

Cross National Comparison of the Effects of Parental Strictness of Rules on Adolescents' Well-being in Italy and the Netherlands

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Few investigations exist which have analyzed the effects that similar parenting behaviors have on adolescent psychological health outcomes across different nations. It is important to understand how common parenting behaviors may influence outcomes differently according to population setting. Italy and the Netherlands are two European countries that are dissimilar in family and societal norms and regulations. This study investigated the one year longitudinal associations of parental strictness of rules on adolescent psychological health indicators including: self-confidence, self-esteem, aggression, depression, positive self-perception, and sense of alienation. Additionally, we tested the potential moderating role that country, age and gender had on these associations. The sample consisted of 510 Italian and Dutch adolescents (mean age=17.4, $SD=1.42$). The sample was representative of adolescents attending high school in the selected parts of both countries. A general linear mixed model was applied to investigate main effect and moderating associations. Results showed that the effect of strictness of family rules on both self-confidence ($\beta=-0.38$, $p=0.04$) and positive self-perception ($\beta=0.28$, $p=0.03$) was lower among Dutch and older adolescents. Results point to the fact that greater efforts should be conducted which account for the influence of cultural and social effects of parenting on adolescent health outcomes.

Keywords: Parental strictness, adolescence, psychological wellbeing.

Comparación transnacional de los efectos de la severidad parental de las reglas sobre el bienestar de los adolescentes en Italia y en los Países Bajos. Existen pocas investigaciones de los efectos de la severidad parental sobre la salud psicológica de adolescentes en diferentes naciones. Es importante entender cómo conductas parentales pueden dar resultados distintos según el país de procedencia. Italia y Holanda son países que tienen diversas normas de sociedad y familia. Este estudio investigó las asociaciones longitudinales de los efectos de la severidad parental sobre la salud psicológica de adolescentes incluyendo: confianza, autoestima, agresión, depresión, auto-percepción positiva, y la alienación. También investigamos el probable rol de moderación de país, edad y género. La muestra estuvo conformada por 510 adolescentes Italianos y Holandeses (edad media=17.4, $DS=1.42$). Un modelo mixto lineal se aplicó para investigar las asociaciones y moderaciones de interés. Los resultados mostraron que el efecto de la severidad parental fueron menores en auto-confianza ($\beta=-0.38$, $p=0.04$) y autopercepción positiva ($\beta=0.28$, $p=0.03$) entre holandeses de mayor edad. Los resultados apuntan al hecho de que más esfuerzos deben llevarse a cabo para entender las influencias que los efectos culturales y sociales de un país de origen tienen sobre los efectos de conductas parentales sobre la salud psicológica de los adolescentes.

Palabras clave: Severidad parental, adolescencia, bienestar psicológico.

In spite of extensive research on parenting and on the health and behavioral effects that such practices have on offspring, few investigations exist regarding the effects that similar parenting behaviors have across different nations. The few studies that have investigated the cross-national effects of parenting on adolescent outcomes have shown that certain parenting behaviors do not have the same meaning or consequences on offspring across nations (Chao, 1994; Galambos, Barker & Almeida, 2003; Stewart & Bond, 2002). One such practice is parental control through strictness of rules; for example, while high levels of parental control have been found to be associated with externalizing behavioral problems in adolescent Caucasian populations, these same parental practices have been shown to be protective against such behaviors in non-Caucasian adolescents (Deater-Deckard, Dodge, Bates & Petit, 1996; Galambos *et al.*, 2003; Steinberg, 1992).

The issue of parental control through strictness of parental rules is of particular of relevance to many aspects of adolescent wellbeing. However, to date, research on this dimension has commonly focused on the protective correlates of parental monitoring, without paying much attention to the potential negative consequences of high parental control and monitoring. Several investigation findings have underlined a curvilinear relationship between parental control and problematic conducts. Studies have found that families that exert either high or low control on their offspring tend to have youth that report more behavioral and psychological problems over families who exert moderate control on their offspring (Chassin, 1986; Fuligni, 1993; Miller, 1986).

