

**Children at home, staying alone?
Paths towards repartnering for men and
women in France**

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March 2010

ABSTRACT

The union trajectories of men and women have undergone a transformation in recent decades in most industrialized countries. Repartnering after union dissolution varies markedly according to sex. Are the differences between men and women when forming a new cohabiting union tied primarily to their sex or to other specific observable causes? This article, based on the French Generation and Gender Study data (Ined-Insee, 2005), will first analyse the importance of age and parenthood at the time of separation as predictors of repartnering. Mothers, regardless of age at the time of separation, are less likely to repartner. However, when details of the year following the separation are analysed according to the child's residence, fathers and mothers with whom a child primarily resides after the separation behave in a similar manner: it is they who form new unions less frequently.

KEYWORDS

Separation; partnership; union; repartnering; age; children; household; residence.

EDITORIAL NOTE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Eva Beaujouan is a researcher at the ESRC Centre for Population Change, University of Southampton. The French “Institut National d’Etudes démographiques”, Ined, provided support for this research through a three years PhD stipend. She especially wishes to thank France Prioux, Laurent Toulemon, Claude Martin for his careful reading and comments, and Catriona Dutreuilh for the proof-reading.

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The ESRC Centre for Population Change Working Paper Series is edited by Teresa McGowan

ESRC Centre for Population Change

The ESRC Centre for Population Change (CPC) is a joint initiative between the Universities of Southampton, St Andrews, Edinburgh, Stirling, Strathclyde, in partnership with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the General Register Office Scotland (GROS). The Centre is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) grant number RES-625-28-0001.

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CHILDREN AT HOME, STAYING ALONE? PATHS TOWARDS REPARTNERING FOR MEN AND WOMEN IN FRANCE

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1. Introduction

This article seeks to explore the mechanisms behind conjugal repartnering, specifically the differences between men and women. For both men and women, the speed and frequency of repartnering diminishes with age (Villeneuve-Gokalp, 1994). At the same time, there is a contrast in the partnering behaviour of persons with and without children: parents are less likely to dissolve unions (Toulemon, 1994), while separated mothers either delay their repartnering (Villeneuve-Gokalp, 1994) or opt more frequently for non-cohabiting partnerships (Martin, 1994).

It seems highly probable that the age at separation and the presence of children from a previous union are correlated in explaining the probability of repartnering. For one, parenthood and the presence of children in the household depend directly on the age at separation. Moreover, the desire to cohabit with a partner may vary by age and presence of children. The type of relationship sought can change with experience and parenthood, and we know, for instance, that non-cohabiting unions are more common among mothers and older women after a separation (Beaujouan *et al.*, 2009; Lampard and Peggs, 1999). In addition, the desire for children may motivate childless men and women of reproductive age to repartner faster than they would at ages where childbearing is no longer possible. Can we then observe a difference in the repartnering behaviour by age for men and women, depending on the presence of children from the previous union?

Regardless of their age, mothers form a new union less rapidly and less frequently than other women (Andersson, 2003; Cassan *et al.*, 2001). The more frequent presence of children in the mother's home has often been put forward as a reason for this observation. Indeed, despite the development of alternating residence, the child most often lives with the mother. In 2005, the proportion of fathers in single-parent families was only 15%, compared with 14% in 1990 (Chardon *et al.*, 2008).

We will therefore take into account these variations in the child's primary residence after separation, a factor that is rarely considered in studies on repartnering. A Swedish study found that this division of roles post-separation influenced the chances of forming a second union (Bernhardt, 2000). In particular, it showed that the presence of children could hinder the formation of a new union, for men and women alike, although the effect is less marked in men. It is possible that the organizational requirements and financial constraints tied to the presence of children, along with a market for second unions often judged less favourable to

women, do not give them the time to meet a second partner. On the other hand, studies have shown that fathers with custody of their children generally form new partnerships faster than those who do not (Barre, 2003), but only for those marrying a woman who is already a mother in Goldscheider and Sassler's study (2006). More qualitative studies tend to show less interest in cohabiting when there is a child at home; this is tied in particular to fears of conflict between the child and the new partner (Martin, 1997; Villeneuve-Gokalp, 1994). Do we find similar results in our studies? Can we attribute delays in repartnering to the presence of children in the household, or do they remain tied to a person's sex?

This work sheds new light on the understanding of post-separation behaviour in men and women, particularly with regard to age and the existence or presence of children. We first give a brief overview of the recent changes in partnership behaviours, and the contrasts between men and women.

2. First insight into the data

2.1 Data: the French Generation and Gender Survey

The "Étude des Relations Familiales et Intergénérationnelles" (ERFI, 2005, Insee-Ined) is the French version of the European "Generation and Gender Survey" (GGS). Covering 10,000 individuals aged from 18 to 79 representative of the French population, the survey contains descriptive data about respondents and details the characteristics of couples. The respondents' complete union history is summarized, linked with the birth of their children. It includes a retrospective section on partnership history which describes the sequence of unions.

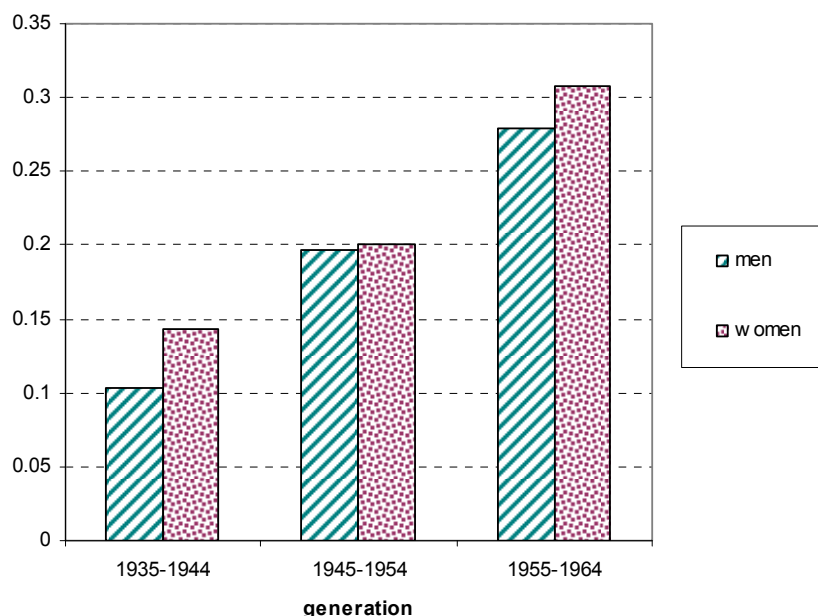
During the survey, people were asked for the history of their relationships. In this specific context, a union is defined by the fact of having lived together with a partner for at least three months. The union begins at cohabitation date, and finishes at separation, death of the partner, or does not have an end-date when there was no separation. In the final sample, 4469 women aged between 25 and 79 entered a first union, among which 1419 finished with a separation. The size is large enough to permit longitudinal analysis of repartnering.

