

WHO MARRIES WHOM?

Educational Systems as Marriage Markets in Modern Societies

EDITED BY

HANS-PETER BLOSSFELD
AND ANDREAS TIMM

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PREFACE

Marriage and social inequality are closely interrelated. Marriage is dependent on the structure of marriage markets, and marriage patterns have consequences for social inequality. This book demonstrates that in most modern societies the educational system has become an increasingly important marriage market, particularly for those who are highly qualified. Educational expansion in general and the rising educational participation of women in particular unintentionally have increased the rate of “assortative meeting” and assortative mating across birth cohorts. Rising educational homogamy means that social inequality is further enhanced through marriage because better (and worse) educated single men and women pool their economic and sociocultural advantages (and disadvantages) within couples.

In this book we study the changing role of the educational system as a marriage market in modern societies from a cross-national comparative perspective. Using life-history data from a broad range of industrialized countries and longitudinal statistical models, we analyze the process of spouse selection in the life courses of single men and women, step by step. The countries included in this book vary widely in important characteristics such as demographic behavior and institutional characteristics. The life course approach explicitly recognizes the dynamic nature of partner decisions, the importance of educational roles and institutional circumstances as young men and women move through their life paths, and the cumulation of advantages and disadvantages experienced by individuals. The book consists of thirteen country-specific studies, each conducted by researchers who have an intimate understanding of the country in question. Most studies employed nationally representative data, covering cohorts of men and women over a broad historical period. As far as possible, very similar statistical analyses were used. But we preferred to avoid complete standardization of method because both the educational system and the age at marriage vary from one country to another and over time. The book is theoretically driven and combines demographic approaches with rational choice theory to explain assortative mating.

The initial idea for this cross-national comparative project was stimulated by empirical results from an event history analysis carried out on West Germany. This research clearly indicated that educational expansion has increased the rate of educational homogamy in Germany. There has been an increasing closure of social structure and social networks as an unintended consequence of educational expansion. In addition, we found that in Germany social origin has a strong effect on educational homogamy. There have been strong direct and indirect effects of father’s education on marriage patterns.

The primary aim in our thirteen-nation comparison was to check the generalizability of our findings and interpretations for Germany. Taking into account the inevitable constraints of data availability and expertise, we tried to include countries varying widely in important characteristics, such as educational systems, family tradition, and the extent to which the roles of men and women have undergone a progressive transformation. The countries included in our comparison are West Germany, the Netherlands, Flemish Belgium (Flanders), France, Italy, Spain, Great Britain, Denmark, Sweden, Hungary, Slovenia, the United States of America and Israel.

As editors of the book and organizers of the cross-national research project, we would like to thank all the contributors for their fruitful cooperation and for the enormous effort they put into their analyses and country-chapters. We tried to use comparable data and made a commitment to apply a common research design to study the changes in “assortative meeting” and “assortative mating”. However, the contributors did not simply help us carry out a previously designed analysis. As clearly indicated by the wealth of information in the country-specific chapters, much of the work in this book represents the creative contributions of our collaborators.

We are grateful to Gijs Beets who supported the publication of this manuscript as a volume in the European Studies of Population series. All the chapters in the book were peer-reviewed by the members of the international group and revised several times. They were also evaluated by two anonymous Kluwer Academic Publishers reviewers. We are very grateful for their thoughtful comments and constructive suggestions which improved the quality of this book.

The major financial support for the comparative project, in particular for the joint workshop held in Bremen, was a grant from the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) for the Sfb-186 research project “Household Dynamics and Social Inequality” at the University of Bremen. During the final stages of preparing this book, support was also provided by a grant from the Volkswagen Foundation (Volkswagen Stiftung) for the GLOBALIFE project at the University of Bielefeld and the Otto Friedrich University Bamberg.

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Hans-Peter Blossfeld
Otto Friedrich University Bamberg

Andreas Timm
University of Bremen

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ABOUT THE EDITORS

Hans-Peter Blossfeld has been professor and chair of Sociology I at Bamberg University since September 2002. He was full professor of Sociology and Political Sciences at the European University Institute in Florence (1989-92), professor of Sociology (Chair of Social Statistics and Sociological Research Methods) at the University of Bremen (1992-98) and professor of Sociology (Chair in Theory and Empirical Analysis of Social Structures and Economic Systems) at the University of Bielefeld (1998-2002). Since 1990 he has been editor of the *European Sociological Review*. He has published 15 books and over 120 articles on social inequality, youth, family, and educational sociology, labor market research, demography, social stratification and mobility, the modern methods of quantitative social research, and statistical methods for longitudinal data analysis. He directs the GLOBALIFE project at the Otto Friedrich University Bamberg (www.uni-bamberg.de/sowi/soziologie-i/).

Andreas Timm studied sociology and jurisprudence at the University of Bremen. His main interests are research in family formation, educational sociology, social inequality, and methods for longitudinal analysis.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Fabrizio Bernardi, took his doctorate in sociology and social research in 1998 at the University of Trento. From 1998 to 2001 he worked as assistant professor of sociology at the University of Bielefeld. Since 2001 he is professor of social structure in the Department of Sociology II of the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED), Madrid, Spain.

Erzsébet Bukodi is Head of Section of Social Stratification within the Department of Social Statistics of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, Budapest. She has finished her PhD in sociology in 2002 about marriage timing, and homogamy in Hungary. Her research interests also involve educational inequalities and different aspects of life course analysis. She is a participant of a research project aiming to develop a new social indicator system in Hungary. Her recent studies has been published in *European Sociological Review*, and in H.-P. Blossfeld-S. Drobnic (eds.): *Careers of couples in contemporary societies* (Oxford University Press, 2001).

Nevenka Černigoj Sadar, PhD in Psychology, is a senior researcher and an associate professor of social psychology at Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana. Her main areas of research are: changing life patterns, gender divisions in paid and unpaid work in relation to social policy measures and quality of life in various life spheres. She lectures career management on post-graduate program and is a mentor to graduate and post-graduate students. She participated in several international comparative research projects.

