Maternal values and parenting and Estonian, German, and Russian adolescents’ friendship satisfaction

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Abstract

The study examined the extent to which the sociocultural context shapes mothers’ values and parenting patterns and moderates associations between adolescents’ perceptions of mothers’ acceptance and control and adolescents’ friendship satisfaction. Questionnaire data were collected from a total of 834 Estonian, German, and Russian middle adolescents and their mothers. The findings indicated culture-specific patterns and meanings of parenting. In all cultures, mothers who valued interdependence more highly considered children’s social-oriented characteristics more important. German and Russian maternal behavior was linked to their parenting goals. For instance, German mothers who considered adolescents’ obedience more important were more controlling. Although boys and girls perceived mothers’ behavior somewhat differently, maternal acceptance (but not control) predicted both boys’ and girls’ friendship satisfaction in all cultures.

Much research has been conducted on the socialization of children, and there is an ongoing discussion about what is optimal for desired developmental outcomes. This study contributes to this discussion by examining the extent to which the sociocultural context shapes mothers’ values and parenting goals and moderates associations between adolescents’ perceptions of their mothers’ parenting behavior and one of adolescents’ outcomes—satisfaction with friendships. With this aim, we examine links between mothers’ values, parenting goals, adolescents’ perceptions of maternal behavior, and adolescents’ satisfaction with their friendships in Estonia, Germany, and Russia.

We focus on mothers’ interdependence values in relation to their family because the cultural conception of the self, defined as the model of independence and interdependence, strongly shapes parenting patterns (Harkness & Super, 2002; Kagitçibaşı, 1996). Interdependence refers to how individuals perceive themselves in relation to others, the degree to which they consider family relations important, want to maintain harmony within the family, and would sacrifice self-interest for the benefit of the family. Additionally, we measure adolescents’ perceptions of their mother’s
acceptance (the extent to which a mother expresses warmth, affection, and support to children) and behavioral control (the extent to which a mother sets limits for children; Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, 2005) and maternal ratings of the importance of the four parenting goals: obedience, independence, popularity, and doing well in school (original instrument by Hoffman, 1988).

Parenting in different cultures

Previous research in diverse cultural settings has shown that parental values and goals shape the way parents treat their children and are also related to children’s developmental outcomes (Hirsjärvi & Perälä-Littunen, 2001; Hoff, Laursen, & Tardif, 2002; Holden, 1995). Several authors suggest that parents’ socialization values and goals reflect their personal value orientation and perceptions of what is valued in the particular cultural context in general (Bornstein & Zlotnik, 2008; Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Kagıtıçbaşi, 2013; Super & Harkness, 2002; Vygotsky, 1994a, 1994b).

Kagıtıçbaşi’s family change theory (1996, 2013) describes sociocultural contexts in terms of which family interaction pattern is the most prevalent. She distinguishes between three family models: (a) the model of interdependence, where family connectedness, conformity, and obedience are highly valued; (b) the model of independence, where child’s self-enhancement and self-maximization are of high importance; and (c) the synthesis of the two previous models—an autonomy-relatedness model, where both autonomy (i.e., volitional agency) and relatedness (i.e., connectedness to others) are valued.

The cultural model of autonomy-relatedness seems to be characteristic of socialization of children in current Estonia. Studies show that Estonian mothers have high expectations for their children; they stress the importance of individualistic goals (e.g., independence, creativity, and self-confidence) while also considering traditional social-oriented characteristics (e.g., being sociable, friendly, polite, and hard working) important (Tulviste, Mizera, & De Geer, 2012; Tulviste, Mizera, De Geer, & Tryggvason, 2007). Estonian and Russian mothers in Estonia and Russian mothers in Israeli have been found to be achievement orientated in their children’s socialization (Rosenthal & Roer-Strier, 2001; Tulviste et al., 2012). Most Estonian mothers are perceived by their children as accepting and moderately controlling (Aavik & Aavik, 2012; Saar & Niglas, 2001; Tulviste & Rohner, 2010).

In prior research, Germany has typically been described as an autonomy-oriented country (Kagıtıçbaşi, 2013). Similar to Estonians, German mothers are accepting and moderately controlling (Albert, Trommsdorff, & Mishra, 2007). They value independence and good social skills in their children and put less emphasis on close family ties and children’s well-mannered behavior (Durgel, Leyendecker, Yagmurlu, & Harwood, 2009). Both German and Estonian mothers have been found to value autonomy more than relatedness, but German mothers stress relatedness less than Estonian mothers (Töugu, Tulviste, Schröder, Keller, & De Geer, 2011).