2.2 Partnership behaviour in men and women have been converging over time

Changes in conjugal behaviour initially affected the post-war generations (Blayo and Festy, 1976; Daguet, 1996; Prioux, 2003). These changes have then transmitted to more recent generations, leading to general changes in the timing of partnerships. With the 1999 EHF survey, Delbès and Gaymu (2005) began noting a visible convergence in the partnership situations of women and men above age 50, tied primarily to changes in their past trajectories and the decrease in widowhood that was especially marked for women. These convergences could also be due to the acceleration of repartnering in women, and indeed in the 2005 ERFI data, we note a convergence in the repartnering behaviour of men and women.

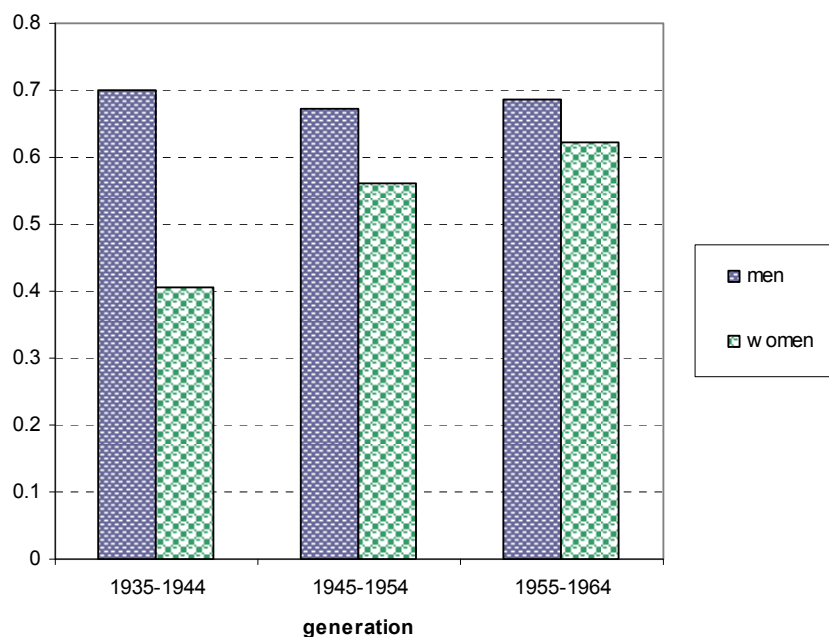
Union disruption has become more and more frequent before age 40 over successive cohorts (Figure 1). This observation reflects the growing frequency of separations that do not involve the death of a partner, while union dissolution through death has decreased sharply at these relatively young ages. Slightly more than one in ten first unions of persons born between 1935 and 1944 (age 60-69 in 2005) were terminated before age 40. In youngest cohorts, on the other hand, aged 40-49 in 2005, nearly a third of all first unions ended before the age of 40.

Figure 1: Proportion of union disruptions before age 40 among persons at risk of disruption, by birth cohort



Reference population: men and women born between 1935 and 1955 who began their first union before age 40

Figure 2: Proportion of new unions before age 40 among persons at risk of repartnering, by birth cohort



Reference population: men and women born between 1935 and 1955 who ended their first union before age 40

Source: INSEE-INED, Érfi-GGS1, 2005

The proportion of new unions before age 40 in women who had ended their first unions also increased, which is not the case for men (Figure 2). Nonetheless, whereas the proportion was 70% for men in the eldest cohorts, the proportion for women was much lower: four out of ten separated women formed a new partnership before age 40 in the cohorts born between 1935 and 1944. Women born more recently have seen their chances of repartnering before 40 approaching that of men, and in the 1955-1964 group of cohorts, more than six women out of ten repartner compared with seven out of ten men.

This change is tied in part to the way the structure of broken unions has evolved. More terminated unions are childless, and childless women repartner faster than mothers, accounting for the contrast. It is also tied to the increase in the chances of forming a new union for all women, observed from the early 1980s (Beaujouan, 2009).

On the whole, more women repartner today after a separation compared with the 1970s, unlike men (Beaujouan, 2009). While there is less discrepancy between the sexes today, we propose to break down observations of new unions for men and women by age and presence of children from the previous union. We shall also study repartnering in relation to the regular presence of children in the household.

3. Age and children as factors for repartnering

3.1 With age, women repartner less often than men

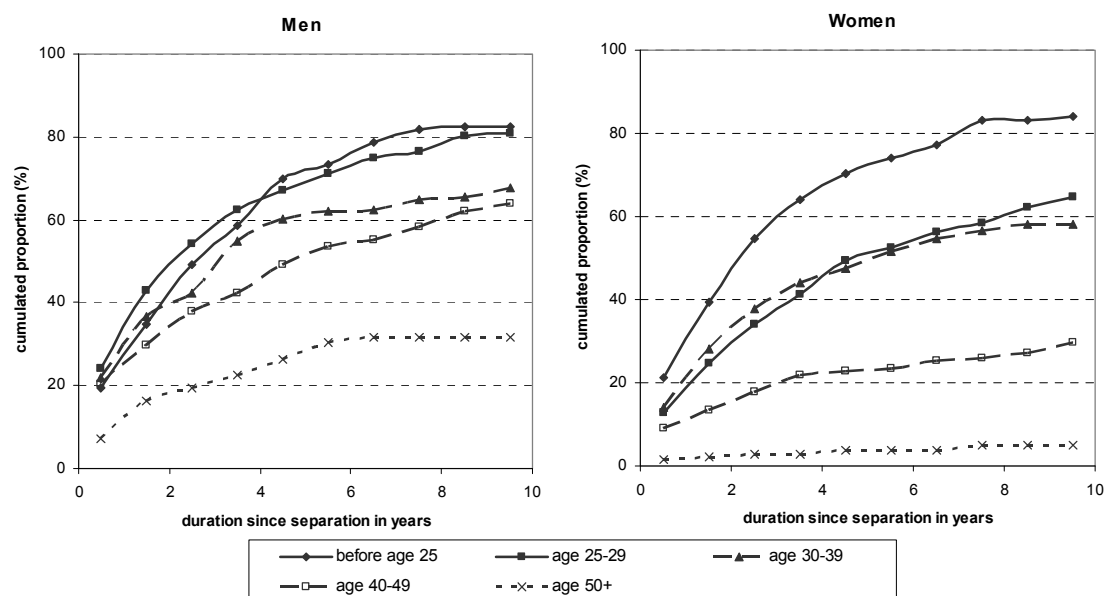
For both men and women, repartnering¹ becomes slower and less frequent with age (Figure 3). There is a sharp slowdown, as half of persons who separate before age 25 are in new partnerships within 2 years, while this proportion is only reached after five years in women aged 30-39 and men aged 40-49. For older persons, less than half live with a new partner after ten years.