Tak Wing Chan is a University Lecturer in Sociology and a Fellow of New College, University of Oxford. His current research interests include social stratification and mobility, and family and the life course.

Martine Corijn is currently working at the Center for Population and Family Studies - CBGS - in Brussels. Her main research interests are family and fertility behavior and family policies.

Nan Dirk De Graaf is professor of Sociology, Department of Sociology, PO Box 9104, 6500 Nijmegen, the Netherlands. He is also a member of the Research school ICS and an associate member of Nuffield College, Oxford. He published various articles on the consequences of inequality (e.g. political, cultural, and health consequences), the impact of cultural and economic resources on educational attainment, and the sociology of religion.

Sonja Drobnič is professor of Sociology at the University of Erfurt. Her main research interests include life-course research and gender, in particular employment dynamics of couples and retirement in a household context, as well as issues in social stratification, comparative research, and longitudinal research methods.

Brendan Halpin lectures in the Department of Sociology, University of Limerick, Ireland. He was previously at the Institute for Social and Economic Research, Essex, and Nuffield College, Oxford. Core interests include the analysis of social processes - marriage, divorce, social mobility and the labor market - from a longitudinal perspective.

Jan O. Jonsson is professor of Sociology at the Swedish Institute for Social Research, Stockholm University. His research is in social stratification and educational inequality, family studies, and young people's living conditions. He is the co-author of *Can Education Be Equalized?* (Westview Press, 1996) and *Cradle to Grave. Life Course Change in Modern Sweden* (Sociologypress, 2001). He is also responsible for the Swedish Level-of-Living Surveys.

Teresa Lankuttis, born 1970 in Hamburg, finished her studies of sociology at Bremen University in 2002. She worked in the Special Collaborative Center 186 "Status Passages and Risks in the Life Course", participating mainly in project B6, "Household Dynamics and Social Inequality". Findings of her thesis "Remarriage After Divorce In Germany" will be published by Prof. Blossfeld in the Journal For Family Research (Zeitschrift für Familienforschung) in 2003.

Søren Leth-Sørensen is a sociologist employed as Senior Advisor at Statistics Denmark. Currently his office is at the University of Aarhus. His responsibilities include managing projects for outside researchers. His main interest is labor market issues and family changes in Denmark. He has taken part in establishing the so-called IDA-database. This a longitudinal database for persons and firms in Denmark.

María José González López is a full-time lecturer in the Department of Political and Social Sciences at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra (Barcelona) and has a Ph.D. in Political and Social Sciences from the European University Institute (Florence). Her main areas of interest are the sociology of the family, gender inequalities and demographic analysis.

Dominique Goux is the head of the Employment Statistics division at the French National Institute for Statistics and Economic Surveys (INSEE) in Paris. She is also associated professor of applied econometrics at Ecole Normale Supérieure de la rue d'Ulm.

Ursula Henz is currently a lecturer at the sociology department of the London School of Economics. Prior to joining the LSE she held research fellowships at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development and Education in Berlin, at Stockholm University and at King's College London. Her studies are mainly concerned with longitudinal aspects of education, labour market participation and family dynamics.

Erik Maurin is a research fellow at the Center for Research in Economics and Statistics (CREST) in Paris. His main research interests include social mobility, the measurement of inequalities and the causes of rising inequalities in employment chances.

Péter Róbert is associate professor at the Department of Sociology at the Eötvös Lóránd University, Budapest. He is also a senior researcher at the Social Research Center (TÁRKI). His research interests are in the field of social stratification and mobility with special focus on educational inequalities and life-course analysis. He is also doing research on life style differentiation, on attitudes toward inequalities and on political preferences. His recent articles have been published in *European Sociological Review*, *International Review of Sociology*, *European Societies*, and in H.-P. Blossfeld-S. Drobnic (eds.): *Careers of couples in contemporary societies* (Oxford University Press, 2001).

Yossi Shavit is professor and chair of Sociology and Anthropology at Tel Aviv University. Before coming to Tel Aviv he was a professor at the European University Institute in Florence and at the University of Haifa. His areas of interest include social stratification, sociology of education and ethnic relations in Israel. With Hans-Peter Blossfeld he published *Persistent Inequalities: a Comparative Study of Educational Attainment in Thirteen Countries* (1993, Westview Press) and with Walter Müller he published *From school to Work: A Comparative Study of Educational Qualifications and Occupational Destinations* (1998, Clarendon Press). He now leads a comparative study on the transformation of higher education and social stratification.

Wilma Smeenk is senior researcher at the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement (NSCR), a research institute of the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) affiliated with Leiden University. Within the field of criminology, her interest in intra-family violence and the role of the family in the development and transmission of criminal behaviors stems from her previous involvement in research on partner choice and family formation of

which this book reports. Other research interests include theory development and the way schools prevent and counter juvenile delinquency.

Haya Stier teaches at Tel Aviv University and serves as the chairperson of the Department of Labor Studies. Her research interests include issues of work and family, poverty and inequality. She recently published in *Work, Employment and Society*; *Social Science Quarterly*; and *American Journal of Sociology* and co-authored, with Marta Tienda, *The Color of Opportunity: Pathways to Family, Work and Welfare* (University of Chicago Press, 2001).

Wout Ultee is professor of sociology at the University of Nijmegen in the Netherlands. Apart from working in the field of social stratification, he has published on theoretical-empirical progress in sociology and has contributed to multi-moment multi-actor data sets for the Netherlands containing life history data collected among primary respondents, their spouse, their parents, their children and their siblings.

1

EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS AS MARRIAGE MARKETS IN MODERN SOCIETIES: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

HANS-PETER BLOSSFELD AND ANDREAS TIMM

INTRODUCTION

The answer to the question Who marries whom? is central for an understanding of the reproduction of social inequality in modern societies (Mare 1991). Rates of homogamy reflect the degree to which individuals of similar social origin and with the same characteristics such as education, religion, race, ethnicity, or occupation, marry each other (Kalmijn 1991, 1998; Kalmijn, Flap 2001). They indicate the degree of exclusion through the social structure and the extent to which social networks are closed to outsiders (Glass 1954; Simmel 1917/1970; von Wiese 1967; Laumann 1973).

