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Why Do German Men Marry Women from Less Developed Countries? An Analysis of Transnational Partner Search Based on the German Socio-Economic Panel*

David Glowsky**

Abstract

This paper examines why German men marry women from countries which are less economically developed. Two hypotheses deduced from exchange theory and the economic theory of the family are tested: 1. Low physical and social attractiveness as well as reduced opportunities to meet German partners lead to marriage with a woman from a poorer country. 2. Because of the economic gap between their countries of origin, German men can marry comparatively more attractive women on the international marriage market than they could hope to attract within Germany. The analysis uses data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP, 1984-2005). The results show that men with wives from poorer countries do not differ from men with German wives with regard to their attractiveness and social contacts. A better explanation for these marriages lies in the age-related "marriage squeeze" encountered by German men older than 30 years. Only on account of their age do these men struggle to find a spouse on the German marriage market, which in turn increases the likelihood of them seeking marriage with women from poorer countries. Furthermore, the results do offer strong evidence that the economic gap between their countries of origin does allow German men to marry more attractive women when they opt for partners from poorer countries.

Keywords: marriage market, marriage migration, marriage squeeze, age difference, social status, attractiveness

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1. Introduction*

Since the late 1970s, the Western European marriage markets have internationalized. Since then, marriages between Western European men and women from distant countries have become a common sight. In these marriages, the wedding usually coincides directly with the woman's migration to the man's home country. In the past 15 years, several developments like the fall of the iron curtain, the spread of the internet, and cheap international flights have boosted marriages between men from highly developed countries and women from economically weaker countries. Women in these marriage constellations usually come from Eastern Europe, South-East Asia and South America (Klein 2000: 323; del Rosario 1994).[1] In the public discussion, a certain stereotype is attached to these marriages: The man is middle-aged, has a heavyset appearance and a pronounced underclass habitus. One would expect the man not to have very much success with women, but in his arms he holds a much younger, beautiful, graceful woman with exotic traits.

Scientific work on these couples, which has been conducted since the 1980s, concentrates mostly on the factors that make women marry into richer countries. This is explained with the economic gap between the countries of origin of both partners: Low-skilled persons from underdeveloped countries, who want to partake in western prosperity, are faced with growing immigration restrictions (Herbert 2001: 315ff.). One of the few remaining migration opportunities is marriage migration. Empirical work on marriage migration arrives at the unanimous conclusion that women from underdeveloped countries use marriage with a husband from a highly developed country mainly as a means of immigration (Ruenkaew 2003; Müller-Schneider 2000; Beer 1996; del Rosario 1994).

However, in existing studies on marriage migration the motifs of the respective men are hardly taken into account. Usually, they are treated only secondary, and they are described as persons with psychological deficits, who marry an obedient woman to compensate for inferiority complexes (for the German discussion cf. Niesner/Anonuevo et al. 1997; Meerwein 1988). But can this image of the unattractive, socially powerless underclass man be verified in an empirical study?

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[1] These are the main areas of origin of the foreign wives of German men (Statistisches Bundesamt 2004). But these are apparently also the regions regarded by men from other western countries, including the USA, who are looking for a wife from a less developed country through an agency. A search for 'mail-order brides' on the internet leads to agencies who offer contacts to women from these parts of the world.

This paper analyzes which factors lead German men to marry a woman from an underdeveloped country. The question is examined from two main perspectives, which are derived from general theories of the marriage market and earlier research in section (2). First, it will be asked whether men who have remained unsuccessful on the German marriage market due to low attractiveness and low social contact choose marriage with a woman from an underdeveloped country as emergency solution. Second, it is examined whether German men use these marriages to find more attractive partners than they could hope to attract on the German marriage market. The data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP) used for analysis are presented in section (3). The analysis in section (4) shows that the marriage of a woman from an economically weak country is hardly connected with low chances on the German marriage market. The assumption that German men marry more attractive women in these marriages, however, proves right. Section (5) discusses methodological problems and suggests improvements of further studies in this field.

2. Dynamics of the marriage market and their implications

Which factors influence the marriage between German men and women from poorer countries? In literature on mate selection two main groups of partner choice theories can be distinguished. One is based on the theory of action, dealing with the incentives for a person to marry another person (2.1); the other group concentrates on the structural opportunities of a person to find a partner (2.2). These theories can be combined with the results of empirical research on marriage migration, according to which low chances on the German marriage market lead to marriage with a wife from a poorer country. Mate selection theories and empirical results also suggest that these marriages serve the maximization of the partner's attractiveness (2.3).

2.1 The role of attractiveness for success on the marriage market

In marriage market research, two theories based on the theory of action have been developed:

a) The application of exchange theory to partner choice is based on two articles by Davis (1964) and Merton (1964). They examined exchange processes in marriages between wealthy black men and underprivileged white women in the USA. For the analysis of marriages between German men and women from economically weaker countries, this approach is used by Beer (1996: 24f.) and Ruenkaew (2003: 42ff.). The theory assumes that out of all available partners, a person will choose the partner with whom the most effective social exchange can be achieved. In a partnership, both partners serve as providers of resources for the other. For the exchange of resources at the beginning of a partnership, the inequality of central features is therefore understood to be an important precondition. Both partners win by becoming a couple,

as they come to share resources of their respective partner. According to Edwards, an individual's chances on the marriage market are determined first by its social status and second by "interpersonal skills and personal assets" (Edwards 1969: 523). While it has not been elaborated which social spheres and which personal qualities are relevant to increase the value of the potential partner on the marriage market, research applying this theory has translated the personal resources mainly as physical attractiveness (Franzen/Hartmann 2001; Buss 1985; Udry 1977; Taylor/Glenn 1976).

b) The economic theory of the family also views singles on the marriage market as rational actors, who try to maximize their benefit by their partner choice. Here, the person is seen as a producer of commodities which cannot be bought on the market. The theory defines commodities as goods and conditions that directly produce benefit and satisfaction. A large part of these commodities, like children, prestige, altruism, companionship and love, cannot be produced by an actor alone, but only together with a partner. Production is generally most efficient with a partner who possesses high resources (Becker 1991: 113). Higher education, for example, increases the income and the children's education, an individual's high prestige is transfered to its partner, and high physical attractiveness of a partner means high intrinsic and social benefit (Hill/Kopp 2001: 18).

