

The Choices and Constraints of Secondary Singles: Willingness to Stepparent Among Divorced Online Daters Across Europe

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Abstract

Using a large-scale sample of online daters in eight European countries ($N = 196,777$), we examine willingness to stepparent among divorcees in relation to both gender and number of children, as well as a set of contextual determinants. We find evidence that having one's own resident children increases the readiness to partner someone with children. Contrary to previous findings, women are generally less willing to stepparent than men, but when resident children are present, gender dissimilarities fade. Notable national differences are also found. Divorced mothers living in Sweden, the Netherlands, Austria, or France are more open to having a partner with children, whereas Polish and Spanish divorced mothers would be less willing to stepparent. These results are interpreted in light of each country's institutional background.

Keywords

divorce/separation, remarriage, stepfamilies, mate selection, culture

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Introduction

The past decades have seen an increase in divorce rates across Europe, dramatically changing the composition of partnership markets (Kiernan, 2004; Kneip & Bauer, 2009; Prioux, 2006). Despite the rise in “secondary singles”—individuals who previously experienced marriage—searching for a new partner, we know relatively little about this group (Goldscheider, Kaufman, & Sassler, 2009; Sassler, 2010). The mate selection of secondary singles is subject to different market conditions and timing (i.e., later in life), as well as different needs and motivations (de Graaf & Kalmijn, 2003; Dewilde & Uunk, 2008; Gelissen, 2004; Shafer, 2013). Existing literature has focused on the probability of entering a second (or higher order) marriage (e.g., de Graaf & Kalmijn, 2003; Shafer, 2013; Sweeney, 1997), drawing conclusions about divorcees’ mate selection patterns and preferences based on the characteristics of their new match. To gain a deeper understanding of repartnering choices, however, it is essential to examine the actual preferences underlying final outcomes (Bredow, Huston, & Glenn, 2011; Shafer, 2013).

Using a large sample of online daters, the current study examines how receptive divorcees are to having a partner with coresident children in the eight European countries of Germany, Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Sweden, France, Spain, and Poland. We focus on a highly salient criterion for mate selection, namely partner’s parental status (Goldscheider et al., 2009; Goldscheider & Kaufman, 2006; Goldscheider & Sassler, 2006). Entering a relationship with someone who has children is linked to uncertainty surrounding the stepparenting role, often leading to relationship conflict and stress (Schwebel, Fine, & Renner, 1991). It also entails that partners spend a certain share of economic resources and time outside of the union and that they may be unwilling to have additional children (de Graaf & Kalmijn, 2003). Since having children is largely regarded as a less desirable trait (e.g., Daly & Wilson, 1998; Goldscheider & Kaufman, 2006), we define lower selectivity among divorced Internet daters as being more willing to enter a relationship with someone that has children.

Previous research indicates that compared with the never married, divorcees are more willing and more likely to enter unions with partners that have previous marital and parenting experience (Bernhardt & Goldscheider, 2002; Goldscheider et al., 2009; Goldscheider & Kaufman, 2006). Although divorcees are often examined as a homogeneous group, there is considerable heterogeneity in the individual characteristics of secondary singles—such as gender and number of children—that may in turn guide preferences. As Sassler (2010) remarks, there is a lack of knowledge about the way parenthood shapes preferences and decisions taken by both divorced men and women in the

initial stages of repartnering. Finally, since the majority of research has been single country studies, it remains unclear how national context affects the selectivity of secondary singles. Enabling or constraining institutional factors for divorced parents have rarely been examined, yet these factors may be pivotal in shaping partnership possibilities and desires.

This study seeks to broaden knowledge on repartnering in several ways. First, it focuses on the early stages of repartnering, providing a unique multivariate analysis of stepparenting preferences of divorced individuals, prior to actual matching. As opposed to relying on attitudinal surveys (Goldscheider et al., 2009; Goldscheider & Kaufman, 2006), this research captures stepparenting preferences in a naturalistic dating environment, with minimum social desirability bias. This allows for a more direct evaluation of raw preferences and standards. Second, by using large-scale data for various European countries, it provides the first cross-national study to examine the willingness to stepparent among secondary singles. Third, this novel cross-national comparison allows us to investigate the link between divorcees' readiness to accept a partner with children and both individual and country-level factors.

Background

The Online Repartnering Market

Marital search theory compares marriage candidates with individuals in pursuit of a job (i.e., in this case, a marital match), having a certain reservation wage threshold (i.e., a minimally acceptable set of characteristics that the partner should have; England & Farkas 1986; Oppenheimer, 1988). The outcome and timing of a match largely depend on market conditions, individuals' own evaluation of costs and benefits associated with extending their search, as well as the mate value that potential partners assign to them. The theory suggests that given a favorable supply of opportunities for meeting and mating, and low costs of searching, those who fare the best are the ones with the highest levels of attractiveness and qualifications. A common assumption in the repartnering literature is that divorcees must adjust their selection criteria and "trade down" due to a shortage of suitable partners. Individuals in scarce partnership markets are forced to expand their search outside of their local marriage market (Harknett, 2008; South, 1991). The growing popularity of online dating sites during the past decade radically increased the "the romantic options available to older adults" (Sassler, 2010, p. 567). The online partnership market provides a large and easily accessible pool of potential mates, with minimum (additional) search costs, no longer restricting divorcees to local market constraints, but rather to their perception

of their own market value or the economic need of repartnering. This study therefore contends that relationship demands and preferences are determined by the profile of partnership “seekers” and the perception of own attractiveness in the mating market, and that reservation wage levels (i.e., accepting a partner with children) are altered by key attributes such as their gender and own parental status (Kalmijn, 1994), which we now outline below.

