

Factors Influencing Teenage Attitudes Toward Authority in Suburban and Urban Areas

AP Research

April 15, 2018

Word Count: 4926

Abstract

Understanding what causes teenagers to question authority is crucial when raising the next generation to be law-abiding yet outspoken, active citizens. Relationships with parents and peers, affluence, gender, age, and religion are all factors that have been linked to attitudes toward authority. This study aims to identify differences between the previously mentioned factors in both urban and suburban areas. 215 student subjects from an urban school district and 111 student subjects from a suburban school district were surveyed about their opinions toward authority and asked about situations in which they might stand up to authority. Results showed that, in both contexts, there are correlations between attitudes toward authority and socioeconomic status, age, and closeness with parent(s). Distinct correlations were not found between attitudes toward authority and either gender or religion.

Factors Influencing Teenage Attitudes Toward Authority in Suburban and Urban Areas

From Black Lives Matter to the Women's March to the March for our Lives movement, many people are challenging some form of authority. In the Black Lives Matter movement for example, people protest against police brutality. By confronting authority when necessary, people change society, improving civil rights and justice for the members of their society. However, obeying authorities is often appropriate too, because without that cooperation a community can fall into anarchy and no one's rights are protected. It is crucial to understand the factors that influence people's responses to authority, particularly among minors, so they can develop sound judgment when interacting with authorities.

This study aims to answer the question *Which factors influence responses to authority in high school students in urban and suburban areas?* Most people assume that students in an urban area are more likely to challenge authority than suburban students. Other demographics thought to influence responses to authority are socioeconomics, age, family, gender, religion, and peer relationships. In order to better understand how demographics affect the way people respond to authority, this study reviews current scholarship and conducts surveys to measure potential correlations between attitudes toward authority and the social factors mentioned above.

Literature Review

To gain an understanding of young adults' approaches to authority, Fattori, Curly, Jorchel, Pozzi, Mihalits, and Alfieri from the Department of Psychology at the Catholic University of Sacro Cuore surveyed young adults on their definitions of obedience and disobedience and how their definitions are expressed through hypothetical examples in society. The article supports the idea of challenging the status quo, noting that it is "pivotal for parents

not to raise children as obedient machines who turned out to be future ‘sleeping’ citizens, blindly accepting the authorities’ requests that can lead to negative social consequences” (2015, p. 206). In addition, it notes that disobedience requires “courage and reflective skills,” the latter consisting of processing a rule, request, or order from authority, and deciding how to respond according to one’s ethics (p. 206). On the other hand, Raby, from the Department of Child and Youth Studies at Brock University argues that submission to authority does not always mean complete obedience or respect (2008). There still must be a point to which people obey authority, even when disobeying authority. For example, if someone is silently protesting authority in order to increase wages, they may not respect their boss or authority and stand up against them, but they still must obey the law by not assaulting their boss.

Developing a sense of when to obey or disobey starts in childhood. The current study addresses attitudes toward authority specifically in high school-aged students because this is when, according to Thompson from the University of California Davis, people’s morals are influenced by more than just their parents and, therefore, their responses to authority have the potential to change (2012, p. 426). Researchers have observed several possible influences by measuring potential correlations in attitudes toward authority among urban and suburban teens, considering many demographic factors. This study indicates that the two geographic groups have generally similar responses to authority, but different responses within certain demographic subgroups. Specifically, socioeconomic status (SES), age, and parental relationships produce distinct correlations across geographic settings, while gender and religion do not.

Socioeconomic Factors

In researching socioeconomic effects, Tuma and Livson from the Child Development Department at the University California Berkeley, looked at differences in attitudes toward authority among adolescents from higher and lower income homes (1960). Their study specifically looks at the extent to which adolescents accept or reject the rules in certain situations, behavioral differences between genders, and parent level of education. The study's major finding is that males with lower SES generally tended to be more compliant with all authorities at home, in school, or in the outside world. Though the study did not find a similar correlation in females of lower SES, this finding is still important because it refutes the stereotype that people in lower income areas resist authority more. Still, more research is necessary to verify its findings and to make sure its findings are still relevant today.

A different study by Zafar, Nabeel, and Khalil from the International Islamic University in Islamabad (2013) similarly aimed to examine how self-concept in adolescents related to their attitudes toward authority. Self-concept, according to Ahuja, is "a collection of beliefs about oneself that includes elements such as academic performance, gender roles, sexuality, and racial identity" (p. 29). Zafar et al. found that those with lower and middle SES are associated with low school self-concept which is directly correlated to negative attitudes toward institutional authority. Among 12-19 year olds, the study found differences in gender, socioeconomic status, and age. All shape attitudes toward authority. Nevertheless, its findings are still different than the study done by Tuma and Livson, which found that teens who are of lower SES actually had a higher self-concept and a more positive attitude toward authority than students associated with lower and middle SES. The contrasting results of these two studies call for more research to be conducted.