These theories allow us to determine what makes a person attractive on the marriage market. Basically, both theories arrive at the same conclusion: People aim to maximize the benefit of their partnership. A partnership's utility grows with the resources of both partners. Thus, on the marriage market, those individuals are attractive who have high social and personal resources. For a clear definition of the relevant features – which are not given by mate choice theories – two further theoretical approaches will be brought in.

c) Bourdieu's theory of capital is used for the concretization of social status. According to Bourdieu, an individual's social position is determined by three types of capital (Bourdieu 1983). *Economic capital* exists in the form of property. *Cultural capital* is described as all forms of education. By being member of a group and the possibility to use the group's resources, social networks and services, a person gains *social capital*. This concept lends itself to the measurement of social stratification and will be used for the description of differences in social attractiveness.

d) For a concretization of personal features this paper restricts itself to biological and physical characteristics. Theories about the meaning of physical features for partner choice are found in the works of evolutionary psychology, according to which partner choice serves finding a partner who seems most capable of raising children. A person assesses a potential partner as attractive whose body features promise successful reproduction. Two body features are central for this assessment: health is an

important prerequisite for healthy children, while youthfulness promises fertility and insures that the parent will be able to provide for the children long enough.[2]

Let us now look into empirical research on marriage migration.[3] The results of this line of research, which has so far been exclusively based on qualitative methods, are consistent with the assumptions of mate selection theories. One central result is that men from wealthy countries marry women from poorer countries because they have remained unsuccessful on their national marriage market. It has been found that some of these men are unattractive physically or with respect to social status. Ruenkaew and Beer report that they have low income and conclude that they are too unattractive for German women (Ruenkaew 2003: 238; Beer 1996: 163). Both studies refer to physical unattractiveness, Ruenkaew explicitly naming overweight (Ruenkaew 2003: 204ff.; Beer 1996: 163; cf. del Rosario 1994).

From the above information we can draw a first hypothesis. According to mate selection theories, attractiveness is an important factor in the search for a partner. Qualitative research concludes that German men marry women from poorer countries because they cannot find a German wife due to their relative unattractiveness. The first hypothesis (H1) thus is: *the lower a German man's attractiveness in comparison with his competitors on the German marriage market, the more probable is his marriage with a woman from an economically weaker country.*

2.2 The role of opportunities for success on the marriage market

Chances to find a partner do not only depend on an individual's attractiveness. Search theory – derived from economics and first applied to marriage by England and Farkas (1986) and Oppenheimer (1988) – connects the efforts of a person to find the maximally attractive partner with market restrictions. The market offers only a limited number of available partners, resulting from the number of single persons and the attractiveness of the person searching. The search for the best possible partner is time-consuming and expensive. As a consequence, the search is limited to a certain reservation attractiveness (analogical to reservation wage in job-seeking), meaning that the first partner matching the reservation attractiveness is accepted. The lower the reservation attractiveness, the sooner a person finds a partner. Those with low own attractiveness have to lower their reservation attractiveness. Qian et al.

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[2] Psychological research has shown that especially women are assessed as attractive on the basis of their youth; the older a woman the less beautiful she is judged by men and women. And the judgment of a woman's beauty correlates positively with the age of the person judging – young women's attractiveness is judged highest by older men (Henss 1992: 293f.).

[3] Earlier studies on marriage migration have mostly dealt with marriages between Western European men and women from South East Asia (cf. especially Beer 1996; del Rosario 1994; Ruenkaew 2003). The study at hand assumes that observations regarding the economic gap between the countries of origin made in these marriages also apply to the marriages analyzed here.

(2005) have shown this for single mothers. For the study at hand, the possibility to search on an alternative marriage market, where better conditions apply, has to be taken into account. I now want to explain two aspects named by search theory in more detail: a) number of available partners, and b) search for available partners.

a) Like every market, marriage markets can be imbalanced, e.g. due to a general lack of men after a war. The marriage market imbalance relevant here exists only within a certain social group. On every marriage market, age-groups marry endogamously, which means that the larger the age difference between two people, the more improbable their marrying (Martin 2001: 305). Therefore, an imbalance of the marriage market can also exist for age-groups, when in a certain age-group there are more singles of one sex than the other. In Germany, single men above the age of about 30 years are confronted with a lack of single women in their age-group (Martin 2001: 310). This "marriage squeeze" rises to the age of 45, decreases slightly after this, but remains intact up to beyond 60 years.[4] German men above 30 years have structural disadvantages compared with men below this threshold. Empirical studies on marriage migration have found that German men who marry women from poorer countries tend to be considerably older than men who marry German women. The average marriage age for German men lies at 31.8 years (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2000). Ruenkaew, for example, reports an average marriage age of 37.8 years for German men who marry women from Thailand (Ruenkaew 2003: 194; cf. Beer 1996: 229; Heine-Wiedenmann/Ackermann 1992: 125f.). However, this fact has not yet been interpreted as a factor that leads to the marriage in the first place. Considering the marriage market imbalance to the disadvantage of German men older than 30 years, this paper proposes that – if this higher marriage age will be shown here as well – age can be a factor that leads to marriages with women from poorer countries.

b) Another factor which is deciding for success on the marriage market is the participation in opportunity contexts. People get to know each other in social contexts, such as the circle of friends, the family, the workplace, public events and the like. In order to find a partner, it is necessary to participate in such contexts, since "who does not meet, does not mate" (cf. Feld 1981: 1019). Whereas these mating contexts were usually organized by the family in earlier times, in the individualized society every person is responsible for the participation in these contexts him- or herself (Bozon/Héran 1989: 94). Studies on the marriage market have shown that 63 per cent of all couples meet in the contexts 'friends/acquaintances' and 'going out/dancing' (Franzen/Hartmann 2001: 192; cf. Bozon/Héran 1989).