In Russia, family relations are valued highly (Zubkov, 2007), and Russians have been found to be more collectivistic with regard to their families than Estonians (Realo & Allik, 1999). Russian mothers are controlling and grant their children less autonomy (Chirkov & Ryan, 2001; Olsen et al., 2002; Saar & Niglas, 2001). Ispa (2002) has examined changes that have taken place in Russian parents’ socialization goals during the past decades. More emphasis is now put on individualistic values (e.g., self-confidence). At the same time, the importance of some parenting goals has not changed: Kindness and politeness are still rated high (Ispa, 2002).

Parenting and child outcomes in different cultures

Autonomy and relatedness are two universal needs in all sociocultural contexts, but the relative emphasis put on these dimensions in children’s socialization varies as it depends on what values and beliefs are more adaptive in that particular sociocultural environment (Chirkov & Ryan, 2001; Greenfield, Keller,
Parental acceptance (i.e., support, nurturance, and love) has beneficial effects on children's psychological adjustment and developmental outcomes in different cultural contexts (Holmbeck, Paikoff, & Brooks-Gunn, 1995; Khaleque & Rohner, 2002; Rohner et al., 2005). The impact of parental control on children's adjustment and outcomes, however, depends on the extent and the type of control and, moreover, on how children perceive parental control (Aunola & Nurmi, 2005; Kagitçibaşı, 1996; Smetana, Robinson, & Rote, 2015). The meaning and, consequently, the effect of parental control have been found to vary in different cultures (Albert et al., 2007; Kagitçibaşı, 2012; Rudy & Halgunseth, 2005). For instance, the perception of maternal control is associated with experiencing protection and care among Indian, Korean, and Japanese adolescents, whereas it is associated with constraint and overprotection among German adolescents (Albert et al., 2007; Rohner & Pettengill, 1985; Trommsdorff, 1985).

Studies involving single cultures or countries have found associations between different aspects of parent–child relationships (e.g., parent–child connectedness, parenting, and attachment relationship) and different aspects of children's and youth's friendships (e.g., the number of friends, satisfaction with friendships, and positive interactions with friends; Clark & Ladd, 2000; Lucas-Thompson & Clarke-Stewart, 2007; Ngai, Cheung, To, Liu, & Song, 2013; Pike & Eley, 2009). De Goede, Branje, Delsing, and Meeus (2009) examined bidirectional effects between parent–child relationships and adolescents' relationships with friends longitudinally. They found that the influence of the parent–child relationship on adolescents’ relationships with friends became weaker over time, but the effect of friends increased. By late adolescence, however, both types of relationships were of equal importance. No studies could be found that would have considered associations between parenting patterns and adolescents' satisfaction with their friendship in different cultures within a single study. Based on the recent study on parent–child relationships and adolescents' peer acceptance (Tamm, Kasearu, Tulviste, & Trommsdorff, 2015), such associations might not be universal across cultures. It has been suggested that peer relationships are less important in cultures where family values are emphasized (Schwarz et al., 2012). Moreover, Diener and Diener (1995) found a stronger association between life satisfaction and satisfaction with friends in individualistic cultures. The major contribution of this study is the examination of how the sociocultural context influences possible links between maternal parenting patterns and adolescents’ satisfaction with friendships.

Adolescents’ gender

According to Super and Harkness (2002), the interaction of individual and contextual variables creates different environments for different children (e.g., boys and girls). Parenting goals and behaviors for boys and girls might differ because of different qualities being important for them to be successful. The gender intensification hypothesis, which is primarily based on studies conducted in the United States, suggests that during adolescence, boys and girls are pressured to conform to traditional gender roles (for a review, see Hill & Lynch, 1983). More specifically, boys are socialized to be independent and achievement oriented, whereas are socialized girls to be relationship oriented and compliant (Hill & Lynch, 1983). Accordingly, mothers might be more authoritative with daughters and more permissive with sons (Conrade & Ho, 2001; McKinney & Renk, 2008).

