The influence of marital status on the degree of togetherness with the partner

A research on the influence of marital status (marriage or cohabitation) on togetherness and to what extent this effect differs between lower educated people and higher educated people.

Abstract: The aim of this study is to investigate the extent to which marital status has an effect on togetherness with the partner. Married people are expected to have a higher degree of togetherness with their partner because they are more likely to view their relationship as a long-term investment, leading them to participate in more shared activities with their partner. In addition, it is expected that this effect is weaker for higher educated people because they are more individualistic. With the use of New Families in the Netherlands data, the effect of marital status on the degree of togetherness is measured among a sample of 1,612 married and cohabiting parents. First of all, the results show that married people have, in general, a higher degree of togetherness with their partner than cohabiting people. Furthermore, separate regression analyses are done for two different types of togetherness, namely: social leisure activities, and couple-specific/bonding activities. Results show that married people engage in more social leisure activities with their partner than cohabiting people, but no difference was found between married and cohabiting people with regards to couple-specific/bonding activities. Lastly, no evidence is found to suggest that the effect of marital status on togetherness differs between lower educated people and higher educated people.

Keywords: togetherness; marital status; couples; level of education; social leisure activities; NFN

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Introduction

Marriage rates have been dropping steadily in many western countries in recent decades, with 70 percent of women and 60 percent of men aged 35 being married in the Netherlands in 1997, as opposed to only 45 percent and 35 percent respectively just 20 years later (CBS, 2018). More than ever, adults are postponing or forgoing marriage altogether. The amount of unmarried couples living together doubled between 1990 and 2000 in the Netherlands and has since seen a steady increase (CBS, 2000; CBS, 2018). In 2020, 1 in 4 couples living together was unmarried (CBS, 2021). Factors that play a role in the explanation of these trends, such as women's growing social and economic independence, religiosity and higher education, have been attributed to the Second Demographic Transition (Kalmijn, 2007; Latten & Mulder, 2013; Lesthaege, 2010). Furthermore, these trends have led to the creation of a large new body of research regarding marital status, with researchers studying the differences between married and cohabiting couples and the effects of marriage and cohabitation on partner dynamics (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007; Tai, Baxter & Hewitt, 2014).

In the field of sociology of the family, one area of study in relation to partner dynamics is research on joint lifestyles, or "togetherness", in the relationship (Gager & Sanchez, 2003; Hill, 1988; Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001; Van Houdt & Poortman, 2018; Voorpostel, van der Lippe & Gershuny, 2010). In this branch of research, togetherness can be defined as participating in social activities such as playing sports, going to dinner or parties, taking trips and visiting events together with your partner.

Research has shown that cohabiting couples live more separate lifestyles than married couples (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001; Van Houdt & Poortman, 2018). It is argued that cohabiting couples have this lower degree of togetherness with their partner because they are more reluctant to develop a joint lifestyle as they are less secure of their relationships and perhaps feel like there is more to lose within a joint lifestyle when the relationship ends (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001; Milardo, 1987). The present study is motivated by the fact that not much is known about what causes some people to have a higher degree of togetherness than others, and studies with 'togetherness' as the dependent variable are rather sparse (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001; Van Houdt & Poortman, 2018). Prior research has shown that married people spend more time participating in leisure activities with their partner than cohabiting people (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001; Van Houdt & Poortman, 2018). Therefore, the first research question of this study is: "*To what extent does marital status (cohabitation or marriage) influence the degree of togetherness with the partner?*"

In prior research, the rise of individualism within family life is brought up as a factor that influences the lifestyles of couples (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001). This notion of individualism could also explain how the effect of marital status on togetherness is different for higher educated people compared to lower educated people. While married people are expected to have a higher degree of togetherness with their partner, the effect of marital status is expected to be weaker for higher educated people because of their individualistic attitudes and values. These individualistic attitudes and values lead them to keep their lifestyles more separate from their partner compared to lower educated people. Prior research has also shown that higher educated men and women are more likely to have a low degree of togetherness with their partner than lower educated people (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001; Van Houdt & Poortman, 2018).

However, thus far, there has been little to no research on whether the effect of marital status on the degree of togetherness could differ between higher educated people and lower educated people. Therefore, the second research question of this study is: *"To what extent does the effect of marital status on the degree of togetherness differ between lower educated people and higher educated people?"*

Research on togetherness in couple relationships is relevant because previous research has suggested that having a joint lifestyle is important in keeping couples, regardless of their marital status, together (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001; Van Houdt & Poortman, 2018). People with lower levels of togetherness in their relationship are also more likely to report low relationship quality and are more likely to divorce (Hill, 1988; Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001; Roberson, 2014; Van Houdt & Poortman, 2018). Relationship dissolution is known to have negative effects on different areas of life such as psychological well-being and the quality of parent-child relationships (Kalmijn & Van Groenou, 2005; Shapiro & Lambert, 1999; Smock, 1994). Finally, people who report low relationship quality have, on average, lower levels of well-being (Brown & Booth, 1996; Kalmijn & Soons, 2009).

