

**ADOLESCENTS' SELF-CONCEPT AND THEIR ATTITUDES
TOWARDS PARENTS, TEACHERS, AND POLICE AUTHORITY**

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to empirically examine the relationship between adolescents' self-concept and their attitude towards authority figures. The sample comprised of 600 adolescents between the ages of 12 to 19 years. In order to fulfill the objectives of the study, a short demographic sheet that comprised of participants' personal information; four attitudinal scales and an Urdu adjective list (UACL) to measure adolescents' self concept were used. The study consisted of two parts. Part I dealt with developing the attitude scales, determining their psychometric properties and pilot study and Part II consisted of the main study. The results of our main study revealed that adolescents between the ages of 12-19 years reported positive self-concept and attitude towards parents and teachers while, reported negative attitude towards police authority. It was also found that there were some differences in the adolescents' self-concept and their attitude towards authority with respect to age, gender and socio-economic status.

Keywords: Adolescence, self-concept, authority figures

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a developmental period between childhood and adulthood. It is marked by multi-dimensional changes: biological, psychological (including cognitive) and social. It lasts from about age 11 or 12 until the late teens or early twenties, and involves major changes in the realms of development (as cited in Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2003) that subsequently demands to meet new challenges, roles, opportunities and responsibilities. Among the salient features of this transitional period is the change in adolescents' self-concept which plays a great role in an individual's personal and social functioning (Nurius, 1989). Self-concept refers to an individual's overall perception of his / her own worth and social acceptance (Bellmore & Cillessen, 2006). Rosenberg (1989) noted "For psychology, self-concept is a major component of an individual's cognition; for sociology, it is both a social product and a social force; for psychoanalysis, it is a source of psychological stress and conflict" (p. 34). Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed that the social environment in which an individual lives can positively or negatively influence his / her self-development. However, during this period when adolescents struggle to adjust to a changing environment, this sometimes turns out into a conflict with parents and other authority figures. It is also evident that during this period, the crisis of identity is at its climax (Erikson, 1968), putting adolescents at the paradox of neither an adult nor a child (Sharma & Vaid, 2005).

Furthermore, during this period logical reasoning skill of the individual increases and a greater tendency emerges to question authority. As a result positive or negative reaction of adolescents may develop towards authority figures. During this period of life adolescents want to have emotional independence from parents and other authority figures in order to achieve adolescent-adult roles. At this stage emotional adaptation becomes necessary for both adolescents and their parents. Adolescents may experiment with a range of activities that their parents and even society as a whole, find inconsistent with their expectations. However, the situation becomes all the more critical when adolescents are uncertain of their worth and develop inner conflict, subjective turmoil, and behavioral inconsistency. Sometimes they might revolt against the authority figures which make them distant from their parents (Arnett, 1999). Previous researches have suggested that adolescents who are violent in school have more negative interactions with their teachers (Blankemeyer, Flannery, & Vazsonyi, 2002; Jack, Shores, Denny, Gunter, DeBriere, & DePaepe, 1996; Meehan, Hughes, & Cavell, 2003; Murray & Murray, 2004).

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A substantial body of researches has documented behavioral problems among adolescents such as verbal and physical violence towards teachers and classmates (Astor, Pitner, Benbenishty, & Meyer, 2002; Herrero, Estévez, & Musitu, 2006). Researches suggest that adolescents show negative attitudes in schools because of their desire for popularity, leadership and an urge for social recognition (Rodríguez, 2004). This attitude of adolescents provides them with a chance to develop social reputation (Buelga, Ravenna, Musitu, & Lila, 2006; Carroll, Hattie, Durkin, & Houghton, 1999; Emler, & Reicher, 2005; Kerpelman & Smith-Adcock, 2005).

