



A brief scale for measuring Anti-Intellectualism



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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the development of a brief scale to measure anti-intellectualism, the degree to which one experiences either positive or negative affect while engaged in epistemic activities such as conceptual integration. Using seven samples, the study examined several psychometric components of the measure, including equivalency across community and student/convenience populations, temporal stability, and indications of different forms of validity. The scale was designed to be a brief, reliable and valid measure of individual differences in the degree to which individuals value affect-reinforced need for intellectual engagement. These results suggest that the Anti-Intellectualism Scale may provide a useful tool for the examination of differences in the desire to engage in intellectually challenging activities, and subsequent outcomes such as vocational interest, academic achievement, and democratic citizenship.

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1. Introduction

In their effort to produce a measure of anti-intellectual dispositions, Eigenberger and Sealander (2001) developed scale items directed toward capturing the attitudes, beliefs and sentiments of university students toward education, professors, and academe itself. The resultant measure was called the Student Anti-Intellectualism Scale (SAIS), and while subsequent studies have indicated the scale is capable of reliable and valid measurement of students' anti-intellectual dispositions (Elias, 2008, 2009; Hook, 2004; Triki, Nicholls, Wegener, Bay, & Cook, 2012), the same conclusion cannot be made for a non-student population as they have never received the SAIS due to the education context specific nature of the items. As a result, the current study developed a brief scale to assess intellectualistic dispositions within the general population.

The SAIS had been designed principally as a measure of anti-intellectualism within the context of academia. Theoretically, the construct of anti-intellectualism was derived from Hofstadter's (1963) historical analysis of religious and populist attitudes toward intellectuals and their stereotyped lifestyle. Here it is argued that anti-intellectualism is a unidimensional construct and lies on a continuum with intellectualism at the opposite end, where the former relates to being against the freedom of thought, creativity, and intellectual pursuits. In addition to

the wording of items restricting a wider audience, the SAIS did not adequately capture intellectualism. Twice as many items are phrased in the negative, almost all concerned with *unreflective instrumentalism* or the "devaluation of forms of thought that do not promise relatively immediate practical payoffs" (Rigney, 1991, p. 444). This new brief measure was designed with the intention of having a set of balanced items emphasizing intellectualism and anti-intellectualism, and that intellectualism is construed as the positive feeling one experiences while engaging in intellectually challenging activities.

An effect of adopting the language of needs in writing items for this new scale was to shift the emphasis from item/statements reflecting (mostly negative) attitudes toward intellectualism, to those expressing an individual's affective state generated by a need to engage in intellectualistic activities such as research, concept exploration, and critical thinking. While this new construal is not inconsistent with the previous notion of anti-intellectualism as unreflective-instrumentalism (Eigenberger & Sealander, 2001), it is nonetheless a somewhat different formulation.

1.1. Intellection

Intellection is a construct denoting individual differences in the degree to which one experiences either positive or negative emotional arousal while engaged in specific epistemic activities such as conceptual integration. It can be thought of as a facet of the need for cognition that is more broadly focused on the affective qualities of a specifically

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intellectual type of engagement, as opposed to a need for cognitive activity. In comparison, this need for cognition may be motivated for example, by the fear of failing a knowledge dependent exam, by curiosity about another person, or by the motivation to avoid or resolve ambiguous, unstructured or unpredictable activities or situations (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982). This desire for someone with a high need for cognition to resolve indecision or situations with a lack of structure or ambiguity is suggestive of an underlying need for a simpler structure (Neuberg & Newsom, 1993) and cognitive closure (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). The same cannot be said of intellection, as the structure, predictability, or ambiguity of an activity or situation is peripheral to the affective qualities of intellectual engagement.

While a number of items in Cacioppo and Petty's original Need for Cognition scale, or revision (Cacioppo, Petty, & Kao, 1984), arguably tap into a need for intellectual activity related to intelligence, many of them reference thinking in general, or thinking as a means to furthering goals or solving unspecific problems. There, the term *need* was used by Cacioppo and Petty in a "statistical (i.e., likelihood or tendency) rather than biological (i.e., tissue deprivation) sense" (p. 118), and indeed the majority of items are not suggestive of an affect-imbued need. As used here, 'intellection' is defined as *the act or process of using the intellect; thinking or reasoning* (Intellection, 2000), that results in affective arousal. Furthermore, factor analyses of the need for cognition scale suggest the items capture several dimensions – cognitive complexity, cognitive persistence, and cognitive confidence (Tanaka, Panter, & Winborne, 1988). Taken together, this suggests that the intellection construct is theoretically related but distinct from the need for cognition.

Intellection is also argued to be distinct from intelligence, and unlike need for cognition should be considered independent of intelligence (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982). Abstract reasoning or intelligence does not equate with knowledge and a desire for an affective response to ideas, as people may be highly knowledgeable but may still differ in their desire or attraction to analyzing information. This is consistent with Hofstadter's (1963) distinction between the *Mental Technician* and the *Intellectual* who may be both highly intelligent, but it is the latter who lives for ideas whereas for the former, ideas function as extrinsic means to other practical ends.

