The authoritarian personality

Personality trait making some people susceptible to obeying people in authority. Such individuals are also thought to be submissive to those of higher status and dismissive of those they see as inferiors therefore hostile towards ethnic, racial and other minority groups.

Adorno

A – cause of obedient personality
M – study of over 200 middle class white Americans and their unconscious attitudes towards other racial groups
  - Developed a scale which include the fascism scale (F-scale) to measure authoritarian personality
  - e.g. ‘obedience and respect for authority are the most important virtue children should learn’
R – those with authoritarian leaning (scored high on scale) identified with ‘strong’ people and generally contemptuous of the weak
  - They were very conscious of their own and others status, showing excessive respect
  - Found authoritarian people had a cognitive style where they saw people with fixed and distinctive stereotypes
  - Strong positive correlation between authoritarianism

Authoritarian characteristics
- Tendency to be obedient
- Extreme respect for authority and submissive to it
- Anti – Semitism
- Potential for fascism
- Political and economic conservatism
- Inflexible in their outlook
- Uncomfortable with uncertainty

Origin of the authoritarian personality

Formed in childhood because of harsh parenting
- Strict discipline and impossibly high standards
- Conditional love

Creates sense of shame and hostility in the child and child cannot express this feeling directly against parent so the fears are displaced onto others who are perceived to be weaker, in process known as scapegoating.

This explains a central trait of obedience to a higher authority which is dislike for people considered to be inferior.

This is a psychodynamic explanation.

Only a correlation
Impossible to say cause and effect of personality and obedience. May be that a third factor is involved.

Sample
Used both genders and big sample

‘A comedy of methodological errors’ – Greenstein

The scale has been criticism for wording in the same ‘direction’ this means it is possible to get high score by just ticking the same line of boxes and therefore people who agree with the items may just be ‘acquiescers’ (agree to everything) furthermore, Adorno interviewed participant afterwards about childhood experiences but already knew test scores so therefore subjective / biased.

Resistance to social influence