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Conjugal Interactions and the Life Course: Rethinking Diversity and the Differential Impact of Biographies and Social Contexts

Sofia Aboim*

1 Introduction

The diversity of family forms has been approached from different perspectives. From Durkheim ([1896]1975) to Parsons (Parsons and Bales, 1955), macro-sociological explanations based on the relation between family and modernization anticipated the rise of conjugal families marked by internal gender differentiation but well adjusted to early modern industrial and urban societies. The classical hypothesis described in the 40s by Burgess, Thomes and Locke ([1945]1960) still proposed the transition between a dominant model – the institutional family – to another – the companionship family, based on cooperation, democracy and togetherness. From the 60s onwards, however, research has focused on the pluralization of conjugal functioning. Demographic changes, increased gender equality and individualization of family life promoted the switch to micro-sociological approaches drawing on interaction and the internal properties of families. As an alternative to class-based families, connections between conjugal functioning and families' life cycles have long been looked for (Hill and Rogers, 1964). Classical developmental approaches have however failed to track the de-linearization of life courses (Kaufmann, 1993). Cohabitation, divorce, remarriage and the emergence of new conjugal biographies have set the contemporary framework for family life. Yet, the effects imprinted by biographical variables on conjugal functioning are still scarcely documented in research.

The main aim of this article is to provide evidence for the impact of life course factors on conjugal functioning, reassessing the connection between conjugal biographies and interactions. On the one hand, we are proposing that rather than dominant models, family modernization in Portuguese society has been developing into plural types of internal functioning under the influence of four decades of economic and social change. In 1960 one-third of the population worked in agriculture, the fertility rate was 3.2, 90.7% of marriages were Catholic, women were legally charged with management of the household and owed obedience to their husbands (only 18% were employed). Family organization was generally based on strong gender differentiation, an institutional orientation and a pattern

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of integration which associated the husband with autonomy and the public space. However, family life has changed dramatically: in 2001 only 5% of the population was employed in the primary sector, the number of children per woman was 1.5, 40% of marriages were non-religious, 25% of children were born outside marriage, the divorce rate rose to 1.8, 65% of women between age 15 and 64 were in jobs and both husband and wife were legally responsible for household life.

On the other hand, we anticipate that life course coordinates, from the mode of entering marital life or timing childbirths to the present household composition will be connected to different types of conjugal functioning. While individualized biographies will more likely promote autonomy-based couples, emphasis on togetherness will be the outcome of joint trajectories with partners entering earlier into marital life and parenting. Our third hypothesis is, however, related to the differential effect of life course or socio-economic variables. In opposition to broad dichotomies which oppose structural coordinates to agency, we propose that the underlying factors having an impact on family dynamics are also plural and, moreover, that each type of functioning will be influenced by specific variables, either related to structural constraints or to conjugal biographies. Using a quantitative and representative data-set of Portuguese couples interviewed in 1999 (Wall, 2005; Aboim, 2006), we present statistical evidence of diversity, multi-causality and the specific effect of conjugal biographies.

2 Approaching conjugal diversity

Beyond the theoretical macro-approaches which have privileged single-family models, concern with pluralization grew in the field as a counterpoint to those classical views of an adaptive and functional conjugal family. Guided by the common goal of "describing the types of relationships found in families" (Kellerhals et al., 1984: 21), multiple approaches aimed at identifying family diversity. In reassessing these theoretical developments, we can broadly identify two major perspectives and distinguish between those which link family and social organization and those which focus on interactions and agency.

In the first case, quite a few theorizations intended to capture the plurality of family forms by making it dependent on social organization. In Bertaux's (1977) classical approach of "*class families*", diversity was mainly explained by the couple's mode of labour production (property ownership, employment position, etc.). However, a second perspective – women's studies – had the merit of bringing gender into the family, thereby allowing for the distinction between differentiated and equally divided gender roles (Oakley, 1974; Michel, 1978). This concern with gender inequalities still flourishes in sociological research (Crompton, 2006), complexifying the distinction between traditional families, strongly differentiated, and modern

families, which divide labour more equally. Today, Pfau-Effinger (1999: 62–63) distinguishes not merely two but five types of family: the *family economic gender model* based on the cooperation of women and men in family businesses; the *male breadwinner/female-home-carer model* in which men and women have differentiated competences; the *male breadwinner/female-part-time-carer model* which portrays a modernized version of the last; the *dual breadwinner/state carer model* where both men and women are full-time employed and delegate care into state responsibility; the *dual breadwinner/dual carer model* which reflects an equal gender division of public and private responsibilities.

A third structural approach disregards socio-economic factors and enhances the impact of values and meanings, stressing the bridges between socio-cultural change and family behaviour (Ariès, 1973; Shorter, 1977). One of the well-known proposals is Roussel's typology (1992), which complexified Burgess et al.'s idea of a transition from institution to companionship. The author describes a gradual move from the "family as institution" into more modern models: "alliance families," which still contain strong institutionalism; "fusion families" already guided by romantic love and gender equality; and "associative families" which symbolize the triumph of the individual over the couple. More recently, individualization processes, as put forward by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) or Giddens (1992), are often linked to the growth of autonomy in family life. Changes in values alongside individual-oriented forms of social organization are allowing for a new emphasis on self-fulfilment, promoting freer choices and producing a certain de-linearization of biographies. Thus, autonomy, as resulting from the quest for self-fulfilment, would be favoured and conjugal togetherness more often rejected. This line of thought laid emphasis on autonomy-based ideals as key components of contemporary families, encouraging research to focus on the *nomic* processes (Berger and Kellner [1975]) through which self-identity is achieved in family life (Singly, 1996). Even though helpful to the understanding of the tense relationship between individual and group, these contributions often overlook the persistence of ideals and practices which understate individual autonomy.

