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# Parental Hope Communication and Parent-Adolescent Constructive Conflict Management: A Multilevel Longitudinal Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

Drawing from relational conflict management research and hope theory, the present study hypothesized that parental hope communication is positively related to constructive parent-adolescent conflict management. Utilizing three waves of longitudinal survey data from 393 Latina/o 6<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> grade students, we tested the hypotheses using a random intercept cross-lagged panel model, which partitions variance at the between-person and within-person levels over time. At the between-person level, we found that, relative to the sample averages, as Latina/o students reported higher levels of parental hope communication, they tended to report higher levels of constructive conflict over the academic year. At the within-person level, parental hope communication at one time point positively predicted constructive parent-adolescent conflict at the next time point. Our findings inform hope theory, family communication, and positive communication research by demonstrating the potential utility of parental hope communication for increasing constructive conflict in parent-adolescent relationships.

The literature on parent-adolescent conflict supports both optimistic and pessimistic perspectives regarding the effects of conflict on adolescents (Laursen & Hafen, 2009). On the one hand, conflict appears to be beneficial because it enables adolescents the opportunity to learn conflict management skills, air frustrations, and express evolving identity needs (Steinberg & Silk, 2002). On the other hand, parent-adolescent conflict appears to be problematic, as it has been found to be positively associated with adolescents' internalizing (e.g., anxiety and depression) and externalizing (e.g., aggression and delinquency) maladjustment in the near term (Weymouth, Buehler, Zhou, & Henson, 2016) and decreases in relational quality and life satisfaction in the long term (Overbeek, Stattin, Vermulst, Ha, & Engels, 2007). In efforts to reconcile these seemingly disparate views, scholars have argued that parent-adolescent conflict can be beneficial *or* detrimental depending on whether it is managed through constructive communication practices (e.g., respectful disagreement, discussion of each person's side; Branje, Van Doorn, Van Der Valk, & Meeus, 2009; Missotten, Luyckx, Branje, & Van Petegem, 2017; Sillars & Canary, 2013; Steinberg & Silk, 2002). This work suggests that, when managed well, conflict can be an essential component of parents' and adolescents' renegotiation of their relational bond (Branje, Laursen, & Collins, 2013) during a period of adolescents' expanding needs for individuation (Ponappa, Bartle-Haring, & Day, 2014).

Constructive conflict management, however, is a "mature" form of interaction that takes time to develop throughout adolescence based on multitudinous factors (Van Doorn, Branje, & Meeus, 2011; Van Lissa, Hawk, Branje, Koot, & Meeus, 2016). A chief objective for researchers, then, is to identify factors that contribute to constructive conflict management practices in parent-adolescent

relationships (Missotten et al., 2017). A communication perspective on parent-adolescent conflict necessitates that such efforts be situated within the larger family communication and cultural environment (Canary, Cupach, & Messman, 1995; Caughlin & Malis, 2004; Shearman & Dumlao, 2008; Sillars & Canary, 2013).

Research indicates, for instance, that positive parent-adolescent communication practices—often occurring outside the context of specific conflict episodes—are linked to the amount of conflict parents and adolescent have (Flannery, Montemayor, Eberly, Torquati, & 1993), their perceptions of each other's communication tactics during conflict episodes (Canary et al. 1995 1995), and the outcomes associated with the conflict (Laursen & Hafen, 2009). Culture, moreover, can affect parents' and adolescents' expectations for conflict, as well as their interpretation, evaluation, and enactment of conflict behaviors (Bámaca-Colbert, Umaña-Taylor, & Gayles, 2012; Dixon, Graber, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008; Sillars & Canary, 2013).

Among Latina/o families, whom we focus on in this study, the cultural values of *respect* (i.e., an importance placed on deference to, and consideration of, authority figures' viewpoints) and *familism* (i.e., an emphasis on interdependence and support among family members; Knight et al., 2010) can be particularly influential in family conflicts. Indicative of this, Dixon et al. (2008) found that, relative to European American girls, Latina and African American girls scored higher in respect for parental authority. Moreover, cultural group moderated the relationship between respect and conflict intensity, such that lacking respect led to more heated conflicts in Latina and African American mother-daughter dyads relative to European American mother-daughter dyads. Therefore, although a respectful tone might be a component of constructive conflict across cultural groups, Latina/o parents might place particular emphasis on respect from adolescents during family conflicts (Dixon et al., 2008; Kuhlberg, Peña, & Zayas, 2010).

In light of the aforementioned issues, the current study aims to contribute to the literature on constructive conflict management, particularly among Latina/o families. Specifically, the current study examines the relationship between constructive parent-adolescent conflict and a form of positive family communication called *parental hope communication*. Based on hope theory (Snyder, 2000, 2002), parental hope communication refers to messages from parents that prepare adolescents to establish goals and develop the pathways and agency necessary to successfully pursue those goals.

Hope communication from parents represents what Davis, Mayo, Picora, and Wimberley (2013) referred to as “strengths-based communication strategies” that parents and other influential figures in children's lives (e.g., therapists, mentors) enact to promote children's sense of hope (see also Barge, 2003; Davis, 2013). Davis and colleagues' (2013) qualitative research centered on discourse transpiring in mental health team meetings with families managing children's mental health challenges. Strengths-based communication strategies, argued Davis et al., reflect the communicative construction of hopeful thinking (Snyder, 2002). We build on this work, within a hope theory (Snyder, 2002) framework, to explore potential longitudinal relationships between parental hope communication and constructive parent-adolescent conflict management.

Parental hope communication might lead to more constructive parent-adolescent conflict management over time because hope can positively contribute to adolescents' pursuit of positive interaction goals during conflicts (Merolla, 2014; Miller, Roloff, & Reznik, 2014). For Latina/o adolescents, hope might be especially influential during family conflict episodes given that multiple primary and secondary goals are salient for them. Indeed, to manage parent-adolescent conflict in constructive ways, Latina/o adolescents typically must not only pursue primary conflict goals (e.g., resource attainment, changes in relational expectations; Canary, 2003), but they must also do so in a way that addresses culturally influenced secondary communication goals (e.g., respect and deference to parental authority; Knight et al., 2010).

To test the relationship between constructive parent-adolescent conflict and parental hope communication in Latina/o families, we conducted a three-wave longitudinal study with Latina/o early adolescents (6th-8th grade students). We employed multilevel longitudinal structural equation

modeling (Hamaker, Kuiper, & Grasman, 2015) to examine whether parental hope communication positively predicts constructive conflict over an academic year, while taking into account numerous controls, including adolescents' respect for family and conflict frequency.

