



Marital history homogamy between the divorced and the never married among non-Hispanic whites

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Abstract

Whether and why the never married and the divorced marry partners of like marital history is not well known. The homogamous tendency on marital history may simply be a by-product of couples' homogamous tendencies on age, socioeconomic status, and parenthood status, in addition to the group size imbalance between the never married and the divorced. Alternatively, marital history homogamy may reflect spousal preferences for similarity in marital history that arises, in part, from continued ties of the divorced to their former marriage. To test hypotheses implied by these two perspectives, regression models are applied to unmarried non-Hispanic white men and women from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, 1985–1997. Results are contrary to the hypothesis based on the by-product perspective. Specifically, in both the male and female subsamples, the tendency toward marital history homogamy is not removed by controlling for individuals' spousal choice on age, education, and parenthood status. However, results are consistent with the hypothesis based on the marital ties perspective. For example, in the subsample of women, the measure of ties to former marriage accounts for about a quarter of the tendency toward marital history homogamy. Results have implications for resource distribution within and across American families.

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1. Introduction

The need to better understand processes underlying social and economic inequality has long motivated demographers and sociologists to investigate marital pairing

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patterns (e.g., Dreachler, 1920; Kennedy, 1944). The tendency for individuals to marry their likes on a specific dimension that affects resource distribution, such as race (e.g., Qian, 1997) and education (e.g., Mare, 1991), implies that individuals select partners in ways that widen inequality in a society.¹ Recent evidence suggests that marriages between persons of like marital history (i.e., first marriage and remarriage) are linked to inequality among children. More specifically, recent studies indicate that children living with parents in a remarriage receive lower parental investment than do children living with parents in a first marriage (e.g., McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994), even when differentials attributable to biological versus step relations and levels of parental resources are removed (e.g., Hofferth and Anderson, 2003). Understanding sources of differentials between the never married and the divorced that underlie marital history homogamy would provide insights into components that construct inequality across these marital units.² Although published statistics suggest a tendency toward marital history homogamy among the never married and the divorced (Lugaila, 1998),³ little is known about the sources of this tendency.

Homogamous tendency of the never married and the divorced on marital history can be viewed as: (a) the by-product of constrained mating opportunities across marital history or (b) the result of individuals' preferences to marry a partner of like marital history due to the distinction between the two groups (Kalmijn, 1998). A by-product perspective posits that mating opportunities are constrained across marital histories by: the tendency toward homogamy on dimensions other than marital history, such as age, socioeconomic status (SES, typically measured with education in studies of assortative mating), and parenthood status⁴ (e.g., Atkinson and Glass, 1985; Kalmijn, 1991, 1994; Mare, 1991; Qian, 1998; see Kalmijn, 1998 for review); and the imbalance in group sizes of the never married and the divorced (Blau et al., 1982). Put simply, these conditions reduce the likelihood that the never married and the divorced meet in the process of mating. This perspective

¹ Inter-marriage, on the other hand, has an effect of attenuating between-family differentiation (and hence inequality).

² If every divorced and never married person would intermarry (i.e., one of the spouse is divorced and one of the spouse is never married), they would presumably eliminate inequality arising from the differential parental marital units.

³ In 1998, among adults who are unmarried, four never-married persons were available to every divorced person (Lugaila, 1998), suggesting that, in the absence of a tendency toward marital history, about 80% of divorced persons should be married to never-married persons. But in the same year, the divorced were married to the never married only half of the time.

⁴ The focus on age, education, and parenthood status as dimensions of differentiation and homogamy is based on both substance and previous empirical findings. Divorce takes place after first marriage, fertility typically follows a marriage at least among non-Hispanic whites (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2000), and lower education is linked to a higher risks of divorce (Martin and Bumpass, 1989). As a result, the divorced on average are more likely to be older and have children, and are less educated than the never married. Another potentially relevant dimension is religious affiliation. Homogamy on religious affiliation is known to be present (Johnson, 1980). However, recent evidence indicates that the never married and the divorced do not differ significantly in their religious denomination (Call and Heaton, 1997). Also, a minor empirical contribution of religious homogamy in explaining marital history homogamy was noted

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