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Authoritarianism as an Agent of Status Quo Maintenance: Women's Careers and Family Lives

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Authoritarianism as an Agent of Status Quo Maintenance: Implications for Women's Careers and Family Lives

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We examined how right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) influenced career and family plans and life outcomes in 2 samples of educated women. In the college-aged sample, participants who planned to earn professional degrees scored higher on RWA than those who planned to earn graduate degrees in the humanities or social sciences. RWA was also positively related to the expression of preferences for male partners who possess masculine characteristics. In the midlife sample, RWA scores were higher for participants with traditional career and family outcomes at midlife. For midlife participants following a nontraditional career path, RWA was positively related to compartmentalizing career and family responsibilities and finding role combination stressful. Authoritarianism is important for understanding women's decisions about combining career and family.

KEY WORDS: right-wing authoritarianism; midlife women; college women; careers; family; gender roles.

Authoritarianism has been conceptualized as both an individual difference and a societal-level variable. Both conceptualizations have implications for understanding status quo maintenance and the rise of repressive social movements. Indeed, the original conception of authoritarianism was developed to help understand the rise of fascism in Europe in the 1930s (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950). More recently, however, some researchers have begun to investigate the operation of authoritarianism in ordinary, nonpolitical domains, domains with which most people engage in their daily lives. For example, authoritarian parenting has been described as intrusively directive and punitive (Baumrind, 1971) and associated with parent–adolescent conflict (Peterson, Smirles, & Wentworth, 1997). Other nonpolitical variables that have been related to authoritarianism in recent research include certain types of religiosity (Hunsberger, 1996) and goal setting in college graduates (Peterson & Lane, 2001). We argue that au-

thoritarianism is an individual difference variable that tends to organize a wide range of nonpolitical aspects of life, including attitudes, cognitions, and behaviors related to career and family.

Authoritarianism can be conceptualized as a self-schema that regulates attitudes, memory, and behavior. Self-schemas are cognitive structures that help people organize information about the self (Markus, 1977). Using Kelly's (1963) terms, cognitive constructs related to authority, morality, and tradition should be bipolar and impermeable for high scorers on authoritarianism. For example, the construct of "gender" should be organized around traditional beliefs that men and women possess mutually exclusive characteristics that are sex-specific. That is, characteristics associated with women might include submissiveness, emotionality, and dependence, whereas those associated with men might include dominance, stoicism, and independence. Information about people who possess characteristics inconsistent with their gender should be difficult for authoritarians to process. Winter (1996) argued that such cognitive rigidity is a result of intolerance of ambiguity—or the preference for clear-cut categories as opposed to ambiguous ones. The relationship between authoritarianism

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and intolerance of ambiguity found empirical support in a variety of early studies (e.g., Block & Block, 1951; Brown, 1953; Frenkel-Brunswik, 1949; Pettigrew, Allport, & Barnett, 1958).

In addition to intolerance of ambiguity, people who score high on authoritarianism tend to organize their world in terms of power hierarchies. That is, they are concerned with distinctions between in-groups and out-groups. Research has shown a robust relationship between authoritarianism and prejudice toward members of perceived out-groups such as Blacks, Jews, homosexuals, the visibly handicapped, and people with AIDS (Adorno et al., 1950; Altemeyer, 1981, 1988, 1996; Cunningham, Dollinger, Satz, & Rotter, 1991; Haddock, Zanna, & Esses, 1993; Lessing, Barbera, & Arnold, 1976, MacDonald, 1974; McFarland, Ageyev, & Abalankina, 1993; McFarland, Ageyev, & Abalankina-Paap, 1992; Noonan, Barry, & Davis, 1970, Peterson, Doty, & Winter, 1993; Smith, 1971). There is ample empirical evidence showing that authoritarians are also hostile toward women. For example, authoritarianism is related to devaluing women's problem-solving skills (Fry, 1975), holding misogynist attitudes (Centers, 1963), and holding negative attitudes about feminism (Sarup, 1976; Smith & Winter, 2002) and feminists (Haddock & Zanna, 1994).

We have argued that authoritarian preoccupation with in-group and out-group distinctions contributes to the maintenance of traditional power hierarchies by directing individual and group efforts toward rewarding group-consistent behaviors and punishing inconsistent ones. For example, Duncan, Peterson, and Winter (1997) investigated the relationship between right-wing authoritarianism and arguments used to support either a prolife or prochoice position on abortion. They found that authoritarianism scores were associated with pro-life essays that relied on conventional morality, submission to traditional authorities, and aggression or punitiveness toward women seeking abortions. Arguments made by more authoritarian participants supported group-consistent behaviors by punishing inconsistent ones (e.g., restrictions on abortion were warranted because an unwanted pregnancy was "...the woman's fault," p. 47).