The growing interest in assortative marriage over the last several years (see Kalmijn 1998) might suggest that there is no need for another study on that issue. But this impression is wrong. There is not only a lack of systematic cross-national comparative analysis about the mechanisms of how single people meet, form couples and eventually marry, but also a paucity of dynamic analysis on the processes of assortative mating in the life course. Most of the current studies have been *ex post facto* analyses of the stock of marriages at a given point in time (Jürgens 1973; Mayer 1977; Tegtmeier 1979; Galler 1979; Haller 1983; Ziegler 1985; Handl 1988; Teckenberg 1991; Ultee, Luijkx 1990; Jones 1991; Mare 1991; Kalmijn 1991; Erikson, Goldthorpe 1992; Uunk, Ganzeboom, Robert 1993; Jones, Luijkx 1996; Uunk 1996; Wirth 1996, 2000; Teckenberg 2000). This kind of research starts from marital matches, normally observed in cross-sectional studies, and then tries to “explain” patterns of assortative mating through the spouses’ individual characteristics. The methodological problems of such a “causal approach” are obvious: this type of analysis not only starts from the outcomes (the unions) and then goes back in time to their causal conditions (the individual characteristics), but also often excludes all those persons from the study who are still single at the time of the interview. An appropriate causal analysis, however, should proceed the other way around. It should study the mechanisms of how change in some property earlier in time induces change in still other properties later in time. In other words, research on assortative mating should start with young single men and women and move along the time axis to reconstruct the effects of changes in earlier social circumstances in the life course on people’s later marriage decisions (Lichter 1990; Lichter, Anderson, Hayward 1995; Blossfeld 1996; Blossfeld, Müller 1997).

The aim of our cross-national comparative study in this book is to achieve exactly that goal. Using life-history data from a broad range of industrialized countries and longitudinal statistical models, we reconstruct the process of spouse selection in the life course of single men and women step by step. We compare the results across countries and within each country across successive birth cohorts covering long historical periods, often the time span after the end of World War II. Of central interest for our analysis is the extent to which young men and women pool their educational resources at the time of their first marriage. Education is considered in this book as a central variable for marriage because (1) education is the most important determinant of occupational success in industrialized societies (Shavit, Müller 1998, p. 1) and (2) it reflects cultural resources influencing individuals’ preferences for specific partners. Thus, from a life course perspective, educational homogamy implies that the degree of social inequality engendered in an individual’s life course is further enhanced through marriage because advantageous (and disadvantageous) economic and sociocultural resources of two individuals are then pooled and cumulated (Mayer 1977).

In most modern societies the participation in higher education has increased dramatically in recent decades (Shavit, Blossfeld 1993, p. 14), and more for women than for men (Erikson, Jonsson 1996; Shavit, Blossfeld 1996). We are therefore especially interested to explore the role of the educational system as a marriage market and to analyze the changes induced by educational expansion. Educational expansion means that there is an increasing chance to meet people of the opposite sex with the same educational level at an age when individuals typically begin to form couples. Educational expansion should therefore increase the likelihood of educational homogamy across cohorts and, as a consequence, not only reinforce social inequality among married couples

from one birth cohort to the next (see Blossfeld, Drobnic 2001), but also lead to a growing divergence of social opportunities for the next generation of children.

The overall result of current studies on assortative mating is that there is a strong correlation between characteristics of both spouses in terms of their social origin and level of education (see e.g. Ziegler 1985; Ultee, Luijkx 1990; Teckenberg 1991; Wirth 1996; Mare 1991; Kalmijn 1991; Smeenk 1998; Teckenberg 2000). This suggests that there are important social mechanisms in modern societies that influence *intragenerational* spouse selection and lead to an *intergenerational* reproduction of social inequality. However, since marriages are not arranged anymore and contemporary young men and women are not forced to marry particular persons today, the interest in explaining how social inequality actually is reproduced in marital decision-making seems to be gaining momentum. We propose in this book that any empirical analysis has to take into account the dynamic interplay of opportunity structures to meet potential partners in specific phases in the life course - i.e. the chance to meet someone of the opposite sex within the social networks structured through the educational system for example - as well as individual's preferences determining the choice of partners within these social circles (Blossfeld 1996; Blossfeld, Müller 1997; Blossfeld, Prein 1998). In particular, we would like to investigate how independently taken individual marriage decisions at the micro level lead to a reproduction of social inequality at the macro level and, conversely, why a significant number of men and women succeed in escaping these forces of social reproduction by marrying a partner who does not have the same social origin or educational background.

This book presents the findings of twelve very similar longitudinal studies on assortative mating. The countries included are West Germany, Flanders, France, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Great Britain, Denmark, Sweden, Hungary, Slovenia, and the United States of America. The primary aim of this comparison has been to test the generality of earlier country-specific findings and interpretations (see Kohn 1987) about the role of the educational system as a marriage market in West Germany (see Blossfeld, Timm 1997). This longitudinal study revealed that the German educational system has become an increasingly important marriage market, particularly for those who are highly qualified, with the effect that educational homogamy has been increasing drastically in West Germany across birth cohorts. The cross-societal comparisons in this book provide the opportunity to test the generality of these findings on Germany and assess the impact of broader historical, cultural, and societal contexts influencing marriage decisions in the life course. Finally, at the end of this book, these longitudinal comparisons are enriched by a cross-sectional case study of educational intermarriage in Israel, a society with unique multiple and cross-cutting divisions.

