

Autonomy in adolescence

Advancements and some thoughts about future directions

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Autonomy in adolescence

Overview

Conceptualisation: what is autonomy?

The role of parents: how to support autonomy?

The role of culture: universalism vs. relativism?

Future avenues: where to go next?

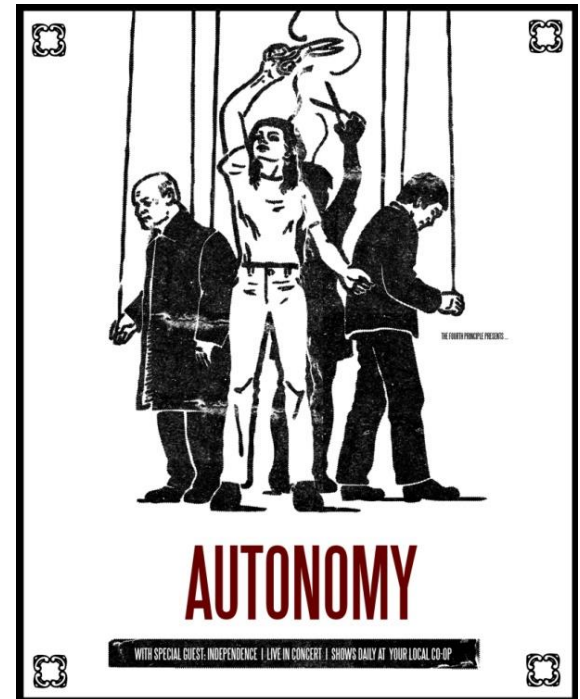
Conceptualisation

Autonomy in adolescence

Developmental task in adolescence

However: strongly debated issue

- Conceptualization & measurement?
- Functional (positive or negative)?
- At odds with relatedness?
- Cultural differences?



Conceptualisation

Autonomy as independence

“The extent to which one acts, decides, or thinks without relying on others” (Steinberg, 2002)

Contrasted with dependence or reliance on others

Different indicators, e.g., independent decision-making

Beneficial? “It depends”

Conceptualisation

Autonomy as volition

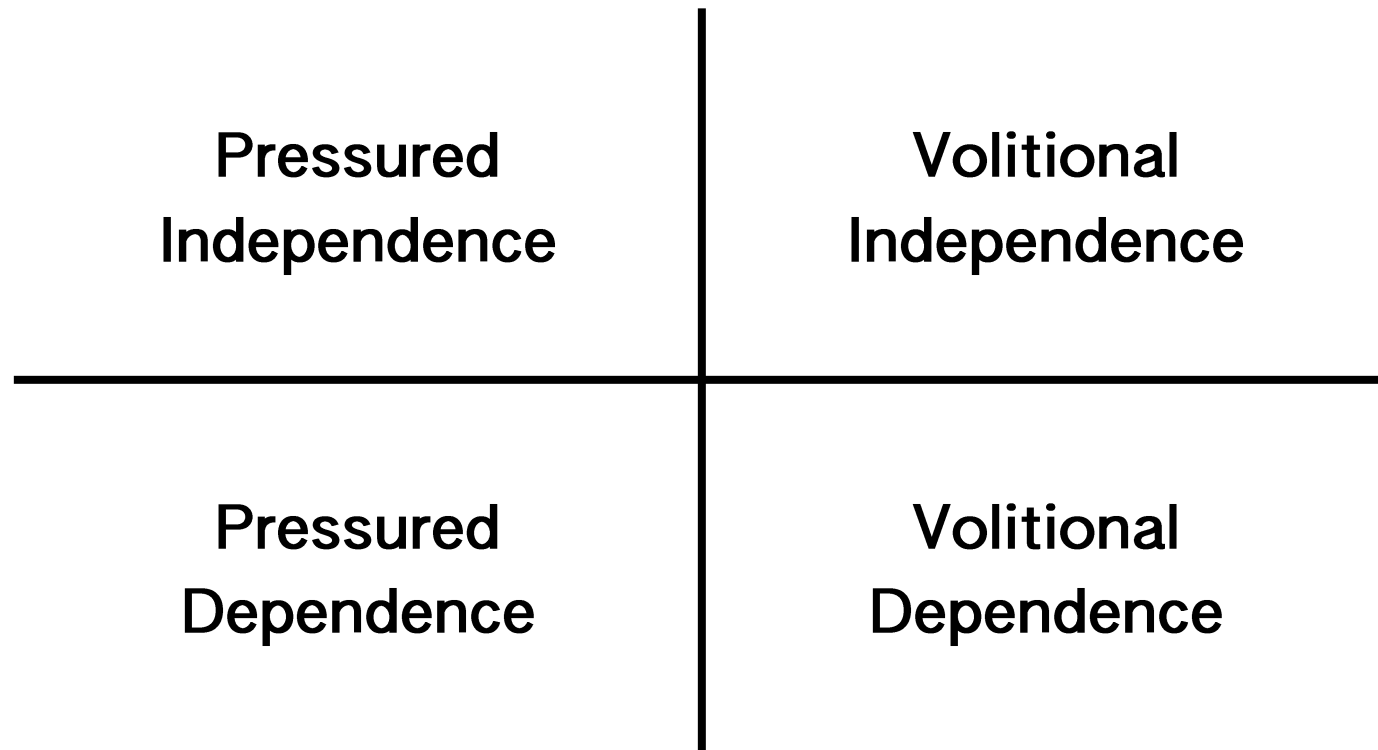
“The extent to which one acts upon personally endorsed values, goals and interests” (Ryan & Deci, 2000)

