

PATTERNS OF INDIVIDUATION IN SLOVENIAN ADOLESCENTS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH ADOLESCENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTS, FRIENDS AND TEACHERS

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Abstract

Previous research about individuation in adolescence mainly focused on analyzing single scales of separation-individuation. The main goals of the present study were (1) to identify groups of adolescents with different profiles of individuation in relation to parents and (2) to find out how these different groups perceive their relationships in three social contexts. N= 546 early, middle and late adolescents participated in the study. They completed questionnaires on developmentally normative aspects of separation-individuation as well as on emotional support, behavioural regulation and autonomy support/psychological control experienced in relationships with parents, friends and teachers. A cluster analysis that was computed for the seven individuation scales showed four distinctive groups of individuation: connected relationship with parents with non-threatened autonomy, individuated relationship with parents with non-threatened autonomy, ambivalent relationship with parents with threatened autonomy, and avoidant relationship with parents with threatened autonomy. The most distinctive differences appeared between the "connected" and the "avoidant" group of adolescents. The latter experience less favourable socialisation conditions in all three social contexts and may thus be prone to less adaptive psychosocial outcomes.

KEY WORDS: *individuation, adolescence, relationship with parents, cluster analysis.*

Resumen

Investigaciones anteriores sobre el proceso de individualización en la adolescencia se han centrado en el análisis de escalas concretas de separación-individualización. Los objetivos del presente estudio fueron (1) identificar grupos de adolescentes con diferentes perfiles de individuación en relación con los padres y (2) saber cómo estos grupos perciben sus relaciones en tres contextos sociales. Participaron 546 adolescentes, quienes completaron cuestionarios sobre los aspectos del desarrollo implicados en el proceso de separación-individualización,

así como sobre el apoyo emocional, la regulación del comportamiento y el apoyo a la autonomía/el control psicológico experimentados en las relaciones con los padres, amigos y profesores. El análisis de conglomerados mostró cuatro grupos distintivos de individualización: relación de conexión con los padres sin amenazas a la autonomía; relación individualizada con los padres sin amenazas a la autonomía; relación ambivalente con los padres con amenazas a la autonomía; y relación de evitación con los padres con amenazas a la autonomía. Las diferencias más significativas aparecieron entre los grupos de adolescentes "conectados" y los "evitadores". Estos últimos experimentan condiciones de socialización menos favorables en los tres contextos sociales, y por lo tanto pueden ser propensos a presentar menores niveles de adaptación psicosocial.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *individualización, adolescencia, relación con los padres, análisis de conglomerados.*

Introduction

In developmental psychology, at least in a more western-oriented tradition of research, there is a strong agreement that reorganisation of adolescent's relationship with parents is an important developmental task in adolescence (Josselson, 1980; Silverberg & Gondoli, 1996; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Although most adolescents continue to maintain a positive emotional tie with parents their relationship with parents also changes. Compared to the period of childhood and early adolescence, adolescents aged 15 to 16 spend less time with parents and with increasing age they also get less social support from them (Helsen, Vollebergh, & Meeus, 2000). The adolescent-parent communication becomes more symmetrical and reciprocal. Accordingly, adolescents are expected to take more responsibility for their own behaviour and decisions and to gradually change their view of parents as the main source of support and approval. Instead, they should rely more on their own internal resources and expand their social networks. Similar to relationship with parents, adolescents gradually establish reciprocal relationships with peers and romantic partners in terms of building mutual trust and intimacy, sharing ideas, and assertiveness in expressing one's opinion.

Adolescent individuation: autonomy and relatedness in relationship with parents

The process of adolescent individuation includes two essential parts: relinquishing childish dependencies on parents (i.e. differentiation or separateness) and gaining individual's independence and self-governance (i.e. autonomy). This developmental task enables adolescents to build more egalitarian and mutual relations in their close relationships (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). However, the task of adolescent individuation does not mean that adolescents lose emotional ties to their family. The individuation process also includes maintenance of close relations to parents (Silverberg & Gondoli, 1996) and it should result in a person's capability to successfully balance relational needs and autonomous strivings in his/her close relationship.

In this article we focus on the characteristics of individuation process in Slovenian adolescents. Slovenia is a small country situated in Central Europe and has been a member of the European Union since 2004. Slovenian adolescents tend to follow general trends of (post) modern youth that are characterized by a shift towards the world of privacy and individual experiences, stressing individuality (individual initiative, accomplishment), family and openness to diversity (Nastran Ule, 1996). At a more general cultural level, horizontal individualism, emphasizing independence and autonomy of the individual is pronounced among adolescents and older age groups. Features of horizontal collectivism, characterized by in-group cooperation and harmony, are also evident, but limited to family and a few other intimate relationships (Oishi, 2000). The majority of Slovenian adolescents reported that their parents are emotionally supportive and stimulate their intellectual growth and self-realization (Ule, Renner, Mencin Čeplak, & Tivadar, 2000). Nowadays, relations within a family are more egalitarian and discussions and negotiations are the prevailing conflict-management strategies. The majority of Slovenian adolescents consider that their parents provide them enough autonomy in their decision-making as well as support with regard to their schooling and career choice (Puklek Levpušček, 2001). Although conflicts between parents and children become more intensive and frequent throughout the years of adolescence, they are limited to specific domains, and do usually not seriously impede parent-adolescent relations (Puklek Levpušček & Zupančič, 2007). Considering these findings, we expected similar results on adolescent individuation in relationship with parents to what has already been supported in some previous studies of North American and Western European adolescents.