[4] The relation of newborn babies is 105 boys for every 100 girls. At this age, the imbalance is still very moderate (105/100=1.05). The more of the females marry, the more precarious the situation becomes for the males. When 90 women are married, the imbalance has risen to 1.5. The descent of the marriage squeeze after 60 years of age is caused by the lower life expectancy of men.

Qualitative studies on marriage migration come to the conclusion that opportunities on the marriage market play a deciding role for the marriage of a wife from a poorer country. They found that a substantial share of German men who opt for these marriages lack social contacts. They are either too shy or have too little time to build up a circle of friends where they could meet a future wife (Ruenkaew 2003: 212; Beer 1996: 185).

Men whose partner search on the German marriage market fails due to a lack of opportunities can alternatively search on the international market. Accordingly, the second hypothesis (H2) is: *German men who have – in comparison with their competitors on the German marriage market – a lack of opportunities to meet potential partners tend to marry women from economically weaker countries.*

2.3 A way to maximize the partner's attractiveness

Apart from low chances on national marriage markets, I suggest that there is a further incentive for men from wealthy countries to marry women from poorer countries: It allows them to marry comparatively more attractive women in several aspects.

a) Age difference. Empirical studies have found that in marriages with women from poorer countries, the average age difference between the partners is considerably higher than in same-nation marriages. In marriages between Germans, the man is on average 3 years older than his wife (Klein 1996: 354). In marriages with women from poorer countries, the observed average age difference ranges between 8.8 years (Niesner/Anonuevo et al. 1997: 92) and 11.0 years (Beer 1996: 228).

b) Difference in education. The couples studied here differ from German couples in respect of their difference in education. Whereas in marriages with two German partners we find a strong trend towards educational homogamy (Blossfeld/Timm 1997: 445; Wirth 2000: 141), couples with German men and women from poorer countries tend clearly towards educational hypogamy. Here, women marry men less educated than themselves. Niesner et al. (1997: 33) find that 68.5 per cent of the Filipino women and 60.2 per cent of South American women have completed a university degree, while only 15.8 per cent of their German husbands have acquired an equivalent education.

These results suggest a further explanation for the research question. The international marriage market might be more than a makeshift solution for unsuccessful men. According to exchange theory and the economic theory of the family, actors on the marriage market aim to maximize the attractiveness of their partners. A number of studies have shown that income, education and professional prestige of a man have a positive effect on the attractiveness of his wife (Schoen/Woolredge 1989; Udry 1977; Taylor/Glenn 1976). The study at hand assumes that in the partnerships examined here, the husband's (or rather his country's) economic resources are exchanged against non-economic resources of the wife. Therefore, the third hypothesis (H3) is:

the higher the husband's country of origin's economic capital in comparison to the wife's country of origin's economic capital, the higher is the wife's education and physical attractiveness compared to the husband's education and physical attractiveness.

3. Data, methods, variables

3.1 Data

This study uses data from the waves 1984-2005 of the German Socio-Economic Panel Study (GSOEP) at the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW), Berlin.[5] The comprehensive questions on marriage and migration contained in the GSOEP permit an exact demarcation of the sample. The GSOEP also holds a large amount of socio-economic variables which can be used to test the various hypotheses. Despite these favorable conditions, the GSOEP allows to analyze the complex questions of the study at hand only with certain limitations: It contains only few cases of marriage migration. Furthermore, the operationalization of the hypotheses, especially physical attractiveness, proves difficult. Nevertheless, the results will show that significant conclusions can be drawn.

Three samples were extracted from the panel. The central sample contains German men with wives from economically weaker countries, whose marriage behavior will be compared with that of the men in the other two samples. The second sample consists of German men with German wives, i. e. men who have married on the national marriage market. The third sample contains German men with wives from economically strong countries; this sample is used as control group for the assumption of the economic incentive for women from poorer countries to marry a German man – for women from economically strong countries this incentive should not exist.

The classification into highly developed and less developed countries follows the example of Müller-Schneider (2000: 15ff.) who names the classic immigration countries Canada, USA and Australia as well as highly developed countries in Western and Southern Europe as countries that attract migrants. Müller-Schneider argues on the basis of immigration numbers, but does not propose a clear measure for the economically high position of the immigration countries. This study employs the 2002 Human Development Index (HDI) as a welfare indicator of the countries German men's wives originate from (United Nations Development Programme 2002). Western welfare states and the European Union with 15 member states as it existed up to May 2004 are categorized as economically strong immigration countries here.[6]

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[5] For a detailed description of this data set, cf. SOEP Group 2001.

[6] Müller-Schneider does not count Greece and Portugal as part of the Western welfare states (Müller-Schneider 2000: 15). Here, however, they are categorized in the group of rich countries. Their citizens do not have strong incentives to marry a German citizen for reasons of migration, since EU-citizens can migrate freely within Europe. Every EU-citizen can migrate to Germany without having to marry

The samples with foreign wives only contain women not born in Germany and who did not hold German nationality at the time of marriage, whereas the opposite criteria are used for the men. In the sample with German wives, both partners were born in Germany and hold German nationality.[7]

In this paper, marriage migration is understood as a process in which marriage enables a person to migrate. Since the GSOEP does not ask people whether they married in order to migrate, the marriages in question have to be identified differently. The connection between marriage and migration can be narrowed down by searching for marriages in which the marriage took place shortly before or after migration. The shorter the time between both events, the more probably it can be assumed to be a case of marriage migration. If the marriage was celebrated before migration, the space of time can be longer; simply by marrying a German man in her home country, a woman improves her economic situation and secures a long-term migration perspective. If a person migrates to Germany and marries a few years afterwards, this can also still be understood as a case of marriage migration; a foreign woman can search a German husband during a stay in a home for asylum seekers or after expiry of a tourist visa. Yet the longer the period between immigration and marriage, the less probable it becomes that marriage serves to legalize the stay. This study includes marriages which were celebrated not more than seven years before or three years after migration. In 69.5 % of all cases, the marriage was celebrated up to one year before or after the wife's migration.

