

# Personal and Social Identity of Adolescents and their Parents – Concept of a Cross-cultural Study and first Results from the German Sample

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Paper presented at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of the European Society on Family Relations (ESFR),  
30<sup>th</sup> September to 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2004 at Fribourg, Switzerland

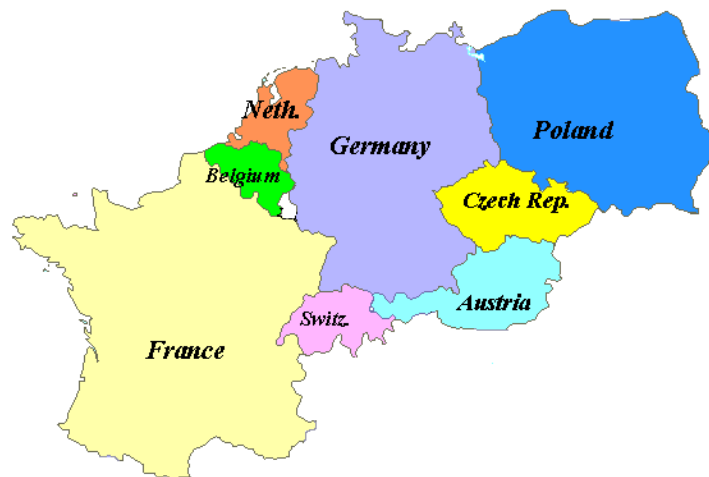
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## Introduction

In this paper I try to explain the methodological and theoretical background of our study and to show some results from the German sample that might be interesting especially for family researchers.

## Research Project

Our project might be interesting for participants of this international congress, because it is an intercultural European study. The samples were drawn in Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Switzerland, the Czech Republic and Poland. It is also planned to include Austria into the study, but this has not been finished until now.



The study is designed to compare Germany with its neighbours. We are especially interested to compare Germany with the "old members of the European Union" in West Europe on one hand, and with the "new EU-countries" in East Europe on the other hand.

The total sample, that we collected until now, is N = 2373 adolescents, aged 13- to 19 years, and N = 1472 parents of these youngsters.

The samples for all countries, that participated in the study, will be described more detailed in the next contributions.

Now - what is the problem, that we want to study in those countries?

We were interested in aspects of identity, because in the research literature identity formation and development is very often described as an problematic challenge in our time, influenced by many risk factors.

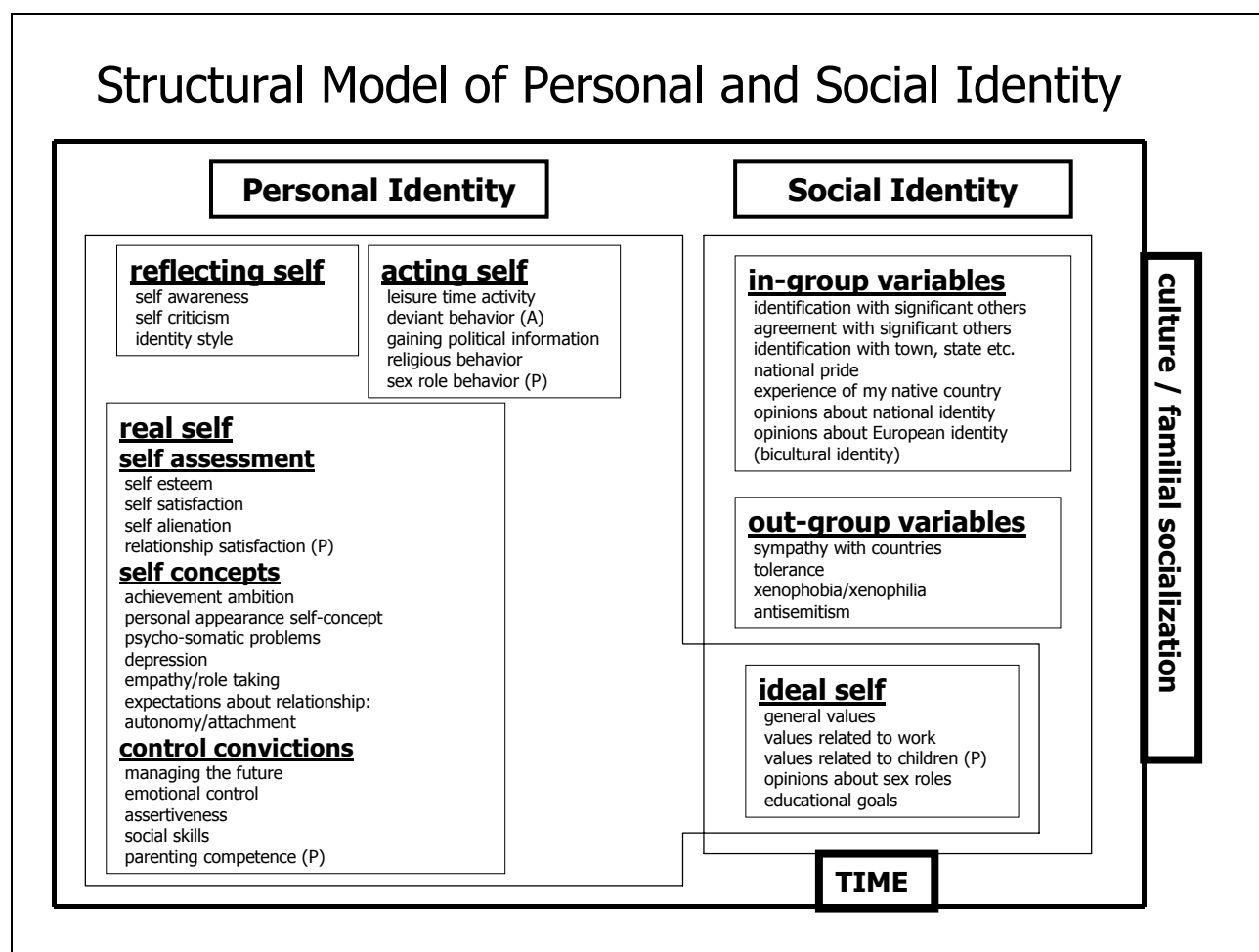
Among these risk factors, that make identity development problematic, are processes of individualisation in modern industrialised societies, ethnic pluralisation and economic globalisation.

