

Rules, Legitimacy Beliefs, Obligation to Obey, and Parent-adolescent Conflict: A Chilean And Filipino Comparison

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Introduction

Conflict is one result of the increased demands that adolescents make for autonomy as they move towards adulthood. Although both parents' and adolescents' expectations for adolescent autonomy increase with age, adolescents typically demand autonomy earlier than their parents are ready to grant it (Smetana, 1988).

Although research on parent-adolescent conflict has typically focused on between-adolescent differences, research on the processes underlying conflict has underscored the importance of understanding within-adolescent differences as well. Research on parents' and adolescents' beliefs in the legitimate domains of parental authority suggests that both parents and adolescents agree that parents can (and indeed, should) regulate some aspects of their adolescents' lives (Smetana, 1988, 1999). Other areas, however, are considered outside of the legitimate domain of parental authority. For example, both parents and adolescents agree that parents have the right to control youth with regards to safety issues and issues of morality, concede some parental legitimacy to the control of conventional behavior, but agree that parents do not have the right to regulate areas in the personal domain. However, parents and adolescents disagree about which domain a particular issue falls within (Smetana, 1988). For example, how one dresses for church might be seen as a matter of personal taste for an adolescent, but a matter of convention for the adolescent's parent.

Smetana (1988) suggests that conflict occurs when parents try to control areas of adolescents' lives that adolescents consider to be outside the legitimate domain of parental authority.

Smetana's work draws critical attention to the processes underlying within-adolescent differences in parent-adolescent conflict. The model is limited, however, in that it carries the implicit assumption that conflict is the inevitable result of parental attempts to regulate adolescent behavior in domains that the adolescent does not concede as within the legitimate domain of parental authority. However, work on false-self behavior suggests that youth often act inauthentically with parents and fail to disclose their true opinions. Recent reinterpretations of the literature on parental monitoring have drawn attention to an alternative strategy commonly employed by adolescents: non-disclosure or disobedience without confrontation.

Within-person differences: Rules, beliefs, and conflict.

Earlier work by Smetana (1988, 1999) suggests that, because the basis for parental authority differs by domain (and thus by issue), adolescents will feel more obliged to obey parental rules about some issues than about others. When adolescents feel obliged to obey parental rules they disagree with, there are advantages to arguing, because conflict allows the adolescent to air their protest and may result in the parent changing their minds, either now or in the future. However, **when adolescents do not feel obliged to obey parental rules they disagree with, they may choose not to disclose their disagreement, leaving open the possibility of willful disobedience.**

Parent-adolescent conflict will be contingent upon:

- 1. whether the issue is governed by a specific rule (i.e. whether the parent has attempted to exert authority over that area);**
- 2. whether the adolescent believes this is a legitimate domain of parental authority; and**
- 3. whether the adolescent feels obliged to obey the parent in this area.**

Rules and the belief that the issue is outside the legitimate domain of parental authority will only result in conflict if adolescents believe they are obliged to obey parental restrictions.

Between-person differences: Culture

Different cultures vary in the extent to which they emphasize obedience to parents and the issues that they see as legitimately within the domain of parental authority. For example, Filipino culture places a relatively greater emphasis on obedience to parental authority, and one would expect adolescents in that culture to be likely to endorse legitimacy of parental authority and obligation to obey over a broader range of issues than would youth in countries where filial piety is a less central value. Chilean youth, for example, are encouraged to verbalize disagreements with their parents, although they are expected to obey parents once rules are negotiated. It is possible that these cultural differences in both rules and beliefs about legitimacy of parental authority and obligation to obey will be reflected in between-person differences in conflict. However, even given these normative differences in conflict, within-person associations between beliefs and conflict may be identical.

**This paper addresses
the following questions**

Are lower levels of legitimacy and more rules associated with higher conflict?

Is that only true globally (i.e., is it a between-person difference) or is it true within-person as well?

Are rules and beliefs about domain-specific parental authority associated with conflict only if the individual feels obliged to obey in that domain?

Do these processes vary in Chile and in the Philippines?