On the other hand, describing and explaining conjugal diversity may turn mainly to the internal dynamics of the family. Strongly anchored in historical privatization, family is conceived as relatively autonomous from external constraints.

Within this perspective, developmental approaches provided a major interpretation of family diversity by allocating specific forms of functioning to different stages of the family life-cycle, from the post-marriage to the empty-nest phase (Hill and Rogers, 1964; Mattesich and Hill, 1987). However, they offered a static and role-associated view of conjugal functioning, which hardly integrates contemporary life courses and accounts for diversity. Thus, in the decades following this initial formulation, serious criticism was directed to the idea that family stages follow universal patterns. In contrast, Rodgers (1973) suggested the concept of family-career

and, shortly after, Aldous (1978) argued that family careers contain sub-careers (sibling, marital, parental), which also suffer the influence of careers external to the family, such as educational and occupational. In this line of reasoning, life course theory, whose focus is the individual and not the family as organic unity, appeared as more suitable to capture the complexity of contemporary family biographies (Aldous, 1990). The development of widely used concepts such as de-standardization, deinstitutionalization or individualization reflects precisely this emphasis on the transformation of an individual's life course. Thus, the pluralization of family forms is, to a great extent, the result of the complicities established with new, more complex and fluid, family life courses.

On the other hand, in endowing family dynamics with specific properties, like those of any other small group, interactionist approaches have been more promising and open-minded in examining plurality. A legacy of the North American tradition of therapy, it strongly contributed, in the 70s and 80s, to the development, from a micro perspective, of several typologies of family functioning (Olson, McCubbin and Barnes, 1983; Reiss, 1981; Kantor and Lehr, 1975). This inheritance is present in recent developments, namely within North American sociology of the family, where interactionist typologies are still on the agenda (Brines and Joyner, 1999; Zuo, 1992; Rogers and Amato, 1997; Noller and Fitzpatrick, 1990). Fitzpatrick (1988) proposed a threefold typology of conjugal families in which she combined degree of conflict, conjugal ideology and interdependence between spouses to distinguish traditional couples (serious conflict, conventional values, strong interdependence), independent couples (conflict habits, liberal values, moderate interdependence) and separate couples (conflict avoidance, ambivalent values, low interdependence).

Inheritances of interactionism can also be found in the research conducted in Switzerland by Kellerhals et al. (1982) and by Kellerhals and Widmer (2003, 2004). Starting from interactionist concepts (such as cohesion, integration or regulation) used in micro-approaches, the authors adapted them to extensive research and quantitative methodological tools in order to obtain a representative view of family diversity. They made distinctions between various types of family functioning, while at the same time taking care to link them with their social contexts, thereby filling some of the gaps of interactions, which excessively disregarded the effect of social factors. From this perspective, four types of conjugal families were identified in 1982: *bastion* families, characterised by fusional cohesion, normative regulation and closure; *companionship* families, characterized by fusional cohesion, communicational regulation and openness; *parallel* families, characterized by cohesion through autonomy, normative regulation and closure; and *associative* families characterized by cohesion through autonomy, communicational regulation and openness. In research carried out at the end of the 90s, Kellerhals et al. (2004) added one further type as a result of the additional criteria covered. Seeking to plug a number of gaps, namely the subjectivist character of the typology, they included

the domestic division of labour and the management of power in the couple's decisions. This produced *cocoon* families, a less differentiated and more intimate form of the bastion family; the bastion type persists, but is now described according to how much gender differentiation there is within it.

In sum, from different angles, attributing greater weight to economic, social, cultural or interactional factors, all these approaches attempt to look at the internal dynamics of families and describe the social ties binding the family together. However, they also have limitations when observing family diversity. One of the common weaknesses of most of the approaches to family functioning has to do with privileging ideals rather than regarding actual practices. On the other hand, classist and gender approaches observe practices of labour division but disregard other crucial components of family life. In this sense, developmental perspectives awarded importance to time and internal change but remained static and linear without giving a real account of families' internal trajectories and dynamics. On the other hand, the macro-theoretical framework of individualization allows for enhancing the power of biographical change, yet without offering us the tools to assess family diversity.

However, an integrated reading of these sociological contributions suggests that we should take into account various approaches and analytical aspects. Firstly, we focus both on practices and ideals in order to capture the diversity of family functioning. Remembering basic principles of symbolic interactionism, which emphasize the routinized character of everyday life (Goffman, 1959), we sustain that meanings and norms emerge from daily interaction, rather than existing separately from practices. Secondly, our perspective is underpinned by two main theoretical approaches: interactionism and women's studies. We start out from the interactionist concepts of cohesion and integration together with that of gender differentiation, seeking to describe conjugal functioning by looking at various sectors of family life: household and professional work, leisure activities, conversations, feelings, money, shared tastes, and socializing with friends and relatives. Thirdly, inspired by the macro-interactionist approach of Kellerhals and Widmer, our aim was to adapt the interactionist concepts to survey measures. Finally, in examining diversity, we integrate the life course approach into our analysis, bringing into play the impact of biographies in the context of social individualization. For that purpose, we constructed multivariate models that allowed us to test the impact of biographical variables when compared to that produced by other major social coordinates, such as class or generation.