By these criteria, 94 couples with wives from economically weaker countries and 68 couples with wives from economically strong countries were extracted from the GSOEP.[8] These samples are very small, which has to be taken into account when generalizing the results of this study. The German-German sample contains 9965 cases. Tables 1a and 1b show the wives' countries of origin.

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a German. Until 2004, this was not the case for the Eastern European countries which joined the EU in 2004; consequently these countries are categorized as economically weaker countries (cf. Müller-Schneider 2000: 24).

[7] Couples with wives from the GSOEP guest-worker sample (families from Turkey, Greece, Yugoslavia, Italy and Spain) were not included as marriages with a foreign wife. From 1978 onwards, immigrant workers could apply for a permanent residence permit, so that it is improbable that such marriages serve for the attainment of a residence permit (Bundesministerium für Familie 2000: 39).

[8] It would be interesting to investigate the related topic of marriages between German women and marriage migrants. However, this is not possible due to even smaller sample sizes for this group.

Table 1a: Women from economically weaker countries – countries of origin

	Frequency
Philippines	12
Poland	12
Russia	10
Thailand	6
Croatia	5
Romania	5
Hungary	5
Ukraine	4
Armenia	
Bolivia	
Brazil	
Bulgaria	
Byelorussia	countries with
Cameroon	3 or less cases [b]
China	
Columbia	total cases: 35
Cuba	
Czech Republic	
"Ex-Yugoslavia" [a]	
Indonesia	
Iran	
Jordan	
Macedonia	
Mexico	
Namibia	
Nigeria	
Peru	
South Africa	
Sri Lanka	
Turkey	
Venezuela	
Vietnam	
Zambia	
Total	94

Table 1b: Women from economically strong countries – countries of origin

	Frequency
Austria	14
France	9
Switzerland	8
Italy	7
United Kingdom	6
Netherlands	6
Belgium	
"Benelux" [a]	
Canada	
Denmark	
Finland	
Greece	
Ireland	countries with
Japan	3 or less cases [b]
Spain	
Sweden	total cases: 18
USA	
Total	68

Source: GSOEP 1984-2005.

[a] As labeled in the GSOEP.

[b] Due to privacy regulations, cells with three or less cases are aggregated

Additionally another sample was constructed which contains 36 couples with men and women from economically weaker countries. In this group, both partners originate from less developed countries and have married before their migration to Germany. This sample is only analyzed in Table 5. Since these marriages were celebrated before migration to Germany and did not serve as a means to acquire a residence permit, here also couples from the "Gastarbeiter" sample can be included. This sample contains couples from the following countries: "Ex-Yugoslavia" (7), Poland (4)

and a total of 25 couples from Croatia, Vietnam, Kosovo-Albania, Romania, Turkey, Hungary, Albania, China, Iraq, "Korea", Kurdistan, Morocco, "Eastern Europe", Pakistan, Russia, Slovenia, Sri Lanka. This sample has a quite different composition from that in table 1a.[9] Former Yugoslavia is stronger here, Thailand and the Philippines are not represented. However, the criteria of a lower economic position in comparison with Germany and the tendencies for the body mass index and marriage age as outlined in footnote 19 apply here as well.

3.2 Methods

The hypotheses will be tested in two sections. The first part (4.1) checks hypotheses H1 and H2, which assume a relation between a German man's chances on the German marriage market and his marriage with a wife from an economically weaker country. This is carried out in two steps. First, the mean values of the various dimensions of attractiveness and opportunities are compared between the three groups of German men. This illustrates differences between the marriage types regarding the respective indicators. In a second step, the interrelation between these indicators and marriage with a woman from a poorer country is tested in a multivariate regression.[10]

The second section (4.2) verifies hypothesis H3, which assumes an exchange process between the husband's country's wealth and the wife's physical attractiveness and education. The indicators are computed as difference between the husband's value and the wife's value. In a first step, mean values are used to test whether German men marry more attractive women in marriages with women from economically weaker countries. It is expected that in these marriages the women are more attractive compared to their husband than is the case in the other samples. The exchange hypotheses must be tested for both partners. Because of this it is tested in a second step – again using mean values – whether women from poorer countries accept trade-offs regarding their husband's attractiveness when marrying a German man instead of a man from their home country. In a third step it is verified in regression models in how far the woman's country of origin has an influence on the difference between her and her husband's attractiveness. Since personal attributes also play a role in exchange processes, the husband's individual characteristics are included in this model as control variables.

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[9] The number of couples from Turkey was reduced from 29 to 2 by a random selection. First, this is necessary because such a large number of Turkish couples would mean an overrepresentation and a strong distortion of the sample in comparison with Table 1a. Second, the average body mass index of Turkish women is much higher than that of German women, which would mean a strong distortion of this value compared to the sample in Table 1a (cf. footnote 19).

[10] For the research question of this study, an event analysis also would be very enlightening. Yet this is not possible, as the sample contains only in a few cases in which data is available for the time before marriage.

3.3 Variables

For most couples data are available from multiple GSOEP waves. For an analysis of partner choice it is best to use data that were recorded as close to the marriage as possible. Therefore, data were used from the wave in which the couple was first included as a couple.[11] At 63.8 %, the largest portion of the sample with women from economically weaker countries is from the GSOEP waves 2000-2005. On average, these marriages were celebrated in 1989 (standard deviation 8.98), whereas marriages with women from economically strong countries were celebrated on average in 1981 (11.78), marriages with German women in 1976 (16.25).

