

## Patterns of relationship regulation: German and French adolescents' perceptions with regard to their mothers

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Following a person-centered approach, the present study focuses on inter- and intracultural similarities and differences in patterns of relationship regulation by adolescents with regard to their mothers in a sample of 153 French and 154 German adolescents. Starting from theoretical assumptions of individuation in adolescence as the process of balancing autonomy and relatedness, a classification approach was applied providing four theoretically derived clusters of relationship regulation, namely "harmonious," "tense," "primary," and "secondary" relationship regulation patterns. Countries did not differ in numbers of adolescents in the "harmonious" and "tense" clusters. More patterns of "primary" relationship regulation were found between German adolescents and their mothers, whereas French families had a higher prevalence of "secondary" regulation patterns. Clusters were validated by maternal parenting (from adolescents' perspectives) and adolescents' optimism. Results on patterns of regulation are discussed in a theoretical framework of intrafamily processes of relationship regulation and implications for family functioning are addressed.

**Keywords:** adolescence; autonomy; relatedness; France; Germany

Adolescence is a developmental period of significant transformations in social relationships (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). The crucial task for families in the process of individuation is to renegotiate adolescents' different needs, such as constructing a distinct self and gaining more independence from parental authority (i.e., autonomy), while being attached to parents and receiving parental support (i.e., relatedness; Grotevant & Cooper, 1985; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Earlier theories on individuation processes in adolescence have focused mostly on adolescents' separation and detachment from their parents (Blos, 1967). At present, it is widely acknowledged that individuation, starting in adolescence and extending to emerging adulthood, is a dual process including both adolescents' development of autonomy and the continuity of relatedness (Grotevant & Cooper, 1985; Youniss & Smollar, 1985; see also Arnett, 2000).

Adolescents may use different strategies to regulate their relationships to parents in line with their needs of autonomy and relatedness. The concept of relationship regulation underlines the active role of individuals in shaping their relational environment in accordance with their own needs and resources. Relationship regulation refers both to self-regulatory efforts of the individual and to attempts to change behaviors or cognitions of social partners (Lang, Wagner, & Neyer, 2009). In the context of families both needs are co-regulated as part of the individuation

process, depending on the importance ascribed to autonomy and relatedness in the family in accordance with underlying cultural factors such as value orientations, parenting, or agency beliefs (Rothbaum & Trommsdorff, 2007).

Borrowing from theories on primary and secondary control (e.g., Rothbaum, Weisz, & Snyder, 1982), we argue that adolescents may attempt to reconcile their needs of autonomy and relatedness within the specific family environment in which they are living either by a) trying to modify the given (relational) environment in line with their own goals, desires and expectations (primary control), or by b) adapting their cognitions and behaviors to the existing relational realities (secondary control). Cross-cultural findings suggest that in socialization contexts that foster autonomy and individuality, adolescents rather prefer primary control strategies, whereas in social-oriented contexts secondary control strategies are preferred (Trommsdorff & Essau, 1998). Therefore, variations in "family cultures," characterized by specific family practices and interactions in line with underlying cultural models of family, may be found both between and within countries (cf. Manzi, Vignoles, Regalia, & Scabini, 2006). This assumption is in line with the culture-informed model of intergenerational relationships across the lifespan, which states that parent-adolescent relationships are embedded in the socioeconomic and cultural context (Trommsdorff, 2006).

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The main aim of the present study is to identify patterns of regulation in the adolescent–mother relationship in Germany and France. Instead of studying single variables as the main unit of analysis (variable-centered approach), we chose a person-centered approach that allows to identify configurations of variables referring to adolescents' individual patterns of relationship regulation by use of cluster analysis (see Bergman, 2001). In order to validate these patterns, we examined their links with perceived maternal parenting behavior and with aspects of adolescents' well-being.

Although we acknowledge the high relevance of fathers in socialization, the present study focuses on the relationships between adolescents and their mothers. Earlier research suggests that fathers and mothers engage in important, but different roles in the relations to their children (Day & Padilla-Walker, 2009). Whereas father–adolescent relationships can be characterized by more authority and fewer interactions, relations to mothers have been described as more connected and cooperative (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Also, the renegotiation of power tends to be accomplished earlier in relationships toward mothers compared to fathers (e.g., Buhl, 2008), hence our particular interest to study individuation from mothers in adolescence as it is a critical phase where this negotiation appears.