Age

Rigby and Densley from the School of Social Studies at the South Australian Institute of Technology compare obedience and disobedience between males and females from a Catholic school in their study from 1985. Their study found that because the teenage years play such a pivotal role in the development of the mind, responses to authority during early adolescence must not be assumed to be similar to that of adults (p. 724). More recent research explains that “adolescents’ self-concept and their attitude towards the authority figures have [been] found to be more positive in late adolescents as compared to early and middle adolescents” (Zafar et al., 2013, p. 28). These findings suggest that younger adolescents are more defiant in general, or perhaps maturity and brain development play a role in behavior of younger and middle adolescents versus older adolescents. In either case, more clarification is necessary.

Parental Influence

Another major factor in teenage attitudes toward authority is family, specifically parents. Ochoa, Lopez and Elmer’s 2007 study conducted at Pablo de Olavide University in Spain led to significant findings regarding parent-child relationships, including the following: teens with behavioral problems tended to have negative attitudes toward formal authority figures like teachers and police; and the quality of a relationship between teen and parent is associated with “positive self-concept (in the family and school domains), acceptance by peers, and positive attitudes towards authority, which in turn would be related to lower levels of violent behavior at schools” (p. 781). Furthermore, the study found that having a good relationship with both mother and father is linked to positive family self-concept and positive school self-concept,

which is associated with positive attitudes toward authority. The study did not mention what the effect of a good relationship with only one parent had on attitudes toward authority.

Kenneth St. C. Levy, from the Department of Justice, in 2001, led an investigation into attitudes toward authority in non-delinquents, noninstitutionalized delinquents, and institutionalized delinquents. The study observed self-concept, relationships, and attitudes with teachers, police, and parents. An interesting finding noted that institutionalized delinquents viewed teachers as significant adults in their lives, which is a testament of their parents' deficiency in the "supervision of, or bonding with their children" (p. 342). The fact that many delinquents had parents who were not present in their lives shows that the role of parents is not only important in the lives of adolescents, it is vital, especially in avoiding institutionalization.

A study by Ken Rigby, who was mentioned earlier with Densley, surveyed university students about their attitudes toward authority as well as their perception of their parents' attitudes toward authority (1987). Results demonstrate that students and parents have similar opinions, indicating that parent opinions influence child opinions. Additionally, the study found parents had more pro-authority views than their children. This result may be caused by external influences on teenagers, rebellious youth culture, or internal factors like the desire for peer acceptance and the need to build an identity and ego for themselves.

Gender

In the study by Zafar et al., females had more positive interactions with their teachers and more positive attitudes toward authority in general than males. However, the study took place in Pakistan, where "girls are taught to be obedient and submissive and boys are encouraged to be

outgoing and assertive” (p. 27). Consequently, the societal trend identified by the study may not translate to the United States.

Rigby and Densley’s study also found that females are much more pro-authority than males, which confirms Coleman’s study (as cited in Rigby & Densley, 1985, p. 724) explaining that boys are much more confrontational with authority. Finally, the study also found that, for both genders, those who expressed a belief in God are more pro-authority. This study only considers responses from Catholic students and is fairly old, so it may need to be updated and broadened.

In 2012, Thomas Blass from the University of Maryland reviewed several studies looking at similarities and differences between people in different countries and whether they obeyed authority or not. He ultimately found few differences regarding which gender obeyed authority in multiple cultures. He mentioned that ten out of twelve studies reviewed found no difference between male and female attitudes while two out of the twelve studies found, in contrast to both Zafar and Rigby and Densley, females are less obedient than males. Though this study is this most recent, the subjects’ ages are not specified, so results could be different between teenagers and adults. The study on gender differences in attitudes toward authority requires further examination.

Religion

Religion has been known to have a significant influence on the morals and behaviors of people, especially their attitudes toward authority because most religions look up to a higher being and require submission to a god or gods. Specifically, the Catholic faith, according to Rigby and Densley, promotes traditional, conservative views of gender roles and promotes

pro-authority beliefs. It should also be noted, however, that there may not always be a consistency between belief and behavior, especially in teenagers when they are beginning to establish a sense of individuality and forming their own opinions. Additionally, in observing the differences between the sexes' behaviors in Catholic school, Rigby and Densley found that "among boys, relatively hostile attitudes towards authority may result in defiant or non-conforming behavior toward parents and teachers seeking to coerce children into attending church... [but] there is no relationship between the girls' attitudes and their church attendance" (p. 728). This study observed one specific religion, but little has been done to understand behavior in religious versus non-religious students.