Aggression (or punitiveness) toward out-groups can be activated or harnessed by authoritarian leaders (especially, as Altemeyer, 2003, suggested, by leaders high on both authoritarianism and social dominance). Authoritarian aggression is usually directed outward, toward perceived transgressors of social mores (e.g.,

Smith & Winter, 2002). However, authoritarianism also operates internally, to control, maintain, punish, and reward the behavior of authoritarians themselves. For example, Milgram's classic research on obedience to authority showed that the most obedient participants scored significantly higher on authoritarianism than the least obedient participants (Elms & Milgram, 1966), which suggests that authoritarianism regulated behavioral responses to situational demands. In our own research, we found a stronger relationship between authoritarianism and some traditional gender role attitudes for women than for men; perhaps women have more at stake in policing themselves with regard to adherence to gender roles (Duncan et al., 1997).

In any event, one effective way to reduce ambiguity in one's life is to adopt clear categories of behavior for oneself. Indeed, authoritarianism is related to support for traditional gender role ideology (Duncan et al., 1997; Frenkel-Brunswik, 1954; Walker, Rowe, & Quinsey, 1993), traditional family structures (Altemeyer, 1988; Levinson & Huffman, 1955), and conventional sexual mores (Ritts & Engbretson, 1991). In the current article we build on this previous work by exploring how authoritarianism is related to future marriage and career goals of a sample of contemporary college women as well as the midlife career and family outcomes of a second sample of college-educated women.

We present two studies. First, we looked at the relationship between authoritarianism and the stated future goals of a sample of currently enrolled college women. Then we examined the relationship between authoritarianism and the life outcomes of a sample of midlife women who graduated from the same college as the first sample. This cross-sectional comparison may give us an idea about how authoritarianism relates to attitudes about career and family choices (in the young adult sample) and how those choices may play out in actual life outcomes (in the midlife sample).

STUDY 1

Hypotheses

In the college student sample, we expected to find a positive relationship between authoritarianism and certainty that marriage (to a man) was on the horizon. Second, we hypothesized that the more authoritarian women would want to highlight gender distinctions

between themselves and men, therefore authoritarianism should be positively related to desiring a future partner who possessed masculine, but not feminine, characteristics. Similarly, given authoritarian interest in maintaining the status quo, there should be a positive relationship between authoritarianism (RWA) and desire for a conventional partner. On the other hand, there should be no relationship between right-wing authoritarianism and valuing in a partner traits unassociated with conventionality or gender roles (e.g., adaptability, tact, solemnity).

Third, we hypothesized that participants who did not expect to pursue further education would score higher on authoritarianism than those who did expect to attend graduate school. Furthermore, *among those who planned to attend graduate school*, we hypothesized that those pursuing a professional degree of some kind would score higher on authoritarianism than those seeking an advanced academic degree. Professional degrees such as a JD or MD offer a clearly structured occupational route that should appeal to participants who scored relatively high on authoritarianism—they provide training for a specific career. In contrast, graduate degrees in the social sciences or humanities are much less structured, and prospects for postgraduate careers are less delineated. Because of the cognitive rigidity associated with authoritarianism, this uncertainty should be unappealing for the more authoritarian students. Keep in mind, however, that the overall score on authoritarianism for participants who planned to attend graduate school *should be low*. The focus of this hypothesis is on the relative authoritarianism scores of those participants who planned to pursue an applied degree (e.g., MD, JD) as compared to an academic degree (e.g., PhD).

Method

Participants and Procedures

Participants were 112 undergraduate students who were taking Introductory Psychology at Smith College in 1999. Students were tested in small groups outside of class and received course credit for filling out a survey devoted to questions about political knowledge, attitudes, life experiences, and future plans about career and family (see Peterson, Duncan, and Pang, 2002, for analyses of politics and authoritarianism in this sample). On average the students were 18.40 years old ($SD = 0.94$). Eighty-two percent reported their ethnicity as European American, 4%

as African American, 12% as Asian American, and 4% as Latina. Percentages do not add up to 100% because some participants marked multiple categories. Seventy-nine percent of the sample reported that they came from middle-class to upper-middle-class backgrounds; 6% indicated that they were wealthy, and 14% indicated that they were working class to lower-middle class.

Measures

Authoritarianism was assessed with Altemeyer's 30-item Right-Wing Authoritarianism scale (Altemeyer, 1988). Items were answered on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). Two examples of RWA items used in Studies 1 and 2 were as follows: "Obedience and respect for authority are the most important virtues children should learn," and "Atheists and others who have rebelled against the established religions are no doubt every bit as good and virtuous as those who attend church regularly" (reverse-scored). Cronbach's alpha was .90 with an item mean of 3.01 and $SD = 0.80$. It should be noted that the sample RWA item mean is below the theoretical neutral point of 4.

