

# The Impact of Critical Events on Conjugal Quality: A Configurational Approach

Manuela Schicka  
Supervisor : Eric Widmer

## Research Question

The project uses a longitudinal perspective to evaluate the impact of critical events and life transitions on the conjugal quality of Swiss couples.

It is assumed that critical life events influence conjugal quality, cause conflicts and reveal the vulnerability of the partners.

This impact will mainly be determined by couples' interaction style.

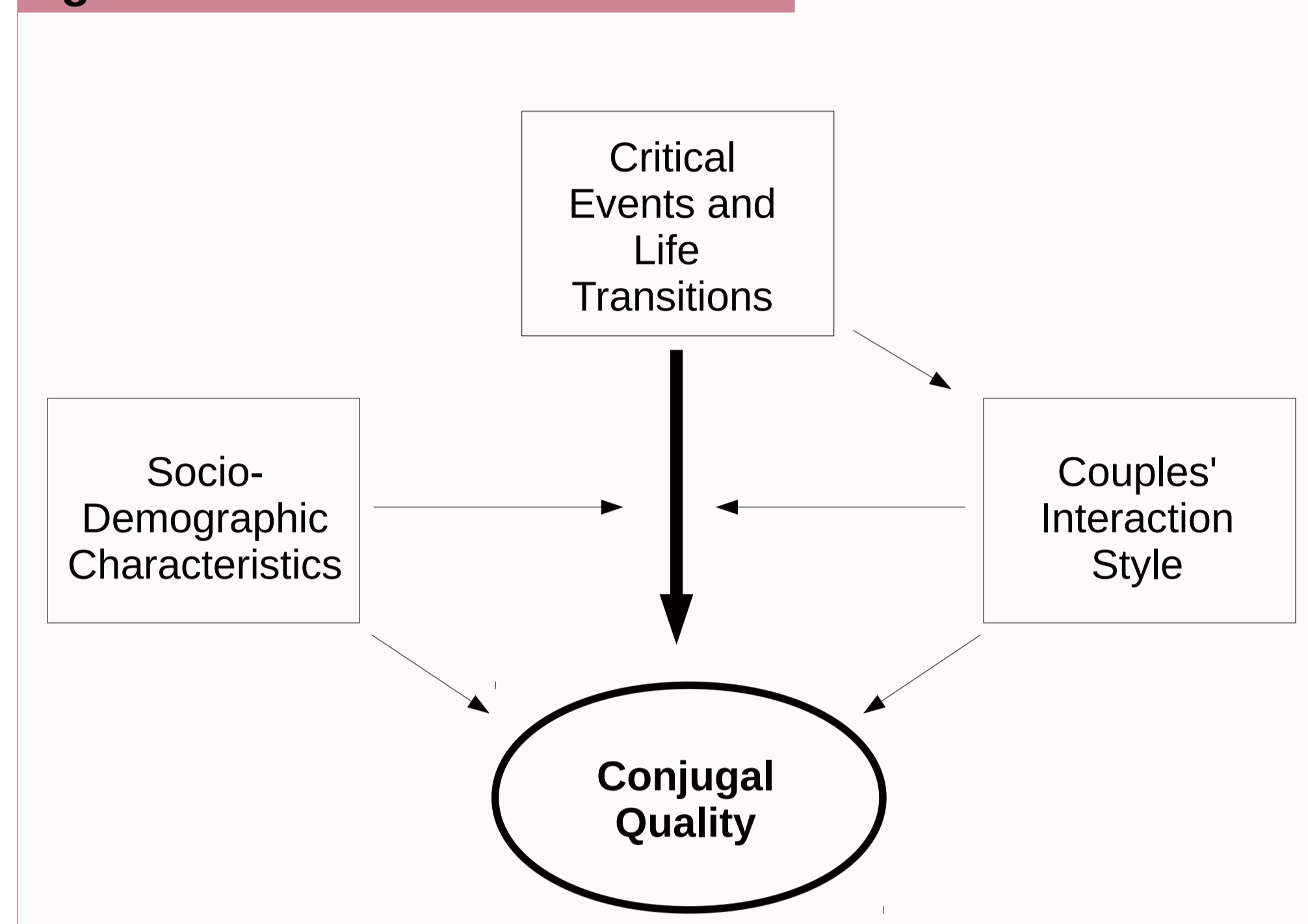
## Data and Sample

Survey: Social Stratification, Cohesion and Conflict in Contemporary Families

3 waves study: 1st: 1998, 2nd: 2004, 3rd: 2011

Sample for this project : 721 couples who are still with the same partner and 99 couples who separated during the observation period

## Figure 1: Theoretical Model



## Table 1: Characteristics of Couples' Interaction Styles

	Interaction style				
	Parallel	Companionship	Bastion	Cocoon	Associative
<b>Cohesion</b>					
Fusion	-	++	++	++	--
Openness	--	++	--	++	++
<b>Regulation</b>					
Differentiation functional roles	++	-	++	-	-
Differentiation relational roles	++	-	++	+	-
Differentiation decisional power	-	--	-	--	--
Master Status	+	--	++	--	-
Routinisation	++	+	++	+	--

## Table 2: Distribution of Interaction Styles (%)

	1998	2011
Parallel	17	13
Companionship	21	32
Bastion	17	17
Cocoon	15	23
Associative	29	15

N=721

## Conjugal Interaction

This project uses an approach of couples' interaction styles which classifies couples according to their degree of cohesion and regulation.

Cohesion describes whether couples are fusional or autonomous, whether they place more emphasis on the "we" or the "I" and whether they are closed or open toward their environment.

The dimensions of regulation include whether couples have high or low differentiation of their functional and relational roles, whether decisional power is differentiated, whether the master status is affirmed, and whether couples organize their daily life by fixed rhythms.

## Table 3: Relation between Couples' Interaction Style in 1998 and Conjugal Conflict, Critical Events, and Conjugal Quality in 2011 (%)

	Parallel 1998	Companionship 1998	Bastion 1998	Cocoon 1998	Associative 1998	Cramers V
<b>Nature of problems of couples 2011</b>						
Problems of addiction and violence	24	8	8	10	14	0.17***
Relational problems	65	54	47	58	70	0.17***
Coordination problems	72	67	64	58	79	0.16***
<b>External Events 2011</b>						
Socio-professional problems	38	30	27	38	26	0.1
Health problems	78	68	72	68	66	0.1
Socio-cultural problems	7	4	4	3	5	0.1
<b>Evaluation of relationship 2011</b>						
Relationship not « very good »	73	61	55	67	73	0.15***
<b>Already thought about separation 2011</b>	50	32	19	26	55	0.29***

N=721  
\*\*\* p < .001, \*\* p < .01, \* p < 0.05

### Interpretation :

24 % of Parallel couples in 1998 experienced problems with addiction and violence in their relationship. In contrast the other couples did not experience these problems that often.

Coordination problems appear to all couples, but Parallel and Associative couples are more often confronted by them.

More than 70 % of Parallel and Associative couples of 1998 declared lower levels of relationship satisfaction and more than 50 % of them already considered divorce in 2011.

## Conclusion

First descriptive results show already that Parallel and Associative couples show higher levels of conflict and lower levels of conjugal quality in a longitudinal perspective.

Their probability to separate between the waves is also higher as for other couples (not shown here).

These two interaction styles are characterized by a low degree of fusion which explains their low levels of conjugal quality. Critical life events do not differ among couples' interaction styles.

It remains to test whether couples' interaction styles work as a mediating factor when critical events and life transitions appear.

## Figures 2-4: Analytical Proceeding