Peer Influence

As mentioned previously, when children enter early and middle adolescence, they are exposed to influences other than just their family and friends (Thompson). However, family and friends still play a vital role in adolescents' social lives, with peer influence increasing. In fact, adolescents' positive and negative attitudes are influenced by their social surroundings (Zafar et al.), which implies their attitudes toward authority may also be influenced by whom they associate with. A study by Grier and Gudiel who specialize in Child and Adolescent Studies, California State University, in 2011 surveyed students on the influence religion had on their behavior in regard to cheating, drinking, breaking the law, and other negative social behaviors. It compared these behaviors to the extent of influence that their peers had on subjects and found that peer influence prevented students from using substances more than religion did. However, these studies do not compare the effect peer pressure has within different types of students such

as students with different levels of closeness to their parents, so there is still more to be researched in this area of study.

Location

Dr. Scheer, Dr. Borden, and Dr. Donnermeyer from Ohio State University (2000) studied how family affected teenagers' use of drugs and alcohol, which is disobedience of the law. Although this is not exactly the same as confronting authority figures, authority figures often derive their positions from the law and this is one of the few studies that specifically compared locations in regard to views of authority. The study claims that rural, suburban, and urban areas "contributed minimally" (p. 111) to understanding adolescent substance use. Location itself is not a significant factor, but it is important "for understanding variations in influence of peer, school, and community environments on substance use" (p. 111). Because there is little research on location's effect specifically on attitudes toward authority figures, the current study aims to further examine location's role and see whether it is consistent with Scheer et al.'s findings.

Methods

In order to answer the question *Which factors influence responses to authority in high school students in urban and suburban areas?*, 326 students were surveyed to understand their backgrounds; their initial, abstract views of authority; how they would behave in specific situations; and their parents' responses to similar questions.

Participants

Student subjects came from two different school districts—one urban and the other suburban. The schools with the sample of students from an urban setting requested anonymity, so they will be referred to as the Urban District (UD). The sample of students from a suburban

district (SD) are from Conejo Valley Unified School District. The 215 participants from UD came from two different high schools while 111 participants from SD came from three different high schools. Because of district policies in SD, parent consent was gathered from SD parents. All participant responses are anonymous, so responses cannot be traced to individual students.

Questionnaire

The first part of the survey helps to identify and classify students to gather demographics of each group. It asks about relationships with parents, free lunch status, grade, age, gender, and religious affiliation. Relationships with parents are used to correlate similarities and differences between parent and child attitudes toward authority as well as to find relationships between closeness with parent and confronting authority. Relationships with parents are measured by how close students considered themselves to be with their parent. Responses include “Very close”, “Close”, “Somewhat close”, “Not very close”, “Not close at all”, and “Close with one but not the other”. SES, age, religion, and gender provide explanations as to why some students may have a certain opinions toward authority.

The second part of the survey addresses the students’ actual attitudes toward authority and the impact that parents have on student attitudes. Some questions provide abstract statements that students respond to. These include statements like “When confronted by a teacher or staff member, I obey what they tell me to do” (see Appendix) to which students respond “Always”, “Usually”, “Sometimes”, “Rarely”, or “Never”. Other statements, like “My parents' opinions on how to respond to authority are similar to mine,” require students to answer with “Strongly agree”, “Agree”, “Neutral”, “Disagree”, or “Strongly disagree”. Hypothetical questions are also asked in order to gain insight on what kinds of institutional authority people

are willing to resist, for example teachers, police officers, or bosses. Parents are not included as authorities in students' hypothetical questions because they are not institutional authority and because students are asked about how they perceived their parents to behave towards the same authorities, so they did not need to be in the responses as well. Data collection took place mostly online or via paper surveys depending on classroom phone usage policies and accessibility.

Results and Discussion

Socioeconomic Status (SES)

Table 1

<i>Hypothetical situations (students)</i> I would stand up to authority if...(mark all that apply)	SD Low Income (Reduced Lunch) (out of 13)	SD Middle/Upper Income Levels (out of 80)	UD Low Income (Reduced Lunch) (out of 143)	UD Middle/Upper Income Levels (out of 44)
A1: I was told by a teacher to stop talking	23.1%	3.8%	10.9%	25.0%
A2: I was given a detention for being late to class	15.4%	11.3%	9.8%	18.2%
B: I was pulled over for a traffic ticket I did not deserve	46.2%	45.0%	29.4%	47.7%
C: I was told by a police officer to get out of my car with little to no explanation	46.2%	48.9%	48.3%	61.4%
D: I was forced to work after clocking out	53.8%	50.0%	49.0%	54.5%
E: I saw a homeless person being mistreated by	76.9%	53.8%	63.6%	70.5%

authority				
F: my friends are protesting authority	7.7%	17.5%	12.6%	27.3%
G: I would obey authority in all these circumstances	---	16.3%	14.0%	---

In order to organize the socioeconomics of each setting, students are divided into those who receive free or reduced lunches, those who do not, and those who are unsure. Students who are unsure are not included in this analysis. In SD, 13 students receive subsidized lunch, 80 do not, and 18 do not know. In UD, the totals are 145, 44, and 26, respectively.

