SPOUSE SELECTION THE SECOND TIME AROUND

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Abstract

Based on a nationally representative sample drawn from the 1979-2008 waves of National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY79), we examine the changes in spousal choice that occur between women's first and second unions in the context of a changing pool of available potential spouses on various dimensions, including age, educational level at marriage, and race. Specifically, we test two hypotheses: (1) The supply of marriageable men is associated with women's spousal choice in first and in second marriages, and (2) If the number of available single men as potential husbands is limited, women are forced to "cast a wider net" and marry men very different from themselves. We find empirical evidence that lends support to these hypotheses. Our results show that a more diverse and smaller pool of marriageable men will limit women's ability to realize their changing preferences and lower the likelihood of a homogamous match in second marriages.

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I. Motivation

Recent decades have seen sweeping changes in patterns of family formation among American women. Past research has extensively examined the assortative mating process with respect to characteristics such as age, education, social class and religion. However, despite divorce, cohabitation, and remarriage becoming increasingly common in the United States, the issue of spouse selection the second time around has received rather little attention.

People decide upon whom to marry based on a variety of observable and unobservable characteristics. A second marriage may be viewed as an opportunity to improve one's chances at finding happiness within the context of a formal union. There are several reasons to expect that a marriage the second time around would be the product of either modest or dramatic changes in one's criteria in spouse selection.

The first hypothesis pertains to "the changing preference." In first marriage, an individual's parents may have considerable influence over attributes that are deemed critical in a potential spouse. For some, finding a life partner of the same religion may be non-negotiable. For others, finding a partner engaged in a certain profession (e.g., a physician) may be of great import. If that marriage fails, however, a divorced person may re-evaluate his or her criteria for spouse selection. Moreover, divorcees may experience weaker parental pressures for endogamy (Cherlin 1978) and become less conventional (Aguirre et al. 1995; Murguia 1982; Dean and Gurak 1978). In a new search, a divorced person may attempt to change his or her preferences to reflect learning from previous mistakes, to the extent that the cause of the marriage's failure extended beyond that person's own flaws. Alternatively, an individual's circumstances might have changed as he or she approached a second marriage. For example, if a child from the first marriage is sufficiently old, then the parent may not view a spouse of the same religion as necessary, as the religious upbringing of the child is no longer of consequence. Last, because remarriages take place at older ages, partners have broader views of the world and are less influenced by traditional norms of endogamy (Aguirre et al. 1995; Dean and Gurak 1978).

The second hypothesis regards potential spouses available on the marriage market. Acting on the changing preference must be accomplished in the context of the pool of available potential spouses. Because remarriage occurs at older ages, the marriage market is smaller as there are fewer single persons and the pool of potential partners for divorced people is typically more limited. Moreover, the composition of the pool of candidates for second marriage may differ considerably from that of the pool for first marriages. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of the pool of available potential spouses' attributes for

the assortative mating process. According to this hypothesis, it is expected that remarriages are therefore likely to be less homogamous than are first marriages.

Based on the discussion of the above issues, the goals of our study are three-fold:

1) We explore how spouse selection in second marriages change relative to that in first marriages in terms of age, education, race, and religion;

2) We estimate how the supply of marriageable men affects women's spousal choice in first and in second marriages; and

3) Given the constraint of the sex ratio of a given divorced woman's "market," we further test the hypothesis that if the number of available single men of similar age is limited, women are forced to "cast a wider net" and marry men of an age very different from their own.

II. Overview of Previous Research

Although the prevailing theoretical argument about the relationship between marriage order and homogamy is that remarriages are less homogamous (Aguirre et al. 1995; Jacobs and Furstenberg 1986; Murguia 1982; Dean and Gurak 1978), the empirical evidence found from the existing studies of assortative mating is far from conclusive.

As the first study to empirically examine status homogamy in second marriages, Dean and Gurak (1978) found that for all three indicators of homogamy (age, education, and religion), first marriages are more homogamous than second marriages. In a related work that extends the study of Dean and Gurak (1978), Jacobs and Furstenberg (1986) compare the degree of homogamy between first and second marriages in educational attainment, occupational status, and age, and arrive at a different conclusion. The authors conclude that among those who remarry, levels of socioeconomic homogamy remain constant between first and second marriages when potential increases in the socioeconomic status of the previous husband are accounted for. The most recent remarriage study by Gelissen (1998) finds mixed evidence of changing spouse selection behavior in terms of age, social class, and education. The finding from Gelissen's work lends no significant support for the "changing preference" hypothesis.

What has been missing from previous empirical studies, however, is addressing the so called "marriage squeeze effect for divorced women." A growing number of studies emphasize demographers' concerns about how sex ratio imbalances might affect marital sorting (e.g., Lichter, Anderson, and Hayward 1995; Qian and Preston 1993; Schoen 1986). Although some remarriage studies point to the importance of exogenous marriage market conditions (Hirschman and Matras 1971; Dean and Gurak 1978; Gelissen 1998) as determinants of assortative mating, little empirical work has been done to examine the actual impact of the differing pool of eligible mates — as reflected in sex ratios — on spouse selection the second time round.

