

## University of Groningen

### Modern Love

Potarca, Gina

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*Document Version*

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Publication date:*

2014

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Potarca, G. (2014). *Modern Love: Comparative insights in online dating preferences and assortative mating*. [Thesis fully internal (DIV), University of Groningen]. [S.n.].

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## CHAPTER 4. DO SECONDARY SINGLES REALLY TRADE DOWN? THE IMPORTANCE OF PARTNER'S EDUCATION AMONG DIVORCED ONLINE DATERS ACROSS EUROPE<sup>5</sup>

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### **Abstract**

Using a large-scale sample of online daters in the 8 European countries of Germany, Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Sweden, France, Spain, and Poland (N = 592,557), we examine the importance that divorcees give to partner's education, compared to the never married. The literature commonly assumes that, divorced individuals have to adjust their selection criteria due to the shortage of suitable partners in the second marriage market. We find evidence that divorced daters indeed give less importance to partner's education than the never married. Women are generally more selective than men, but when resident children are present, divorced fathers appear more concerned with partner's education, while divorced mothers with more than two children are less demanding. Notable national differences are found, however. Divorced mothers living in countries with a high maternal employment rate and extensive formal childcare provisions (e.g., Sweden, France), as well as a low divorce rate (e.g., Poland) give less importance to partner's socio-economic profile, while divorced mothers from countries with a high gender pay gap (e.g., Austria, Switzerland and Germany) attach more value to partner's socio-economic status. The results show that family-friendly policies play a key role in assisting the partnering decisions of divorced parents.

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<sup>5</sup> A slightly different version of this chapter is currently under review at an international peer-reviewed journal. Co-authors are Melinda Mills and Marijtje van Duijn.

## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

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The last decades have witnessed a rise in divorce rates in both the United States and Europe, dramatically changing the composition of partnership markets (Bramlett & Mosher 2002; Kiernan 2004; Kneip & Bauer 2009; Prioux 2006). This has been accompanied by a rise in ‘secondary singles’ – individuals who have already experienced marriage and/or parenthood – searching for a new partner, yet we know relatively little about this group (Goldscheider *et al.* 2009; Sassler 2010). The mate selection of secondary singles is subject to different market conditions and timing (i.e., a later stage in life), as well as different needs and motivations for (re-)entering a union (de Graaf & Kalmijn 2003; Dewilde & Uunk 2008; Gelissen 2004; Shafer 2013). Existing literature on re-partnering has largely focused on the probability of entering a second (or higher order) marriage (e.g., de Graaf & Kalmijn 2003; Shafer 2012; Sweeney 1997), drawing conclusions about divorcees’ mate selection patterns and preferences based on the characteristics of their new match. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the re-partnering choices that people make, however, it is essential to examine the actual preferences underlying final outcomes (Bredow *et al.* 2011; Shafer 2013).

Using a large sample of online daters, the current study extends existing literature by examining the importance that divorced men and women give to partner’s education in the 8 European countries of Germany, Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Sweden, France, Spain, and Poland. We focus on factors that are unique to the population of secondary singles including the presence and number of children and due to our cross-national focus, the national contextual factors that influence the impact of divorce and economic dependence of divorcees.

The current study focuses on the importance given to partner’s education, which has been shown to be one of the most important partnership selection criteria. A high level of education represents one of the most valued qualities on the partnership market (Becker 1981; Oppenheimer 1988), signaling economic well-being, cultural capital and lifestyle (Halpin & Chan 2003; Hou & Miles 2008; Mare 1991). Across most European countries, research indicates that individuals prefer equally educated partners, particularly in contexts of educational expansion and the transition towards a dual-earner family regime (Blossfeld & Timm 2003). Increased educational homogamy (i.e., marriages between individuals with the same educational level) raises concerns about growing income and social inequality (Breen & Salazar 2010; Breen & Andersen 2012). The importance that people attach to educational

attainment when assessing the desirability of a potential mate has long-lasting consequences on eventual marital sorting and overall between-household inequality.

A common assumption is that, in comparison to the never married, divorced individuals must adjust their selection criteria and ‘trade down’ due to a shortage of suitable partners. Individuals in scarce partnership markets are required to expand their search outside of their local marriage market (Harknett 2008; South 1991). The growing popularity of online dating sites during the last decade radically increased the “the romantic options available to older adults” (Sassler 2010: 567) by offering a large and easily accessible pool of potential mates. Yet it remains unclear if secondary singles are still required to ‘trade down’ – such as dating someone with a lower level of education – in the new era of digital partnering. The literature remains relatively silent about whether the mate selection preferences (and not final choices) of divorcees actually differ from the never married. By minimizing the influence of marriage market constraints in light of Internet dating, this study can properly examine the demand-side aspect of re-partnering. Unfettered by the scarcity of supplies, we can better understand the mate selection preferences of divorcees instead of examining only final partnership outcomes.

Although divorcees are often examined as one coherent group, there is likely considerable heterogeneity in the individual characteristics of secondary singles – such as gender and number of children – that may in turn guide their partnership preferences. It remains unclear how parenthood affects the mate selection criteria of both divorced men and women and whether children constrain or boost parents’ selectivity. We therefore also examine how the number of one’s own resident children affects the re-partnering ‘shopping list’ of divorcees. As Sassler (2010) notes, there is currently a lack of knowledge about the way parenthood shapes the preferences and decisions taken by parents in the initial stages of the re-partnering process. Several studies identified the negative association between presence of children and divorcees’ chances of re-partnering, particularly for women, who generally hold the post-divorce custody of children (e.g., Bumpass, Sweet, & Martin, 1990; de Graaf & Kalmijn 2003; Graefe & Lichter 2007; Lampard & Peggs 1999). However, there is also contrasting evidence that parenthood increases the chances of entering a new union, especially for men (e.g., Goldscheider and Sassler 2006; Wu & Schimmele 2005). In this study we attempt to understand whether children positively or negatively affect re-partnering preferences by examining the link between number of resident children and the importance given to partner’s educational level.

Finally, since the majority of research has been single country studies, we also know very little about how the national level context impacts the partnership searches of secondary singles. The normative acceptability of divorce and enabling or constraining factors for single parents (labor force participation, pay equality, childcare) has not been examined. Yet these factors are likely pivotal in shaping partnership possibilities and desires. We anticipate that there are different social costs of re-partnering in different contexts, particularly when co-resident children are involved, and test the influence of institutional and cultural arrangements on the importance that divorcees give to partner's education.

There are large differences in the composition of the population of divorcees across Europe, which are attributed to substantial variations in union formation patterns in terms of timing and occurrence of marriage, prevalence of non-marital cohabitation, and divorce rates (e.g., Kalmijn 2007; Kiernan 2002). For instance, there are earlier and higher divorce rates in countries such as Sweden versus more recent increases in Poland (Eurostat Database 2011). Furthermore, divorced women in the Netherlands, Germany or Switzerland have high education but often work part-time making them more financially dependent on their partner. Divorced women from Scandinavian countries, on the other hand, have high levels of both education and gainful employment (Uunk 2004). Countries like Sweden also display the highest proportions of fathers living with children after union dissolution (Andreß *et al.* 2006). Poland maintains high levels of overall female full-time employment, despite labor market transformations and declining state-provided childcare support in recent decades (Kotowska *et al.* 2008). We also know that there are substantial cross-national differences in women's drop in income following marital breakdown, with divorced women from Northern European countries displaying the lowest economic deterioration and those from Southern Europe experiencing the largest economic decline (Andreß *et al.* 2006; Uunk 2004). Therefore, particularities in divorcees' socio-demographic profile and the economic consequences of divorce result in different needs associated with re-partnering and different ways in which the divorced perceive their own attractiveness on the dating market. In this study, we therefore also examine the role played by certain contextual factors meant to mitigate the negative impact of divorce and enhance the economic independence of the divorced in general and divorced parents in particular. We specifically test the effect of female labor force participation, gender wage gap, formal childcare arrangements, as well as cultural aspects such as societal acceptance of divorce.

This study seeks to broaden the knowledge on re-partnering in several ways. First, it shifts the focus to the early stages of re-partnering by providing a unique multivariate analysis of the education-specific partner preferences of divorced individuals, prior to actual matching. This allows for a more direct evaluation of the raw preferences and standards held by divorcees in the re-partnering market. Second, by using unique large-scale data for various European countries, it provides the first cross-national study looking at the education-related partner preferences of online secondary singles. A third and related point is that by engaging in a novel cross-national analysis of this topic, it allows us to link the partner selection criteria of divorcees in relation to education with both individual and country-level characteristics. As previously stated, the current literature includes contradictory findings with respect to the role of children or how previous union experience shapes mate selection outcomes. This study can provide a clearer depiction of how life course aspects are associated with partnering preferences. We also investigate the link between various institutional and normative country-level factors on the value attached to a prospective partner's socio-economic level.