A component that has been hypothesized to moderate the relationship between parental practices and health and behavioral outcomes in adolescence is cultural context. There is strong empirical evidence that indicates that parental practices are related to social and cultural contextual values. Historical features of cultures influence the ways in which parents care for children in a society, and these practices have lasting psychological and physiological effects on offspring (Whiting & Edwards, 1988). We know from relevant literature that parenting is considered to be socio-culturally constructed (Harkness, Super & van Tijen, 2000). Social cultural contexts influence the ways in which parents care for children in society and this social-culturally defined care in turn determines the psychological and physiological outcomes of the offspring of such society (Whiting & Edwards, 1988). Empirical evidence shows that parental goals, which are related to contextual values, shape how parents and children interact. Studies that have compared North American and European families have found that parents tend to emphasize different values or characteristics in their children according to place of origin (Harkness *et al.*, 2000) which in turn results in a different interpretation of child behavior. Consequently, we see the importance of the role of social and cultural contexts in understanding the effects of some dimensions of parenting.

Taking into account the role of social and cultural contexts on parenting we see that the meaning and effects of parental control may vary according to the values that are promoted in each society. For example, youths in social and cultural contexts that are high in power distance might be more inclined to accept strict rules from parents over youths in low power distance social and cultural contexts. According to Hofstede's theory (Hofstede, 1984; Hofstede & McCrae, 2004), power distance is one of dimensions that are distinctive of a culture. It indicates the extent to which less powerful members of institutions (such as the family) accept and expect the unequal distribution of power. Consequently adolescents in high power distance cultures might be more prepared to accept strict rules of parents because they are educated to expect differences in power allocation among family's members.

Another dimension of social and cultural context that might influence the effect of parenting on adolescent wellbeing is uncertainty avoidance. According to Hofstede (Hofstede, 1979, 2001), uncertainty avoidance indicates the extent to which a social and cultural context programs its members to feel either comfortable or uncomfortable in unstructured situations. Cultures who avoid uncertainty try to minimize the possibility of such situations by strict laws and rules. On the other hand we see that cultures that are accepting of higher levels of uncertainty are generally more tolerant toward new situations and less inclined to have many formal rules. They are also less expected to show and express emotions because they are more contemplative and phlegmatic. Consequently, strict rules might be more accepted in cultures with high uncertainty avoidance as they are inclined to accept strict and structured contexts.

Italy and the Netherlands are two European countries that are quite differ with respect to power distance and uncertainty avoidance dimensions (Hofstede, 1984; 2001); these two aspects are reflected in the observed differences in the family life and structure of both countries. Italy has Mediterranean culture where the role of the family is central to the societal organization (Naldini, 2003). It is characterized by close and often intense familial relationships (Claes, 1998; Facio & Batistuta, 1998; Scabini, Lanz & Marta, 2006). Children typically live with their families until early adulthood due in part to the delayed age of marriage, low rates of pre-marital cohabitation, and difficulties finding employment. These facts have been reported to delay the transition to adulthood among Italian adolescents (Bonino, Cattelino & Ciairano, 2006). There is also a dimension of solidarity among Italian families that is strong (Buzzi, Cavalli & De Lillo, 2002). In addition, it seems that the procrastination of leaving home has made familial relationships even closer than in the past; this at the expense of the creation of new family nuclei and economical and psychological independence (Buzzi *et al.*, 2002; Scabini *et al.*, 2006). Researchers have shown that parental control and support are central in Italian daily life during adolescence (Claes, 1998). On the contrary, in the Netherlands children typically leave the family well before marriage, often to attend the

University. Cohabitation with peers of the same or opposite sex is quite common. Parent-child relationships tend to not be as intense as those of Italian families, and family life in general is deemed to be less central to daily life. Although the transition to adulthood currently is delayed in all the Western countries, Dutch adolescents usually reach partial independence at the age of 18 when many leave the parental home to live alone or with same-age peers. Furthermore, Dutch parenting seems mainly based on endorsement of autonomy (Meeus, 2006). To sum up, it is evidenced that Dutch adolescents are more inclined than Italian youth to develop values that promote independence. In contrast, Italians seems to be oriented to foster emotional bonding with families even in a developmental moment when these bonds are supposed to decrease. These differences make these countries ideal settings to investigate how strict parenting behaviors affect adolescent wellbeing differently according to country and social and cultural context.

