
Psychological perspectives in the study of authoritarianism

Edgardo Etchezahar, Buenos Aires University (UBA) – National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET)

Silvina Brussino, National University of Córdoba (UNC) – National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET)

Abstract: *Different theoretical perspectives have been developed within the psychology framework for the analysis of the authoritarian phenomenon. They constituted some of the background lines of what would afterwards be considered as the field of Political Psychology. The first approach takes place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century's, along with group psychology, where authoritarianism is studied as an emergent behavior of crowds. Subsequently, developments in authoritarian personality suggest a change in the analysis axes by studying the phenomenon in an intra-individual way. A third perspective arises with the cognitive approach, represented by the concept of dogmatism, which emphasized the study of beliefs and the way in which individuals defend them. Parallel to this approach, advances in the field of Experimental Psychology on obedience, account for the situation in the authoritarian phenomenon. Later on, the study of authoritarian personality is taken up once more with the concept of right-wing authoritarianism, which is defined as the individual differences in the covariation of three attitudinal clusters (authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression and conventionalism). Finally, the most recent perspective for the study of the phenomenon suggests rethinking right-wing authoritarianism as an intergroup phenomenon, since its three attitudinal clusters account for a group phenomenon, plus a personality trait. The main objective of this paper is to critically review each of the six perspectives which have approached the study of authoritarianism as psycho-political phenomena, showing its peculiarities as well as its differences so as to finally consider which of those are still acceptable alternatives for the interpretation of this phenomenon.*

Keywords: *Authoritarianism, Crowds, Dogmatism, Obedience, Submission, Aggression, Conventionalism*

1. Introduction

Throughout human history, intergroup conflict has been a central theme analyzed by great thinkers, politicians, historians, theologians, military theorists and psychologists who have attempted to examine and explain the nature of the problem from different perspectives (Dahl, Shapiro, & Cheibub, 2003). In this regard, studies on authoritarianism within the framework of Political Psychology provide information which is relevant to understanding some of the key aspects involved in intergroup conflict. The study of the authoritarian phenomenon has a transversal nature in the analysis of psycho-political phenomena, since it has been linked to other issues such as political leadership, ideology, political participation and political socialization, among others. Thus, for over a century, its study in the framework of political psychology has been addressed from at least six different perspectives, which created conceptual and methodological tools for the comprehension of the phenomenon.

The first approach to the study of authoritarianism emerges from the analysis of crowds phenomena, which began to be studied in the late nineteenth century (Le Bon, 1895/2012) and continued until the beginning of the twentieth century (Freud, 1921/1998; Reich, 1933 / 1980). Subsequently, authoritarianism was studied as a personality trait, the etiology of which could be located in early childhood. However, it was considered that during adulthood, social, political and economic factors could awaken a *potentially fascist* personality (Adorno et al., 1950; Fromm, 1941). A third approach to thinking the authoritarian phenomenon suggested an analysis of the beliefs of individuals as its main focus (Rokeach, 1960), analyzing to what extent they were able to defend them. Thus emerged the concept of dogmatism, as an alternative to the developments in authoritarianism, from a cognitive perspective, contrary to the then dominant psychoanalytic perspective. Years later, after the rise in social psychology experimentation, the interactionist approach becomes relevant, which analyzes authoritarianism from a situational perspective (Turner, 1991). According to such developments,

if an individual who had no signs of being authoritarian is presented with a peculiar situation in which they are asked to harm a third party under the responsibility of an authority, they are likely to do it, perhaps even kill, as long as certain conditions are met (Elms & Milgran, 1967; Milgran, 1964). Based on these studies, Altemeyer (1981) attempts to raise a leading synthesis by returning to the study of the phenomenon as a personality trait, though taking into consideration the progress made by previous perspectives. Thus arises right-wing authoritarianism (Altemeyer, 1981) which, while it resumes certain conceptualizations by Adorno et al. (1950), it also analyzes the phenomenon from a different interpretative theoretical framework, by considering that the phenomenon can be explained by the covariation of three attitudinal clusters: authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, and conventionalism. Finally, the latest approach intends to study authoritarianism as an intergroup phenomenon (Duckitt, 2010). It is a reinterpretation of the approach proposed by Altemeyer (1981) in the light of social identity theory developments (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Thus, it is proposed that while the concept of authoritarianism refers to a personality trait, it is brought into play in an intergroup manner because it involves membership to a group, in which standards to be met will be established as well as aggression toward those who do not comply.

These six perspectives for the study of authoritarianism have emerged at particular historical moments, as a result of discussions between them. Thus, the lack of consensus led to a proliferation of approaches, many of which remain today. Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to critically review each of the six psychological perspectives which have approached the study of authoritarianism, accounting for their particularities as well as their differences so as to finally consider which ones still constitute plausible alternatives for the interpretation of this phenomenon.