Several assumptions of this study refer to physical attractiveness. When employing information from a mainly socio-economic data set, the concept of physical attractiveness can only be reconstructed to a limited extent.[12] The estimation of a person's physical attractiveness from demographic measures can incorporate only some aspects of the overall picture as it would appear in direct contact (Voland/Grammer 2003). For this reason, the study at hand bases its analyses of physical attractiveness on several variables in order to include various aspects of this complex construct. As measures for physical attractiveness, the body mass index (BMI), satisfaction with health and age are used.

The use of the body mass index is based on the observation that having a slim body is widely seen as a prerequisite for beauty. Additionally it has been observed in earlier research that German men's overweight can lead to marriage with a woman from an economically weaker country. Body size and weight, from which the BMI is calculated, were only queried in the 2002 and 2004 GSOEP waves, which leads to inaccurateness in two aspects. First, in some cases the space of time between marriage and the measurement of the BMI is longer than would be desirable. Second, these periods are of different average lengths in the three samples. On average, marriages with women from poorer countries were celebrated 8 years later than marriages with women from rich countries and 13 years later than marriages with German women. Since BMI increases with age, the BMI at marriage of women from poorer countries may be underestimated in comparison to the other samples. These limitations have to be kept in mind. It has to be said, though, that especially men's BMIs remain a highly constant measure after adolescence (Casey/Dwyer et al. 1992), so that the BMI at the point of measurement should not deviate strongly from the BMI at the point of marriage. For the analysis, the BMI is divided into two categories, namely over-

[11] The mean value of the distance between marriage and data collection lies at 8.05 years (standard deviation 7.95) for marriages between German men and women from poorer countries. For marriages with German women this value lies at 16.88 years (14.79), for marriages with women from rich countries it lies at 14.50 years (13.39).

[12] A better solution of this problem is to have photos assessed by independent raters (Hitsch/Hortaçsu et al. 2006; Henss 1992), a method which cannot be employed here.

weight versus normal- and underweight. All persons with a BMI over 25 are categorized as overweight (World Health Organization 2004).[13]

Henss (1998) names health as an important factor for physical attractiveness. Accordingly this study uses satisfaction with health, which was queried with the question "How satisfied are you today with the following areas of your life? – your health" as a second indicator for physical attractiveness. The question could be answered on a scale from 0 ("totally unhappy") to 10 ("totally happy"). This variable is the only general health question that has been surveyed in all waves. In this question we do not find an objective measurement of health, but one that is filtered by the feeling of the person asked. This does not necessarily mean a disadvantage. It is assumed that health is a crucial factor for attractiveness on the marriage market, but we do not know whether objective health as a doctor would certify it or rather satisfaction which a person radiates are responsible for this attractiveness. In any case, both are strongly related. It turns out that satisfaction with health clearly correlates with the variables "self-evaluation of health" (.751) and "number of trips to the doctor's in the last three months" (.382).[14] This shows that it is plausible to measure attractiveness via satisfaction with health.

Section 4.2 uses (marriage) age as a third indicator for physical attractiveness. The GSOEP holds no further indicators for physical attractiveness. The body mass index, satisfaction of health and age only describe aspects of physical attractiveness, but this study assumes that with their help it is possible to approximate a person's attractiveness.

For the measurement of social status, this study uses two of Bourdieu's types of capital. Economic capital is represented by the metric variable *monthly net income*. Cultural capital is measured by a person's *level of education* as given by the internationally comparable CASMIN-classification (Comparative Analysis of Social Mobility in Industrial Nations). In this scale, the differentiation between educational levels is based on class specific barriers of a country's educational system and the related job market opportunities (König/Lüttinger et al. 1987; Wirth 2000: 107).[15] The variable is coded in 9 levels from (1) "no educational attainment" to (9) "university degree".

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[13] Whereas it can assumed that a person's attractiveness increases with declining body mass index, this effect is limited. A person who appears abnormally skinny, will probably be little attractive. It is unclear, however, where this line should be drawn. Young women strive for a slimness that is given by the fashion industry. Models with a BMI of 16 are not uncommon today. Underweight does not play a large role in the data set, however. The sample with women from economically weaker countries contains only three women with a BMI under 18 (underweight), whereas this deviation is moderate (17.91; 17.78; 17.04). All men in this sample have a BMI over 18. In the sample with German women only 1.4 % of all women have a BMI under 18 (0.4 % under 17), and only 0.2 % of the men are underweight here. These portions are marginal. For this reason and the unclarity of the point where a low BMI becomes unattractive, the BMI is used as a linear measure in this study.

[14] Pearson's correlation, two-tailed test, significant on 1 % level. Full GSOEP sample 2005 (N = 2940).

[15] While CASMIN makes educational attainment comparable between states, the problem remains that foreign degrees do not necessarily have the same value in Germany as in the country where it was

A person's opportunities to find a partner on the marriage market are represented by the *marriage age* and the *participation in important marriage market segments*. A dichotomous variable distinguishes between men of up to 30 years of age (0) and those who are affected by the marriage squeeze, i. e. men over 30 years (1). A person's micro-structural opportunities to find a potential partner on the marriage market depend on many factors and can be considered here only by approximation. This study measures the participation in important marriage market segments by the frequency with which people *"Meet friends, relatives, neighbors"* and *"Go to pop concerts, dance events, discos"*. The answers are coded as 1 = "rarely, never", 2 = "at least once per month" and 3 = "at least once per week".

To test the third hypothesis, which assumes that German men marry more attractive women when they choose a woman from an economically weaker country, education and physical attractiveness of both partners have to be operationalized. The CASMIN scale is used again for the comparison of education. The first indicator of physical attractiveness is the body mass index. Age is added as a second indicator for beauty, since it is considered as a primary selection attribute in evolutionary psychology (Henss 1998). The variable for each of these areas is computed as the difference of the values of the partners (value man – value woman).

