

Chilean Adolescents' and Parents' Views on Autonomy Development

Youth & Society
2014, Vol. 46(2) 176–200
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DOI: 10.1177/0044118X1434215
yas.sagepub.com



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Abstract

This study aims to understand Chilean parents' and adolescents' conceptions of autonomy and whether they hold different expectations for autonomous behaviors by generation and socioeconomic level. A qualitative approach to data collection was used through separate focus groups of parents and adolescents from different socioeconomic condition. Substantial similarities in parents' and adolescents' conceptions of autonomy were found. Both generations conceive autonomy as multidimensional (i.e., self-sufficiency, decision making, and acting responsibly) and as an age-graded process that is achieved in interaction with parents. Participants emphasize the affective quality of the parent–adolescent relationship, particularly trust, for healthy autonomy achievement. Differences by socioeconomic status (SES) were also apparent in that low-middle-SES parents emphasize the self-sufficiency and responsibility component of autonomy, and adolescents grant more authority to parents in regulating adolescents' behavior compared with their high-middle-SES counterparts.

Keywords

autonomy, beliefs, parenting, trust, focus groups

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Introduction

Families change in response to historical events and adapt to new societal values, expectations, and norms for social behavior (Greenfield, 2009). The process of socialization involves the acceptance of values, customs, and standards of society as well as the ability to function in an adaptive way in the larger society (Grusec & Davidov, 2007). Parental socialization is shaped by societal values and expectations of what constitutes autonomous behavior and both what and when particular expressions of adolescent autonomy are appropriate must be understood within the cultural context in which families develop (Greenfield, 2009; Martínez, 2007). For example, Haase, Silbereisen, and Reitzle (2008) found significant changes in the timing for autonomous behavior in adolescents from Eastern Germany after reunification showing assimilation to Western Germany timetables for developmental transitions.

Our study of adolescent autonomy is contextualized in Chile, a developing country that underwent dramatic transformation of political and social institutions related to the military coup in 1973, followed by rapid economic development and sociopolitical change since the reinstitution of democracy in 1990. Concurrent with sociohistorical change, expected shifts in family norms and practices have been described (United Nations Program for Development [UNPD], 2009). Prevailing values and social norms in Chile evolved from those of an authoritarian to those of a democratic system, fostering rejection of authoritarian values, emphasis on self-development and agency, and liberalization of social and sexual norms (Martínez, Cumsille, & Thibaut, 2006).

Changes in views about authority and self-development have implications for the socialization of children and adolescents and likely alter expectations for autonomy. To some extent, family beliefs regarding autonomy and authority are supported by macrosocial expectations regarding the value of self versus interdependence with others (Kagitcibasi, 2007). Thus, political and social change can alter the context for parenting. Although Chileans have a high family orientation (UNPD, 2002), young Chileans espouse more individualistic values than older cohorts. In a cross-national comparison, Darling, Cumsille, and Peña Alampay (2005) found that Chilean adolescents were less likely to believe that parents had legitimate authority to govern particular areas of their lives or to feel obliged to obey than their Filipino and U.S. counterparts. Similarly, Chilean parents were less likely to enforce rules (Darling et al., 2005) and more likely to express discomfort with strict rule

enforcement. They reported being less authoritarian and less prone to use power assertive practices than did their own parents (Martínez et al., 2006).

Though evidence indicates that societal values and norms have changed in Chile (UNPD, 2009), we do not know how these changes relate to parents and adolescents' views of autonomy and whether their expectations regarding autonomous behavior in adolescence have evolved. Most of the studies that examine parent-adolescent relationships have been conducted with families of European origin, mostly in the United States (Fuligni, 1998; Phinney, Kim-Jo, Osorio, & Vilhjalmsdottir, 2005) and from middle-class backgrounds. With a few exceptions (Darling, Cumsille, & Martínez, 2008; Darling et al., 2005; Milnitsky-Sapiro, Turiel, & Nucci, 2006; Nucci, Camino, & Sapiro, 1996), much less evidence is available on how autonomy develops in adolescents from Latin American families. In this scenario, we explore conceptions of autonomy and views on how autonomy develops in adolescence from the perspective of the actors (i.e., parents and adolescents) as these constitute representations of their actions and behaviors in practice and thus convey social and cultural expectations.

Parents' Beliefs and Cultural Scripts

In what ways do parents' values and goals for the socialization of their children inform how the process of autonomy development is achieved? Parents hold different ideas and beliefs—also called *ethnotheories*—about the development and care of their children. These ideas are historically reproduced symbolic practices used by a cultural community to make sense of their environment and are the means by which cultural elements from the broader social system are filtered into the families. Thus, cultural beliefs provide meaning to the exchanges between parents and adolescents and motivate parental practices and the organization of daily life (Harkness & Super, 1996; Palacios & Moreno, 1996). Parental ethnotheories differ with respect to the developmental domains that are particularly emphasized in different socio-cultural environments (Kärtner et al., 2007). Families from different socio-economic condition may hold different beliefs regarding development, prioritize different goals in socializing their children as well as allocate resources and organize daily life differently, thus creating different contexts for the negotiation of autonomy.

