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Parents' Partnership Decision Making After Divorce or Widowhood: The Role of (Step)Children

Using data from the Netherlands Kinship Panel Surveys, this study investigated divorced and widowed parents' (N = 350) decision making about living arrangements after repartnering: Twenty-eight percent lived apart together (LAT) and others lived together (remarried or cohabiting). The focus was on determinants of LAT: Women, older respondents, residents of larger cities, and parents of 2 or more children are more apt to LAT. On the basis of additional qualitative interviews with LAT respondents (n = 25), the reasons for LAT were investigated. Data showed that many children are involved in pure boundary work in an effort to guarantee the continuation of their family. Other (step)children use the sabotage or refusal types of boundary work, not accepting the new partner or excluding a parent from contact, especially with grandchildren. Many of these efforts are successful. To preserve the ties with their children, parents often adapt their decision making about the living arrangements with a new partner accordingly.

Longevity, higher divorce rates, and other demographic trends have led to a growing number of older adults who are unpartnered, either because of a breakup or the death of a partner. Divorced or widowed adults not only have to cope with grief and bereavement, but also have lost an important source of social support and daily companionship. They can remedy this absence of a significant other by establishing a new romantic bond (Carr, 2004). Widowed men in particular report an interest in getting remarried or living together (Moorman, Booth, & Fingerman, 2006). The demographic imbalance in the sex ratio makes it easier for men at advanced ages to find a new partner, whereas for women the pool of suitable men becomes smaller. This discrepancy is intensified because elderly men tend to prefer women who are younger than they (Morgan & Kunkel, 1998). Therefore, age at dissolution of the former partner relationship is a strong predictor of repartnering (de Jong Gierveld, 2004), although women with non-coresidential children have a higher probability of repartnering than do women with children still at home (de Graaf & Kalmijn, 2003). Men in better socioeconomic circumstances have more opportunities of finding a new partner, especially if they are involved in activities through which they meet other people, such as labor force participation (Chevan, 1996; de Jong Gierveld, 2004).

Sociostructural and cultural changes, such as emancipation and individualization, have altered

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Key Words: divorce, intergenerational relationships, living apart together, repartnering, (step)children, widowhood.

1 the family life and household composition
 2 of younger and older adults, and traditional
 3 biographies have been replaced by *choice*
 4 *biographies* (Brothers & de Jong Gierveld,
 5 2011; Du Bois-Reymond, 1998), including
 6 various forms of repartnering and stepfamily
 7 arrangements. Many older adults are successful
 8 in finding a new partner. "Individuals select
 9 from a veritable smorgasbord of romantic
 10 options, including . . . entering into shared
 11 living" (Sassler, 2010, p. 557). Some remarry,
 12 others live together, and some start living-
 13 apart-together (LAT) relationships, although it
 14 is unclear whether each of these options are
 15 always freely chosen rather than a default option.
 16 In the current study, LAT relationships were
 17 defined as a living arrangement in which intimate
 18 partners (who regard themselves as a couple
 19 and are recognized as such by others) maintain
 20 separate households and finances and share
 21 living quarters on an intermittent or temporary
 22 basis (Haskey, 2005; Strohm, Seltzer, Cochran,
 23 & Mays, 2009).

24 25 26 REPARTNERING OF PARENTS

27 Repartnering at an older age, and living arrange-
 28 ments such as remarriage and living together
 29 or LAT, have already been the topic of ample
 30 research (e.g., de Jong Gierveld, 2002, 2004;
 31 Karlsson & Borell, 2002; Régnier-Loilier, Beau-
 32 jouan, & Villeneuve-Gokalp, 2009). Studies
 33 have also examined the role children and
 34 stepchildren might play in influencing their par-
 35 ents' decision of whether to move in together
 36 (e.g., Goldscheider & Sassler, 2006; Graefe &
 37 Lichter, 1999), but these are still rather scarce,
 38 especially studies regarding middle-aged and
 39 older parents. This is unfortunate, because par-
 40 ents remain parents for a lifetime and it seems
 41 more than likely that, regardless of whether they
 42 still live at home, children play an important
 43 role in decision making about the new fam-
 44 ily constellation. Parents' lives are linked to
 45 those of their children, and parents remain con-
 46 cerned about their children's well-being even
 47 after those children are no longer living at home.
 48 A parent's new relationship may threaten the
 49 children's well-being or decrease the contact
 50 with adult children or grandchildren, particularly
 51 if the repartnering means that two households
 52 will merge. This may make parents more reluc-
 53 tant to invest in new partnerships not only when
 54 their children are younger and still part of the

household but also after their children have
 grown up and moved out of the home.

In the current study, we identified the ways
 children and stepchildren can have a positive
 or negative effect on their divorced or widowed
 parent's decision to remarry, live with a new
 partner, or have an LAT relationship. We asked
 two broad research questions: (a) Is having
 children directional in regard to remarrying or
 living together versus LAT? and (b) how do
 the characteristics of intergenerational relations
 determine the decision making of older adults
 in regard to getting married or living together
 versus LAT? To answer these two questions,
 we used quantitative data from a large-scale
 panel survey, the Netherlands Kinship Panel
 Study (NKPS), especially data that focused
 on changes in family relationships across
 contexts and time. To examine the mechanisms
 behind certain choices, we used qualitative data
 collected in an in-depth study on repartnering
 that devoted special attention to changes in
 relationships with children and other kin. In this
 qualitative approach, we conducted interviews
 with 52 divorced or widowed NKPS respondents
 involved in a new romantic partnership and
 either living together or in an LAT relationship.

In the following sections, we sketch the
 societal background of current demographic and
 family behavior, with a focus on northern and
 western Europe. We discuss why children are
 apt to play an important role in influencing their
 parent's decision making about a new partner
 relationship and living arrangements.