Research has found that aggressive adolescents show negative attitude towards institutional authority such as the police, the law and also school and teachers (Adair, Dixon, Moore, & Sutherland, 2000; Emler & Reicher, 1995; Estévez, Herrero, Martínez, & Musitu, 2006). Adolescents who participate in aggressive behavior develop antisocial schemas and show negative attitude towards authority figures and institutions (Nihart, Lersch, Sellers, & Mieczkowski, 2005). To overcome these crises the authority figures would like more control over adolescents' attitude in order to make them consistent with their demand. In this regard, teachers have a prominent influence during school and college time because of interaction with adolescents for considerable hours daily. Students as they enter high school are more likely to feel grown up, have more subjects to select, have more time to spend with their friends, have more opportunities to explore different styles of life, enjoy greater independence from parental monitoring, and feel challenged intellectually by academic work. However, adolescents who have more advanced perspective taking abilities and more impression formation skills behave in socially approved ways (Lenhart & Rabiner, 1995). Researches have reported that self-concept of adolescents become more differentiated, consolidate over time, and become better organized as adolescents progress through their teen years (Alasker & Olweus, 1992; Byrne & Shavelson, 1996; Marsh, 1989; Montemayor, 1983).

Previous studies have examined attitudes of adolescents towards a number of authority figures such as teachers, police, the law, and the army (Heaven, 1988). One of these studies was conducted by Murray and Thompson (1985), who noted that a number of adolescents were cynical regarding teachers or police. However, study with Australian Aboriginal preadolescents indicated significantly less positive attitudes towards parents and police authority (Rigby & Black, 1993). Lapsley, Olson, Harwell, Flannery, and Quintana (1984) found that attitudes towards authority become more unfavorable with age, specifically

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during high school. Similar trends were found with an Australian sample of adolescents, but only in regard to attitudes towards parents and teachers, not the law and police (Rigby, Schofield, & Slee, 1987). Gender and socio-economic differences have also been examined with the study variables. Some studies have reported more positive attitudes among females than among males (Murray & Thompson, 1985; Emler & Reicher, 1987). Regarding socio-economic status, previous researches suggest that students in high community schools are more thoughtful, concerned for others, accept the authority of others, avoid courses of action that are harmful to themselves or others and maintain the higher standards of ethical conduct (Osterman, 2000; Schaps, Battistich, & Solomon, 2004).

Adolescents' attitude towards the authority figures seems to be complicated and needs extensive exploration. It is therefore important to understand the dynamics of their behavior, as adolescents' "style of life" and deviation from the social norms may expose them with trouble. Hence the current study was undertaken to probe adolescents' self-concept and its relationship with their attitudes towards the authority figures.

Objectives

The study was designed to achieve the following objectives:

1. To measure the self- concept of adolescents.
2. To examine the relationship between adolescents' self- concept and their attitudes towards the authority.

Hypotheses

1. There is a positive correlation between adolescents' self-concept and their attitude towards fathers, mothers, teachers, and police authority.
2. Late adolescents (i.e. 18-19 years old adolescents) have more positive attitude towards the authority than early and (i.e. 12-14 years old adolescents) and middle adolescents (i.e. 15-17 years old adolescents).
3. Female adolescents have a high self-concept and more positive attitude towards fathers, mothers, teachers, and police authority than male adolescents.
4. Adolescents belonging to high socio-economic status have high self-concept and more positive attitude towards fathers, mothers, teachers, and police authority than adolescents belonging to middle and low socio-economic status.

METHOD

Participants

Participants in this study were 600 adolescents (289 male and 311 female) aged 12 to 19 years selected from secondary schools and colleges of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, Pakistan. Three categories of educational institutions were taken (Urdu medium institutions, Federal Government institutions and English medium private institutions). These institutions determined the socio-economic status of the adolescents' families. The adolescents were grouped into three categories; adolescents belonging to early adolescence (12-14 years), adolescents belonging to middle adolescence (15-17 years), and adolescents belonging to late adolescence (18-19 years).

Measures

Urdu Adjective Checklist (UACL)

UACL was developed by Ansari, Farooqi, Khan and Naheed (1982) to measure the self-concept of adolescents. It comprises of 150 popular adjectives in the Urdu language. The total time of administration varies from ten minutes to an hour depending upon the respondent. Both negative and positive adjectives are arranged on factorially derived 7 subscales including achievement, aggression, affiliation, autonomy, abasement, dominance and intelligence. UACL is a five-point scale. Responses were made on a 5 point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". The scoring was reversed for negative items. The reverse scoring started from 5 to 1. All the scores were summed up to find out the total score on each scale. High scores on the scale indicate an adolescent's positive self-concept.