In the course of globalisation and due to numerous migrations, the issue of keeping one`s own identity as well as the search of social affiliation, might become an important topic.

Simultaneously, it is possible to observe a growing tendency towards nationalistic thought and differentiation world-wide, which can be seen in anxieties about strangers and violence against foreigners. The problem of safeguarding an identity in the tension between the desire to be open to the world on the one hand and the innate need for intimacy and social affiliation on the other hand is the subject of our research project.

## Theoretical Background

In our theoretical model we differentiate between personal and social identity. Personal identity refers to the question: Who am I? The individual`s awareness of being the same person despite development over time and in different situations and contexts is a central issue.



Our structural model is based on the one hand on William Stern's (1918) critical personalism and on the other hand on Fend's (1994) research on the development of self-concepts in adolescence. Identity is defined there as a "unitas multiplex", which is composed of the components "reflecting self", "real self" with the components self assessment, self concepts and control convictions, "acting self", and "ideal self". The concept of identity style by Berzonsky (1989) was integrated, too, as well as the identity regulation model by Haußer (1995), who defines identity as a relationship structure of combining "self-esteem", "self-concepts" and "beliefs of self-efficacy" and "locus of control".

For social identity we differentiate in-group-variables and out-group variables. Social identity describes – according to the theory of Tajfel (1982) – the feeling of affiliation within social groups. Everybody has several social identities, based on being an insider in social groups on the micro and macro level (e.g. family, friends, village or town, nation or the European Union). Individuals use specific strategies to create or positive social identity. These strategies include increasing the perceived value of the in-group and reducing that of the out-group. These strategies can take extreme forms, like xenophobia and excessive national pride, and influence opinions about other people and groups. But it is also possible to increase the perceived value of the out-group and reduce that of the in-group. The definition of the self and of others, the process of social affiliation and the definition of individual boundaries are all interacting dynamically.

We also included the factor time in the model: Of course already in childhood there is an awareness and a concept of self. But typical in adolescence is a process of reflection about it. The result of this reflection is the differentiation of the components of personal identity.

Our theoretical framework is a contextual one, that means, we think that especially family socialisation and cultural factors influence identity development, respectively the components of the structural model.

So our research design is a cross-cultural study and it includes adolescents and their parents to make it possible to analyse intrafamilial socialisation processes. We developed a questionnaire that is based on the model, and translated it into several languages.