Method

Sample. Students in the Philippines' and Chile's capital cities were recruited through public and private schools and private universities to participate in this study. Active parental consent was used in both locations. 205 Chilean and 121 Filipino youth completed surveys and were included in this study.

Protocol and Instruments. Students in both countries completed surveys in group settings during school. In addition to completing the Strategic Disclosure Questionnaire, a version of the Strategic Disclosure Card Sort {Darling, in review #233} designed to be completed in survey format (See Appendix 1 & 2), students also provided demographic information about their family background. Chilean youth completed the survey in Spanish, adapted to Chilean idioms, and Filipino youth completed the survey in Tagalog.

Plan of Analysis

Nested data. Data collected in this study correspond to aggregated data. In order to take into account the nestedness of the data, analyses were conducted using Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM). Two-level analyses were run, with individual issues nested within adolescents. The multilevel analysis allowed us to partition the variance into issue-specific variance, which correspond to within subject variance, and the between individual variance.

Gender, age were included as predictor at level-2 (between individuals variance).

Results

Do Chilean and Filipino Youth report differences in number of rules, obligation to obey, legitimacy of parental authority and parent-adolescent conflict?

Confirmation of cultural differences: Mean levels of conflict, felt obligation to obey, and legitimacy of parental authority were calculated for each individual, and t-tests were used to predict differences between Filipino and Chilean youth (Table 1 and Figure 1).

- **Filipino youth report higher beliefs in the legitimacy of parental authority, greater obligation to obey, and more rules than Chilean youth.**
- **Despite the fact that Filipinos show a more prevalent belief in the legitimacy of parental authority, Filipino youth also report more conflict.**

Table 1

Descriptive Information on Mean Conformity, Legitimacy, Obligation to Obey, and Number of Rules by Country and Gender

| | COUNTRY | | | | |
|--------------------|---------------|-------|---------------------|-------|------|
| | Chile (N=205) | | Philippines (N=122) | | |
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | p |
| Conflict | 0.53 | (.49) | 0.88 | (.62) | .000 |
| Legitimacy | 0.51 | (.23) | 0.64 | (.23) | .000 |
| Obligation to Obey | 0.44 | (.26) | 0.67 | (.21) | .000 |
| Number of Rules | 0.39 | (.20) | 0.60 | (.21) | .000 |