### Defining constructive parent-adolescent conflict communication

At its core, constructive relational conflict management involves framing conflicts as disagreements and differences that can be managed and potentially resolved through mutually respectful, cooperative, and problem-focused communication (Branje et al., 2009; Canary, 2003; Kurdek, 1994; Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991). Three issues must be kept in mind, however, when defining constructive conflict communication. First, conflict communication is “polysemous” (i.e., subject to multiple interpretations; Sillars & Canary, 2013). Although scholars have clearly identified forms of conflict communication that appear constructive for parent-child relationships, it will always be true that what is considered constructive in one family might not always be considered constructive in another. Second, conflict can be constructive and beneficial to relationships, while also being emotionally and mentally taxing for individuals. Costs and benefits, in short, co-occur in family conflicts (Laursen & Hafen, 2009). Third, a conflict episode can be constructive even if the parents and adolescent do not successfully resolve the source of their discord or accomplish their primary conflict goals. Given that many conflicts concern unresolvable differences, constructive conflict transpires when parties maintain a sense of balance between competitive and cooperative tactics (Canary, 2003) and avoid interaction styles that provoke sustained negative affect (Laursen, DeLay, Richmond, & Rubin, 2016).

With these caveats in mind, constructive parent-adolescent conflict practices can be isolated (Branje et al., 2009). Constructive conflict includes directly yet calmly and respectfully discussing each party's concerns in a way that facilitates management or resolution of a problem (e.g., Kurdek, 1994; Rusbult et al., 1991). Respectful and calm discussion, as noted earlier, may be particularly important in Latina/o families due to strong expectations of respect for parental authority. Both theory and research support the idea that when parents and adolescents manage conflict using constructive tactics, it increases the likelihood of positive relational outcomes (Laursen & Hafen, 2009) and mitigates the likelihood of negative individual outcomes, such as adolescent maladjustment (Branje et al., 2009).

### Defining parental hope communication

Parental hope communication is rooted in Snyder's (2002) hope theory. Hope theory (Snyder, 2002) is a comprehensive social scientific framework that defines hope as a dual-component cognitive construct focused on goal pursuit. The two mutually influencing cognitive components in hope theory are *pathways thinking* and *agency thinking* (Snyder, 2002). Pathways thinking is how people come up with routes toward goals they view as meaningful. Agency thinking is people's sense of efficacy that they can successfully enact the pathways they develop through pathways thinking. Within the framework of hope theory, the high-hope person is someone who possesses high levels of pathways and agency thinking across situations. Pathways and agency thinking jointly comprise hope (Snyder, 2002).

According to hope theory, pathways and agency thinking begin to develop based on early family interaction (Snyder, 2000). Parents and other socialization agents teach children and adolescents how to establish goals, problem solve, and manage adversity (Snyder, 2000). Hope theory suggests that if people's history of interaction with caregivers was generally supportive and encouraging of secure attachment, then they are more likely to have high hope levels as they enter adulthood (Fruht, 2015; Jiang, Huebner, & Hills, 2013; Snyder, 2002). High levels of hope are beneficial throughout the lifespan because they lead individuals to pursue challenging goals in an efficacious manner and facilitate resilience against life's setbacks (Snyder, 2002). A large body of research

demonstrates that hope predicts positive outcomes in multiple domains, including school, athletics, and mental and physical health (Edwards, Rand, Lopez, & Snyder, 2007).

In efforts to build upon the cognitive emphasis of hope theory, our interest is in *parental hope communication*, which we define as the messages children exchange with parents, particularly in the context of everyday interaction (Duck, Rutt, Hurst, & Strejc, 1991), but also during less frequent and challenging circumstances (e.g., Merolla, 2014), that fortify pathways and agency thinking (Snyder, 2002). This definition of parental hope communication aligns with Davis et al.'s (2013) research on strengths-based health communication strategies, which are conceptualized as messages that help children and families thrive despite mental health challenges. According to Davis et al., this type of communication “refers to, suggests, or acknowledges something positive in the child, parent, family, team or environment which can be used to move them forward in a positive direction” (p. 68). These strategies, which include recognizing children’s talents, identifying resources to help them pursue goals, and pointing out past positive actions, are the building blocks of pathways and agency thinking (Davis et al., 2013).

Although parental hope communication is an outgrowth of hope theory (Snyder, 2002) and research on hopeful discourse (e.g., Barge, 2003; Davis et al., 2013), it also fits within the broader framework of “positive communication” (i.e., communication that supports well-being; see Socha & Beck, 2015 for a review). Thus, parental hope communication overlaps with various existing communication constructs indicative of positive communication, especially supportive communication (Holmstrom, 2013; MacGeorge, Feng, & Burleson, 2011) and confirming communication (Dailey, 2010; Ellis, 2002). We briefly describe each of these constructs and then highlight their similarities and differences from parental hope communication.

Supportive communication, broadly speaking, involves verbal and nonverbal behaviors directed toward improving a person’s well-being when they are confronting a problem in their life (MacGeorge et al., 2011). Supportive communication is divided into specific categories of communication (e.g., advice, emotional support, esteem support, and informational support), all of which aim to help someone manage a trying situation (Feng, 2009; Holmstrom & Burleson, 2011; Xu & Burleson, 2001). Parental hope communication aligns with aspects of supportive communication (MacGeorge et al., 2011). For example, like supportive communication, hope communication can enhance children’s self-esteem (via agency development) and efficacious problem-solving (via pathways development). Yet, hope communication differs from supportive communication in that it is not necessarily linked to a specific problem or stressor. Supportive communication (e.g., esteem, informational, emotional support) is typically conceived as person-centered communication directed toward a target who is experiencing distress caused by a specific problem or acute stressor event (Goldsmith, 2004; Holmstrom, 2013; Holmstrom & Burleson, 2011; MacGeorge et al., 2011). Although hope communication can occur alongside supportive communication in the same interaction, it can also occur independent of support provision. Our conceptualization of parental hope communication involves pathways- and agency-enhancing messages that can be exchanged between parents and children in the course of everyday interaction as part of an ongoing socialization process. For example, parents can tell children that they are doing well in life and have a bright future without those messages necessarily being directed toward alleviating children’s distress stemming from an identifiable stressor. When stressors do emerge, though, hope communication and supportive communication might co-occur.

Hope communication also shares similarities with confirming communication. Confirming communication from parents includes messages that show children that they are unique, capable, and valuable individuals (Ellis, 2002). Drawing on various family, psychological, and communication theories, Dailey (2010) theorized that confirming communication both *accepts* (e.g., “My parent smiles at me often”) and *challenges* (e.g., “My parent pushed me to set goals in my sports activities”) children (see also Dailey, 2006). Aligned with Dailey’s (2010) conceptualization of confirming communication, parental hope communication involves discussion between parents and children on the topics of problem solving and preparation for the future. However, hope communication,

unlike confirming communication—particularly the challenge dimension of confirming communication (Dailey, 2006)—is not inherently parent-initiated whereby the parent “pushes” or “challenges” the child to pursue a goal or solve problems. In short, parents can talk directly or indirectly about children’s pathways and agency toward future goals without the necessary condition of overt parental challenge regarding those goals.