In this present study we tested the one year longitudinal role of perception of parental strictness of rules on adolescent wellbeing among a sample of Italian and Dutch adolescents. Firstly we tested the differences in perception of strictness of parental rules according to country of origin. Considering Hofstede's theory, we expected to find stricter perception of family rules for Italian youth over their Dutch counterparts. Secondly, we tested one year follow up associations between perception of parental strictness of rules and a range of indicators of adolescent wellbeing including personal and social discomfort; these indicators included adolescent self-confidence, self-esteem, depression, positive self-perception, sense of alienation, and aggression. Additionally we considered the moderating role that country of origin had on these associations. We expected that strictness of parental rules might have more negative consequences among Dutch adolescents, in terms of higher symptoms of depression and lower positive self-perception because the value of independence and power equality is socio-culturally more important for Dutch than for Italian youth (Hofstede, 1984; Hofstede & McCrae, 2004). We also expected to find some effect on higher aggressiveness but only in Italian sample, as uncertainty avoidance culture are more allowed to express negative emotions.

The third goal of this study was to test the moderator role of age, and gender in the relation between perception of parental strictness of rules and our selected adolescent wellbeing indicators. Regarding gender we hypothesized that males and females would respond differently to parental control, and that these gender differences might be more evident in our Italian sample where traditional sex roles are common (Buzzi *et al.*, 2002). Across most cultures, males are socialized to be more independent and to individuate from the family more quickly than females (Leaper, 2002). Thus, we expected that parental control may have different meanings for males and females, particularly toward the later part of adolescence. Regarding age, we know that parent-child relationships change across the period of adolescence, with conflict

increasing from early to middle adolescence, then stabilizing in late adolescence (Laursen, Coy & Collins, 1998). Changes in cognitive, social, and emotional development across adolescence suggest that each phase of adolescence requires a different mix of parental control and encouragement of emancipation. Younger adolescents, though they are striving for autonomy, are still cognitively and socially immature, and thus in greater need of parental limit setting. Higher levels of parental control in later adolescence, by contrast, may reflect the inability of parents to allow their offspring to individuate from the family, and this may be more likely to be perceived negatively by adolescents. This might particularly true for Dutch adolescents over Italian ones.

METHOD

The sample consisted of 510 Italian and Dutch adolescents, living in the northwest of Italy and the northeast of The Netherlands, and was reasonably balanced for country (52% Italian, 48% Dutch), gender (52% boys, 48% girls), age (15-17 years: 56%; 18-19 years: 44%; mean age=17.4), type of school (31% academic high school, 69% technical and vocational school) and place of residence (39% large or medium-sized city, 61% small town) variables. There were no differences between this sample and national samples in terms of socio-demographic characteristics (www.istat.it in Italy; www.cbs.nl in the Netherlands). The sample was representative of the population of adolescents attending high school in the selected parts of Italy and the Netherlands. Furthermore, there were no differences between the epidemiological data about adolescent substance use drawn from some recent European studies and the correspondent cohort drawn for this study (Hibell *et al.*, 2004).

Participants

Italian sample. The sample consisted of 324 youths (56% male) ranging in age from 15-20 ($M=17.29$ yrs, $SD=1.61$) living in northwest Italy. Nearly all (89.6%) of the parents were married and lived together. Half (50%) of the mothers and 86% of the fathers worked full-time; an additional 11% of the mothers worked part-time and 31% were housewives. A total of 6% of both fathers and mothers had a University degree. We included diverse types of secondary schools as schools that focused on high educational tracks (25.3%) and schools that focused on technical training (74.7%). After excluding students with missing data at follow-up, the number of students included in the models was 302. Attrition analyses showed that participants lost at follow up reported significantly higher levels of aggression ($M=1.45$ vs. $M=1.20$; $p=0.02$).

Dutch sample. The sample from the Netherlands consisted of 186 youth (45.3% male) ranging in age from 15-19 ($M=17.37$ yrs., $SD=0.91$) who had complete

data on all measures in the current study. As with the Italian sample, nearly all (92.1%) of the students came from two-parent homes. Fifteen percent of the mothers and 84% of the fathers worked full-time; an additional 40% of the mothers worked part-time. Dutch youth attended a range of secondary schools including schools that focused on high educational tracks (40.8%) and schools that focused on technical training (59.2%). The Dutch youth lived in medium-sized towns (16%) and small towns (84%). After excluding students with missing data at follow-up, the number of students included in the models was 171. Attrition analyses showed that participants lost at follow up reported significantly higher levels of aggression ($M=1.63$ vs. $M=1.28$; $p=0.04$).

