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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF STUDIES

1.1 BACKGROUND OF CONTEMPORARY PARTNER SELECTION

Mate selection, which is the process of seeking and choosing a romantic partner, represents a pervasive theme in family studies (for reviews, see Sassler 2010; Surra *et al.* 2004). This focus is attributed to the widespread importance and impact of committed relationships and mate choices. At the individual level, engaging in long-term dating, cohabiting or marriage significantly improves mental and physical health as well as subjective well-being (e.g., Kamp Dush & Amato 2005; Soons, Liefbroer, & Kalmijn 2009; Williams & Umberson 2004). Partnerships are also inherently connected to parenthood and family formation (Macura *et al.* 2002; Smock & Greenland 2010). At the societal level, mate selection patterns reveal the nature of the underlying social structure, opportunities for interactions, boundaries and inequalities between social groups (Blau & Duncan 1967; Blossfeld 2009).

The last decades have witnessed increasingly rapid and complex transformations of the family, which included a rise in non-marital partnerships and non-standard family forms (Billari & Liefbroer 2010; Elzinga & Liefbroer 2007; Lesthaeghe & Moors 2000; Mills, Blossfeld, & Klijzing 2005; Potarca, Mills, & Lesnard 2013). The shift to a later age of entry into the first formal union (Manning, Browne, & Payne 2014; Sobotka & Toulemon 2008) and the steady increase in divorce rates (Bramlett & Mosher 2002; Kalmijn 2007; Kiernan 2004; Kneip & Bauer 2009) mean that more singles than ever are on the relationship market. In addition to demographic changes to the number of 'eligibles' in the partnership pool, the process of finding a partner have likewise been altered by transformations in the area of work and family life (Barraket & Henry-Waring 2008). Individuals not only devote more time to their professional lives, but migrate more often for work, leaving the traditional matchmakers of family and friends (Sautter *et al.* 2010). People increasingly have to resort to other, more time-efficient means to find a partner. Against the background of advances in information and communication technologies, computer literacy and spread of Internet use, online dating sites emerged as an alternative means to locate a partner, offering highly systemized interfaces for browsing and getting in contact with prospective mates (Barraket & Henry-Waring 2008).

Internet dating websites have now become a widely accepted and utilized channel for finding a partner (Smith & Duggan 2013). Meeting a partner over the Internet (through online dating sites, as well as online gaming, chat rooms, social networking sites, etc.) has surged dramatically, surpassing family, school and other conventional offline venues for partner selection (Rosenfeld & Thomas 2012). More than one-third of American marriages now begin

online, most of which are mediated through online meeting sites (Cacioppo *et al.* 2013). In Germany, online dating has witnessed a rapid surge, with approximately 5.5 million people seeking a partner online (Schulz *et al.* 2008). Between 2000 and 2007, meeting a partner via the Internet in the Netherlands was the fastest growing method (CBS 2011).

Online dating sites have also potentially transformed the way individuals attract, meet and interact with romantic partners (Finkel *et al.* 2012; Lawson & Leck 2006). Internet dating websites reduce the importance of geographical proximity and offer opportunities to meet people outside of one's own environment and social network, substantially enlarging the pool of potential connections (Barraket & Henry-Waring 2008; Brym & Lenton 2001; Donn & Sherman 2002; Sprecher 2009). Compared to meeting a partner offline, online dating provides an easier and more convenient access to the dating pool (Finkel *et al.* 2012), a greater sense of agency and control over romantic choices (Barraket & Henry-Waring 2008), an abundance of already-available detailed information about prospective mates, as well as options to filter and select the optimal candidates along key socio-demographic attributes (Heino *et al.* 2010; Lawson & Leck 2006).

The advent of online dating has also brought about highly unique and remarkable opportunities for social scientists to examine individuals' partnering preferences and behavior more closely and in greater detail (Fiore & Donath 2004). Researchers can now more directly examine how mate selection unfolds in its initial phases and in a naturalistic dating environment, with minimum social desirability bias (Yancey 2009). As opposed to the commonly used census or survey data that usually contain information on transitions and events (e.g., successful first unions), the richness of the online dating material provides a unique insight into the 'black box' of what people actually seek in a partner, how relationships are initiated and on what grounds (Hitsch, Hortaçsu, & Ariely 2010). As a result, family research recently started to explore partner selection using data derived from online dating preference and profile information (e.g., Feliciano, Robnett, & Komaie 2009; Robnett and Feliciano 2011; Yancey 2009) or interaction records (e.g., Hitsch, Hortaçsu, & Ariely 2010; Kreager *et al.* 2014; Lewis 2013; Lin & Lundquist 2013; Skopek, Schulz, & Blossfeld 2011). By means of survey data, attention has also been given to the comparison between couples who met online and those who met through conventional meeting venues, in terms of relationship satisfaction, dissolution rates, or socio-demographic composition (e.g., Cacioppo *et al.* 2013; Rosenfeld & Thomas 2012).

Nevertheless, “research on how technology changes the nature of marriage markets and romantic relationships is in its infancy” (Schwartz 2013: 458). Most studies are anchored in a particular national context, most often the U.S. (for exceptions, see a German study by Skopek and colleagues (2011), or Australian studies by Barraket & Henry-Waring (2008) and Henry-Waring & Barraket (2008)). The necessity to examine partnership transitions and processes across various contexts has been asserted in several studies (e.g., Prince Cooke & Baxter 2010; Kalmijn 2007; Mills & Blossfeld 2005; Lee & Ono 2012). Individual partnering decisions are taken within larger social and institutional contexts that have distinct histories, normative climates, marriage markets and population composition. To gain a full picture of mate selection, one needs to go beyond merely the examination of micro-level determinants, and address the contextual embeddedness of individuals in pursuit for a partner by also examining national or regional influences. Moreover, previous studies on mate selection largely focused on the constraining role of structural settings on partner choices. It remains unclear how context shapes actual preferences, and not only final outcomes.

Furthermore, our knowledge about what people actually desire in a partner remains rather limited. The values, norms and preferences that people employ in the pursuit of a romantic partner have implications for their ultimate behavior and choices for interpersonal bonds (Regan *et al.* 2000). As a result, “behavior can be meaningfully interpreted only when we understand the belief systems that surround the act” (Tucker 2000: 166). Despite the significance of evaluating preferences, particularly in the context of Internet dating that allows for a more genuine expression of personal wishes, there are only a handful of studies examining preferences (e.g., Robnett and Feliciano 2011; Yancey 2009). Moreover, we know relatively little about mate selection preferences in connection to certain social groups. This dissertation builds on existing research, but also extends it considerably by addressing the current gaps in the literature. First, there is considerable research on racial preferences in the U.S. (e.g., Feliciano, Robnett, & Komaie 2009; Robnett & Feliciano 2011; Yancey 2009), but we know virtually nothing about interracial dating in Europe. Second, partnering patterns are mainly studied in relation to heterosexual men and women (e.g., Hitsch, Hortaçsu, & Ariely 2010; Kreager *et al.* 2014), with almost a complete lack of attention given to the preferences of gays and lesbians. Third, the literature often focuses on entry into first unions and thereby lacks an understanding of what divorcees genuinely seek in a partner and whether they still trade down in a dating market with a larger pool of potential partners (Sassler 2010).

Finally, the literature is yet to provide insights into how online dating sites impact mate selection and positive assortative mating (i.e., the non-random association between individuals with similar backgrounds). There has been an ongoing debate about the way the Internet reconfigures the nature of romantic connections. Utopians or optimists proposed that the Internet would eventually alter social and intimate ties by removing boundaries defined by race, status, or space (e.g., Barlow 1996; Castells 2001). Skeptics, on the other hand, suggested that online dating would reproduce existing patterns of assortative mating and that “the same type of people are meeting online as they do offline” (Henry-Waring & Barraket 2008, p. 29).

1.2 AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This dissertation contributes to the understanding of the complex nature of partner selection in today’s digital era. Specifically, it delivers the first cross-national examination of individual- and contextual-level factors affecting the mate selection and partner preferences of online daters (*Chapters 2, 3, and 4*). Placing the focus on preferences, criteria and values in the primary stages of relationship formation, this research examines the profile and preference information of individuals enrolled on a European multinational Internet dating website. Furthermore, using U.S. survey data on how people met their partner, this dissertation also intends to provide the first empirical test of assortative mating in online dating markets in comparison to other non-purposeful online meeting venues, as well as traditional marriage markets (*Chapter 5*).