With age, the probability of repartnering decreases more for women than for men. According to the 1999 EHF survey, among those who ended their first union in 1980-1984, 83% of men and 78% of women aged below 30 had repartnered, but this was the case for only 50 % of men and 32% of women aged 40-49 at the time of separation (Delmeire, 2005). The same finding was made in the Érfi survey.

In unions that ended by separation before age 25, women repartnered as frequently as men in the ten years following the separation (Figure 3). The differences by age at separation between men and women become more visible after age 25. For instance, while 63% of women who separate between the ages of 25 and 29 have a new partner 10 years later, this is the case for 80% of men. This gap shrinks at around age 30, only to increase sharply later. Only 65 % of separated men between 30 and 39 form a new union within 10 years, while the proportion of women of the same age who repartner is still around 60%. About half of men older than 40 at the time of separation are in a new union within ten years, while the proportion falls very sharply (by about 30 points) for women.

¹ We refer here to repartnering that follow a separation, i.e. a union that did not end because of the death of a partner. Thus we are studying a more homogenous group, particularly when the “choice” aspect for child custody is discussed.

Figure 3: Proportion of men and women in new partnerships by duration since separation (in years) and by age at separation



Reference population: men and women separated between 1980 and 2002, either through the end of a consensual union or marriage, excluding separations due to the death of a partner

Source: Ined-Insee, Érfi-GGS1, 2005

Note: Aggregates are observed over completed periods 0, 1, 2, etc. (0.5 for persons repartnering in the interval [0;1[, 1.5 in the interval [0;2[, etc.)

3.2 The effect of children varies according to age

Children contribute to the disparities by age and sex

When they separate from their first partner, one in ten men and six in ten women declare that they have had children with that partner (Table 1). The difference in the declarations of men and women in terms of fertility stands at about 10 points regardless of age. As men form their families when they are slightly older than women, they will have had less time to have children for every age group. This difference between the sexes for first unions can also be partly linked to the fact that men may have children in a second union where the woman is in her first union (Bozon, 1990). Survey and recall biases, which differ by sex, can also explain this contrast.

The presence of children is strongly linked to the age of the parents (Table 2). Among separated women (with and without children), the presence of a child at home in the year following the separation is more and more frequent up to age 50: from 25 % before age 25, less frequently with their children as they age (Table 2). The general increase in the presence of children with age is therefore due to the higher frequency of mothers among separated women.

Meanwhile, the older they are, the more likely fathers are to live with their child just after the separation. Consequently, with age, women's households are less and less likely to be the child's primary residence. The observation that children reside more frequently with their father as the father's age increases may be more closely tied not to the age of the parents, but to the age of the child at the time of separation. Adolescents, who enjoy greater autonomy in the choice of domicile after the separation of their parents, live more often with their fathers than younger children do (Villeneuve-Gokalp, 1999). The "other" category includes parents whose children no longer live in a parent's home in the year following the separation, and who have their own home or live with other persons. For separations affecting persons aged 40-49, children are more likely to be living away from home in the year following the separation (2.6% of men's children and 6.6% of women's children).

Table 1: Separations, classified according to presence of children and their residence the year after the separation, by age at the time of separation

Age at separation	men				women			
	childless	child at home	child elsewhere	Total number	childless	child at home	child elsewhere	Total number
before age 25	84.7	1.3	14.0	209	74.3	23.3	2.4	338
age 25-29	68.4	4.2	27.4	232	55.5	40.9	3.7	287
age 30-39	30.2	7.0	62.8	328	22.7	63.2	14.1	409
age 40-49	20.7	16.7	62.6	163	9.6	63.9	26.4	206
from age 50	13.6	6.8	79.6	71	17.7	36.5	45.8	50
All	50.0	6.4	43.6	1003	42.5	46.1	11.4	1290

Reference population: Men and women, separated between 1975 and 2005

Source: Ined-Insee, Érfi-GGS1, 2005

Table 2: Detailed distribution of child's place of residence in the year following separation, by age at the time of separation

Age at separation	men				women			
	child with me	with the other parent	with both parent	other	child with me	with the other parent	with both parent	other
before age 25	8.7	76.1	12.2	3.0	90.7	3.2	3.2	2.9
age 25-29	13.2	70.8	13.0	3.1	91.8	1.5	4.4	2.3
age 30-39	10.1	73.4	15.2	1.4	81.8	6.8	10.6	0.9
age 40-49	21.1	56.9	19.5	2.6	70.8	9.7	12.9	6.6
from age 50	7.9	33.7	4.5	54.0	44.4	5.8	2.5	47.3
All	12.7	65.9	14.7	6.7	80.1	6.0	8.7	5.2

Reference population: Men and women separated after a fertile union between 1975 and 2005

other = separately, with other persons, other members of the family, in care

Source: INED-INSEE, Érfi-GGS1, 2005

The children's place of residence depends on the type of previous union (results not presented). Children most often live with their mother alone if they were born within a cohabiting union. Catherine Villeneuve-Gokalp (1999) showed that this also depends on the investment in the cohabiting union; if the union lasted for some time, the ties between father and children were better preserved than in other types of union owing to the choice of shared child custody. Alternating residency is less likely to be adopted when a direct marriage ends than when the type of partnership was more liberal (cohabitation or a phase thereof).

