

**Parenting Style, Legitimacy of
Parental Authority, and
Adolescents' Willingness to
Share Information with their
Parents:**

Why Do Adolescents Lie?

**Nancy Darling
Patricio Cumsillo**

The Pennsylvania State University

Bonnie Dowdy

Dickinson College

Introduction:

- ! Strategic Disclosure: Is lying always a bad thing?
- ! Does strategic disclosure matter?
 - " Parental monitoring of adolescent behavior depends on adolescents' willingness to share information.

Questions:

- ! How commonly do adolescents keep information from their parents?
- ! Who chooses different strategies for disclosing information?
- ! Why do adolescents choose the strategies they do?
- ! Are different adolescents' choices motivated by different reasons?

Methods:

- ! 83 8th graders completed an interview and two surveys
 - " European-American, socioeconomically diverse

- ! Measures:
 - " Parenting Style: The PSI-II (Darling & Toyakawa, 1997) measured two dimensions of maternal parenting style:
 - responsiveness (5 items, " α " = .82)
 - demandingness (5 items, " α " = .82)

 - " Legitimacy of Parental Authority: Students were asked whether their parents had the right to set rules about each of 20 issues.
 - Global legitimacy: Proportion of items students indicated their parents had a right to set rules about.

 - Specific legitimacy: Did student indicate their parents had a right to set rules about this particular issue?

! Strategic Disclosure: Adolescents indicated agreement with parents about each issue using a card sort, then sorted the cards they disagreed with their parents about according to how they would respond if the issue came up and why they would respond that way.

" Strategy Choice: Issues of disagreement were sorted according to what adolescents thought they would do if the issue came up with their parents:

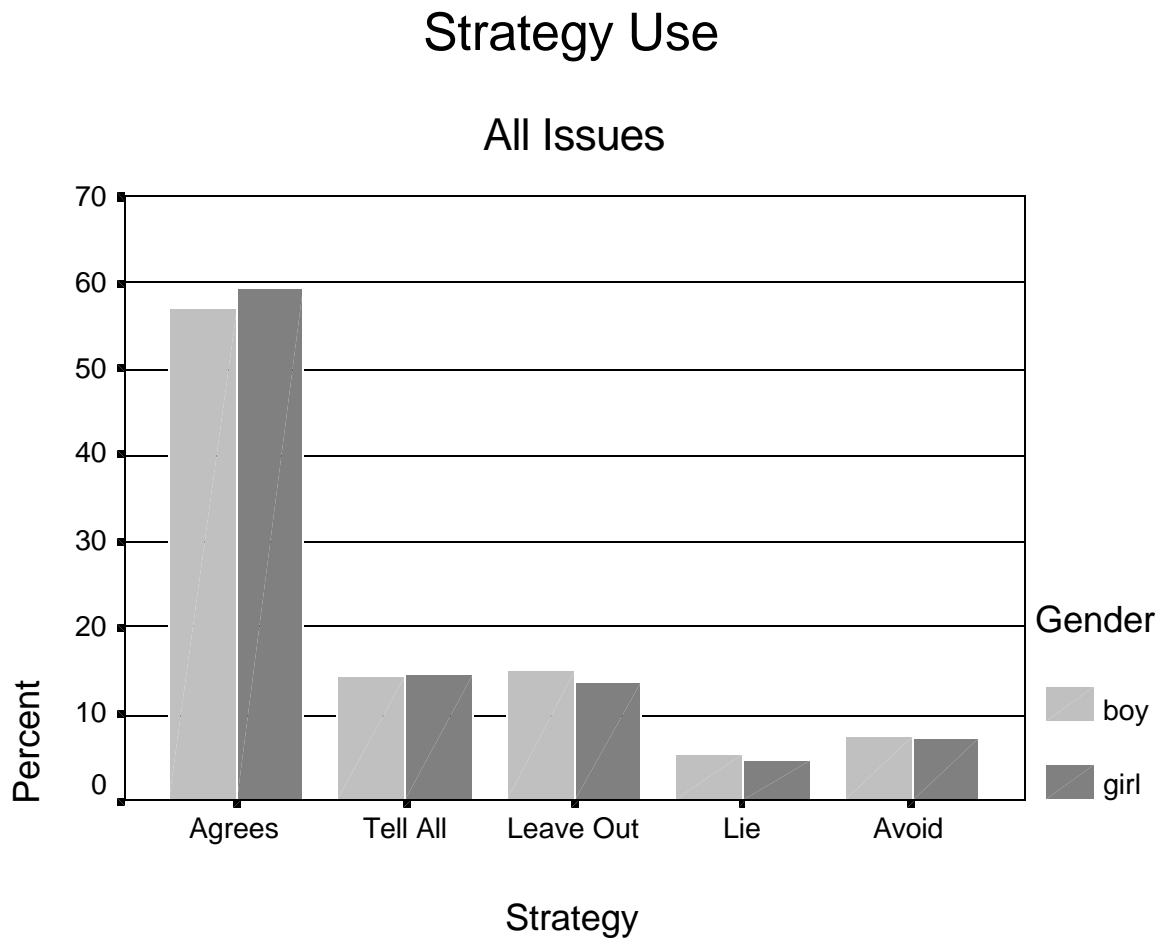
- Tell the parent
- Leave out some details the parents would want to know
- Avoid the issue
- Lie