III. Data and Methods

Marital History and Spousal Characteristics

The main data of this study draw upon the 1979-2008 waves of National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1979 cohort (NLSY79). NLSY79 is a panel survey of 12,686 men and women aged 14-22 in 1979. The survey was administered annually between 1979 and 1993 and biannually since 1994. These data are unique because they track union formation and dissolution events of each respondent from age 14 to 51. In this paper, we restrict our attention to women who ever ended their first marriage during the sample window. The restricted sample includes 2088 women with valid marital histories. Among them, 1411 (63%) women ever remarried during the sample period. There are 819 women who remained single after the dissolution of their first marriages.

Another benefit of the NLSY79 is that the data contain rich information with respect to spousal characteristics that are available for both first and second marriage. The detailed relationship history recorded in the household roster data in various rounds of NLSY79 allow us to identify the spouse of women for each marriage. After combining spousal characteristic variables in conjunction with the marital history, we are able to collect information on age, education, and race of all married women's first husbands, and second husbands for women if they ever remarried within the data window.

Sex Ratio Measures

To construct a marriage-market indicator as a proxy of the relative supply of marriageable men, we follow the literature and construct a "virtual sex ratio" — that is, the relative number of single men to women available and likely to marry from 1979 to 2008. Our sex ratio measures are based on 1980 and 1990 Census data and 2000 to 2008 annual American Community Survey data. The numbers of single men and women are aggregated into year-race-age cells, respectively. We then construct a complete time series of data from 1970-2008 by linearly interpolating between census years. Following Spanier and Glick (1980), we assume for each woman who married at age a in year t, the pool of potential similarly aged spouses are all single men two years younger to three years older of the same race (r=white non-Hispanic, black non-Hispanic, Hispanic):

$$SR_{rat} = \frac{\sum_{a-2}^{a+3} \text{Single Men}_{rat}}{\text{Single Women}_{rat}}$$

Similarly, we construct a sex ratio that measures the relative supply of younger single men (at least three years younger) to women, and older single men (at least six years older) to women separately. The last step is to attach the series of year-age-race specific sex ratios constructed for each woman in the data based on their age, race, year of first/second marriage and age at first/second marriage. The sex ratios are also linked to women who remain single after first divorce based on their age/year of first marriage and a one year lag of age/year of first divorce.

IV. Results

Summary Statistics

Table 1 provides descriptive information with respect to age and education differences between women and their husbands. The numbers in parentheses show the proportion of marriages weighted by NLSY79 individual-level sampling probabilities. Consistent with previous work, we find good evidence that some changes in spousal choice occur between women's first and second unions in terms of age and education. For example, panel A indicates that the weighted proportion of second marriages in which women are around the same age of their husbands decreases by 50 percent from that of their first unions, with marginal distribution dropping from about sixty to about thirty percent. Panel B also suggests that educational heterogamy is more common for remarried women.

Table 1A:

Age Difference	**2nd Marriage (Husband-Wife)**			
1st marriage (Husband-Wife)	**<0**	**0-4**	**>4**	**Total**
<0	48	30	44	122
	(37.37%)	(22.86%)	(22.86%)	(22.86%)
0-4	208	302	311	821
	(25.66%)	(33.34%)	(41.00%)	(60.02%)
>4	95	125	248	468
	(19.42%)	(25.60%)	(54.98%)	(32.24%)
Total	351	457	603	1,411
	(24.55%)	(30.03%)	(45.41%)	100%

Table 1B:

Education difference	**2nd marriage (Husband-Wife)**			
1st marriage (Husband-Wife)	**<0**	**0-4**	**>4**	**Total**
<0	128	122	80	330
	(39.64%)	(36.33%)	(24.03%)	(24.13%)
0-4	152	496	238	886
	(17.61%)	(53.81%)	(28.58%)	(63.19%)
>4	33	86	76	195
	(16.25%)	(46.39%)	(37.36%)	(12.68%)
Total	313	704	394	1,411
	(22.75%)	(48.65%)	(28.59%)	100%

Regression Results

We use a two-stage estimation model to empirically examine how the supply of marriageable men affects women's spousal choice in first and in second marriages differently. Our primary results focus on age differences. In stage 1, we look at the association between the sex ratio of an individual woman's "market" when she married for the first time and an individual woman's choice of her first husband. The probability of women finding similar aged men is a function of different sex ratios measuring the relative supply of marriageable men. Our preliminary results show that for every one-unit increase in sex ratio within same age group, the estimated odds for women marrying men around the same age increase by 9 percent.

We then proceed to calculate the predicted probability of marrying a man of similar age, which we assume as the "propensity" of homogamy controlling for the actual supply of potential spouses. The mean predicted probability of marrying a man of similar age is 76.4%, which is 1.2 percentage point higher than the actual probability. In the next step, we model spouse selection the second time around in a multinomial logistic regression framework. We control for the "propensity of age homogamy" estimated from the first stage, along with the set of sex ratio measures. Preliminary results show that under the constraint of a smaller pool of available men for women after divorce, the probability of finding a second husband of similar age again is negatively associated with the woman's "homogamy preference." These results highlight the fact that a more diverse and smaller pool of marriageable men will limit women's ability to realize their changing preferences and lower the likelihood of a homogamous match in second marriages.