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## Brief report

## Interactive associations of parental support, demands, and psychological control, over adolescents' beliefs about the legitimacy of parental authority



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## ABSTRACT

The present study examined the relationship between parental support, demand, psychological control and adolescents' beliefs about the legitimacy of parental authority for personal and multifaceted issues in a sample of 1342 Chilean adolescents ( $M = 16.38$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ , age range 14–20). Results from multiple regression analyses separated by age indicated that demand was positively associated with adolescents' beliefs about the legitimacy of parental authority for personal and multifaceted issues and that psychological control was negatively associated with adolescents' legitimacy beliefs concerning personal issues. Furthermore, parental support moderated the relationship between parental demand and adolescents' beliefs about parental legitimacy for personal and multifaceted issues: those who display high levels of demand showed stronger beliefs about parental legitimacy at high level of support. These results support the interactive effect of parental support and demand on adolescent development.

Adolescents differ in the degree to which they believe parents have the legitimate right to regulate their behavior (Kuhn & Laird, 2011). Interest on *beliefs about the legitimacy of parental authority* (BPL) as mostly centered on studying normative changes and determinants of this phenomenon. Some studies have connected beliefs about the legitimacy of parental authority with parenting style dimensions (e.g. Cumsille, Darling, Flaherty, & Martínez, 2006, 2009). *Parenting style* is a set of attitudes towards children which creates an emotional climate within which parenting behaviors are expressed (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Certain dimensions are key to its characterization, specifically *support* or attitudes perceived as supportive of psychosocial development, *demand* or expectations applied to children's behaviors depending on the social/family norms, and *psychological control* as parental emotional manipulation that restrict the child's autonomy (Barber, Maughan, & Olsen, 2005). Support is positively related (Darling, Cumsille, & Martínez, 2008) and psychological control is negatively related with beliefs about the legitimacy of parental authority (Kuhn & Laird, 2011).

According to Baumrind (1991), it is natural for interaction patterns between parenting style dimensions to emerge. The interaction indicates that the associative effect, in the statistical sense, of one variable depends upon the specific value of a third variable (Aiken & West, 1991). However, findings from previous studies show only direct associations between parenting style dimensions and legitimacy beliefs. We ask whether support, demand, and psychological control are interactively associated with adolescents' beliefs in the legitimacy of parental authority.

Legitimacy beliefs about parental authority vary depending on the social-cognitive domain in which their behaviors are classified (Smetana, 1995). The domains described are *moral* (e.g., doing physical harm to others), *conventional* (e.g., etiquette and manners),

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and *psychological*. Two aspect of the psychological domain are referred to each as *personal* (e.g., choice of recreational activities), and *prudential* (e.g., smoking). Finally, issues *multifaceted*, entail overlaps between conventional and personal (as well as prudential) concerns (Smetana, Campione Barr, & Daddis, 2004).

Legitimacy beliefs decline over time. The most pronounced decline occurs in early adolescence and over personal issues. Less dramatic changes occur from middle to late adolescence, when legitimacy beliefs decline mainly for prudential issues and less for multifaceted issues (Smetana, 2011). Finally, adolescents legitimize parental authority over moral and conventional issues even in late adolescence (Smetana, Crean, & Campione Barr, 2005). Because most of the normative variation in legitimacy beliefs is associated with personal and multifaceted issues (Darling et al., 2008), we will focus on these two domains.

We hypothesized that demands relates positively with legitimacy beliefs for personal and multifaceted issues and that this relationship is conditional to the level of parental support. Consequently, the association with demands will be greater in adolescents who report higher parental support since demands provides non-intrusive behavioral guidelines (Grolnick & Pomerantz, 2009) and support legitimizes those guidelines because adolescents will perceive rules as signs of parental concern (Kuhn & Laird, 2011). Also, we expect that adolescents who report high parental psychological control will show lower legitimacy beliefs than their peers. The psychological control interferes with adolescents' need for autonomy, which is satisfied by building the personal sphere; psychological control is considered highly intrusive of the personal domain (Nucci, Hasebe, & Lins-Dyer, 2005). Further, middle adolescence is a period of increased striving for autonomy (Pettit, Laird, Dodge, Bates, & Criss, 2009), and use of psychological control on personal issues, especially at this stage, would frustrate adolescents' attempts to shape a sphere of personal freedom. Consequently, we expected that perceived psychological control would be negatively related to legitimacy beliefs, only for personal issues and specifically during middle adolescence. We tested the hypotheses separately by domain, by adolescent age, and by parental figure.

In Chile, family relations are typically close, but both parents and adolescents tend to expect less direct assertion of parental control and less strict adolescent obedience than the one that might be typical in the United States. However, Chilean youth espouse legitimacy beliefs similar to those in the United States (Cumsille, Darling, Flaherty, & Martínez, 2009; Darling et al., 2008), therefore we do not expect relations to be different from what is observed in other cultural context.

## 1. Method

### 1.1. Participants

The sample comprised 656 male and 686 female drawn from two municipal, two private, and two subsidized private schools in Chile. Their age ranged from 14 to 20 ( $M = 16.38$  and  $SD = 1.24$ ). A total of 35.0% declared that their parents were separated.

### 1.2. Measures

#### 1.2.1. Beliefs in the legitimacy of parental authority

Items started with the question “Is it OK for your parents to set rules about ... ?” Students chose between *yes* (1) and *no* (0). Eight items of personal (e.g., How you spend your free time) and five of multifaceted issues (e.g., Hanging around people your parents think are problematic) were selected from existing measures (Cumsille et al., 2006, 2009).

#### 1.2.2. Psychological control

Based on the scale of Barber, Xia, Olsen, McNeely, and Bose (2012). Adolescents indicated how often their mother/father use emotional manipulation to control or restrict their emotional or psychological experiences (e.g., “My mother/father embarrasses me in public”). Answers range from *never* (1) to *always* (5).

**Table 1**

Correlation matrix of legitimacy beliefs and parenting variables (N = 1112) and means and standard deviations of parenting variables.

	N	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. BPL (Personal)	1304	1.33	0.33							
2. BPL (Multifaceted)	1308	1.68	0.29	.54**						
3. P.C. (M)	1328	1.73	0.74	-.18**	-.10**					
4. P.C. (F)	1214	1.58	0.64	-.14**	-.10**	.53**				
5. Support (M)	1297	4.45	0.75	.17**	.12**	-.58**	-.28**			
6. Support (F)	1186	4.19	0.90	.16**	.10**	-.30**	-.45**	.49**		
7. Demand (M)	1300	4.63	0.57	.22**	.13**	-.28**	-.10**	.55**	.31**	
8. Demand (F)	1197	4.49	0.71	.21**	.10**	-.21**	-.19**	.35**	.63**	.61**

Note: Correlations have been rounded off to the second decimal. BPL = Beliefs about Parental Legitimacy.

P.C. = Psychological Control. M = Mother. F = Father.

\*\* $p < .01$ .

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