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Chapter 4

Family forerunners? Parental separation and partnership formation in 16 countries*

* This chapter is currently under review at an international scientific journal. This chapter is co-authored by J. Härkönen and J. Dronkers (†, 30 March 2016). Härkönen and Dronkers started with the (idea of) paper already in 2011, but never finished it. Brons conducted all the analyses on up-to-date data and rewrote the main part of the manuscript together with Härkönen. Earlier versions of this chapter were presented at the PAA (San Francisco, 2012) and Dutch Demography Day (Utrecht, 2017).

Abstract

The objective of this study is to analyze the relationships between parental separation and partnership formation patterns across 16 countries and over time, and how the relationships are shaped by contextual factors. Several studies have found that parental separation predicts higher rates of cohabitation and lower rates of marriage. Few studies have analyzed these relationships over time or across countries, and none have systematically analyzed whether they are moderated by contextual factors. In this study, retrospective partnership histories on 87,313 women from the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) and Harmonized Histories (HH) datafiles were used. Annual data on entry into cohabitation or marriage as the first co-residential union, and on entry into marriage were analyzed using life table and event history techniques. The overall incidence of parental separation and non-marital birth rates were used as contextual-level measures in the event history analyses. The results of this study showed that the association between parental separation and partnership formation depended on the importance of marriage as the context for intimate and family life. Rising non-marital birth rates predicted a weaker positive association between parental separation and cohabitation, and a more negative association between parental separation and marriage. The associations between parental separation and partnership formation were not weaker when parental separation was more common. In conclusion, children of divorce have been among the forerunners of the increase in cohabitation and the retreat from marriage.

4.1 Introduction

Many studies have found that having separated parents is associated with lower rates of marriage and higher rates of cohabitation (e.g. Berrington, & Diamond, 2000; Cherlin, Kiernan, & Chase-Lansdale 1995; Erola, Härkönen, & Dronkers, 2012; Frisch & Hviid, 2006; Kiernan, 2003; Ongaro & Mazzuco, 2009; Perelli-Harris et al., 2017; Raab et al., 2014; Raab, 2017; Sassler, Cunningham, & Lichter, 2009; Wolfinger, 2003). This finding has been used to argue that the increases in (parental) divorce and separation have catalyzed the decline of marriage as the setting for intimate and family life and the increase of cohabitation seen across Europe and North-America (Perelli-Harris et al., 2017).

Research on parental separation and partnership formation has generally focused on single countries and time points, thus overlooking the potential variation in this association across countries and over time (for exceptions, see Kiernan, 2003; Li, & Wojtkiewicz, 1994; Perelli-Harris et al., 2017; Raab, 2017; Sassler, & Goldscheider, 2004; Wolfinger, 2003). Some studies have questioned the stability of this association. For example, Wolfinger (2003) found that children of divorce had higher rates of marriage in older American cohorts but lower marriage rates in more recent ones, and Perelli-Harris and colleagues (2017) showed how parental divorce did not predict cohabitation in countries where cohabitation was next to universal, although a clear positive association was found in countries where cohabitation was less common. These findings question the stability in the association between parental separation and partnership formation. At the same time, they suggest that children of divorce may have been among the forerunners of the family change often referred to as the Second Demographic Transition (Lesthaeghe, 1995; 2010; Van de Kaa, 2001) or the deinstitutionalization of marriage (Cherlin, 2004). However, despite providing descriptive evidence of variation in the association between parental separation and partnership formation, previous research has not systematically analyzed the contextual factors moderating this relationship. This has limited the ongoing—and often contradictory—research into the cross-national and temporal variation in the effects of parental separation (Härkönen, Bernardi, & Boertien, 2017), but also research on family change and its forerunners.

Our study presents the largest analysis of the relationship between parental separation and partnership formation across countries and over time. We used retrospective life course data from the Generations and Gender Survey and Harmonized Histories datafiles on 87,313 women from 16 countries and three birth cohorts to answer two main research questions. First, we asked the descriptive question of whether relationships between parental separation and partnership formation were similar across countries and over the three birth cohorts. Using life table analysis, we focused on two outcomes: the probability of cohabiting or marrying directly at the formation of one's first co-residential union by age 30, and the probabilities of getting married regardless of possible prior cohabitation(s) by ages 30 and 40. The first outcome refers to the relationship between parental separation and the increase in cohabitation, whereas the second relates to questions of a possible withdrawal from marriage. Second, we asked the explanatory question of whether the association between parental separation and the partnership formation outcomes varies by observed context-level factors. We theorized the role of two such factors, the importance of marriage as the context of intimate and family life, and the overall incidence of parental separation. We test the moderating role of these contextual factors on the association between parental separation and partnership formation using event history regression models. Our results contribute to the literatures on (the stability of) parental separation and family demographic outcomes, and on family change and its forerunners.

4.2 Theoretical Background

Parental separation and partnership formation

Parental separation predicts when and what types of partnerships young adults form. Several studies have reported that children of divorce—here used to refer to everyone with separated parents—start forming co-residential unions at a younger age than their peers from intact families (e.g., Cherlin, Kiernan, & Chase-Lansdale, 1995; Kiernan, & Hobcraft, 1997). This has often been associated with a more general pattern of “growing up earlier” (Weiss, 1979), in which children of divorce begin dating, have their sexual initiation, and leave the parental home at an earlier age than those from intact families. The reasons for this include conflict with parents and their possible new partners (Cherlin, Kiernan, & Chase-Lansdale, 1995;

Goldscheider, & Goldscheider, 1998; Wolfinger, 2003), and lower social control by (Thomson, McLanahan, & Curtin, 1992), or less support from separated parents (e.g. Aquilino, 1991; Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1998).