Procedure

Public schools representing the different types of high schools attended by Dutch and Italian adolescents were invited to participate utilizing snowball recruiting. All schools that were contacted agreed to be involved in the study. Consent from the parents of students who were minors and from students over the age of 18 were obtained in accordance with Dutch and Italian law and the ethical codes of the Professional Psychology Associations. No students refused to participate. The questionnaire was completed individually, anonymously, and in its entirety during school hours under the supervision of specially trained researchers and in the absence of the classroom teachers; it turned in immediately upon completion by 100% of the students sampled. Questionnaire administration was preceded by a presentation of the study to the schools and students and was followed by a presentation of some of the general results.

Measures

All measures were derived from the Italian (Bonino, Ciairano, Jackson & Bijstra, 1998) and the Dutch versions (Bonino *et al.*, 1998) of the questionnaire “*Me and My Health*” which was translated into Italian and Dutch from *The Health Behavior Questionnaire* (Jessor, Donovan & Costa, 1991) and was adapted to both socio-cultural contexts. *The Health Behavior Questionnaire* contains questions focused on health and psychosocial risk behaviors as well as dimensions of adolescents’ psychological functioning. The scales used within the study were derived from the theoretical framework of Problem Behavior Theory (Jessor, Donovan & Costa, 1991), recently revised (Jessor *et al.*, 2003). In the revision of Jessor *et al.*’s theory, parental support and control are considered to be different aspects of protection.

Parental strictness of rules was assessed with 8 items reflecting strictness of family rules regarding behavior inside and outside the home. Questions covered rules about television watching, getting homework done, bedtime, getting chores done, letting the family know where they were going when they went out, curfew, attending parties, and dating. The response scale ranged from (1) 10 not at all strict to (4) very strict.

Cronbach alphas on this measure were .72 and .73 for the Italian and Dutch samples, respectively.

Self confidence in coping evaluated the: capacity to deal with everyday problems, to take important decision about life, to learn new skills (3 items). The possible answers to each question are: not at all (1), not too (2), fairly (3), very (4). Cronbach alphas on this measure were .84 and .82 for the Italian and Dutch samples, respectively.

Self-esteem evaluated the: abilities to do well in school work, capacity to resist peer pressure, to be attractive to the opposite sex, whole satisfaction about oneself (4 items). The possible answers to each question are: not at all (1), not too (2), fairly (3), very (4). Cronbach alphas on this measure were .57 and .53 for the Italian and Dutch samples, respectively.

Aggression was evaluated with the following item: if during the past six months, how often the adolescent had: started a fight, hit someone, been in a fight, carried a weapon, had a serious fight at school (5 items). Cronbach alphas on this measure were .81 and .63 for the Italian and Dutch samples, respectively.

Sense of alienation evaluated: to feel left out of things other kids do, to feel unsure about who one really is, not to know how to act, hardly anything done in life means very much (4 items). The possible answers to each question were: disagree (1), a little (2), fairly (3), very (4). Cronbach alphas on this measure were .63 and .59 for the Italian and Dutch samples, respectively.

Depressive feelings evaluated: to feel really down about things, to feel pretty hopeless about the future, to spend a lot of time worrying about little things, to feel depressed about life in general, to feel lonely (5 items). The possible answers to each question are: no (1), a little (2), fairly (3), a lot (4). Cronbach alphas on this measure were .79 and .87 for the Italian and Dutch samples, respectively.

Positive self-perception was measured with 7 items assessing self-efficacy and satisfaction. Response options ranged from (1) not at all to (4) very. Cronbach alphas were .63 in the Italian sample and .67 in the Dutch sample.

Analyses

The analyses included non-missing data from study participants at two time points with one year distance between them. Analyses were performed on cross-sectional and one year follow-up data. Due to the clustering of students within schools and the fact that autocorrelation of respondents would violate the assumption of independence for ordinary least squares regression analyses, potentially shrinking standard errors and increasing type I error rates, a general linear mixed model was applied in the analysis. Mixed-model regression methods accommodate any degree of dependence present in the data by modeling it explicitly (Murray, 1998). A multilevel structure indicates that data

to be analyzed were obtained from various levels, and these levels are nested within each other. PROC MIXED SAS Version 9.0 (SAS Institute, 1999) was for the analysis. We performed general linear mixed models to analyze the associations between parental strictness of rules and adolescent self-confidence, self-esteem, aggression, depression, positive self-perception, and sense of alienation. In order to determine if differences existed between genders, ages and countries we explored the moderating effects on the relationships between selected determinants and indicators of well-being. Possible confounders adjusted for in the analyses included age, gender.