The theoretical basis for the expected adolescent–mother relationship patterns of regulation and their associations with further variables is introduced in the paragraphs that follow.

#### *Aspects of adolescent–parent relationships related to individuation*

Which strategies do adolescents use to balance their needs in the process of individuation? First, adolescents regulate their individuation by the amount of personal thoughts and feelings they disclose to their mothers, indicating intimacy with mothers and emotional closeness (Buhrmester & Furman, 1987). Several studies in Western countries have found rather open communication between adolescents and their parents, in particular with mothers, but self-disclosure is often confined to specific issues that change over time (Scabini, Marta, & Lanz, 2006; see also Kerr, Stattin, & Burk, 2010). Second, controversial discussions and disputes are an integral part of the individuation process as they may help to make the standpoints of different family members clear and distinguishable. Through the expression (and resolution) of conflicts, adolescents learn to establish their own views and ideas, and the family may renegotiate the roles and boundaries between family members (Allison & Schultz, 2004; Perosa & Perosa, 1993). Research has indicated that only a small portion of adolescent–parent relationships involve major conflicts and can be described

as problematic; the majority of arguments deal with rather minor disagreements over common daily issues (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). The frequency of conflicts between adolescents and their mothers may be a proxy variable for autonomy strivings and self-assertion serving adolescents' individuality (see Grotevant & Cooper, 1985). Third, perceived admiration might reflect relatedness to parents (Buhl, 2008; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Adolescents and young adults generally continue to rely heavily on their parents' (and especially their mothers') emotional support, advice, and approval, although friends and, later, also romantic partners assume increasingly important roles (Buhl, 2008; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992; Masche, 2008; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). These three dimensions are part of the NRI (Network of Relationship Inventory; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992) and were used in this study.

#### *Parenting and the process of individuation*

Adolescents' cognitive representations of their relationships with mothers are informed by their perceptions and interpretations of their mothers' parenting behaviors (such as promoting or hindering autonomy and relatedness; Grolnick, Gurland, DeCoursey, & Jacob, 2002; Grusec & Davidov, 2010). Hence, we try to validate patterns of relationships by examining their links with maternal parenting behavior as perceived by adolescents.

Within the framework of parental acceptance–rejection theory by Rohner (2004), a dimensional approach to parenting that has often been applied in cross-cultural research, a wide number of studies have demonstrated universally positive connotations of parental warmth with psychological and behavioral adjustment, whereas rejection has consistently linked to negative effects on adolescents' developmental outcomes (Rohner, 2004; see also Grusec & Davidov, 2010).

According to Rohner and Khaleque (2003), behavioral control refers to the demands and rules that parents formulate for their children, and to the extent to which they insist on compliance with their expectations (i.e., permissiveness vs. strictness). The control dimension of parenting has exhibited culturally specific correlates in several studies: in particular, in an individualist (in contrast to a collectivist) context, strict parental control can be perceived as restriction for adolescents' personal autonomy (e.g., Rohner & Pettengill, 1985; Trommsdorff, 2006; see also Trommsdorff & Friedlmeier, 2010). A developmental task of parents with adolescents, therefore, is the adaptation of their parenting style to increased autonomy demands of their children, for instance by reducing their direct authority demands, renegotiating rules and regulations with their children, and using more nonintrusive monitoring techniques (Kerr et al., 2010).

### *Well-being of adolescents*

The importance of studying the link between types or patterns of adolescent–parent relationship quality and adolescents’ psychological well-being and adjustment has been underlined by many authors (e.g., Caprara, Pastorelli, Regalia, Scabini, & Bandura, 2005; Sabatier, Mayer, Friedlmeier, Lubiewska, & Trommsdorff, 2011; Schwarz et al., in press). In a cross-cultural study on adolescents with Dutch and ethnic backgrounds living in the Netherlands, Wissink, Dekovic, and Meijer (2006) reported effects of parent–child relationship quality (as measured by the NRI dimensions of conflict, antagonism, and self-disclosure) on adolescents’ self-esteem in all groups. Delaney (1996) provided similar evidence in a study on different types (or patterns) of relationships between adolescents and their parents. Adolescents in detached relationships reported greater anxiety, more depressive symptoms, and lower self-esteem than did those in either individuated or connected relationships with parents (see also Kruse & Walper, 2008). Here, we focus on optimism, referring to generalized expectancies of positive outcomes, as a proxy measure for adolescents’ well-being (Scheier, & Carver, 1985; see also Hackney, & Sanders, 2003), and analyze its relation to clusters of relationships. We expect that parent–adolescent interactions that promote autonomy while maintaining relatedness might foster adolescents’ well-being, whereas negative outcomes are expected if these two needs are not balanced (cf., Allen, Hauser, Bell, & O’Connor, 1994).