Research analyzing whether parental separation predicts entry into marriage has found contrasting results. Many studies have found that parental separation is associated with lower rates of marriage (e.g., Erola, Härkönen, & Dronkers, 2012; Frisch, & Hviid, 2006; Ongaro, & Mazzuco, 2009; Wolfinger, 2003). Children of divorce are argued to hold more negative views about marriage and more positive views about cohabitation (Axinn, & Thornton, 1996; Ongaro, & Mazzuco, 2009; Perelli-Harris et al., 2017), to be more aware of the limitations of marriage (Amato, 1988), or to have lower levels of trust in their own relationships than those from intact families (Jacquet, & Surra, 2001). Moreover, parental separation is associated with lower educational attainment, but whether low education is also associated with lower rates of marriage varies cross-nationally (Bumpass, & Lu, 2000; Goldstein, & Kenney, 2001; Kravdal, 1999; Liefbroer, 1991; Liefbroer & Corijn, 1999; Manning, & Cohen, 2015). Children of divorce may also be less favored candidates for marriage (Erola, Härkönen, & Dronkers, 2012; Wolfinger, 2003; 2005), due to consequences of their parents' separation on psychological well-being (Härkönen, Bernardi, & Boertien, 2017), or on interpersonal skills (Amato, 1996; Amato, & DeBoer, 2001; Glenn, & Kramer, 1987; Wolfinger, 2005).

Other studies, in contrast, have found no effect of parental separation on marriage, or that children of divorce marry at a younger age than those from intact families (Cherlin, Kiernan, & Chase-Lansdale, 1995; Tasker, & Richards, 1994; Wolfinger, 2003). Attempting to explain this apparent contradiction, Wolfinger (2003) found that the association between parental separation and marriage has changed: with the exception of teen marriage, children of divorce entered marriage earlier in older cohorts but later in younger ones. Similar results were reported by Sassler and Goldscheider (2004; for contrasting results, see Li, & Wojtkiewicz (1994)).

According to Wolfinger (2003), his result suggested that rather than marrying (directly), children of divorce were taking advantage of the growing accessibility of cohabitation. A number of studies have reported similar results of higher prevalence of cohabitation among children of divorce than among those from intact families (e.g., Berrington, & Diamond, 2000; Cherlin, Kiernan, & Chase-Lansdale 1995; Kiernan, 2003; Ongaro & Mazzuco, 2009; Perelli-

Harris et al., 2017; Raab, 2017; Sassler, Cunningham, & Lichter, 2009). This does not, however, necessarily mean that children of divorce forego marriage altogether. Their attitudes toward or wariness to marriage, or their or their partners' skepticism of the quality of the partnership, can instead mean that cohabitation is used as a "trial marriage" (Heuveline & Timberlake, 2004; Hiekel et al., 2014; Perelli-Harris et al. 2017), and that children of divorce delay rather than forego marriage.

Parental separation and partnership formation in the context of family change

The above discussion suggested that the relationship between parental separation and partnership formation can vary across social contexts. Although most research has focused on single countries, in particular the United States or the United Kingdom, some cross-national research yields support for this expectation. Perelli-Harris and colleagues (2017), for example, showed that in Sweden and France, the likelihood of cohabitation did not vary by parental separation, and that the difference was generally small also in other countries where cohabitation was common, but larger in countries where cohabitation was less common. Despite results showing that the association between parental separation and partnership formation varies cross-nationally and over time, previous research has not systematically analyzed which contextual features may account for this variation.

Building on the literatures on family change and on the effects of parental separation, we discuss the importance of two contextual-level factors that can shape the association between parental separation and partnership formation, namely, the centrality of marriage as the context for intimate partnerships and family life, and the incidence of (parental) separation. Their importance in family life courses has varied considerably both across countries and over time (e.g., Andersson, Thomson, & Duntava, 2017), and we expect them to shape the association between the two.

The increased acceptability of having intimate partnerships and children outside marriage is one of the central features of the deinstitutionalization of marriage (Cherlin, 2004) or more broadly, the Second Demographic Transition (e.g., Lesthaeghe, 1995; 2010; Van de Kaa, 2001). This change did not take place evenly in all socio-demographic groups, but was led by "forerunners", who have been varyingly identified as students and the avant-garde (Lesthaeghe, 1995; 2010; Van de Kaa, 2001) or alternatively, as socioeconomically less advantaged groups (e.g., Perelli-Harris & Gerber, 2011; Trost, 1975). Although children of

divorce are less commonly considered in this literature, they may willingly or unwillingly become forerunners of the withdrawal from marriage and the increase in cohabitation because of their skepticism of marriage and awareness of its limitations, or because of the characteristics that make them less “marriageable”. A similar proposition was already made by Wolfinger (2003) who argued that the children of divorce are among the first to take advantage of the increasing availability of alternatives to marriage.

This argument suggests that differences in partnership formation patterns by parental separation depend on the strength of the marriage institution. These differences would be small when marriage is highly normative, and cohabitation is sanctioned and marginal behavior. When cohabitation becomes more acceptable and commonly practiced, the gaps would grow if children of divorce are among the forerunners of this change. Finally, when cohabitation as the first union form becomes next to universal, differences by parental separation can yet again diminish (cf., Cherlin, Kiernan, & Chase-Lansdale, 1995; Van de Kaa, 2001; Villeneuve-Gokalp, 1991), as suggested by Perelli-Harris and colleagues (2017).

The above argument relates primarily to the type of first union (cohabitation or marriage). The normative importance of marriage as the context for family life can also affect whether children of divorce simply delay or forego marriage. Although cohabitation has increasingly replaced (direct) marriage as the first form of a co-residential union (Billari, & Liefbroer, 2010), the meaning of cohabitation continues to vary within and across countries from being a prelude to or a trial marriage, to being a long-term alternative to it (Heuveline, & Timberlake, 2004; Hiekel, Liefbroer, & Poortman, 2014). Cohabitation is more often seen as a long-term alternative to marriage in countries—such as the Nordic ones (Andersson, Thomson, & Duntava, 2017; Hiekel, Liefbroer, & Poortman, 2014; Sobotka, 2008)—in which cohabitation as the first family form is nearly universal, and more likely to be seen as a stage in the family formation life course where cohabitation is less institutionalized. Children of divorce may, again, be among the first ones to forego marriage. Similar to above, gaps in foregoing marriage can be expected to be minor when marriage—regardless of earlier cohabitation—is institutionalized and next to universal, but widen when its grip on family life weakens. However, even though countries vary in the prevalence and acceptability of long-term alternatives to marriage, life-time rates of marriage are high even in countries such as Sweden (Ohlsson-Wijk, 2011), which have been seen as being in the forefront in the

withdrawal from marriage. Therefore, we do not hypothesize similar late convergence in (low) marriage rates by parental separation as we did above in the case of cohabitation.