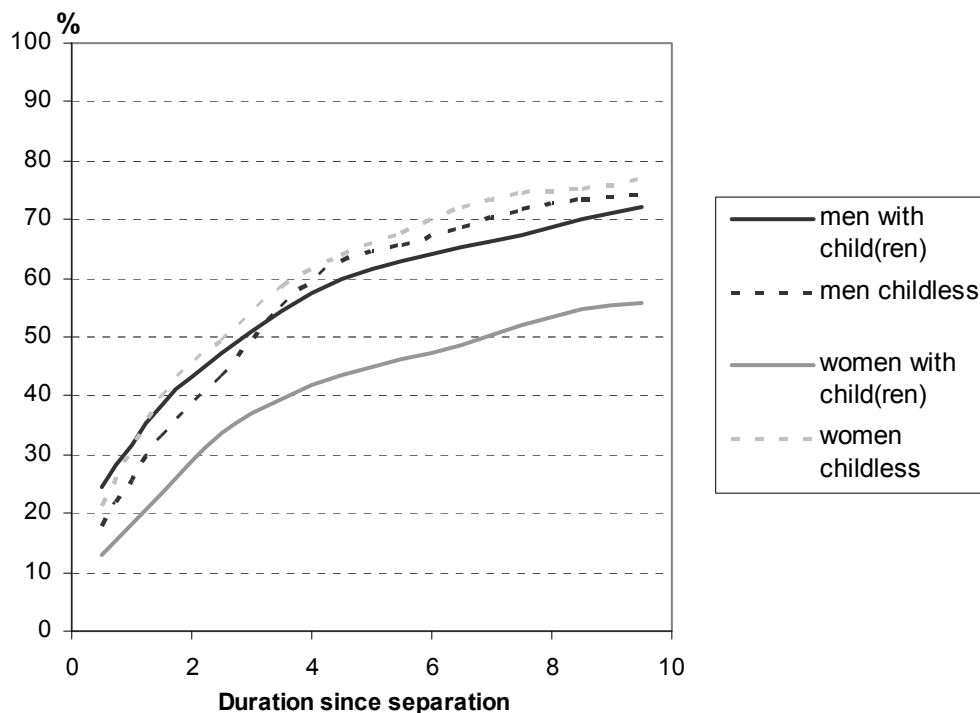
Nonetheless, these results are descriptive, and the longer duration of direct marriages and the age at separation can also explain this phenomenon.

After verifying the general link between repartnering and parenthood by sex, we will detail the relationship by age in order to observe the reaction of parents and non-parents according to age.

Mothers are less likely to repartner

Mothers repartner less rapidly than other women and men after a separation, and to a lesser degree² (Figure 4). From the fifth year after separation, a more-or-less constant gap of 20 points is established between mothers and women who have not had children. Childless women form new unions in similar proportions to childless men. Likewise, there is little difference between men who had children during the previous union and those who did not.

Figure 4: Proportion of persons in new partnerships by time since separation (in years), by sex and birth of children during the first union



Scope: First unions ending in a separation between 1975 and 1994 and before 55 years
Source: INED-INSEE, Érfi-GGS1, 2005

Figure 4 simply provides an overview that corresponds to the results generally observed, all other things being equal (de Guibert-Lantoine, 2002). To pursue our observations, we will go into greater detail according to age.

² Here, observations were extended to include separations from 1975 and 1994 in order to have a sufficiently large sample size for the analysis.

Strong divergence in repartnering by fathers and mothers according to age

The factors governing the choices and behaviour in the area of conjugal and reproductive life differ by age and sex (Charton, 2006; Régnier-Loilier, 2007). If a woman is young at the time of separation and has no children, she may wish to repartner and have children in the new union, due mainly to procreative norms (Bajos et Ferrand, 2006). Women at a less fertile age may also wish to have children rapidly before reaching the physiological limit, or the “deadline ages” rooted in the fertility norm. On the other hand, once they have had children, women are less likely to form a new union, and some appear to be less motivated or in less of a hurry to form a cohabiting union (Beltzer and Bozon, 2008; Villeneuve-Gokalp, 1991). The emotional relationship with children sometimes takes precedence over the desire to find a new partner (Lampard and Peggs, 1999). Nonetheless, some mothers view the presence of children as a restriction that may, for instance, deter potential candidates from entering a union with them. Repartnering may then be strongly linked to past fertility and also to intentions regarding childbearing, but the selection effect may be difficult to disentangle.

Figure 5 shows the decrease with age in the proportion of new unions for men and women, regardless of the presence or absence of children. The drop is especially marked between ages 25 and 35. Whereas 60 to 70 % of persons who separated at around age 22 had formed a new union within five years (and around 80% within ten years), this is the case of 40 to 50% of people who separated at around age 32.

Having children from the previous union does not have the same influence by age for men and women. Nonetheless, mothers at all ages repartner less frequently than fathers³ and women without children. Women who separate before age 25 and have no children have significantly higher chances of forming a new union within five years compared with their male counterparts.⁴ This could indicate a measure of haste to form a new partnership in women who separate young and do not (yet) have children. At the same ages, women who already have children form new unions much less frequently, at least in the first ten years.

Repartnering behaviours in fathers appear to be much less influenced by age. The proportions forming new unions decrease only slowly, and remain at above 60% for separations at around age 50, whereas about 30% of mothers form a new union at the same age. Irregularities

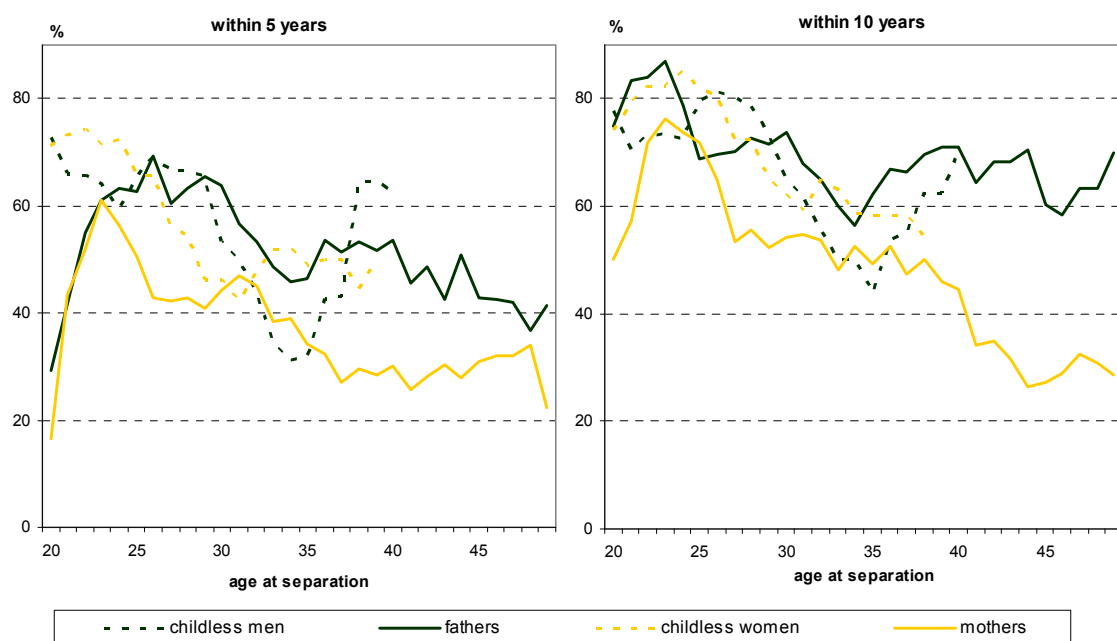
³ The significance of these differences can be verified using frequency tests, described in appendix 2.9. When we indicate a comparison without discussing its significance, this means that it is significant at a 5% level using a frequency test.

