



LUDWIG-
MAXIMILIANS-
UNIVERSITÄT
MÜNCHEN

Carolin Thönnissen, Eva-Verena Wendt, Franziska Schmahl, Sabine Walper (LMU Munich), Carles Pérez Testor (URL Barcelona) & Eugenia Scabini (UCSC Milan)

**ADOLESCENTS' AND YOUNG ADULTS'
INDIVIDUATION PROBLEMS IN RELATION TO
PARENTS AND PARTNER:
COMPARING FINDINGS FROM
GERMANY, ITALY, SPAIN AND SWEDEN**





1. Theory

- Individuation
- Attachment

2. Attachment and Individuation

- Project & Sample
- Results

3. Cross-cultural differences in Individuation

- Project & Sample
- Results



Individuation:

✓ Development of autonomy while maintaining related

(Allen et al., 1994; Blos, 1966; Walper 2003; Youniss & Smollar, 1985):

- **Relatedness:** sympathy, loyalty, mutual support
- **Autonomy:** becoming independent from thoughts and intentions of others
 - ☞ emotional autonomy
 - ☞ autonomy of behavior
 - ☞ cognitive autonomy
 - ☞ economic autonomy

✓ Individuation is a developmental task in adolescence as well as in early adulthood (e.g. Becker-Stoll et al., 2000)



Munich Individuation Test of Adolescence

(Walper, Schwarz and Jurasic, 1996; Walper, 1997, 1998)

- ✓ Based on the
Separation-Individuation Test of Adolescence (SITA)
(Levine, Green, & Millon, 1986; Levine & Saintonge, 1993)
→ but strongly revised
- ✓ 6 scales measuring
 - ✓ successful individuation
 - ✓ specific individuation problems
- ✓ for mother, father, best friend and romantic partner



Attachment & Individuation

✓ Attachment relationships as secure base for exploration and individuation => high importance of a sense of reliability



secure attachment relationships function as reassurance while exploring one's own individuality



insecure attachments function as stressor which constrain the individuation process by inhibiting a balanced development of autonomy and relatedness

