

Is Mate Selection in Early Adulthood More Strongly Influenced by Parents or Peers? A Comparison of Munich and Milan¹

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Emerging adulthood has been increasingly recognized as demanding phase marked by salient developmental tasks like home-leaving and partnership formation. Although parents as well as peers are important social contexts, only little is known about their relative influence on mate selection and partnership maintenance in early adulthood. We address these issues comparing two cities in Germany and Italy: Munich and Milan.

Hypothesis:

Given the later age of home-leaving and stronger family ties in Italy, we expected stronger influences of families on partnerships in Milan than Munich, per se as well as relative to peers. Young women were hypothesized to allow for stronger family influences than men.

Data:

In 2005, 849 young adults in Munich and Milan aged 20 to 30 participated in a questionnaire study. Standardized scales assessed the subjective influence of parents and friends on partnerships of young adults.

Sample:

	Germany	Italy	Total
N	405	444	849
mean age (years):	24.25	24.95	24.62
females:	58.8%	58.8%	58.8%
lives with parents:	28.6%	82.4%	56.8%
partnership:	62.2%	65.1%	63.7%

Variables:

Six scale were developed to assess family and peer influences on young adults' partnership:

Perceived Mutual Liking ...

- between partners and families of origin (8 Items): $\alpha = .72$
Example: My partner and I often have problems because of his/her family. (*inverted*)
- between partners and friends (6 Items): $\alpha = .68$
Example: There are often problems among my friends because of my partner. (*inverted*)

Importance of Acceptance ...

- between partners and families of origin (4 Items): $\alpha = .85$
Example: It is very important to me that I like my partners' parents.
- between partners and friends (4 Items): $\alpha = .89$
Example: It is very important to me that my partners' friends like me.

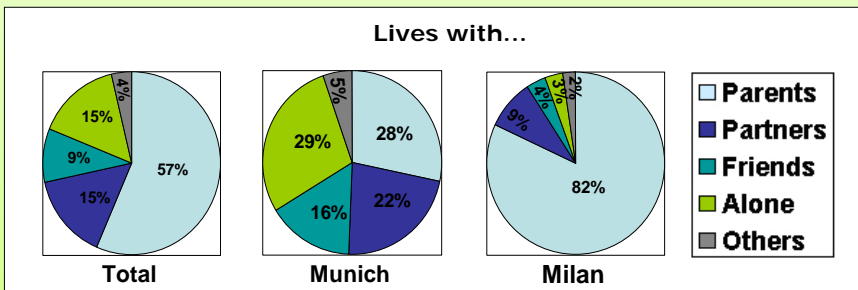
Readiness to Quit the Partnership in the case of serious conflict ...

- between families of origin and partners (4 Items): $\alpha = .90$
Example: If my family and my partner don't like each other, I will quit the relationship with my partner.
- between friends and partners (1 Items):
Example: If my partner and my friends don't like each other, I will quit the relationship with my partner.

Rating Scales:

1 = „do not agree“ or „not at all“ to 4 = „agree absolutely“ or „absolutely“.

Results:



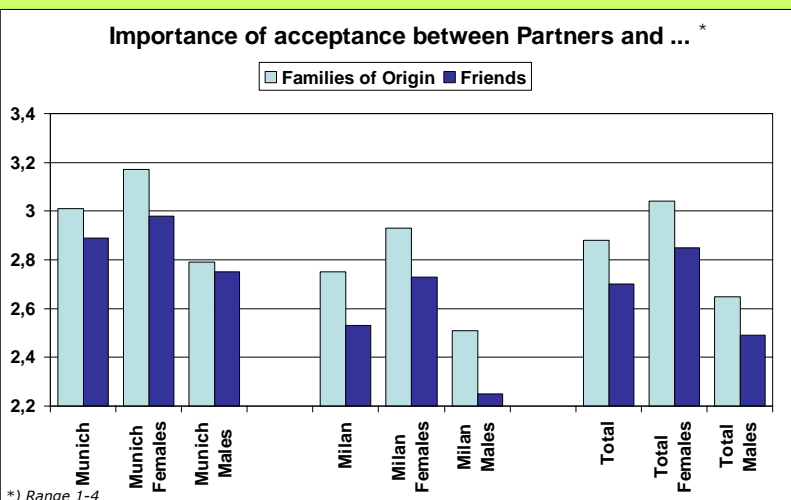
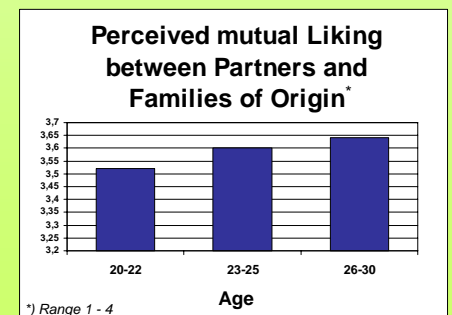
As expected from national statistics, the residential situation differs strongly between Munich and Milan ($\chi^2=258.74$; $p<.001$). Young people in Milan are more likely to live with their parents than their age-mates in Munich.

Contrary to expectation, there are no main effects of country and gender on Perceived Mutual Liking between partners and families or partners and friends. Furthermore, perceived mutual liking between parents and partners does not differ from perceived mutual liking between peers and partners.

However, separate analyses by country reveal that young men in Germany rate the Perceived Mutual Liking between partners and families ($M=3.46$) significantly lower than young women in Germany ($M=3.58$) ($t=-2.10$; $df=251$; $p<.05$). Also, only young men in Germany tend to rate the Mutual Liking between partners and families ($M=3.46$) lower than between partners and friends ($M=3.55$) ($t=-1.94$; $df=92$; $p=.06$).

With increasing age, young adults report higher Mutual Liking between partners and friends ($F_{(2)}=4.19$; $p<.05$) (see figure to the right).

There is no interrelation between the Perceived Mutual Liking and the Importance of Acceptance, except for women in Italy ($r=.22^{**}$).

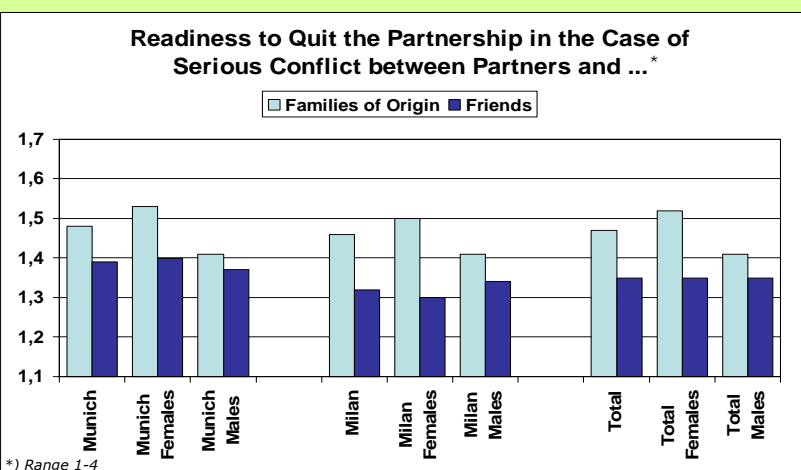


The Importance of Acceptance between partner and family as well as friends differs significantly by country. Contrary to expectation, the importance of mutual acceptance between partner and family is rated higher by German than Italian adults ($M_G=3.01$; $M_{It}=2.75$; $t=-5.18$; $df=839$; $p<.001$). The same holds for mutual acceptance between partner and friends ($M_G=2.89$; $M_{It}=2.53$; $t=-7.21$; $df=814.07$; $p<.001$).

In line with our hypotheses, women view the acceptance between partners and families as more important than men ($M_f=3.04$; $M_m=2.64$; $t=-8.03$; $df=839$; $p<.001$). The same holds for mutual acceptance between partners and friends ($M_f=2.85$; $M_m=2.49$; $t=-6.99$; $df=704.02$; $p<.001$).