3 Data and measures

In order to examine the diverse forms of the conjugal family, we analysed families on the basis of a survey, carried out in 1999, of 1776 Portuguese women aged between 25 and 49, living with a partner (whether in a first or second marriage/cohabitation) and having at least one child aged between 6 and 16 living at home. According to the 2001 Portuguese Census, these families represent 32,7% of all family nucleus; within them 8,8% were cohabiting couples and 3,9% were blended families. For continental Portugal the sample, which was put together by the National Statistics Institute (INE), is representative of couples having these characteristics, which enabled us to work with statistically representative data. [1]

3.1 Dependent variable

Conjugal functioning, our dependent variable, was analysed on the basis of three main concepts.

The first, cohesion, refers to the ties which bind the members of the family, and is based on relationships and norms which may be focused on fusion or autonomy. Our investigation of internal cohesion thus led us to collect a varied set of indicators. First, we looked at *cohesion practices*, enquiring "who does what with whom?" in three areas of daily life (household work, activities outside the home and conversations). Following Kantor and Leher's (1975) idea of identifying diverse axes of fusion within the family, we aimed at identifying subgroups of interactions within the group (individual, couple, couple and children, mother and children, father and children ...). We sought to ascertain whether there was a prevalence of joint practices (those focused on the couple/family), separate practices (focused on the individual) or mixed practices, in which fusion and separation are combined. Secondly, we focused on norms of cohesion, as we sought to find out whether essential resources (money, tastes, free time and friends) are placed under the couple's control; in other words, whether there is a normative orientation towards autonomy or fusion. The conjugal cohesion indicator thus measures the emphasis on or the effacing of individuality vis-à-vis the "we," highlighting autonomy or fusion as explicit "nomic constructions" which may be more or less aligned with practices.

The second key-concept to our approach measures *gender differentiation* within the couple. However, we considered not only the *conjugal division of labour* but also the *gender division of leisure activities*, which widens gender analysis to less usual domains. At one extreme, we observed couples where sharing of household

1 The survey was conducted using face-to-face interviews and was based on an original target sample of 2260 households. The 79 percent response of the original sample (overestimated by 25 percent in order to compensate for non-response) gave the achieved sample of 1776 families. The multi-stage area probability sample was extracted from a Master Sample of households built up for the National Labour Survey and allowed for a 95 percent level of confidence (sampling error +- 2.3%, $\alpha = .05$).

duties, dual employment and a balance in individual and family leisure activities are paramount, while, at the opposite, we find the differentiation model. At work, conjugal inequality was reflected both in the male breadwinner model and in another model where both are employed but the wife handles household tasks. In the construction of autonomy through individualized leisure activities, inequalities may also assume different features, whether autonomy is only male or divided, but in different proportions.

The third concept, external integration, measures the extent of the group's openness or closure. In the first case the family shows a high level of integration in the outside world; while in the second, it will adopt a reclusive attitude (Kantor and Lehr, 1975; Reiss, 1981; Kellerhals et al. , 1982, 2004). Using this concept, we sought to establish whether the family maintains contacts with the outside world, which activities predominate in family life (going to the café, to the cinema...) and also if it spends time with others (friends, relatives, neighbours). We used two indicators: the volume and frequency of activities outside the home and the volume and frequency of occasions/time spent with others.

3.2 Independent variables

The independent variables used to construct multivariate models may be divided into three categories according to the general hypothesis outlined earlier: socio-economic context, age/generation and life course variables. In the first case, we sought to find out if couples' interactions varied according to social inequalities related to educational and class-based differences. Several studies (e.g., Kellerhals et al. 2004) have highlighted the linkages between autonomy and qualified milieus and the inverse correlation between fusional interaction and lower qualified couples.

In the second case, explanation would be attributed to the effects of age, which appears as an intermediate variable. Age is both related to the generational coordinates of our sample, which gathers women who entered adulthood and family life in different historical times, and to specific moments of individual and family life cycles.

Thirdly, we consider the impact of family life events.[2] We mainly used variables that measure conjugal history across time, that is to say, the conjugal life course, instead of pre-defined family life cycle stages. A similar strategy was used by Nock (1979) or Spanier et al. (1979). Both authors wrote landmark critiques to classical developmental approaches and presented empirical justification for using variables such as marriage cohort, length of marriage or the mere presence and age of children. Some authors may have argued in favour of a life cycle periodization (Kapinus and Johnson, 2003), but our strategy follows the biographical flow of conjugal life courses without predetermining specific family stages.

2 See description of the analysis carried out for the different blocks of variables below.

3.3 Analytic strategy

For the analysis, given the specific characteristics of each type of conjugal interaction, we used binary logistic regression employing block and forward stepwise entry to determine factors that significantly predict each one of the six types of conjugal interaction, which were recoded into dummy variables. The independent variables fell into three groups: educational and socio-professional, age and life course characteristics. The analytic strategy was to build a hierarchical model where these blocks of variables were entered in three cumulative steps. This allowed examining the predictive gain at each step. The overall aim was to identify which types are more dependent on structural forms of social inequality and which depend more on age coordinates or conjugal biographies, in order to assess the differential impact of biographies when compared to that of social class or generation.