Gender

Past studies have often shown that in comparison to women, men are generally more successful in overall levels and speed of repartnering (e.g., de Graaf & Kalmijn, 2003; Ivanova, Kalmijn, & Uunk, 2013; Poortman, 2007; Shafer & James, 2013; Wu & Schimmele, 2005), and have more favorable odds even when accounting for the presence of own children (Bernhardt & Goldscheider, 2002; Wu & Schimmele, 2005). Gender differences in the likelihood and timing of second union formation have been attributed to multiple causes: divorced women might have a lower desire to remarry (Frazier, Arikian, Benson, Losoff, & Maurer, 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; Goldscheider et al., 2009; Goldscheider & Kaufman, 2006; Sassler, 2010); and a stronger stigma of divorce and lone parenthood for women, who usually hold custody of children (Goldscheider & Sassler, 2006; Jansen, Mortelmans, & Snoeckx, 2009). This study examines divorcees who are purposely 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 repartner given market constraints and difficulties in finding a partner does not apply in the context of this study. Moreover, given that our sample includes a sizeable subgroup of divorced men with coresidential children, we are in the unique position to address gender differences over and above the “child burden” effect (Jansen et al., 2009, p. 1285).

When it comes to accepting a partner with children, research shows that women have a lower selectivity than men. Women have a greater willingness to marry someone with children (Goldscheider et al., 2009; Goldscheider & Kaufman, 2006; Raley & Bratter, 2004) and are more prone to enter a union with a partner who has coresident children (Bernhardt & Goldscheider, 2002). This gender discrepancy could be attributed to the postdivorce living arrangement of children usually residing with the mother. This means that after entering a union with someone with children, men would be more likely to live with their stepchildren compared to women who would more often

have nonresident stepchildren (Goldscheider & Kaufman, 2006; Goldscheider & Sassler, 2006). Nonetheless, women are more open toward having a partner who is already a parent even when stepchildren are coresident (Bernhardt & Goldscheider, 2002). The explanation relates to the greater divorce stigma experienced by women and their subsequent decreased mate value, as well as their greater willingness to care and invest in nonbiological children as opposed to men's reluctance to support someone else's children (Bernhardt & Goldscheider, 2002; Goldscheider & Sassler, 2006). Therefore, we expect divorced women to be more willing to date a partner with resident children than divorced men.

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, as previously mentioned, children generally reside with the mother after divorce (Goldscheider & Kaufman, 2006; Goldscheider & Sassler, 2006). Having resident children is generally shown to deter the likelihood of second union formation, particularly among women (e.g., the United States: 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 et al., 1990) or younger children (Jansen et al., 2009). Qian, Lichter, and Mellott (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 nonbiological children could strain the relationship (de Graaf & Kalmijn, 2003) or due to people's reluctance to make financial and parenting investments in nonbiological 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 with children might be cognizant of their negative capital on the dating market and downgrade their expectations for a new match.

Previous research indeed shows that both men and women with coresidential or noncoresidential children have more favorable attitudes toward step-parenting than those without children (Goldscheider & Kaufman, 2006). Goldscheider and Sassler (2006) also reveal that for both men and women, resident children increase the chances of starting a new union with partners who also have children. These findings could also be related to the tendency to hold more positive attitudes toward those that have a similar nonnormative parenting status (Goldscheider & Kaufman, 2006). Other studies uncover a stronger effect of resident children on women's chances of repartnering with someone who has children from previous unions, compared to men (Bernhardt & Goldscheider, 2002; Goldscheider et al., 2009). As opposed to custodial mothers, fathers living with their children are believed to be more selective and less eager to get involved in complex family arrangements (Goldscheider et al., 2009). Nonetheless, fathers' lower willingness to stepparent could also be linked to the more favorable prospects that men with children have on the dating market and their greater ability to attract never-married or childless partners (Shafer, 2013; Stewart, Manning, & Smock, 2003; Wu & Schimmele, 2005). We then expect a positive association between presence of own children and willingness to date someone with residential children for both men and women, but with a more prominent effect for women.

Contextual Background of Repartnering Preferences

Although rarely empirically examined, the preferences of secondary singles are also conditional on national institutional features, which mitigate the potentially negative economic consequences of divorce and shape divorcees' economic independence and repartnering options. The previously outlined *marital search theory* argues that 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 (Oppenheimer, 1988). Economic dependence (generally of women) following divorce may create a higher need or haste to repartner someone irrespective of their parental status, which in turn may increase readiness to stepparent. This cross-national study allows us to empirically test the link between divorcees' willingness to stepparent and national-level indicators of maternal labor market participation, gender wage gap, and child care arrangements. 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.

