

Sexual problems and conjugal psychosocial functioning

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Question:

What are the sociopsychological factors that account for intimacy and sexual problems of contemporary couples?

Data

- Data drawn from the study "*Social Stratification, Cohesion and Conflict in Contemporary Families*"
- Data collection took place between October 1998 and January 1999. Sample includes 1530 couples from the three linguistic areas of Switzerland.
- In each couple, the two partners were interviewed separately. On most questions, each of them had to provide an answer.
- Sample with demographic features very similar to those of other recent surveys and micro-censuses on households and families in Switzerland (OFS, 1998).

Conjugal functioning

- Emphasis on the self versus the group
- Attitudes of couples with their environment
- Gender inequalities in couple relationships

Socialisation

- Attachment styles
- Divorce of parents
- Conflict in family of origin

Support networks of couples

- Various resources (emotional, financial, domestic)
- Linear or curvilinear effects?

Dimensions of conjugal intimacy

(Keciour et al., 2003)

- Exchanges of confidence
- Free expression of the intimate self
- Intensification of shared moments and exchanges in particular through sexuality
- Assumption of roles which reinforce interdependence
- Construction of external boundaries and emergence of a « we »

Frequency of various problems of intimacy during conjugal life (%)

Indicators of problems of intimacy	Men	Women	Couples	Association of male and female answers (Cramer)
Serious lack for communication, difficulty expressing feelings and emotions	43	46	62	.19**
Disagreements or problems in sexual relations	32	30	45	.25**
Important difficulties to do with the personality of the other and his/her pace	17	28	36	.19**
Strong disappointment in love, falling out of love	16	19	27	.25**
Problems with infidelity by your spouse	6	8	11	.25**
Coarseness or duress in sexual relations	4	5	6	.33**
Physical violence against you	3	4	5	.41**