In the section which follows, we will briefly outline the results obtained and suggest a typology of family interactions.

4 A typology of conjugal interactions

To determine the number of types of conjugal families, we computed several hierarchical clusters. We first put together various cohesion indexes (of separate, joint and mixed daily practices, of fusional and autonomous "intentions", of equality in employment, housework and other activities) and indexes of integration (of goings out, time spent with others). We then conducted a factorial analysis (principal axis factoring) with varimax rotation which extracted six factors with statistical internal congruence (α>.70). Five of the factors aggregated items concerning conjugal routines, individual activities and external integration; one of them was related to norms of cohesion and established a negative correlation with the former. This analysis was followed by a cluster analysis using the factor scores obtained earlier, which was carried out in two stages: we first conducted a hierarchical analysis (using Ward method) and then used the "quick cluster" to optimize the classification obtained earlier. This statistical analysis is in line with the research methodology, which does not at the outset limit the number of types, allowing room for new combinations of types of answer. After examining solutions from three to seven clusters, we found the six group solution the best suited in terms of balance between within-cluster homogeneity, parsimony and clarity. Overall, it reproduced the factor solution, revealing, as main feature, the complex and even opposite relationship between practices, whether related to the division of labour or to leisure activities, and norms of cohesion: fusional norms did not always match fusional routines and inversely. The six different combinations of indicators are presented in table 1.

The first type is "*parallel*" interaction, as 14.8% of the couples feature strong separateness in household chores, leisure and conversations. This non-fusional

Table 1: Types of conjugal interaction (n = 1776)

	All families	Parallel	Asso-ciative	Familial Parallel	Confluent	Bastion	Compa-nionship fusion
	(p < 0.000)	14.8	15.1	21.7	12.4	19.7	16.3
Routines of conjugal cohesion	cf = 0.76[a]						
Strong separateness	8.0	41.8	0.0	4.5	0.0	4.9	0.0
Weak separateness	26.4	37.5	14.2	75.1	5.4	6.3	4.1
Joint	29.2	7.9	19.7	0.8	1.4	74.4	60.7
Mixed (joint and separate)	36.4	12.8	66.1	19.6	93.2	14.4	35.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Norm of cohesion	cf = 0.59						
Fusion	61.0	12.8	2.6	85.2	75.3	85.8	85.5
Autonomy	39.0	87.2	97.4	14.8	24.7	14.2	14.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Division of labour	cf = 0.50						
Dual earner and female housework	37.7	50.4	35.6	47.0	11.6	46.4	25.9
Dual earner and joint sharing	24.9	9.8	26.4	8.1	62.9	15.4	40.4
Dual earner and delegation	9.6	6.4	27.2	8.1	3.3	5.4	8.2
Male earner and female housework	18.6	21.8	6.4	30.3	8.6	25.3	11.3
Male earner and joint sharing	5.8	2.6	1.2	2.4	12.2	4.5	13.5
Female earner and female housework	3.5	9.0	3.2	4.1	1.4	3.0	0.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Type of personal autonomy	cf = 0.59						
Male individual	25.6	30.8	13.8	54.0	38.2	7.1	6.9
Female maternal	21.2	26.2	34.3	17.9	21.8	10.3	21.4
Male individual. female maternal	8.1	10.3	14.9	9.4	10.9	1.4	4.1
Balanced	12.2	10.6	17.2	15.8	27.3	0.9	6.6
None	32.9	22.1	19.8	2.9	1.8	80.3	61.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Integration with outside world	cf = 0.53						
Closure	17.3	31.6	4.9	9.4	2.3	44.6	5.2
Openness weak	39.3	47.9	22.4	47.5	20.0	48.3	40.3
Openness average	25.0	16.7	29.9	31.7	31.8	6.9	35.9
Openness strong	18.4	3.8	43.3	11.4	45.9	0.3	18.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

[a] Cf: contingency coefficient.

dynamic is reasserted for norms, since autonomy – which is significantly over-represented (87.2%) – is sought in relation to money, leisure, tastes and friends. Conjugal separateness implies strong gender differentiation both in the division of labour, where the housework is normally female whether the couple is dual or male earner, and in leisure activities. Men go out alone while women mainly carry

out activities with the children. This gender-differentiated autonomy is associated with a dynamic of closure: some 80% of these families are closed or are only weakly open to the outside world. This type is therefore similar to the parallel families put forward by Kellerhals et al. (1982, 2004).

Parallel autonomy is the result of traditional gender divisions more than of the parity and independence normally attributed to associative couples (Roussel, 1992). Strongly institutional marriages in more traditional societies also allow individuals some margin for autonomy, despite the fact that it is achieved through strong separation of routines (Wall, 1998). So we should distinguish between modern ideals of associative autonomy and that experienced in and through gender differentiation.