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 then mitigate the potential income decline following divorce. As seen in Table 1, Poland and Sweden have some of the highest rates of maternal full-time employment among the countries included in this study. Divorced women from Scandinavian countries in general are known to have high levels of both education and gainful employment (Uunk, 2004). Poland also maintains high overall female full-time employment, despite labor market transformations and declining state-provided child care support in recent decades (Kotowska, Józwiak, Matysiak, & Baranowska, 2008). We anticipate that in such national settings that foster high full-time maternal employment, divorced mothers would have a higher chance of attaining economic independence, and thus display higher selectivity in partner preferences (i.e., lower willingness to stepparent).

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, Borgloh, Bröckel, Giesselmann, and Hummelsheim (2006) argue that gender differences in postdivorce 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 entering a new partnership, irrespective of the potential presence of stepchildren. 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 be less selective and be more acceptant of a partner with children.

Finally, numerous studies have found that family-friendly policies have a positive impact on the employment and income level of women after divorce (e.g., Dewilde, 2002; Gornick, Meyers, & Ross, 1997; Raeymaeckers, Dewilde, & Mortelmans, 2008; Raeymaeckers, Dewilde, Snoeckx, & Mortelmans, 2008; Uunk, 2004; van Damme, Kalmijn, & Uunk, 2008). *Formal child care* arrangements play a substantial role in allowing divorced mothers to combine work and family (Raeymaeckers, Dewilde, & Mortelmans, 2008; Raeymaeckers, Dewilde, Snoeckx, et al., 2008; Uunk 2004) and ensure mothers' employment continuity (Stier, Lewin-Epstein, & Braun, 2001; Uunk, Kalmijn, & Muffels, 2005). Jansen et al. (2009) propose that when child care 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 repartnering. Keck and Saraceno (2013) demonstrate that the most effective policy to enable mothers to remain in paid work is generous provision of child care services for children under the age of 3. We therefore examine country differences in terms of child care 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 3 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 child care facilities, but also for highly positive attitudes toward the use of child care services (European Commission, 2009; Mills et al., 2014). Swedish parents are also less reliant on nonformal child care arrangements. Dutch and French parents, on the other hand, complement the widespread use of formal child care services with greater reliance on other arrangements such as childminders, family, or friends (European Commission, 2009). Germany has a moderate level of children under 3 in formal care. It also has a strong tradition of part-time child care 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. A country that provides highly restrictive formal child care provisions is represented by Poland, where coverage of child care arrangements is limited and unable to meet the demands of employed parents (European Commission, 2009). Informal kin and nonkin networks, however, play a significant compensating role. Based on this overview, we anticipate that in countries with high child care provisions (particularly formal), such as Sweden and France,¹ divorced mothers are more selective in their repartnering choices and thus are less willing to have a partner with resident children.

Method

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. The website is currently based in 20 countries in Europe and Latin America, including the 8 countries under focus in this study, which were the first ones that had an active website and comparable database of users at the time of data access. As previously outlined and seen in Table 1, the countries exemplify national contexts with a great deal of variation in terms of institutional arrangements relevant for divorced mothers' economic independence. The *eDarling* company is one of the largest European partner agencies on the web (Datingsitesreviewed.com, 2012). In Germany, for instance, *eDarling*

Table 1. National-Level Indicators by Country.

	Maternal full-time equivalent employment rate ^a	Gender wage gap ^b	Formal child care ^c	Informal child care ^c
	2010	2010	2011	2010
Germany	18.9	16.8	24	15
Austria	28.4	19.2	14	37
Switzerland	12.0	18.5	24	45
The Netherlands	10.7	20.5	52	59
Sweden	46.5	14.3	51	3
France	39.5	14.1	44	21
Spain	40.5	6.1	39	20
Poland	50.9	6.2	3	35

^aEU-LFS (European Commission, 2010) and EU-SILC (Central Statistics Office, 2010). For Switzerland, we use data from the Swiss Labour Force Survey (Swiss Federal Statistical Office, 2010). ^bOECD Employment Database. ^cEurostat SILC; European Commission report. In percentage of children under 3 years of age cared for.

tops the ranking of online dating services having roughly twice as many users as their main competitor (Süllhöfer, 2013). The website provides the possibility of enrolling as either a nonpremium (free) or a premium (paid) member. Nonpremium 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, and race.

The data analyzed in this study focus on the user profile information and the dating preferences that divorced online daters express when filling in the entry questionnaire. The total sample consists of 196,777 divorced 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 coresident children could refer to coresident younger siblings. We also excluded the groups of never married ($N = 461,402$), separated² ($N = 127,995$), and widowed ($N = 35,323$), given that the study focuses strictly on the stepparenting preferences of divorced men and women.

Sample Representativeness

One concern might be related to the representativeness of our sample in relation to the broader population of divorcees in each country. Given that individuals who are most likely to enroll on an Internet dating site are the ones who regularly use the Internet, which makes the results more generalizable to the population of Internet users, we briefly compare the sociodemographic profile of divorced online daters in our sample to a sample of divorced Internet users (Table 2). The population of Internet users is generally defined by overrepresentations of younger and highly educated individuals (Eurostat, 2011), as also seen when comparing divorced Internet users to the broader group of divorcees in Table 2. First, the gender distribution of divorcees enrolled on the *eDarling* dating site reflects an overrepresentation 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% highly educated women enrolled on the *eDarling* dating site in France compared to 31% highly educated women regularly using the Internet. Therefore, given an overrepresentation of somewhat younger and better educated divorced women and the fact that women belonging to these groups were previously found to be less willing and less likely to enter a union with a partner who already has children (Bernhardt & Goldscheider, 2002; Goldscheider & Kaufman, 2006), we can presume that our potential findings regarding women display a slightly higher selectivity (i.e., lower willingness to stepparent) than what would be expected from a general analysis of Internet-using divorcees.