2. Authoritarianism as crowd's phenomena

In the late nineteenth century Le Bon (1895/2012) proposes a historical analysis of crowd's behavior. According to him, crowds organized in political groups (particularly socialist) and unions begin to determine the fate of nations. From this emerges the first research devoted to the study of authoritarianism from a psychological perspective.

Le Bon (1895/2012) used the term crowds to refer to large groups of people in which individuality merges with the group, therefore losing control of their thoughts and emotions. A crowd in psychological terms can be a street mob, a political party or a trade union, its main feature being authoritarian behavior, so long as it's not guided by the Rationality Principle. The agglomeration of individuals presents a new set of characteristics which is different from their individuality, since the crowd acquires a collective mentality in which critical thinking is flooded with unconscious attributes aimed to obtain competitive advantage. Crowd members become intolerant and fanatic, which Le Bon considered as a decrease in several steps in the development of civilization. Le Bon (1895/2012) considers the crowd individual as barbaric, they act primarily by instinct, because their behavior convincingly demonstrates that "the part played by the unconscious mind in all our actions is immense" (p. 217).

On the other hand, Le Bon describes different forms of persuasion in crowd leaders "a crowd is a servile flock unable to do anything without a leader" (p. 87). The author believes that leaders are more men of action than thinkers, as they are easily excitable, often bordering on insanity. Crowd leaders are fanatically committed to their beliefs, unable to sustain their political actions with rational arguments. Also, the role of the leader is essential, since crowds "are always willing to listen to strong men" (p. 235), responding to the intensity of their faith towards a typically authoritarian leader (Perry, Chase, Jacob, Jacob, & Von Laue, 2009). However, it is necessary to clarify that the work of Le Bon (1895/2012) justifies an aristocratic government, as it tries to sustain an authoritarian elite government

within society, contrary to democratic principles (Perry et al., 2009).

Years later, the study of crowd's phenomena is taken up by Freud (1920/1998) who analyzes it from the perspective of his psychoanalytic theory. According to the author, certain group phenomena and general social behaviors might be a result of early childhood experiences or, to put it another way, of the subjective perception of said events (Stellmacher & Petzel, 2005). For Freud (1933/1998) mature personality is the result of the efforts of the self to control instinctive impulses, in order to regulate behavior in an acceptable way. All individuals go through different developmental stages of the *libido* throughout their childhood, through various stages in which the subjects can stay fixated (oral, anal and phallic). Since these hypotheses are ad hoc, they can only be demonstrated *post facto*, therefore, Freud believed that by observing the irrational, often authoritarian behavior, of individuals in a crowd it would be possible to detect the regression to the evolution stage of the libido to which they have stayed fixated.

According to Freudian theory the self is responsible for sustaining the mental life of the individual, though it must submit to the designs of two structures of the psychic apparatus: the id and the superego (Freud, 1933/1998). In crowd's phenomena, the figure of a leader (imaginary or real) is introjected into the superego, posing as authority figure whose designs the individual should unconditionally submit to. Regarding psychic economy, Freud (1920/1998) suggests that in crowd's phenomena a double libidinal bond occurs, on one hand, between the individual and the leader, and on the other, between the crowd members. According to the author, the social structures of both the church and the army are examples of this process because both of them have a strong hierarchical organization, supported on clear leadership (God and general) who must be unrestrictedly obeyed.

Although Freud did not specifically work on the authoritarianism phenomenon, his psychoanalytic theory offered a fertile ground for the development of various theories that later on took up the study of said phenomenon.

Many authors suggested that the psychoanalytic approach provided a framework through which it was possible to interpret various psychosocial phenomena along with other social theories such as Marxism.

3. Authoritarian Personality

Based on conceptualizations developed by both Psychoanalysis and Marxism, Reich (1933/1980) studied authoritarian phenomena in his work *The crowds psychology of fascism*. In this paper the author explores the ways in which the fascist regime ascended to power in Italy, based on the emergence of symptoms caused by sexual repression. His central question refers to why crowds become authoritarian, even though this goes against their own interests (Sharaf, 1994). Reich suggested that the reason for the emergence of Nazism and fascism was sexual repression: during childhood, as members of the proletariat, children learn to suppress sexual desire from their parents. Therefore, during adulthood, rebellion against such impulses causes anxiety. Thus, fear of revolution, as well as sexuality, is anchored in characteristics of the crowd and influences people to be irrational (Cattier, 1970; Sharaf, 1994). Such principles by Reich changed the focus of analysis in the study of authoritarianism, crowd's phenomenon was previously considered the promoter of the authoritarian behavior of crowds, but according to his approach it is just a trigger of what was experienced during childhood by each of the individuals that are part of this aggregate of individuals. In Reich's words (1933/1980) "the suppression of sexual nature in children, particularly their genitals, makes them apprehensive, shy, obedient, afraid of authority, good and normal in the authoritarian sense" (p. 104). Thus, rebellious forces are paralyzed since any rebellion will turn into anxiety, then, the same inhibition of sexual curiosity in children's thinking, produces a closure of their thinking skills. In short, the objective of sexual suppression creates an individual who is set to an authoritarian order and who will undergo various forms of misery and degradation. From birth, a child must submit to family, a miniature

authoritarian structure. Later, this makes it capable of subordinating to a general authoritarian system.