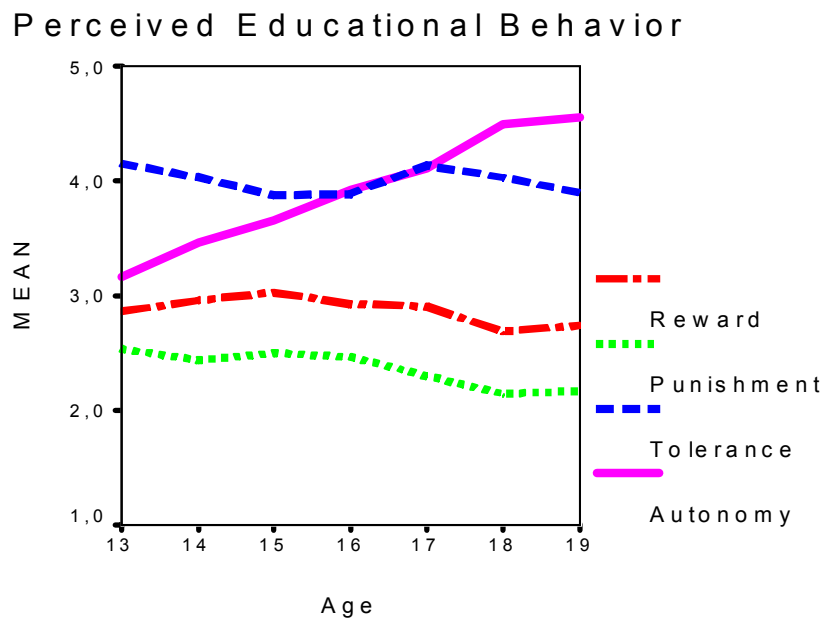
## Familial Socialisation

We operationalised familial socialisation by the aspects: "reward", "punishment", "tolerance" and "autonomy". We used parallel instruments for adolescents and parents.

To assess "reward" and "punishment" we chose the scale "Erziehungspraktiken", that is included in the "Familiendiagnostisches Testsystem" by Schneewind, Beckmann and Hecht-Jackl (1985). There are two subscales for both, reward and punishment: an emotional dimension and a material dimension.

The scale "tolerance" was developed by Ross, Campbell and Clayer (1982). It measures, how far parents accept the individuality of the child.

The scale "autonomy" was published by Schneewind and Braun (1988). Autonomy means the youngsters independence in every-day-situations, as for example, going out or making friends.



As you can see in this figure, especially perceived autonomy depends on the child's age: It increases. Reward and punishment decrease slightly, and there is no significant trend in tolerance.

Family socialisation is more characterised by reward than by punishment. These results are consistent with the research literature and can be understood as an external validation of the scales.

## Transmission Effects

The power of family socialisation can be characterised by transmission effects. These effects are mostly explained by the child's identification with the parents. As the research literature shows, however, the strength of transmission also depends on the subject of the questions. This could be shown for example concerning political socialisation: In the 1990s a lot of research was done in Germany about the transmission of anti-democratic attitudes. The transmission of aspects of identity, however, has never been studied in such a broad approach, as we did.

Our data show, that personal identity of parents correlates in many respects significantly with the identity dimensions of their children. But there are also exceptions:

|                                      | Correlation |                 |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|-----------------|
|                                      | significant | not significant |
| <b>self awareness</b>                |             | X               |
| <b>self criticism</b>                | X           |                 |
| <b>identity style</b>                | X           |                 |
| <b>self esteem</b>                   | X           |                 |
| <b>self satisfaction</b>             | X           |                 |
| <b>self alienation</b>               | X           |                 |
| <b>religious behavior</b>            | X           |                 |
| <b>gaining political information</b> | X           |                 |

We did not find, for example, a significant correlation for "self awareness". An explanation might be, that the degree of "self awareness" is age specific. A high degree is especially typical in adolescence.

|                                  | Correlation |                 |
|----------------------------------|-------------|-----------------|
|                                  | significant | not significant |
| <b>achievement ambition</b>      | X           |                 |
| <b>personal appearance</b>       | X           |                 |
| <b>psycho-somatic problems</b>   | X           |                 |
| <b>depression</b>                | X           |                 |
| <b>empathy/role taking</b>       |             | X               |
| <b>relationships: autonomy</b>   |             | X               |
| <b>relationships: attachment</b> | X           |                 |
| <b>managing the future</b>       |             | X               |
| <b>emotional control</b>         |             | X               |
| <b>assertiveness</b>             | X           |                 |
| <b>social skills</b>             |             | X               |

The same interpretation (of age effects) can be used for the other aspects, that do not correlate significantly. That are the self concepts of "role-taking" and "autonomy in relationships" as well as the control convictions "managing the future", "emotional control", and "social skills".