## 4.2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

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In this section, 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.

### *The re-partnering market and educational assortative mating*

Marital search theory (England & Farkas 1986; Oppenheimer 1988) suggests that given a favorable supply of opportunities for meeting and mating, those who fare the best have the highest levels of attractiveness and qualifications, such as education. A large body of research has revealed strong couple endogamy by education and educational preferences (Blossfeld 2009; Blossfeld & Timm 2003; Breen & Salazar 2011; Qian 1998; Skopek *et al.* 2011). Other research such as Skopek *et al.* (2011) studied the contact behavior of online daters in Germany, finding that educational homophily was essential for contacts and increased with higher educational levels. Institutions of higher education have also been characterized as an important marriage market for first unions (Mare 1991). For divorcees education is a social

marker, which serves as a ‘badge’ for success and higher labor market returns (Kalmijn 1994).

Divorcees represent a highly select group, not only due to the fact that they are more prone to experience unstable relationships, but are also influenced by the experience of the marital dissolution process itself (Kiernan and Mueller 1999). Socio-demographic factors shown to enhance the risk of divorce include pre-marital cohabitation, early union formation (Bennett, Blanc, & Bloom 1988; Ermisch 1995; Haskey 1992), parental divorce (Kiernan & Mueller 1999), race or ethnicity (Schoen 1992; Teachman 2002), lower education and unemployment (Haskey 1984; Sweeney 1997; Wu & Balkrishnan 1994). The group therefore often has a vulnerable social and economic position, which entails different partnering needs and expectations compared to those who have never married (Frazier *et al.* 1996; Poortman 2007).

The online partnership market provides a large pool of potential partners, no longer restricting divorcees to local market constraints, but rather to their perception of their own market value or the economic need of re-partnering. In partnership matching markets, mate preferences are specified as a function of one’s own and prospective partner attributes. The assumption is that an individual prefers a partner if the potential utility from a match with that partner exceeds a threshold value (i.e., a minimum standard) for a prospective mate. An individual’s mate value is based on their own traits (Todd & Miller 1999), including attributes such as their family status or gender (Kalmijn 1994).

### *Relationship history*

In the next section we address differences between childless divorced and childless never married individuals. There are two mechanisms of how relationship experience might impact future partnership preferences. First, a prior marriage could reduce the perceived market value of divorcees. Given that being divorced is often viewed as a non-normative trait that reduces individuals’ market value and the quality of partners they can attract (South 1991), these secondary singles may have lower demands than their never married counterparts. Moreover, since divorcees are usually older and in “different positions on their occupational trajectories” (Sweeney 1997: 481), partner’s education as an indicator of future economic well-being is less of a concern in re-partnering decisions compared to first unions (Kalmijn & Graaf 2003; Shafer & James 2013). Following this argument, *we would expect divorcees to give less importance to partner’s education, in comparison to the never married.*

A second competing mechanism posits that divorcees learn from previous relationships and are more motivated to be more selective (Gelissen 2004; Poortman 2007). Provided that generous market conditions permit the realization of such preferences, secondary singles might actually increase their standards to ensure that subsequent unions are more suitable and yield more benefits. Finding a new partner with good economic prospects is prioritized particularly when divorce has had a significant negative impact on an individual's economic well-being (de Graaf & Kalmijn 2003; Dewilde & Uunk 2008; Jansen *et al.* 2009). Thus contrary to the first mechanism, selectivity would lead us to anticipate that *secondary singles give more importance to a prospective partner's education than those without previous marital experience.*

### *Gender*

Previous research has identified that in comparison to women, men are generally more successful in the overall levels and speed of re-partnering (e.g., de Graaf & Kalmijn 2003; Ivanova *et al.* 2013; Poortman 2007; Shafer & James 2013; Wu & Schimmele 2005), and have more favorable odds even when accounting for the presence of children (Bernhardt & Goldscheider 2002; Wu & Schimmele 2005). Gender differences in the likelihood and timing of second union formation has been attributed to multiple causes: divorced women might have a lower desire to re-marry (Frazier *et al.* 1996) and benefit less from partnerships (Poortman 2007); a scarce availability of desirable mates for divorced women given men's overall tendency to enter partnerships with younger, childless and never-married women (de Jong Gierveld 2004; Sassler 2010, Goldscheider & Kaufman 2006; Goldscheider *et al.* 2009); and, a stronger stigma of divorce and lone parenthood for women, who usually hold custody of children (Goldscheider & Sassler 2006; Jansen *et al.* 2009). This study examines divorcees who are purposely and actively seeking a new relationship in a large pool of potential candidates. Since we examine preferences of partner seekers and not successful unions, the argument of a reduced desire to re-partner given market constraints and difficulties in finding a partner does not apply in the context of this study. Since our sample also includes a sizeable sub-group of divorced men with co-residential children, we are in the unique position to address gender differences over and above the 'child burden' effect (Jansen *et al.* 2009: 1285).

Gender differences in the selection criteria of secondary singles searching for a partner in online dating can be understood using both evolutionary and economic arguments. First,



the evolutionary approach argues that women place great value on the economic resources and social status of potential mates to ensure men's capability of parental investment (Buss 2003; Triver 1972). A second economic argument highlights the gender differences in post-divorce economic level and stability. In comparison to divorced men, women experience more significant losses in economic well-being following union dissolution (e.g., Andreß *et al.* 2006; Holden & Smock 1991; Poortman 2000; Sweeney 1997). Divorce is more harmful to women than men not only due to the greater financial and caring responsibilities of being a custodial parent, but also because of women's generally lower levels of earnings and labor market attachment (Smock, Manning, & Gupta 1999). Although the mechanism differs from the evolutionary argument, both arguments lead to the prediction that *in comparison to divorced men, divorced women are in need of a high-status partner and would therefore be more selective and give more importance to partner's education.*

#### *Number of children*

The role of resident children in shaping the dating choices and chances of divorcees is a core factor that remains interwoven with many aspects discussed until now, particularly gender. Gender effects are prominent due to the fact that children generally reside with the mother after divorce (Goldscheider & Kaufman 2006; Goldscheider & Sassler 2006). Although there has been considerable research on the role that children play on both parents' chances and choices of re-partnering, findings are inconsistent and mainly divided along two lines.

One line of research shows that having resident children *deters* the likelihood of second union formation, particularly among women (e.g., U.S.: Bumpass, Sweet, & Martin, 1990; Graefe & Lichter 2007; The Netherlands: de Graaf & Kalmijn 2003; Great Britain: Lampard & Peggs 1999; France: Beaujouan 2012; for cross-national European studies, see Ivanova *et al.* 2013; Jansen *et al.* 2009). The effect tends to be stronger for single parents with multiple children (Bumpass, Sweet, & Martin, 1990) or younger children (Jansen *et al.* 2009). Qian and colleagues (2005) find that women who experienced out-of-wedlock childbearing have higher chances of cohabiting rather than marrying and are usually matched with less appealing men (e.g., lower educated, older).

Several explanations explore why children might impede partnering prospects. The most common explanation is the sheer scarcity of time and opportunities to meet and find a new partner (Glenn 2002). Another reason, which is more applicable in the case of online daters actively searching for a mate in a large partnership market, is that having children has

implications for the way in which individuals are perceived as potential partners (Qian *et al.* 2005). Parents might have a decreased mate value due to concerns that non-biological children could strain the relationship (de Graaf & Kalmijn 2003) or a reluctance to make financial and parenting investments in non-biological children (Lampard & Peggs 1999; Qian *et al.* 2005). One general expectation we can draw from these arguments is that divorcees with resident children would be less attractive on the dating market than those without children, particularly when there are more children. Divorcees might also be cognizant of their negative capital on the dating market and downgrade their expectations for a new match. This would result in *divorcees with children to 'trade down' or give less importance to partner's education compared to divorcees without children.* We expect to find this particularly in the case of divorced mothers, for whom the presence of children is often stigmatized and associated with less successful re-partnering (Qian *et al.* 2005), despite the need for an affluent match and economic security.

