

# Adolescent–Parent Relations in Asian Indian and Salvadoran Immigrant Families: A Cultural–Developmental Analysis of Autonomy, Authority, Conflict, and Cohesion

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From a cultural perspective, this study addressed the two developmental theories that adolescents want more autonomy and fewer parental rules than parents consider appropriate, and that discrepancy between adolescents and parents on views of autonomy and authority result in decreased cohesion and increased conflict. The study included 100 adolescent–parent dyads who were immigrants to the United States from El Salvador and India. While findings pointed to cross-cultural commonalities, such as autonomy seeking among adolescents, they also highlighted the importance of culture to different meanings of autonomy and the limits of the discrepancy thesis. The discussion calls for future scholarship to include concepts of salience to diverse groups such as family interdependence and appreciation for the parental immigrant experience.

Developmental psychology research addressing the relationship between adolescents and parents has frequently focused on adolescent autonomy, parental authority, and family conflict and cohesion. Two prominent and relatively long-standing theoretical claims have been put forth with regard to these concepts. Every major textbook on adolescent development discusses them. One is that adolescents wish for more autonomy and less parental authority than their parents are inclined to grant (Erikson, 1968; Smetana, 2005). The other is that this discrepancy between adolescents and parents on views of autonomy and authority diminishes cohesion and increases conflict (e.g., Cox, Brooks-Gunn, & Paley, 1999; Smetana, 2005).

Research pertaining to these two theories has focused heavily, albeit not exclusively, on middle-class European American families (Juang & Umaña-Taylor, 2012; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). In other cultural groups, however, the nature of adolescent development and adolescent–parent relationships may be partly or wholly different. As Suárez-Orozco, Bang, and Kim (2010, p. 250) have observed, “Theories of parent–child relationships ...

are limited by the fact that they were developed by Western-trained psychologists with the constricted lens of understanding that comes with that perspective.” The present aim was to address the two theories via a cultural approach. A well-established cultural psychology and anthropological method is to test a theory with universalistic claims through the study of one or a few cultural groups that differ in important ways from those used to develop the theory. If findings come out differently, they indicate the need for theory revision. If they support previous results, they help to build a robust case for generalizability—although not universality (Jensen & Chen, 2013). The present study included adolescent–parent dyads from Asian Indian and Salvadoran immigrant families in the United States. (We alphabetize the order in which we describe the cultures and groups included in the present study).

## RESEARCH FINDINGS ON AUTONOMY, AUTHORITY, CONFLICT, AND COHESION

### Authority and Autonomy

A substantial amount of research with European American adolescents has indicated that they seek to increase behavioral autonomy and limit parental authority (e.g., Smetana, 2005; Steinberg, 2001). Research also indicates that these findings generalize

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We are profoundly grateful to the immigrant adolescents and parents who took time out of their busy lives to be part of this research. We also thank Renata Cerqueira, Michelle Diaz, Jeanne Felter, Silvia Juarez, and Kirtana Tanuku for their research assistance. Finally, the first author wishes to acknowledge generous support from the Pew Charitable Trusts.

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to some other cultural groups, including African Americans (Smetana, 2000), some American immigrant adolescents (Fuligni, 1998), and adolescents in Chile and the Philippines (Darling, Cumsille, & Pena-Alampay, 2005). However, findings also indicate variation among adolescents from different groups. Asian American (Feldman & Quatman, 1988) and Chinese American adolescents (Fuligni, 1998) have later age expectations for autonomy than their European American peers.

Research on autonomy and authority has been conducted largely with samples of adolescents, rarely including parents as well. The limited available research with adolescent-parent dyads suggests that parents are more favorable of parental authority and less favorable of adolescent autonomy than their adolescents are. This discrepancy has been found among European Americans (Smetana, 1988), African Americans (Smetana, 2000), and Asian immigrant families in Canada and in the United States (Feldman & Quatman, 1988; Juang, Lerner, McKinney, & von Eye, 1999; Kwak & Berry, 2001).

However, cultural studies have also pointed to diversity. Research comparing Canadian immigrant families (merging adolescents' and parents' scores) has indicated that Vietnamese, Asian Indian, and Korean groups scored higher on endorsement of parental authority and lower on approval of adolescent autonomy, as compared to Anglo Celtic families (Kwak & Berry, 2001). Other studies have reported later expectations of autonomy for Asian American families compared with European American ones (Feldman & Quatman, 1988), and for Asian families in Hong Kong compared with families of European origin in Hong Kong (Stewart et al., 1998).

