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Autonomy in adolescence: a conceptual, developmental and cross-cultural perspective

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of autonomy development during adolescence. Autonomy, inspired by the Separation-Individuation Theory of Peter Blos, was initially framed as autonomy-as-independence. However, as debates in the literature arose regarding the interpretation of autonomy in adolescence, often referred to as the detachment debate, it became evident that a distinction is needed between autonomy-as-independence and autonomy-as-volitional functioning, the latter definition coming from Self-Determination Theory of Ryan and Deci). This paper defines both facets of autonomy in adolescence and reviews a line of research on their developmental trajectories, the cross-cultural interpretations of autonomy, and the role parents play in nurturing adolescent autonomy. This review provides further evidence for the two-dimensional nature of autonomy in adolescence. This distinction between independence and volition carries significant implications for how autonomy is perceived in relation to adolescents' psychosocial adjustment and development. It also influences our understanding of how micro-contexts, such as parents and macro-contexts, including cultural factors, can shape adolescent autonomy. It is our hope that this paper contributes to the clarification of the autonomy concept and serves as an inspiration for young researchers to pursue further investigations into this vital subject.

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Several theorists consider the adolescent years to be a period during which an increase in autonomous functioning occurs (e.g., Berk, 2022; Feldman, 2008; Santrock, 2016; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). What is more, autonomy is considered to be a developmental task of adolescence (Feldman, 2008; Steinberg, 2001; Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins, 2003). As a consequence, the development of autonomy is supposed to have a beneficial influence on adolescents' psychosocial functioning. No

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wonder that several previous studies have therefore investigated the impact of adolescent autonomy on several aspects of well-being and functioning. However, findings on this relationship were mixed, and sometimes even contradictory. For instance, a study by Finkenauer et al. (2002) showed that high emotional autonomy from parents during adolescence was related to more physical complaints and stronger depressed mood, whereas Noom et al. (1999) showed that emotional autonomy was related to more social competence, higher self-esteem and lower depressed mood. Note that both studies used samples of Dutch adolescents with a similar background. Starting from these mixed findings, we will present first a conceptual analysis of what adolescent autonomy exactly is, and after that, we will present results of longitudinal and cross-cultural studies that shed more light on this topic. Throughout this paper, a research line, that started about 30 years ago under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Luc Goossens, and was continued within the Developmental Psychology research group at Ghent University, is presented. This research line engaged several PhD students over its duration.

What is autonomy in adolescence? A conceptual analysis

Literature on adolescent autonomy presents different definitions and conceptualizations. According to Feldman (2008) and Steinberg and Morris (2001), autonomy is the development and expression of independence. It means freedom *from* the constraints of childhood dependence on parents. As a consequence, in striving for autonomy, adolescents spend less time with parents and siblings, but more time with peers and friends (Berk, 2022; Larson & Verma, 1999). Ryan et al. (1995) presented a somewhat different definition of adolescent autonomy, that is, actions that are initiated and regulated by the adolescent itself, that is, the freedom *to* make choices, to pursue goals and so forth. As a consequence, adolescents will experience volition. Hidden within these different theories are two broad conceptualizations of autonomy, of which one has to do with self- reliance and independence from others and the second one has to do with the regulation of behaviour on the basis of deeply endorsed values, preferences, and interests (Soenens et al., 2007, 2018).

Autonomy-as-independence means behaving, deciding or thinking without relying on others. The opposite of this type of autonomy is dependence or reliance on others, and on the parents in particular during adolescence (Goossens, 2006; Steinberg, 2002). This viewpoint is rooted in

Separation-Individuation Theory (SIT; Blos, 1967, 1979), which implies that a normative developmental task for adolescents is to relinquish and transcend an idealized and immature view of their parents and to reduce the psychological dependence on parents' approval. When occurring smoothly, this normative process of separation-individuation results in more independent decision-making (Smetana et al., 2004). Initial studies (e.g., Silverberg & Gondoli, 1996; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986) proposed in line with Blos (1967, 1979) that autonomy-as-independence, that is, developing mature, realistic and balanced perceptions of parents (Lamborn & Steinberg, 1993), is the source of higher self-reliance and also ultimately leads to higher well-being.