Measurement of Variables

Individual-Level Variables

Dependent variable. The acceptance of a partner with children is a binary variable (0 = no, and 1 = yes), based on the item "Would you accept a person living with children under 18?"

Independent variables. Previous union experience is gauged by looking at *marital status*, which is a dichotomous variable (1 = *divorced*). *Coresident children* is

Table 2. Sociodemographic Characteristics of Divorced Website Users Versus National Statistics of Divorcees.

	Divorced online daters		Divorced Internet users		Divorced general population	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
<i>Gender distribution (%)</i>						
Germany	43.6	56.4	41.0	59.0	40.3	59.7
Austria	42.4	57.6	33.6	66.4	36.1	63.9
Switzerland	38.3	61.7	47.6	52.4	41.9	58.1
The Netherlands	45.3	54.7	33.7	66.3	35.4	64.6
Sweden	44.1	55.9	34.2	65.8	35.1	64.9
France	36.3	63.7	37.1	62.9	42.8	57.2
Spain	41.5	58.5	47.8	52.2	44.7	55.3
Poland	40.8	59.2	28.9	71.1	32.8	67.2
<i>Mean age 20-95 (SD)</i>						
Germany	47.4 (8.8)	46.1 (8.6)	49.7 (9.8)	48.4 (11.1)	54.3 (11.5)	52.4 (12.4)
Austria	47.0 (8.9)	46.5 (8.3)	50.5 (9.9)	49.7 (10.4)	52.5 (11.4)	51.1 (11.0)
Switzerland	49.1 (9.2)	48.1 (8.5)	49.3 (11.8)	51.5 (9.2)	51.8 (12.3)	55.2 (11.5)
The Netherlands	49.0 (9.1)	47.9 (8.9)	52.8 (9.5)	52.0 (10.9)	54.5 (10.6)	53.3 (11.5)
Sweden	49.7 (10.4)	49.8 (9.9)	56.2 (11.3)	55.4 (12.1)	59.5 (12.0)	57.1 (11.9)
France	47.8 (9.5)	48.2 (9.4)	52.8 (10.2)	48.5 (11.2)	55.4 (10.1)	51.5 (13.4)
Spain	45.5 (8.6)	44.9 (7.9)	46.7 (10.4)	45.8 (10.4)	50.0 (11.5)	49.7 (11.8)
Poland	41.2 (9.2)	41.0 (9.3)	56.7 (10.2)	43.5 (10.7)	54.3 (10.2)	49.8 (12.7)
<i>Individuals with high education (%)</i>						
Germany	20.7	16.3	40.4	26.5	32.3	17.4
Austria	19.9	20.7	20.0	17.2	14.3	16.2
Switzerland	40.0	34.1	65.0	47.8	51.9	38.9
The Netherlands	28.8	25.9	36.7	29.8	31.4	26.6
Sweden	35.7	45.2	28.0	44.9	24.2	41.0
France	38.9	41.2	47.9	31.0	22.4	20.0
Spain	32.9	36.2	52.7	30.0	41.2	19.0
Poland	32.0	44.6	47.6	42.6	22.2	26.1

Note. The figures in the *Divorced Internet users* and the *Divorced general population* panels related to the population of divorced Internet users and divorced individuals in general, respectively, are calculations by authors based on nationally representative weighted data from the fifth wave of the ESS (ESS Round 5, 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 sociodemographic characteristics of individuals who regularly use the Internet, we selected respondents who 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?"

measured by the question "How many children under 18 live with you?" (1 = *no children*, 2 = *one*, 3 = *two*, and 4 = *three or more children*). This measure does not allow us to distinguish whether the child is biologically or legally related to any of the adults in the household. Given the high level of interactions included in our analyses, we combined the information on both marital and parenting experience and created a comprehensive variable titled *family status* (1 = *childless divorced*, 2 = *divorced with one coresident child*, 3 = *divorced with 2 coresident children*,

and 4 = *divorced with three or more coresident children*). Gender is a dummy variable (1 = female).

We also introduce control variables for factors that have been shown to affect remarriage. These include *educational level* (1 = *low*, 2 = *medium*, 3 = *high*), *age* (in years, ranging from 20 to 95), *age squared*, *race* (1 = *European*, 2 = *Hispanic*, 3 = *Arabic*, 4 = *Asian*, 5 = *African*, or 6 = *other*), *religion* (1 = *Christian*, 2 = *Muslim*, 3 = *Buddhist*, 4 = *atheist*, 5 = *nonreligious believer*, and 6 = *other denominations*), *family formation intentions* (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: 1 = *none*, 2 = *maybe*, and 3 = *yes*), and *long-term dating intentions* (1 = *strong preference for a long-term relationship*). Finally, we also control for user’s *type of membership* (1 = *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 to 49 years living in a household with at least one child in the age category 0 to 2 years. For most countries, the indicator is computed based on 2010 EU-LFS and EU-SILC data. For Switzerland, however, we rely on 2010 Swiss Labour Force Survey data and compute mothers’ employment rate for women aged 15 to 64 years 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 were provided by the OECD Family Database (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2009). Finally, the national level of employment-related welfare provisions is addressed by looking at a measure of *formal child care*. We rely on Eurostat SILC (European Commission, 2013) data on the percentage of children in the age category 0 to 2 years cared for under formal arrangements. These refer to preschool education or equivalent, child care at center-based services outside school hours, a collective crèche, or another day care center including family day care organized/controlled by a public or private structure.