In sum, the well-established finding that European American adolescents desire increased autonomy and decreased parental authority generalizes to some other cultural groups. More cultural research, however, is clearly needed to assess the extent of generalizability, and to better understand the role of culture in regard to these concepts.

### **Conflict and Cohesion**

There has been little research investigating the extent of discrepancy between adolescents' and parents' perceptions of conflict and cohesion. Studies with European Americans have found that adolescents and parents do not differ on conflict, but that adolescents report less cohesion than their parents do (Carlson, Cooper, & Spradling, 1991; Ohannesian, Lerner, Lerner, & von Eye, 2000). Findings from other cultural groups provide as yet

an ambiguous picture. Smetana, Daddis, and Chuang (1994) found that mothers from middle-class African American families reported more conflict than did their adolescents. However, Dixon, Graber, and Brooks-Gunn (2008) found that African American, European American, and Latina American mothers reported less conflict than did their preadolescent daughters.

Research comparing cultural groups is also sparse and inconclusive. Asian Indian immigrant adolescents and parents have been found to report more frequent and intense conflicts, as compared to European Americans (Farver, Xu, Bhadha, Narang, & Lieber, 2007). A comparison of U.S. adolescents of Mexican, Chinese, Filipino, and European origin, however, showed no group differences on levels of conflict and cohesion (Fuligni, 1998). Some researchers have suggested that the inconsistent findings indicate that cultural groups differ on family dynamics (Suárez-Orozco & Carhill, 2008).

As indicated previously, it has been theorized that discrepancies between adolescents' and parents' views on authority and autonomy predict conflict and cohesion. Nevertheless, very few studies have examined this proposed connection. In a study with African American and European American families, high discrepancy between adolescents and mothers on autonomy was positively related to mothers' reports of conflict and negatively related to adolescents' reports of cohesion (Holmbeck & O'Donnell, 1991). A study that compared Asian American adolescents' reports for themselves and their parents found that low discrepancy on autonomy predicted cohesion (Juang et al., 1999). It seems clear that more cultural research is warranted.

### **ADDING A CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE**

Following longstanding cultural theory, culture is defined here as the key beliefs, values, and behaviors shared by members of a community (Schlegel & Hewlett, 2011). Cultures may be defined by factors such as nationality, religion, and/or ethnicity. The crux of it, however, is shared ideology and behavior. While cultures exhibit coherency, they also show heterogeneity among individuals and change over time. Next, we turn to the salient cultural characteristics of the two immigrant groups included here, Asian Indians and Salvadorans.

Indian culture emphasizes hierarchy based on age, and in particular respect for parents and elders is underscored (Chaudary & Sharma, 2012). However, while parents expect compliance and

respect from adolescents, warmth and affection have also been found to be highly valued in Indian and Indian immigrant families (Kapadia, 2008). A distinctive feature of Indian cultural beliefs is the idea that parents, especially fathers, are to be regarded by children as a god would be regarded by a devotee. As Hindu religion has many gods, this idea is not analogous to a father being "God" in a Judeo-Christian sense. Nevertheless, the idea conveys the authority of parents within the family. Families of Asian Indian background in the United States mostly maintain these cultural beliefs and behaviors, but they are also different from families in India. For example, they are less likely to live in extended families, and they place a particularly strong value on education (Kapadia, 2008).

Salvadoran culture stresses "familismo," which entails strong orientation and commitment to the immediate and extended family. Research has indicated that Salvadoran identity is strongly tied to family identity (Umaña-Taylor & Fine, 2001). Within the family, children are expected to respect their parents, and husbands and sons often have authority over female members (Gorkin, Pineda, & Leal, 2000). The emphasis on family is situated within a broader collectivism. Relations among friends, coworkers, and family members presume interdependence, in which individuals receive support from the group. Among Salvadoran immigrant families in the United States, this interdependence in part finds expression in large amounts of remittances to family members who remain in El Salvador (Mahler, 2005). Also, Catholicism remains a powerful source of religious and cultural meaning in El Salvador, and the church is one of the principal institutions buttressing the Salvadoran immigrant community in the United States (Mahler, 2005).

