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**DOI**

[10.4402/genus-588](https://doi.org/10.4402/genus-588)

**Publication date**

2013

**Document Version**

Final published version

**Published in**

Genus

[Link to publication](#)

**Citation for published version (APA):**

Latten, J. J., & Mulder, C. H. (2013). Partner relationships in the Netherlands: new manifestations of the Second Demographic Transition. *Genus*, 69(3), 103-121. <https://doi.org/10.4402/genus-588>

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## **Partner relationships in the Netherlands: new manifestations of the Second Demographic Transition**

### 1. INTRODUCTION: THE SECOND DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION AS AN ONGOING PROCESS

There have been profound changes in partnership formation and dissolution as well as parenthood in the past few decades. Many scholars now refer to these changes as part of the Second Demographic Transition, even though the idea that the Demographic Transition had been succeeded by a second one was controversial when it was first introduced by Lesthaeghe and Van de Kaa (1986, in Dutch; see also Van de Kaa, 1987, 1994; Lesthaeghe, 1995).

The main demographic changes Van de Kaa and Lesthaeghe pointed out when they introduced the idea of the Second Demographic Transition in the 1980s were: a rise in the divorce risk; a decrease in fertility; postponement of parenthood; a rise in voluntary childlessness; a rise in unmarried cohabitation accompanied by a decrease in marriage (Lesthaeghe and Van de Kaa, 1986); and an increase in living alone (Van de Kaa, 1987). These changes, they argued, were indicative of a weakening of the institution of the family, later also denoted as the de-institutionalization of family life (Hantrais, 2006) or of marriage (Cherlin, 2004). The bourgeois family model, they postulated, had given way to the individualistic family model. These changes became discernible in the mid-1960s in some countries, mainly in North Western Europe. They have now spread all across Europe, including Southern Europe (Delgado *et al.*, 2009) and North America (Kane, 2013), albeit at a different pace in different countries and regions. Later, several other indicators of the Second Demographic Transition (or of its later phases) were identified, such as an increased prevalence of post-marital cohabitation, part-time cohabiting or ‘living apart together’ (Lesthaeghe, 1995), and increased fertility among cohabiting couples (Lesthaeghe, 2010).

Twenty-five years have passed since the Second Demographic Transition was first proposed as a term for a set of changes in demographic behavior, and

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almost fifty since the changes began to take shape. We feel it is time to review the latest trends, asking ourselves: Which new forms of demographic behavior are emerging, and how could these be related to ongoing social change? To what extent do these new forms of behavior signal a continuation of the Second Demographic Transition, or possibly a new phase in this Transition?

Our review is limited to changes in partner relationships. We use the term partner relationships for all intimate relationships between two partners of the same or opposite sex, regardless of whether they reside together. The term partnership is used for co-residential partner relationships. When we discuss parenthood, we only do so in relation to its connection with partner relationships. The case we discuss is the Netherlands, where new demographic trends have often shown up early. Dutch women were early in postponing motherhood and for quite some time had the highest average age of first motherhood in Europe. The Netherlands was the first country to legalize marriage for same-sex couples. This is not to say the Netherlands has been a forerunner in all respects - in fact Coleman and Garssen (2002) argued that around the year 2000 it was European mainstream for most demographic phenomena. Remarkably though, some of Coleman and Garssen's observations were no longer true by 2010. Extra-marital fertility, for example, was low when they wrote their article but has risen substantially since.

### 1.1 *Ongoing societal change*

Van de Kaa (1994) stressed the connections between the changes in demographic behavior on the one hand, and three forms of societal change on the other: structural change (including economic change), cultural change (mainly changes in values), and technological change. For the discussion in this article, it is important to assess to what extent these forms of contextual change are still ongoing today, possibly facilitating yet newer forms of demographic behavior.

The main structural change Van de Kaa (1994) identified was modernization, involving the development of the postindustrial society and the welfare state. Among the more concrete changes he listed were two that seem to be particularly relevant to partnerships: increased levels of education - particularly among women - and the increased labor force participation of women. Both these changes have continued since Van de Kaa wrote his article. The past few decades have seen a continuous rise in the education level of men and women in the Netherlands. By 2005 Dutch women in their thirties surpassed men in education level for the first time in history. By 2010, 43 percent of women compared to 37 percent of men aged 25-43 had completed higher education. Young men now dominate at the lower end of the education distribution. In all EU countries the share of young women expected to complete a higher education surpasses the share of men (Statistics Netherlands, 2011). During the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the absolute number of working women rose by half a million in the

Netherlands whereas the number of working men had stabilized. In 2005, 40 percent of the families with young children had one breadwinner. Only four years later, this percentage had decreased to 30. Fulltime housewives are rapidly becoming rare. The majority of the new generations of mothers combine motherhood with a mostly part-time job. By 2009, the woman had the highest income in almost 1 in 5 two-earner couples (Moonen and Kösters, 2011). According to a recent OECD report, around 2010 the Netherlands was among the few OECD countries in which women aged 25-44 without children earned more on average than childless men of the same age (OECD, 2012). These ongoing changes facilitate the increasing economic and social independence of women, both within and outside partnerships. As a consequence, the prevalence of separation could keep increasing and so could that of living alone and living as a single parent.