Autonomy-as-volition is the second type of autonomy that is important for adolescents, that is, feeling psychological freedom and authenticity. Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Ryan, 2023; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017; Vansteenkiste et al., 2010) claims that together with the needs for relatedness and competence, the need for autonomy is a third basic psychological need that, when fulfilled, results in thriving and psychosocial adjustment. The opposite of this type of autonomy is heteronomy, that is, feelings of pressure or inner conflict (Ryan et al., 2016).

Within SDT, autonomous motivation is also considered important, that is, having self-endorsed reasons for engaging in an activity (Deci & Ryan, 2000). When autonomously motivated, people engage in an activity willingly. The opposite of this is behaving under pressure, both pressure from within and from external conditions. Just like the psychological need for autonomy, autonomous motivation consistently predicts higher well-being, as well as perseverance and achievement (Grolnick et al., 2000; Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2005; Vansteenkiste et al., 2005).

For several decades, distinct bodies of literature have emerged, each focusing on one of these two types of adolescent autonomy. However, to fully understand the dynamic nature of adolescence, in this paper, we differentiated and integrated both types of autonomy.

To further differentiate and understand these different conceptualizations of adolescent autonomy, five important differences are worth mentioning. First, independence develops in or refers to a relationship (e.g., independence from parents in adolescence). Volition is more a within-person feature (i.e., the degree to which behaviours or goals are aligned with one's deeply held values, preferences, and interests (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999)). Second, independence is possibly at odds with supportive and high-quality relationships because independence involves relinquishing

bonds with parents such that there is a trade-off between independence and support. In contrast, volitional functioning is compatible with support and high-quality relationships and is even promoted by supportive relationships (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Third, whereas SIT (Blos, 1967, 1979; Mahler, 1972) states that the development of independence is particularly salient during two specific life periods (i.e., early childhood and adolescence), SDT claims that volitional functioning is relevant throughout the complete lifespan. Fourth, independence is often argued to be a typical Western concept, which is relevant in individualistic cultures but not in collectivist cultures. In contrast, SDT argues that volitional functioning is a universally important ingredient for adaptive functioning because it appeals to basic psychological need satisfaction. Finally, autonomy-as-independence is more a matter of quantity (e.g., both too little independence as well as too much independence from parents too early in adolescence are considered maladaptive; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986), whereas autonomy-as-volition is a matter of quality of motivation (i.e., contrasted with controlled motivation or feeling pressured).

Three studies underscore this differentiated view on autonomy. First, Kins et al. (2009) examined emerging adults' process of home-leaving, that is, living independently from parents. Living situation can be seen as an indicator of dependence (living with parents) vs independence (living away from parents). Given home-leaving is considered a developmental during the transition to adulthood (Arnett, 1998), the key hypothesis in this study was that living independently would add to emerging adults' well-being. Comparing emerging adults ($N = 224$; Mage = 22 years and 10 months; $SD = 8$ months) in these two groups showed that those living independently were more satisfied with their living condition ($\beta = .23$, $p < .001$) which in turn also predicted higher overall well-being ($\beta = .26$, $p < .01$), compared to their agemates still living with parents. However, emerging adults' motivation for living with parents or independently was measured in this study. Autonomous motivation (e.g., I still live with my parents because this is a choice that I fully endorse) was differentiated from controlled motivation (e.g., I live independently because my parents pressure me to do so). When adding this motivation for living situation in the predictions above, the effect of living situation became nonsignificant, and autonomous motivation for living situation became the strongest predictor of emerging adults' well-being. To sum up, the volitional nature of one's living situation is much more important for well-

being than the living situation as such. Note, however, that in this Belgian sample, autonomous motivation was strongly and positively correlated with emerging adults' living situation ($r = .39$; $p < .001$), indicating that independent living situation seems to provide emerging adults with better opportunities for volitional functioning and may, as such, contribute indirectly to well-being. Therefore, given that autonomous motivation is clearly tied up with the type of living situation, the possible contribution of living situation to well-being should not be entirely dismissed. In sum, this study differentiated emerging adults' independence (i.e., living situation) and their volitional functioning (i.e., autonomous vs. controlled motivation) and showed that the latter is more important for flourishing at this age.