Parental hope communication, in sum, is a form of positive and strengths-based family communication (Davis et al., 2013; Socha & Beck, 2015), grounded in hope theory (Snyder, 2002), that operates alongside and/or in conjunction with existing family communication constructs (Dailey, 2010; Ellis, 2002; MacGeorge et al., 2011). Focusing on parental hope communication is theoretically and practically significant because it can identify messages that are rather straightforward in nature that parents can utilize in efforts to promote children’s hopeful thinking. Next, we discuss why parental hope communication can positively contribute to constructive parent-adolescent conflict communication.

### The relationship between constructive conflict and parental hope communication

During parent-adolescent conflict episodes, differences of opinion, frustration, and increased negative affect appear inevitable due to increasing tensions between connection and autonomy (Branje et al., 2009; Steinberg & Silk, 2002). Adolescents beset by hopelessness might find it particularly challenging to communicate with their parents about areas of discord. As previously discussed, relational conflict, even when managed constructively, can be quite emotionally and cognitively taxing (Laursen & Hafen, 2009). Consequently, adolescents lacking hope (Snyder, 1996) are potentially vulnerable to feeling overwhelmed during conflict episodes because they struggle to distance themselves from negative events (Snyder et al., 1997). When flooded with negative affect, adolescents with low hope should be less likely to engage in cognitively-taxing and other-oriented constructive conflict behaviors (e.g., calm discussion of each person’s side; Canary, 2003), and more likely to engage in default-activated and self-protective conflict behavior (e.g., defensiveness and withdrawal; Rusbult, Olsen, Davis, & Hannon, 2001).

For Latina/o adolescents, who may be especially concerned with obedience and preserving harmonious family relationships (Dixon et al., 2008), enacting constructive conflict management behaviors can be a complex endeavor. Indeed, although some degree of anger and frustration is normative in conflict episodes (Canary, 2003), such feelings can feel at odds with salient culture-based expectations for parent-child communication. Thus, parental hope communication may be especially beneficial for Latina/o adolescents because, consistent with hope theory, it can support the mental capacities (e.g., goal-directed thinking, planning, organization, self-presentational thoughts; Kruger, 2011; Snyder et al., 1997) needed for the successful engagement in the communicatively complex task of constructive conflict management.

Other cultural factors, such as *fatalism* (i.e., the belief that events transpire for a reason outside one’s internal doing), could also affect the likelihood of constructive conflict management in Latina/o families. Fatalism, which is common among members of minority groups with long histories of discrimination, is generally linked to avoidant behaviors and a sense of powerlessness and inefficacy with regard to goal pursuits (Abraído-Lanza et al., 2007; Basáñez, Warren, Crano, & Unger, 2014; Guzmán, Santiago-Rivera, & Hasse, 2005). Hope theorists argue that discrimination also contributes to children’s sense of hopelessness when they enter trying situations (Snyder, Feldman, Taylor, Schroeder, & Adams, 2000). As a result, when Latina/o adolescents enter conflict episodes, they might consciously or unconsciously adopt a fatalistic attitude concerning their ability to influence their parents in a manner that successfully balances salient tensions between dissent and deference. Research indicates that feelings of hopelessness and inefficacy might undermine individuals’ willingness and ability to engage in constructive conflict communication (Doherty, 1981; Merolla, 2014; Miller et al., 2014). This seems to further underscore why parental hope communication and its assumed promotion of pathways and agency thinking (Snyder, 2002) could contribute to more

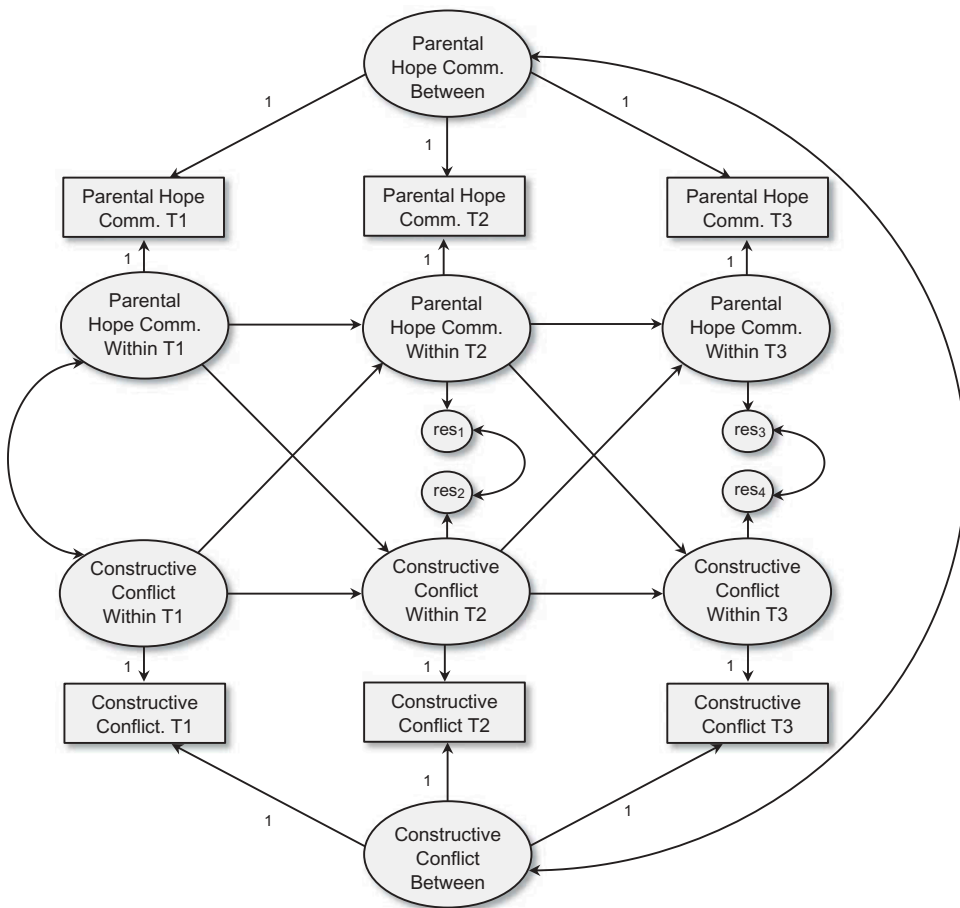


constructive parent-adolescent conflict amongst Latina/o adolescents. Overall, pathways and agency thinking can positively contribute to what Canary (2003) identified as *interaction control*, or the ability to communicate in a cooperative manner (i.e., pursue pro-relational goals) despite the inevitable frustrations, anger, or feelings of hopelessness that can arise from conflict instigation.