In SD, a 19.3% gap shows that low SES are significantly more likely than middle/upper SES to challenge teachers who try to quiet them (Table 1). In UD, the same hypothetical produced a 14.7% gap, but in the opposite direction--upper SES are more likely to confront teachers than lower SES are. It is interesting that neither SES group had consistent responses in both districts. The most prevalent pattern found in this data shows that the smallest grouping in each district (low SES in SD and high SES in UD) most often stood up to their teachers. This minority correlation repeats itself almost every scenario. The gap varies from 1.2 % to 23.1% in the aforementioned question A1 as well as A2, B, D, E, and G. Hypothetical F does not apply because it measures peer influence, and C held true for UD but is somewhat contrary to the pattern (a -2.7% gap) among SD. In total, the minority correlation is present in 13 of 14 pairings. While the small sample size of SD low SES students suggests the need for more research, perhaps it is not the relative affluence itself that influences behavior but one's SES relative to the

dominant SES of the population. In other words, being outside the majority in terms of SES compels students to advocate for themselves regardless of income level.

The final SES hypothetical of note asked if students would join peers in challenging authority. In both locations, upper SES students appear to feel more peer pressure. SD upper SES students are 10% more likely to be influenced by peers; UD upper SES are 15% more likely. It is also interesting that UD kids stood up significantly more than SD kids when their peers are involved.

Table 2

<i>Hypothetical situations (parents)</i> In your opinion, your parent(s) would stand up to authority if...(mark all that apply)	SD Low Income (Reduced Lunch) (out of 13)	SD Middle/Upper Income Levels (out of 80)	UD Low Income (Reduced Lunch) (out of 143)	UD Middle/Upper Income Levels (out of 44)
A: Their child got in trouble at school	53.8%	38.8%	29.4%	29.6%
B: their boss consistently made them work late	46.2%	42.5%	38.5%	34.1%
C: they are pulled over for a traffic ticket they did not deserve	53.8%	58.8%	50.3%	65.9%
D: they are told by a police officer to get out of their car with little to no explanation	46.2%	46.3%	47.6%	52.3%
E: they saw a homeless person being mistreated by someone of authority	61.5%	47.5%	40.6%	43.2%
F: their peers are protesting authority	7.7%	15.0%	8.4%	13.6%
G: they would obey	7.7%	12.5%	18.2%	9.1%

authority under all these circumstances				
---	--	--	--	--

In the hypothetical situations for parents (Table 2), 62% of low SES students and 48% of middle/high SES students in SD said their parents would challenge authority if they saw a homeless person being mistreated. In UD, 40% of low SES and 43% of middle/high SES students said their parents would. The higher percentage of low SES parents in SD who would stand up to authority compared to higher SES parents suggests lower SES parents may be more empathetic toward the homeless. Though this finding is consistent in parent data, it is not consistent with the students as seen in Table 1, which shows that students are not as likely to be as sympathetic toward the homeless as their parents.

The previously discussed hypothetical situation shows that parents' attitudes are significantly different from each other in SD, but not in UD. It should be considered that there is probably a larger financial gap in SD between lower SES and middle/high SES, which may explain why SD parent responses toward the homeless are so different.

The likelihood of questioning school authorities is greater among low SES parents in SD than among middle and high SES, but behavior among UD parents is virtually the same. In contrast, low SES parents of both areas are less likely than upper SES to challenge police if they received an undeserved traffic ticket. This difference may be due to the seriousness of the situation or it may reveal differing attitudes toward the importance of school in comparison to the law. Perhaps the poor also feel less empowered than the wealthy to stand up to police.

Table 3

When confronted by a teacher or	SD low SES (out of 13)	SD high and middle SES	UD low SES (out of 145)	UD high and middle SES
---------------------------------	------------------------	------------------------	-------------------------	------------------------

staff member, I obey what they tell me to do.		(out of 80)		(out of 44)
Always	23.1%	46.3%	42.1%	31.8%
Usually	61.5%	48.8%	43.4%	54.5%
Sometimes	15.4%	5.0%	11.0%	13.6%
Rarely	---	---	2.1%	---
Never	---	---	---	---

For the abstract statements (Table 3), most students “always” or “usually” obey teachers. However, there is a wider gap between those who responded “always” and those who answered “usually” in SD than in UD. These gaps correlate to the students who responded to the hypotheticals saying they would stand up to a teacher if told to be quiet, showing once again that the smaller SES groups within each district are more likely to challenge authority. The findings in UD reflect Tuma and Livson’s finding where lower SES students are more compliant. However, findings in SD are more consistent with Zafar et al.’s findings that associated less compliance with lower SES. The current study’s data serves as a sort of in-between to the two studies’ clashing statements because both were true in different cases.