A second conflicting line of research suggests that the presence of children *does not constrain* but may even enhance re-partnering prospects, particularly for men. A Canadian study shows that having children does not influence women's re-partnering chances and even has a positive effect on men's entry into new non-marital unions (Wu & Schimmele 2005). Men with co-resident children may fare well in the partnership market due to positive stereotypes of fatherhood enhancing men's attractiveness and re-partnering chances (Stewart *et al.* 2003; Wu & Schimmele 2005). It may be that men have a more positive view of their own market value, but also that they search for a partner that can share parenting responsibilities. This would lead to *divorcees with children (particularly men) to give more importance to partner's education compared to divorcees without children.*

#### *Contextual determinants of re-partnering preferences*

Although rarely empirically examined, the preferences of secondary singles are also conditional on national institutional and normative features, which shape divorcees' economic independence and re-partnering options. This cross-national study allows us to empirically test the role played by national-level maternal labor market participation, the gender wage gap, childcare arrangements and acceptability of divorcees. Since women have a higher risk of falling into poverty after divorce (e.g., Holden & Smock 1991) and are more susceptible to work and family reconciliation issues (Esping-Andersen 2009), this section focuses primarily

on how macro-level factors influence the mate preferences of divorced women with resident children.

Institutional factors mitigate the potentially negative economic consequences of divorce. As Oppenheimer (1988: 584) argues, certain institutional conditions that favor female labor market involvement and independence are able to ‘subsidize’ women’s search for a partner until an appropriate match is found. Financial security has likewise been shown to increase the willingness to form a more ‘non-normative’ union with someone with children (Goldscheider & Kaufman 2006). Economic dependence (generally of women) following divorce may create a higher need or haste to re-partner, which in turn may decrease the importance given to partner’s socio-economic resources (i.e., partner’s education).

A high full-time maternal employment rate points to an institutional context that enables the economic autonomy of women with children. An extended access to full-time employment for mothers would also mitigate the potential income decline following divorce. Moreover, Raeymaeckers and colleagues (2008b: 121) argue that countries with high female labor force participation generally provide “more female jobs” and an employment infrastructure that is more suitable for women with children (e.g., work-life reconciliation, childcare). As Table 4.1 demonstrates, Poland and Sweden have some of the highest rates of maternal full-time employment among the countries included in this study. In *national settings where the full-time maternal employment rate is high, we anticipate that divorced mothers would have a higher chance of having economic independence and be more able to balance care and employment responsibilities, and thus afford less importance to partner’s education.*

**TABLE 4.1.** National Level Indicators by Country

	Maternal full-time employment rate <sup>a</sup>	Gender Wage Gap <sup>b</sup>	Formal childcare <sup>c</sup>	Informal childcare <sup>c</sup>	Crude divorce rate <sup>d</sup>
	2010	2010	2011	2010	2010
Germany	18.9	16.8	24	15	2.3
Austria	28.4	19.2	14	37	2.1
Switzerland	12.0	18.5	24	45	2.8
The Netherlands	10.7	20.5	52	59	2.0
Sweden	46.5	14.3	51	3	2.5
France	39.5	14.1	44	21	2.1
Spain	40.5	6.1	39	20	2.2
Poland	50.9	6.2	3	35	1.6

Notes: <sup>a</sup> EU-LFS 2010 and EU-SILC 2010. For Switzerland, we use data from the Swiss LFS 2010.

<sup>b</sup> OECD Employment Database.

<sup>c</sup> Eurostat SILC; European Commission report. In percentage of children under 3 years of age cared for.

<sup>d</sup> Eurostat Database.

It is not only maternal labor market participation that plays a role, but also the extent of the gender pay gap and whether women have the capacity to earn enough to ensure economic autonomy. Andreß *et al.* (2006) argue that gender differences in post-divorce economic deterioration would be reduced if, among others, women's earning opportunities were equal to men's. To test this we assume that the higher the gender pay gap in a country, the greater women's dependency on their partner's socio-economic resources. *In countries such as the Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland and Germany, which display some of the biggest gender pay gaps in our sample (and Europe, for that matter), we anticipate divorced mothers to give more importance to partner's education.*

Numerous studies have also found that family-friendly policies have a positive impact on the employment and income level of women after divorce (e.g., Dewilde 2002; Gornick *et al.* 1997; Raeymaeckers *et al.* 2008a, b; Uunk 2004; van Damme *et al.* 2008). Formal childcare arrangements play a substantial role in allowing divorced mothers to combine work and family (Uunk 2004; Raeymaeckers *et al.* 2008a, b) and ensure mothers' employment continuity (Stier *et al.* 2001; Uunk *et al.* 2005). Jansen and colleagues (2009) show that when childcare arrangements are not sufficiently available to allow single mothers to achieve self-reliance through full-time employment, the only alternative to ensuring their own and children's economic well-being is through re-partnering. Keck and Saraceno (2013) demonstrate that the most effective policy to enable mothers to remain in paid work is generous provision of childcare services for children under the age of three. We therefore examine country differences in terms of childcare provisions for very young children between the ages of 0 to 2 years.

Table 1 shows that for the countries included in this study, the Netherlands, Sweden, and France have the highest shares of children under three cared for in formal arrangements. Sweden is known not only for high usage/ demand, wide availability and flexibility (i.e., services provided at atypical hours over the week and the year) of formal childcare facilities, but also for highly positive attitudes towards the use of childcare services (European Commission 2009, Mills *et al.* 2014). Swedish parents are also less reliant on non-formal childcare arrangements. The Netherlands and France, on the other hand, seem to complement the widespread use of formal childcare services with greater reliance on other arrangements such as child-minders, family or friends (European Commission 2009). Germany has a moderate level of children under three in formal care. Similar to the Netherlands, it also has a strong tradition of part-time childcare arrangements (i.e., less than 30 hours per week), which,

in combination with a rather low use of informal arrangements, hinders mothers' full-time employment. The country that provides highly restrictive formal childcare provisions is represented by Poland, where coverage of childcare arrangements is limited and unable to meet the demands of employed parents (*ibid.*). Informal kin and non-kin networks, however, play a significant compensating role. Based on this overview, we anticipate that in countries with *high childcare provisions* (particularly formal), *divorced mothers give less importance to partner's education.*

Finally, national norms and the cultural climate related to divorce and single mothers also shapes divorcees' re-partnering search (Dewilde & Uunk 2008). The extent to which divorce is common and socially accepted influences the way divorced individuals are perceived on the partnership market (Ivanova *et al.* 2013). Meggiolaro and Ongaro (2008) found that in a more secularized context, the second union formation of separated women is less hindered by the presence of children. The authors conclude that in more traditional settings, with a decreased tolerance towards divorce and lone parenthood, single mothers have lower chances of re-partnering due to the higher social and psychological costs faced by men when entering non-standard, socially disapproved unions. In nations with strong cultural values against divorce and single parenthood, divorced women with children will have a lower mate value. As Table 1 shows, divorce rates are the highest in Switzerland and Sweden and very low in Poland. We therefore anticipate that in *nations where divorce is less prevalent, divorced mothers* will therefore be required to give *less importance to partner's education.*

#### *Background factors*

We also introduce control variables for factors that have been shown to impact remarriage. First, we anticipate variations in re-partnering preferences with respect to educational level. The literature shows that higher education increases the likelihood of entering a new union (de Graaf & Kalmijn 2003; Gierveld 2004; Ivanova *et al.* 2013; Poortman 2007; Shafer & James 2013; Sweeney 2002). Studies that examine re-partnering patterns also reveal differences with respect to age (e.g., de Graaf & Kalmijn 2003; Poortman 2007), race (e.g., Bumpass *et al.* 1990; Goldscheider *et al.* 2009), religion (e.g., Chiswick & Lehrer 1990; Gierveld 2004), desire for children or intentions for long-term commitment (e.g., Goldscheider & Kaufman 2006).

### 4.3 DATA AND METHODS

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#### *Data and sample*

We analyze anonymized profile and preference information of childless never-married and divorced members registered at the *eDarling* online dating site. In an agreement with the company, data were accessed in September 2011. Launched in early 2009, *eDarling* is an online dating company that provides online matchmaking services targeted at a broad audience. It is currently based in 20 countries in Europe and Latin America, including the 8 countries under focus in this study. The company is one of the largest European partner agencies on the web. In Germany, for instance, *eDarling* tops the ranking of online dating services having roughly twice as many users as their main competitor (Süllhöfer 2013). The total sample consists of 592,557 heterosexual online daters, extracted from a total initial sample of 865,954 heterosexual site users. We excluded members younger than 20 (amounting to  $N = 44,457$ ) given a higher chance that co-resident children could refer to co-resident younger siblings. We also dismissed the groups of separated<sup>i</sup> ( $N = 129,308$ ), widowed ( $N = 36,137$ ) and never-married daters with co-resident children ( $N = 76,614$ ), given that the focus of our analyses is on examining the differences in mate selection criteria between divorcees (with or without children) and those with no prior relationship and fertility experience.