The prevalence of parental separation can also modify differences in partnership formation behavior by parental separation. According to the “waning effect” argument, the effect of parental separation should be weaker when parental separation is more prevalent (cf. Albertini, & Garriga, 2011; Dronkers, & Härkönen, 2008; Lansford, 2009; Raab, 2017; Sigle-Rushton, Hobcraft, & Kiernan, 2005). When separating is easier and common, the average child of divorce comes from a less troubled family, the separation process is likely to be associated with shorter periods of stressful acrimony, and being a child of divorce is less stigmatizing. When parental separation is a more common experience, children of divorce may differ less from those stemming from intact families in characteristics that predict partnership formation patterns. The waning effect thus leads to expect that the association between parental separation and partnership formation is weaker when parental separation is more common.

Although the waning effect hypothesis has not, to our knowledge, been directly tested in the context of partnership formation, related research on the intergenerational transmission of divorce has led to somewhat conflicting conclusions. Dronkers and Härkönen (2008) found a negative correlation between the prevalence of parental divorce and the intergenerational transmission of divorce. On the other hand, a long debate has concerned whether the intergenerational transmission of divorce has weakened over time, or not (Li & Wu, 2008; Wolfinger, 1999; 2005). More generally, despite the popularity of the waning effect argument, many earlier studies have failed to support it (cf. Härkönen et al., 2017).

4.3 Data & Methods

Data

In this study, we used retrospective yearly event history data from 16 European countries. Data for 15 countries came from the first wave of the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS). The data were collected in different years in different countries, between 2002 and 2013 (Fokkema et al., 2016). We chose the countries with sufficiently detailed information on partnership history, parental separation and parental educational attainment: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Georgia, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Norway,

Poland, Romania, Russia, and Sweden. For the United Kingdom, we used the Harmonized Histories data set created by the Non-Marital Childbearing network and made publicly available to the Generations and Gender Programme research community (for information, see Perelli-Harris, Kreyenfeld, & Kubisch, 2010). The Harmonized Histories data set consists of data from the British Household Panel Survey, collected in 2005 and 2006 and made comparable to GGS. In total, our data included 87,313 women. We focused on women, because gender differences in the timing of partnership formation may affect our findings. Table 4.1 gives an overview of the interview year(s), birth cohorts and the number of women, respectively, in each country.

Table 4.1. Birth cohorts, interview year and number of women per country.

	Birth cohort	Interview year(s)	N
Bulgaria	1930-1986	2004	6,271
Russia	1930-1987	2004	5,983
Georgia	1930-1988	2006	4,912
France	1930-1987	2005	5,118
Hungary	1930-1983	2004-2005	6,681
Italy	1938-1985	2003	5,109
Romania	1930-1987	2005	5,462
Norway	1930-1988	2007-2008	7,064
Austria	1963-1990	2008-2009	2,868
Estonia	1930-1983	2004-2005	4,153
Belgium	1930-1990	2008-2010	3,443
Lithuania	1930-1988	2006	4,394
Poland	1930-1993	2010-2011	11,339
Czech Republic	1930-1987	2004-2006	4,604
Sweden	1933-1994	2012-2013	4,924
United Kingdom	1930-1987	2005-2006	4,988
Total	1930-1994	2003-2013	87,313

Sources: *Gender and Generations Surveys (GGS) and Harmonized Histories (HH)*.

Analysis

The empirical analysis had two parts: A descriptive life table analysis, and an event history regression analysis. In both cases, we focused on two dependent variables, namely the type of the first co-residential union (cohabitation vs. marriage), and first marriage. Women entered the risk of union formation at age 16, if they had, by that time, not yet been in a co-residential union. They exited the risk of union formation at the age of their first cohabiting union or first marriage, respectively, or when right-censored at interview, or at age 30 or age 40 (depending on the analyses, see below).

The main independent variable was parental separation. We defined children of divorce as those who experienced parental separation at age 16 or earlier. The timing of parental separation was not available for the United Kingdom and the Czech Republic. For these countries, we relied on the available information on whether the parents had separated.

Life table analysis

We used life table methods to estimate partnership formation patterns by parental separation in 16 different countries and up to three different cohorts. We estimated cumulative probability and cumulative incidence functions on differences in partnership formation by parental separation, which tell us of the experience of partnership formation irrespective of its timing.

The descriptive analysis produced three types of estimates. First, we estimated the cumulative probabilities of having entered any co-residential union by age 30 (irrespective of whether this is cohabitation or marriage). Almost everyone in the data who ever entered a co-residential union had done so by age 30; this cut-off age also enabled us to expand the number of cohorts we could include in the analysis without running into problems with small case numbers.

Second, we estimated the cumulative incidences of having entered premarital cohabitation or having married directly by age 30. Because premarital cohabitation and direct marriage are competing events, regular life table methods produce biased estimates of cumulative probability functions. Therefore, we estimated cumulative incidence functions for these competing events using the Stata's *stcomlist* command (Clayton, 2017), and the *stpepemori* command to assess the statistical significance between the children of divorce and those from intact families (Coviello & Boggess, 2004).

Third, we estimated cumulative probabilities of marrying (regardless of prior cohabitation experience) by age 30, as well as by age 40. These analyses complement the estimates of first union formation by allowing marriage later in life, and up to age 40.

To assess changes over time, the data were divided into three cohorts, to women born 1930-1949, 1950-69, and 1970 and thereafter. This division was done on practical grounds, so as to maximize case numbers and at the same time allow cohorts sufficient time in the data. Each country-cohort had to have at least 500 women and at least 20 parental separations to be included in the analysis on cohort patterns, in order to avoid unreliable coefficients due to few parental separations in a small cohort. As a result, for some countries the oldest birth cohort was not available, whereas for others we could observe all three cohorts. In the analysis of marriage by age 40, we were restricted to analyzing change over the two oldest cohorts in 14 countries (Austria and Italy were excluded).

Event history analysis

The objective of our event history analysis was to assess whether the associations between parental separation and partnership formation are moderated by the importance of marriage as the setting for intimate and family life as well as by the overall incidence of parental separation. We pooled the data from each country into one file and estimated discrete-time event history regression models. We analyzed the two outcomes, the rate of entering cohabitation or marriage as the first co-residential union and the rate of marriage regardless of prior cohabitation, separately. In the analysis of formation of the first co-residential union, the data were right-censored at age 30. In the analysis of entry into marriage, the data were right-censored at age 40.

