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**Frequency of conflict, conflict behaviour and
relationship stability**

DRAFT

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1 Introduction

Conflicts are a universal and normal phenomenon in social life (Dahrendorf 1979). As a consequence, marriages or intimate relationships are not only places of harmony, love and mutual support without any conflict, but, as well as other areas in society, places of fights for restricted resources, of conflicting interests and social tension. Some people think that conflict among partners and in families is even more intense and serious than in other social areas.

Yet, the state of research on conflict in relationships is assessed very differently. There are three positions: Some researchers complain about the lack of theory of conflict in relationships (Tyrell 2001). However, other researchers state that conflict and communication are often examined. In a recently published handbook of communication in families, Sillars et al. (2004: 413) argue: "Conflict is one of the most (if not the most) studied and discussed subjects in the area of family communication". Conflict is examined so frequently that the sight of the positive aspects of interaction in families and between spouses is lost. Finally, in another handbook of family sociology, Farrington and Chertok (1993) state that conflict theory in family sociology has already exceeded its peak and is hardly of interest any more.

In this paper, we want to investigate whether and how conflict intensity affects relationship stability. By "conflict" we mean "an interpersonal process that occurs whenever the actions of one person interfere with the actions of another" (Peterson 1983: 365). With this definition, relationship conflict characterizes a certain aspect of the interaction between the partners. A number of theories state that relationship stability depends on interaction processes. For example, the exchange theory argues that relationship stability depends not only on exit costs or the attractiveness of alternative living arrangements, but also on how men and women evaluate their partnership and how they interact. Following this theory, conflicts between the partners constitute an important theoretical element of an explanation why some relationships are dissolved and others not.

In sociology, research on divorce and partnership dissolution is dominated by

studies that stress sociodemographic explanatory factors or look at broad measures of marital quality. Only a few studies look closer at single dimensions of couples' interaction in order to better identify the mechanisms of couples' dissolution. This is the aim of this paper. But in order to understand how the frequency of conflicts is related to stability, we also examine the social conditions that might moderate the link between these two factors.

2 Theory and hypotheses

Previous research has related partnership conflicts to partnership stability in different ways. First, partnership conflicts are seen as one dimension of the broader concept of marital quality. The latter, in turn, is assumed to be an important predictor of union stability. An example of a multidimensional scale of marital quality that also includes partner conflicts is the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier 1976), where partner conflicts are not seen as a single explanatory factor. They are correlated with a number of other characteristics of the partnership and are only one indicator to assess an index to measure overall marital quality.

Several scholars have criticized the use of such a multidimensional concept of marital quality. For example, Norton (1983) argues that the Dyadic Adjustment Scale is not able to identify certain marital dysfunctions, and causal patterns between single indicators are ignored. In line with such criticism, Glenn (1990) differentiates between an "individual feelings" and an "adjustment" school, because he wants to underline that subjective and interactive aspects of marital quality should be investigated separately. As a consequence, partnership conflict has to be regarded as a concept different from marital quality (Fincham/Bradbury 1987). Whereas relationship quality refers to relationship satisfaction, partnership conflict is conceived as a feature of partners' interaction.

The assumption that partnership conflicts and relationship quality are distinct elements of a theoretical model of relationship stability leads to the question how they are causally linked to each other. Two models are relevant here, one is derived from the exchange framework and specified by Lewis/Spanier (1979) and the other is the

vulnerability-stress-adaptation model of marriage (Karney/Bradbury 1995: 23). Both models predict an indirect relationship between pair conflicts and the stability of their relationship.

The central causal line in the model by Lewis/Spanier (1979: 282) is expressed by the hypothesis “The greater the rewards from spousal interaction, the greater the marital quality”. The level of conflict is directly related to the amount of rewards from spousal interaction (Figure 1).

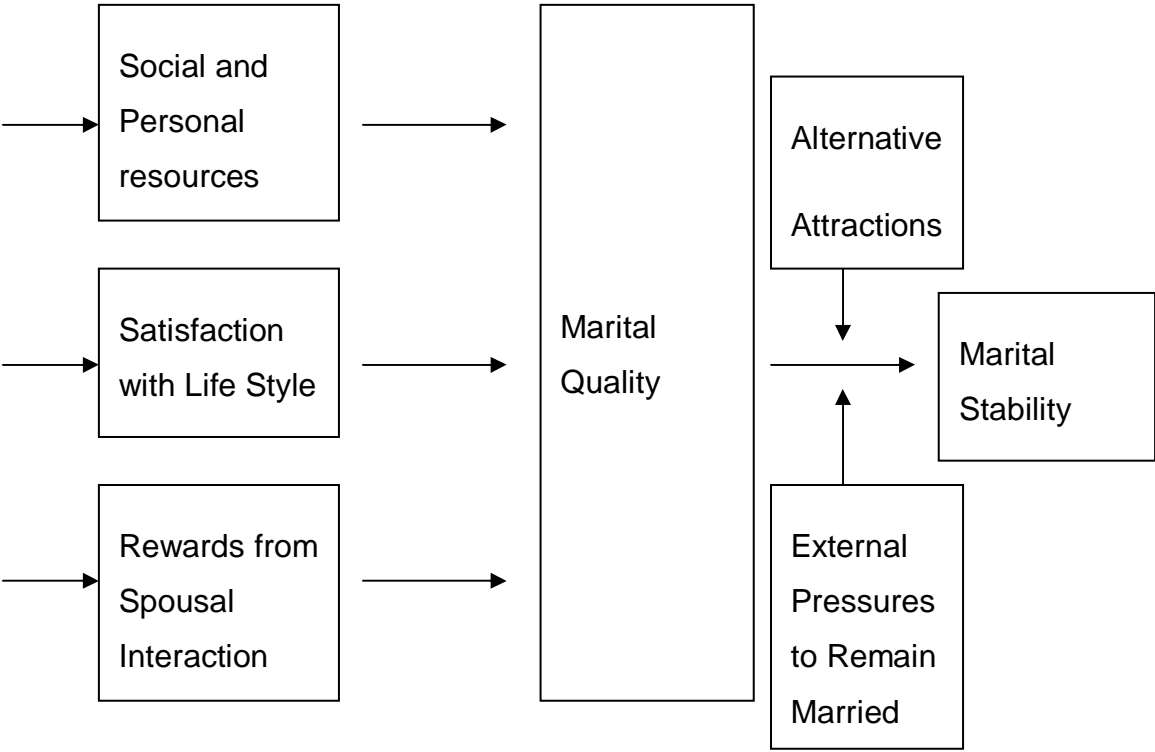


Figure 1: The Exchange Model by Lewis/Spanier (1979)

As well as the model by Lewis/Spanier, the so-called *vulnerability-stress-adaptation model of marriage* (Karney/Bradbury 1995: 23) assumes that marital stability is dependent on marital quality, which means marital satisfaction. There are reciprocal effects between marital quality and adaptive processes as a further

element of the model. As one can categorize conflict as a kind of adaptive process, the model implicates no direct relationship between conflict and stability, but an indirect one where conflict intensity affects satisfaction which in turn affects partnership stability (Figure 2).

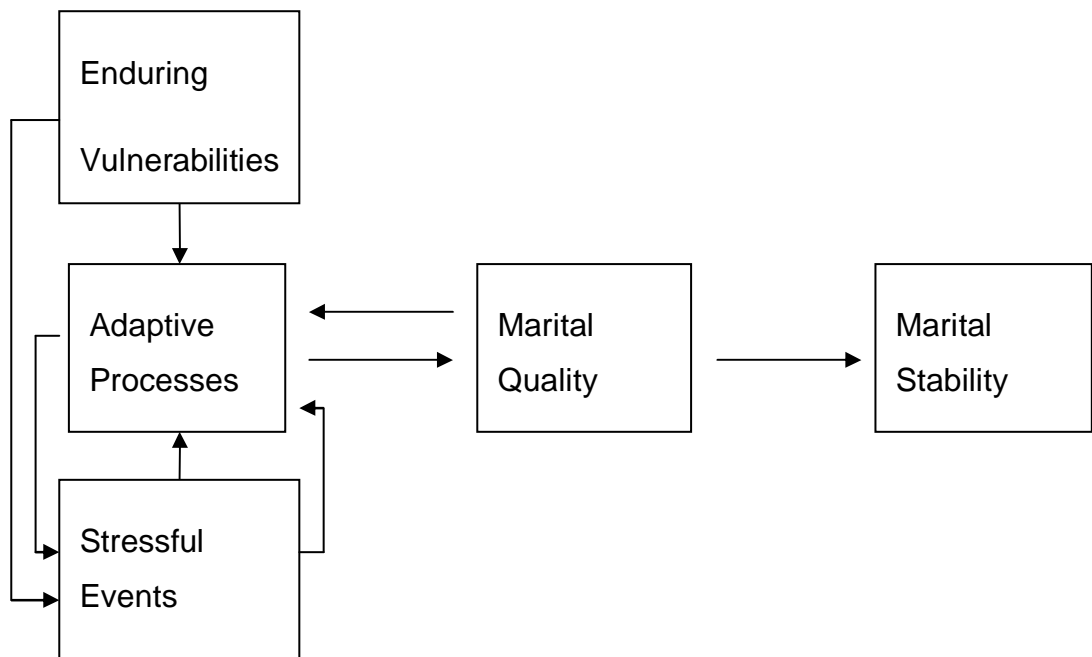


Figure 2: The vulnerability-stress-adaptation model (Karney / Bradbury 1995)