The website provides the possibility of enrolling as either a non-premium (free) or a premium (paid) member. Non-premium membership includes registration, filling in an entry questionnaire of 283 questions and the opportunity to browse through the proposed profiles of candidates without being able to inspect their photos or exchange e-mails. To gain access to pictures and to establish and react to contacts, a monthly subscription fee is required (premium membership). The entry questionnaire includes a personality test, personal details (e.g., age, occupation, educational level, race, religion, marital status, height, lifestyle habits etc.), importance awarded to partner's characteristics (e.g., education, physical appearance), as well as preferences for potential partners in terms of age, height, geographical location, fertility history and plans, lifestyle habits, and race. The data analyzed in this study focus on the user profile information and the dating preferences that people express when filling in the entry questionnaire. More precisely, our dependent variable is the importance that members give to a match's education.

### *Sample Representativeness*

One concern might be related to the representativeness of our sample. Given that the individuals most eligible to enroll on an Internet dating site are the ones that regularly use the Internet, we briefly compare the socio-demographic profile of divorced online daters in our sample to the population of divorced Internet users (Table 4.2). First, the gender distribution of divorcees enrolled on the *eDarling* dating site reflects an over-representation of women, similar to the distribution of male and female Internet users. Second, for both men and women, the average age of divorced online daters is slightly younger compared to the Internet-using divorced. The mean age of divorced members on the dating site ranges from 41.2 (for men) and 41 (for women) in Poland to 49.7 (for men) and 49.8 (for women) in Sweden. Finally, we contrast the proportion of highly educated individuals in each population. Whereas divorced men on the dating website are higher educated to a lower extent than the Internet-using divorced men (with the exception of divorced daters in Sweden), divorced women who are dating online are more often highly educated (with the exception of those in Germany, Switzerland, or the Netherlands). For instance, there are 41.2 percent highly educated women enrolled on the *eDarling* dating site in France compared to 31 percent highly educated women regularly using the Internet. Therefore, given an over-representation of somewhat younger and better educated divorced women, we can presume that our findings regarding women display a slightly higher selectivity than what would be expected from a general analysis of Internet-using divorcees.

### *Measurement of variables*

#### *Individual-level variables*

*Dependent variable.* The importance of match's education is measured via an item that asks: 'What importance do you give to the educational level of the person you are searching for?' on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 meaning 'not at all important' to 7 'very important'. We treat the variable as continuous.

*Independent variables.* Previous union experience is gauged by looking at *marital status*, which is a categorical variable including: never married (reference), and divorced. *Co-resident children* is measured by the question 'How many children under 18 live with you?' with the following 4 options: no children (reference), one, two, and three or more children. This measure does not allow us to distinguish whether the child is biologically or legally

**TABLE 4.2.** Socio-demographic Characteristics of Divorced Website Users Versus Statistics of Divorced Internet Users

	Divorced Online Daters		Divorced Internet Users <sup>a</sup>	
<i>Gender distribution (%)</i>				
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Germany	43.6	56.4	41.0	59.0
Austria	42.4	57.6	33.6	66.4
Switzerland	38.3	61.7	47.6	52.4
The Netherlands	45.3	54.7	33.7	66.3
Sweden	44.1	55.9	34.2	65.8
France	36.3	63.7	37.1	62.9
Spain	41.5	58.5	47.8	52.2
Poland	40.8	59.2	28.9	71.1
<i>Mean age 20-95(S.D.)</i>				
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Germany	47.4 (8.8)	46.1 (8.6)	49.7 (9.8)	48.4 (11.1)
Austria	47.0 (8.9)	46.5 (8.3)	50.5 (9.9)	49.7 (10.4)
Switzerland	49.1 (9.2)	48.1 (8.5)	49.3 (11.8)	51.5 (9.2)
The Netherlands	49.0 (9.1)	47.9 (8.9)	52.8 (9.5)	52.0 (10.9)
Sweden	49.7 (10.4)	49.8 (9.9)	56.2 (11.3)	55.4 (12.1)
France	47.8 (9.5)	48.2 (9.4)	52.8 (10.2)	48.5 (11.2)
Spain	45.5 (8.6)	44.9 (7.9)	46.7 (10.4)	45.8 (10.4)
Poland	41.2 (9.2)	41.0 (9.3)	56.7 (10.2)	43.5 (10.7)
<i>Individuals with high education (%)</i>				
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Germany	20.7	16.3	40.4	26.5
Austria	19.9	20.7	20.0	17.2
Switzerland	40.0	34.1	65.0	47.8
The Netherlands	28.8	25.9	36.7	29.8
Sweden	35.7	45.2	28.0	44.9
France	38.9	41.2	47.9	31.0
Spain	32.9	36.2	52.7	30.0
Poland	32.0	44.6	47.6	42.6

Notes: <sup>a</sup> The figures related to the population of unmarried Internet users are calculations by authors based on nationally representative weighted data from the fifth wave of the ESS (2010). Given unavailability of data on Internet use for Austria in the fifth round of the ESS, we rely on data from the fourth wave (ESS 2008). To examine the socio-demographic characteristics of individuals that regularly use the Internet, we selected respondents that mentioned using the Internet at least once a week, based on the following item: "How often do you use the internet, the World Wide Web or e-mail - whether at home or at work - for your personal use?".

S.D. = standard deviation.

related to any of the adults in the household. We combined the information on both relationship and parenting experience and created a comprehensive variable entitled *family status*, that has the following categories: 0 'childless never married', 1 'childless divorced', 2 'divorced with one co-resident child', 3 'divorced with 2 co-resident children', and 4 'divorced with three or more co-resident children'.



*Gender* is measured as a dummy variable, with values ‘0’ for male (reference category) and 1 for ‘female’. For *educational level*, we harmonize and group each country’s categorization for education according to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) code. We differentiated between three educational levels and created three dummy variables, which range between: the reference category of low (ISCED levels 0 ‘preprimary education’, 1 ‘primary education or first stage of basic education’, and 2 ‘lower secondary or second stage of basic education’), medium (ISCED 3 ‘(upper) secondary education’ and 4 ‘post-secondary non-tertiary education’) and high (ISCED 5 ‘first stage of tertiary education’ and 6 ‘second stage of tertiary education’).

*Control variables.* *Age* is a numerical variable ranging from 20 to 95. For ease of interpretation, in the analysis age is centered around the mean. We also include *age squared* to control for a potential curvilinear association between age and importance of partner’s education. *Ethnicity* is a categorical variable with the following values: European, Hispanic (Latin American), Arabic, Asian, African, or other. The initial categorization included Indian as a racial group, but it was later recoded into the broader Asian category as the differentiation between the two groups is not very explicit. *Religion* distinguishes between Christian (reference), Muslim, Buddhist, atheist, non-religious believer (also referred to as ‘spiritual’ without adhering to a particular religion), and other denominations. *Family formation intentions* are captured through the question ‘Do you want to have children and start a family with the person you are looking for?’ with the following three options: ‘none’ (reference), 1 ‘maybe’, and 2 ‘yes’. *Long-term dating intentions* is measured on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 meaning ‘not at all’ to 7 ‘very much’. Finally, we control for user’s *type of membership*, which is non-premium or premium.

#### *Contextual-level variables*

As described previously, a summary of the values of all contextual variables is shown in Table 1. The first two national-level variables are the level of *maternal full-time employment rate* and the *gender wage gap*. The *maternal full-time employment rate* is calculated as the employment/ population ratio for full-time working (i.e., at least 40 hours of work per week) women aged 25–49 living in a household with at least one child in the age category 0-2. For most countries, the indicator is computed based on EU-LFS (2010) and EU-SILC (2010) data. For Switzerland, however, we rely on Swiss-LFS (2010) data and compute mothers’ employment rate for women aged 15-64 who work full-time (i.e., an average of 41 hours per

week) and who live in a household with at least one child under 7. Even though the two data sources do not perfectly match, we contend that they are fairly comparable. Both sources show Switzerland and the Netherlands having the lowest rates of full-time maternal employment, indicating the high prevalence of part-time work among mothers in both countries (Buchmann, Kriesi, & Sacchi 2010; Wielers & Raven 2013).

The *gender wage gap* refers to full-time employees and is defined as the difference between male and female median wages divided by the male median wages. The data are provided by the OECD Family Database (OECD 2014).

The national-level of employment-related welfare provisions is addressed by looking at a measure of *formal childcare*. We rely on Eurostat SILC (European Commission 2013) data on the percentage of children in the age category 0-2 cared for under formal arrangements. These refer to pre-school education or equivalent, childcare at centre-based services outside school hours, a collective crèche or another day-care centre including family day-care organised/ controlled by a public or private structure.