Plan of Analysis:

- ! Predict choice of strategy and motivations from:
 - " Sex of the adolescent
 - " Global characteristics of the parent:child relationship:
 - responsiveness
 - demandingness
 - global legitimacy
 - " Particular characteristics of the issue:
 - adolescents' belief in the parents' right to set rules about this issue

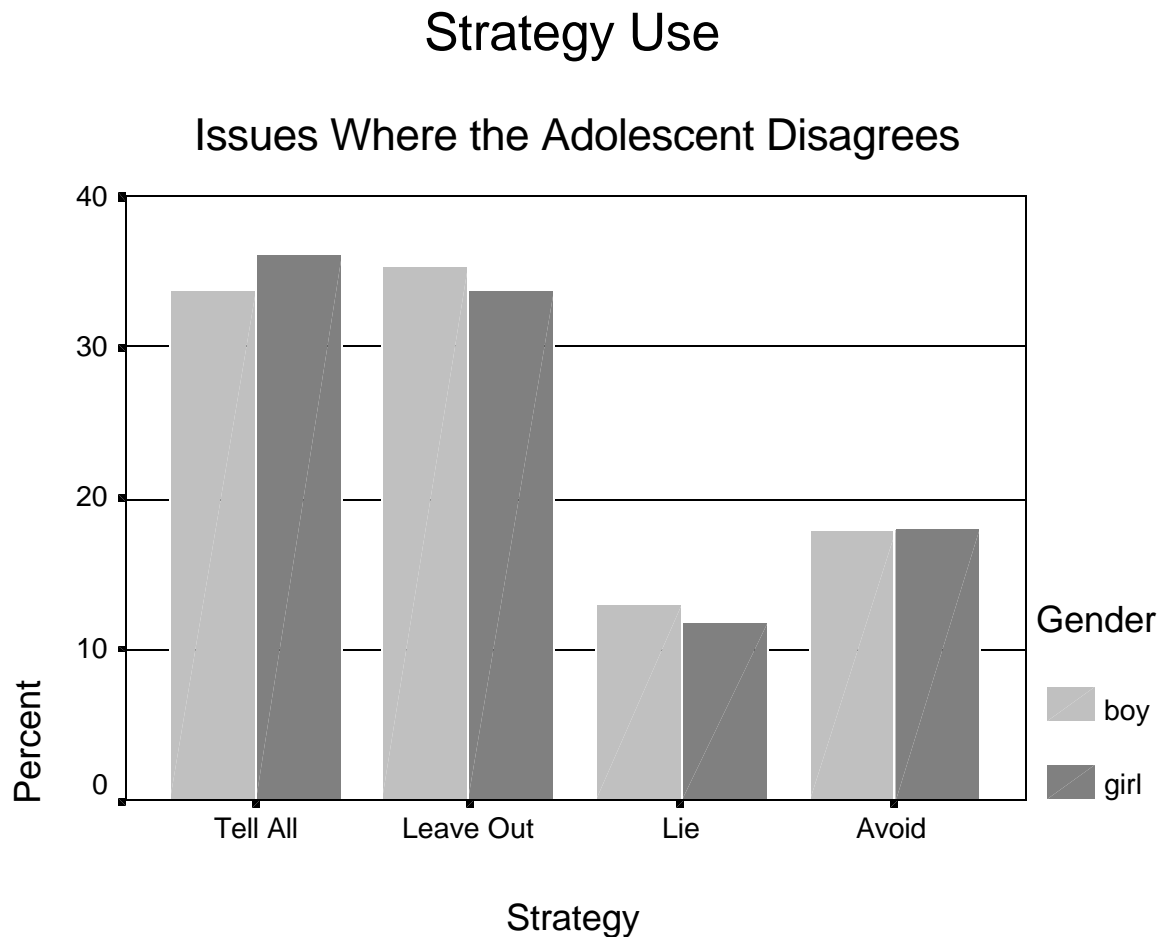
- ! Each adolescent was asked about 20 different issues:
 - " nested data (issue within adolescent)
 - 2-level Hierarchical Linear Model
 - " outcome is categorical
 - series of contrasts