Like Reich (1933/1980), Fromm (1936/1989) believed that understanding of social phenomena from a Marxist perspective is complemented with Psychoanalytic theory, since the latter analyzes the psychological links which mediate between the individual and the superstructure. He therefore developed a Freudian-Marxist synthesis in his work *Method and function of a social Marxist Psychology*. In order to answer the question about the existence of other explanatory mechanisms to explain the conformity of social behavior, in addition to the exercise of power, Fromm regarded family as a representative of society based on Freudian psychoanalytic theory. Thus, while Freud (1929) realized the political outreach of psychological analysis, Fromm (1936/1989), applied it to the authority models of German workers during the first decades of the twentieth century, developing an analytic social psychology. According to Fromm, (1936/1989) the Family is particularly suitable for the interaction of Marxist and Freudian analysis as it is the central axis in which social and libidinal dimensions intersect, allowing subjects to experience different ways of freedom (Horkheimer, 1936/1972).

At this point, Fromm (1941) analyzes the concept of liberty by suggesting that many individuals, instead of using it properly, try to minimize its negative effects through thoughts and behaviors which provide some form of security according to three answers:

1. *Authoritarianism*: The authoritarian desires to gain control of other people in an attempt to impose some kind of order in the world; they also wish to submit to the control of a superior force, which can be found in the form of a person or an abstract idea (sadistic and masochistic component of authoritarian personality).

2. *Destructive capabilities*: That which cannot be controlled, must be destroyed (similar to sadism).

3. *Compliance*: unconscious process through which individuals incorporate normative beliefs and thought

processes of their society, experiencing them as their own. This prevents free thought, which causes anxiety.

The analysis of the human aspect of freedom and authoritarianism leads Fromm (1941) to consider the issue, the role of psychological factors as active forces in the social process. According to this author, although Nazism can be analyzed based on psychological factors, its study should be complemented by including economic and social factors. Thus, Fromm laid the foundation for the study that would be conducted years later by the so-called Berkeley Group, composed by Adorno et al. (1950) to empirically analyze the authoritarian phenomenon.

Research by Adorno et al. (1950) was based on a central hypothesis: "the political, economic and social convictions of an individual often form a wide and coherent pattern [...] This pattern is an expression of deep trends of their personality" (p. 1). Thus, the authors' main concern was to know the peculiarities that characterize the *potentially fascist individual*, whose personality structure makes it particularly susceptible to antidemocratic propaganda. The main purpose of this work was to know what *forces of personality* promote such behaviors in order to fight them.

Adorno et al. (1950), Fromm (1941) and Reich (1933/1980) explained the origins of authoritarian personality appealing to Freudian psychoanalytic theory, which emphasizes the importance of early childhood experiences as the basis of personality development. From this perspective, as it's been mentioned before, authoritarian personality takes place when the aggressive-compulsive needs of children are excessively suppressed by parental demands of obedience, therefore projected onto other people belonging to groups or minorities perceived as weak. The punitive father figure was a decisive socialization agent is the basis of this reasoning (Hopf, 1993). In addition, Fromm (1941) argues that an authoritarian father figure conveys diminishment in the way of unworthiness and lack of any support to the child, implicitly or explicitly. This aspect refers to the self-evaluation of the father figure, who sees himself as unworthy to exercise leadership, since there will always be someone above him in the hierarchy to submit to.

Furthermore, according to psychoanalytic theory, personality configuration depends on the way both the Oedipus complex and object relations are resolved (Ortiz Zabala, 1985).

Thus, Adorno et al. (1950), retake Fromm's (1936/1989) developments about the father figure in order to explain the genesis of authoritarianism whose origins are based in the work of Freud on oedipal relations. In those cases in which these disputes were poorly settled in childhood, aggression against the father was transformed into masochistic obedience and sadistic hostility displaced towards other objects. To Fromm (1941), authoritarian character never reaches its maturity, because it's not possible to love or make use of reason by it. This is a key aspect to understanding the authoritarian's tendency to social isolation, which is sustained by a deeply rooted fear. This fear, built in early childhood, needs another person with which to establish a symbiotic relationship, providing a meaning to everyday life as well as avoiding the destruction of their identity (Hopf, 1993).

