Adolescent Secretive Behavior: African American and Hmong Adolescents' Strategies and Justifications for Managing Parents' Knowledge About Peers

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Drawing upon the expectancy violation-realignment theory of autonomy development, this qualitative study examined African American and Hmong adolescent autonomy-seeking behaviors and parent–child communication about activities and relationships with peers. Twenty-two African American and 11 Hmong adolescents in grades 6–12 and 14 African American and 8 Hmong primary caregivers were interviewed. Participants discussed their perspectives on adolescent information management regarding activities with friends. Four categories of information management strategies and four primary types of adolescent justifications were identified. Adolescents were pragmatic in their decisions about secretive behaviors but also considered the impact of their behaviors on their relationships with parents. Adolescent strategies were consistent across ethnic groups, whereas justifications for secretive behaviors were embedded within cultural and family experiences.

Behavioral autonomy development during adolescence involves a negotiation of social roles as well as overall changes to the nature of the parent–child relationship. Developmentally, adolescents are expected to assert more and more control over their decisions and behaviors as they get older, particularly as they begin to participate in romantic relationships and other activities of which parents may not approve (Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins, 2003). Similarly, the methods that adolescents use to prevent parents from finding out private information should become more complex (and more successful) as adolescents get older and develop increasingly restrictive notions of their privacy (Bakken & Brown, 2007; Brown, Bakken, Nguyen, & Von Bank, 2007). This study examines adolescent and parent perspectives on adolescents' se-

cretive behaviors about activities and relationships with peers within two cultural communities. Focusing primarily on adolescent narratives, we engage in a detailed and culturally sensitive exploration of both the strategies that African American and Hmong adolescents use to communicate with their parents about activities and relationships with friends and the justifications used to rationalize their secretive behaviors.

Conceptualizing Adolescent Autonomy Development

There is growing consensus that autonomy in adolescence should not be viewed as increasing freedom from others but as an emerging ability to make one's own decisions or to develop one's own perspective while still maintaining appropriate connections with significant others (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986, 1998; Hill & Holmbeck, 1986; Steinberg, 1990). Several researchers have emphasized the importance of interpersonal relationships, especially parent–child relationships, to autonomy development during adolescence (Daddis & Smetana, 2005; Feldman & Quatman, 1988; Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins, 2003). Because adolescent autonomy is embedded within parent–child relationships, it is likely to be affected by or drive the changing nature of these relationships throughout adolescence.

Collins and colleagues have emphasized the importance of behavioral autonomy in their studies of family relationships, leading to the development of the *expectancy violation-realignment model* of behavioral autonomy development (Collins, Laursen, Mortensen, Luebker, & Ferreira, 1997; Collins & Luebker, 1994). According to this model, parents and their children develop relational and behavioral expectations as a result of their long-term interdependencies. These expectations guide parents' and adolescents' perceptions and understandings of each other's behavior, which in turn motivate individual actions or reactions to each other in a given situation. Predictions of both parental and adolescent actions and responses become less reliable during adolescence, which creates conflict in the relationship. In order to resolve or minimize conflict and foster developmental adaptations in the relationship, parents and/or adolescents must revise their expectancies for appropriate attitudes and behavior. As adolescents get older, the expectancy violation-realignment model predicts that conflicts over violated expectancies will decrease, and empirical evidence supports these theoretical assertions (Laursen, Coy, & Collins, 1998), although these patterns may be different for adolescents involved in more delinquent behaviors (Laird, Pettit, Dodge, & Bates, 2003; Tilton-Weaver & Galambos, 2003) or who have especially conflictual relationships with parents. Conflict may decrease in most families because they have already experienced key behaviors that might create conflict and also because both parents and adolescents get better at resolving conflicts, especially those over behaviors that begin to become regular events and activities. This study extends these inquiries to explore

some aspects of how parents and adolescents within two ethnic minority groups negotiate these changes in autonomy.

In addition to using more sophisticated strategies to resolve conflict, both adolescents and their parents may begin to take more of an active role in autonomy processes. Adolescents may attempt to avoid conflict altogether, becoming more secretive about their activities and censoring or strategically disclosing information about the behavioral decisions they have made (Afifi & Guerrero, 2000; Jensen, Arnett, Feldman, & Cauffman, 2004; Smetana, Metzger, Gettman, & Campione-Barr, 2006). These secretive behaviors help adolescents actively avoid having parents find out about discrepancies in expectancies that may lead to conflict. Parents, on the other hand, may begin to use more active strategies to find out about their children's activities (Tilton-Weaver & Galambos, 2003), or they may become more selective in the information that they require, realizing that it is not possible or necessary for them to know all of the details about their adolescent's activities.

The types of strategies that adolescents use to avoid conflict or that parents use to obtain information may have a lasting effect on the parent–child relationship and autonomy development. For example, parents who are too intrusive may prompt adolescents to become more secretive and distant. Adolescents who openly share basic details about their activities with friends may inspire enough parental trust to dissuade parents from demanding more detailed information, whereas adolescents who are extremely deceptive may lose parents' trust and live under more scrutiny.

Communication About Peer Relationships and Activities

Peer relationships are an ideal arena in which to examine autonomy processes (Collins, Gleason, & Sesma 1997; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). As adolescents begin to spend more and more time with peers and less time with parents (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984), they become more personally responsible for their behavioral decisions (Bosma & Jackson, 1996), and have more agency in deciding what parents know or do not know about these activities (Jensen et al., 2004; Marshall, Tilton-Weaver, & Bosdet, 2005). Smetana and Asquith (1994) documented that parents and adolescents often have different opinions about the degree of authority parents can assert over particular decisions and activities. As they get older, adolescents believe that parents have less authority, especially over issues considered personal, which often include activities with friends. This heightens the potential for decisions that adolescents make about these activities to violate parental expectations, raising the possibility of parent–child conflict. When adolescents are aware of these violations, they may be reluctant to share information about the peer activity in question, just as they are unwilling to accede to parental authority (Smetana et al., 2006). Understanding more about how parents and

adolescents handle these discrepancies in beliefs may help us understand the more general processes of behavioral autonomy development.