Contrasted with pressured functioning

Beneficial? “Universally positive”

Conceptualisation

Differentiation and combination?



Conceptualisation

Research illustration

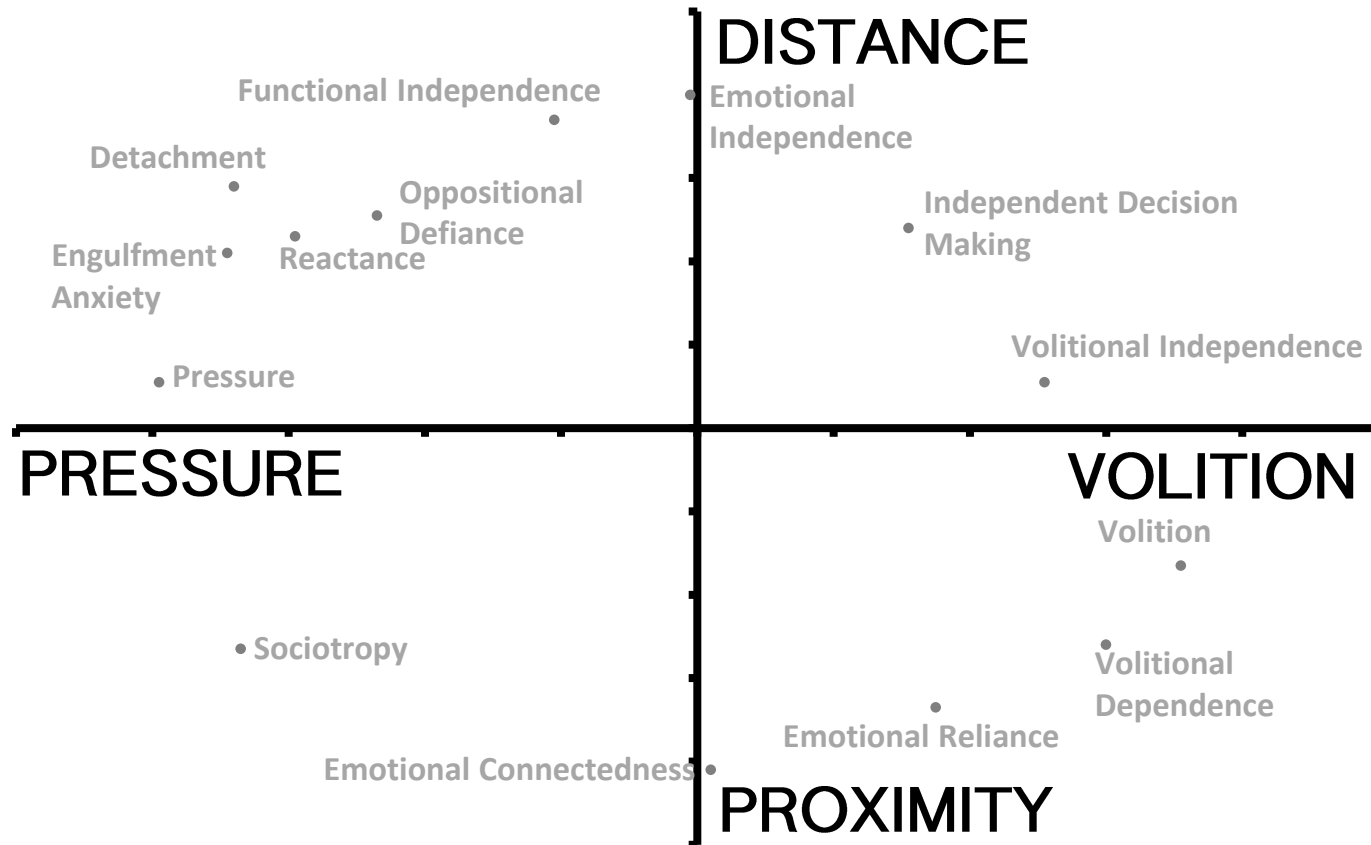
Objectives

- Underlying dimensions?
- Links with adjustment?

Study 1	Study 2
N = 707	N = 783
14-20 years	14-21 years
8 autonomy measures	14 autonomy measures