Development of the Attitude Scales

Attitude towards Father Authority Scale. As per requirement of our research study there was a need to develop an instrument to measure the attitude of adolescents towards father authority. After searching journals and related articles, work of Ray (1971), Ray and Lovejoy (1983), and Rigby and Rump (1981) provided ample guideline. The Attitude towards Father Authority Scale is in English version with 102 items including negative and positive statements regarding father. Sample items included the following: 'My father understands

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me' 'My father keeps promises' 'My father fulfils my needs.' Responses were made on a 5 point Likert type scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." Scoring was reversed for negative items. All the scores were summed up to find out the total score on the scale. High scores on the scale indicate an adolescent's positive attitude towards father authority.

Attitude towards Mother Authority Scale. A new scale for measuring attitude of adolescents to mother authority was developed for the research study. The Attitude towards Mother Authority Scale is in English version with 102 items including negative and positive statements regarding mother. Sample items included the following: 'My mother is critical' 'My mother is supportive' 'My mother irritates me.' Responses were made on a 5 point Likert-type scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." Scoring was reversed for negative items. All the scores were summed up to find out the total score on the scale. High scores on the scale indicate an adolescent's positive attitude towards mother authority.

Attitude towards Teacher Authority Scale. In order to find out adolescents' attitude towards teacher authority, a scale was developed. However, inspirations came from the research work done by Jersild (1963) and Ray (1971). This scale is in English with 88 items including negative and positive statements. Sample items included the following: 'My teachers are impartial' 'My teachers satisfy my curiosity' 'My teachers have command on their subjects' 'My teachers make things interesting'. Responses were made on a 5 point Likert-type scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". Scoring started from 1 to 5 for positive items. However it was reversed for negative items. High scores on the scale indicate an adolescent's positive attitude towards teacher authority.

Attitude towards Police Authority Scale. Attitude towards Police authority scale was developed for the current study. It is in English version comprising of 42 positive and negative items. Sample items included the following: 'Our police misuse its power' 'Our police is firm and fair in their dealing with the public'. Responses were made on a 5 point Likert-type scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". Scoring of negative items was reversed. The reverse scoring started from 5 to 1. The scores were summed up to find out the total score on the scale. High scores on the scale indicate an adolescent's positive attitude towards police authority.

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Procedure

Initially attitudinal scales were developed in English language and the psychometric properties of all the scales were determined. After determining the sample and instruments for the current study, prior contacts were made with several public and private schools and colleges selected at random; six schools finally participated in the study mostly based on the availability and the willingness of staff to collaborate in the study. Following initial contacts with the head of institutions all the concerned teachers were informed about the objectives of the study. In parallel, a letter describing the purpose of the study was sent to the parents requesting their consent. Participants anonymously filled out the scales during regular class periods. Keeping in view the objectives of the current study a pilot study was conducted. 100 male and 100 female adolescents were both asked to complete Urdu Adjective Checklist (UACL) for self-concept, Attitude towards father authority scale, Attitude towards mother authority scale, Attitude towards teacher authority scale, and Attitude towards police authority scale. Additionally, they were required to complete a demographic sheet indicating their age, gender and institutional affiliation. Hence the data collected for the pilot study provided a sound understanding of the variables and showed the direction of the study. However for the main study the sample size was increased. The scales were administered on 600 male and female adolescents from different educational institutions of Rawalpindi and Islamabad (Pakistan).

Data Analysis and Results

For the current study SPSS Version 13.0 was used. Quantitative research methods were used to analyze the data. The reliability of the scales was determined by alpha coefficient. Descriptive analysis, Independent sample t-test, and Pearson Product moment correlation have been applied for data analyses. To measure the variance between groups ANOVA was used.