Such an indirect association is also plausible because conflicts do not always have negative consequences for the partnership. Conflicts are not inherently good or bad and therefore not a definite risk factor for relationship stability (Brandtstädter/Felser 2003: 29; Gottman/Notarius 2000). Therefore, a first hypothesis is: *There is no direct effect of the level of conflict on relationship stability* (“Conflict hypothesis”, H 1).

In order to further investigate the role of conflicts for partnership stability we look more closely at the direction and the strength of conflict effects. Especially the exchange theory would predict that conflicts reduce partnership satisfaction and hence partnership stability. But conflicts can also initiate a successful adaptation

process leading to more satisfaction and thus stability. However, a precondition for such a “growth through conflict” (Braiker/Kelley 1979: 160 ff.) is a certain type of conflict behaviour, meaning the way partners deal with their conflicts. If their conflict behaviour is positive and problem-solving the level of conflict should not reduce relationship satisfaction and stability (Gottman 1993): *The more positive the conflict behaviour, the less likely conflict intensity reduces partnership satisfaction* (“conflict management hypothesis”, H 2)

From exchange theory the notion of the “unhappy stable marriages” was derived (e.g. Heaton/Albrecht 1991). The argument is that the costs of a dissolution or separation can be so high that even a very low quality of the partnership cannot exceed them. In other words: in case of high exit costs even a high degree of dissatisfaction with the partnership and many conflicts do not entail separation. When exit costs are high, only those who are extremely unsatisfied will separate. The partnership is like a steam boiler which needs a lot of internal pressure to go to pieces: *The higher the exit costs, the less the conflict level and the satisfaction with the partnership affect relationship stability* (“steam boiler hypothesis”; H 3). Exit costs are higher in case of a marriage compared to nonmarital cohabitation, and with children or a common household compared to living in two separate households. Figures 3 and 4 demonstrate that not only the size or level of the conflict effect but also the pattern of the curve should depend on the dissolution costs. In case of high exit costs only very dissatisfied partners are likely to separate, in case of low exit costs a broader range of dissatisfied partners undergo a considerable dissolution risk. Even if conflicts are possibly not directly related to partnership stability, couples that are exposed to high dissolution costs can be expected to have to experience many conflicts before they separate. If dissolution costs are low, a few conflicts might suffice to leave the partnership.

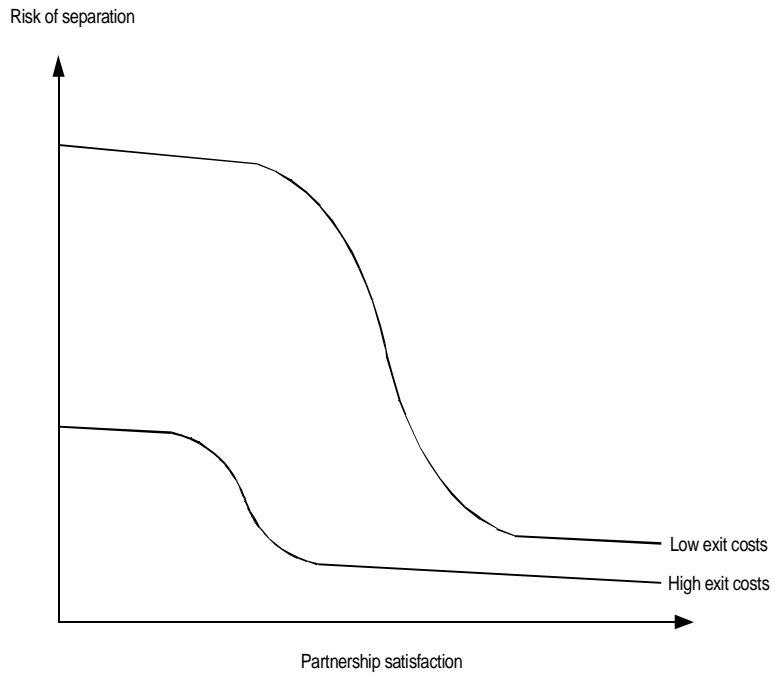


Figure 3: The effect of partnership satisfaction on the dissolution risk for couples with low and with high exit costs

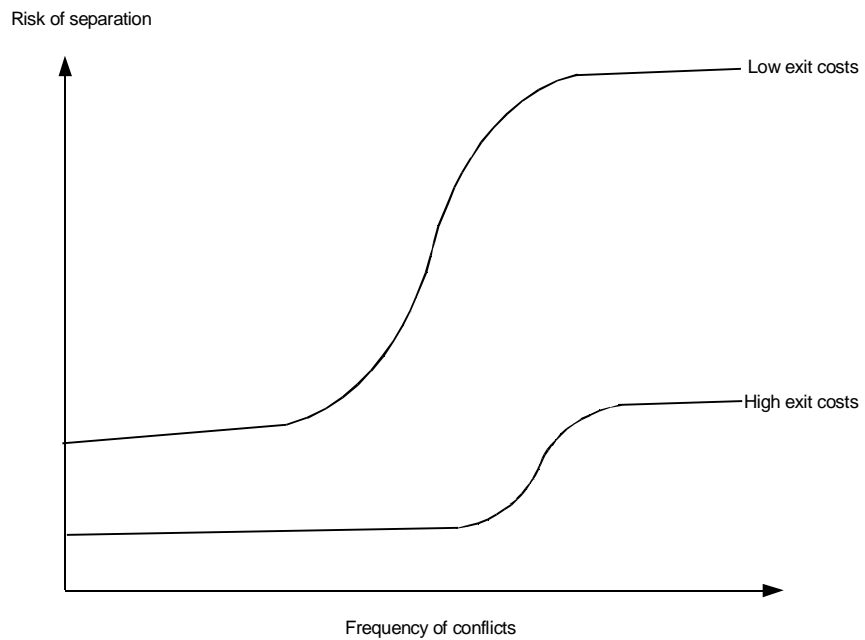


Figure 4: The effect of frequency of conflicts on the dissolution risk for couples with low and with high exit costs

3 Data and methods

The following analyses are based on a pooled dataset which contains data from the project "Partnerships and Marriages of Adults or Adolescents in Cologne" (PEJEK) and the "Panel Analysis of Intimate Relationships and Family Dynamics" (PAIRFAM). The Cologne project was performed in two waves. The first wave took place between February and March 2005, the second wave was carried out between January and March 2007. Overall, we achieved interviews with 228 couples (456 individuals) in the first wave, from which we were still able to interview 160 couples (320 individuals) in the second wave. The PAIRFAM panel was conducted in three waves in four German cities (Mannheim, Bremen, Chemnitz and Munich), beginning the first wave in autumn 2005 (August – December), continuing with the second wave between March and June 2006 and ending with the third and last wave at the end of the same year (October – December 2006). In the first wave, 215 couples participated and we were able to interview 175 couples at the end of the project. Finally, our analysis is based on 335 couples that were interviewed at wave 1 and at least one follow-up and from whom it is known whether the partnership broke up or not. All samples were drawn from the registration offices and stratified according to the age groups 15 to 17, 25 to 27 and 35 to 37 years.

3.1 Measurement

The pooling of the datasets across the five cities increases the statistical power of our analyses. But the questionnaires of both projects were not completely identical, e.g. the number and wording of the items differed. As a consequence, the construction of the variables is rather complicated.

Partnership status: Whether or not a person lives in a partnership is determined in PEJEK by the following question "Do you actually have a partner? Having a partner does not necessarily mean that you are living together with your

partner in the same accommodation”¹. In PAIRFAM, all respondents were asked “What is your marital status?” Then a list was handed over that includes 16 combinations of marital and partnership status².