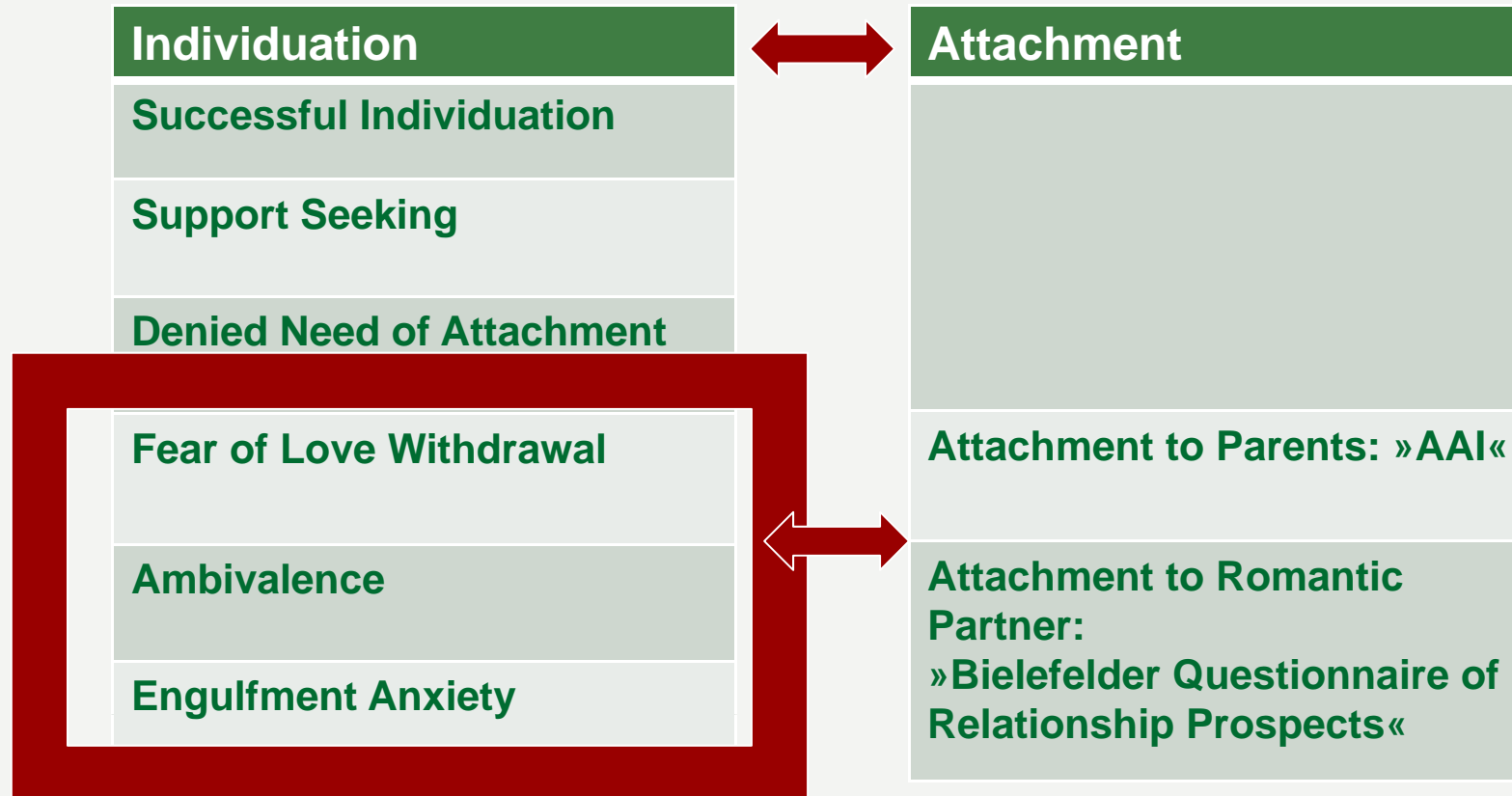


1. Theory

2. Attachment and Individuation

- MITA-Dimensions and attachment
- Data
- Indicators
- Results

3. Cross-cultural differences in individuation





Project “Young Love” (“Jugendliebe”)

- ✓ 114 romantic couples (mean age 21,98 years)
 - questionnaire data on individuation problems (MITA) and attachment to partner
- ✓ Subsample of 61 couples (mean age 21,36 years)
 - additional interview data on attachment representation (Adult Attachment Interview - AAI)



- ✓ 3 individuation problems to mother/father/romantic partner measured by the „Munich Individuation Test of Adolescence“ (MITA) (Walper, 1997)

| 3 selected MITA-Scales → measuring individuation problems | | Alpha |
|---|--|---------|
| Fear of Love Withdrawal | 5/4 Items, e.g. „ <i>When I have disappointed my mother/my father/my partner, I am anxious that she/he loves me less</i> ” | .63-.65 |
| Ambivalence | 5/4 Items, e.g. „ <i>Sometimes I have the feeling that I like my mother/my father/my partner more than she/he likes me</i> ” | .60-.80 |
| Engulfment Anxiety | 3 Items, e.g. „ <i>I would prefer it if my father/my mother wasn't so clingy</i> ” | .61-.72 |



Attachment to Parents:

Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) (George et al, 1985; Main & Goldwyn, 1994):

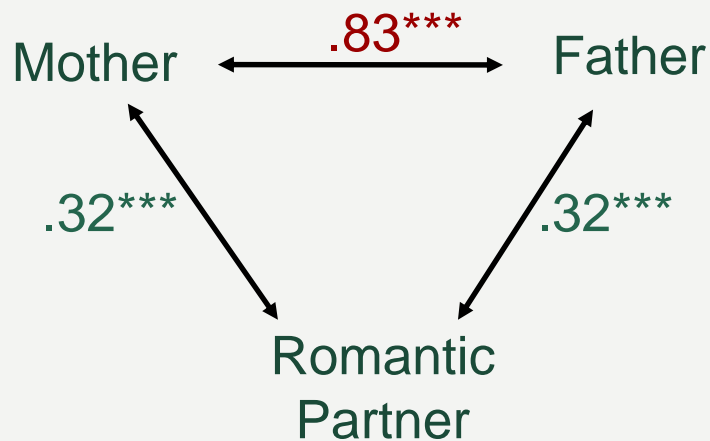
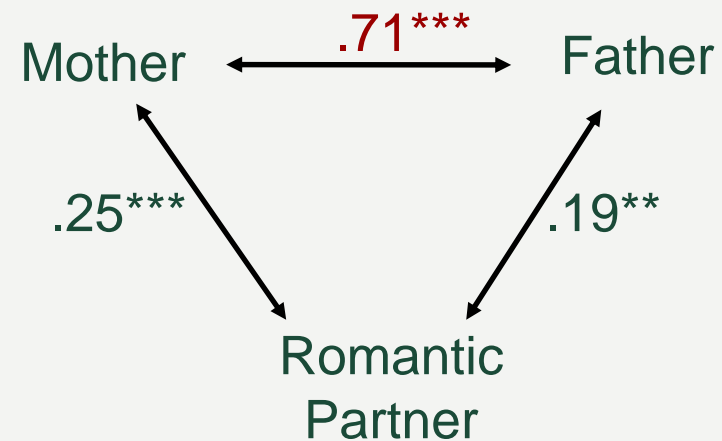
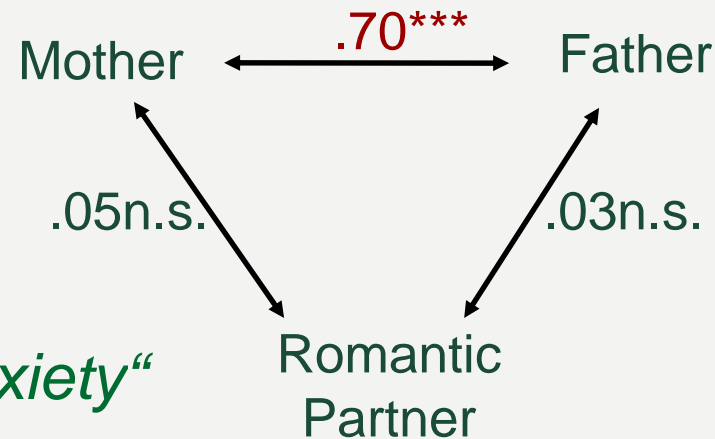
- ✓ Semi-structured interview about experiences with close attachment figures, mostly mother and father, during childhood
- ✓ The AAI identifies 3 states of mind:
 - ✓ **Secure attachment representation** => coherent and objective view on their attachment experiences
 - ✓ **Dismissing attachment representation** => restricted access to attachment experiences
 - ✓ **Preoccupied attachment representation** => preoccupation with attachment centred feelings or memories