4. Cognitive approach: closed-minded and the role of beliefs

The work of Adorno et al. (1950) was quickly disseminated worldwide since it promisingly contributed to its evaluation of potentially fascist personality. In a global climate of tension as a result of World War II, along with various emerging Neo-Nazi foci in different parts of the world, the ability to empirically analyze potentially fascist personality seemed to be a matter of broad relevance (Duckitt, 2010). However, critiques to the work of Adorno et al. (1950) did not wait: first, Shils' (1954) comments about the authoritarianism as it had been conceptualized by the Berkeley Group was limited only to the political right wing are to be highlighted. Far from being a general measure of authoritarianism as proposed by Adorno et al. (1950), Shils (1954) considered the authoritarian phenomenon to be circumscribed to the right wing of the political spectrum, since aspects such as tradition, religiosity and ethnocentrism were specific characteristics of conservative

ideologies, which did not consider authoritarianism at the opposite end of the political ideological spectrum: left-wing. Moreover, Westen (1992) considers that during the 50s there is a conceptual shift in the analysis of psychosocial phenomena: the passage from a psychoanalytic interpretation to a cognitive. Even though prior to the '50s this perspective was very popular, while also psychoanalysis continued to develop after this decade, the change that Westen (1992) analyzes lies in the use of interpretive theoretical frameworks from the major scientific publications concerning psychosocial issues.

To address these two critiques to the work of Adorno et al. (1950), Rokeach (1960) suggests that the concept of *dogmatism*, interpreting the phenomenon from a cognitive approach, continuing the previous work on mental rigidity (Rokeach, 1948). Such conceptualization involved a new way of thinking the individual as tied to a belief system, which would be more or less permeable to the information received from the environment. The analysis of the permeability of the belief system can be analyzed from a continuum that extends from an open mind to a closed mind (the latter being the pole of authoritarianism). On a conceptual level, Rokeach's (1960) proposal suggests that different political ideologies could be authoritarian (including the left-wing ones), depending on the degree of opening or closing of an individual's belief system. Dogmatism theory seemed to be the answer to Shils' (1954) question at the conceptual level, yet this did not happen with his empirical evaluation. Different authors, who used the scale of dogmatism created by Rokeach (1960) to assess the construct, reported that it only assessed right-wing authoritarianism, which, rather than accounting for left-wing authoritarianism, the scale was reporting even more evidence to the idea that authoritarianism was restricted to the right-wing.

5. Authoritarianism in situation

Alongside the work of Adorno et al. (1950) and Rokeach (1960), Experimental Social Psychology noticed how interacting individuals could respond differently to what they

would do in isolation (Turner, 1991). Thus, certain aspects that were considered characteristic of a personality trait were put under discussion since they could vary dramatically if an artificial situation was created by researchers (Duckitt, 2010). One of the main examples which study this approach is the concept of *obedience*, which had a central role in the construction of the various theories on authoritarianism, mainly the Berkeley Group theorists who analyzed the phenomenon as an individual characteristic called authoritarian submission. This approach did not take into account that obedience is essentially a social behavior, since, as stated by Milgram (1974) "men are not without others and hierarchical structures are consolidated amongst them" (p. 123). In general, obedience is regarded as fulfilling someone else's requests, whether the subject thinks these reasonable or not. The development of life in society requires a system of authority, because "only the man who lives in isolation is not required to respond to the commands of others through defiance or submission" (Milgram, 1963, p. 371).

Although Milgram's (1963, 1974) studies have been criticized due to their methodology and their ethical implications, there is no doubt that they demonstrated a number of significant features for submission to authority in specific social situations (Altemeyer, 1981). It is particularly remarkable that these experiments showed that a significant number of people were able to administer apparently lethal electric shocks to other participants. 65% of the volunteers that Milgram randomly recruited using a newspaper, managed to shock a person with 450 volts and virtually all participants reached 300 volts, before refusing to continue.

Nevertheless, the percentage of subjects willing to administer a lethal shock decreased when three experimental variations on the original design of the experiment were implemented: a) hearing the complaints of the subject who would be shocked, b) being in the same room with the victim in sight of one another, and c) proximity to the victim (e.g. having to place the students' hand on a "shock plate" to administer the punishment). Obedience percentages were 62.5%, 40% and 30% respectively with each variation. These variations in the

results of the experiment showed that the proximity to the victim was one of the key factors to explain obedience (Milgram, 1974). The closer were participants were to the victim, the smaller odds to obey the experimenter and so they refused to administer lethal electric shocks. Milgram (1974) points out that his experiment created a conflict in the subjects between a deeply rooted disposition not to harm others and the equally strong tendency to obey authority. In this regard, there is a parallel between his proposal and the theory of authoritarian personality developed by Adorno et al. (1950) given that there is a clear tendency in potentially authoritarian subjects to be particularly punitive towards offenders and those diverted from social order. However, it is the situation that leads the individual to show an authoritarian behavior.