The cultural change underlying the Second Demographic Transition can best be summarized as a growing importance of higher-order needs (Lesthaeghe, 2010): the need for self-actualization and individual autonomy. Among the concrete trends Van de Kaa (1994) mentions are increased secularization and individualism. The spread of unmarried cohabitation seems to be closely related to secularization (Lesthaeghe, 2010). According to Giddens (1991), the contemporary partnership can be described as a *pure relationship*, in which intimacy and emotional commitment are crucial and which is based on democratic and egalitarian interaction between partners. As generations are developing new norms for relationships, namely that any relationship should be based on emotional grounds, relationship break-ups are legitimized when cracks appear in the emotional foundation. The Netherlands is a particularly secularized country, where secularization is still going on. The share of the population reporting they have no religious affiliation rose from 41 to 44 percent in the period 2000-2010, and even from 49 to 56 percent and among 20-25 year olds (StatLine, 2010). There are also signs of a continuing increase in individualism in the Netherlands. Repeated surveys on values held between 1980 and 2011 show that hedonism (an orientation towards consumption and excitement in life), has steadily gained importance and was the most important value in 2011 (Eisinga *et al.*, 2012). Most 18-35 year olds in the Netherlands are positive about unmarried cohabitation: around 90 percent see it as acceptable, and the proportion thinking it is a good idea to cohabit before marriage has grown from 0.61 in 1994 to 0.74 in 2002 (Liefbroer and Fokkema, 2008). It seems likely that ongoing secularization and further changes in attitudes would be associated with a further growth in cohabitation and strengthening of cohabitation as an alternative to marriage.

The introduction of the birth control pill and the IUD, both in the mid-1960s, was a major technological change that has facilitated the Second Demographic Transition (Van de Kaa, 1994). Partner relationships as well as marriage itself became increasingly detached from the previously self-evident link with

parenthood. Reliable contraception has later also contributed to the increase in extramarital fertility because it allowed people to make a conscious decision to have a child outside marriage. Television and air travel also contributed to the Second Demographic Transition, because they enabled people to acquire information about other countries and cultures (Van de Kaa, 1994). Probably the most important recent technological innovations facilitating further changes in demographic behavior are new fertility techniques and the internet. From the 1980s on, new fertility techniques have introduced new options for infecund couples: in vitro fertilization and egg cell donation became possible. Freezing egg cells is also technically possible, although not widely practiced. Such new techniques have contributed further to the idea that fertility can be planned and controlled. The internet has obviously made a huge further contribution to the spread of information. But it has not done just that: it allows people to find and contact other people who can help them fulfilling all kinds of wishes with regard to partnerships and fertility, even if such wishes are uncommon. It can help people find partners who meet very specific requirements, surrogate mothers, sperm donors, fathers for their children who are interested in fatherhood as a co-parent rather than as a partner, or same-sex couples of the other sex to engage in a four-parent arrangement. These new techniques facilitate a de-coupling of parenthood from two-sex partnerships. One would think, therefore, that such a trend could have started to become discernible.

## 2. TRENDS IN PARTNER RELATIONSHIPS

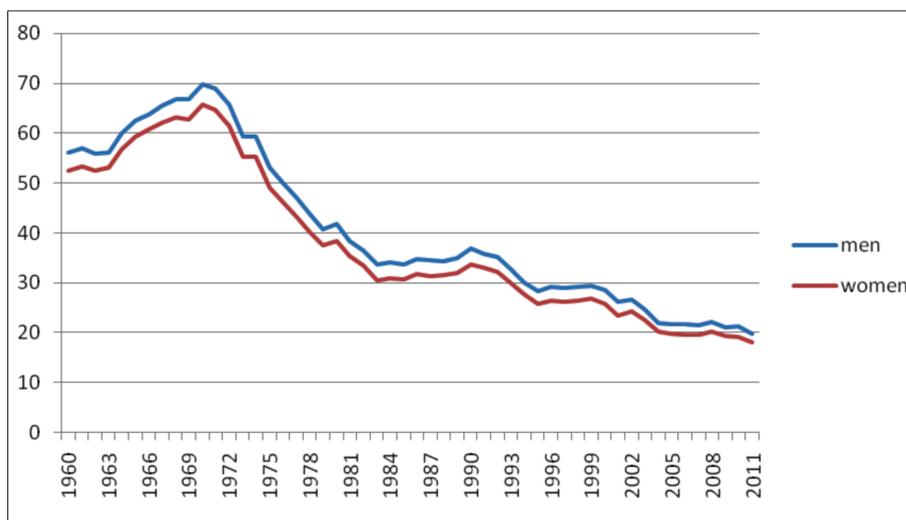
Our overview of trends is based on two main sources. The first is data from Statistics Netherlands derived from the Municipal Population Registers. These data pertain to the entire population of the Netherlands. Much of this material is available from the StatLine database ([www.cbs.nl/statline](http://www.cbs.nl/statline)). The data not available on StatLine were prepared by Statistics Netherlands. This source was used in text and for figures if no further specification is given. Other material was derived from the Netherlands Fertility and Family Surveys of 2003 and 2008. Figures 5 and 6 state the same explicitly. Both versions of the survey had a target population of men and women aged 18 to 62. Final sample sizes of the 2003 and 2008 surveys were 8,145 and 7,811, which amounted to a response of 57% and 60% of the original samples. We use descriptive methods to analyze the data.