### Differentiating types of variance in constructive conflict and parental hope communication

The primary goal of this study is to test the longitudinal association between parental hope communication and constructive parent-adolescent conflict based on adolescents' self-reported survey data. We utilize a recently developed approach to longitudinal structural equation modeling called a random-intercept cross-lagged panel model (RI-CLPM; Hamaker et al., 2015). The RI-CLPM (see Figure 1) is advantageous in that it accounts for associations at the between-person (i.e., stability) and within-person (i.e., change) levels. This is something that traditional panel models do not do (Berry & Willoughby, 2016).

The between-person level in the RI-CLPM captures the stability of variables over time. The within-person level in the RI-CLPM, in contrast, captures intra-individual fluctuations over time. These levels provide very different information. For example, a significant between-person association between parental hope communication and constructive conflict would suggest that in parent-child



**Figure 1.** Random intercept cross-lagged panel model of parental hope communication and constructive parent-adolescent conflict.

relationships where higher than average parental hope communication occurs (relative to the sample mean), higher than average constructive conflict communication also occurs (relative to the sample mean). This type of association approximates relatively stable differences between people, rather than any type of causal relationship between variables (Hamaker et al., 2015; Keijsers, 2016). Such an association would make sense given that families can exhibit stable communication climates, which manifest in family members' relatively high or low scores across interaction measures (Ackerman, Kashy, Conger, & Donnellan, 2011).

A significant within-person association, however, would indicate that the amount of parental hope communication an adolescent receives (relative to that adolescent's expected amount) at one time point, predicts changes in the amount of constructive parent-adolescent conflict the adolescent experiences (relative to that adolescent's expected amount) at a later time point. Longitudinal within-person relationships of this sort are typically of greater importance to family and communication theorizing and application because these relationships approximate causal processes at the appropriate level of analysis (Berry & Willoughby, 2016; Hamaker et al., 2015; Keijsers, 2016; te Poel, Baumgartner, Hartmann, & Tannis, 2016).

We hypothesized that parental hope communication would be positively associated at both the between-person level (*Hypothesis 1*) and within-person level (*Hypothesis 2*). The cross-lagged model structure also enables us to test the possibility that constructive conflict predicts parental hope communication. It is possible that when parents and adolescents constructively manage conflict it also makes parental hope communication more likely to occur (e.g., due to greater relational connection or openness). Thus, adolescents' self-reported parental hope communication will positively predict their self-reported constructive conflict with their parents over time. The literature, though, does not provide a sufficiently clear basis for a directional hypothesis. Thus, we offer a research question with regard to potential cross-time effects of constructive conflict on parental hope communication (*Research Question 1*).

## Method

This study's analyses are based on data that come from a larger project on stress and coping for Latina/o early adolescents focusing on hope communication, parent-child conflict, interpreting for family members, mental health outcomes, and substance use. Junior high school students (6<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> grades) in the southwestern United States filled out a survey in October 2015 for Time 1, in February 2016 for Time 2, and in May 2016 for Time 3. Students were allowed to enter or leave the study at any time; therefore, a total of 411 students completed a survey (nearly the entire school's student population). Utilizing the school data, 96% of the students were of Latina/o descent; therefore, only Latina/o students ( $n = 393$ ) were selected for the current study's analyses.

A closer look at the sample of 393 Latina/o students revealed that 46% were female, with an average age of 12.5 years ( $range = 10\text{--}15$ ,  $SD = .90$ ). Thirty-two percent were in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, 39% were in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, and 29% were in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. With respect to nativity, 89.3% were born in the United States, 8.4% in Mexico, and 2.3% in another country (unspecified). The majority of students had a mother who was born in Mexico (62.6%), and 33.1% had a mother who was born in the United States (4.3% other). Similarly, most students had a father who was born in Mexico (67.2%), whereas 26.5% had a father who was born in the United States (6.3% other). Based school report data, the average yearly household income was \$31,328 ( $Range = \$364\text{--}\$94,900$ ,  $Mdn = \$31,006$ ,  $SD = \$14,856$ ), and the average number of people within a household was 4.80 ( $Range = 2\text{--}9$ ,  $Mode = 5$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ).

## Procedures

To recruit schools, the second author called and e-mailed school principals whose school was within a 3-hour driving distance from the university. The author also sent information packets to local



schools within the county. The school principal of the participating school expressed interest because most of the students were Latina/o and had experiences pertinent to the study. Prior to each wave, the second author provided information letters for parents that the school sent home. The letters described the purpose of the study and notified parents that their child would complete a survey during a class period at school. Parents had two weeks to withdraw their child from the study, and sixteen parents withdrew their child from the study.

On the days that students were surveyed, the second author and research personnel described the confidential and voluntary nature of the study to the students. Afterward, students signed an assent form and completed the survey using a tablet computer. The assent and survey completion process took approximately 30–40 minutes. This process was repeated at each wave. All study documents were provided in English and Spanish. The second author established translation fidelity with Rogler's (1989) back translation method. At Time 1, 4.4% completed the survey in Spanish, 5% at Time 2, and 3.6% at Time 3. For participating, the junior high school received \$600 at each time point, and each student received a snack and university paraphernalia.

## Measures

The school setting limited the amount of time students had to assent and fill out the survey; therefore, shortened scales were utilized in the present study. See Table 1 for descriptive statistics, alpha reliability coefficients, and intercorrelations for the main study variables.

### Parent-adolescent constructive conflict management

We used three items to measure constructive parent-adolescent conflict. Consistent with past research (e.g., Branje et al., 2009), we adapted items from the constructive factors of existing relational conflict management measures, which emphasize direct discussion of issues in a way that supports solving or managing a problem (Kurdek, 1994; Rusbult et al., 1991). The items also referenced tonal features, such that constructive conflict communication is not only direct and problem-focused (Kurdek, 1994; Rusbult et al., 1991), but also calm and respectful. At all three time points, students were asked, "When you argue with your mom or dad, how often do you ... calmly talk about your disagreements with each other? ... respectfully share your thoughts with each other? ... try to understand each other's side of the argument?" (1 = *never* to 5 = *very often*). When completing each of these items, students reported on "mom or dad" together, rather than each parent separately.

### Parental hope communication

Three items were taken from Snyder et al.'s (1997) *Children's Hope Scale* and modified to assess parent-child hope communication. At Time 1, students were asked, "How often do these people

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics, reliabilities, and correlation matrix for main study variables.

