New Boundaries on the Marriage Market: Are the First and Second Marriage Market
Segregated and Who Crosses the Line?

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Short Abstract

Because of the rise in divorce and separation, the marriage market has become increasingly diverse as to singles' relationship histories. Consequently, a new boundary may have emerged on the marriage market. This study examines similarity in partners' relationship history to show whether the first and second marriage market are segregated. Using several Dutch data sets, I find a strong tendency towards homogamy on marital, union and parental history, even after controlling for structural meeting chances. Against expectations, partner similarities are equally strong in marriage and cohabitation. The highest homogamy rates are found for prior union history, suggesting that the strongest dividing line is between those with and without any union experiences. Analyses examining who crosses this line show that indicators for progressive attitudes, such as parental divorce and religiosity, are the most important determinants, much more so than greater restrictions on the marriage market due to few socioeconomic resources.

Partner similarities in age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity and religion suggest that the marriage market is segregated along age lines and ethnic, socioeconomic and religious boundaries (Kalmijn, 1998; Blackwell & Lichter, 2004). Recent demographic trends suggest the emergence of a new boundary. The rise in cohabitation, divorce and separation, imply that the marriage market has become increasingly diverse as to singles' relationship histories. As a result, the marriage market may nowadays also be segregated by people's prior relationship history. This study examines whether such a new boundary has emerged between the first and second marriage market by studying similarity in partners' relationship history, in short, relationship history homogamy. This type of homogamy shows people's willingness to interact with others depending upon their relationship history (Kalmijn, 1998); a person's relationship history is then used as a selection criterion on the marriage market. The implications of relationship history homogamy also warrant its examination. Remarriages are less stable than marriages, most so when both rather than one partner is divorced (Clarke & Wilson, 1994). Homogamy implies that the well documented adverse effects of divorce for parents and children cumulate over the life course through partner selection patterns.

Prior research is scarce, pertains to the US and has been limited to marital choices. Americans show a strong tendency to marry someone with a similar marital history (Dean & Gurack, 1978; Ono, 2005). Although not focused on homogamy, studies on stepfamily formation further suggest a tendency towards homogamy on parental history (Goldscheider & Sassler, 2006). First, I examine whether these findings can be generalized to the Netherlands. Because family change occurred relatively late here, stronger patterns of homogamy may be expected. Second, I extend upon prior studies by analyzing homogamy in marriages as well as consensual unions. In addition, homogamy refers to the extent to which: (1) the divorced mate with the never married (marital history homogamy), (2) people with no prior union experiences, be it marriage or cohabitation, mate with divorced or separated persons (union history homogamy), and (3) people with prior children mate with childless persons (parental history homogamy). A third contribution is that I examine who crosses the boundary between the first and second marriage market by assessing the effects of socioeconomic and social-demographic characteristics on chances of a heterogamous union.

Unions are expected to be homogamous due to structural opportunities and mating preferences. Meeting opportunities arising from the relatively greater group size of those without a prior history vis-à-vis those who have, imply relationship history homogamy (Kalmijn, 1998; Ono 2005). Chances to meet dissimilar people may also be reduced because of homogamy on other characteristics (Ono, 2005). As people with prior relationships are older and from lower economic strata, homogamy on these characteristics would lead to relationship history homogamy as a byproduct. In addition, homogamy on marital or union history may result from parental history homogamy and vice versa. Studies show that marital history homogamy persist after such structural factors are controlled, pointing at the role of preferences (Ono, 2005). People may prefer a mate with a similar history or they compete for mates without any prior history. People may prefer similarity because ties to the prior relationship, such as contacts with the ex-partner, constitute barriers for intermarriage (Ono,

2005). In case of heterogamy, ties to the former relationship of just one of the partners could lead to conflict and lack of understanding of the other, never-partnered, partner. Conflict is less if partners share similar experiences. Ties to the former relationship, however, and the complexities it creates for new partners may at the same time be a reason for people to prefer mates without any relational experiences, as is suggested in case of the most complex type of prior history, that is, having prior children (Goldscheider & Sassler, 2006). Regardless of whether people prefer similarity or partners without any history, the result will be homogamy.

Theories on differences between marriage and cohabitation suggest that homogamy is greater in marriage than cohabitation. Cohabitation may imply less commitment and therefore less stringent selection criteria (Schoen & Weinick,1993), leading to less homogamy in cohabiting unions. Alternatively, cohabitation may be a trial stage and selective outfall in the process to marriage may lead to greater homogamy in marriages (Blackwell & Lichter, 2004). Theories on the complexities of remarriage further suggest that homogamy varies depending on the type of relationship history. Ties to the prior relationship are a major reason why people would prefer a similar partner or one without prior relationships. The extent to which people have such ties depends upon whether this relationship was a marriage or consensual union and whether there were children involved. Given the institutionalized nature of marriage, formerly married people probably have stronger ties to the former relationship than cohabitants. Ties may even be stronger in case of prior children, because children make it more likely that relationships with ex-partners and their family are continued (Cherlin, 1978). Homogamy will thus be strongest for parental status, followed by marital history, and lastly, union history.