The present inclusion of Asian Indian and Salvadoran immigrant families was driven by several considerations. First, research on the two theories in question has been conducted largely with European American families. As discussed, there is a need to turn to groups that are culturally diverse. As should be clear, families of Asian Indian and Salvadoran backgrounds have beliefs and behaviors that in important ways differ from those common among middle-class European American families, including the emphasis on collectivism, hierarchy within the family, and compliance with parents. Indian and Salvadoran cultures are also distinct from one another as evidenced for example in their religions, and how religious beliefs and practices intersect with family roles. Furthermore, immigrants from India and El Salvador have arrived in the United

States under notably different circumstances and with access to markedly different resources. According to the 2006–2010 American Community Survey, 70.7% of Asian Indian immigrants (aged 25 years or older) had a college or postgraduate degree and their per capita income was \$37,931. The comparable figures for Salvadorans were 7.8% and \$15,416 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a). In addition, Salvadorans initially fled to the United States to escape a civil war in the 1980s, whereas Asian Indian immigrants were attracted by employment opportunities (Migration Policy Institute, 2010). The inclusion of groups that differ notably not only from European Americans but also from one another makes for a stronger cultural test of the theories on adolescent–parents family relations. At the same time, as described previously, if findings for both groups were to replicate previous ones, this would bolster existing developmental theory.

The two groups included in the present study are especially relevant to the current context of immigration in American society. Eighty percent of immigrants to the United States over the last four decades have arrived from Latin America and Asia; and immigrants from El Salvador and India constitute the second largest populations from Latin America and Asia, respectively (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b).

It is important to note that this study was not designed to parse the variables that differentiate the two cultural groups. Asian Indian and Salvadoran immigrant groups clearly differ on a cluster of characteristics. Here, the two groups are conceptualized as distinct cultural groups. The task of examining the relative contribution of elements of the cluster (e.g., between religion and socioeconomic status [SES]) was not undertaken here. Similarly, the role of gender (e.g., as a variable in differentiating types of adolescent–parent dyads) was not examined. Additional parsing of variables would potentially come after the goal undertaken here of examining the role of culture as whole, or it would need to be premised on different theoretical justifications.

Whereas much of the previous research has included only adolescents (obtaining data about parents from adolescents), here dyads were included because adolescents and parents sometimes perceive their relationship in divergent ways (Larson & Richards, 1994). Moreover, dyadic research is important from a cultural perspective. Among immigrant families (and in a rapidly globalizing world in general), the cultural beliefs and behaviors of adolescents may change more rapidly

than those of their parents (Jensen, 2011). While the present Asian Indian and Salvadoran adolescents undoubtedly share their parents' cultural background in a variety of ways, they also very well may be developing somewhat different sets of cultural beliefs and behaviors.

### HYPOTHESES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The two long-standing and universalistic theoretical claims that were put to the present cultural test would hypothesize that: (1) Both Asian Indian and Salvadoran adolescents will report lower approval of parental authority and earlier age expectations for behavioral autonomy, compared to their parents. (2) Discrepancies between adolescents and parents on authority and autonomy will predict less cohesion and more conflict. Three other research questions, for which there are too few previous findings to propose specific hypotheses, also guided analyses: (1) To what extent do adolescents and parents within each of the cultural groups differ on perceptions of conflict and cohesion? (2) To what extent are Asian Indian and Salvadoran adolescents similar or different on views of authority, autonomy, conflict, and cohesion? (3) To what extent are there family dynamics specific to each cultural group as to how adolescent-parent discrepancies on autonomy and authority correlate with cohesion and conflict?

### METHOD

#### Participants and Procedures

The study included 100 adolescent-parent dyads, evenly divided between US immigrants of Asian Indian and Salvadoran backgrounds. Adolescents ranged in age from 14 to 18 years, with no significant difference between groups ( $M_{\text{Indian}} = 15.86$ ,  $SD = 1.38$ ;  $M_{\text{Salvadoran}} = 15.62$ ,  $SD = 1.53$ ). Parents' ages ranged from 33 to 58 years, also with no significant difference between groups ( $M_{\text{Indian}} = 45.22$ ,  $SD = 4.86$ ,  $M_{\text{Salvadoran}} = 43.28$ ,  $SD = 5.80$ ). Each adolescent was paired with a mother or a father. Among Asian Indian families, there were 40 mother-adolescent (15 mother-son, 25 mother-daughter) and 10 father-adolescent (six father-son, four father-daughter) dyads. Among Salvadorans, there were 39 mother-adolescent (18 mother-son, 21 mother-daughter) and 11 father-adolescent (six father-son, five father-daughter) dyads. Thus, the Asian Indian and Salvadoran adolescent groups had fairly even gender distributions with girls

accounting for 58% and 52% of the respective groups. As with many previous studies, more mothers than fathers volunteered. Mother accounted for 80% of Asian Indian parents and 78% of Salvadorans.

Parents were first-generation immigrants (arrived in the United States in their late teens or thereafter), and adolescents were second-generation immigrants (born in the United States or arrived prior to elementary school). The groups did not differ significantly on the number of years that adolescents ( $M_{\text{Indian}} = 14.30$ ,  $SD = 2.97$ ,  $M_{\text{Salvadoran}} = 15.08$ ,  $SD = 2.43$ ) and parents ( $M_{\text{Indian}} = 18.52$ ,  $SD = 5.65$ ,  $M_{\text{Salvadoran}} = 19.58$ ,  $SD = 4.02$ ) had been in the United States.