In fact, only 15.1% of families fall into the "*associative*" type, a designation which is close to that put forward both by Roussel and Kellerhals. One key feature is that the cohesion norm embodies explicit intentions of autonomy (97.4%). However, in practice, separateness is not the unique mark as in the case of parallel couples. On the contrary, in day-to-day life, practices are plural as they take many forms giving space to the conjugal-duo, individual self-expression, more individualized relationships between each parent and the children and also the whole nuclear family. A particular combination of traces is found here: mixed routines of conjugal cohesion alongside intentions to safeguard individual autonomy; relative parity in matters of personal autonomy, with an emphasis on female autonomy; and a strong presence of household work delegation strategies (in the domestic employee) associated with partners' dual employment. Intense openness is the predominant profile, revealing social integration and diversified patterns of sociability. The contrast with parallel autonomy is thus very clear.

A third type was identified as "*familial parallel*" (21.7%), as it combines practices of separation with fusional norms. The division of labour is similar to that of parallel families: families in which the wife does not work outside the home (30.3%) or in which she takes on (almost) all household duties even when she has a paid occupation (47.0%) are over-represented. As in the previous type, autonomy obtained through leisure activities is much more male than female and, globally gender inequalities override internal cohesion. However, in contrast with the former, these couples do emphasize a fusional norm of cohesion. They also have some family practices which are a little more fusional, namely leisure activities which are occasionally carried out jointly by the couple and the children. As far as integration is concerned there is also greater openness, as there is an oscillation between weak (47.5%) and occasional openness (31.7%).

On the other hand, the forms we have labelled "*confluent*" (12.4%) also combine fusional and autonomous practices, but cohesion is produced both through expressive and instrumental routines. Fusion applies not only to leisure and conversations but strongly also to the conjugal sharing of household tasks: 62.9% of these couples divide work by coupling dual breadwinning with the conjugal sharing

in the home. In fact, the instrumental sharing is quite important to characterize conjugal cohesion. In leisure, routines become more individualized since partners have both separate and joint activities. Finally, integration in the outside world is achieved through strong openness (45.9%). The confluent type embodies somewhat opposite features: autonomy and fusion in practices alongside a search for fusion in norms, the instrumental and the expressive, equality highlighted in the division of labour, and diversity of forms of building some personal autonomy for both men and women.

The fifth type, the "*bastion*", covers 19.7% of families and, as with the type suggested by Kellerhals et al. (2004), its key features are elements of fusion and closure. Fusion in leisure and conversations prevails in practices (63.5%), matching the intention to place money, tastes, leisure activities and friends under the control of the couple as a unit (85.8%). In contrast with the previous cases, there is no room for partners to engage in individual activities, but nonetheless separateness arises in the gender differentiated division of labour where the model of a dual breadwinner and female household work (46.4%) is over-average. A core feature is the tendency to closure, given the high percentage of closed families (44.6%). If we add together closure and weak openness we can see that 93.4% of these families fall into this category.

Finally, "*companionship fusion*" (16.3%), identifies those situations where a dynamic of fusional cohesion and openness are found together. Practices are mainly fusional and include both the expressive aspect (leisure, conversation) and the instrumental (household work). In gender roles, 40.4% involve dual breadwinning and sharing of household duties; and in 13.5% of cases, the man takes a significant part in household tasks even if the woman is not in paid labour. Fusion is also found as the cohesive norm, giving additional meaning to this strong fusional profile. In terms of integration, families tend towards a certain openness, even though 40% have only weak openness.

5 The impact of the life course and the multi-causality hypothesis

Having thus described the different forms of interaction, we must now discover the extent to which these types vary according to life course coordinates or, on the contrary, depend on education, class or age of respondents. Several studies have proved that conjugal functioning is influenced by educational and socio-economic inequalities, as well as by the trajectory of the couple and its present stage in family life (Kellerhals et al., 1982, 2004). However, we propose that rather than single statistical effects, which would have similar influence in all types of functioning, each one will be affected by specific variables depending on its particular features.

In order to measure the impact of our independent variables we carried out binary logistic regressions to determine the factors which predict each type of conjugal interaction that were recoded into dummy variables. Using three sets of variables – educational and socio-professional, age and life course characteristics – we aimed at building a hierarchical model where these blocks were entered in cumulative steps, in order to analyze predictive gains at each step. The first block examines the predictive capacity, for each type, of women's and men's educational level and of couples' social class.[3] The second block adds the age of women and men to the model. Finally, we included a wide set of variables related to conjugal biographies: the couple's formation trajectory (cohabitation and/or marriage) and the length of partnership, the fact of being a first partnership or a blended family, the partners' age at marriage/cohabitation, the duration of the pre-cohabiting relationship, the interval between the entry into marital life and the birth of the first child as well as the interval between the first and the last child, the age of both the youngest and the oldest child, in addition to the number of children living in the couple's household at present and the woman's employment trajectory since the beginning of the union.

Findings allow us to conclude that the predictive range of the model differs significantly, depending on the types of conjugal functioning. Furthermore, the most important result concerns the fact that some types are more affected by conjugal biographies than others, which confirms our initial hypothesis. While associative and parallel couples appear to be strongly influenced by life course indicators, other types are more dependent on education and social class (familial parallel and bastion types) and some (companionship fusion) seem even to escape both the constraints of structural variables and the variations of conjugal biographies (table 2).