Analytical Procedure

The first step in the analyses was to examine the main sociodemographic characteristics of the divorced online daters included in our sample. Using Stata, we then carry out logistic regression models for our binary outcome variable. Despite the fact that the data include online daters living in eight 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, Morgan, Schoeneberger, Kromrey, & Ferron, 2014). Moreover, having only eight 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 two logistic regression models (including control variables). In a second stage, we add interaction terms of family status, gender, and country. Based on this model, we predict probabilities (when all other variables are held constant at sample mean values) of accepting a partner with resident children, by family status and gender, for each country. In an approach similar to the two-stage regression, we then run simple ordinary least squares regression analyses with the country-specific predicted probabilities 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, and formal child care. To visually and more intuitively grasp the relationship between country-specific predicted probabilities and contextual variables, we graph a scatterplot with a fitted regression line for each country-level predictor. The main shortcoming of this analytical approach is its rather simplistic nature. The fact that the data set only includes eight upper level cases limits the ability to include covariates or examine the strength and robustness of the association between outcome and predictor in more detail. Nevertheless, its advantage is that it can still grasp cross-national variation in divorced mothers' willingness to steparent and the potential clustering of countries in association with various macro-level indicators. Furthermore, all individual-level analyses use the *cluster* option in Stata to adjust for nonindependence of divorcees who live in the same country.

Results

Descriptive Results

Table 3 reports the sociodemographic profile of divorced online daters included in our study. In each country, divorcees without children are much more represented among men, while divorcees with one or more children are

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Independent Variables Used in Analyses (N = 196,777).

	Germany		Austria		Switzerland		The Netherlands		Sweden		France		Spain		Poland	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
<i>Family status (%)</i>																
Childless, divorced	84.4	54.1	84.8	54.3	86.9	61.4	74.4	51.1	61.1	56.9	70.5	54.0	79.2	50.3	79.6	42.1
Divorced, one child	10.7	28.4	10.2	27.6	7.1	22.0	11.7	23.7	16.9	21.7	14.8	24.4	12.7	30.8	13.7	38.3
Divorced, two children	4.0	14.1	4.0	14.8	4.7	13.5	11.0	20.2	17.5	16.8	11.6	16.4	7.0	16.8	5.3	15.9
Divorced, three or more children	1.0	3.5	1.0	3.3	1.2	3.1	3.0	4.9	4.5	4.6	3.0	5.2	1.0	2.1	1.4	3.6
<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>Race (%)</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

(continued)

Table 3. (continued)

	Germany		Austria		Switzerland		The Netherlands		Sweden		France		Spain		Poland	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Religion (%)																
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
Nonreligious 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
Family formation intentions (%)																
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
Membership (%)																
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
Long-term dating intentions (%)																
High	89.0	94.4	87.2	94.0	86.3	93.9	85.2	87.6	83.4	91.0	80.3	85.6	79.7	85.3	68.8	66.6
Mean age (SD)	47.4 (8.8)	46.1 (8.6)	47.0 (8.9)	46.5 (8.3)	49.1 (9.2)	48.1 (8.5)	49.0 (9.1)	47.9 (8.9)	49.7 (10.4)	49.8 (9.9)	48.2 (9.4)	45.5 (8.6)	44.9 (7.9)	41.2 (9.2)	41.0 (9.3)	
N	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.

more numerous among women. Consistent with previous studies (Andréß et al., 2006), Sweden has the largest proportion of divorced men with at least one coresident child (cumulative percentage of 38.9), while Poland has the lowest (cumulative percentage of 20.4). The highest proportion of highly educated divorced men is found in Switzerland, while the largest shares 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 nonreligious 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.

Multivariate Results

We now examine the main individual- and contextual-level hypotheses proposed in this study. First, Table 4 reports findings of a logistic regression model that tests the association between family status and accepting a partner with children (Model 1), and an additional model that includes an interaction between family status and gender (Model 2). Given the large sample size, the significance level is set at 0.1% ($p < .001$).

Table 4 indicates that, contrary to our expectation, women are less willing to stepparent than men. To inspect gender differences across the different categories of family status, we examine the gender interaction terms and also plot the predicted probabilities of accepting a partner with resident children for both men and women (Figure 1). We observe that, contrary to expectations, women are less accepting toward partnering someone who already has children, but only when childless. When looking at divorcees with one or two resident children, gender differences disappear. If three or more children are present in their household, then divorced women show slightly more readiness to have a partner with children than divorced men. This is, however, mostly valid among the lower educated, as seen in supplementary analyses available on request. In spite of this, the direction of gender differences is largely preserved across all family status and educational-level categories.