In this study, multiple linear regression analyses will be conducted to answer the two research questions. The data that will be used is data gathered from the first wave of the New Families in the Netherlands survey, gathered by Utrecht University in collaboration with Statistics Netherlands (CBS) (NFN; Poortman, Van der Lippe & Boele-Woelki, 2014). The sample that will be used in this study will include people who are either married or cohabiting and have at least one child with their partner.

Theoretical framework

An explanation for differences in the degree of togetherness in couple relationships is the notion that couples' degree of togetherness depends on the costs and benefits that are involved in spending time and participating in activities together (Hill, 1988; Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001; Van Houdt & Poortman, 2018). The amount of time people spend doing things together with their partner can in part be explained by how much they enjoy being in each other's company. Having shared values and interests might lead a couple to spend more time together, as it is something they derive pleasure from (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001; Van Houdt & Poortman, 2018). Spending time doing things together, also known as having a high degree of togetherness with the partner, can be seen as a benefit in such cases. It can be assumed that couples that do not have similar interests or hobbies spend less time participating in activities together because it is more costly for them as it is not something they enjoy (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001; Van Houdt & Poortman, 2018). Couples that have not been together long are also expected to spend more time taking part in activities together as a way to get to know each other, and the number of things they do together will decline over time as the benefit of getting to know the other person dissipates over time (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001; Van Houdt & Poortman, 2018).

Furthermore, previous research shows that married and cohabiting couples differ from each other in terms of the costs and benefits of how much time they spend doing things together as a couple (Van Houdt & Poortman, 2018). Married people have more of a joint lifestyle with their partner, meaning they engage in leisure activities together and have a shared social network, than cohabiting couples (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001; Kalmijn & Van Groenou, 2005; Van Houdt & Poortman, 2018). When looking at this difference between married and cohabiting people, there seems to be a different mechanism at work in terms of how couples choose to spend their time. Not having many interests in common with your partner makes it more costly to engage in activities with them (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001). Deciding to not do those activities because it does not bring you joy could then be described as a momentary or short-term oriented decision. Some couples, however, may decide to not intertwine their lives as part of a long-term orientation.

Married people often view their relationship as a long-term investment, and therefore will be more likely to participate in more shared activities and become part of each other's social networks as this is something that not only brings them joy in the short term, but will benefit them in the long term (Hill, 1988; Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001; Van Houdt & Poortman, 2018). These benefits, shared leisure time and a shared social network, are a set of

goods directly connected to the marriage that will be lost when the relationship dissolves. Having a high degree of togetherness therefore serves as a type of "relationship capital" (Becker, Landes & Michael, 1977; Hill, 1988; Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001).

Cohabiting people are less confident about the future of their relationship, and will likely live more separate lifestyles and have a lower degree of togetherness with their partner (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001). Cohabitors do this as a way of preventing big losses in terms of relationship capital in case the relationship fails (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001). In these cohabiting relationships, people perceive having a high degree of togetherness as a risky investment because of the potential loss of shared leisure time and social network connections.

When couples that had a low degree of togetherness during their relationship break up, they will in large part be able to continue living their lives the way that they used to with regard to how they spend their leisure time. They will also remain in touch with most of their social network after the dissolution of their relationship, as these friends were not connected to their former partner (Van Houdt & Poortman, 2018).

Previous studies frequently point to this difference between married people and cohabiting people and often attribute this to having different levels of commitment, with married people having a higher level of commitment to their partner and to the relationship than cohabiting people (Hiekel & Wagner, 2020; Manting, 1996; Thomson & Colella, 1992; Van Houdt & Poortman, 2018). Not only is marriage accompanied by a legal commitment in the form of a contract, on an interpersonal level marriage also implicates a higher level of commitment as it suggests a long-term orientation (Poortman & Mills, 2012). Some argue that cohabitors' lower level of commitment comes as a result of more individualistic value orientations causing them to be less dependent on their partner (Thomson & Colella, 1992; Van Houdt & Poortman, 2018). Others argue that cohabitors' lower level of commitment to their partner can be explained through the lack of normative and societal expectations that come with marriage as well as the lack of commitment to marriage as an institution (Hiekel & Wagner, 2020; Axinn & Thornton, 1992).