LAT AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO COHABITATION IN EUROPE

The modernization and emancipation in west-
 ern Europe that have been observed in recent
 decades are reflected in value changes empha-
 sizing individualism, personal autonomy, gender
 equality, and detachment from traditional fam-
 ily roles (Lesthaeghe & Surkyn, 1988; Mills,
 2007; Sobotka, 2004; van de Kaa, 1987). This
 has led to demographic changes in Europe and
 an increase in the number of adults who real-
 ize that LAT is one such trend. LAT is now
 sometimes a preferred alternative to married or
 unmarried cohabitation (de Jong Gierveld, 2004;
 Levin, 2004; Strohm et al., 2009), not merely
 a makeshift solution for individuals who cannot
 afford to get married and share a household.
 On the contrary, LAT relationships require that

one has the resources to live independently, such as a good education and the capacity to run an independent household. Since the introduction of more egalitarian ideas about men and women's position in society, the acceptance of new partnership forms and new living arrangements such as living together or LAT on the part of midlife and older adults is becoming more common, especially in northern and western Europe (Bumpass, Sweet, & Martin, 1990; Chevan, 1996; Davidson, 2002; de Jong Gierveld & Peeters, 2003; Régnier-Loilier et al., 2009; Stevens, 2002). A more modern orientation and emphasis on individualization has made the LAT arrangement more attractive. Research has shown that two groups—adults with a higher education level and women—more frequently exhibit a more modern value orientation (Merz & Liefbroer, 2012) and might thus be more likely to prefer LAT to cohabitation.

PARENTS AND CHILDREN ACROSS THE LIFE COURSE: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Older people's social networks tend to be concentrated on the nuclear family and close kin (Carstensen, 1995; van Tilburg, 1998), and it is not uncommon for adult children to play a central role in their elderly parents' lives and even to function as attachment figures (Merz, Schuengel, & Schulze, 2009), although the parent's partner history affects the degree of contact and support exchanges (de Jong Gierveld & Peeters, 2003; van der Pas, Tilburg, & Knipscheer, 2007). Therefore, in this study we examined various kinds of interactions between repartnered parents and their children and stepchildren. Scholars have investigated the complex interrelationship between parents and children by focusing on various dimensions of solidarity (Bengtson, Giarrusso, Mabry, & Silverstein, 2002; Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997; Silverstein, Burholt, Wenger, & Bengtson, 1998), but intergenerational relationships do not automatically continue to be relationships of solidarity, because parents as well as children may turn to other sources of social support or cease to act as sources of support. Lüscher and Pillemer (1998) and Giarrusso, Silverstein, Gans, and Bengtson (2005) have advocated including the possibility of mixed feelings, that is, an attraction–repulsion dynamic, ambivalence, or a model of both solidarity and conflict. Life course transitions,

children becoming adolescents, and parents getting divorced and repartnering might affect relationships between parents and children and lead to conflicts and contradictory feelings (Giarrusso et al., 2005). Studies conducted by Dykstra and Schenk (2012) and Connidis (2010) show that the repartnering of parents stimulates parents and children to renegotiate their relationships. According to the ambivalence type of intergenerational family relationships (de Graaf & Fokkema, 2007; de Jong Gierveld & Peeters, 2003), repartnered parents less frequently provide support for their children and are less frequently in contact with their children. Moreover, repartnering proves to be the major trigger for transforming child–parent relationships into discordant ones, with a higher likelihood of conflict and a lower likelihood of connectedness and support exchanges (Schenk & Dykstra, 2012).

AMBIVALENCE, BOUNDARY AMBIGUITY, AND BOUNDARY WORK

The complexity of repartnering and stepfamilies arrangements influences ambivalence and boundary ambiguity in families (Brown & Manning, 2009), whether because the structure of the family is unclear or because the new structure is clear but, for some reason, family members ignore or deny them. It is the perception, even more than the structure, that determines boundary ambiguity (Boss, 2007). Families who have suffered the death of a parent or the loss of a parent at dissolution of (parent's) marriage experience ambiguous loss situations or have a high potential for boundary ambiguity, which could present a barrier for postdivorce or postwidowhood reorganization. The inclusion of a new member in the family is one of these boundary changes that affects the risks for boundary ambiguity. The perception of a family member that the family boundaries are being intruded on by an outside person (or group of persons) is another important one (Carroll, Olson, & Buckmiller, 2007).

From a child's perspective, a parent's repartnering might involve an unpleasant feeling that someone is trying to take the father's or mother's place, trying to influence the family's daily life, or trying to replace the missing parent. Verbally, and via overt behavior, they try to guarantee the continuation of the family. Their explicit aim is to protect the family territory from intruders. Some researchers state that the risk of

boundary ambiguity is especially high for young children and adolescents (Brown & Manning, 2009), others have shown that, because of their cognitive capabilities, older children have a greater potential to experience family ambiguity (Fine, 1996; Stewart, 2005).

From a parent's perspective, having children might be an obstacle to any plan to start a new composite household. Parents—in particular, mothers—might be reluctant to start a new composite household because they do not want to confront their children with any more change (Karlsson & Borell, 2005). Perhaps observing a situation friends of theirs are in, parents might anticipate a possibly negative outcome of a new composite household that would combine their own and their partner's children. Complex households consisting of two partners and their children from former relationships are frequently characterized by more fragile and less robust intergenerational ties (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1994; Stewart, 2005). One of the reasons people with children might opt for LAT relationships as opposed to coresidence is the issue of negotiating family boundaries with children. In the quantitative part of the current study, we differentiated between childless older adults and parents. In the qualitative part of the study, we intended to further elicit the attitudes and behaviour of the children, with specific attention given to the boundary work of children and their parents.