We then explored the influence of having own resident children. Figure 1 confirms that the presence of children is associated with greater willingness to stepparent for both men and women, with a more spectacular increase for

Table 4. Logistic Analysis of Accepting a Partner With Resident Children (N = 196,777).

	Model 1			Model 2		
	Coefficient	SE	OR	Coefficient	SE	OR
Family status: Childless divorced (ref.)						
Divorced, one child	1.320*	0.114	3.742	0.943*	0.138	2.569
Divorced, two children	1.644*	0.123	5.174	1.163*	0.156	3.200
Divorced, three or more children	1.535*	0.175	4.640	0.765*	0.217	2.149
Gender: Male (ref.)						
Female	-0.530*	0.034	0.589	-0.603*	0.031	0.547
Family status × gender interaction						
Divorced, one child × female				0.477*	0.067	1.611
Divorced, two children × female				0.612*	0.094	1.845
Divorced, three or more children × female				1.011*	0.108	2.749
Education: Low (ref.)						
Medium	0.006	0.042	1.006	0.007	0.043	1.007
High	-0.060	0.068	0.941	-0.059	0.069	0.943
Age	-0.010	0.005	0.990	-0.009	0.005	0.991
Age squared	-0.003*	0.000	0.997	-0.003*	0.000	0.997
Race: European (ref.)						
Hispanic	-0.271*	0.055	0.763	-0.271*	0.055	0.763
Arabic	-0.113	0.064	0.894	-0.129	0.063	0.879
Asian	-0.554*	0.082	0.574	-0.553*	0.083	0.575
African	-0.221	0.078	0.801	-0.230	0.077	0.795
Other	-0.160	0.061	0.852	-0.164	0.062	0.848
Religion: Christian (ref.)						
Muslim	-0.491*	0.067	0.612	-0.480*	0.064	0.619
Buddhist	-0.150	0.098	0.861	-0.141	0.099	0.868
Atheist	0.102	0.052	1.107	0.104	0.051	1.110
Nonreligious believer	0.062	0.043	1.064	0.063	0.043	1.065
Other	0.033	0.046	1.033	0.035	0.046	1.036
Family formation intentions: None (ref.)						
Maybe	1.054*	0.038	2.868	1.051*	0.038	2.859
Yes	1.061*	0.109	2.890	1.069*	0.108	2.913
Long-term dating intentions	0.227	0.082	1.255	0.224	0.082	1.251
Membership: Nonpremium (ref.)						
Premium	0.050	0.017	1.051	0.050	0.017	1.051
Country: Germany (ref.)						
Austria	-0.021*	0.003	0.979	-0.021*	0.003	0.980
Switzerland	-0.121*	0.007	0.886	-0.120*	0.007	0.887
The Netherlands	0.069*	0.010	1.071	0.072*	0.010	1.075
Sweden	0.409*	0.025	1.505	0.423*	0.025	1.526
France	-0.260*	0.011	0.771	-0.253*	0.012	0.776
Spain	-0.659*	0.019	0.517	-0.658*	0.019	0.518
Poland	-0.308*	0.037	0.735	-0.307*	0.036	0.736
Constant	1.220*	0.070	3.386	1.260*	0.075	3.525
Log pseudolikelihood			-82408.69			-82295.09

Note. SE = standard error; OR = odds ratio; ref. = reference category. SEs are corrected for the nonindependence of individuals within countries.

* $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests).

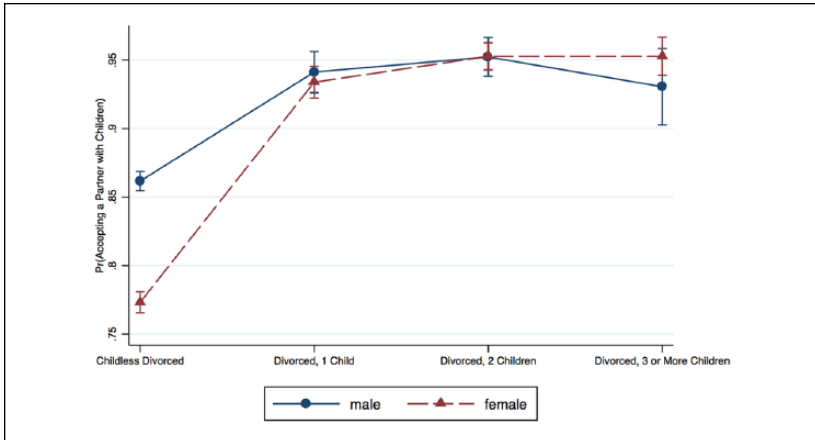


Figure 1. Predicted probabilities of accepting a partner with resident children, by family status and gender.

Note. Based on the Model 2 reported in Table 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.

women, as expected.³ The differences between divorced women with one, two, or more than two resident children are negligible. However, for divorced men with three or more children, the data show a slightly lower willingness to stepparent compared to divorced men living with a smaller number of children. This effect is mainly driven by the preferences of the lower educated, as additional analyses once again indicate.

