Assortative mating by occupational status during early industrialization

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Received 8 August 2008; received in revised form 16 June 2010; accepted 29 June 2010

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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Keywords: Homogamy; Industrialization; Status attainment; Context

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 considered 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-
The present study will improve 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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