THEORIES AND HYPOTHESES

Most theories of assortative mating describe spouse selection as the result of a long-term, cumulative and continuously changing life course process (see e.g. Haller 1983; Lichter 1990; Lichter, Anderson, Hayward 1995). From a social structural point of view, this process begins with the economic and cultural conditions of primary and secondary socialization in the family of origin during childhood and youth, branches off when young people are selected into the various tracks within the educational system, and further differentiates into the manifold occupational fields and job careers after entry into the employment system. All of these role transitions in the life course are connected with a permanent restructuring of social networks and interaction relationships (Laumann 1973) with continuous changes in the opportunities to meet certain potential spouses in everyday activities. In the following, we first describe the specificities of the educational system as a marriage market, then we develop a general partner search model and discuss the consequences of gender-specific preferences and the mechanisms of social origin for marital choice, and finally, we describe our cross-national comparison.

The Educational System as a Marriage Market

Partner decisions and spouse selection are most often made in the phase of transition from youth to adulthood. This phase of the life course cannot be specified by rigid age categories but rather has to be conceptualized as the gradual adoption of adult roles and differential participation in certain "adult" activities (Hogan 1978; Marini 1984, 1985; Blossfeld, Nuthmann 1989). Thus, partner decisions and the decision to marry are itself a defining characteristic of the normative conception of the transition to adulthood (Featherman, Hogan, Sorensen 1984). The other significant transitions are completion of education and entry into first stable jobs which are determined by the country-specific institutional structures of the school and university systems and the organization of the employment and industrial relations systems. The focus of our discussion in this book is on the role of the educational system as a marriage market.

First of all, the organization of the educational system in all modern societies (Shavit, Blossfeld 1993) imposes normally a relatively rigid age-graded logic on the life course of youth and young adults. Although the degree of tracking in the educational system varies across modern countries, educational careers are as a rule structured in a sequence of selection barriers or hurdles that have to be mastered by each generation (Shavit, Blossfeld 1993). In most societies, educational decisions are also concentrated on specific ages and they are

normally hard to postpone or to revise once they are made (cf. for example Blossfeld 1989, 1990). At every educational hurdle, a certain proportion of young men and women fail to succeed in the process of acquiring higher qualifications. The probability of a successful transition at a particular educational attainment level depends (1) on the number of positions available at the next level relative to the origin level for each cohort, and (2) on the social allocation of these positions according to mechanisms such as gender and social origin (cf. Shavit, Blossfeld 1993).

This stepwise selection process in the educational system has three important consequences for the role of the educational system as a marriage market. *First*, in each generation the less able and educationally disadvantaged are leaving the educational system at earlier selection barriers (and at younger ages). The selection process in the educational system therefore creates increasingly homogeneous groups within the educational system with rising age. From one step in the selection process to the next, only those youth or young adults who remain together longer will attain either the same or eventually a higher educational level. According to Blau (1994), this structural homogenization has important consequences for social networks because the probability that friendships develop is first of all dependent on contact opportunities. Thus, educational selection produces a structurally increasing likelihood of establishing a social relationship with a similarly qualified partner - and then perhaps of later marriage - due to the mere fact that one has continued together in the educational system. It is important to note that we mean here not only the contacts that one makes directly within the classroom or the educational institution itself, but also those within everyday life activities. This means friends, and friends of friends, contact opportunities in free-time and sports activities and the like which, of course, are also to a large extent structured directly or indirectly by the fact that young people participate in the educational system.

Conversely, the structural chance of meeting a partner with a different level of educational attainment decreases significantly with time in school because (1) those in each age group with lower qualifications have already left the educational system and have thereby taken other life course trajectories (with different and normally more heterogeneous social networks); and (2) because of "ceiling effects" the chances of meeting a partner with higher qualifications clearly decreases as individuals' levels of educational attainment advance. In other words, the growing opportunity of meeting people with the same level of qualification in the course of the educational career is a by-product of the selection process in the educational system and therefore indirectly increases the likelihood of educational homogeneity.

Second, the process of selection in education means that the more highly qualified will leave the educational system at a later age. Since attaining an education makes it difficult to adopt family roles in most countries (Marini 1985) and involves a high degree of economic dependence on parents or the state (see e.g. Blossfeld, Nuthmann 1989), most young men and women participating in the educational system are therefore normally "not ready" to start a family. Completion of education is thus an important step in the normative (and economic) conception of the transition to adulthood and, in this way, becomes a socially significant precondition for entering into marriage (Blossfeld, Huinink 1991; Blossfeld, Jaenichen 1990; Blossfeld 1995; Smeenk 1998).

Since the more highly qualified postpone the starting of a family longer, the probability will grow that they will then quickly "catch up" with their age cohort after leaving school and eventually marry the partner who became a boy or girl friend during the period of education. Thus, for the highly educated, the decision of marrying a person of the same educational attainment level should be highly age-graded directly after leaving the educational system.

Third, in this process of educational selection, the less qualified enter the labor market and employment system at an earlier age. This transition is often connected with a more heterogeneous social network at work and leisure and implies an increase in the frequency of contacts to people with different social characteristics such as age, occupation, or educational attainment level. The chances of meeting a spouse with a different level of education is thus structurally increased for these groups at younger ages. Many of these contacts will occur by chance and be unimportant. But without the chance to meet, no new social relationships can develop. Sometimes life-long friendships and marriages begin with such kind of "accidental" encounters (Blau 1994). Thus, lower qualified people are not only prepared to marry at an earlier age (because they are leaving the educational system earlier and that involves a higher degree of economic independence on parents or the state) but their - conscious or latent - "readiness" meets with a more heterogeneous marriage market at the workplace and leisure activities. A lower level of educational attainment should therefore be related to a less age-graded marriage behavior and a higher likelihood of heterogamy at an earlier age.

On the other hand, lower qualified young adults who have left the educational system earlier in the life course will for a longer time tend to meet at the workplace similarly aged single people with the same lower educational attainment level. If it is true that individuals tend to prefer spouses of approximately the same age, this should then reinforce the tendency of homogamous marriage also among the less qualified. Having left the educational system earlier, however, gives lower qualified people more time to choose an appropriate partner in the life course. Thus, homogamy among the lower qualified should therefore be less age-graded than for the higher educated.