Well-being & problem behavior	Well-being & problem behavior

Conceptualisation

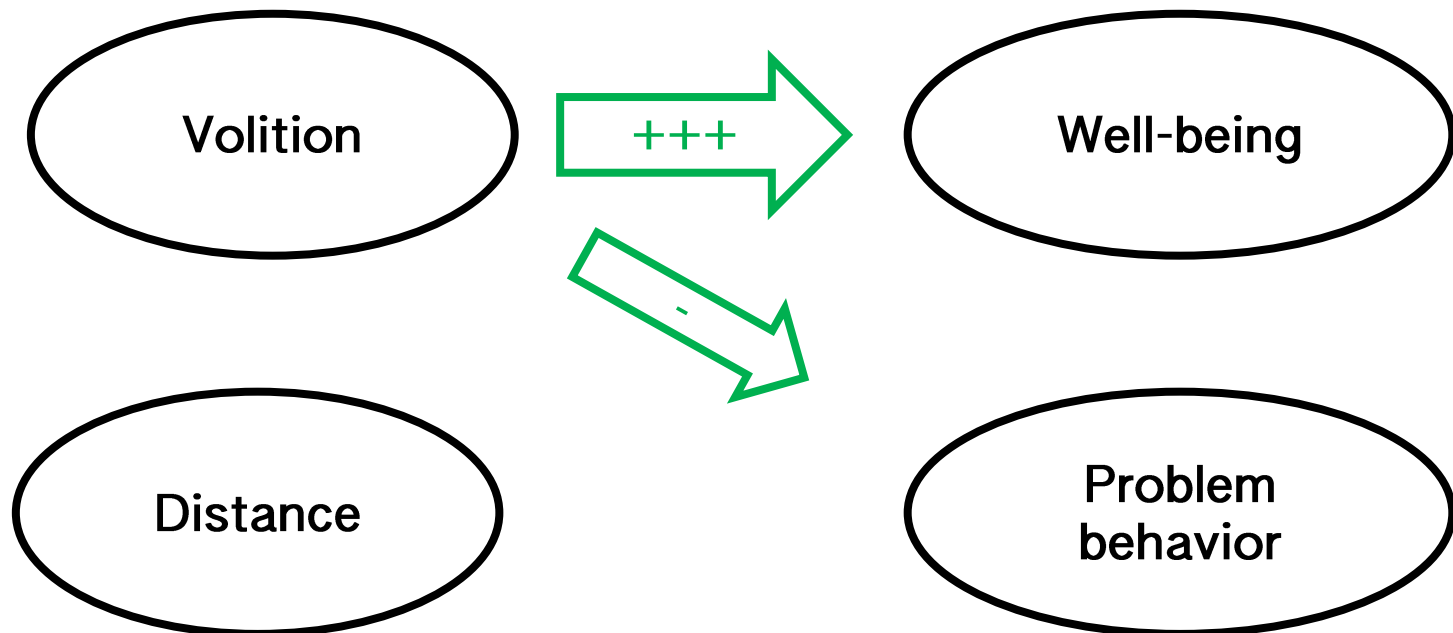
Research illustration: results



Van Petegem, S., Vansteenkiste, M., & Beyers, W. (2013). The jingle-jangle fallacy in adolescent autonomy in the family: In search of an underlying structure. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 42, 994-1014.