All in all, it seems that married people are more likely to view spending time together as a couple as a benefit. The long-term investment that married people make and the high level of commitment that married people experience as opposed to cohabiting people lead them to have a higher degree of togetherness with their partner. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H1: *Married people have a higher degree of togetherness than cohabiting people.*

While 'education' in prior research on togetherness has only been used as a control variable (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001; Van Houdt & Poortman, 2018), there is ground for the notion that the effect of marital status on togetherness is different for lower educated people than it is for higher educated people. According to modernization theory, higher education serves as a modernizing institution that changes an individual's attitudes and values from being more traditionally oriented to being more modern or individualistic. This leads higher educated individuals to be more likely to enact non-traditional gender roles and to be primarily motivated by their own preferences, needs and goals (Hamamura, 2011; Parvazian, Gill & Chiera, 2017). Research across different countries has shown that individuals in higher education more often describe themselves as being self-reliant and independent compared to peers with a low socioeconomic status (Ma & Schoeneman, 1997; as cited in Hamamura, 2011). Moreover, it is argued that higher educated people have less traditional ideas of partner relationships (Hamamura, 2011; Parvazian, Gill & Chiera, 2017).

Married people are expected to have a higher degree of togetherness with their partner because they are more committed to their partner than cohabiting people. However, higher educated people are expected to be less committed to their partner and the effect of marriage on togetherness is therefore expected to be weaker for people that are higher educated. It is argued that more individualistic value orientations lead to people being less committed to their partner which in turn lead them to live more separate lifestyles (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001; Thomson & Colella, 1992; Van Houdt & Poortman, 2018). While being more individualistic and less committed is generally seen among cohabitors, it is expected that this can also be observed among married people that are higher educated. The effect of marital status is therefore expected to be weaker for married people that are higher educated.

Higher educated people often have less traditional, more individualistic value orientations compared to lower educated people (Parvazian, Gill & Chiera, 2017). This leads them to spend less time engaging in leisure activities with their partner and makes them less likely to have a shared social network with their partner as they are more likely to prioritize their personal preferences.

Moreover, prior research has shown that higher educated people have a lower degree of togetherness with their partner than lower educated people (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001; Van Houdt & Poortman, 2018).

While married people have a higher degree of togetherness with their partner than cohabiting people, being higher educated and thus having more individualistic values is expected to weaken this effect. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H2: *Married people have a higher degree of togetherness than cohabiting people, but this effect of marital status is weaker for higher educated people.*

Methods

Data

In order to test the hypotheses, data from the first wave of the New Families in the Netherlands (NFN) survey will be used (Poortman & Van Gaalen, 2019). NFN is a longitudinal study that was conducted among divorced and separated parents in the Netherlands with the aim of collecting recent data about legal arrangements of divorce regarding the children involved. In 2009, a new Dutch law was passed with the goal to reduce adverse effects of divorce on children that requires parents that are going through a divorce to make a parenting plan.

Data from the first wave were gathered between 2012 and 2014 using a multi-method and multi-actor approach and were gathered among the main sample of formerly married or cohabiting parents as well as among control groups of intact married or cohabiting families and of parents who had gotten divorced before the new law was put in force. In the current study, data from the intact families will be used, so the 'married parents' (sample 3) and the 'cohabiting parents' (sample 4). In total, sample 3 and 4 consisted of 2173 married or cohabiting parents (N = 2173). In the current study, the analyses will be conducted among 1612 married or cohabiting parents as the data is filtered to exclude missing values (N = 1612). People were approached via mail with information about the study and an invitation to take part in an online survey about parenthood in divorced and intact families carried out by Utrecht University in collaboration with Statistics Netherlands.

Both parents from a household were approached to participate in the survey but not everyone responded. On the person level, which is people's individual response, the response rate for intact families in Wave 1, samples 3 and 4, was 45% (N = 2173), with only a slight difference between married and cohabiting people (46% and 44% respectively). On the household level, which is the total number of households that participated in the survey with either one or both partners taking part in the study, the response rate for intact families was 56% (N = 1338). The participants were all parents who had minor children at the time of the

survey, with men (especially those with young children), young people, people from non-western descent and people on welfare being underrepresented.

Operationalization

Dependent variable

The dependent variable in this study is *togetherness with the partner*. This variable is measured using two questions which will be combined into one variable to create an overall model of togetherness. Moreover, these two questions will also be used to separately measure two different types of togetherness, namely: togetherness with regard to social leisure activities and togetherness with regard to couple-specific/bonding activities.