4. Empirical analysis

4.1 Lack of chances on the national marriage market

In this chapter, the hypotheses will be tested that German men with low attractiveness (H1) and a lack of opportunities to meet a woman on the German marriage market (H2) are more likely to marry a woman from an economically weaker country than their competitors.

Table 2 compares the average values of the men in the three samples regarding the various attractiveness and opportunity dimensions.

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awarded. Foreign academics with a degree from their home country possibly do not have the same chances on the German labor market as German academics. This problem cannot be controlled here. This study treats foreign degrees on a par with German degrees.

Table 2: Physical attractiveness, social status, and opportunities on the marriage market of German men by wife's country of origin

	Physical Attractiveness		*Econ./Cult. Capital*		*Opportunities*		
	Body Mass Index	Satisfaction with health	Income	Education	Social activities with friends etc.	Cinema, pop concerts, dancing	Marriage age
	> 25 in %	Mean	Euro Mean	< Abitur in %	Mean	Mean	> 30 Years in %
Wife from econ. weaker country	40.0	7.03 *(2.01)*	2,089 *(1,240)*	65.7	2.03 *(0.77)*	1.23 *(0.52)*	65.4
	[75]	[93]	[84]	[93]	[87]	[90]	[81]
Wife from econ. strong country	44.6	7.44 *(1.95)*	2,858 *(2,411)*	47.1	2.16 *(0.75)*	1.22 *(0.45)*	26.6
	[56]	[68]	[67]	[68]	[62]	[65]	[64]
Wife from Germany	52.8	6.92 *(2.37)*	1,915 *(1,674)*	70.4	2.13 *(0.72)*	1.21 *(0.49)*	30.0
	[6316]	[9877]	[8379]	[9804]	[9128]	[8983]	[9582]

Source: SOEP 1984-2005. Standard deviations (italic) and N in parentheses.

First of all it can be concluded that the marriage with a woman from an economically strong country is connected with a high social status. Men in those marriages have a BMI below average and are healthier than average German men who are married; also, they have a higher income and are more educated than the men in the other two samples.

Let us now focus on the upper and lower group. The assumption that physical unattractiveness leads to the marriage with a wife from an economically weaker country is disproved. Men in those marriages are less often overweight and they are healthier than men with German wives. The same is shown for the social status: men with women from poorer countries have a slightly higher income than men with German wives and a slightly higher proportion has achieved "Abitur" (general university entrance diploma; CASMIN level 6). Also the indicators for participation in the marriage market show only marginal differences between the two groups. Men with wives from poorer countries meet friends slightly less often, but they engage in social activities virtually as often as men with German wives. Social involvement seems to have no impact on the concerning marriage behavior.

Looking at the marriage age, however, we can see a clear confirmation of the hypothesis. Of the men who have married women from economically weaker countries, indeed a noticeably higher proportion than in the two other samples was older than 30 years at the time of marriage. Almost two third of the men in this group were affected by an age-related marriage squeeze when they married a woman from a poorer country. This value is far higher than the results for the other two samples.[16]

[16] The high marriage age for men with wives from poorer countries is strongly connected with earlier marriages. Of these men, 37.2 per cent were married before. This value lies at only 6.9 per cent in the sample with wives from economically strong countries and at 18.7 per cent for men with German

The comparison of these variables' means resp. distributions[17] between marriages with German women and women from poorer countries shows that the distributions for health, income, education[18] and socializing behaviour do not differ significantly. A significantly smaller proportion of men with women from poorer countries is overweight (p = .028) and they are significantly more often older than 30 years at marriage (p = .000).

The strength of this effect in various age groups is additionally analyzed in a logistic regression with the dependent variable "marriage with a wife from a poorer country". Table 3 gives the probabilities of these marriages for men in different age groups with the age group 23-25 as reference category.

Table 3: Marriage with a wife from a poorer country (logistic regression with marriage age groups)

< 23 years	-1.751	N = 1535
26-28 years	.057	N = 1980
29-32 years	1.255**	N = 1461
33-37 years	1.318***	N = 795
38-42 years	1.995***	N = 484
43-52 years	2.113***	N = 498
> 52 years	1.045*	N = 568

Source: SOEP 1984-2005. The table gives the standardized effect coefficients (***: p<.001, **: p<.01, *: p<.05).
Reference category: 23-25 years (N = 2406).

The regression shows that the probability of marriage with a woman from a poorer country rises with increasing age and only falls after the age of 52. The age-related probability of these marriages is thus congruent with the age-related marriage squeeze of German men (Martin 2001).

In order to verify the bivariate results, the influence of all indicators from Table 2 on the marriage with a wife from a poorer country is analyzed in a multivariate model in Table 4. It shows that men with women from foreign countries belong to younger birth cohorts than men in German-German marriages. The average year of birth for men with women from foreign countries is 1953, wheras the average year of birth of men with German wives is 1946 in this sample. In order to control for cohort

wives. However, no further conclusions will be drawn from this fact here, since the data at hand offer no information on how these numbers are related to partner choice.

[17] This paper uses t-tests for metric variables, for ordinal variables Mann-Whitney U-tests are employed (Bortz 1993: 137ff.).

[18] Education and especially income increase in the life course, so it might be possible that these indicators only show similar values for men with women from poorer countries as for men with German wives because men with women from poorer countries are older. To check this, education and income are additionally compared for men with a marriage age above 30 years only. Again, this analysis shows so significant difference.

effects, especially regarding education and birth, the year of birth is included in a second model.

Table 4: Influence of chances on the marriage market on the probability to marry a woman from a poorer country (logistic regression)

Physical attractiveness		
Overweight (Body Mass Index over 25)	-.194	-.179
Satisfaction with health	.285	.243
Attractiveness by Bourdieu's sorts of capital		
Income	.018	.022
Education	-.164	-.189
Opportunities on the marriage market		
Social activities with friends, relatives, neighbors	-.055	-.067
Visits to pop concerts, dances, discos	-.048	-.085
Marriage age over 30 years	.916***	.928***
Year of birth		-305
Pseudo-R^2 (Nagelkerke)	.095	.101
N [a)]	55/49/4939	55/49/4939

Source: GSOEP 1984-2005. The table gives the standardized effect coefficients (***: p<.001).

