

Constructing Autonomy in the Context of Adolescent-Parent Relationships

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Adolescent-parent relationships are transformed during adolescence as youth seek greater autonomy. Although peers may inform adolescents' autonomy desires, teens must negotiate with their parents to gain more autonomy—or take more devious routes by concealing their behavior from their parents. In this keynote talk, I discuss my program of research focusing on these issues. My research employs a developmental, social-cognitive, and constructivist framework to examine how adolescent-parent conflict and disclosure and secrecy with parents are associated with shifts in the boundaries of parental authority across adolescence and correspondingly, increases in adolescents' claims to personal jurisdiction over different areas of their lives. My focus has been on both normative developmental changes as well as variations according to ethnic/racial and cultural backgrounds and parenting. The research highlights the need to consider differences in adolescents' and parents' perspectives and the different domains in which autonomy development occurs.

I will discuss the theoretical framework for my research and provide an overview of the findings of cross-cultural research on changing conceptions of parental authority. Next, I will present current variable- and person-centered research on disclosure, concealment, and parental monitoring. Recent research using a narrative approach to understanding adolescents' meaning making about their experiences of disclosure, concealment, and lying also will be presented. This research provides new insights into the lessons adolescents learn from disclosure versus secrecy and how they impact adolescents' sense of self and relationships with parents. In the last part of the talk, I will make connections between my research on adolescents' construction of autonomy in the personal domain and the development of moral conceptions of fairness and rights. With the current political shifts in the U.S. and Europe and the rise of intolerance and inequality worldwide, it has become increasingly pressing to understand how moral autonomy, including conceptions of fair treatment, respect, equality, and rights, develop or are thwarted in family contexts during adolescence, and I will discuss new directions to these issues.