Findings by McElhaney and Allen (2001) suggest that autonomy supporting parental practices have different effects within different contexts. For example, parental inhibition of autonomy—whether defined in behavioral or

cognitive terms—may be appropriate in dangerous environments that pose multiple threats to adolescent's well-being (Dubrow & Garbarino, 1989). In high-risk contexts, parents are more likely to use strategies emphasizing conformity and obedience rather than those that promote independence and autonomy (Bartz & Levine, 1978; Dubrow & Garbarino, 1989; Harkness & Super, 1995; Kelley, Sanchez-Hucles, & Walker, 1993).

The long-term values and socialization goals that parents hold for their children differ in meaning in different cultures (Trommsdorff & Kornadt, 2003) and between families within the same cultural group (LeVine et al., 1994; Suizzo, 2007). Cultural beliefs are influenced by the characteristics of the social settings in which families live such as access to education and availability of economic and social resources. Social position also affects socialization goals, child-rearing practices (Conger & Dogan, 2007), and cultural models of parenting (Jarrett, 1999).

Different groups within the same culture may value and promote distinct aspects of autonomy and hold different social norms and expectations about the relationship between parents and children. Previous studies report differences in legitimacy beliefs of parental authority between adolescents of different socioeconomic groups. For example, Nucci, Camino, et al. (1996) found that middle-class Brazilian adolescents believed personal topics are under their personal jurisdiction compared with their low-SES counterparts that granted legitimacy to parental authority. Similarly, Smetana (2000) found that high-SES African American adolescents did not grant legitimate authority to their parents to regulate personal aspects of their lives compared with their middle-SES counterparts.

Using survey data, Cumsille, Darling, Flaherty, and Martínez (2006, 2009) found that low-SES Chilean adolescents accepted parental control in more areas of their lives than middle- or high-SES adolescents; a result that should have implications for their conception of and expectations for autonomous behavior. Given high socioeconomic segregation in Chile, we explore differences in views of autonomy between parents and adolescents of different socioeconomic condition, their beliefs about what it means to be autonomous, and their expectations regarding autonomy achievement. We expect social change to have a differential effect by SES as there is evidence that predominant social values, and their consequences for socialization, would permeate families and individuals at different pace depending on their social position (Bronfenbrenner, 1958; Conger & Dogan, 2007).

Values, standards, and customs are not simply transmitted from one generation to the other but, to some extent, constructed by each generation. Young generations assimilate new expectations easily whereas their adult

parents may hold both the old and new expectations. We explore whether Chilean parents and adolescents hold different beliefs about individual autonomy and parental authority depending on their experiences within their families of origin, available resources, and constraints associated with their living conditions.

Method

Procedure

Schools were contacted to participate in a larger longitudinal study of adolescent autonomy development. After securing approval from school officials, letters were sent to parents and adolescents informing them of the goals of the study and inviting them to voluntarily take part in the focus groups. Participants signed informed consent (parents) or assent (adolescents) forms. The study procedure was approved by the IRB of Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile and the ethics committee of the funding agency (FONDECYT).

Participants

Twenty-nine high school students drawn from three types of schools (one private, one private subsidized, one public) that represent the diversity of SES conditions in the Chilean school system (Martínez et al., 2006) participated in the study. According to indicators of socioeconomic vulnerability of the Chilean Ministry of Education (Chile, Ministerio de Educación, Sistema de Medición de la Calidad de la Educación, 2009) these schools were classified as high (private), middle (private subsidized), and low (public) SES.

Adolescents were enrolled in 9th to 12th grade and ages ranged from 14 to 18 years ($M = 15.5$, $SD = 1.1$). Sampling was aimed to obtain diversity by age and gender. Eleven parents recruited through two schools participated in the study. The majority of parents were female (7), with mean age of 47.66 years ($SD = 6.8$), and had between 2 and 8 children ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.69$). Demographic characteristics of participants are presented in Table 1.

Parents in low-SES schools on average reported no more than 10 years of education and earnings equivalent to the bottom 30% of the population distribution of income (Chile, Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas [INE], 2008), parents in middle-SES school on average reported between 11 and 12 years of education and monthly earnings that classify them between the 40% and 60%

Table 1. Focus Group Participant Description.

Adolescents					
	N	SES	Sex	Grade	Family composition
FG 1	11	Low	55% men	Four 9th graders, three 10th graders, two 11th graders, two 12th graders	64% biparental family, 27% uniparental family, 9% other
FG 5	10	Middle	40% men	Three 9th graders, two 10th graders, three 11th graders, two 12th graders	80% biparental family, 20% uniparental family
FG 2	8	High	50% men	Two 9th graders, two 10th graders, two 11th graders, two 12th graders	63% biparental family, 38% uniparental family
Parents					
	N	SES	Sex	Age	Schooling
FG 3	5	High	40% men	$M = 45.75, DS = 1.71$, 44-48 years	40% completed high school, 20% completed college, 20% graduate studies
FG 4	6	Low	55% men	$M = 49.20, DS = 9.15$, 42-63 years	17% did not complete high school, 50% completed high school, 33% college incomplete

of the population distribution in family income. Parents in the high-SES school on average reported at least 15 years of education and monthly earnings that place them in the upper 30% of the population in income (INE, 2008).