Theory of adolescent individuation

One of the most cited theories on adolescent individuation is Blos' theory of second individuation (Blos, 1967). Blos expanded the theory of separation-individuation in early childhood (Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1975) to the period of adolescence. The author stated that the important developmental task of adolescent individuation process is to disengage from infantile parental representations and strengthen one's own internal resources instead. Hence, individuation process in adolescence primarily includes reforming of internal parental representations. Adolescents should disengage from infantile object ties and change their childish perceptions of parents as infallible and omnipotent protectors. In this process adolescent copes with the pain of object loss by seeking support, loyalty, devotion, and empathy from peers. Later on, Josselson (1980) explained more precisely the sub-phases of separating from parents and gaining personal autonomy. Adolescents go through the process of differentiation (seeking psychological distance from parents), practicing (testing their newly developed independence), rapprochement (ambivalent period, fear of fusing again with parents but also try to re-establish connectedness) and finally achieve consolidation (recognize similarities and differences with others, function autonomously but also retain relational needs).

Measuring adolescent individuation

In order to identify different aspects of adolescent individuation as described by Blos and Josselson researchers mainly use self-reported questionnaires, e.g. Separation-Individuation Test of Adolescence (SITA; Levine, Green, & Millon, 1986), Munich Individuation Test of Adolescence (MITA, Walper, 1997), and Emotional Autonomy Scale (EAS, Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986). These scales include three broader aspects of adolescent individuation: (1) *relational needs* (e.g., support/nurturance seeking, enmeshment seeking, separation anxiety, ambivalent feelings in relation to parent, nondependency), (2) *differentiation/separation* (e.g., de-idealisation, denial of attachment needs/dependency denial, engulfment anxiety), and (3) *healthy individuation* (balancing dependence and independence needs). While the SITA and its revised version MITA measure specific manifestations and resolutions of separation – individuation phases in adolescence (e.g., nurturance seeking, denial of attachment needs, engulfment anxiety, separation anxiety, ambivalence, healthy individuation), the EAS contains cognitive aspects of emotional autonomy (i.e., perceiving parents as people and parental de-idealization) as well as affective components of autonomy (i.e., non-dependency on parents and individuation).

Using the above mentioned self-reported scales the researchers often focus on analyzing single dimensions of separation-individuation and their relationships with adolescent family functioning, peer relations and psychological adjustment. Studies involving a “variable-centred” approach showed that adolescents who expressed a need for closeness and higher social support from parents, and who successfully balanced dependence and independence needs in relationship with parents, reported better family relations, peer/romantic relationship and personal adjustment (e.g., Helsen et al., 2000; Lamborn & Steinberg, 1993; McClanahan & Holmbeck, 1992; Smetana & Gettman, 2006). On the other hand, separation process as manifested in excessive separation strivings was associated with poorer family functioning and adjustment (e.g., Beyers & Goossens, 1999; Holmbeck & Leake, 1999; Ryan & Lynch, 1989). Therefore, the prevailing view in the recent research on adolescent individuation is that developing responsible autonomy without threatening emotional bond to parents leads to better psychological adjustment.

The authors who used single scales of S-I, however, found only partial support for the manifestations of the separation-individuation sub-phases in different adolescent age groups. While adolescent’s idealisation of parents and need for parental support slightly decreased with age and separation issues were more characteristic in younger than older adolescents, the authors could not find support for healthy individuation, when measured as a separate dimension, as the characteristic outcome of individuation process in late adolescence (e.g., Puklek Levpušček, 2006).

The important limitation of the variable-centred approach is that it favours the role of main variable effects and thus masks more subtle effects of various levels of variable combinations. Therefore, the aim of the present study was to

investigate possible existence of groups of adolescents each with their own profiles of individuation in relation to parents. A typological person-centred approach provides more holistic approach to classifying individuals that yields meaningful profiles regarding the combination of variables. In literature, studies in which authors applied a typological approach when seeking to identify qualitatively different patterns of individuation are scarce. In a broader perspective of studying different types of parent/adolescent relationship, Lamborn and Steinberg (1993), who relied on a priori theoretical considerations, identified four types of adolescent families: "detached", "individuated", "connected", and "ambivalent". Other studies that focused more specifically on adolescent individuation mostly used empirical methods, yielding different typologies by cluster analyses. For example, McClanahan and Holmbeck (1993) who used the SITA in the US college sample identified four clusters of individuation labelled as "healthy separators", "anxious deniers", "peaceful detachers", and "succorance seekers". Delaney (1996) who employed, among other scales, the EAS in a sample of the US early adolescents found three types, labelled as "individuated", "connected" and "detached". To our knowledge, there is only one study in Europe that investigated individuation types in adolescents. Kruse and Walper (2008) used the MITA to assess individuation in the sample of German adolescents aged between 10 and 20 years. Cluster analyses identified three types of individuation in relationship with mother and four types of individuation in relationship with father/step father. Nonetheless, the authors found that individuation types for mothers and fathers co-varied significantly (the overlap was between 60 and 80%). "Securely individuated" adolescents formed the largest group. This group of adolescents reported high relatedness and low ambivalent and anxious feelings in relationship with both parents. The second largest group was "dependent ambivalent" group. This group of adolescents showed high relatedness, but at the same time high anxious and ambivalent feelings as well as higher denial of attachment needs as the "securely individuated" group. The third individuation type was labelled "avoidant". This group of adolescents showed high scores in denial of attachment needs and engulfment anxiety and at the same time low relatedness needs. The fourth type, found only for individuation in relationship with father/step father was labelled "detached autonomous" and was characterized by low scores for all scales.