We used the percentage of non-marital births of all births as a measure of the importance of marriage as the setting for intimate and family life. Despite being a unidimensional measure, and the national idiosyncracies that can affect it, this measure is arguably the best single measure of the extent to which family life takes place outside marriage. Furthermore, unlike other measures, such as on cohabitation, the percentage of non-marital births is readily and reliably available across a wide range of countries and over long time periods. The data for all countries came from the Council of Europe (2006) and Eurostat (2018) and were available since 1960 for the majority of countries included in this study. We used the percentage of non-marital births as a period measure (over five-year

intervals), that is, as an indicator of the social context in which the women in our sample were forming their partnerships. Furthermore, we included a squared term of the percentage of non-marital births to allow for non-linear change in the relationship between parental separation and partnership formation during the deinstitutionalization process of marriage, as theorized above.

The second macro-level variable, the percentage of children of divorce in each birth cohort, is aggregated from the GGS and Harmonized Histories data using the three birth cohorts for each country. Following the above theoretical discussion of variation in the effects of parental separation, this measure was a cohort-measure indicating the social context during the time when the women grew up and some experienced parental separation. For better interpretation, both macro indicators are centered around the mean. The descriptives of these macro indicators can be found in Table 4.2.

In addition, we included six control variables in the event history analyses. The highest level of educational attainment of both parents was available for all 16 countries, which we converted into a continuous and comparative measure of educational level, the International Standard Level of Education [ISLED], which ranges from 0 to 100 (Schröder & Ganzeboom, 2014). We used the average ISLED score of the father's and mother's education to control for parental education. Parental education was centered around the country-specific mean and divided by 10. We also controlled for age (minus 15 years) and age squared, birth cohort and its squared term, and a series of country dummy variables (with the United Kingdom as the reference country). The country-specific descriptives of all independent variables and of the dependent variables can be found in Table 4.2.

We analyzed the rate of entering cohabitation or direct marriage as the first co-residential union using discrete-time competing risks event history regression, estimated with multinomial regression models on discrete-time data (Yamaguchi, 1991). The rate of entering marriage—regardless of prior cohabitation—was analyzed using regular discrete-time event history regression (binary logistic regression) (Yamaguchi, 1991). In both cases, we interacted the macro-level variables with parental separation. Because we control for the country dummies, we also control for any stable but unobserved between-country differences. Our estimates are thus best interpreted as reflecting how change in the macro-variables predicts change in the association between parental separation and partnership formation over time. By controlling for a continuous measure of birth year (and its squared term), we also adjust

for secular changes that affected all countries. We estimated cluster robust standard errors to allow for intra-country dependencies.

Table 4.2. Descriptive statistics for the main dependent and independent variables, separately for each country.

	% ever partner (at age 30)	% ever married (at age 30)	Mean duration first union	Mean parental education	Average birth year	% experienced parental separation (before age 16)	% non- marital birth
United Kingdom	76.8	60.9	8.8	43.5	1961	21.7	20.8
Sweden	83.3	47.1	8.2	45.2	1965	23.3	38.5
Czech Republic	74.2	66.4	8.4	45.2	1961	16.2	10.5
Poland	81.7	76.8	8.8	38.6	1960	6.8	7.9
Lithuania	75.9	70.2	9.2	38.4	1959	9.4	10.0
Belgium	84.6	65.9	8.1	41.4	1962	10.3	11.1
Estonia	88.1	72.7	8.4	38.0	1956	14.8	24.0
Austria	77.7	47.1	8.2	53.8	1975	14.8	27.5
Norway	82.8	58.8	8.9	46.3	1960	9.7	24.0
Romania	88.1	84.7	7.6	28.0	1956	5.6	8.5
Italy	70.5	67.6	10.5	24.6	1959	1.6	4.8
Hungary	84.0	76.7	8.0	36.4	1957	9.2	12.0
France	82.0	60.5	8.7	33.4	1959	11.7	19.6
Georgia	78.5	68.7	8.4	43.0	1960	3.5	34.9
Russia	84.4	76.5	8.1	39.7	1958	14.4	14.8
Bulgaria	78.9	71.3	7.5	36.2	1962	6.8	17.6
Average	80.7	67.0	8.5	39.5	1961	11.2	17.9

Sources: Gender and Generations Surveys (GGS) and Harmonized Histories (HH). N persons = 87,313.

4.4 Results

Life table analysis of parental separation and partnership formation

Table 4.3 shows the share of women from different countries and birth cohorts who had ever been in a co-residential union, begun their first co-residential union as a cohabiting union or as marriage, and had ever been married, respectively, by age 30. Overall, one can detect major cross-national and cross-cohort variation in these partnership formation experiences. The share of women who began their first co-residential union as a marriage, as well as the share of ever-married women by age 30, have decreased over time in all countries. With some exceptions (most clearly, Italy), the share of women who had ever experienced a co-residential partnership by age 30 has remained stable. The decreases in direct marriage have been

replaced by an increase in (pre-marital) cohabitation as the first union. The decrease in the fraction of women who have ever married by age 30 shows that many of these cohabitations were not transformed into marriages by this age.

Do children of divorce differ from those from intact families in their union formation behaviors? Statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) differences are marked in bold font. The differences in having formed the first co-residential union are mostly nil or minor, but the statistically significant differences in having formed a co-residential union by age 30 are in favor of the children of divorce. There are larger differences in the type of the first union. As a general pattern, one can conclude that where statistically significant differences exist (in 29 out of 46 country-cohorts), children of divorce are more likely to cohabit in their first co-residential union rather than marry directly (cf. Kiernan, 2003). At its largest, the difference was about 15 percentage points. The only exception to this pattern is the oldest cohort in Georgia, where children of divorce were more likely to marry directly, and where there were no differences in cohabitation. The differences in the share of ever-married women by age 30 are statistically significant in 15 country-cohorts (out of 46). Although marriage tended to be less common among the children of divorce, we find four cases (the Estonian 1950-69, Georgian 1930-49, Lithuanian 1950-69, and the Norwegian 1930-49 cohorts) where children of divorce were more likely to have married by age 30 than those from intact families.