Data Collection and Analytic Approach

Separate focus groups were conducted for parents (2 groups) and adolescents (3 groups). An open question script was developed to elicit adolescents' and parents' conceptions of autonomy. Questions targeted parents' and adolescents' real account of the transactions they engaged in and the meanings of these exchanges from their perspective.

Focus groups were guided by one member of the research team and each group was observed by two additional members of the research team. The script developed started with general questions about autonomy development followed by probing questions when clarification was needed. Participants were encouraged to present alternative or diverse perspectives.

Group sessions were audiotaped and subsequently transcribed. To capture the way participants perceive and interpret reality data were analyzed following grounded theory (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Flick, 2002) guidelines. Responses to each interview question were open coded by two independent coders to reflect themes emerging from the data. Agreements and disagreements between coders were analyzed in group meetings (triangulation) and recoded until agreement was reached. Definite codes were established based on the complete interview text and coders' biases were checked. In addition, coders registered memos of topics emerging from participants' narratives which oriented subsequent axial coding.

Axial coding was applied to categories that emerged through open coding. Categories proposed for each focus group were subsequently compared by participants (adolescents vs. parents) and by SES groups to identify similarities and differences in themes and content. Categories that emerged in all versus some focus groups were identified, and the density of responses related to the category (e.g., number of experiences reported) was analyzed.

Focus groups were conducted in Spanish and, subsequently, transcripts were translated to English and revised for semantic and idiomatic equivalence.

Results

For the presentation of results, we first describe findings that are consistent across generations (parents and adolescents) or across socioeconomic groups. Findings are organized around definitions of autonomy and expectations for autonomy granting and achievement. Second, we discuss differences observed between generations (parents and adolescents) and socioeconomic groups as they emerged in the data.

Definition of Autonomy

In participants' view, autonomy does not have a univocal meaning or definition and is related to other indicators of psychosocial development (e.g., independence and maturity).

Although independence and autonomy are used as synonyms in Spanish, distinctions were evident in participants' definitions. In their view, unlike autonomy, independence is defined by others from whom the person must become independent (adolescent perspective) or who grant certain freedom for behavior (parent perspective). Alternatively, autonomy was defined as an evolved state of self-sufficiency and self-management that involves behavioral and internal processes related to self-evaluation. Consistent with conceptual analysis of autonomy (Noom, Dekovic, & Meus, 2001) participants highlighted the regulatory component of autonomy that includes self-reflection (e.g., choice) and competence for action (e.g., taking responsibility).

Participants' conception of autonomy included three interrelated dimensions: to be self-sufficient in everyday situations, to make one's own decisions, and to act responsibly (see Figure 1). Self-sufficiency represented adolescents' ability to deal by themselves with everyday situations, both simple and complex. This dimension is consistent with definitions of behavioral autonomy (Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins, 2003), and it includes to do homework, to clean their rooms, to cook, to manage their money, and, for older adolescents, to go on vacation with friends. Both parents and adolescents claimed that being able to generate one's own financial resources is also a sign of self-sufficiency.

The second dimension of autonomy was the ability to make one's own decisions. For parents and adolescents, this was a core dimension in autonomy achievement, notwithstanding they emphasized different aspects of decision making. In adolescents' view, as greater autonomy is achieved, more actions that require decision making must be taken on and decisions to be made become more complex. For adolescents, the core marker of autonomous decision making was the self (personal domain) reflecting their awareness of their increased ability and right to make decisions. In their view of autonomy, what they take on is based on whom they are, their beliefs, desires, and their personal criteria.

Parents agreed that the agent of decision making should be the adolescent and emphasize his or her individual rights. However, their responses often suggested adolescents lack the ability to make decisions independently from external guidelines ("maturity"). Furthermore, when describing the characteristics of autonomous decision making, parents highly emphasized the quality of the decision itself or, in their own words, how confident adolescents feel about their own decisions, as illustrated in the following quote by a high-SES parent:

Conceptions of Autonomy	
Self-sufficiency	Adolescent's capacity to self-sustain, that is, <i>to be self-sufficient</i> , being able to do the necessary things for subsistence too (FG 3, 75).
To make own decisions	I feel I have more autonomy now [...] I can be with my classmates, close to my home, I <i>choose</i> whom I hang out with. Before I used to hang out with the older or the younger kids just to have fun. Now that I'm older it is different, <i>you know I prefer this</i> , something more cool, let's go dancing ... (FG 5, 38).
To act responsibly	Taking responsibility for a personal activity [Talking about a difficult event in family, mother says]... I thought my daughters were going to go down, but instead my middle daughter <i>took responsibility with her studies</i>, she put herself to work. She is very responsible because she is aware her mom will not stand for her. She knows that, she knows how to get organized, she takes care of her responsibilities and has not given up with school (FG 4, 118). Anticipating potentially harmful consequences [Mother talking about her daughter] I much rather be with her, I say "where my eyes can see you" [...]. I talk to her, I tell her if she wants to date someone or going steady she can do it when she is 15 years, and if she wants to have sex she can [I say] "It is your problem, but...be very responsible because I would not like you to get pregnant at 16 or 17, with a child and ruining your life" []. <i>You have to be responsible because you are the only one to be damaged ...in every aspect of your life, love, school, everything. ...</i> (FG 4, 159, 163-164). Future prospects and projects I am attending a technical school so we have to choose, so we [classmates] all have to start thinking what do I want for myself? So, we have to work hard on what we are discussing right now, autonomy, Whom do I want to become? Work on? Here is ...a lot of my fellows decide to take the technical track, many of them will be advised to pick a certain track, <i>but is that what I really want? They can tell you pick computer science but what do I want for my future, for tomorrow, what do I want to be?</i> (FG 5, 44).

Figure 1. Examples of dimensions of autonomy emergent in participants' definitions.

I mentioned that I also defined autonomy as the degree to which they [adolescents] feel their decisions are the right ones, um . . . I think that when you see them, I mean, how you can tell is, maybe, if you see them making a decision and they don't feel sure and have doubts, then

it's because they are not ready to make that decision yet. I mean, they're not autonomous in that point, but when they make a decision and have good results, or bad ones at least, there's some awareness that they thought [about it]. I think their autonomy is successfully achieved. (FG 3, 136¹)

Both adolescents and parents highlighted the subjective sense of self-reliance of a youngster's decision, pointing to the affective and regulatory components of autonomy (Noom et al., 2001). However, whereas for adolescents the self as the locus of decision was important (e.g., being aware of or relying on own feelings, desires, and beliefs), for parents the important component was the extent to which an adolescent is confident with a decision or the outcomes of that decision.

The third dimension of autonomy was acting responsibly. According to the *Real Academia Española* dictionary, a responsible person is attentive and cautious about what he or she does or decides to do; someone who is in charge of something or someone else. Figure 1 depicts participants' examples of acting responsibly as taking responsibility or being in charge of an activity (e.g., sports) the adolescent decided to take on. First, responses emphasized the self-organizing, monitoring (e.g., time use), and goal-setting aspects of autonomy (Noom et al., 2001). Second, participants believed that a person who is attentive and cautious may be capable of anticipating consequences that are potentially harmful. Both adolescents and parents highlighted that being autonomous entails thinking ahead of time and anticipating possible consequences of actions. Beyond foreseeing negative consequences, the extent to which decisions serve to accomplish a desired goal or future prospects was also mentioned. Along these lines, parents and adolescents believed that a pivotal aspect of autonomy development is being able to establish and put forth projects for the future.

In sum, across SES groups, adolescents and parents believed autonomy is the ability to act independently, to identify the person's reasons and beliefs for his or her behavior, to make decisions on one's own, and to act responsibly. However, differences in the relative importance of each component were also apparent between groups.

The ability to manage one's own behavior and to be self-sufficient was strongly emphasized by low-SES participants. In contrast, middle- and high-SES participants provided only one example of self-sufficiency and placed greater emphasis on decision making.

Acting "responsibly" refers to how adolescents learn to self-regulate their behavior. The notion of self-regulation was frequently highlighted by

middle-SES parents, who clearly expect their children to follow parental guidelines and rules for behavior. In addition, low-SES parents expected their children to respect and acknowledge the parents' right to socialize and set rules. These parents value adolescents' ability to self-regulate their behavior based on social expectations, as illustrated by the following quote of a low-SES parent:

Children nowadays think that being autonomous is a synonym for licentiousness [. . .]. I mean, they think they can do whatever they want, even though we're living in a society full of norms and regulations [. . .]. Like she [another participant] said, as long as they're with us they have to accept rules anyway. I mean, they can express their points of view, but they still owe us respect, and I think that's the most important part of human existence. (FG 4, 100)

Beyond definitions, participants' responses pointed to two other aspects of autonomy, namely that it develops gradually and it is learned through interactions with parents.