In order to extend the knowledge about the characteristics of adolescent individuation in different cultural settings we aimed at searching for internally replicable typology of individuation in relationship to parents in a group of 13- to 18-years old Slovenian adolescents. Furthermore, we compared the individuation patterns found in our study to the ones established in some previous studies which applied similar person-centred approach when seeking qualitatively different patterns of adolescent individuation. We expected that adolescents would form at least four basic groups with individuation profiles that show different configurations of relational needs (with positive or ambivalent/anxious feelings in relationship with parents), separation strivings, and successful individuation. We also analysed age and gender differences in individuation profiles. According to some previous research findings (e.g., Kruse & Walper, 2008; Puklek Levpušček,

2006) we expected younger compared to older adolescents to show a more frequent pattern of high relatedness and low separation strivings with their parents on one hand and a more frequent pattern of ambivalent relationship with parents on the other. Accordingly, we expected that older adolescents would be more likely to evidence a pattern of moderate levels of relatedness and separation strivings and non-ambivalent relationship with parents as signs of successful individuation. While previous research does not suggest strong gender effects (Kruse & Walper, 2008) we did not expect to find any differences in the frequency of adolescent males and females belonging to particular individuation patterns.

Adolescent individuation and social relationships

Another aim of the study was to find out how adolescents with various individuation patterns perceive their close relationships in the three social contexts: family, peer group and school.

As proposed by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), each individual adolescent is part of a continuously interacting set of complex social relationships. Adolescents form bi-directional relationships with others in close ("face to face") social context (a microsystem level). For example, adolescents who live in well-differentiated family system have a better chance to develop their autonomy. It is also likely, however, that parents provide greater support for self-differentiation strivings (e.g. expressing personal views, deciding about one's personal matters) to adolescents who are developing successfully. The characteristics of social contexts at the microsystem level also relate to adolescent's development through between-contexts interactions (a mesosystem level). From the mesosystem perspective it is important that the incentive for family system change toward greater openness and respect for individuality also emerges from adolescent experiences in other close relationships: many adolescents gradually transfer the pattern of relationship experienced in the friendship (e.g., sharing ideas, mutual trust, equal rights to express one's own opinion) to their relationship with parents (Youniss & Smollar, 1985).

Barber and Olsen (1997) proposed three basic socialisation conditions that are relevant to adolescent functioning in a variety of social settings (family, peer group, school): connection/emotional support (satisfying adolescent's relational needs), regulation (monitoring adolescent's behaviour, setting limits), and facilitation of autonomy (tolerating self-differentiation through respect for autonomous decision making, one's personal attitudes etc.). The research suggest that the congruence of positive relationship experiences across social contexts leads to more adaptive psychological outcomes (e.g., Eccles, Early, Frasier, Belansky, & McCarthy, 1997; Levitt, Levitt, Bustos, Crooks et al., 2005).

In this study we hypothesized that adolescents who belonged to more successful separation-individuation profiles would report better socialisation experiences in the three social contexts. More specifically, adolescents who belong to profiles with

non-threatening autonomy will perceive more emotional support, regulation and autonomy granting in their relationships with parents, friends and teachers than their peers who belong to profiles with threatening autonomy. However, we also expected that adolescents from different individuation profiles would differ most according to socialisation experiences with parents while adolescent individuation is primarily associated with the change in parent-adolescent relationship.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 546 early, middle and late adolescents. There were 172 early adolescents (age 13 to 14), 90 males, 82 females, 190 middle adolescents (age 15 to 16), 87 males, 103 females, and 184 late adolescents (age 17 to 19), 98 males, 86 females. Adolescents were recruited from nine schools in Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia. The two groups of early adolescents represented the students from the last two years of compulsory schooling (Grades 7 and 8). The groups of middle adolescents consisted of students from the first and the second year of high school education. Late adolescents were students of the third and the fourth years of high school education. Adolescents came from families of diverse educational backgrounds. The majority of adolescents (83.6%) lived in two-parent families.