THE CURRENT STUDY

In this research, we explored the factors that can play a role in older adults' decision making about living arrangements after repartnering, in particular the role of boundary work of children. Research has shown that better educated adults, individuals who live in urbanized areas, and women are more frequently characterized by a more modern value orientation (Merz & Liefbroer, 2012). On the basis of these considerations, we formulated the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Better educated adults, women, and residents of more urbanized areas are more likely to prefer LAT to cohabitation.

In addition, we examined the effects of parent–child and parent–stepchild relationships on parents' decision making about living arrangements after repartnering. Confronted with their children's comments and boundary

work, some parents will probably nevertheless start a composite household with the new partner, whereas others may be more cautious, give precedence to their children's feelings, and refrain from living together and continue maintaining separate households in an LAT relationship. We explicitly considered the specifics of parenthood, as they were neatly summarized in the subtitle of a recent article by Levitzki (2009): "Parents are always parents" (p. 226). Following the ample literature emphasizing the centrality of parenthood in the lives of aging individuals (see Dykstra & Hagestad, 2007, for an overview), we argue that taking the well-being of children into account nourishes older adults' identity and promotes their life satisfaction. Widowed or divorced parents with a new partner are likely to want to prevent negative outcomes for their children and consequently to prefer an LAT relationship to a new composite household. On the basis of these considerations, we formulated a second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: In repartnering after widowhood or divorce, being childless increases the likelihood of coresidence, and having children increases the likelihood of LAT relationships.

The NKPS survey data fail to provide sufficient details and nuances for a more thorough examination of children's attitudes and roles in the repartnering of older parents. The use of multiple methods in the study of these rather complicated issues has been advocated since Denzin's (1970) book was published. Miles and Huberman (1984) noted that "If you collect and double-check findings, using multiple sources and modes of evidence, the verification process will largely be built into the data-gathering process" (p. 235). This is why we combined quantitative and qualitative data analyses. This combination offers ample opportunity to investigate various aspects of family life via multivariate data analysis of the NKPS survey as well as in-depth interviewing of a selection of older NKPS repartnered respondents. The in-depth interviews were conducted with a semistructured interview scheme that included questions about children's reactions at the start of their parent's current relationship. This kind of interviewing, with its open structure of the questions and answers, offered us the opportunity to develop new theoretical ideas about children's attitudes

and behavior in relation to their parents' decision making about the preferred type of relationship.

METHOD

Participants in the Quantitative Analysis

The data in this study are from the NKPS. At Wave 1 (2003–2004), computer-assisted personal interviews were conducted with 8,161 men and women age 18 to 79 (Dykstra et al., 2005). The overall response rate of the NKPS was 45%. Response rates in the Netherlands tend to be lower than in other Western industrialized countries (de Leeuw & de Heer, 2002). At Wave 2 (2006–2007), 6,085 of the respondents were reinterviewed (Dykstra et al., 2007). Adults above age of 50 at Wave 2 with new partners after their divorce or widowhood ($N = 350$) were at the core of this study; these included 251 men and women who lived with a new partner (and children), were remarried (69%) or not (31%), and 99 men and women who had an LAT relationship with a new partner.

Measures in the Quantitative Analysis

The dependent variable indicated whether a respondent was in an LAT relationship or lived with the new partner. Answer categories were 1 = LAT and 0 = coresidence.

Sociodemographic characteristics. Previous research has shown that older people, especially older, more highly educated women in urban areas, more frequently have LAT relationships (de Jong Gierveld, 2004). This is why *age* and *gender* (1 = male, 2 = female), *education level* (1 = incomplete primary school–11 = postgraduate university level), *employment status* (1 = employed, 2 = retired, and 3 = other [e.g. housewives]) and *urbanization* of the area where the respondent lived (1 = not urbanized–5 = very strongly urbanized) were included as variables.

Life course characteristics. The *reason for the termination of the former relationship* was included as a dichotomous variable (divorced or separated and never widowed vs. ever confronted with the death of a [cohabiting] partner). The *number of former partnership breaks* was included in the set of predictors. We constructed a variable based on information

about the *number of children born in former relationships*; dummy variables indicate whether the respondent was childless or a parent of one or two or more children at the start of the current relationship.

Participants in the Qualitative Analysis

The current qualitative study addressed family bonds, in particular the quality of the family bonds of divorced or widowed adults above age 50 in new relationships, comparing remarried, cohabiting, and LAT relationships. The criteria for inclusion in this in-depth analysis were as follows: divorced or widowed respondents above age 50 at Wave 2 of the NKPS, who were either remarried, living together or in an LAT relationship. In order to investigate intergenerational bonds, adults with two or more children at the start of the current relationship were selected. At the end of the interviews at Waves 1 and 2, respectively, respondents were asked permission to approach them again to take part in a follow-up interview. Only respondents who gave permission were invited to be involved in this in-depth study; two refused because of health reasons. A university-educated interviewer and the first author conducted the interviews in 2008–2009. All the interviews were conducted at the respondents' homes, throughout the Netherlands. The mean duration of the interviews was 60 to 90 minutes. About half the interviews were with adults who were living together, and the other half were with adults in LAT relationships. Given the rich and abundant set of information gathered in the 52 interviews, for this study we decided to solely concentrate on the data from the 25 respondents in LAT relationships. We conducted 16 interviews with divorced adults and nine with widows or widowers; 11 were male and 14 were female, all of them in heterosexual relationships. Their age at the start of the LAT relationship varied: Twenty-four percent started the relationship before age 45, 12% started it between 45 and 49, and 64% started it after 50. A comparison of the NKPS Wave 2 composition with those of this qualitative study indicates that the percentage of respondents ever widowed, with 22% at Wave 2 and 36% represented in the qualitative interview, differed considerably. The portion of women was 59% versus 60%—totally comparable—and the mean age was 61 years in both samples.

Measures and Procedures of the Qualitative Analysis

Given that the researchers had ample information on the respondents' sociodemographics, partner status and history, children, social network, and health status, based on the data gathered at Waves 1 and 2 of the surveys, the semistructured interview guide included a specific series of topics that covered various aspects of the relationships with their children and other family members.