### 2.1 *Marriage*

*Decreasing tendency to get married.* In the 1950s and 1960s, marriage was the dominant route by which to leave the parental home and a necessary condition for starting life as a couple and having children in the Netherlands. In 1970 the marriage rate was 70 per 1000 unmarried men and 66 per 1000 unmarried

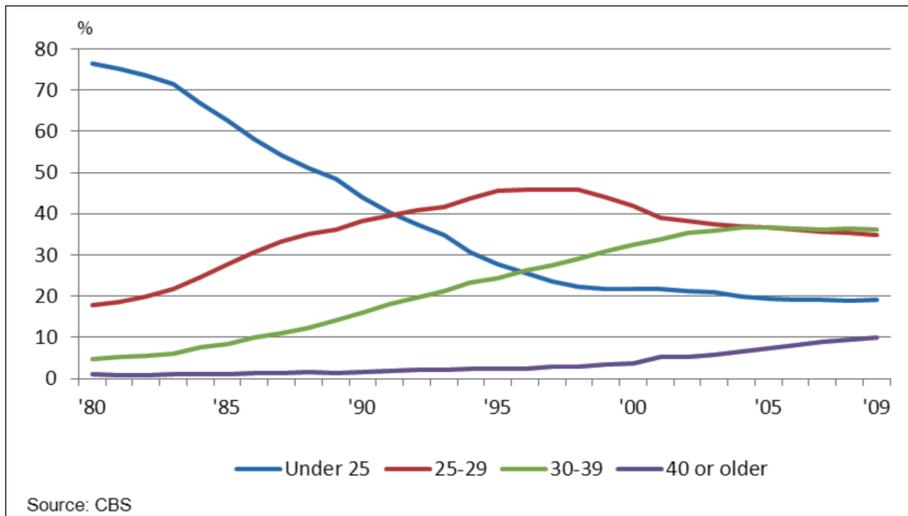
women. Since that peak year, marriage rates have declined (Figure 1): around 2010, they had reached 21 for men 19 for women. For men the probability of ever entering into a marriage has decreased from 90 percent for older generations to around 65 percent for the generation born around 1970. For women, the corresponding percentages are 95 and 70. In 1970, 58 percent of the young men left their parental home to start living with a partner, mostly within a marriage. At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, only 43 percent of the young men left home to start living with a partner, mostly outside a marriage (Statistics Netherlands, 2009a). Living alone or living together unmarried have largely replaced marriage as the first living arrangement after leaving home.

Figure 1 – *Marrying persons per 1000 unmarried persons in the Netherlands, 1960-2010*



The long-term downward tendency in getting married has been accompanied by an ongoing rise of the average age of first marriage, from 25 in 1970 to 33 in 2009 for men and from 23 to 30 for women. Together with the Scandinavian and some other Western European countries, the Netherlands ranks highest in the average age of first marriage in Europe. People in some Eastern European countries are up to five years younger when they first marry (Eurostat, 2008). Until the end of the 1990s the rise in the average age at marriage was caused by a shift in first time marriages toward women aged 25-29 (see Figure 2). By the year 2000 the shift was toward women in their thirties, and since 2005 there has been a rise in the share of first time brides over 40: by 2010, this share was 1 in 10 (Latten and De Graaf, 2011). The figures up to 2010 do not signal an end to this postponement tendency in first marriages.

Figure 2 – Women's age at first marriage, the Netherlands, 1980-2009

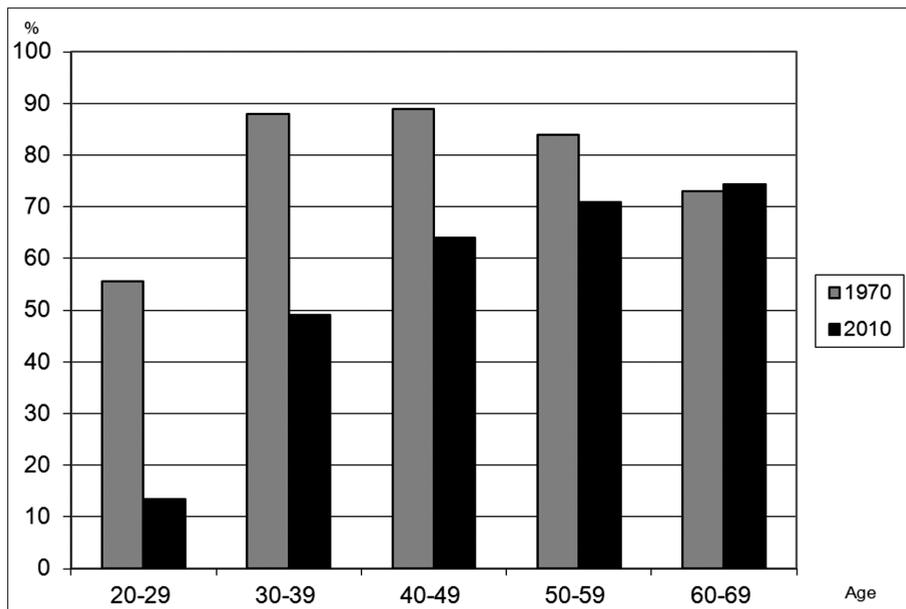


There is a marked decline in the share of married people among the younger age groups as a consequence of the decreasing tendency to get married and because of the postponement of marriage. The share of married 20-69 year-olds fell from 77 to 55 percent between 1970 and 2010. It fell from 55 to only 13 percent among people in their twenties. The share of people marrying in their thirties fell from 88 to 49 percent. The decline was less strong for people in their forties and fifties, and there has been no decline so far among people over 60 (Figure 3). This difference between age categories indicates an ongoing change in marriage patterns among younger cohorts.