Measures

INDIVIDUATION

Munich Individuation Test – MITA (Walper, 1997) consists of 35 items (mother and father version), which describe six different aspects of adolescents' separation-individuation in relation to parents: (a) *Engulfment Anxiety* (fear of overcontrol and emotional intrusion of parent, the scale consists of 6 items, $\alpha_{mother} = 0.82$, $\alpha_{father} = .80$, example item: "I often wish she/he was less protective and worried less about me."); (b) *Denial of Attachment Needs* (rejection of support and help from parent, expression of self-sufficiency, the scale consists of 6 items, $\alpha_{mother} = .67$, $\alpha_{father} = .72$, example item: "Actually, I don't need her/him."); (c) *Support Seeking* (need for support and help from parent and closeness with him/her, the scale consists of 6 items, $\alpha_{mother} = .74$, $\alpha_{father} = .77$, example item: "Later on, I would like to live in the same town as she/he, so we could spend a lot of time together."); (d) *Successful Individuation* (integration of closeness with parents and personal autonomy, the scale consists of 5 items, $\alpha_{mother} = .71$, $\alpha_{father} = .75$, example item: "My mother/father is still important to me, although I have my own interests."); (e) *Ambivalence* (attachment needs without positive expectations to fulfil these needs, the scale consists of 5 items, $\alpha_{mother} = .60$, $\alpha_{father} = .64$, example item: "I'm not sure my

mother/father likes my affection towards her/him.”); (f) *Fear of Love Withdrawal* (adolescents’ separation anxiety or fear that his/her behaviour or failure would lead to a loss of parental love, the scale consists of 3 items, $\alpha_{mother} = .56$, $\alpha_{father} = .66$, example item: “If I disappoint my mother/my father I’m afraid that she/he won’t like me anymore.”).

Adolescents answer the MITA on a Likert-type scale ranging from *never true for me* (1) to *always true for me* (4). High associations were observed between mother’s and father’s scores on the corresponding aspects of individuation (r_s between .51 and .76). In accordance with this result, some previous studies showed that adolescents were unlikely to differentiate between the autonomy from each parent (e.g., Delaney, 1996; Hoffman, 1984) or individuation types for mothers and fathers co-varied significantly (Kruse & Walper, 2008). Therefore, it seemed reasonable to use only one parental score (i.e. average sum of mother’s and father’s score) for each aspect of individuation in the subsequent analyses.

Parental De-idealisation (Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986) is a subscale of Emotional Autonomy Scale (EAS) and describes adolescents’ relinquishing of childish perceptions of parental omnipotence. Adolescents answer on a Likert-type scale ranging from *never true for me* (1) to *always true for me* (4). A higher score on the original subscale means higher parental idealisation. To make it comparable with other measures, the subscale was renamed to *Parental Idealisation* (Puklek Levpušček, 2006). It consists of 5 items, $\alpha_{mother} = .69$, $\alpha_{father} = .73$, example item: “My parent hardly ever makes mistakes. “ We used one parental score (i.e. average sum of mother’s and father’s score on the Parental Idealisation subscale) in the subsequent analyses.

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Parents

Parental support was measured by the *Parental Warmth/Involvement scale* (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991). For this study the original instruments were slightly adapted, in that students answered all items on a 5-point Likert scale (1- *strongly disagree* to 5 - *strongly agree*). The scale consists of 10 items ($\alpha_{mother} = .83$, $\alpha_{father} = .89$), perception of parents as loving, responsive and involved. “My mother/father keeps pushing me to do my best in whatever I do.”

Parental regulation was measured with a five-item monitoring scale adapted from the *Parental Strictness/Supervision scale* (Lamborn et al., 1991) and the *Monitoring scale* (Barber & Olsen, 1997). The scale consists of 5 items ($\alpha_{mother} = .82$, $\alpha_{father} = .85$), perception of how much knowledge parents have about the activities of their adolescent child. “My mother/father knows exactly where I go at night.”

Psychological control was measured by the *Psychological Control Scale – Youth Self-Report* (PCS-YSR; Barber, 1996). It represents parental dimension that minimizes adolescent’s attempts to behave or think autonomously. The scale consists of 13 items ($\alpha_{mother} = .88$, $\alpha_{father} = .88$), perception of parents as controlling the adolescent

with guilt induction, love withdrawal, invalidating feelings, personal attacks. "My mother/father is a person who tells me of all the things she/he had done for me."

Mother's and father's scores on support, regulation and psychological control were averaged to create one score for each of the socialization dimensions.

Friends

For the purpose of this study the three scales of friends' emotional support, regulation and autonomy support were created. The responding format was: *none, rare, most, all*.

Friends' support: perception of friends as caring, responsive, helpful. The scale consists of 5 items, $\alpha = .74$, example item: "How many of your friends accept you just the way you are?"

Friends' regulation: perception of friends' disapproval of adolescent's violation of social norms or immoral behaviour. The scale consists of 6 items, $\alpha = .77$, example item: "How many of your friends would disapprove if you behaved aggressively towards others?"

Friends' autonomy support: perception of friends' capacity to tolerate autonomous behaviour, attitudes and decision making in a relationship. The scale consists of 6 items, $\alpha = .75$, example item: "How many of your friends show respect for your viewpoints even when they differ from their own?"

Teachers

For the purpose of this study the three scales of teacher emotional support, regulation and autonomy support were created. The responding format was: *none, rare, most, all*.

Teacher support: perception of teachers as supportive, emphatic, helpful, praising of good work. The scale consists of 5 items, $\alpha = .74$, example item: "How many of your teachers praise you when you do your school work well?"

Teacher regulation: perception of teacher's classroom regulation. The scale consists of 5 items, $\alpha = .65$, example item: "How many of your teachers demand silence when they give a lecture?"

Teacher autonomy support: perception of teachers' support of students' initiative and autonomous learning in a class. The scale consists of 5 items, $\alpha = .75$, example item: "How many of your teachers enable you to express your opinion about the topic of the study?"

