

Stamm, Isabell; Bernhard, Fabian; Ahrens, Jan-Philipp; Istiqliler, Baris

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Marriage: an institution you cannot disparage? Evidence on the marriage norms of entrepreneurs

Isabell Stamm · Fabian Bernhard ·
Jan-Philipp Ahrens · Baris Istiqliler

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Abstract Entrepreneurship research increasingly acknowledges marriage as an important resource for long-term commitment to entrepreneurial ventures. At the same time, family scholars emphasize the deinstitutionalization of marriage in many countries, meaning that marriage as formalized and long-term companionship has lost importance. We contend that outdated ideological positions in entrepreneurship studies on marriage potentially obscure the more complex reality of the marriage norms of entrepreneurs. Using representative panel data from Germany, our study demonstrates that there is substantial heterogeneity among marriage norms internalized by entrepreneurs in various contexts. While entrepreneurs, on average, are less likely to internalize companion marriage norms than the general population, family entrepreneurs are significantly more likely to

internalize companion marriage norms. We provide new insight into the link between marriage norms and entrepreneurship and open promising new areas of inquiry with regard to social norms and entrepreneurial activity.

Plain English Summary Entrepreneurs and family entrepreneurs embrace different marriage norms. Entrepreneurs are less inclined to embrace traditional companion marriage norms compared to the general population, while family entrepreneurs tend to be more traditional. Previous research on entrepreneurship suggests that marriage can be beneficial for business development, providing a long-term perspective. However, marriage norms have changed significantly in Western countries and now challenge traditional views. This study examines marriage norms among entrepreneurs using representative panel data from Germany. The results highlight the need to update assumptions about marriage in entrepreneurship research. Scholars should view marriage not as a binary status but as dynamic sets of norms that vary among entrepreneurs and family entrepreneurs. Future entrepreneurial theory should consider social norms at the crossroads of institutional changes, entrepreneurial contexts, and internalized norms.

I. Stamm (✉)
Max-Planck-Institute for the Study of Societies, Paulstr. 3,
50676 Cologne, Germany
e-mail: ist@mpifg.de

F. Bernhard
EDHEC Business School, 18, Rue du 4 Septembre,
75002 Paris, France
e-mail: fabian.bernhard@edhec.edu

J.-P. Ahrens · B. Istiqliler
Department of Business Studies, University of Mannheim,
Mannheim, Germany
e-mail: jahrens@staff.mail.uni-mannheim.de

B. Istiqliler
e-mail: baris.istiqliler@staff.uni-mannheim.de

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1 Introduction

Entrepreneurship research has acknowledged marriage, a legalized form of a private relationship, as an influential factor in entrepreneurial activity. Marriage has been shown to be a source of financial capital, labor, and emotional support that can be utilized to gain a competitive advantage for a business (e.g., Ruef et al., 2003; Belenzon et al., 2016; Bird & Zellweger, 2018). In these approaches, marriage is often equated with “companion marriage,” a specific set of marriage norms that suggest a lifelong and monogamous commitment between a wife and a husband who pool resources, reproduce, and socialize children (Cherlin, 2004). This is often seen as a “traditional” form of marriage in many Western countries. Understood in this way, marriage typically translates to high levels of trust, commitment, and identification (Belenzon et al., 2016), which are accompanied by increased involvement and dedication to the business (Danes et al., 2010; Matzek et al., 2010; Miller et al., 2011; Randerson et al., 2016, 2020). Being married can yield higher financial performance (Belenzon et al., 2016) and growth (Bird & Zellweger, 2018), produce more innovations, reduce employee turnover, and improve labor productivity (Amore et al., 2017). On the downside, marriage has been associated with conservatism in entrepreneurial practices, such as risk avoidance, overly cautious cash management, and lower rates of investment (Gallo et al., 2004; Miller et al., 2013).

Marriage as an institution, however, has undergone substantial change over the past decades. This requires a rethinking of the links between companion marriage and entrepreneurial activity. For the USA, Canada, and large parts of Europe, family scholars demonstrate an increase in the age of first marriage, a stark increase in cohabitation (i.e., couples living together without being formally married), and an increase in childbirth outside of marriage (Burkart, 2018; Lück et al., 2021; Sassler & Lichter, 2020; Smock & Schwartz, 2020). Indeed, Frank Sinatra’s famous song that claims that you cannot disparage the institution of marriage has become a relic of the 1950s. Instead, family scholars observe a deinstitutionalization of marriage, suggesting that companion

marriage as a long-term form of private relationship has lost its appeal in an individualized society (Cherlin, 2004; Robbins et al., 2022).

Entrepreneurship and family business scholars have repeatedly called for the need to embrace the plurality of family life to overcome the assumptions of the past when considering the intertwining of marriage and entrepreneurship (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003; Jaskiewicz & Dyer, 2017; Randerson et al., 2016, 2020). Despite this growing awareness of the need to revisit the link between marriage and entrepreneurship, scholars struggle to conceptually integrate the deinstitutionalization of marriage. We argue that one reason for this is that marriage is treated solely as a relationship status within an entrepreneurial network rather than as a varying bundle of social norms (Bird & Wennberg, 2016; Belenzon et al., 2016; Amore et al., 2017; Bird & Zellweger, 2018). The deinstitutionalization of marriage implies that companion marriage is a specific set of marriage norms that refers to social rules regarding when one should get married and how marital partners should behave (Berger & Kellner, 1964; Robbins et al., 2022). This set of norms has not only lost its institutional character but has also become more plural. In this article, we argue that any attempt to capture the relationship between marriage and entrepreneurial activity will thus have to integrate marriage norms in addition to marriage status. Moreover, we show that these norms vary across entrepreneurial contexts.

To theorize accordingly, we turn to Granovetter’s, (1985, 1995, 2017) original notion of the embeddedness of entrepreneurial activity, which views social norms as a multilevel concept that links changing institutions on the macrolevel, entrepreneurial networks on the mesolevel, and internalized norms of entrepreneurial individuals on the microlevel (see also Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993; Powell et al., 1991). Following Granovetter, (2017), we hypothesize that individuals from different entrepreneurial contexts, such as entrepreneurs and family entrepreneurs, may embrace the deinstitutionalization of marriage heterogeneously. Specifically, we hypothesize and empirically show that entrepreneurs are less inclined to emphasize companion marriage norms, while family entrepreneurs are more traditional and more likely to emphasize companion marriage norms.

To test our hypotheses, we utilize the German Pairfam Panel (pairfam), a contemporary panel

dataset on spousal and family relationships that is representative of the entire population in Germany. This dataset uniquely allows us to identify entrepreneurs and provides information about the intimate relationships of the population that is not found in other entrepreneurship-related panels (such as the Panel Study of Entrepreneurial Development). Our findings confirm that there is substantial heterogeneity among different types of entrepreneurship with regard to marriage norms. While entrepreneurs, in general, are less traditional than the non-entrepreneurial general population in Germany, our study shows that family entrepreneurs, especially when they are female or work with their spouse, embrace companion marriage norms.

Our research offers novel insights in three ways. First, we show that to fully capture today's increasingly multifaceted realities regarding relationships and their interplay with entrepreneurial contexts, it is necessary to go beyond stereotypical assumptions about marriage. For researchers who want to understand the link between marriage and entrepreneurial activity, it is helpful to integrate underlying marriage norms in their analysis because these norms exhibit remarkable heterogeneity across entrepreneurial contexts. We find that traditional companion marriage norms remain important in a very specific subgroup of the general population, namely, those who engage in entrepreneurial activity with family members. These findings contribute to research on the link between marriage and entrepreneurial activity by stressing the plurality of marriage norms among different entrepreneurs. Second, our study enriches the theoretical debate on relational embeddedness by pointing to the need to understand marriage norms as a conceptual link between institutional-level change and entrepreneurial activity. Third, our findings support the deinstitutionalization thesis with respect to entrepreneurs but counter it with regard to family entrepreneurs, a small but economically important part of the population. Overall, we underline the need to move from understanding marriage as a binary relationship status to consider varying marriage norms when studying entrepreneurship. The integration of norms opens promising new areas of inquiry regarding the link between marriage and entrepreneurship in society.