⁴ However, differences with men are no longer significant after this period.

observed in men at around age 35 lead us to believe there may be a sampling problem, also described in (Beaujouan, 2009).

In total, it appears that the perspectives for both men and women in forming a new union based on whether they have children or not are heavily influenced by their age at separation. We note that fathers are the most likely to repartner, mothers the least likely, and that the contrast increases with age. In men, paternity can signal a certain preference for family and life in a couple (Bernhardt, 2000). For mothers, it is possible that the arrangements made after the separation, particularly with regard to child custody, constitute an obstacle to repartnering.

Figure 5: Proportion of persons in new unions within five years/ten years of separation by sex, age at separation, and birth of child(ren) prior to separation



Scope: First unions ending in separation between 1980 and 1999 (respectively 1994) and before age 50
Smoothing: Moving average 5
Source: INED-INSEE, Érfi-GGS1, 2005

3.3 The children's place of residence is a strong determinant

In the presence of children, repartnering is less frequent in the first ten years

As seen before, mothers receive primary custody of children more often than fathers after a separation. Looking after a child, or simply having one at home can represent a constraint or provide justification for not entering into new conjugal relationships. Encounters with new partners may be complicated by the limited amount of time for personal activities. Children's expectations with respect to their parent and their judgment of the new partner could also

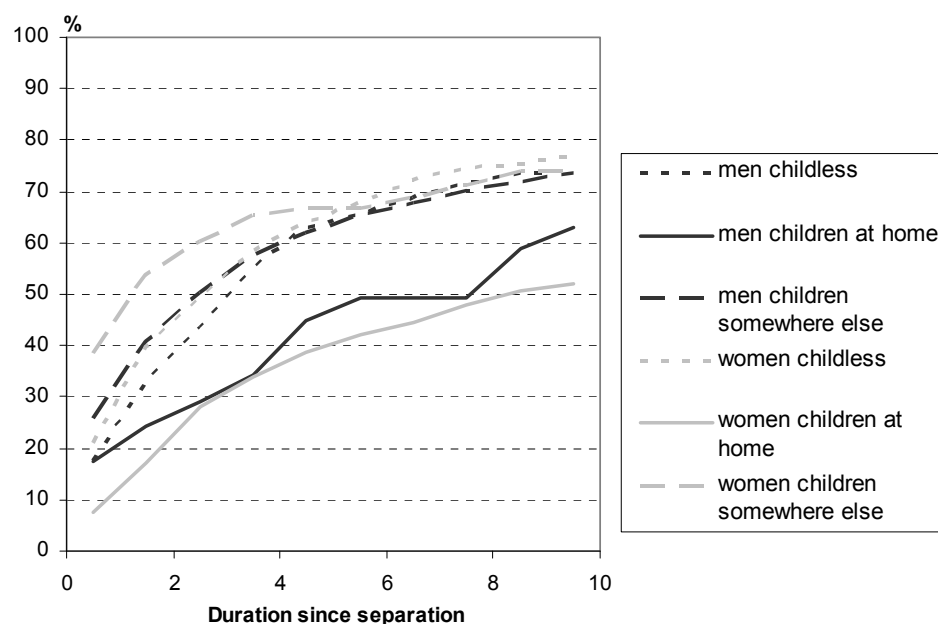
hamper the prospects of repartnering (Lampard and Peggs, 1999). We will therefore study if this very marked imbalance in the residence of children is one of the factors that place women at a disadvantage for repartnering. We can also ask if separated men and women who live alone with their children have the same repartnering behaviour.

The construction of variables involving child custody is carried out as follows: the indicator of a child's presence in the parent's home is constructed based on responses to the question "With whom did your child live primarily in the year that followed the separation? You can have several answers if your children did not all live in the same place." If the person responds "with me" but not "with my ex-partner" or "joint custody", we considered it an indication that the children lived primarily with that person. Otherwise, we concluded that custody was not exclusive, and the indicator takes the modality "with my ex-partner" if the child lived only with the latter, and "with both of us" otherwise. The "other" option refers to children who have left the home, as well as missing values. Finally, "joint custody" refers to the situation when both parents take care of their children, and "alternating" custody when a legal arrangement exists between parents so that children spend equal amounts of time with each of them.

Since having children at home is often given as a reason for the slow repartnering of mothers, we have broken down the repartnering of parents according to whether or not they live with their child in the year following the separation (Figure 6). This is a proxy for the presence of children, as the situation may change between the year following the separation and five or ten years after the separation. Moreover, we assume that on "the day" of separation, the situation is the same as in "the year" following the separation.

We found that mothers whose children did not live primarily with them repartnered more rapidly than all the others in the first four years (Figure 6, significant using a test of frequency). Men who were the primary caregivers for their children appeared in fact to be as constrained by their presence as women were, or perhaps slightly less. The small sample upon which this is based (42 men) nonetheless requires us to interpret our results with caution. It seems, overall, that more than parenthood itself, the fact of living or not with children determines the speed at which adults repartner.

Figure 6: Proportion of men and women in new unions by duration since the separation (in years), according to sex and place of residence of children the year following separation



Scope: Unions ending in separation between 1975 and 1994 and before age 55

Source: INED-INSEE, Érfi-GGS1, 2005

Note: the legends should be read as follows::

man no child: man who has no child at all at the time of separation;

man with me: man who has at least one child with him most of the time; man elsewhere: man whose children have left the home or live full-time with their mother the year following the separation.