Procedure

The administration of questionnaires took place in classrooms (2 sessions, 20 min each). To avoid similar answers to the corresponding items of individuation and relationship with mother and father the participants filled in the items related to

mother on the first day, along with the items related to the adolescent relationships with friends. The items related to father and teachers were completed the following day.

Results

Cluster analysis of individuation profiles

In the first step we searched for internally replicable clusters which would best describe the differential profiles of adolescent individuation in relation to parents. We followed the procedure by Asendorpf, Borkeanu, Ostendorf and van Aken (2001). The authors used the cluster analysis of multiple trait scores (with the evaluation of cluster replicability) for identification of personality prototypes.

To evaluate the replicability of the cluster solutions, we used double cross-validation procedure (described by Asendorpf et al., 2001). The full sample was randomly split into two halves (sub-samples). The two-step clustering procedure was applied to each half of the sample: (a) In the first step, Ward's hierarchical clustering procedure was applied in each of the two sub-samples separately (squared Euclidean distances were used as measures of dissimilarities among adolescents). Cases were ordered into clusters, and mean z-scores on seven individuation scales (six MITA subscales and EAS Idealisation subscale) were then used as initial cluster centres in the non-hierarchical K-means clustering procedure in the second step; (b) The K-means clustering procedure was first conducted on the cases from the first sub-sample with initial cluster centres from the same sub-sample (to obtain primary clusters). The procedure was then repeated on the cases from the first sub-sample with initial cluster centres from the second sub-sample (to obtain secondary clusters); (c) The participants within the first sub-sample were assigned to their primary and secondary clusters; (d) The two solutions (primary and secondary cluster classifications for each participant) were then compared for agreement by using Cohen's κ . Sometimes it was necessary to reorder the clusters to increase agreement; the order of the clusters is irrelevant; (e) The same procedure as described in points b, c and d was applied to the second sub-sample; (f) The mean of the two resulting κ s obtained in the two sub-samples was then calculated; (g) This procedure was repeated ten times with different random splits of the full sample. The resulting 10 κ s were then averaged and a value of at least $\kappa = .60$ was considered acceptable. Two-, three-, and four-cluster solutions were examined.

With this procedure we found two-, three- and four-cluster solution as sufficiently replicable across different splits within the data set ($\kappa = .97$, $.79$ and $.76$, respectively). Finally, we retained a four-cluster solution for the description of adolescent profiles of individuation. We calculated the mean z-score for each of the seven individuation subscales for adolescents in the four clusters by using Ward's hierarchical cluster analysis for the whole sample of adolescents.

Description of the four individuation profiles

Table 1 shows the mean level of the response scale (1-4) and the mean z-score for each of the seven individuation scales, representing the degree to which each scale is characteristic of adolescents in a particular cluster. To interpret the profiles in terms of relative contributions of seven individuation dimensions, we used the following criteria: (1) the mean level of the response scale in the six MITA subscales and the EAS Parental Idealisation subscale ((mother's score+ father's score/number of items)/2), with scores between 1.00 and 1.99 considered to be low on the variable, scores between 2.00 and 2.99 medium, and scores between 3.00 and 4.00 high on the variable; (2) standardized values of the individuation variables, with z-scores lower than $-.40$ indicating low level of the variable, z-scores between $-.40$ and $.40$ indicating medium level of the variable, and z-scores higher than $.40$ indicating high level of the variable¹; and (3) significant differences found between the clusters in individuation variables.

The described procedure led to the following characterization of the individuation clusters:

Table 1

Scale mean scores and z-scores (in parentheses) for each of the four clusters and results of ANOVA

Individuation scales	Cluster				<i>F</i> (3, 545)
	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4	
Successful individuation	3.46 ^a (.70)	3.02 ^b (-.18)	2.95 ^b (-.32)	2.56 ^c (-1.11)	112.90*** ($\eta^2=.38$)
Support-seeking	2.82 ^a (.81)	2.13 ^b (-.37)	2.17 ^b (-.30)	1.71 ^c (-1.09)	155.65*** ($\eta^2=.46$)
Idealisation	2.43 ^a (.57)	2.02 ^b (-.19)	2.07 ^b (-.10)	1.53 ^c (-1.08)	71.11*** ($\eta^2=.28$)
Denial of attachment needs	1.80 ^a (-.80)	2.25 ^b (.10)	2.57 ^c (.74)	2.75 ^d (1.11)	178.08*** ($\eta^2=.50$)
Engulfment anxiety	1.99 ^a (-.63)	2.31 ^b (-.14)	2.89 ^c (.73)	3.19 ^d (1.19)	135.55*** ($\eta^2=.43$)
Ambivalence	1.40 ^a (-.53)	1.63 ^b (-.04)	2.35 ^c (1.44)	1.46 ^a (-.40)	180.61*** ($\eta^2=.50$)
Fear of love withdrawal	1.63 ^a (-.03)	1.47 ^b (-.31)	2.26 ^c (1.07)	1.27 ^d (-.66)	74.37*** ($\eta^2=.29$)

Note: Means with different superscript (a, b, c, d) differ at $p < .05$; η^2 = partial eta squared; *** $p < .001$

1 We followed the cut-off z-score= $\pm .40$ which allows for a satisfactory interpretation of the nature of the separation-individuation clusters as was proposed by McClanahan and Holmbeck (1992).