Next, inspired by the seminal work of Hmel and Pincus (2002), Van Petegem et al. (2013) focused on the jingle-jangle fallacy in the conceptualization and measurement of adolescent autonomy. The jingle fallacy points to the belief that scales with the same name measure the same construct (Thorndike, 1904) and the jangle fallacy relates to the assumption that two scales with different names measure different constructs (Kelley, 1927). Both fallacies apply to the construct of adolescent autonomy. Both Finkenauer et al. (2002) and Noom et al. (1999) measured 'emotional autonomy' in their study, but clearly, they were measuring different constructs (a jingle fallacy). Beyers et al. (2003) defined and measured 'detachment' as alienation and distrust in the relationship with parents, whereas Steinberg and Silverberg (1986) measured and defined 'engulfment anxiety' as the extent to which the parents are perceived as overpowering and intrusively controlling, thereby threatening adolescents' sense of independence and selfhood. However, Van Petegem et al. (2013) showed that detachment and engulfment anxiety are both strong indicators of controlled distance (a jangle fallacy). In their study, Van Petegem et al. (2013) hypothesized that different measures of 'autonomy' tap into either independence versus dependence or volition versus pressure as such, whereas others were expected to constitute a combination of both dimensions. Two adolescent samples ($N = 707$, 51% girls, and $N = 783$, 59% girls, age range = 14–21 years) completed several frequently used measures of 'autonomy'.

Using factor analysis with Procrustes rotation, clear evidence was found for a two-dimensional structure, with the first dimension reflecting 'volition versus pressure', that is, the degree to which adolescents experience a sense of volition and choice as opposed to feelings of pressure and

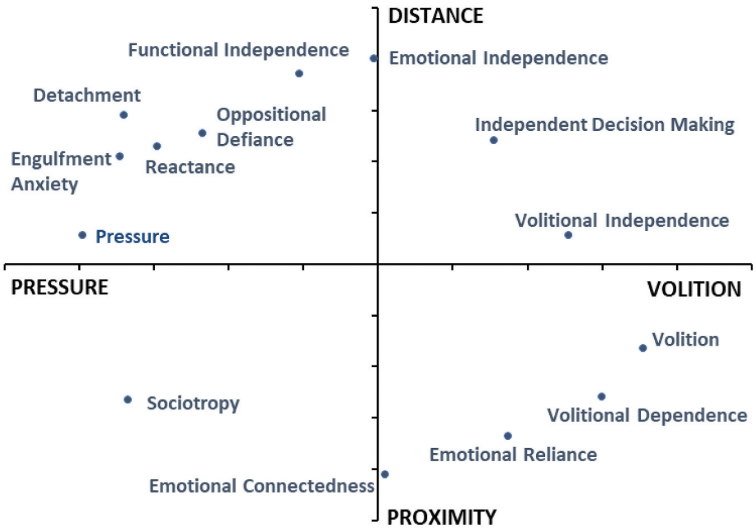

Figure 1. Two-dimensional factor solution of 'autonomy' scales (Van Petegem et al., 2013, study 2).

coercion. The second dimension reflected 'distance versus proximity', which involves the degree of interpersonal distance in the parent-adolescent relationship (Figure 1).

Beyond clarification of what each of the scales in this study is actually measuring, this study also sheds light on what autonomy-as-independence is all about. Independent functioning (e.g., as indicated by youth alone decision-making) implies taking some distance from the parents as one is not relying upon the advice of the parents, a tendency that – on average – seems accompanied by feelings of volition and self-endorsement. This interpretation seems justified by the moderate positive loading of independent decision-making on both dimensions. Thus, the present findings suggest that autonomy-as-independence and autonomy-as-volition are clearly distinct, yet not fully orthogonal. This finding is consistent with the work of Kins et al. (2009) showing that an independent living situation in emerging adults is on average reflective of a volitional choice.