As previously seen, parents with child(ren) –at home or otherwise – probably have fairly non-homogenous ages. Figure 7 thus gives the breakdown of these results by age at separation. The number of men who principally have their children with them, and mothers who do not, is too small before age 25 to allow a breakdown by sex of the effect of the residence of the children.

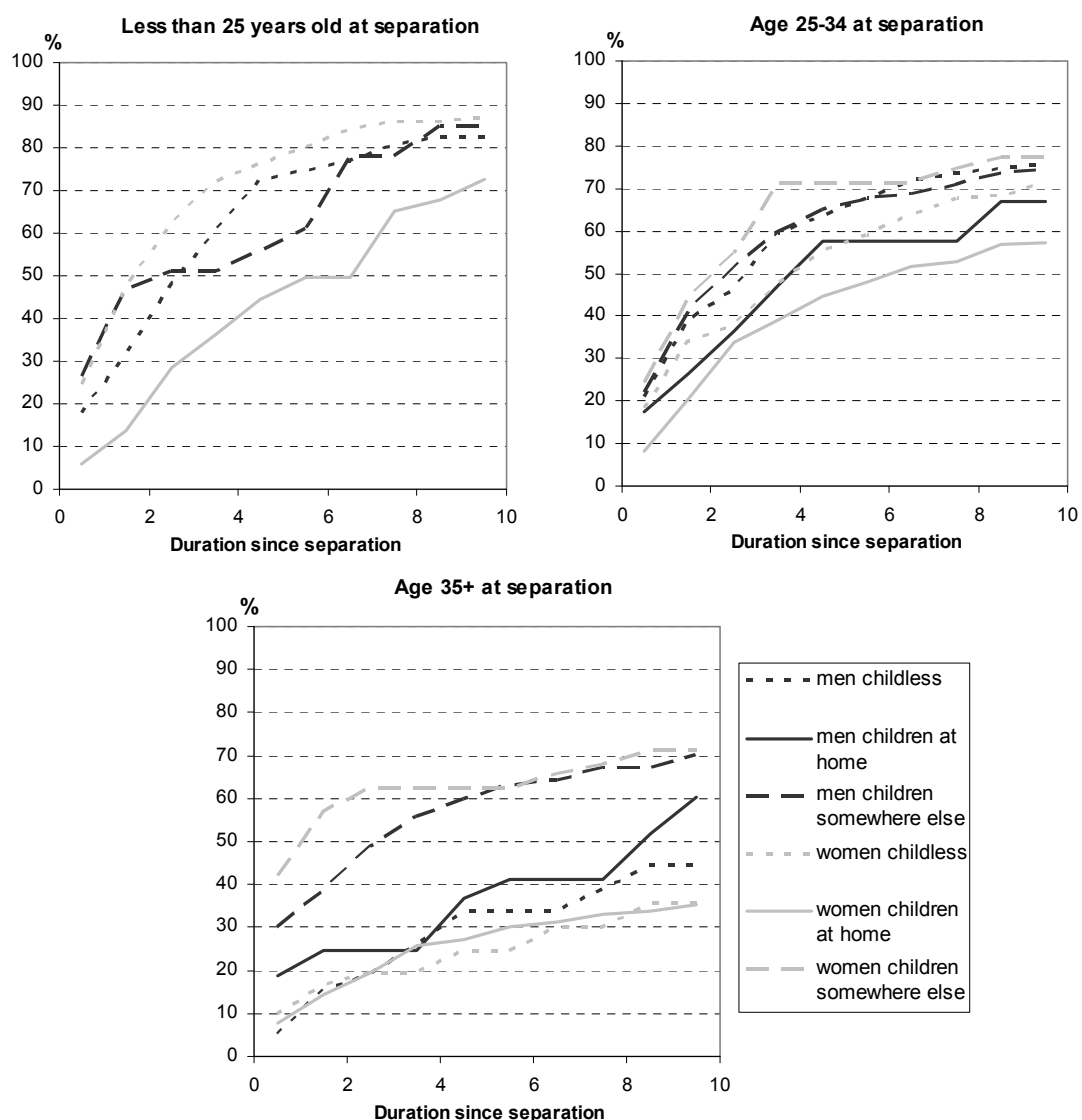
Between ages 25 and 34, without the constant presence of children at home, mothers repartner especially rapidly⁵ (Figure 7): 70 % have reformed a union within four years, compared with only 40% of women who live with their children. It is possible that some of them may have already found a partner at the time of separation when they quit the household and leave the children with their father. Childless women are found in an intermediate position. Men have relatively high levels of repartnering, and at the end of 10 years, between 70 and 75% of men and women aged 25-34 at separation will have repartnered, with the exception of mothers having custody of their children.

For “custodial parents” as well as persons without children, if the separation took place after age 35, the chances of repartnering are much lower. Parents who have at least one child but do

⁵ All results given here are significant at a 5% level using a proportions test.

not have them at home are the quickest to repartner: 30% of men and 40% of women who do not have custody at this age repartner in the year following the separation. In the end, they repartner at levels that are nearly equivalent to those of the 25-34 age group. At these ages, when children do not live in the same house, they may either be with the other parent or have already left the parent's home. After age 35, men and women have similar levels of conjugal recomposition within five years, once the child's place of residence in the year following the separation is taken into account. Within ten years, a (non-significant) gap between men and women with children appears.

Figure 7: Proportion of persons who have repartnered by duration since the separation (in years) and presence of children from the first union



Scope: First unions ended by separation between 1975 and 1994 and before age 55

Source: INED-INSEE, Érfi-GGS1, 2005

Small sample size: 19 men with their child between ages 25 and 34, 21 after age 35

21 women without their child between ages 25 and 34, 43 after age 35

23 women without their child after age 35, 23 men with their child elsewhere before age 25

for other fields: at least 50, and closer to 100-150 persons

Regression: log-odds ratio of repartnering within 5 and 10 years

Logistic regressions model the log-odds ratios for repartnering in the 5 years (resp. 10 years) following separation. We refer to the working document of Laurent Toulemon (1995) on the use and syntax of logistic regression models.

Logistic regression models the odds ratio logarithm as a linear combination of predictors associated with different variables introduced into the model.

$$\text{Logit}(p) = \ln\left(\frac{p}{1-p}\right) = b + \sum_{i=1}^n a_i X_i$$

Where p is a proportion, the X_i represent the n variables introduced into the model, b is a constant, and a_i is the increase in logit attributable to a one-unit increase in X_i . If the variables have several categories, they are broken down into binary variables, and the indicators not introduced into the model are those that form the reference category, of which b is the estimate. Coefficients are estimated using the maximum likelihood method, that is, by maximizing the probabilities that estimated coefficients will coincide with the observed value.