As mentioned above, adolescents' renegotiation of expectancy violations may include preventing their parents from knowing about the details of their activities and relationships. Attentive to Kerr and colleague's assertions that what parents know is what children tell them (Kerr & Stattin, 2000, 2003; Kerr, Stattin, Biesecker, & Ferrer-Wreder, 2003; Kerr, Stattin, & Trost, 1999), several researchers in the developmental and communications fields have conducted studies demonstrating different strategies that adolescents use to limit parents' knowledge about peer relationships. Even when parents actively attempt to probe for information on a particular topic, adolescents may omit certain details (Mazur & Hubbard, 2004; Petronio, 1994) to control the information that they reveal to parents. Adolescents may attempt to change the subject of conversations (Mazur & Hubbard, 2004) or even completely avoid contact with parents to deflect parents' interest in a particular topic or activity, especially regarding feelings toward friends, activities with friends, and romantic relationships (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995). Similarly, many adolescents believe that certain circumstances justify explicitly lying to their parents (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995; Jensen et al., 2004; Marshall et al., 2005; Mazur & Hubbard, 2004; Su, 2006). In fact, Jensen and colleagues (2004) found that the majority of high school students in their study had lied to their parents.

We suspect that, in addition to using creative strategies to censor information from parents, adolescents try to balance multiple objectives or justifications for their secretive behaviors. Arguably, it is difficult to completely understand adolescent information management strategies without also exploring the justifications or motivations for their behaviors. Given that there is a limited number of strategies for adolescents to select from when making information management decisions (Buller & Burgoon, 1994), soliciting adolescents' justifications for their behaviors may be a critical component of research on secrecy and disclosure. Adolescents often may selectively disclose information about their friends in attempts to avoid conflicts with parents, especially if the conflicts may lead to restrictions on subsequent activities with peers. However, censorship may also be used to assert personal control over activities and relationships with peers (Smetana, Daddis, & Chuang, 2003) or to develop or maintain positive, trusting relationships with parents. To get a clear sense of how adolescents balance these different objectives, researchers must attend not only to what adolescents do (the specific disclosure or censorship strategies they use), but also why they do so (the justifications they offer for their actions).

Importance of Ethnic Group Experiences

Examination of any developmental processes should be conducted with attention to social and cultural contexts (Greenfield, Keller, Fuligni, &

Maynard, 2003; Lerner, 1995; Socha, Sanchez-Hucles, Bromley, & Kelly, 1995). This is an especially crucial aspect of studying parent–child interactions and communication patterns in minority families (Garcia Coll et al., 1996). Some researchers and theorists have critiqued cross-cultural studies for assuming incorrectly that family relationships and social networks influence adolescents from different ethnic backgrounds in similar ways (Giordano, Cernkovich, & DeMaris, 1993; Greenfield et al., 2003). As researchers learn more about cultural influences on adolescent development, they need to consider more carefully the ways in which autonomy processes develop in specific cultural contexts. In this paper, we have selected families from distinctive cultural backgrounds that serve to illustrate some of the potential impact of cultural experiences on these autonomy processes.

In the present study, we consider how ethnic group experiences and cultural values and beliefs within African American and Hmong families relate to the patterns of adolescent information management strategies and justifications. Examination of autonomy beliefs within these groups poses an interesting cross-cultural comparison. Both ethnic communities have a long history of displacement and marginalization that contributes to their parenting behaviors and interactions with their adolescent children, but their cultural backgrounds and histories within the United States are quite different. An in-depth analysis of African American and Hmong parents' and adolescents' perspectives on behavioral autonomy provides the opportunity to highlight not only characteristics of autonomy processes that are consistent between families with different cultural backgrounds but also those aspects of the process that more closely tied to family cultural experiences.

Within Hmong families, strong traditional cultural beliefs (Trueba, Jacobs, & Kirton, 1990), experiences with immigration (Kwak, 2003), and refugee status (Faderman, 1998; Trueba et al., 1990) are particularly salient factors that play a role in adolescents' relationships with their parents as well as their personal developmental goals. Intergenerational discrepancies in values and autonomy expression may be present across cultures, but the discrepancies are more pronounced in Asian families (Stewart, Bond, Deeds, & Chung, 1999), particularly in recent immigrant and refugee Hmong families (Faderman, 1998). Parents attempt to instill conservative traditional Hmong cultural values of family unity and privacy, unquestionable respect for elders, and clearly defined sex roles (Trueba et al., 1990). Parents may often be conflicted about providing their children with the opportunities that they need to be successful in America while still helping them to maintain a dedication to traditional values. Children learn early on that family reputations are very important to maintain in the close-knit Hmong communities, where parents and family elders strive to maintain the traditional patriarchal structure of family respect and authority. However, adolescents from immigrant families tend to acculturate to American ways faster and more completely than their parents (Kwak, 2003), and this differential adjustment to

American society may create feelings of independence for adolescents, causing them to view their parents as having less efficacy in providing sufficient guidance for navigating American youth culture (Faderman, 1998).

African American parents, in contrast, have much more experience navigating through mainstream American culture (Boykin, 1986; Collins, 1998; Mosley-Howard & Evans, 2000), and both parents and adolescents often have experiences with racism and discrimination (McAdoo, 2002; Peters, 2002; Phinney & Chavira, 1995). Hughes and Johnson (2001) suggest that when African American parents communicate to their children about what it means to be Black, they focus much of their efforts on teaching about their own culture and the value of diversity. However, compared with other ethnic minority groups within the United States, African American families perceive more discrimination and focus more of their efforts on preparing their children for anticipated racial bias (Hughes, 2003). To raise children who have a stable sense of self and who can succeed in society, parents often feel they need to teach their children about being both Black Americans and members of the dominant (White) American culture (Collins, 1998; Hurd, Moore, & Rogers, 1995). Traditional cultural beliefs and ethnic group experiences may play an important role in autonomy development and parent–child communication patterns during adolescence. Youth communicate with parents less and less about their activities and relationships at a time when parents are concerned more and more with their children's retention of and adherence to ethnic group traditions and potential experiences with discrimination during their increasing time spent away from home. These factors may contribute to both adolescent and parent perspectives on appropriate adolescent disclosure or secrecy.

Despite many recent studies exploring patterns of secrecy and disclosure in parent–child relationships during adolescence (Darling, Cumsille, Caldwell, & Dowdy, 2006; Finkenauer, Engels, & Meeus, 2002; Frijns, Finkenauer, Vermulst, & Engels, 2005; Marshall et al., 2005; Smetana et al., 2006), little of this research has focused on ethnic group contributions to parent–child communication patterns beyond surface level comparisons of ethnic differences. The goal of this paper is not to produce largely generalizable conclusions about information management strategies, but rather to examine the patterns of results that can be used as a basis of comparison in future research (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). This study provides an opportunity to consider characteristics of youth, parent, and family experiences that would not emerge from traditional attitudinal or behavioral measures (Thorkildsen & Nicholls, 2002).