The first goal of this research is to shed light on the nature of people’s preferences when seeking a partner. The dissertation seeks to broaden the knowledge on mate selection by directly looking at individuals’ partner ‘shopping list’ and expectations for what a good match might be. We capture partnering preferences by focusing on a broad set of outcomes, ranging from racial preferences among majority and minority members (*Chapter 2*), dating intentions and attitudes towards sexual exclusivity among gay and lesbian daters (*Chapter 3*), as well as the value attached to partner’s education among divorcees (*Chapter 4*). This focus on these diverse topics permits the examination of selectivity along a broad range of aspects and social groups.

A second research aim is to evaluate how individual-level attributes shape what people seek in a partner and romantic involvement. The dissertation makes an important step in

identifying how individuals' socio-demographic profile and prior experiences affect partnering demands. We address the role of own racial background in preferring same-race or different-race partners (*Chapter 2*); differences between gay men and lesbians in relationship preferences (*Chapter 3*); or the association between dating standards and life course aspects such as previous union history or presence of children (*Chapters 3 and 4*), as well as gender (*Chapter 4*).

A third aim is to understand differences in mate selection across diverse national contexts in Europe in order to understand how social context shapes the perceptions, expectations, attitudes and demands of individuals on the dating market. The project intends to assess whether universally assumed patterns of mate selection are replicated across different contexts. To examine how the larger context matters for partnering preferences, we look across various countries that represent different European regions and embody diverse frameworks of cultural values, population composition, and institutional support and welfare regimes. The particular countries we focus on are: Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, Spain, Italy, and Poland. In addition, this project seeks to identify specific macro-level factors that have an impact on individuals' partnering preferences. For that reason, we engage in cross-country (and sometimes cross-regional) comparative analyses that take into account a range of structural, institutional, and normative aspects of the social environment. More concretely, we analyze the link between racial preferences and population composition, informal and formal climate towards immigration (*Chapter 2*); the role of social and legal acceptance of same-sex partnerships in the relationship preferences of gay men and lesbians (*Chapter 3*); and the association between the importance given to partner's education among divorcees and employment rate, gender wage gap, formal childcare provisions, and divorce rate (*Chapter 4*).

The final goal of the book is to assess the importance of partnership markets and the social milieu in which relationships are forged in breeding certain mate selection patterns (*Chapter 5*). Previous studies of online dating preferences and interaction have consistently revealed positive assortative mating in online partner selection (e.g., Hitsch, Hortaçsu, & Ariely 2010; Lin & Lundquist 2013; Robnett & Feliciano 2011; Skopek, Schulz, & Blossfeld 2011). It remains unknown, however, whether the 'amount' of assortative mating increases or decreases in the context of digital mating markets compared to other places of meeting and mating. To summarize, the broader research questions that motivate the four studies included in this dissertation are formulated as follows:

What are the preferences and criteria that individuals have when looking for a partner online? More specifically:

- *What are the racial preferences of online daters across various European countries?*
- *What is the extent of gay men and lesbians' long-term dating intentions and monogamy beliefs?*
- *How much importance do divorced online daters give to partner's education?*

To what extent are individual-level (e.g., racial status, relationship history, children, gender) and contextual-level characteristics (e.g., population composition, normative climate, institutional and legal sanctions) related to online daters' partnering preferences?

Does finding a match through Internet dating affect typical assortative mating patterns?

1.3 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Mate selection is generally analyzed from two theoretical viewpoints (Kalmijn & Flap 2001), namely: the *demand-side* perspective, centering on the preferences that people have when choosing a partner (e.g., Buunk *et al.* 2002; Belot & Francesconi 2013; South 1991), and the *supply-side* perspective, which focuses on the composition and structure of opportunities that define marriage markets and their impact on the creation of intimate ties (e.g., Kalmijn & Flap 2001; Lampard 2007; Mollenhorst, Völker, & Flap 2008a, b). Whereas previous work addresses generally one of the two perspectives, this book attempts to bridge both demand and supply theories to provide a comprehensive understanding of partner selection in online dating from the viewpoint of individual preferences, as well as partnership market characteristics.

Demand-side perspective of mate selection

One of the central factors driving marriage or relationship choices is individual partner preferences (Kalmijn 1998). They represent internalized tastes and criteria guided by values, genetic dispositions, socialization, contextual influences or strategic considerations of the type of partner someone is able to attract or the type of relationship that suits them the best (Eagly & Wood 1999; Belot & Francesconi 2013). Partnering preferences have been examined from various theoretical perspectives, including assortative mating theory (Kalmijn

1991, 1998; Mare 1991), sexual strategy theory (Buss & Schmitt 1993) and sociosexuality theory (Simpson & Gangestad 1991), which are used in separate chapters within this dissertation and outlined below.

The sociological literature on mate selection reveals a strong tendency for individuals to match with someone similar to themselves in terms of social origin, age, education, race/ethnicity, political ideology, interests or religious beliefs (e.g., Blau & Duncan 1967; Blossfeld & Timm 2003; Burgess & Wallin 1943; Kalmijn & Flap 2001; Mare 1991; Smits, Ultee, and Lammers 1998; Stark & Flache 2012; for a recent review see Schwartz 2013). Referred to as ‘assortative’, ‘matching’, ‘homophilous’, or ‘endogamous’, the predilection of choosing a partner that shares the same background can be explained through a number of reasons. First, sharing cultural resources provides relationship security and rapport given common values and lifestyle (Hutnik 1991; Kalmijn 1998; Waller & Hill 1951). Second, similarity in social status and the pooling of socio-economic resources favors the transmission of (additional) wealth to the next generation (Kalmijn 1991; Schwartz & Mare 2005; Ultee & Luijkx 1990). Third, choosing someone belonging to the same group ensures the cohesiveness and continuity of the group (Sumner 1906), which also leads to a positive social identity (Tajfel 1982).

Two attributes that commonly lead to positive *assortative mating* are race/ethnicity and education. Racial background is an ascriptive characteristic that serves as indicator of partner’s cultural resources, whereas education represents an achieved attribute that gives cues of economic success, labor market performance and lifestyle (Halpin & Chan 2003; Hou & Miles 2008; Kalmijn 1998; Mare 1991). A large body of research reveals prominent racial and educational endogamy both in the U.S. (Fu & Heaton 2008; Rosenfeld 2008) and Europe (Blossfeld & Timm 2003; Kalmijn & van Tubergen 2006; Skopek, Schulz, & Blossfeld 2011). Despite evidence about declining trends in endogamy particularly with respect to race (Fu & Heaton 2008; Rosenfeld 2008), choices for a same-race or a similarly educated partner prevail, prompting concerns about enduring social inequalities. *Chapter 2* further explores homophilous preferences by addressing online dating preferences for same-race partners (i.e., in-group preferences), as well as willingness to interracially date (i.e., out-group preferences) across various European populations. *Chapter 4*, on the other hand, expands our understanding of educational assortative mating by examining the value that Internet daters, especially those with previous union experience, attach to partner’s education.

Additional theoretical viewpoints that provide insights into individuals' partnering preferences are the theories of *sexual strategy* (Buss & Schmitt 1993) and *sociosexuality* (Simpson & Gangestad 1991). Sexual or mating strategies represent integrated collections of adaptations evolved to regulate and influence an individual's reproductive career, ranging from the way partners are selected to the amount of effort invested in mating and parenting (Gangestad & Simpson 2000). According to Buss and Schmitt (1993), both men and women engage in either short-term or long-term mating, depending on context. Furthermore, sociosexuality is a concept referring to the predisposition to engage in sexual relations outside of committed partnerships (Simpson & Gangestad 1991). The theory distinguishes between restricted or monogamous individuals, on the one hand, and unrestricted individuals who have a greater interest and acceptance of non-committed sexual relations and non-monogamous partnerships on the other. Mating strategies and sociosexual attitudes are addressed in *Chapter 3*, which focuses on the relationship preferences of gay and lesbian online daters.