Table 4

When confronted by a police officer, I obey what they tell me to do.	SD low SES (out of 13)	SD upper and middle SES (out of 80)	UD low SES (out of 145)	UD upper and middle SES (out of 44)
Always	69.3%	83.7%	61.1%	72.7%
Usually	30.7%	13.7%	31.1%	25.0%
Sometimes	---	1.3%	5.3%	2.3%

Rarely	---	1.3%	1.8%	---
Never	---	---	<1%	---

As seen in Table 4, most kids are obedient toward police. However, suburban students obey more often, shown by a larger gap between “always” and “usually” responses: 39% SD low SES versus 30% for UD low SES; 70% for SD upper SES versus 48% for UD upper SES. Also, upper SES students in both locations answered “always” more than low SES even though according to the hypotheticals, affluent parents said they would stand up to police more than poorer parents (Table 2). This also reflects the idea that students are more compliant with authority than their parents.

Table 5

My parents are respectful towards authority.	SD low SES (out of 13)	SD high and middle SES (out of 80)	UD low SES (out of 143)	UD high and middle SES (out of 44)
Always	38.5%	47.5%	62.9%	63.6%
Usually	46.2%	48.8%	29.4%	27.3%
Sometimes	15.4%	3.8%	6.3%	6.8%
Rarely	---	---	0.7%	2.3
Never	---	---	0.7%	---

The data suggest that adults are less afraid than students to confront authority and that their attitudes are not consistent with the student minority correlation. This confirms the findings of the parent hypothetical questions. The contrast between generations may result from students feeling more peer pressure and, therefore, more alienation when outside the predominant SES;

parents, on the other hand, tend to work and interact in less diverse socioeconomic settings since they tend to work with other people in the same occupation, meaning they don't have as many opportunities as students to feel alienated.

Age

Table 6

<i>Hypothetical situations (students)</i> I would stand up to authority if...(mark all that apply)	SD 9th grade	SD 10th grade	SD 11th grade	SD 12th grade	UD 9th grade	UD 10th grade	UD 11th grade	UD 12th grade
I was told by a police officer to get out of my car with little to no explanation	37.5%	47.6%	44.9%	58.3%	56.0%	58.1%	47.7%	46.5%
I was forced to work after clocking out	37.5%	42.9%	51.0%	66.7%	44.0%	45.2%	52.3%	45.1%

Table 6 shows generally increasing resistance to police officers among SD as they age, with a spike among seniors; in UD, younger students (grades nine and ten) are hypothetically more confrontational than eleventh and twelfth graders. This may suggest that in early adolescence geography does indicate a more challenging response to authority, but the SD and UD are nearly the same in eleventh grade. The spike in confrontation among SD twelfth graders requires more study, but might be explained by an increase in SD student driving and having more opportunities to stand up to police authority. Perhaps encountering more driving interactions with police, which is presumably more common among SD than UD students, makes SD students more comfortable standing up to police.

In SD, as age increases, so does the percentage of those who would stand up to their bosses. Results in UD are mostly consistent with the patterns seen in SD with the exception of the 12th graders. A possible reason for this finding may be that SD students express more confidence with authority without the reality check of actually having a job. In UD, students may be more likely to work since SES tended to be lower income and, by senior year, working students would understand the realities of employment and having a boss.

Table 7

My parents' opinions on how to respond to authority are similar to mine.	SD 9th grade	SD 10th grade	SD 11th grade	SD 12th grade	UD 9th grade	UD 10th grade	UD 11th grade	UD 12th grade
Disagree	4.0%	9.7%	5.7%	5.6%	---	2.4%	12.2%	---
Strongly disagree	---	6.5%	2.3%	---	---	2.4%	4.1%	---

Perhaps the most interesting age-related finding is that in middle grades opinions vary most from parents' (Table 7). This is consistent with Thompson's conclusion that children in middle adolescence begin to be influenced by more than just parents and friends. Rigby notes that a drop in respect for authority could be explained by rebellious youth culture or the need for adolescents to have a sense of independence, but the present findings suggest that, by late adolescence (12th grade), students return to a view more in line with their parents' opinions.