RESULTS

Table 1
Alpha Reliability of various scales used in the study (N=600)

Scales	No of Items	Alpha Reliability Coefficients
Self-concept Scale	150	.95
Attitude towards father authority scale	102	.92
Attitude towards mother authority scale	102	.92
Attitude towards teacher authority scale	88	.89
Attitude towards police authority scale	42	.89

Table 1 indicates that the Alpha reliability coefficients of Self-concept Scale, Attitude towards father authority scale, Attitude towards mother authority scale, Attitude towards teacher authority scale, and Attitude towards police authority scale, is .95, .92, .92, .89, and .89 respectively which is quite satisfactory.

Table 2
Mean scores and Standard Deviation (SD) of adolescents on scales used in the study (N=600)

Scales	Mean	SD
Self-concept Scale	558.39	67.2
Attitude towards father authority scale	367.33	43.6
Attitude towards mother authority scale	374.52	43.6
Attitude towards teacher authority scale	312.36	37.8
Attitude towards police authority scale	155.83	23.1

Table 3

Correlation among Self-concept Scale, Attitude towards father authority scale, Attitude towards mother authority scale, Attitude towards teacher authority scale, and Attitude towards police authority scale (N=600)

Scales	Self-concept	ATFAS	ATMAS	ATTAS	ATPAS
Self-concept	-	.574**	.605 **	.431 **	-.059
ATFAS			.964**	.575**	-.072
ATMAS				.518**	-.031
ATTAS					-.123**
ATPAS					-

Note. *** $p < .01$ ** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$; ATFAS = Attitude towards Father Authority Scale, ATMAS = Attitude towards Mother Authority Scale, ATTAS = Attitude towards Teacher Authority Scale, ATPAS = Attitude towards Police Authority Scale.

The above table shows that there is a significant positive correlation of Self-concept scale (UACL) with attitude towards father authority, mother authority, and teacher authority scales. However a negative correlation between self-concept scale (UACL) with attitude towards police authority scale exists.

Table 4

Gender Difference of the adolescents in Self Concept, and Attitude toward Parents, Teachers and Police Authority

Scales	Male ($n = 289$)		Female ($n = 311$)		<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
UACL	554.9	68.2	561.6	66.2	1.22
ATFAS	354.0	37.2	379.6	45.5	7.48***
ATMAS	366.8	41.8	381.5	44.1	4.17
ATTAS	296.8	31.0	326.7	37.9	10.49**
ATPAS	158.3	22.5	153.5	23.4	2.56

Note. $df = 598$, *** $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$; ATFAS = Attitude towards Father Authority Scale, ATMAS = Attitude towards Mother Authority Scale, ATTAS = Attitude towards Teacher Authority Scale, ATPAS = Attitude towards Police Authority Scale.

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The above table shows that the mean scores of female adolescents are slightly higher as compared to male adolescents on all the scales except on Attitude towards police authority scale. The table also indicates significant differences on Attitude towards father authority scale and Attitude towards teacher authority scale with respect to gender. The results demonstrate that female adolescent's attitude towards father and teacher authority is more positive as compared to male adolescents.

Table 5
Difference between Adolescents categorized in Early, Middle and Late Adolescence age groups on variables of Self-concept Scale and Attitude towards parents, teachers and police authority

Scales	12 -14 Years (n =288)		15 -17Years (n =182)		18 - 19 Years (n=130)		<i>f</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
UACL	549.9	61.7	563.8	62.9	569.5	81.5	4.73**
ATFAS	371.8	42.7	366.6	45.6	358.1	41.5	4.51*
ATMAS	373.4	42.1	373.7	43.8	377.9	46.6	.497
ATTAS	322.0	35.9	315.5	34.3	286.1	34.7	47.4***
ATPAS	149.7	22.5	160.9	21.1	162.2	23.6	20.8***

df= 598, ****p* < .001, ***p* < .01, **p* < .05; Note. ATFAS = Attitude towards Father Authority Scale, ATMAS = Attitude towards Mother Authority Scale, ATTAS = Attitude towards Teacher Authority Scale, ATPAS = Attitude towards Police Authority Scale.

