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## Theory & Hypothesis

Leaving the parental home is one of the challenges in the period of young adulthood. There are huge differences between southern Europe, where the age of leaving the parental home is significantly higher than in middle and northern Europe (e.g. Iacovou, 2001; Rossi, 1997). Therefore, when looking at influences of the residential situation, social norms and regional distinctions have to be strongly considered.

But how far away from their parents do young adults live? And what about personal contact to parents, and calling each other? Many researchers considered influences on geographical distance of parents' and childrens' places of residence, e.g. socio-demographic characteristics, and psychological aspects (Hank, 2007; Kalmijn, 2006; Michielin & Mulder, 2007; Shelton & Grundy, 2000). Lawton, Silverstein and Bengtson (1994) found correlations between distance and provision of care and support, and more general, reciprocal influences between contact and affection in mother-adult-child relationship, but not in father-adult-child relationship.

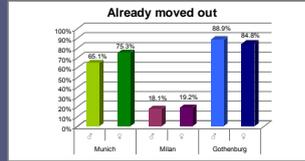
But there are many questions open, especially when looking at differences between countries:

### How does the relationship of young adults and their parents look like, after having left the parental home?

- Is there an influence of distance on the frequency of face-to-face contact, and beyond also by phone?
- Is there a correlation between geographical distance or frequency of contact and the relationship quality?
- Are there differences by country? In frequencies of contact, as well as in correlations between relationship quality and contact?

## Data

Standardized questionnaire data was collected from 1365 young adults (age 20 – 30 years) in Milan (Italy), Munich (Germany) and Gothenburg (Sweden), altogether 708 young adults have already left the parental home: Most of them in Sweden (86.6%), next German young adults (71.2%) and last Italian young adults (18.7%).



## Variables

### Relationship to Mother/Father

Munich Individuation-Test of Adolescence (MITA)

- Feeling Insecure (8-Items;  $\alpha = .72/.76$ )
- Relatedness (10-Items;  $\alpha = .83/.88$ )
- Engulfment Anxiety (5-Items;  $\alpha = .73/.75$ )

Network of Relationship-Inventory (NRI)

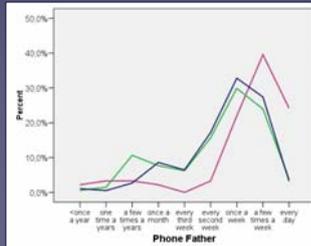
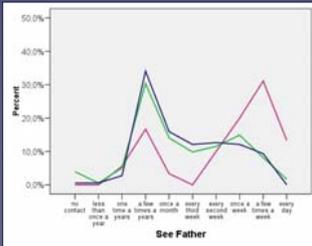
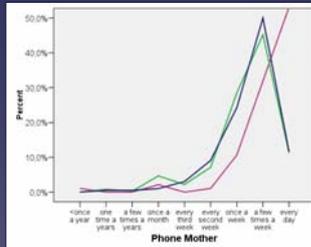
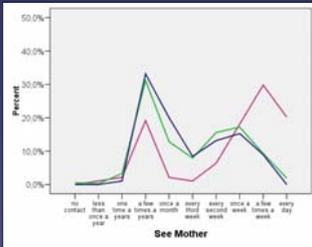
- Intimacy (3-Items;  $\alpha = .84/.81$ )
- Support (3-Items;  $\alpha = .82/.79$ )
- Emotional Closeness (10-Items;  $\alpha = .93/.94$ )

### Geographic and Contact Information

- Frequency of Contact by Phone (1 Item)
- Frequency of Face-to-Face Contact (1 Item)
- Distance of Places of Residence (1 Item)

## Results

Country	Phone Calls	At least once a week						Seldom than few times a year						Cramer's V <sup>(1)</sup>	
		I		G		S		I		G		S			
		I	G	I	G	I	G	I	G	I	G	S			
Mother	At least once a week	62.2%	30.7%	27.1%	50.0%	9.1%	0.0%	Σ = 90	Σ = 310	Σ = 170	Σ = 14	Σ = 33	Σ = 9	.292**	
	Seldom than few times a year	8.9%	1.6%	4.1%	50.0%	81.8%	4.7%								.424**
	% of N (Country)	84.1%	78.5%	82.5%	13.1%	8.4%	4.4%								.397**
Father	At least once a week	60.3%	32.3%	29.7%	38.1%	9.4%	0.0%	Σ = 78	Σ = 195	Σ = 118	Σ = 21	Σ = 64	Σ = 23	.370**	
	Seldom than few times a year	11.5%	3.1%	5.1%	57.1%	50.0%	91.3%								.418**
	% of N (Country)	72.9%	49.4%	57.3%	19.6%	16.2%	11.2%								.490**