Partnership dissolution: The Cologne study asked directly whether the respondent at wave 2 was still in a partnership with a certain person or not³. In PAIRFAM, however, as there are two time periods during which a breakup might occur (between w1 and w2 or between w2 and w3), only those separations are counted that occurred for couples who had a relationship during the first wave. Respondents indicated that the state „living in a partnership“ or “married” does not hold anymore. From all 335 couples 81 (24%) dissolved until the second wave. Dissolutions occurred less often for married than for unmarried couples (Figure 5).

¹ “Haben Sie zur Zeit einen festen Lebenspartner/eine feste Lebenspartnerin, d.h. nicht notwendigerweise, dass Sie mit diesem Partner/dieser Partnerin in einer Wohnung zusammenleben.”

² Welchen Familienstand haben Sie? In Partnerschaft lebend wurde anschließend definiert als: Verheiratet – Mit Ehepartner zusammenlebend/ Verheiratet – Einer von uns wohnt überwiegend woanders/ Verheiratet, getrennt lebend – Wohne mit meinem neuen Partner zusammen/ Verheiratet, getrennt lebend – Mein neuer Partner und ich wohnen (überwiegend) in getrennten Wohnungen/ Geschieden – Wohne mit meinem neuen Partner zusammen/ Geschieden – Mein neuer Partner und ich wohnen (überwiegend) in getrennten Wohnungen/ Verwitwet – Wohne mit meinem neuen Partner zusammen/ Verwitwet – Mein neuer Partner und ich wohnen (überwiegend) in getrennten Wohnungen/ Ledig – Wohne mit meinem Partner zusammen/ Ledig – Mein Partner und ich wohnen (überwiegend) in getrennten Wohnungen/ Eingetragene Lebensgemeinschaft – Mit Partner zusammenlebend / Eingetragene Lebensgemeinschaft – Mein Partner und ich wohnen (überwiegend) in getrennten Wohnungen /

³ „Zunächst hätte ich gerne gewußt, ob Sie noch mit < PERSON> zusammen sind?“

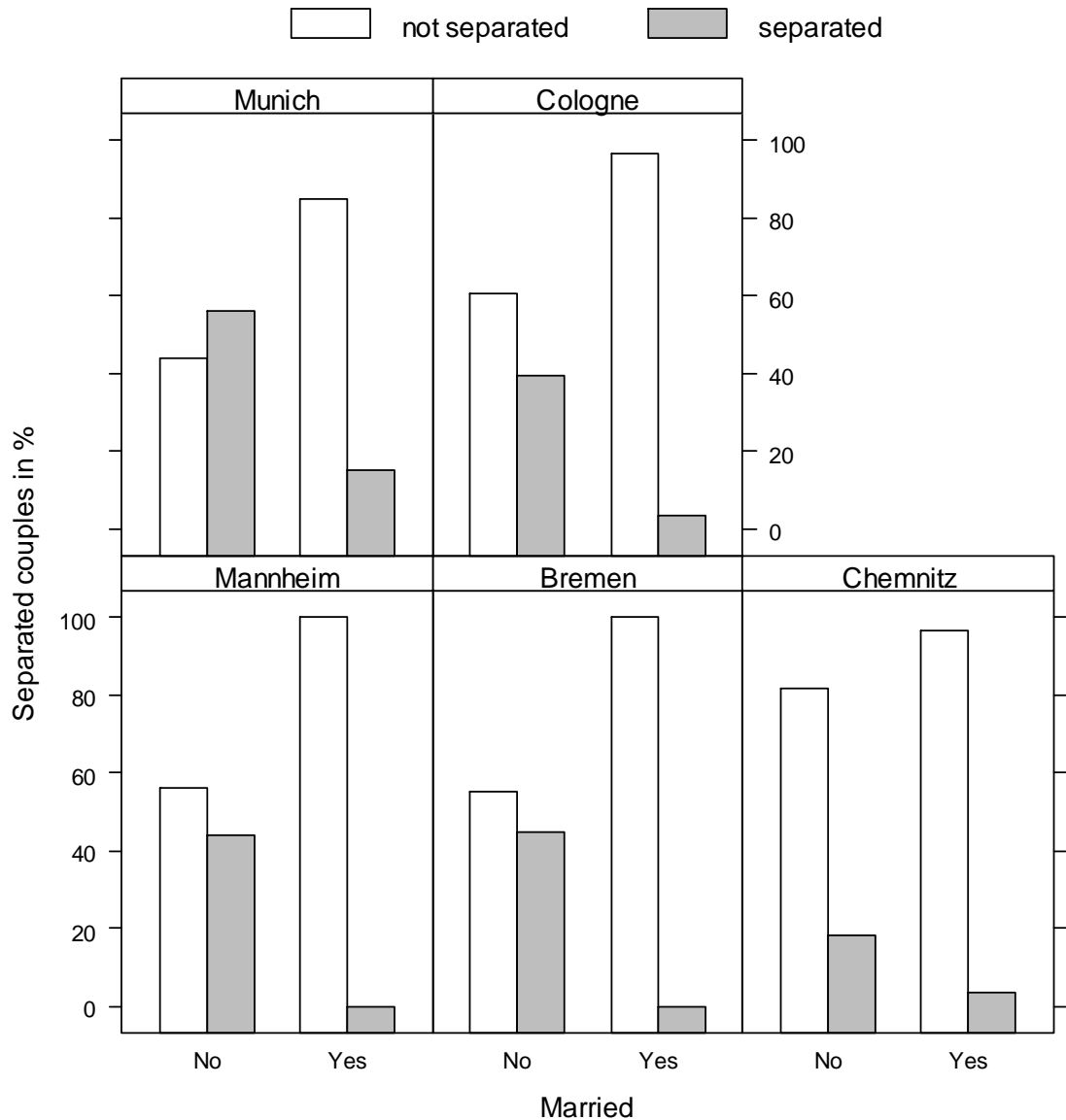


Figure 5: Proportion of separated couples by marital status and place of residence

Partnership satisfaction. To measure partnership satisfaction the respondents were asked “How satisfied are you with your relationship in general?” (not at all = 1 to very satisfied = 5).

Partnership conflicts: In PAIRFAM, partnership conflicts are measured by the following question: “In every partnership there are issues, partners quarrel about.

How often did you recently quarrel about the following issues⁴ (never = 1 to very often = 5): (common) recreational activities, household division of labour, financial issues, school or work related issues, sexuality and friends. In PEJEK, the question was: „I will name you a number of issues people can quarrel about. How often do conflicts arise concerning...” (never = 1 to very often = 5). As the frequency of conflicts is a property of a partnership, an index was constructed by summing up the two conflict levels of each partner. Similar lists of conflict issues have been used by Hahlweg (1996), Brandtstädter und Felser (2003) and Hill (2004). Figure 6 shows that the level of conflicts is highest with respect to recreational activities and the household division of labour. A lower level of conflict we find in case of school/work issues, finance, sexuality and friends. Absolute differences between the partners with respect to the reported frequencies (DIF) of conflict are lowest for the issue of recreational activities and highest for issues that are related to school or work. But obviously, there is not a single outstanding conflict issue – a result that was also revealed by Wagner/Weiß (2005) in a more detailed study that was based on the Cologne subsample.

⁴ „In jeder Partnerschaft gibt es Themen, über die man unterschiedlicher Meinung ist. Wie häufig kam es in letzter Zeit in Ihrer Partnerschaft über folgenden Dinge zu Meinungsverschiedenheiten?“ (nie bis sehr häufig). Partnerschaftliches Konfliktverhalten: Kompromiss eingehen, zeige Partner, dass ich ihn mag, entschuldige mich, wenn ich Unfreundliches gesagt/getan habe, bin zuversichtlich, dass wir die Sache lösen werden, nach der Diskussion eine stärkere Verbundenheit mit dem Partner/der Partnerin spüren als vorher. Geben Sie eigene Fehler zu und übernehmen die Verantwortung für das Problem? Überlegen Sie sich hilfreiche Ideen oder Lösungen?