Drawing participants across a wide age range (11–19) from two ethnic groups allows us to consider age as well as cultural differences in patterns of adolescent information management strategies and parent perspectives on disclosure. Age analyses provide an exploration of the expectancy violation-realignment model prediction that strategies become more sophisticated as

adolescents get older. Ethnic group comparisons allow us to highlight how the cultural experiences of living in refuge immigrant families for the Hmong adolescents and how the impact of experiences with racism and discrimination in African American families may contribute to variations in adolescent information management. The study's narrative approach allows adolescents' information management strategies and justifications to emerge from their own voices (Orozco, 2008; Way, Gingold, Rotenberg, & Kuriakose, 2005). This helps to identify types of information management specific to adolescents' family and ethnic group experiences. The narrative approach may reveal complexities in participants' autonomy development that may not be accessible through traditional quantitative methods.

This paper focuses on the following specific research questions: (1) What strategies do African American and Hmong adolescents use to manage the information that their parents know about their peer relationships and activities, and how does the use of these strategies differ by age and ethnicity? (2) What justifications do these adolescents provide for their information management behaviors, and how do these justifications differ by age and ethnicity? (3) What recurring themes emerge that may provide additional insights into adolescent autonomy development and parent–child communication patterns?

METHOD

Design

Parents and adolescents completed individual semistructured interviews in which they discussed what parents know about adolescents' activities with peers and how they find out what they know. Parents and adolescents were asked to recall incidents involving adolescents' activities and relationships with friends, focusing on how they communicate with each other about these behaviors and experiences.

Participants

Participants in this analysis included 22 self-identified African American and 11 Hmong adolescents in 6th–12th grades (ages 11–19) and 14 African American and 8 Hmong primary caregivers living in a midsized Midwestern city. The adolescent sample was 69% female and 31% male, and participants were distributed relatively equally between younger (6–8th grade; $n = 19$) and older (9–12th grade; $n = 14$) age groups. Not all primary caregivers participated in study because some parents consented to their child's participation but did want to participate themselves, and the research team lost contact with some families who moved or who did not have permanent phone numbers throughout the data collection timeframe.

Hmong adolescents were all 1.5 or second generation immigrants. The majority of adolescents in both Hmong and African American families lived in single-parent homes with their biological mother, father, or a close relative. All participants lived in working class and low income families, which reflects the socioeconomic status of African American and Hmong families in the larger community, and allows the current study to focus on cultural contributions to adolescent development without the potential confounds created by differences in family structure or variations in SES within the two cultural groups. Participants were all recruited primarily through advertisements at after-school programs and through direct recruitment at community centers serving Hmong and African American youth. Almost all participants reported spending much of their free time with family and friends, and many of the close friends of the Hmong participants were also relatives (similar-aged siblings and cousins).

Procedure

Four African American and three Hmong interviewers were trained in the background of the research project and the content of the interview. Participants were interviewed by ethnically matched members of the research team. This was especially important with Hmong families, because they may have been able to describe certain activities or concepts better in Hmong than in English. All interviews with Hmong biological parents were conducted in Hmong, and many adolescent interviews contained discussion in both Hmong and English. Interview sections conducted in Hmong were translated by a native speaker of the Hmong language and back-translated by a second native speaker to verify translations. Interviews lasted between 40 and 90 minutes.

Adolescent interviews followed a semistructured format. Respondents were asked to list typical activities with peers (e.g., "I'd like you to tell me some stories about things that you've done with friends") and indicate whether parents/guardians knew about particular activities with peers and how they found out (e.g., "Let's look at the things you did with your peers. Which ones did your parents know about? How did they know about them?"). Adolescents then presented their reasoning for deciding whether or not to tell parents about particular activities (e.g., "Why did you decide to tell your parents?").

Parent interviews focused on what parents know about their child's activities with friends (e.g., "What are some of the things that your child did with friend groups in the last week?") and how they find out (e.g., "What are the ways that you find out information about what your child does with friends?"). Adolescent and parent interviews contained eight major prompts; this format allowed interviewers to use follow-up questions

throughout the conversation. Data analyses for this paper were based on responses to the questions outlined above.

The semistructured interview approach allowed participants to guide the nature of the discussion within a framework similar to the voice-centered relational technique described by Brown and Gilligan (1992). This format provides a window into participants' attitudes and behaviors and allows researchers to explore more complex thoughts and decision-making patterns that reflect cultural contributions to parent–child interactions that may be presumed or uninvestigated using quantitative methods (Thorkildsen, 2005). This approach allowed participants to determine the course and the content of the interview conversations while ensuring that similar topics were discussed across interviews. Using interim analysis (Huberman & Miles, 1998), the interview protocol was updated during data collection after an initial analysis of interview data, allowing the utilization of conversations from early interviews to help focus the remaining data collection. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed using pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. After the original transcription, all interview transcripts were verified by an additional member of the research team and edited for format and content.

Data Analysis

Since this paper focuses on exploration of adolescent information management strategies and justifications, we concentrate on the adolescents' interviews, but draw some data from parent interviews to supplement adolescent narratives. Interviews were coded using an iterative and sequential pattern coding technique (Miles & Huberman, 1994), separately for strategies and justifications. The interview schedule allowed us to achieve a level of intimacy and familiarity with each respondent that is not ordinarily achievable in quantitative studies (Thorkildsen, 2005), potentially yielding insights that would be difficult to obtain with quantitative data.

We read through interview transcripts multiple times, identifying general themes representing the potentially age-related and culturally relevant experiences of the participants. After the first reading of interviews, initial frameworks of strategies and justifications were developed to be used as a starting point for analysis. These initial categories were updated and refined as necessary throughout the data analysis based on instances of strategic disclosure found in participant narratives. In the first step of the analysis, the first author and an undergraduate research assistant identified interview segments in which adolescents talked about what they tell or do not tell their parents about activities and relationships with peers (strategies) or why they tell or do not tell (justifications). Once potential instances were identified, the first author coded the instances into conceptual categories of strategies or justifications, such that individual participants could have multiple

instances of strategies or justifications coded within each category, or they could have no instances coded within categories that were not represented in their interviews. The coding scheme and category definitions were modified as necessary throughout the coding process. After the initial coding of categories, an undergraduate research assistant coded a random 20% of strategies and justifications, and interrater reliability was calculated. Cohen's κ indicated very high reliability (.87 for strategies, .86 for justifications). Ethnicity, gender, and age of participants were not considered while the data were being coded.

In the second step of the analysis, strategies and justifications were compared across interviews to ensure the validity and consistency of the category conceptualizations. Each coded instance was compared with those found both within and between interviews. In the third step of the analysis, patterns of information management strategies and justifications were compared across age and ethnicity.