The first question related to social leisure activities was "How often have you participated in the following activities together with your partner?". Respondents were then given a list of eight different activities, namely: playing team sport, individual sport (e.g., jogging, cycling), going out (e.g., to restaurant, cafe, parties), taking a trip into nature/cycling/walking, visiting an event (e.g., a fair, theme park or zoo), doing cultural activities (e.g., going to the theater, concert or museum), going to a singing, music, theater, painting or other hobby club and watching television. For each of these activities the respondent could choose from six answering options ranging from 'always together with my partner' (1) to 'never together with my partner' (5) and 'did not do this activity in past year' (88). The last answering option ('did not do this activity in past year') will be considered missing in the analysis as it does not say anything about *togetherness with the partner* and would therefore skew the data in the analysis. This first type of togetherness consists of social leisure activities. These are activities that many people might prefer to do alongside somebody else instead of alone, whether this be a friend, family member or a partner.

In the analysis, the eight items from the first question will be used to construct a mean scale. The mean over the eight items is computed only for cases having at least four non-missing values. The items will be recoded to make one variable to measure the first type of togetherness (social leisure activities) on a five point scale, with a score of 1 indicating a low level of togetherness with the partner and a score of 5 indicating a high level of togetherness with the partner.

A Cronbach's Alpha analysis on the eight activities taken up in the first question to measure *togetherness* showed high internal consistency between the eight items (α = .802).

The second question about couple-specific activities consisted of two statements: "Had time for each other at home (e.g. cooking together or talking extensively. Do not count watching television" and "Been away without the children, on holiday or for a night/weekend". For these statements, respondents had the following answering options ranging from 'various times per week' (1) to 'never' (7). This second type of togetherness is made up of activities that can be considered more couple-specific in the sense that these are activities that you would be more likely to take part in with a partner rather than a friend.

The mean over the two items is computed only for cases having at least two non-missing values to make a separate variable that measures the second type of togetherness (couple-specific/bonding activities) on a seven point scale. The items of the second question will be recoded so that a score of 1 indicates a low level of togetherness with the partner and a score of 7 indicates a high level of togetherness. A second Cronbach's Alpha analysis of the two items of the second question shows low internal consistency among the items ($\alpha = .218$). This low value is likely due to the low number of items.

Finally, togetherness will be analyzed as a whole using the total of ten items from both questions. Because the two questions used to measure togetherness were measured on two different scales, the variables were standardized as Z-scores and then combined to create a mean variable to measure overall togetherness. The mean over the ten items is computed only for cases having at least four non-missing values. In a third Cronbach's Alpha analysis, all ten items from the two questions to measure togetherness were inserted. The test showed good internal consistency among the ten items ($\alpha = .780$).

Independent variable

The main independent variable in this study is *marital status*. This variable is measured using the question "Are you married, have you registered your partnership or are you cohabiting?". The answering options that respondents could choose from were 'married' (1), 'registered partnership' (2) and 'cohabiting' (3). In this study, only marital unions and cohabiting unions will be studied and marital status will therefore be measured as a dichotomous variable with 'married' (1 = 1) and registered partnership and cohabiting combined as 'cohabiting' (2 & 3 = 0).

In this study, an interaction analysis with *education* will be conducted. This variable is measured using the question "What is your highest attained level of education?". Answering options in the survey are the following: 'incomplete elementary' (1), 'elementary school only' (2), 'lower vocational' (3), 'lower general secondary' (4), 'medium general

secondary' (5) , 'upper general secondary' (6), 'intermediate vocational' (7), 'higher vocational' (8), 'university' (9) and 'post-graduate' (10). A high score on this continuous variable indicates a higher level of education.

Control variables

A control variable known to be associated with togetherness is *age*. As couples age, their networks become smaller leading them to spend more time with their partners instead of other people in their social circle (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001).

A second variable known to be associated with togetherness is *work*. We can expect couples where either one or both partners work many hours a week to spend less time together than couples where neither of the partners work a lot. This variable will be measured using the question 'How many hours per week do you currently *actually* work?'. In the current study, the actual working hours instead of the work hours according to the contract will be used because it will more accurately represent how much time people will be able to spend in their partner's presence. Accordingly, 'How many hours per week does your partner *actually* work?' is also taken up in the analysis.

Another variable that could have an influence on togetherness is the *number of children*. In the dataset, respondents' number of children range from having 1 child to having 9 children. People with a larger number of children might spend more time caring for their children compared to those with fewer children and will therefore have less time to spend with their partner.