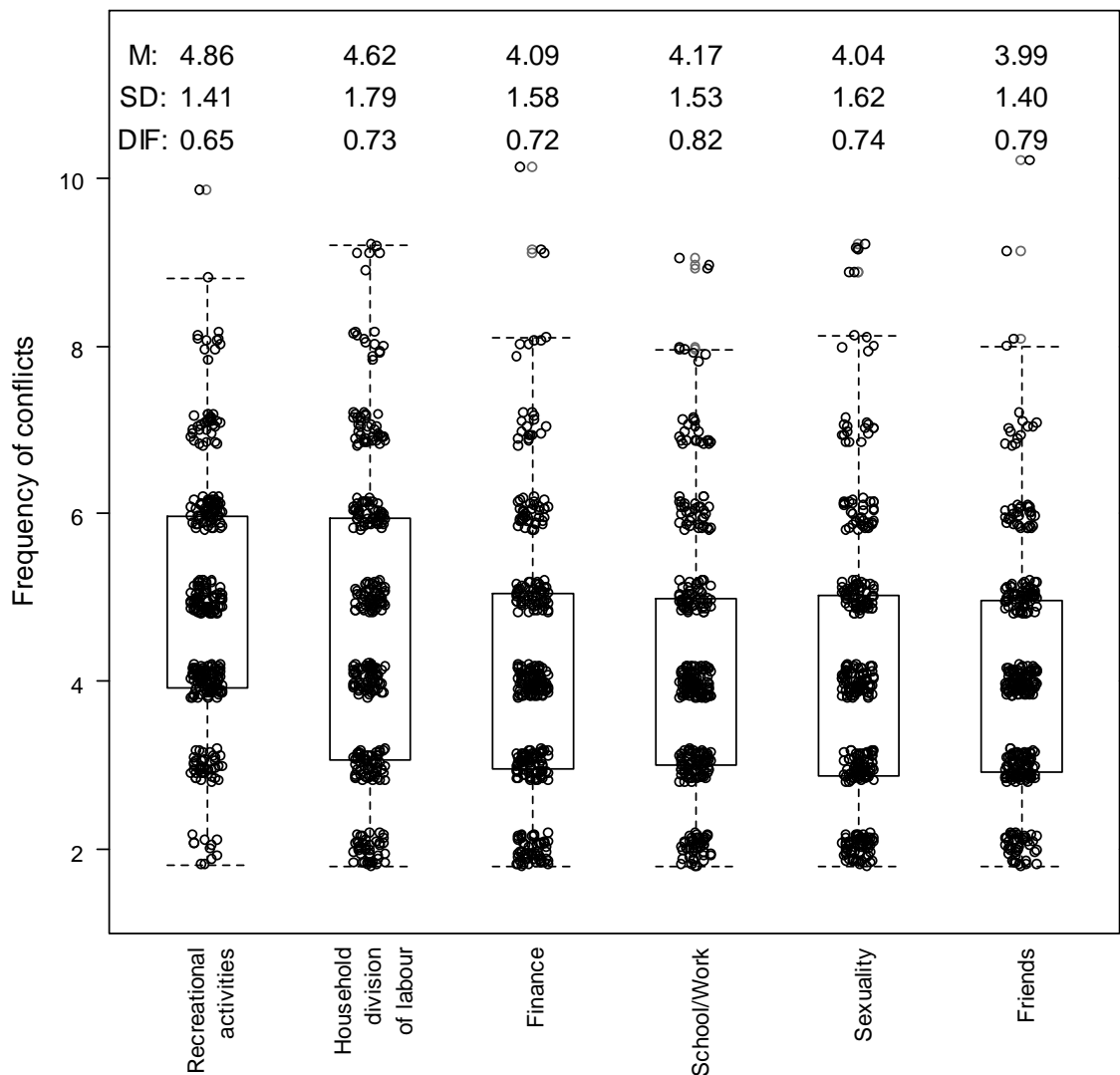


Figure 6: Distribution of frequency of conflict for different conflict issues (M: mean; SD: standard deviation; DIF: absolute difference of the two partner scores)

Conflict behavior. Conflict behaviour was measured according to three “conflict styles” (see also the Conflict Inventory by Margolin in Hahlweg 1996): positive conflict behaviour (e.g. excuse for being unfriendly, to admit a mistake), aggressive conflict behaviour (e.g. insults, reproaches, threats), withdrawal (e.g. resignation, leaving in a huff). In PEJEK the question was: “There are different ways to deal with each other in

a conflict. I am going to read out a number of statements. Tell me for each statement how often you act in the way described in the statement.” (never=1 to very often=5). In PAIRFAM the respondents should choose the conflict issue where disagreement occurs most often (Reichle et al. 2005). Then, the respondents should identify from a listing of items how they typically react when such a disagreement occurs, e.g. compromise, show that one likes each other, being confident that the problem can be solved (nearly never = 1 to very often = 5)⁵. As both projects used two different scales with different numbers of items we computed the average score. In the following, we restrict our analysis to positive conflict behaviour.

As indicators of the dissolution or exit costs we use the marital status, the presence of children and a variable that captures whether the partners are living in a common household. Table 1 gives descriptive information for all variables that are used in the empirical analyses, Table 5 (Appendix) shows the bivariate correlations between the variables.

⁵ in Pairfam: „Bitte wählen Sie jetzt das Themas aus Frage 5 aus (das Konfliktthema), über das Sie am häufigsten Meinungsverschiedenheiten haben, also die größte Zahl angekreuzt haben (sollten dies mehrere Bereiche sein, entscheiden Sie sich bitte für einen). ... Wie reagieren Sie üblicherweise, wenn Sie über dieses Thema unterschiedlicher Meinung sind?“ (1: fast nie, 5: sehr oft)

Table 1: Descriptive measures

	N	Missings		Min	Max	X	SD	Skewness
		N	%					
Separation	335	0	0	0	1	0,24	–	–
Mean age of the pair (at the time of interview)	333	2	0,60	14,5	47,0	29,55	7,63	-0,34
Satisfaction with partnership	325	10	2,99	4,0	10,0	8,89	1,22	-1,23
Frequency of conflicts	322	13	3,88	13,0	46,0	25,77	5,79	0,39
Positive conflict behaviour	313	22	6,57	4,8	10,0	7,68	1,01	-0,15
Children (1=yes; 0=no)	335	0	0,00	0,0	1,0	0,39	–	–
Common household (1=yes; 0=no)	333	2	0,6	0,0	1,0	0,69	–	–
Marital status (1=married; 0=unmarried)	333	2	0,60	0,0	1,0	0,41	–	–

3.2 Analysis of panel attrition

Assessing the quality of our samples is important for generalizing the results. Panel attrition has been tested according to a number of variables that are included in the subsequent analysis (Table 2). Obviously, panel attrition was high in Munich und Cologne. Here, for 29% and 30%, respectively, of the couples who took part in the first wave compared to 13% to 19% in the cities of Mannheim, Bremen and Chemnitz, no valid measure of the partnership status exists. The same is true for respondents who are not married or have no children. But these effects are small and not significant. No sample selectivity has been observed as to age, partnership satisfaction, the level of conflicts. However, in cases where complete information is available conflict management is significantly better.

Table 2: Determinants of Panel Attrition

	City					Marriage		Children		Age	Satis- faction	Frequency of conflicts	Positive conflict management
	M	B	C	Mu	Co	No	Yes	No	Yes				
Couple's status missing at wave 2/3	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	\bar{x}	\bar{x}	\bar{x}	\bar{x}
No	87	85	82	71	70	72	81	74	79	29	9	26	8
Yes	13	15	19	29	30	28	19	26	21	28	9	25	7
N	54	39	81	41	228	274	167	278	165	443	433	425	418
P	0,02					0,05		0,30		0,16	0,45	0,61	0,03
	Test of equal proportions									t-Test			

4 Results

4.1 Do conflicts reduce partnership stability?

Our general conflict hypothesis states that partnership stability does not decrease when the level of conflict increases. Empirical analyses reveal that there is indeed no direct effect of the conflict level on partnership stability. Obviously, the level of conflict is not higher for those partnerships that separated (Figure 7).