As expected, Asian Indian parents ( $M = 6.39$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ) reported higher levels of education than Salvadoran parents ( $M = 3.89$ ,  $SD = 1.4$ ),  $t(93) = 9.86$ ,  $p < .001$  (7-point scale: 1 = some elementary/junior high school, 7 = postgraduate education). Asian Indians ( $M = 4.43$ ,  $SD = 1.2$ ) also had higher levels of family income than Salvadorans ( $M = 2.90$ ,  $SD = 0.82$ ),  $t(96) = 7.26$ ,  $p < .001$  (6-point scale: 1 = less than \$15,000, 6 = more than \$199,999). These SES differences were controlled for in statistical analyses.

Participants resided in an East Coast metropolitan area. To sample participants from culturally cohesive communities, they were recruited through local religious institutions (Catholic churches and Hindu temples) followed by snowballing. Of all families contacted, 68% agreed to participate. This quite high response rate may attest to participants forming part of cohesive communities where participation by one family served as endorsement for another family, and so on. The response rate may also reflect that the research team included members of similar cultural backgrounds as the participants. This particularly aided in establishing trust among Salvadorans, where recruitment of families required lengthy efforts.

Parents provided written informed consent on behalf of themselves and their adolescents (when younger than 18 years of age). Adolescents who were younger than 18 gave oral assent, and the few adolescents who had turned 18 gave written consent. Next, participants completed questionnaires pertaining to family values and relationships. All adolescents and Asian Indian parents opted to complete questionnaires in English (all were fluent). Salvadoran parents preferred to fill out the Spanish version of the questionnaires. Salvadoran researchers who were fluent in both languages had back-translated the questionnaires.

Researchers who administered the questionnaires to Salvadoran participants were of Salvadoran background and fluent in both English and Spanish. Each participant received \$25.

## Measures

**Endorsement of parental authority.** The legitimacy of parental authority was assessed based on the measure that Fuligni (1998) adapted from Smetana (1988). Participants indicated if it is acceptable for parents to make rules about 14 behaviors (e.g., dating, homework, chores) by answering "OK" or "Not OK." Each participant's score was computed by summing the number of items to which the answer was "OK." Cronbach's  $\alpha$ s: Indian adolescents = .75, Indian parents = .88, Salvadoran adolescents = .72, Salvadoran parents = .86.

**Expectations for behavioral autonomy.** Behavioral autonomy was assessed based on the questionnaire from Feldman and Quatman (1988), with items adapted by Fuligni (1998). It measures the age at which an adolescent is or will be allowed to engage in behaviors such as "going to parties at night," "going out on dates," and "choosing friends." There were 13 items, which are rated on a 5-point scale with 1 = *before 14 years old* to 5 = *never to be allowed*. Cronbach's  $\alpha$ s: Indian adolescents = .78, Indian parents = .88, Salvadoran adolescents = .79, Salvadoran parents = .88.

**Cohesion.** The cohesion scale (from FACES II by Olson, Spenkle, & Russell, 1979) measures adolescents' and parents' feelings about the closeness of their relationships (e.g., "My father and I feel very close to each other") and how frequently they do things together (e.g., "My adolescent and I do things together"). The 10 items are rated on a 5-point continuum ranging from 1 = *almost never* to 5 = *almost always*. Higher scores indicate more cohesion. Cronbach's  $\alpha$ s: Indian adolescents = .83, Indian parents = .76, Salvadoran adolescents = .86, Salvadoran parents = .89.

**Conflict.** The Issues Checklist (IC; Prinz, Foster, Kent, & O'Leary, 1979; Robin & Foster, 1984) was used to measure conflict. The scale asks whether the adolescent and parent discussed any of 12 topics within the past 2 weeks (e.g., chores, spending money, dressing, cursing). The first part of the scale is a *yes* or *no* scale. In that regard, it measures the frequency of discussions. The second part measures the intensity of each discussion on

a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = *very calm* to 5 = *very angry*. Previous studies have computed conflict in terms of the number of discussions that include any anger (scores equal to or >2), and this approach was used here. Cronbach's  $\alpha$ s: Indian adolescents = .64, Indian parents = .78, Salvadoran adolescents = .79, Salvadoran parents = .92.