### *Comparison between Germany and France*

Only a few researchers have concentrated on differences in parent–child relations among European countries (e.g., Manzi et al., 2006), whereas most studies regarding differences in parent–child relationships among Western cultures have compared US with European samples (e.g., Laursen, Wilder, Noack, & Williams, 2000; Suizzo, 2004). The question of whether the distribution of relationship regulation patterns is the same in Germany and France is justified based on earlier descriptions of culture specificities of German and French families with adolescents (e.g., Alsaker & Flammer, 1999; Schleyer-Lindenmann, 2006). For instance, French parents tend to encourage their children to become independent, while also sharing the parenting goal of obedience (Sabatier & Lannegrand-Willems, 2005; Suizzo, 2004). In contrast, German parents tend to promote independence and self-actualization in children, and these parenting goals might have replaced obedience and conformity expectations that were prevalent in Germany until the 1960s (Keller & Lamm, 2005). French parents are reported to set limits and insist on compliance of their children (Claes, Lacourse, Bouchard, & Perucchini, 2003), whereas German parent–adolescent relations are

characterized by less authority (referring to the power distribution in the relationship) and more reciprocity (i.e., mutually negotiating the relationship) in comparison with parents in other Western countries such as the United States (Laursen et al., 2000). The reported findings converge with larger representative surveys (for a summary see, for instance, Gram, 1999) and indicate possible culture specificities.

### *Aims of the study*

The present study draws on an individuation–theoretical perspective, assuming that separation tendencies and autonomy strivings in adolescence do not preclude relatedness to parents, but may be simultaneous characteristics that stimulate relationships between adolescents and their parents (Youniss & Smollar, 1985; see also Rothbaum & Trommsdorff, 2007).

As our goal was to identify different patterns of relationship regulation, we used a person-centered approach applying cluster-analysis which allows us to simultaneously take into account three core aspects of relationships (intimacy, conflict, perceived admiration), instead of addressing only isolated effects of each dimension (see Bergman, 2001). This is an advantage over variable-centered approaches. Therefore, family researchers increasingly use such pattern approaches (e.g., Delaney, 1996; Ferring, Michels, Boll, & Filipp, 2009; Michels, Albert, & Ferring, 2011; Henry, Tolan, & Gorman-Smith, 2005; Kruse & Walper, 2008).

Families differ in the ways they regulate basic needs of autonomy and relatedness, so we expect to find different patterns of relationship regulation between adolescents and their mothers. Here, we follow the concept of relationship regulation as the reconciliation between different needs in parent–child relationships. This concept has also been applied with respect to the regulation of exchange processes, a typical task of balancing needs of closeness and reciprocity in adult child–parent relationships (Lang et al., 2009).

We further validate the clusters with (a) maternal parenting reported by adolescents and (b) adolescents’ optimism. Apart from identifying and validating relationship patterns, we ask if different “family cultures” will be reflected by cross-cultural variation in the prevalences of patterns of relationships.

### *Methods*

#### *Participants*

Participants were selected out of an original sample of 310 German and 197 French adolescents taking part in the larger cross-cultural “Value of Children and Intergenerational Relations” study that has been carried out

in 16 countries in different parts of the world (Trommsdorff & Nauck, 2010; see Mayer, Albert, Trommsdorff, & Schwarz, 2005 for a detailed description of the German sample; Sabatier & Lannegrand-Willems, 2005 for a detailed description of the French sample). German respondents came in equal parts from Chemnitz (a middle size town in East Germany), Konstanz (a middle size town in Southern Germany), and Essen (a larger city in an urbanized industrialized area in North-Western Germany). In France, respondents came in equal parts from Paris and its suburban areas, Bordeaux and surroundings, and smaller towns in rural areas all over France.