In summary, the structural opportunities to meet a potential spouse with the same qualification level in the life course should be strongly dependent on the educational attainment level. This opportunity will be highly time-dependent because it is based on the logic of a stepwise selection process producing filtered educational

groups with rising age. The likelihood of educational homogamy should therefore increase significantly with the level of educational attainment. A logical implication of this structural life course process is that educational expansion (cf. Shavit, Blossfeld 1993; Müller, Karle 1993; Erikson, Jonsson 1996) should produce higher levels of educational homogamy across cohorts because both the level of educational attainment and the duration of educational participation increases for a growing number of young people within each cohort (cf. Blossfeld 1985, 1989).

A Decision Model of Marital Choice

The opportunities to meet people with the same educational attainment level are only the necessary (structural) conditions for educational assortative mating (Blau 1994). Young men and women still have to choose a particular partner from their selective social networks (cf. Blossfeld 1996; Blossfeld, Müller 1997). Partner search is, however, an important but rather difficult type of decision making process under uncertainty (Todd, Miller 1999). In this search process, (1) individuals encounter prospective partners in a temporal sequence, (2) who are appearing in random order and (3) are coming from a population with unknown parameters; (4) there are search costs and (5) time limits for partner decisions; (6) there is the difficulty of backtracking to previously rejected prospects (because they might have found another partner in the meantime); (7) there is temporal discounting; and above all, (8) there is the problem that mating must be mutually acceptable to both prospective partners.

In the literature, various search models have been suggested making more or less realistic assumptions on the search process (Gigerenzer, Todd 1999). We do not discuss here in detail all the models that have been proposed (see the discussion in Todd, Miller 1999), for example, by statisticians (models for the so-called “secretary problem,” see Ferguson 1989 or Gilbert and Mosteller 1966), by economists (“optimization models under constraints,” see Lippman, McCall 1976), by biologists (models on animals engaging in mate search, (see Anderson 1994 or Johnstone 1997) or by economic game theorists (models on “two-sided matching,” see Roth, Sotomayor 1990). Instead we are following the footsteps of Gigerenzer and Todd (1999) who suggested that individuals with limited time and knowledge normally use simple and frugal heuristics to make reasonable inferences in complex decision situations. These heuristics do not require finding out or guessing about what all the prospective partners and their life courses may hold in the future, as, for example, the economic models of optimization under constraints do (see also the discussion in Blossfeld, Prein 1998). Instead, these heuristics limit the search for partners or information using easily applicable decision rules and may be considered as specific models of bounded rationality.

The most important heuristic in the context of this book is Simon’s (1956) concept of satisficing. Satisficing is a method for making a partner choice from a set of alternatives encountered sequentially when one does not know much about possible partners ahead of time (Simon 1999). Typically, in such situations, there may be no optimal solution for when to stop looking for prospective marriage partners and settle down with a particular one. Satisficing takes the shortcut of setting an adjustable aspiration level and ending the search for further alternatives as soon as one is encountered that exceeds the aspiration level (Simon 1956). Following Todd and Miller (1999), we assume that the adjustable aspiration level is based on individuals’ past life course experiences and the mate values of those who do and do not show interest.

In the context of this book, we assume that the educational attainment process, as a process of cultural transmission and cultural learning, plays an important role in determining the individual’s conception of an acceptable partner (Haller 1983). We assume that the standards of an appropriate (marriage) partner in terms of educational attainment level rise with the individual’s educational attainment level. Thus, people are assumed to orientate their more or less vague and conscious idea of what they consider to be an acceptable (marriage) partner (Oppenheimer 1988) on their respective educational attainment level reached at each point in the life course. Individuals who are below this level are less attractive partners or might not be seriously considered, and those who do, must not necessarily be the “ideal partners”. In other words, we do not have to assume that the search will be continued until a “perfect” partner has been found (Oppenheimer 1988). Individuals’ definitions of an acceptable partner, however, are assumed to reflect the already reached educational attainment level in the life course (Lichter, Anderson, Hayward 1995).

An important additional feature of mate selection is that at the same time when individuals are evaluating prospective mates, they are also evaluated in return (Todd, Miller 1999). In other words, partner decisions are consensual choices. This means that if a person wants to let a first encounter or repeated rendezvous develop into a long-term intimate relationship or even marriage, then this can only happen if both partners agree (Blau 1994). Both partners must therefore have an interest in the continuation and stability of the intimate relationship and in turning it into a marital union at a certain point in time. Thus, preferences of both partners of the opposite sex have to be taken into account if we are going to explain marriage decisions. We therefore concentrate on the impact of gender on partner decisions and its change over time.

Gender-Specific Preferences and Their Changes

If there was no gender-specific division of labor in the family and the labor market, then, according to Becker (1981, p. 73), men and women would benefit mostly from each other if they resemble themselves as much as possible in all their personal traits (intelligence, health, education, religion, social origin etc.). This view implies that the preference (and utility) structure of men and women tends to be inherently prone to (educational) homogamy, i.e., that “the like likes the like”. It might seem that this general claim is consistent with empirical evidence, as shown by Blau (1994, p. 4).

However, research also shows that modern societies are still characterized by high levels of sex-segregation in the workplace (Bielby, Bielby 1988), gender-specific income and occupational structures (Hakim 1998), and a gendered division of work within the family (Brines 1994; Blossfeld, Drobni 2001). Although the gender structure has changed significantly in these societies across cohorts, these changes have been quite asymmetric for women and men. Female labor market participation has multiplied and most young women are today forced to juggle household and family demands with involvement in paid work, while young men still seem to be constrained to their role as provider by the traditional gender-based division of household and employment responsibilities (see Blossfeld, Drobni 2001).

Becker (1981) asserts that the fundamental reason for the difference in the utility functions of men and women is the gender-specific division of work in society. In this view, women and men do not only marry to fulfill their intimacy needs or because they want to have children together. Rather they marry because the gender roles are inherently complementary (Becker 1981). In a gender-traditional society, men expect to benefit from their wives, since women have been socialized to be more orientated towards taking charge of the household and raising children. On the other side, women count on benefiting from their husbands since men have specialized in life-long gainful employment. In a gender-traditional society, a good education is therefore particularly important for men, since husband's income position determines the economic and social status of the family. In such a context, women thus tend to prefer men with high levels of education and good labor market opportunities and compete for them in the marriage market.