It is reasonable to expect different patterns of strategy and justification use between African American versus Hmong youth because of differences in ethnicity, family structure, and parenting practices. To account for these differences, data analysis involved a parallel research approach (Cooper, Jackson, Azmitia, & Lopez, 1998; Sue & Sue, 1987). Using this orientation, the general framework for analysis (categories of strategies and justifications) was externally defined, but the structure and content of particular categories from one ethnic group were not imposed on the other. Instead, the specific conceptualizations of categories were allowed to vary depending on the explanations of situations and contexts discussed in the interviews of adolescents within each ethnic group. This approach allows for potential ethnic differences in the conceptualization and use of information management to emerge through emic discourse and also allows the comparison of these potential differences within a common framework. The use of parallel design may be particularly important within Hmong families (Dunnigan, McNall, & Mortimer, 1993; Hutchison & McNall, 1994). Their status as immigrants and refugees provide Hmong families with autonomy-related experiences and perspectives that may be quite different from their native-born American counterparts. However, because Hmong adolescents spend much of their time participating in American culture, they also develop a sense of what is typical for American teenagers. Utilizing a parallel research approach allowed examination of these constructs within the appropriate contexts both within and between Hmong and African American families.

After completion of the primary coding, we calculated relative frequencies of strategy and justification use to highlight general patterns within and between age and ethnic groups. First, we conducted two-way ANOVAs to determine any group differences in the number of instances of strategies and justifications per individual. The structure of the final coded data obviated the use of χ^2 distributions to test for differences in the frequency of strategy

and justification use because of violations to independence requirements (each individual could have data within multiple categories), and the small sample size prevented detection of statistical significance using other multivariate tests. Thus, in order to examine statistical differences in the frequencies of strategies and justifications, we utilized the two-sample Wilcoxon's test, controlling family-wise type I error rates through the use of Holm's procedure (Marascuilo & Serlin, 1988). In order to control for variations in total frequency of speech acts between groups, we converted individuals' frequency counts for each category into a proportion of their total count of strategies and justifications, respectively. We used these proportions to calculate test statistics for key comparisons made throughout the presentation of qualitative results. All statistically significant results reported below are significant at the $p < .05$ level. We selected the specific qualitative examples found in the following sections to represent the typical themes and patterns that emerged throughout the data. Excerpts from parent interviews were selected to supplement the narratives outlined by the adolescent cases.

RESULTS

Results are presented in three sections. First, to examine patterns of management strategies, we provide an overview of the definitions and relative frequencies of adolescent strategies for managing the information that parents know regarding adolescents' activities and relationships with peers, highlighting age and ethnic group differences. Second, we examine adolescents' justifications for their information management, including the relative frequency with which adolescents reported the different justifications, highlighting general age and ethnic group patterns of use, and providing qualitative examples from the interviews. Finally, we provide two examples of major themes emerging throughout the interviews, utilizing both adolescent and parent perspectives.

What Adolescents Tell and What Parents Know: Information Management Strategies

Initial analysis of variance indicated no age or ethnic group differences in the number of strategies coded per individual (Table 1). Four categories of information management strategies emerged from the content coding of interviews: *full disclosure* (telling parents everything), *partial disclosure* (telling parents the truth, but leaving out particular details), *topic avoidance* (avoiding discussion of activities or waiting until parents ask), and *deception* (explicitly lying to parents). Table 2 contains relative frequencies of strategy use in the sample. Members of both ethnic groups manifested the same four categories. Although the current study examined patterns of disclosure strategies

TABLE 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Strategy and Justification Use by Ethnicity and Age

	African American			Hmong			
	Younger	*Older*	*All*	*Younger*	*Older*	*All*	*All Groups*
Strategies							
Mean	4.38	5.00	4.64	4.83	6.40	5.55	4.94
SD	2.76	2.65	2.67	3.13	4.51	3.78	3.05
Justifications							
Mean	5.67	7.56	6.48	8.83	12.60	10.55	7.88
SD	3.23	3.13	3.25	7.78	4.83	6.59	4.97

emerging from within adolescent narratives, the emergent categories are conceptually equivalent to forms of nondisclosure discussed by other researchers (Buller & Burgoon, 1994; Darling et al., 2006). The relative frequencies of strategy use between groups differ somewhat, and adolescents from different age and ethnic groups appear to utilize different rationalizations for their behaviors.

Who tells less: Age and ethnic group differences in adolescent strategies. African American adolescents demonstrated clear age differences in their reports of information management strategies. Older African American adolescents reported significantly less full disclosure and more partial disclosure than their younger peers. Additionally, a test of the

TABLE 2

Total Frequency (Freq.) and Relative Percentage of Strategy Use by Ethnicity and Age

	African American			Hmong			
	Younger Freq.	*Older Freq.*	*All Freq.*	*Younger Freq.*	*Older Freq.*	*All Freq.*	*Total Freq.*
Strategy	*%*	*%*	*%*	*%*	*%*	*%*	*%*
Full disclosure	29	7	36	5	2	7	43
	50%	16%	35%	18%	14%	15%	27%
Partial disclosure	17	22	39	12	13	25	64
	30%	49%	38%	41%	40%	41%	39%
Topic avoidance	9	10	19	9	10	19	38
	16%	22%	19%	31%	29%	30%	23%
Deception	2	6	8	3	7	10	18
	4%	13%	8%	10%	17%	14%	11%
Total	57	45	102	29	32	61	163
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

difference scores between full and partial disclosure indicated that younger African American adolescents reported significantly more full disclosure than partial disclosure compared with their older peers. With the exception of lying, age differences in strategy use within the group of Hmong participants seemed minimal. The lack of age differences in strategy use by Hmong adolescents reflects the more frequent use of partial disclosure and topic avoidance in the younger age group compared with their African American counterparts. However, these age group differences were not statistically significant.

Considering African American parents' general ability to investigate the details of their children's activities from a variety of sources compared with Hmong parents' abilities, and taking into account adolescents' frustrations with parents' lack of knowledge about life as a teenager in America, it is no surprise that Hmong adolescents appeared to keep more information from their parents at younger ages. As indicated in Table 2, the relative frequencies of adolescent reported strategies suggest that younger Hmong adolescents utilized significantly less full disclosure and more of the other strategies at earlier ages compared with their African American counterparts.

Examining general patterns of strategy use between the two ethnic groups in this study revealed that regardless of age, Hmong adolescents reported less full disclosure, more topic avoidance, and more deception than their African American counterparts. Although the latter two comparisons were not statistically significant, they represent trends that should be investigated in future research. Examination of ethnic group variation in the difference scores between partial disclosure and both full disclosure and topic avoidance showed African American adolescents reporting significantly more full disclosure than partial disclosure and less topic avoidance than partial disclosure compared with their Hmong counterparts, indicating that Hmong adolescents in this study utilized more secretive and active strategies (partial disclosure and topic avoidance) in preventing their parents from finding out information about their activities and relationships with friends. Consistent with adolescents' assertions that many Hmong parents just don't understand what it means to be a teenager in America, most Hmong youth in both age groups were very consciously aware of their parents' limited ability to find out the details of their activities when outside the home.