Parents' and Adolescents' Views on the Development of Autonomy

Across SES, parents and adolescents believed that autonomy is acquired gradually as part of a person's developmental process. Age is one marker of the gradual nature of autonomy as adolescents claimed that parents grant more opportunities and allow children greater latitude to regulate their own behavior, depending on how old they are. As a high-SES parent described,

Our eldest child is a boy, and my daughters always complain: "why is Felipe always granted permission?" I tell them it has nothing to do with the fact that he [Felipe] is male but that he is the eldest. He had the same curfew that my daughters at age 10 and honestly my daughters finally accepted it because the argument is convincing. It is not a gender but an age issue that has to do with children's development. (FG3, 448)

In general, participants viewed autonomy as a lifelong endeavor that begins before adolescence and lasts until adulthood. However, parents and adolescents focused on different aspects of this process. Most parents described what they call regulatory aspects of adolescents' behavior, that is, tasks based on a social or age-related criterion they expect adolescents to

Adolescent	Parent
Experimentation	Age-related criterion
Adolescent: Yes, because parents, for example, can't let their children live in a bubble and then go out into the world and find out what reality is, without being able to face it. Adolescent: I think that you have to start knowing the world now. Let's say that parents let their children experiment different things, because if you're locked away from the world and then you get older, you're not going to be learning things and you have to realize what's happening (Low-SES Adolescent FG 1, 200-2001).	Rather than age...[it has to do with] not only how the physical and the cognitive aspects [of children] develop, but also the emotional development, because that too is fundamental so that they can, you know, get on a bus and not be traumatized because the bus driver says "I don't take school children". So, it's kind of their capacity to solve the needs of their age or the stage of development that they are in, so, we can say that they develop and manage, according to the stage in which they are in (High-SES Parent FG, 3, 82).

Figure 2. Parent's and adolescents' distinctions of the gradual nature of autonomy development.

accomplish. Alternatively, for adolescents opportunities to experiment in step-by-step fashion were central to becoming autonomous. They expected adults to give children opportunities to experience and/or to handle new situations or behaviors as illustrated in Figure 2. Adolescents underlined the negative consequences of parental overprotection and intrusion that prevent adolescent exploration. As a high-SES adolescent stated,

If my parents hadn't given me those [to act on his own] opportunities, I'd probably be in my room all day; if they hadn't let me go out as much . . . [parents let opportunities]; you simply become isolated in your own world, which could be school or your house. So, then you go out to college to a whole different world, and if you hadn't a chance to live certain things or to experience some autonomy, you're not going to be able to cope and it'll be really hard for you to be part of the real world. (FG 2, 357)

In brief, adolescents stressed the importance of experimentation as a crucial step in adapting and preparing themselves to face the real world, and its longer-term benefits for expanded autonomy in adulthood. Nonetheless, they also recognized the pivotal role parents play in supporting this process, as it strengthens adolescents' identity exploration (i.e., discover whom they want to be) and allows them to gain experience in an incremental fashion.

The Transactional Nature of Autonomy

For both parents and adolescents, autonomy also develops in interaction with others. Participants believed that adolescents develop the components of autonomy—responsibility, independence, and decision making through their interactions with parents. This transactional view refers to parent–adolescent exchanges that provide opportunities for children to behave autonomously and to progressively assume power to make their own decision. These exchanges are in turn followed by the adolescents behaving more responsibly. The following quote describes how a high-SES parent grants autonomy and monitors the way the adolescent responds:

... if I think about how I allow for such autonomy, because some way or another we have to start slackening the reins in order to grant autonomy, my analogy is that it has to do with giving and taking. I mean testing, I just see what happens along the way. (FG 3, 86)

In participants' view, the relational context in which these interactions take place is shaped by characteristics of the parents, the adolescents, and the quality of the affective climate of the parent–adolescent relationship. Concerning characteristics of the adolescents, participants pointed out to gender, "character," and level of "maturity" of the person. As illustrated in the following quote of high-SES parent, participants concurred that parents' fearful attitude hinders autonomy granting as it magnifies the potential risks of adolescents' freedom:

... my daughter [aged 12 approximately] complained because we didn't let her cross the street to shop at a store ... ". . . but, dad, it's right across the street, all I have to do is cross it. . . ." My wife was scared to death [to let her go] because it was a time when almost every story on the news was about children getting mugged or kidnapped. . . . maybe those parental fears were a bit exaggerated. (FG 3, 86)

Participants from low- and high-SES provided examples of mutual transactions to describe how opportunities for adolescents to act autonomously and progressively make decisions on their own are granted. At the same time, parents and adolescents of low-SES stated the expectation that adolescents will act responsibly (i.e., in line with parental expectations and values; see examples of the trust–responsibility virtuous circle on Adolescent FG1 and Parent FG4). Alternatively, high-SES parents expressed greater concern and anxiety about preventing risks and feel more responsible for anticipating potential negative consequences associated with their adolescent children autonomous behavior than their low-SES counterparts (see quote FG3,86, on previous page).

Finally, participants both SES groups identified the affective components of the parent–child relationship, such as emotional support, trust, and open communication that they consider necessary for autonomy to develop favorably, as is illustrated in the following quote from a low-SES adolescent: “Gender doesn’t matter. Men and women can have the same opportunities in terms of going out, but it depends on how much your *parents trust you*” (FG 1, 177, emphasis added). Participants from low and high SES emphasize different aspects of the emotional climate between parents and adolescents. Low-SES participants stressed both responsibility and communication in developing trust whereas high-SES stressed communication as will be described shortly.