Duration of the relationship is another variable that is controlled for in the analysis. This variable is created by subtracting the year during which couples moved in together from the year in which the completed survey was received. While every respondent in the sample has one or multiple children with their partner and it can therefore be assumed that these couples have been together for at least a while, people that have been together with their partner for a long time are expected to have a lower degree of togetherness than those that have not been together long. Furthermore, holding the duration of the relationship constant is important because cohabiting relationships on average are shorter than marriages (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001).

Additionally, the respondent's gender is taken up in the analysis with female respondents as the reference category (1 = male, 0 = female).

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the dependent and the independent variables that are used in this thesis for married people and cohabiting people separately.

Analytical strategy

In this study, multiple linear regression analysis will be used to analyze the extent to which marital status has an effect on togetherness. In the first model only the effect of marital status on togetherness will be analyzed. Furthermore, in the second model this effect of marital status will be analyzed including several control variables. The control variables are age, education, gender, working hours per week of the respondent, working hours per week of the partner, number of children and duration of the relationship. The third model also adds the interaction between marital status and education to test the second hypothesis. The control variables will be added to this model as well. First, the results of the three models for overall togetherness will be analyzed. Then, the three models for the two types of togetherness will be analyzed. The results of these analyses will be shown and discussed in the results section of this thesis.

A test for multicollinearity among all the variables used in the regression analyses and a separate test among *work hours of the respondent* and *work hours of the partner*, shows that none of the tolerance values exceed 1 and none of the VIF values exceed 3. Therefore, multicollinearity among the variables is not suspected (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt & Ringle, 2019).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics

	Married (N = 1044)				Cohabiting (N = 568)			
	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Togetherness (overall)	0.034	0.56	-1.84	1.52	-0.07	0.51	-1.39	1.41
Togetherness (leisure activities)	3.14	0.78	1.25	5.00	3.01	0.75	1.43	5.00
Togetherness (couple-specific activities)	3.97	0.82	1.00	7.00	3.91	0.88	1.00	7.00
Age respondent	43.95	5.71	28	64	40.70	6.16	25	62
Duration of relationship	18.83	5.96	0.00	42.00	14.15	5.92	2.00	35.00
Education	6.87	1.86	2.00	10.00	7.11	1.80	2.00	10.00
Number of work hours per week	32.95	14.22	0	150	33.63	13.07	0	120
Number of work hours per week partner	35.45	14.01	0	90	36.40	12.96	6	120
Number of children	2.19	0.85	1	9	1.87	0.63	1	4

Results

Overall model of togetherness

The first model was generated to examine the relationship between the independent variable, *marital status*, and the dependent variable, *togetherness*. Model 1 of Table 2 shows that the results point to a significant positive effect of marriage on togetherness (B= .111, t=3.823, p<.001). These results suggest that married people participate in more social activities together with their partner than cohabiting people. The proportion of variance in the dependent variable, R^2, is 0.009, meaning the independent variable explains this type of togetherness for about 0.9%.

To test whether the effect of marital status on togetherness remains significant, the following variables are controlled for: age, gender, education, working hours of the respondent, working hours of the partner, number of children and duration of the relationship. The second model where these variables are added to the multiple regression analysis is then generated. By adding the control variables to the model the proportion of variance, R^2, has gone up to 0.051, meaning the model has improved compared to the first model. The effect of marital status on togetherness remained significant (B=.111, t=3.637, p<.001). These results provide support for the first hypothesis (H1: *Married people have a higher degree of togetherness than cohabiting people*), indicating that married people spend more time participating in social activities together with their partner than cohabiting people.

Next to this significant effect of marital status, Model 2 of Table 2 also shows significant effects of several control variables. The results show that the control variable *age* has a significant negative effect on togetherness, suggesting that the older a person is the less time they spend taking part in activities together with their partner (B=-.007, t=-2.164, p<.05).

Furthermore, Model 2 of Table 2 indicates that there is a significant negative effect of *education* on togetherness (B=-.032, t=-4.215, p<.001) which suggests higher educated people have a lower degree of togetherness with their partner than lower educated people.

While the absolute time husbands and wives spend together in theory has to be the same for both partners, their perceptions and interpretations of the time they spend together may vary widely. The results show that there is a significant negative effect of *gender* (female) on togetherness, which suggests that women report lower togetherness than their male counterparts (B= -.193, t=-4.390, p<.001).

Both the number of actual *working hours per week of the respondent* as well as the *number of actual working hours per week of their partner* had no significant effect on togetherness. The *number of children* that a respondent has with the partner also had no significant effect on togetherness. Finally, the *duration of the relationship* showed no significant effect on togetherness either.

