The Social Significance of Homogamy

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Non-technical summary

In an age of rapid change, marked for instance by greater social mobility, which suggests an increasing ability of people to shape their lives as they see fit, it might be expected that the choice of marriage partner or 'live-in' partner would be marked by a greater freedom from social constraints and expectations. A prospective partner's social background, whether denoted by social class, education, religion or ethnicity, should matter less than appearance, behaviour, interests (apart from less definable attractions). Using British Household Panel Study data, as well as the Longitudinal Study, however, we find that people continue to marry or partner others like themselves on the basis of social background. This *homogamy* principle remains extremely powerful as an intervening factor in partnership choices. Further, the closeness of partners to each other in terms of more changeable characteristics, such as their social or political attitudes, increases during the period of the relationship. People start their lives together by being socially close, and become closer over time. While it might be expected that the changing nature of marriage itself might affect this - specifically, that increasing cohabitation but also remarriage could lead to a decline in the probability of homogamy, because less is at stake in the former case (and so experimentation is more likely), while choice might be more constrained in the latter - neither has any significant effect on the tendency towards homogamy.

What do these results tell us about the public but also the personal significance of marriage? At the social level, we could say that any decline in homogamy would indicate greater social openness, parallel therefore to increasing social mobility. Society would become less unequal if education, income, wealth, and so on, were less concentrated through marriage. Yet we do not see any tendency towards greater social openness through either marriage or partnership. At the individual level, it might be assumed that the closeness of one partner to another in terms of social background would result in greater individual happiness or at least to a less stressful life. And indeed, in some further analysis, we do find an association between homogamy and, on average, lower stress levels. In sum, people continue to need to marry or partner people who are in broad terms like themselves. While homogamy, therefore, continues to deflect greater social equality through marriage, within the partnership itself equality is important.

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Abstract
It is a long-standing principle in anthropology, sociology but also economics, that there are strong social and material incentives for people to marry or partner on the basis of social similarity, thus encouraging equality within partnerships but social inequality in the distribution of education, income, or other characteristics. It has been argued, however, that marriage is becoming less homogamous, and therefore that society is becoming more open. Using both the Longitudinal Study and the British Household Panel Study, we find that homogamy remains a powerful factor in marriage and partnership. Further, it reduces stress levels in the partnership and increases over the period of the relationship as partners' social and political attitudes become closer over time.

Key words: Homogamy, marriage, social attitudes, stress

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Introduction

The extent of homogamy (like marrying like) tells us something about how open a society might be. If couples become less closely united on the basis of social distinctions such as wealth or education, then social divisions between couples, and between households, become less pronounced. This process would be a complement of other (if sometimes contradictory) evidence of a growth in social mobility. Thus increasing heterogamy is associated for some analysts with a breaking down of social divisions, and implicitly with the strengthening of an open and democratic society (Hakim 2000; Ultee and Luijkx 1990). Conversely, if homogamy is rising, this suggests some form of social closure, which might also stretch across the generations. Parents who have equally high levels of education, income or wealth can transmit additional benefits to their children through the resultant pooling of resources, whether material, cultural or intellectual (Blossfeld and Timm 2003). This, in Bourdieu's view, would be a compensatory strategy of reproduction that the relatively privileged might use to counteract the equalising effects of increased social mobility (Bourdieu 1976) – the well-off 'close ranks'. Mare speaks of '*barriers* to marriage between persons with unequal amounts of formal schooling' (1991: 30; our emphasis). In this case, homogamy and social mobility have opposite effects.

Homogamy levels have been extensively studied, but homogamy tends to be treated purely in the aggregate: that is, to what degree can we say that marriage is more or less homogamous in one society than another, or at one time than another? However, the issue is more complex. While we look in this paper at rates of homogamy, we also ask whether homogamy occurs on only one dimension (for instance, education, social class, ethnicity, or even social and political attitudes), whether it changes over the period of a relationship as a result of reciprocal influence, and finally if contributes to human happiness. It has been argued that there is a link between religious homogamy and 'marital quality' on the one hand, though this is in decline as a result of changing beliefs in the family (Myers 2006)[1], and marital stability on the other (Weiss and Willis 1997; Blossfeld and Müller 2002). We ask, instead, whether homogamy reduces the probability of stress in a relationship.

The measurement and meaning of homogamy

Unfortunately it is not easy to ascertain trends in homogamy. In respect of a frequently analysed dimension, education, the trends are problematic, with some analysts claiming that marriages are becoming more closed (Blossfeld and Timm 2003; Mare 1991; Schwartz and Mare 2005), some more open (Hakim 2000; Ultee and Luijkx 1990 - although this latter finding was not conclusive). One problem in these comparisons is timescale. Hakim's review, for instance, is of a longer period of time than that of some others - the period 1910-1966 in the US. Even though Hakim compares 1949 to 1996 in Britain, for much of that time the spread of higher education was still extremely limited. This means that in the earlier years the marriage market comprised mostly poorly educated people; homogamy was perforce high, and subsequently likely to fall. Further, any decline in homogamy could be the result of increasing choice (there are more educated people for the less educated to choose from) or simply a random result of changes in numbers (the operation of chance, therefore, rather than of choice). These represent two very different processes. Nevertheless, on balance it seems likely that educational homogamy is increasing in several countries. Schwartz and Mare (2005), analysing US data 1940-2003 on newly weds, find that the 'odds of educational homogamy have been higher since 2000 than in any other decade since 1940' (2005: 641). This is exemplified by intensified polarisation, whereby people at both the top and the bottom of the educational ladder increasingly marry within their groups.