These gender differences are likely to be culture specific. Olsen et al. (2002) found that mothers of Russian girls were the most controlling, while mothers of U.S. girls the least. Many studies report no differences in the way Estonian and Russian mothers treat their sons and daughters (Aavik & Aavik, 2012; Botchkovar & Broidy, 2013; Tamm, Kasearu, & Tulviste, 2014; Tulviste & Rohner, 2010). Estonian mothers of boys have, however, been found to consider traditional socialization values more highly
than mothers of girls (Tulviste & Mizera, 2010). There are conflicting results on whether the same parenting behavior affects boys’ and girls’ adjustment similarly (McKinney & Renk, 2008) or differently (Bosco, Renk, Dinger, Epstein, & Phares, 2003). We examine gender differences in the association between maternal parenting behavior and adolescents’ satisfaction with friendships in diverse cultural contexts.

Summary and hypotheses

In this study, we examine maternal values, parenting goals and behavior, and adolescents’ satisfaction with their friendships and compare associations among these variables for Estonian, German, and Russian adolescents. Figure 1 depicts the hypothesized model according to which (a) mothers’ value of interdependence is related to their parenting goals and behavior, (b) mothers’ parenting goals are related to mothers’ parenting behavior, and (c) parenting behavior is linked to adolescents’ satisfaction with their friendships. Regarding adolescents’ gender, we expect maternal parenting goals and behavior to differ for boys and girls. Additionally, we examine how, if at all, associations between adolescents’ perceptions of maternal acceptance and control and their own friendship satisfaction differ among boys and girls.

Method

Sample

The study is part of the Value of Children and Intergenerational Relations (VOC-IR) project that was initiated by Nauck and Trommsdorff and carried out in a large number of countries in collaboration with several cooperating teams from different disciplines (overview by Trommsdorff, Kim, & Nauck, 2005; Trommsdorff & Nauck, 2005, 2010).

In each country, the sample was stratified according to social, regional (urban/rural), and educational differences. In this study, the sample included 834 adolescents and their mothers: 298 from Estonia, 311 from Germany, and 225 from Russia (see Table 1 for demographics).

Measures

The questionnaires were translated from English to German and Estonian by a bilingual native speaker of the relevant languages. In Russia, the questionnaires were translated from German to Russian. In all three countries, the questionnaires were also translated back into the source language. The questionnaires have previously been tested in cross-cultural studies (Schwarz, Chakkarath, Trommsdorff, Schwenk, & Nauck, 2001). Paper-and-pencil instruments were used for collecting adolescent data and interviews.
Table 1. Demographics of Estonian, German, and Russian adolescents and their mothers

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<th>Estonian sample</th>
<th>German sample</th>
<th>Russian sample</th>
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<td>n</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>225</td>
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<td>% of boys</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age, M (SD)</td>
<td>15.53 (1.12)</td>
<td>15.67 (1.07)</td>
<td>15.35 (1.23)</td>
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<td><strong>Mothers</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Age, M (SD)</td>
<td>41.37 (6.01)</td>
<td>43.50 (4.89)</td>
<td>41.03 (5.72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education in years, M (SD)</td>
<td>13.78 (3.08)</td>
<td>10.76 (1.53)</td>
<td>9.67 (0.83)</td>
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</table>

for collecting data from mothers. Only the measures relevant to the current study are described below.

**Satisfaction with friendships**

Adolescents’ satisfaction with their friendships was measured with a single-item measure: They were asked to indicate how satisfied they were with their friendships on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not satisfied at all) to 5 (very satisfied). Single-item measures have been found to be good alternatives to multiple-item ones when assessing, for instance, parent–child communication (Tabak et al., 2012), closeness in relationships (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992), and global self-esteem (Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski, 2001).

**Maternal parenting**

Adolescents assessed their mother’s parenting behavior by filling out a short version of Rohner’s Parental Acceptance–Rejection/Control Questionnaire (Sherman & Donovan, 1991). Ten items measured maternal acceptance (e.g., “My mother treats me gently and with kindness”), and six items measured maternal control (e.g., “My mother wants to control whatever I do”). Adolescents were asked to rate the degree to which each statement was true for their mother’s style of parenting on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (almost never true) to 4 (almost always true). In this study, we excluded two items from the control subscale (“My mother lets me go anywhere I want without asking” and “My mother lets me go out any evening I want”) because they did not work in all samples. In the three samples, Cronbach’s αs ranged from .87 to .90 for acceptance and from .64 to .73 for control.