The above table shows significant differences on Self-concept scale, Attitude towards father authority scale, Attitude towards teacher authority scale and Attitude towards police authority scale with respect to adolescents' age groups; categorized according to early (12-14 years), middle (15-17 years), and late (18-19 years) adolescents age groups.

Table 6

Difference between adolescents with low, middle and high socio-economic status scores on variables of Self-concept Scale and Attitude towards parents, teachers and police authority

	Low SES (n =222)		Middle SES (n =178)		High SES (n =200)		F
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
UACL	541.2	58.0	558.4	65.7	577.3	73.0	15.8***
ATFAS	363.9	39.5	368.2	44.8	370.3	46.8	1.20
ATMAS	365.9	39.4	374.8	45.4	383.8	44.6	9.15***
ATTAS	315.8	33.2	308.9	39.9	311.5	40.6	1.73
ATPAS	149.2	21.8	157.0	22.5	162.1	23.1	17.5***

*df =597 ***p < .001; Note.* ATFAS = Attitude towards Father Authority Scale, ATMAS = Attitude towards Mother Authority Scale, ATTAS = Attitude towards Teacher Authority Scale, ATPAS = Attitude towards Police Authority Scale.

The above table shows highly significantly high scores of adolescents belonging to high socio-economic status on Self-concept Scale, Attitude towards mother authority scale, and Attitude towards police authority scale as compared to adolescents belonging to low and middle socio-economic status.

DISCUSSION

The current study was aimed to examine the self concept of adolescents (between the ages of 12-19 years) and their attitude towards authority (fathers, mothers, teachers and police). Analysis of the relationship of adolescents' self concept with their attitudes towards fathers, mothers, teachers and police authority reveals that adolescents' high self-concept is positively related to their attitude towards their fathers, mothers and teachers but negatively related with police authority. The results of the current study indicate that adolescents have high self-concept. Previous researches have found that adolescents' self-concept increases as they progress through different stages of teen years and stabilizes in the same sequence (Alasker & Olweus, 1992; Bryne & Shavelson, 1996; Marsh, 1989; Montemayor, 1983). Although there are parent-adolescent conflicts during this critical period of life yet previous researches have suggested that a majority of adolescents feel close to their parents, and respect their parents' judgment as individuals (Steinberg, 1990; Hill, 1998). Research findings revealed that

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interactions in the society affect adolescents' self-concepts (Burrichter & Walden, 2006).

The current study reveals a moderate positive correlation between adolescents' self-concept and their attitude towards teacher authority. However they showed negative attitudes towards police authority. Researches have also found that when the school environment is supportive and caring adolescents are less likely to be involved in behavior problems (Battistich & Hom, 1997) and develop positive attitudes towards themselves and others (Schaps, Battistich & Solomon, 1997). The sample of the current study was taken from the educational institutions located in the major cities of Pakistan (Rawalpindi and Islamabad). Environment in these educational institutions is disciplined and conducive for learning. Peterson and Skiba (2000) suggested that adolescents' positive and negative attitude is a reflection of social environment in which they interact. Yoneyama and Rigby (2006) identified two factors that constitute positive climate, the first being support from teachers, and second healthy relationships with peers in school environment. Moos, Moos and Trickett (1989) also considered teachers' support in school and their involvement in school activities as factors harnessing positive attitudes in adolescents. These factors are further related to positive interactions with teachers and school (Jack et al., 1996; Molpeceres, Lucas, & Pons, 2000; Samdal, 1998). It has been found that in previous researches school experience is related to subsequent attitude towards institutional systems (Rubini & Palmonari, 1998).