RESULTS

Table 1. Country differences of study variables of interest

	Italy N=324		Netherlands N=186		P
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Gender (Male %)	56		45.3		0.001
Age	16.86	1.42	16.98	0.72	NS
Strict Family rules	19.47	4.14	16.41	3.59	<.0001
Coping Self Confidence	3.00	0.42	3.13	0.37	0.0007
Positive Self Perception	3.01	0.39	3.09	0.28	0.0294
Self Esteem	3.02	0.46	3.07	0.30	NS
Aggression	1.20	0.42	1.10	0.25	0.0025
Depression	2.24	0.68	1.70	0.69	<.0001
Sense of Alienation	2.02	0.65	1.51	0.47	<.0001

Descriptive analyses of our sample revealed that our Italian sample indicated significantly higher perception of strictness of family rules, higher reported means of aggression, depression and sense of alienation. On the other hand, our Dutch sample reported higher levels of coping self-confidence, and positive self-perception (see table 1).

One year follow up analyses revealed self-confidence to be associated with strictness of family rule ($\beta=0.36$, $p=0.04$) indicating that higher reports of self-confidence were associated with a higher indication of strictness of family rules in the general sample. We then explored the differences of this finding between countries and found that the effect of strictness of family rules on self-confidence was lower among Dutch adolescents ($\beta=-0.38$, $p=0.04$).

Further analyses revealed a negative interaction between strictness of family rules and age ($\beta=-0.02$, $p=0.05$) indicating that the effect of strictness of family rules on self-confidence was lower among older adolescents.

Finally, a significant three way interaction was identified between the association of strictness of family rules and self-confidence with the moderating variables age and country ($\beta=0.02$, $p=0.04$). This interaction result shows that the effect of strictness of rules on self-confidence not only differed by age but that this difference also existed between countries.

Table 2. Mixed model regression of general strictness of family rules by indicators of adolescent wellbeing, follow up analysis

Effect	Self Confidence			Self Esteem			Aggression			Depression			Positive Self Perception			Sense of Alienation		
	Estimate	Standard Error	P	Estimate	Standard Error	P	Estimate	Standard Error	P	Estimate	Standard Error	P	Estimate	Standard Error	P	Estimate	Standard Error	P
Intercept	1.22	0.28	0.05	1.43	0.27	0.03	1.15	0.247	0.043	1.093	0.351	0.089	1.135	0.228	0.038	1.012	0.261	0.107
Baseline measure	0.53	0.04	<0001	0.57	0.04	<0001	0.36	0.044	<0001	0.543	0.036	<0001	0.627	0.037	<0001	0.510	0.042	<0001
Strict Family Rules	0.36	0.17	0.04	0.21	0.16	0.20	0.13	0.164	0.411	0.179	0.237	0.450	0.287	0.134	0.033	-0.038	0.242	0.877
Age	0.01	0.015	0.40	-0.006	0.013	0.66	-0.03	0.014	0.027	-0.013	0.020	0.511	0.001	0.011	0.907	-0.011	0.021	0.606
Gender	0.04	0.04	0.38	0.07	0.03	0.18	0.15	0.033	0.042	-0.175	0.049	0.071	0.049	0.028	0.222	-0.138	0.049	0.084
Country	-0.05	0.04	0.43	-0.07	0.04	0.29	0.04	0.038	0.474	0.280	0.058	0.131	-0.064	0.032	0.295	0.153	0.058	0.232
Strict Family Rules *Country	-0.38	0.18	0.04	-0.19	0.17	0.28	0.02	0.174	0.915	-0.118	0.252	0.641	-0.280	0.142	0.050	0.210	0.257	0.415
Age	-0.02	0.01	0.04	-0.01	0.01	0.18	-0.008	0.010	0.422	-0.009	0.014	0.530	-0.017	0.008	0.028	0.003	0.014	0.831
Strict Family Rules *Age	0.00012	0.0008	0.98	0.008	0.008	0.32	0.012	0.008	0.142	-0.021	0.011	0.063	0.004	0.006	0.510	0.006	0.012	0.626
Strict Family Rules *Age*Country	0.02	0.01	0.04	0.011	0.01	0.28	-0.001	0.010	0.884	0.006	0.015	0.692	0.016	0.008	0.049	-0.013	0.015	0.383