Contact	Italy	Germany	Sweden
Mother Daily	51.0%	11.0%	11.3%
At least once a week	39.8%	72.0%	73.8%
= once a week - daily	90.8%	83.0%	85.1%
Contact * Distance (Cramer's V <sup>(1)</sup> ) .574** .449** .484**			
Father Daily	21.5%	3.6%	3.4%
At least once a week	55.9%	48.5%	58.4%
= once a week - daily	77.4%	52.1%	61.8%
Contact * Distance (Cramer's V <sup>(1)</sup> ) .545** .414** .435**			

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Phone Calls * Distance (Cramer's V <sup>(1)</sup> ) .237 (n.s.) .129 (n.s.) .137 (n.s.)			
Father Daily	21.5%	3.6%	3.4%
At least once a week	55.9%	48.5%	58.4%
= once a week - daily	77.4%	52.1%	61.8%
Phone Calls * Distance (Cramer's V <sup>(1)</sup> ) .334* .147 <sup>(n)</sup> .115 (n.s.)			

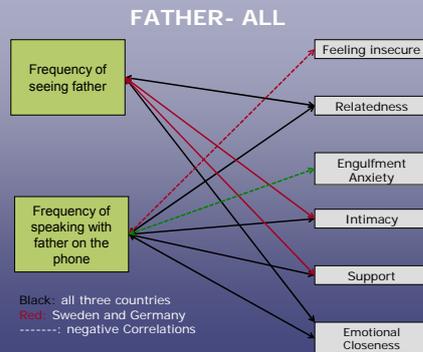
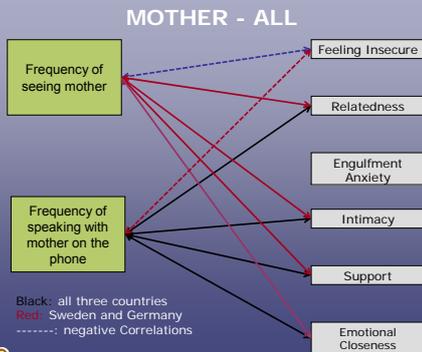
<sup>(1)</sup> See Parent: 1 (at least once a week); 2 (at least once a month); 3 (a few times a year); 4 (seldom)  
Phone Parent: 1 (every day); 2 (at least once a week); 3 (at least once a month); 4 (a few times a year); 5 (seldom)  
Distance: 0 (same town); 1 (< 59 km); 2 (< 139 km); 3 (< 299 km); 4 (< 550 km); 5 (more)

The frequency of speaking with mother on the phone is more important than the frequency of seeing each other, especially in Italy.

The pattern of correlations is similar in Sweden and Germany.

Referring to phone contact, the correlations are quite the same in all three countries.

## Significant Correlations of Contact and Quality of Relationship to Parents



Black: all three countries  
Red: Sweden and Germany  
-----: negative Correlations

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The frequency of contact to father on the phone is more important than seeing each other, again.

There are significant differences in the correlation between frequency of seeing father and relatedness: The correlation is significantly higher in Munich (.40) than in Gothenburg (.17).

Referring to the correlation between phone contact and Emotional Closeness, Munich (.52) and Gothenburg (.53) show significantly higher correlations than Milan (.35).

## Discussion

There are similar patterns of contact to mothers and fathers: the majority sees and calls parents very often, whereas the frequency of contact by phone is little higher to mothers than to fathers. But there is a group of young adults with very little contact.

Differences by country have been found: In Italy, contact a few times a week is highest, whereas in Germany and Sweden contact a few times a year is quite common.

It's not surprising that most young adults in Italy are living „next-door“ to their parents or very far away (>500km), regarding the strong Italian family ties and the high youth unemployment. In Sweden, there are more young adults living in a distance of 1 up to 500 km, and in Germany they are equally distributed.

In reference to the young adults who already moved out of the parental home, the frequency of phone-contact to parents was more important than the frequency of seeing each other. The geographical distance between young adults and their parental home was highly correlated with the frequency of seeing each other, but not with the frequency of phone contact.

For relationship quality to parents these results show that every relationship indicator except Engulfment Anxiety is influenced by frequency of phone contact.

For further analyses, gender of the young adults and dyadic effects with gender of parent have to be considered. Regarding the group of young adults with extreme little contact to parents, analyses of effects of and on psychological adjustment may give us a hint at some underlying processes that (are) influence(d) (by) relationship to parents.

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Shelton, N. & Grundy, E. (2000). Proximity of Adult Children to their Parents in Great Britain. *International Journal of Population Geography*, 6, 181-195.