On the other hand, traditional men have ambiguous or mixed preferences with regard to women's education in gender-traditional societies (Becker 1981). As discussed above, husbands have the greatest advantage if their wives are as similar as possible in their traits, including educational level. However, these men are also providers and need wives who assume the bulk of family care and domestic functions and therefore should not have invested too much into their own career resources (or income potential). Thus, in the Becker model they prefer women with similar qualifications but low labor market orientation.

Since women in gender-traditional societies attach less value to their own formal education, the average level of education of these women remains far below that of the men. In other words, only some men can structurally succeed in finding women with the same level of education, while many of them have to marry downwardly regarding educational attainment level. Yet this downward marriage does not in fact frustrate them because traditional women are supposed to stay at home and their lower educational attainment level is therefore not as consequential. In sum, Becker's gender-traditional model suggests a tendency towards educational hypogamy for men and a tendency towards educational hypergamy for women, in particular for the older birth cohorts in the country-studies of our book. This discussion also suggests that it would be misleading to separate preference-based explanations (the preferences of men and women in a gender-traditional society) from structural marriage-market explanations (the structural force of men to marry downwardly) in an artificial way. Both mechanisms are quite interdependent and constitute a dynamic system.

Becker's model also implies that women who are marrying downwardly (or men who are marrying upwardly) should be an exception in gender-traditional societies because these couples diverge with regard to the distributive realities regarding the gender of providers and dependents in traditional society. But this might not be the only explanation. According to the “doing gender” approach, they also violate socially sanctioned arrangements offering recurrent opportunities to advance claims about the self as “naturally” male and female (Berk 1985). Thus, breadwinning wives and dependent husbands in more gender-traditional societies risk (a) social accountability, (b) negative judgements from relatives, friends, colleagues, and (c) even a threat of their gender identities (Brines 1994).

Yet these social and interactional pressures should not only be important in gender-traditional societies. We expect that they also conspire to slow down the diffusion of equal gender roles across cohorts. In particular, they should limit the speed of a symmetric change in gender roles (Brines 1994) and therefore even constrain the choice of women to marry downwardly among later born cohorts. With asymmetric role change, we mean the empirically well-documented “failure” of husbands to increase their housework and child care participation more substantially when their wives work (Brines 1994), or their insistence on the provider role, for example, in West Germany (Blossfeld, Drobni 2001). However, it remains an empirical question to which extent the structural and cultural context of work and family roles change enough across cohorts to profoundly alter this normative context in different societies.

In general, the probability that young men and women change gender norms in successive birth cohorts should strongly depend on the degree of conformity with these norms in the preceding cohorts as well as their

usefulness under new structural constraints. We claim that social norms are changed by rational actors, if the actions of others objectively change costs and benefits to an extent that these norms do not facilitate the actor's means-ends relationships anymore (Blossfeld, Prein 1998). We therefore argue that men's preferences regarding women's educational attainment should dramatically change across cohorts. When the continuous gainful employment of wives becomes normal and the wife's income becomes a significant determinant of the living standard and "lifestyle" in dual-earner families (see also Egebeen, Hawkins 1990), men will increasingly prefer women with a high income potential. Since the level of education is a major determinant of labor market, career and income opportunities in modern societies (Shavit, Müller 1998), men in each later birth cohort should increasingly prefer highly qualified women. This change in preferences, together with men's structurally increased chance of meeting women of equal qualification in the educational system, should therefore raise the level of educational homogamy and reduce educational hypogamy of men across cohorts.

Of course, men with low qualifications in each successive cohort will also increasingly prefer women with higher qualifications and income potential, but these qualified women might be still socially accountable if they marry downwardly, at least as long as the male breadwinner ideology plays an important role in a specific society. Thus, we assume that the continuation of the male breadwinner norm in an emerging dual-earner society will keep the proportion of women who marry less qualified men low across cohorts. Many dual-earner couples in modern societies still try to maintain the image of wives as secondary providers by defining husband's income as essential and wife's salary for "extras" (Blossfeld, Drobnik 2001). This model also suggests that the best educated women and the worst educated men should have the highest likelihood of remaining single (see, e.g. Lichter, Anderson, Hayward 1995). The former because, if they are not successful in finding an equally qualified partner, it is still socially and psychologically costly for them to marry downwardly; the latter because they are not very attractive marital partners in face of the male breadwinner and dual-earner norm.

Mechanisms of Social Origin

The aspect of assortative mating that most intrigues sociologists is the role of the family of social origin. Social origin refers to a conglomerate of highly correlated economic and social characteristics of parents such as wealth, household income, prestige, jobs, education etc. These correlates not only make status differences between educational groups of parents symbolically more important, but also function as barriers between social circles. With increasing level of father's education, we therefore expect the social networks to become more exclusive so that the father's educational attainment level should have a positive *direct effect* on the rate of educational homogamy of the children.

However, expansion of education has increased the number of children from disadvantaged backgrounds in institutions of higher education and thus makes contacts between children of different social origin easier (see also Shavit, Blossfeld 1993; Müller, Karle 1993; Müller, Haun 1994; Henz, Maas 1995; Erikson, Jonsson 1996). This should diminish the social barriers between children from different social classes and increase the probability of coupling among these children. We therefore assume that the positive effect of father's educational attainment level on educational homogamy of his children decreases across cohorts. This effect should be the stronger the greater the degree of openness and the less rigid the degree of tracking in the educational system.

With regard to the *indirect effects* of social origin on the choice of friends and marriage decisions, we formulate the following six hypotheses:

The opportunity of meeting an equally qualified partner in the educational system is the highest if the level of education of son/daughter corresponds to that of the father. In this case, the social networks of the family of origin and the social networks mediated through the educational system will overlap the most and mutually reinforce each other.