To test the second hypothesis, the interaction variable with *education* is added to create the third model. The results show no significant effect of education on the relationship between marital status and togetherness. This suggests that the effect of marital status on the degree of togetherness does not differ between higher educated people and lower educated people. Thus, no evidence is found in support of the second hypothesis.

Separate models for togetherness
While evidence was found for the effect of marital status on togetherness, the following analyses are done to test whether the effect that was found for overall togetherness will also be found for the two types of togetherness separately. To test whether there is a difference between the effects of marital status on the first type of togetherness compared to the second type of togetherness, Tables 3 and 4 were created.

The equality of coefficients is tested to analyze whether the effect of marital status is the same between the first type of togetherness (social leisure activities) and the second type of togetherness (couple-specific/bonding activities). To test this, a general linear model is produced. The output shows the coefficient estimates for both types, with the effect of marital status for the first type of togetherness being 0.160 (Std. Error = 0.045) and 0.078 for the second type of togetherness (Std. Error = 0.050). The contrast estimate is .082 (p=.184) which means that the null hypothesis that the effects are equal cannot be rejected. This suggests that while the effect of the first type may be larger than the effect for the second type, they are not significantly different from one another. It should be noted however that while the effect of marital status for the first type of togetherness lies relatively close to the effect of marital status that is found in Model 2 of Table 3, the effect for the second type of togetherness appears to be larger than the effect that is found in Model 2 of Table 4. It is unclear why these effects do not align perfectly.

Model 1 of Table 3 shows that the results point to a significant positive effect of marriage on togetherness when it comes to social leisure activities (B= .129, t=3.210, p<.001). Model 1 of Table 4, however, shows only a small positive effect of marital status on

togetherness regarding couple-specific activities that is not significant (B=.066, t=1.494, p=.135).

The proportion of variance in the dependent variable for the first type of togetherness, R^2, is 0.006, meaning the independent variable explains this type of togetherness for about 0.6%. The proportion of variance in the dependent variable for the second type of togetherness is 0.001, meaning the independent variable explains the second type of togetherness for about 0.1%.

To test whether the effect of marital status on togetherness remains significant after adding the control variables age, gender, education, working hours of the respondent, working hours of the partner, number of children and duration of the relationship, the second model where these variables are added to the multiple regression analysis is generated for both Table 3 and Table 4. By adding the control variables to the model the proportion of variance, R^2, has gone up to 0.041 for the first type of togetherness, meaning the model has improved compared to the first model. The proportion of variance also increased for the second type of togetherness, to 0.022, meaning the second model for the second type of togetherness has also improved compared to the first.

After adding the control variables, the effect of marital status on togetherness (social leisure activities) became larger and remained significant (B=.152, t=3.566, p<.001). The effect of marital status on togetherness (couple-specific/bonding activities), however, became smaller and was still not significant (B=.047, t=1.003, p=.316).

These results, split up into two types of togetherness, show mixed evidence for the first hypothesis (H1: *Married people have a higher degree of togetherness than cohabiting people*). Based on the results in Table 3, where the first type of togetherness (social leisure activities) is analyzed, support for the first hypothesis is found as the effect of marital status on togetherness is very significant after controlling for a number of variables. Based on the results in Table 4, however, where the second type of togetherness (couple-specific/bonding activities) is analyzed, support for the first hypothesis is not found, since no effect of marital status is found.

While the results show that the control variable *age* has a significant negative effect on both types of togetherness, this effect is only significant for the second type of togetherness (B=-.012, t=-2.365, p<.05), suggesting that the older a person is the less time they spend taking part in couple-specific/bonding activities together with their partner.

Furthermore, Table 3 shows that there is a significant negative effect of *education* on togetherness (B=-.054, t=-5.070, p<.001), which suggests that the more highly people are educated, the lower their degree of togetherness with their partner. Table 4 also shows a negative effect of *education* on togetherness, however, this effect is not significant.

The results also show that there is a negative significant effect of *gender* (female) on both the first type of togetherness (social leisure activities) (B= -.179, t=-2.917, p<.01) as well as on the second type of togetherness (B=-.258, t=-3.819, p<.001), which is in line with the overall model of togetherness and suggests that women report lower togetherness than their male counterparts.

Moreover, *working hours of the respondent* shows no significant effect for either the first type of togetherness (social leisure activities) nor the second type of togetherness (couple-specific activities). The results also show no significant effect of the *partner's working hours per week* for the first type of togetherness (social leisure activities), but do show a very small positive effect for the second type of togetherness (couple-specific activities), which is significant (B=.004, t=1.995, p<.05).