However, general differences in the relative frequencies of information management strategies between the two ethnic groups did not fully explain how or why these differences emerged. In other words, knowing what adolescents did to prevent their parents from finding out information did not help us understand what drives adolescents to become increasingly sophisticated in their secretive behaviors and activities. Examining information management in light of adolescents' justifications for their behaviors will help to explain the culturally embedded nature of adolescents' decisions to keep certain information about their activities from their parents.

Adolescents' Objectives in Keeping Secrets: Justifications for Information Management

Initial analysis of variance indicated an ethnic group effect in the number of justifications coded per individual, with Hmong adolescents providing significantly more justifications than their African American counterparts. The large standard deviations, within the Hmong participants in particular, suggest considerable variance within each group as well (Table 1). Just as adolescents used multiple strategies, they also provided multiple justifications for their behavior. Four major categories of justifications for information management emerged from the data, including nine specific justifications (Table 3). These justifications represent adolescents' reasoning behind their decisions to use certain strategies in particular situations. The first major category consisted of adolescents' primarily *pragmatic* motivations. Pragmatic justifications included concerns about *consent management*, or telling parents what is needed to get permission to go out (e.g., "I know that if I tell them, they would never let me go out."), *punishment avoidance*, which included censoring or disclosing to avoid negative consequences (e.g., "I don't want to get in trouble. They'd yell at me and tell me to go apologize."), and *privacy maintenance*, or declaring personal jurisdiction over information ("It ain't her business. It's my business . . . I don't know, it's just not her business"). Although other researchers have suggested that personal issues represent a domain of their own (e.g., Nucci, 1981; Smetana et al., 2006), adolescents in this study were quite utilitarian in their use of privacy maintenance as a justification for their information management.

The second major category of justifications represented adolescents' emphasis on *relational* concerns when making decisions about what to tell or not tell their parents. Relational justifications included emphasis on attempts to build or maintain *trust* in parent–child relationships (e.g., "There still is that trust you've got to have. I think she trusts me, and I wouldn't do anything to lose that trust."), manifestation of a belief in *parental omniscience*, or perceiving that parents have the ability to know or find out about everything (e.g., "There's some sick way she ends up finding out . . . I don't know . . ."), *acceptance of parental authority*, or the belief that the parental role entitles parents to certain knowledge (e.g., "Because they're the parents. They should know."), and a consideration of *relationship characteristics*, family dynamics, and other aspects of the parent–child relationship (e.g., "I really want my dad to get involved, but he's really busy, so I don't want to bother him [with the details].").

The third category of justifications included *prudential* concerns, acknowledging that parents need to know some details to ensure their children's safety (e.g., "If something happened to me, she can know where I am."). Finally, some adolescents justified their secretive behavior by proclaiming *developmental* considerations, maturity, or personal growth (e.g., "I feel that I

TABLE 3
Total Frequency (Freq.) and Relative Percentage of Justification Use by Ethnicity and Age

| Category | Justification | African American | | | Hmong | | | Total |
		Younger Freq. %	Older Freq. %	All Freq. %	Younger Freq. %	Older Freq. %	All Freq. %	Freq %
Pragmatic	Consent management	3	10	13	5	15	20	33
		4%	15%	10%	9%	22%	16%	13%
	Punishment avoidance	13	12	25	9	8	17	42
		19%	18%	18%	17%	14%	16%	17%
	Privacy maintenance	9	4	13	6	5	11	24
		13%	6%	10%	10%	6%	8%	9%
	Pragmatic subtotal	25	26	51	20	25	45	96
		36%	39%	38%	36%	42%	40%	39%
Relational	Parental omniscience	10	4	14	4	1	5	19
		15%	6%	10%	8%	4%	5%	7%
	Relationship characteristics	4	3	7	13	14	27	34
		6%	4%	5%	25%	21%	22%	14%
	Trust	3	7	10	1	2	3	13
		4%	10%	7%	2%	6%	5%	6%
	Acceptance of parent authority	8	5	13	2	3	5	18
		12%	7%	10%	4%	5%	5%	7%
	Relational subtotal	25	19	44	20	20	40	84
		37%	27%	32%	39%	36%	37%	34%
Prudential	Safety concerns	16	19	35	10	2	12	47
		24%	28%	26%	19%	10%	14%	20%
Developmental	Developmental	2	4	6	3	4	7	13
		3%	6%	4%	6%	12%	9%	7%
Total		68	68	136	53	51	104	240
		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

should be able to handle things on my own, like my own decisions and stuff.'').

Table 3 contains relative frequencies of each justification within age and ethnic groups. In general, adolescents from all groups frequently cited pragmatic justifications for their information management, with relatively consistent frequencies both within and between age and ethnic groups. Getting permission for activities, avoiding punishment for misbehaviors, and maintaining appropriate levels of privacy were concerns for most adolescent participants of the study. Older adolescents from both ethnic groups demonstrated an increased frequency of pragmatic justifications compared with their younger counterparts, citing consent management significantly more than their younger peers. However, participants explained their behaviors

with relational justifications almost as frequently as they cited pragmatic concerns.

African American participants were more likely to invoke parental omniscience and accept parental authority than their Hmong counterparts, and they more frequently acknowledged their parents' safety concerns in rationalizing their disclosure, although these differences were not statistically significant. These patterns reflect African American parents' typical concerns about protecting children from negative experiences with racism and discrimination outside the family, although very few participants in the current study explicitly discussed these concerns. In the excerpt below, Melissa described the increased behavioral expectations for her son, Andrew, because she anticipated that he would encounter prejudice and discrimination as a young Black man:

> It's like people look for the worst in you because you may be living in a certain place and you're already stereotyped of how you live until they actually come in and see, like you all are doing. And I think I'm trying to teach my kids that this is not how life is. It gets greater. And a whole lot better.

African American adolescents strove to maintain a balance between respecting parents, maintaining trusting relationships, and achieving more behavioral autonomy. This balance also reflected their parents' efforts to help protect and prepare their children for potential negative experiences in the world outside the home. Many of Andrew's relational justifications reflected these efforts:

> Interviewer: So you feel your mom has a right to know where you're going. Do you feel like she needs to know all the details?
> Andrew: Well, not everything. Because there still is that trust you've got to have. Mostly I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing. And I think she trusts me and I wouldn't do anything to lose that trust with us. Without that, you really don't have anything. But sometimes I feel that I should be able to handle things on my own. And she's given me the freedom to do that. So sometimes. yes. I've gotten in trouble. I paid the price, and I know not to do it again.