Indeed, one significant outcome relates to the effect life course variables have on forms of conjugal autonomy, even though educational and class inequalities are also seen to have impact particularly on the associative type, which is definitely linked to higher levels of female educational attainment and to couples whose profile is more qualified professionally, especially if the woman has a continuous employment trajectory throughout her marital life. However, biographical variables add predictive power to the model, when compared to the results obtained for other types (table 2): entering into conjugal life at an older age and cohabiting instead of marrying seem to be well related to the emphasis on individual autonomy. As could be easily anticipated, those who have experienced more individualized conjugal biographies are more likely to advocate for autonomy.

On the other hand, the likelihood of building parallel interaction could only be predicted with difficulty by social class or educational capitals. Although it is

3 Which we divided into five groups (qualified professions, clerical employees, self-employed and small business; peasant and farm workers, industrial workers) in order to obtain categorical variables suitable for logistic regression procedures.

Table 2: Logistic regression analysis measuring impact of selected variables on each type of conjugal interaction (block entry binary logistic regressions) (n = 1755)

Dependent variables (dummy)	Parallel	Associative	Familial parallel	Confluent	Bastion	Companionship fusion
First block						
Women's educational level [i]	−0.10* [a]	0.61***	−0.56***	0.21***	−0.20***	−0.12
	(1.89) [b]	(11.29)	(7.11)	(5.48)	(11.65)	(1.32)
Men's educational level [i]	−0.36***	0.10	−0.01	−0.01	0.05	0.21***
	(8.79)	(0.18)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.11)	(8.89)
Social class of the couple						
Qualified professions [ii]	−0.21**	−1.24***	−0.83	0.70**	−0.45*	0.53
	(4.28)	(7.97)	(1.30)	(5.36)	(3.87)	(0.88)
Clerical employees	−1.12*	−2.05***	0.82	1.14***	−0.89*	0.05
	(1.54)	(9.41)	(1.22)	(14.98)	(2.76)	(0.01)
Self-employed and small businessmen	−1.27	−2.66***	0.37*	0.79**	0.28***	−0.18
	(0.45)	(5.80)	(2.70)	(7.55)	(4.67)	(0.06)
Peasants and farm workers	0.22	−1.36**	0.87**	0.82***	0.78***	−0.45
	(0.67)	(6.57)	(5.98)	(7.51)	(8.15)	(0.50)
Industrial workers	−1.17	−1.93***	0.63***	1.31	0.49***	0.47
	(1.80)	(4.04)	(7.14)	(2.16)	(6.34)	(0.53)
Nagelkerke R^2	0.07	0.20	0.08	0.03	0.12	0.02
Second block						
Women's age	−0.12**	−0.04	0.10***	−0.14**	0.062	−0.12*
	(6.92)	(1.18)	(6.56)	(3.40)	1.115	(3.14)
Men's age	0.06***	−0.03	0.04*	0.02	−.022	0.03
	(7.14)	(0.96)	(3.44)	(0.54)	909	(1.22)
Nagelkerke R^2	0.11	0.21	0.10	0.04	0.13	0.03
Predictive gain	4%	1%	2%	3%	1%	1%

Continuation on the followin page

Dependent variables (dummy)	Parallel	Associative	Familial parallel	Confluent	Bastion	Companionship fusion
Third block						
Years of dating	–0.05	–0.01	–0.06***	–0.05	–0.01	0.02
	(1.40)	(0.01)	(5.71)	(1.10)	(0.07)	(0.20)
Women's age at marriage/cohabitation	–0.08**	0.08***	0.02	0.12	–0.03	0.01
	(5.77)	(9.43)	(0.18)	(2.20)	(0.31)	(0.01)
Couple formation trajectory						
Always cohabitation	1.08***	0.55**	0.10	–1.28	–0.01	–1.57
	(9.21)	(2.69)	(2.60)	(1.51)	(0.01)	(0.02)
Initial cohabitation followed by marriage	0.54**	0.42*	–(0.06)	–0.46	–0.27	–0.04
	(3.75)	(2.03)	0.03	(1.84)	(0.98)	(0.02)
Always marriage	–0.27	0.17	0.44	0.21*	0.16**	0.20
	(1.01)	(0.36)	(2.45)	(3.87)	(3.23)	(0.57)
Years of interval between marriage and 1st. child's birth	0.01	0.05	–0.03	0.12*	–0.01	0.02
	(0.00)	(0.21)	(0.30)	(2.21)	(0.03)	(0.11)
Years of interval between 1st and last births	–0.01	–0.03*	0.03*	–0.11**	0.01	–0.03
	(0.01)	(2.34)	(1.36)	(3.45)	(0.09)	(1.05)
Duration of conjugality	–0.01	0.11*	0.13	0.18	–0.03	0.01
	(0.11)	(1.89)	(1.57)	(0.46)	(0.01)	(0.00)
Number of children living at home	0.30***	–0. 08	0.11	–0.39***	0.02	0.04
	(6.70)	(0.24)	(0.93)	(5.91)	(0.03)	(0.06)
Age of the youngest child	0.01	0.03	–0.26	–0.12*	0.13***	0.05
	(0.06)	(1.11)	(1.34)	(3.95)	(9.45)	(0.08)
Age of the oldest child	–0.03	0.05	0.01	0.16**	–0.11***	–0.01
	(0.27)	(0.97)	(0.06)	(6.65)	(10.56)	(0.07)
Blended families[iii]	0.15***	0.78*	–0.19	0.15	–1.19*	–0.36
	(4.39)	(1.08)	(0.05)	(0.02)	(2.13)	(0.15)
Women's employment trajectory since entry into conjugality[iv]	0.12	0.65***	–0.19***	0.32	–0.16**	0.23
	(1.82)	(14.98)	(4.71)	(0.43)	(2.89)	(2.34)
Nagelkerke R^2	0.20	0.28	0.12	0.07	0.16	0.04
Predictive gain	9%	8%	2%	3%	3%	1%
Overall Model Chi-Square	$X^2 = 95,4$ DF = 24 p < .000	$X^2 = 174,74$ DF = 24 p < .000	$X^2 = 85,73$ DF = 24 p < .000	$X^2 = 44,29$ DF = 24 p < .05	$X^2 = 90,89$ DF = 24 p < .000	X^2 = n.s.