## RESULTS

### Analyses Plan

To compare adolescents and parents (within dyads) on authority, autonomy, conflict, and cohesion (Hypothesis 1 and Question 1 above), repeated measures analyses of variance (ANOVAs) among Asian Indian families and among Salvadoran families were conducted. To test for cultural group differences on the variables (Question 2), univariate analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs) among adolescents and among adults were carried out with SES as a covariate. SES was a composite measure of standardized scores for parental education and family income. (There were no significant SES interactions with dependent variables).

This analysis plan was followed in lieu of conducting mixed design ANCOVAs, which would have allowed for simultaneous comparisons of dyads (adolescents and parents) and cultural groups. However, as Gilmore (2007) has observed, entering a covariate (i.e., SES) into such an analysis will inappropriately adjust for the covariate across dyads for the whole sample and yield misleading results. The present analysis plan also follows the recommendation by several editions of SPSS Knowledgebase (2010).

To examine associations of dyadic discrepancies on authority and autonomy with cohesion and conflict (Hypothesis 2), multiple regression analyses were conducted. They were conducted separately for the cultural group to determine whether there were family dynamics specific to each group (Question 3). To take into account whether the adolescent or parent in a dyad had the higher score, discrepancy scores were treated as a piecewise linear function and two discrepancy variables were created (Wu & Chao, 2005). One was for dyads where parents scored higher, and the other was where adolescents scored higher.

### Comparisons Within Dyads and Across Cultures

Table 1 shows the findings for dyadic comparisons, which were the same for each cultural group. Com-

pared with adolescents, parents endorsed authority significantly more, had significantly later age expectations for autonomy, and reported significantly more cohesion. Adolescents and parents did not differ significantly on conflict.

Comparisons of parents across cultural groups, showed that Asian Indians ( $M = 3.76$ ;  $SD = 0.11$ ) had significantly later age expectations for autonomy than Salvadorans ( $M = 3.31$ ;  $SD = 0.11$ ),  $F(1, 91) = 6.52$ ,  $p = .012$ ,  $\eta^2 = .067$ . There was also a trend with Salvadoran parents ( $M = 12.38$ ;  $SD = 0.43$ ) scoring higher than Asian Indian parents ( $M = 11.14$ ;  $SD = 0.41$ ) on parental authority,  $F(1, 91) = 3.23$ ,  $p = .076$ ,  $\eta^2 = .034$ . Comparisons of adolescents showed no significant cultural differences. There was a trend with Asian Indians ( $M = 3.26$ ;  $SD = 0.11$ ) having later expectations for autonomy than their Salvadoran peers ( $M = 2.93$ ;  $SD = 0.12$ ),  $F(1, 91) = 2.98$ ,  $p = .088$ ,  $\eta^2 = .032$ .

### Correlations Among Variables in Families

Pearson-product moment correlations were used to examine relations among variables within each cultural group. The top half of Table 2 shows results for Asian Indians. For adolescents, approval of authority correlated positively with cohesion. For parents, in contrast, approval of authority correlated positively with conflict. Correlations between adolescents' and parents' scores showed that adolescents' approval of authority was positively linked to parents' expectations of autonomy at a later age. Adolescents' and parents' reports of cohesion correlated positively, and adolescents' score on cohesion was positively linked to parental approval of autonomy at a later age.

The bottom half of Table 2 shows correlations for Salvadorans. Among adolescents, approval of authority and later autonomy expectations correlated positively, and higher scores on conflict correlated negatively with cohesion and authority. Among parents, cohesion and conflict were negatively correlated. Adolescents' scores on authority, autonomy, and cohesion correlated positively with parents' scores for the same respective variables. Adolescents' later autonomy expectations correlated positively with parent's approval of authority. Adolescents' scores on conflict were negatively related to parents' approval of authority. Finally, there were negative correlations between adolescents' scores on conflict and parents' scores on cohesion, and vice versa between adolescents' scores on cohesion and parents' scores on conflict.

### Associations of Discrepancies on Authority and Autonomy With Cohesion and Conflict

First, univariate analyses of variance with SES as a covariate (ANCOVA) were conducted to determine whether the cultural groups differed on discrepancy scores for autonomy and authority. For the variable where parents endorsed authority more than adolescents, there was significantly more discrepancy in Salvadoran dyads ( $M = 4.50$ ;  $SD = 0.57$ ) than Asian Indian ones ( $M = 2.52$ ;  $SD = 0.54$ ),  $F(1, 91) = 4.77$ ,  $p = .034$ ,  $\eta^2 = .050$ .

