1.4 The Authoritarian Personality as a Dispositional Explanation for Obedience: 30-minute Pack

AQA 7182 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

1 Describe the proposed childhood origin and mechanism for the Authoritarian Personality.

(Total for Question 1 is 3 marks)

2 Outline Adorno et al.'s sample and method for the F-scale and give one sample limitation.

(Total for Question 2 is 4 marks)

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3 Discuss the Authoritarian Personality as a dispositional explanation for obedience.

(Total for Question 3 is 16 marks)

4 Apply the Authoritarian Personality explanation to Kwame's scenario to explain likely obedient behaviour.

(Total for Question 4 is 6 marks)

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Mark scheme · 1.4 The Authoritarian Personality as a Dispositional Explanation for Obedience: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

states the proposed origin: harsh, conditional parenting in childhood oe	**M1**
explains the mechanism: strict discipline and conditional love produce displaced hostility and rigid respect for authority, which become personality traits oe	**A1**
links how this leads to obedience to authority and intolerance of others deemed lower-status oe	**A1**

Answer: Adorno et al. proposed that harsh, conditional parenting in childhood leads to authoritarian traits via strict discipline and conditional love, causing displaced hostility and a rigid respect for authority that later manifests as obedience and intolerance.

Question 2

outlines method: large questionnaire study using the F-scale to measure authoritarian traits, analysed in relation to recorded attitudes and background variables oe	**M1**
outlines sample: over a thousand adult American participants were included in the original research programme, often described as middle-class or white samples oe	**M1**
states a limitation: the sample was culturally and socially narrow, limiting generalisability oe	**A1**
explains consequence: results may not apply to other cultures or social groups with different political views oe	**A1**

Answer: Adorno et al. used a large questionnaire study with the F-scale on a mainly white, middle-class American adult sample; a limitation is this narrow sample reduces generalisability to other cultures or social groups.

Question 3

Level 4 Knowledge of the Authoritarian Personality is accurate and detailed. Discussion is thorough and balanced, showing clear evaluation of evidence and methodology, and an effective integration of dispositional and situational perspectives. Application to the workplace scenario is effective and sustained. Specialist terms are used accurately and the answer is coherent and well structured.	**13-16**
Level 3 Knowledge is clear with some detail. Discussion includes relevant evaluation and some integration of evidence, though not fully developed. Application to the scenario is present but may be less consistent. The answer is organised with appropriate use of terminology.	**9-12**
Level 2 Knowledge and understanding are limited or partially accurate. Evaluation is superficial and application to the scenario is brief or only partly relevant. The argument lacks clarity in places and terminology is used inconsistently.	**5-8**
Level 1 Very limited knowledge with little or no relevant evaluation. Application to the scenario is minimal or absent. The response may be fragmentary and lacks structure or specialist terminology.	**1-4**
Level 0 No creditable content.	**0**

Indicative content:

- AO1: Key features of the Authoritarian Personality: Adorno et al.'s concept that certain personality traits predispose individuals to be obedient and uncritical towards authority, including conventionalism, authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, rigidity of thinking and hostility towards lower-status groups.
- AO1: The F-scale: a questionnaire intended to measure authoritarian traits, consisting of many agree/disagree items summed to produce a score, used to correlate with attitudes and behaviours linked to obedience.
- AO1: Proposed origin: harsh, punitive and conditional parenting leads to displaced hostility, strict respect for authority and the development of authoritarian traits that increase likelihood of obedience.
- AO2: Empirical support: Elms and Milgram's interviews found higher authoritarian scores and reported strict childhoods among many highly obedient participants, consistent with Adorno's ideas. Describe how such findings support a dispositional link in workplace examples where employees with authoritarian traits obey managers.
- AO3: Methodological criticisms: the F-scale may be politically biased, conflating conservatism with pathology; sample limitations in Adorno's work reduce generalisability; reliance on questionnaires risks social desirability and response bias. The correlational nature of much evidence means causation is not demonstrated and third variables may explain associations.
- AO3: Theoretical criticisms: dispositional accounts may underplay the powerful effect of situational factors demonstrated in experimental work (e.g. Milgram), and cannot easily explain why the same person might behave differently in different contexts. Individual differences evidence shows not all people with similar childhoods develop identical personalities.
- AO3: Complementary view: the dispositional approach helps explain individual differences in obedience within the same situation, so it can complement situational accounts by identifying who is more likely to obey when placed in an authoritative context. For example, in a workplace some employees obey managers unquestioningly partly because of personality predispositions while others resist because of personality or moral conviction.
- AO3: Practical implications: understanding dispositional risks can inform recruitment, training and organisational checks that reduce blind obedience; ethically, it warns against simple blame on personality for harmful obedience without considering context.
- AO3: Balanced conclusion: the Authoritarian Personality offers valuable insight into individual propensities to obey but has empirical and conceptual limits; a full explanation of obedience should integrate dispositional and situational factors and use stronger longitudinal and experimental methods to test causal claims.

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Question 4

applies relevant trait: identifies Kwame's rigid views, conventionalism or hostility towards lower-status groups as traits of an authoritarian personality oe	**M1**
applies origin: links his childhood strict, punitive parenting to the proposed origin of authoritarian traits oe	**M1**
explains mechanism: harsh parenting produced displaced hostility and a tendency to respect authority and obey senior figures to avoid punishment oe	**A1**
applies to behaviour: because he values authority and order he is likely to conform to managers' demands and follow rules without question oe	**A1**
adds consequence: his prejudice towards lower-status customers is another expression of authoritarian hostility, reinforcing his identification with higher-status authority figures oe	**A1**
links to obedience: overall these traits make Kwame psychologically predisposed to obedience in workplace hierarchical relationships oe	**A1**

Answer: Kwame shows traits of an authoritarian personality, such as rigid views and hostility towards lower-status groups, and his strict, punitive childhood fits Adorno's proposed origin. Harsh parenting may have produced a tendency to respect and submit to authority to avoid punishment, so he is likely to obey managers without challenge; his prejudice against customers illustrates the displaced hostility characteristic that accompanies such obedience.

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