*** < 0.001 **p < 0.01 *p < 0.05; a Regression coefficients; b Wald statistics

i 1) No schooling; 2) Basic; 3) Secondary; 4) Mid-level course; incomplete degree; 5) Degree completed or higher.

ii Entrepreneurs and managers; Intellectual and scientific professions; Technical and intermediate professions.

iii 1) blended; 2) not blended.

iv 1) Never at work; 2) Work at 1 or 2 moments; 3) Always at work.

linked to low qualified couples, age and especially life course predictors appear to have a particularly important effect. Cohabiting couples who stayed unmarried after several years of marital union, couples who have several children living at home and those who had remarriage trajectories more often engage in parallel interaction. Conjugal cohabitation or remarriage, if they occur in low qualified social contexts, seem to generate a weak marital integration which is revealed by the couple's daily routine separation.

The main conclusion to be drawn from our data should therefore stress the connection between the deinstitutionalization of conjugal trajectories and marital autonomy, which is the case of both associative and parallel couples. Flexible biographies, which may be more distant from the classical family life cycle, encourage individuals to stress their autonomy, even though its features (more or less modern) seem to be underpinned by class contexts as highlighted by regression procedures.

Education and social class have some influence on some of the types, particularly the bastion and the familial parallel, which associate with the same low qualified groups: from industrial and clerical workers to owners of small businesses. From the point of view of life course variables, the predictive capacity is weaker. Even so, both types associate with women who have non-continuous employment trajectories and data also suggests that bastion couples are more likely to have younger children. The interweaving of gender differentiation, fusional practices and closure, which characterizes the bastion type, may to some extent depend on specific family moments that are more demanding in terms of the family work-load. Low female educational levels, when linked to older women and peasants or farm working couples, seem to promote more daily separateness within the couple, which is the case of the familial parallel type.

The remaining types – companionship fusion and confluent – are overall less predictable. Companionship fusion does not even fit to the model, thus pointing to the relative autonomy of family interaction. It may also be reflecting the historical construction of the fusional couple as the legitimate model of conjugality (Ariès, 1973; Shorter, 1977). Fusional and companionship-based ideals may therefore have become transversally distributed across society. The confluent type, also centred on fusional norms and gender sharing even if practices are more autonomy-based, is slightly more predictable particularly when the life course variables are added to the model. It appears more often among women who have fewer and older children and whose offspring were born at intervals of several years.

In sum, statistical findings enabled us to corroborate the multi-causality hypothesis. A second finding relates to the effect of life course variables. Their importance is quite obvious when related to associative or parallel couples. More than fusion, autonomy seems to be connected to particular patterns of deinstitutionalized conjugal trajectories. Education and class seem more important to predict

gender-segregated forms of fusional functioning whereas companionship fusional couples are not at all predicted by either set of variables.

6 Discussion: the foundations of conjugal functioning

In looking back over the ground we have covered, we may conclude that the hypothesis of family diversity fits in perfectly with contemporary Portuguese society. Like in Switzerland (Kellerhals et al., 2004; Widmer et al., 2003), family modernization implies pluralisation more than it promotes sequential types which would progressively substitute each other. From this perspective, our approach focusing on both practices and ideals has revealed not only that families are plural, but that there are different and complex ways of building autonomous or fusional couples. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, it enabled us to unravel the complicities between the "I" and the "We", thus perceiving the distance between norms and practices of conjugal cohesion, which is a central feature of our typology. As we aimed to demonstrate, the normative cleavage between fusion and autonomy is central to examine family interaction, but even more so if practices, involving routines and gendered forms of organization, are also part of the analysis. Although a fusional norm is embraced in nearly 70% of the cases, daily practices are far more complex and variegated. The common goal of fusion branches off into specific variants according to whether practices are fusional or mingled, in other words juxtaposing togetherness and separateness, or whether gender roles are little or highly differentiated.

The truth is that the purely fusional couple, of which the most excellent example is companionship fusion, is also that less affected by external variables, perhaps because it has greater proximity to the ideal of companionship which is a part of the historical making of the modern family. A movement from institution to romantic and democratic forms of relationship seems to be transversal to different social groups in contemporary Portuguese society. As a result, the norm of conjugal fusion appears as dominant, thus, pointing to the erosion of strongly institutional and gendered families. An example of these transformative dynamics appears quite clearly in the case of familial parallel couples where fusional unity with the spouse exists as a wish, but still within the framework of an institutional marriage. This privatization- and even romantization -movement developing at a rapid pace in contemporary Portugal may, in fact, be the key factor underlying the plurality of "fusional" types, whose differences should be nonetheless underscored. The making of fusional couples has revealed to be highly dependent upon the degree to which joint routines are permeated by gender differentiation and by dynamics of separateness – having separate activities and conversations with the children may be of great relevance, for instance.