For this type of modelling, the degree of correlation between the variables must be as low as possible; otherwise estimators of correlated variables will be biased, or estimators of other variables may also be biased in relation to the reference categories.

Limiting ourselves to five years would have some advantages. First, keeping the same study period, we have a larger study population (separated for more than five years) than with a ten-year duration. Second, if there is no problem with sample size, we can also study events taking place in more recent periods (by shifting the selected period by five years): recall errors will be less frequent, as will be mortality-related biases, which become larger when the older populations in the survey are studied. Finally, the proxy of presence of children in the household (presence the year after the break-up) is more likely to have changed in the meantime if we look at repartnering 10 years later than if we limit the observation to 5 years. However, limiting the observation period also has its drawbacks: fewer new unions are formed in a shorter period, and other types of error appear, particularly the overrepresentation of short-term relationships. The chances of experiencing an event are proportional five or ten years after the separation in most of the categories of selected variables, but seem slightly different for men with children at home. Thus we chose to show the results after 10 years despite the uncertainty on the presence of children that was introduced.

In total we retained populations of persons whose first marital or consensual union were ended by separation more than 5 years (10 years) before the survey, and we did not take into account unions that ended because of the death of a partner. The date of separation (not of the divorce) was used as the reference point for repartnering.

In view of the literature and the principal factors likely to affect conjugal relationships, we built a model for each sex, in which we introduced variables explaining the past conjugal history: age at separation, length of the first union, cause of termination, number of children from the first union, their place of residence after the separation. We did not introduce the age at the first union, which is the complement of the length of the first union and the age at separation, but we may comment on it during the analysis. We tested the pertinence of introducing these variables into the models and their level of significance, and the selected models have been optimized (maximum likelihood). In particular, several interactions were tested.

All other things being equal, repartnering is less likely when the child is part of the household

The descriptive results are confirmed, all other things being equal, for repartnering that takes place in the five or ten years following the separation. The permanent presence of children in the household the year following the separation is associated with less frequent repartnering within five years, for men and women alike (Table 3). When childcare constraints are looser, the presence of children does not significantly affect the chances of repartnering compared with persons who do not have children in the medium term. However in the longer term the results for men with children at home are no longer significant (Table 4), which can be due to the smallest sample or to custodial fathers catching up other male behaviours.

Table 3: logistic regression of repartnering in the first 5 years after separation, child's residence variable, log-odds, standard error

	men	women
no children	ref	ref
children at home	-0.82** (0.38)	-1.11*** (0.18)
children somewhere else	-0.13 (0.19)	0.05 (0.3)

Number of observations: 1407

Reference population: men and women who separated before age 50 and between 1980 and 1999, excluding union dissolution due to the death of a partner.

***, **, *: significant at less than 1%, 5%, 10%

Other controls: age, status of previous union, length of first union

Source: INED-INSEE, Érfi-GGS1, 2005

Table 4: logistic regression of repartnering in the first 10 years after separation, child's residence variable, log-odds, standard error

	men	women
no children	ref	ref
children at home	-0.42 (0.43)	-1.08*** (0.23)
children somewhere else	0.08 (0.25)	0.11 (0.4)

Number of observations: 1128

Reference population: men and women who separated before age 50 and between 1975 and 1994, excluding union dissolution due to the death of a partner.

Differences between men and women: influence of the presence of children

A mixed regression in which men and women are introduced simultaneously allows a direct comparison of their probabilities of repartnering, for instance when children are concerned. For one, the populations of separated men and women are not too dissimilar, and the descriptive variables chosen for the previous union and for the context have relatively similar values by sex (Beaujouan, 2009). Moreover, it is quite possible to compare men and women of the same age at separation, as the timing for entry into conjugal life only has a marginal influence on the comparison between the two sexes. Table 4 presents an interaction between the “sex” variable and the “children” variable (first the existence of children, then residence). It is an estimation of risk for women in relation to that of men: in the same regression, the reference category is changed to determine the significance level⁶ of variables involving children⁷.

Table 5: Parameters of the logistic regression of repartnering in the first 5 years after separation, mixed, children-sex interaction, log-odds, standard error

	men	women
a- no child	ref	-0.001 (0.17)
a- children	ref	-0.73*** (0.15)
	men	women
b- no children	ref	0.01 (0.17)
b- children at home	ref	-0.29 (0.36)
b- children somewhere else	ref	0.17 (0.28)

***, **, *: significant at less than 1%, 5%, 10%

Number of observations: 1407

Scope: men and women who separated between ages 20 and 50 and between 1980 and 1999, excluding unions ending through the death of a partner

Other controls: age, year and status of the previous union, length of the previous union

Source: INED-INSEE, Érfi-GGS1, 2005

⁶ This is equivalent to performing a Wald test which can be entered directly in the programming of logistic procedure under SAS.

⁷ To check the robustness of the mixed model, we also checked whether the log-odds ratio found in a sex-children interaction had values close to those found in separate male-female models

Table 6: Parameters of the logistic regression of repartnering in the first 10 years after separation, mixed, children-sex interaction, log-odds, standard error

	men	women
a- no child	<i>ref</i>	0.054 (0.23)
a- children	<i>ref</i>	-0.86*** (0.19)
	men	women
b- no children	<i>ref</i>	0.014 (0.223)
b- children at home	<i>ref</i>	-0.6 (0.41)
b- children somewhere else	<i>ref</i>	0.05 (0.378)

***, **, *: significant at less than 1%, 5%, 10%

Number of observations: 1128

Scope: men and women who separated between ages 20 and 50 and between 1975 and 1994, excluding unions ending through the death of a partner

At first glance, parenthood leads to a large imbalance between the sexes in terms of repartnering (Tables 5-a and 6-a). Women and men without children exhibit about the same behaviour for conjugal reconstruction, but when they have children, women repartner less frequently than men. However, given the same conditions of child custody, there is no significant difference between men and women in terms of repartnering (Tables 5-b and 6-b). None of the modalities is significantly different between men and women and the coefficients for childless people and for persons with children living elsewhere are very low, which signals that their estimated chances of repartnering are similar when they are in the same situation with regard to these situations. Given the sample size, however, the test is not very powerful. In particular, men who have their children with them are more likely to repartner than women in the same situation with significance limited to 18% within 5 years and to 14% within 10 years, but it is possible that with a larger sample size the difference would have become significant, and that there is a shift between custodial mothers and fathers.