(a) Adolescents in cluster 1 (37.5%) had high scores on successful individuation, and medium-high scores on parental support seeking and parental idealisation. They had low scores on engulfment anxiety, denial of attachment needs, fear of love withdrawal and feelings of ambivalence in relationship with parents. On the basis of described configuration, cluster 1 was labelled *Connected relationship with parents with non-threatened autonomy* (abbrev. "connected").

(b) Adolescents in cluster 2 (31.9%) had medium-high scores on successful individuation, medium scores on parental support seeking, parental idealisation, denial of attachment needs and engulfment anxiety, and medium-low scores on ambivalence and fear of love withdrawal. Compared to the "Connected" profile, adolescents in the cluster had lower scores on parental support seeking, idealisation and fear of love withdrawal. The configuration of scores shows moderate levels of separation strivings (denial of attachment needs, engulfment anxiety) but not as much emphasized as in the next two clusters. We labelled this cluster *Individuated relationship with parents with non-threatened autonomy* (abbrev. "individuated").

(c) Adolescents in cluster 3 (17.9%) showed medium levels of successful individuation and relational needs (parental support seeking, idealisation), medium-high denial of attachment needs and engulfment anxiety, and medium-high ambivalence and fear of love withdrawal. This configuration describes adolescents with emphasized separation strivings and anxious ambivalent relationship with parents. The cluster was labelled *Ambivalent relationship with parents with threatened autonomy* (abbrev. "ambivalent").

(d) Adolescents in cluster 4 (12.6%) had medium-low scores on successful individuation, low scores on parental support seeking and idealisation, medium-high scores on denial of attachment needs, high scores on engulfment anxiety, and low scores on ambivalence and fear of love withdrawal. The cluster describes adolescents with low relational needs and high separation strivings. It was labelled *Avoidant relationship with parents with threatened autonomy* (abbrev. "avoidant").

Age differences in cluster membership

As indicated in Table 2, adolescents of the three age groups differ in their cluster membership, $\chi^2(6, N= 546)= 13.94, p= .03$. The participants in early- and middle adolescent groups were more represented in the "connected" profile than late adolescents. Accordingly, the "connected" profile represents the most frequent individuation profile in the early- and middle-adolescent groups. The "individuated" profile was the most characteristic for the group of late adolescents and the least characteristic for the group of early adolescents. In the group of late adolescents, the "individuated" profile is the most frequent individuation profile. Among the age groups, the "Ambivalent" profile is the most characteristic for the group of early adolescents, although it is less frequent than the "connected" profile in this age group. The "avoidant" profile is the least frequent individuation profile within all age groups.

Table 2

Summary table with frequencies and percentages of adolescents within clusters and age groups

	Age group			Total
	13-14	15-16	17-18	
Connected (N)	70	73	62	205
% within cluster	34.1%	35.6%	30.2%	100.0%
% within age group	40.7%	38.4%	33.7%	37.5%
Individuated (N)	40	60	74	174
% within cluster	23.0%	34.5%	42.5%	100.0%
% within age group	23.3%	31.6%	40.2%	31.9%
Ambivalent (N)	40	33	25	98
% within cluster	40.8%	33.7%	25.5%	100.0%
% within age group	23.3%	17.4%	13.6%	17.9%
Avoidant (N)	22	24	23	69
% within cluster	31.9%	34.8%	33.3%	100.0%
% within age group	12.8%	12.6%	12.5%	12.6%
Total (N)	172	190	184	546
% within cluster	31.5%	34.8%	33.7%	100.0%
% within age group	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

A cross-tabulation test showed that there was no difference in cluster membership between males and females, $\chi^2(3, N= 546)= 1.89, p= .59$.

How do adolescents with different individuation profiles perceive emotional support, behavioural regulation and autonomy support in their social relationships?

As shown in Table 3, adolescents in the four individuation clusters differ according to perceived socialization behaviours of their parents, friends and teachers. Differences among adolescents with different individuation profiles were found in perceived emotional support, behavioural regulation and psychological control of parents, behavioural regulation of friends, and teachers' support and autonomy granting. The effect sizes of between-group differences in socialisation dimensions are the largest for parental behaviours.

Post hoc tests (Bonferonni test) showed that adolescents with "connected" profile perceived their parents as the most emotionally supportive, with the highest regulation of adolescent's behaviour and the lowest psychological control. Adolescents with "individuated" profile reported higher score on parental support and lower score on psychological control than adolescents in the two clusters with threatened autonomy ("ambivalent", "avoidant"). They also reported on higher parental behavioural regulation than adolescents with "avoidant" individuation profile. Adolescents with "Ambivalent" profile perceived the highest parental psychological control as compared to the other three clusters. Adolescents with "avoidant" profile reported on lowest behavioural regulation of their parents.