What this study also suggests is that different types of autonomy or different groups of adolescents exist. Some adolescents show high volitional distance, a pattern of autonomy or independence that goes hand in hand with individual decision-making and is typical for Western

adolescents. Other adolescents, however, might feel pressured or forced to take distance from parents, for instance due to stress within the family. This pressured independence may go hand in hand with rebellion and defiance (Van Petegem et al., 2013). Volitional proximity sometimes is considered to be characteristic of youth in Southern or Eastern countries (e.g., Cross et al., 2003; Oishi, 2000) and refers to adolescents that volitionally rely on parental advice and guidance. Finally, other adolescents might stay close to parents because they feel pressured to do so (by parents) or because they feel guilty for not being loyal to their parents.

Finally, Van Petegem et al. (2012) further tested the relative contribution of each autonomy operationalization in the prediction of adolescents' adjustment (i.e., well-being, problem behaviour, and intimacy). Data were gathered from a sample of 707 Belgian adolescents between 14 and 20 years (51% girls). An integrated measure of adolescent autonomy was used. First, adolescents completed the *Family Decision Making Scale* (FDMS; Dornbusch et al., 1985), answering the question 'Who decides' (from *My parents alone* to *I alone*) on 20 issues from five social domains (Smetana & Daddis, 2002; Smetana et al., 2004), that is, the personal domain (e.g., what clothes to wear), the friendship domain (e.g., whether you can hang out with friends your parents do not like), the prudential domain (e.g., whether you smoke cigarettes or not), the conventional domain (e.g., how you talk to your parents), and the moral domain (e.g., whether you can hit others). In the next step, the motives for independent decision-making were measured. Participants were first instructed to select the three items with the highest scores on FDMS and they were explicitly instructed to write them down. By doing so, their independent functioning was primed. Then, they were asked to indicate why they decide relatively independently about these issues, using the *Self-Regulation Questionnaire* (SRQ; Ryan & Connell, 1989), thereby tapping into the motives for independent decision-making, again differentiating autonomous (e.g., 'because this is personally important to me') and controlled motives for independent decision-making (e.g., 'because I would feel bad if I didn't'). In the same way, the motives for dependent decision-making were measured.

The degree of independent vs. dependent decision-making was, as expected, only slightly related to the underlying motives for independent and dependent decision-making (r's from −.19, $p < .001$; to .09, $p < .05$). Independent decision-making as such only showed unique associations with more problem behaviour ($\beta = .33$, $p < .001$), that is, an absence of

parental involvement in adolescent decision-making seems to be indicative of youth problem behaviour. Volitional independence was a unique predictor of adolescents' intimacy in friendships ($\beta = .30$, $p < .001$) and volitional dependence predicted higher well-being ($\beta = .29$, $p < .001$) and less problem behaviour ($\beta = -.18$, $p < .01$), whereas controlled motives for both independent and dependent decision-making predicted more maladjustment (e.g., lower intimacy in friendships, $\beta = -.15$, $p < .01$; lower well-being, $\beta = -.26$, $p < .001$; and more problem behaviour, $\beta = .28$, $p < .001$). Thus, in line with Kins et al. (2009) the undergirding motives do matter in understanding when dependent or independent decision-making is beneficial or harmful, as these motives explain additional variance in adolescent adjustment above and beyond the degree of dependent vs. independent decision-making as such.

Development of adolescent autonomy

As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, several theorists consider the adolescent years to be a period during which an increase in autonomous functioning occurs (e.g., Berk, 2022; Feldman, 2008; Santrock, 2016; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). What's more, autonomy is considered to be a developmental task of adolescence (Feldman, 2008; Steinberg, 2001; Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins, 2003). Note that all of these cited authors refer in their statements to autonomy-as-independence. However, despite these developmental perspectives on adolescent independence, longitudinal research on this developmental task is largely lacking. Therefore, Beyers (2001) conducted a longitudinal study, comprising 309 adolescents (57.9% girls) that were followed up from age 13 to 17 with measures of autonomy-as-independence from parents (i.e., a 12-item shortened version of the Emotional Autonomy Scale; Beyers et al., 2003; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986; Cronbach's alpha = .80; range = 12 to 48) at ages 13, 15 and 17. Latent growth curve modelling in the total sample showed that development of autonomy-as-independence followed a curvilinear trend, with major increase between ages 13 and 15 (Figure 2, blue line). Increase between ages 15 and 17 was only 31% of the growth between age 13 and 15.