Attachment to Romantic Partner:

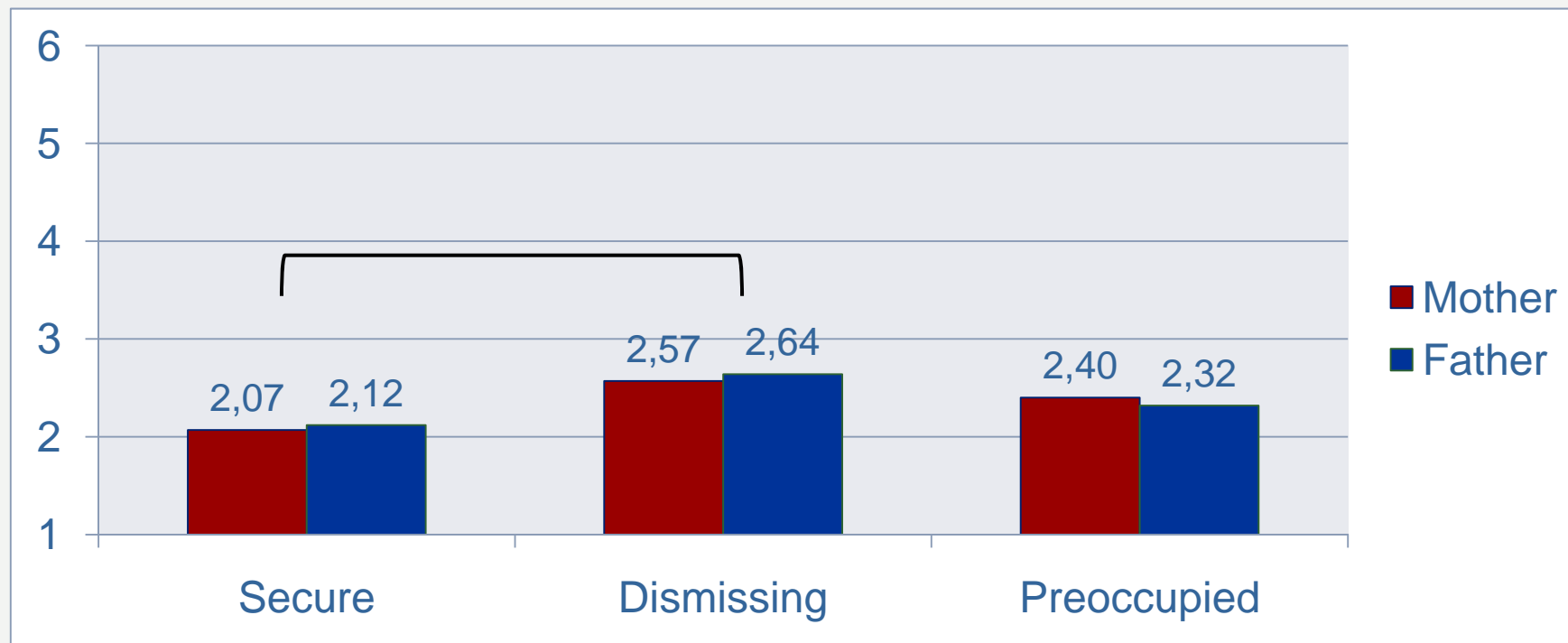
✓ 2 shorted scales of the „Bielefelder Questionnaire of Relationship Prospects” (BFPE, Bielefelder Fragebogen zu Partnerschaftserwartungen, Höger & Buschkämper, 2002):

