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Dogmatism and Mental Health: A Study of Perceived Relationship

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Twenty-five females and 14 males enrolled in an undergraduate psychology course entitled "Personality Problems and Mental Health" were administered Rokeach's (1960) Dogmatism Scale three times. The scale was presented in a format suggested by Willis' (1960) method of controlled marginals. Each time the scale was preceded by different instructions (adapted from Stotsky, 1955) : in Condition I Ss were asked to reply to the statements according to their *personal* opinion; in Condition II Ss were instructed to answer the statements *as a normal person would answer*; in Condition III Ss were required to respond to the statements *as a neurotic individual, a person in poor mental health who showed anxiety symptoms, would respond*. The order in which conditions occurred was counterbalanced with no interval between the three administrations.

Three *t* tests for correlated measures compared the dogmatism scores between Conditions I and II, I and III, and II and III. These two-tailed *t* tests indicated significant differences ($p < .001$). The Ss perceived themselves as being far less dogmatic than either normals (Personal, $M = -658.15$, $SD = 631.00$; Normal. $M = 399.95$, $SD = 913.67$; $t = 6.20$, $df = 38$) or neurotics ($M = 1671.92$, $SD = 911.39$, $t = 15.08$, $df = 38$). Perhaps they interpreted the word normal to mean an average individual. Consequently, it is not surprising that they considered themselves somewhat less dogmatic than the average person. Neurotics were viewed as being more dogmatic than normal

($t = 6.69$, $df = 38$). Thirty-five of 39 Ss attributed higher dogmatism scores to neurotics than either to normals or to themselves. It means that a strong relationship between dogmatism and poor mental health exists in the minds of the students, even though no empirical study, so far, has indicated any such relationship. Whether this stereotype is prevalent among students or is simply restricted to psychology students who have had relevant courses, is hard to ascertain from the present data. It is plausible that psychology professors are responsible for fostering such a stereotype among the students through insinuation and speculation.

The scores of the 25 females and 14 males were compared for all three conditions separately. The results indicated that the female Ss perceived the neurotics as being more dogmatic than the male Ss did (Female, $M = 1701.40$, $SD = 637.39$; Male, $M = 1262.14$, $SD = 1181.47$; $t = 2.21$, $df = 37$, $p < .05$). The remaining two comparisons were not significant. It appears that, if a stereotype concerning the dogmatic attitude of the neurotics is being conveyed to the students, the females seem more susceptible to belief in it. There is some evidence indicating that females are on the whole more submissive and susceptible to influence; whereas, males are more independent and dominant (Di Vesta & Cox, 1960). However, recently the validity of these findings has been challenged (Aronson, 1972).

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