The Trust–Responsibility Virtuous Circle

Several adolescents from low-SES illustrated how the level of trust that parents grant to their children relates to how much autonomy is granted. Parental trust is based on the expectation that the adolescent child will know how to cope and will respond in a predictable and responsible way. As examples on Figure 3 illustrate, adolescents described the mutually reinforcing cycle between parental trust and teenage responsibility as a virtuous circle of interaction that reinforces the increasing yield of autonomy.

For participant adolescents, responsibility, a sense of commitment toward a goal and/or being accountable for one’s own actions, is an indicator of autonomy development. As illustrated by the following quote of a low-SES adolescent, responsibility is evidenced by respecting agreements between parents and adolescents, by showing consistency between saying and doing, and by being accountable for their own decisions:

Adolescent 1: . . . if you say “I’m going to do something” and you actually do what you said you would do, you respect an agreement or say “give me

The trust-responsibility virtuous circle	Trust and open communication
Adolescent 1: I think it's the confidence and responsibility that each one of us can demonstrate. For example, parents may trust you when they let you go to a party or anywhere else, but if they catch you lying or doing something weird, then it [trust] disappears...zero confidence. Adolescent 2: it also depends on us when it comes to parents; because if we introduce them to our friends and they know who our friends are...they're not going to give us so much trouble. Of course, if they don't know who they are [they stop trusting in us...] (Low-SES Adolescent FG 1, 134-136). Adolescent 1: It depends on how much parents trust us. If you do things behind their back and they find out, they lose confidence in you and then when you ask them for permission, they don't [give you permission] ...if parents know what we're up to, they won't give us so much trouble when it comes to giving us permission. Interviewer: So, when you're young, right, you can do certain things to earn your parents' confidence and perhaps achieve more autonomy. Adolescent 2: I think you earn their trust through your actions and the attitudes you show them you can get more and more confidence, permissions and all of that from your parents (FG 1, 181-183).	Adolescent 1: ...because I've always told my mom everything, I mean, I told her when I wanted to start drinking and when I wanted to start smoking...[] my mom is aware of everything I do. In a sense, our conversations along with showing her that I'm a responsible person generated confidence. Adolescent 2: I once talked to my mom, [since] my mom was kind of apprehensive []. But I talked to her once and told her that if she actually trusted me and I really showed her that I was responsible, she'd just had to trust me, ...I mean, she worries about me. She's the type of mom that always says "call me when you get there" and everything, but now she's not. like, if I don't call her, she's going to get mad at me and never let me go out again, that is, she likes to know where I am, she likes to know what I'm doing, but she tells me that it's my decision if I want to call her or not, she doesn't [pressure me] (High-SES Adolescent FG 2, 269).

Figure 3. The affective quality and/or emotional environment of parent–adolescent interactions: Building trust.

permission and I'll get a 7 [highest grade] in a test" [a commitment to being responsible] if you say "if you give me permission" but then you don't do it. (FG 1, 338)

Adolescent 2: Being responsible for your own actions and then your parents will see if you did things, and you were responsible and everything's OK, and they'll show a certain degree of trust in you. (FG 1, 344)

The connection between adolescents' responsible behavior and parental trust is further illustrated by a low-SES mother:

I know that when my son says "Mom, I'm going to a friends' house," I know he'll be there and I can trust him. He shows respect and we respect each other mutually, in that he'll always tell the truth on top of everything, and communicate openly, in the sense that he's not going to hide from me what he's been doing [. . .]. (FG 4, 305)

Parents indicated that they support adolescents when they feel their children have shown they can be trusted. Describing an argument with her daughter, a low-SES parent stated,

She [daughter] was telling me "mom please, I have given you enough, I want you to trust me. If I tell you that it wasn't that way [problem with a teacher] it is because it was like I say" . . . I have to believe my daughter and not the teacher . . . I have to put hundred percent trust in her, because she has shown me with facts that . . . she has become responsible. (FG 4, 132-143)

Trust and Open Communication

Trust is built from actions and attitudes on behalf of both parents and adolescents. Adolescents believed that they can earn parents' trust by respecting them (e.g., not lying nor cheating), being honest, and acting responsibly. Besides respect, open communication with parents (e.g., disclosing information) also builds trust (see quotes in Figure 3).

From the adolescents' point of view, keeping an open communication with parents helps them reveal personal information and experiences. Such disclosure on behalf of adolescents plays a central role in developing confidence as expressed by a high-SES adolescent:

I have a good relationship with my mother. . . . She knows me and knows everything I do, and I tell her everything. So, she kind of really trusts me . . . (FG 2, 116)

Another adolescent quote illustrates how trust opens adolescents to influence and feedback from their parents:

I tell my parents everything, [. . .], my dad completely understands me, so I listen to him and know that because he is older than me, he can give me advice that will help me. I completely trust him and have the confidence to tell him everything about me [. . .]. (FG 5, 23)

Finally, regarding the affective components of autonomy development, parents and adolescents of high SES greatly valued open communication as a key component to establish a sense of trust and confidence between parents and children. Open communication was also mentioned by adolescents and parents of low SES, but for them trust seems to be established and reestablished depending on adolescents' responsible behavior.