*Introduction of same-sex marriages.* On 1 April 2001 the Netherlands was the first country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage, followed by Belgium, Spain, Canada, South Africa, Norway, Sweden, Portugal, Iceland and Argentina. By the summer of 2011 same-sex marriages were also legal in Washington, D.C., Massachusetts, Connecticut, Iowa, Vermont, New Hampshire and New York and Mexico City.

Some 15,000 gay and lesbian couples tied the knot between April 2001 and 1 January 2011; slightly more women than men. In this period the same-sex marriages added 2 per cent to all marriages contracted. Yet this did not offset the long-term decline in total numbers of annual marriages in the Netherlands by a long shot. According to Statistics Netherlands 20 percent of an estimated 57,000 co-residential same-sex couples were married in 2010 (De Graaf, 2011a). It can be assumed that the lower likelihood of same-sex couples to marry has to do with a lower probability to start a family. Still, 1 in 5 mostly female same-sex couples have children.

Figure 3 – *Share of married people by age category in the Netherlands, 1970 and 2010*



The acceptance of homosexuality generally increased in the first decade of the existence of same-sex marriages. In 2006, 15 percent of the Dutch population expressed negative views on homosexuality, whereas in 2008 this had fallen to 9 percent (Keuzenkamp *et al.*, 2010). The population of the Netherlands appears to be one of the most tolerant in Europe in its attitudes towards homosexuals. In 2010 only one in five was opposed to adoption by gay couples while one in ten favored abolishing gay marriage. This is in sharp contrast with attitudes in Eastern European countries, where acceptance of gay marriages ranges between 10 and 20 percent (Keuzenkamp, 2011). However, lower tolerance towards homosexuality is mainly found among less educated and religious people - native Dutch as well as migrants (Keuzenkamp, 2011).

*New marital status of registered partnership.* In 1998 registered partnership was introduced as a new way of formalizing a relationship. It was a forerunner of gay marriage, which had not yet been legalized at the time. Registered partnership was introduced to accommodate people who could or did not want to get married, but who wanted a civil registration with more or less the same status as marriage. And so registered partnership became an additional institutionalized marital status, which resembles marriage but is less formal and does not have the same symbolic meaning.

In the first three years after its introduction, many same sex couples used

this opportunity to have their relationship officially registered. After the introduction of same-sex marriage, partnership registration remained as an extra type of marital status for couples of the same and of the opposite sex. Moreover, in order to offer equal rights to all couples, it became possible to transform existing marriages into registered partnerships. This had an unexpected side effect. Quite a few married couples on the brink of divorce first changed to a registered partnership, in order to get a ‘flash divorce’ which did not require a lawyer. However in March 2009 the legislator abolished this route, among other things because it was not recognized outside the Netherlands.

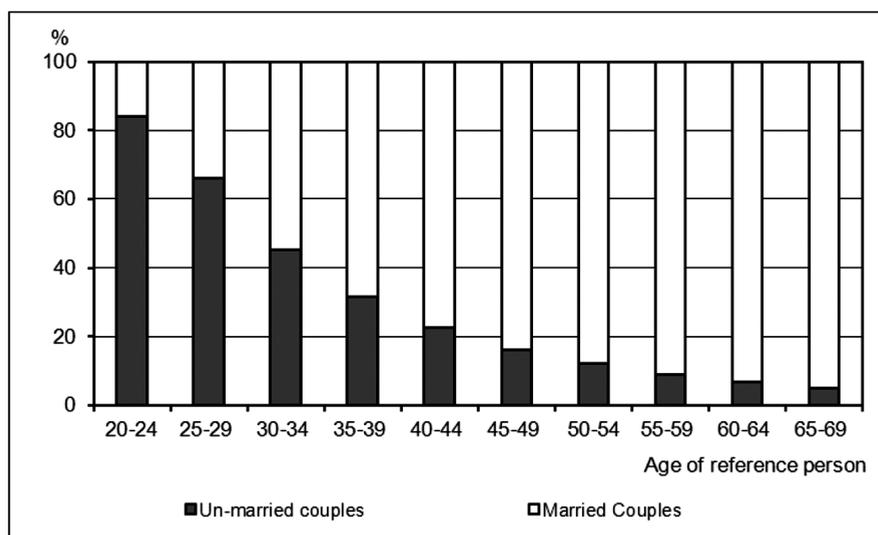
Registered partnerships are still on the rise as an increasing share of two sex couples opt for it. There were nearly 10 thousand new registered partnerships in 2010 compared to just over 2 thousand in 2001 (De Graaf, 2011b). This implies that by 2010 more than 1 in 7 couples who had their relationships legally sanctioned opted for a registered partnership rather than marriage. The number of gay couples opting for a registered partnership has remained stable at 400-600 a year. Registered partnerships are chosen particularly by older couples. Nearly 1 in 3 women who entered into a registered partnership in 2009 was over forty, compared to 1 in 5 women who got married. If a registered partnership is mainly perceived as an alternative to marriage, this could indicate a reluctance of previously married people to re-marry. If it is mainly perceived as an alternative to unmarried cohabitation, it could indicate a need for formal arrangements later in life, for example because people are more likely to own a home or other assets by then.