| BFPE Dimensions | | Alpha |
|---------------------|--|-------|
| Acceptance Problems | 7 Items, e.g. <i>Sometimes I think that I show more affection to my partner than he.</i> | .74 |
| Self Disclosure | 6 Items, e.g. <i>It is easy for me to talk about my feelings with my partner.</i> | .73 |

*„Fear of Love Withdrawal“**„Ambivalence“**„Engulfment Anxiety“*



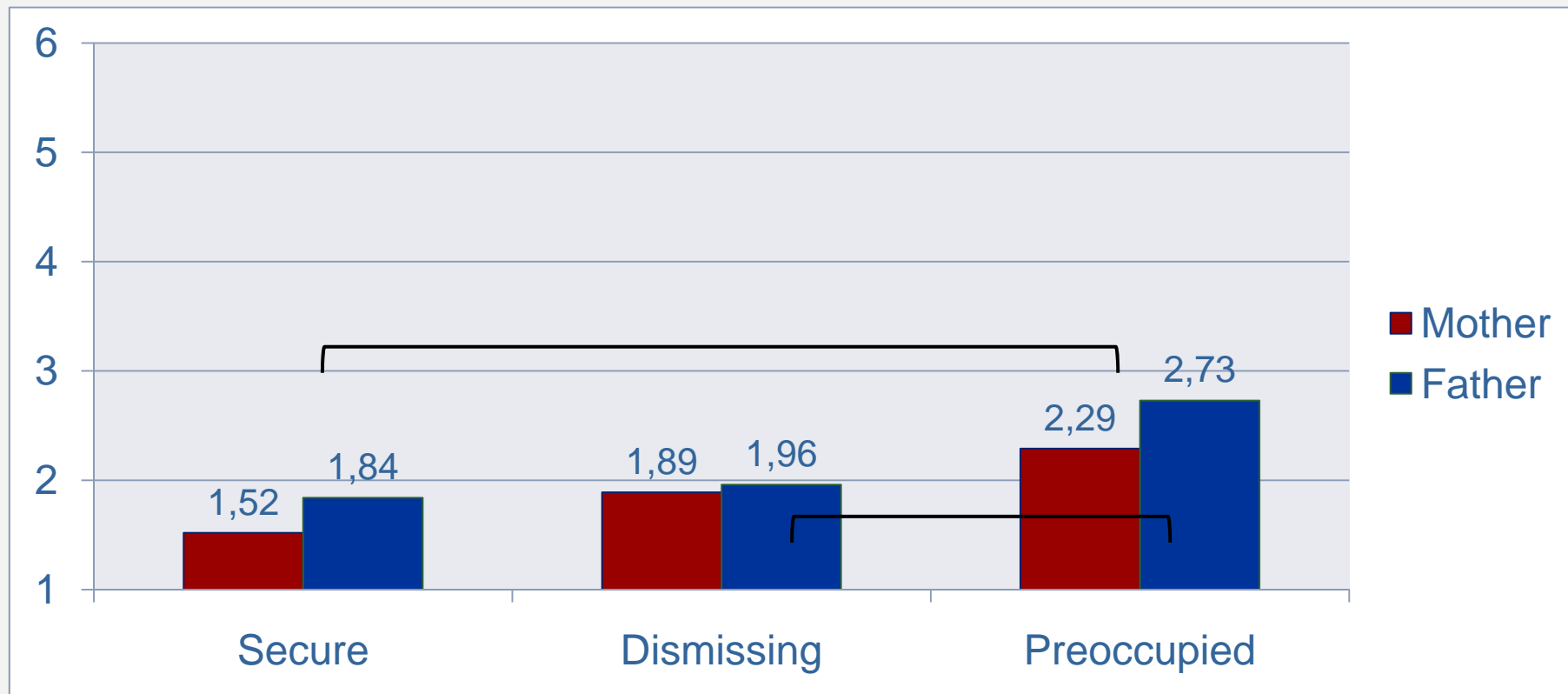
Differences in „Fear of Love Withdrawal“, depending on the AAI-classification:



Insecure attached individuals, especially dismissing individuals, have more „Fear of Love Withdrawal“ in relation to mother and father



Differences in „Ambivalence“, depending on the AAI-classification:



Insecure attached individuals, especially preoccupied individuals, show the highest scores in ambivalence



Correlations with Acceptance Problems and Self Disclosure in Romantic Relationships (BFPE):

| Corr | Acceptance Problems (BFPE) | Self Disclosure (BFPE) |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Fear of Love Withdrawal | .58*** | -.11 |
| Ambivalence | .62*** | -.19** |
| Engulfment Anxiety | .17* | -.27*** |

- ✓ Fear of Love Withdrawal and Ambivalence are reflecting Acceptance Problems in romantic relationships.
- ✓ Engulfment Anxiety differentiates less between the two dimensions of Acceptance Problems and Self Disclosure.



Results regarding the relationship of attachment and individuation problems:

1. Participants report individuation problems **relationship-specific**, but the relation to mother and father is experienced highly **similar**.
2. Individuals with **insecure attachment representations** show **more individuation problems** to mother and father
3. MITA scores to partner have quite **high and plausible correlations** with the BFPE, a measure of attachment problems in romantic relationships.



1. Theory

2. Attachment and Individuation

3. Cross-cultural differences in individuation

- Research Questions
- Research Project
- Sample
- Indicators
- Results



Cultural Differences:

✓ age at & reasons for home-leaving, economic circumstances, and residential arrangements after home-leaving

(Bernardi & Nazio, 2006; Rusconi, 2006; Iacovou, 2002; Schizzerotto, 2003; Vogel, 2003; Mills, 2006)

✓ **“family welfare regime”** with respective patterns like “famiglia lunga” in Italy vs.

✓ **“institutional welfare state”** in Sweden

(Berthoud & Iacovou, 2003; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Vogel, 2003)



LUDWIG-
MAXIMILIANS-
UNIVERSITÄT
MÜNCHEN

Research Project

YAGISS
Young Adults in Germany, Italy, Sweden and Spain
Life Design of Young Adults ages 20 to 30 in Munich, Milan,
Gothenburg, Stockholm, and Barcelona between
Vocational Training, Job and Family



| | | | |
|---|---|------------------------------------|---|
| Fakultät für Psychologie und Pädagogik | Centro Studi e Ricerche sulla Famiglia | Institute of Psychology | Grup de Recerca de Parella i Família |
| Ludwig- Maximilians- University Munich | Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore Milan | Göteborg University | Universita Ramon Llull Barcelona |
| Germany | Italy | Sweden | Spain |

3. Cross-cultural differences: Research Questions



1. How do young adults' individuation problems differ between Munich, Milan, Barcelona and Gothenburg?
2. Do individuation problems increase by coresidence with parents?
3. Are there patterns of individuation problems with respect to parents and partner?
4. High individuation problems in the relationship to parents and partner are linked with high depressive scores.
5. Strong family ties and coresidence with parents lead to more individuation problems in relation to parents. The strongest evidence should be observed in Italy.

3. Cross-cultural differences: Sample



| | Milan | Barcelona | Munich | Gothenburg |
|--------------------------|-------|-----------|--------|------------|
| N (total=1137) | 341 | 309 | 351 | 136 |
| Age Ø | 25.0 | 24.5 | 24.7 | 24.4 |
| ♀ | 60.4% | 63.1% | 61.5% | 65.2% |
| University access | 73.2% | 78.2% | 79.9% | 98.5% |
| Coresidence with parents | 78.6% | 60.8% | 25.4% | 6.6% |

Only data from participants with romantic partners and both parents alive was used



Individuationproblems META (Walper)

- 14 identical Items for mothers and fathers
 - 5 Items **Ambivalence**
 - 3 Items **Fear of Love Withdrawal**
 - 6 Items **Engulfment Anxiety**
 - Cronbach's Alpha = .82
- 14 Items for partner
 - 4 Items **Ambivalence**
 - 4 Items **Fear of Love Withdrawal**
 - 6 Items **Engulfment Anxiety**
 - Cronbach's Alpha = .83



Depressiveness (Radloff)