Figure 1. Interaction Analysis of Country as a moderator between strict family rules and self confidence

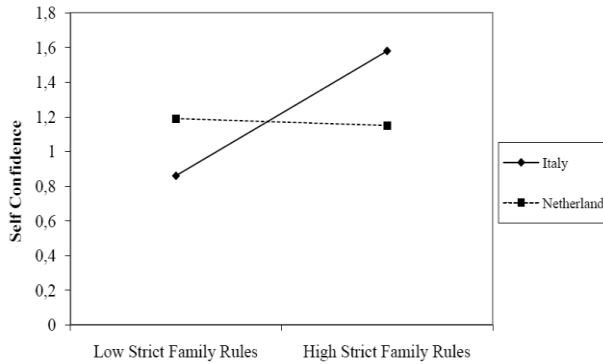


Figure 2. Interaction Analysis of Country as a moderator between strict family rules and positive self perception

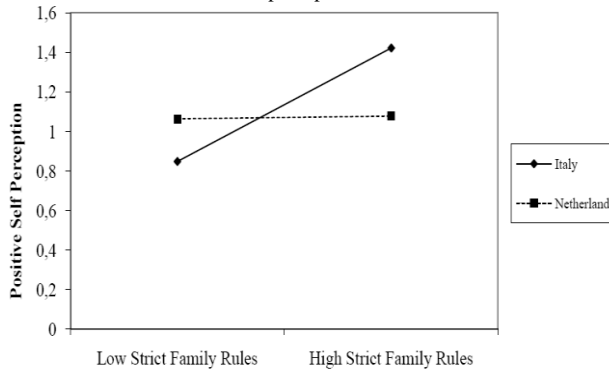


Figure 3. Interaction Analysis of Age as a moderator between strict family rules and self confidence, Netherlands

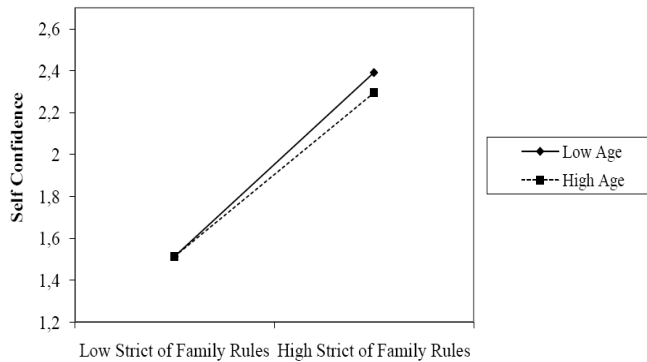
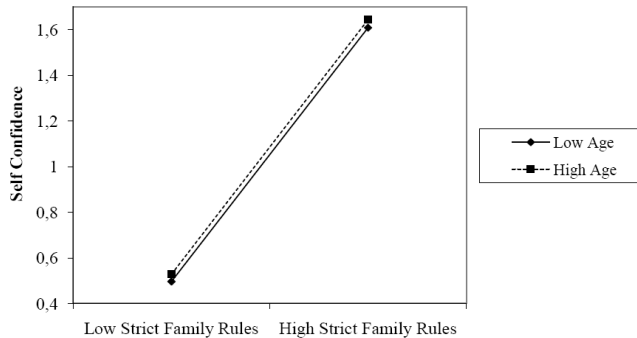


Figure 4. Interaction Analysis of Age as a moderator between strict family rules and self confidence, Italy



Likewise a significant follow up association was found between positive self-perception and strictness of family rules ($\beta=0.28$, $p=0.03$) showing that higher reports of positive self-perception were associated with greater perception of strictness of family rules. Further exploration of this finding showed that the effect of strictness of family rules on positive self-perception was lower among Dutch adolescents ($\beta=-0.28$, $p=0.05$). In addition a negative interaction was found between strictness of family rules and age which showed that the effect of strictness of family rules on positive self-perception was lower among older adolescents ($\beta=-0.02$, $p=0.03$). Interaction analysis between the association of strictness of family rules and positive self-perception with the moderating variables age and country indicated that the effect of strictness of rules on positive self-perception differed by both age and country ($\beta=0.02$, $p=0.04$). This indicated that the effect of strictness of rules on positive self-perception not only differed by age but that this difference also existed between countries.