As the original French sample was smaller than the German sample, a selection was made in which both samples were similar with respect to mothers' educational level, adolescents' age, and gender distribution, resulting in a sample of 153 French adolescents and 154 German adolescents. Seventy percent of mothers had earned at least a high school diploma ("Bac" or "Abitur/Fachhochschulreife"). All German and most French adolescents were living in two-parent households (10% of French adolescents were living with divorced, widowed or single mothers), and only one adolescent (in the French sample) was adopted. In most cases, the current partner of the mother was also the father of the target child, except for 16% of French and 6% of Germans families. All adolescents were attending school. The mean age of adolescents was 16 years ( $M = 15.73$  years,  $SD = 1.04$  years in Germany, and  $M = 15.85$  years,  $SD = 1.12$  years in France; Range for both: 13–18 years). Forty-four percent of the German adolescents and 46% of the French adolescents were male.

### Measures

Self-reports of adolescents were obtained with a standardized questionnaire written in either German or French, respectively. The questionnaire was originally developed in English as part of the larger cross-cultural project and translated then in the respective language versions by a team of bilingual psychologists. Back translation was used to ensure adequacy of the country specific questionnaire versions (Van de Vijver & Leung, 1997).

Several measures that appraise family relations are available from previous studies. A convincing approach that allows researchers to measure relationship quality with specific relationship partners was provided by Furman and Buhrmester (1992). The Network of Relationship Inventory (NRI) concentrates on different relationship aspects to draw a comprehensive picture of the quality of close relationships of children and adolescents toward different network partners over time. This questionnaire has proven useful in a range of studies in different cultures and languages (Furman & Buhrmester, 2009). Specifically,

it has been applied in several recent studies focusing on individuation processes from adolescence to adulthood (e.g., Buhl, 2008; Wissink et al., 2006). Among the different dimensions of the NRI, we used intimacy, perceived admiration and conflict with mothers as these are relationship aspects that may be regulated by adolescents in order to balance their needs of relatedness and autonomy during the individuation process (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). Intimacy was measured with three items, conflict and felt admiration with two items each, all rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *never*, 5 = *always*).

The Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire with the Control Supplement (e.g., Rohner & Khaleque, 2003) was applied to measure adolescents' perception of maternal parenting. The dimension of acceptance contained 10 items, the dimension of control (i.e. permissiveness vs. strictness) contained six items, and the dimension of rejection contained eight items, all rated on a 4-point Likert-scale (1 = *almost never true*, 4 = *almost always true*).

To measure adolescents' optimism, the Life-Orientation-Test by Scheier and Carver (1985) was applied using seven items that were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*). Table 1 reports the scale properties.

## Results

### Preliminary analyses

Item bias due to flaws in translation or participants' understanding concepts differently may distort results in cross-cultural studies (Van de Vijver & Leung, 1997). Therefore, we checked measurement equivalence between both groups with respect to the three applied relationship dimensions, intimacy, conflict, and perceived admiration, in a three-factor model. Confirmatory factor analyses with AMOS 18 demonstrated that the most restrictive model indicating scalar invariance fit the data well ( $\chi^2/df = 1.96$ , CFI = .95, RMSEA = .06) and did not differ significantly from the less restrictive model of metric invariance (parameters testing the scalar against the metric invariance model were  $\chi^2 = 9.19$ ,  $df = 7$ ,  $p = .24$ ). This model constrained intercepts, factor loadings between indicators and constructs, and covariances between constructs to be equal in both cultural groups (see Davidov, Schmidt, & Schwartz, 2008). As scalar invariance allows for mean comparison of the groups, it was thus possible to carry out cluster analyses for the full sample. Confirmatory factor analyses provided further evidence for metric equivalence of the three dimensions of perceived parenting and of the optimism scale in both cultural groups, indicating that the assumed factorial structure for these indicators holds in both samples.

Table 1. Descriptions of measures for German and French adolescents: Example items, means, standard deviations, and internal consistencies of scales.