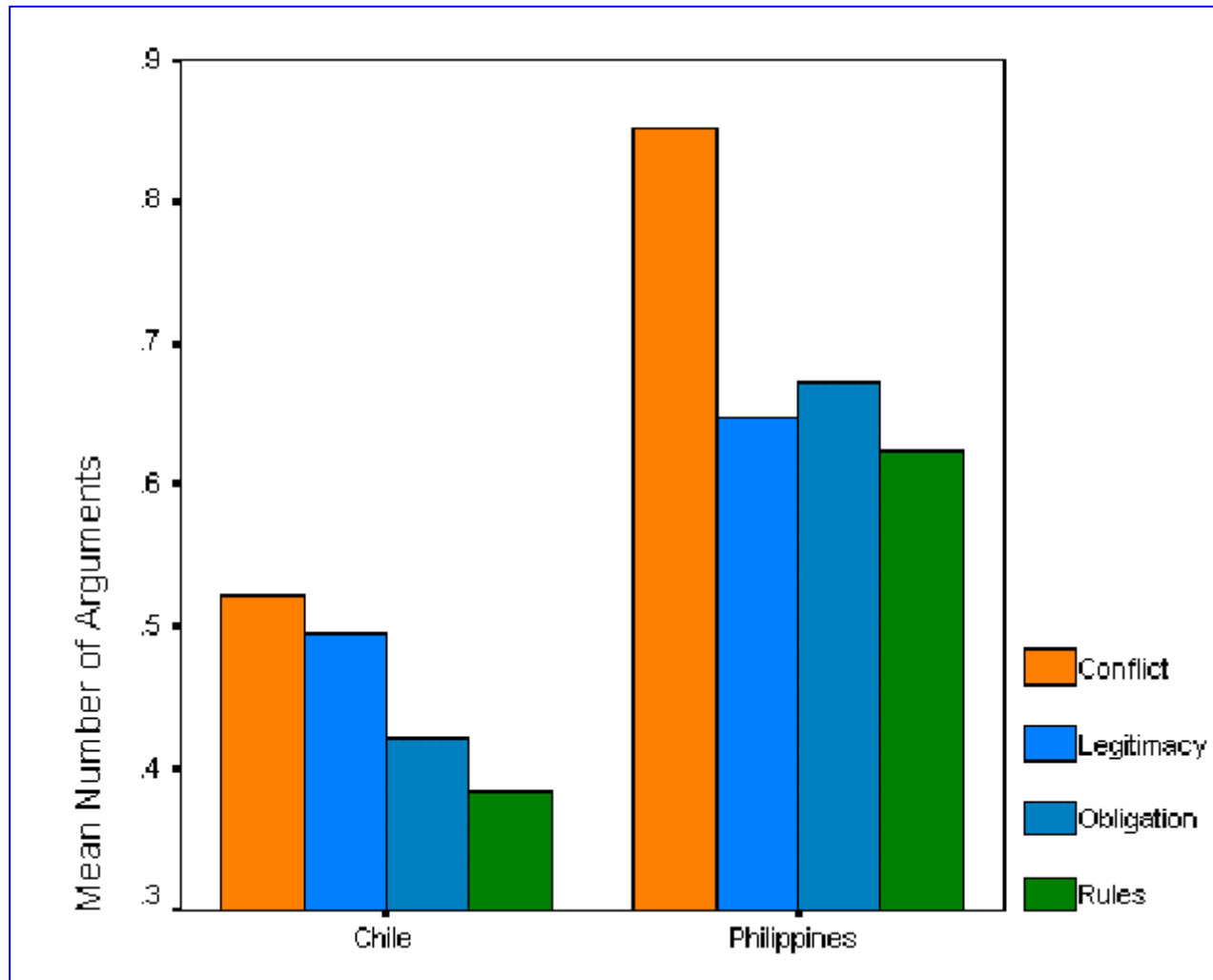


Figure 1

Adolescent's reported conflict, legitimacy of parental authority, obligation to obey and number of rules by country

Between-adolescent differences in conflict

Does level of conflict vary according to adolescent age,
gender and country of origin?

Model 1: Background characteristics. HLM analyses were performed predicting between-person differences in conflict from the adolescents' age, gender, and country. Because previous research has suggested that American youth of Filipino background show a slower pattern of autonomy development than youth from other ethnic backgrounds, we also tested whether the covariation of age and conflict differed for Filipino and Chilean youth. All variables are centered to allow for the simultaneous interpretation of main effects and interactions terms. Results are reported in Table 2.

- **Conflict is higher in the Philippines than in Chile. Although conflict decreases with age in Chile, Filipino youth report that conflict continues to raise throughout adolescence (see Figure 2).**

Table 2

Between-person differences in conflict predicted by demographic characteristics, and by demographic characteristics, global legitimacy and global rules

| Variables | Model 1 | | Model 2 | |
|------------------|----------------|----------|----------------|----------|
| | B | T | B | T |
| Mean conflict | 0 | -0.18 | 0 | -0.13 |
| Country | 0.16 | 5.57*** | 0.06 | 2.01* |
| Gender | 0.05 | 1.67 | 0.04 | 1.68 |
| Age | -0.05 | -1.76 | 0.02 | 0.84 |
| Country*age | 0.11 | 3.90*** | 0.08 | 2.89** |
| Legitimacy | | | -0.13 | -4.36*** |
| Rules | | | 0.28 | 8.46*** |
| df | 314 | | 312 | |