Multiple correspondence analysis

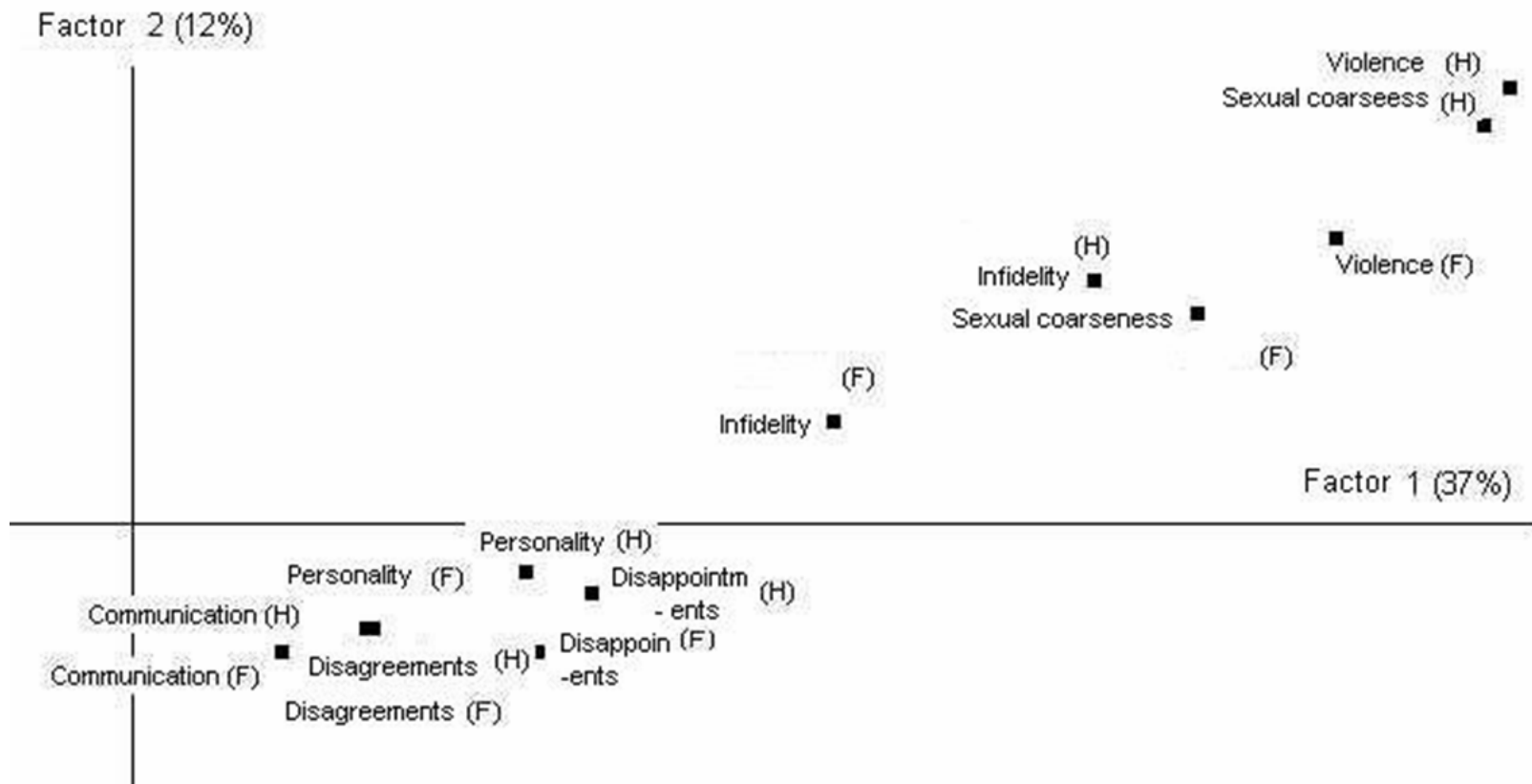


Table 1. Styles of conjugal interactions (%)

	Parallel	Companion- ship	Bastion	Co- coon	Associa- tive	Average Percenta ges (whole sample)	Cramers' V
Size of cluster (% total)	17	24	16	15	29		
<i>Cohesion</i>							
Fusion (women)	17	57	92	67	5	42	.66**
Fusion (men)	24	91	74	83	13	53	.68**
Closure (women)	81	19	58	65	9	40	.58**
Closure (men)	68	20	28	56	20	35	.41**
Internal orientation (women)	60	16	42	72	11	34	.50**
Internal orientation (men)	16	16	9	95	19	27	.63**
<i>Regulation</i>							
Strong differentiation of functional roles	60	49	79	48	53	57	.21**
Strong differentiation of relational roles	74	38	91	70	60	63	.36**
Strong differentiation of decisional power	31	13	23	18	24	22	.15**
Strong master status	56	24	74	42	60	50	.34**
Strong routinisation	45	34	76	56	27	44	.35**

Parallel-style couples (17%)

- Characterized by strongly sex-typed domestic and relational roles, strong fusion and marked self-enclosure. They feel threatened by their environment while not investing in internal relations, and they distribute functional and relational roles in a rigid differentiated fashion. The values that organize action are order, differentiation of activity spheres and withdrawal into the self.

Companionship-style couples (24%)

High fusion and openness scores and a comparatively low degree of role and power differentiation. These couples use environmental resources to strengthen internal solidarity and communication. The values guiding behavior are external integration and community.

Bastion-style couples (16%)

Founded on couple self-enclosure, fusion, and sex differentiation. There is no turning to the world outside the couple; on the contrary, these couples view external actors with a certain wariness while strongly valuing internal relations. Family as a group takes precedence over individual interests and orientations. This warm, closed world is supported by sharply sex-specific roles and relatively rigid arrangements expressed also in couples' orientation—women favor aims internal to family life, while men strongly favor external ones. Conjugal life is organized by consensus and tradition.

Cocoon-style couples (15%)

- High levels of both fusion and couple self-enclosure. Contrary to *Bastion*-style couples, however, distribution of domestic tasks and relational roles is neither sex-typed or inegalitarian. Whereas in *Bastion* couples, only women favor internal objectives, in a *Cocoon* couple both partners say they have such objectives. This interaction style is at once warm, closed and relatively free of gender inequalities compared to *Bastion*-style. Behavior-organizing values are comfort and intimacy.

Association-style couples (29%)

Radically opposed to *Bastion-style* couples: low degree of both fusion and couple self-enclosure, egalitarian division of power, roles relatively undifferentiated by sex. The main values that structure this interaction style are quest for personal authenticity and negotiation of individual rights.