The open starting question was, "How did your children react when they learned about your new (current) partner?" The respondents had plenty of time to answer this question. If necessary, additional questions were formulated for clarification.

The information was audio-recorded and transcribed to prepare the data for entry into the qualitative data system. The analysis procedure started with the open coding of the texts of the interviews. This resulted in more than 30 different coding categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; LaRossa, 2005). Next, we examined and compared the coding categories to note similarities and differences. The coding categories were combined into clusters of related categories, including one that ordered all the coding categories on a continuum from very positive to very negative. As expected, parent-child bonds over time were not stable; they were created and re-created, they got better and they deteriorated. Introducing life course elements—such as children's marriages and associated needs and possibilities for broadening support for children and grandchildren—provided an opportunity to reassemble meaningful pieces of information (Elder, 1995). Coding schemes were revised and expanded as our interpretations and explanations progressed. There was, for example, a need to nuance the original concept of children's boundary work, differentiating the comments of children still at home and those who had grown up and left. We completed our analysis by formulating four broad types of parent-child interactions based on statements by our LAT respondents.

RESULTS

Quantitative Analyses

Descriptive Characteristics. Ninety-nine of the 350 older adults in new relationships (28%)

were in LAT relationships. This LAT living arrangement attracts many older adults. Two thirds of the coresident partners had remarried, and one third had not. The main characteristics of the LAT partners and the respondents who lived together are presented in Table 1. More women than men were in LAT relationships. The mean age of the LAT respondents was 60.9, significantly higher than the mean age of the coresident respondents (57.7). The mean age at the start of the current relationship differed significantly in the two groups: 39.0 for coresident respondents and 53.2 for LAT respondents. The education levels did not differ significantly. Coresident respondents were more frequently employed, and LAT respondents were more frequently retired. Most respondents in both groups had been divorced, and 1 out of 5 of the LAT respondents had experienced the death of a former partner.

The LAT respondents exhibited a higher mean number of breaks in partner relationships. The percentage of LAT respondents who were parents at the start of the current relationship was 79.8%, significantly higher than the 66.5% in the coresidence group. Respondents with two or more children were more frequently in LAT relationships. The oldest as well as the youngest children of the LAT respondents were significantly older at the start of their parents' new relationship than the children of coresident respondents. Table 1 shows an overrepresentation of LAT respondents in the urbanized and extremely urbanized areas of the Netherlands. We conclude that LAT respondents might not be a cross-section of repartnered older adults, but they do exhibit a wide variety of sociodemographics and life course histories. We needed to conduct the multivariate analysis to consolidate this preliminary finding.

Multivariate Analysis. The outcomes of the multivariate analysis focused on the probability of LAT as compared to coresidence (either as a married couple or in cohabitation) and are shown in Table 2. In Model 1, the sociodemographic variables are taken into account, and the numbers show significant odds ratios for gender as well as age. Women and older people were more frequently in LAT relationships than men and younger respondents. Significant odds ratios indicate that living in urbanized and extremely urbanized areas was more strongly associated with LAT than living in rural areas.

Table 1. Main Sample Characteristics for Respondents Age 50 and Over in Living Apart Together (LAT) or Coresidence With a New Partner After Divorce or Widowhood (N = 350)

Characteristic	Coresidence (n = 251)	LAT (n = 99)	χ^2 or F
Female (% yes)	48.2	58.6	$\chi^2 = 3.061, df = 1, p < .10$
Mean age	57.7	60.9	$F = 13.313, df = 1, p < .000$
Mean age at start current partner relation	39.0	53.2	$F = 130.491, df = 1, p < .000$
Type of union			
Married	68.9		
Cohabitation	31.1		
LAT		100.0	
Education level			$\chi^2 = 4.801, df = 4, ns$
Lower/lower professional	17.9	13.1	
Mid level/mid-level professional	37.1	35.4	
Higher secondary	2.4	6.1	
Higher professional	29.1	34.3	
University	13.5	11.1	
Employment status			$\chi^2 = 6.442, df = 2, p < .05$
Employed	53.8	40.4	
Retired	30.7	44.4	
Other (e.g., housewives)	15.5	15.2	
Urbanization municipality			$\chi^2 = 8.448, df = 4, p < .10$
Not or hardly urbanized	29.9	16.1	
Moderate	19.5	20.2	
(Very) strongly urbanized	50.6	63.6	
Type of break former partner relationship			
Divorced, never widowed	96.8	77.8	$\chi^2 = 32.825, df = 1, p < .000$
Ever widowed	3.2	22.2	
Mean number of breaks	1.2	1.4	$F = 5.168, df = 1, p < .05$
Mean duration of current partner relationship	18.7	7.6	$F = 87.174, df = 1, p < .000$
Parent at start current partner relationship?			$\chi^2 = 8.018, df = 2, p < .05$
0 children	33.5	20.2	
1 child	15.1	12.1	
2 children or more	51.4	67.6	
Age of oldest child at start of current partner relationship			$\chi^2 = 34.383, df = 2, p < .000$
Childless	33.5	20.2	
1–17 years	36.7	16.2	
18 years or above	29.9	63.6	
Age of youngest child at start of current partner relationship			$\chi^2 = 59.954, df = 2, p < .000$
Childless	33.5	20.2	
1–17	48.6	21.2	
18 or more	17.1	58.6	

Model 2 shows a greater likelihood that respondents who were widowed or had two or more children at the start of the current relationship would be in an LAT relationship than a coresidence one. To control for possible inter-relations among the predictors, we investigated

one full model that included all the predictors (cf. Model 3 in Table 2). The results revealed that having been widowed increased the likelihood of being in an LAT relationship. Living in a more urbanized area was also more associated with LAT than coresidence. Moreover, having