**Mother’s parenting goals**

Mothers rated the importance of the four parenting goals (obedience, independence, being popular, and doing well in school; original instrument by Hoffman, 1988) on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important). These parenting goals have been assessed in many previous studies (with different instruments), and their importance has been shown to be culturally different (Keller et al., 2006; Tulviste et al., 2007).

**Mothers’ interdependence**

Mothers’ interdependent self was measured by the relevant subscale from the Self Construal Scale (Singelis, 1994). The wording of the items was changed so that mothers were asked about their interdependence in relation to their family instead of an unspecified group of people (people around me, my group). The subscale consisted of five items (e.g., “I would sacrifice my self-interest for the benefit of my family”). We excluded one item that did not work in all three samples (“I often have the feeling that my family is more important than my own accomplishments”). Mothers indicated how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the four statements on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The reliability coefficients of the scale ranged from .72 to .73.
Table 2. Mean scores for study variables by country

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<td>4.32</td>
<td>0.45</td>
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aGermans differ from Estonians and Russians.
bAll three cultural groups differ from each other.
cRussians differ from Estonians and Germans.

***p < .001.

Data analysis

SPSS 20.0 was used for conducting descriptive and dispersion analyses and for estimating missing values in the data set (regression equations in missing value analyses). Amos 20.0 was used for performing a multiple-group structural equations modeling (SEM). As the data did not meet the assumptions of normality (Mardia’s coefficients > 20, critical ratios for kurtosis exceed 1.96), we also used bootstrapping with maximum likelihood (with 2,000 iterations and 95% confidence intervals). We correlated the errors of four latent constructs: child’s obedience, independence, popularity, and doing well in school. This did not change the significance of the results.

Results

Descriptive and dispersion analyses

The mean scores of the study variables are given in Table 2 and the correlations between the variables in Table 3.

Mothers’ interdependence

Russian mothers ($M = 4.32, SD = 0.45$) valued interdependence more than mothers from Estonia ($M = 4.07, SD = 0.55$) and Germany ($M = 4.14, SD = 0.55$), $F(2, 831) = 15.16, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.04$.

Mothers’ parenting goals

German mothers differed from Estonian and Russian mothers by considering children’s obedience, $F(2, 831) = 140.64, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.25$, and academic performance, $F(2, 831) = 58.10, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.12$, less important. Russian mothers valued children’s popularity less than Estonian and German mothers, $F(2, 831) = 9.64, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.02$. All three groups differed from each other in terms of valuing children’s independence, $F(2, 831) = 78.81, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.16$. Estonian mothers considered it most important, whereas Russian mothers the least.

Mothers’ acceptance–control

Estonian, German, and Russian adolescents differed from each other in terms of perceived maternal acceptance, $F(2, 831) = 14.03, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.10$, and behavioral control, $F(2, 831) = 47.04, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.18$. Russian adolescents perceived the highest maternal acceptance ($M = 3.81, SD = 0.65$) and control ($M = 3.34, SD = 0.77$). Estonian mothers were the least accepting ($M = 3.34, SD = 0.54$) and German mothers the least.
Table 3. Correlations between study variables

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<td>.35***</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdependence</td>
<td>.15*</td>
<td>.30***</td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>.33***</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.27***</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>−.15*</td>
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<td>−.06</td>
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*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

controlling (M = 2.50, SD = 0.68). In Estonia and Russia, there was a significant positive correlation between maternal acceptance and control.

Adolescents’ friendship satisfaction

There was a statistically significant difference in adolescents’ satisfaction with their friendships between Estonians, Germans, and Russians, F(2, 831) = 10.33, p < .001, η² = 0.02. The Bonferroni post hoc test showed that German adolescents (M = 4.22, SD = 0.84) were more satisfied with their friendships than Estonians (M = 4.04, SD = 0.84) and Russians (M = 3.90, SD = 0.79).

Confirmatory factor analysis

We evaluated the measurement model by conducting a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with covariances between the latent constructs. First, CFA was conducted for each sample separately after which a multiple-group CFA was run and invariance of factor loadings tested. All observed variables loaded significantly onto the corresponding factor with factor loadings being at least .5. The chi-square test of a multiple-group CFA with equal factor loadings across the three samples was significant, χ²(690) = 1153.10, p < .001. It is, however, highly affected by violation of multivariate normality. As suggested by Hoe (2008), we
used the comparative fit index (CFI; > .90 indicates good fit), the root mean square approximation of error (RMSEA; < .05 indicates good fit), and the $\chi^2/df$ ratio (3 or less indicates good fit) as indicators of the model fit. In this study, $\chi^2/df$ ratio = 1.67, CFI = .91, and RMSEA = .03.