	Parental Hope Comm. T1	Parental Hope Comm. T2	Parental Hope Comm. T3	Constructive Conflict T1	Constructive Conflict T2	Constructive Conflict T3
Parental Hope Comm. T1	-					
Parental Hope Comm. T2	.61	-				
Parental Hope Comm. T3	.53	.68	-			
Constructive Conflict T1	.38	.33	.32	-		
Constructive Conflict T2	.31	.41	.45	.44	-	
Constructive Conflict T3	.27	.37	.46	.39	.57	-
<i>M</i>	4.23	4.07	4.08	3.04	2.79	2.75
<i>SD</i>	.92	1.03	1.07	1.12	1.05	1.13
<i>Range</i>	1–5	1–5	1–5	1–5	1–5	1–5
$\alpha$	.81	.84	.88	.81	.79	.86

Note. All correlations were statistically significant at  $p < .001$ .

[mom or dad, friends, or teachers] ... tell you that you're doing pretty well? ... talk about all the ways you can solve your problems? ... tell you that you're prepared to do well in the future?" (1 = *never* to 5 = *very often*). For each item, students reported on their "mom or dad" together, rather than each parent separately. At Time 2 and Time 3, the introduction asked, "In the past 3 months (90 days), how often did these people..." and students responded to the same three items.

Hope theory conceptualizes hope as being based on separate pathways and agency components (Snyder, 2002). Thus, existing measures of hope assess pathways and agency dimensions. However, the operationalization of hope can be unidimensional, whereby the pathways and agency items are summed (see Snyder et al., 1997). Our use of brief unidimensional measure, then, is consistent with many researchers' approach to the measurement of hope theory-based constructs.

### Control variables

Students' age, home language (0 = English, 1 = Spanish/Mixteco), sex (0 = male, 1 = female), time spent in the United States, respect for family, and parent-adolescent conflict frequency were included as control variables. These variables were measured at the first wave. Based on school reported data, 71.6% of the students' home language was Spanish, 26.9% English, and 1.6% Mixteco (an indigenous language in Mexico). Respect for family was assessed by taking the average score of three items from Knight et al.'s (2010) Respect and Familism Referent subscales (e.g., "No matter what, children should always treat their parents with respect"; 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*;  $M = 4.25$ ,  $SD = .81$ ,  $\alpha = .78$ ). Parent-adolescent conflict frequency was measured by asking students, "Parents and children sometimes have arguments about schoolwork, friends, being disrespectful, privacy, and many other things. How often do you argue with your mom or dad?" (1 = *never* to 5 = *very often*;  $M = 2.52$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ). Time spent in the United States was measured with the question, "How many years have you lived in the United States?" with response options on a five-point scale (1 = *less than 1 year*, 2 = *between 1 and 5 years*, 3 = *between 6 and 10 years*, 4 = *more than 10 years*, and 5 = *whole life*;  $M = 4.59$ ,  $Mode = 5$ ;  $SD = .93$ ).

Age, sex, and home language accounted for general demographic differences across the sample. We added conflict frequency given that parents and children with infrequent conflict might find it easier to have constructive conflict. Past research indeed shows constructive conflict and conflict frequency are correlated (Missotten et al., 2017). Further, infrequent conflict might suggest a generally warmer communication climate between the parents and children (Ackerman et al., 2011), which might make hope communication more likely to occur. Respect for family was added because children with high respect for family might be more likely to be deferential to parents during disagreements (Stein et al., 2014). Differences in conflict management styles and expectations might also be shaped by the amount of time that adolescents have lived in the United States due to varying levels of acculturation (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2007).

## Results

As noted earlier, we tested our hypotheses using a RI-CLPM (see Figure 1; Hamaker et al., 2015). Prior to examining the structural model, we conducted a series of preliminary analyses to assess the missing data mechanism, descriptive statistics, measurement invariance, and metric, mean, and parameter invariance over time. Model analyses were conducted with AMOS 24.0.

### Missing data

There are three ways to classify missing data: *missing completely at random* (MCAR), *missing at random* (MAR), or *missing not at random* (MNAR). It is challenging to determine in an absolute sense which missing data mechanism exists in a given dataset, and all tests regarding missing data mechanisms must be interpreted with caution (Enders, 2010; Little, 2013; McKnight, McKnight, Sidani, & Figueredo, 2007). However, researchers can get a general sense of the missing data

mechanism through logic and a series of tests conducted within each wave and across wave (Enders, 2010; McKnight et al., 2007).

In longitudinal studies, there are multiple types of missing data to consider (Little, 2013). Within-wave missing data, or *item nonresponse*, is indicative of participants answering some but not all items in the survey, whereas, across-wave missing data, or *wave nonresponse*, reflects late entry or attrition (McKnight et al., 2007). In this study, 61.3% of participants completed all three waves, 28.7% completed two waves, and 10% completed one wave. To examine the pattern of missing data within each waves, we conducted Little's MCAR tests on the quantitative variables included in the models from each wave. The quantitative covariates were included in the wave 1 test. When Little's MCAR tests are nonsignificant, it suggests that the data might be MCAR. When these tests are statistically significant, it suggests the data might be MAR or MNAR.

Results showed that the data within the first and third waves were potentially MCAR, given that the Little's tests were nonsignificant (wave 1:  $\chi^2 = 213.671$ ,  $p = .09$ ; wave 3:  $\chi^2 = 19.531$ ,  $p = .881$ ). The Little's test for the second wave was significant  $\chi^2 = 35.024$ ,  $p < .02$ . Therefore, we conducted independent samples *t*-tests to cast light on whether the second wave of data was MAR or MNAR (McKnight et al., 2007). To conduct these tests, each variable in wave two is coded as present or missing to test whether missingness was related to other variables in the dataset. When missingness is related to variables in the dataset, but not the missing variable itself, then the data can be considered MAR (Enders, 2010; McKnight et al., 2007). However, if missingness is not related to variables in the dataset, it suggests the data are MNAR. The results of *t*-tests showed that missingness for certain variables was related to variables in the dataset. For example, in wave 2, participants who were missing data on the constructive conflict management items tended to have higher scores on the first item from the parental hope communication measure,  $t_s = -2.1$  to  $-2.0$ ,  $ps < .05$ ).

To examine the potential explanations of wave nonresponse, we conducted an analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Games-Howell post-hoc tests to test if participants who completed one wave, two waves, or all three waves exhibited mean differences on the model variables. The ANOVA results showed that, across all of the variables, there was only one significant difference, such that participants who completed only two waves ( $M = 3.22$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ), compared to those who completed all three waves ( $M = 2.71$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ), had a higher mean for constructive conflict management at wave 2,  $F = 2.99$ ,  $p < .02$ ,  $M \text{ diff} = .52$ ,  $p < .03$ . This lone difference does not appear especially meaningful or problematic, and suggests that there were few differences between participants with differing wave completion rates. Although the MAR mechanism is not directly testable (Enders, 2010; McKnight et al., 2007), MAR is a likely mechanism responsible for wave nonresponse (e.g., attrition) in longitudinal studies (Little, 2013). Thus, MAR is a reasonable assumption for missing data across waves in this study. When the missing data mechanism is MAR, MCAR, or a combination of the two, missing data are appropriately treated with full information maximum likelihood estimation (FIML; Little, 2013), which is the approach utilized in the current study.