Table 2. Outcomes of Logistic Regression Analyses Predicting Realizing Living Apart Together Versus Coresidence (N = 350)

Predictor	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>e</i> ^β	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>e</i> ^β	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>e</i> ^β
Gender (1 = female)	0.43	0.25	1.54 [†]	0.47	0.26	1.60 [†]	0.49	0.27	1.63 [†]
Age	0.05	0.02	1.05**				0.02	0.02	1.02
Lower & lower professional education (ref.)									
Mid-level & mid-level professional	0.43	0.41	1.54				0.66	0.45	1.94
Higher level, higher level professional, university	0.31	0.41	1.36				0.50	0.45	1.64
Not employed/retired (ref.)									
Employed	-0.24	0.31	0.79				-0.17	0.32	0.85
Urbanization community (low → high)	0.24	0.09	1.27**				0.35	0.10	1.42**
Experienced widowhood? (1 = yes)				1.98	0.45	7.22***	2.02	0.48	7.52***
Number of breaks				0.41	0.23	1.51 [†]	0.43	.24	1.53 [†]
Number of children at start current partner relationship (ref.: childless)									
1				0.24	0.43	1.27	0.23	0.44	1.26
2 or more				0.61	0.31	1.83*	0.78	0.33	2.18*
Nagelkerke <i>R</i> ²		.10			.15			.22	

Note: ref. = reference.

[†]*p* < .10. **p* < .05. ***p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

no children was a predictor of not being in an LAT relationship. Having two or more children significantly increased the likelihood of LAT. In the qualitative study, we intended to further elicit the attitudes and behavior of the children, with specific attention paid to boundary work.

Outcomes of the Qualitative Analysis

We asked the 25 LAT respondents to describe the bonds with their children at the moment when they were informed about the new partner. None of the respondents had difficulty answering the opening question or hesitated to do so. They were able to express themselves and speak more or less extensively about the bonds with their children.

Our analysis showed that the quality and changes in the quality of the bonds with children varied strongly in the starting phase of the current relationships. On the basis of the analysis, we differentiated the following main types: (a) positive comments made by children, reported

by one respondent; (b) neutral or indifferent comments, or never having experienced a guarded or negative interaction with the children about the current relationship, reported by seven LAT respondents; (c) serious problems with their own children or their partner's children that strongly affected their well-being and in many cases forced them to redefine their plans for the future, reported by 13 respondents; (d) anticipating problems with the children and working hard to prevent them by designing their plans for the future in a certain way, reported by four respondents. In the next sections, we address each of these types of experiences in greater detail and illustrate them with quotes.

Positive Comments by Children. In this category we included the only respondent who spoke in positive terms about her children's comments and behavior, a 65-year-old divorced woman who met her current partner when she was 54, 7 years after her divorce. She and her partner had had an LAT relationship for 11 year:

My kids evaluated the new situation as fantastic. Yes, because my son William called immediately and said, "Oh, Mom, just go for living together!" I said, "No, I will not do that yet." I said "First I'll wait and see how things go." And then, later on . . . he said, "Yes, Mom now I understand why you don't share a house." . . . My daughter said, "Well done, Mom, I think you did the right thing." . . . And no, no, she did not talk about sharing a house. I think women have a feeling for this. . . . At the start one of [my partner's] children was not that glad about the new situation. His daughter thought I was squandering her dad's money. When she saw I continued to live in my own house and pay for myself, it went better. . . . Now we are on good terms.

This respondent combined the positive comments of her own children with the more reserved ones of his. All in all, she provided one of the most favorable pictures of the interaction with her and his children. She relates how after a period with guarded comments by his children, the situation became more positive.

Indifferent, Neutral, or No Comments by Children. Several respondents did not get either positive or negative comments from their children; the parents and children each went their own way. A 74-year-old divorced man in an LAT relationship for 14 years described it as follows:

My kids, er . . . it does not interest them that much, no, er . . . I have my own life, my kids have their own lives . . . This is what they said, "Dad, you lead your own life, what do you want to do with your life?" And it does not matter whether I do good or bad things . . . as long as it does not harm my health . . . I don't need to tell them everything, they don't tell me everything either.

However, this example of parents and children leading their own lives in a harmonious way is not the same as the situation of respondents who reported their children's comments in neutral terms because the intergenerational bonds are so weak. Three respondents noted that their ties with their children had been virtually nonexistent for years, long before the LAT relationship started. This is especially true of two divorced men and one older widow who had no contact with her daughter after her daughter's marriage. A 55-year-old divorced man put it as follows:

Nearly no contact . . . My new partner, she saw my daughter and my son, may be, two or three times. I

did not see them more frequently . . . but this does not keep haunting me. So, no contact anymore.

It is not surprising that these respondents did not discuss the details of their new relationship with their children and did not hear any negative or positive comments.

Predominantly Negative Comments by Children.

In analyzing children's negative reactions, the data show that the concept of boundary work is helpful in this context but requires further differentiation. We needed additional nuancing, for example, between the comments of children who were still at home and those who were not. The following three types of reactions were observed: (a) the *pure boundary work* type, most frequently observed in biological children who still lived at home; (b) the *refusal* type, observed in (young) adult children who had left home; and (c) the *sabotage* type, most frequently observed in the children of the new partner, whose rejecting comments and behavior represent an effort to prevent the intrusion of a new person into their family household. Below, we describe the three types of reactions and illustrate them with examples from the in-depth interviews.

The pure boundary work type. With this type of reaction, parents are confronted with the comments and behavior of their biological children, who are trying to establish boundaries around their current family home. In doing so, they try to influence their parent to continue the situation as it was before the arrival of the new partner. Nearly all these children have memories of the old situation with both biological parents present. Missing a parent and being confronted with a parent's new partner is a very emotional experience for children. This is illustrated by the following statements by the children of a divorced 53-year-old father with two sons at home:

"Take it or leave it; either she leaves or I leave" (10-year-old son).