Conjugal problems according to styles of interactions (Odds ratios)

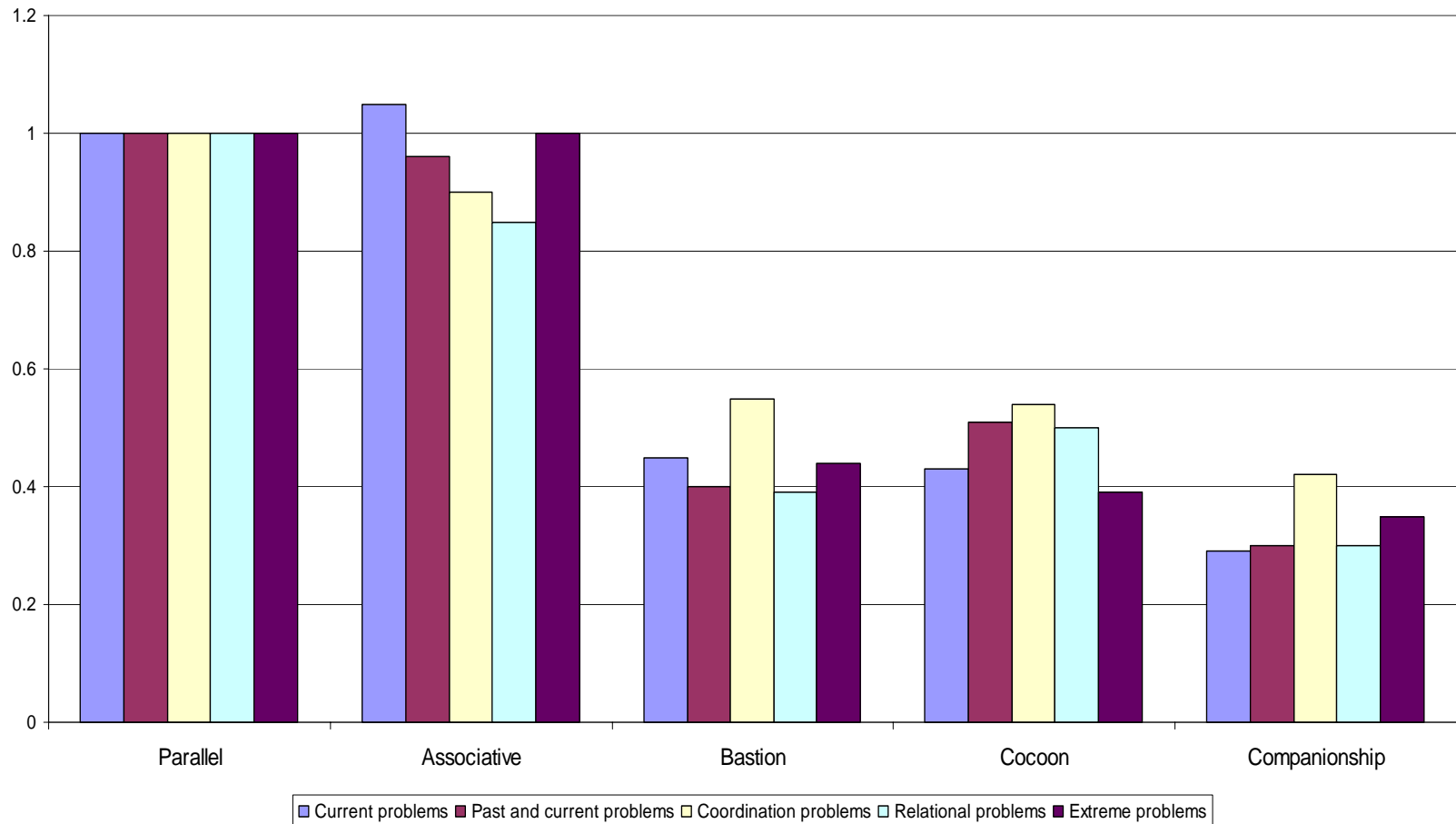


Table 2 : Characteristics of network ideal- types (column %)