Finally, the *normative context of divorce* is measured via a proxy of the crude divorce rate<sup>ii</sup> (i.e., the annual number of divorces per 1,000 inhabitants), with the assumption that the more common divorce is in a country, the less social stigma is associated with divorcees and therefore the more acceptance it receives (Ivanova *et al.* 2013). The data on each country's crude divorce rate were retrieved from the Eurostat (2011) database.

### *Analytical Procedure*

The first step in the analyses was to examine descriptive statistics in relation to our outcome variable, as well as the main socio-demographic characteristics of the childless never married and divorced online daters included in our sample. Using Stata, we then carried out an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis for our continuous outcome variable<sup>iii</sup> of importance given to partner's education. Despite the fact that the data include online daters living in 8 European countries, using multilevel models that account for the nesting of individuals within countries would result in biased estimates due to the low number of upper-level units (Bell *et al.* 2014). Moreover, having only 8 countries would make the results vulnerable to outliers and influential cases (Maas & Hox 2005). As an alternative, we engage in a country fixed-effects model that includes distinct country dummies. We first estimate main and interaction effects of family status and gender in an OLS regression model (while

also controlling for education, age, age squared, ethnicity, religion, family formation intentions, long-term dating intentions, type of membership, and country). In a second stage, we add interaction terms of family status, gender and country. Based on this model, we estimate marginal effects (when all other variables are held constant at sample mean values) of the importance of partner's education, by family status and gender, for each country. In an approach similar to two-stage least squares regression, we then run simple OLS regression analyses with the country-specific marginal effects corresponding to divorced women with resident children as dependent variable and each of the following country-level predictors: maternal full-time employment rate, gender wage gap, formal childcare, as well as the crude divorce rate. To visually and more intuitively grasp the relationship between country-specific marginal effects and contextual variables, we graph a scatterplot with a fitted regression line for each country-level predictor.

#### 4.4 RESULTS

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##### *Descriptive results*

Table 4.3A includes the mean values of the dependent variable, by family status for both men and women in each country. According to these figures, women give more importance to partner's education than men, irrespective of family status. Overall, divorced men with or without children attach more value to match's education than childless never married men. Divorced women, on the other hand, have lower mean scores than never-married women, irrespective of the presence of children. Partner's education appears to be the most valued among German, Austrian, Swiss, and Spanish men and women. French men and women award the least importance to partner's education, across all family status categories.

Table 4.3B reports the distribution of childless never married, childless divorced and divorced individuals with at least one co-resident child in each country and for men and women. The highest proportion of never married daters without any co-resident children is in Poland, while both the Dutch and the Swedish samples contain the highest shares of divorced daters with or without co-resident children. As expected, Sweden has the largest proportion of divorced men with at least one co-resident child (cumulative percentage of 15.1), while Poland has the lowest (cumulative percentage of 4).

Table 4.3C delves further into the socio-demographic profile of our target group of divorcees (thus excluding the childless never married). The highest proportion of highly

educated divorced men is found in Switzerland, while the largest share of highly educated divorced women can be seen in Sweden and Poland. The countries where racial minority groups have the highest levels of representation are the Netherlands, Sweden, France and Spain. Whereas in most countries approximately half of divorced website members declare to be Catholic, in the Netherlands, Sweden and Spain, divorcees are more likely to mention being atheist or non-religious believer. In general, men have more pronounced family formation intentions, especially in Spain or Poland. Particularly in the Netherlands and Sweden, women are more likely to have no intention of starting a new family. However, divorced women generally have stronger long-term dating intentions than divorced men. Finally, the oldest divorcees can be found in Sweden, while the youngest participate on the Polish website.

**TABLE 4.3A.** Mean Values of the Dependent Variable Used in Regression Analyses, by Family Status, Gender, and Country (Range: 1 - 7)

	Germany		Austria		Switzerland		The Netherlands		Sweden		France		Spain		Poland	
	M.	F.	M.	F.	M.	F.	M.	F.	M.	F.	M.	F.	M.	F.	M.	F.
Childless never married	3.60 (1.27)	4.50 (1.21)	3.56 (1.27)	4.57 (1.2)	3.50 (1.24)	4.39 (1.11)	3.10 (1.29)	4.04 (1.23)	3.08 (1.36)	3.84 (1.33)	2.59 (1.36)	3.40 (1.41)	3.34 (1.46)	4.43 (1.39)	3.12 (1.28)	4.03 (1.25)
Childless divorced	3.60 (1.15)	4.43 (1.12)	3.61 (1.19)	4.56 (1.17)	3.62 (1.13)	4.48 (1.13)	3.16 (1.18)	4.02 (1.10)	3.12 (1.22)	3.85 (1.18)	2.79 (1.28)	3.55 (1.27)	3.49 (1.37)	4.40 (1.35)	3.01 (1.27)	3.82 (1.23)
Divorced, 1 child	3.59 (1.19)	4.41 (1.11)	3.47 (1.16)	4.46 (1.17)	3.56 (1.10)	4.37 (1.08)	3.29 (1.16)	3.98 (1.12)	3.18 (1.19)	3.89 (1.18)	2.78 (1.31)	3.47 (1.35)	3.53 (1.34)	4.38 (1.34)	3.02 (1.26)	3.78 (1.20)
Divorced, 2 children	3.59 (1.18)	4.37 (1.14)	3.74 (1.08)	4.43 (1.15)	3.86 (1.00)	4.38 (1.09)	3.30 (1.11)	4.08 (1.08)	3.23 (1.27)	3.94 (1.22)	2.83 (1.30)	3.49 (1.37)	3.53 (1.41)	4.39 (1.33)	2.97 (1.28)	3.61 (1.18)
Divorced, 3 or more children	3.52 (1.19)	4.14 (1.21)	3.61 (1.69)	4.26 (0.99)	3.50 (1.15)	4.23 (1.14)	3.44 (1.16)	4.17 (1.12)	3.33 (1.35)	3.71 (1.24)	2.82 (1.38)	3.20 (1.42)	3.65 (1.61)	4.28 (1.59)	2.88 (1.30)	3.32 (1.23)
<i>N</i>	72,927	61,869	7,974	7,673	4,880	5,609	17,617	16,780	13,738	12,703	52,548	59,619	41,689	38,883	98,150	79,898

*Source:* Database of heterosexual members of the eDarling dating site, September 2011.

*Notes:* M. = males. F. = females. Standard deviations are reported in parentheses.

**TABLE 4.3B.** Distribution of Never Married and Divorced Online Daters, by Gender and Country

	Germany		Austria		Switzerland		The Netherlands		Sweden		France		Spain		Poland	
	M.	F.	M.	F.	M.	F.	M.	F.	M.	F.	M.	F.	M.	F.	M.	F.
<i>Family status (%)</i>																
Childless never married	73.7	59.9	66.4	52.6	67.0	53.8	60.6	50.0	60.9	46.5	71.9	56.5	73.4	59.8	80.3	64.9
Childless divorced	22.2	21.7	28.5	25.8	28.6	28.4	29.3	25.6	23.9	30.4	19.8	23.5	21.0	20.2	15.6	14.8
Divorced, 1 child	2.8	11.4	3.4	13.1	2.3	10.2	4.6	11.9	6.6	11.6	4.2	10.6	3.4	12.4	2.7	13.5
Divorced, 2 children	1.1	5.7	1.3	7.0	1.6	6.3	4.3	10.1	6.8	9.0	3.3	7.1	1.9	6.8	1.0	5.6
Divorced, 3 or more children	0.3	1.4	0.4	1.6	0.4	1.4	1.2	2.4	1.7	2.5	0.9	2.3	0.3	0.8	0.3	1.3
<i>N</i>	72,927	61,869	7,974	7,673	4,880	5,609	17,617	16,780	13,738	12,703	52,548	59,619	41,689	38,883	98,150	79,898

*Source:* Database of heterosexual members of the eDarling dating site, September 2011.

*Notes:* M. = males. F. = females.