His 19-year-old brother said

"She may be your girlfriend, but I don't want to have anything more to do with her" (this son left the home as soon as the woman arrived).

A divorced 57-year-old mother in a long-term LAT relationship shared the following:

After 18 years of marriage, I got divorced and lived with my three teenage children. I had a new

1 partner . . . but we seldom had contact because of
2 my children. It was too difficult for them (to deal
3 with my new relationship). And I had to put my
4 children first . . . especially my daughter had a lot
5 of issues (with my new partner) at the time. It is
6 only recently that they have come to accept this
7 relationship.

8 The children quoted here are successful in the
9 sense that their parents refrain from starting a
10 composite household.

11 *The refusal type.* For children who have already
12 left home, the pure concept of boundary work no
13 longer applies. These older children nonetheless
14 comment on the behavior of their parent, and
15 many do so by not approving of the new partner
16 situation. Adult children sometimes reduce the
17 frequency of visits to their parents and explicitly
18 deny the new partner bond. A 78-year-old
19 woman in a long-term LAT relationship noted,
20 “My daughters refused to come visit me on
21 Sundays if Henry, my new partner, was in my
22 house . . . and . . . I was not invited to the
23 wedding of his granddaughter.”

24 A similar situation was described by a 74-
25 year-old widower who was 62 at the start of a
26 new relationship:

27 My son . . . comes to visit me every Monday
28 evening. And I am very happy about that. This
29 guy, I can talk to him so pleasantly, sometimes
30 at the computer if I have problems with it, I am
31 learning . . . No, that’s fine. I have more problems
32 with my daughter, I have not seen her in years,
33 although I did not put anything in her way . . .
34 I wrote her a letter, but no answer. In the letter
35 I told her that if I did something wrong at the
36 start of my new relationship, I am willing to have
37 a heart-to-heart talk. But I never got a response.
38 And that’s a pity, . . . I will be 75 next year and I
39 am planning a big party . . . It would be so lovely
40 to have her here.

41 These two respondents clearly show the
42 consequences of children’s comments and
43 behavior. They were very unhappy about losing
44 regular contact with children who had grown up
45 and left home.

46 *The sabotage type.* The comments and behavior
47 in this subgroup are characteristic of a situation
48 in which it is not a parent’s biological
49 children, but the children of the new partner,
50 who are obstructive. In other words, “his”
51 or “her” children stand in the way of the
52 respondent’s well-being. Some examples of

1 these comments are presented below. First, a 68-
2 year-old divorced man who had been in an LAT
3 relationship for 3 years described his situation:

4 My grown-up kids were happy when they heard
5 about my new partner. But her son (age 18) . . . is
6 a bit odd, and behaves as if he is the boss at home
7 . . . He could not stand to have another man . . .
8 me . . . in the house. And he influenced his mother
9 to do exactly what he wanted. That’s why I am
10 happier living on my own.

11 A 62-year-old man in a long-term LAT
12 relationship put it as follows:

13 We, my new partner and I, tried sharing a
14 household. Her daughter reacted very strongly.
15 “What’s that guy doing in our house?” And her
16 son didn’t say a word to me at breakfast, not even
17 “Good morning” or anything . . . that feels awful
18 . . . not good. So I decided to move out and live
19 separately again.

20 It is clear from these comments how sad
21 and disappointed the respondents were. Several
22 respondents confirmed that the comments and
23 behavior of their partners’ children affected
24 their lives. The very start of a coresidence
25 situation was wrecked. The respondents returned
26 to their own homes and continued to have an
27 LAT relationship. A special type of sabotage
28 is illustrated by a 67-year-old man in an LAT
29 relationship. His partner was terminally ill, and
30 he took care of her. He was not only the
31 principal caregiver, he was the only one, because
32 her children did not get involved. During the
33 terminal period of her illness, he took care of her
34 24 hours a day. His status as partner and primary
35 caregiver was denied by her children, even in
36 the preparations for her funeral:

37 I was the only one who took care of my (LAT)
38 partner when she was dying of cancer, but I was
39 not included in the preparations for the funeral,
40 and her children did not even put my name on the
41 memorial card.

42 A total of 12 respondents mentioned children’s
43 strong negative comments about their parents’
44 new relationship. Four were the pure boundary
45 type, three were the refusal type, and five were
46 the sabotage type. The comments and behavior
47 of children were taken very seriously by divorced
48 and widowed adults. Some older adults even
49 anticipated their children’s negative comments
50

1 and behavior and did their best to avoid conflicts.
2 Their situation is described below.

3 *Anticipating problems and negative comments.*

4 Four LAT respondents were categorized as
5 anticipating. A 56-year-old widow in a long-term
6 LAT relationship with three teenage children at
7 home anticipated problems if she and her partner
8 set up a new composite household with her and
9 his children.
10

11 I did not think it was a good idea to . . . go live
12 with my three children in his house or for him and
13 his daughter to come live here, no . . .

14 Interviewer: So it was a conscious choice to
15 become LAT partners?

16 Respondent: Yes, in the beginning, yes, neither
17 of us ever considered living together. I like it the
18 way it is now. No, I never wanted to combine the
19 households. His daughter is totally different from
20 my children and I did not like the sound of the
21 idea. They have contact on birthdays and so on,
22 but . . . she is just another type of child. Nothing
23 wrong with her, um . . . don't get me wrong. It
24 just would not be a good match if they all had
25 to live in one house . . . we never even thought
26 about it that much. So that is why I live here with
27 three children; I don't want another man around
28 the house.