How commonly do adolescents keep information from their parents?



! Adolescents agree with their parents on the issues 58% of the time

How commonly do adolescents keep information from their parents?



Adolescents usually share some information, even when they disagree:

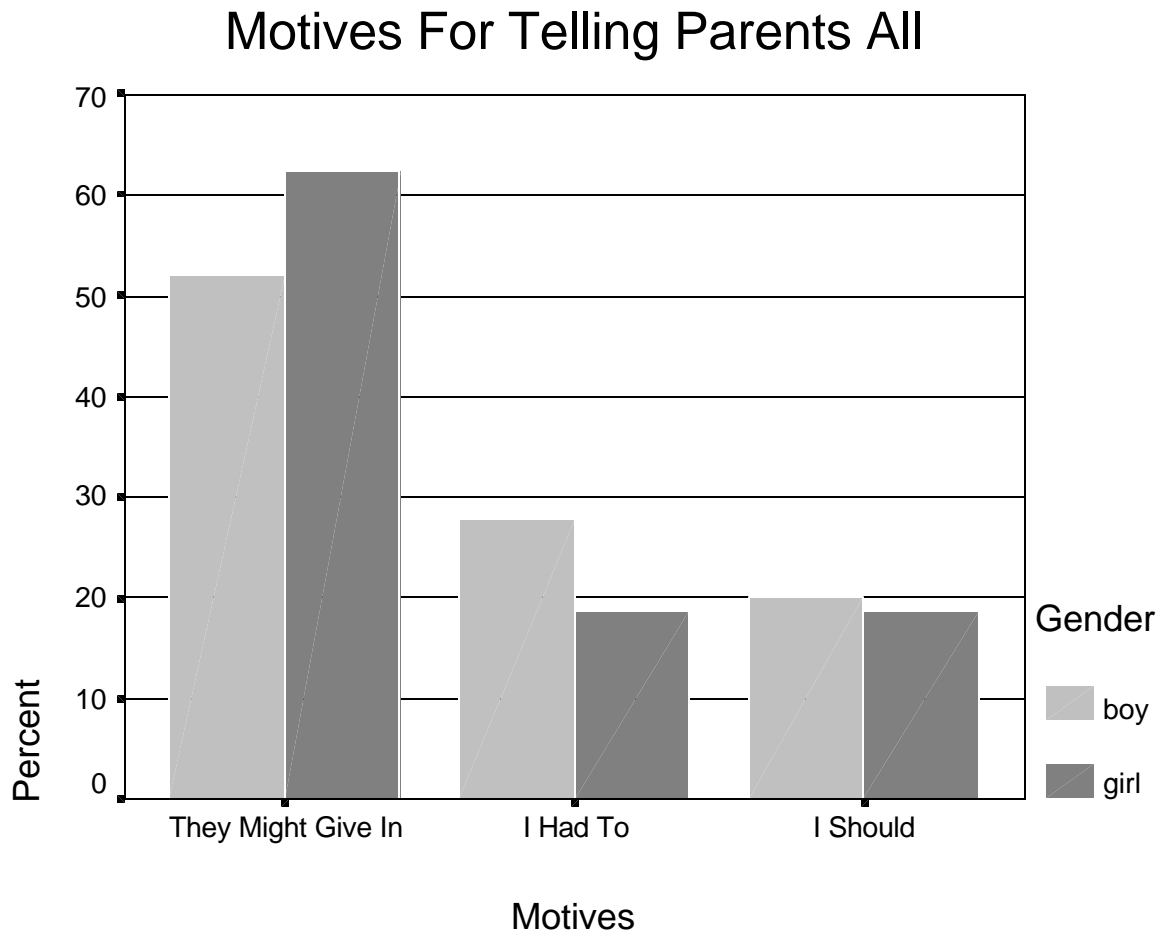
" 35% Tell All, 35% Leave Out Important Information