### Measurement invariance

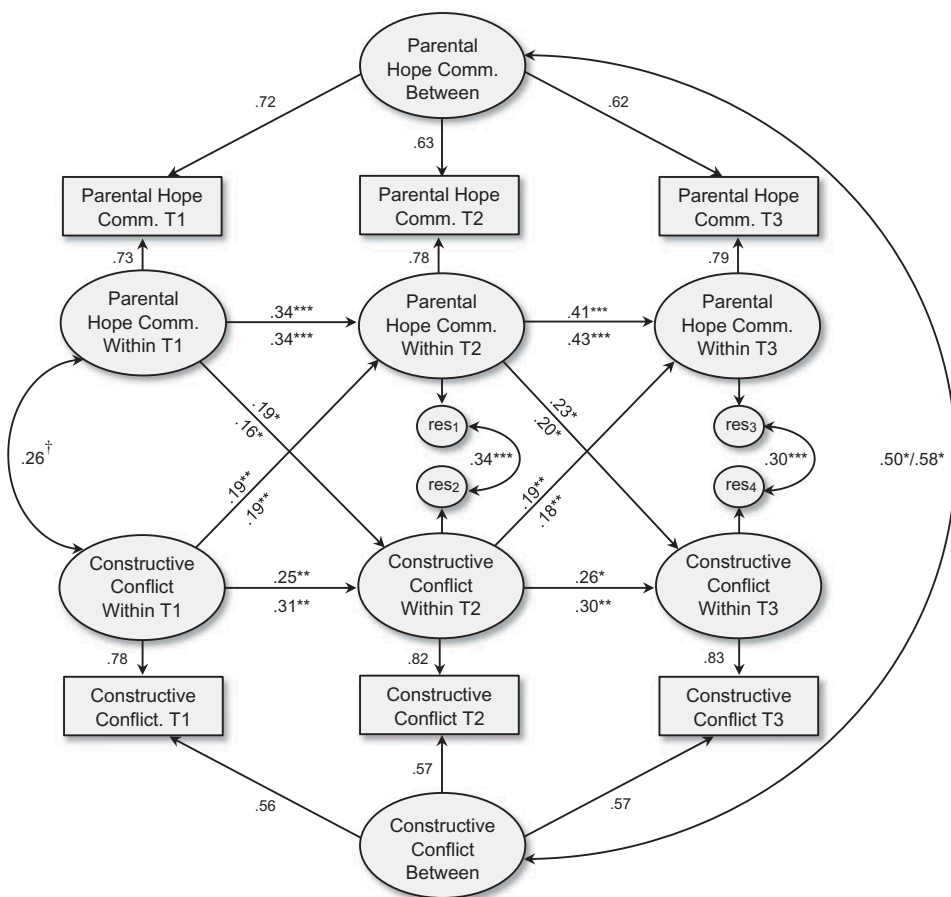
We first ran a series of invariance models to test if the measurement of parental hope communication and constructive conflict was factorially invariant across time—a necessary condition for longitudinal structural equation modeling (Little, 2013). Three increasingly stringent invariance measurement models were fit to the data. The first model, the configural invariance model, is the least restrictive model; it is used to establish acceptable baseline fit. The second model is the weak invariance model, which constrains the factor loadings across time. The third model is the strong invariance model, which constrains both the factor loadings and item intercepts across time. Weak invariance and strong invariance are established based on the change in model fit from the configural to weak, and from weak to strong models. Invariance standards are met if the overall model fit is acceptable and the change in the Confirmatory Fit Index ( $\Delta CFI$ ) is less than .01 (Little, 2013). Strong invariance was established based on model fit,  $\chi^2 = 168.821$ ,  $df = 118$ ,  $p < .002$ , CFI = .981, Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) = .973, Root

Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .033 (90% CI: .021, .044), and sufficiently small  $\Delta$ CFI values (.002 and .006 for the weak and strong models).

## Hypothesized model

### Model setup

The model (see Figure 1) was constructed with two random intercepts, which represent the between-person levels for parental hope communication and constructive conflict (Hamaker et al., 2015). The random intercepts loaded onto Time 1-Time 3 (T1-T3) observed variables (i.e., observed means at each wave) for parental hope communication or constructive conflict, with loadings set to 1.0. The correlation between the random intercepts tests the hypothesized between-person association (i.e., H1). Next, person-centered variables were constructed with a latent variable for each T1-T3 observed variable in the model. The observed variables loaded onto



**Figure 2.** Final model of parental hope communication and constructive parent-adolescent conflict.

*Note.* Standardized estimates above the lines are for the model with the covariates included and untrimmed, whereas the estimates below the lines are for the model without the covariates. Covariates included in the model were age, conflict frequency, home language, respect for family, sex, and time spent living in the United States. Covariates were correlated with the random intercepts (i.e., Parental Hope Comm. Between and Constructive Conflict Between), and modeled as direct predictors of the observed indicators of Parental Hope Comm. and Constructive Conflict at T1. Model fit:  $\chi^2 = 20.45$ ,  $df = 19$ ,  $p = .368$ , CFI = .998, RMSEA = .014 (90% CI: .000, .047).

† $p < .10$ . \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

the latent factors with loadings set to 1.0. Autoregressive and cross-lagged paths were then modeled between the waves. The cross-lagged paths test for potential within-person longitudinal associations between the variables (i.e., H2 and RQ1).

Per Hamaker et al. (2015), we tested if the variable means were time-invariant with a model in which means of the six observed variables were intercorrelated and their means were held constant over time. Our initial model results indicated that the T2 and T3 variable means were time-invariant, but the T1 variable means were higher than T2 and T3 means. When we removed the T1 mean constraints, the model fit significantly improved based on the  $\Delta\text{CFI}$  and a significant  $\chi^2$  difference test:  $\chi^2 = .154$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .926$ ,  $\text{CFI} = 1.00$ ,  $\text{TLI} = 1.036$ ,  $\text{RMSEA} = .00$  (90% CI: .00, .032);  $\Delta\text{CFI} = .031$ ,  $\Delta\chi^2(2) = 20.799$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The T2 and T3 mean constraints were therefore left in place, while the T1 means remained unconstrained, in subsequent analyses.