### Structural equation modeling

After the fit of the configural model was determined ($\chi^2/df$ ratio = 1.64, CFI = .92, RMSEA = .03), the factor loadings were set to be equal across the three groups. Although there was a slight decline in the fit indices, the fit of the model remained acceptable. This means that the observed items measure the same theoretical construct across the three cultural groups. The chi-square statistic was significant, $\chi^2(717) = 1185.06, p < .001$. $\chi^2/df$ ratio (1.65), CFI (=.91), and RMSEA (=.03), however, yielded acceptable fit.

The results of SEM are presented in Table 4. Figure 2 shows the significant
associations in the Estonian, German, and Russian sample.

Factors related to mother’s parenting behavior and goals

In Russia, the predictor factors (i.e., adolescents’ gender, mothers’ interdependence, and mothers’ parenting goals) explained a larger proportion of variance in maternal acceptance scores than in Estonia and Germany. Estonian and German girls perceived higher maternal acceptance than boys, $B_{\text{Est}} = .14$, $B_{\text{Ger}} = .14$. Among Russians, mothers’ interdependence was positively associated with being accepting,
Maternal acceptance was also positively related to valuing children’s academic performance in Russia, $B = .17$. A positive association occurred between maternal control and valuing children’s obedience in Germany, $B = .22$.

Maternal interdependence values explained a larger proportion of variance in obedience scores than in other parenting goals. In all samples, maternal interdependence was positively linked to valuing children’s obedience ($B_{\text{Est}} = .33$, $B_{\text{Ger}} = .27$, $B_{\text{Rus}} = .35$) and academic success ($B_{\text{Est}} = .26$, $B_{\text{Ger}} = .19$, $B_{\text{Rus}} = .27$). Maternal interdependence was also positively related to valuing children’s independence among Estonians ($B = .26$) and to valuing children’s popularity among Germans ($B = .21$). In Estonia, mothers considered independence less important for girls than for boys, $B = -.14$. German mothers considered academic success more important for boys ($B = -.13$), whereas Russian mothers for girls ($B = .16$).

**Factors related to friendship satisfaction**

In all samples, maternal acceptance was positively linked to adolescents’ satisfaction with their friendships, $B_{\text{Est}} = .17$, $B_{\text{Ger}} = .19$, $B_{\text{Rus}} = .24$. In Germany, gender also predicted adolescents’ satisfaction with their friendships; girls perceived lower satisfaction with friendships than boys, $B = -.12$. No indirect associations through maternal acceptance and control were found between adolescents’ gender and their friendship satisfaction.

**Discussion**

The study examined links among mothers’ interdependence values, parenting goals and behaviors, and their adolescent children’s satisfaction with friendships in three different sociocultural contexts: Estonia, Germany, and Russia. Our findings partially support the hypothesized model. Mothers’ interdependence values were related to their parenting goals in all countries, but they were related to adolescents’ perceptions of maternal behavior only in Russia. Perceived maternal behavior (acceptance, but not control) was related to adolescents’ friendship satisfaction in all three cultural contexts.

**Parenting in different cultures**

Our findings support the theoretical views that parental practices reflect what is valued in the particular sociocultural context (e.g., Kagitçibaşı, 2013; Vygotsky, 1994a, 1994b). Although previous studies have shown that individualistic values have started to increase in importance in Russia (Ispa, 2002), the results of this study suggest that Russian mothers valued interdependence still more highly than Estonian and German mothers and considered academic success and social-oriented characteristics, such as obedience, more important than independence. Independence was the most highly valued socialization goal among German mothers. Mothers in Germany—a country that has been described as highly autonomy oriented (Kagitçibaşı, 2013)—considered children’s obedience and academic success less important than mothers in Estonia and Russia. It might be that Western parents perceive children’s disobedience as an indicator of autonomy and, thus, do not consider obedience that important (Rothbaum & Trommsdorff, 2007).