To assess certainty of marriage, participants were asked: "If currently single, do you plan to marry at some point?" They answered on a 4-point scale (1 = *no*, 2 = *unlikely*, 3 = *probably*, 4 = *yes*). At this point all participants were unmarried. To assess the idealized characteristics of their future spouses, the participants were asked to "think about the qualities that your ideal spouse or partner might possess." They were then asked to indicate the gender of their ideal partner. (Seven participants indicated that they wanted a female partner and were excluded from these analyses.) Several adjectives were then provided for rating their idealized partner on a 5-point scale (1 = *extremely undesirable characteristic* to 5 = *extremely desirable characteristic*). The three key adjectives were masculine, feminine, and conventional. In addition, six more adjectives were rated: adaptable, moody, solemn, tactful, theatrical, and unpredictable.

To assess future plans for education, participants were asked: "Are you planning on graduate school or a professional school after graduation?" They were given three response options: yes (selected by 53%), maybe (selected by 44%), or no (selected by 4%). This question was followed up with "If yes, what kind (e.g., medical school, MBA, graduate school in English)?" All the participants who answered "yes"

Table I. Right-Wing Authoritarianism, Certainty of Marriage, and Desired Characteristics of Life Partner, Study 1

	M	SD	Correlation with RWA
Certainty of marriage	3.42	0.68	.26*
Desired characteristics			
Masculine	3.78	0.84	.40***
Feminine	2.21	0.99	−.30**
Conventional	2.69	0.99	.48***
Adaptable	4.17	0.81	−.06
Tactful	4.05	0.72	.10
Unpredictable	3.01	1.00	−.09
Theatrical	2.93	0.94	.02
Solemn	2.48	1.01	.07
Moody	1.77	0.79	−.12

Note. $N = 100$. As discussed in the text, participants who indicated that they wanted a female partner were excluded from the analyses of partner characteristics.
$^*p < .05.$ $^{**}p < .01.$ $^{***}p < .001.$

to the first question were scored for the second question. Responses were coded for nine different areas that exhaustively covered participants' choices for doctoral-level and master's degrees.[3] These nine categories were collapsed into three superordinate categories: 57% selected professional schools (e.g., business, medicine), 12% selected the natural sciences (e.g., chemistry, biology), and 31% selected the social sciences or humanities (e.g., psychology, art history).[4]

Results

As shown in Table I, authoritarianism was positively correlated with participants' relative certainty that they would get married. Table I also presents the correlations between the RWA scale and the desired characteristics of a male partner for the heterosexual participants. Authoritarianism was positively related

[3]The participants who answered "maybe" did not answer the second part of the question and so were excluded from this analysis. The participants who planned to pursue an advanced degree ($M = 3.06, SD = .88$) did not differ on RWA from those who were unsure whether they would pursue an advanced degree ($M = 2.95, SD = 0.72$), $t(104) = 0.70$, *ns*.

[4]Following Peterson and Lane (2001), we decided to separate the natural sciences from the humanities and social sciences. Students tend to believe that the natural sciences require a different type of knowledge mastery than the humanities and social sciences. The natural sciences tend to be perceived as more traditionally positivist, with an emphasis on formulas and correct answers, whereas the social sciences and humanities tend to be perceived as more untraditionally social constructivist. We expected high scorers on authoritarianism to be more attracted to the traditional modes of knowledge found in the natural sciences. As stated above, this question was only answered by those who indicated a definite desire to attend graduate school.

Table II. Right-Wing Authoritarianism and Educational Goals and Attainment

	RWA		
Type of advanced degree	M	SD	F
Planned for by the student sample			
Social sciences or humanities ($n = 18$)	2.59ᵃ	0.57	5.19**
Professional ($n = 34$)	3.31ᵃ	0.92	
Natural sciences ($n = 7$)	3.36	0.64	
Earned by the alumnae sample			
Social sciences or humanities ($n = 17$)	1.98ᵃ	0.45	8.93***
Professional ($n = 48$)	2.40ᵃ	0.53	
Natural sciences ($n = 4$)	3.15ᵃ	0.83	

Note. Means that share superscripts within samples are significantly different from each other according to Tukey's HSD test ($p < .05$). RWA item means for the student and alumnae samples are not comparable. The students answered RWA items on a 7-point scale, whereas alumnae used a 5-point scale.
$^*p < .05.$ $^{**}p < .01.$ $^{***}p < .001.$

to desiring masculinity and conventionality and negatively related to desiring femininity in their future male partners.[5] In terms of the other adjectives, as expected, there was no relation between RWA scores and preferences for partners who were adaptable, moody, solemn, tactful, theatrical, or unpredictable.