In contrast to the themes of trust and parental authority in African American families, Hmong adolescents considered characteristics of their relationships with parents and family dynamics more frequently than any other justification when making decisions about what to tell parents. This category represented the only statistically significant ethnic group difference in justification use, with Hmong adolescents providing more relationship

characteristic justifications than their African American counterparts. As indicated above, many Hmong participants in both age groups explained that keeping information from parents is a necessary part of being a Hmong adolescent, because sometimes parents just do not understand what it's like to be a Hmong teenager in America.

For example, although Moua was 18 years old and had just graduated from high school, her parents continued to closely oversee her activities with friends, which often led Moua to secrecy and deception about her activities and relationships. Despite their differing opinions about the necessity of overprotectiveness, both Moua and her mother, Doua Chi, agreed that the restrictiveness stemmed from a conflict between traditional Hmong cultural values and American teenage norms. Doua Chi explains:

> Our Hmong culture is different than the American culture, you know? In the future, I want [my children] to know how to support themselves and take care of themselves. And children, if you let them go out and they don't obey you, they'll see other kids and these kids' parents can't discipline them.

While Doua Chi viewed her strictness as a use of her Hmong values to shield her children and prepare them for a successful life, Moua regarded it as unnecessary overprotectiveness. She felt as if her parents did not understand that it is normal and necessary for teenagers to have fun with friends, and that this does not have to take away from learning and achievement. Her parents considered spending time with friends unimportant unless it served a specific purpose.

> I tell my mom, I'm just going to my friend's house, and even then sometimes, I can't go. Like you know sometimes I get told "No. Why do you want to go? Is it important?" It's like, no, but I just want to go.

This perception of overprotectiveness and parents' lack of knowledge about life as a normal American teenager drove many of the information management decisions made by Hmong adolescents, especially older participants. Because parents did not seem to value recreational friendships, Hmong adolescents felt the need to be more selective with what they told their parents about their activities with friends. Whereas trust within the parent–child relationship was treasured and respected within the African American families in this study, many adolescent Hmong participants felt that their parents should trust more than they do, and that sometimes parents need to be manipulated in order to gain trust. Shoua, a 14-year-old Hmong girl, described taking a younger sibling to basketball games until her parents trusted her, at which point she would be able to use this trust to get permission to leave the house with less scrutiny: "Over time, you have to get your parents to trust you, right? So usually at the beginning, I'd tell them

yeah mom, I'm going to the basketball court. Usually I bring like a sister or brother with me."

Examining the stories of participants in both groups highlights the importance of family cultural beliefs and values in understanding why adolescents decide to keep information from their parents. Parents' culturally embedded responses to their adolescents' changing behavior and communication may also help explain different patterns of adolescent information management strategy use. For example, African American parents appeared to be more generally aware of the specific activities that their children were involved in as well as the types of activities that warrant parental caution. Generally, African American parents reported a more active role than most Hmong parents. Kenneth, uncle and primary caretaker to three teenage boys, communicated with other parents, actively sought information from his children and their friends, and gained knowledge through participating in activities.

> I know the parents, and we communicate back and forth, so we're all on the same page about what's going on. Sometimes I'm even involved in dropping them off. I get in touch with the parent and ask them do they know about this activity . . . and so we're talking, the parents.

Although there was considerable variation in the level of knowledge that Hmong parents in this study reported, their concerns were more focused on being confident that children are good, obedient, and listen to what parents have to say. Many Hmong parents were confident in their children's reports of their activities, despite adolescents' assertions that parents were not trusting. Youa explained:

> The most important would be to know what they are doing— was it good or bad? If you ask nicely, they'll tell you the truth, "We are not lying. If you don't believe us, just follow us." They'll say that. Therefore, you kind of believe them in their words.

Other Hmong parents were indeed less trusting of their children's word, but they did not take more action themselves. Below, Dee responded to a question about what her children would do when they said they are going out to play. "Oh, I don't know. They go to school and I don't know what they do. Once they return from school, they tell me they're going to the center. I only know that they are going to the center."

Although most Hmong parents agreed that it is important to know what their children are doing when they are away from home, they often knew very little about these activities, by both parental and adolescent accounts.

Several parents reported frustration with the cultural distance between parents and their children, as Va explains:

> I think that as a mother, I don't know English or know how to read and write. So, this takes away my ability to be a good mother to them. Saying it to them, they may not understand or don't believe you. I don't understand them. So, it's like you're not their real mother.

Recurring Themes: Full Disclosure, Partial Disclosure, and Lies

The myth of full disclosure. Younger African American adolescents reported fully disclosing information about peers considerably more than any other strategy and more than any other group claimed full disclosure. Daleesha, a 12-year-old African American girl, provided a typical explanation of her full disclosure to her mother. "I tell my mom when I do stuff. I just try to tell her so I can get it over with. She'll find out." However, frequent claims of full disclosure should not be construed as evidence that adolescents do not try to keep secrets from their parents or are inept at doing so. In total, 62% of participants in this study made a claim to full disclosure at least once, and the majority of individuals who reported using full disclosure contradicted themselves after further discussion about the details of their activities with friends.

Adolescents' claims to full disclosure often imply telling parents everything about the *basic details* of activities (who, what, where, when), not necessarily *everything*. For example, Julian, a 15-year-old African American boy, explained the details he provides to his uncle and primary caregiver about his activities. "I tell him that I'm going to the court or I'm going to somebody's house. And I tell him what time I'm coming back. If I don't come back at that certain time, I call him and tell him I'll be a little bit late coming home." In short, Julian felt that the basic details of his activities were enough to satisfy his uncle. He would always tell him "Where I'm at. What I'm going to do. What time I'll be back."

In turn, many parents acknowledged that "full disclosure" does not require knowing every detail. Ginger, 12-year-old Daleesha's mother, acknowledged this sentiment. "There's some things that she doesn't want to tell me. A lot of times she will hesitate because she thinks I'm going to confront that person or have her confront them and then she'll be talked about and teased."

Ginger prepared herself for a time when Daleesha won't be so forthright.

> Maybe she'll just stop talking about anything with me, as she gets older. I think that conversation will lessen. But, I will still try to sit down and have the same conversations with her. . . . The rules wouldn't change, but they'll probably get more enforced.

Partial disclosure or lies?   As Table 2 indicates, adolescents from both groups utilized partial disclosure as a primary strategy of information management. As the most common of all strategies on average, adolescents partially disclosed information to their parents when they did not want to lie but they also did not want to tell their parents the entire story. In particular, adolescents frequently used partial disclosure when activities with friends included spending time with boyfriends or girlfriends. Nhia, a 13-year-old Hmong boy, often omitted the fact that his girlfriend was a member of the friend group he spends time with. "I usually tell them that I go hang out with my friends. I do go over there but I just *happen* to meet [my girlfriend] there." Similarly, Briana, a 13-year-old African American girl, left out the detail that boyfriends often go to the movies with her and her friends. "If I'm going somewhere with me and my friends and their boyfriends . . . like movies or whatever. Sometimes my mom does not know that [our boyfriends will be there]."