## 2.2 *Unmarried cohabitation*

In the 1970s unmarried cohabitation was rare among people in their twenties. Only 1 in 10 people aged 20-24 who got married had ever cohabited before (Van Hoorn *et al.*, 2001). Cohabitation emerged in that decade among a select category of highly educated, non-religious young people. In the next decades it spread to the majority of people entering their first partnerships. By the 1990s three-quarters of the 20-24 year olds who got married had lived together with their marriage partner. By 2000, 9 in 10 brides aged 25-29 had cohabited before marriage. The prevalence of cohabitation differs strongly between religious categories. Among cohorts born in 1965-74, the percentage who had cohabited before marriage was almost 90 for those with a non-religious father, between 70 and 80 for those with a catholic or mainstream protestant father, just over 40 for those with an orthodox protestant father, but less than 10 for those with a Muslim father (Statistics Netherlands, 2009b). In all, a sizeable majority of the population is either engaged in long-term unmarried cohabitation, or cohabits only for a short time until either breaking up or getting married.

These trends also translate into increasing numbers of unmarried cohabiting couples. The share of unmarried couples (of all couples) increased from 13 to 20 percent between 1995 and 2010. By 2010, the share of unmarried couples had reached 66 percent among 25-29 year olds, and 45 percent among 30-34 year olds. Up to 2010 there had been a modest share of unmarried partnerships among people over 50 (Figure 4).

Figure 4 – *Unmarried and married couples (including registered partnerships) by age in the Netherlands, 2010*

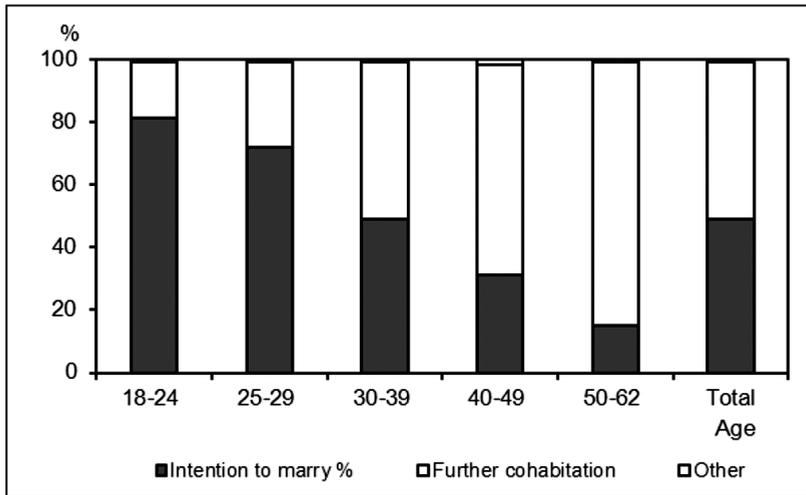


*Temporary phase for some, long-term choice for others.* By 2010 cohabitation appears to have diverse functions in different stages in life. It can serve as an interim prelude to marriage, or as a replacement for a first or a second marriage. Findings from the 2008 Fertility and Family Survey suggest that slightly less than half of all actual cohabiters aged up to 62 see cohabitation as an interim living arrangement: around half of them expect to marry one day (Figure 5).

The intentions of cohabiting respondents differ strongly by age, and the function of cohabitation seems to differ correspondingly. 81 percent of the 18-24 year old cohabiting men and women intend to get married at some point. So, cohabitation still seems to function as a transitory situation for most of the younger cohabiting couples. However, only a minority of the cohabiters over forty expect to get married. In many older unmarried couples at least one of the partners is divorced. Some have children from a first marriage and do not want to remarry for that reason; others are widowed and may not want to feel disloyal to their deceased partner. They could be qualified as “after-marriage cohabiters”, in contrast to the “before-marriage” and the “permanent” cohab-

iters (Antokolskaia *et al.*, 2011). Irrespective of age or stage in life, three quarters of the couples who expect to continue cohabiting feel that marriage would not add anything to their partnership. These findings suggest a rising share of people who attach little value to marriage.