Example items	Germany			France		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Cronbach's $\alpha$	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Perceived acceptance " . . . mother says nice things to me"	3.54	0.47	.88	3.27	0.54	.87
Perceived control " . . . mother tells me exactly what time to be home"	2.49	0.63	.71	2.86	0.60	.67
Perceived rejection " . . . mother views me as a burden"	1.26	0.39	.80	1.56	0.45	.69
Intimacy " . . . you tell your mother everything on your mind?"	2.73	0.98	.83	2.44	0.93	.78
Conflict " . . . you and your mother disagree and quarrel?"	2.25	0.94	.75	2.06	0.74	.73
Perceived admiration " . . . your mother lets you know you're good at many things?"	3.51	0.75	.73	3.26	0.83	.74
Optimism "In uncertain times, I usually expect the best."	3.54	0.59	.77	3.28	0.58	.60

### Main analyses

To describe types of adolescent–mother relationships, we carried out a hierarchical cluster analysis for the three relationship scales (standardized for the full sample) using the Ward method and employing squared Euclidian distance as proximity measure. According to the agglomeration coefficients, a four- or five-cluster solution was appropriate; the more parsimonious four-cluster solution was chosen. *K*-means cluster analyses were applied to improve the classification of adolescents into the four relationship cluster. The final cluster solution was found in three iterations (see Figure 1 and Table 2). In order to check for adequacy of the clusters in both countries, we also carried out the same cluster analyses separately for German and French adolescents. For both countries, a four-cluster solution was compatible with the data.

Adolescents in the first cluster (31% of all adolescents) reported below-average intimacy and conflict, and perceived admiration in their relationships with their mothers around the midpoint of the scale. This cluster was labeled *secondary regulation* drawing on theories of primary and secondary control (e.g., Rothbaum & Wang, 2010). As said before, secondary control refers to the adaptation of the self to the (relational) environment, i.e. accommodating to the given relationship.

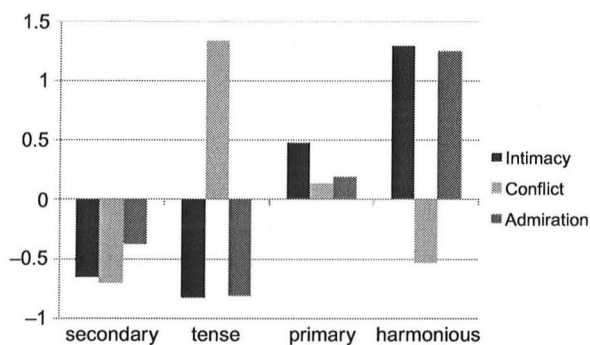


Figure 1. Clusters with respect to intimacy, conflict, and perceived admiration (standardized measures).

The second cluster labeled *tense regulation* (20.9% of adolescents) was characterized by frequent conflicts, but lower-than-average intimacy and admiration. The third cluster labeled *primary regulation* (29.7% of adolescents) contained amounts of intimacy, conflict, and admiration that corresponded to the respective sample means. According to the theory of relationship regulation, primary control refers to the attempt of the individual to modify the (relational) environment, for instance, by actively negotiating the relationship. The last cluster labeled *harmonious regulation* (18.3% of adolescents) was characterized by high intimacy and admiration and low levels of conflict.

The clusters did not differ in age of adolescents,  $F(3, 305) = 1.27, ns$ . A small marginal gender effect was found (Cramer's  $V = .15, p < .10$ ): more boys than girls belonged to the "secondary" cluster (36.2% of all boys vs. 26.8% of all girls), whereas girls were overrepresented in the "tense" cluster (25.6% of all girls vs. 15.2% of all boys). This gender distribution in the clusters is consistent with earlier research reporting that girls experience both more intimate relationships with their mothers and more conflicts than do boys (e.g., Allison & Schultz, 2004; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992).

Clusters differed across cultures (Cramer's  $V = .16, p < .05$ ): more than a third of German adolescents, but only a fourth of French adolescents belonged to the "primary" cluster. The reverse pattern was found for the "secondary" cluster. However, German and French adolescents were distributed equally to the "tense" and "harmonious" clusters (see Table 3).