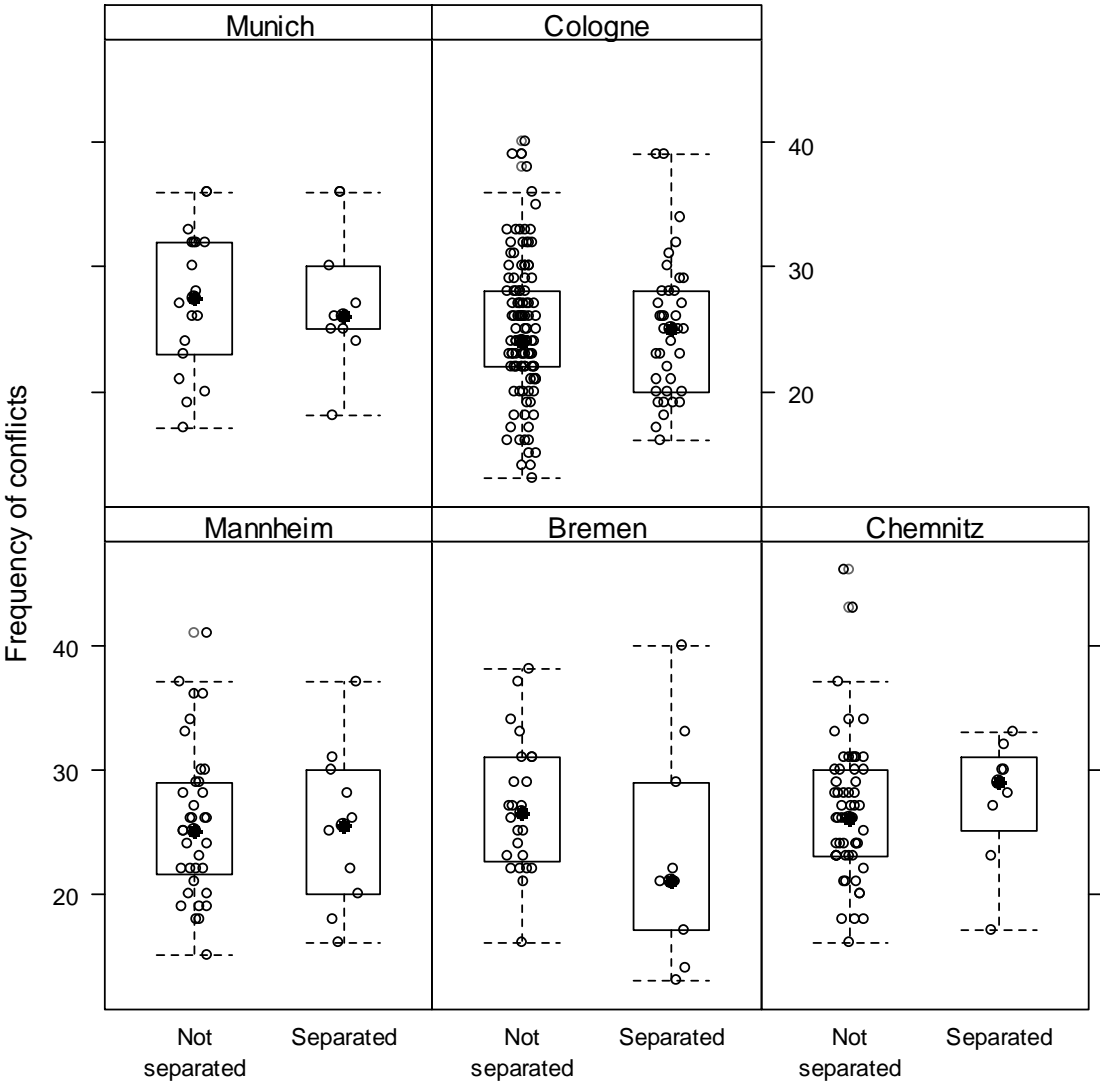


Figure 7: Frequency of conflicts by partnership status and place of residence

Also simple logistic regression shows that the conflict level does not affect the likelihood of separation ($\beta=-0.01$, $p=0.50$) in the total sample ($N=322$). The association between relationship satisfaction and conflict is strong for each of our samples. We get an overall relationship of $r=-0.55$ ($p=0.00$, $n=313$). If partnership satisfaction increases by one unit, separation risk decreases by 26% ($\beta= -0.30$; $p=0.00$). From Figure 8 it becomes clear that this high correlation exists for each of the five samples. Partnership stability is much closer associated with partnership satisfaction than with the intensity of partner conflicts.

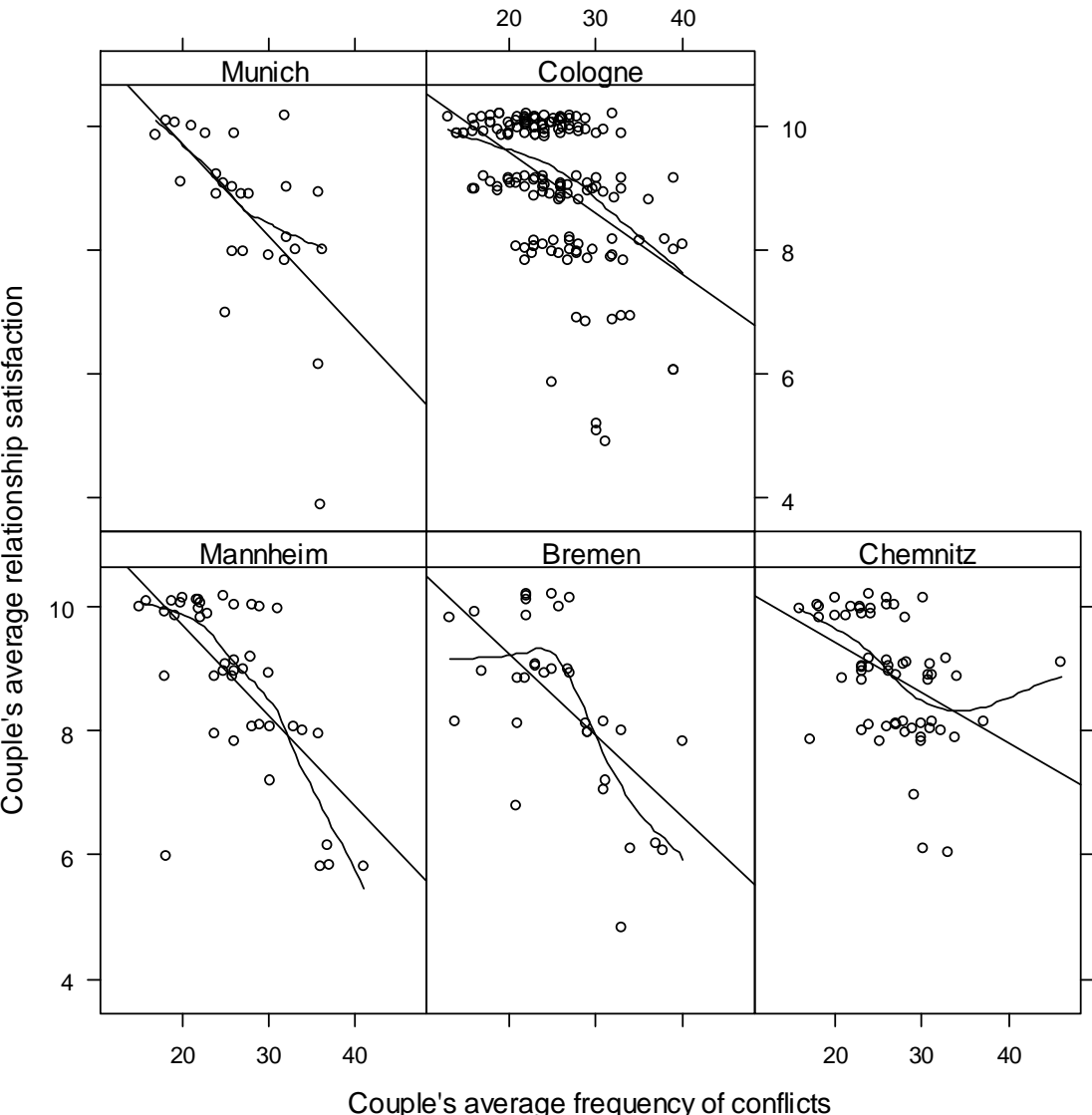


Figure 8: Association between conflict frequency and partnership satisfaction by place of residence

4.2 Management hypothesis

As Figure 9 and Table 3 demonstrate, the association between conflict and relationship satisfaction is especially strong if the partners do not exercise positive conflict behaviour. Conflicts do not matter very much if the partners communicate in a positive way. Nevertheless, in both cases the subjective evaluation of the partnership is negatively affected by the level of conflict. Correlation is reduced from -0.60 ($N=157$, $p=0.00$) to -0.46 ($N=147$, $p=0.00$). The difference between the correlation coefficients is significant at the 9% level. Conflicts reduce satisfaction a lot even if the partners deal friendly and fairly with each other. It is also interesting to see that the (unstandardized) regression coefficient for the level of conflict is still significant if the variables that capture exit costs are controlled for (Table 3).