Conceptualisation

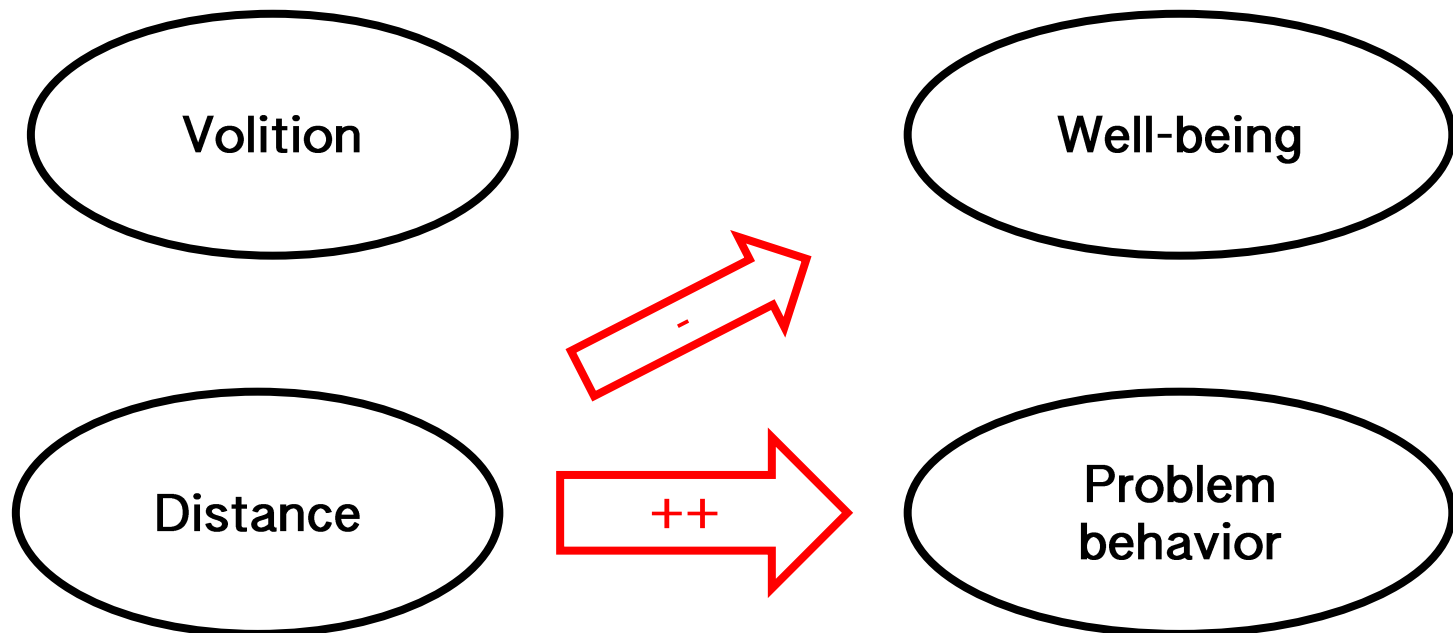
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Conceptualisation

Research illustration: results



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Conceptualisation

More research illustrations

Decision-making in adolescence (Van Petegem et al., 2012)

- Independence vs. dependence
- Volitional (*chose to*) vs. pressured motives (*have to*)
- Replicated in China and Greece

(Chen et al., 2013; Fousiani et al., 2014)

Home-leaving in young adulthood (Kins et al., 2009)

- Underlying motives
- Correlates with adjustment
- Independence vs. motives

Conceptualisation

Conceptual comparison

Independence	Volition
Interpersonal	Experiential Motivation
What?	Why?
Freedom from	Freedom to
Western	Universal
Developmental task	Life task
“it depends”	“the sky is the limit”

→ How to foster volitional functioning?

The role of parents

Autonomy support

« Encouraging adolescents to act upon personally endorsed values, goals, and interests »

(Grolnick et al., 1991; Soenens et al. 2007)

In adolescence, e.g.,

- Empathy, perspective-taking
- Offer choice, whenever possible
- Provide rationale, when choice is limited

The role of parents

Controlling parenting

« Forcing adolescents to act, think, and feel in parent-imposed ways »

(Grolnick & Pomerantz, 2009; Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010)

Coercive and intrusive practices, e.g.,

- Guilt induction, shaming
- Love withdrawal
- Personal critiques
- Threat with punishments

The role of parents

Research results

Meta-analytical evidence

(e.g., Piquart, 2017a, 2017b; Vasquez et al., 2016)

- Psychological health
- Academic achievement
- Internalizing and externalizing problems
- (...)