On the other hand, those sons/daughters who have attained higher education levels than their fathers will have access to new social networks via school. We assume that these sons/daughters will not only prefer partners with the same education, but will also try to secure their higher social status through homogamous marriage. We therefore expect that the likelihood of educational homogamy also increases in this case.

However, these upwardly mobile sons and daughters also retain their networks with people from their social origin (friends, acquaintances, relatives, etc.) (Blau 1994). Thus, we expect that these social networks will increase the likelihood of choosing a partner from their social origin and therefore to marry downwardly. This effect of social origin on downward marriage should be particularly important for traditionally oriented men, as discussed above. Yet, it might also become important for women across cohort.

Sons and daughters who are downwardly mobile in their educational career should, of course, be less inclined to educational homogamy at this lower level. Thus, we assume a negative effect of social origin on homogamy for this group.

Since these downwardly mobile people can also utilize the social networks of their family of origin, they should have a chance to meet better educated partners and to marry upwardly. This will especially be the case for

traditionally oriented women, but might also be an increasingly important mechanism for men marrying upwardly.

Finally, in terms of social networks, the likelihood should be very small that sons and daughters who are upwardly (downwardly) mobile due to their educational career, marry up (down) even further. Such double upward (downward) mobility should be difficult to achieve due to the lack of social networks.

In summary, if children from privileged (underprivileged) social origins fail (succeed) in the course of their educational career and fall below (go beyond) the educational attainment level of their fathers, then we expect a counter-mobility through marriage which then will at least partially correct the individual failures (achievements) in educational attainment. On the other hand, there will also be a certain proportion of children from the underprivileged classes who will succeed through their own educational career and then be able to secure this upward mobility through educational homogamy. These latter sons and daughters, we would call the “true beneficiaries of educational expansion.” The percentage of these couples and its change across generations should thus be an excellent indicator of the degree of social openness in modern societies. In this book we will examine which of these partially opposing tendencies has been dominant in various countries.

DATA AND METHODS

In chapters 2 to 13, we use individual-based event history data and longitudinal analytical methods and techniques (Blossfeld, Rohwer 2002) to test our hypotheses. The majority of data used in this book came from retrospective or longitudinal panel surveys collected in the 1990s. This included the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSEOP) (chapter 2), data from the Panel Study on Belgian Households (PSBH) and the Fertility and Family Survey including data on Flanders and Brussels (chapter 3), the French Survey on Education and Qualification (FQP) (chapter 4), the Netherlands Family Survey and the Family Survey Dutch Population (chapter 5), the Italian Household Longitudinal Survey (chapter 6), the Spanish Socio-demographic Survey (chapter 7), the British Household Panel Study (BHPS) (chapter 8), the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) (chapter 9), the IDA database for Denmark (chapter 10), the Swedish Level of Living Survey (LNU) (chapter 11), the Hungarian Social Mobility and Life History Survey (1992) (chapter 12), and the Quality of Life Survey in Slovenia (chapter 13).

The basic analytical framework of event history analysis is a discrete state space and a (continuous or discrete) time axis. The following twelve country-specific chapters analyze transitions across a set of discrete destination states (upward, downward or homogamous marriage), including the length of time in the state ‘single.’ The time axis or clock used in this book is age, starting at a predefined year, normally the age at which people are legally allowed to marry. Dependent on the available country-specific datasets, discrete- (Yamaguchi 1991; Vermunt 1997) or continuous-time event history models (Blossfeld, Rohwer 2002) were used. There is, however, no principal difference between discrete-time and continuous-time event history models since the earlier are a special cases of the latter. The usual kind of censoring in the data is right-censoring. In this case the end of the episode of being ‘single’ is not observed but the observation of the episode is terminated at an arbitrary point in time. This type of censoring typically occurs in life course studies at the time of the retrospective interview or in panel studies at the time of the last panel wave. Because the timing of the end of the interview or observation window is determined independently from the substantive process under study, this type of right censoring is unproblematic and can easily be handled with event history methods (Blossfeld, Rohwer 2002).

The central concept of event history analysis is the transition rate:

$$r(t) = \lim_{t' \rightarrow t} \frac{\Pr(t \leq T < t' | T \geq t)}{t' - t}$$

The transition rate provides a local, time-related description of how the marriage process evolves over time. It can be interpreted as the propensity (or intensity) to change from the origin state ‘single’ to one of the destination states (upward, downward or homogamous marriage), at time t . But one should note that this propensity is defined in relation to a risk set ($T \geq t$) at t , i.e. the set of units that still can experience the marriage event because they have not yet experienced the marriage event before t .

The central idea in event history analysis is to make the transition rate, which describes the marriage process evolving in time, dependent on age (t) and on a set of (time-constant ‘ x ’ and time-varying ‘ $x(t)$ ’) covariates:

$$r(t) = g(t, x, x(t))$$

The causal interpretation of the transition rate requires that we take the temporal order in which the marriage process evolves very seriously. In other words, at any given age, t , the transition rate $r(t)$ can be made dependent on conditions that happened in the past (i.e., before t), but not on what is the case at t or in the future after t .

There are several possibilities to specify the functional relationship $g(\cdot)$ (see Blossfeld, Rohwer 2002) as is shown in the country-specific chapters.

The most important scientific progress permitted by event history analysis is based on the opportunity to include explicitly measured time-varying covariates in transition rate models (Blossfeld, Rohwer 2002). These covariates can change their values over process time (age) in the marriage analysis. Time-varying covariates can be qualitative or quantitative, and may stay constant for finite periods of time or change continuously. From a substantive point of view, time-varying covariates can be conceptualized as observations of the sample path of parallel processes. These processes can operate at different levels. In the context of this book, the impact of parallel processes at the level of the individual's different domains of life, at the intermediate level (e.g., organizational features of the school systems), at the macro level (e.g. educational attainment levels of birth cohorts) as well as any combination of such processes are studied.