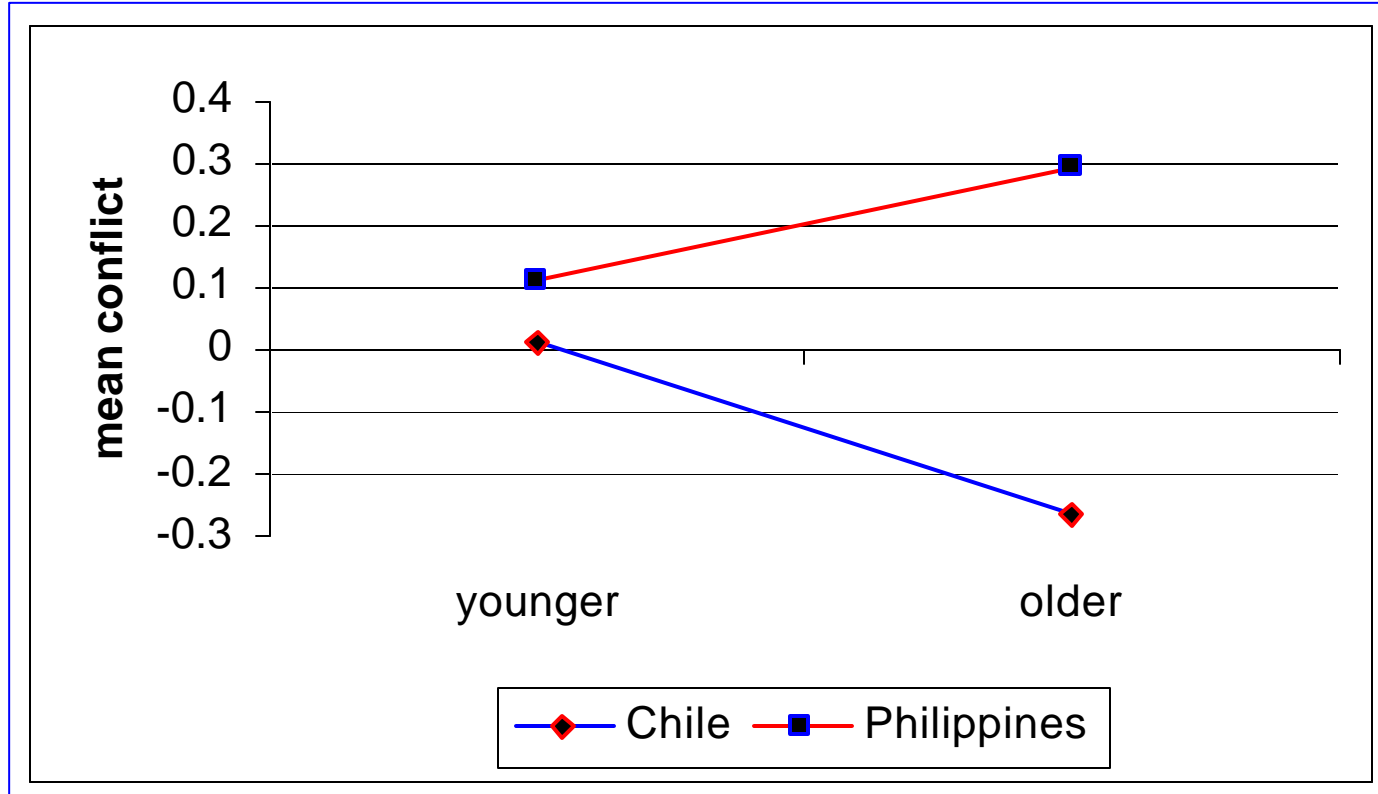


Figure 2

Predicted levels of conflict for Filipino and Chilean youth one standard deviation above and below the mean. Conflict scores are standardized, with a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1.

Does parental control and beliefs about legitimacy of parental authority affect adolescent's conflict at the individual level?

Model 2: Global rules and legitimacy beliefs. In order to test the hypothesis that greater parental attempts to control youth would result in higher levels of conflict and greater beliefs in the legitimacy of parental authority would result in lower levels of conflict at the between-person level, a sum of the number of issues parents set rules about and the number of issues adolescents conceded parental authority to was added to the model.

- **The more rules parents set, the more conflict is reported. The greater range of issues that adolescents concede parental authority on, the less conflict. Both of these predictions are consistent with the theoretically writings of both Collins and Smetana, but have not been previously tested.**
- **Adding these process variables does not eliminate the difference in conflict levels between Chilean and Filipino youth.**
- **When country by rules and country by legitimacy terms were added to the model, they were not significant.**

Within-adolescent differences in conflict

Does parental control and beliefs about legitimacy of parental authority affect adolescent's conflict at the issue level?