Next, regression analyses were conducted for each cultural group to examine associations of dyadic discrepancy on autonomy and authority with cohesion and conflict. As seen in Table 3, when Asian Indian parents endorsed parental authority more than adolescents, discrepancy was positively associated with parent-reported conflict

TABLE 1  
Repeated Measures Analyses of Variance for Family Relationship Variables in Asian Indian and Salvadoran Families

	<i>n</i>	<i>Adolescents</i>		<i>Parents</i>		<i>p</i>	$\eta^2$
		<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>95% CI</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>95% CI</i>		
Asian Indian families							
Parental authority	50	8.82 (0.40)	8.02, 9.61	11.34 (0.30)	10.74, 11.94	<.001	.36
Behavioral autonomy	50	3.25 (0.09)	3.08, 3.42	3.74 (0.08)	3.59, 3.90	<.001	.32
Cohesion	50	3.56 (0.10)	3.37, 3.76	3.88 (0.08)	3.72, 4.04	.001	.20
Conflict	38	3.55 (0.39)	2.77, 4.34	4.26 (0.41)	3.43, 5.09	.217	.04
Salvadoran families							
Parental authority	50	8.32 (0.54)	7.24, 9.40	11.98 (0.42)	11.44, 12.82	<.001	.50
Behavioral autonomy	50	2.90 (0.10)	2.70, 3.10	3.36 (0.09)	3.18, 3.55	<.001	.35
Cohesion	50	3.46 (0.11)	3.24, 3.69	3.78 (0.11)	3.56, 4.00	.001	.19
Conflict	32	4.09 (0.37)	3.33, 4.86	4.28 (0.48)	3.31, 5.25	.708	.00

Note. CI = confidence interval.

TABLE 2  
Correlations Among Family Relationships Variables for Asian Indian and Salvadoran Families

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Asian Indian families							
1. A: parental authority							
2. P: parental authority	.07						
3. A: behavioral autonomy	.20	.12					
4. P: behavioral autonomy	.38**	.04	.20				
5. A: conflict	-.07	-.16	-.00	-.12			
6. P: conflict	.09	.57***	.04	-.11	-.00		
7. A: cohesion	.45***	-.20	-.08	.29*	-.22	-.04	
8. P: cohesion	.01	-.12	-.12	-.01	.01	-.20	.52***
Salvadoran families							
1. A: parental authority							
2. P: parental authority	.43**						
3. A: behavioral autonomy	.60***	.33*					
4. P: behavioral autonomy	.24 <sup>†</sup>	.22	.55***				
5. A: conflict	-.40*	-.53**	-.09	.06			
6. P: conflict	-.21	-.12	-.31 <sup>†</sup>	-.11	.33 <sup>†</sup>		
7. A: cohesion	.18	.06	.15	.04	-.37*	-.37*	
8. P: cohesion	.14	.07	.16	.19	-.39*	-.39*	.65***

Note. A = adolescent-reported; P = parent-reported.

<sup>†</sup> $p < .10$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

TABLE 3  
Regressions for Associations of Dyadic Discrepancies on Authority and Autonomy With Cohesion and Conflict Among Asian Indian Families

	A: Cohesion			P: Cohesion			A: Conflict			P: Conflict		
	B	SEB	$\beta$	B	SEB	$\beta$	B	SEB	$\beta$	B	SEB	$\beta$
Discrepancy on authority												
A > P	-.08	.08	-.12	-.03	.08	-.06	-.25	.34	-.12	-.25	.46	-.09
P > A	-.10	.03	-.40**	-.01	.03	-.03	.00	.13	.00	.39	.17	.36*
Discrepancy on autonomy												
A > P	.51	.39	.19	.47	.27	.21	-1.98	1.78	-.19	-3.65	1.72	-.37*
P > A	.10	.17	.09	-.08	.17	-.08	.15	.69	.04	1.03	.76	.23
	$R^2 = .30$			$R^2 = .04$			$R^2 = .04$			$R^2 = .25$		
	Adj $R^2 = .24$			Adj $R^2 = -.04$			Adj $R^2 = -.05$			Adj $R^2 = .17$		

Note. A = adolescent-reported; P = parent-reported; A > P = adolescents scored higher than parents; P > A = parents scored higher than adolescents.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

and negatively associated with adolescent-reported cohesion. When adolescents had later expectations for autonomy than parents, discrepancy was negatively associated parent-reported conflict. For Salvadoran families, the regression models did not yield significant results.

## DISCUSSION

The results speak to the value of adding a cultural perspective to the developmental one. Below we

discuss how results show strengths and limitations of the developmental theories presently tested, and point to specific future research directions of a more cultural nature. We also provide representative quotes from interviews with participants to let their voices amplify our argument. All participants took part in one-on-one, semi structured interviews. Here, we draw on findings from inductive language analyses focused on the extent and nature of cohesion and conflict in the adolescent-parent relationship.

