

## Parent-Adolescent Relationships: A Social Domain Analysis

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Researchers from different theoretical perspectives have called for the need to disaggregate parenting styles to better understand the component processes that affect child and adolescent development (Barber, Harmon, Bean, & Erickson, in press; Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). In keeping with this dictum and the theme of this symposium, this paper draws from the framework of social domain theory (Smetana, 1995; Turiel, 1983, 1998) to examine domain distinctions in parenting and parent-child relations. Social domain theory has distinguished among three conceptual and developmental types of social knowledge. This has included moral issues, or acts that are prescriptively wrong because they have consequences for others' rights or welfare, social conventional issues, or the arbitrary behavioral regularities that structure social interactions in different social settings, and personal issues, which entail preferences and choices pertaining to friends or activities, the state of one's body, and privacy (Nucci, 1996; Smetana, 1995a; Turiel, 1983, 1998). Previous research has shown that social interactions differ as a function of domain (see Smetana, 1997 for a review). For instance, social interactions in the context of moral, conventional, and personal events have been found to differ (see Smetana, 1997 for a review).

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Parents with different parenting styles draw domain boundaries in somewhat different ways with permissive parents overextending the boundaries of children's personal domain and authoritarian parents drawing those boundaries very restrictively (Smetana, 1995b). Finally, modes of family decision-making have been found to differ by domain (Smetana, 2000). In the present paper, we extend this research to examine distinctions between behavioral and psychological control. We examine whether these two forms of control are associated with, or anteceded, by domain-specific parental beliefs and practices and whether domain-differentiated forms of control, in turn, predict adolescents' desires for autonomy in different domains.

Previous research has demonstrated the importance of distinguishing between parental psychological and behavioral control (Barber, 1996; Barber et al., in press; Barber, Olsen, & Shagle, 1994; Steinberg, 1990). According to Steinberg (1990) and more recently, Barber and his colleagues (Barber, 1996; Barber et al., 1994, in press), psychological control refers to parents' attempts to control the child's activities in ways that undermine the child's psychological development. Psychological control, which includes intrusiveness, love withdrawal, and guilt induction, inhibits development by interfering with the development of independence and a healthy sense of self and personal identity. High levels of psychological control have been found to predict children's internalizing problems, such as anxiety, depression, and loneliness. In contrast, behavioral control refers to parents' rules, regulations, and restrictions and parents' awareness of their adolescent's activities. Behavioral control facilitates development by providing adolescents with necessary supervision and guidance; inadequate behavioral control has been found to predict externalizing problems such as drug use, truancy, and antisocial behavior (see Barber et al., in press).

Barber and his colleagues (Barber, 1996; Barber et al., 1994, in press) have asserted that children require an adequate degree of psychological autonomy for healthy psychosocial development and that children must develop an understanding that they are effective, competent individuals with a clear sense of personal identity. These researchers have focused primarily on the style of social interactions that may undermine healthy development, but they have not specified whether certain types of social interactions may lead children and adolescents to feel more psychologically controlled. In a theoretically complementary fashion, however, Nucci and his colleagues (Nucci, 1996; Nucci & Smetana, 1996; Nucci & Turiel, 2000) have asserted that the psychological need for autonomy, personal agency, and effectance may be satisfied when individuals define an arena of control over personal issues. Asserting control over personal issues and making autonomous decisions are seen as an aspect of the self that forms the boundary between the self and the social world (Nucci, 1996).

In both cross-sectional (Fuligni, 1998; Smetana, 1988; Smetana & Asquith, 1994) and longitudinal studies (Smetana, 2000), research has shown that the boundary of adolescents' personal domain increases as adolescents get older but that adolescents and parents disagree over where these boundaries should be drawn. Across ages and ethnicities, adolescents consistently claim greater personal jurisdiction than parents are willing to grant. These findings suggest that parents need to balance appropriate control over adolescents' behavior with developmentally appropriate attempts to grant them more autonomy over personal issues. Furthermore, research indicates that parents' attempts to control or infringe on what adolescents perceive as their personal domain lead to conflict in their relationships (Fuligni 1998; Smetana, 1989; Smetana & Asquith, 1994). This theorizing and research led us to hypothesize that adolescents would feel more

psychologically controlled when they view parents as exerting restrictive control over personal issues and when they judge parental control over these issues to be less legitimate.