2 Deinstitutionalization of marriage and marriage norms of entrepreneurs

2.1 Deinstitutionalization of marriage

The deinstitutionalization of marriage thesis, first proposed by Cherlin, (2004, 2020), claims that marriage as an institution has undergone a weakening or, put differently, that the norm that one should get married and stay married has lost its binding force (for a critical discussion, see, for example, Lauer & Yodanis, 2010). Cherlin, (2004) first observes an institutionalization of marriage in the first half of the twentieth century. During this institutionalization, marriage as a legally regulated form of personal relationship was coupled with a specific set of marriage norms and expectations, which we refer to as companion marriage. During the institutionalization of companion marriage, marriage shifted from its earlier understanding as an alliance between kinship networks toward life-long companionship in different-sex couples (Burgess & Locke, 1945). Companion marriage norms include the expectation of getting married when a couple permanently lives together or has children and the expectation to stay married for life. Companion marriage strongly regulated spousal behavior and became the only socially acceptable way to have a sexual relationship and to raise children in the USA as well as in Canada and Europe (Cherlin, 2004).

Cherlin observes a second transition that started in the 1970s and accelerated in the 1990s, which he calls the deinstitutionalization of marriage. During the second transition, marriage lost its normative power to regulate all spousal relationships. Marriage is no longer tied to heterosexual partners, cohabitation, or child-bearing; instead, it has become one of many forms of legitimate spousal relationships. Cherlin, (2004) argues further that marriage norms have changed. The reasons to get married and stay married now symbolize an important step in the personal development of spouses and their public commitment to one another (Bulcroft et al., 2000). Hence, the deinstitutionalization of marriage shifts toward being a capstone in individualized life courses, which has increased the symbolic importance of marriage (Cherlin, 2004, 2020; Sprey, 2009). The deinstitutionalization of marriage thesis thus offers an explanation for the increase in alternative forms of living together

or apart that exist side by side. It also explains why individuals still choose to get married.

However, there is growing evidence that the deinstitutionalization of marriage does not apply to all subgroups in the same way. Scholars have pointed to gender, race, education, and profession as typical demarcation lines (e.g., Cherlin, 2020; Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Gibson-Davis, 2009; Gibson-Davis et al., 2018; Lundberg et al., 2016; Wilson, 2009). In their experimental study, Robbins et al., (2022) systematically tested differences in marriage norms. While they showed strong overall support for the deinstitutionalization of marriage, they found similar marriage norms across gender, racial, and class lines. They showed that the norm of getting married now applies to couples who have achieved certain milestones, such as completing their education, obtaining a high income, or expecting children. The effects of education and income on the norm to marry can be observed across class boundaries. This is in line with earlier research that showed that couples believe they should have the necessary financial contributions or assets to afford capstone events such as getting married or buying a home (e.g., Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Gibson-Davis, 2009; Gibson-Davis et al., 2018; Ishizuka, 2018; Smock et al., 2005).

2.2 Institutional embeddedness and internalized norms

Entrepreneurship and family business scholars have long realized the need to embrace the plurality of family life to overcome the assumptions of the past when considering the intertwining of marriage and entrepreneurship (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003; Jaskiewicz & Dyer, 2017; Randerson et al., 2020). Several researchers advocate for greater conceptual precision and improved measurement methods (Danes, 2011, 2013; Danes & Zachary, 2021). It is no longer sufficient to treat marriage as a historical and univocal concept measured by a “dummy” variable in quantitative studies; rather, we must focus on the dynamic and plural social norms that entrepreneurs apply toward marriage in different entrepreneurial contexts. Aldrich et al., (2021) warn entrepreneurship scholars not to miss “*the opportunity to investigate novel and interesting empirical phenomena, to formulate critical research questions, and to generate new and valuable insights, if they do not fully take into account*

these major socio-historical changes and their implications” (p. 2).

Despite this growing awareness of the need to revisit the link between marriage and entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship scholars struggle to conceptually integrate the deinstitutionalization of marriage. One reason may be that marriage is mainly considered a relationship status rather than a specific set of marriage norms (Bird & Wennberg, 2016; Belenzon et al., 2016; Amore et al., 2017; Bird & Zellweger, 2018).

Social norms are generally included in the widely used relational embeddedness approach (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998), which has been applied in various studies on entrepreneurship (Bird & Zellweger, 2018; Mawdsley & Somaya, 2021; Moran, 2005; Song et al., 2020; Wigren-Kristoferson et al., 2022). In their seminal piece, Nahapiet & Ghoshal, (1998) suggest that all entrepreneurial activity is embedded in a network of dyadic social relationships. This network serves as a basis to extract capital for entrepreneurial ventures. What matters is not only who one knows (structural dimension) but also what quality these relationships are (relational dimension) and how they are cognitively framed (cognitive dimension). These authors further elaborate that the relational dimension of embeddedness rests upon a history of interactions that two people have developed and that vary in terms of interpersonal trust, obligation, identification, and social norms. Theoretically, the embeddedness concept thus allows for each dyadic relationship to embrace different marriage norms.

Multiple studies drawing from an embeddedness perspective show the value of distinguishing different relational configurations in which entrepreneurial activity is embedded (Bird & Zellweger, 2018). This is particularly true for the distinction between family and nonfamily entrepreneurship (Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2011). These two forms differ in the reliance of entrepreneurial activity on strong-tie relationships (Ahrens et al., 2019; Long & Mathews, 2011; Stamm, 2021). However, in most empirical applications of the embeddedness concept, marriage is treated as a relationship status within the entrepreneurial network and is most often associated with family entrepreneurship (Song et al., 2020; Arregle et al., 2015; Meuleman et al., 2017). In the application of the embeddedness

concept, the role of social norms, that is, the shared conceptions of what is desirable, right, and good, is lost: it is subsumed in the category of obligations (Bird & Zellweger, 2018) or completely neglected (Moran, 2005).

The conceptual reduction of norms to the relational dimension of embeddedness is problematic, as is their neglect in empirical studies given that this neglect reduces relational configurations solely to heterogeneous entrepreneurial networks. This reduction detaches social norms from institutional change as well as from the individual embrace of social norms. Furthermore, it does not consider that within entrepreneurial networks, particular social norms may emerge and reproduce. In fact, social interactions in entrepreneurial networks themselves may create particular social spaces in which some social norms are more prevalent than others.

Interestingly, these dynamic functions of social norms are manifest in Granovetter's original work on embeddedness, which Nahapiet & Ghoshal, (1998) built on. However, they seem to have been lost in application. Norms, to Granovetter, are *"principles people acknowledge, and sometimes follow, about the proper, appropriate, or 'moral' way to conduct themselves, and these are socially shared and enforced informally by others"* (Granovetter, 2017). For Granovetter, social norms operate on three levels: they can be taken-for-granted expectations within a society or community (macrolevel), they can be specific to a particular network (mesolevel), or they can be internalized by individuals guiding their behaviors (microlevel) (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Social norms are thus not restricted to relationships in networks but "travel" across the levels of macrolevel institutions, mesolevel networks, and microlevel dyadic relationships. Given their traveling function, social norms create links between these levels. They can translate institutions into entrepreneurial networks, or network-specific norms can be internalized.

Granovetter, (2017) further explains that to understand the force of social norms within varying entrepreneurial networks, two things are essential: emotions, such as the shame of breaking with a social norm, and the tightness of the social network, or how much we care about other people judging our breaking of a norm. This also means that the enforcement

of social norms is more effective in a close-knit network, such as in family entrepreneurship.