One of the major debates surrounding Milgram's experiment (1963) revolved around whether his study refuted the theory developed by Adorno et al. (1950) or not, since the subject's authoritarian behavior emerged under specific external conditions, but it was unclear whether it responded to a personality pattern, as it had been proposed by the Berkeley Group theorists or if it was generated within context. This discussion led Milgram (Elms & Milgram, 1966) to make a new series of studies, this time considering a number of personality variables of the participants before carrying out the experiment. Of the 160 subjects who had participated in a previous experiment (Milgram, 1965), a sub-sample of 40 (20 "defiant" and 20 "obedient") was selected to participate in a follow-up study. Each subject responded, amongst other instruments, to the F scale created by Adorno et al. (1950) which evaluates potentially fascist personality. Thus, the authors identified higher levels of authoritarianism in those subjects classified as obedient compared to those classified as defiant. However, no significant differences were found in the F scale in those subjects with high and low obedience scores in the experimental situations.

The Elms and Milgram's study (1966) shows that in some cases obedient subjects seemed to have warm relationships with their families, which contradicts the theory proposed by

the psychoanalytic perspective on the genesis of authoritarianism. In addition, as noted by Frenkel-Brunswick (1954), the study of childhood background on behaviors such as obedience, prejudice and authoritarianism rarely follow a uniform pattern and, therefore, should be interpreted with caution. Thus, it is concluded that the levels of obedience or disobedience of an individual do not necessarily reveal a pattern of unique personality which is inevitably expressed through one behavior or other (Elms & Milgram, 1966). In this respect, Elms (1972) points out that the relationship between authoritarianism and obedient behavior must be taken with precaution, since obedience is a measure of submission to authority. According to the author, much of the research on authoritarianism has been performed in a non-experimental way, using paper and pencil questionnaires, which do not necessarily explain people's behavior. Whereas in the experiments conducted by Milgram it can be clearly seen how people obey or reject the demands of authority, in a realistic and highly disturbing situation.

Thus, these experiments on obedience to authority made it possible to account for the complementary differences between the situational approach and personality (Altemeyer, 1988). The power of the situation can clearly be seen in some of the various experimental variants introduced by Milgram (1974). For example, when incorporating one more actor to fulfill the role of authority, together with the experimental subject and Milgram himself, he was trying to show how an individual would act if another teacher - besides Milgram - agreed with the experimenter applying electric shocks or not. If the actor who served as subject screamed that he wanted to be released from the experiment and one of the actor's teachers agreed with this, only four of forty participants (10%) reached the 450 volts. However, if the two teachers (an actor and Milgram) paid no attention to the complaints of the student who was supposed to receive electric shocks, thirty seven out of forty subjects (92%) reached the 450 volts. According to Altemeyer (1988) this is one of the main lessons of social psychology on how easy it is for the situation to triumph over individual differences.

However, all patterns of socialization of an individual also come into play in every circumstance, although they can be set aside when facing strange environment, as in those experimental situations suggested by Milgram. Generally, individuals act in familiar settings with known people whose behavior can be partially inferred (Altemeyer, 1996). Thus Altemeyer suggests that some people need little situational pressure to submit to the authorities and attack those perceived as different, while others require a significantly higher pressure. He therefore proposes that the authoritarianism he calls "right-wing" can be thought of as a personality variable which presents individual differences (Altemeyer, 1988).

6. Right wing authoritarianism

The work of Altemeyer (1981, 1988, 2002) has produced an original turn on the study of authoritarianism by suggesting a new conceptualization of this phenomenon. Altemeyer's (1981) main critique refers to previous research that "has been rapidly developed and published long before it could be proven from a scientific perspective" (p. 114). In this respect, the author highlights the lack theoretical soundness with which various conceptions of authoritarianism were suggested, along with the lack of psychometric analysis of the assessment tools used, such as, for instance, the lack of analysis of the items or quality and quantity deficiencies, poor levels of reliability, multidimensional constructs, etc. Thus, Altemeyer (1988) believes that many studies are based on a *fallacy of scientific validity*, and reflects on why various works were accepted to be published, concluding that this shows a "crisis of confidence" on a general level on social psychology, which complicates not only the study of authoritarianism but also the different issues that have been addressed from this perspective.

In order to develop their theoretical approach, Altemeyer (1981) takes up the work of Adorno et al. (1950) to analyze the features which, when together, create authoritarian personality. The work of Adorno et al. (1950) identified nine characteristics of potentially fascist personality, while

Altemeyer (1981) considers that only three of them are relevant to the study of the phenomenon (authoritarian aggression, authoritarian submission and conventionalism). It is important to note that the work of Altemeyer (1981) does not wholly or partially confirm the one conducted by the Berkeley Group, but according to the author, that study was the starting point for his research. For instance, while Adorno et al. (1950) believe that "... one of the phenomena that characterizes middle class is susceptibility to fascism" (p. 229), and built on this premise it is stipulated that *conventionalism* is "... rigid adherence to the values of the middle class" (p. 234). Altemeyer (1996) suggests that authoritarianism focuses on individual perception regarding the standards approved by those perceived as legitimate authorities, which may or may not be the standards that characterize middle class. Also, *authoritarian aggression* is theorized by the Berkeley Group as "... the attack on people who violate the conventional values of the middle class" (Adorno et al., 1950, p. 228). However, Altemeyer (1996) believes that this premise would leave out, for instance, those participating in the Milgram experiment on obedience to authority. *Authoritarian aggression*, according to Altemeyer, can be directed towards any outgroup with different conventions to those of the ingroup. The other authoritarian personality characteristics analyzed by Adorno et al. (1950) such as "cynicism", "superstition" or "exaggerated sexual concern", are not part of the structure of authoritarianism.