This book also explores the mechanisms in which micro- and macro-level factors impact preferences, which necessitates the use of various theoretical viewpoints, such as marital search theory (England & Farkas 1986; Oppenheimer 1988), life-course perspective (Elder 1974; Elder & Shanahan 2006), contact theory (Allport 1954), conflict theory (Blalock 1967; Blumer 1958), institutional perspectives on women's labor market performance and (re)marriage (Oppenheimer 1988), and normative explanations on intermarriage (Jacobson & Heaton 2008) or re-partnering (Meggiolaro & Ongaro 2008).

The nature of partner preferences is altered by the perception that individuals have of their own attractiveness in the mating market. *Marital search theory* compares marriage candidates to individuals in pursuit of a job (i.e., a marital match) while keeping a certain reservation wage (i.e., a minimally acceptable set of characteristics that the partner should have) (England & Farkas 1986; Oppenheimer 1988). The success and timing of a match depend not only on market conditions, but also on the profile and qualifications that the partnership 'seekers' have. This dissertation also contends that relationship demands and partner preferences are determined by the characteristics of the online daters themselves. Whereas *Chapter 2* examines racial status as the main individual factor shaping mating preferences and the emergence of racial hierarchies (Bonilla-Silva 2004; Hagendoorn 1995), *Chapters 3* and *4* extensively address life course determinants.

The *life course* framework (Elder 1974; Elder & Shanahan 2006; Huinink & Kohli 2014) emphasizes the inter-relatedness of transitions and trajectories across the life span.

Through the succession of certain life stages in young adulthood, individuals acquire new resources and mindsets that have consequences for decisions and outcomes in middle or later adulthood (Mayer 2009). Prior family formation experiences are likely to affect people's chances and timing of entering new partnerships as individuals. Numerous studies addressed the influence of previous union and parenting experiences on the entry into subsequent partnerships (e.g., de Graaf & Kalmijn 2003; Gelissen, 2004; Jansen, Mortelmans, & Snoeckx 2009; Lichter & Qian 2008; Poortman 2007), as well as attitudes and expectations towards new relationships (Frazier *et al.* 1996; Goldscheider & Kaufman 2006). This book further examines the association between the partnering preferences of online daters and life course aspects such as previous union experience and the presence and number of children.

Finally, individual partner preferences are subject to *contextual forces*, beyond the usual link between structural determinants and partner choices typically addressed in the marriage literature (e.g., Blau, Blum, & Schwartz 1982; Blau, Beeker, & Fitzpatrick 1984). Whereas previous research mainly focused on the role of marriage market characteristics, particularly the opportunity structure, in determining who marries whom, this book examines the characteristics of the environment in which partnering preferences are formed. Oppenheimer (1988) contends that marital search is highly affected by demographic and societal trends in the area of work and family. However, it is not only factors related to labor market performance that influence individuals' position in the partnership market. This dissertation extensively addresses the context dependency of mate preferences by proposing various theoretical viewpoints referring to the link between the environment and individual preferences. *Chapter 2*, for instance, relies on *contact theory* (Allport 1954), which suggests that majority members living in countries with large minority populations exhibit more racial openness given the high degree of exposure and familiarity to racially diverse individuals. As a contrasting viewpoint, *conflict theory* (Blalock 1967; Blumer 1958) maintains that natives perceive the growth in minority populations as a threat to the economic and cultural status quo, which would lead to more racial restrictiveness. We also rely on *cultural explanations* of intermarriage (Chiswick & Houseworth 2011; Jacobson & Heaton 2008; Kalmijn & van Tubergen 2010) and propose that the normative climate towards external groups shapes the racial preferences of majority members. More explicitly, we focus on anti-immigrant attitudes and inclusiveness of migrant integration policies as indicators of tolerant attitudes and regulations with respect to immigration. In *Chapter 3*, we refer to *social and legal sanctions* affecting gay men and lesbians' mating strategies (Buss & Schmitt 1993). We specifically

look at social acceptance and legal recognition of same-sex unions and their role in reducing relationship stressors and providing greater perceived relationship horizon (Frost & Meyer, 2009; Frost, 2011; Lau, 2012; Otis *et al.*, 2006). Lastly, *Chapter 4* includes theoretical considerations about *women's economic roles* and autonomy (Oppenheimer 1988) in different institutional settings and their role in shaping divorcees' re-partnering preferences with respect to education. *Normative explanations* of re-partnering choices (Meggiolaro & Ongaro 2008) are likewise re-visited, with a specific focus on the prevalence of divorce, which gauges cultural values against divorcees (Ivanova *et al.* 2013) and affects the standards divorced parents have when looking for a new partner.

Supply-side perspective of mate selection

The realization of individual preferences (i.e., the demand) is however highly dependent on the possibilities of interaction and the pool of potential partners that the environment provides (i.e., the supply). The 'provision' of contact opportunities characterizing the social setting in which people search for a partner determines whether individuals can choose according to their homophilous preferences. Blau's (1977, 1994) *structural theory* posits that the forging of social ties is affected by the opportunity structure and population composition of the social milieu that individuals inhabit. Choices for close personal relations are strongly related to the macro-social structure of the environment. Different social contexts or foci of activity have a different socio-demographic composition, which leads to the context specificity of personal ties (Feld 1984; Marsden 1990). The likelihood of creating an endogamous match is higher in local marriage markets with an abundant supply of candidates, as well as high social and cultural segregation (Kalmijn & Flap 2001). The investigation of where people meet partners similar to themselves has been examined in marital or cohabiting unions (e.g., Blau & Schwartz 1984; Kalmijn 1998; Kalmijn & Flap 2001), or sexual relationships (e.g., Laumann *et al.* 1994). Recent attention has also been devoted to the role of the Internet as an increasingly prevalent partnership market altering the nature of intimate ties (Rosenfeld & Thomas 2012). *Chapter 5* in this dissertation re-visits the supply perspective on partnering and stresses the importance of the environment in which individuals choose their partners. Specifically, it examines the link between assortative mating and online dating sites as partnership markets with distinct characteristics and options for a presumably easier realization of homophilous preferences.

1.4 OVERVIEW OF THE FOUR STUDIES

The following section offers an overview of the main hypotheses guiding the four empirical chapters in this dissertation. Table 1.1 also provides a summary of specific research questions, outcome and predictor variables, data, methods and main findings in relation to each chapter. Detailed information about the data sets and analytical methods is described in sections 1.5 and 1.6 respectively. The first three studies rely on the same data and examine online daters' homophilous preferences and relationship standards in connection to specific individual- and contextual-level factors. The final chapter uses an additional dataset and makes assumptions about the composition of partnership markets and tries to reveal how online dating sites affect assortative mating in terms of key socio-demographic traits. Note that all chapters are written in the form of independent journal articles and are thus meant to be considered in isolation from one another. For this reason, some degree of overlap and repetition is inevitable.

Chapter 2: Racial Preferences in Online Dating across European Countries

The first chapter sets out to examine the racial preferences of heterosexual online daters in 9 European countries. It specifically looks at in-group preferences (i.e., willingness to date same-race partners), as well as preferences for out-group (i.e., different-race) members among native Europeans, Hispanics, Asians, Africans, and Arabs. The study aims to empirically demonstrate whether same-race preferences and racial hierarchies operate in similar ways in different national contexts. Whereas the majority of previous studies examine the U.S. context (Lewis 2013; Lin & Lundquist 2013; Robnett & Feliciano 2011), for the first time this chapter focuses on a series of diverse European countries. Compared to the American context, Europe has more recently started to experience considerable non-Western immigration (Bail 2008) and racial tensions between the native majority and certain minority groups (e.g., Arabs). The 9 selected countries are vary widely in terms of racial composition, as well as immigration laws and climate, providing a fertile ground for drawing conclusions about cross-national variations in individual-level racial preferences.

First, we anticipate strong in-group preferences given arguments related to cultural matching (Kalmijn 1998) and social distance between racial groups (Bogardus 1947; Blumer 1958). Individuals prefer being matched to partners with the same racial status, which entails sharing similar cultural resources, values and habits. Feelings of disconnection from other groups mean that people are also reluctant to form interpersonal connections with racially dissimilar others. Second, we hypothesize a hierarchical pattern of racial preferences

(Hagendoorn, 1995). Alongside in-group members, we anticipate Europeans to also rank high in online daters' preferences due to prevailing culture and dominant population size. Asians and Hispanics would hold an intermediate position given colonial ties (Verkuyten & Kinket 2000) or cultural similarity with the native population (Snellman & Ekkehammer 2005). Finally, given that the African and Arab groups are more culturally distant and have a more recent migration history, we predict that they would rank at the lower end of the hierarchy as the least preferred mates (Snellman & Ekkehammer 2005).