		I Sparse	II Friend- ship	III Patricen- tric	IV Matri- centric	V Bicentric	VI Inter- fering	Cramer's V
Size of Cluster (%)		18	15	18	21	20	10	
Size of network								
Large number of relatives	F	20	32	50	39	45	77	.31**
	M	24	4	59	33	68	67	.47**
Large number of friends	F	47	80	62	73	65	69	.22**
	M	39	72	72	62	72	76	.27**
Contacts with network members								
Frequent contacts with relatives	F	29	49	67	68	74	83	.36**
	M	27	5	78	62	92	77	.61**
Frequent contacts with friends	F	54	89	63	77	67	81	.25**
	M	39	78	62	55	67	57	.24**
Network support available								
Domestic support available	F	11	69	4	68	90	84	.69**
	M	10	71	74	9	89	81	.70**
Emotional support available	F	37	96	37	97	100	93	.68**
	M	27	97	85	21	93	89	.69**
Financial support available	F	7	60	8	63	85	71	.68**
	M	9	71	67	6	80	63	.64**
Quality of relationships in the kinship network.								
Close, affectionate and united family	F	36	54	60	74	80	64	.31**
	M	31	39	60	48	76	31	.33**
Family tries to control couple	F	12	21	22	28	7	71	.63**
	M	19	8	15	16	2	82	.55**

**=*sig*<.01, *=*sig*<.05

Couples with sparse networks (18%)

Characterized by weak ties with friends and relatives, for both partners. The network is rather small and contacts with friends and relatives are sparse; support is not readily available. Interference of the network is very low, as is the overall quality of relationships in the network.

Couples with friendship networks (15%)

Strongly invest in their friendship ties, whereas their kinship ties are almost nonexistent. Those couples do not have a great number of relatives living close to them and they do not interact very often with them. Their family is not considered warm and supportive, but neither is it interfering. Support is available, most likely from friends. Again, both partners have quite identical network profiles. One exception is that men have a smaller and more passive kinship network than women.

Couples with patricentric networks (18%)

Men have a much larger number of relatives and friends than the women do. They meet with their relatives and friends more often and can get support from them much more easily than women do. These couples can be described as asymmetrical or unicentric, as one partner's network is predominant. Note, however, that quality of family relationships is the same on both sides.

Couples with matricentric networks (21%)

- Stand in sharp contrast to couples with patricentric networks. In their case, women have a much larger and much more active network than men, both in terms of relatives and friends. Support is more readily available for women than for men, and the overall quality of relationship among their relatives is significantly higher.

Couples with dense networks (20%)