2.3 Entrepreneurs and companion marriage norms

We start by embracing the individualization thread that runs through conjecture about the deinstitutionalization of marriage (Cherlin, 2004, 2020). We argue that entrepreneurs form a subgroup that pioneers an autonomous and individualized form of work as well as marriage norms. The concept of individualization indicates that the accelerating pace of social change and increased uncertainty compel individuals to continuously make crucial decisions throughout their lives and bear sole responsibility for the outcomes of those decisions (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991). Consequently, individualization is a paradoxical phenomenon: on the one hand, it grants individuals the freedom to autonomously shape their lives, while on the other hand, it compels them to make choices about their employment and personal relationships. Although individualization is regarded as a comprehensive concept, the domains of work and family are often examined separately despite striking similarities.

The professional world has become less dependable, more flexible, and often precarious (Castel, 2003; Castells, 2009). With these changes, individuals achieve more freedom and autonomy at work but are also forced to seize opportunities and to carry risks independently (Morgan & Pulignano, 2020; Srnicek, 2017). Similarly, in the realm of family and marriage, according to Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, (1990), orderly, predictable sequences of behavior are replaced by the *"normal chaos of love."* Individuals no longer comply with companion marriage norms but view marriage as a capstone in individualized life courses (Beck-Gernsheim, 1998; Cherlin, 2020; Giddens, 1991).

In their pursuit of freedom and lone responsibility, entrepreneurs become the pioneers of individualized work (Castells, 2009) and forerunners of an entrepreneurial society (Audretsch, 2007). As such, founding and owning a business can be viewed as a series of individual choices to navigate an uncertain professional world. Following the holistic idea of individualization (Castells, 2009; Giddens, 1991), this pioneering position of entrepreneurs in terms of individualized work is likely to be reflected in other

areas of their lives, particularly their private relationships (Stamm, 2016; Stamm et al., 2022). We suggest that entrepreneurs can be seen as a subgroup in the general population that is particularly fit for individualized work as well as individualized marriage norms. We thus propose the following:

H1: Entrepreneurs are less likely to embrace companion marriage norms than the rest of the general population (individualization effect).

We now turn to a specific subgroup of entrepreneurs—specifically, those engaged in business ventures with other family members, i.e., *family entrepreneurs*. It is important to note that virtually, all entrepreneurs are embedded in family relationships. However, entrepreneurs only become family entrepreneurs when they leverage regular interactions with spouses or family members for their entrepreneurial activity, i.e., they integrate them into their business. Family entrepreneurs turn to trusted relationships (e.g., spouses, siblings, children) to find allies for their ventures (Ruef et al., 2003). These family entrepreneurs represent the most prevalent type of business in many Western countries (Faccio & Lang, 2002; Gottschalk & Lubczyk, 2019; La Porta et al., 1999). As a consequence of utilizing family relations in their entrepreneurial activity, the lives of these family members are strongly interlinked as their entrepreneurial careers and their generation of income and wealth depend on the performance of the other family members (Stamm, 2016). These family members form a close-knit network that is likely to produce and reproduce specific social norms (Granovetter, 2017).

Even in an individualized society, the social norms that govern companion marriage may still be important to some individuals because they ensure enforceable trust (Cherlin, 2020). In families, individuals can trust that they will receive a return on investments they have made from other family members (most often in symbolic forms). Trust exists in these situations precisely because it is enforceable within the close-knit network (Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993). Enforceable trust among families relies on the idea of a long-term, even lifelong, commitment to reciprocal relationships. With regard to marriage, Cherlin explains, “*Marriage, more so than cohabitation, lowers the risk that one’s partner will renege on agreements that have been made. [...] It allows individuals*

to invest in the partnership with less fear of abandonment” (Cherlin, 2004: 854–855). Cherlin refers to buying a house or the decision of one spouse to stay home to care for the children while the other spouse works as examples. In these cases, the norm of companion marriage may be particularly attractive because the idea of lifelong companionship ensures enforceable trust (Cherlin, 2020). Empirical studies confirm that a joint financial commitment, such as buying a house, is an important explanatory variable to understand the marriage norms that individuals adopt (Billari & Liefbroer, 2016; Fulda, 2018).

Consistent with this perspective, we propose that when family members collaborate in entrepreneurial endeavors, they anticipate a sense of trust that can be enforced within the family (Granovetter, 2017). We thus propose the following:

H2: Family entrepreneurs are more likely to embrace companion marriage norms than non-family entrepreneurs (enforceable-trust effect).

After presenting a case for the significance of enforceable trust within the family entrepreneurship context, we need to qualify this argument in two ways. First, enforceable trust is particularly important with regard to spousal relationships (Cherlin, 2004) and less so for sibling or parent–child relationships because spousal relationships are perceived to be more fragile than other types of family relationships (Bird & Zellweger, 2018). We can assume that enforceable trust becomes even more important when spouses also become business partners in the sense of co-owning a business or working in one’s partner’s business. The intertwining of private relationships with business venturing can threaten the partners’ careers, income, and wealth generation and thus add layers of complexity and dependencies to the relationship.

A second argument for the desire for enforceable trust may be rooted in the cultural context of gender roles, making it particularly important to women working in family business settings. Research on family relations indicates that women are more likely to seek economic prospects with marriage than men are (e.g., Flouri & Buchanan, 2001; Kuo & Raley, 2014; Sweeney, 2002). This stream of research suggests that when faced with high investment decisions such as buying a home or reducing work hours to care for children, women tend to embrace companion marriage more often. In line with these findings, gender

may be a decisive factor that influences the role of entrepreneurship in marriage norms. In other words, since women, due to various cultural and contextual factors, depend on enforceable trust more than men do, we hypothesize that gender takes on a moderating effect in the relationship between family entrepreneurship and companion marriage norms. We thus propose the following:

H3: Family entrepreneurs who work with their spouses are more likely to embrace companion marriage norms than other entrepreneurs (co-working effect).

H4: The relationship between family entrepreneurs and companion marriage norms (H2) is stronger for female family entrepreneurs than for male family entrepreneurs (gender effect).

3 Data and methods

3.1 Sample

To test our hypotheses, we leveraged the “Panel Analysis of Intimate Relationships and Family Dynamics” (pairfam) dataset, an annual survey representative of all people living in private households in Germany who were born within one of four birth cohorts: 1971–1973, 1981–1983, 1991–1993, and 2001–2003 (Huinink et al., 2011). Because pairfam contains the responses of randomly selected individuals from all over Germany who were surveyed in multiple waves, it offers a unique opportunity to analyze the development of spousal relationships at different life stages and different occupational roles, including those involved in entrepreneurship. Our analysis draws from the pairfam waves 4 through 10 (between 2011 and 2017) because data related to our research question can be found in these waves.

3.2 Dependent variable: companion marriage norms

We used a three-item scale from the pairfam questionnaire to operationalize our dependent variable, social norms related to *companion marriage*. All items were compiled using a 5-point Likert scale to rate respondents’

agreement (complete disagreement = 1; complete agreement = 5) with the following three statements: (1) “you should get married if you permanently live with your partner”; (2) “couples should marry at the latest after a child is born”; and (3) “marriage is a lifelong union that should not be broken.” Cronbach’s alpha was 0.73. A satisfactory value for polychoric alpha (0.75) along with a mean interitem correlation (0.47) between 0.15 and 0.50 and individual interitem correlations at moderate levels (0.38 to 0.55) indicate that our items form a reliable scale with convergent validity (Clark & Watson, 2016) and that it is appropriate to average these items into a single scale (Kline, 2015).

3.3 Independent variables

Entrepreneur To construct the independent variable of entrepreneur as our group of interest, we coded a binary indicator variable (0/1) where one indicated a respondent who was currently following an entrepreneurial career as self-employed, as a manager working in his or her own business (owner-manager), or in a business owned by his or her family.

Family entrepreneur The independent variable of family entrepreneur, which is a subsample of entrepreneurs, identifies entrepreneurs in a context where multiple family members jointly pursue an entrepreneurial activity. To construct this variable, we coded a binary indicator variable (0/1) equal to one when a respondent was currently a manager in his or her family’s business or an owner manager employing a family member. Conversely, we specified a nonfamily entrepreneur (*family entrepreneur* = 0) when an entrepreneurial activity was pursued without family involvement in ownership, management, or other forms of employment. This categorization mirrors the typical distinction between nonfamily and family entrepreneurs (Miller et al., 2011).