Third, we suggest that both natives and minorities' preferences are subject to contextual influences. We take into account a comprehensive set of structural, normative and institutional aspects. For Europeans, we put forward the following expectations. Based on arguments derived from contact theory (Allport 1954), we anticipate that Europeans living in countries with large minority populations have more interactions with out-group members and exposure to different cultures. This leads to lower preferences for dating in-group members and higher preferences for dating out-group members. However, the opposite would be expected if we rely on conflict theory (Blalock 1967; Blumer 1958), which maintains that majority members perceive large minority populations as economic and cultural threats. Furthermore, we hypothesize that natives' racial preferences would be more homophilous and less open towards out-groups in contexts of pronounced anti-immigrant attitudes and restrictive migrant integration policies (Chiswick & Houseworth, 2011; Jacobson & Heaton 2008; Schneider 2008). For minority groups, we consider the role of relative group size. Members of larger groups would display stronger in-group identification and have more involvement of third parties (i.e., family, community) in partnering decisions (Kalmijn 1998; Kalmijn & van Tubergen 2006). Due to a more salient group identity and the anticipation of third parties' scrutiny, minority members belonging to large groups are expected to prefer more same-race partners and less different-race mates.

Chapter 3: Relationship Preferences among Gay and Lesbian Online Daters: Individual and Contextual Influences

Chapter 3 delves into a largely understudied topic, namely the partnering preferences of gay men and lesbians in the initial stages of relationship initiation. The aim of the study is to investigate how both individual and contextual determinants are related to the long-term dating intentions and monogamy beliefs of gay and lesbian online daters across 53 regions in 8 European countries. Sexual strategy theory (Buss & Schmitt 1993) proposes that individuals

developed a plurality of mating patterns, including long-term as well as short-term partnering. Sociosexuality is an additional concept describing human mating strategies, referring to the disposition individuals have towards sexual relations outside of committed relationships (Simpson & Gangestad 1991). However, theories and empirical research largely target heterosexual men and women. To draw hypotheses about the mating preferences of gay men and lesbians, we rely on previous findings concerning relationship values or union stability of same-sex couples. Conflicting evidence regarding the differences between gay and lesbian couples with respect to dissolution risks (Andersson *et al.* 2006; Kalmijn, Loeve, & Manting 2007) prevent us from formulating an explicit hypothesis about the long-term dating intentions of gay men compared to lesbians. Nevertheless, based on studies revealing lesbians' greater propensity towards sexually exclusive partnerships (e.g., Bryant & Demian 1994), we do anticipate stronger monogamy beliefs among lesbian women than among gay men.

Furthermore, we propose that life course aspects such as previous relationship history and presence of children shape the relationship standards that gay men and lesbians have when looking for a partner online. We first hypothesize that divorced, separated, and widowed online daters have lower long-term dating intentions and weaker monogamy beliefs given a decreased willingness or ability to invest in new partnerships (Carr 2004; Poortman 2007). We also suggest an alternative hypothesis, which states that individuals learn from the experience of failed relationships by searching for a better-matched partner and by increasing their standards for subsequent relationships (Gelissen 2004). This would entail a greater interest in long-term dating and stronger beliefs in sexual exclusivity. Moreover, we anticipate that gay men and lesbians with resident children have less demanding relationship preferences given negative perceptions of parenthood on the mating market (Qian *et al.* 2005). On the other hand, having children could increase individuals' selectiveness in finding a suitable match to share parenting responsibilities (Bzostek, McLanahan, & Carlson 2012). This translates into higher long-term dating intentions and stronger monogamy beliefs.

Finally, we are particularly interested in contextual forces underlying the relationship preferences of gay men and lesbians. We propose that both informal and formal tolerance towards same-sex couples shape gay men and lesbians' expectations and perceptions about the type of relationships they can enter or maintain (Frost 2011; Lannutti 2007). We anticipate that in regional contexts with a positive normative climate towards same-sex partnering, as well as in countries that legally recognize same-sex unions, gay men and lesbians are more

interested in starting longer-term partnerships and place more value on monogamy given less relationship strain and more confidence in making couple-specific investments.

Chapter 4: Do Secondary Singles Really Trade Down? The Partner Preferences of Divorced Online Daters across Europe

In Chapter 4 we extend the focus on understanding the connection between life course aspects and partnering preferences in online dating. We characterize the re-partnering market as shaped not only by individual preferences, but also one's own attributes (e.g., gender), previous life course history (e.g., relationship history, presence of children) and national-level contextual factors that enable or constrain partnership formation. Whereas Chapter 3 examines how previous union experience and presence of children impact gay and lesbians' relationship preferences, Chapter 4 is particularly interested in the differences between never married and divorced heterosexual daters in terms of the importance given to partner's education. It is usually assumed that divorcees have to trade down their partnering standards due to the shortages of potential candidates in the re-partnering market (Harknett 2008). Would divorced individuals still lower their standards when experiencing online dating and its large pool of prospective partners? In addition to this, we are also interested in discerning how one's children shape the importance attached to partner's socio-economic resources among both divorced women and men. This chapter targets online daters in 8 European countries and, similar to Chapter 2, it also connects partnering preferences to a series of country-level explanatory factors.

First, building on marital search theory (England & Farkas 1986; Oppenheimer 1988), we contend that in the conditions of a partnership market with a wide supply of potential matches, successful partnering largely depends on individuals' market value and economic considerations regarding the need to re-partner. It is therefore the ones with a positive perception of their own attractiveness that can make demanding claims in the online dating market. Nevertheless, individuals who experience financial distress following divorce are also expected to attach a greater value on future partner's socio-economic resources. We propose that relationship history, in combination with gender and parenthood, are pivotal factors affecting individuals' market value and their demands in terms of partner's education.

Two alternative hypotheses on the association between previous union experience and importance given to partner's education (in the absence of resident children) are tested. On the one hand, we argue that the stigma of experiencing the dissolution of a marital union

lowers the perceived market value of divorcees (South 1991). In addition to education losing its weight as mate selection criterion in later ages (de Graaf & Kalmijn 2003; Shafer & James 2013), we hypothesize that divorcees give less importance to partner's education than the never married. On the other hand, we assume that divorcees are more demanding as consequence of learning from failed relationships (Gelissen 2004). We also propose that the financial deterioration following divorce (Dewilde & Uunk 2008; Jansen *et al.* 2009) would make them particularly concerned with finding a partner with favorable socio-economic prospects. Therefore, there might be a positive relationship between being divorced and the value attached to partner's education.

The gender of divorcees is also expected to alter the importance given to partner's education. Two theoretical arguments that describe different mechanisms, but predict the same outcome, are outlined. First, evolutionary claims posit that women pay more attention to social-economic resources when selecting a partner (Buss 2003; Triver 1972). Second, economic arguments state that women generally experience a more dramatic income drop after divorce (Andreß *et al.* 2006; Holden & Smock 1991) and usually maintain custody of the children (Jansen *et al.* 2009). The greater financial needs of divorced women would also predict higher standards for a match's social status and thus more importance given to partner's education compared to divorced men. We also explore the link between having resident children and re-partnering preferences for education. We first hypothesize that divorcees with children (predominantly women who are more likely to be stigmatized for lone parenthood) give less importance to partner's education compared to divorcees without children due to parents' decreased mate value (de Graaf & Kalmijn 2003; Qian *et al.* 2005) and the low demands they can make on the dating market. However, we also predict that divorced parents (particularly men) give more importance to partner's education given positive attitudes towards fatherhood (Stewart *et al.* 2003; Wu & Schimmele 2005) and the need for a partner to share parenting responsibilities.

The study also aims to uncover contextual influences shaping divorced mother's re-partnering standards with respect to education. We contend that an institutional environment that favors women's economic independence and assists them in balancing work and family life would create different needs for re-partnering (Andreß *et al.* 2006) and a lower emphasis on socio-economic status as mate selection criterion. We thus hypothesize that in countries with high maternal full-time employment, a low gender wage gap, and adequate formal childcare arrangements, divorced mothers are less concerned with partner's education.