Additionally, the results in Table 3 show that the *number of children* that a respondent has with the partner has no significant effect on the first type of togetherness (social leisure activities). However, the effect of the number of children on the second type of togetherness (couple-specific activities), as shown in Table 4, does have a negative effect on this type of togetherness that is significant (B=-.063, t=-2.269, p<.05). This suggests that having a higher number of children leads people to spend less time doing couple-specific/bonding activities together.

Finally, the *duration of the relationship* shows no significant effect on the first type of togetherness (social leisure activities), but did show a significant positive effect on the second type of togetherness (couple-specific activities) which suggests that the longer a couple is together, the higher their degree of couple-specific togetherness (B=.016, t=3.105, p<.01).

To test the second hypothesis, the interaction variable with *education*, is added to create a third model for both the first and the second type of togetherness. After adding the interaction variable to the model, the proportion of variance, R^2, does not change for either third model. The results show no significant effect of education on the relationship between marital status and either types of togetherness. This suggests that the effect of marital status does not differ between higher educated people and lower educated people for either types of togetherness.

Thus, there is no evidence for either of the separate models for togetherness to support the second hypothesis (H2: *Married people have a higher degree of togetherness than cohabiting people, but this effect of marital status is weaker for higher educated people.*).

Table 2: Multiple regression model of togetherness (overall)

	Model 1		**Model 2**		**Model 3**	
	B	**S.E.**	**B**	**S.E.**	**B**	**S.E.**
Constant[1]	-0.067**	0.023	0.589***	0.156	0.578***	0.169
Marital status (ref. cohabitation)	0.111***	0.029	0.111***	0.031	0.129	0.116
Education			-.032***	0.008	-0.031*	0.013
Age			-0.007*	0.003	-0.007*	0.003
Work hours respondent			0.002	0.001	0.002	0.001
Work hours partner			0.002	0.001	0.002	0.001
Gender			-0.193***	0.044	-0.194***	0.044
Number of children			-0.020	0.018	-0.021	0.018
Duration of relationship			0.004	0.003	0.004	0.003
Education*marriage					-0.003	0.016
R^2	0.009		0.051		0.051	
N	1612		1612		1612	

[1]*Dependent variable: togetherness*, ***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05

Table 3: Multiple regression model of togetherness (social leisure activities)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B	**S.E.**	**B**	**S.E.**	**B**	**S.E.**
Constant[1]	3.013***	0.032	3.950***	0.217	3.900***	0.236
Marital status (ref. cohabitation)	0.129***	0.040	0.152***	0.043	0.238	0.162
Education			-0.054***	0.011	-0.046**	0.018
Age			-0.008	0.005	-0.009	0.005
Work hours respondent			0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002
Work hours partner			0.001	0.002	0.001	0.002
Gender			-0.179**	0.062	-0.181**	0.062
Number of children			-0.014	0.025	-0.015	0.025
Duration of relationship			-0.001	.005	-0.001	0.005
Education*marriage					-0.012	0.022
R^2	0.006		0.041		0.041	
N	1612		1612		1612	

[1]*Dependent variable: togetherness (social leisure activities)*, ***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05

Table 4: Multiple regression model of togetherness (couple-specific/bonding activities)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B	**S.E.**	**B**	**S.E.**	**B**	**S.E.**
Constant[1]	3.908***	0.035	4.616***	0.238	4.606***	0.259
Marital status (ref. cohabitation)	0.066	0.044	0.047	0.047	0.064	0.178
Education			-0.011	0.012	-0.010	0.020
Age			-0.012*	0.005	-0.012*	0.005
Work hours respondent			0.000	0.002	0.000	0.002
Work hours partner			0.004*	0.002	0.004*	0.002
Gender			-0.258***	0.067	-0.258***	0.068
Number of children			-0.063*	0.028	-0.063*	0.028
Duration of relationship			0.016**	0.005	0.015**	0.005
Education*marriage					-0.002	0.024
R^2	0.001		0.022		0.022	
N	1612		1612		1612	

[1]*Dependent variable: togetherness (couple-specific/bonding activities)*, ***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05

Conclusion and discussion

This study aimed to answer the following research question: "*To what extent does marital status (cohabitation or marriage) influence the degree of togetherness with the partner?*"

The influence of marital status on togetherness was examined, as well as the effect of marital status on the two types of togetherness that can be distinguished, namely: social leisure activities, the first type, and couple-specific/bonding activities, the second type.