The current study indicated that adolescents' high self-concept is negatively related with their attitude towards police authority. These results need to be examined in depth. Further studies should be undertaken to explore the psychological, social and political factors that have led to adolescents' negative attitude towards the police authority. Gender differences in self-concept and attitudes towards authority figures have also been examined in the current study. Adolescents' attitude towards themselves and authority figures may vary depending upon their gender. The current study demonstrates that female adolescents have higher self-concept compared to male adolescents. This finding supports previous research finding that boys scored significantly lower on self-concept scale than girls (Andrew, 2002). While analyzing gender differences in examining the study variables our findings supported and strengthened prior findings and confirmed that girls have comparatively more positive attitude towards self and authority figures in general. These results are consistent with previous studies documenting girls' positive attitude to authority than boys

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(Emler & Reicher, 1987; Murray & Thompson, 1985). Previous research related to teacher–student interactions, has also reported that female adolescents showed positive interactions with teachers (Bearman, Wheldall, & Kemp, 2006). This may be due to the process of socialization to which male and female adolescents are exposed. In our culture girls are taught to be obedient and submissive and boys are encouraged to be outgoing and assertive. Age trends differed for the current study regarding adolescents' self-concept and their attitude towards authority figures. Late adolescents as compared to early and middle adolescents indicated more favorable attitude towards authority figures.

The current study further suggests that adolescents belonging to high socio-economic status have high self-concept and more positive attitude towards authority figures than adolescents belonging to middle or low socio-economic status. This finding of our study is consistent with the findings of Osterman (2000) and Schaps, Battistich and Solomon (2004). Furthermore, researches have revealed that students belonging to low social status show lower levels of school self-concept (Hymel, Bowker, & Woody, 1993; Ladd, 1999). School self-concept appeared to have direct association with student's attitudes towards institutional authority. Similar trends in adolescents' self-concept and attitude towards authority scores were found by Levy (2001).

The findings of the study are important for parents, teachers, mental health professional and society in general. The negative attitudes of adolescents may hamper their learning process, healthy adjustment and quality of social interactions in educational settings. Similar conclusions were made by previous researches (Estévez, Musitu, & Herrero, 2005; Smith & Brain, 2000). Individual differences in these variables would help in explaining why some adolescents develop positive and negative attitudes towards authority. In this regard, the quality of family environment and social support may contribute to the explanation of adolescents' level of self-concept and their attitudes towards authority figures. Number of students in each class in schools and colleges is increasing every year and as a result the gap between the teacher and the taught is widening. Moreover, political interference in the education system in our society has its impacts on the personality development of the student adolescents. However further research is needed to address these issues in order to bring into limelight the causal direction of influences and associations.

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Conclusions

Following conclusions have been drawn from the current study:

Adolescents between the ages of 12-19 years have a positive self-concept. High self-concept of adolescents between the ages of 12-19 years has positive relationship with their attitude towards father, mother and teacher authority and negative relationship with police authority. In general, adolescents' self-concept and their attitude towards the authority figures have found to be more positive in late adolescents as compared to early and middle adolescents. In general, female adolescents have comparatively high self-concept and positive attitude towards authority figures than male adolescents. It was also found that adolescents belonging to high socio-economic status have more positive self-concept and favorable attitude towards authority figures than adolescents belonging to middle and low socio-economic status.

Limitations

1. First, the data for the current study was collected from adolescents' sample only. It would be desirable in future research to obtain additional data from parents, teachers, class-mates, neighbors, and law-enforcing agencies to gain better understanding of the variables.
2. Second there may be bias in the data because the assessment was based on self-report measures of adolescents only.
3. Third, although the assessment used questionnaires, the inclusion of observational data obtained in real-life settings would be desirable.
4. Fourth, data were collected at only one time period. Data collection over a longer period of time can be of value.
5. Finally, because of the small sample size, there is a need for replication of the study.

Suggestions and Recommendations

1. The research was conducted on a limited sample. The size of the sample should be increased and a greater number of respondents should be catered in the study.
2. It was conducted within the limited target area. The study could be further extended by including other parts of the country also.

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3. Regarding the measuring instruments, the number of statements on the attitudinal scale should be equalized and merged so as to develop a single comprehensive scale. Moreover, Attitude towards mother authority scale and Attitude towards father authority scale can be merged so as to develop a single scale that could measure adolescents' attitude towards parental authority as per requirement of the research.

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