29 In anticipating possible conflicts with children,
30 some parents ruled out a composite household
31 from the start and simply had an LAT
32 relationship. As one widow noted,
33

34 It's quite something that I have been living on my
35 own for years. It is in total awareness that as long
36 as my children live here . . . I will never share a
37 household with a new partner . . . I see my female
38 friends [with a composite household], it means so
39 much fuss in the house, no . . . I think it's not my
40 piece of cake.

41 More specifically, some respondents opted for
42 an LAT relationship in which they saw each
43 other only when the children were not around,
44 for example, in the evening or, in cases of marital
45 dissolution, on weekends when the children
46 were with the former spouse. The anticipating
47 respondents very explicitly mentioned their
48 intention from the start to not have a composite
49 household.
50

51 DISCUSSION

52 The current study expands the prior knowledge
53 on the role of children and stepchildren in their
54

1 divorced or widowed parent's decision making
2 about living arrangements after repartnering,
3 especially if the parents are middle-aged or
4 older adults. By combining quantitative and
5 qualitative data, the study enriches the empirical
6 results of a logistic regression analysis with
7 in-depth data to add details and contexts to
8 the quantitative results. We expected children
9 and stepchildren to play an important role in
10 influencing their widowed or divorced parents'
11 decision making about living arrangements with
12 a new partner.

13 As expected (Hypothesis 2), parenthood,
14 especially with more than one child, means
15 a greater likelihood of LAT, and childless
16 individuals more often live together after
17 repartnering. Using qualitative data, we showed
18 why and how children affect their parents'
19 decision making and identified several types
20 of behavior children can adopt. We showed that
21 older female adults living in more urbanized
22 areas were more likely to maintain separate
23 households after repartnering than younger male
24 ones (partly in accordance with Hypothesis 1).
25 We discuss the results in greater detail below
26 and consider possible mechanisms underlying
27 the supporting, neutral, and constraining role
28 children may play in the repartnering of their
29 divorced or widowed parents.
30

31 *Sociodemographic Factors and Value*
32 *Modernization Predicting LAT*
33

34 As predicted, older women living in more urban-
35 ized areas more often had LAT relationships, and
36 higher education levels were associated with
37 realizing LAT intimate partnerships (although
38 not significantly). Standard biographies have
39 been replaced by the lifestyle choices (Du Bois-
40 Reymond, 1998) of individuals who plan, reflect,
41 and negotiate (Rijken & Knijn, 2009) with
42 their significant others in the context of value
43 modernization, longevity, and higher divorce
44 rates. These characteristics have previously been
45 associated with less traditional attitudes and
46 demographic behavior (e.g., Keizer, Dykstra,
47 & Jansen, 2008; Merz & Liefbroer, 2012) in
48 Dutch and cross-national studies.

49 It is interesting that older ages were associated
50 with LAT relationships. This contradicts the
51 earlier findings on the association between mod-
52 ernization and lifestyles and is not easy to inter-
53 pret. Older ages at the start of relationships are
54 indicative of individuals who want to preserve

1 their personal lifestyles, habits, and households.
 2 Older women are especially inclined to protect
 3 their income and pension schemes and safeguard
 4 their future position by not merging households
 5 with a new partner (de Jong Gierveld, 2002).

6 At the same time, societal value changes
 7 affecting demographic behavior and family life
 8 might also mean that a decade or two ago,
 9 repartnered individuals did not spontaneously
 10 mention their children as a reason not to
 11 move in with a new partner. The current
 12 interviews explicitly included questions about
 13 the role children and stepchildren played in
 14 the decision making of repartnered adults and
 15 clearly demonstrated the centrality of children to
 16 the current cohort of parents. Perhaps disclosing
 17 the constraining role of children in the decision-
 18 making of older adults about living arrangements
 19 was not done some 20 years ago, but nowadays
 20 the existence of ambivalence is acknowledged,
 21 even in the best families (cf. Bengtson et al.,
 22 2002; Connidis & McMullin, 2002), no matter
 23 how central intergenerational relationships are
 24 to parents and children.

25 *Intergenerational Solidarity and Ambivalence*

26 The divorce or death of one's parents can be a
 27 major negative life event in a child's life. Their
 28 parents' divorce can be particularly disturbing
 29 for children because it means a partial loss of
 30 the affective tie with one parent and is often
 31 accompanied by changes at home, such as
 32 a decrease in the quality of the relationship
 33 with the other parent (Crowell, Treboux, &
 34 Brockmeyer, 2009) as well as other short-
 35 and long-term negative effects (Riggio, 2004).
 36 Children might see a parent's new partner as
 37 a threat to the fragile ties they have with
 38 their parents. Children and parents can differ
 39 significantly about seeing a newly constructed
 40 household as a family (Brown & Manning,
 41 2009). Apparently, children sometimes engage
 42 in strong boundary work in an effort to prevent
 43 their parents from establishing a new composite
 44 household with a new partner and secure their
 45 own position in the household. Insecurity about
 46 the relationship with the custodial parent may
 47 be one reason for engaging in boundary work
 48 so as not to have to share the parent with a
 49 new partner on a daily basis. Parents, however,
 50 might want to share a home with a new partner
 51 to provide their children with a complete family
 52 and guarantee greater resources. At the same

1 time, as is clear from the qualitative data in the
 2 current study, parents are aware of—or even
 3 anticipate—their children's boundary work and
 4 sometimes refrain from sharing a home with a
 5 new partner to protect their children.