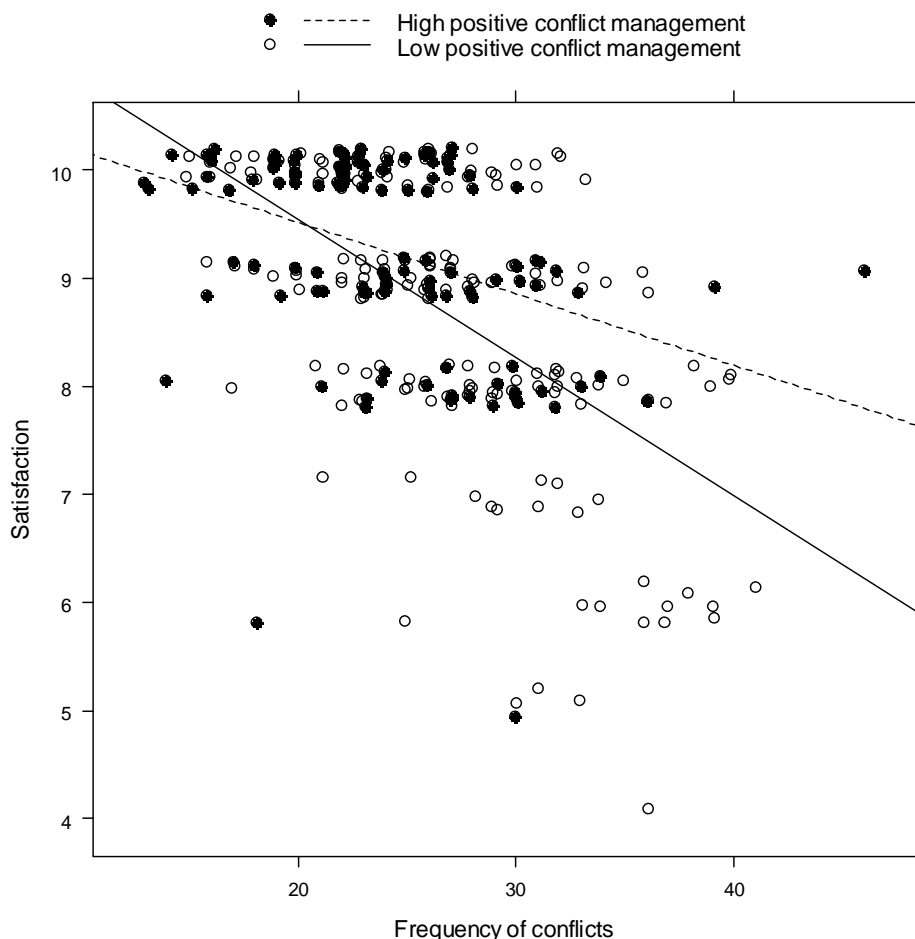


Figure 9: Association between frequency of conflicts and partnership satisfaction according to the positivity of conflict behaviour

Table 3: Effects of the frequency of conflicts on partnership satisfaction for couples with a low and couples with a high positive conflict behaviour

	Positive conflict management			
	Low		High	
	B	Se	B	Se
Intercept	8.22	0.15	9.11	0.12
Conflicts (centered)	-0.12	0.01	-0.07	0.01
Married (0/1)	0.59	0.19	0.20	0.19
Age (centered)	-0.02	0.01	-0.00	0.01
Cologne (0/1)	0.29	0.17	0.16	0.16
N	174		120	
R ² (adj.)	35		14	

Gray shaded cells indicate $p < 0.05$

As the distribution of couple's satisfaction is strongly skewed (see Table 1), it may be inappropriate to apply an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model. Nevertheless, OLS regression models are much easier to understand. To ensure the correlational pattern of the predictors we also applied proportional odds logistic regression models which revealed very similar results.

4.3 High exit costs, not satisfied and many conflicts?

Our third hypothesis states that the amount of exit costs affects the relationship between partnership satisfaction and the conflict level on the one side and partnership stability on the other. We expect that these differences refer to the functional form of the relationship.

In the following, we assume that exit costs differ with respect to the presence of children, the legal status of the partnership and the degree of institutionalization of the partnership. We distinguish couples with and without children, couples that are married or not married and couples sharing a household or not. The dissolution costs are highest for those who are married and if they separate they are much less satisfied with their partnership than the unmarried who separate. The same is true for those who live together and separate compared to those who do not share a common household (Figure 10 and 11; one-sided significance test).

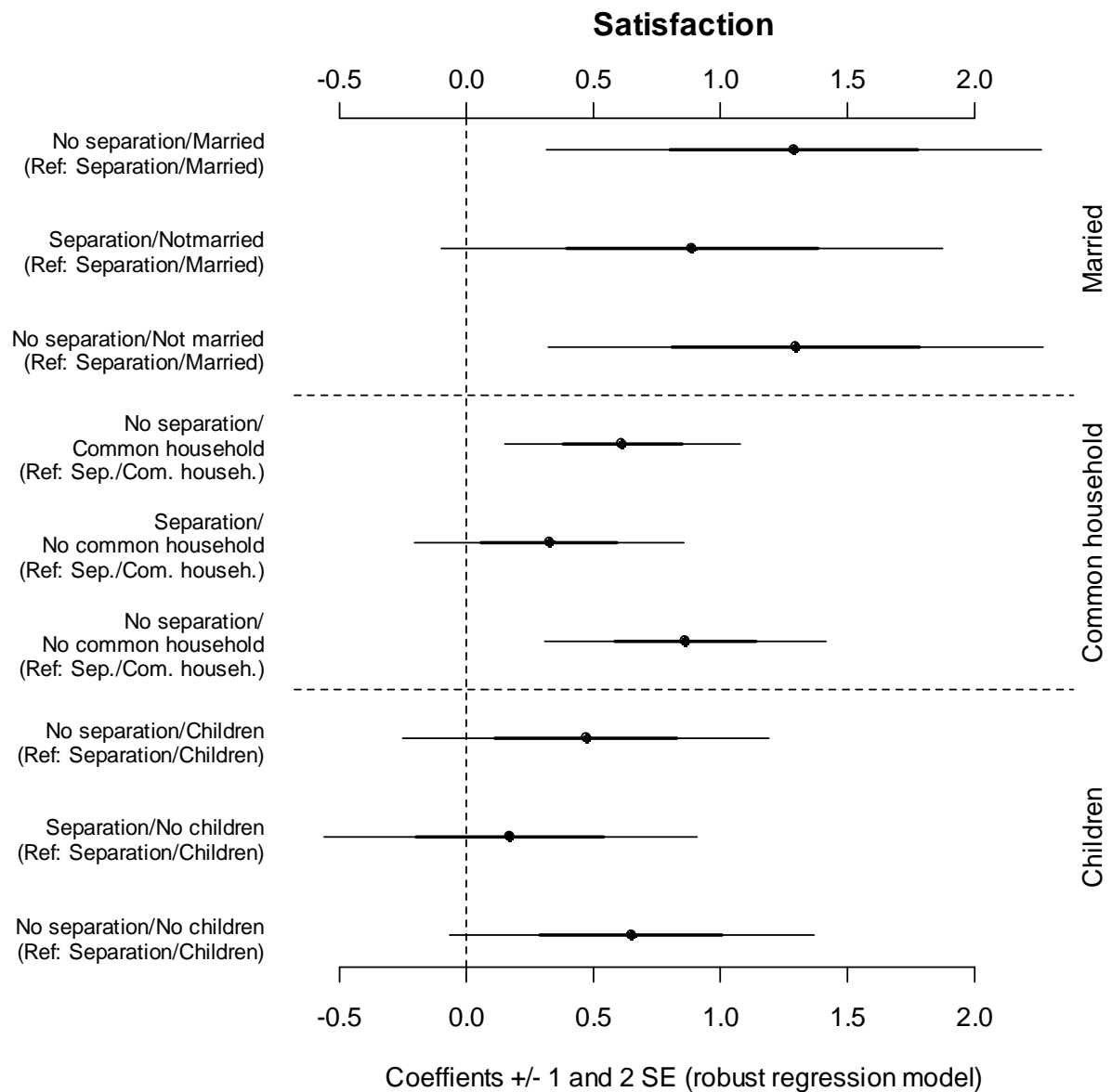


Figure 10: The level of partnership satisfaction for couples according separation status and dissolution costs (unstandardized regression coefficients)