What may seem like a lie to parents may actually be very carefully crafted partial disclosure to adolescents. Jonathan, a 14-year-old African American boy, avoided lying to his mother about going to parties with his cousin by telling her about everything else that they did with each other, omitting the part about the parties.

> Jonathan: I just tell her where we be going and stuff. And if we're going to stay out late and stuff like that, I don't tell her none of that stuff. If I'm going to be at [my cousin's] house, I tell her that we're going outside so like just do regular things. Like if we're going to the mall and stuff, I just don't tell her that we're going to go to parties.
>   Interviewer: Do you just leave that out or do you sometimes tell her that you're doing one thing and then go do something else?
>   Jonathan: No, I just leave that part out . . .

In situations like these, adolescents distinguished telling their parents the truth and leaving out key details from telling something that is not true. Even though she would like to have more open communication within her relationship with parents, Moua, an 18-year-old Hmong girl, reported explicitly lying to her parents when she knew that they would not give her permission to spend time with friends.

> I want to tell them about everything I go through my daily life. I wouldn't mind for them to know everything, but when I explain to them, they always take it the wrong way. That's why I learned to keep my mouth shut now. . . . I don't tell them everything. I tell them sometimes I am going to library [when I am not]. Like I said, if I'm doing something serious, then he says okay, go ahead, and then I can go.

Moua's statement above reflects that Hmong adolescents' use of partial disclosure is often complicated by their perceptions of cultural distance between their parents and their parents' lack of understanding about teenage life. Choua, a 14-year-old Hmong girl, explained that she sometimes does not tell her parents about her involvement in an after school program, because her parents would rather have her come home from school and help out around the house and at the family store.

> In a way, they want me to quit [the after school program], 'cause then I could spend more time with them and be at the store more, and stay home more, but I don't want to stay home, because its so boring. I've been there long enough. But you know, it's your parents, you got to do the things that they kind of want to do, they expect more from you than you expect from them.

Similarly, Choua expressed that some adolescent activities are inappropriate to Hmong parents, even though they consist of harmless teenage fun. She described her struggles with communicating to her parents about a youth-organized dance scheduled in parallel with a traditional Hmong New Years celebration:

> I know that if I tell them, that they would never let me go. 'Cause I know how parents are. They're concerned about you very much, they're watching where you're going, but sometimes when we need a little fun, we just kind of just want to sneak off and go. I mean, its how we dance and everything, its very inappropriate for parents to see, so they wouldn't want to know what we do. That's why at New Years, we have a traditional Hmong party and a D.J. party.

However, use of partial disclosure was not always driven by adolescents' active attempts to keep their parents from finding out information. Sometimes even parents acknowledged that they just do not need to know the details about everything. Marisa, the mother of Andrew, a 15-year-old African American boy, realized that she cannot know everything about her son's activities and relationships. In fact, she expected that Andrew should be able to make some decisions without her immediate guidance or knowledge.

> Interviewer: Can you think of a time when Andrew didn't tell you everything about something that he did?
> Melissa: Um, I really don't know. I really don't know. But now that he's 15, he's kind of, you know I let him make his own decisions now about a lot of things. So I wouldn't say that I could pinpoint where he didn't tell me everything. I couldn't pinpoint that. I trust him and

like I say, he's getting at that age now where it's time for him to make his own decisions. So I can't answer that one.

DISCUSSION

Adolescents in this study actively avoided talking to their parents about many of the details of their peer relationships and activities with friends. Individuals justified their censorship in numerous ways, many of which benefit adolescents by reducing their chances of getting into conflict with their parents, losing trust, or being prohibited from participating in certain activities with certain peers. Adolescents' use of multiple strategies to manage information within the parent–child relationship supports the notion that in addition to the conflict resolution processes predicted by the expectancy violation-realignment model of behavioral autonomy development (Collins, 1995; Collins et al., 1997), adolescents often take the process into their own hands in an effort to avoid conflict altogether. In fact, any decrease in conflict between parents and adolescents (Collins & Luebker, 1994; Smetana & Asquith, 1994) may be attributable in part to adolescents' increasing and more successful use of strategic disclosure and secrecy, which further insulates parents from peer relationships and activities that may cause conflict.

In a recent study, Darling et al. (2006) asked adolescents to sort a variety of issues into four predetermined categories of strategic management. In the current study, the same four categories of strategic management emerged from analysis of open-ended conversations with adolescents. This similarity across studies is noteworthy given their marked differences in methodology (card sort with predetermined categories vs. open-ended interviews), specificity of focus (general activities vs. peer relationships specifically), and participant demographics (primarily White and middle class vs. African American and Hmong working or lower class). Unlike Darling and colleagues, we were able to assess the frequency with which and the conditions under which adolescents activated various categories of strategic management and their justifications for doing so. Additionally, we were able to look beyond surface-level comparisons of frequencies and begin to understand the complex contributions of ethnic group culture to these developmental processes.

Ethnic Group Differences

Despite considerable differences in the stories of adolescents and their parents from both African American and Hmong families, the present study reinforces the notion that lessons can be learned about the universal nature of developmental processes through examination of culturally specific

practices (Greenfield et al., 2003). First, the results of this study have high-lighted that the examination of adolescent strategies and justifications for managing the information that parents know about their activities and relationships with friends and understanding parents' intended and actual roles in behavioral autonomy processes makes much more sense when viewed within the appropriate cultural contexts.

At a surface level, the relative frequencies of strategy use in Table 2 might suggest that Hmong adolescents are simply more secretive and increasingly devious in their communication with parents. In fact, older Hmong partic-ipants admitted lying to their parents more frequently than they reported full disclosure. However, our participants' voices tell a much different story. Many of the Hmong participants in this study, as is the case with youth in other recent immigrant families (Jones & Trickett, 2005; Weisskirch, 2007), serve as language brokers and cultural liaisons for their parents. Parents and youth both understand and acknowledge the large cultural differences be-tween traditional Hmong values and beliefs and the standards of growing up in American culture. These differences have left many parents feeling help-less and many youth feeling frustrated that their parents are not able to provide the guidance and support they need to live their lives as Hmong teenagers in America.