In order to validate the clusters, we first compared the four groups regarding different parenting dimensions, controlling for possible country effects (see Table 4). Clusters and countries differed with respect to perceived acceptance; no interaction effect was found. We carried out pairwise comparisons (Tukey's HSD) of clusters and found that all four clusters differed from each other: highest maternal acceptance was perceived by adolescents in the "harmonious" cluster, followed by "primary," "secondary," and finally "tense" clusters. Further, French adolescents rated their perceived acceptance somewhat lower than

Table 2. Cluster with respect to intimacy, conflict, and admiration (nonstandardized measures).

	"Secondary" ( <i>n</i> = 95)		"Tense" ( <i>n</i> = 64)		"Primary" ( <i>n</i> = 91)		"Harmonious" ( <i>n</i> = 56)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Intimacy	1.95	0.49	1.79	0.47	3.05	0.54	3.83	0.82
Conflict	1.66	0.40	3.09	0.56	2.25	0.43	1.79	0.44
Admiration	3.08	0.64	2.74	0.64	3.54	0.48	4.38	0.54

Note: Reports by adolescents on 5-point scale (1 = *never*, 5 = *always*).

Table 3. Cross-table of cluster membership and country.

		Cluster			
		"Secondary" ( <i>n</i> = 95)	"Tense" ( <i>n</i> = 64)	"Primary" ( <i>n</i> = 91)	"Harmonious" ( <i>n</i> = 56)
Germany	<i>N</i> observed	38	30	54	31
	<i>N</i> expected	47.5	32.0	45.5	28.0
	% in Germany	24.8	19.6	35.3	20.3
	% in the cluster	40.0	46.9	59.3	55.4
	% of total sample	12.4	9.8	17.6	10.1
France	<i>N</i> observed	57	34	37	25
	<i>N</i> expected	47.5	32.0	45.5	28.0
	% in France	37.3	22.2	24.2	16.3
	% in the cluster	60.0	53.1	40.7	44.6
	% of total sample	18.6	11.1	12.1	8.2

did German adolescents. Concerning perceived rejection, again two main effects (cluster and country) were found. Pairwise comparisons (Tukey's HSD) indicated that adolescents in the "tense" cluster perceived higher rejection than did adolescents in all other clusters, whereas the remaining three clusters did not differ from each other. Also, French adolescents as a group rated perceived rejection slightly higher than did Germans. Main effects for cluster and country were also found regarding perceived maternal control. However, the pairwise comparisons did not indicate any significant differences between clusters. French adolescents rated maternal control generally higher than did German participants.

Finally, comparing optimism in the different groups showed both a cluster and a country main effect. Pairwise comparisons indicated that "tense" adolescents were least optimistic, and "harmonious" adolescents were most optimistic. "Secondary" and "primary" adolescents were in between: "secondary" adolescents were significantly less optimistic than "harmonious" adolescents and "primary" adolescents were significantly more optimistic than "tense" adolescents. Also, German adolescents were found to be more optimistic than French adolescents (a similar result was reported by Grob, Stetsenko, Sabatier, Botcheva, & Macek, 1999).

## Discussion

The present study draws on the observation that adolescence cannot be described in a uniform way and that adolescents are not a homogeneous group. Assuming that different strategies may be used to balance needs of autonomy and relatedness, the main aim was to find out which patterns of regulation can be observed in adolescent-mother relationships in Germany and France. As expected, the person-oriented approach was useful for providing a deeper insight into the variety of parent-child relationships in adolescence both between and within countries by demonstrating several patterns of relationship regulation (see also Bergman, 2001).

Four different clusters were identified describing patterns of "secondary," "tense," "primary," and "harmonious" relationship regulation in German and French families with adolescents. The first pattern indicates the often-cited tendency of adolescents to separate and withdraw from their family as part of their search for identity. This cluster was labeled "secondary," drawing on concepts of primary and secondary control (e.g., Rothbaum & Trommsdorff, 2007; Rothbaum & Wang, 2010; Trommsdorff & Essau, 1998). Accordingly, adolescents who use a "secondary" regulation strategy accommodate to the existing maternal relationship. They create individuality by communicating less

Table 4. Analyses of variance comparing adolescents in the four clusters with respect to perceived parenting and well-being in Germany and France.