Model 1: Issue-level differences in legitimacy, rules, and obligation to obey.

Within-adolescent differences in conflict, adolescents' perception of the legitimacy of parental authority about each issue and the extent to which parents had set rules about each issue were added to the previous model to predict conflict about each issue. In a second analysis, adolescents' obligation to obey was entered as a moderator of both the association of rules and conflict, and the association of legitimacy of parental authority and conflict. Results are reported in Table 3.

- **When an issue is governed by an explicit rule, adolescents report more conflict, whether or not they feel obliged to obey (Figure 3). When an issue is not governed by an explicit rule, adolescents are more likely to argue if they feel obliged to obey.**
- **When an adolescent considers parents to have legitimate authority over an issue, they report higher levels of conflict, whether or not they feel obliged to obey. However, when an adolescent does NOT consider parents to have legitimate authority over an issue, they will argue with their parents if they feel obliged to obey, but report low levels of conflict if they do not. In other words, the association of legitimacy of parental authority and conflict is contingent upon perceived obligation to obey (Figure 4).**
- **There is no evidence that this differs by age, but rules are more strongly related to conflict in the Philippines than in Chile.**

Table 3

Between- and within-person differences in conflict predicted by demographic characteristics, and by demographic characteristics, global legitimacy and global rules

| Variables | Model 3 | | Model 4 | |
|--------------------------------|----------------|----------|----------------|----------|
| | B | T | B | T |
| Between people | | | | |
| Mean conflict | -0.36 | -17.49 | -0.41 | -19.9 |
| Country | -0.03 | -1.31 | -0.03 | -1.51 |
| Gender | 0 | -0.14 | 0 | -0.13 |
| Age | 0 | -0.02 | 0 | 0.15 |
| Country*age | 0.07 | 3.42*** | 0.07 | 3.45*** |
| Legitimacy | -0.06 | -2.82** | -0.08 | -3.35*** |
| Rules | 0.1 | 3.89*** | 0.1 | 3.78*** |
| Within person | | | | |
| Legitimacy | 0 | -0.25 | 0.06 | 1.78 |
| Rules | 0.7 | 19.94*** | 0.77 | 16.51*** |
| Obligation to obey | | | 0.27 | 6.05*** |
| Legitimacy* obligation to obey | | | -0.23 | -4.28*** |
| Rules* obligation to obey | | | -0.15 | -3.26*** |
| df | 312/318 | | 312/318 | |