As to who crosses the line, two mechanisms may explain individual differences in chances of a heterogamous union. First, the marriage market can be viewed as a place where people trade resources to get the best possible match. People with limited or undesirable resources face greater restrictions to get what they want (Kalmijn, 1998). Hence, if people prefer similarity (i.e., homogamy), men and women with many socioeconomic resources and younger persons have a smaller chance of a heterogamous union on both the first and second marriage market. If people compete for mates without any prior experience, this hypothesis also holds for people from the first marriage market. However, high-resource and younger persons from the second marriage market are more likely to cross the line and enter a heterogamous union; they can compensate for their prior history by offering these resources in return. Second, people may differ in their preferences rather than restrictions. A union between persons from the first and second marriage market is unconventional and people with progressive attitudes may be more open-minded about it. Hence, non-religious persons and persons with unconventional family experiences, such as parental divorce, may be more likely to enter a heterogamous union. Alternatively, the stigma of divorce and separation may imply that it is socially disapproved of to have a divorced or separated partner (Goldscheider & Sassler, 2006). Progressive persons from the first marriage market are then more likely to cross the line, but on the second marriage market, progressive attitudes predict smaller chances of heterogamy.

For this study, six data sets were pooled to arrive at a sufficiently large sample size for the group of people with prior unions: the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study, the Family Surveys Dutch Population of 1992, 1998, 2000 and 2003, and the Households in the Netherlands Survey 1995. In all surveys, both partners in a marital or consensual union were asked about their childbearing history, prior marriages and cohabiting unions. Some surveys did not distinguish between prior cohabitation and marriage and others only have information on marital history. Sample sizes thus differ depending upon the type of relationship history homogamy studied (N for marital and parental history homogamy: 6,666; for union history homogamy: 4,525). The data pertain to the stock of existing unions, which has the disadvantage of analyzing a selective sample given the aforementioned higher dissolution risks of remarriages, but all analyses control for union duration.

Homogamy is assessed for all unions and for marriages and consensual unions separately, and before and after controlling for union duration and structural factors: age and educational homogamy and homogamy on parental history (when assessing marital and union history homogamy) or on marital history (for parental history homogamy). Loglinear models are common in homogamy studies, but sample sizes do not allow for these data-intensive models. I follow the approach of Ono (2005) and use logistic regressions with wife's relationship history as the dependent variable (i.e., divorced or not; prior union or not; prior children or not) and husband's relationship history as the central independent variable. The extent of homogamy is shown by the exponentiated coefficient (odds ratio). Analyses with husband's rather than wife's relationship history as the dependent variable yield similar results.

Simple percentages show strong homogamy with 95% of the unions being homogamous on parental history, 93% on marital history and 90% on union history. Most of these unions are those with both partners having no prior marriages, unions or children, which is no surprise given their larger group size compared to those who divorced or separated. Odds ratios, which control for relative group size (Kalmijn, 1998: 405), also suggest strong homogamy. Homogamy is found to be significantly stronger in marriage than cohabitation for all types of homogamy, and parental history homogamy is the strongest, followed by marital history and union history homogamy, respectively. However, once structural factors and duration are controlled, odds ratios drop and contrary to expectations, differences between cohabiting and marital unions are no longer significant. Also against expectations, union history homogamy is found to be the strongest type of relationship homogamy. The adjusted odds ratio shows that people with prior union experiences are almost five times as likely to be in a union with someone who has prior unions than people without union experiences. The adjusted odds ratios for marital and parental history are significantly smaller (2.4 and 2.2 respectively).

To assess who crosses the line, logistic regression analysis is used with union history (i.e., prior unions or not) as the dependent variable as this type of homogamy was the strongest. Because partner choice may differ by gender and for those from the first and second marriage market, chances of heterogamy are modeled separately for men and women and for those from the first and second market. Analyses control for the duration and type of union, and

include indicators for homogamy on age, education and parental status to control for heterogamy as a byproduct. Little support is found for the trading-resources perspective. For men from the first marriage market (N=3,340), none of the indicators for socioeconomic resources (i.e., employment, economic occupational status and education) is significant. For women without any prior unions (N=3,395), only the effect of education is significant, but opposite to expectations: higher educated women are more likely to be in a union with a previously divorced or separated man. Age effects are consistent with expectations; younger men and women are less likely to crossover to the second marriage market. Although sample sizes are small and results therefore not definitive, the results for the second marriage market are inconsistent as well. For previously divorced or separated men (N=423) none of the socioeconomic indicators is significant, and for women (N=368) only the effect of economic occupational status is marginally significant; high-status women are less likely to cross the line, suggesting that women use their resources to get a similar partner. Age effects are again strong; older men and women are less likely to crossover to the first marriage market.

More support is found for the importance of progressive attitudes. Men and women from the first marriage market are more likely to have a divorced or separated partner when their parents were non-religious or when women's - not men's - parents divorced. Women with non-religious parents from the second marriage market are also found to be more likely to cross the line. Overall, greater restrictions due to few resources do not seem to explain heterogamous choices well, rather it seems to be a matter of differences in preferences arising from unconventional experiences. The consistent age effects are therefore more likely to be explained by other mechanisms than by the greater restrictions faced by older people. For example, preferences may change as people grow older or their opportunities to meet previously divorced or separated persons are simply greater given age-segregated social networks and social activities.

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