Are the apparent differences in partnership formation patterns related to the prevalence of each partnership formation type, as we theorized? As mentioned above, the prevalence of any union formation is high in all country-cohorts, and differences by parental separation are minor.

Table 4.3. Parental separation and women's union formation by age 30, cumulative probabilities and incidences. Statistically significant ($p < 0.05$, two-tailed test) differences in bold font.

		First partnership age 30		First partnership (competing risk) age 30				First marriage age 30	
		No	Yes	Cohabitation (1)		Marriage (2)		No	Yes
Parents separated?		No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Austria	1930-1950	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
	1950-1970	0.90	0.89	0.62	0.71	0.26	0.16	0.70	0.63
	1970-...	0.87	0.91	0.70	0.84	0.15	0.07	0.52	0.42
Belgium	1930-1950	0.82	0.82	0.27	0.37	0.54	0.45	0.79	0.74
	1950-1970	0.90	0.81	0.44	0.55	0.44	0.22	0.80	0.58
	1970-...	0.92	0.93	0.70	0.86	0.20	0.06	0.55	0.42
Bulgaria	1930-1950	0.85	0.79	0.13	0.13	0.71	0.58	0.82	0.79

	1950-1970	0.91	0.92	0.22	0.27	0.68	0.63	0.87	0.85
	1970-...	0.83	0.70	0.39	0.44	0.42	0.26	0.69	0.47
Czech Republic	1930-1950	0.81	0.80	0.07	0.15	0.73	0.64	0.79	0.79
	1950-1970	0.87	0.87	0.14	0.26	0.72	0.60	0.83	0.82
	1970-...	0.78	0.78	0.41	0.48	0.36	0.29	0.60	0.56
Estonia	1930-1950	0.90	0.94	0.16	0.20	0.73	0.72	0.86	0.87
	1950-1970	0.92	0.94	0.37	0.46	0.54	0.48	0.81	0.82
	1970-...	0.86	0.85	0.68	0.73	0.16	0.11	0.47	0.42
France	1930-1950	0.84	0.84	0.10	0.22	0.73	0.59	0.80	0.78
	1950-1970	0.87	0.85	0.50	0.60	0.36	0.24	0.65	0.60
	1970-...	0.87	0.88	0.75	0.83	0.10	0.04	0.50	0.36
Georgia	1930-1950	0.82	0.92	0.21	0.19	0.59	0.73	0.76	0.86
	1950-1970	0.88	0.85	0.28	0.35	0.58	0.47	0.81	0.76
	1970-...	0.77	0.78	0.42	0.46	0.34	0.32	0.54	0.52
Hungary	1930-1950	0.91	0.95	0.02	0.03	0.88	0.92	0.90	0.93
	1950-1970	0.90	0.90	0.11	0.17	0.78	0.73	0.86	0.87
	1970-...	0.79	0.82	0.39	0.49	0.39	0.33	0.58	0.52
Italy	1930-1950	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
	1950-1970	0.76	0.74	0.06	0.15	0.67	0.59	0.73	0.63
	1970-...	0.56	0.49	0.12	0.23	0.44	0.26	0.50	0.48
Lithuania	1930-1950	0.80	0.77	0.03	0.08	0.75	0.70	0.78	0.74
	1950-1970	0.84	0.89	0.07	0.12	0.75	0.77	0.81	0.86
	1970-...	0.83	0.83	0.32	0.40	0.51	0.43	0.70	0.67
Norway	1930-1950	0.82	0.88	0.13	0.16	0.68	0.72	0.78	0.84
	1950-1970	0.89	0.90	0.59	0.74	0.29	0.15	0.67	0.56
	1970-...	0.86	0.91	0.75	0.85	0.10	0.05	0.41	0.36
Poland	1930-1950	0.89	0.92	0.04	0.10	0.83	0.82	0.88	0.87
	1950-1970	0.87	0.90	0.06	0.14	0.80	0.75	0.85	0.87
	1970-...	0.86	0.87	0.28	0.43	0.55	0.43	0.76	0.67
Romania	1930-1950	0.91	0.93	0.06	0.15	0.84	0.78	0.89	0.89
	1950-1970	0.94	0.96	0.12	0.22	0.82	0.74	0.91	0.89
	1970-...	0.87	0.89	0.21	0.40	0.66	0.49	0.82	0.82
Russia	1930-1950	0.85	0.87	0.14	0.17	0.70	0.69	0.81	0.82
	1950-1970	0.90	0.93	0.17	0.29	0.72	0.64	0.85	0.84
	1970-...	0.87	0.94	0.36	0.51	0.50	0.41	0.74	0.71
Sweden	1930-1950	0.89	0.87	0.37	0.52	0.51	0.35	0.79	0.68
	1950-1970	0.91	0.92	0.79	0.85	0.11	0.05	0.53	0.46
	1970-...	0.89	0.92	0.79	0.88	0.07	0.04	0.36	0.33
United Kingdom	1930-1950	0.89	0.87	0.03	0.05	0.85	0.80	0.88	0.87
	1950-1970	0.82	0.84	0.30	0.43	0.50	0.40	0.71	0.67
	1970-...	0.86	0.88	0.66	0.76	0.16	0.10	0.53	0.40

Sources: Gender and Generations Surveys (GGS) and Harmonized Histories (HH). N persons = 87,313.