Most Hmong adolescents in this study were aware of their parents' ad-monitions and considered most of their behaviors normal for American teenagers. They prevented their parents from finding out the details of their activities not only for pragmatic or selfish reasons, but often because they have learned that it is easier to not tell parents than it is to help them un-derstand. Simultaneously, some parents feel threatened by the potential that their children will lose connection with their culture, and others acknowl-edge the importance of their children's success in America but do not know how to help them. These complexities only further underscore the impor-tance of attending to the culturally embedded nature of behavioral auton-omy negotiations within parent–child relationships, and they warrant further investigation into how behavioral autonomy processes develop within immigrant and refugee families, especially when traditional cultural backgrounds are considerably different from the customs of the host culture.

Although African American participants were less likely to explicitly mention cultural, ethnic, or racial experiences in their conversations, their stories also implicate key cultural components. As other researchers have encountered, many African American parents in this study did not explicitly discuss their struggles with racism and discrimination or their efforts to protect their children from and prepare them for potential negative expe-riences in the community (Sanders Thompson, 1994; Spencer, 1983; Thorn-ton, Chatters, Taylor, & Allen, 1990). This pattern does not necessarily suggest that African American adolescents do not consider the impact of their ethnicity and family cultural background when making information

management decisions. To the contrary, ethnicity and culture are often very important to parenting (Peters, 2002; Sanders Thompson, 1994) and very salient aspects of African American children's and adolescents' lives (Tatum, 1997). This pattern may reflect many African American parents' general reluctance to discuss racial issues with researchers (Thornton et al., 1990).

The explicit nature of cultural considerations in Hmong adolescents' narratives may also be an artifact of Hmong adolescents' experiences as mostly second generation immigrants and refugees within the United States. Their identities as Hmong family members and American teenagers come to the forefront of their everyday activities, and may be indicative of their active negotiation of the traditional Hmong values of their families and the influence of American youth culture in their daily lives (Davidson, 1996; Kwak, 2003; Trueba et al., 1990). In contrast, the cultural impact on African American youths' decision making may be less explicit because the relationship between their family culture and American youth culture is less discrepant and has been more solidly established and stable throughout their lives. This being said, many of the patterns of information management and parent–child communication implicate similarities between parents' concerns related to their children's behavioral autonomy and typical racial socialization practices aimed at preparing children for potential racial bias and discrimination (Hughes et al., 2006; Lesane-Brown, 2006).

Many African American adolescents and parents in this study endorsed continued emphasis on trust within the family, acceptance of parental authority, and the importance of parents' prudential concerns, or making certain that parents know enough about particular activities in order to ensure their children's safety. These patterns are all consistent with typical messages and behaviors that African American parents use to socialize their children to race and ethnicity. The potential connection between behavioral autonomy development and parental racial socialization practices also provides an additional layer of complexity that warrants further research investigation. Particularly in African American families, parents' concerns about their children encountering racism and discrimination while outside the purview of parents increase during early adolescence, which is also when adolescents begin to assert more control over decisions about their behaviors and activities. Understanding how families negotiate these two processes, which at times would appear to contradict each other, would be a fascinating topic for future research.

Adolescents as Relational Pragmatists

That most adolescents in this study made concerted efforts to prevent their parents from finding out the details of their activities with peers suggests that if parents want to know more than the basic details, they need to actively seek out this information on their own. Relying on spontaneous disclosure of

information for most parents may not lead to full knowledge of activities and relationships. However, many adolescents also indicated that they wanted to avoid lying to their parents as much as possible. Asking questions about who, what, and where may be enough for parents who have come to terms with their children's behavioral autonomy, but relying on child disclosure may prove frustrating to parents who want to know more. Parents may also need to use more active information seeking strategies themselves, rather than relying solely on reports from their children.

The present study has also highlighted that adolescents are not the exclusively pragmatic and selfish beings that many adults may perceive them to be. In fact, adolescent participants in this study cited developing or maintaining positive relationships with their parents as important objectives of their secretive behaviors and selective disclosure almost as frequently as they reported pragmatic justifications. Relational justifications may be a key to helping researchers understand the culturally embedded nature of adolescent information management. Although similar patterns of adolescents' pragmatic objectives emerged within and between groups, the differences in the conceptualization and use of relational justifications drove much of the analysis of the cultural contributions to behavioral autonomy processes within this study. Additionally, the similar frequencies of pragmatic and relational justifications as a whole and the apparent culturally embedded nature of relational justifications within this study may provide future studies with the basis to distinguish potentially culturally universal components of behavioral autonomy (e.g., adolescent pragmatism) from those that are more culturally relative (e.g., consideration of relational characteristics).

Limitations and Future Research

Adolescents in this study clearly demonstrated the importance of family relationships, particularly maintenance of trusting, respectful relationships with their parents. However, all of the study's participants also appeared to have generally positive, caring relationships with their parents. Patterns of information management may be very different within families that do not get along very well or for adolescents who are involved in more delinquent activities (Darling et al., 2006). The current study also focused on a small sample within two specific ethnic groups, and all participants lived in working class or lower class households. Similarities in strategies and justifications between this and previous studies is promising, but examination of these constructs within other ethnic and socioeconomic groups may result in different patterns due to the culturally embedded nature of autonomy development processes.

Future studies of behavioral autonomy development in adolescence can use the constructs developed through this and other related studies to

continue advancement and expansion of the expectancy violation-realignment model as a bidirectional, process-oriented, relational theoretical model. Researchers should explore further the explicit and implicit negotiations between adolescents and their parents that lead to advancements or stagnation of adolescent autonomy, attending to the culturally embedded nature of justifications or motivations for utilizing particular information management strategies. The most interesting future studies may be those that are able to examine adolescent autonomy-seeking behaviors and parental information-seeking behaviors in combination with cultural family processes, including ethnic and racial socialization messages that parents provide to their children.

Parental expectancies may also be realigned as they see their children developing (or not developing) behavioral autonomy. The parental perspective on adolescents' behavioral autonomy and selective disclosure as well as the developmental processes that parents go through while their children are developing autonomy are understudied aspects of autonomy development that deserve more exploration. Understanding how parents change their expectancies and behaviors if and when they realize that their adolescent children no longer tell them everything will be crucial to understanding the processes as a whole.

The current study provides promising additions to our current knowledge of autonomy development and parent–adolescent communication about activities with friends. It uncovers some interesting directions for future research, and it contributes insight into the potential universal salience of autonomy constructs and the cultural nature of parent–child relationships and their evolution over time. Hmong and African American adolescents' patterns of information management strategy and justification use and parents' perspectives on secrecy and disclosure provide an empirically supported expansion of theoretical and conceptual frameworks that have been investigated primarily in White and middle class families. The findings from this study can guide future investigations of parental strategy use and the interactional nature of parent–child relationships and adolescent autonomy development.

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