### Adding Cultural Meaning to Concepts

Akin to previous findings, the present study indicated that parents considered their authority to be more legitimate than did adolescents, and parents wished to grant autonomy to their adolescents at a later age than the adolescents desired. As the present findings come from two groups that in many ways are distinct from previous samples, they indicate that this kind of discrepancy exists more broadly. In short, they strengthen the argument for generalizability.

As described, scholars have interpreted the discrepancy as a developmental phenomenon, in which adolescents need to strive for autonomy, whereas parents are concerned with maintaining order in the family and protecting their children from harm. The present findings, however, do not support a blanket universalistic theory. One rather obvious reason is that the discrepancy may not exist in cultural groups yet to be studied. In interviews, the Asian Indian participants often highlighted that “in India it is totally different than America,” as an adolescent (#012-006) averred when explaining how she had come to have different expectations about dating and other activities involving both girls and boys than her parents. A father (#023-012) echoed this view while also expressing common parental resistance to some of the ways of his new country: “dating, driving, having ears pierced, or hairstyle—see, unfortunately, the thing is, in this country no one asks you.” An alternative interpretation of the present discrepancy finding, then, is that it reflects dissonant acculturation, with parents remaining closer to traditions in their country of origin and adolescents having assimilated more to some norms in the United States (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Future research with cultural groups that have less exposure to American or western norms is needed to know just how widespread the discrepancy between adolescents and parents is.

Delving deeper, the present findings also speak to different cultural meanings of autonomy and authority. To explain, we will continue to focus on the Asian Indian participants. Asian Indians have been found to score lower on autonomy than European Canadians (Kwak & Berry, 2001), and here, they scored lower than the Salvadorans (a trend for adolescents). About half of the items on the autonomy scale pertain to dating and unsupervised activities that might involve both girls and boys. In India, where decisions about whom to marry are typically made by families rather than individuals, these kinds of behaviors are restricted (Saraswathi, Mistry,

& Dutta, 2011). Among Asian Indian immigrants, family input about dating and choice of spouse remains very common (Medora, Larson, Hortascu, & Dave, 2002). On the present questionnaires, the majority of Asian Indian parents in fact indicated that they did not expect their adolescent to make autonomous decisions about dating at any age.

It is important to understand that this cultural understanding of dating, mixed-sex relations, and marriage is also tied to an indigenous understanding of stages of development. In the Hindu Indian conception of the life course, the period from about 7 years until marriage, termed *brahmacharya*, is set aside for learning adult work and household skills (Saraswathi et al., 2011). In interviews with the present Asian Indian adolescents and parents, this entire cultural worldview was repeatedly expressed. A mother (#035-018) put it succinctly when asked if a 15-year-old adolescent should be permitted to date: “I probably wouldn’t [allow it] at all because at that age they need to concentrate on their education.” Survey questions about autonomy and authority inevitably pertain to particular behaviors. As noted, the autonomy scale pertains to behaviors such as “go out on dates” and “go on an overnight trip with both male and female friends, without supervision.” The parental authority scale addresses behaviors such as dating, doing well in school, and completing homework. But cultural groups vary not only on the meanings they give to a behavior (e.g., dating), but also on how they understand behaviors to be connected (e.g., dating and education). It seems clear that the standard measures of autonomy and authority assess behaviors that have markedly different meaning to Asian Indians—and probably other cultural groups too—than to the samples for which they were originally developed.

The importance of cultural meaning for the concepts of autonomy and authority also extends from behavior to identity. The standard measures emphasize individual decision-making. They ask if an adolescent will be allowed to engage in behaviors independent of parental rules, or irrespective of parental disapproval (e.g., “Choose his/her own friends even if you disapprove”). While adolescents in this study differed significantly from their parents on scores of autonomy and authority, it is not as clear that they understood decision making in such an individualized way. An Asian Indian adolescent (#036-018) who strongly endorsed dating exemplifies an alternative view. In contrast to her mother who was quoted above, she said about dating: “I mean it’s not wrong (laughter). There’s nothing



wrong with it." Nonetheless as this adolescent elaborated, it became clear that she did not frame a decision about dating as an adolescent's versus a parent's choice. She spoke of many considerations going into the decision, including the maturity of the adolescent, whether parents like the dating partner, and the extent to which the adolescent listens to the parents. When finally asked who—the adolescent or the parent—should decide about dating, she refuted the premise of the question: "They *both* have a say in it." This suggests a cultural conception of identity that is interdependent, such that some decisions are reached in more of a collective than individual way (see also Kapadia & Bhangoo, in press). In recent years, cultural psychology theory has pointed to the need to add an interdependent notion of self to the independent self that is common in Western psychological theory (Kağitçibasi, 2013; Kağitçibasi & Yalin, in press).