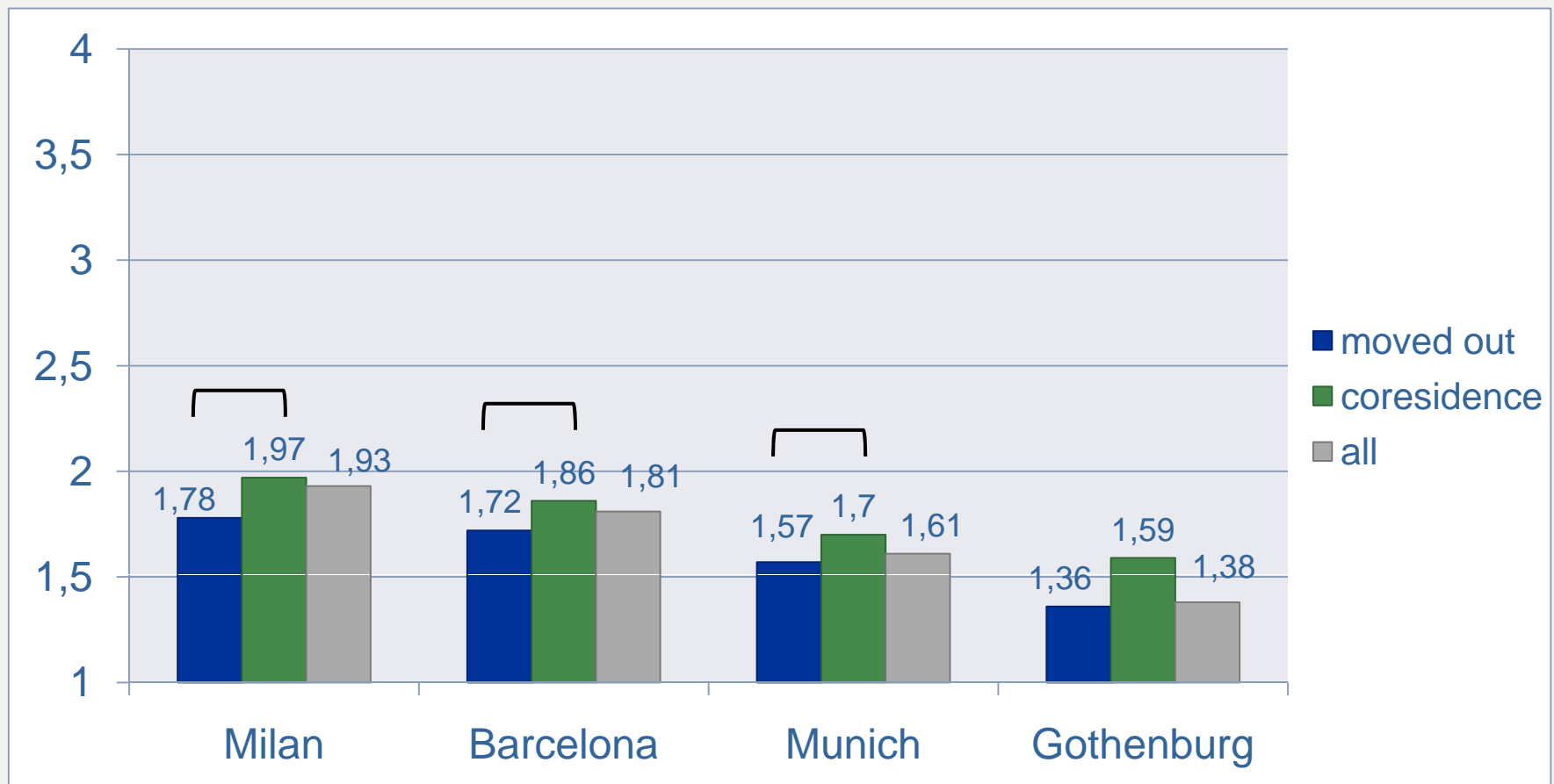
- 8 Items, e.g. “During the last week, I felt depressed“,
- Cronbach’s Alpha = .81

Residential Arrangement

- „Which person lives together with you in one household?“
- mother, father, siblings, stepfather/partner of mother, stepmother/ partner of father, grandparents, friends/flatmates, partner, children, alone, others



Differences in „Individuationproblems“ towards parents, depending on the city:





Clusteranalysis individuation problems towards parents and partner in each country:

| | Milan | Barcelona | Munich | Gothenburg | All |
|--|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1) Low individuation problems towards parents & partner | 75 (22%) | 119 (38.5%) | 201 (57.3%) | 112 (82.4%) | 507 (44.6%) |
| 2) High individuation problems towards parents only | 140 (41.1%) | 75 (24.3%) | 83 (23.6%) | 13 (9.6%) | 311 (27.4%) |
| 3) High individuation problems towards parents & partner | 126 (37%) | 115 (37.2%) | 67 (19.1%) | 11 (37.2%) | 319 (28.0%) |