Finally, we argue that the normative context of re-partnering, specifically the extent to which divorce is socially accepted and pervasive also influences the perceived market value of divorcees (Ivanova *et al.* 2013). In contexts with strong norms against union dissolution there are likely higher costs of partnering with a divorcee (Meggiolaro & Ongaro 2008). Given their decreased attractiveness, divorced parents living in countries with a low prevalence of divorce are expected to be less demanding and thus give less importance to partner's education.

Chapter 5: Does Online Dating Affect Assortative Mating? The Case of Educational, Racial and Religious Endogamy

While the previous chapters aimed to describe and explain the partnering preferences of online daters in the early stages of relationship initiation, the final chapter focuses on the outcomes of online mate selection. This chapter's aim is to investigate the impact of recent partnership markets, specifically online dating sites, on the formation of intimate relationships and, more broadly, the reproduction of social inequalities. The driving question is whether couples that met via Internet dating sites exhibit (positive) assortative mating to a greater or lower extent compared to couples that met through other online venues (that are not specifically designed for mate selection) or conventional mating markets such as friends, family, school, workplace, religious venues, and so forth. I examine three pivotal endogamy patterns, referring to couple similarity in terms of education, race, and religion (Schwartz 2013). The study relies on theoretical considerations regarding the structure and composition of the social milieu where people meet and mate (Blau 1977, 1994). This entails that the type of social relations forged within a context depend on the socio-demographic composition of the people embedded within it. The more homogenous an environment is, the more likely endogamous connections are to emerge (Kalmijn & Flap 2001).

The guiding hypothesis of this study is that online dating sites promote more educational, racial and religious endogamy in comparison to both conventional and other online meeting settings. Despite not being social homogenous, online dating sites provide an ideal setting for the realization of homophilous preferences due to the particularities of their partnership market. This includes an easy access to a generous pool of prospective partners, the potential interference of website algorithms that match people with similar others, as well as options of effortlessly screening and selecting partners with a similar background.

Among conventional meeting venues, school settings are highly homogenous in terms of education and religion (Mare 1991; Kalmijn & Flap 2001), leading to strong educational and religious endogamy patterns. The homogeneity of religious venues (Feld 1984) similarly leads to increased endogamy in terms of religious affiliation. Personal networks of family, friends, and neighbors are also sometimes found to be related to high religious endogamy (Kalmijn & Flap 2001), whereas work settings promote more educational similarity between partners (Mollenhorst, Völker, & Flap 2008a). The more heterogeneous leisure settings of going out or socializing, as well as voluntary associations (Bozon & Héran 1989) are connected to less pronounced endogamy patterns. However, a certain degree of segregation and thus couple endogamy can still occur (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook 2001).

1.5 DATA

The data used in this dissertation stem from two sources. The first three empirical studies rely on a secondary data source, specifically a database of members enrolled on the eDarling dating website in September 2011, containing anonymized user profile and preference information. The website currently operates in 20 countries in Europe and Latin America, but the countries that had an active dating site at the time of data access were the 9 European countries of Germany, Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Sweden, France, Spain, Italy¹, and Poland². According to current classifications (Finkel *et al.* 2012; Fiore & Donath 2004), the eDarling dating site qualifies as mainstream (i.e., targets a general audience and users from a variety of socioeconomic and racial backgrounds) and a personality-matching system (i.e., the website provider is in charge of matching people based on the results of the personality test). It is one of the largest European online dating companies (Datingsitesreviewed.com 2012) and it provides services for people in search of a serious relationship. A more detailed description of the dating options provided by the website in addition to issues of representativeness and selectivity can be found within *Chapters 2, 3, and 4*.

¹ Chapter 4 excludes Italy given a small sample size of divorced individuals enrolled on the Italian website. Italian divorcees represent a highly selective group due to the low prevalence of divorce in Italy and the higher proportion of lone parents who are separated rather than divorced in Italy (Chzhen & Bradshaw 2012). However, given the inability to distinguish between various types of separation (e.g., legal separation preceding divorce, separation following cohabitation, informal separation), as explained in Chapter 4, we only look at the partnering preferences of divorcees and thus dismiss Italy from the analyses.

² The data used in Chapter 3 excludes Poland given a missing item measuring one of the outcomes of interest.

When setting up a dating profile on the website, people are required to fill in an entry questionnaire of 283 questions. The items include personality testing, self-descriptions and personal information (referring to socio-demographic attributes, life-style habits, personal interests, and physical traits), relationship preferences (e.g., long-term dating intentions), as well as selection criteria for potential partners (e.g., in terms of age, height, geographical location, fertility history and plans, educational level, income, lifestyle habits, race, and religion). The data analyzed in the first three empirical chapters focus on daters' stated preferences regarding partner's racial status (*Chapter 2*), relationship intentions and monogamy attitudes (*Chapter 3*), the importance of partner's educational level (*Chapter 4*), as well as user's socio-demographic information. The chapters in this dissertation are also complemented by various sources of contextual-level data derived from European statistical databases and country (or regional)-level aggregated survey data. *Chapter 2* and *4* rely on a sample of heterosexual members, whereas *Chapter 3* focuses on the database of gay and lesbian daters.

Using such a rich data set presents multiple advantages. We have the possibility of coming closer to a more genuine measure of individuals' dating preferences, which are captured in the absence of significant others and not mediated by other third parties (e.g., interviewers). The data offer the chance to gain unique insights on the topic of mate selection in the digital era. They minimize social desirability bias and describe partner selection in a natural dating environment. The data also help re-consider old questions regarding assortative mating and permit us to understand what exactly people seek in a partner when experiencing a close-to-ideal marriage market (see *Chapter 5* for a detailed characterization of the online dating pool and its advantages, including accessibility, large and diverse pool of potential partners, browsing interface, potential matching algorithms). Moreover, the geographic spread and the fact that the website provides dating services in multiple countries permits us to engage in a highly unique cross-national comparative analyses of online partnering preferences for the first time.

Whereas previous chapters look at online daters only, *Chapter 5* makes use of a different data source in order to make comparisons with individuals that found a partner in other dating venues. More specifically, it relies on the first wave of the How Couples Meet and Stay Together (HCMST) survey (Rosenfeld, Thomas, & Falcon 2011). HCMST is a nationally representative longitudinal survey of English-speaking adults in the U.S., with the first wave of data collected in 2009. The survey mainly addresses partnered respondents who

are either married or in a romantic or sexual relationship. The items included in the data set refer to respondent's as well as partner's socio-demographic profile, respondent's assessment of relationship quality, and information about the context in which the couple met. The benefit of using the HCMST survey data is that it allows an innovative test of assortative mating for partnerships established via online dating sites in comparison to other venues for meeting and mating. Moreover, as opposed to the usual census data found in the mate selection literature, the sample includes both marital and non-marital unions and is thus able to draw conclusions about union patterns on a more generalized level.

1.6 ANALYTICAL STRATEGY

To answer the research questions guiding this dissertation, a series of analytical methods is implemented. Given our focus on individual and contextual variation in mate selection and the cross-national nature of the data used in *Chapters 2* and *4* (and cross-regional in *Chapter 3*), we run analyses that can test both micro- and macro-level determinants, as well as account for the nesting of individuals in broader geographical units. An ideal practice of accounting for the hierarchical nature of the data and including predictors that vary at more than one level is multilevel analysis (Snijders & Bosker 2012). Whereas *Chapter 3* addresses gay and lesbian online daters nested in 53 sub-regions of the 8 countries under focus, *Chapters 2* and *4* are interested in the partnering preferences of heterosexual online daters across 9 (*Chapter 2*) or 8 (*Chapter 4*) European countries. Using multilevel modeling with a small number of upper-level units is unadvisable given the risk of running into biased results (Bell *et al.* 2014), particularly vulnerable to outliers and influential cases (Maas & Hox 2005). As a result, for *Chapter 3*, which has a reasonable amount of upper-level units, we proceed with multilevel analysis, while for *Chapters 2* and *4* we employ an alternative strategy and estimate country-fixed effects models, which include distinct country dummies. We first estimate main effects in an individual-level analysis, while also including interactions with each country. In a second step, we run a simple regression analysis with the marginal effects (or predicted probabilities) obtained based on previous models with country interactions as dependent variables and specific country-level indicators as predictors. To better visualize and more intuitively interpret the association between national-level determinants and country estimates, we often graph a set of scatterplots. A detailed presentation of the specific

analytical choices taken within each chapter is now provided below and also summarized in Table 1.