Only 4% of students indicated that they did not plan to attend graduate school in the future. Therefore, we were unable to test the hypothesis that these participants would score higher on authoritarianism than those who planned to attend graduate school. Among those who indicated a firm desire to attend graduate school, the univariate *F* revealed a significant difference in RWA scores by type of advanced degree desired (see top half of Table II). A post hoc Tukey's HSD test showed that participants interested in pursuing postbaccalaureate degrees in the social sciences or humanities scored significantly lower on RWA than did participants interested in pursuing professional degrees.

Discussion

The results of Study 1 supported our hypothesis that there would be a positive relationship between authoritarianism and marriage and education plans in contemporary female college students. We found authoritarianism to be positively related to certainty of marriage and desire for future partners who were

[5]Two RWA items were about traditional gender and family roles. When these items were excluded from the RWA scale, the results for all analyses in both studies were unchanged.

masculine and conventional, but not feminine. This interest in men who fulfill masculine stereotypes is consistent with prior research (Duncan et al., 1997; Peterson & Lane, 2001) and supports the notion that high scorers have bipolar gender constructs and are uncomfortable with role ambiguity. For example, the flexibility in the roles and behavior necessitated by men and women partners who share parenting duties challenges societal norms and requires constant renegotiation of work and family duties (Deutsch, 1999). Ambiguities of this sort should be unappealing to high scorers on authoritarianism.

We were unable to test the hypothesis that participants who did not plan to pursue further education would score higher on authoritarianism than those who did have such plans because only 4% of our sample said that they definitely were not interested in graduate school. Smith College is an extremely competitive and academically focused institution. Students may perceive that they are expected to pursue post-baccalaureate education. Whether or not they do attend graduate school and whether attendance varies by authoritarianism scores is another question, one that we might start to answer in our second study with a sample of alumnae from the College.

However, among those who said they definitely planned to attend graduate school, there were differences in authoritarianism scores based on the type of graduate degree desired. Participants who planned to pursue professional degrees scored higher on authoritarianism than did participants who planned to pursue a degree in the social sciences or humanities. This is consistent with the hypothesis that the more authoritarian students would be interested in practical degrees that provide clear professional identities (e.g., as a lawyer, a medical doctor). We attempted to replicate this finding in our second study. Because so few students planned to enroll in graduate programs in the natural sciences ($n = 7$), we hesitate to interpret the nonsignificant finding that these participants scored higher on RWA than did participants who planned to pursue the other two types of degrees.

STUDY 2

In Study 2, we had the opportunity to examine the relationship between RWA and the actual midlife career and family outcomes of a sample of alumnae who graduated from the same college as the contemporary students studied in Study 1.

Hypotheses

Our first hypothesis was that participants who had not obtained any education beyond a bachelor's degree would score higher in authoritarianism than those who had obtained a graduate degree. Second, among those who had attended graduate school, those who had earned a professional degree should score higher on authoritarianism than those who had earned a degree in the social sciences or humanities.

In terms of career and family decisions, we hypothesized that midlife participants who made traditional, gendered, career and family choices would score higher on authoritarianism than their counterparts who made less traditional choices. In terms of family, we expected that participants who had married only once and those who had at least one child would score higher on authoritarianism than divorced or never-married participants and participants with no children. In terms of career, we expected that underemployed participants (those working in positions that did not require use of skills represented by their highest degree) would score higher on authoritarianism than participants who were fully employed (employment that required use of skills represented by highest degree earned). Underemployment in educated women often indicates a compromise between career and family commitments that is consistent with the traditional feminine gender role.

We proposed two hypotheses concerned with balancing career and family. First, we hypothesized that relatively authoritarian participants might cope with conflicting demands posed by combining career and family by trying to keep them as separate as possible (intolerance of ambiguity), preferably by taking on one role at a time rather than combining the two (Crosby, 1987). This means that for fully employed participants authoritarianism should be related positively to delaying childbirth in order to keep work and family independent for as long as possible. In addition, there should be a positive relationship between authoritarianism and stress related to role combination.

Finally, the relationship between authoritarianism and assertive confidence was examined. In general, research has shown that middle-aged adults are not only perceived by others as very competent, but that midlife adults themselves feel more competent and productive than do adults of other ages (Helson & Moane, 1987; Vandewater & Stewart, 1998; Wink & Helson, 1993). Stewart, Ostrove, and Helson (2001) found that educated women tend to increase

in self-confident power as they age from the 30s to the 40s to the 50s. However, because high authoritarian women committed to careers may believe that the exercise of power is incompatible with their gender role, we expected authoritarianism to be negatively related to self-confident power at all three of these points in time. (Once again, though, keep in mind that the overall score on authoritarianism for fully employed participants should be low.)