→ More individuation problems in Milan and Barcelona

3. Cross-cultural differences: Results

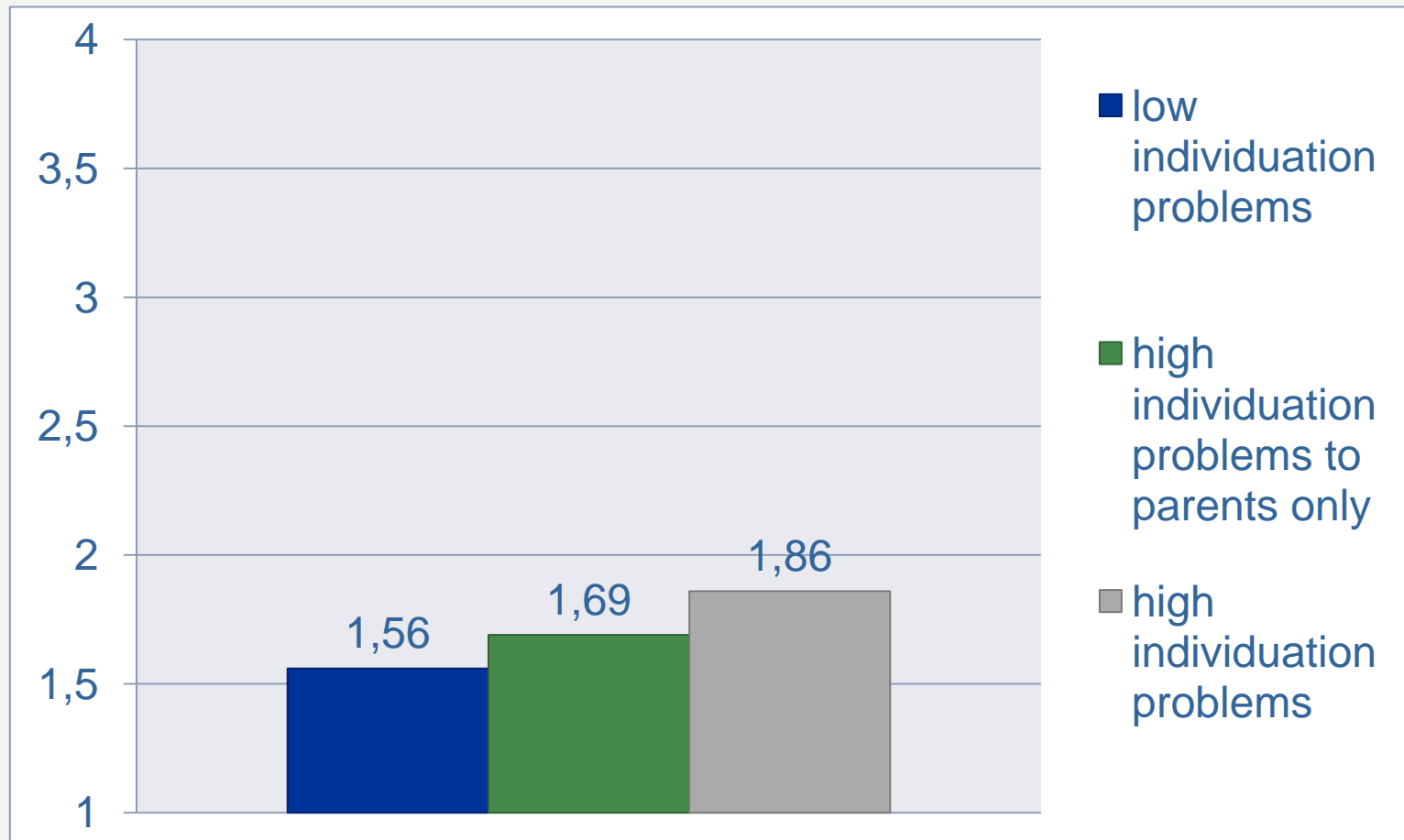


| | Milan | | Barcelona | | Munich | | Gothenburg | |
|----|---------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|-------------|
| | Moved out | Coresidence | Moved out | Coresidence | Moved out | Coresidence | Moved out | Coresidence |
| 1) | 22 (6.6%) | 53 (30.3%) | 47 (14.2%) | 72 (41.1%) | 157 (47.3%) | 44 (25.1%) | 106 (31.9%) | 6 (3.4%) |
| 2) | 33 (25.4%) | 107 (59.1%) | 26 (20.0%) | 49 (27.1%) | 60 (46.2%) | 23 (12.7%) | 11 (8.5%) | 2 (1.1%) |
| 3) | 18 (14.9%) | 108 (54.5%) | 48 (39.7%) | 67 (33.8%) | 45 (37.2%) | 22 (11.1%) | 10 (8.3%) | 1 (0.5%) |