[a)] Men with women from economically weaker countries/men with women from economically strong countries/men with German wives.

Most of the analyzed indicators have – as could be expected after the bivariate results in Table 2 – no significant influence on the decision to marry a wife from an economically weaker country. The indicators of physical attractiveness, social status and social contacts have no significant effects. Moreover, their coefficients indicate – with the exception of education and frequency of visits to concerts and discos – the opposite of the expected correlations. The inclusion of the year of birth does not affect this result.

A man's age has by far the strongest explanatory power for the marriage with a woman from an economically weaker country. This may be explained as follows: Men over 30 years of age are subject to structural restrictions to finding a woman on the German marriage market. The choice of a woman from an economically weaker country is a way out of this situation.

4.2 Exchange of resources

Table 5 tests if and to what extent in the marriages analyzed here the economic resources of the husband are exchanged with non-economic resources of the wife. First, it is asked whether German men marry more attractive women when they decide for a woman from an economically weaker country instead of a German woman. Second, it is investigated whether women from economically weaker countries accept

trade-offs regarding their husband's attractiveness when they marry a German man instead of a man from their home country.[19] In order to answer this question, a sample with marriages between two partners from a poorer country that were celebrated before migration to Germany is included in Table 5.

Table 5: Difference in physical attractiveness and cultural capital between the spouses (mean value)

	Age difference (in years)	Difference in BMI	Difference in education (CASMIN)
Wife from econ. weaker country	8.01 *(9.32)* [94]	3.55 *(3.97)* [70]	-.60 *(3.08)* [93]
Wife from econ. strong country	2.21 *(4.64)* [68]	2.34 *(4.48)* [53]	.47 *(2.94)* [68]
Wife from Germany	2.76 *(4.22)* [9965]	1.67 *(5.07)* [5949]	.46 *(2.23)* [9804]
Both partners from econ. weaker country	3.39 *(4.34)* [36]	1.12 *(5.94)* [19]	-.06 *(2.07)* [36]

Source: GSOEP 1984-2005. Standard deviations in parentheses.

Let us first see whether German men marry more attractive women when opting for a woman from an economically weaker country. The age difference between the partners shows clearly that, first, they are able to marry younger women. In marriages between German men and women from economically weaker countries the

[19] The average BMI of women from economically weaker countries is lower than that of German women. The average BMI of women above 15 years from Germany and the five most frequent foreign countries of origin (Table 1a): Germany: 26.0; Philippines: 22.8; Poland: 24.8; Russia: 25.9; Thailand: 23.5; Croatia: 25.0. The same is true – with the exception of Turkey – for the sample with two partners from a foreign country: "Ex-Yugoslavia"/Kosovo-Albania (Serbia): 25.3; Vietnam: 20.6; Romania: 25.2; Turkey: 27.6 (World Health Organization 2007). Also do women from less developed countries marry earlier than German women. The share of women who are married at the age of 24 years is 14.8 % in Germany, but 44.3 % in the Philippines, 52.1 % in Poland, 66.5 % in Russia, 52.0 % in Thailand and 44.1 % in Croatia. The same is true for the sample with two foreign partners: "Ex-Yugoslavia"/Kosovo-Albania: no value; Vietnam: 56.9 %; Romania: 58.7 %; Turkey: 61.8 % (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2000). Insofar it can be expected that in case of a random distribution marriages with women from these countries would show higher age and BMI differences than marriages with German women. Yet this study understands partner choice as a process of rational action instead of a random match. The deciding point is whether women from poorer countries accept a trade-off in marriages with German men compared to marriages with men from their home country.

age difference of 7.91 years is almost three times as high as in German-German marriages. This result is fully in line with earlier studies.

A similar result can be seen for the body mass index. Men who marry women from economically weaker countries have a higher BMI in relation to their wives than in the other samples; the difference is more than twice as high as in the German-German sample.

Also, as can be seen in the last column, women from poorer countries marry German men with lower education compared to them, whereas the opposite is the case for German women and women from rich countries.[20] The mean values of all three variables differ significantly between German-German marriages and marriages with women from poorer countries, which underlines this effect.[21]

On the other side of this exchange stand the foreign women. Comparing the values for their marriages with men in their home country and their marriages with German men we see that in the latter relationships they marry less attractive men. When they marry a German man, they accept significantly older and heavier men than in a marriage in their home country. The mean value of education difference points in the opposite direction, but is not significant.[22] Concerning physical appearance, it can be concluded that women who marry a German man accept less attractive partners. The main incentive for this partner choice lies in the opportunity for economic improvement. For this, they seem to they put up with less attractive men.

Table 6 tests whether the influence of the economic gap between the countries of origin remains stable when the individual resources of the husband are controlled for.[23]

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[20] In the sample with women from an economically weaker country, 40.4 % have a university degree. Two third of these women marry hypogamously; in 14 of 94 marriages a woman with a university degree is married to a German man with basic vocational qualification.

[21] t-tests: age difference (p = .000); BMI difference (p = .000); education difference (p = .001).

[22] t-tests: age difference (p = .000); BMI difference (p = .038); education difference (p = .248).

[23] The husband's age, BMI and education that were used to calculate the dependent variables have been included in the models for the sake of completeness. A test for multi-collinearity shows acceptable values. Pearson's r for age with age difference (.192), BMI with BMI difference (.508) and education with difference in education (.514) are clearly under the threshold of .80 given by Berry/Feldman (1985: 43). The tolerance values also do not indicate multi-collinearity (Backhaus 2000: 49f.).