Using the “Etude de l’histoire familiale” survey (“Study of family history”, EHF, 1999), Corinne Barre (2005) found that fathers who had custody at the time of the survey appeared to repartner more rapidly than other fathers, and that the situation was the reverse for mothers. That finding was not confirmed here, as we reached opposite results. However, there are two strong differences in our mode of comparison. In the article cited, the presence of children was evaluated at the time of the survey (between 0 and 5 years after separation), whereas it is evaluated here in the year following the separation. More importantly, the field is very different. In the article it covers all fertile unions that were broken (including by widowhood), whereas here, it only covers persons who separated between ages 20 and 50. The age effect is evident⁸, so Barre’s results cannot correspond with ours.

⁸ After 50 and especially 60, chances are high that children are no longer at home, but repartnering is less probable. Widowhood, frequent for separations without children at home, is thus compared with separations with children at home, a situation that occurs much earlier in life. Repartnering is more rapid

4. Discussion and conclusion

In this article on the determinants of repartnering, we analysed in detail two major factors distinguishing men from women: age and the presence of children. The development of infertile unions ending at a younger age is more favourable to the repartnering of women compared to that of men. This could contribute to the closing of the gap between raw levels of repartnering by sex since the 1980s.

In addition to the general decrease with age in the proportions of individuals forming new unions, we observe that differences in levels for men and women increase with age. The lower deceleration for men compared with women can only be very partially attributed to the general difference in their conjugal timing. Children, however, provide a better explanation for the differences between the sexes. At younger ages, women without children repartner quickly and in a higher proportion, which is less the case for men. At nearly all ages, fathers form cohabiting unions more frequently than mothers.

Factors such as the marriage market or different aspirations in founding a new union may explain the contrast between mothers and fathers in the formation of a new partnership. It is possible, in particular, that older women and/or women with children are less attractive to single men, and that they form partnerships less often for this reason. But it is also possible that, quite simply, women are happy with their newfound freedom and are more inclined to enjoy it, whereas men prefer to be part of a couple. Gender-based differences appear to guide repartnering, tied in part to perceptions inherited from the past.

Expectations of men and women for the new union likely shape their repartnering behaviour. When women separate after age 35-40, women without children do not repartner more quickly than mothers, which leads to the question of their incentive to repartner. In the same way, a mother's chances of repartnering, already lower, decrease beginning age 30. It is possible that women who are still of childbearing age may seek "conjugal or parental" relationships (Beltzer et Bozon, 2008), but once the age for having children (again) has passed, they distance themselves from conjugal life. They are less fertile with age, whereas men, at these older ages and socially mature, remain good candidates for having children and starting a family. The fertility of the new union would provide important data in the quest to understand the stakes behind repartnering.

for men with children at home not because they have children, but because they are younger at the time of separation. In women, the large number of mothers living with their child(ren) can compensate for this age effect.

In France, mothers who do not have primary custody of their children repartner as frequently as childless women in the five years following the separation despite the fact that they already have children. The lower probability for women of forming a new union thus appears to be determined in particular by the presence of children in the household. It is not simply the fact of “being a parent already” that slows down repartnering. Our hypothesis that women with children feel less of a need to repartner because their “desire for motherhood” has been fulfilled does not appear to be verified in this case.

Both men and women who have main custody of their children the year after separation repartner less frequently, at least in the five first years after separation, even when the age effect has been controlled for. The material problems tied to the presence of children can slow down the process of meeting new partners and forming unions. However, the material constraints of custody are not necessarily the only ones that decrease the possibility of repartnering, and other reasons can come into play to explain the contrast between parents with and without children at home. For example, the constant presence of children in the same household makes a person less available to search for a partner and less attractive to a potential one. Available persons may also feel less lonely in the presence of children and feel less of a need to live again with a partner. The difficulty that certain women have in restarting a sex life may also be mentioned (Beltzer and Bozon, 2006). Nonetheless it does not appear to be the source of differences between women with and without children, as after two years, mothers have found a sexual partner as frequently as other women (Beltzer et Bozon, 2008).

The disinvestment in terms of conjugal life and the preference for a dissociation between family life and romantic life may lead to a decreased desire to live with a partner. Non-cohabiting conjugal partnerships are sometimes the expression of such a choice, although it is often a simple stage. At a certain age, women turn more often to these types of less committed relationships (Beaujouan et al., 2009). In the presence of children, particularly, certain reasons come into play: the fear of a new failure, for example, or resistance to the thought that a new partner would interfere in family life or child-rearing (Le Gall et Martin, 1993). This can then lead to a division in life between moments when one is a parent and moments when one is a partner. A more detailed study of the extent of this phenomenon would require more detailed data, and the comprehension of underlying reasons requires a qualitative post-separation follow-up of persons.

All in all, our results are particularly sensitive to selectivity phenomena. As women live away from their children relatively infrequently, it is possible that some of those who did not have

exclusive custody of their children just after the separation are specific. For instance, they may have left to live with a new partner while leaving the children with their father, a scenario we can picture even better given that some of them repartner very rapidly (Beaujouan, 2009). Moreover, results from the literature showing that fathers with custody are even quicker to repartner compared with other men are nowhere to be found here. As we have already mentioned, men probably remain more often with their children following the departure of their partner, a situation that does not favour the formation of a new union. It may not be so the presence of children that affects these men's chances of repartnering, but the fact that their partners left and the lack of anticipation — in contrast with other men, of which a larger proportion trigger a separation when they have already found another partner. Here, however, we are reaching the limits of statistical analysis, and a qualitative study would provide answers and surpass these conjectures.

Overall, the fact that mothers, more often than fathers, have nearly exclusive custody of their children after the separation explains in part why they form a cohabiting couple less frequently than fathers do. Changes in provisions for the residence of children could perhaps modify the more general repartnering behaviour of mothers. But on one hand women do not necessarily cherish the “ideal” of repartnering once they are mothers. In addition, this appears to be closely related to a representation of parental roles (Eydoux and Letablier, 2007), and only develops slowly, remaining more frequent in environments with high sociocultural capital (Beaujouan, 2009). Changes in children's mode of residence are thus slow to happen, and may have only a limited impact on differences between men and women in repartnering.

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