Co-working spouse This variable indicates a subsample of *family entrepreneurs* in which entrepreneurs employ their spouse in their business or share business ownership with their spouses.

3.4 Control variables

In our models, we statistically controlled for factors that previous research has found to affect marriage norms (Becker, 2005). Based on the extant literature, we included demographic factors such as age, gender, education, and household income, which are all commonly described as influencing marriage norms (Cherlin, 2004, 2020; Flouri & Buchanan, 2001; Gibson-Davis et al., 2005; Robbins et al., 2022; Willoughby, 2010). In addition, we controlled for religiosity because marriage is connected to religious beliefs in most cultures (Flouri & Buchanan, 2001). We did so by including respondents' accounts of how often they went to their place of worship (e.g., church, mosque, and synagogue) as a proxy indicating the degree of their practiced religiosity. Furthermore, the country and culture in which one grows up are associated with marriage norms (e.g., Flouri & Buchanan, 2001). While our sample was collected in Germany, some participants might have grown up in a different culture and immigrated to Germany later in their lives. To offset such cultural effects on marriage norms, we controlled for participants' migration status (1st-generation migrant) and assumed a declining influence of the foreign culture in the later generation (2nd-generation migrant). Past research has shown that respondents' current and past relationships and partner(s) might influence their views and norms toward marriage (Willoughby et al., 2015). We thus included respondents' relationship information, that is, whether they were currently involved with a spouse, formal marital status, number of past spouses, gender of the spouse, revealed homosexuality, education of the spouse, and number of children. The variable booklet (Table 3 in the Appendix) details each variable's technical coding.

3.5 Empirical strategy

We used regression analyses to test our results. Our regressions with the full sample included 14,820 observations of 6397 individuals, which we used to test Hypothesis 1. To test Hypotheses 2 and 3, this sample was reduced to the subsample of entrepreneurs to investigate the impact of different entrepreneurial contexts (nonfamily and family entrepreneurs) on marriage norms. The subsample consisted of 903 observations pertaining to 474 individuals.

To analyze our panel dataset, we employed random-effects estimators using robust standard errors to avoid heteroskedastic results and to allow for inferences in case of an unchanged status in the variable of interest (Huber, 1967; White, 1980). Since family entrepreneurs and co-working spouses are stable conditions for virtually all individuals in the sample, this approach was suitable.¹

4 Results

In Table 1, we present the descriptive statistics along with the pairwise correlations. Among our respondents, 10.1% are identified as entrepreneurs. This proportion aligns with the average percentage of entrepreneurs in Germany between 2011 and 2017, which was reported to be 10.1% according to the Germany Federal Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales—BMAS), (2022), indicating that our sample was representative. Furthermore, among the entrepreneurs in our sample, 17% reported being family entrepreneurs, representing 1.7% of the entire sample. Table 2 shows the results of our regression analyses with robust standard errors. We display six models. Models 1 and 3 show the regression models only with control variables for the full sample and the subsample of entrepreneurs, respectively. Models 2, 4, 5, and 6 test our four hypotheses.

Regression Models 1 and 2 show that norms related to companion marriage have a significantly positive relationship with older age, male gender, migration background, religiosity, and being legally married in our complete sample. These norms have a significantly negative association with level of education (that of both the respondent and the spouse; detailed education indicators are condensed in Table 2 for parsimony), being divorced, having multiple spouses in the present and the past, and homosexuality. We also observe that the number of children is negatively associated with companion marriage. Some of these

¹ Using another panel estimator (such as fixed-effects or first differenced estimation) to capture these negligible number of cases where changes occurred would yield no meaningful results due to the insufficient *within variance* in our sample.

Table 1 Summary statistics and pairwise correlations

Nr.	Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Companion marriage	2.82	1.09	1	5	1.00						
2	Business owner	0.10	0.30	0	1	-0.04	1.00					
3	Family business setting	0.02	0.13	0	1	0.03	0.39	1.00				
4	Co-working spouse setting	0.01	0.11	0	1	0.04	0.33	0.85	1.00			
5	Male	0.52	0.50	0	1	0.20	0.05	0.06	0.04	1.00		
6	Age	33.53	8.06	18	46	-0.09	0.15	0.06	0.06	-0.05	1.00	
7	Educ.: inadequately completed	0.01	0.09	0	1	0.04	-0.01	0.01	-0.01	0.02	-0.01	1.00
8	Educ.: general elementary education	0.03	0.16	0	1	0.06	-0.03	0.01	0.01	-0.02	-0.01	-0.02
9	Educ.: basic vocational qualification	0.11	0.32	0	1	0.06	-0.05	-0.01	0.00	0.09	0.03	-0.03
10	Educ.: intermediate vocational qualification	0.34	0.47	0	1	0.01	-0.05	0.00	-0.01	-0.02	0.19	-0.07
11	Educ.: intermediate general qualification	0.02	0.15	0	1	-0.02	0.01	0.00	0.01	-0.01	0.00	-0.01
12	Educ.: general maturity certificate	0.03	0.16	0	1	-0.02	0.00	0.00	-0.01	0.02	-0.07	-0.02
13	Educ.: vocational maturity certificate	0.14	0.34	0	1	-0.03	0.04	0.04	0.04	-0.05	0.03	-0.04
14	Educ.: lower tertiary education	0.08	0.27	0	1	-0.01	0.03	-0.01	0.00	0.00	0.09	-0.03
15	Educ.: higher tertiary education	0.13	0.34	0	1	-0.07	0.14	0.02	0.02	0.00	0.14	-0.04
16	Household income	7.34	0.51	4	10.82	0.01	0.06	0.06	0.05	0.08	0.14	-0.06
17	1st generation migrant	0.09	0.29	0	1	0.12	0.03	0.01	0.01	-0.05	0.07	0.12
18	2nd generation migrant	0.09	0.28	0	1	0.07	0.01	0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.05	0.00
19	Religiosity: rarely	0.32	0.47	0	1	0.00	-0.02	0.03	0.02	-0.01	-0.03	-0.03
20	Religiosity: several times a year	0.15	0.35	0	1	0.04	0.04	0.02	0.02	-0.06	0.05	0.00
21	Religiosity: one-three times a month	0.05	0.22	0	1	0.09	0.02	0.02	0.01	-0.02	0.09	0.04
22	Religiosity: once a week	0.03	0.17	0	1	0.14	0.03	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	0.05	-0.02
23	Religiosity: more than once a week	0.01	0.10	0	1	0.12	0.02	0.00	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.01
24	Married	0.43	0.49	0	1	0.17	0.06	0.05	0.06	-0.06	0.48	0.00
25	Divorced	0.08	0.27	0	1	-0.16	0.03	0.01	0.00	-0.10	0.22	0.01
26	Number of kids	1.01	1.15	0	8	-0.01	0.11	0.06	0.07	-0.09	0.57	0.01
27	Number of previous spouses	0.24	0.43	0	1	-0.09	-0.06	-0.05	-0.05	0.09	-0.23	0.02
28	No current spouse	1.62	1.54	0	13	-0.16	0.07	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.01	-0.01
29	Male current spouse	0.38	0.49	0	1	-0.14	-0.02	-0.03	-0.02	-0.80	0.10	-0.03
30	Revealed homosexuality	0.01	0.10	0	1	-0.05	0.00	0.01	0.02	0.01	-0.01	-0.01
31	Educ. (spouse): inadequately completed	0.01	0.10	0	1	0.02	0.00	0.02	0.03	-0.01	0.01	0.05
32	Educ. (spouse): general elementary education	0.02	0.15	0	1	0.05	-0.03	-0.02	-0.02	0.01	0.02	0.01
33	Educ. (spouse): basic vocational qualification	0.08	0.27	0	1	0.01	-0.05	-0.02	-0.01	-0.13	0.07	-0.01
34	Educ. (spouse): intermediate vocational qual.	0.25	0.43	0	1	0.03	-0.02	0.02	0.02	-0.04	0.13	0.00
35	Educ. (spouse): intermediate general qual.	0.02	0.14	0	1	0.02	-0.02	0.00	-0.01	0.00	-0.02	0.00
36	Educ. (spouse): general maturity certificate	0.02	0.15	0	1	0.02	0.03	0.00	0.00	0.01	-0.02	-0.01
37	Educ. (spouse): vocational maturity cert.	0.12	0.32	0	1	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.03	0.08	-0.03
38	Educ. (spouse): lower tertiary education	0.06	0.24	0	1	0.00	0.04	0.03	0.04	-0.05	0.12	0.00
39	Educ. (spouse): higher tertiary education	0.11	0.32	0	1	-0.03	0.13	0.03	0.03	-0.01	0.12	0.00