Method

Participants and Procedures

In 1994, members of the Smith College Class of 1964 met for their 30th class reunion. In order to prepare a report for the reunion, two class officers worked with the first author to administer a survey that asked participants about their career and family trajectories and current life situation. Approximately 600 of the alumnae were sent this class survey; 232 participants responded. In 1995–96, the first author contacted these participants a second time and asked them to participate in a formal academic study of educated women at midlife. One hundred forty-two participants responded to this request and provided information about their political beliefs, family life, careers, and educational attainments. They also filled out various personality inventories and attitudinal measures. At that time, members of the sample were 52 or 53 years old; most were White (97%). Most of the participants were married (74%). Variables from the alumnae and academic surveys were used to test hypotheses; 98 participants completed both surveys. (See Duncan, 1999; Duncan, Wentworth, Owen-Smith, & LaFavor, 2002; Peterson & Duncan, 1999; and Stewart et al., 2001 for analyses of other data from this sample).

Measures

Participants were asked to check their highest degree attained and to write in the field in which they achieved it. The highest degree earned by 28% of the sample was a bachelor's degree, 44% had earned a master's degree, and 27% had earned a doctoral-level degree. Of those who had attended graduate school, 25% earned degrees in the social sciences or humanities, 69% earned professional degrees, and 6% earned degrees in the natural sciences.

Participants were asked to complete 10 items from Altemeyer's (1988) RWA scale. Because of the excellent psychometric qualities of the RWA scale (as described by Christie, 1991) fewer RWA items were used in Sample 2 to conserve space for other types of survey questions relevant to midlife women. The 10 items used were ones that have shown consistent high reliabilities over time.[6] To be consistent with other survey questions, RWA items were answered on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Five of the items were phrased in the authoritarian direction, and five were phrased in the nonauthoritarian direction. The item mean was 2.35 ($SD = 0.55$) and Cronbach's alpha was .77.

Three measures of traditional life outcomes were created by examining responses to the demographic questionnaire. The first outcome was whether the participant had gotten married and remained married. Sixty-two percent of the sample had married once only; 38% had gotten divorced or remained single. The second outcome assessed parental status. Ninety percent of the sample had at least one child.

The third life outcome variable assessed whether or not the participant was working at her educational level. To create this variable, we first classified each woman's occupation into one of four groups. Twenty-six percent of the sample was either not working for pay or working in a position that required less than a bachelor's degree (e.g., legal secretary, nurse's aide, customer representative). Twenty percent of the sample was working in a position that required a bachelor's degree (e.g., school teacher, CPA). Twenty-six percent of the sample was working at a master's level position (e.g., social worker, architect). Finally, 26% of the sample was working in a position that required a doctoral-level degree (e.g., lawyer, tenure-track university professor). The second and third authors, who were unaware of participants' RWA scores, classified each respondent's job separately. Percent category agreement was .87, and disagreements were resolved through discussion. Because we had information about the most advanced degree each participant had attained (72% went beyond the bachelor's degree), we were able to determine whether a participant was working at her educational level; specifically, whether she was underemployed or fully employed. Participants were given a score of 1 (*underemployed*) if they were working in a position rated below their

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[6]In the student sample, the short-form version of the RWA scale correlated .81 with the remaining RWA items and .91 with the entire RWA scale.

educational level. Thus, a participant with a PhD who was working as a high school teacher would be categorized as underemployed, as would a participant with a bachelor's degree working as a salesclerk. If a participant was working at or above educational level she was assigned a score of 2, or fully employed. A participant with a bachelor's degree who was employed as a high school teacher would be categorized as fully employed, as would a therapist with an MSW. Of the participants working for pay (84% of the sample), 50% were working at or above their educational level.

Participants were asked to report how many children they had raised ($M = 1.99$, $SD = 1.06$) and whether any children were still living at home (43% of families still had at least one child at home). If they had children, they were asked to report how old they were when they had their eldest ($M = 27.86$, $SD = 4.62$) and youngest ($M = 32.05$, $SD = 5.49$) children. To assess the level of stress involved in raising children while working full-time, we relied on a checklist of 14 events or life stages that might be expected to induce stress (e.g., college years, adjustment to living with spouse/partner). Respondents were asked to pick the two most stressful events in their lives. We selected the stressor of "raising children while working full time" for our analyses. Twenty-one percent of the participants who had children marked this as one of their two most stressful periods. (Participants without children or who never worked outside the home full-time were excluded from this particular analysis.)

Self-confident power was assessed with a checklist of 59 items representing "feelings about life." These items were originally developed by Helson (Helson & Moane, 1987; Helson & Wink, 1992) to operationalize various theories of adult development. Participants were instructed with the following cue: "We are interested in your experience of life during the last few years as compared with what it was earlier in your life. Please rate the (59) items below on the following scale." (A 3-point scale was used with 1 = *not at all descriptive* and 3 = *very descriptive*). Examples of items included "A sense of being my own person," "Feeling needed by people," and "Intense interest in inner life." Participants were asked to rate each item as it applied to them retrospectively ("In my 30s" and "In my 40s") and concurrently ("In my 50s"). Stewart et al. (2001) developed a *Self-confident Power Scale* that assessed personal feelings of mastery and competence. The six items that comprise the scale are as follows: "Feeling powerful," "Feeling more confident," "Feeling I have the authority to do what I want," "Not holding back when I have something to

offer," "Having an accurate view of my powers and limitations," and "Feeling I understand how the world and other people work." Alpha values for these six items were .73, .77, and .74 across the three decades of life rated by participants. (As discussed by Stewart, self-confident power increased significantly in the participants from a low score of 1.94 during the 30s to 2.48 during the 50s).