	(1) "Secondary"				(2) "Tense"				(3) "Primary"				(4) "Harmonious"				Country × Cluster					
	Germany		France		Germany		France		Germany		France		Germany		France		Country		Cluster			
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F	$\eta^2$	F	$\eta^2$		
Perceived acceptance	3.54	0.34	3.21	0.49	3.00	0.59	2.84	0.59	3.65	0.30	3.45	0.36	3.87	0.23	3.74	0.24	17.2**	.06	48.9**	.33	0.85	.01
Perceived control	2.29	0.56	2.87	0.54	2.84	0.71	2.87	0.80	2.45	0.65	2.81	0.55	2.50	0.50	2.87	0.55	21.73**	.07	2.82*	.03	2.51 <sup>+</sup>	.02
Perceived rejection	1.18	0.21	1.51	0.38	1.64	0.53	1.72	0.54	1.19	0.35	1.58	0.46	1.13	0.15	1.40	0.37	33.36**	.10	13.64**	.12	2.17 <sup>+</sup>	.02
Optimism	3.54	0.50	3.20	0.51	3.34	0.59	3.15	0.72	3.57	0.57	3.38	0.59	3.72	0.64	3.46	0.48	12.67**	.04	4.24**	.04	0.30	.00

Note. \*\* $p < .01$ . \* $p < .05$ . <sup>+</sup> $p < .10$ . Post-hoc tests as reported in the text were carried out by Tukey's HSD test.

openly with their mothers, keeping their personal matters to themselves without defending their autonomy by open conflicts. This restricted communication does not, however, preclude their feelings of being accepted and valued by their mothers (see also Youniss & Smollar, 1985). These adolescents seem to separate themselves from their mothers without detaching. This conforms to several studies that have clearly distinguished separation and detachment as two distinct aspects of autonomy (Beyers, Goossens, Vansant, & Moors, 2003; Lamborn & Groh, 2009).

The "tense" pattern corresponded to earlier descriptions of adolescence as a rather problematic phase, with communication between adolescents and mothers being disturbed by conflicts. These adolescents seem to detach from their mothers in their struggle for autonomy; the expression of their own opinions may not find approval with their mothers, as reflected by the relatively high frequency of conflicts and low levels of both intimacy and perceived admiration.

In the "primary" regulation cluster, conflicts occur as a typical part of relationship renegotiation in adolescence, coexisting with positive aspects of the relationship. In the sense of primary control strategies, these adolescents attempt to influence the existing maternal relationship (Trommsdorff & Essau, 1998). Adolescents in this cluster communicate openly with their mothers, expressing their own viewpoints even if these differ from their mothers' ideas, without fear of losing their mothers' approval; conflicts may serve to clarify boundaries within the family. These results underline that the frequency of conflicts per se cannot be taken as an indicator of a negative relationship quality, but has to be seen in the context of other relationship aspects (Cicognani & Zani, 2009); hence, the advantage of the pattern approach.

The "harmonious" cluster described highly coherent parent-child relationships in which high self-disclosure and appreciation was accompanied by an absence of conflicts. These adolescents treat their mothers as confidants and do not seem to struggle for autonomy via conflicts. On the basis of our data we cannot conclude, however, whether these adolescents show autonomy in their actual behavior.

Relationships in both countries could be described by similar patterns, which only differed in part with respect to frequency. Both "tense" and "harmonious" relationships occurred equally frequently in both countries. However, the clusters that refer to two different styles of developing autonomy while preserving relatedness, namely "primary" (relationship renegotiation by self-assertion) versus "secondary" (setting boundaries by decreased communication) styles, were distributed differently across the two countries. The different adherence to the "primary" and "secondary" regulation clusters point to cultural specificities in German and French "family cultures" as described in earlier studies (Claes et al., 2003; Keller & Lamm, 2005;

Laursen et al., 2000). For instance, French mothers tend to encourage their children to become independent, but they also emphasize goals of obedience and social integration (e.g., Sabatier & Lannegrand-Willems, 2005; Suizzo, 2004), whereas German mothers rather promote independence and self-actualization in their children (e.g., Keller & Lamm, 2005). Drawing on earlier findings in individualist and collectivist contexts regarding differences in the development of primary and secondary control, differences in parenting goals may account for the development of different regulation patterns. Indeed, earlier studies reported that primary control is fostered in contexts that emphasize the individual self, whereas secondary control has a higher prevalence in contexts favoring conformity and group-orientation (Rothbaum & Wang, 2010; Trommsdorff, & Essau, 1998; Trommsdorff, in press). The present results underline the importance of cross-cultural comparisons of adolescent–parent relationships among Western countries (cf. Buhl, 2008).