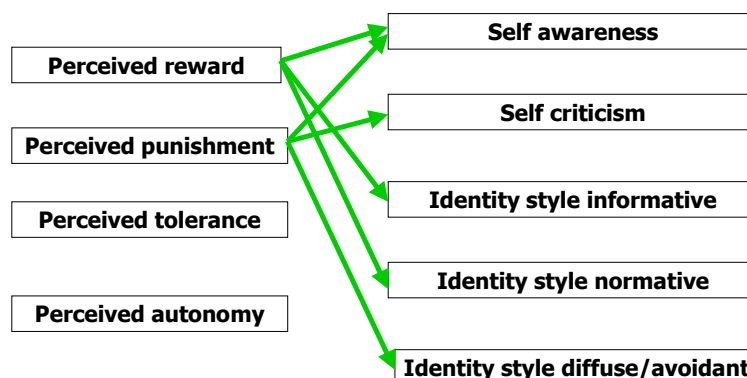
|   | Correlation |                 |
|---|-------------|-----------------|
|   | significant | not significant |
| <b>identification with sign. others</b> | X           |                 |
| <b>agreement with sign. others</b>      | X           |                 |
| <b>national pride</b>                   | X           |                 |
| <b>experience of my native country</b>  | X           |                 |
| <b>opinions about national identity</b> | X           |                 |
| <b>opinions about European identity</b> | X           |                 |
| <b>tolerance</b>                        | X           |                 |
| <b>xenophobia</b>                       | X           |                 |
| <b>xenophilia</b>                       | X           |                 |
| <b>antisemitism</b>                     | X           |                 |

Whereas we found mixed significant and not significant correlation coefficients concerning personal identity – the correlation coefficients for social identity are all significant. They also are mostly numerically higher. So we can conclude, that transmission effects are more considerable in social than in personal identity.

### Effects of educational behavior

A more detailed analysis of intrafamilial processes is possible, when we connect the measures of family socialisation (perceived by the adolescents) with the aspects of adolescents´ personal and social identity. For this, we calculated linear regression analyses. As the data show, reward, punishment, tolerance and autonomy have differential effects on adolescents´ identity development.

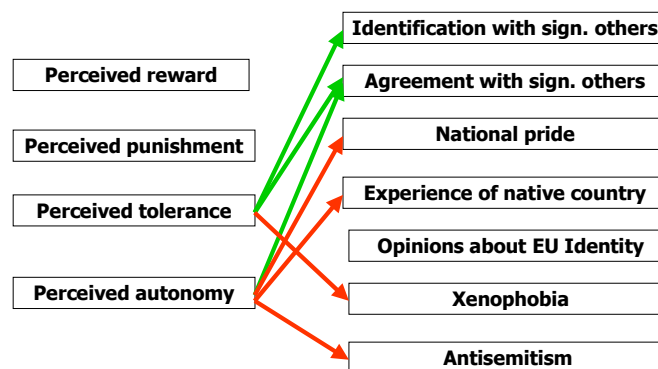
For example let´s have a look at the outcomes of reward and punishment on reflecting self.



There is a significant path from reward to self awareness, to informational identity style and to normative identity style. From punishment there is a significant path to self awareness, too, as well as to self criticism and a diffuse/avoiding identity style.

So on one hand the positive vs. negative outcomes of reward and punishment, that have often been described in the literature, can be demonstrated also for identity development. On the other hand, we found a hint, that self awareness is bivalent. It can be the outcome of reward and of punishment. This fits with other data of our project. Self awareness can be a productive mechanism in managing the developmental tasks in adolescence as well as a risk factor.

I am afraid, there is not enough time to discuss all results of the regression analyses, as we found them for other variables. So for now I can just pick out one more example, for the outcomes of tolerance and autonomy on social identity.



For tolerance we found significant positive and negative paths to identification and agreement with significant others and a negative path to xenophobia. For autonomy there is a positive path to agreement with parents, but negative paths to national pride, experience of native country and antisemitism. This reflects what is reported in the research literature, that education with high levels of tolerance and autonomy reduces attitudes of authoritarianism.

## Conclusion

So we can conclude that family socialisation is a powerful determinant for identity development of adolescents. This finding is an important message for understanding the following contributions in our symposium. Additionally the next speakers will stress more the cross cultural approach of our project.

**Thank You for Your Attention!**

## Literature

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