In *Chapter 2* we focus on understanding the racial preferences of online daters across 9 European countries, by testing the effect of both individual-level racial background and several national-level determinants. There are five dichotomous dependent variables as each website user provided ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answers to the item regarding their willingness to date a partner with European, Hispanic, Asian, African, or Arabic origin. We first engage in a two-level five-response logistic regression models of preferences for specific racial groups with the five binary outcomes being considered as repeated measures or, equivalently, as a multivariate outcome. This strategy accounts for the potential correlation or non-independence of observations (i.e., answers nested in individuals). As mentioned above, to investigate national variation, we include interaction effects of racial background and country. Based on this model, we predict probabilities of preferring each racial group, by own racial background, for each country. Subsequently, we run simple regression analyses with Europeans and minorities’ preference probabilities corresponding to each of the 9 countries as dependent variable and each of the following country-level indicators as predictors: foreign-born population size, anti-immigrant attitudes, inclusiveness of migrant citizenship policies, and relative group size.

In *Chapter 3*, we are interested in the long-term dating intentions and monogamy beliefs of gay men and lesbians residing in 53 regions within 8 European countries. We explore individual-level life-course determinants, as well as contextual aspects such as general attitudes towards same-sex couples and legal recognition of same-sex unions. Given the nesting of individuals in 53 regions and the fact that both outcome variables are dichotomized, we run two multilevel logistic regression analyses in which we estimate both individual- and contextual-level predictors. We also estimate models that include cross-level interactions between each macro-level measure and gender to investigate differences between gay men and lesbians with respect to contextual determinants. Given the binary nature of our outcome variables, we fit all multilevel models by means of Monte Carlo Markov Chain estimation, which lead to more precise estimates (Browne 2009).

Chapter 4 examines the importance given to a partner’s education by divorced online daters across 8 European countries, with particular attention to individual-level factors such as gender, previous union history or number of children, and certain institutional and normative country-level indicators. We treat our outcome variable as continuous, entailing that the first

step in the analyses is to run an ordinary least squares regression model. Similar to *Chapter 2*, we also add interactions by country. Based on this, we estimate marginal effects of the importance of partner's education, by family status (i.e., a combined variable of previous union experience and children) and gender, for each country. We then estimate additional simple regression analyses in which the 8 country-specific marginal effects represent the dependent variable and each of the following country-level indicators are predictors: maternal full-time employment rate, gender wage gap, formal childcare, and crude divorce rate.

As described in section 1.4, *Chapter 5* employs a different source and type of data, which also calls for an appropriate statistical approach. This study is interested in assessing whether couples that met via online dating sites are more endogamous with respect to education, race and religion, compared to couples that met through other online settings or conventional venues for meeting and mating. To examine differences in the 'amount' of couple endogamy across various meeting settings, I employ log-multiplicative uniform difference (unidiff) models (Erikson & Goldthorpe 1992; Xie 1992). Three-way cross-classified tables of both partners' characteristics (education, race or religion) by meeting settings represent the point of departure for the analysis. The unidiff models assume that the pattern of partners' association to be the same for each meeting setting (i.e., the partners are more often similar than dissimilar), but the relative strength of this association can vary across settings by a multiplicative scaling factor. The unidiff models predict the cell frequencies of the cross-classified table and estimate setting-specific parameters of the overall association between partners. The analysis provides a parsimonious way to describe differences in couple endogamy across venues. Given the rather limited sample size and the fact that unidiff models do not allow the inclusion of many control factors, to inspect the robustness of results across various groups, I re-run the analysis by type of couple, age group, marital status, and presence of children.

1.7 SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

The aim of this dissertation was to understand patterns of mate selection and assortative mating in contemporary partnership markets, namely the Internet dating market. The four chapters outlined in section 1.4 each aimed to explore various aspects of online partner selection. A detailed presentation of each chapter's results, conclusions, and contributions to the mate selection literature is provided below.

Chapter 2 addressed racial preferences for in- and out-group members among online daters in 9 European countries. It first provided evidence for strong same-race preferences across most national contexts, particularly among natives. Second, it uncovered the existence of a specific ranking of preferences that both majority and minority members consent to. A hierarchy places Europeans as the most preferred partners followed by one's own group on top, Hispanics and Asians in the middle, and finally Africans and Arabs at the bottom as the least likely to be selected. This finding echoes results of previous mate selection studies of U.S. racial hierarchies (Bonilla-Silva 2004; Lin & Lundquist 2013). However, as opposed to the American context, minorities' preferences for the majority group surpass in-group preferences, pointing to a much more dominant ranking position of the white majority in the European partnering landscape. Furthermore, we demonstrated that country differences in the size of immigrant populations, anti-immigrant climate, and citizenship integration regimes contribute to particular cross-national variations in Europeans and minorities' racial preferences. Europeans living in countries with a sizeable foreign-born population (e.g., Switzerland, Sweden) had lower in-group preferences as well as higher preferences for minority groups. Among natives, a pronounced anti-immigrant sentiment was related to increased in-group preferences (e.g., in Italy), whereas more inclusive migrant integration policies were associated with decreasing same-race preferences (e.g., in Sweden). These results illustrated the salience of structural opportunities for interaction with external groups in providing exposure and openness for interracial partnering (Allport 1954; Blau, Becker & Fitzpatrick 1984). They also demonstrated the importance of formal and informal (in)tolerance towards immigrants usually affecting inter-group contact (Schneider 2008) in shaping Europeans' racial restrictedness in online partner selection. Finally, we found that minority members belonging to larger groups are more inclined to prefer same-race partners, particularly among Arabs. This reflects a strong identification of Arab members with the in-group and the likely influence of religious norms against entering partnerships with non-Muslims (Lievens 1998).

Chapter 2 contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it provided the first cross-national examination of racial preferences among online daters across multiple European countries. This study was thus able to address racial homophily and hierarchies across multiple national contexts, with distinct immigration population composition, and levels of attitudinal and legal acceptance of immigrants. Certain results diverged from previous U.S.-based findings, indicating distinctly European as well as country specificity of racial

preferences and hierarchies. Related to the first point, the second contribution of this study was to investigate which contextual forces affect racial partner preferences. Third, marital patterns until now analyzed in the intermarriage literature (e.g., Blau, Blum, & Schwartz 1982) are a product of both individual preferences and structural opportunities for interaction. By focusing on a large dating market, we diminish the constraining role of shortages in the marriage market and innovatively examine how contextual forces shape genuine racial preferences.

Chapter 3 investigated the long-term dating intentions and monogamy beliefs of gay and lesbian online daters across 53 regions in 8 European countries. The study first showed that compared to gay men, lesbians had stronger beliefs in the importance of monogamy, but are less interested in long-term dating. This finding revealed that gay men and lesbians differ in both intentions to commit to a long-term partner, and general attitudes towards sexual exclusivity. We further stress the importance of life course aspects in guiding relationship preferences among sexual minority groups. In line with previous research, being separated or widowed was associated with less demanding partnering preferences (Brines & Joyner 1999; Carr 2004). Having experienced divorce however was related to lower long-term dating intentions only among gay men. Divorced lesbians on the other hand, had more demanding relationship preferences, similar to heterosexual divorced women who apply more selective re-partnering criteria after divorce (Gelissen 2004). We also found a constraining effect of having children on partnering standards (Jansen, Mortelmans, & Snoeckx 2009) for both gay and lesbian daters. Having at least two resident children was linked to both a lower interest in long-term dating and weaker monogamy beliefs. Finally, the study revealed that contexts of positive attitudes towards same-sex couples and legal recognition of same-sex unions are connected to greater long-term plans and monogamy beliefs. We concluded that societal and institutional acceptance of same-sex partnering offers gay men and lesbians more certain definitions of partner roles and the ability to imagine a larger time horizon regarding the relationships they can form (Lau 2012; Powell *et al.* 2010).