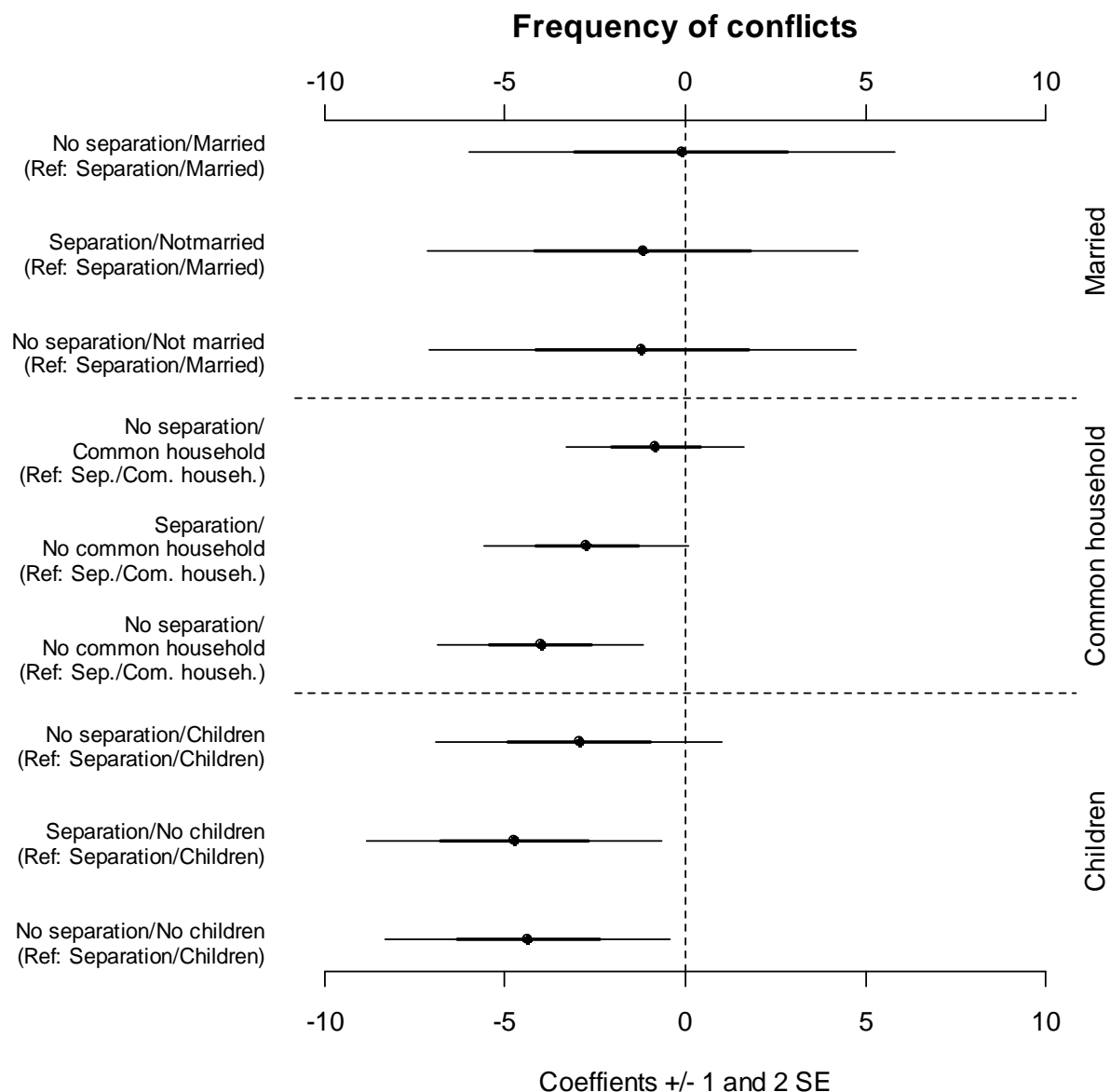


Figure 11: The frequency of conflicts for couples according to separation status and dissolution costs (unstandardized regression coefficients)

Further empirical evidence is derived from Figure 12. Distance between the curves indicates the main effect, e.g. the effect of having children on stability or the effect of living together on stability. In every case, marital stability is higher when exit costs are also high.

Moreover, each curve of a pair shows a similar shape. This means that the level of satisfaction and of conflict affect partnership stability irrespective of the exit costs.

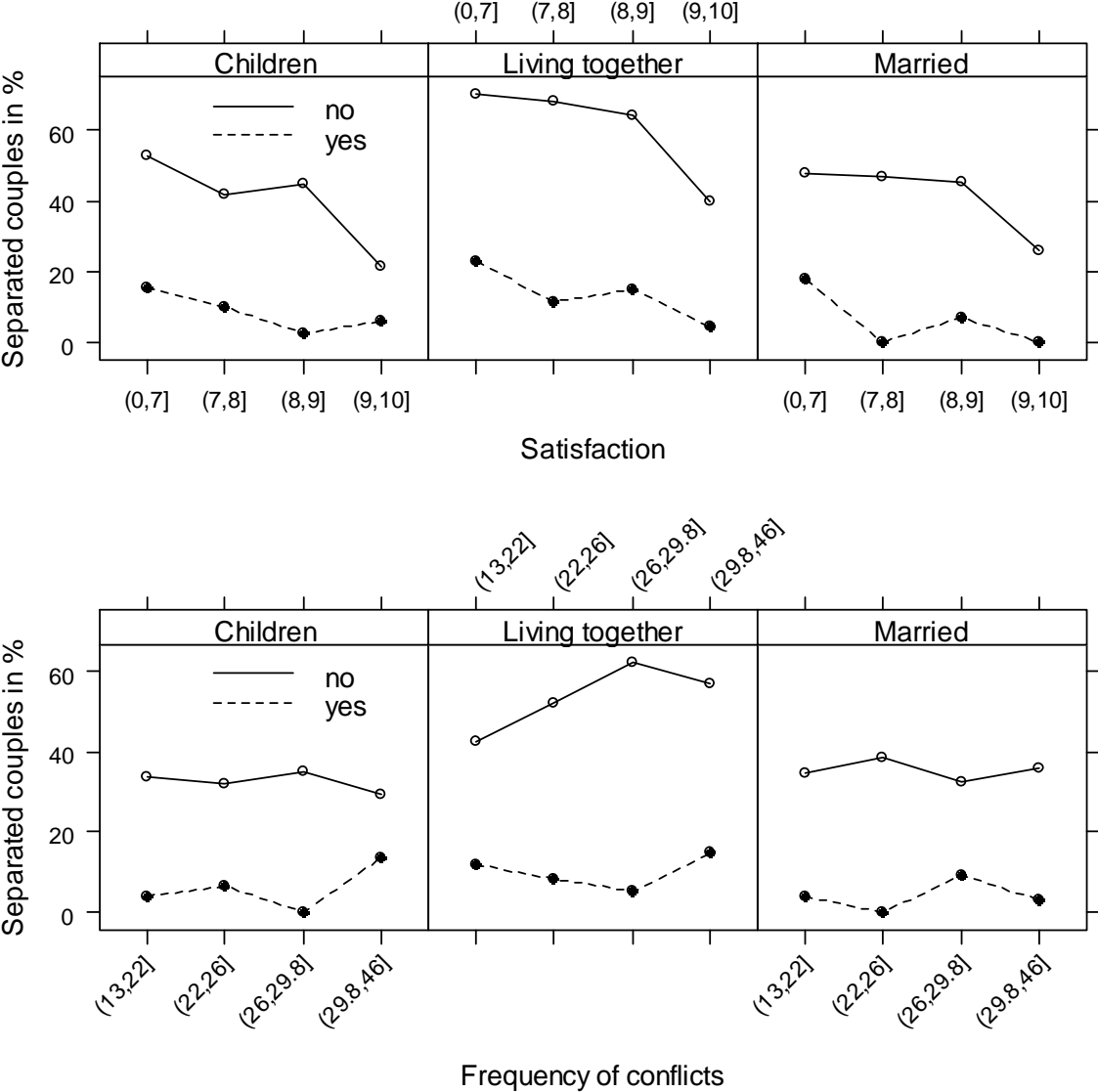


Figure 12: Proportion of separated couples according to the level of satisfaction, the frequency of conflicts and dissolution costs

Finally, we investigate how the variables examined so far have an influence on partnership stability. In Table 4, we differentiate between pairwise subgroups to compare partnerships with low exit costs (not married, no children, no common household) to those with high exit costs (married, children, common household). As expected, the frequency of conflicts is not related to the likelihood of separation – even if the exit costs are low. But we find some evidence that the link between the subjective evaluation of the partnership and the likelihood of a separation is weaker when the dissolution costs are high (presence of children, common household). As there are too few separations of married couples, the estimates are not meaningful.