Perhaps the major disagreement point between the Berkeley Group and Altemeyer is that the first built their model on authoritarian personality from a Freudian psychoanalytic framework, thus emphasizing early childhood as a result of adult behaviors and also highlighting causes to unconscious hostility channeled through repressed hatred, such as hostility projected, etc. Altemeyer's suggestion (1981) trumps any attempt of psychodynamic interpretation of the phenomenon (Hopf, 1993; Meloen, 1993), focusing on social learning (Bandura, 1974) as an interpretative framework of the construction of authoritarian personality.

Altemeyer (1981) defines right-wing authoritarianism as the covariation of three attitudinal clusters in an individual. On the one hand, *authoritarian submission* referred to a high degree of submission to the authorities perceived as legitimate by the peer group. Moreover, *authoritarian aggression*, defined as general aggression aimed at different people or groups perceived as different to that of peers. Finally, *conventionalism*, understood as a high degree of adherence to the social norms of the peer group, perceived as endorsed by society and the established authorities. By attitudinal conglomerate the author refers to the tendency to answer the same way - overall - to certain type of stimuli (e.g. established authorities, social groups which are the object of aggression, social conventions). According to Altemeyer (1981), a tendency to answer is not the same as a concrete answer because, as demonstrated by Milgram (1974), most individuals can be easily induced to commit aberrant acts by a legitimate authority. Thus, authoritative behavior results from the interaction between individual aspects and situational influences. In other words, Altemeyer (1981, 1988, 1996, 2002) considers right-wing authoritarianism as a individual factor, or personality trait, developed on the premise that some individuals require very little pressure on a situational level in order to submit to the designs of an authority and harm others, while other individuals will hardly be affected by such pressure.

In this regard, like Adorno et al. (1950), right-wing authoritarianism constitutes a predisposition to act. However, Altemeyer's suggestion (1981) differs substantially from the Berkeley Group's position as far as the description of the phenomenon and the explanations of its development are concerned. For him, the construction of authoritarian personality takes place according to the context, being the various socialization agents the key for its development. Thus, Altemeyer (1981) adopts an interactional perspective to explain authoritarianism, in which the family, the peer group and the various social institutions that people take part in (e.g. education, justice, security forces) play a fundamental role.

Altemeyer (1981) uses the concepts of authoritarianism and right-wing authoritarianism interchangeably, as he believes that the only ideological pole in which this phenomenon can be empirically analyzed is the political right. However, he makes it clear that it is not necessary for an authoritarian individual to have a specific political preference, in fact, in most of his research (Altemeyer, 1981, 1988, 1996, 2002), he was able to observe that, in most cases, those subjects classified as authoritarian have a low interest in politics or no interest at all. In this regard, Altemeyer (1981) considers that it is not a matter of political affinity but rather authoritarian subjects can be considered right wing due to their psychological characteristics and personality. Most subjects who classify themselves as related to right wing politics tend to be authoritarian, however many apolitical people can be considered authoritarian because of their levels of intolerance towards individuals belonging to different social groups to their own.

7. Authoritarianism as an intergroup phenomenon

The study of authoritarianism as an intergroup phenomenon has its origin in the work of Sumner (1906) in the early twentieth century. The aforementioned author appealed to notions of ingroup and outgroup to explain ethnocentrism as a manifestation of authoritarianism. Years later, Allport (1954) developed a new conceptualization of ingroup and outgroup to analyze individual differences in prejudice, considering they respond to the perception of each subject from a social object.

However, it was not until the work of Downing and Monaco (1986) that it began to be systematically discussed whether authoritarianism should be conceptualized as a personality or intergroup variable. The previously mentioned authors analyzed the relationship between authoritarian personality (assessed through the F scale) and situational factors which are precursors ingroup - outgroup conflict, which had been revealed by the experiment of Sherif et al. (1961) known as *the den of thieves*. Downing and Monaco (1986) arrive to two main conclusions:

1) Subjects with low authoritarianism levels do not present a clear bias ingroup-outgroup differentiation,

2) Subjects with high authoritarianism levels are biased in ingroup-outgroup differentiation, increasing according to differential contact.