Table 6: Explanation of age difference, BMI difference and education difference (linear regressions)

	Age difference	BMI difference	Education difference
Economic gap between countries of origin [a)]			
Wife from economically weaker country	.130***	.043***	-.055***
Wife from economically strong country	-.011	.013	-.016
Individual attractiveness of husband			
Monthly income	.022	.056***	-.037**
Education	.008	.145***	.531***
BMI	-.022	.541***	.029*
Health	-.004	.037**	.005
Age	.193***	-.095***	.164***
R^2	.054	.299	.298
N [b)]	64/55/5340	59/53/5043	64/55/5340

Source: GSOEP 1984-2005. The table gives the standardized beta coefficients; (***: p<.001,**: p<.01,*: p<.05).
[a)] The reference category for these two indicators are marriages with German wives.
[b)] Men with women from economically weaker countries/men with women from economically strong countries/men with German wives.

A look at the first two indicators, i. e. the countries of origin of foreign wives, shows that the economic gap between the countries has a significant influence on the difference of age, BMI and education between the partners. This result remains true when controlled for the individual resources of the German husband. In marriages with wives from economically weaker countries, the age difference and BMI differences are higher than in German marriages. The difference in education is negative as expected, indicating marriages with comparably more educated wives. The results for marriages with women from economically strong countries are much weaker and not significant, which emphasizes the salience of the economic gap.

We see that apart from the economic gap between the countries of origin, the only further variable with a significant effect on age difference is the husband's age. This is to be expected, since young men can marry only slightly younger women; this value can rise only with the husband's age, which is the case here. Analogous mechanisms explain the strong interrelations between BMI and BMI difference as well as education and difference in education. What else can be seen: High monthly income and high education are factors that lead to marriage with slimmer women. This result is congruent with the findings of Franzen and Hartmann (2001), who show that men with higher social status marry physically more attractive women. Also, good health, an indicator for physical attractiveness, leads to marriage with a woman with a comparably lower BMI. The negative influence of age on BMI difference can probably be explained by the gender-specific development of body fat in the life cycle; with rising age, this value increases stronger in women than in men (Casey/Dwyer et al. 1992: 17). The third regression shows that socially and physically attractive men marry comparably more educated women. The negative influence of income on the difference in education can be interpreted as an exchange between the

man's economic capital against the wife's cultural capital (cf. Kalmijn 1998). Men with a higher BMI, i. e. physically less attractive men, marry less educated women.

The three regressions showed a clear influence of the economic gap between the partners' countries of origin on marriage structure. People aim to maximize their partner's attractiveness. It could be shown that German men increase their partners' attractiveness by choosing a wife from a poorer country instead of a German wife.

5. Conclusion and outlook

This study asked which factors explain why German men marry women from economically weaker countries. Two approaches were chosen. First, it was analyzed whether men with low chances on the German marriage market choose women from these countries. This hypothesis has largely been disproved. Physical unattractiveness, low social status and a lack of social contact do not lead to these marriages. However, a strong influence could be shown for the marriage age of German men. This allows the conclusion that German men marry women from poorer countries when they have age-related difficulties to find a German wife.

Second, the study tested whether the opportunities to increase the partner's attractiveness is an incentive for German men to marry women from poorer countries. This hypothesis was fully confirmed. The extent to which wives from poor countries are younger, slimmer and more educated than their husband is higher than in German-German marriages. This observation also remains stable when controlling for the husband's individual resources. This proves that an exchange of resources can not only take place between the direct features of marriage partners, but also between the individual feature of one partner and the economic wealth of the other partner's country of origin. When women from economically weaker countries wish to marry a German man, which means an economic improvement for them, they have to accept trade-offs in other aspects.

The results disprove many conclusions made in previous, qualitative studies. The assumption of del Rosario (1994), Beer (1996) and Ruenkaew (2003) that physical unattractiveness, social isolation and a low social status lead to marriages with women from poor countries, cannot be verified here. This discrepancy can probably be explained by the different methodological approaches. Qualitative studies have used guided interviews to analyze small samples. The study at hand tests hypotheses using a quantitative approach; it searches for measurable differences in partner choice between German men who opt for wives from economically weaker countries and those who chose German wives. This approach only regards clear irregularities, mavericks remain unseen. The results of this study suggest that low physical and social attractiveness of men might be a reason to marry a woman from an economically weaker country in single cases, but that most of these marriages are not explained by these factors. The data rather suggest to interpret the choice of a woman from an economically weaker country by means of search theory. Average German men who

are looking for very attractive partners and cannot find such a partner in Germany or who do not wish to search for a long time, can avoid these obstacles by chosing a woman from an economically weaker country.

The methods employed here allow for various recommendations for further studies in this field. First, a better, especially larger sample would mean a major improvement. Beside better reliability, this would permit a differentiation between foreign wives' countries of residence. Furthermore, the data collection should also be carried out as close to the point of marriage as possible or retrospectively to record the situation of both partners at the time when the decision to marry was made.

Second, a better operationalization of social contacts as indicator for chances on the marriage market would be useful. In this study, only the frequency of contacts was measured, but this does not give any information about the person's behavior in these contexts, which also influences the chances of finding a partner. Ruenkaew finds shyness in several of her interview partners, which leads to a lack of contact to potential partners (Ruenkaew 2003: 212). The inclusion of such factors could be improved with methods from psychology, e. g. with the measurement of personality characteristics like openness vs. introversion.

Third, a similar aspect which could not be followed here, is the influence of attitudes towards gender roles. In qualitative studies, men with South-East Asian wives said they had married their wife because they did not get along with the emancipated way of German women. It would be worth examining to what extent conservative attitudes towards gender roles influence the decision to marry a foreign wife.

Fourth, the influence of cultural (Beer 1996: 169f.) closeness could be taken into account. In a first step it would have to be examined whether a divergence between the cultural patterns of the man and potential German mates lead to the choice of a foreign wife. In a second step it could then be examined whether German men choose those foreign wives that are culturally close to them.

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