Limit Setting

Only parents of low SES mentioned that setting clear limits for adolescent behavior is crucial for autonomy development, as illustrated in the following quote:

I think that autonomy [. . .] also implies certain restrictions, because they [adolescents] can't always be doing what they want, being with their parents, [adolescents] have to use guidelines and principles that parents instill in them, that is, in terms of permission and things like that [. . .]. Autonomy has limits too, as I was saying before, they can't go out wherever they want to, and in that case, they have to follow the rules that we set at home. (FG 4, 98)

Parents of low SES value their guardianship and normative power over their children. In other words, they feel the need to establish clear limits between what children can and cannot do, conveying their adolescent children clear expectations on what type of behavior is appropriate. These parents explicitly stated their legitimate authority to regulate their children's conduct.

Discussion

Chilean society underwent major transformations over the past two decades, transitioning from an authoritarian regime to a democracy, with significant changes in the value and importance of individual rights. This transition to a more individualistic society (Greenfield, 2009) was expected to be reflected in the goals and beliefs that parents endorse in the socialization of adolescents' autonomous behavior.

Overall, findings reveal consistent similarities in beliefs regarding autonomy development between parents and adolescents and across socioeconomic groups. Participants endorse a multidimensional, complex view of autonomy that encompasses increasing degrees of self-direction. First, across generations, participants emphasize three interrelated dimensions, namely, self-sufficiency, decision making, and acting responsibly. These range from observable (e.g., behavioral) to internal (e.g., self) markers of autonomy and are consistent with those described in the literature (Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins, 2003). As participants elaborated on their examples of autonomy markers they highlighted more complex and evolved aspects of autonomy development. Beyond those of self-sufficiency and decision making, participants pointed to the self-regulative component (Noom et al., 2001) of autonomy achievement. For example, descriptions of “acting responsibly” reflect integration of different dimensions of autonomy (e.g., cognitive, behavioral).

Participants think of autonomy as a dynamic process that is achieved through interactions between parents and adolescents. Nonetheless, participants from different SES groups provided different examples of typical exchanges. At the same time, participants across age and SES highlighted the role of the affective quality of these exchanges for autonomy to develop optimally, in particular, trust building. The responsibility component of autonomy emerges in the trust-building process between parents and adolescents that supports autonomy achievement.

Although parents and adolescents across SES agree that autonomy is achieved gradually, differences between generations were also apparent. Parents focused in normative behavior whereas adolescents emphasized experimentation as a central component of autonomy achievement. The major difference between generations concerns mutual expectations about behavior regulation. Consistent with Laursen, Coy, and Collins (1998), adolescents in our study report conflict related to their willingness to experiment and decide on their own and their parents’ preventing these opportunities because of age or maturity considerations. The self-selected nature of our sample may have prevented the occurrence of responses reflecting more marked expressions of rebellion or intense conflict on the part of adolescents.

Parents and adolescents also differ in the markers of autonomous decision making; adolescents emphasized the locus and parent the outcome of the decision. For adolescents, a key marker of autonomy is that the agent of decision is the self, demarcating their personal domain. Alternatively, parents emphasized the degree of confidence adolescents feel about their decisions as a marker of autonomy.

Participants’ view of autonomy as a process is illustrated in their conception of a mutually reinforcing cycle (bidirectional influences) between trust

(parent) and responsibility (adolescent). In their words, responsibility means being accountable to others that trust you. Interestingly, adolescents' responses highlight the importance of the affective components of the parent-adolescent relationship for optimal autonomy development, in particular, trust and open communication. Adolescents acknowledge that parental support provides a safe context for exploration and validation in the process of autonomy achievement. This finding disconfirms the expectation that, inevitably, adolescents detach from parents and supports the idea of continuity in the quality of the parent-child relationship through adolescence (Collins & Steinberg, 2008).

Findings also suggest socioeconomic differences in parents' views of the role of authority and control in autonomy development. Parents from low SES voiced expectations for their children to conform to family rules and obligations stating themselves as legitimate authority figures for their children. Alternatively, high-SES parents did not state themselves as authorities. Rather, they emphasized the quality of communication as the means to exert influence on their children. This finding confirms those reported by Hoff, Laursen, and Tardif (2002) that compared with middle-SES, low-SES parents were more likely to demand compliance and to adopt a more authoritarian style with their children. If parental expectations for behavior are openly communicated or implied, they should relate to adolescent's behavior. Consistently, low-SES adolescents' conception of autonomy involves acting responsibly, thus generating a mutually reinforcing virtuous cycle of trust and responsibility.