Beyond the significant means of level and slope, also the variances of level and slope were highly significant ($p < .01$), indicating substantial interindividual differences in both the level and rate-of-change of autonomy-as-independence. Concretely, individual estimates of the level of

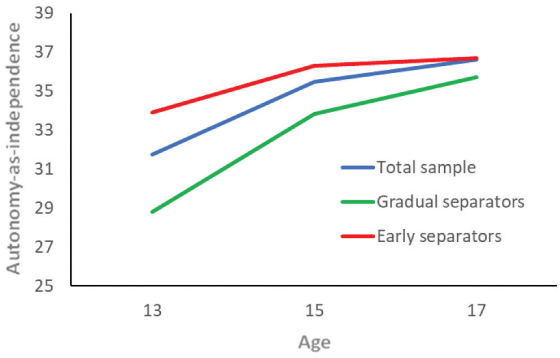

Figure 2. Development of autonomy-as-independence in total sample (N = 309), gradual separators (n = 148) and early separators (n = 149); Beyers (2001).

autonomy-as-independence at age 13 ranged between 15.45 and 45.68, and individual levels of the rate-of-change (slope) ranged between 0.02 and 14.23. Note that in this study, all adolescents showed a positive rate-of-change in autonomy-as-independence between age 13 and 17, said otherwise, no single adolescent decreased in autonomy-as-independence, supporting the hypothesis of a normative development of autonomy-as-independence during early and middle adolescence.

This progressive development autonomy-as-independence was confirmed in longitudinal studies in Black American minority youth (Smetana et al., 2004; focus on independent decision-making) and in Spanish adolescents (Parra et al., 2015; focus on emotional independence) with slight but substantive increases in autonomy-as-independence between ages 12 and 18 years. Beyond age 18 and up to age 22 autonomy-as-independence decreased again the latter study, supporting the idea of rapprochement in late adolescence (Quintana & Lapsley, 1990).

Further analyses on these data (Beyers, 2001) revealed two distinct subgroups of adolescents, with a different developmental trajectory of autonomy-as-independence as suggested by Silverberg and Gondoli (1996), that is, gradual separators and early separators (Figure 2, green and red lines, respectively). Gradual separators had a low level of autonomy-as-independence at age 13 and a strong increase in the years after that whereas early separators already at age 13 showed high autonomy-as-independence from parents (i.e., a level that gradual separators only reached at a age 15) and little increase up to age 17. In line with the hypothesis of Silverberg and Gondoli (1996), early separators were less

well adjusted than gradual separators, as evidenced by substantially higher levels of stress and deviant behaviour found in the former group, compared to the latter. Moreover, gradual separators not only were better adjusted but also were a more homogeneous group in terms of adjustment, compared to early separators. Finally, and probably most important, positive associations between autonomy-as-separation on the one hand, and internal distress and deviant behaviour on the other hand, only showed up for early separators, that is, if autonomy-as-independence has deteriorating outcomes in terms of adolescents' adjustment (Ryan & Lynch, 1989), then this is only true for adolescents with very high emotional independence already at the onset of adolescence and consistently high scores throughout the remaining years of adolescence.

When autonomy is defined as volitional functioning, no clear hypotheses exist on age-related development during adolescence and early adulthood. From the SDT perspective, autonomy is considered a fundamental and inherent human need, the satisfaction of which would be essential for people to grow and thrive across the lifespan (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017; Ryan et al., 2016; Soenens et al., 2018). Rather than assuming a short sensitive period in which autonomy plays a prominent role, in SDT it is assumed that people move towards greater levels of integration, thereby gradually displaying more volitional functioning as they grow older. That is, with increasing age, people would be more capable of bringing ongoing experiences in harmony with their values, interests, and preferences (Ryan et al., 2016). Confirming this reasoning, adolescents have been found to increasingly display volitional functioning (Van Petegem et al., 2015). This movement towards more volitional functioning does not stop after adolescence but seems to continue throughout the lifespan. For instance, with increasing age, adults display more self- endorsed reasons for pursuing goals (Sheldon & Kasser, 2001) and for engaging in non-enjoyable activities, such as voting and paying taxes (Sheldon et al., 2005). Such findings suggest that people continue to display increases in autonomy-as-volition, beyond adolescence and into adulthood and that growth in autonomy is not the privilege of adolescents (Soenens et al., 2018).

