A long line of research shows that adults who are high in authoritarianism—a general tendency to submit to established authority and social convention—show greater ethnocentrism, xenophobia, political intolerance, and prejudice. Within this work, several assumptions have gone unexamined. In this talk I will present recent work challenging some of these long-time assumptions. For one, traditional accounts of authoritarianism suggest that individual differences in this tendency crystallize in early adulthood along with other sociopolitical orientations. Departing from this perspective, I will argue that authoritarian tendencies exist well before then, manifesting themselves in age-relevant forms. Specifically, I will suggest that among young children, these individual differences will be expressed as greater responsiveness to cues of status and of deviance when determining whom to learn from. I will further address assumptions regarding the relation between authoritarianism and personality and authoritarianism and education, highlighting a central role for self-perceptions and values. In all, this talk will argue for a functional perspective on authoritarianism, pointing to possible intervention avenues earlier ignored.