Table 4: Determinants for couple’s separation by different subgroups

	Married				Children				Living together			
	No		Yes		No		Yes		No		Yes	
	beta	se	beta	se	Beta	se	beta	Se	beta	se	beta	Se
Intercept	8,32	2,71	10,95	14,18	10,33	2,97	1,50	6,13	10,63	4,19	4,70	4,12
Conflicts	-0,03	0,03	-0,07	0,19	-0,05	0,04	0,08	0,08	0,00	0,05	-0,02	0,05
Satisfaction	-0,54	0,18	-0,64	0,97	-0,7	0,19	0,27	0,43	-0,78	0,31	-0,43	0,22
Positive conf. Behaviour	0,01	0,19	0,50	0,67	0,13	0,2	-0,8	0,49	-0,05	0,30	0,15	0,28
Age	-0,13	0,03	-0,37	0,17	-0,18	0,03	-0,08	0,09	-0,13	0,04	-0,11	0,05
Cologne	-0,04	0,38	1,41	1,38	0,23	0,4	-0,78	0,94	-0,17	0,62	0,37	0,54
N	174		120		182		113		83		157	
N events	66		3		63		7		48		21	
R ² (Nagelkerke)	25		30		37		15		27		11	

Gray shaded cells indicate $p < 0.05$

5 Conclusion and discussion

It is true that high conflict couples are less satisfied with their relationship and it is also true that partners separate more often if they are not satisfied with their relationship. But it is not true that high conflict couples are more likely to break up – there is at least no direct association between these two factors. As exchange theory and the model by Karney/Bradbury (1995) predict, this association is mediated by the partners’ evaluation of the partnership.

The more conflicts, the less satisfied the partners are with their relationship. But even this link is not always strong, it is important how men and women handle their conflicts. If they are still positive with each other, if they know how to avoid an

escalation of their conflicts, the latter do not affect their overall evaluation of the partnership too much. However, one should take into account interdependencies between the frequency of conflicts and partners' conflict behaviour. Conflicts initiate a certain conflict behaviour, but the latter can also lead to further conflicts or to their escalation (Wagner/Weiß 2005). Conflicts, their handling by the partners, and the level of satisfaction with the partnership are part of an interaction process which is difficult to disentangle.

Another result of this study concerns the role of dissolution costs for the internal functioning of partnerships. Clearly there exist social barriers to divorce or separation which increase the costs of breaking up. But these costs also affect how dissatisfied men and women are or must be before they decide to separate. The stability of partnerships without a common household is more sensible to the level of satisfaction than for partnerships with a common household.

Even if partner conflicts do not directly affect the likelihood of separation, they should not be neglected from a theoretical perspective. Especially sociological studies deal with the social conditions of relationship conflicts and how partners handle them. Wagner/Weiß (2005) found that the duration of the partnership is positively and significantly linked with the frequency of conflicts (see also Table 5 and Figure 13, Appendix), whereas the presence of children or the marital status are less important. So, we know that conflict level increases with the duration of a partnership, but we have not really understood why this is the case. The frequency of conflicts is also linked to personality and to externally induced individual strain. With respect to personality, emotional instability (neuroticism) seems to be associated with the frequency of conflicts. And individual strain might be a consequence of problems and pressures that have their origin in the social environment of the school, the job or kin relations.

Nonetheless, the results of this study suggest that the explanation of partnership dissolution has to incorporate not only social variables that regulate the social costs of a separation, but also the interaction of the partners and their evaluation of the partnership. The social environment of a partnership and social embeddedness of the partners is not only an external and additional factor that helps to explain the stability of partnerships. There is at least some evidence that the social

embeddedness of a partnership (e.g. children and family, legalization of a partnership by marriage) interact with internal factors like the evaluation of the partnership and the interaction of the partners in terms of conflicts and conflict management.

Our conclusions are very preliminary. For example, we did not address selectivity issues. Selectivity might reverse the original association between conflicts and stability. If only those partners accept high exit costs who experience a low level of conflicts or if only those high conflict pairs form a partnership who successfully developed a conflict management than the general or the other conflict hypotheses might be false.

6 References

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7 Appendix

Table 5: Correlation matrix (Spearman's rho correlation coefficient is printed in the lower triangle matrix, the number of cases are printed in the upper triangle matrix)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Separation (1)	335	322	325	313	335	333	333	335
Conflicts (2)	-0,03	322	313	303	322	321	321	322
Satisfaction (3)	-0,17	-0,55	325	305	325	323	325	325
Conf. behaviour (4)	-0,01	-0,28	0,27	313	313	311	312	313
Children (5)	-0,32	0,13	-0,02	-0,10	335	333	333	335
Married (6)	-0,39	0,10	0,05	-0,01	0,64	333	331	333
Common household (7)	-0,45	0,21	-0,01	-0,04	0,48	0,54	333	333
Age (8)	-0,43	0,10	-0,04	-0,11	0,60	0,58	0,60	335
Partnership duration	-0,42	0,26	-0,07	-0,10	0,60	0,62	0,66	0,69

Gray shaded cells indicate $p < 0.05$

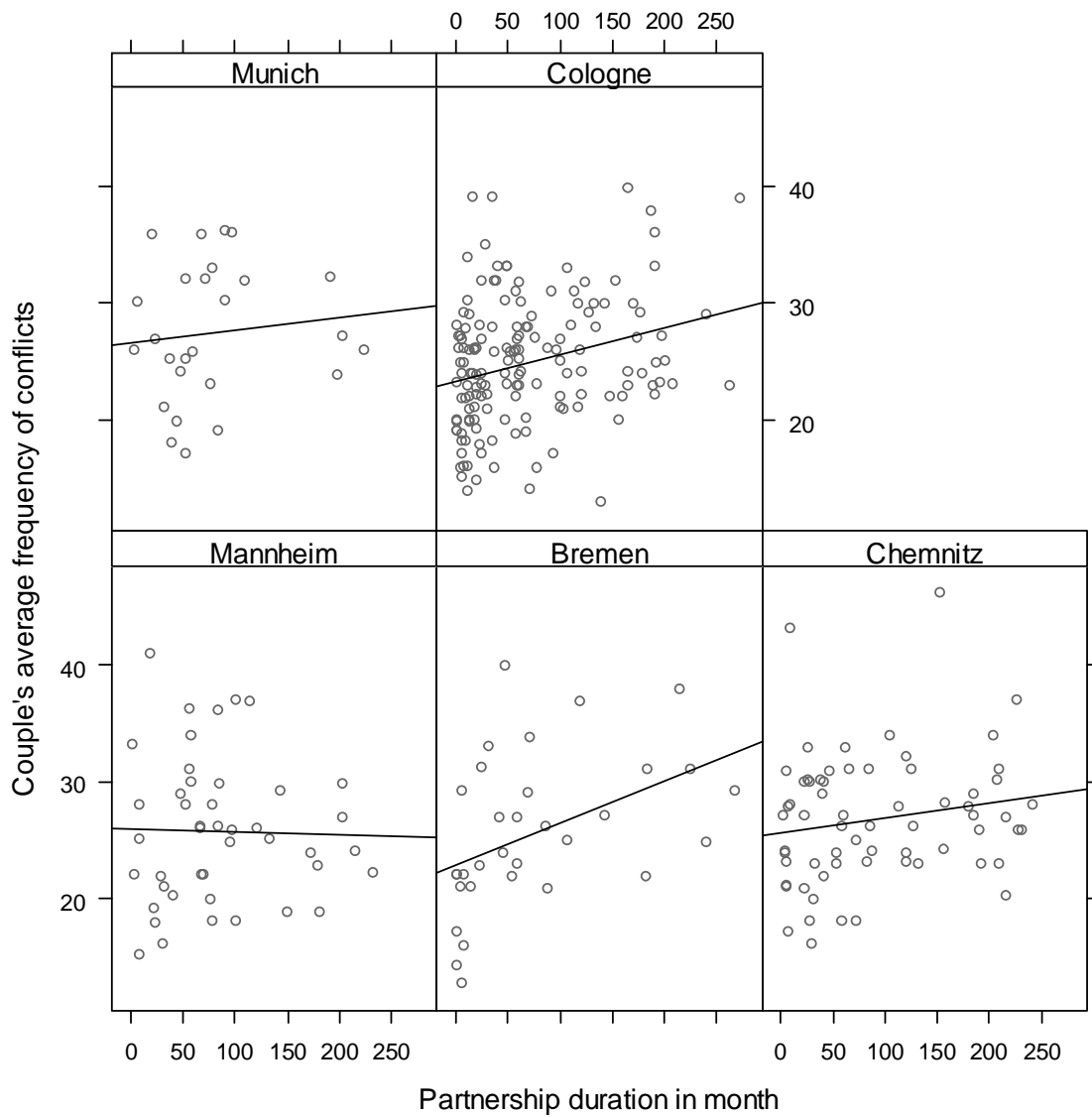


Figure 13: The association between partnership duration and the frequency of conflicts by place of residence