We now turn to contextual influences, which are visualized in Figure 2 plotting the association between the willingness to stepparent among divorced women with children and various country-level indicators (contact the authors for supplementary materials). Results in the first column of Figure 2 reveal no clear link between divorced mothers' willingness to stepparent and national-level maternal labor force participation. In Sweden, a country with a particularly high level of maternal full-time employment, we find an unexpected high willingness to stepparent particularly among divorced women with one or two children. On the other hand, in Poland and Spain, where rates of maternal full-time employment are also comparatively high, divorced mothers are less acceptant of a partner with children.

Findings in the second column of Figure 2 confirm that in countries such as the Netherlands or Austria, which have high gender pay gap scores, divorced women with at least one resident child are more ready to partner someone with children. Conversely, Spain and Poland have a relatively low wage disparity

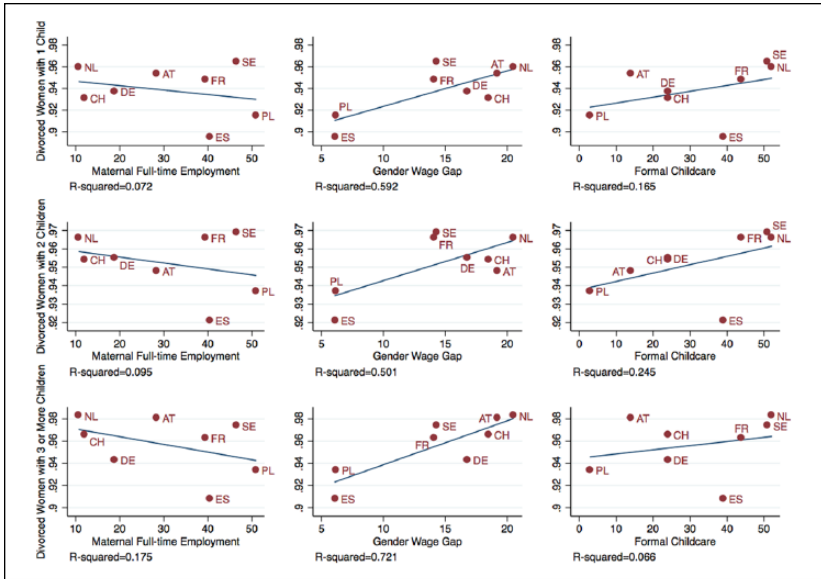


Figure 2. Scatterplots of the association between accepting a partner with children among divorced women with children and various country-level indicators ($n = 8$).

Note. AT = Austria; CH = Switzerland; DE = Germany; ES = Spain; FR = France; NL = the Netherlands; PL = Poland; SE = Sweden. The linear fit and R-squared are based on simple ordinary least squares regression estimates. The top row of graphs corresponds to divorced women with one resident child. The second row of graphs corresponds to divorced women with two resident children. The bottom row of graphs corresponds to divorced women with three or more resident children.

between genders, but show lower willingness to steparent among divorced women with children. Finally, results shown in the third column of Figure 2 indicate that contrary to expectations, in countries like Sweden (with a high reliance on formal child care provisions), the Netherlands and France (both with high formal child care arrangements in combination with high informal support), divorced women with one or more resident child are more willing to steparent. Finally, in Poland, divorced mothers with access to low formal child care provisions are less accepting toward partnering someone with children.

Conclusions and Discussion

Using unique partner preference information for members of an online dating website in eight European countries, this study examined the selectivity of divorcees 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 remarriage 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 mate selection and could thus properly address the demand side of repartnering. The study investigated willingness to stepparent in connection to gender as well as number of children. We also suggested that the partner preferences of divorcees with children, particularly divorced women, are subject to specific contextual influences.

The study built on marital search theory (England & Farkas 1986; Oppenheimer, 1988) and the assumption that successful partnering in a market with large supplies of potential matches largely depends on individuals' market value, which is based on their own traits (Todd & Miller 1999). We showed that two key aspects (i.e., gender and presence of children), particularly in interaction with each other, determine the claims that divorcees make on the online dating market. We first found evidence that repartnering preferences are highly gender specific, with divorced women being less willing to have a partner with children, compared to divorced men. This finding contradicts previous research showing women as more willing to stepparent than men (Bernhardt & Goldscheider, 2002). This suggests that in the case of previous studies looking at remarriage outcomes, women's choices were more likely reflecting preferences altered by market constraints than genuine preferences. We propose two likely explanations for this finding. First, childless women are voluntarily child free and intentionally choose a life without (any) children. Childless women are a growing group in many European countries, reaching levels of 20% in many recent cohorts (i.e., born after 1968), and even higher at 30% for educated women (Miettinen, Rotkirch, Szalma, Donno, & Tanturri, 2015). Second, due to recently increased coparenting and custody regulations in many European countries, women are more aware that men have custody and coresidence children for a larger period of time, making them a less attractive option. Nonetheless, when the presence of own children is taken into account, differences between divorced men and women dissipate. This indicates that when it comes to stepparenting preferences, the "child burden" (Jansen et al., 2009, p. 1285) has an equal effect on both divorced fathers and mothers, and that the presence of children uniformly alters individuals' perception of mate value and attractiveness on the repartnering market.

