1.4 The Authoritarian Personality as a Dispositional Explanation for Obedience

AQA 7182 · about 55 minutes · Write-in edition

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

1 Compare dispositional and situational explanations and give one strength each.

(Total for Question 1 is 4 marks)

2 Describe the purpose of the F-scale in Adorno et al.'s research.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

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

(Total for Question 3 is 3 marks)

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

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

5 Identify and explain one political-bias criticism of the F-scale.

(Total for Question 5 is 3 marks)

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

(Total for Question 6 is 16 marks)

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

(Total for Question 7 is 6 marks)

8 Explain why F-scale/obedience links are correlational and give one implication.

(Total for Question 8 is 4 marks)

Mark scheme · 1.4 The Authoritarian Personality as a Dispositional Explanation for Obedience

Question 1

comparison: dispositional focuses on individual personality traits and childhood origins, situational focuses on features of the immediate context and authority figures that encourage obedience oe — **M1**

strength of dispositional: explains individual differences, why some people obey more than others in the same situation oe — **A1**

strength of situational: supported by experimental evidence showing that authority and context can produce high obedience even in ordinary people (e.g. Milgram-type findings) oe — **M1**

explains why this matters: situational evidence demonstrates how powerfully context can shape behaviour, which dispositional accounts alone cannot explain oe — **A1**

Answer: Dispositional accounts highlight stable individual traits and childhood origins to explain obedience, explaining individual differences. Situational accounts emphasise the power of authority and context, backed by experimental evidence showing ordinary people can obey under certain conditions. Each account has a strength: dispositional explains why some people differ, situational explains powerful contextual effects.

Question 2

states the F-scale was designed to measure levels of authoritarian personality traits in individuals oe — **B1**

states it used a series of items where agreement indicated more authoritarian attitudes, producing a total score to compare between people oe — **B1**

Answer: The F-scale was designed to measure how strongly a person holds authoritarian traits, using questionnaire items where higher agreement produced a higher authoritarianism score.

Question 3

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 4

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 5

identifies criticism: the F-scale may conflate right-wing political beliefs with personality pathology oe — **M1**

explains how: agreement with conservative or traditional social attitudes could increase F-scale scores even if these are political positions rather than evidence of deep authoritarian personality traits oe — **A1**

explains consequence: this political bias undermines the claim that the F-scale measures a stable personality cause of obedience oe — **A1**

Answer: The F-scale has been criticised for political bias because agreement with conservative social attitudes could raise scores without indicating a pathological authoritarian personality, undermining its claim to measure a stable dispositional cause of obedience.

Question 6

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.

Question 7

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.

Question 8

explains why correlational: both measures are observed and compared (questionnaire scores and obedience levels or interview reports) without experimental manipulation of personality oe **M1**

explains that correlation cannot establish direction of causality or rule out third variables oe **M1**

gives implication: cannot claim authoritarian personality causes obedience because a third factor, such as socio-economic background or political beliefs, could produce both high F-scale scores and obedience oe **A1**

adds consequence: researchers must avoid causal language and use longitudinal or experimental methods to test causal claims oe **A1**

Answer: Links are correlational because both F-scale scores and obedience measures are observed without manipulating personality; correlation cannot prove causation or rule out third variables. Therefore we cannot claim authoritarian personality causes obedience, since a third factor could cause both, and causal claims require longitudinal or experimental evidence.