Is adolescent autonomy only important in Western Cultures?

A prominent debate in cross-cultural psychology exists about the meaning and adaptive or maladaptive role of autonomy for different

cultural groups, with several scholars rejecting the supposed beneficial role of autonomy in non-Western cultures and countries. The well-know model on cultural agency of Markus and Kitayama (2003) distinguishes between disjoint and conjoint models of agency. In disjoint cultures, agency is equated with independence, that is, being disconnected from others. This is typically true for North-Western countries in the world. In conjoint cultures in the rest of the world, agency is constructed by meeting social obligations. So, depending on the culture and the model on agency, one expresses themselves either through the achievement of independence and personal achievement (disjoint model) or through harmonious relationships with in-group members (conjoint model). In this cross-cultural view, autonomy is clearly equated with independence or separation from others, in contrast to conforming to existing norms and rules. Further, the benefits of autonomy would be limited to individuals living in a disjoint culture (e.g., Cross et al., 2003; Oishi, 2000). Illustrating the cultural specificity of the prevalence and effects of autonomy-as-separation, Qin et al. (2009) compared adolescents from working- and middle-class suburbs of major cities in the United States and China and reported that US adolescents showed higher initial levels and stronger increases in independent decision-making in the transition from seventh to eighth grade than Chinese adolescents. Note, however, that also Chinese adolescents showed increases in independent decision-making with age, again supporting the normative nature of the development of autonomy-as-separation during adolescence. Further, although higher initial levels of independent decision-making related to enhanced emotional functioning in both China and the US, increases in independent decision-making were related to increases in well-being only in US adolescents.

When autonomy is defined as volitional functioning, it is not necessarily at odds with the social expectations and interdependent relationships in a conjoint culture (Soenens et al., 2018). Cross-cultural studies that investigated autonomy-as-volition (and other basic needs) in many different countries around the world (Church et al., 2013; Tay & Diener, 2011) consistently confirmed that, despite cultural differences in the degree of volition, fulfilment of autonomy-as-volition is enhancing people's feelings of well-being around the globe. A possible reason for this is that adolescents in conjoint cultures can volitionally depend on culturally determined

expectations, given they have internalized them. Indeed, several studies confirmed that internalization of cultural values consistently predicts higher well-being (e.g., V. Chirkov et al., 2003; V. I. Chirkov et al., 2005).

Building on these studies, Chen et al. (2013) provided further evidence for the two-dimensional nature of adolescent autonomy as defined above, that is autonomy-as-independence and autonomy-as-volition. Similar to the study of Van Petegem et al. (2012) cited above, Chen et al. (2013) assessed both the degree of independent decision-making and the motives for (in)dependent decisions, in a sample of Chinese adolescents in the 10th grade ($N = 573$; 16 years on average; 51.2% girls; from either an urban or rural area of China). As in the study of Van Petegem et al. (2012) on Belgian adolescents, also for these Chinese adolescents the degree of independent vs. dependent decision-making was not significantly related to their well-being ($\beta = -.02$, *ns*), whereas both volitional independence ($\beta = .17$, $p < .01$) and volitional dependence ($\beta = .26$, $p < .01$) both predicted higher well-being. So, also in Chinese adolescents, the underlying motives for (in)dependence are much more important for adolescents' well-being that the degree of independence as such. For an even more stringent test of this conclusion, Chen et al. (2013) compared the above predictions in two groups, one with adolescents low on collectivism and the other with adolescents high on collectivism (assessed with the *Perceived Cultural Context questionnaire*; V. Chirkov et al., 2003). Multigroup modelling showed no differences at all between the constrained and unconstrained model, so the investigated relationships showed to be invariant across the two groups. These findings shed further light on the 'paradox of choice', that is, the question of whether independence will engender well-being, especially for relatively collectivistic Asian individuals (Markus & Schwartz, 2010; Schwartz, 2006). It is not simply the case that Chinese adolescents do not benefit from independent decision-making because such functioning mismatches with the dominant culture value. The key to the paradox is the consideration of the relative internalization of such behaviour. If one authentically endorses the independent decisions one takes, one psychologically benefits from doing so, even if one lives in a relatively more collectivistic society as China. More generally, this finding is consistent with the claim in SDT that self-endorsed