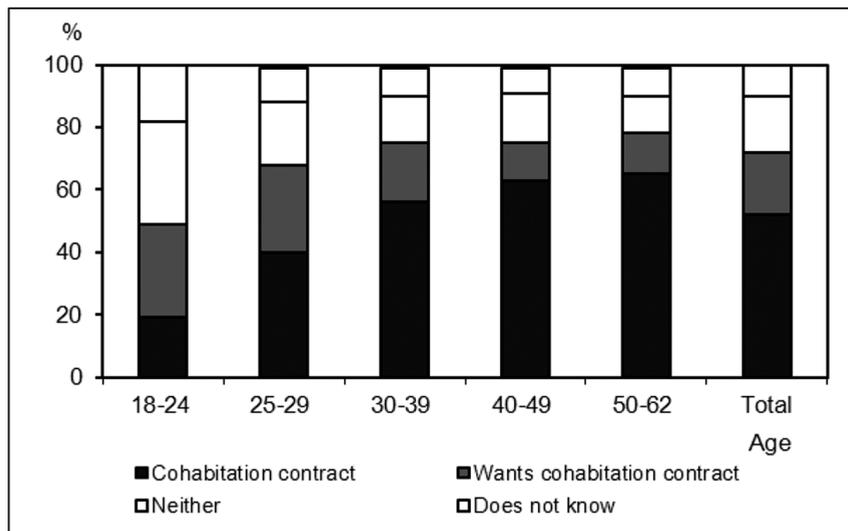
Figure 5 – *Intentions to marry among cohabiting couples, the Netherlands 2008*



Source: Netherlands Fertility and Family Survey 2008

*Cohabitation contracts.* Unmarried cohabitation does not necessarily imply the absence of legal commitment between the partners. Many current public and private regulations require some form of legal arrangement of a relationship in order for couples to qualify for certain benefits or to settle joint ownership of a home or other assets. Therefore, a growing share of couples has a cohabitation contract drawn up by a notary. Essential is that it is a private agreement between two individuals only. It is different from registered partnership which, just like marriage, implies a civil status as a partner and includes statutory rights and obligations. A cohabitation contract does not always cover the whole spectrum of rights and obligations, for example when it comes to alimony. This is guaranteed only when parties have chosen to record it in their contract (Antokolskaia *et al.*, 2011). According to the Netherlands Fertility and Family Surveys, the total share of cohabiters with a cohabitation contract rose from 61 percent in 2003 to 72 percent in 2008 (De Graaf, 2010). The percentage with a cohabitation contract or with an intention to get a contract is greater at older ages (Figure 6).

Figure 6 – *Cohabitation contracts among cohabiting couples by age, the Netherlands, 2008*



Sources: Netherlands Fertility and Family Survey 2008.

### 2.3 *Childbirth outside marriage*

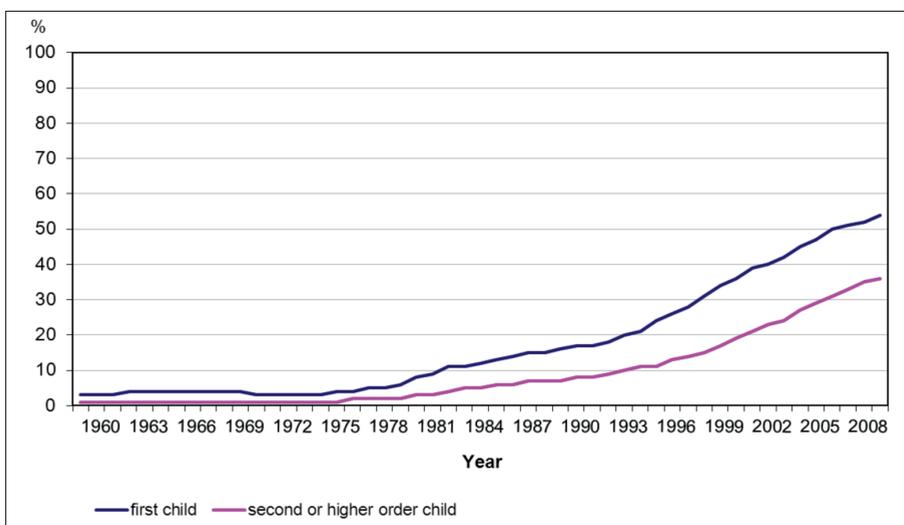
Until the 1960s births outside marriage were rare, unwanted and stigmatized. In 1960, only 1 in 30 firstborn children was born out of wedlock. These were usually babies of young single women, often teenagers, whose pregnancy was unintended. Children of unmarried mothers were usually given up for adoption. From the 1980s onwards, however, the number of births out of wedlock began to rise, and this rise accelerated in the mid-1990s (see Figure 7). It is no longer closely connected with teenage pregnancies or unintended ones.

Nowadays children are born out of wedlock mostly to couples who choose to start a family without being married. By 2010, more than half of all firstborn children were born out of wedlock. So in fact by then marriage had lost its traditional dominant function as *sine qua non* for parenthood, just like it had earlier for living as a couple.

The changes become visible in a reversal of the chronological order of the average age of first marriage and first parenthood. By 2009, the averages were 29.4 for first motherhood and 30.3 for first marriage. Moreover, an increasing share of parents with a second or third child remains unmarried. The share of second children with unmarried parents rose steadily from nearly zero in the early 1970s to 17 percent in 2000 and accelerated to 34 percent in 2010. These figures not only indicate an increasing tendency to disentangle parenthood and marriage, but also seems to point to a growing diversity