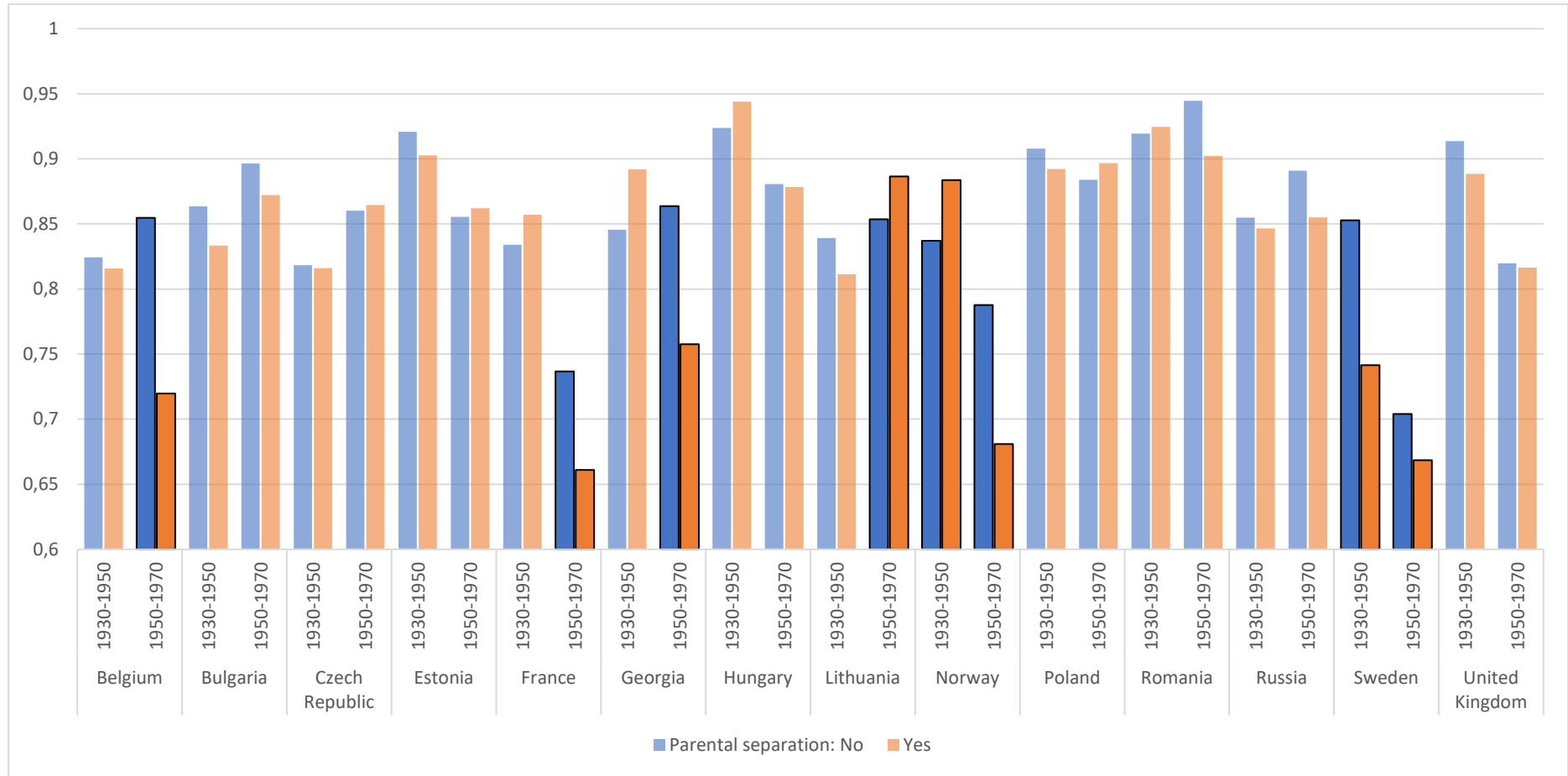
Regarding the type of first union, there is no apparent relationship between the prevalence of a union type and the gaps therein by parental separation when compared across all country-cohorts. Nevertheless, there is a tendency for unmarried cohabitation to replace direct marriage faster among the children of divorce. However, children of divorce have been more likely to cohabit rather than marry directly even in countries such as Sweden and Norway, where cohabitation as the first union type has in the latest cohort become next to universal and direct marriage a rarity. There seems to be a more suggestive pattern in differences in having ever married. When marriage by age 30 is the norm (with 80% or so of each cohort having married), gaps by parental separation are not statistically significant, or children of divorce are more likely to have married. However, when marriage rates fell, they often fell first among the children of divorce.

Figure 4.1 extends the follow-up in ever-marriage to age 40 in the two oldest cohorts in 14 countries (Austria and Italy are excluded, as they lack information on the oldest cohort). In most country-cohorts, the point estimates are very similar by parental separation and the differences are not statistically significant. In most country-cohorts, over 80% of all women had married by age 40. Importantly, none of the differences observed at age 30 (Table 4.3) had closed by age 40. In two country-cohorts (middle Lithuanian and oldest Norwegian cohorts), children of divorce were more likely to have married; the difference was already visible by age 30, and the probability of marriage was over 80%. Children of divorce were less likely to marry in six country-cohorts. Again, these differences were already visible by age 30. Importantly, in each case less than 80% of the children of divorce had married. Together, these results suggest that when marriage starts giving way to other partnership forms—whether long-term cohabitation, or instable cohabitation(s)—it happens first among the children of divorce.

Event-history analysis of contextual moderators

In the final stage of the analysis, we present the results from our discrete-time event history models, in which we analyze whether contextual factors moderate the association between parental separation and partnership formation. Following the theoretical discussion, we analyzed whether the strength and sign of the relationship depends on the social and normative importance of the marriage institution, and on the overall incidence of parental separation.

Figure 4.1. Parental separation and probability of having ever married by age 40, by country and cohort. Kaplan-Meier cumulative probability estimates, statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$, two-tailed tests) in darker colors.



We present two different analyses: a competing risks event history analysis of entry into cohabitation versus marriage as the first co-residential union (Table 4.4, Model 1), and a regular event history analysis of entry into marriage (regardless of prior cohabitation history, see Table 4.4, Model 2). Estimates of the individual-level control variables show that parental education is associated with lower rates of entry into both cohabitation and marriage, as well as lower rates of ever marrying. This can reflect either postponement of these partnership types, foregoing them altogether, or both. The rate of entering these unions is positively curvilinear by age. The rate of entering cohabitations has increased with a weakening slope over birth cohorts. Compared to the United Kingdom, the rate of entry into cohabitation was higher in Austria, Belgium, Estonia, France, Norway, and Sweden, and lower in the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, and Russia. The entry rate to direct marriage was higher in Bulgaria, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, and Russia, and lower in Austria, Belgium, and Sweden. The rate of ever marrying was higher in Bulgaria, Estonia, and Romania than in the United Kingdom, and lower in Austria, France, and Italy.