DISCUSSION

Family and parenting investigations have shown parental control through strictness of family rules to be associated with both salutary and harmful health and behavioral consequences for adolescents (Barber & Olsen, 1997; Eccles, Early, Frasier, Belansky & McCarthy, 1997; Pettit, Laird, Dodge, Bates & Criss, 2001; Stice & Barrera, 1995). Among the possible reasons for such mixed study results is the lack of consideration for the social and cultural context in which the parenting behaviors occur. In this present study we tested the follow up effects of parental strictness of rules on adolescent wellbeing among a sample of Italian and Dutch adolescents. We conducted this study in order to gain a better understanding of the effects that similar parenting behaviors have on distinct countries with diverse social and cultural contexts.

When considering our general sample from both countries our results indicated that greater perception of strictness family rules was associated with greater self-confidence and with higher indications of positive self-perception. As discussed, a number of studies have associated high parental behavioral control with low levels of externalizing problems, such as antisocial behavior and conduct disorders among adolescents (Barber & Olsen, 1997; Eccles *et al.*, 1997; Pettit *et al.*, 2001; Stice & Barrera, 1995). These associations have been explained in part by the fact that high behavioral control fosters self-regulation and compliance (Aunola & Nurmi, 2005; Hart, Newell & Olsen, 2003). Our findings showed that high levels of parental control through strictness of family rules may also have positive effects on adolescent psychological wellbeing. The fact that higher indications of parental control were associated with greater indications of self-confidence and positive self-perception may be due to the fact that in some social and cultural contexts parental control is perceived with high parental warmth and low neglect (Rohner & Pettengill, 1985). Given the fact that strong parental control, bonding, and support are central in Italian daily life during adolescence (Ciairano, Kliewer, Bonino & Bosma, 2008), we may suppose that similar processes were driving our results.

In order to better understand these associations it was necessary to further investigate the potential differentiation of these results by country, age, and gender. Our analysis of the possible differences between countries of the effects of perception of strictness family rules on adolescent well-being showed interesting significant distinctions. As expected, and based on Hofstede's theory, we found that Italian youth reported significantly stricter perception of family rules over their Dutch counterparts. This finding may in part be explained by the close ties that exist in the Italian family. As discussed, family life in Italy is characterized by close and intense familial relationships (Claes, 1998; Facio & Batisuta, 1998; Naldini, 2003; Scabini *et al.*, 2006). This, together with the fact that there is a social and cultural expectation for children to remain

in the household well into their late twenties may explain why our sample of adolescents is reporting a higher perception of strict family rules. Italian adolescents may be living such aspects of family life as parental control in a much more intense manner given the fact that they know that they will have to coexist with their parents for extended periods of time. Consequently such aspects as the negotiation of household rights and responsibilities have great importance for them.

In fact, our analysis of the possible differences between countries of the effects of perception of strictness family rules on adolescent wellbeing showed lower effects on our sample of Dutch adolescents' self-confidence and on positive self-perception. Again, this may be due to the fact that Italian adolescents tend to report much stronger bonds and more intense relationships with their caregivers. It follows that certain parental practices will have greater effects on Italian adolescents since they may have more invested in familial relationships than their Dutch counterparts. The fact that the positive effect of strict family rules on self-confidence and positive self-perception was greater among Italian adolescents is significant given recent socio-cultural changes that are occurring in Italy. In contrast with past decades in Italy, adolescents and young adults have reported being given a great deal of freedom in decision making within the home by being able to negotiate family processes (Scabini *et al.*, 2006). Consequently young adults living in the parental home report living in a familial context which is highly supportive and without serious conflict (Scabini *et al.*, 2006). Studies have shown young adults to perceive communication with their parents to be very open and amicable as well as satisfactory and highly supportive (Scabini *et al.*, 2006).