**TABLE 4.3C.** Descriptive Statistics of Independent Variables Used in Regression Analyses (Divorced Sub-group)

	Germany		Austria		Switzerland		The Netherlands		Sweden		France		Spain		Poland	
	M.	F.	M.	F.	M.	F.	M.	F.	M.	F.	M.	F.	M.	F.	M.	F.
<i>Education (%)</i>																
Low	28.5	19.3	29.7	22.4	24.3	23.1	9.5	7.7	13.3	7.7	10.4	11.4	19.1	14.6	2.1	1.7
Medium	50.8	64.4	50.5	56.9	35.7	42.8	61.7	66.4	51.0	47.1	50.7	47.5	48.0	49.2	65.9	53.6
High	20.7	16.3	19.9	20.7	40.0	34.1	28.8	25.9	35.7	45.2	38.9	41.2	32.9	36.2	32.0	44.6
<i>Ethnicity (%)</i>																
European	94.4	94.4	95.6	97.0	94.8	94.1	90.6	89.3	89.1	90.0	90.5	88.0	92.0	87.6	97.9	97.7
Hispanic	0.4	0.7	0.3	0.4	0.4	1.8	0.7	1.2	1.0	1.5	0.4	0.5	4.9	9.1	0.1	0.1
Arabic	0.8	0.4	0.7	0.2	0.6	0.3	0.9	0.9	2.2	0.7	3.7	3.9	0.9	0.5	0.1	0.0
Asian	1.2	1.0	1.1	0.9	1.6	1.2	3.2	2.7	2.5	2.8	0.7	0.8	0.3	0.2	0.4	0.2
African	0.5	0.4	0.7	0.1	0.4	0.9	0.6	0.5	1.5	1.1	1.5	2.5	0.5	0.2	0.1	0.1
Other	2.8	3.1	1.7	1.5	2.2	1.8	4.0	5.4	3.6	3.9	3.2	4.3	1.4	2.3	1.4	2.0
<i>Religion (%)</i>																
Christian	43.2	49.3	49.6	51.9	45.5	45.6	28.4	27.7	21.8	26.3	40.4	43.9	29.3	29.6	57.8	66.8
Muslim	3.2	1.6	2.4	0.9	2.7	1.4	1.9	1.7	3.3	1.8	4.1	3.9	1.2	0.6	0.3	0.1
Buddhist	0.8	0.7	1.2	0.9	1.2	1.5	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.8	0.6	0.7	0.3	0.4	0.5	0.3
Atheist	29.3	22.6	15.8	10.9	20.3	15.0	20.4	17.3	46.6	37.3	33.8	28.2	25.9	19.0	8.6	4.1
Non-religious believer	20.3	22.6	27.8	32.7	27.0	31.9	26.7	28.1	22.0	28.3	15.9	17.5	40.7	46.1	30.1	26.7
Other	3.3	3.1	3.1	2.8	3.4	4.7	22.0	24.6	5.8	5.5	5.3	5.9	2.6	4.2	2.6	2.0
<i>Family formation intentions (%)</i>																
None	29.9	61.3	29.5	65.5	41.9	70.5	50.4	74.9	45.8	76.5	42.1	71.3	18.6	39.8	16.1	38.6
Maybe	50.2	28.5	51.8	26.6	45.1	22.8	37.0	17.9	42.2	17.4	41.2	20.1	47.6	38.8	61.9	48.3
Yes	19.9	10.2	18.7	7.9	13.1	6.7	12.5	7.2	12.1	6.1	16.7	8.6	33.8	21.5	22.1	13.1
<i>Membership (%)</i>																
Non-premium	86.8	85.7	84.6	82.9	89.9	88.1	91.8	91.8	88.8	85.1	89.9	90.4	92.3	91.7	91.1	87.4
Premium	13.2	14.3	15.4	17.1	10.1	11.9	8.2	8.2	11.2	14.9	10.1	9.6	7.7	8.3	8.9	12.6
<i>Mean age (S.D.)</i>	47.4 (8.8)	46.1 (8.6)	47.0 (8.9)	46.5 (8.3)	49.1 (9.2)	48.1 (8.5)	49 (9.1)	47.9 (8.9)	49.7 (10.4)	49.8 (9.9)	47.8 (9.5)	48.2 (9.4)	45.5 (8.6)	44.9 (7.9)	41.2 (9.2)	41 (9.3)
<i>Mean long-term dating intentions (S.D.)</i>	6.3 (1.2)	6.6 (0.9)	6.2 (1.2)	6.6 (0.9)	6.1 (1.2)	6.5 (0.9)	6.0 (1.3)	6.2 (1.2)	6.0 (1.3)	6.3 (1.1)	6.1 (1.4)	6.4 (1.2)	6.0 (1.3)	6.2 (1.2)	5.4 (1.6)	5.3 (1.6)
<i>N</i>	19,203	24,799	2,677	3,640	1,608	2,593	6,948	8,386	5,371	6,797	14,769	25,938	11,076	15,636	19,291	28,045

Source: Database of divorced heterosexual members of the eDarling dating site, September 2011.

Notes: M. = males. F. = females. S.D. = standard deviation.

*OLS regression results*

We now examine the main individual- and contextual level hypotheses proposed in this study. First, Table 4.4 reports findings of the OLS regression model that tests the association between family status and the importance awarded to partner's education, including a gender interaction as well. In conjunction with our theoretical discussion related to relationship history, we put forth two competing hypotheses, namely that in comparison to the childless never married, secondary singles without children would give either less or more importance to partner's education. We then elaborated upon these basic competing hypotheses to consider whether there was a gendered effect and proposed an economic and evolutionary-based argument that divorced women would be more in need of a high-status partner and thus give more importance to partner's education than divorced men.

Results in Table 4.4 reveal that divorced daters without children give less importance to partner's educational level than the never married. Table 4.4 also indicates that women generally award more importance to partner's education. To inspect gender differences across the different categories of family status, we inspect the gender interaction terms and also plot the marginal effects of importance given to partner's education for both men and women (Figure 4.1). As expected, divorced women are more concerned about partner's education than divorced men, irrespective of the presence or number of children. Figure A4.2 (*Appendix*) plots the marginal effects of importance given to partner's education by family status, gender and education. The figure shows that lower educated divorced women with three or more resident children are not significantly different than their male counterparts in terms of the importance given to partner's education. In spite of this, gender differences are largely preserved across all educational level categories.

We then explored the mechanisms of how the presence of resident children might either decrease the re-partnering demands particularly for women or increase the re-partnering standards of men. In contrast to the previous economic argument for divorced women, we hypothesized that divorced women with resident children would be cognizant of their weaker mate value and opt to 'trade down' and thus give less importance to men's education than divorced women with no children. For divorced men with children, on the other hand, we anticipated a more positive self-perceived image of fatherhood, and thus more value attached to partner's education. Figure 4.1 confirms that the presence of children is associated with a higher importance given to partner's education for men. The differences between divorced women with no children and those with one or two resident children are negligible. However,

for divorced women with more than two resident children, the data confirm a negative association between presence of children and importance of partner's education (but only for the lower and medium educated women, as Figure A4.2 indicates). This finding is replicated when examining the importance of partner's income level as dependent variable in supplementary analyses (available upon request). Therefore, a high number of resident children has a deterring effect on divorced mothers' re-partnering standards when it comes to more than one measure of partner's socio-economic status.

Additional analyses explored three-way interaction terms (family status  $\times$  gender  $\times$  country) that allowed us to assess whether previous findings are consistent across the 8 countries. Figure A4.3 (*Appendix*) plots the marginal effects of importance given to partner's education by family status, gender and country. The graph shows that in most countries childless divorced daters give less importance to partner's education than the childless never married. Nonetheless, in the absence of resident children, divorced men in Spain and particularly in France, as well as divorced women in France award more importance to match's education than the never married, giving confirmation to the learning hypothesis (Gelissen 2004). Furthermore, across all national contexts, never married and divorced women (with or without children) attach more importance to partner's education than men. Finally, we notice that in most countries having children increases the re-partnering standards of divorced men (excepting Germany and Poland, where there are no clear differences between divorced men with children and those without) and decreases the re-partnering standards of divorced women if the number of children is higher than two (excluding the Netherlands, where the importance given to partner's education slightly increases with the number of children).