Parental Influence

Table 8A

<i>Hypothetical situations (students)</i> I would stand up to authority if...(mark all that apply)	Very close/Close to parents	Not very close/Not close at all to parents	Close with one parent but not the other
---	-----------------------------	--	---

UD			
A1: I was told by a teacher to stop talking	14.5%	14.3%	7.1%
A2: I was given a detention for being late to class	13.4%	19.0%	21.4%
B: I was pulled over for a traffic ticket I did not deserve	31.0%	42.9%	42.9%
C: I was told by a police officer to get out of my car with little to no explanation	48.3%	52.4%	71.4%
D: I was forced to work after clocking out	47.6%	57.1%	50.0%
E: I saw a homeless person being mistreated by authority	64.1%	52.4%	71.4%
F: my friends are protesting authority	17.2%	14.3%	7.1%
G: I would obey authority in all these circumstances	11.7%	14.3%	7.1%

Table 8B

<i>Hypothetical situations (students)</i> I would stand up to authority if... (mark all that apply) SD	Very close/Close	Not very close/Not close at all	Close with one but not the other
A1: I was told by a teacher to stop talking	5.5%	14.3%	16.7%
A2: I was given a detention for being late to class	9.9%	---	33.3%
B: I was pulled over for a traffic ticket I did not deserve	43.8%	---	66.7%
C: I was told by a police officer to get out of my car with little to no explanation	45.2%	28.6%	66.7%

D: I was forced to work after clocking out	49.3%	14.3%	83.3%
E: I saw a homeless person being mistreated by authority	56.2%	28.6%	66.7%
F: my friends are protesting authority	16.4%	14.3%	---
G: I would obey authority in all these circumstances	12.3%	28.6%	---

As shown by responses to questions A2, B, C, E, and G, UD students who said they are close with only one parent are consistently more likely to question authority compared to students who are very close/close or not very close/not close at all with their parents. Only in the least serious context, question A1, are the one-parent students least likely to stand up, while the peer question (F) shows that one-parent students are least influenced by others. Though it is expected that being close with one parent would be a sort of middle ground between not being close with either parent and being close with both, the data prove that it is actually not a middle ground and is, in fact, the group that stands up to authority the most. These patterns are even stronger in SD, appearing in every hypothetical except F. All responses in SD were also more similar to each other in general. Possibly, a broken trust-relationship with one parent causes students to question authority while a good relationship with the other parent gives students the confidence to challenge authorities. Further research is needed to confirm the findings of the present research and seek explanations as to why one-parent students are more likely to stand up.

When looking at Statement F in both districts, there is no fluctuation or increase or decrease in those who would stand up to authority. This disproves any notion that peer pressure and peer influence is affected by how close students are to their parents. Overall, UD and SD

had wide ranges of responses to Statement F, and there are still no correlations between parent-child closeness and likelihood to conform to peer pressure.

Table 9A

When confronted by a teacher or staff member, I obey what they tell me to do. (UD)	Very close/Close	Not very close/Not close at all	Close with one but not the other
Always	49.1%	28.2%	71.4%
Usually	48.1%	62.3%	28.6%
Sometimes	12.8%	9.6%	---
Rarely	1.5%	---	---
Never	<1%	---	---

Table 9B

When confronted by a teacher or staff member, I obey what they tell me to do. (SD)	Very close/Close	Not very close/Not close at all	Close with one but not the other
Always	49.1%	42.9%	---
Usually	48.1%	57.1%	100%
Sometimes	5.7%	---	---
Rarely	---	---	---
Never	---	---	---

In UD, 90-100% of responses from each group are either “always” or “usually” obedient (Table 9A). However, those who are close with one parent responded with “always” at a much higher rate; those who are close with both parents had pretty even responses between “always” and “usually”; those who are close with neither parent leaned toward “usually”. The students who are close with only one parent all said they would always or usually obey teachers, but in given situations (hypothetical questions), their responses are inconsistent with their answers to the abstract questions, suggesting their beliefs do not always translate into actions. This behavior proves that Rigby and Densley’s statement about belief and behavior not being consistent in religious adolescents can also be true in adolescents in other contexts as well. Among those in SD who are close with both parents, responses split evenly between always and usually. The responses of students who feel close with neither parent lean toward “usually,” and those who are close with one one parent all responded with “usually” (Table 9B). This shows that students with one close parent do not occupy a middle position between those with two parents and those with none. The fact that no groups overwhelmingly answered “always” obedient, other than UD one-parent students (whose actions did not reflect their beliefs), points out that Fattori et al.’s concern for people “blindly accepting the authorities’ requests” is not well-founded.