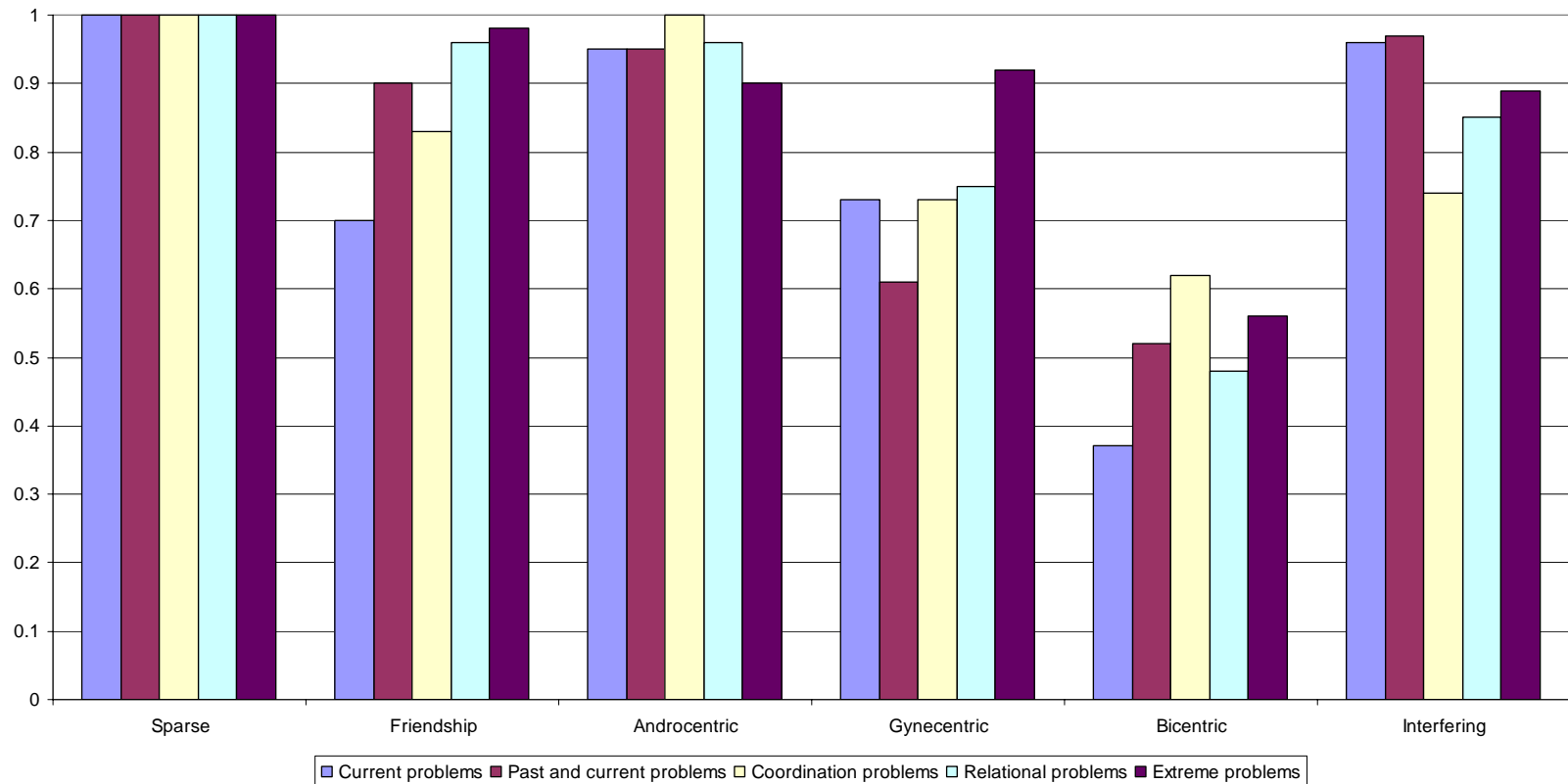
Are characterized by strong kinship and friendship ties for both partners, who have large number of friends and relatives around and frequent contacts with them. Both partners would get support in case of need. Family relationships are seen as strong and warm by both of them.

Couples with *interfering networks* (10%)

Similar to couples with bicentric networks with regard to the strength of support.