In dealing with such systems of parallel processes, the issue of reverse causation is often addressed in the methodological literature (see, e.g., Kalbfleisch, Prentice 1980; Tuma, Hannan 1984; Blossfeld, Hamerle, Mayer 1989; Yamaguchi 1991; Courgeau, Lelièvre 1992). Reverse causation refers to the (direct or indirect) effect of the dependent process (here: marriage) on the independent covariate process(es) (here, for example, educational participation). Reverse causation is often seen as a problem because the effect of a time-dependent covariate on the transition rate is confounded with a feedback effect of the dependent process on the values of the time-dependent covariate. However, Blossfeld and Rohwer (2002) have developed a causal approach to the analysis of interdependent processes that also works in the case of interdependence. For example, if two interdependent processes, Y_t^A and Y_t^B , are given, a change in Y_t^A at any (specific) point in time t' may be modeled as being depend on the history of both processes up to, but not including t' . Or stated in another way: What happens with Y_t^A at any point in time t' is conditionally independent of what happens with Y_t^B at t' , conditional on the history of the joint process $Y_t = (Y_t^A, Y_t^B)$ up to, but not including, t' ('principle of conditional independence'). Of course, the same reasoning can be applied if one focuses on Y_t^B instead of Y_t^A as the 'dependent variable.' Beginning with a transition rate model for the joint process, $Y_t = (Y_t^A, Y_t^B)$, and assuming the principle of conditional independence, the likelihood for this model can then be factorized into a product of the likelihoods for two separate models: a transition rate model for Y_t^A which is dependent on Y_t^B as a time-dependent covariate, and a transition rate model for Y_t^B , which is dependent on Y_t^A as a time-dependent covariate. From a technical point of view, there is therefore no need to distinguish between defined, ancillary, and internal covariates (see, e.g., Kalbfleisch, Prentice 1980) because all of these time-varying covariate types can be treated in the estimation procedure. In this book, estimating the effects of time-varying processes on the (upward, downward or homogamous) marriage rate was normally achieved by applying the method of episode splitting (see Blossfeld, Rohwer 2002).

THE CROSS-NATIONAL COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE: COUNTRY AS CONTEXT

Previous life course analysis using West German data clearly supported the above hypotheses about the increasing importance of the educational system as a marriage market as well as the direct and indirect effects of social origin on educational homogamy (Blossfeld, Timm 1997). However, in the absence of appropriate cross-national evidence, there would be no way of knowing whether this interpretation applies also outside the particular historical, institutional, and cultural context of West Germany. No analysis based only on West Germany could tell us whether the increasing importance of the educational system as a marriage market as well as the specific effects of social origin on educational homogamy are an integral part of the social-stratification system typical of modern postindustrial societies, or are to be found only in countries that have a specific educational system, or only in countries characterized by a particular economic or political system. Replications of our research by competent colleagues in other countries, particularly standardized case studies as used in this book, make it possible to check the generality of the German findings and the validity of our theoretical interpretations.

The aim of this book is therefore to study the process of spouse selection in the life course of single men and women in various modern countries and to compare these longitudinal patterns across these societies. Using the countries as contexts (see Kohn 1987), we are primarily interested in testing the consistency of the relationships discussed above in various structural settings. Insofar as the following twelve national case studies yield similar findings, our interpretation of the relationship between social origin and educational expansion on the one side and educational homogamy on the other, in large part, can abstract from whatever differences there may be in the cultures, educational, political, and economic systems, as well as historical circumstances of the particular countries. But when the empirical findings differ from case study to case study, then we must look to what is idiosyncratic about the particular countries for our interpretation of the mechanisms (Kohn 1987). In the latter case, cross-national differences might well be instances of more general lawful cross-national regularities. But developing such more general cross-national hypotheses is a difficult task because it is normally hard to identify which of the many differences in history, culture, educational, political or economic systems between countries (or between studies) lies at the heart of the differences in findings.

The countries included in this book vary widely in important characteristics, such as the timing and degree of the transition into the service society (compare for example, Italy and Spain on the one side and Sweden as well as Denmark on the other), the political system (democracies and (former) socialist states); the societal emphasis on social equality and the connected types of welfare state regimes (e.g., liberal, social democratic, or conservative; see Esping-Andersen 1990, 1999), the organizational form of the school system (nationally centralized in most countries, decentralized in the United States of America, and regional in Germany) including the degree of “tracking” (mostly rigid with the exception of the United States of America and Sweden; see Erikson and Jonsson 1996) and educational attendance rates. The countries included in this cross-national comparison are West Germany, the Netherlands, Flanders, France, Italy, Spain, Great Britain, Denmark, Sweden, Hungary, Slovenia, and the United States of America. In each of the country-specific chapters, the organizational aspects of the educational system and the historical and cultural context within which individuals have to make their partner decisions are taken into account. This life-course approach explicitly recognises the dynamic nature of partner decisions, the importance of educational roles and institutional circumstances as young men and women move through their life paths, and the cumulation of advantages and disadvantages experienced by individuals. In particular, we are trying to better understand how spouse selection of single men and women from different social classes evolves over the life cycle, along with shifts in the educational system as well as country-specific constraints and opportunities.

Chapter 2 reports on the empirical results for West Germany. Chapters 3 to 13 then present the case studies on Flanders, France, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Great Britain, Denmark, Sweden, Hungary, Slovenia, and the United States of America. Each study was conducted by researchers, who have an intimate understanding of the country in question, and most employed relatively recent nationally representative data, covering cohorts of men and women educated over a broad historical period. We also employed very similar statistical analyses, but preferred to avoid complete standardization of method because both the educational system and the age at marriage themselves varied from one country to another. However, we did attempt to maintain sufficient standardization to enable a systematic comparison of the results. Thus almost all of these case studies follow a common set of guidelines. In Chapter 14 these comparisons are enriched by a cross-sectional case study of educational intermarriage in Israel, a society with unique multiple and cross-cutting divisions. Finally, Chapter 15 summarizes the cross-national similarities and differences and draws more general conclusions about educational homogamy in modern societies.

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