Table 1 (continued)

Nr.	Variable	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
8	Educ.: general elementary education	1.00										
9	Educ.: basic vocational qualification	-0.06	1.00									
10	Educ.: intermediate vocational qualification	-0.12	-0.25	1.00								
11	Educ.: intermediate general qualification	-0.03	-0.06	-0.11	1.00							
12	Educ.: general maturity certificate	-0.03	-0.06	-0.12	-0.03	1.00						
13	Educ.: vocational maturity certificate	-0.07	-0.14	-0.29	-0.06	-0.06	1.00					
14	Educ.: lower tertiary education	-0.05	-0.11	-0.21	-0.05	-0.05	-0.12	1.00				
15	Educ.: higher tertiary education	-0.07	-0.14	-0.28	-0.06	-0.06	-0.15	-0.12	1.00			
16	Household income	-0.10	-0.08	-0.04	-0.07	-0.01	0.08	0.14	0.22	1.00		
17	1st generation migrant	0.12	0.02	-0.08	0.04	0.03	-0.04	0.01	0.05	-0.06	1.00	
18	2nd generation migrant	0.05	0.01	-0.06	0.02	0.04	-0.02	0.00	0.00	-0.02	-0.10	1.00
19	Religiosity: rarely	0.00	0.01	-0.01	-0.02	-0.02	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.07	-0.01	-0.02
20	Religiosity: several times a year	-0.02	-0.02	-0.03	-0.01	0.01	-0.01	0.03	0.05	0.04	0.01	0.02
21	Religiosity: one-three times a month	0.00	0.01	-0.03	0.02	-0.01	0.00	0.01	0.04	0.02	0.06	0.03
22	Religiosity: once a week	0.03	0.04	-0.03	0.03	-0.01	-0.01	0.00	0.01	-0.01	0.11	0.03
23	Religiosity: more than once a week	0.00	0.00	-0.02	-0.02	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.05	-0.02	0.05	0.06
24	Married	0.01	-0.01	0.14	-0.02	-0.06	-0.01	0.07	0.08	0.13	0.12	-0.01
25	Divorced	0.02	0.03	0.05	0.08	-0.02	-0.02	0.00	-0.02	-0.09	0.04	-0.01
26	Number of kids	0.04	0.05	0.14	0.03	-0.06	-0.04	0.04	0.03	-0.09	0.09	-0.04
27	Number of previous spouses	-0.01	0.04	-0.09	0.04	0.05	0.00	-0.05	-0.07	-0.14	-0.03	0.03
28	No current spouse	-0.04	-0.01	-0.07	-0.01	-0.01	0.05	0.05	0.06	0.07	-0.12	0.03
29	Male current spouse	0.03	-0.09	0.06	0.00	-0.04	0.05	0.00	0.01	0.02	0.05	-0.02
30	Revealed homosexuality	0.00	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02	0.01	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.01	-0.03	0.01
31	Educ. (spouse): inadequately completed	0.06	0.03	0.00	-0.01	-0.01	0.00	-0.03	-0.04	-0.06	0.04	0.00
32	Educ. (spouse): general elementary education	0.16	0.08	-0.01	0.02	-0.02	-0.04	-0.03	-0.04	-0.07	0.08	0.02
33	Educ. (spouse): basic vocational qualification	0.05	0.17	0.03	0.02	-0.04	-0.04	-0.04	-0.09	-0.06	0.05	0.00
34	Educ. (spouse): intermediate vocational qual.	-0.02	-0.01	0.26	-0.04	-0.05	-0.03	-0.04	-0.12	0.01	-0.04	-0.03
35	Educ. (spouse): intermediate general qual.	0.03	-0.01	-0.01	0.08	0.00	-0.02	0.01	-0.03	-0.05	0.05	0.03
36	Educ. (spouse): general maturity certificate	0.02	-0.01	-0.06	0.00	0.07	0.01	-0.01	0.04	0.00	0.02	0.01
37	Educ. (spouse): vocational maturity cert.	-0.02	-0.05	0.02	0.01	-0.01	0.05	0.05	0.01	0.08	-0.03	-0.03
38	Educ. (spouse): lower tertiary education	-0.04	-0.07	-0.02	-0.02	-0.01	0.06	0.11	0.06	0.11	0.01	-0.02
39	Educ. (spouse): higher tertiary education	-0.05	-0.09	-0.17	-0.04	0.02	0.02	0.08	0.34	0.20	0.03	0.00

Table 1 (continued)

Nr.	Variable	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
19	Religiosity: rarely	1.00										
20	Religiosity: several times a year	-0.29	1.00									
21	Religiosity: one-three times a month	-0.16	-0.10	1.00								
22	Religiosity: once a week	-0.12	-0.07	-0.04	1.00							
23	Religiosity: more than once a week	-0.07	-0.04	-0.02	-0.02	1.00						
24	Married	0.00	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.04	1.00					
25	Divorced	-0.02	-0.02	-0.03	-0.01	-0.01	-0.25	1.00				
26	Number of kids	-0.04	0.07	0.09	0.09	0.03	0.54	0.17	1.00			
27	Number of previous spouses	-0.01	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03	0.00	-0.49	0.13	-0.32	1.00		
28	No current spouse	-0.01	-0.03	-0.06	-0.05	-0.06	-0.25	0.20	-0.10	0.15	1.00	
29	Male current spouse	0.00	0.04	0.04	0.02	-0.03	0.23	-0.02	0.16	-0.45	-0.09	1.00
30	Revealed homosexuality	-0.01	0.01	-0.01	-0.02	0.02	-0.04	0.01	-0.08	0.00	0.00	0.03
31	Educ. (spouse): inadequately completed	-0.01	0.00	-0.01	0.03	-0.01	0.01	0.01	0.03	-0.06	-0.02	0.03
32	Educ. (spouse): general elementary education	0.01	-0.03	0.01	0.02	-0.02	0.06	0.00	0.08	-0.09	-0.03	0.02
33	Educ. (spouse): basic vocational qualification	-0.01	0.02	0.03	0.01	-0.02	0.12	0.01	0.14	-0.17	-0.04	0.20
34	Educ. (spouse): intermediate vocational qual.	-0.01	-0.02	-0.05	-0.04	0.01	0.20	-0.04	0.15	-0.33	-0.10	0.16
35	Educ. (spouse): intermediate general qual.	0.02	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	0.00	0.02	-0.01	0.02	-0.08	-0.02	0.03
36	Educ. (spouse): general maturity certificate	0.01	-0.01	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.00	-0.03	0.00	-0.09	0.00	0.01
37	Educ. (spouse): vocational maturity cert.	0.02	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.14	-0.02	0.06	-0.21	-0.04	0.05
38	Educ. (spouse): lower tertiary education	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.04	0.14	-0.04	0.07	-0.14	-0.01	0.10
39	Educ. (spouse): higher tertiary education	-0.03	0.05	0.07	0.03	-0.02	0.13	-0.02	0.07	-0.20	0.04	0.08
Nr.	Variable	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	
30	Revealed homosexuality	1.00										
31	Educ. (spouse): inadequately completed	-0.01	1.00									
32	Educ. (spouse): general elementary education	0.00	-0.02	1.00								
33	Educ. (spouse): basic vocational qualification	0.00	-0.03	-0.04	1.00							
34	Educ. (spouse): intermediate vocational qual.	0.00	-0.06	-0.09	-0.17	1.00						
35	Educ. (spouse): intermediate general qual.	0.00	-0.01	-0.02	-0.04	-0.08	1.00					
36	Educ. (spouse): general maturity certificate	0.01	-0.02	-0.02	-0.05	-0.09	-0.02	1.00				
37	Educ. (spouse): vocational maturity cert.	0.00	-0.04	-0.05	-0.11	-0.21	-0.05	-0.06	1.00			
38	Educ. (spouse): lower tertiary education	0.01	-0.03	-0.04	-0.08	-0.15	-0.04	-0.04	-0.09	1.00		
39	Educ. (spouse): higher tertiary education	0.00	-0.04	-0.05	-0.11	-0.21	-0.05	-0.05	-0.13	-0.09	1.00	