6 The direction of dependence and providing
 7 and receiving support in intergenerational
 8 relationships beyond childhood is strongly
 9 linked to the age of parents as well as children
 10 even if the children are adults themselves. 10
 11 In older dyads, children can be a source of
 12 support and advice for their elderly parents 12
 13 (Merz, Schuengel, & Schulze, 2008). However,
 14 the intergenerational relationship is central, 14
 15 especially for young adult–parent dyads, who
 16 continue to rely on their parents for support and 16
 17 advice. In younger child–parent relationships 17
 18 in particular, a parent's new partner might be 18
 19 viewed as a threat to young adult children 19
 20 and lead to boundary work by them to protect 20
 21 the intergenerational relationship as a central 21
 22 source of advice and care, as is illustrated in 22
 23 the in-depths interviews in the pure boundary 23
 24 type of children's involvement. Earlier empirical 24
 25 research (e.g., de Graaf & Kalmijn, 2003; 25
 26 Sweeney, 1997) has shown that parents with 26
 27 children still living at home are less likely 27
 28 to repartner, largely because they have fewer 28
 29 opportunities to meet a new partner. In addition, 29
 30 the qualitative part of this study also noted that 30
 31 parents with children are frequently confronted 31
 32 with constraints in the sense that, via boundary 32
 33 work, as shown in their comments and behavior, 33
 34 children serve as obstacles to the start of a 34
 35 composite household with their parent's new 35
 36 partner. In this context, the concept of boundary 36
 37 work needs nuancing; we differentiated among 37
 38 the pure type of boundary work, the refusal type, 38
 39 and the sabotage type. The pure boundary type 39
 40 is characteristic of the comments and behavior 40
 41 of biological children who are trying to establish 41
 42 boundaries around their current family home. 42
 43 Also, outcomes of the qualitative part of our 43
 44 research showed that several children who had 44
 45 already left home commented extensively on the 45
 46 behavior of their parent in not approving the 46
 47 new partner situation and sometimes reducing 47
 48 the frequency of visits to their parents (the refusal 48
 49 type of boundary work). The outcomes of the 49
 50 qualitative part of this study additionally show 50
 51 the specific type of sabotage boundary work 51
 52 as elicited in the comments and behavior of 52
 53 the children of the new partner. Several quotes 53
 54 illustrated that the very start of a coresidence 54

1 situation was wrecked by the comments and
2 behavior of "his" or "her" children.

3 On the other hand, adult children whose
4 divorced or widowed older parents are unpart-
5 nered might have a positive view of the new
6 partner as a new and extra source of compani-
7 ship and support, as illustrated in this study. Most
8 children provide support and care for their par-
9 ents if necessary, motivated in part by a sense of
10 filial obligation and in part by true affection and
11 love. Nonetheless, earlier studies on intergenera-
12 tional support have noted that providing support
13 for parents can have negative effects on chil-
14 dren's well-being (Merz, Consedine, Schulze,
15 & Schuengel, 2009). Some adult children, as
16 is illustrated in the qualitative examples in our
17 study, experience a parent's new partnership as
18 a relief and a good addition to their relation-
19 ship and support exchange with their parents.
20 Other children, as is also illustrated in the quali-
21 tative examples, experience the new partnership
22 as something negative and a reason to termi-
23 nate their own relationship with their parent. So,
24 depending on the life stage of adult children and
25 their parents, children can act as an obstacle to a
26 parent's intention to move in with a new partner.

27 In this study, we reported on the experiences
28 and evaluations of 25 divorced or widowed older
29 adults in LAT relationships. The experiences of
30 divorced or widowed older adults who decide
31 to live together will be the central topic of
32 another study. We make one exception and
33 include a comment by a 65-year-old woman
34 who remarried after a long LAT relationship:

35 I announced my new relationship to the kids (who
36 were around 20 at the time) by saying, "I have
37 met someone and I'm worried that you might not
38 like it. For the time being we don't intend to get
39 married." My oldest son said, "Why are you doing
40 this? Isn't it nice with just the three of us?" That is
41 what he said . . . really. It took them a long time to
42 get used to it. My youngest son in particular could
43 not deal with it. And my daughter was a little bit .
44 . . eh, hmm, very much an obstacle. So we waited
45 and waited (in an LAT relationship) and in the end
46 . . . we decided. Then it took me more than half
47 a year to move my stuff to his house. You start
48 in a totally different . . . every family has its own
49 culture. But now we are married.

50 This illustrates the close interconnectedness
51 between LAT and living together. We conclude
52 that the great majority of LAT partners say
53 their children were an important element in the
54

1 decision to being an LAT relationship versus
2 coresidence. The children stimulated them to
3 either opt for LAT instead of living together or
4 to postpone living together.
5

6 *Limitations and Concluding Remarks* 7

8 We hope we have made an interesting contri-
9 bution to the understanding of aspects of the
10 repartnering of divorced or widowed middle-
11 aged and older adults by explicitly addressing
12 the role of children and stepchildren. The use
13 of qualitative interviews in addition to quanti-
14 tative analyses has been explorative but clearly
15 demonstrates the central role children play in
16 their parent's decision making. However, the
17 current study is not without weaknesses.

18 It should be noted that although the NKPS is a
19 panel survey, no clear longitudinal analyses have
20 been conducted. The quantitative and qualitative
21 data are based on retrospective interviews.
22 Studying older adults in the midst of decision
23 making about living arrangements with a new
24 partner could be a valuable elaboration on the
25 current study.

26 In the current analyses, no distinctions were
27 drawn between divorced and widowed adults
28 with regard to their living arrangements after
29 repartnering. However, literature on children
30 addresses the various effects parents' divorce
31 or death can have on children (e.g., Spruijt, de
32 Goede, & van der Valk, 2001). The differences
33 may not only influence the adaptive outcome in
34 children but can also play a role in children's
35 attitudes to parents' repartnering and decision
36 making with respect to living arrangements.

37 The current study is a first step toward
38 elucidating some of the complex associations
39 intergenerational relations can have with adult
40 decision making after repartnering. Because
41 our quantitative as well as qualitative results
42 showed that children clearly influence older
43 adults to choose LAT relationships rather
44 than coresidence ones, future studies might
45 more structurally investigate which aspects of
46 intergenerational relationships discourage or
47 encourage parents to choose either LAT or
48 coresidence with new partners.
49

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