

SECOND TIME SWEETER? MARITAL MATCHING BETWEEN FIRST AND SECOND MARRIAGES

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ABSTRACT

We use data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1979 (NLSY79) to examine changes in matching patterns between first and second marriages in the US. Using Becker's (1973, 1974) efficient marriage market hypothesis and following Dalmia and Sicilian (2008), we develop an empirical framework to understand the importance of individual traits in spouse selection. Our structural model estimates indicate that positive assortative mating (degree of homogamy) strengthens in second marriages over first marriages. The share of couples who marry up (hypergamy) and marry down (hypogamy) falls substantially as individuals sort to partners who are more similar to them in many aspects, particularly age, education, and hours worked, in their second marriage. Finally, we find the matching patterns of second marriages to be similar to those of ongoing first marriages, providing further evidence that "likes do marry likes."

Keywords: Marital assignments, assortative mating, market efficiency

1. INTRODUCTION

The institution of marriage has witnessed significant changes in recent decades in the United States. Not only have divorce and cohabitation become a common occurrence, age at first marriage has also increased for both men and women (Rose, 2001). The rise in cohabitation has also affected the remarriage rates (Bumpass, James, & Martin, 1990). While most divorced individuals eventually remarry, the remarriage rates have been declining steadily since 1990. In 2019, the remarriage rate was at 25.1 remarriages per 1,000 men and women eligible to remarry. This represents a 50-percent and a 25-percent drop from the 1990 and 2008 rates, respectively (Reynolds, 2021). These shifts in marriage behavior are likely to impact selection of partners in the event an individual does marry or remarry. While there is a large literature on patterns of marital matching in the first marriage indicating a strong preference to choose partners with similar social, economic and demographic characteristics (assortative mating), very little is known about marital sorting in second marriages. Much of the research on remarriage has been focused on examining the extent to which socioeconomic factors and individual traits affect the propensity to remarry and the timing of remarriage. As a result, partner choice in second marriages remains understudied and information about similarities and differences between first and second marriages continues to be limited. Understanding individual preferences in remarriage, specifically if assortative mating patterns observed in first marriages also apply to second marriages, is important as it has implications for marital stability as well as the physical, economic, and social well-being of households.

It is conceivable that preferences in second marriages may differ from those in first marriages. For instance, partner preference the second time around may reflect what each individual learned from mistakes made in the first marriage. This perspective, popularly known as the learning hypothesis in the literature, suggests that the lessons derived from failed unions are likely to lead to the most homogamous choices in second marriages compared to first marriages. More specifically, divorced individuals who remarry reflect on the lessons learned from the failed marriage, adjust their preferences accordingly and look for a partner with whom they can maintain a stable marriage. In other words, they are likely to remarry someone who is more similar to them compared to their first partner. Although individual preferences play an important role in