Notes: Pearson correlation coefficients are portrayed *in italics* when significant in the 95% confidence interval

Table 2 Regression results with random effects estimation (companion marriage as DV)

	Controls only (full sample)	H1	Controls only (subsample)	H2	H3	H4
Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Entrepreneur		−0.111*** (0.042)				
Family entrepreneur				0.166* (0.100)		0.551*** (0.189)
Co-working spouse					0.205* (0.114)	
Family entrepreneur & male						−0.517** (0.215)
Male	0.331*** (0.035)	0.264*** (0.047)	0.345** (0.169)	0.330* (0.169)	0.327* (0.170)	0.371** (0.171)
Age	−0.021*** (0.002)	−0.021*** (0.002)	−0.036*** (0.007)	−0.036*** (0.007)	−0.036*** (0.007)	−0.036*** (0.007)
Household income (<i>ln</i>)	0.012 (0.016)	0.026 (0.023)	0.119* (0.061)	0.113* (0.061)	0.114* (0.061)	0.116* (0.061)
1st-generation migrant	0.428*** (0.042)	0.404*** (0.050)	0.293** (0.135)	0.286** (0.132)	0.288** (0.132)	0.268** (0.131)
2nd-generation migrant	0.185*** (0.039)	0.226*** (0.051)	−0.052 (0.139)	−0.061 (0.138)	−0.052 (0.138)	−0.080 (0.139)
Religiosity: rarely	0.175*** (0.026)	0.145*** (0.031)	0.211** (0.099)	0.196** (0.099)	0.201** (0.099)	0.197** (0.099)
Religiosity: several times a year	0.328*** (0.034)	0.284*** (0.042)	0.331*** (0.128)	0.326*** (0.126)	0.327*** (0.125)	0.329*** (0.124)
Religiosity: one–three times a month	0.605*** (0.053)	0.607*** (0.066)	0.636*** (0.164)	0.619*** (0.165)	0.626*** (0.166)	0.616*** (0.166)
Religiosity: once a week	0.932*** (0.064)	0.908*** (0.079)	1.025*** (0.163)	1.036*** (0.162)	1.035*** (0.162)	1.058*** (0.160)
Religiosity: more than once a week	1.268*** (0.104)	1.215*** (0.135)	1.442*** (0.245)	1.457*** (0.242)	1.455*** (0.241)	1.457*** (0.248)
Married	0.370*** (0.029)	0.393*** (0.036)	0.565*** (0.110)	0.563*** (0.110)	0.552*** (0.111)	0.572*** (0.110)
Divorced	−0.137*** (0.046)	−0.130** (0.056)	0.042 (0.146)	0.025 (0.145)	0.021 (0.144)	0.038 (0.145)
Number of kids	−0.049*** (0.012)	−0.056*** (0.015)	−0.038 (0.039)	−0.040 (0.039)	−0.039 (0.038)	−0.038 (0.038)
No current spouse	−0.145*** (0.035)	−0.178*** (0.049)	−0.256 (0.196)	−0.259 (0.195)	−0.259 (0.196)	−0.262 (0.196)
Number of previous spouses	−0.034*** (0.007)	−0.037*** (0.009)	−0.042+ (0.026)	−0.040+ (0.026)	−0.041+ (0.026)	−0.040+ (0.026)
Male current spouse	−0.111*** (0.037)	−0.232*** (0.050)	−0.259+ (0.180)	−0.261+ (0.179)	−0.265+ (0.180)	−0.294+ (0.180)
Revealed homosexuality	−0.424*** (0.088)	−0.405*** (0.118)	−0.516 (0.361)	−0.543 (0.378)	−0.556+ (0.386)	−0.495 (0.351)
Education controls included (for respondent and spouse)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 2 (continued)

	Controls only (full sample)	H1	Controls only (subsample)	H2	H3	H4
Constant	2.984*** (0.123)	3.071*** (0.173)	2.609*** (0.493)	2.653*** (0.493)	2.657*** (0.493)	2.608*** (0.495)
Number of total observations	14,820	8,898	903	903	903	903
Number of individuals	6397	4452	474	474	474	474
Prob. F	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Overall R-sqr	0.180	0.191	0.314	0.320	0.322	0.326

Notes: robust standard errors in parentheses. Significance levels: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$, and + $p < 0.15$. Education levels indicated by eighteen CASMIN indicators in total for respondent and spouse (see Table 1 and Appendix) are not shown for parsimony in presentation

relationships become statistically insignificant in Models 3 to 6, in which the subsample of entrepreneurs is considered.² Another finding relates to household income, which is a marginally significant predictor of companion marriage in Models 3–6 for the subsample of entrepreneurs.

Hypothesis 1 posits that entrepreneurs are less likely to embrace companion marriage and thus have less traditional marriage norms than non-entrepreneurs. A significantly negative coefficient of the variable *entrepreneurs* in Model 2 of Table 2 supports this hypothesis ($\beta = -0.111$; $p = 0.008$). Hypothesis 2 predicted that family entrepreneurs would embrace companion marriage more than nonfamily entrepreneurs. The variable *family entrepreneurs* analyzed for the subsample of the entrepreneurs in Model 4 of Table 2 indicate a significantly positive coefficient ($\beta = 0.166$; $p = 0.096$), offering support for Hypothesis 2. Hypothesis 3 posits that entrepreneurs who also co-work or co-own their business together with their spouse also prefer companion marriage. The significantly positive coefficient of *co-working spouse* in Model 5 of Table 2 ($\beta = 0.205$; $p = 0.072$) offers support for Hypothesis 3. To test Hypothesis 4, we interacted the *family entrepreneur* variable with the *male* indicator to determine whether male status negatively moderated the positive relationship between family entrepreneurs and companion marriage (i.e., Hypothesis 2). We found support for Hypothesis

4 in Model 6 of Table 2 because of the negative and significant coefficient of the interaction variable *family entrepreneurs and male* ($\beta = -0.517$; $p = 0.016$). The effect for female respondents in the base term *family entrepreneur* was significant in the opposite direction ($\beta = 0.551$; $p = 0.003$). This indicates that the inclination for *companion marriage* is stronger for female family entrepreneurs. Figure 1 shows the interaction plot for Model 6 and illustrates how the effect of family entrepreneurs differs between male and female entrepreneurs. Checks of the variance inflation factors (VIF) of all our models are below the thresholds and indicate that multicollinearity and related problems of statistical inference are not a major concern.

4.1 Collateral analyses

For additional statistical robustness, we employed a series of collateral analyses and used proxies to test our underlying theoretical assumptions and our previous findings for plausibility. In general, changes in entrepreneurial status occur often and result in sufficient within-variance in our sample, opening room for corroboration in a collateral analysis that relies on a first-differenced estimation to test H1. This analysis makes it possible to analyze whether individuals who changed their entrepreneurial status also changed their marriage norms in parallel. By doing so, we offer supporting evidence for a potentially causal relationship between the entrepreneurial context and marriage norms. We examined whether companion marriage norms change in cases where entrepreneurial status has changed. Therefore, we ran panel regressions

² Regarding the observed insignificance, this subsample has reduced degrees of freedom, resulting in a decrease of power in these subsample regressions.