functioning is universally important and beneficial (V. Chirkov et al., 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2006, 2017; Vansteenkiste et al., 2006).

Can parents support the development of adolescent autonomy?

When considering autonomy as an important developmental task in adolescence, one might wonder whether and how parents can support this task. In line with the different aspects of adolescent autonomy above, a similar distinction was made between promotion of independence as defined by Silk et al. (2003) and support of volitional functioning (Liga et al., 2020; McCurdy et al., 2020; Soenens et al., 2007). Promotion of independence refers to parents' promotion of adolescents' independent expression, thinking, and decision-making, and granting them freedom and independence. Support of volitional functioning is a characteristic of parents who are empathic to their children's perspective, who provide choices to their children whenever it is possible, minimize the use of control and power assertion, and help their offspring to explore and enact upon their true personal values and interests (Grolnick, 2003; Soenens et al., 2007).

In the study of Soenens et al. (2007) both aspects of parental autonomy support were assessed in a sample of 396 late adolescents (aged 17–25 years; 79% female) and both internal and external validity of the measure of promotion of independence and support of volitional functioning was obtained. When entering both aspects of autonomy support in a regression, it turned out that promotion of independence was not a significant predictor of adolescent adjustment, whereas support of volitional functioning was significantly predictive of better adolescent adjustment ($\beta = .21$; $p < .01$). In the study of Kins et al. (2009) emerging adults and both their parents reported on parental support of volitional functioning. Most interestingly, parents' and emerging adult report correlated strongly ($.39^{***} \leq r \leq .47^{***}$) and therefore were used as indicators of parental autonomy support that directly predicted more autonomous motivation for emerging adults' living condition, as well as indirectly through autonomous motivation higher subjective well-being in these emerging adults. In another study with early adolescents (Chueng et al., 2016), both adolescents and their mothers reported on parental support of volitional functioning. In this study, mothers' and adolescents' reports only correlated mildly ($r = .17^{*}$), but regardless of who reported, parental

autonomy support predicted better academic and emotional functioning in the adolescents.

A question that remains, however, is whether these two types of parental autonomy support also predict adolescents' autonomy development? This question was answered in a cross-cultural study on 658 Belgian and Greek adolescents (aged 13 to 20; 58% female). Using the measure of Soenens et al. (2007), Fousiani et al. (2014) showed that both maternal ($\beta = .36$; $p < .001$) and paternal promotion of independence ($\beta = .23$; $p < .001$) predicted higher levels of adolescents' independent decision-making. Thus, if adolescents feel that their parents emphasize the necessity to make independent decisions and to be self-reliant in their functioning, the adolescents are more likely to actually act independently. Similarly, both maternal and paternal support of volitional functioning predicted stronger volitional independence ($\beta = .36$; $p < .001$ and $\beta = .27$; $p < .001$, respectively) as well as stronger volitional dependence in adolescents ($\beta = .42$; $p < .001$ and $\beta = .29$; $p < .001$, respectively). So, when parents are viewed as being empathic, supportive, and providing choice, adolescents make more self-endorsed and volitional choices in their lives, be it more volitional independence as well as more volitional dependence. Moderation analyses by gender and country revealed that the relations between perceived parental autonomy support and adolescent autonomy were equivalent across boys and girls and across Belgian and Greek adolescents. Finally, two interesting and consistent interactions emerged in this study, in the prediction of adolescents' independent decision-making, that somehow qualified the main effect of promotion of independence mentioned above (Figure 3). Specifically, the relation