When the lags between surveys are equal, which they were in this study, Hamaker et al. (2015) recommend constraining the autoregressive and cross-lagged parameters across time because the constraints provide additional degrees of freedom and power. If cross-time constraints are not included, the models could have too few degrees to freedom to accurately estimate parameter values. Moreover, when model fit between constrained and unconstrained models is equivalent, the constrained model can be considered more parsimonious. We compared the fit of models with and without cross-time constraints in place. Results showed that the model fit for the constrained model was good and equivalent to the unconstrained model,  $\chi^2 = 6.159$ ,  $df = 7$ ,  $p = .521$ ,  $\text{CFI} = 1.00$ ,  $\text{TLI} = 1.005$ ,  $\text{RMSEA} = .00$  (90% CI: .00, .058);  $\Delta\chi^2(4) = 4.971$ ,  $p = .29$ ;  $\Delta\text{CFI} = .00$ . Cross-time constraints were therefore retained in subsequent model tests. The control variables were correlated with the random intercepts and modeled as direct predictors of the observed indicators of T1 hope communication and constructive conflict.

### ***Assessing model fit and the between-person and within-person results***

The full model fit the data well,  $\chi^2 = 20.450$ ,  $df = 19$ ,  $p = .368$ ,  $\text{CFI} = .998$ ,  $\text{TLI} = .991$ ,  $\text{RMSEA} = .014$  (90% CI: .00, .047). Overall, results showed significant associations at the between-person and within-person levels. Figure 2 provides the results, including the standardized loadings for the random intercept correlation and autoregressive and cross-lagged paths with and without the controls in the model. The inclusion of the controls did not substantively change the results.

**Hypothesis 1.** We predicted that parental hope communication and parent-adolescent constructive conflict management would be positively associated at the between-person level. In support of this hypothesis, there was a significant positive correlation between the random intercepts for parental hope communication and constructive conflict. This correlation suggests that, relative to the sample averages, participants who tended to report higher levels of parental hope communication also tended to report higher levels of constructive conflict over the course of the academic year. This correlation approximates the “trait-like” stability of the variables for the duration of this study (Hamaker et al., 2015).

**Hypothesis 2.** We also predicted that, at the within-person level, parental hope communication would positively predict parent-adolescent constructive conflict management over an academic year. In support of this hypothesis, there were significant positive cross-lagged paths between parental hope communication and constructive conflict, indicating that parental hope communication at one time point positively predicts amount of constructive parent-adolescent conflict at the next time point. A more technical interpretation is that participants’ deviations from their expected levels of constructive conflict at T2 and T3 were predicted by deviations from their expected levels of parental hope communication at T1 and T2, respectively.

### Research question 1

We asked if constructive conflict positively predicts parental hope communication over an academic year at the within-person level. The significant positive cross-lagged paths between parent-adolescent constructive conflict and parental hope communication indicate that constructive conflict at one time point does positively predict amount of hope communication at subsequent time points. That is, participants' deviations from their expected levels of parental hope communication at T2 and T3 are predicted by deviations from their expected levels of constructive conflict at T1 and T2, respectively.

### Additional results and controls

Although of only minor interest, there were also significant within-person autoregressive paths and intrawave correlations in the model. The autoregressive paths suggest that when participants scored above expected levels of parental hope communication and constructive conflict at one wave, they tended to score above expected levels in those same variables in the next wave. The intrawave correlations between the latent factors (T1) and residuals (T2 and T3) indicate that, within each time point, participants who scored higher than expected in one variable tended to score higher than expected in the other variable.

The inclusion of the controls had a minimal impact on the findings. For example, upon entry of the controls, the correlation between the random intercepts slightly decreased from .58 ( $p < .011$ ) to .50 ( $p < .017$ ), while the cross-time standardized estimates between parental hope communication and constructive conflict slightly increased from  $\beta_{T1-T2} = .16$  and  $\beta_{T2-T3} = .20$  ( $p < .023$ ), to  $\beta_{T1-T2} = .19$  and  $\beta_{T2-T3} = .23$  ( $p < .011$ ). As a check on potential overcontrol, we also ran models where we systematically trimmed out the control parameters and correlations that had  $p$  values  $< .10$  (Little, 2013). Again, there was no change in the results. The significant (or marginally significant) associations involving the controls from the trimmed model were as follows. Within-person constructive conflict at T1 was predicted by respect for family ( $\beta = .12, p < .05$ ), age ( $\beta = -.13, p < .01$ ), home language ( $\beta = .11, p < .05$ ), and sex ( $\beta = .10, p < .06$ ). Within-person hope communication at T1 was predicted by age ( $\beta = .10, p < .05$ ). Between-person constructive conflict was correlated with respect for family ( $r = .31, p < .001$ ), sex ( $r = -.18, p < .05$ ), and conflict frequency ( $r = -.25, p < .01$ ). Between-person hope communication was correlated with respect for family ( $r = .53, p < .001$ ), age ( $r = -.21, p < .01$ ), sex ( $r = -.15, p < .05$ ), and conflict frequency ( $r = -.25, p < .001$ ).

## Discussion

The results of this study suggest that parental hope communication and constructive parent-adolescent conflict management are associated in multiple ways. The significant and positive correlation between the random intercepts in the model indicates that the association between parental hope communication and constructive conflict is relatively stable over the course of an academic year. The significant and positive cross-lagged paths, however, show that these variables also reciprocally predict one another across time. Consistent with predictions, increases in parental hope communication predicted increases in parent-adolescent conflict management. It was also found that increases in parent-adolescent conflict management predicted increases in parental hope communication. Thus, despite the apparent stability of these variables, within-person changes in both parental hope communication and parent-adolescent constructive conflict still matter. Specifically, higher-than-expected scores in one variable predicted higher-than-expected scores in the other variable over time.

Building on hope theory (Snyder, 2000, 2002), research on strengths-based communication and hope discourse (Davis et al., 2013), and calls for further exploration of positive family communication (Socha & Beck, 2015), this study's findings offer novel insight into the literature on parent-adolescent conflict. Results show that parental hope communication might promote constructive conflict management for early adolescents (6th-8th grade). Parental hope communication might



predict constructive parent-adolescent conflict because parental hope communication could make adolescents feel that their self-concept and goals are recognized and affirmed (Davis, 2013; McNaughton, Cowell, & Fogg, 2015). Parental hope communication could also contribute to adolescents' perceptions of a warmer family communication environment (Ackerman et al., 2011). This can facilitate more positive attributions and make both parents and adolescents less likely to reciprocate negativity (Canary et al., 1995; Sillars & Canary, 2013).

Research on relational conflict management from the perspective of hope theory also suggests why parental hope communication might contribute to constructive conflict. Merolla (2014, 2017), for example, reported cross-sectional and longitudinal findings that link romantic partners' degree of hope to their likelihood of engaging in constructive conflict management practices, such as calm discussion and problem-solving. Consistent with the tenets of hope theory (Snyder, 2002), this research indicates that pathways and agency thinking help romantic partners pursue pro-relational conflict goals and avoid destructive goals (Canary, 2003) in a way that facilitates a pro-relational transformation of motivation (Rusbult et al., 2001). If, as we assert, adolescents' pathways and agency thinking is bolstered by parental hope communication, adolescents who receive parental hope communication might exhibit a tendency toward constructive conflict management goals and behavior (even when experiencing negative emotions) due to an increased likelihood of engaging in the pro-relational transformation of motivation.