Thus, the work of Downing and Monaco (1986) on the relationship between personality and situational factors showed that authoritarianism increases when individuals make a greater distinction between ingroup identification and outgroup differentiation. The authors conclude that their findings "favor the theory of the authoritarian personality, rather than the hypothesis of information processing on an intergroup level for the understanding of authoritarianism" (p. 451), since intergroup relations do not favor the reduction or increase of authoritarianism, except for differential contact.

Years later, Duckitt (1989) suggests that previous studies which analyzed authoritarianism as an intergroup variable and personality trait (Grabb, 1979; Hawthorn, Couch, Haefner, Langham, & Carter, 1956; Katz & Benjamin, 1960) failed in both its theoretical and empirical justifications, mainly because of the psychodynamic assumptions on which had been are based. Thus, Duckitt's proposal (1989), criticizes the research by Adorno et al. (1950) on authoritarian personality by considering that it is based on their reductionist perspective of the phenomenon:

"The individual has been analyzed as a system which is regulated by an internal dynamic or as an element of a larger social system primarily responsible for the properties of said system" (Duckitt, 1989, p. 67).

In this regard, Duckitt suggests the need to analyze the authoritarianism phenomenon from an approach with possible empirical proof, and therefore the author bases his work on previous developments by Altemeyer (1981). As previously mentioned, the theory of right-wing authoritarianism, accounts for the presence of the phenomenon based on the covariance of conventionalism,

authoritarian submission, and authoritarian aggression on an individual level. However, Duckitt (1989) deems it necessary to rethink this proposal in terms of group cohesion, just as it was developed by Tajfel and Turner (1986) in their social identity theory, since authoritarianism "reflects the intensity of an individual's emotional identification within a particular social group" (p. 70). Thus, it is proposed that the three attitudinal clusters suggested by Altemeyer (1981) can be thought parting from six questions that make it possible to account for authoritarianism as a construct which is "perceptible at the level of individual differences and intergroup phenomenon" (p. 71):

a) Conventionalism: compliance with rules and regulations of the group

1) Are the behaviors and beliefs of individuals regulated by the rules and regulations of the ingroup as opposed to self-regulation by individual needs?

2) Must individuals necessarily comply with the rules and norms of the ingroup?

b) Authoritarian Aggression: tolerance vs. intolerance to nonconformity

1) How serious should the punishment for nonconformity to ingroup norms and rules be?

2) Who should administer the punishments and penalties for not complying with the conventionalism?

c) Authoritarian Submission: Respect and Conditional vs. unconditional obedience.

1) To what extent should ingroup leaders and authorities be granted respect and unconditional obedience to rather than conditionally differentiating their actions in the performance of their role?

2) To what extent should ingroup leaders be the ones who are granted unconditional respect and

obedience rather than to the one's own consciousness based on one's own interests?

As contrast variable for intergroup analysis of the phenomenon, Duckitt (1989, 2010) suggests that authoritarianism is the cause of prejudice, and not the other way around, as had traditionally been assumed (eg Adorno et al., 1950). However, although Duckitt (1992, 2010) provides empirical evidence of the covariation of authoritarianism in various forms of prejudice, the research design does not allow affirming a coincidence, except partially, since the author used a non-experimental methodology.

In short, both the experimental investigation of Downing and Monaco (1986) and Duckitt studies (1989, 1992, 2010) conclude that the authoritarian phenomenon accounts for the ingroup - outgroup distinction. However, its intergroup value remains to be clarified, and in light of Duckitt's findings (2010) authoritarianism would have the same influence as the phenomenon understood as personality variable, just as it was studied by Altemeyer (1981).

8. Conclusions

In this paper, six different perspectives on the psychological study of authoritarianism have been presented. They are based on different approach of the subject which was selected from different theoretical and methodological frameworks. Thus, the study of authoritarianism as an emerging crowd's phenomenon which was initiated by Le Bon (1895/2012) was reworked by Freud (1921/1998) from his psychoanalytic theory and later retaken by Reich (1933/1980), who incorporates the Marxist perspective into his analysis. This approach of phenomenon began losing consensus facing the developments made by Brunswick Frenkel (1954) and, in particular, Fromm (1941) on the family etiology of authoritarianism. While these authors take the psychodynamic approach as theoretical framework, they also restructure psychoanalytic concepts developed by Freud (1933/1998) about the etiology of

authoritarianism, moving away from an intraindividual explanation and posing a multicausal construction of personality, where the family plays a key role along with the social, political and economic conditions in which it develops. The emergence of authoritarianism as crowds phenomenon ceases to be taken into consideration since the axis will focus on individual development. However, the rejection of psychodynamic developments made by Fromm (1941) by the Berkeley group, led to his departure from the Social Research Institute he shared with Adorno et al. (1950).