→ Generalize across cultural groups?

The role of culture

Universalism vs. relativism

Universalism, e.g.,

- Psychological control in Peru (Gargurevich & Soenens, 2016)
- Autonomy support in Japan (Tanaka et al., 2023)
- Psychological control in Ghana (Salaam & Mounts, 2016)

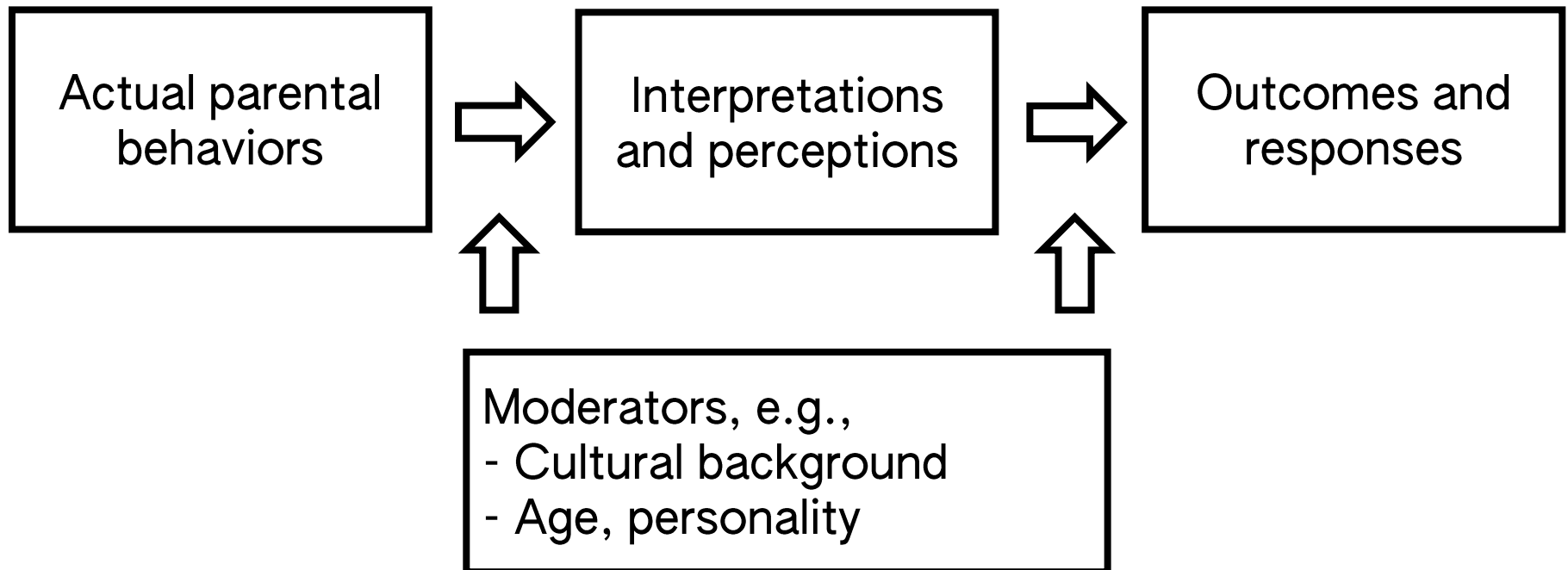
Relativism, e.g.,

- Shaming, love withdrawal in China (Helwig et al., 2016)
- Choice in Ghana (Marbell & Grolnick, 2013)

The role of culture

Universalism without uniformity

Psychological processes have both universal and context-specific features (Schweder & Sullivan, 1993)



Soenens, B., Vansteenkiste, M., & Van Petegem, S. (2015). Let us not throw out the baby with the bathwater: Applying the principle of universalism without uniformity to autonomy-supportive and controlling parenting. *Child Development Perspectives*, 9, 44-49.

The role of culture

Research illustration

Interpretations of parental guilt induction

Sample

- N = 316 Belgian adolescents
- N = 341 Chinese adolescents

Design: vignette-based study

The role of culture

Research illustration: vignettes

Imagine the following situation:

One day you come home from school with a result for an important course which is worse than usual. (...) When you now tell your results to your mother, she says the following:



Autonomy support:

« (...) Why do you think it turned out this way? (...), but you can try to learn from what went wrong. (...) ».