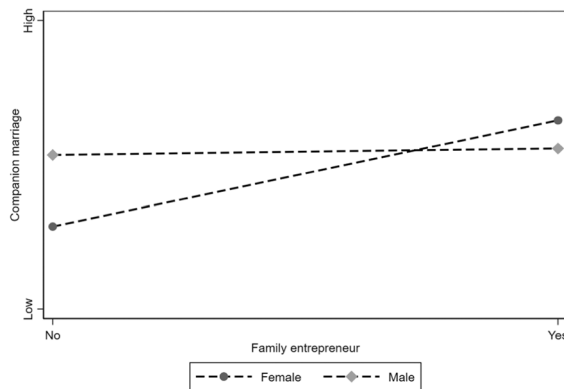


Fig. 1 Interaction plot: family entrepreneur and male (Table 2, Model 6)

with first-differenced estimators that enabled us to derive a difference-in-difference interpretation. More specifically, we accounted for the simultaneous change in our dependent and independent variables when controlling for all other changes in our predictor vector. Our analysis showed that a change in the entrepreneurial status of a respondent coincided with a significantly negative change ($\beta = -0.301$; $p = 0.004$) in companion marriage norms, in line with our argumentation. We also tested a fixed effects model in which we observed a significant relationship ($\beta = -0.141$; $p = 0.096$). These findings support the plausibility of our causal reasoning given that a change in the opposite temporal direction would be rather unlikely (i.e., a change in marriage norms that results in becoming an entrepreneur is implausible) (Hayes, 2013). However, we point to the fact that our empirical strategy is primarily intended to establish associations in line with our hypotheses.

5 Discussion

This study is situated in the debate on the advantages and disadvantages of marriage for entrepreneurial activity (e.g., Ruef et al., 2003; Belenzon et al., 2016; Bird & Zellweger, 2018). Within this debate, the need to rethink the assumed link between companion marriage and entrepreneurial activity has been acknowledged (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003; Aldrich et al., 2021; Jaskiewicz & Dyer, 2017; Randerson et al., 2016; Randerson et al., 2020). Thus far, however, it has been

difficult to integrate the ongoing deinstitutionalization of marriage into the study of entrepreneurship. One reason, as we argue, is that current studies focus too narrowly on marriage as a relationship status and neglect the variety in underlying marriage norms. In this study, we link the macrolevel deinstitutionalization of marriage norms and the mesolevel particularities of entrepreneurial networks with regard to marriage norms to the internalized marriage norms of entrepreneurial individuals. Indeed, understanding social norms as a multilevel concept opens a new pathway to more comprehensively capture the family embedding of entrepreneurial activity (Aldrich et al., 2021).

Our results show that on average, entrepreneurs are less intrigued by traditional, long-term companion marriage than the general population. We interpret this finding as a result of the macrolevel deinstitutionalization of marriage on the subgroup of entrepreneurs. With regard to their marriage norms, entrepreneurs appear more attuned to individualized marriage norms (Beck, 1992; Castells, 2009). This general tendency among entrepreneurs exists regardless of their marital status. Our findings thus run contrary to the current literature on marriage and entrepreneurship, which often fails to consider that the status of being married precludes conclusions of a long-run perspective on entrepreneurial activity (Miller et al., 2011; Bird & Zellweger, 2018; Danes & Zachary, 2021). Entrepreneurship research may thus do well to rely less on an arguably artificially binary marital status when drawing conclusions on long-term orientations. With the deinstitutionalization of marriage, marital status has been detached from companion marriage norms, and marriage norms have become more plural. Thus, internalized marriage norms are now far more important to understand entrepreneurial behavior and expectations.

Our study also shows that in specific contingencies, entrepreneurs seem to be more traditional, such as when another family member is involved in the business. This is a crucial differentiation that distinguishes family entrepreneurs from other entrepreneurs (Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2006). Family entrepreneurs exhibit a significantly stronger preference for companion marriage than nonfamily entrepreneurs. Indeed, our study suggests that family entrepreneurship is associated with embracing more traditional marriage norms because family entrepreneurship is, as we argue, comparable to engaging

in other large financial investments such as buying real estate with a partner (Billari & Liefbroer, 2016). Contrary to the deinstitutionalization of marriage thesis, family entrepreneurs thus form a notable exception (Cherlin, 2004; Robbins et al., 2022). Congruent with the embeddedness argumentation as proposed by Granovetter, (1985, 1995, 2017), we interpret this finding as evidence of an interdependent influence between particular entrepreneurial contexts and marriage norms. When family members are involved in entrepreneurial endeavors together, it establishes a scenario where the family's careers, incomes, and wealth are contingent upon stable and potentially enforceable partnership agreements. In this context, companion marriage norms provide enforceable trust and hold greater significance compared to situations where only one family member is engaged in entrepreneurship.

Our study further shows that for family entrepreneurs, the type of family relationship between those involved in the business is a crucial distinction with respect to endorsed marriage norms. Individuals who co-work or co-own with their spouse value companion marriage more than other entrepreneurs. The reciprocal dependency among family entrepreneurs seems to increase among spouses because their joint household income and wealth depend on the successful operation of the business. In line with Granovetter, (2017), we argue that in such situations, companion marriage may be particularly attractive because it provides enforceable trust and reduces uncertainty. Companion marriage seems to provide a long-term outlook, dependability, and a high degree of commitment that can be important for engaging in an entrepreneurial venture jointly as spouses.

Another key take-away from our study is the analysis of gender effects on marriage norms adapted by entrepreneurs. Male gender negatively moderates the relationship between family entrepreneurs and the internalization of companion marriage. This finding suggests that female family entrepreneurs are more inclined to have marital long-term perspectives than male family entrepreneurs are. A theoretical explanation for this effect may be that for female family entrepreneurs, enforceable trust is even more urgent than it is for men (Cherlin, 2020; Flouri & Buchanan, 2001; Granovetter, 2017; Robbins et al., 2022; Sweeney, 2002). Being in business together may be a more

complex and risky investment for women. Previous research has shown that female family entrepreneurs, especially in Germany, remain in a financially weaker position because they traditionally accept more household duties despite working in the business (Stamm et al., 2022).

The findings of this study provide three main contributions. First, we address the critique that the entrepreneurship literature has operated with an overly simple and stereotypical understanding of marriage that neglects the heterogeneity of spousal relationships and shifting marriage norms (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003; Aldrich et al., 2021; Danes & Zachary, 2021). We add to this debate that it is not marriage as a specific social tie that brings a long-term perspective to doing business (Belenzon et al., 2016; Bird & Zellweger 2018; Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2011; Randerson et al., 2020); rather, it is a set of marriage norms that do so. Capturing these marriage norms is much more complex than a dichotomous relationship status and requires a multilevel perspective. In fact, our results show that entrepreneurs are not only affected by a macrolevel institutional change in marriage norms but also that the mesolevel (here, the family entrepreneurial context) affects how the marriage norms of entrepreneurs are shaped. We highlight a new sociological perspective that acknowledges the multilevel character of marriage norms and suggest that in certain entrepreneurial contexts such as family entrepreneurship, marriage norms may evoke a long-term perspective. Future research on marriage and entrepreneurship should no longer simply assume a long-term outlook for entrepreneurial activity from the status of being married but should consider the conditions that produce such a long-term outlook among couples. As we have shown, these conditions include normative ideas about marriage in specific entrepreneurial network constellations. Future research may also consider additional conditions that shape a long-term outlook, such as practiced living and financial arrangements among spouses, variation in decision-making within families (Danes 2011, 2013), or “couplehood,” the sense of identity, commitment, and purpose shared by individuals in a personal relationship that includes a stock of relationship capital (Danes & Zachary, 2021; Danes, 2016). In addition, the more traditional marriage norms of female family entrepreneurs (with a

stronger embrace of companion marriage) provide an important direction for future research and may require a more specific examination of their work situation and their work/family roles (Danes, 2016).