In sum, the present findings indicate a need for future research to examine qualitatively how cultural groups understand common adolescent behaviors, and how adolescents and parents reach decisions individually and collectively. This is needed in order to assess the ecological validity of concepts and measures of autonomy and authority, and their usefulness in predicting family conflict and cohesion.

### Adding Cultural Concepts to Models

The present findings lend some support to the theory that discrepancy between adolescents and parents on authority results in decreased cohesion and increased conflict. For Asian Indian families, discrepancy on authority was linked to adolescents reporting diminished cohesion and parents reporting increased conflict. A longitudinal study would be required to know the direction of the linkage.

The model predicting conflict and cohesion from discrepancies on autonomy found little support here. It could be the case that even though the adolescents had earlier age expectations as compared to their parents, the topics tapped in the behavioral autonomy scale have not yet become sources of family discussion or conflict. More than half of the adolescents reported later expectations for autonomy than their current age (mean of 16 years). However, this also suggests that autonomy is not a concept of prime importance among adolescents in the present cultural groups, and hence also not a good predictor variable.

We would suggest that future research identify concepts of high salience to the cultural groups in

question in order to build predictive theory. In other areas such as mental health and resilience, new models are emphasizing the importance of culturally relevant concepts (Berkel et al., 2010). To elaborate in regards to family relations, we will now turn to the Salvadoran families for whom the regression models did not yield any significant results.

In interviews, Salvadoran parents and adolescents often brought up the importance of commitment to the family. Here are two responses by adolescents who were asked what makes them feel close to their parents: "I have the values that they've given me. Like family values, they've given me that" (#118-119), and "I spend a lot more time with my parents than I do with friends. I have my friend time. [But] my family time ... just brings everybody so much closer" (#112-106). As discussed in the introduction, familismo is a key cultural concept to Salvadorans. The interviews reflected this in regards to both beliefs and behaviors.

As also described at the outset, Salvadoran immigrants may express familismo through remittances (Mahler, 2005). Here, the interviews suggested another expression of familismo that may be characteristic of Salvadorans who have immigrated. Adolescents and parents often spoke of how important it is that adolescents appreciate the struggle of parents on their behalf. A father (#128-114) said, "we, as immigrants, have suffered in coming over here. And we communicate to our children that we have suffered because they start feeling the love, and [they] learn what the parents have done so that they are here now." And the adolescents seemed to have learned. Giving voice to a common explanation of why she was close to her parents, an adolescent (#129-115) stated, "we can talk to each other. Like what happened when they were over there, and how it's different from what I'm living now. Like you can appreciate them more, seeing that I have a better life." Salvadoran parents escaped a brutal civil war, and to their families—more than some other immigrant families—this history is part of family relations. The present quantitative findings and interview quotes suggest that a useful theoretical model predicting cohesion for Salvadoran immigrant families would include emic concepts of familismo and appreciation for parents' struggle.

### LIMITATIONS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The present study had limitations. Immigrant generation status and age group covaried. Due to the

immigration histories of the present populations, such covariation is common and not easy to disentangle. Also, the present cultural groups (like all cultural groups) are characterized by clusters of characteristics that covary (García Coll et al., 1996). Some of these characteristics also cannot easily be disentangled (e.g., ethnicity and religion), whereas others could be (e.g., SES and nationality).

A larger dyadic study could also take gender into account. Studies that include adolescent girls and boys as well as mothers and fathers are exceedingly rare in regards to the present variables. Studies with European Americans suggest that gender impacts perceptions of cohesion and conflict (Holmbeck & O'Donnell, 1991). We would recommend that future studies take gender into account because conceptions of gender are culturally shaped (Kwak, 2003), and the present study highlights the importance of culture.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the present study points to the fruitfulness of adding a cultural perspective to the developmental one. As Raffaelli and colleagues have observed, cultural research strengthens "all developmental research" (Raffaelli, Carlo, Carranza, & Gonzales-Kruger, 2005, p. 30). Bridging the perspectives is important for the sake of valid theory, breadth of empirical knowledge, and success of potential applications (Guerra, Graham, & Tolan, 2011; Jensen, 2012, in press a,b). Scholarship and applied practices in regards to the relationship between adolescents and parents would benefit from research that casts a wider conceptual net than the hitherto prevalent focus on autonomy and authority. New work would be welcome that pays attention to the emic meanings of behaviors that are salient to adolescents and their parents.

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