The importance of setting up a typology which differentiates norms and practices also applies to autonomy-based couples, which represent a third of our sample. Both the associative and the parallel type lay emphasis on norms of individual autonomy. However, they are quite different in terms of their routine organization. Strong separateness and gender differentiation prevail in parallel couples. In a way, this type is the linear opposite of companionship fusion, as it matches practices with norms. In associative couples, on the contrary, practices are linked to the weaving of fusion and autonomy. Individuality is emphasized but strong togetherness in partnership is also expressed through the intensity of conjugal communication and joint leisure activities.

Emphasis on autonomy may therefore be related to different conditions and features. However, as anticipated, both types are particularly linked to life course factors, namely those which, such as cohabitation or remarriage, identify more deinstitutionalized conjugal biographies. As more individual and conjugal life courses are individualized, the more a couple is likely to privilege norms of autonomy. Therefore, a biographical approach to family interaction may help us to understand further the underlying motives of conjugal autonomy, beyond the sole impact of education or social class or even that of macro-transformation towards individualization. Conjugal autonomy is also dependent on these variables, but it will tend to assume different forms in diverse social contexts. As we have seen, associative couples may share with parallel couples some biographical features, but they are much more qualified than the latter.

In the overall reckoning, if we consider the relation between autonomy, life course variables and modernization processes, we see that the complexity of autonomy-based dynamics reflects the outcome of changes which have taken place in the family and trends which show the contemporary deinstitutionalization and flexibilization of conjugal trajectories. As a number of authors point out (Elias, 1993; Giddens, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), both movements — whether for greater emphasis on autonomy or on freer biographies — mark the distance travelled from the more traditional pattern of the institutional family, based on strong gender differentiation, the enduring nature of family ties, group reproduction, and normative codification of behaviour. In both cases, we are witnessing that which we may interpret as the modernization of family life. However, modernization itself seems to produce a complex link between changes of biographical flows and the building up of conjugal autonomy.

7 Conclusion

Our analytical aims were to identify the various types of conjugal functioning that coexist in contemporary Portuguese society and, furthermore, to examine the ways

through which pluralisation is emphasizing the impact of life course, socio-economic or generational variables. Beyond the hypothesis of the diversity of conjugal families, we also assumed that focusing both on practices and ideals would reveal the key traces of family interaction. Finally, a third question was related to the explaining of this family diversity. We anticipated that family types are better predicted by type-specific variables rather than being the homogeneous product of similar coordinates. In sum, to explain the diversity of families and evaluate the real effect of biographical variables, we sought to look at the factors which affect each type of functioning differently.

Conducting an extensive analysis of family life has enabled us to achieve an overall view of what is happening within the conjugal family with children in contemporary Portugal. Our results show a considerable plurality of ways of living together as a couple and as a family, making up a final scenario which, like in Switzerland is considerably variegated. We identified six types, none of them statistically dominant. Even though our results are not truly comparable to those of Swiss researchers, namely because our sample privileged couples with children, some of the types – the associative, the parallel, the bastion and the companionship fusion – share common features with Kellerhal's and Widmer's typology.

Secondly, it is important to emphasize that findings point to the complex features of most of the types, which is a main point of our typology even if the contrast between norms of fusion and autonomy still establishes a key differentiation pattern from the start. Apart from the parallel and companionship fusion types, the first centred on separateness and the second on fusion and conjugal sharing, the other articulate autonomy and togetherness in specific ways. Familial parallel families combine a strong sense of family fusion with separateness in daily routines, as well as occasional togetherness (mainly family-centred leisure activities). Bastion families are extremely fusional, both normatively and in practice, but they introduce gender differentiated autonomous practices (in instrumental activities related to housework, caring and paid work). Confluent families stress the importance of fusion as the interaction norm but safeguard individual autonomy in daily routines; togetherness in instrumental activities, leisure and communication is combined with some conjugal separateness in goings-out. Finally, the associative type weaves autonomy norms and individualized practices that strongly emphasize the woman's autonomy with conjugal togetherness, as the couple arises as a key subgroup of daily leisure activities.

As we anticipated, findings enabled us to corroborate the multi-causality hypothesis. The underlying social processes promoting the diversity of family interactions are also considerably plural; that is, each type of family is influenced by specific factors whether from socio-economic context or life course determinants, or enhancing the relative autonomy which can be ascribed to private behaviour.

Generally, autonomy-based types are linked to educational and socio-professional capitals but also depend on life course factors. Even though anchored in class contexts, conjugal autonomy has been shown to have a biographical foundation, which points to the effect of deinstitutionalized conjugal trajectories on the couple's internal dynamics. Contrastingly, fusional types, particularly the companionship fusion, appear as more widespread and, thus, less dependent on external factors. In the overall reckoning, the anticipated connection between fusional functioning and joint conjugal biographies cannot be drawn from our findings. Life course variables were revealed to be more significantly tied up with autonomy based conjugal functioning.

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