Results

Contrary to our hypothesis, there was no difference in RWA scores between participants who did not earn a degree beyond a BA ($n = 26$, $M = 2.45$, $SD = 0.60$) and those who earned a graduate degree of some kind ($n = 68$, $M = 2.34$, $SD = 0.59$), $t(92) = 0.81$, *ns*. However, as shown in the bottom half of Table II, participants who had earned degrees in the social sciences or humanities scored significantly lower on authoritarianism than did those who had earned professional degrees; these participants, in turn, scored lower on RWA than did those who had earned degrees in the natural sciences. Note, once again, the small sample size for the natural scientists ($n = 4$). These results for actual degree recipients parallel the undergraduate sample results in Study 1 quite closely.

Returning to the midlife sample, some of the criterion variables concerning career and family are logically related and so were strongly correlated (e.g., when oldest and youngest children were born; see Table III). However, most variables were unrelated; these correlations are reported in Table III.

As hypothesized, those participants who had married only once ($n = 74$, $M = 2.43$, $SD = 0.59$) scored significantly higher on authoritarianism than those who were divorced or remained single ($n = 59$, $M = 2.23$, $SD = 0.50$), $t(131) = 2.08$, *r*-effect = .18, $p < .05$. Parental status and occupational status were also related to authoritarianism. Participants who had at least one child ($n = 86$, $M = 2.39$, $SD = 0.58$) scored significantly higher on RWA than did participants who did not ($n = 10$, $M = 1.97$, $SD = 0.45$), $t(94) = 2.22$, *r*-effect = .22, $p < .05$. Furthermore, underemployed participants ($n = 48$, $M = 2.49$, $SD = 0.50$) scored higher on RWA than did fully employed participants ($n = 50$, $M = 2.24$, $SD = 0.65$), $t(96) = 2.14$, *r*-effect = .22, $p < .05$.[7]

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[7]When the 16 participants who were not working for pay were excluded from the underemployed group, none of the results changed for any of the analyses using this distinction.

Table III. Intercorrelations of Family and Work Variables, Study 2

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Married once only	1.00	−.17	.09	.16	.14	.34***	.22*	.00
2. Fully employed		1.00	.00	−.01	−.27*	−.11	.08	.12
3. Age when oldest child was born			1.00	.71***	.56***	−.44***	−.02	.17
4. Age when youngest child was born				1.00	.59***	.07	.02	.17
5. Number of children at home					1.00	.19	.06	.12
6. Total number of children						1.00	.18	.07
7. Combining work and family was stressful							1.00	.17
8. Earned a post-baccalaureate degree								1.00

Note . Point-biserial correlations were computed for the marriage, work, stress, and degree variables.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

As shown by the *means* in Table IV, ages at which participants had had their oldest and youngest children, total number of children, and perceived stress of combining children and work did *not* differ as a function of working at educational level. The only difference in the parenting variables between these two groups occurred for the number of children still at home. Fully employed participants had fewer children at home in 1995 than did underemployed participants, $t(84) = 2.27$, r-effect $= .24$, $p < .05$.

In contrast, the correlations of these variables with RWA differed dramatically between the two groups. For the fully employed participants, authoritarianism was positively related to the ages at which oldest and youngest children were born. For the underemployed participants, these relationships were negative (albeit not significant). z Tests to compare the magnitude of these correlations showed that they were significantly different from each other (see Howell, 1987, pp. 240–241, for a discussion of z Tests).

As expected, a similar pattern emerged for the other three family variables. Authoritarianism was positively related to the number of children still at home for the fully employed participants, whereas RWA was negatively (albeit not significantly) related for the underemployed participants; the magnitude of these correlations were significantly different from each other. The total number of children each participant had was unrelated to RWA for the fully employed participants and positively related for the underemployed participants; the magnitude of these correlations were significantly different from each other. Finally, perceived stress about combining children and work was positively related to RWA for fully employed participants (albeit marginally) and negatively related for the underemployed participants (albeit marginally). However, these two correlations

were significantly different from each other according to a z-test.[8]

Finally, as shown in Table V, there were no differences between fully employed and underemployed participants in *mean* levels of self-confident power in their 30s, 40s, or 50s. However, for fully employed participants, self-confident power was *negatively* related to authoritarianism in their 40s and 50s, but not in their 30s. The magnitude of the correlations for the 50s ratings were significantly different from each other according to a z-test.