Overall, the Importance of Acceptance between partner and family is rated significantly higher ($M=2.88$) than between partner and friends ($M=2.70$; $t=6.65$; $df=839$; $p<.001$) except for young men in Germany, who see acceptance between partner and family or friends as equally important ($t=0.63$; $df=165$; $p>.05$).

There is no effect of age on subjective importance of acceptance. Furthermore, there is no effect of residential situation as far as country is included in the analysis.



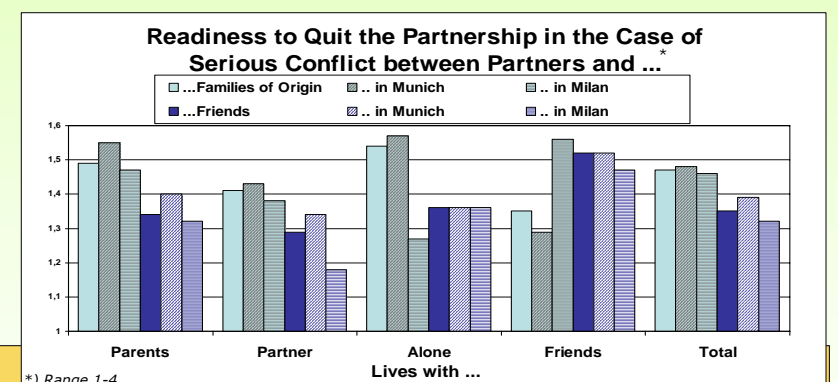
Contrary to expectation, the Readiness to Quit the Partnership in the Case of Serious Conflict between partner and family does not differ by country. In the case of conflict between partner and friends, however, readiness to quit the partnership is marginally higher for Germans ($M=1.40$) than for Italians ($M=1.32$) ($t=-1.79$; $df=822,40$; $p=.074$).

The Readiness to Quit the Partnership in the Case of Serious Conflict between partner and family is significantly higher for women ($M=1.52$) than for men ($M=1.41$) ($t=-2.72$; $df=797.25$; $p<.01$). However, there is no gender difference in the Readiness to Quit the Partnership between partner and friends ($t=0.01$; $df=839$; $p<.05$).

The Readiness to Quit the Partnership due to conflict between partner and family is significantly higher ($M=1.47$) than between partner and friends ($M=1.35$; $t=5.79$; $df=838$; $p<.001$). For young men in Germany, however, there is no significant difference between the Readiness to Quit the Partnership between partner and friends ($M=1.37$) and partner and family ($M=1.41$) ($t=0.83$; $df=165$; $p>.05$).

There is no effect of age on the Readiness to Quit the Partnership due to conflict with family or friends.

The Readiness to Quit the Partnership due to conflict differs by residential situation and country (see figure to the right). Young adults tend to quit the relationship in the case of serious conflict between partners and friends most often if they live with their friends and least if they live with their partners or others ($F_{(4)}=2.26$; $p=.06$). There is no significant influence of residential situation in the case of serious conflict between partners and families ($F_{(4)}=1.90$; $p>.05$).



Discussion:

Although peer influences increase in adolescence, this does not hold for all domains. As shown in this study, family influence on young adults partner relationships is stronger than friends' influence. This supports the notion of the continuing importance of the family of origin across adolescence and adulthood.

In line with our expectations, young women rate mutual acceptance between partner and family or friends as more important than young men. Furthermore, they are more ready to quit their partnership in the case of serious conflict between partners and families than young men. This supports the notion of higher relatedness among

women particularly to their family or origin.

Contrary to our hypothesis, German young adults attribute higher influence to their families and friends than their Italian counterparts. Considering the Italian phenomenon of the "lunga famiglia" with strong cultural framing of the importance of families in Italian Society and the later age at home leaving, this may seem surprising. However, according to our findings, home-leaving does not weaken the influence of the family. Claiming autonomy may be most salient if residentially dependent.