Regarding differentiation of our results according to the age of our sample, our results showed that the effects of strictness of family rules on self-confidence and positive self-perception were lower among older adolescents. This is understandable given the fact that as adolescents grow older they begin to depend less on their parental relationships for some aspects of their wellbeing such as self-confidence and positive self-perception. We expected that higher levels of parental control in later adolescence could reflect the inability of parents to allow their offspring to individuate from the family, and this may be more likely to be perceived negatively by adolescents. This was confirmed by the fact that this investigation found that the effect of strictness of rules on self-confidence and on positive self-perception not only differed by age but between countries as well. Our three way interactions which showed strict family rules to have a lesser effect on the self-confidence and positive self-perception of both older and Dutch adolescent.

In our hypotheses we expected that strictness of parental rules might have more negative consequences among Dutch adolescents, in terms of higher symptoms of depression and positive self-perception taking into account the value of independence and power equality which is socio-culturally more important for Dutch than for Italian

youth (Hofstede, 1984; Hofstede & McCrae, 2004). Our results failed to show these relationships and the question remains whether this was due to a true lack of association between these phenomena or if our sample was not fit enough to capture these differences. Regardless, further research is needed which can allow us to better understand the effects that strict family rules have on adolescents living in a more independent and individualistic society as is the Dutch one. In addition, we hypothesized that males and females would respond differently to parental control, and that these gender differences might be more evident in our Italian sample where traditional sex roles are common. We know that in most cultures, boys are socialized to be more independent and to individuate from the family more quickly than females (Leaper, 2002), thus we expected to find some differentiation in our results according to gender. However this study failed to identify any gender differences among our study associations. Further investigations are warranted which can help investigators determine how such parenting practices as parental control affect genders differently, especially given the clear differences in socialization and expected social roles that exist in some countries.

In summary, this investigation found a positive effect of strictness of parenting rules on adolescent self-confidence and positive self-perception, and we found that this effect differed both by age and country of origin of the participants.

This paper has some limitations to consider, one was the self-report nature of our data regarding strictness of parenting rules and indicators of wellbeing. Self-reported data may be considered subjective in nature and therefore not proper for an objective analysis. However, in this study we were interested in how our adolescent samples' wellbeing was affected by the perceived strictness of parental rules they lived in their household. Indeed, as a number of investigators have found, self-reports from adolescents may be the most valid way of measuring particular parenting behaviors since feeling controlled or criticized is very much a subjective experience (Aunola, Stattin & Nurmi, 2000).

In addition we did not collect data regarding the parental perception of family rules; this information could prove useful in future studies in order to compare the experience of strictness of rules of both adolescents and parents in order to achieve a more objective measure. Another limitation that should be considered in this study is the fact that no cultural specific family indicators were taken into account. As evidenced by our findings, parental practices do not necessarily have the same meaning across different social and cultural contexts. While youths of some social and cultural contexts may perceive control as a manifestation of parental rejection, others may correlate this behavior with warmth and care (Chao, 1994) and this paper has taken one step to show that the effects on adolescents may be distinct according to their predominating social and cultural context. Further efforts should be conducted which incorporate parenting

measures which take into account cultural, social and historical points of reference of the populations under study (Stewart & Bond, 2002). This would allow for a greater understanding of how parenting practices vary by social and cultural context and to understand how such practices are interpreted differently by youth of various contexts. An understanding of this type is of great consequence for researches in the field given the widespread reporting of findings that associate certain parenting practices with adolescent health and behavior outcomes. Further efforts must be taken to understand how historical and recent findings of the field of parenting research apply in international contexts.

It is important to point out that to date only a small number of studies have examined the effects of similar parenting practices across social and cultural contexts (Stewart & Bond, 2002). Most published studies on parental relationships and practices have been conducted in North America with primarily homogenous Caucasian populations. To our knowledge this is one of the first papers to analyze how parenting affects the wellbeing of European adolescents longitudinally, and one which makes an attempt to differentiate the effects of parenting on adolescents according to country of origin. Investigations of this sort put into evidence the fact that great care should be put into understanding how parental rearing efforts are experienced differently across social and cultural contexts and how these may affect the welfare of adolescents in diverse manners. This investigation's contribution to the field is that it will help us gain an increasingly refined understanding of the parenting factors that contribute to adolescent wellbeing. A more detailed understanding of the factors that influence adolescent wellbeing can help guide prevention investigators in the field to focus on specific factors that may promote adolescent welfare, and not only risk prevention. In addition, investigations of this sort may help parental education efforts that may guide caregivers on which types of behaviors promote psychological and behavioral wellbeing in their offspring, especially during such turbulent times as adolescence.

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