Discussion

Consistent with our hypotheses, participants who displayed life outcomes at midlife consistent with the traditional feminine gender role scored significantly higher on authoritarianism than did those who displayed life outcomes inconsistent with the traditional feminine gender role. Participants who had married and stayed married, had at least one child, and who were working below their educational level scored significantly higher on authoritarianism than never-married or divorced participants, participants with no children, and those working at or above educational level. These results provide midlife behavioral evidence consistent with Duncan et al.'s (1997) finding that RWA was correlated with the endorsement of traditional gender roles in college-aged women. The current studies provide evidence that authoritarianism has an impact on the choices women make about career and family.

It is important to note, however, that casual relationships between life outcomes and authoritarianism

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[8]Note that none of the correlation results in Table IV seem to be a function of age of first marriage. The correlation between RWA and age of first marriage was $r = .01$.

Table IV. Parenting as a Function of Authoritarianism and Working at Educational Level, Study 2

Parenting variables	M	SD	Correlation with RWA	Significance of difference between correlations (z)
Age when oldest child was born				
Fully employed	27.86	4.64	.43**	2.99**
Underemployed	27.86	4.59	−.24	
Entire sample			.11	
Age when youngest child was born				
Fully employed	32.00	5.59	.55***	3.61***
Underemployed	32.09	5.46	−.10	
Entire sample			.25*	
Number of children at home				
Fully employed	0.33	0.55	.62***	3.21**
Underemployed	0.73	0.79	−.10	
Entire sample			.24*	
Total number of children				
Fully employed	1.88	1.12	.05	2.14*
Underemployed	2.10	0.99	.46***	
Entire sample			.24*	
Combining work and family was stressful				
Fully employed	0.26	0.45	.31†	2.55*
Underemployed	0.16	0.37	−.26†	
Entire sample			.05	

Note. Alumnae sample. $n = 48$ for fully employed participants; $n = 48$ for underemployed participants. Sample size may vary downward slightly for any given correlation due to missing data.
†$p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

are difficult to untangle. It is likely that personality and situation interact in such a way that these participants sought out comfortable work and family configurations, and that those choices then affected levels of authoritarianism. For example, a woman high on authoritarianism may choose (if she is able) to stop working outside the home (or at least reduce her commitment to her career) when she bears her first child.

That choice may then limit her social world (e.g., other stay at home mothers and their children) relative to mothers who also maintain a career (e.g., women with careers may have more opportunities to interact with men and women from varying social and economic backgrounds). This lack of experience with diverse others may serve to heighten levels of authoritarianism in the former group, whereas experience with

Table V. Self-Confident Power as a Function of Authoritarianism and Working at Educational Level, Study 2

	M	SD	Correlation with RWA	Significance of difference between correlations (z)
Retrospective power at age 30				
Fully employed	2.00	0.45	−.22	1.66
Underemployed	1.92	0.38	.18	
Entire sample			−.08	
Retrospective power at age 40				
Fully employed	2.28	0.44	−.43**	1.54
Underemployed	2.21	0.43	−.08	
Entire sample			−.29*	
Current power at age 50				
Fully employed	2.46	0.44	−.53***	2.04*
Underemployed	2.52	0.38	−.14	
Entire sample			−.35*	

Note. Alumnae sample. $n = 48$ for fully employed participants; $n = 48$ for underemployed participants. Sample size may vary downward for any given correlation due to missing data.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

diverse others may lower them in the latter. Clearly, it is difficult to separate selection effects from outcome effects.

However, when we only look at participants who chose to work in careers commensurate with their educational level, and compare them with participants who work below their educational level, it appears that authoritarianism is related to *how* women balance career and family. Despite the fact that fully employed participants got married and had their children at the same ages as underemployed participants, we found evidence that the RWA scores of fully employed participants were positively related to greater role compartmentalization (as opposed to role combination) of career and family. That is, for the fully employed participants, RWA scores were related to postponement of first childbirth. In addition, there was some weaker evidence that for fully employed participants (as compared to underemployed participants), RWA was related to the stress of combining both work and child-rearing. We can imagine at least two possible reasons for this. First, as argued earlier, authoritarianism is probably related to rigid cognitive constructs about sex and gender roles. Authoritarianism is related to endorsement of traditional gender roles and support for separate "spheres of influence" for women and men (i.e., women in the family, men in business and politics). Operating in men's sphere may be related to feelings of cognitive dissonance or stress. Alternatively, it may be that stress was related to authoritarianism because highly authoritarian women may have married more traditional (masculine) husbands who might have been reluctant to share child-rearing responsibilities. Whether because of cognitive or family structure, or both, these data suggest that authoritarianism might serve as a barrier to juggling multiple demands efficiently. These results, coupled with the results for underemployed participants, provide examples of how authoritarianism may operate in different ways depending upon a woman's life context.