! Lying is the least frequent way of keeping information from parents:

" 12% Lie, 18% Avoid the Issue

Why do adolescents choose to share information when they disagree with their parents?

Adolescents sorted issues they said they would share information with their parents into three possible motivations.



- ! Most common motivation was the hope that parents would give in (given 58% of the time).

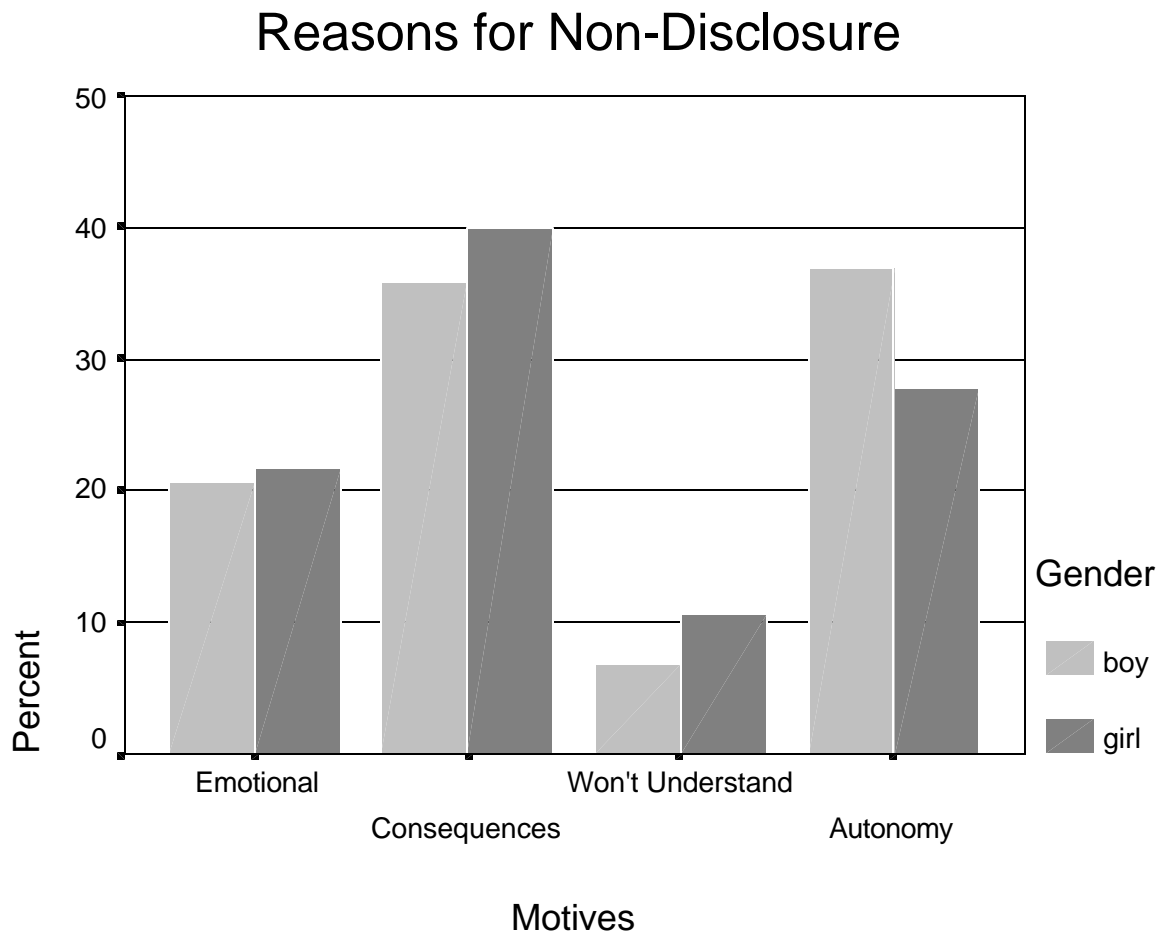
Who chooses to disclose information to parents? Are different adolescents' choices motivated by different reasons?

