The Influence of Personality Organization on Right-Wing Authoritarianism

Christine L. Hujing B.A & Matthew M. Yalch Ph.D.

INTRODUCTION
- Right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) is characterized by strict obedience to authority and encourages aggression toward those who disobey or question it.
- One factor driving high levels of RWA is personality, specifically its pathological aspects.
- Pathological personality organization includes three dimensions: primitive defenses, problems in reality testing, and identity diffusion.
- RWA entails an unrealistic idealization of authority and splitting those who differ from it.
- Given this, we might expect RWA to be associated with primitive defenses and reality testing problems.
- However, there is little research on this.

METHODS
- Study participants were 392 workers on Prolific (age mean 36 years; see Table 1).
- Measures: Inventory of Personality Organization (IPO), brief form of RWA scale.
- We examined the association between dimension of object relations and RWA using a Bayesian approach to multiple regression.

RESULTS
- Dimensions are object relations had generally large (r mean = .42) bivariate associations with RWA.
- Primitive defenses and reality testing problems had positive and identity diffusion had negative relative associations with RWA (see Table 2).

DISCUSSION
- Findings underscore the roots of RWA in immature psychological development and to a lesser extent problems distinguishing reality from fantasy.
- These findings are consistent with simplistic and at times far-fetched messaging from authoritarian elements of U.S. electorate.
- In contrast, the negative association between identity diffusion and RWA may reflect a grounding effect of identifying with authority figures.
- Overall, findings may suggest that therapeutic intervention may lead to lower levels of RWA, although this is rarely an overt treatment goal.