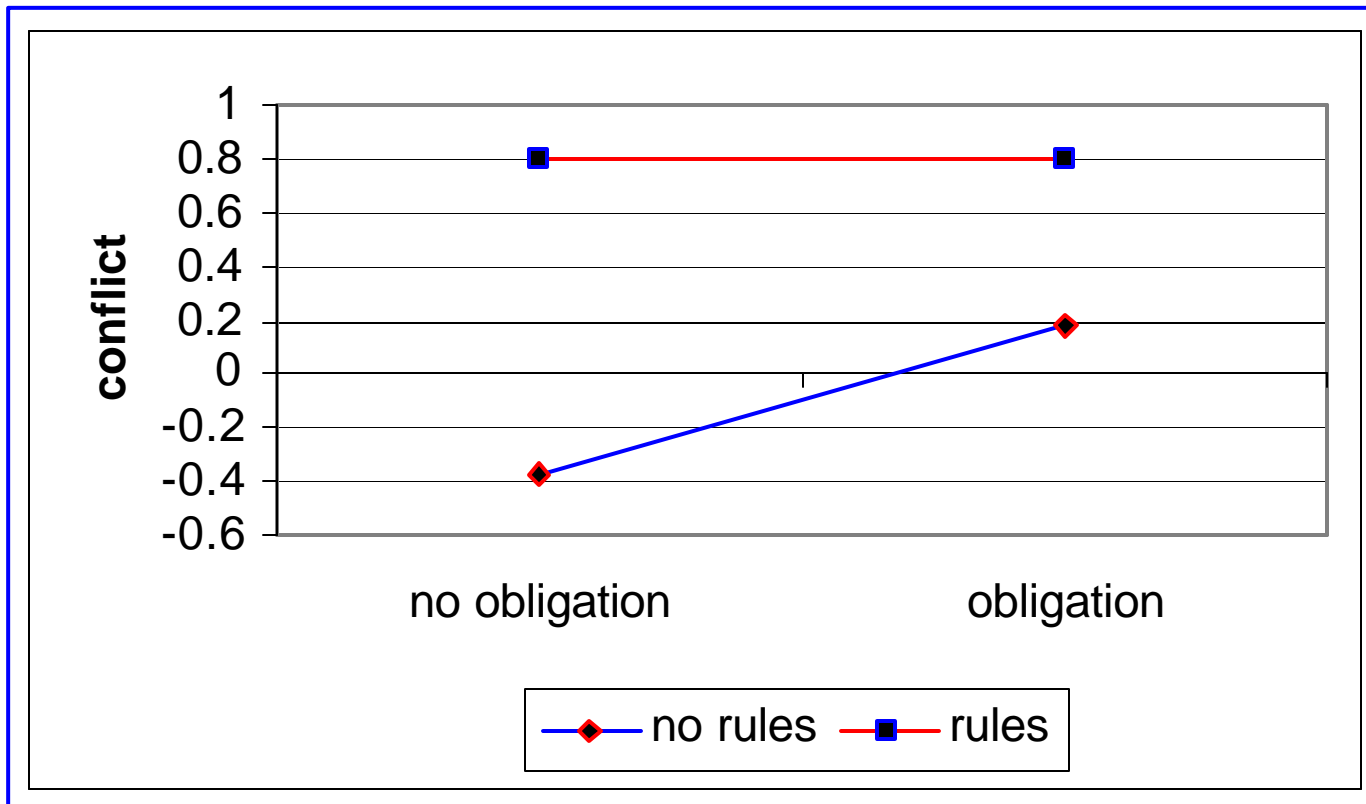


Figure 3

Adolescents report greater conflict about issues governed by rules, whether or not they feel obliged to obey those rules. When issues are governed by rules, adolescents appear willing to argue with their parents if they feel obliged to obey, but not willing to argue when they do not.

Follow-up Analysis

Obligation to obey, legitimacy of parental authority, and social cognitive domains.

Smetana's work on legitimacy of parental authority stems from the cognitive tradition of social domain theory. Do issues described by different patternings of legitimacy of parental authority and obligation to obey appear to fall in different domains? The percentage of adolescents who rated each issue with each pattern of legitimacy and obligation was calculated separately for each country. Results are reported in Table 4. Issues that are most likely to be rated as not legitimately subject to parental authority and with no felt obligation to obey appear to correspond to what Smetana has described as the personal domain: the type of music adolescents listen to, choice of music, friends, and clothing, extracurricular activities, etc. Issues that are most likely to be described as being both within the legitimate domain of parental authority and where the adolescent feels obliged to obey appear to be within the prudential domain: drugs, curfew, alcohol, and issues related to adult supervision. Issues most likely to fall into the two categories that show a divergence of legitimacy and obligation to obey appear to be what Smetana refers to as 'mixed' - including elements of several pure domains. In particular, they appear to combine the personal domain with the convention and prudential domains.