Our main interest is in the interaction effects of parental separation with the two context-level variables: the percentage of non-marital births (and its square), and the percentage of women who experienced parental separation. The macro-level variables are centered, and the estimates for parental separation show that at the average levels of parental separation and non-marital birth prevalence, children of divorce had a 56% higher annual rate ($RRR = 1.557$) of entering cohabitation, but that parental separation does not predict rates of direct marriage. However, parental separation predicted a lower rate of marrying (regardless of prior cohabitation) by age 40. Together, the results suggest that at these average levels of parental separation and non-birth prevalence, children of divorce formed first (cohabiting) unions earlier than those from intact families, but either delayed or completely forewent marriage.

None of the main or interaction effects of the incidence of parental separation are statistically significant. This suggests that the changing (increasing) incidence of parental separation has not affected patterns of partnership formation neither among women from intact nor from separated families. The non-significant interaction effects provide evidence against the “waning effect” hypothesis of the consequences of parental separation stating that parental separation has a smaller effect when it is a more common experience. We find

more evidence for the moderating effect of the centrality of marriage on the relationship between parental separation and partnership formation.

When considering cohabitation as the outcome, the negative (RRR = 0.987) and statistically significant interaction term shows that the association between parental separation and the entry rate into cohabitation becomes weaker with an increase in the proportion of births to unmarried mothers, which we interpret as reflecting an increasing deinstitutionalization of marriage. For example, when the rate of births outside marriage increased from the average rate of 18% by 15 percentage points to 33%, the association between parental separation and the entry rate into cohabitation is expected to decrease from a risk ratio of 1.557 to 1.280 (1.557×0.987^{15}), with a 95% confidence interval (CI) ranging from 1.157 to 1.416.

The curvilinear main effect shows that the deinstitutionalization of marriage increases the entry rate into cohabitation among women from intact families at a decreasing slope. The negative (linear) interaction effect tells that this increase happens at a slower pace among the children of divorce, implying that when it comes to pre-marital cohabitation, children of divorce have been forerunners of this family change.

The main (linear) effect of the non-marital births rate on entry into direct marriage is negative. The interaction term is likewise negative—suggesting that the decrease in direct marriage happens at a faster pace among the children of divorce—but the coefficient is not significant at the 5% level. The basic pattern is similar when considering the rate of ever marrying as the outcome, but the interaction estimate shows a higher level of statistical significance. The negative main effect shows that an increase in non-marital birth rates decreased the rate of marriage among women from intact families, and the negative interaction tells that the decrease happened at a higher pace among the children of divorce. We interpret this as indicating that children of divorce were among the forerunners of the withdrawal from marriage when marriage became deinstitutionalized. The gap in marrying by parental separation grew as a result.

An increase in the non-marital birth rate by 15 percentage points from the average rate of 18% would lead to an expected parental separation coefficient of 0.727 (0.895×0.985^{15} ; 95% CI: 0.645-0.820). On the other hand, a decrease in the non-marital birth rate by 15 percentage points would lead to an expected coefficient of 1.101 ($0.895 \times [1 / 0.985]^{15}$;

95% CI: 1.001-1.210). This implies that the parental separation gap is non-existent or even positive when marriage is institutionalized, but grows negative with its deinstitutionalization.

Table 4.4. Parental separation and union formation. Competing risks event history analysis for entry into first union by age 30 (Model 1, relative risk ratios and standard errors), and event history analysis for entry into marriage by age 40 (Model 2, odds ratios and standard errors).

	Model 1				Model 2	
	Cohabitation		Marriage		Ever married (age 40)	
	RRR	s.e.	RRR	s.e.	OR	s.e.
Individual level variables						
Parental separation	1.557**	(0.052)	0.988	(0.060)	0.895**	(0.035)
Parental education	0.933**	(0.020)	0.878**	(0.013)	0.923**	(0.011)
Age (minus 15)	1.308**	(0.032)	1.486**	(0.022)	1.203**	(0.011)
Age (minus 15) squared	0.971**	(0.003)	0.952**	(0.002)	0.976**	(0.002)
Birth cohort	1.033**	(0.006)	0.998	(0.006)	0.997	(0.005)
Birth cohort squared	0.999**	(0.000)	1.000	(0.000)	0.999**	(0.000)
Macro level variables						
<i>% Parental separation in cohort</i>						
Main effect	1.005	(0.006)	1.010	(0.011)	0.994	(0.009)
Interaction parental separation	1.007	(0.004)	0.998	(0.006)	1.007	(0.005)
<i>% Non-marital births (period)</i>						
Main effect	1.028**	(0.007)	0.953**	(0.008)	0.974**	(0.004)
Interaction parental separation	0.987**	(0.004)	0.989	(0.006)	0.986**	(0.003)
Main effect (squared)	0.999**	(0.000)	1.000	(0.000)	1.000	(0.000)
Interaction parental separation (with squared term)	1.000	(0.000)	1.000	(0.000)	1.000	(0.000)
Country (ref. United Kingdom)						
Austria	1.906**	(0.128)	0.627**	(0.080)	0.792**	(0.038)
Belgium	2.246**	(0.180)	0.664*	(0.106)	0.800*	(0.069)
Bulgaria	1.058	(0.101)	1.650**	(0.298)	1.224	(0.137)
Czech Republic	0.704**	(0.048)	0.968	(0.101)	0.907	(0.064)
Estonia	1.510**	(0.066)	1.549**	(0.157)	1.363**	(0.047)
France	1.583**	(0.099)	0.858	(0.109)	0.887*	(0.054)
Georgia	1.171	(0.174)	2.405**	(0.631)	1.313	(0.273)
Hungary	0.597**	(0.056)	1.448*	(0.246)	1.089	(0.111)
Italy	0.234**	(0.036)	0.721	(0.191)	0.582**	(0.106)
Lithuania	0.508**	(0.046)	1.022	(0.171)	0.883	(0.087)
Norway	2.115**	(0.184)	0.801	(0.116)	0.937	(0.078)
Poland	0.533**	(0.064)	1.073	(0.222)	0.889	(0.125)
Romania	0.628**	(0.085)	1.483	(0.375)	1.207*	(0.116)
Russia	0.858*	(0.056)	1.582**	(0.166)	1.333**	(0.069)
Sweden	2.892**	(0.260)	0.828**	(0.052)	1.212**	(0.087)
Constant	0.043**	(0.004)	0.067**	(0.010)	0.121**	(0.009)
Log pseudolikelihood	-201727.94				-175795.96	
Number of observations (person-years)	602,605		602,605		795,842	

Sources: Gender and Generations Surveys (GGS) and Harmonized Histories (HH).