Barber et al. (1994) also have asserted that to become a competent member of society, children must acquire an understanding that social interactions are governed by rules and structures that must be followed; appropriate behavioral control pertains, in part, to how those social regulations are enforced and supervised. Therefore, we asked whether adolescents who view their parents as using more restrictive control over moral and conventional acts and who view that authority as more legitimate report greater parental monitoring.

In the analyses presented here, we distinguished between socially regulated acts, which include moral and conventional issues, and personal issues. We constructed the personal category broadly and included issues that adolescents and parents in previous research have viewed as personal for the teen (Smetana, 2000; Smetana & Asquith, 1994), as well as what we have referred to in previous research as multifaceted and friendship issues (Smetana, 1988; Smetana & Asquith, 1994). These issues (for example, the state of the adolescent's bedroom) typically are seen as personal by adolescents, but may be seen as conventional or psychological by parents (Smetana & Asquith, 1994).

We examined two dimensions of domain-specific parenting antecedents. We examined adolescents' domain-specific beliefs about legitimate parental control, which were assessed here in terms of judgments of legitimate parental authority and judgments of adolescents' obligation to obey parents (see Smetana, 2000 for a more complete description). The two judgments together formed a 3-point scale of authority beliefs, which were examined separately for socially regulated and personal items. We also examined adolescents' domain-specific ratings of restrictive parental control, which were assessed in terms of adolescents' ratings of the extent of family rules and

parent-unilateral decision-making (each assessed on 5-point Likert scales). Each of these ratings or judgments was applied to 19 moral, conventional, personal, multifaceted, and friendship issues. The distinction between socially regulated and personal issues was theoretically derived, but it was also empirically validated. As expected, socially regulated and personal issues were found to be distinct and internally consistent factors in both adolescents' beliefs about legitimate parental authority and in their ratings of restrictive parental control.

We examined the effects of beliefs and ratings on adolescents' ratings of maternal psychological control and parental monitoring (which was used here as an assessment of behavioral control). Psychological control was assessed reliably using a 12-item scale derived from Schaefer (1965), and monitoring was assessed reliably using a 4-item scale derived from Steinberg (1987).

We examined whether adolescents' perceptions of psychological control and parental monitoring have different domain-differentiated antecedents in parenting beliefs and practices and whether, in turn, these domain-differentiated forms of control predict adolescents' desires for greater autonomy. To summarize our hypotheses, we predicted that adolescents' perceptions of maternal psychological control would be influenced by their perceptions of restrictive control over personal issues, as well as their judgments that parents have less legitimate authority over issues in the personal arena. In contrast, we predicted that adolescents' perceptions of parental monitoring would be influenced by their perceptions of parental control in the social realm and by their judgments that parents have legitimate authority in this arena. Because psychological control has been described as subjective and "in the eye of the beholder" (Barber et al., in press; Pettit, Laird, Dodge, Bates, & Criss, 2001), our analyses focused on adolescents' reports of parenting.

These hypotheses were examined in a longitudinal study of adolescent-parent relationships in middle income African American families. The study focused on a sample of 95 middle income African American families with early adolescents ( $M$  age = 13.14 years,  $SD$  = 1.29) who were followed for two years and then reassessed when children reached middle adolescence ( $M$  = 15.05 years,  $SD$  = 1.28). The present analyses focus on 82 adolescents for whom complete data were available at both times. Further information on the sample is available elsewhere (Smetana, 2000; Smetana & Daddis, 2000; Smetana & Gaines, 1999).

To test our hypotheses, we performed hierarchical regressions separately on psychological control and monitoring. Adolescents' age and gender and family income (coded on a 7-point scale) were first entered to control for their effects. Adolescents' Time 1 domain-differentiated beliefs about legitimate parental authority and ratings of restrictive control were entered in the next step. We tested the domain distinctiveness hypothesis by entering parenting beliefs and ratings for both socially regulated and personal acts in both analyses, expecting that only perceptions of parenting in the hypothesized domain would be significant in predicting each form of control. We also included adolescents' Time 1 ratings of parental monitoring (in the analyses of psychological control) and adolescents' ratings of psychological control (in the analyses of parental monitoring) to test their distinctiveness. The hypotheses were examined both concurrently at Time 1 and longitudinally, using Time 1 measures to predict Time 2 monitoring and psychological control.