Based on the theories about married and cohabiting people's differing cost-benefit analyses associated with how much time they decide to spend together, the expectation in this study was that married people have a higher degree of togetherness with their partner than cohabiting people. It was argued that this is because married people are more likely to view their relationship as a long-term investment, leading them to invest more time into their relationship, while cohabiting people are less confident about the future of their relationship and will likely live more separate lifestyles to prevent big losses in terms of leisure activities and social network connections when the relationship fails (Hill, 1988; Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001; Van Houdt & Poortman, 2018). The results of this study provided support for the expectation that married people have a higher degree of overall togetherness with their partner than cohabiting people, which is in line with findings from prior research on togetherness.

Then, the influence of marital status on the first type of togetherness (social leisure activities) was tested. Married people have a significantly higher degree of togetherness with their partners than cohabiting people, which is in line with findings from earlier studies on togetherness (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001; Van Houdt & Poortman, 2018). After taking relevant control variables into account, the effect was still significant. These findings were in line with the findings in the overall model and indicate that married people often view spending much of their social leisure time with their partner as a benefit, whereas cohabiting people are more likely to view having a joint lifestyle as a risk.

Furthermore, the influence of marital status on the second type of togetherness (couple-specific/bonding activities) was tested. No significant effect was found, and after adding the control variables, the effect still was not significant. It is an interesting finding that marital status solely has an effect on social leisure activities and not on couple-specific/bonding activities, that has rarely been studied before. In most prior research on togetherness, only an overall type of togetherness is examined.

A possible explanation for the mixed evidence that was found with regard to the two types of togetherness is that while cohabiting people may decide to participate in social

leisure activities without their partner as a way of preventing possible loss of a shared lifestyle when the relationship ends, this line of thought does not apply to more 'couple-specific' activities such as going on vacation together, going on a trip without the kids or making time for each other at home such as cooking a meal together and talking extensively. The activities that were used to measure the first type of togetherness can be considered activities that one can also take part in with friends, family or co-workers. The activities that were used to measure the second type of togetherness are activities that people are more likely to take part in with a partner than with friends or family as they have a more romantic nature. While it is for example not impossible for friends to go on vacation together, it is perhaps not as common for couples with children to go on separate vacations. This could explain why no significant difference between married and cohabiting people was found with regards to couple-specific togetherness.

Moreover, this study also sought to answer the question: *"To what extent does the effect of marital status on the degree of togetherness differ between lower educated people and higher educated people?"*

It was expected that the effect of marital status would be weaker for higher educated people. Based on the theoretical framework presented in the current study, higher educated people were expected to have more individualistic value orientations compared to lower educated people. While married people spend more time engaging in leisure activities with their partner and have a shared social network with their partner, it was expected that the effect of marital status would be weaker for higher educated people. The results of the analysis, however, did not provide support for this expectation.

In line with the results of the overall model of togetherness, when education was added as an interaction variable to investigate the influence of education on the relationship between marital status and the two types of togetherness, no significant effect was found for either the first type nor the second type of togetherness. A possible explanation for this finding is that education purely has an effect on togetherness, with higher educated people having a lower degree of togetherness than lower educated people, but that the effect of marital status on togetherness does not differ significantly between the two groups. Perhaps married people simply are more committed to their partner and to their relationship, resulting in a high level of togetherness, and no distinction based on level of education can be made among married people.

While the results are interesting and contribute to existing literature on togetherness, a few limitations of this study should be discussed. First, to get an accurate representation of

the activities people take part in over the course of days, weeks, or as is the case in this study, months, a survey is perhaps not the best way to get a precise depiction of exactly how many times someone takes part in an activities when they have to account for a wide time frame. People both overestimate and underestimate the amount of time they spend doing something, which also explains the gender difference that was found in the analyses. To get a more accurate depiction of what people do and how much time they spend doing it, a time diary would be useful in studies on togetherness.

Furthermore, a number of groups were underrepresented in the study (men, men with young children, young people, people from non-western descent and people on welfare) which might lead the sample to be an inaccurate representation of the population.

A suggestion for future research would be to take up more items related to couple-specific/bonding togetherness in the survey. The Cronbach's Alpha analysis showed low internal consistency among the items which could be due to the fact that only two items were taken up in the analysis. Including more items related to couple-specific/bonding togetherness would allow a variable that measures couple-specific/bonding togetherness to more accurately measure what it intends to measure, thereby increasing the content validity.

Moreover, having 'emotional togetherness' as a dependent variable is perhaps interesting for future research as this has not been studied yet. I would be interested to see whether the amount of activities that couples engage in together, or what types of activities, influence how emotionally connected partners feel, and whether this effect differs, for example, between married and cohabiting people.

To summarize, this study has shown that while more and more men and women in the Netherlands choose to forgo marriage and opt for cohabitation instead, a case can still be made for the willingness to invest in something by spending time together as a couple that comes with the promise of a marriage vow.

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