Table 10A

When confronted by a police officer, I obey what they tell me to do. (UD)	Very close/Close	Not very close/Not close at all	Close with one but not the other
Always	66.0%	56.8%	71.4%
Usually	27.0%	38.7%	28.6%
Sometimes	4.9%	9.1%	---

Rarely	---	---	---
Never	1.3%	---	---

Table 10B

When confronted by a police officer, I obey what they tell me to do. (SD)	Very close/Close	Not very close/Not close at all	Close with one but not the other
Always	86.3%	85.7%	66.7%
Usually	13.8%	14.3%	33.3%
Sometimes	---	---	---
Rarely	---	---	---
Never	---	---	---

In UD, of those who are very close/close with their parents, more students “always” obey police than “usually” obey police (Table 10A). This finding contrasts with the even split between always and usually obeying teachers that is evident within UD (Table 9A). Of those who are close with only one parent, there are significantly more who obey police “always” instead of “usually” as opposed to all one-parent students obeying teachers only “usually”. This is noticeably evident in students with all other levels of closeness as well, just not to the extreme of those who are close with only one parent (Table 9B and Table 10B). In SD, the majority of all groups, no matter how close with their parents, said they would always obey police. Data suggest that both SD and UD groups understand the seriousness when interacting with police and, therefore, students obey them more often than they do teachers.

Limitations

Because there was no incentive for students to answer the survey, it was hard to get a large sample size, so only a fraction of each school is represented. In SD, more results came from students in 10th and 11th grade while UD more responses came from 11th and 12th grade classes, and not as many surveys were given to AP or Honors classes.

Within the survey, some questions could have been worded more specifically. For example, one of the hypotheticals asked if students thought their parents would stand up to authority if their child got in trouble at school. Unlike other questions, the situation does not specify whether the student is in trouble for a valid reason or not. In general, the question is still somewhat useful because it shows whether the students' parents are afraid to stand up to authority at all, but it is different from other hypotheticals and therefore, somewhat limited. A more specific situation would only enhance the quality of responses because it would reveal the extent to which parents would stand up to school authorities. For example, some parents may be willing to stand up if their child is wrongfully accused of something, but not if they are rightfully accused of something.

Finally, because the current study is correlational, connections can be made to see if behaviors are linked, but results cannot explain whether certain factors in subjects' lives are causes of their behavior.

Conclusion

Comprehending teenagers' attitudes toward authority has significant implications for the future. Understanding behavioral patterns in adolescents gives us insight into raising a new generation of active citizens who are cooperative yet unafraid to advocate for themselves with people of authority. As high school students from urban and suburban areas were asked about

gender, religion, peer pressure, socioeconomic status, age, and parental relationships, the last three--socioeconomics, age, and closeness with parent(s), revealed the most consistent correlative patterns.

Results suggest that it is not the richest or poorest students but the least represented SES group in its district that is most likely to stand up to authority. Using this information, schools can better understand how well they serve their students. Knowing, for example, that economic minorities are more likely to agitate, schools can choose to address the needs of this small group so students do not feel underrepresented. Also, when students do challenge school staff, the faculty can respond better, whether taking a more patient disciplinary approach or training students in positive advocacy skills.

In terms of age, students' attitudes toward authority tend to stray away from their parents most in 10th and 11th grades, but become more similar again in 12th grade, regardless of geographic location. With this in mind, appropriate training and intervention should begin no later than ninth grade, and probably continue through eleventh, so students will have the skills necessary to navigate the middle high school years when they reassess the values they were taught at home. A study conducted by Thakur from the Department of Psychology at Himachal Pradesh University (2017) that investigates ways to implement positive disciplinary programs in schools found that it is also important to reinforce encouragement to students more than criticism while disciplining students in school

Curiously, results demonstrate that in both districts students who are close with one parent are more assertive with authority than students who are close with both or neither of their parents. One-parent students also perceive themselves to be more obedient to authority in

theory, but their responses to hypothetical situations indicate they are more likely than other students to question authority. Challenging the common understanding that one close parent is always better than none, this finding suggests that there's more complexity to parent-child relationships--both close ones and broken ones--than previous research has revealed. It is difficult to hypothesize why this correlation exists, but it undoubtedly should be considered in designing future studies.

Subsequent research may also benefit from this project when considering causes for certain attitudes toward authority. By knowing there are correlations between attitudes toward authority and SES, age, and parental bonds, future research can expand on whether these factors affect attitudes toward authority or only correspond to them. The current study could also be used as a template for studying factors that affect the attitudes toward authority found in non-adolescents.