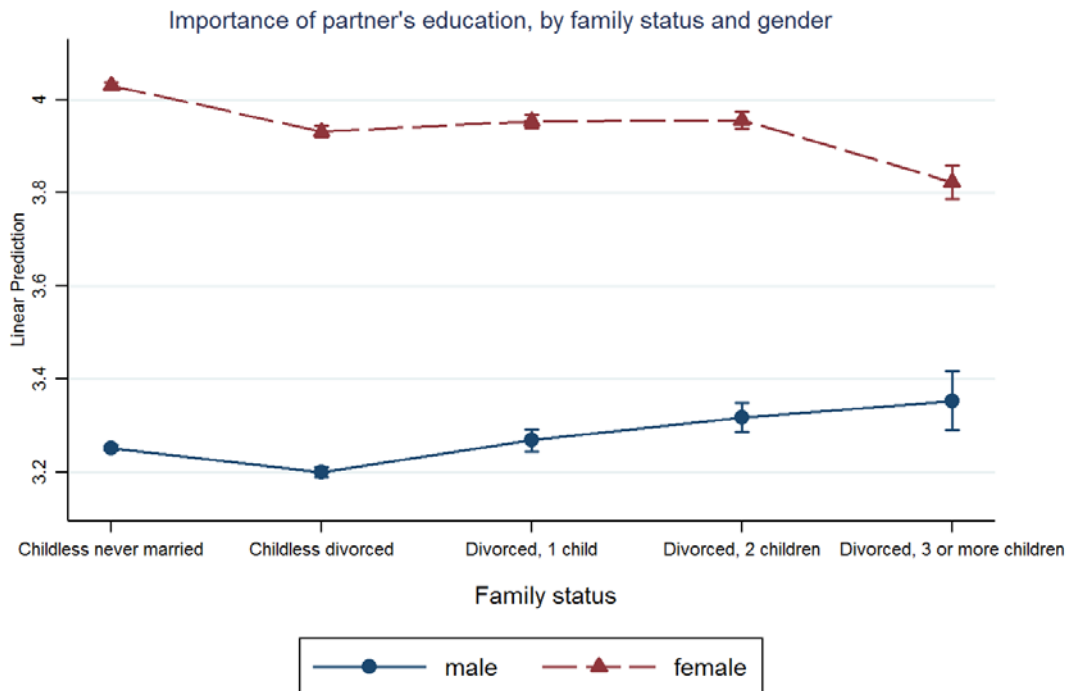


**TABLE 4.4.** OLS Analysis of Importance Given to Partner's Education ( $N = 592,557$ )

	Coeff. (SE)		
Family status: Childless never married (ref.)			
Childless divorced	-0.052	(0.007)	***
Divorced, 1 child	0.016	(0.013)	
Divorced, 2 children	0.066	(0.016)	***
Divorced, 3 or more children	0.101	(0.032)	**
Gender: Male (ref.)			
Female	0.778	(0.004)	***
Family status × gender interaction:			
Childless divorced × female	-0.047	(0.008)	***
Divorced, 1 child × female	-0.093	(0.015)	***
Divorced, 2 children × female	-0.140	(0.019)	***
Divorced, 3 or more children × female	-0.308	(0.037)	***
Education: Low (ref.)			
Medium	0.389	(0.006)	***
High	0.919	(0.006)	***
Age	0.001	(0.000)	***
Age squared	0.0002	(0.000)	***
Ethnicity: European (ref.)			
Hispanic	-0.021	(0.014)	
Arabic	0.039	(0.017)	*
Asian	0.087	(0.017)	***
African	0.138	(0.016)	***
Other	0.020	(0.010)	*
Religion: Christian (ref.)			
Muslim	0.114	(0.014)	***
Buddhist	0.050	(0.023)	*
Atheist	-0.077	(0.004)	***
Non-religious believer	-0.056	(0.004)	***
Other	-0.031	(0.008)	***
Family formation intentions: None (ref.)			
Maybe	-0.126	(0.005)	***
Yes	-0.147	(0.006)	***
Long-term dating intentions	0.028	(0.001)	***
Membership: Non-premium (ref.)			
Premium	0.088	(0.006)	***
Country: Poland (ref.)			
Germany	0.661	(0.005)	***
Austria	0.678	(0.011)	***
Switzerland	0.516	(0.013)	***
The Netherlands	0.093	(0.008)	***
Sweden	-0.051	(0.009)	***
France	-0.497	(0.005)	***
Spain	0.469	(0.006)	***
Constant	2.487	(0.011)	***
R-squared	0.202		

Notes: Coeff. = Coefficient; SE = Standard error; ref. = reference category.

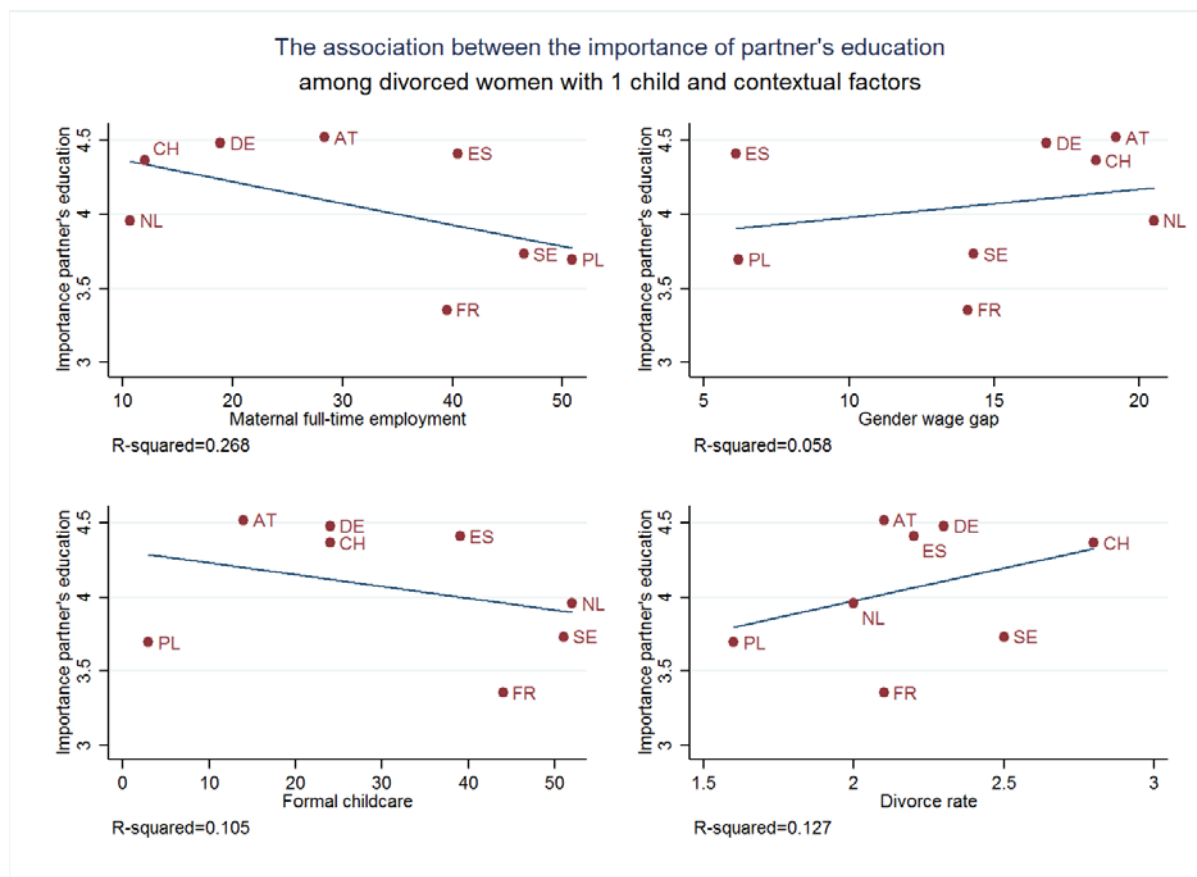
\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$  (two-tailed tests).



**Figure 4.1.** Marginal effects of the importance given to partner's education by family status and gender.

*Notes:* Based on the OLS regression model reported in Table 4.4, with significant interactions of family status and gender, and controlling for education, age, age squared, race, religion, family formation intentions, long-term dating intentions, type of membership, and country.

We now turn to contextual effects, which are visualized in Figure 4.2 plotting the association between the importance given to partner's education among divorced women with one resident child<sup>iv</sup> and various country-level indicators. We first proposed that in countries with a high maternal full-time employment rate, divorced mothers would give less importance to partner's education due to better chances of economic security and a more balanced work-family life. Results in the upper left hand panel of Figure 4.2 confirm our expectations. In Poland and Sweden, countries with a particularly high level of maternal labor force participation, we find low importance given to partner's education. The lowest value awarded to a partner's education is found in France, a country that also has a moderately high level of maternal full-time employment. At the other end of this spectrum, Germany and Switzerland have relatively lower maternal full-time employment rates, connected with more importance awarded to a match's education.



**Figure 4.2.** Scatterplots of the association between the importance given to partner's education among divorced women with one resident child and various country-level indicators ( $N = 8$ ).

*Notes:* The linear fit and R-squared are based on simple OLS regression estimates.

Country abbreviations: AT = Austria, CH = Switzerland, DE = Germany, ES = Spain, FR = France, NL = The Netherlands, PL = Poland, SE = Sweden.