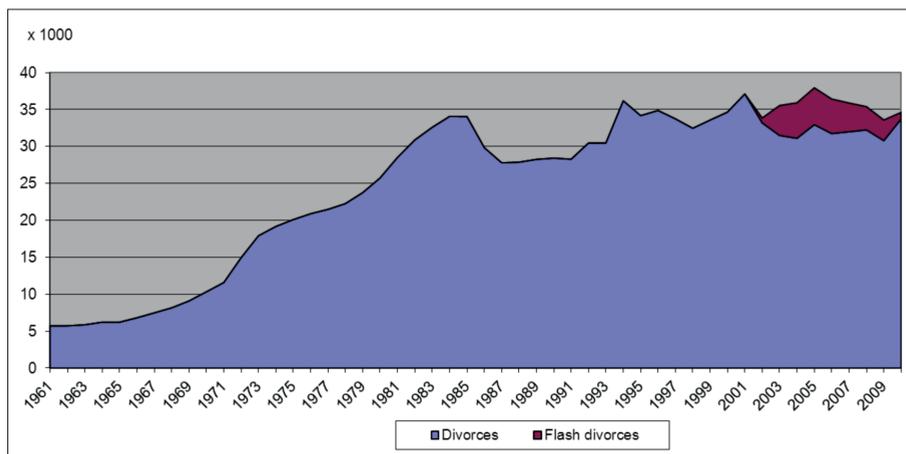
in meanings people attach to marriage, if they marry at all. Holland (2013) distinguishes four types of marriage, based on their timing with respect to parenthood: the *family forming marriage* which refers to marriage as a prerequisite for parenthood, the *legitimizing marriage* that takes place just after first parenthood, the *reinforcing marriage* that takes place some time after first parenthood, and the *capstone marriage* that takes place after family formation is completed. The first type has rapidly decreased in number, the second is now the most common, and the third and fourth are on the rise.

Figure 7 – *Percentage of children born to unmarried mothers in the Netherlands, 1960-2010*



## 2.4 Break-up of partnerships

The number of divorces has risen sharply in the Netherlands, especially since the 1970s. In 1970, the top year for marriages, there were only 10 thousand divorces. Five years later this had doubled to 20 thousand. A significant economic trigger in the increase of divorces was the introduction of an Income Support Law in the early 1970s that guaranteed women an income after divorce. It was accompanied by a legal change in 1971 that widened the accepted reasons for divorce. By 2001, the total number of divorces hit a record high of 37 thousand. In 2002, it dropped to 32 thousand (Figure 8). This decrease does not, however, accurately reflect the empirical reality of marriages ending in divorce. It mainly reflected the emergence of a new way to divorce, the flash divorce (see also Section 2.1). Flash divorces were not included in the official divorce statistics.

Figure 8 – *Divorces and flash divorces, the Netherlands, 1960-2010*

The total annual number of divorces, including flash divorces, has remained fairly stable since 2001 (Van Huis and Loozen, 2010). This apparent stability hides a rising risk of divorce for successive cohorts of married couples, however. The risk for couples who married in the late 1960s or early 1970s of getting divorced within 20 years was 1 in 6. For couples who married in the early 1990s this is expected to be over 1 in 4. The risk of divorce for men younger than 40 was lower in 2011 than around 2000, but for men in their forties and fifties the risk has risen sharply since 1991 (Latten and Stoeldraijer, 2012).

Various studies have shown that unmarried couples are far more likely to break up than married couples. The 2008 Fertility and Family Survey indicates a steady rise in the risk of breaking up an unmarried cohabitation. Around 1 in 7 unmarried partnerships that started in the second half of the 1980s broke up within four years. For unmarried partnerships started in the early 2000s this came close to 3 in 10 (Statistics Netherlands, 2009a).

## 2.5 *Living apart together*

A special type of informal relationship is living apart together (LAT). Here single people or single parents have an intimate relationship without moving in together. These relationships can partly be seen as a modern form of courtship or engagement for young people, preceding a co-residential partnership. But there are signs that LAT relationships are not just that. According to the 2003 Fertility and Family Survey, a considerable share of people with a steady partner does not want to live together. Most are over 40 and have previously lived with a partner. Just over 4 in 10 people in their forties and more than 7 in 10 people over 50 who

do not live with their partner at present do not want to do so in the future either. When asked why, more than half say that they want to keep their freedom. For 1 in 10, children from a previous relationship play a role. Some divorced people prefer not to start a family with a stepparent, but want a LAT relationship for the time their children live at home. The new tendency of co-parenting may also slow down the search for a new co-residential partner. Furthermore, nearly 10 percent do not want to live together anymore due to bad experiences in the past (Loozen and Steenhof, 2004). An analysis by De Jong Gierveld and Latten (2008) showed that the experience of divorce leads some older people to want a LAT rather than a co-residential partnership. Figures from the 2008 Fertility and Family Survey show that a third of all divorced women is in a LAT relationship or wants one. The presence of children, and their potential reaction to the new partners, may play a role in this choice. Over half of the people in a LAT relationship live together part of the time on a regular basis, often one or two days a week (Statistics Netherlands, 2009c).