The results for adolescents' perceptions of maternal psychological control were consistent with predictions (see Table 1). As expected, parental monitoring did not predict psychological control in concurrently or longitudinally, providing support for the notion that psychological control and monitoring are not opposite ends of the same continuum of control. As predicted,

adolescents who believed that parents have less legitimate authority over personal acts and who rated their parents as higher in restrictive control over personal issues viewed their mothers as more psychologically controlling, as assessed both concurrently and longitudinally over the two years of the study. Also as expected, adolescents' beliefs about parental authority regarding socially regulated acts and their reports of restrictive control over these issues did not contribute significantly to adolescents' perceived maternal psychological control in either early or middle adolescence. Therefore, these results suggest that at least in adolescence, perceived psychological control is influenced by adolescents' perceptions of the particular behaviors that are controlled, as well as the style in which that control is exercised. Although adolescents' claims to personal jurisdiction reflect a normative developmental process, adolescents who believed that they should have more control over personal issues and who also viewed their parents as especially restrictive of their personal freedom viewed their mothers as higher in psychological control.

Turning to adolescents' perceptions of parental monitoring (see Table 2), we found that African American girls in our sample were monitored more than were boys, as others have found (Barnes & Farrell, 1992; Pettit et al., 2001). The findings also revealed domain-specific associations, but in a less clear-cut pattern than expected. In the concurrent analyses, adolescents' ratings of parents' restrictive control over socially regulated acts were marginally associated with adolescents' perceptions of greater parental monitoring, as predicted. In addition, adolescents' beliefs about legitimate parental authority over personal acts also contributed significantly to their perceptions of parental monitoring. Adolescents who believed that parents ought to have more legitimate control over personal issues also reported being monitored more. Because these findings were only obtained concurrently, the causal direction of these findings is unclear; it is possible that adolescents who are monitored less come to view parental authority as less legitimate.

Nevertheless, along with the findings for psychological control, they demonstrate the importance for parents of balancing control over their adolescents' behavior with allowing them developmentally appropriate freedom to make decisions about personal issues. As adequate supervision is associated with positive adolescent outcomes, parents must be seen as having legitimate authority to monitor some behaviors like who adolescents are with, the types of activities they are engaged in, and so on – all of which may be seen as personal by adolescents. But the previous analyses indicate that too much restriction of these behaviors leads to feeling psychologically controlled. Mason, Cauce, Gonzales and Hiraga (1996) have described this balance as precision parenting, and our findings highlight exactly how precise that balance must be, at least in terms of African American adolescents' perceptions of parenting.

In a final set of analyses, we examined the influence of psychological control, monitoring, and domain-matched ratings of parents' restrictive control on adolescents' desires for autonomy, as assessed using Holmbeck and O'Donnell's (1991) Desires for Autonomy Scale. As in the previous analyses, we differentiated between adolescents' desires for autonomy over socially regulated (that is, moral and conventional) acts and personal issues and empirically determined that this conceptual distinction was both valid and reliable.

Again, we used hierarchical regressions to examine longitudinally the influence of variables on adolescents' desired autonomy over personal and socially regulated acts. Controlling for background factors, we examined the effects of both psychological control and monitoring, as well as domain-matched restrictive parental control (that is, ratings of family rules and family decision-making) at Time 1 on desired autonomy for personal and social issues. Because the analyses were longitudinal, we also examined whether changes over time in forms of control predicted desired autonomy over personal and social acts. The results (see Table 3) demonstrated that adolescents



who reported that they were monitored less in early adolescence and who viewed their parents as higher in restrictive control over personal issues wanted more autonomy over personal issues two years later. The results are straightforward in indicating that adolescents who view their parents as restricting their personal freedom in early adolescence wanted more autonomy over these issues two years later, and psychological control was not significant in the analyses.

Finally, we repeated the analyses, examining adolescents' desires for autonomy in the social realm. Only changes over time in psychological control significantly predicted desired autonomy over socially regulated issues. Desiring more autonomy over moral and conventional issues has a fundamentally different meaning than wanting more autonomy over personal issues. Autonomy in the social realm implies a desire to become more self-regulating in following the rules, customs, etiquette, and laws of society, whereas autonomy over personal issues means desiring more personal freedom. Most existing measures of autonomy – whether desired (Holmbeck & O'Donnell, 1991), achieved (Steinberg, 1987) or expected (Feldman & Quatman, 1988; Fuligni, 1998) -- have used items that fall within our personal category, but stimulus items typically have been selected on an ad-hoc basis and justified on empirical rather than theoretical grounds. These results provide some theoretical rationale for deciding the types of issues that should be included in the assessment of behavioral autonomy and indicate the importance of keeping them distinct, as they appear to have different developmental trajectories.