** p<0.01, * p<0.05 (two-tailed tests).

Together, the life table and event history findings suggest that children of divorce tend to form partnerships at an earlier age, which is line with many previous results. However, family change in the surrounding society affects which kinds of partnerships children of divorce and those from intact families form. Our findings are in line with Wolfinger's (2003) argument that children of divorce have been among the first to take advantage of the growing acceptance of non-marital family arrangements: they enter cohabitations at a higher rate, but delay or even forego marriage, possibly because they remain in stable cohabitations or because they experience more instable cohabitations. In any case, children of divorce have been among the forerunners of the retreat from marriage.

4.5 Conclusions & Discussion

In this paper, we have analyzed the association between parental separation and partnership formation behavior in 16 countries and over three birth cohorts that spanned 60 years. Using retrospective partnership history data on over 87,000 women, we conducted life table and event history analyses on the association between parental separation and partnership formation, focusing on the type of the first co-residential union (cohabitation or marriage) and on whether one had ever married. Ours was the largest cross-national and cross-cohort analysis of parental separation and partnership formation, and the first to explicitly test the moderating effects of macro-level contextual features on the association.

The motivation for our paper stemmed from two literatures. A common finding in the divorce literature has been that children of divorce have lower rates of marriage and higher rates of cohabitation. Suggested reasons for this pattern include attitudes toward cohabitation and marriage and awareness of their respective limitations, trust in own relationships, and life course and psychological implications of parental separation. These associations have been widely reported, but few studies have explicitly focused on whether they vary over time or cross-nationally. Another argument—though with varying levels of empirical support—in the divorce literature states that the effects of parental separation become weaker when parental separation becomes more common (cf. Härkönen, Bernardi, & Boertien, 2017). This “waning effect” argument leads to expect that the association

between parental separation and partnership formation patterns is weaker when parental separation is more commonplace.

A second strand of literature that motivated our paper concerns family change—in particular, the retreat from marriage and increase in cohabitation—and its forerunners. Much of this research has focused on socioeconomic predictors, but results on whether low or high socioeconomic groups are most likely to cohabit vary cross-nationally and over time (Brons, Liefbroer, & Ganzeboom, 2017; Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Cohen & Manning, 2010; Kennedy & Bumpass, 2008; Kravdal, 1999; Lichter & Qian, 2008; Liefbroer, 1991; Manning & Cohen, 2015; Mooyaart & Liefbroer, 2016). Based on the proposed mechanisms for the association between parental separation and partnership formation, we argued that children of divorce would be among the forerunners of the increase in cohabitation and the retreat from marriage, being among the first to take advantage of the emerging opportunities for intimate and family life outside marriage (cf. Wolfinger, 2003).

Our descriptive life table analyses over three cohorts showed that by age 30, there were small or no differences by parental separation in having formed any co-residential partnership. However, we found more often differences in the type of partnership formed, which confirmed previous findings that children of divorce were more likely to have cohabited and less likely to have married, whether directly or overall. These results are in line with previous research (e.g. Cherlin, Kiernan, & Chase-Lansdale 1995; Erola, Härkönen, & Dronkers, 2012; Ongaro & Mazzuco, 2009; Sassler, Cunningham, & Lichter 2009; Wolfinger, 2003). In many country-cohorts, differences in having ever married reflected differences in postponement. Even when children of divorce had been less likely to have married by age 30, there were often no gaps in marriage by age 40. However, children of divorce had a lower probability of having married by age 40 in country-cohorts where this probability had overall decreased (roughly, to below 80-85%). This was a first piece of evidence suggesting that children of divorce have been forerunners of family change.

We analyzed the “waning effect” and “forerunner” hypotheses more closely in event history analyses, which pooled together data from the 16 countries and introduced contextual variables on the overall incidence of parental separation in each country-cohort, and on the non-marital birth rate in each period. We argued that the latter proxies the “deinstitutionalization of marriage” (Cherlin, 2004) that has been a prominent feature of recent family change. These analyses produced two main findings. First, the “waning effect”

hypothesis was not supported. The interactions between the overall incidence of parental separation and own experience of parental separation were never significant. Second, the findings supported the “forerunner” hypothesis. Specifically, we found that children of divorce had higher rates of cohabitation when marriage was more institutionalized (measured by low non-marital birth rates), but this gap became smaller as women from intact families caught up in their rates of cohabitation.

We also found that children of divorce have been forerunners in the retreat from marriage. When marriage is institutionalized, children of divorce may even have higher rates of marriage (cf. Wolfinger, 2003), but as the deinstitutionalization of marriage proceeds, children of divorce are among the first ones to retreat from it. Future research should analyze whether the retreat from marriage among the children of divorce has been a consequence of an increase in stable, long-term cohabitation, or due to more instability in their cohabitations. Parental separation begets instability in own partnerships (Dronkers & Härkönen, 2008), and cohabitations are less stable than marriages. The combination of these two factors may help explain why children of divorce have been among the first to retreat from marriage.

All in all, our findings show that the children of divorce have been among the forerunners in adapting new partnership forms. This conclusion has implications on the debates on family change. Several scholars have argued that the rise in cohabitation and retreat from marriage reflects either “avant-garde” behavior led by those with the most resources (Lesthaeghe, 1995; 2010; Van de Kaa, 2001), or a “pattern of disadvantage” led by the socio-economically less well-off (Perelli-Harris & Gerber, 2011). Though not directly addressing this debate, our findings add to the literature on the drivers of family change by showing how children of divorce have been early adapters in these developments. Our interpretation that due to their experiences, children of divorce were among those ready and willing to grasp the opportunities for new partnership forms has implications for thinking more broadly about who drove these family changes and why. Because parental separation predicted a higher rate of entry into cohabitation, our results likewise support the idea that increases in (parental) separation and divorce have catalyzed the increase in cohabitation, particularly at the early stages of this change (Perelli-Harris et al., 2017). Finally, our findings question the argument that parental separation effects are weaker when parental separation is more common.