References

- Ahuja, H. (2017). A comparative study of the relationship of attitude towards dress and self-concept between female and male students of college. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 5(1), 28-40. <https://doi.org/10.25215/0501.064>
- Blass, T. (2012). A cross-cultural comparison of studies of obedience using the milgram paradigm: A review. *Social & Personality Psychology Compass*, 6(2), 196-205. doi:10.1111/j.1751-9004.2011.00417.x
- Fattori, F., Curly, S., Jörchel, A. C., Pozzi, M., Mihalits, D., & Alfieri, S. (2015). Authority Relationship From a Societal Perspective: Social Representations of Obedience and Disobedience in Austrian Young Adults. *Europe's Journal Of Psychology*, 11(2), 197-214. doi:10.5964/ejop.v11i2.883
- Kelly, S. (2015). Authority in schools: A weberian perspective on can we get children to do what they are told?. *Prospero (13586785)*, 21(3), 15-16.
- Levy, K. C. (2001). The relationship between adolescent attitudes towards authority, self-concept, and delinquency. *Adolescence*, 36(142), 333.
- Ochoa, G. M., Lopez, E. E., & Emler, N. P. (2007). Adjustment problems in the family and school contexts, attitudes towards authority, and violent behavior at school in adolescence. *Adolescence*, 42(168), 779-794.
- Raby, R. (2008). Frustrated, resigned, outspoken: Students' engagement with school rules and some implications for participatory citizenship. *International journal of children's rights*, 16(1), 77-98. doi:10.1163/092755608X267148

- Rigby, K., & Densley, T. R. (1985). Religiosity and attitude toward institutional authority among adolescents. *Journal Of Social Psychology, 125*(6), 723.
- Rigby, K., & Rump, E. (1981). Attitudes toward parents and institutional authorities during adolescence. *Journal Of Psychology, 109*(1), 109.
- Scheer, S. D., Borden, L. M., & Donnermeyer, J. E. (2000). The relationship between family factors and adolescent substance use in rural, suburban, and urban settings. *Journal Of Child & Family Studies, 9*(1), 105-115.
- Thakur, K. (2017). Fostering a positive environment in schools using positive discipline. *Indian Journal Of Positive Psychology, 8*(3), 315-319.
- Thompson, R. A. (2012). Whither the preconventional child? Toward a life-span moral development theory. *Child Development Perspectives, 6*(4), 423-429.
doi:10.1111/j.1750-8606.2012.00245.x
- Tuma, E., & Livson, N. (1960). Family socioeconomic status and adolescent attitudes to authority. *Child Development, 31*(2), 387-399.
- Zafar, H., Nabeel, T., & Khalily, M. T. (2013). Adolescents' self-concept and their attitudes towards parents, teachers, and police authority.. *Pakistan Journal Of Psychology, 44*(1), 15-35.

Appendix

TEENAGE ATTITUDES TOWARD AUTHORITY

Some of the following questions will ask about relationships with parents. If there is a question that requires you to choose between two options, choose the one that best describes you.

What gender do you identify with?

- Male
- Female
- Other

What grade are you in?

- 9th
- 10th
- 11th
- 12th

What is your GPA?

- 4.0+
- 3.0-3.99
- 2.0-2.99
- 1.0-1.99

- 1.0 or below

Do you qualify for or receive free or reduced price lunches at your school?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

What religious group do you associate yourself with?

- Roman Catholic
- Protestant Christian
- LDS
- Islam
- Jewish
- Other world religion
- None (Atheist, Agnostic, etc.)

What religious group do your parent(s) associate with?

- Roman Catholic
- Protestant Christian
- LDS
- Islam
- Jewish
- Other world religion

- None (Atheist, Agnostic, etc.)

How close do you consider yourself to be with your parent(s)?

- Very close
- Close
- Somewhat close
- Not very close
- Not close at all
- Close with one but not the other

Answer the following questions based on how much they apply to you. Authority includes teachers, parents, police, or anyone else you are required to obey.

I would stand up to authority if... (Mark all that apply)

- I was told by a teacher to stop talking
- I was given a detention for being late to class
- I was pulled over for a traffic ticket I did not deserve
- I was told by a police officer to get out of my car with little to no explanation
- I was forced to work after clocking out
- I saw a homeless person being mistreated by authority
- my friends were protesting authority

- I would obey authority in all these circumstances

In your opinion, your parent(s) would stand up to authority if... (Mark all that apply)

- their child got in trouble at school
- their boss consistently made them work late
- they were pulled over for a traffic ticket they did not deserve
- they were told by a police officer to get out of their car with little to no explanation
- they saw a homeless person being mistreated by someone of authority
- their peers were protesting authority
- they would obey authority under all these circumstances

When confronted by a teacher or staff member, I obey what they tell me to do.

- Always
- Usually
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

When confronted by a police officer, I obey what they tell me to do.

- Always
- Usually
- Sometimes
- Rarely

- Never

I don't care whether I show respect to authority or not.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

My parents are respectful towards authority.

- Always
- Usually
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

My parents' opinions on how to respond to authority are similar to mine.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree

Strongly disagree