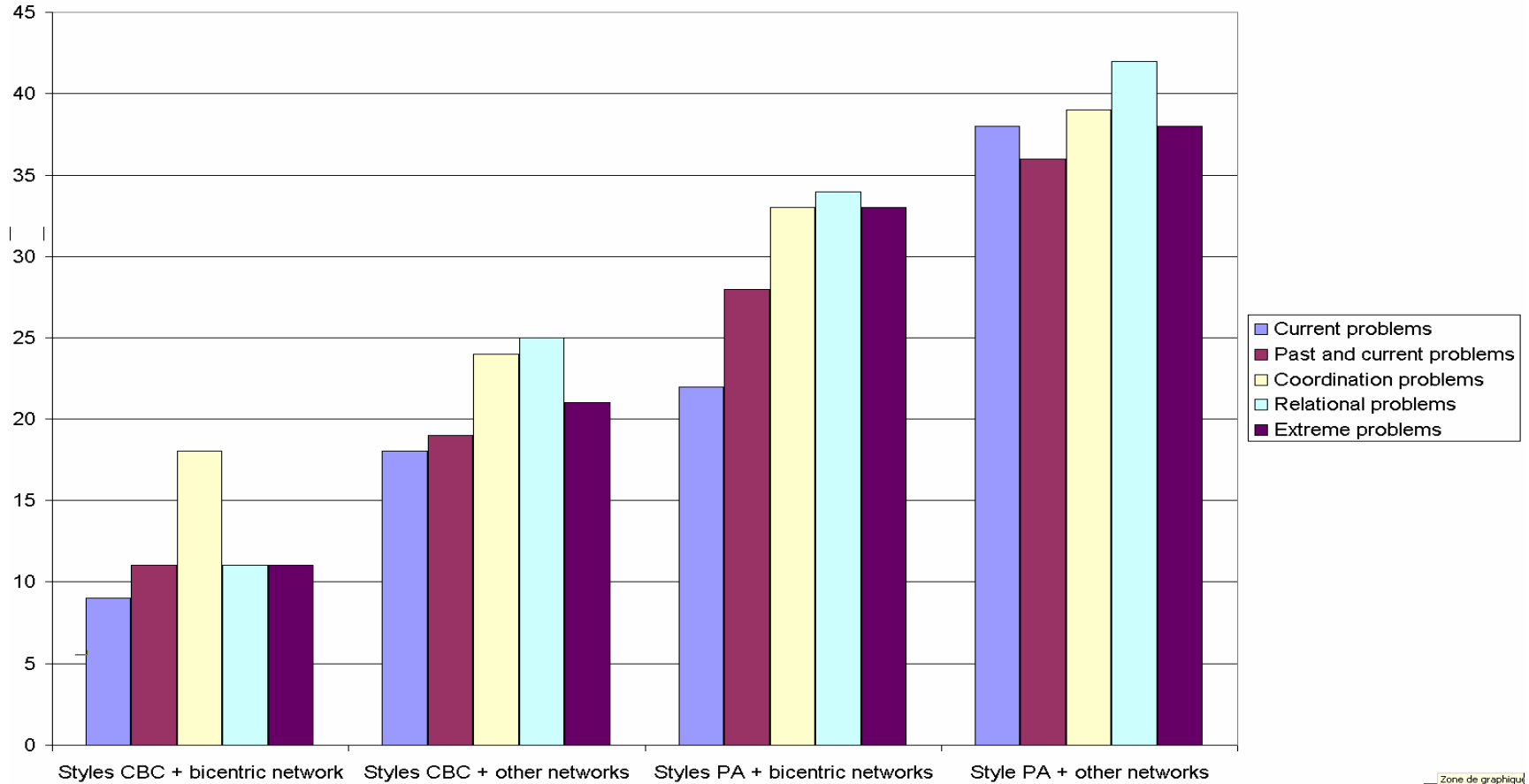
However, there is a strong feeling of being controlled by the kinship network, especially for women. Family relationships are much more often considered as not warm than in bicentric networks.

Conjugal problems according to types of networks (Odds ratios)



Conjugal problems according to styles of conjugal relationships and types of networks

(%)



— [Zone de graphique]

Ordinal regression of the scale of deterioration of intimacy on the psycho-sociological explanatory factors, and on the control variables. Odds ratios and coefficients of significance

<i>Style of conjugal interaction</i>			
Parallel	1.00	0.69*	0.82
Companionship	0.40**	0.44**	0.39**
Bastion	0.51**	0.38**	0.47**
Cocoon	0.56**	0.48**	0.50**
Association	--	--	--
<i>Type of conjugal network</i>			
Friendly	0.92	1.02	0.90
Patricentric	1.00	0.80	0.90
Matricentric	0.71*	0.86	0.67*
Dense	0.61**	0.76*	0.61**
Intrusive	0.97	0.91	0.86
Sparse	--	--	--

follows

<i>Unhappy climate in family of origin</i>			
None	--	--	--
Unhappy family climate for the woman	1.60**	1.23	1.50**
Unhappy family climate for the man	1.00	1.63*	1.18
Unhappy climate for both partners	1.80**	1.96*	1.76**
<i>Divorces in the family of origin (parents of the husband and wife)</i>			
No divorce	--	--	--
Parents of the woman divorced	1.28	1.38	1.41
Parents of the man divorced	1.22	1.39	1.33
Divorces among parents of both partners	0.89	2.45	2.47

Discussion and conclusion

follows

[21]

<i>Control variables</i>			
<i>Educational level of the woman</i>			
Low	1.03	0.86	1.03
Medium	--	--	--
High	1.37*	1.37*	1.51**
<i>Phase in family life</i>			
Pre-child	0.64*	0.85	0.86
Pre-school	0.80	0.90	0.86
School	--	--	--
Post-school	0.96	1.11	1.10
Post-child	1.17	0.91	1.17
Couples without children ⁶	0.57*	0.79	0.67
<i>Matrimonial status</i>			
Cohabiting	1.38	1.30	1.19
Married	--	--	--
<i>Reconstituted family</i>	0.77	0.87	0.81
Non reconstituted family	--	--	--