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Adolescents' as active agents in the socialization process: Legitimacy of parental authority and obligation to obey as predictors of obedience ☆

Nancy Darling[a,*], Patricio Cumsille[b], M. Loreto Martínez[b]

[a]*Oberlin College, USA*
[b]*Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile*

Abstract

Adolescents' agreement with parental standards and beliefs about the legitimacy of parental authority and their own obligation to obey were used to predict adolescents' obedience, controlling for parental monitoring, rules, and rule enforcement. Hierarchical linear models were used to predict both between-adolescent and within-adolescent, issue-specific differences in obedience in a sample of 703 Chilean adolescents (*M* age = 15.0 years). Adolescents' global agreement with parents and global beliefs about their obligation to obey predicted between-adolescent obedience, controlling for parental monitoring, age, and gender. Adolescents' issue-specific agreement, legitimacy beliefs, and obligation to obey predicted issue-specific obedience, controlling for rules and parents' reports of rule enforcement. The potential of examining adolescents' agreement and beliefs about authority as a key link between parenting practices and adolescents' decisions to obey is discussed.
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Keywords: Socialization; Legitimacy of parental authority; Parenting; Obedience; Cross-cultural; Chile

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*Corresponding author. Psychology Department, Severance Hall, Oberlin College, Oberlin, OH 044074, USA. Tel.: +1 440 775 8363.
E-mail address: Nancy.Darling@oberlin.edu (N. Darling).

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Introduction

A primary goal of child socialization is to prepare youth to assume adult social or occupational responsibilities and to foster compliance with parental and societal standards (Schlegel, 1995). Researchers interested in adolescent socialization tend to measure success in terms of global indicators of healthy development, including academic performance or the avoidance of deviance. At a day-to-day level, parents may be more likely to assess success in terms of obedience to rules and family standards: Is homework done? Are adolescents dressed appropriately when they walk out the door? Did they come home when they were supposed to? (Durbrow, Peña, Masten, Sesma, & Williamson, 2001). Parents who establish clear, reasonable rules for behaviour and enforce them consistently tend to have adolescents who conform to adult standards of good behaviour (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Effective parental monitoring of adolescent behaviour is a key component of parents' socialization efforts and is also a consistent predictor of healthy psychosocial development, lower levels of problem behaviour, and positive developmental outcomes (Crouter & Head, 2002). It has been hypothesized that, in addition to communicating care and concern to the child, effective monitoring also allows parents to reduce risk in children's environment, encourage the development of risk avoidant strategies in the child, effectively reward and punish child behaviour, and better fit their parenting practices to current child needs (Dishion & McMahon, 1998).

Although parental monitoring has usually been conceived of as an attribute of the parent (Crouter & Head, 2002; Dishion & McMahon, 1998), recent critiques have emphasized two related problems with this literature (Kerr & Stattin, 2000; Stattin & Kerr, 2000). First, although monitoring is conceptualized as a parenting practice that involves parents attending to and gathering information about their children's lives, it has been most frequently measured as parents' knowledge of their children's lives. Second, research suggests that this knowledge comes both from parents' efforts but, even more importantly, from adolescents' voluntary disclosure of information. From the perspective of socialization research, one important implication of these findings is that the active role of the adolescent in their own socialization has been neglected in past theory and research. The goal of this paper is to examine the relationship between parenting practices, adolescents' agreement with parents and adolescents' beliefs about parental authority with adolescents' conformity to parental standards. Three specific questions are addressed:

(1) To what extent is obedience a global characteristic that varies across adolescents and to what extent does individual adolescents' obedience vary across issues?
(2) Do parental monitoring, rules, and rule enforcement predict adolescent obedience?
(3) Do adolescents' internal standards of behaviour (agreement with parents) and their beliefs about their parents' right to set rules (legitimacy of parental authority) and their own obligation to obey parents' standards when they disagree predict obedience over and above parental monitoring, rules, and rule enforcement?

Questions 2 and 3 are addressed at two levels. Differences *between* adolescents in their overall agreement and beliefs about legitimacy of parental authority and obligation to obey are used to predict differences between the obedience of different adolescents, controlling for parental monitoring. *Within*-adolescent differences in obedience to parental standards with regards to

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