Similar to German mothers, Estonian mothers considered children’s independence the most important parental goal. Surprisingly, however, children’s independence was much more important for Estonian than German mothers. Relying on Kagitçibaşı’s theory (1996, 2013), our findings suggest that Estonian mothers do stress both autonomy and relatedness. They tended to value all characteristics relatively highly. Similar findings were reported by Tulviste et al. (2007): Estonian mothers emphasized individualistic as well as social-oriented characteristics in their children. As Tulviste et al. (2007) and Tulviste and Mizera (2010) suggest, it is likely that because of ongoing sociocultural changes, various characteristics are needed for success in Estonia.

Clear differences also emerged in the parenting behavior of mothers from different cultures. Based on adolescents’ reports, Estonian mothers were the least accepting, whereas German mothers the least controlling. In
accordance with previous studies (Chirkov & Ryan, 2001; Olsen et al., 2002; Saar & Niglas, 2001). Russian adolescents perceived their mothers as highly controlling. At the same time, Russian mothers were also perceived as highly accepting. Given that in Estonia and Russia a positive correlation emerged between maternal acceptance and behavioral control, it is likely that maternal control has a positive meaning in these countries—it might mean that the mother is interested in what their children do and cares for them. It is likely that in cultures where maternal behavioral control is generally more positively endorsed, adolescents also interpret it positively (Kagitçibaşı, 2012; Tulviste & Rohner, 2010).

Predicting maternal parenting goals and behavior

Our study further suggests that maternal values are more predictive of parenting goals than parenting behavior. To some extent, it might be caused by the fact that maternal values and parenting goals were assessed by mothers, but mother’s parenting behavior was assessed by adolescents. Stronger links between maternal values and parenting goals are, however, also in accordance with Schwartz’s (2010) definition of values—desirable goals that motivate action. In all cultural contexts, when mothers valued interdependence, they considered children’s social-oriented characteristics (obedience) and academic success more important. Estonian and German mothers high in interdependence also considered children’s individualistic characteristics important. This suggests that mothers try to promote those values in their children that are important in the current and future society rather than only those values they personally consider important (Bornstein & Žlotnik, 2008; Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Kagitçibaşı, 2013; Super & Harkness, 2002; Vygotsky, 1994a, 1994b). Interdependence and independence are not, of course, necessarily the opposites of one continuum (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). Interdependence referred to the extent to which one considers family relationships important. Studies have shown that individualistic values are highlighted more in the school than in the family context (Tulviste & Kikas, 2010). By viewing independence as autonomy rather than separateness, one can be both interdependent and independent (Kagitçibaşı, 2013).

The relation between maternal interdependence values (i.e., consider family relationships important) and acceptance was only significant in Russia; when Russian mothers were high in values of interdependence, they were perceived to be more accepting by their adolescent children. Compared to Estonian and German mothers, Russian mothers were in fact more accepting toward their children and considered interdependence more important.

According to theoretical views, parenting goals shape parenting behavior (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Hirsjärvi & Perilä-Littunen, 2001; Hoff et al., 2002). Our findings for German and Russian mothers support this. For Russian mothers, doing well in school was the most important parenting goal. As the findings suggest, they support their children’s academic performance through being warm, supportive, praising, and showing interest toward children’s activities rather than through being more controlling. Among Germans, we found a positive relation between valuing children’s obedience and being controlling. In Estonia, parenting goals were not related to parenting behavior. This might be because of Estonian mothers considering all goals relatively important.

Predicting adolescents’ friendship satisfaction

German adolescents were more satisfied with their friendships than their peers from Estonia and Russia. Tamm et al. (2015) found that German adolescents also perceived higher acceptance by peers than Estonian and Russian adolescents. These findings suggest that German adolescents have more satisfying relationships with their peers. German adolescents might also be more oriented toward relationships with peers and friends outside their family. This supports the conclusions of Schwarz et al. (2012) that peer relationships are considered more important in cultural contexts where family values are less important.

In accordance with the claims and findings of previous studies (e.g., Khaleque & Rohner,
we found that adolescents’ perception of maternal acceptance was important for their satisfaction with friendships in all three cultural contexts. Namely, those adolescents whose mothers showed affection, support, and praised their children were more satisfied with their friendships. Similarly, McElhaney, Porter, Thompson, and Allen (2008) found that adolescents who have supportive parents are more successful in interacting with their peers. Maternal acceptance thus appears to continue to be important during adolescence. As adolescence is a time of self-discovery, it might be even more important that a mother supports her adolescent children and approves their choices. Maternal behavioral control, however, was not related to adolescents’ friendship satisfaction. It might rather be psychological control that affects adolescents’ relationships with friends through inhibiting adolescents’ autonomy to, for instance, choose friends and decide when and how to interact with them. 