The intellection construct is suggested as having much in common with Berlyne's (1954, 1957) notion of specific or diverse epistemic curiosity. Specific epistemic curiosity described a need for knowledge, and would be exemplified by biologist's need to investigate the ultimate cause of ageing, or a philosopher's quest for a solution to a theoretical puzzle – in many cases reducing incongruity or satisfying a need for what is not known by gaining new knowledge. Intellection certainly resembles this, with its aversion to boredom and need for stimulation; we suggest there is a kind of intellectual sensation-seeking element within the notion of intellection. Furthermore, this epistemic curiosity should be linked to epistemic style or preference (Eigenberger, Critchley, & Sealander, 2007). Specifically, high levels of intellection should overlap with intellectual processing (e.g., complex, effortful thinking) whereas lower levels of intellection should overlap with default processing (e.g., effortless, expedient thinking).

Diverse and incongruous conceptual stimuli describe the types of information sought and encountered during activities prompted by intellection, but their particular satisfaction or solutions do not function as end points that once reached, extinguish the need. This affective stimulation derived by intellection should be akin to that gained by open-mindedness and not dogmatic unchangeable and unjustified certainty (Altemeyer, 2002), but the need is not satisfied by the type of cognitive closure typified by discomfort with ambiguity or unpredictability (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). Individuals with higher levels of intellection would engage in more schema remodeling (e.g., recreating old knowledge into new), have cognitive flexibility (Martin & Rubin, 1995); that is, awareness of options and alternatives and a willingness to be flexible in their approach, and this process would be experienced

as rewarding and positive. Those lower on intellection, or considered anti-intellectual, should view these experiences as negative or without value, and even aversive in some instances.

Consistent with Berlyne's (1957) notion of curiosity as a drive, is the assumption that, as with curiosity, the *need* in anti-intellectualism operates as a motivational drive designed to achieve an optimal level of arousal through intellectual challenges. However, it is also akin to a 'growth need' that cannot be satiated by merely resolving an incongruity, answering a trivia question, or finding an interesting hobby. On one hand, this ongoing need for growth in knowledge and understanding should overlap with abstract value priorities of stimulation and self-direction as important guiding principles in one's life (Schwartz, 1992); priorities that could be interpreted as goal-orienting values for individuals with high intellection. On the other hand, abstract value priorities relating to conservation values, which encompass maintaining tradition and complying with the permanence of societal norms, should be goal-orienting values for individuals with low intellection. Importantly however, intellection should not be related to a willingness to submit to established authorities, or favor authoritarian conventions or norms given that experiencing positive or negative emotional arousal while carrying out epistemic activities or tasks should be independent of authoritarian attitudes. What one feels as a result of engaging in intellectual activities should not necessarily be indicative of whether one believes you or others should submit to authority.

1.2. Intellectualism-Anti-Intellectualism Scale

The scale introduced here, the Intellectualism-Anti-Intellectualism Scale (IAIS) consists of items that are worded to correspond with dispositional proclivities regarding the kind and degree of arousal one may experience when faced with or engaged in intellectual activities. The nature of the arousal connoted by the items is that of experiencing an organismic, or primary personological need, which is resolved by taking cognitive action in the form of inference-generating thinking, intended to produce the acquisition and accommodation of new information. The scale's items are worded to suggest engagement with conceptual material as either rewarding, or aversive and uninteresting. The general connotative tone of the items suggests an element of *sensation seeking* as described by Zuckerman (1971). All of the IAIS items use phraseology that calls attention to the affective nature of engaging in intellectual activity. Positively worded items contain descriptors such as "stimulating" or "thrilling", while negatively worded items reference opposite states such as feeling "bored" or "impatient".

The main intent of developing the scale was to produce a brief self-report measure using items that unambiguously link stimulus-seeking, reward, and intellectual engagement. For the true, physical sensation seeker, it might be said that the thrill or 'rush' is found among risky and challenging activities, whereas for those with a high intellection – for 'intellectual thrill-seekers' as it were, the rush is found within the exploration, challenge, and stimulation of ideas.

While Need for Cognition (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982) may be broadly construed as implicating a need to exercise one's intellect, the IAIS is targeted at intellectual activities and the affective states that are generated by intellectual activities. As in sensation seeking, the notion of intellection assumes that cognitive operations employed to satisfy the need are reinforced by affective rewards. As an activity, intellection is used to designate those cognitive operations involved in the comprehension, creation, and manipulation of concepts.

The starting assumption of investigating a specific intellection was that it is intrinsically rewarding to engage in a cognitive process, which results in understanding. The construct of intellection then, describes that feature of cognition which directs the process of concept formation and intellectual manipulation through observation and logical inference, motivated, at least in part, by the pleasurable arousal attendant upon the production of new concepts, and mastering higher levels of understanding.

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