The first contribution of *Chapter 3* is that it extended the largely understudied topic of gay men and lesbians' mate selection patterns. Second, it provided a first examination of life course aspects in connection to the relationship preferences of two sexual minority groups characterized by particular legal and biological contexts of family formation. Third, it tested both individual and contextual factors shaping gay men and lesbians' partnering standards. By accounting for multiple levels of variation, we acknowledged that online daters' preferences

are simultaneously influenced by individual and broader contextual characteristics. Finally, whereas previous research addressing same-sex partnering has generally relied on small convenience samples (Andersson *et al.* 2006; Jepsen & Jepsen 2002), this study used a detailed large-scale data set that permitted a unique and comprehensive understanding of gay men and lesbians' relationship intentions and attitudes.

Chapter 4 examined the importance given to partner's education among divorced online daters in 8 European countries. Results confirmed that when it comes to preferences for partner's education level, divorced daters (without children) are less selective than never married individuals. This indicated a decrease in perceived mate value following union dissolution (South 1991). Nevertheless, it could also illustrate that partner's education as a selection criterion loses its salience in later ages and re-partnering decisions (Kalmijn 1994; Shafer 2012). In support of evolutionary theory (Buss 2003) and economic arguments about women's greater need for a high status partner, we further showed that divorced women are more concerned with partner's education than divorced men. Similar to the findings of *Chapter 3*, the presence and particularly the number of children also shaped the re-partnering standards of divorced men and women. Whereas divorced women with more than two resident children gave less importance to partner's education, divorced men with children were increasingly more concerned with match's education. Finally, we presented several associations between contextual aspects and divorced mothers' standards for partner's education. We found that in countries with high maternal full-time labor force participation and high formal childcare provisions, such as Sweden and France, divorced women with children attach little importance to partner's education. This could be linked to women's greater economic independence and better chances of balancing work and family life (Raeymaeckers *et al.* 2008). Furthermore, divorced mothers in countries with relatively low maternal full-time employment and a pronounced gender pay gap (e.g., Austria, Switzerland, and Germany) gave more importance to the match's education, reflecting a greater reliance on men's socio-economic resources among divorced women with children (Andreß *et al.* 2006). As we predicted, divorced mothers in contexts that had a low divorce rate (e.g., Poland) had less demanding partner preferences and thus gave less importance to partner's education.

Chapter 4 extends the knowledge on secondary mate selection in several ways. First, it focused on the actual preferences of divorcees and provided a more direct assessment of what individuals with previous union experience seek in a new partner in terms of education. Previous research commonly addressed individuals' re-partnering standards by looking at

final matches and the characteristics of the new partner (e.g., Shafer 2012; Sweeney 1997). Given the scarcity of available partners in the (offline) secondary marriage market, previous studies described re-partnering preferences that are largely affected by the lack of structural opportunities for meeting. Therefore, our study was better able to gauge divorcees' raw preferences for partner's education. Second, it examined both individual and contextual factors shaping the importance that divorcees give to partner's socio-economic status. Given absent or inconclusive findings regarding the differences between divorcees and never married individuals (Gelissen 2004; South 1991), and the role played by children in affecting divorced parents' selectivity (Lampard & Peggs 1999; Wu & Schimmele 2005), this study clarified the way life course aspects influence the re-partnering preferences of divorced men and women. The study also addressed the context dependency of re-partnering and inspected a set of institutional and normative country-level factors meant to shape divorcees' demands on the dating market. A final contribution of Chapter 4 is therefore that it engaged in the first cross-national examination of the partner preferences of divorced online daters and can provide comparative insights into the selectivity of secondary singles in multiple and diverse national contexts.

Finally, *Chapter 5* compared educational, racial, and religious endogamy patterns between couples that met through Internet dating sites and those that met through other online venues or various offline settings. The main finding of this study was that online dating sites generally promote less socio-demographic similarity between partners in comparison to both conventional and other online meeting contexts, particularly when it comes to racial background. This result has the potential to substantiate initial prophecies about cyberspace demoting the importance of ascriptive characteristics in the forging of social ties (Barlow 1996; Castells 2001). When it comes to offline meeting places, school settings were confirmed as contexts that breed high levels of endogamy with respect to all three characteristics (Kalmijn & Flap 2001). Religious venues favored positive sorting particularly along race and religion, whereas meeting through family, friends, or neighbors relates to more couple similarity mostly in terms of race. Despite presumably optimal market conditions for the realization of endogamous preferences (i.e., easy access to a sizeable pool of prospective partners, the presence of potential similarity-based matchmaking algorithms, and the possibility of browsing and selecting along key socio-demographic traits), online dating sites did not favor more endogamy than other less optimal settings. This study contested the universally assumed preference of choosing a partner that shares the same background and

suggests that individuals vary in terms of endogamous tendencies (Lampard 2007). It is possible that online mate selection de-emphasizes similarity in terms of ascriptive traits while accentuating similarity with respect to personality and lifestyle. An additional explanation refers to increased exposure to diversity in the online environment and the weakening of social control (Rosenfeld & Thomas 2012; Schwartz 2013).

The first contribution of *Chapter 5* is that it aimed to advance the understanding of how digital partnership markets shape mate selection and relationship outcomes (Cacioppo *et al.* 2013; Rosenfeld & Thomas 2012). Second, it provided the first examination of assortative mating patterns in relation to Internet meeting sites. The investigation attempted to discern whether online dating reinforces more, less or the same amount of positive sorting as conventional meeting venues. Third, it extended previous studies by examining the Internet as a distinctive partnership market (Rosenfeld & Thomas 2012), thereby making an important distinction between relationship formation through natural or secondary online venues for interaction (e.g., chat rooms, social networking sites, online community) and online settings intended and used for romantic interaction (McKenna 2007). Previous results (Cacioppo *et al.* 2013) and our findings supported the decision to consider the particularities of each online setting. Another further development to previous research was the comparison between online dating sites and other online venues, as well as multiple offline contexts of interaction. A final contribution is that the study drew conclusions about the endogamy patterns defining both marital and non-marital relationships, as opposed to past research that mostly examines couple endogamy in relation to married couples only (e.g., Hou & Miles 2008; Mare 1991).

Overall conclusions

With a majority of daily social life increasingly moving from offline to online venues, the four studies included in this dissertation contributed to the understanding of Internet partner selection and the formation of intimate relationships within the boundaries of this evolving social context. The project examined a multitude of previously unexplored partnering aspects, ranging from stated preferences, intentions and attitudes recorded in the beginning of the selection process, to final partner choices. The research addressing the demand-side perspective of online mate selection highlighted the importance of individual characteristics (e.g., racial status, gender, stage in the life course) as well as broader, macro-level factors in shaping partnering preferences. The use of cross-national data provided an unprecedented breadth and depth of information about online daters' profile and stated preferences, meant to

advance the understanding of individual preferences for a suitable partner and relationship type. This study also provided additional knowledge about homophily and racial preferences as being highly pervasive among racial groups in Europe, about lesbian daters valuing monogamy more than gay men, but seeking long-term relationships less, and about divorcees giving less importance to partner's education than the never married. Partnering preferences were shaped by individuals' racial status and homophilous tendencies (*Chapter 2*), negative perception of their market value (*Chapter 4*), as well as prior life-course experiences (*Chapters 3 and 4*).

Chapters 2 to 4 also uncovered important country-specific patterns and institutional differences that can inform both scholarship and public policy. For instance, inclusive migrant integration policies were linked to more racial openness among Europeans (*Chapter 2*); legal acceptance of same-sex couples favored more long-term dating intentions and stronger monogamy beliefs (*Chapter 3*); high maternal full-time labor force participation and high formal childcare arrangements had a pivotal role in defining the re-partnering standards of divorced women with children (*Chapter 4*). These findings provided relevant evidence for policy-makers interested in reducing racial/ ethnic and gender inequalities, as well as the liberalization of marriage laws. From a theoretical point of view, *Chapters 2 to 4* extended our knowledge about assortative mating and sexual strategies in online dating by calling attention to the importance of contextual influences on partnering preferences. Even in the less restrictive digital mating markets, partner selection holds the imprint of national or regional particularities with respect to norms, structures, and institutions.

Finally, the research inspecting the supply-side perspective of online partner selection underscored the importance of where and how people seek for mates. It applies the theory of social structure (Blau 1977, 1994) and draws conclusions about a novel, yet increasingly prominent partnership market and social context of interaction. Using unique survey data that connects relationship formation to various marriage markets, *Chapter 5* showed that online dating sites breed more openness between social groups and contribute to the overall decreasing trends in couple endogamy. Therefore, even though finding a partner through Internet dating sites continues to be guided by homophilous preferences, particularly with respect to race, the online environment, its wider space of interaction and ability to bridge people from various social backgrounds encourages boundary crossing and ultimately reduces the 'usual' degree of separation between groups.