Table 3
Cluster differences in adolescents' perceptions of parents, friends and teachers

	Cluster				<i>F</i>	η^2
	Connected	Individuated	Ambivalent	Avoidant		
Parents						
Support	4.11 ^a	3.63 ^b	3.28 ^c	3.22 ^c	79.79***	.31
Regulation	3.58 ^a	2.98 ^b	2.76 ^b	2.62 ^d	36.08***	.17
Psychological control	1.68 ^a	1.88 ^b	2.41 ^c	2.12 ^d	38.53***	.18
Friends						
Support	3.12	3.03	3.02	3.00	2.38	.01
Regulation	2.85 ^a	2.65 ^b	2.65 ^b	2.48 ^b	8.44***	.04
Autonomy	3.08	3.08	2.97	3.14	2.61	.01
Teachers						
Support	2.48 ^a	2.37 ^{ab}	2.26 ^{bc}	2.16 ^c	9.63***	.05
Regulation	3.18	3.10	3.14	3.12	1.52	.01
Autonomy	2.09 ^a	1.97	2.00	1.88 ^b	3.55*	.02

Note: Means with different superscript (a, b, c, d) differ at $p < .05$; Parental dimensions were rated on a 1-5 scale while friends' and teachers' dimensions were rated on a 1-4 scale; * $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$.

As regards relationship with friends, adolescents with different individuation profiles differed only in their perception of friends' behavioural regulation. Adolescents with "connected" profile reported more friends to disapprove socially unacceptable behaviours than the other three groups. Adolescent with "avoidant" profile reported fewer friends to regulate their behaviour than the other three groups.

Adolescents with different individuation profiles also differ according to emotional support and autonomy granting of their teachers. Adolescents with "connected" profile perceived more teachers as emotionally supportive as adolescents with "ambivalent" and "avoidant" profile. Adolescents with "connected" profile also reported more teachers to support their learning autonomy than adolescents with "avoidant" profile.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to find internally replicable clusters (profiles) of adolescent individuation in relation to parents. Instead of focusing on specific dimensions of adolescent individuation we searched for groups of adolescents each with their own profiles of individuation in relation to parents. We measured

adolescent individuation by using the six scales of the MITA (Walper, 1997) which cover relational needs, separation strivings and healthy individuation in relationship with parents. In addition, we also used the Parental Idealisation subscale of the EAS (Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986), which covers the cognitive aspect of emotional autonomy or more specifically, adolescents' maintaining/relinquishing childish perceptions of parental omnipotence.

Four distinct and replicable profiles of adolescent individuation with parents were identified: connected, individuated, avoidant and ambivalent. The four individuation profiles resemble typology of adolescents' families that was proposed by Lamborn and Steinberg (1993). Furthermore, the three profiles ("connected", "individuated", "avoidant") are similar to a typology of parent/adolescent relationships found in a sample of the US early adolescents (Delaney, 1996). Although Delaney (1996) could not find support for the ambivalent type of parent/adolescent relationship, recent evidence of its occurrence was established in the study carried out on the sample of 13 to 20 years old German adolescents (Kruse & Walper, 2008). We thus believe that the findings of our study strengthen the external validity of adolescent individuation typologies and show evidence of trans-cultural validity of individuation profiles, at least in more western-oriented cultures.

The majority of adolescents (69.3%) belonged to the two profiles with non-threatened autonomy ("connected", "individuated"). Overall, despite some variations in the frequency of adolescents in specific clusters, this result seems to be consistent with some previous findings obtained in other cultural contexts. Delaney (1996), for example, ascertained that "for most adolescents, their quest for autonomy unfolds in the context of close relationships with mothers and fathers" (p. 293). Furthermore, Kruse and Walper (2008) found that the "securely individuated" cluster represents the most frequent pattern of relationships with mothers and fathers. In accordance with some previous studies on adolescent individuation and family relationships in Europe and the US (e.g., Kruse & Walper, 2008; Puklek Levpušček, 2001, 2006; Smetana & Gettman, 2006) we may conclude that the majority of Slovenian adolescents in our sample experienced enough support in their families and did not find it difficult to separate from their parents. The results of the present study also support previous findings of Slovenian researchers who established that the majority of Slovenian adolescents experience considerable amount of autonomy in the family. They want to and at the same time have an opportunity to decide on personal issues (Puklek Levpušček, 2001, 2006; Ule et al., 2000). Furthermore, with increasing age Slovenian adolescents also reported growing levels of behavioural and attitudinal autonomy from both family and peers (Puklek Levpušček, 2001).

Nonetheless, 30% of adolescents in the present study belonged to the profiles where high separation strivings and ambivalent or low relational needs were emphasized. Compared to other groups, adolescents who belonged to the "ambivalent" profile had the most anxious and ambivalent feelings in relationship with parents, while adolescents, who belonged to the "avoidant" profile, showed the lowest levels of relational needs and the lowest level of balance between

dependence and independence needs (i.e. the least adaptive individuation pattern).

The two well-represented profiles in early adolescence (“connected”, “ambivalent”) showed that early adolescence is a period in which we can observe two rather conflicting patterns of individuation: adolescents with strong relational needs and successfully balanced dependence and autonomy in relationship with parents on the one hand and adolescents with strivings to manifest their autonomy through emotional separation from parents (e.g. denial of attachment needs) on the other. The results thus support the hypothesis about the existence of opposite manifestations of individuation in early adolescence. They correspond to our previous research findings which showed that early adolescence is a period in which the most prominent changes occur in the individuation process. Especially adolescents around the age of 14 appeared to be the most ambivalent group as regards individuation toward parents (Puklek Levpušček, 2006).