Further evidence of this is found in the results for self-confident power. As suggested by our hypothesis, fully employed participants' scores on authoritarianism were negatively related to expressing confident power at midlife. Research has shown that women increase in self-confident power over time (Stewart et al., 2001). Authoritarianism appears to moderate this effect in that fully employed participants' scores on authoritarianism were actually negatively related to self-confident power in their 40s and 50s. High authoritarian participants inhabiting a nontraditional gender role seem to be missing out on one of the positive aspects of aging for women—increased self-confidence. Why might this be? People who score high on authoritarianism tend to embrace a hierarchically structured world, and are more comfortable when women hold less power than do men. The negative relationship between RWA and self-confident power may reflect this unease at inhabiting a nontraditional gender role. This conflict does not seem to affect underemployed women who exist in a social world endorsed by traditional society. Thus, the more authoritarian participants in traditional roles may not feel a loss of self-confidence because they occupy a role in which society expects them to be competent.

Taken together, these findings support the argument that right-wing authoritarianism can act as a powerful motivator for status quo maintenance at the individual level. Authoritarianism seems to organize attitudes and behaviors that influence goal setting about ordinary aspects of life, such as career and family. In our sample of midlife women, we found that authoritarianism was related to traditional career and family outcomes, which suggests that the future desires of current college students might translate into life outcomes in similar ways.[9]

Closing Comments

In any given generation, there exist a multitude of ways to respond to social changes. For example, in an historical analysis of American family life, Weiss (2000) argued that the parents of the baby boom generation did not always accept the traditional gender roles we associate with the 1950s. Her book is based on qualitative analysis of the Oakland and Berkeley longitudinal data (IHD) housed at the University

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[9]It is important to remember that participants in both samples scored objectively low on the RWA scale. In other words, we have been discussing *relative* scores on RWA, not authoritarian versus nonauthoritarian participants. Few of the participants in our samples were authoritarian in the sense meant by Adorno et al. (1950) or Altemeyer (1988). The high scorers may simply have desired more structure in their lives or desired to be more conventional than those who scored lower. This may manifest in the *relatively* higher RWA scores of alumnae with advanced professional degrees versus those with advanced degrees in the humanities and social sciences. (If we were working with objectively authoritarian participants, we would expect them not to pursue higher education at all.) Perhaps success at a law firm, in a medical setting, or in a corporate environment requires more observance and respect for power hierarchies. Regardless, the relatively higher scorers probably will not act in what we think of as a typically authoritarian manner (e.g., be highly prejudiced toward members of outgroups).

of California—these famous data sets contained men and women who were children during the Great Depression and came of age during World War II and the post war expansion. Weiss wrote that "beneath the patina of fifties nostalgia lurks subterranean evidence of significant innovations" in American family life (p. 223). For example, the fact that postwar brides and grooms started families early and spaced children close together meant that women were free from child-care responsibilities at a relatively early age. This outcome was probably unintended, but "in this way the stage was set for a takeoff in married women's work in the 1960s, when the baby boomers reached school age" (p. 52). Of course not all of the IHD women went to work when opportunities became available, and we expect that authoritarianism was one variable that moderated whether women (and men) took advantage of such changing opportunities.

The Study 2 graduates of 1964 were born after the generation described by Weiss but before the baby boom generation; they were toddlers during World War II and came of age in the 1950s and early 1960s just before the second wave of the women's movement. Thus their cohort—born in the early 1940s—was in a unique position after college graduation to continue some of the innovative family patterns that were tested by the World War II generation. As shown in Study 2, the participants more likely to pursue these innovations were less authoritarian than their more conventional peers. However, diversity is one of the spices of life. Some women wanted to be a part of a family context of male breadwinner and female homemaker; many of these women in the sample raised successful families and experienced deep contentment. Nevertheless, the overall pattern of results suggests that authoritarianism can be useful for understanding individual responses to social change. The way people respond to social changes is dependent upon, among other things, idiosyncratic combinations of individual personalities and life experiences, immediate social context, and social identities. We found that, keeping cohort, social class, and gender relatively constant, the individual difference variable of RWA explained variance in the goals of contemporary college students and the life outcomes of a sample of midlife women.

Unless gender roles change drastically in the next 30 years or so, the desire of the more authoritarian students for conventional marriages and practical jobs should lead them to make decisions that may have them looking at midlife like the high authoritarian women from the class of 1964. Of course, they may

have different decisions to make as social changes do occur; however, we can hypothesize that the women who embrace these changes will be low on authoritarianism. Authoritarianism can help us understand individual responses to larger societal changes. In this way, the concept of authoritarianism nicely bridges psychological and sociological levels of analysis. It offers a human window into society's ongoing struggle between the maintenance of the status quo and its alteration.

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