Furthermore, parental responses suggest different cultural expectations within each socioeconomic group. Low-middle-SES parents express more willingness to enforce moral and conventional rules whereas high-SES parents tend to recognize their children's individuality. These differences may relate to their differential endorsement of an interdependent versus an autonomous model of self (Kagitcibasi, 2005). Alternatively, they could reflect strategies that low-SES families endorse to protect their children from potential dangers in their neighborhood (Jarrett, 1995).

Parental cognitions are affected by the particular cultural contexts in which parents find themselves as well as by the specific experiences they have had with their own caretakers (Grusec, Hastings, & Mammone, 1994). Our representation of socioeconomic context builds on Super and Harkness's (1986) concept of the developmental niche that captures the ways in which parents' and adolescents' exchanges are embedded in a set of sociocultural relationships that provide meaning to their interactions. Through development, individuals are selectively exposed to parts of the developmental niche, that is, to selected opportunities for experience and action. In our study, opportunities to manage chores, take care of younger siblings, and help out with

family chores are actively promoted by parents of low-SES children. Therefore, they attain increasing levels of self-sufficiency even before entering adolescence compared with their high-SES counterparts. Alternatively, high-SES parents stress the development of the self as an agent of decision. The latter suggests that different domains of autonomy are promoted within families of different SES. In a socioeconomic segregated society, affluent groups afford more opportunities to be agents of decision compared with low-SES groups that encounter more opportunities to conform (Cumsille et al., 2006). Thus, socialization goals and parenting ethnotheories reflect the demands of the ecocultural (i.e., socioeconomic) environment.

Low-middle-SES parents' accounts of autonomy granting frequently applied to daily-life situations and emphasized self-sufficiency (behavioral), whereas high-SES parents often focused on the emotional quality of the relationship with their children and emphasized self markers of autonomy, like decision-making (cognitive) component of autonomy. Likely, these differences reflect the way in which socioeconomic contexts call for different cultural practices or routine ways of doing things that optimize adaptation of families. Different practices may also reflect differences in ways parenting roles and relationships are represented and enacted within different families.

Parents of different SES conditions seem to hold different beliefs about the significance of their parenting behaviors. As these ideas guide parents' interpretations of behavior and motivate their practices with children (Cole, 1991), they are relevant to understanding the meaning of parent-adolescent interactions and the way these are instrumental to the socialization goals that parents prioritize. For example, low-SES parents believe their children are capable of assuming responsibility and likely the tangible experiences they provide to their adolescent children will be different from those of their high-SES counterparts. Parents from low-middle-SES report active promotion of self-sufficiency behaviors whereas high-SES parents focus on the quality of communication. The intensity with which parents from low-SES groups promote actions of self-sufficiency in their children and the extensiveness with which adolescents find opportunities to practice these behaviors probably relates to adolescents playing a more active role in their socialization. Overall, differences described above indicate that cultural models of parenting express different beliefs and values that inform socialization goals (Keller et al., 2006; Keller & Lamm, 2005).

Consistent with previous findings with adolescents (Cumsille et al., 2006, 2009; Milnitsky-Sapiro et al., 2006; Smetana, 2000), low-middle-SES parents pose a higher value on firm behavioral control and the legitimacy of

parental authority for autonomy granting than their high-SES counterparts. These differences in beliefs translate into different parental practices in the process of autonomy granting and associate with acceptance on the part of low-SES adolescents. Parents of low-middle-SES place greater value on authority and behavioral control for optimal autonomy development and, correspondingly, their adolescent children legitimize parental authority (Cumsille et al., 2006). Alternatively, high-SES parents place greater concern on care and risk prevention in the process of autonomy achievement. Their concerns about adolescents' at-risk behavior could be interpreted as a covert way of exerting control by parents.

The limitations of the study design call for caution in the generalization of results. First, participants were self-selected and represented a small group, and their views may not be representative of other groups of parents and adolescents. However, the goal of our study was to identify generational and SES differences that can be further studied in future research.

Second, the results and processes we hypothesized were not observed but inferred from participants' reports. However, we followed conventional methods of quality control in qualitative research (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006), such as triangulation of researchers and results as a way to maximize validity. At the same time, verbatim transcriptions allow the reader to judge the accuracy of interpretations.

Findings of our study suggest that parents from different socioeconomic condition may hold different theories or cultural models about what is optimal for autonomy development. This interpretation is based on the themes each group selected to describe examples of autonomy and the domains of autonomy each group valued. These differences deserve further investigation as they may reflect differences in implicit—taken for granted—ideas shared by members of a cultural group about the ways in which autonomy is promoted. At the same time, our results represent a starting point to address differences in views of autonomy across generations that maybe differentially affected by historical changes. Our results also inform interventions aimed to promote adolescent autonomy development through parent–adolescent interactions that integrate the different views of the participants and that consider the socioeconomic backgrounds in which they are embedded.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This study was funded by Fondo de Desarrollo Científico y Tecnológico, Fondecyt #1070852.

Note

1. Notation describes the number of focal group from which the quote was drawn and the paragraph number within which the quote is located.

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