Second, our study points to the theoretical relevance of social norms as a multilevel phenomenon that has been overlooked in current applications of the embeddedness approach in entrepreneurship research. Social norms are principles about appropriate and good ways of doing things that people acknowledge and that are socially shared and informally enforced by others (Granovetter, 2017). They are multilevel phenomena: they may appear in macrolevel institutions, emerge in entrepreneurial networks, and be internalized by entrepreneurial individuals. As such, social norms have the capacity to *travel* across levels. While the prominent relational embeddedness approach (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998) considers social norms at the level of entrepreneurial networks, current applications in the entrepreneurship field neglect them (Bird & Zellweger, 2018; Mawdsley & Somaya, 2021; Moran, 2005; Song et al., 2020; Wigren-Kristoferson et al., 2022). As we have argued in this study, however, social norms are key to linking entrepreneurs and subgroups of entrepreneurs to institutional change, to particularities of their entrepreneurial context, and to their normative ideas that ultimately influence their behavior.

Third, our study largely confirms the deinstitutionalization of the marriage thesis (Cherlin, 2004; Robbins et al., 2022) while pointing to family entrepreneurs as a notable exception. Our findings show that entrepreneurs exemplify and even exceed the underlying trends of individualization and diminish the significance of companion marriage. However, we also identify family entrepreneurs as a distinctive subgroup for whom companion marriage remains significant, particularly for women. Therefore, our findings highlight the importance of considering specific work and ownership arrangements among individuals

when aiming to comprehend the diversity of marriage norms and identify subgroups. These work and ownership arrangements provide insight into individuals' economic circumstances in a distinct dimension beyond commonly studied variables such as income or profession (Robbins et al., 2022). However, it seems necessary to systematically consider the work and ownership arrangements and arising dependencies of different subgroups when further testing the deinstitutionalization of the marriage thesis.

Overall, we open promising new areas of inquiry regarding the link between marriage and entrepreneurship in society. At the very least, research in this field may benefit from the reminder that a dichotomous perspective on marriage precludes a deeper understanding of the nexus of marriage and entrepreneurship and should be replaced by a more fine-grained view that incorporates various marriage norms.

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Data Availability This work utilizes data from the Relationship and Family Panel (pairfam), which was directed by Josef Brüderl, Sonja Drobnič, Karsten Hank, Johannes Huinink, Bernhard Nauck, Franz J. Neyer, and Sabine Walper. The data is provided by GESIS – Leibniz Institute for Social Sciences and access should be requested directly from the data provider: www.pairfam.de. The syntax used for the analysis of this data can be inquired by Baris Istiqliler.

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Appendix

Table 3 Variable booklet

Nr	Variable	Description (pairfam variable names are in <i>italic</i>)
1	Companion marriage	A continuous indexed variable reflecting the norms of respondents toward marriage. Likert scale items “you should get married if you permanently live with your partner” (<i>vall17</i>), “couples should marry at the latest after a child is born” (<i>vall12</i>), and “marriage is a lifelong union which should not be broken” (<i>vall18</i>) in pairfam dataset are averaged for an operationalization of companion marriage
2	Entrepreneur	An indicator variable taking the value one if the respondent is currently following an entrepreneurial career as a self-employed, owner-manager, or as a manager in their family’s business (<i>job2 [d283]</i> between 10 and 22, and 54, as well as a whole block of <i>job5</i> or <i>job6</i> is answered)
3	Family entrepreneur	An indicator variable taking the value one if the respondent follows an entrepreneurial career (entrepreneur equals to 1) and when a family member is employed at the same company (at least one of <i>job5i2-job5i3</i> equals to 1; or at least one of <i>job6i1-job6i3</i> equals to 1 in conjunction with <i>job5i1</i> being equal to 1)
4	Co-working spouse	An indicator variable taking the value one when in addition to <i>family business setting</i> indicator (see above) being equal to 1, if the respondent employs their spouse in their own business (<i>job6i</i>) or if the spouse is a co-owner of the business (<i>job5i</i>)
5	Male	An indicator variable taking the value one if the sex of the respondent is male (<i>sex_gen</i> equals to 1)
6	Age	A count variable indicating the respondent age (<i>age</i>)
7	Education (respondent)	A set of 10 indicator variables generated from the ordinal variable <i>casmin</i> indicating the educational attainment of the respondent according to CASMIN classification (see König et al., 1988; Brauns & Steinmann, 1999). The variable takes values between 0 and 9: (0) currently enrolled, (1) inadequately completed, (2) general elementary education, (3) basic vocational qualification, (4) intermediate vocational qualification, (5) intermediate general qualification, (6) general maturity certificate, (7) vocational maturity certificate, (8) lower tertiary education, and (9) higher tertiary education. In our regression models, the “currently enrolled” case (<i>casmin</i> equals to 0) is left out as the base case, and the rest of the indicator variables are included to control for the different levels of educational attainment of the respondent
8	Household income	A log transformation of the continuous variable <i>hhincoecd</i> indicating the level of equivalent household income calculated according to OECD guidelines (OECD, 2020)
9	Migration status: no migration background, 1st-generation migrant, 2nd-generation migrant	A set of 3 indicator variables generated from the ordinal variable <i>migstatus</i> indicating the migration status of the respondent. The variable takes values between 1 and 3: (1) no migration background, (2) 1st-generation migrant, and (3) 2nd-generation migrant. In our regression models, no migration background case (<i>migstatus</i> equals to 1) is left out as the base case, and the rest of the indicator variables are included to control for the migrant status of the respondent

Table 3 (continued)

Nr	Variable	Description (pairfam variable names are in italic)
10	Religiosity	A set of 5 indicator variables generated from the ordinal variable <i>sd31</i> indicating the respondent's frequency of visiting place of worship (church, mosque, synagogue, etc.) or taking part in religious events. This variable takes values between 1 and 6: (1) more than once in a week, (2) once in a week, (3) one–three times in a month, (4) many times in a year, (5) rarely, and (6) never. In our regression models, the “never” case (<i>migstatus</i> equals to 6) is left out as the base case, and the rest of the indicator variables are included to control for the migrant status of the respondent
11	Formal institutionalized marital status: married, divorced, never married	A set of 3 indicator variables derived from the ordinal variable <i>relstat</i> indicating the formal relationship status of the respondent. First indicator “married” takes the value of one if the respondent is currently married (<i>relstat</i> equals to 4 or 5). Second indicator “divorced” takes the value of one if the respondent is divorced from his partner (<i>relstat</i> 6, 7 or 8). Third indicator “never married” takes the value of one if the respondent has never married in his life (<i>relstat</i> 1, 2, or 3). In our regression models, the “never married” case (<i>migstatus</i> equals to 1) is left out as the base case, and the rest of the indicator variables are included to control for the migrant status of the respondent
12	Number of kids	A count variable indicating the number of kids the respondent has (<i>nkids</i>)
14	Number of previous spouses	A count variable indicating the number of previous partners the respondent had (<i>np</i>)
15	No current spouse	An indicator variable taking the value one if the respondent does not currently have a spouse (<i>page</i> equals to –3)
16	Male current spouse	An indicator variable taking the value one if the sex of the respondent's partner is male (<i>psex_gen</i> takes the value of 1)
17	Revealed homosexuality	An indicator variable taking the value one if the respondent revealed his homosexual choices in the past (<i>homosex_new</i> equals to 1 or 2)
18	Education (spouse)	A set of 10 indicator variables generated from the ordinal variable (<i>pcasmin</i>) indicating the educational attainment of the respondent's current spouse according to CASMIN classification. The operationalization and inclusion of the indicator variables are analogous to our educational attainment variable from above

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