Attitudes to the Army and Pro-Nuclear Activism in Three Student Groups

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the correlates of attitudes toward the army and pro-nuclear activism among students in Australia, N. Ireland and (white) South Africa. Results showed the South Africans to be most favorably disposed toward the army and also to be most favorably disposed toward the deployment of nuclear weapons. Across the three groups those with positive attitudes toward the army were authoritarian in their attitudes, had positive attitudes to those in positions of authority and voted for right-wing parties. In addition, N. Irish militarists were Protestant, had little personal experience of political violence, and were not anxious, while South African militarists were found to be conformers. With regard to pro-nuclear activism, the cross-cultural correlates were authoritarianism, positive attitudes to those in authority and support of right-wing parties. Pro-nuclear activists in N. Ireland were older and had not experienced political violence, while South African activists were female.

THE CURRENT BUILD-UP of nuclear weaponry is an issue which has given rise to passionate debate across the political spectrum as well as to significant cross-cultural differences of opinion. This build-up and the ensuing debate resulted in, among others, a severe rift in the ANZUS alliance (particularly between New Zealand and the United States), the bombing by French agents of the Rainbow Warrior in Auckland harbor and, on a more positive note, the meeting in Geneva in November, 1985 between President Reagan and Mr. Gorbachev. Given the fact that the human race now has the potential to destroy much of our planet, together with the fact that 1986 was designated
the International Year of Peace, it is timely to determine attitudes to the army and pro-nuclear activism. This study will relate not only attitudinal and personality factors to militarism, but also socio-demographic variables including the social and political contexts in which the respondents live.

Studies of the personality characteristics of those who can be defined as pro-military are quite rare. One such early study by Eckhardt and Newcombe (1969) in which militarism was defined as "...the belief in military deterrence, or the reliance on military strength to defend one's nation and its values, or aggressive foreign policy in general..." (p. 210), sought to determine the association between their measure of militarism (see Eckhardt et al., 1967) and authoritarianism, conservatism, rigidity and dogmatism. Their research revealed these variables to be highly interrelated and to have little association with age, level of education, and religious membership, although militarism did relate significantly to church attendance ($r = .33; p < .05$); that is, those who attended church regularly tended to be more militaristic.

Ray (1972a) later argued that "...far from being a dangerously maladjusted person, the militarist is shown to be among our better adjusted and less obnoxious citizens" (p. 322), although Ray (1972b, p. 357) defined militarism differently, namely, as "...a liking or admiration for the armed forces and things associated with them".

Both the Eckhardt and Newcombe (1969) and Ray (1972a) studies were concerned only with militaristic attitudes. Given the current attitude/behavior controversy (for an early paper in this regard see Hollander, 1954), Heaven (1985) attempted to determine the correlates of militaristic behavior. He devised a short scale which, he argued, measured actual behavioral tendencies rather than attitudes. He found support for Ray's (1972a) results; militarists (as measured by the Heaven, 1985 scale) were found to be achievement motivated and domineering. They did not, however, score high on a measure of psychoticism nor were they found to be prejudiced toward minorities. In concluding his study, Heaven (1985, p. 265) noted that, "This study has concerned itself mainly with aspects of militarism such as discipline, conscription, submissiveness, etc. It did not concern itself with the current debate regarding nuclear disarmament. It is, of course, quite possible that those militarists who support their country's continuing build-up of nuclear weapons would differ quite substantially from the more 'traditional' militarist. This awaits further investigation".

The purpose of the present study, therefore, was to determine, cross-culturally, attitudes toward more 'traditional' military issues in three different societies, that is, to gauge the admiration for the army, as well as to gauge what has been referred to as "activism regarding the nuclear arms race" (Werner & Roy, 1985). This latter aspect is concerned with behavioral intention, for example, "Would you be prepared to attend a public meeting in support of the continued production of nuclear weapons?" Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) assert that behavioral intentions are good predictors of attitudes.

It was decided to conduct this study in three quite disparate cultures,