Interestingly, we also found that constructive parent-adolescent conflict management positively predicted parental hope communication over time. This is an intriguing finding because it demonstrates the interlinkages between various forms of family communication. It also underscores scholars' claims that family conflict does not only lead to problematic outcomes. As Branje et al. (2013) put it, "conflict during adolescence may actually strengthen the parent-child relationship by providing a much-needed vehicle for communication" (p. 279). The current study suggests that when conflict is managed through constructive communication, it might have beneficial consequences, such that it promotes other forms of constructive or positive parent-adolescent communication (e.g., parental hope communication).

It is important to note that in our analyses, we controlled for conflict frequency. Controlling for conflict frequency is noteworthy because researchers must be cautious not to conflate conflict amount with conflict *communication*, which can vary in its degree of constructiveness or destructiveness (Branje et al., 2009). There is compelling evidence that the amount of conflict parents and adolescents have is positively related to increased incidence of adolescent maladjustment (Weymouth et al., 2016). The present results suggest that when holding constant the amount of conflict adolescents report having with their parents (from wave 1), adolescents' self-reported reception of parental hope communication and the degree to which they engage in constructive conflict communication are positively linked over time. If we conceptualize parental hope communication as a positive form of family communication (and thus a positive outcome), the current results offer further evidence of how constructive conflict management can have positive consequences for parent-adolescent relationships (Laursen & Hafen, 2009).

Other potential confounds were also accounted for in the analysis, such as the cultural variable of respect for family (Stein et al., 2014). Given that our sample was composed of Latina/o youth, we deemed it necessary to account for the possibility that certain cultural values might increase the likelihood of adolescents enacting respectful communication during conflict with their parents. Familism could also make hope communication more likely to occur in families, as familism has been found to be linked to more positive, warm, and cohesive parent-adolescent relationships (Stein et al., 2014). The current results suggested that parental hope communication and constructive conflict are related above and beyond respect for family. Nevertheless, considering that within-person and between-person constructive conflict and parental hope communication were significantly associated with respect for family, it is important that researchers take cultural values into account in studies on family conflict management (Dixon et al., 2008; Sillars & Canary, 2013).

This study also contributes to the family communication literature by demonstrating the utility of the RI-CLPM (Hamaker et al., 2015). Hamaker et al. (2015) argue that all behavioral and perceptual

constructs likely have an enduring element, and this stability needs to be accounted for in longitudinal research. Stability is especially likely to be observed in short-term studies with few data waves. For many family processes, researchers are particularly interested in within-person changes (Berry & Willoughby, 2016; Keijsers, 2016). That is, they seek to test how changes in one area of a person's life lead to changes in other areas of that same person's life. By utilizing the RI-CLPM, communication researchers can better account for how variables of interest are related at the between-person and within-person levels (Te Poel et al., 2016).

This study is, however, limited by several factors. Notably, we only ascertained the adolescents' perspective. Yet, research demonstrates the value of comparing the effects of parent and adolescent perspectives on communication (Ackerman et al., 2011; Human, Dirks, DeLongis, & Chen, 2016). We also did not differentiate conflict or communication by parent (e.g., adolescent-mother vs. adolescent-father conflict). This is an issue because conflict with mothers and fathers might operate differently (Chung, Flook, & Fuligni, 2009). Further, although we assumed that the students could determine for themselves who they considered to be their mom and dad, we did not specifically state that mom and dad could include other caregivers, such as stepparents. This could have negatively affected the reliability of the measures.

In addition, our results emerged from a sample of Latina/o families in the southwestern United States from a single school. It is plausible different results would emerge with different cultural groups, locations, and schools. This includes groups outside of the United States. We encourage researchers to further test the model variables across groups and settings to determine if cultural context, group identity, or school-based variables moderate the observed effects.

We also did not include measures of positive relational outcomes, such as relationship satisfaction, in our model. We assumed that constructive conflict is positive for parent-adolescent relationships, but we did not explicitly test this. Further, even if constructive parent-adolescent conflict (or parental hope communication, for that matter) positively predicts relational quality, the association might be nonlinear, such that constructive conflict actually becomes problematic after a certain point (Laursen & Hafen, 2009). Parents and adolescents are also likely to use a host of conflict management tactics in the same episode (e.g., withdrawal, hostility, standoff; Montemayor & Hanson, 1985; Sillars & Canary, 2013; Vuchinich, 1987). Future research could test if and how parental hope communication influences multiple conflict styles.

It is also unclear if our survey measures, which focused on general impressions of parental communication and conflict behavior, capture what occurs in actual family interactions. Our self-report survey measures are subject to multiple biases, such as recollection bias. In addition, given the measures of conflict behavior and parental hope communication asked students to report how often various forms of communication occur (ranging from *never* to *very often*), it is unclear what those frequencies represent when it comes to actual interaction. It is possible that students' mental representations of communication frequency can vary drastically. Thus, we do not know if our results could be replicated in studies examining hope communication in actual family interactions, whereby verbal and nonverbal behavior can be quantitative or qualitatively coded (see, e.g., Ackerman et al., 2011; Davis et al., 2013; Vuchinich, 1987). Additionally, a perennial problem in longitudinal survey research is the possibility that different lag times (e.g., years instead of months) can yield different results (Little, 2013).

This study is also limited by the lack of prior research on the measurement and construct validity of parental hope communication. We assessed parental hope communication with a brief three-item unidimensional measure that combined communication focused on pathways and agency. We based these items on an existing hope measure (for use with children), which the researchers advocated treating as unidimensional (Snyder et al., 1997). However, other hope theory-based scales assess pathways and agency thinking separately with three to four items each (Snyder, 2002). The two factors can then either be tested separately or combined into an overall hope estimate based on study design or factor analyses. Our study is limited because our three-item measure did not enable us to separately assess the effects of parental communication focused on pathways and agency. It is

possible that the different dimensions could have varying effects. Further, although we view parental hope communication as a unique construct, we did not conduct construct validity tests to confirm this. This provides opportunities for future research on the measurement of parental hope communication.

Even though conflict typically makes up a small portion of many families' overall amount of communication, it appears to have an outsized influence on individual and family functioning (Chung et al., 2009). Whether that influence is positive or negative is subject to many factors (Laursen & Hafen, 2009). This study suggests that parental hope communication might play a role in how parent-adolescent conflict unfolds. Specifically, parental hope communication and constructive conflict appear to share a reciprocal relationship over time. Hope theorists argue that parents are a primary influence on children's hope (Snyder, 2000). The current study extends hope theory by suggesting that when parents communicate hope to early adolescents, it might get reflected back to them in the form of more constructive communication when conflicts arise.

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