### 3. THE LATEST TRENDS IN PARTNER RELATIONSHIPS: THE SECOND DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION NOW AND IN THE FUTURE

The latest trends in partner relationships in the Netherlands can be summarized as follows. The trends pointed out by Van de Kaa and Lesthaeghe are still happening in the Netherlands: marriage has continued to decrease, and unmarried cohabitation, divorce and living alone have continued to rise. These well-known changes indicating a de-institutionalization of family life have recently - mostly from around 2000 onwards - been accompanied by new trends indicating further de-institutionalization: the increasing number of couples for whom cohabitation is the long-term living arrangement, the rising number of unmarried couples splitting up, the rising number of children born to co-habiting couples, and the rise in LAT relationships. Other recent changes cannot easily be categorized under de-institutionalization because they in fact indicate the emergence of new institutions or the transformation of existing ones: the introduction of same-sex marriage, the introduction of registered partnership as a new marital status (temporarily accompanied by the flash divorce), and the rise in cohabitation contracts. We think these three trends indicate a diversification of partner relationships, or more precisely, of formal partnership arrangements. In distinguishing *diversification* from de-institutionalization we adopt a view that differs from Cherlin's (2004) view; he saw the introduction of same-sex marriage as one of the signs of the de-institutionalization of marriage.

The de-institutionalization trend can be seen as a continuation of an already existing tendency, and thus as fitting in with the Second Demographic Transition. The diversification of formal partnership arrangements was not foreseen by Lesthaeghe and Van de Kaa and is, at first sight, perhaps somewhat contradicto-

ry to the de-institutionalization trend. Yet it is completely in line with ongoing changes in the meaning of marriage: from an institution exclusively for one man and one woman, sanctioned by the church, and the only accepted way of starting a co-residential partnership and a family, marriage has become just one of the options to formalize a partnership either at its start or at a later stage, for two-sex and same-sex couples alike, and next to two other options: a registered partnership and a cohabitation contract. Couples not only have a choice *whether* to formalize their partnership but also *when* and *how* to do it. In all, we can argue that the latest trends in partner relationships in the Netherlands indicate a continuation of the Second Demographic Transition.

Despite the changes in partner relationships, it is also important to note what has not changed so far: the vast majority of the population prefers to be in a partner relationship and the vast majority of children are born within a co-residential partnership. Partnerships and parenthood are still strongly linked.

If we assume that secularization, individualization, and the pure relationship will continue to gain importance, we may expect single people to increasingly form partner relationships only when they see important gains in emotional value, and couples to dissolve their relationships as soon as the emotional value no longer meets their expectations. This could lead to a further postponement of partnership formation, a further increase in separation, and a concomitant further increase in living alone. It could also lead to an increase in highly individualized partnership forms, for example partnerships in which the couple shares a residence a few days a week and lives apart for the rest (so-called commuter partnerships; Van der Klis and Mulder, 2008).

Another possible new future trend might be the detachment of parenthood from co-residential partnerships or from partner relationships in general, not just as a hypothetical possibility or a rare phenomenon but as a realistic choice among diverse living arrangements: singles or couples in LAT relationships who become parents. Such single parents could be quite similar to divorced single parents, and LAT parents would resemble post-separation parents in a co-parenting arrangement. We believe it is quite likely that these new trends would actually be discernible in a not too distant future, not in the least because they would be in line with the ongoing changes in structure, culture and technology.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In this article we have sketched the latest trends in partner relationships in the Netherlands, and we have raised the question to what extent these trends can be seen as a continuation of the Second Demographic Transition. We also discussed what further changes in partner relationships we may expect based on these underlying trends.

We argue that the new trends in partner relationships can be summarized under two headings. The first is a further *de-institutionalization* of family life as shown by a decrease in marriage, an increase in unmarried cohabitation, changes in the timing and meanings of cohabitation and marriage, the emergence of cohabitation as a long-term arrangement and a common way of having and raising children, and the increase in living-apart-together relationships. The de-institutionalization can undoubtedly be seen as a sign that the Second Demographic Transition continues. The second is the *diversification* of arrangements in partner relationships as shown by the introduction of same-sex marriages and registered partnerships, and the increase in cohabitation contracts. Although this diversification was not foreseen by Lesthaeghe and Van de Kaa in their earlier work, we still think it can be seen as another sign of a continuation of the Second Demographic Transition, because it is associated with greater individual choice in the formalization of partnerships.

We also see a growing resemblance in partnership behavior between same-sex and two-sex couples. Both choose between marriage, cohabitation with or without formal registration, and a registered partnership. Some have children, of their own, from previous relationships or from donors.

We see no signs of an end to the underlying trends or the Second Demographic Transition itself. The economic independence of women is likely to grow. Secularization and individualization are still continuing. New fertility techniques are opening up new options, not only for infecund couples but also for same-sex couples and single women. And the internet facilitates finding co-parents or donors of sperm or egg cells. There is still room for a further decline in marriage, a further growth of parenthood among cohabiting couples, a further increase in separation and a further growth in living alone. These changes could be accompanied by an increasing disconnection of parenthood and partnership.

One thing we see no sign of as yet is a decline in the tendency to form partner relationships in life, or a decline in the importance people attach to partner relationships. But we cannot know for sure that such tendencies will never happen: they might be a future phase in individualization trends.

Our findings and arguments pertain to the Netherlands. Many of the trends in partner relationships we have signaled are not exclusively taking place in the Netherlands. The Netherlands can be seen as a forerunning country in some respects (for example in same-sex marriage) but not in all (child-bearing outside marriage, for example, is more common in the Nordic countries than in the Netherlands). Just as has happened for the trends reported by Van de Kaa and Lesthaeghe in their early work, some or all of them might spread over much or all of the industrialized world or further. This could imply the new manifestations of the Second Demographic Transition we believe we see could continue to spread.

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