- ! 43% of the variability in adolescents' choices is *between* adolescents
 - " This variability cannot be predicted by responsiveness, demandingness, sex, global legitimacy, or item specific legitimacy.

- ! Excluding issues where adolescents had no choice but to tell, most of the variability between those who hoped their parents would give in and those who told because they felt they should was between individuals (??%).
 - " No difference in motivations by sex, responsiveness or demandingness.
 - " The less legitimate the adolescents felt parents' authority was, the more likely they were to be motivated by the hope that their parents would give in.
 - Legitimacy of the individual item did not predict motivation.

Why do adolescents choose not to share information?

Students sorted issues that they did not tell their parents about into 10 categories indicating why they would choose that strategy. Responses were then coded into four categories.



- ! Most common reasons were fear of consequences (i.e. parents would stop or punish them: 38%) and autonomy (i.e. it is my decision, not theirs: 32%).

Who chooses to lie rather than avoid the issue or disclose partial information to parents?

- ! Between adolescent and between issue variability is approximately equally important in determining whether or not adolescents lie (52% v. 48%).
- ! Adolescents who see their parents as more responsive and less demanding are less likely to lie.
- ! The more legitimate adolescents believe their parents' authority is, the less likely they are to lie.
 - " This is true of their global beliefs in parents' authority, but not of their beliefs about the parents' legitimate authority with regards to the particular issue in question.
- ! Looking at specific contrasts:
 - " Adolescents who see their mothers as responsive and legitimate are more likely to tell her at least part of the truth, rather than lie.
 - " Maternal responsiveness and demandingness do not discriminate between adolescents who lie and those who avoid the issue. The more legitimate adolescents believe their parents' authority to be, the greater the likelihood that they will avoid the issue rather than lie.

Who chooses to tell at least part of the truth to their parents rather than avoid the issue?

- ! Most of the variability in the choice between omitting information and avoiding the issue entirely is between adolescents (75%)
- ! Neither maternal responsiveness nor demandingness discriminate between those who omit and those who avoid.
- ! There is a trend ($p=.07$) for adolescents who believe their parents to be more legitimate authorities to tell at least part of the truth to their parents.
 - " Adolescents' belief in the legitimacy of the parents' authority for the individual item does not predict.

Overall: Who chooses which strategy of disclosure?

- ! Adolescents who tell their parents at least part of the truth see their parents as more legitimate authorities, responsive, and less demanding than those who lie, and more legitimate authorities than those who try to avoid the issue.
- ! Neither sex nor adolescents' belief in the legitimacy of their parents' authority in this particular situation predict strategy choice.

Are different adolescents' choices motivated by different reasons?

- ! Among those adolescents who do not tell their parents all of the truth . . .
 - " Adolescents who see their mothers as responsive are more likely to say their strategy choice was motivated by emotional reasons (my parents would be angry or upset). There is a trend for this to be true of adolescents who see their parents as less demanding as well.
 - Neither global nor specific parental legitimacy predict emotional motivations.
 - " There is a trend for adolescents who see mothers as more responsive and less demanding to be motivated by autonomy beliefs (it's my decision not theirs) as well.
 - Neither global nor specific parental legitimacy predict autonomy motivations.
 - " Neither responsiveness, demandingness, nor legitimacy predict motivation by either consequences nor lack of parental understanding.