The results also supported the thesis about the most successful individuation pattern in older adolescents. The “individuated” profile was the most characteristic for the group of 17- to 18-years old adolescents. The adolescents within this profile show moderate to high levels of successful individuation as well as moderate needs for parental support and separation strivings. At this point, the results thus support the developmental trajectory of individuation process. Individual’s relational needs and autonomous functioning without severe separation strivings are more successfully balanced in later than earlier period of adolescence (Josselson, 1980; Puklek Levpušček, 2006). It has to be noted that the “individuated” type in our study accords with the “individuated” model of parent/adolescent relationship (Grotevant & Cooper, 1985). In this model the authors suggested that moderate to high levels of individuality are expressed in a successful balance between autonomy (separation) strivings and at least moderate levels of connectedness. However, in the future studies we should pay more attention to the developmental appropriateness of high levels of parental support seeking and non-elevated conflicts with parents in adolescence. We agree with Delaney’s note (Delaney, 1996) that connected relationship with parents which remains unchangeable through adolescence may become an obstacle on the way to mature adult functioning. In fact, some longitudinal studies showed that moderate levels of conflict between parents and adolescents may have an adaptive function. In her 11-year longitudinal study, Seiffe Krenke (2006) examined how the quality of earlier parent-adolescent relationship contributed to different leaving home patterns in young adults. The results showed that *in-time leavers* (participants who left home at the mean age of 21 (females) and 23 (males)) had experienced a high level of conflict with their parents in early adolescence but less conflict in late adolescence. In contrast, in the group of young adults still living at home the researchers found the lowest level of conflict throughout adolescence, especially in mid-adolescence.

According to the hypothesis, we did not find any gender differences in the membership of specific individuation types. Although there is some support for gender differences when analysing separate individuation dimensions (e.g., Puklek Levpušček, 2006; Walper, 1997) research evidence does not support such gender

differences when analysing qualitatively different types of individuation (Delaney, 1996; Kruse & Walper, 2008).

The second general goal of the present study was to find out how adolescents with various individuation patterns perceive their close relationships in the three social contexts: family, peer group and school. The results showed that "connected" adolescents perceived their family context as the most emotionally supportive, with the highest regulation of adolescent's behaviour and the lowest level of psychological control. Accordingly, this group perceived the highest behavioural regulation of their friends, and the highest teachers' emotional support and autonomy granting. The most distinctive differences were found between the "connected" and the "avoidant" groups of adolescents. The results supported the thesis that adolescents with more successful individuation patterns also perceive more positive socialization experiences in their close relationships (Eccles et al., 1997; Levitt, 2005). However, the correlation nature of the study does not allow us to make any causal interpretation. More individuated adolescents may provoke social environments to better satisfy their needs for connection, regulation and autonomy (Barber & Olsen, 1997). On the other hand, social environments with better socialization practices may support adolescents' self-differentiation strivings within emotionally supportive atmosphere and thus enable adolescents to better balance their conflicting needs for dependence and independence.

The results also showed a clear distinction in reported parental socialization dimensions; adolescents with more successful patterns of individuation (individuated, connected) have more positive socialization experiences with parents than adolescents with high separation strivings and low or ambivalent relational needs (ambivalent, avoidant). However, adolescents with various individuation profiles differed only in some socialization dimensions of the other two social contexts (friends, teachers). The hypothesis which stated that individuation profiles would differ most in terms of socialisation experiences with parents was thus confirmed. Nevertheless, the results suggest that especially adolescents with "avoidant" profile (the least adaptive individuation profile) experience less favourable socialisation conditions in all three social contexts and may thus be prone to less adaptive psychosocial outcomes. Similar conclusions about the potentially non-adaptive nature of "avoidant" profile can also be found in other studies (e.g., Delaney, 1996; Kruse & Walper, 2008).

The role of school context in adolescent individuation process was not examined before. This study found that adolescents who belong to individuation types with non-threatened autonomy perceive their teachers as more emotionally supportive and better facilitators of autonomous learning. The congruence in family-school system is thus supported.

To summarize, findings from the present study indicated the value of an individual difference approach to the study of adolescent individuation. The analysis of separate scales usually yields a picture of connected parent/adolescent relationship with low insecurity and low anxiety in the relationship. However, if the goal of the study is to search for the interplay of different individuation dimensions and to reveal the more extreme groups (e.g., ambivalent, avoidant) typological

approach is a more appropriate research method. It enables us to detect distinct types of relationships which have different implications for individual development of adolescents.

There are several limitations of the study that call for more detailed future research in the domain of adolescent individuation and its association with the complexity of within-context- and between-context social relationships. Our study is cross-sectional in nature and does not enable us to determine possible changes in membership of particular individuation types through adolescence. Furthermore, we found that adolescents who belonged to individuation types with threatened autonomy (ambivalent, avoidant) had less favourable experience with social partners than their mates who belonged to more successful individuation types (connected, individuated). However, because of the cross-sectional nature of the study, we cannot determine if disruption in adolescents' relationships is only temporary or if it signals persistent problems. The third limitation is the fact that the majority of adolescents who participated in the study came from two-parent families. Therefore, there is no particular data on individuation types and socialization experience of adolescents who live in different types of families (nuclear families, single-parent families, stepparent families). Such facts thus limit the external validity of the findings.

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