Tamm et al. (2014) who analyzed the Estonian VOC-IR data found that neither maternal ratings of their acceptance nor control was related to adolescents’ perceptions of peer acceptance. When comparing that study with the present one, two main conclusions can be drawn. First, adolescents’ own perceptions of maternal parenting behavior might be more predictive of their adjustment than maternal reports (see also Bornstein & Zlotnik, 2008; West et al., 2011). Second, maternal acceptance might be more strongly related to adolescents’ friendships than to their peer acceptance because of friendships being more similar (e.g., in terms of intimacy) to the relationship between a mother and a child.

Adolescents’ gender

As expected, differences emerged in maternal parenting goals and behavior for boys and girls. There were, however, cultural differences in which characteristics were considered more important for boys and girls. In Germany, mothers of boys considered academic success more important than mothers of girls. In Russia, it was the other way around.

Maternal acceptance was important for both boys’ and girls’ friendship satisfaction. Estonian and German girls perceived, however, higher maternal acceptance than boys. According to Tamm et al. (2014), Estonian mothers reported being equally accepting and controlling toward girls and boys. We can thus say that Estonian adolescents perceive their mothers’ behavior differently from mothers. Nevertheless, a previous study with Estonian early adolescents also found no differences between boys’ and girls’ perceptions of maternal acceptance and control (Tulviste & Rohner, 2010). Many studies show that children’s behavior has an effect on their mothers’ and fathers’ parenting (O’Connor, Jenkins, Hewitt, Defries, & Plomin, 2003; Reitz, Dekovic, Meijer, & Engels, 2006; Wright, Beaver, Delisi, & Vaughn, 2008). Bidirectional effects between mothers’ and children’s behavior should thus be examined to explain the conflicting findings about gender differences in perceived maternal acceptance and control. A longitudinal study found an increase in mothers’ negative affect toward their sons when children became older (McNally, Eisenberg, & Harris, 1991). The authors suggested that this is because sons tend to have more behavior problems than daughters. It might, however, also be that girls perceive higher maternal acceptance because of being closer with mothers than boys (Starrels, 1994; Steinberg & Silk, 2002).

Limitations

The study has some limitations that need to be pointed out. Although the total sample size was large, the samples from the three countries were relatively small. The questionnaires had previously been tested in cross-cultural studies, but questions about their cross-cultural reliability did arise in this study. In order to increase the reliability coefficients of some questionnaires, we had to exclude a couple of items that did not work equally well in the three samples. This resulted in having a small number of items measuring the same construct. The reliabilities remained, however, modest. The findings should thus be interpreted cautiously. Furthermore, the use of cross-sectional data enables us
to examine associations but not the direction of effects among the variables.

Conclusions and future directions
The results of this study suggest that mothers’ parenting patterns strongly reflect their personal values and the values prevalent in the particular sociocultural context. Russian adolescents perceived their mothers as more accepting as well as more controlling than their peers from Estonia and Germany. The findings imply, however, that the meaning of maternal control is more positive in Estonia and Russia than in Germany. Although maternal control was not linked to adolescents’ friendship satisfaction, it should be examined whether its different meaning underlies its different developmental outcomes for children in other areas (e.g., academic success).

Adolescents’ perceptions of maternal acceptance were important for their satisfaction with friendship in all cultural contexts. Thus, mothers in diverse cultures can support their children’s positive relationships with friends by expressing warmth, affection, and support for their children. At the same time, it must be recognized that the way adolescents interpret their parents’ behavior can be different from parents’ own perceptions of their behavior. The dynamic and reciprocal nature of socialization (Smetana et al., 2015) implies that both parents’ and children’s perceptions should be examined.

The study further showed that the same characteristic might be more important in one culture for girls but in another culture for boys. Thus, no generalizations across cultures about gender differences in mothers’ parental goals and behavior can be made. Maternal acceptance, however, is equally important for boys’ and girls’ developmental outcomes.

For future studies, we suggest examining both mothers’ and fathers’ parenting goals and behavior. There is plenty of evidence that maternal and paternal parenting behaviors differ, and both are important in terms of children’s outcomes (e.g., Bosco et al., 2003; McKinney & Renk, 2008). Nevertheless, less is known about how the importance of paternal acceptance differs in diverse cultural contexts.

References


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