In this context, Adorno et al. (1950) developed his theory of authoritarian personality from an intra-individual level of analysis, where the context would only operate as trigger to awaken potentially fascist personality, developed during early childhood. Despite the criticism (see Christie & Jahoda, 1954), the work of Adorno et al. (1950) was quickly replicated in different parts of the world. This was because, in addition to being an innovative conceptualization of the authoritarian phenomenon, the authors developed an assessment instrument: the F scale. This scale was highly relevant to the study of potentially fascist personality in a context marked by the emergence of neo-Nazi and fascist groups in different parts of the world, shortly after World War II ended.

However, one of the main arguments against this approach indicated that the F scale did not assess authoritarian personality in general, but instead allowed to study a particular type of authoritarianism: the right wing (Shils, 1954). It is important to note the historical context in which this review was made, because as it was framed within the process of the Cold War, many scholars believed that left-wing authoritarianism was as dangerous as right wing (Leffler, 2008).

Parallel to these events, in the 50`s there is a conceptual shift in the analysis of psychosocial phenomena: the passage from a theoretical framework based on interpretive psychoanalytic theory to the primacy of a cognitive framework (Westen, 1992). Within this framework there were developments by Rokeach (1960), who suggested the concept

of dogmatism, reprising his previous work on mental rigidity (Rokeach, 1948). This perspective focused on people's beliefs, and its purpose was to analyze the levels of tolerance of an individual towards others who think differently. Thus, Rokeach's (1960) theoretical proposal made it possible to analyze whether individuals defended their beliefs in a dogmatic way, regardless of their content (e.g. scientific, religious, political). However, although the theoretical developments were convincing and prolific (Meloan, 1993), its empirical support was weak, and at times even contradictory (1950). In addition, this proposal focused only on cognitive aspects without considering the influence of context, which is not consistent with the study of psychosocial variables such as authoritarianism. These critiques led to Rokeach's proposal losing consensus in the scientific world and being abandoned (Duckitt, 2010).

As Rokeach's proposal was being developed, experimental social psychology advanced in the analysis of one major aspect of authoritarianism: obedience. While Fromm (1941) and Adorno et al. (1950) suggested from a psychodynamic perspective, that one of the central themes in the study of authoritarianism was submission to authority, Milgram's work (1963, 1965, 1974) on obedience offered empirical evidence on how a situation can lead individuals without any pathology to obey criminal orders. These studies provide strong contradictory evidence to the etiological explanation of authoritarian personality proposed by Adorno et al. (1950) since it is not possible for the vast majority of individuals who participated in the experiment to have grown in harsh environments, with the figure of a punitive father. Furthermore, Elms and Milgram (1966) inquired about the upbringing environment where the individuals who reached the final consequences when giving electrical shocks during the experiment have developed. Surprisingly to the authors, many of the interviewed subjects had a very good relationship with their families and did not consider to have grown up in a punitive environment.

During the 70's it was very difficult to argue that the authoritarianism phenomenon could be studied as a personality trait. Due to the many critiques to the work of

Adorno et al. (1950), along with the failed assessment of dogmatism by Rokeach (1960) and the empirical findings of the situational perspective (Milgram, 1974; see Stanford Prison Experiment, Zimbardo, 2007). However, in the early '80s Altemeyer's proposal (1981) on right-wing authoritarianism allows the phenomenon to be analyzed as a personality variable once more. According to Altemeyer (1981), his theory is complementary to the situational approach, because even though it is undeniable that the pressure of the situation may lead the subject to aberrant behavior, this is not always the case. It is necessary to consider that in the obedience experiments conducted by Milgram (1974) some subjects decided not to continue with the administration of electric shocks. The only plausible way to understand the different behavior of these individuals is to appeal to their personality characteristics. Thus, Altemeyer (1981) suggests that the different responses to an obedience situation can be explained by personality traits whose etiology lies in the different ways in which an individual interacted with the environment throughout their life history, that is, by social learning (Bandura 1974).

Over the last few decades, Duckitt's proposal (1989, 2010) reconceptualized right wing authoritarianism by considering it as a personality variable susceptible to intergroup analysis. According to the author, the three attitudinal clusters described by Altemeyer (1981) express the relations between the ingroup (which has a number of conventional rules that the individual must follow in order to be part of it: conventionalism and submission) and the outgroup (those who do not follow the rules of the internal group and are therefore despised and discriminated: authoritarian aggression). In this way, the expression right wing authoritarianism is described as the identification of an individual with their peer group along with the tendency to attack the different.

Finally, it is important to note that even though this paper presented an overview through the different theoretical conceptualizations of authoritarianism based on a chronological order, it is only a display resource given that such developments do not occur in a linear sequence. In

addition, due to the extension of this paper, this work does not consider the theoretical and empirical developments very close to the phenomenon of authoritarianism which have certainly intervened decisively to their understanding (e.g. the need for cognitive closure, intolerance to ambiguity, death anxiety). Therefore, this paper is proposed as an attempt to clarify the relationship between the different psychological perspectives which have allowed understanding of the authoritarianism phenomenon, though it is necessary to continue this analysis.

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