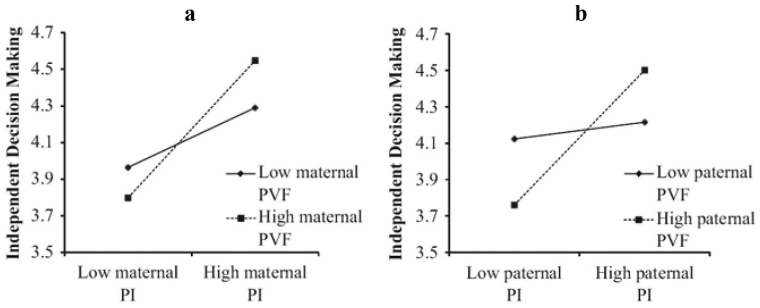

Figure 3. Interaction between maternal (A) and paternal (B) promotion of Independence (PI) and promotion of volitional functioning (PVF) in the Prediction of Adolescents' Independent Decision Making (Fousiani et al., 2014).

between perceived maternal promotion of independence and independent decision-making was stronger when maternal support of volitional functioning was high. Similarly, for fathers, the positive relation between perceived paternal promotion of independence and independent decision-making was only positive when also paternal support of volitional functioning was high. Therefore, promotion of independence only or particularly predicts more independent decision-making in adolescents, when independence is promoted in a volitional way by parents.

What these interactions also suggest is that different types of parental autonomy support exist. Some parents support independence in a volitional way and help their adolescents to act upon their emerging interests and personal values. Other parents promote independence in a pressuring way (e.g., 'When will you learn to take care of your own business?! I cannot be available for you all the time!'), adolescents may feel insecure about acting independently, which may hamper their independent decision-making.

Conclusion

This paper provides an overview of autonomy development during adolescence autonomy, inspired by Separation-Individuation Theory (Blos, 1967, 1979), was initially framed as autonomy-as-independence. However, as debates in the literature arose regarding the interpretation of autonomy in adolescence (Ryan & Lynch, 1989; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986), often referred to as the detachment debate (Silverberg & Gondoli, 1996), it became evident that a distinction is needed between autonomy-as-independence and autonomy-as-volitional functioning, the latter definition coming from Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017). This paper defines both facets of autonomy in adolescence, explores their developmental trajectories, delves into the cross-cultural interpretations of autonomy, and examines the role parents play in nurturing adolescent autonomy.

Development of autonomy-as-independence is a normative developmental task in adolescence, as theory stated (Blos, 1967, 1979) and research confirmed (Beyers, 2001). Compared to autonomy-as-volition which when satisfied consistently predicts flourishing in adolescents regardless of timing, age, and culture, autonomy-as-independence is less or not at all related to well-being and even sometimes to ill-being (e.g., when separating from parents early;

Beyers, 2001). Parents can both support autonomy-as-independence as well as autonomy-as-volition. When parents support autonomy-as-volition, autonomy-as-independence seems to come as a byproduct.

Further investigations on this topic could widen the age range of the studies above, with some of them only focusing on early adolescents, others only on emerging adults. Further long-term longitudinal studies throughout adolescence are needed to shed further light on the development of autonomy at this age. Further, when investigating parents' support of this development, research could be strengthened by consistently using adolescent and parent reports, particularly when studying parents' support or promotion of independence (McCurdy et al., 2020).

Finally, as highlighted by Soenens et al. (2018), it is crucial for scholars in the field of adolescent development to articulate their conceptualizations of autonomy as clearly and explicitly as possible. This distinction between independence and volition carries significant implications for how autonomy is perceived in relation to adolescents' psychosocial adjustment and development. It also influences our understanding of how micro-contexts, such as parents, and macro-contexts, including cultural factors, can shape adolescent autonomy. It is our hope that this paper contributes to the clarification of the autonomy concept and serves as an inspiration for young researchers to pursue further investigations into this vital subject.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Author note

Data cited in different studies of our PhD student are stored on a research group file server that is accessible to the first author.

The data that support the findings of these studies are available from the corresponding author, [WB], upon reasonable request.

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