The associations between perceived acceptance–rejection and the relationship clusters were similar in both countries. The results support the assumption of acceptance contributing to positive relationship quality and rejection contributing to negative relationship quality. The results also serve as validation criterion for the relationship clusters in line with Rohner (2004). The “tense” cluster is notable because adolescents in this cluster had the lowest perceived maternal acceptance and the highest feeling of rejection, while the reverse was true for the “harmonious” cluster. Although a warm and responsive parenting style forms the basis for a non-tense relationship (cf. Rohner, 2004), the remaining “primary” and “secondary” clusters were less clearly distinguishable, demonstrating that the exact form of relation cannot be predicted by acceptance–rejection alone. In this regard, Grusec and Davidov (2010) recently argued that parental warmth is too wide a category – the functionality of warmth and acceptance depends on the specific domain where it is applied.

Maternal control did not predict adherence to particular clusters, again suggesting different effects of this parenting dimension depending on context (e.g., Grolnick et al., 2002; Trommsdorff & Friedlmeier, 2010). The maternal control variable was generally more important in France than in Germany indicating higher acceptance of parental authority in French than in German families (cf. Claes et al., 2003; Keller & Lamm, 2005).

As expected, low-rated optimism as indicator of well-being of adolescents was related to the “tense” cluster in both countries, whereas all other groups fared rather well regarding optimism. This indicates that conflicts are highly unfavorable for adolescents’ well-being if they co-occur with detachment from mothers. However, conflicts or separation of adolescents may not necessarily induce negative outcomes as long as they are accompanied by continued direct or indirect forms of closeness to mothers (Perosa & Perosa, 1993).

### *Caveats*

The lack of age differences between clusters may be due to the rather small age range of adolescents in the present study. Also, there may be individual differences in adolescents’ developmental transitions regarding different speed and time points. It would be desirable to examine in a longitudinal design how relationship patterns evolve over time and if oscillation between clusters can be found (cf. Ferring et al., 2009). For instance, depending on the stage in the individuation process, phases of more frequent conflicts may alternate with more harmonious phases. Adolescents in the harmonious cluster may have acted out and resolved conflicts in earlier phases, they may enter a more troubled phase at a later time point, or avoid conflicts with mothers over the whole course of adolescence (Masche, 2008).

The present study was limited to the adolescent–mother relation as crucial for individuation in adolescence. As fathers and mothers may have distinct roles in socialization (see e.g., Day & Padilla-Walker, 2009), future research should also draw a closer look at adolescents’ individuation from fathers. Apart from the study of dyadic relationships, the study of the whole family climate would possibly provide further insights (see Roest, Dubas, & Gerris, 2009).

The present sample was not nationally representative for German and French families, but consisted of families with a moderate-to-high educational status. Although it would be desirable to compare representative samples in both countries, this is rarely realized in cross-cultural studies because of the high costs that generating nationally representative samples in more than one country would involve (see Manzi et al., 2006). Here, our main concern was to ensure comparability of the samples by keeping the main socioeconomic variables similar in both samples, namely educational status of the mothers, gender proportions, and adolescents’ age. Also, we included different population groups by selecting samples from three different regions in each country.

### *Conclusions*

The identified clusters – secondary control, tense, primary control, and harmonious – give a comprehensive picture of the range of theoretically relevant relationship patterns in adolescence in two Western countries. Relationship regulation differs between families and between cultures depending on how much importance families attach to autonomy and relatedness of their members, and there are different ways to regulate the balance between both needs.

The present research has also implications for intervention: parents may find it helpful to learn that adolescents apply different strategies to balance autonomy and relatedness in the process of individuation, and this may enable them to better understand and respond more appropriately to adolescents’ specific needs.

The strength of the present study is the person-centered approach which allows studying the combination of different relationship aspects. This is especially important for investigating the role of conflicts, the meaning of which depends on its combination with other relationship aspects.

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