Marital search theory also contends that partnership outcomes, particularly for women, are highly affected by demographic and societal trends in the area of work and family (Oppenheimer, 1988). In line with this reasoning, we tested associations between willingness to stepparent among divorced mothers and a

set of contextual aspects. The main theoretical assumption that we put forward was that institutional contexts that assist women in achieving economic independence and a suitable balance between work and family life (translated in high levels of maternal full-time employment and formal child care provisions), are also supporting partner searches that yield more fitting results (Oppenheimer, 1988), meaning lower risk partnerships that do not involve non-biological children. Contrary to authors' expectations, the data show no apparent association between divorced mothers' willingness to stepparent and these two contextual aspects. In fact, in Sweden and (to a lower extent) France, despite high maternal labor force participation, large formal child care provisions and an extensive welfare state support for women to effectively combine family- and employment-related roles (Fagnani & Letablier, 2004; Gallie & Russell, 2009), divorced women with children have high acceptance toward partners with children. In these particular cases, women's higher chances of economic independence and lower reliance on men's economic input most probably mean that divorced mothers are less concerned with the prospect of sharing partner's financial resources with nonbiological children. Past studies show that divorced women from Northern European countries experience the lowest economic deterioration following marital breakdown (Andreß et al., 2006; Uunk, 2004). Also, a greater willingness to date a partner with children among divorced women in Sweden and France could be related to the demographic and cultural landscape in the two countries, where nonnormative family arrangements are commonplace and universally accepted (Andersson, 2002; Beaujouan, 2012; Surkyn & Lesthaeghe, 2004).

Nonetheless, the study did reveal a link between national-level gender pay gap and divorced mothers' willingness to stepparent. This finding indicates that it is not simply labor market participation that makes a difference in terms of accepting a partner with children, but how comparable women's earning ability is in relation to men's and thus how dependent they are on partner's socioeconomic resources (Andreß et al., 2006). The discrepancy between male and female wages in countries such as the Netherlands and Austria, and the subsequent high degree of reliance on men's economic contribution, mean that divorced mothers living in such contexts are more ready to accept partner's nonnormative parental status. Divorced women with children in Germany and Switzerland, who face similarly high gender wage gaps and often forced into part-time employment (Salladarré & Hlaimi, 2014), making them more financially dependent on having a partner, also display moderately high levels of willingness to stepparent.

As previously mentioned, in Spain and Poland, divorced women with children are the least accepting of a partner with resident children of their own. This could be linked to both countries' Catholic background and less acceptant

cultural norms toward unconventional partnering involving children from both partners' previous relationships (Prskawetz, Vikat, Philipov, & Engelhardt, 2003). However, a lower willingness to stepparent among Spanish women could also suggest a strong concern with sharing prospective partner's socioeconomic resources in a country where women were documented to experience a strong postdivorce income drop (Uunk, 2004). Therefore, economic insecurity following divorce might not lead to decreased mate value and lower selectivity, as initially suggested in the study, but to a greater need to match with someone whose resources one would not have to compete for.

Finally, the fact that Polish divorced mothers are less open to partnering someone with children could also be connected to Poland's low gender wage gap as well as high maternal full-time employment, which constitute a legacy of the intensive female participation in the labor force during the socialist regime (Lobodzinska, 1996). Despite low formal child care provisions, Polish mothers' continuity on the labor 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 child care services for young children, women's ability to participate in the labor market on a full-time basis depends on the youngest child starting compulsory education (Thévenon, 2009). A lower willingness to stepparent among divorced mothers in Poland could also indicate that their resident children are younger. This would be unsurprising, given that Polish divorced mothers in our sample are among the youngest.

This study provided a unique and more comprehensive picture of the willingness to stepparent among 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 repartnering preferences of individuals following the dissolution of cohabiting unions as opposed to marital ones. 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 repartnering standards of individuals exiting cohabiting unions are warranted. Moreover, in many countries in the sample, it is common for young adults to live with their parents in their late teens and early twenties (Eurofound, 2014). One limitation of our study is that the item used to measure resident children only captures offspring under the age of 18 years, inviting for a certain level of caution in interpreting results connected

to the childless individuals. Another potential 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, as well as whether online daters' preferences and what they initially want in a partner are consistent with eventual contacting and matching between users. Finally, this study is explorative in its attempt to address cross-national differences in willingness to stepparent among divorcees. Future studies using data on a larger number of countries could examine contextual influences, of institutional as well as cultural nature, on divorcees' partner preferences more directly and in more detail.

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Notes

1. We refrain from using the Netherlands as case where formal child care options would foster women's economic autonomy and balancing of work and family life domains, and through that, a lower willingness to stepparent. There are aspects of the Dutch case (e.g., high female part-time employment, few hours in formal child care, high gender wage gap) that lead us to anticipate a different pattern among divorced women with children in the Netherlands, resulting in lower economic self-determination and a higher acceptance toward partnering someone with children (see Mills, 2015).

2. Given the inability to distinguish between various types of separation (e.g., legal separation preceding divorce, separation following cohabitation, informal separation) which could each be connected to different repartnering needs and preferences (Andreß et al., 2006), we only examine individuals who declare being divorced, thus having dissolved a formal marital union.
3. The analyses were replicated on a subsample of premium members only with similar results (available on request). Moreover, additional analyses explored three-way interaction terms (family status \times gender \times country) meant to evaluate whether previous findings are consistent across the eight countries (contact the authors for supplementary materials).

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