Explicit control:

« (...) such failures cannot be repeated in the future and that the result must be better next time. From now on, you'll have to study for this course on the moments I say so, and I will control it regularly. (...) ».

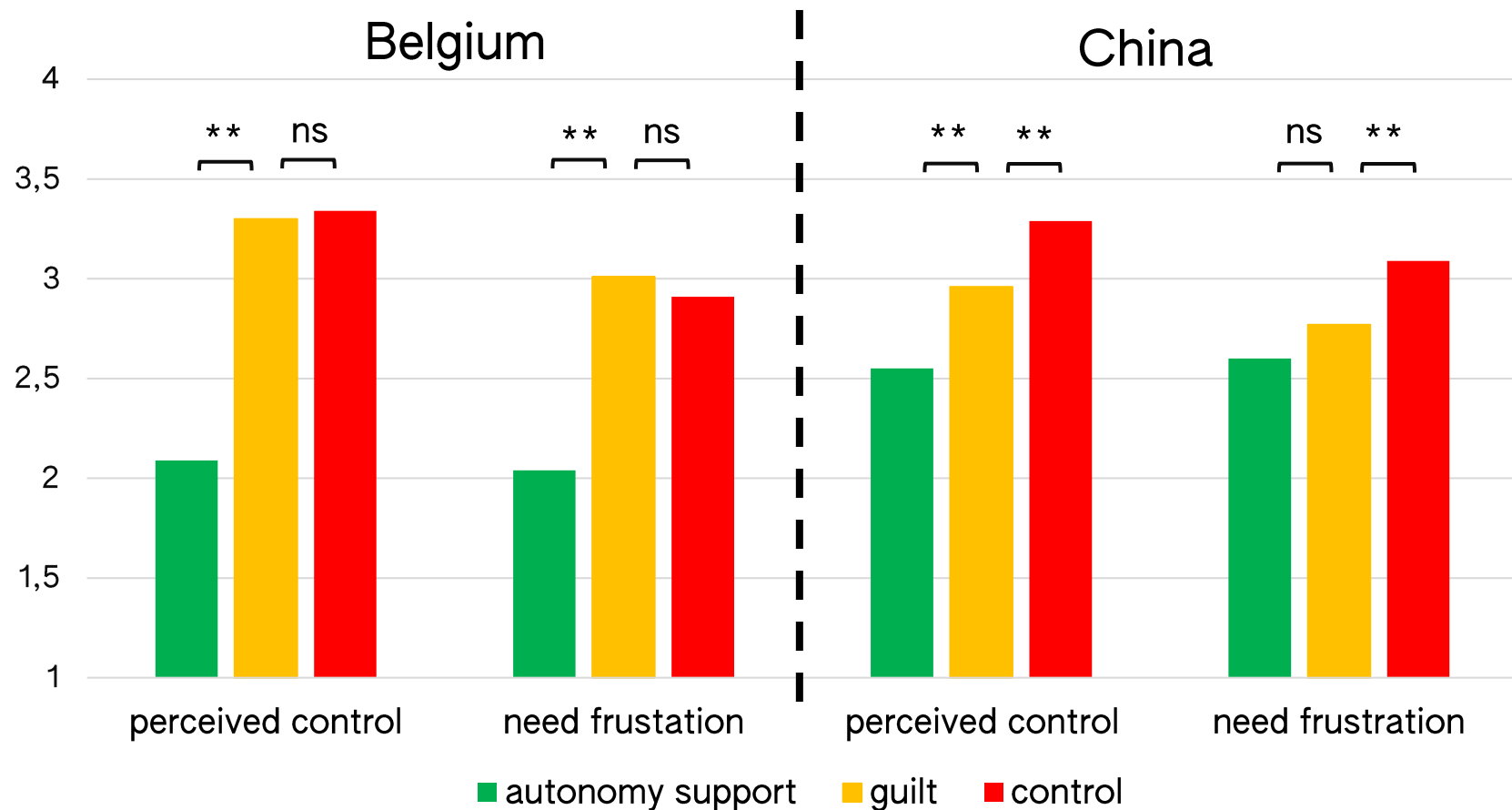


Guilt:

« (...) You know, I try really hard to take care of you and this family. (...) Please, I beg you, try not to disappoint my like this again. (...) ».

