



Parental Authority Legitimacy’s Influence on Adolescent Disclosure



Chase O’Neal, Christopher Odudu, Dr. Nicole Campione-Barr
Department of Psychological Sciences, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri, USA

INTRODUCTION

- Studies repeatedly show that parent’s knowledge of their adolescent’s whereabouts, activities, and friends are predictive of adolescents’ adjustment (Kerr & Stattin, 2000; Smetana, 2019).
- Therefore, it is important to recognize that parents get most of their information about their children’s activities from their children’s willingness to disclose, which acts as a protective mechanism against engagement in misconduct, leading to less norm breaking and delinquency (Stattin & Kerr, 2000; Kerr & Stattin, 2000).
- The present study examines the connection between parents’ and adolescents’ views of PAL and adolescent disclosure over time. Additionally, the present study will investigate the impact of adolescent gender, sibling birth order, and the social cognitive domain of the issue’s adolescents disclose about (Turiel, 2002).

STUDY AIMS

Do family members’ perceptions of parental authority legitimacy influence adolescents’ willingness to disclose to their parents?

- Hypothesis 1:** Stronger adolescents’ belief in Parental Authority over a domain will lead to greater willingness to disclose about the domain.
- Hypothesis 2:** Stronger parents’ belief in Parental Authority over a domain will lead to less willingness to disclose about the domain.

METHOD

Participants	145 families, ranging from 11 to 21 of age	
Mean sibling age	Older = 16.46 (+/ 1.35)	Younger: 13.67 (+/ 1.56)
Ethnicity	European American: 91% Other: 9%	
Marital Status	Married: 75.2% Single, Divorced, Separated, or Married: 24.8%	
Mean Family Income	70,000-\$84,000	
Parent Education	College degree: 72.3%	

- Parental Authority Legitimacy (PAL)**– Adolescents and their mother’s beliefs about acceptability for parents to make a rule on a 3-point scale indicating if it was 1 (not okay), 2 (sometimes okay), or 3 (okay) adapted from previous research (Smetana, 2000; Smetana & Daddis, 2002), about 24 different issues ranging across 4 domains (Moral, Prudential, Personal, and Multifaceted) relevant to social domain theory (Turiel, 2002). Cronbach alphas ranged from .50 – .93
- Disclosure**– Measured from a scale adapted from previous research assessing adolescent disclosure to parents only (Smetana et al., 2006), assessed frequency of adolescent disclosure on a scale from 1 (never tell) to 5 (always tell), across three domains: personal (11 items), prudential (4 items), and multifaceted (11 items) to parents and siblings. Cronbach alphas ranged from .82 – .99

Table 1.

Standardized Parameter Estimates for Time 1 Adolescent Parental Authority Legitimacy on Time 4 Domain-Specific Self-Disclosure Main Effects and Interactions

	Moral Domain		Prudential Domain		Conventional Domain	
	Estimate	t-value	Estimate	t-value	Estimate	t-value
Intercept	2.46	2.03*	1.19	1.17	.86	.70
Maternal Education	-.00	-.04	-.06	-.70	-.19	-2.06*
Age	-.33	-2.72***	-.23	-2.85**	.03	.28
Birth Order	-.08	-.70	.11	1.01	-.03	.20
Gender	-.01	-.15	.02	.26	-.05	-.54
Adolescent PAL	-.24	-2.38**	-.23	-2.85	-.21	-1.96†
Birth Order * Gender	-.12	-1.25	.09	1.11	.07	.70
Birth Order * Adolescent PAL	.11	1.07	-.17	-2.12	-.08	-.84
Gender * Adolescent PAL	.26	2.51**	.02	.19	.20	1.83†

Note. †p <.10, *p <.05 **p <.01,*** p <.001; PAL= Parental Authority Legitimacy

RESULTS

- Significant correlations were found for variables such as Adolescent Age, Adolescent PAL, and Gender. Importantly, significant associations between parental authority legitimacy (PAL) and adolescent disclosure were found only from the adolescents’ perspective of PAL, and not from mothers’ perspective.
- A significant main effect for Adolescent-Reported Moral PAL was found such that when adolescents believe a parent has less legitimate authority about making moral rules, adolescents’ self-disclosed less moral information four years later ($\beta = -.24$, $p = .02$).
- A significant main effect for Adolescent-Reported Prudential PAL was found such that when adolescents believe a parent has less legitimate authority about making prudential rules, adolescents’ self-disclosed less prudential information four years later ($\beta = -.23$, $p = .01$).
- A marginally significant main effect for Adolescent-Reported Conventional PAL was found such that when adolescents believe a parent has less legitimate authority about making conventional rules, adolescents’ self-disclosed less conventional information four years later ($\beta = -.21$, $p = .05$).

DISCUSSION

- Hypothesis 1** – Partially Supported: Weaker belief in parental authority in the moral domain for male adolescents was associated with less willingness to disclose in the moral domain.
- Hypothesis 2** – Not Supported: When male adolescents possessed stronger beliefs in parental authority for the conventional domain, they self-disclosed less conventional information.
- Conclusion:** Our research partially supported previous research’s findings, indicating a connection between parental authority legitimacy and adolescent’s willingness to disclose.
- Limitations and Future Directions:** The present study examined predominantly White, middle class sample. Future studies should examine more diverse populations to increase generalizability of these findings.

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