

Wilson G D & Patterson J R. A new measure of conservatism.

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Previous tests of conservatism and authoritarianism are criticized on a number of grounds and the development of a new test which circumvents these deficiencies is described. The Conservatism Scale (C-Scale), which substitutes brief catch-phrases representing controversial issues for the wordy and leading statements of traditional questionnaires, is shown to be reliable, valid, and economical. [The *Science Citation Index*® (SCI®) and the *Social Sciences Citation Index*® (SSCI®) indicate that this paper has been cited in over 150 publications since 1968.]

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"Every Sunday night during my childhood, my grandparents would assemble at our house for an acrimonious game of cards. Granddad, in particular, was a martinet, and I became familiar with his rigid and predictable set of attitudes ranging across every social and political issue. Concepts like 'union,' 'fluoridation,' 'bearded students,' and 'contraceptive vending machines' were like a red flag to a bull, guaranteed to evoke a tirade. Any attempt at reasoned debate was futile and would only excite him further. From observation of Granddad and others, I became convinced that the emotional component of attitudes was central and that most of the arguments people use to support their cases are not so much rational as rationalizations.

"As an undergraduate at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand, in the early 1960s, I was impressed by the Adorno *et al.*'s studies of authoritarianism, especially their idea that social attitude constellations served defensive personality functions. However, their questionnaires seemed to consist of clumsy, ambiguous, and leading statements and the bogey of acquiescence bias was beginning to be recognized.

"In 1965, my master's dissertation year, I shared an office with another student, John Patterson. We

discussed the problems attitude researchers were having with their tests and hit upon the solution of paring the items down to seminal catch-phrases representing controversial issues that would evoke immediate emotional reactions. Keeping model conservatives (such as Granddad) in mind, as well as perfect liberals (ourselves to a large extent), we compiled a pool of potentially suitable items. With a mixture of item analysis and considering criteria such as broad coverage of attitude areas, cross-cultural meaningfulness, and avoidance of ambiguity, we settled on a list of 50 items, half of which were scored in the conservative direction, and half liberal.

"When I proudly showed this test to the head of the department, he could not resist completing it himself. But having done so, with many a jocular comment, he put it aside, saying, 'That's good fun, but shouldn't you be getting on with your thesis!' Thereafter, we gathered our standardization data somewhat furtively with the help of friends, and wrote up the paper as an interim manual, duplicating it and providing our own covers. The writing was truly collaborative in that John and I sat together and agreed upon the wording of every sentence.

"In 1967, I took up my first academic appointment, at the Institute of Psychiatry in London. There I showed the C-Scale to Hans Eysenck, who, in contrast to my previous mentor, encouraged me to submit it for journal publication.

"The paper is widely cited because the scale has caught on with researchers as a quick, convenient, yet reliable and valid, social attitude measure that is relatively free of acquiescence and social desirability effects. In 1975, it was revised and a scoring system for subscores such as religion/puritanism, militarism/punitiveness, ethnocentrism/intolerance, and anti-hedonism introduced.<sup>2</sup> It has been studied in connection with a wide variety of behaviours ranging from response to humour, art and poetry preferences, and name style to marital compatibility, effects of alcohol, and avoidance of walking under ladders. Translations have been made in many European and Oriental languages, permitting cross-cultural comparison of attitude patterns and their relation to demographic variables. There is a growing body of evidence to support the theory that high C-scores reflect a generalized aversion to uncertainty."<sup>3,4</sup>

1. Adorno T W, Frenkel-Brunswik E, Levinson D J & Sanford R N. *The authoritarian personality*. New York: Harper, 1950. 990 p. (Cited 1,770 times.)
2. Wilson G D. *Manual for the Wilson-Patterson Attitude Inventory (WPAI)*. Windsor, England: National Foundation for Educational Research-Nelson, 1975. 71 p.
3. .... *The psychology of conservatism*. London: Academic Press, 1973. 277 p.
4. .... The catch-phrase approach to attitude and measurement. *Pers. Individ. Differ.* To be published, 1985.