The analyses presented here contribute to an emerging body of literature that has demonstrated the utility of distinguishing among the component processes of parenting. Previous research has indicated that behavioral and psychological control need to be distinguished and that they have different outcomes for children's adjustment (Barber et al., 1994, in press). Our analyses provide greater specificity by indicating that these two different forms of control have different

domain-related and conceptually distinct antecedents. Moreover, our analyses highlight the importance of considering these processes in a developmental framework. Our previous work has demonstrated that morality and social convention have different origins and different developmental trajectories. Although these distinctions remain important, we focused here primarily on the boundaries between what adolescents perceive to be legitimately regulated and subject to parents' authority (that is, moral and conventional issues) and issues that adolescents consider to be outside of those boundaries and legitimately under their personal jurisdiction. Our findings demonstrate that shifts in those boundaries during adolescence lead to corresponding changes between what is perceived by adolescents to be appropriate control and what is seen as overcontrol. Moreover, where those boundaries are drawn have implications for whether adolescents are satisfied or not with their emerging autonomy.

Finally, a word on our sample is warranted. The sample consisted of middle-class African American families. We believe that ethnicity and socioeconomic status may influence where domain boundaries are drawn. For instance, our data suggest that African American middle class parents may be more restrictive of adolescents' personal arenas than are European American middle class parents, most likely due to the greater environment risks that their adolescents face in a cultural environment where racism and prejudice remain pervasive. We believe that although the boundaries may differ somewhat in different ecological niches, the processes described here are broadly generalizable. Of course, this remains to be tested through further research.

More generally, these analyses are part of our attempt to specify parenting both in terms of the form of control that parents may use, as well as the domain in which that control is exerted. Our results suggest that examining domain-specific parenting beliefs and practices may lead to better

predictions of adolescent adjustment and outcomes, and this hypothesis deserves further attention in future research.

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Table 1:

Hierarchical Regressions on Adolescents' Ratings of Maternal Psychological Control

	Time 1			Time 2		
	<u>F</u> $\Delta$	R <sup>2</sup>	beta	<u>F</u> $\Delta$	R <sup>2</sup>	beta
<u>Step 1:</u>	1.05	.04		.72	.03	
Teen Gender			.07			-.15
Teen Age			.06			.06
Family Income			-.13			.04
<u>Step 2:</u>	2.71*	.20		1.13	.10	
Parental Monitoring			-.10			.02
Authority Beliefs -Social			-.05			-.02
Authority Beliefs - Personal			-.30*			-.20+
Restrictive Control - Social			.02			-.04
Restrictive Control - Personal			.32*			.28*

Note. These values represent final beta's. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .



Table 2:

Hierarchical Regressions on Adolescents' Ratings of Parental Monitoring

	Time 1			Time 2		
	F $\Delta$	R <sup>2</sup>	beta	F $\Delta$	R <sup>2</sup>	beta
<u>Step 1:</u>	6.45***	.21		4.21**	.14	
Teen Gender			.39***			.32**
Teen Age			-.06			-.11
Family Income			-.02			-.15
<u>Step 2:</u>	5.37***	.43		1.46	.23	
Psychological Control			-.07			.21+
Authority Beliefs -Social			-.09			.07
Authority Beliefs - Personal			.46***			.16
Restrictive Control - Social			.19+			.17
Restrictive Control - Personal			.02			-.01

Note. These values represent final beta's. + p < .10, \* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001.

Table 3:

Hierarchical Regressions on Adolescents' Ratings of Desired Autonomy for Socially Regulated and Personal Acts at Time 2

	Socially Regulated Acts			Personal Acts		
	F $\Delta$	R <sup>2</sup>	beta	F $\Delta$	R <sup>2</sup>	beta
<u>Step 1:</u> df(4, 73)	.93	.05		1.04	.05	
Teen Gender			-.11			-.06
Teen Age			.18			.19+
Family Income			-.19			.06
<u>Step 2:</u> df(3, 70)	.39	.06		3.80*	.19	
T1 Monitoring			.11			-.30*
T1 Psych Control			-.18			.01
T1 Domain-Specific Control			-.12			.24+ (.32*)
<u>Step 3:</u> df(3, 67)	2.33+	.15		.75	.21	
T2 Monitoring			-.00			.12
T2 Psych Control			.37**			-.03
T2 Domain-Specific Control			-.03			.17

Note. These values represent final beta's and t-values. The number in parentheses represents a significant beta obtained at an earlier step.