study (Eisenman, 1968a) which found that, among groups of extreme scorers, females made more severe moral judgments than males. This sex difference was apparent to a stronger degree in the present study, since a significant difference was obtained using the entire sample rather than extreme groups. However, since Klinger, Albaum and Heatherington (1964) have found that males tend to make more severe moral judgments when females are involved as stimulus objects and females tend to make more sever moral judgments when males are involved, the results are open to the question of whether females were more moral(listic) in the present sample, or whether the test of MJMC is biased toward this finding due to its presenting Ss with male stimulus objects in its items. Klinger et al. used only one story

to test their hypothesis about sex differences, while the present study employed six items. Further, since an attempt to see if some items yielded significant results while other items were nondiscriminating failed to show the superiority of one item over another, the results suggest that Ss' moral judgments generalized over the range of items presented, even though the items differ in content. It is interesting that the pre-manipulation moral values were rather conservative with little acceptance of the behaviors in question on the MJMC test.

The failure to find birth order differences comparing first born males vs. later born males is inconsistent with the Adlerian interpretation, but the harsher moral judgments made by first born females relative to later born females is consistent with Adler (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1959). These findings are entirely in accord with Kammeyer (1966) whose data suggested that first born American college women are conservators of the traditional culture, and with Eisenman's (1967a, 1967b) finding that first born female college students preferred simpler polygons than later born females. Since complexity preference is related to creativity (Barron, 1963; Eisenman, 1968c) we would expect that more creative Ss would make less severe moral judgments (Eisenman & Smith, 1967).

It is interesting that moral judgments were changed even though moral judgments were not directly attacked in the experimental classes. What seems to have happened is that a negative valence was given to a certain type of person, authoritarians, who, it was pointed out, possess various attributes including moralistic tendencies. This stigma attached to authoritarianism was apparently sufficient to generalize to harsh moral judgments in general, with the result

that Ss in the experimental classes made less severe moral judgments relative to the control classes and, for the pretested experimental class, relative to previously made moral judgments. It seems clear from this study and the one by Berkowitz and Walker (1967) that it is possible to modify Ss' moral judgments, either in the direction of making them more severe (Berkowitz & Walker, 1967) or, as in the present experiment, less severe.

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Footnotes

[1]A modified version of this paper was presented at the American Psychological Association annual meeting, San Francisco, Calif., Sept. 1, 1968.

[2]It is recognized that "optimal" tends to be based on value judgments rather than objective data. The problem of a value-free definition of "optimal" is beyond the scope of this paper.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Rankings on Moral Judgments Test by Experimental and Control Groups With and Without Pretesting

Pretest Moral Judgment Score	Pretested Experimental Group	Unpretested Experimental Group	Pretested Control Group	Unpretested Control Group	Unpretested Control Group
Mean	4.79	----	4.88	----	----
SD	1.31	----	1.60	----	----
Posttest Moral Judgment Score					
Mean	2.81	2.89	4.85	4.92	4.86
SD	1.09	1.79	1.98	2.03	1.75

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Ranking on Moral Judgments Test

by

Males and Females, and First Borns and

Later Borns

	Males	Females
First born		
Mean	4.11	5.89
SD	2.20	1.17
Later born		
Mean	4.56	5.01
SD	2.03	1.05