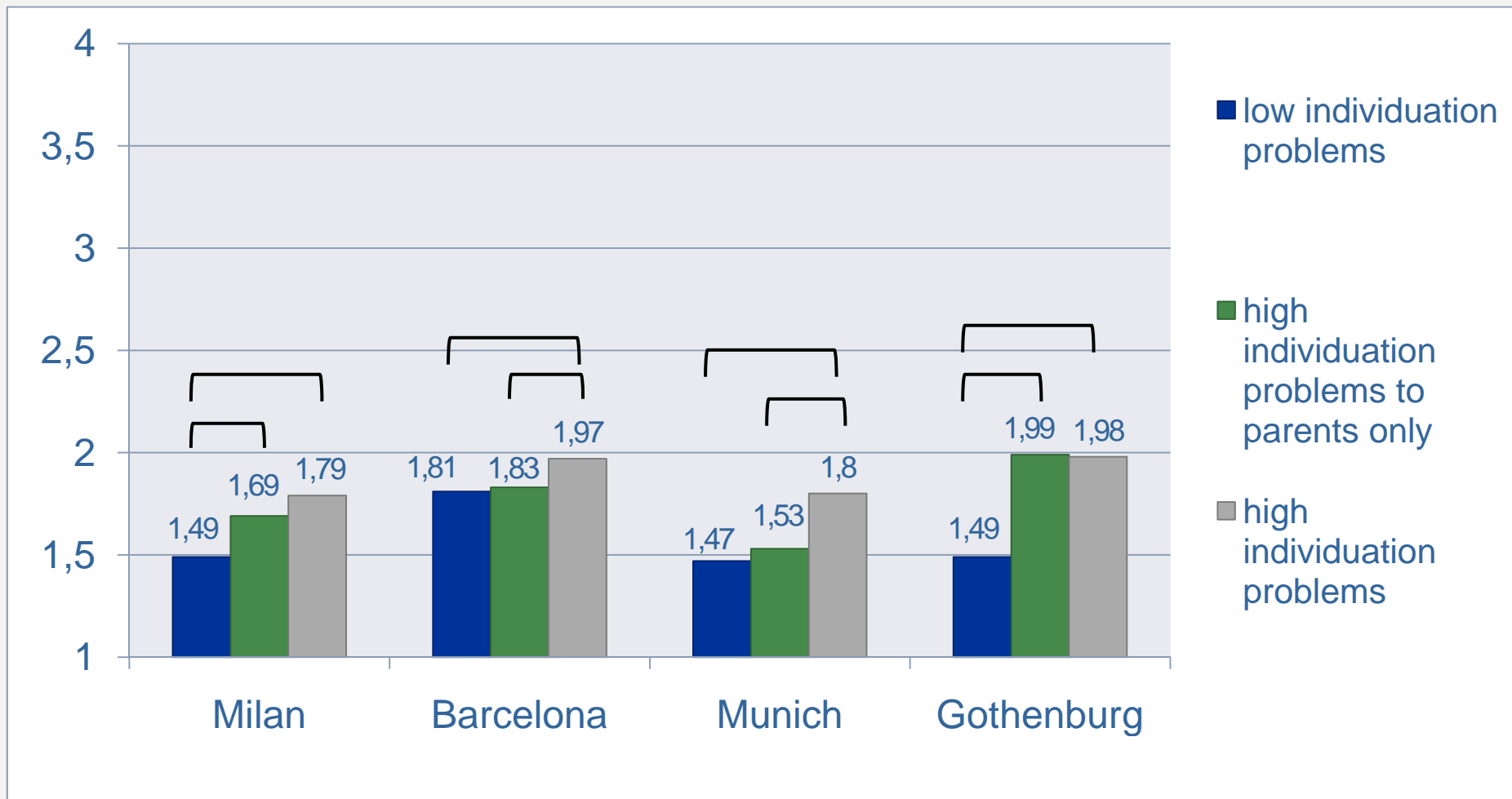
Differences in „Depressiveness“:

$F=50,95$
 $df=2$
 $p<.001$





Differences in „Depressiveness“, depending on the city:





- Individuation problems differ between
 - ✓ country and residential status
 - ✓ more individuation problems in Southern Europe
 - ✓ coresidence as a risk factor
 - ✓ their effects on well-being
 - ✓ more individuation problems lead to more depressiveness
 - ✓ individuation problems - more relevant for young adult's well being in Gothenburg

- construct: famiglia lunga
 - ✓ differs in the mediterranean area
 - ✓ typical for Milan, but not for Barcelona



THANK YOU

Contact:

c.thoennissen@lmu.de

www.yagiss.de