We also hypothesized that in countries with a high gender wage gap, divorced mothers have a higher dependence on men's earnings and would give more importance to partner's educational status. The upper right hand panel of Figure 4.2 shows however a nearly absent association between gender wage gap and the value that divorced women with one child award to partner's education. Nonetheless, in countries such as Austria, Germany, and Switzerland, which have the highest gender pay gap scores, divorced women with one resident child give greater importance to partner's education. Conversely, Spain has a relatively low wage disparity between genders, but shows high importance given to match's education among divorced women with one resident child.

Furthermore, we proposed that in countries with high formal childcare provisions, divorced women with resident children would give less importance to partner's education given better prospects for continuous labor market participation and economic self-reliance. The data confirm this to a certain extent. Results shown in the bottom left hand panel of

Figure 4.2 indicate that in countries like Sweden (with a high reliance on formal childcare provisions), the Netherlands and France (both with high formal childcare arrangements in combination with high informal support), divorced women with one resident child give little importance to partner's education. In Poland, on the other hand, divorced mothers with access to low formal childcare provisions also give low importance to partner's education. However, as seen in Table 4.1, Poland has a relatively high share of informal childcare support.

Finally, we put forward the hypothesis that in countries with a more negative normative climate towards divorce (i.e., with low divorce rates), divorced mothers would be a non-normative group with low demands on the re-partnering market and thus give less importance to partner's education. As predicted, in Poland, which has the lowest divorce rate, divorced women with one resident child give low importance to partner's education. At the other extreme, Switzerland displays one of the highest divorce rates, that is associated with high importance given to partner's education among divorced women with one child.

#### *Background factors*

Results reported in Table 4.4 also show relevant effects of various background factors. Highly educated online daters are more concerned with partner's education. Figure A4.1 shows that the positive association between one's own educational level and the importance given to partner's education is consistent across all family status categories and for both men and women. Other results in Table 4.4 reveal that website members who declare being Atheist, non-religious believers or of another religion, and those with family formation intentions give less importance to partner's education. Online daters that are more concerned about partner's education are more likely to be of Asian origin, Muslim, or have long-term dating intentions.

## 4.5 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

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Using unique partner preference information for members of an online dating website in nine European countries, this study examined whether divorcees are indeed less selective than the never married when looking for a new partner, given a partnership market that allows for more effective and generous searches. As opposed to previous work that has mostly focused on re-marriage patterns and divorcees' final partner choices or outcomes (e.g., de Graaf & Kalmijn 2003; Shafer 2013), this study examined preferences in the early phase of partner selection. We were therefore better able to understand if secondary singles actually (want to) trade down in comparison to the never married, as the re-partnering literature seems to suggest so far. We addressed one key mate selection criterion, namely the importance that daters give to the match's educational level. Education usually serves as an indicator of partner's human capital and socio-economic resources. The study also examined gender differences as well as the association between the number of children and the importance given to partner's education. Finally, we suggested that the partner preferences of divorcees with children, particularly divorced women, are subject to specific contextual influences. We analyzed the link between the value placed on partner's education among divorced mothers with resident children and a set of institutional factors meant to advance mothers' economic independence and through that, their demands on the re-partnering market. Finally, we proposed that contexts with a negative climate towards divorce decrease divorced mothers' partner selectivity.

We first found evidence that – in relation to partner's educational level – divorced daters without children are indeed less demanding than those without a previous marital history. Our finding suggests that divorced daters have a less confident perception of their own attractiveness and the demands that they can make on the re-partnering market. However, it could also entail that education is a less conspicuous criterion for partner selection at older ages. This would be in line with previous research revealing that over time individuals become more concerned with more tangible indicators of economic resources, such as occupational status (Kalmijn 1994). Educational homogamy (i.e., marrying someone with the same educational level) is also shown to be more common among second marital unions than first ones (Shafer 2013), a pattern that could also be related to the fact that higher educational institutions are a primary marriage market particularly for first unions (Mare 1991).

Furthermore, we show that re-partnering preferences are highly gender-specific, with divorced women giving more attention to partner's education, compared to divorced men. Women's greater interest in a match's education provides confirmation to evolutionary arguments related to women's general concern with partner's socio-economic status (Buss 2003). It likewise supports the economic reasoning that the higher post-divorce income drop experienced by women leads to a greater need for a high status partner. However, we found that the presence of children steadily increases the selectivity of divorced men, showing a stronger concern with female partner's socio-economic status. Divorced women with more than two resident children, on the other hand, perceive the presence of children as a negative trait on the partnership market and therefore give less importance to partner's education.

Finally, we revealed associations between the importance given to a partner's education among divorced women with children and a set of contextual aspects, particularly maternal full-time labor force participation. Living in a country such as Sweden, with a high maternal full-time employment rate ensures a certain degree of economic independence, which in turn leads to a lower emphasis on partner's socio-economic profile. The fact that Swedish divorced mothers award less importance to a match's education and rely less on men's economic input is also likely linked to high formal childcare provisions and a more extensive welfare state support for women to effectively combine family- and employment-related roles. Divorced women with children in Austria, Switzerland and Germany were shown to be greatly concerned about partner's education, which we associated with high gender wage gaps and moderate levels of maternal full-time employment rates. It is therefore not merely employment participation that makes a difference in terms of economic autonomy, but also how comparable women's earning ability is in relation to men's and thus how dependent they are on partner's socio-economic resources.

Another national context where divorced women with children give a higher value to a partner's education is Spain, despite a moderate level of maternal labor force participation and a relatively low gender wage gap. A strong concern with a prospective partner's socio-economic status in a male breadwinner country such as Spain is likely conditioned by a strong post-divorce income drop among Spanish women (Uunk 2004). Future research should investigate the more specific link between education-related preferences and the female employment rate among divorced mothers (and not just women with children). France, on the other hand, scores the lowest when it comes to the importance given to partner's education. We associate this with a moderately high maternal full-time employment rate, a low gender

pay gap, and generous formal childcare services. France is in fact a frontrunner in public policies supporting women in bridging the work-family divide (Fagnani & Letablier 2004; Morgan 2003). Finally, Poland distinguishes itself by having divorced women with children giving low importance to a partner's status. The reduced interest in partner's education is understandable given Poland's high maternal full-time employment, a legacy of the intensive female participation in the labor force during the socialist regime (Lobodzinska 1996). Despite low formal childcare provisions, Polish mothers' continuity on the labour market is most likely supported by high informal assistance provided by family and friends. It would be important that future research also takes into account the age of the youngest child. In Poland, the arrival of the first child is known to have a negative impact on mother's full-time employment, which is most often replaced with part-time working (Thévenon 2009). With scarce childcare services for young children, women's ability to participate in the labour market on a full-time basis depends on the youngest child starting compulsory education (ibid.). A lower value placed on partner's socio-economic resources among Polish mothers could therefore indicate that resident children are generally of mandatory school age or older.

This study provided a unique and more comprehensive picture of the education-related partner preferences of divorced men and women and the role played by both individual and contextual factors. Despite its many advantages, the data used in this study did not provide full information about an individuals' entire marital and parenting history (e.g., number of previous unions, time since divorce, age of children etc.). We encourage future research to also examine the re-partnering preferences of individuals following the dissolution of cohabiting unions as opposed to marital unions. Since children born to cohabiting parents are an increasingly prevalent reality across European countries (Perelli-Harris *et al.* 2010), studies analyzing the impact of resident children and contextual factors on the re-partnering standards of individuals exiting cohabiting unions are warranted. Furthermore, whereas we employed a one-dimensional measure of formal childcare, we suggest future studies need to account for other dimensions of formal childcare arrangements, such as affordability or accessibility. The different countries in this study provide diverse legal contexts of re-partnering and parenthood in the aftermath of divorce and further research could also inspect cross-national differences in child support, alimony, visitation rights, and custodial arrangements.

#### 4.6 NOTES

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- i. We do not have information about whether the separation refers to the dissolution of either a formal or informal union. Given this uncertainty, we only examine individuals that declare being divorced, thus having dissolved a formal union.
- ii. We also replicated the analysis with an attitudinal measure capturing (aggregated) normative values on (dis)approval of divorce, with similar results.
- iii. The distribution of the variable is fairly normal (skewness -0.036; kurtosis -0.005). The skewness and kurtosis statistics for each country sample are provided in Table A4.1 in the *Appendix*. To further compare the distribution of the dependent variable across countries, Figure A4.1 (*Appendix*) graphs box-plots per country.
- iv. We replicate the analysis for divorced women with two resident children and divorced women with three or more resident children, and report the results in the *Appendix* (Figures A4.4 and A4.5). The findings are generally similar. Nonetheless, the association between importance of partner's education and maternal employment rate becomes particularly stronger as the number of children increases.