The role of culture

Research illustration: results



Chen, B., Soenens, B., Vansteenkiste, M., Van Petegem, S., & Beyers, W. (2016). Where do the cross-cultural differences in dynamics of controlling parenting lie? Adolescents as active agents in the perception of and coping with parental behavior. *Psychologica Belgica*, 56, 169-192.

Future avenues

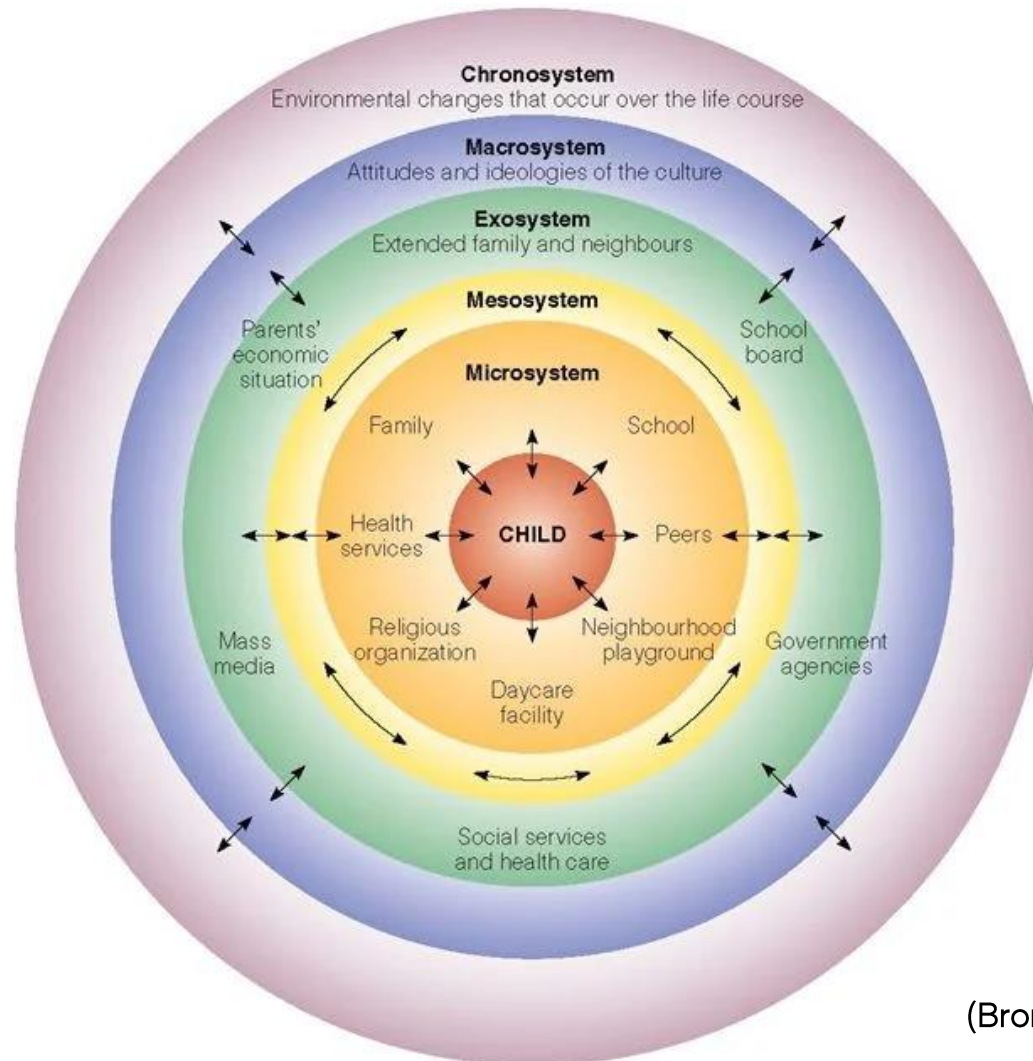
Where to go next?

Important steps forward, e.g.,

- Conceptualization & operationalization
- Understanding of cultural differences
- Methodological advancements

Future avenues

Bioecological model of human development



(Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007)

Future avenues

Contextualization of autonomy development

Impact of different systems

- Opportunities and barriers for development?
- Beyond the microsystem

Cultural differences

- Beyond stereotypes
- Recognizing within-group variability
- Focusing on specific processes

Future avenues

Contextualization of autonomy development

Socio-economic inequalities

- Exosystem: e.g., parents' economic situation, neighborhood
- Macrosystem: e.g., economic inequality, structural discrimination
- How do such structural factors facilitate or undermine development?

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