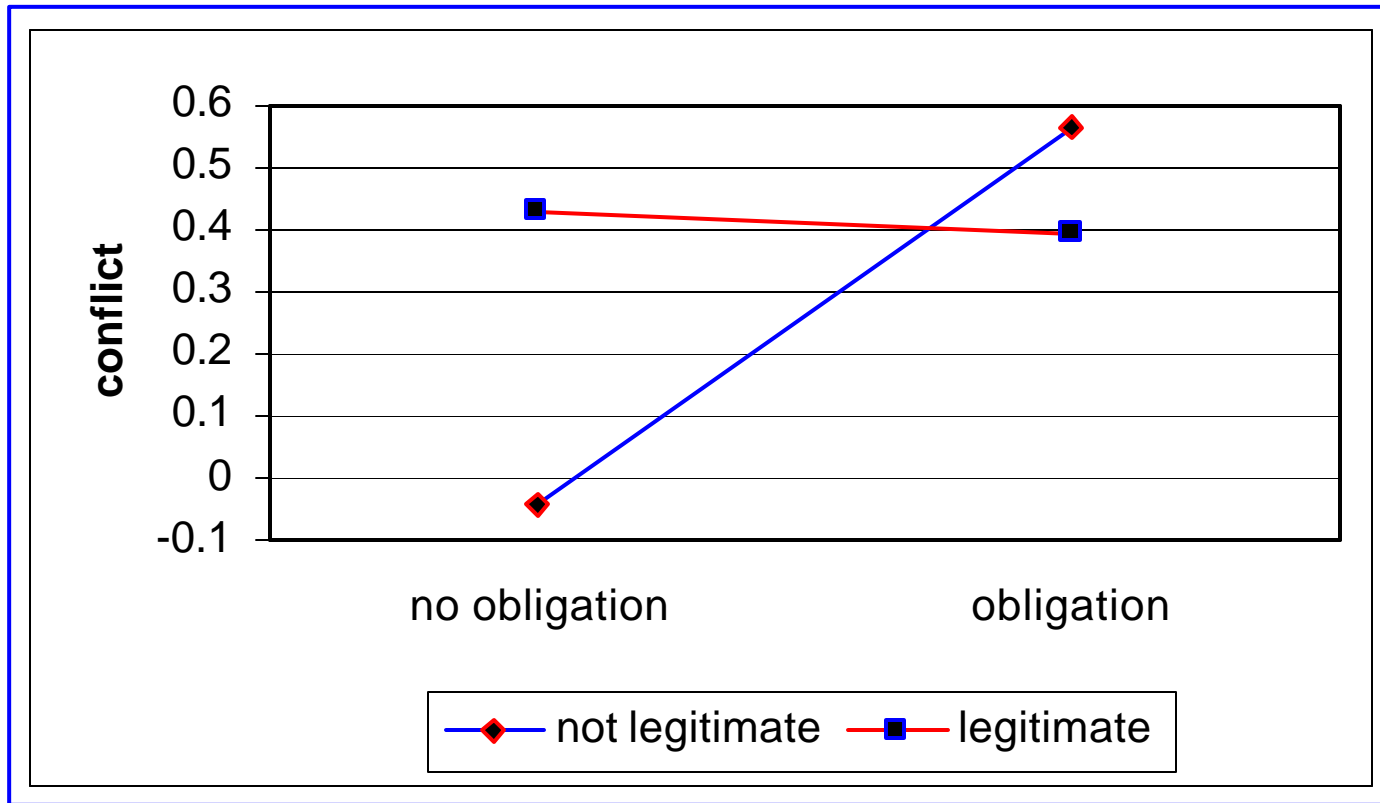


Figure 4

Youth report high levels of conflict about issues that they see as both legitimately within the domain of parental authority and feel obliged to obey. If they do not feel obliged to obey and they see parental authority as illegitimate, they report low levels of conflict.

Discussion

Parent-adolescent conflict differs across different cultures, across different individuals, and across issues, within-adolescents. These analyses provide evidence consistent with the writings of both Collins and Smetana suggesting that normative parent-adolescent conflict results from attempts by parents to control the behavior of adolescents and adolescents' beliefs that parents' have no right to do so. This research extends past research on adolescents' beliefs about the legitimacy of parental authority by examining it in the context of adolescents' felt obligation to obey. The results add more detail to our understanding of the association of legitimacy of parental authority and parent-adolescent conflict. Although conflict is highest when adolescents feel that parental authority is not legitimate and they are obliged to obey, it is *lowest* when they feel that parental authority is not legitimate and they do not feel obliged to obey. Careful inspection of the data reveals that the covariation of legitimacy of parental authority and obligation to obey appears to parallel different domains identified by Smetana, Nucci, and colleagues . More research is needed to understand the overlap in the cognitive approach to understanding differences in legitimacy, which is based on a domain approach to understanding social cognition, and an issue-specific approach.

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