

Assortative mating by occupational status during early industrialization

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Abstract

According to the logic of industrialism thesis during industrialization, the influence of, achieved characteristics on mate selection increased, while the influence of ascribed, characteristics decreased. Other processes that accompanied industrialization, such as, the development of mass communication, urbanization, increasing regional mobility, modern transport, and educational expansion, were hypothesized to break down, cultural differences and cause a decline of status based mate selection. This study, provides a first direct test of these hypotheses by analyzing a large dataset on, marriages in the Dutch province Zeeland between 1811 and 1915, a period before and, during industrialization. Industrialization and the other afore mentioned processes, were measured at the local level in each year of marriage, to take both local and, temporal variation into account. Using multilevel analyses it is shown that (1) the, influence of ascribed and achieved characteristics on status of the spouse differed, considerably between municipalities and changed over time, (2) the influence of, ascribed characteristics decreased, while the influence of achieved characteristics, remained unchanged, (3) the logic of industrialism thesis is supported, while, processes accompanying industrialization are less systematically related to changes in, ascription and achievement.

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1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, numerous researchers have studied the question of who marries whom (Kalmijn, 1998). This topic is of interest to social scientists and important to society because it enhances our understanding of the stratification of society. When high marries high and low marries low, there are strong barriers between status groups, and society can be con-

sidered socially closed. This is even more the case when characteristics determining partner choice are mainly ascribed and not achieved. In this case, the position in society of the future spouse can already be predicted at birth. Research shows that in recent marriage cohorts achieved characteristics (education for example) are more important predictors of marital choices than ascribed characteristics (father's occupational status for example) (Blau & Duncan, 1967; Kalmijn, 1991, 1994; Mare, 1991; Uunk, 1996). However, drawing on the industrialism thesis (Kerr, Dunlop, Harbison, & Myers, 1960; Treiman, 1970) one can conclude that in the past partner choices were predominantly affected by ascribed characteristics. Only when industrialization took place did societies become more open, barriers between sta-

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tus groups become weaker, and achieved characteristics become more important.

This study investigates the validity of the claims that openness has increased by studying whether, and if so how, macro developments during early industrialization changed the process of partner selection in the Dutch province of Zeeland between 1811 and 1915. Focusing on the bridegroom, this chapter addresses the following questions: (1) To what extent did the occupational status of his father (ascribed characteristic) and his own occupational status (achieved characteristic) increase his likelihood of marrying a woman from a high-status group? (2) Did the influence of ascribed and achieved characteristics on partner selection differ between regions and periods? (3) To what extent can such differences be explained by macro processes such as industrialization, mass communication, and urbanization?

Theories concerning the effects of industrialization on status attainment were originally formulated in relation to attainment in the labor market, but they have since been extended to partner selection (Blau & Duncan, 1967; Uunk, 1996). With industrialization, labor markets and societal life changed. Industrialization can be defined as “the use of mechanical contrivances and inanimate energy (fossil fuels and water power) to replace or augment human power in the extraction, processing, and distribution of natural resources or products derived therefrom” (Davis, 1955, p. 255). It created many new occupations and changed the content of existing occupations. In industrial labor markets it became more rational for employers to select employees on the basis of achieved characteristics, such as the level of education, than on the basis of ascribed characteristics. Accordingly, achieved characteristics became more important predictors of an individual’s success on the labor market than ascribed characteristics. This has consequences for mate selection. One of the characteristics that potential mates value in each other is (future) economic success (Kalmijn, 1998, p. 502). In industrialized societies, ascribed characteristics should therefore be less important for mate selection and achieved characteristics more important, compared with preindustrialized societies (Blau & Duncan, 1967; Uunk, 1996).

Historical and sociological studies do not yet provide a definite answer to the question whether industrialization and its accompanying macro processes changed the importance of ascribed and achieved characteristics for the selection of a spouse. Historical studies addressing partner choice in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have often focused on partner characteristics other than occupational status, such as the age of the spouses or

the geographical distance between the spouses (Kalmijn, 1995; Lynch, 1986; Oris, 2000; Van Poppel & Nelissen, 1999; Van Poppel & Ekamper, 2005). Historical studies that do address the role of status attainment in partner selection tend to focus on a specific social group, a small region, or study a few points in time, making it difficult to generalize the research findings (Kocka, 1984; Lanzinger, 2005; Mitch, 1993; Schüren, 1993). Recent historical studies of marriage patterns, using log-linear analyses, do cover larger regions and longer periods, but they distinguish only a few periods and do not explicitly relate marriage choice to macro developments (Van Leeuwen & Maas, 2005). Sociological studies of homogamy more often study longer periods, larger regions, more variables, and a sample of the total population. However, their analyses seldom predate World War II, by which time the process of industrialization had been more or less completed in all Western countries (Smits, Ultee, & Lammers, 1998; Ultee & Luijkx, 1990).

The present study will improve on previous research in four ways. First, it investigates processes of partner selection in a Western country over a very long period, starting before the onset of industrialization and finishing when industrialization and its accompanying macro processes were advanced. In this way, the industrialism thesis can be tested on its home ground, i.e. during industrialization. Second, it distinguishes between local contexts within the province of Zeeland. This allows us to take into account the fact that macro-level developments such as industrialization did not occur throughout society at the same time. Some regions remained mainly agricultural long after industrialization had begun in other regions. Consequently, mate selection is expected to differ regionally, an expectation that has already found some support in research on occupational status attainment (Grusky, 1983; Zijdeman, 2008, 2009). Third, this study improves on previous research by relating several macro-level developments to the process of mate selection. Previous research has often been limited in the number of indicators it has used to characterize macro developments, while sometimes only time is used to indicate the development of industrialization and other macro processes. The macro-level developments that occurred in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have a more structural side, i.e. changes in the labor market that favor selection based on achieved characteristics, and a more cultural side, i.e. changes in human relations and values due to urbanization, educational expansion, mass communication, and mass transport (Craig, 1981; Garnier & Hage, 1991; Rijken, 1999; Treiman, 1970). Both aspects will be operationalized

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