1.8 LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This section acknowledges the restrictions encountered in conducting this research and puts forward suggestions for future research that can advance the understanding of relationship formation through online dating sites.

First, the data we used in *Chapters 2 to 4* contained information regarding stated preferences and attitudes. It would be an interesting endeavor to also examine whether online daters' preferences and what they initially want in a partner are consistent with eventual contacting and matching between users. Despite certain evidence of differences in racial choices between different stages of online interaction (Lewis 2013; Lin & Lundquist 2013), previous research examining either stated preferences or contacting behavior find consistent patterns of homophily and racial preferences (Feliciano, Robnett, & Komaie 2009; Hitsch, Hortaçsu, & Ariely 2010; Robnett & Feliciano 2011; Yancey 2009). Furthermore, expressed preferences in terms of race and partnering are thought to be highly consistent with actual behavioral choices (Qian & Lichter 2011). Nevertheless, these conclusions are based on U.S. studies. Further research with cross-national data on both online dating preferences and interactions is warranted. An additional means of validating our findings is to conduct research using information accessed from multiple mainstream dating websites, to control for possible bias induced by selecting a certain dating site. Moreover, the conclusions we drew in this dissertation could be extended by using a higher number of countries that would allow for the fitting of multilevel models instead of the multiple-stage approach used in Chapters 2 and 4. Finally, the analysis undertaken in Chapter 5 should be supplemented with larger samples and additional survey data that targets European couples as well.

Second, there are several other aspects of online mate selection and relationship initiation that still remain puzzling. The data-set employed in *Chapters 2 to 4* refers to preferences captured as a snapshot at one point in time. An avenue for future studies could be the examination of preferences longitudinally, based on individuals' strategic considerations and the extent of (un)successful interaction experienced on the website. Moreover, research is still inconclusive about the presentation of self and impression management online (Goffman 1959). Self-descriptions in online dating profiles are ways in which daters can freely advertise their mate value and control the impression they wish to convey to others. Future studies can shed light on this topic and uncover successful strategies of self-presentation, as well as cross-cultural differences in the semantics of online impression management. Cross-national research should examine country differences in the "gendered reliance on men to be the

initiators” of online contact and patterns of online communication (Henry-Waring & Barraket 2008: 29) as well. This might provide insights into how unwritten rules of online courtship vary from country to country. Little is also known about the transition from online to offline dating and how the relationship initiated through the Internet meeting site evolves in the offline environment. Furthermore, future research could examine the increasingly popular dating apps (e.g., Tinder) that offer the possibility of getting in contact not only with individuals outside one’s social network, but also with those in close proximity to it (i.e., friends of friends sharing common interests). Recent reports reveal the prominent role played by mobile dating apps alongside online dating sites in present-day partner selection (Smith & Duggan 2013).

Finally, the literature on the emergence of romantic relationships is largely examined from a singular disciplinary perspective (Sassler 2010; Surra *et al.* 2004). This dissertation managed to address both sociological (e.g., contact theory, marital search theory) and psychological (e.g., sexual strategy theory, sociosexuality, evolutionary theory) explanations of individuals’ partnering preferences. However, the understanding of how people seek a partner online could benefit from a more comprehensive theoretical approach that is able to connect and transcend multiple disciplinary boundaries (Sassler 2010). Overcoming the scientific segregation of relationship formation studies could pave the way for a broader cross-disciplinary discussion of online mate selection.

TABLE 1. Overview of the Empirical Chapters (Chapter 2-5)

Main Research Questions	Outcomes and Predictors	Data and Method	Main findings
<p>Chapter 2 Are individuals from all racial groups more willing to date a same-race than a different-race partner? Is there a hierarchy of racial preferences across all countries? How are racial preferences dependent on contextual aspects such as size of immigrant population, relative group size, anti-immigrant sentiment and inclusiveness of migrant integration policies?</p>	<p><i>Outcomes:</i> preferences for specific racial groups (e.g., European, Hispanic, Arab, African, or Asian)</p> <p><i>Individual-level predictor:</i> own racial background.</p> <p><i>Country-level predictors:</i> size of foreign-born population; relative group size; anti-immigrant attitudes; inclusiveness of migrant integration policies</p>	<p>Data: profile and preference information of heterosexual members enrolled on the eDarling dating site in 9 European countries</p> <p>Method: two-level five-response logistic regression (with country fixed effects and individual-level predictors); OLS regression (with country-level predictors)</p>	<p>Daters tend to prefer partners of the same racial background. There is also a hierarchy of preferences among both Europeans and minority groups. Europeans living in countries with a large foreign-born population have lower levels of in-group preferences and increased preferences for minority groups. Anti-immigrant attitudes and restrictive migrant integration policies are linked to stronger in-group preferences among natives. Minorities' same-race preferences increase with relative group size.</p>
<p>Chapter 3 Do gay men and lesbians differ in long-term dating intentions and monogamy beliefs? Do life course factors, such as previous relationship experience and presence of children, alter the dating preferences of gay men and lesbians? Does living in contexts of both social and legal recognition of same-sex couples encourage gay men and lesbians to pursue longer-term relationships and favor monogamy?</p>	<p><i>Outcomes:</i> long-term dating intentions; belief in the importance of monogamy</p> <p><i>Individual-level predictors:</i> gender; previous union experience; resident children.</p> <p><i>Regional-level predictor:</i> attitudes towards same-sex couples</p> <p><i>Country-level predictor:</i> legal recognition of same-sex couples</p>	<p>Data: profile and preference information of gay and lesbian members enrolled on the eDarling dating site in 8 European countries</p> <p>Method: multilevel logistic regression</p>	<p>Lesbians have stronger monogamy beliefs, but less interest in long-term dating than gay men. Divorced gay men have lower long-term dating intentions, while divorced lesbians have more demanding relationship preferences. Resident children curb the relationship preferences of both gay men and lesbians. Contexts of both normative and legal acceptance of same-sex unions are related to stronger interest in long-term dating and monogamy beliefs.</p>

TABLE 1. Continued

Main Research Questions	Outcomes and Predictors	Data and Method	Main findings
<p>Chapter 4</p> <p>Are divorcees less selective than the never married when it comes to partner's socio-economic status? Do gender and presence of children affect how much importance divorcees give to partner's education? Are re-partnering preferences context dependent? More specifically, do divorced mothers give less importance to partner's education in countries with high maternal full-time employment, low gender wage gap, high childcare provisions, and low divorce rate?</p>	<p><i>Outcome:</i> the importance of partner's education</p> <p><i>Individual-level predictor:</i> family status (previous union experience; resident children)</p> <p><i>Country-level predictors:</i> maternal full-time employment rate; gender wage gap; formal childcare; divorce rate.</p>	<p>Data: profile and preference information of heterosexual members enrolled on the eDarling dating site in 8 European countries</p> <p>Method: ordinary least squares regression (with country fixed effects and individual-level predictors); OLS regression (with country-level predictors)</p>	<p>Divorced daters give less importance to partner's education than the never married.</p> <p>Women are more concerned with partner's education than men.</p> <p>For men, the presence of children is related to more importance of partner's education. Divorced women with more than two children have lower standards for partner's education.</p> <p>In countries with high maternal full-time labor force participation and high formal childcare arrangements (e.g., Sweden, France), divorced women with children give less importance to partner's education.</p>
<p>Chapter 5</p> <p>Do online dating sites promote more educational, racial and religious endogamy in comparison to both conventional and other online meeting settings?</p>	<p><i>Outcome:</i> expected cell frequency in cross-classified tables of both partners' characteristics (education, race or religion) by meeting setting</p> <p><i>Predictor:</i> meeting setting.</p>	<p>Data: HCMST, first wave</p> <p>Method: log-multiplicative uniform difference models</p>	<p>Online dating sites display weaker endogamy patterns compared to other contexts of meeting and mating.</p> <p>Schools promote positive sorting along all three attributes; religious venues favor racial and religious endogamy; personal networks display particularly high racial endogamy.</p>