We have already mentioned the idea that heterogamy equals social openness. According to Hakim, though, it is also linked to a particular structure of gender relations.

> the fact remains that women today continue to prefer marriage to men who have money, status, and power, even when they themselves have achieved high earnings, whereas men continue to prefer young and attractive women, other things being equal. This long established exchange of complementary status and assets has been weakened by the educational equality of women and men, but it has not disappeared completely (Hakim 2000: 222).

The problem with this statement is the phrase 'other things being equal'. On several significant dimensions, especially education, equality is a fact which is changing how

men and women interact. Even if women wish to 'marry up' financially this does not require them to have a lesser education.

The idea that marriage is a calculation used to make headway in the social hierarchy rather than to find a compatible partner runs counter to long-standing anthropological and sociological confirmation of the social basis of similarity, and even equality, in marriage (e.g. Bourdieu 1976; Kalmijn 1998; Westermarck 1903). Equality is not only a personal preference but often a social prerequisite. Like Mare, quoted above, Kalmijn argues that 'group identification and group sanctions' (1998: 400) continue to impose social pressure on marriage. Homogamy also has a clear emotional underpinning derived from an ability to share problems, beliefs, leisure interests, a sense of humour, and so on (Kalmijn and Bernasco 2001).

This does not mean that material considerations do not form part of the partnership decision. Indeed the reverse is likely, but such considerations themselves encourage equality. Goode (1964) explicitly points to the economic loss (to one partner or family) which homogamy prevents, while economists of the family, most notably Becker (1991), build this idea into formal models of marriage markets. Further, Becker argues that homogamy is efficient not only for the partners but for society. On the assumption that one person's education makes the other more productive (on a range of dimensions), both have an incentive to marry someone of at least equal education, and as they both seek this, equality is a likely outcome. Kalmijn finds that in partnerships where both partners work, educational matching overrides matching on earnings; he argues that this 'cultural similarity… can be understood as an attempt to develop a common lifestyle in marriage' (1994: 448). In Denmark, Nielsen and Svarer show, if indirectly, that 'joint income… show[s] no influence on partner selection' (2006: 25). Educational matches seem more important, as in Kalmijn's case, suggesting a more cultural basis to marriage. Further, men may now gauge the economic value of a marriage in much the same way as women may do, or have done in the past (Blossfeld and Timm 2003: 341; Brynin and Francesconi 2004; Kalmijn 1998: 399). This is likely not only to create greater equality within couples but to encourage homogamy (Mare 1991: 17; Oppenheimer 1988), thus reducing further the probability of women marrying up.

Finally, it is also reasonable to assume that the effect of homogamy intensifies through the process of living together, as partners are likely to influence each other's behaviour, values, and tastes, presumably in the direction of homogeneity of outlook.

In this case, *adaptation* reinforces the *selection* effect. Many of the characteristics that determine homogamy are fixed at the time of partnership formation – age (relative to the other person) most obviously, ethnicity, religion (within limits), social class background, and education (which can change after the event, though mostly does not). However, other characteristics are subject to change through the fact of emotional and physical proximity to others. In general, one might expect people to influence each other within marriage. Such reciprocal influences can be wide-ranging and invisible to either side. For instance, each partner's education might make the other more effective in their jobs (Brynin and Francesconi 2004). Experience counts. There are transfers of knowledge, understanding, cultural interests, lifestyle preferences, and social values between partners. Individuals in couples are not simply two individuals living together but more than the sum of the parts.

Rising education has the reverse effect to that suggested by Hakim, releasing suppressed social demand for educational equality within couples. As education becomes more equal this enables greater conformity in terms of mutual rights, expectations, cultural interests, and lifestyles. With the increased pool of female graduates, men who previously married non-graduates need not do so.[2] Certainly choice rises with education, but it works against heterogeneity. Non-graduates can more easily marry graduates than in the past because they are now more available, but by the same token the past did not allow large numbers of graduates to marry each other. This has changed.

The role of social change

The argument in favour of a relationship between falling homogamy and increased social openness seems to rest on a simple numerical effect of the rise in education, which, it is held, helps create more diverse opportunities in marriage. However, this says nothing about social openness as a value. Our emphasis on the continuity implied by the underlying social and psychological imperatives of homogamy does not mean there are no other pressures for change. We posit here two factors which could be important. First, education itself changes attitudes. The upward trend in educational homogamy need not run in parallel to trends in homogamy on other dimensions. Higher education especially might encourage liberal views and therefore a desire for social openness and social mixing and liberal people are more likely than others to marry outside their inherited ethnicity, religion, and so on (Kalmijn 1998: 413). As

one example, Lampard finds that higher levels of education are associated with greater political heterogamy, if weakly (1997: 87).

We can posit the effect of a second kind of social change through the growth in cohabitation and in remarriage following marital breakdown. Marriage is in decline as a proportion of all unions, and we might expect cohabitations to be less homogamous than marriages, because less is at stake. Interestingly, in his study of political homogamy Lampard finds that heterogamy is stronger amongst couples who are only 'dating', while cohabitees match almost equally to married couples (1997: 87). Nevertheless, this still implies that weaker forms of union join people only weakly matched on their social beliefs. Using German panel data from a sample of young women, Moors' analysis suggest that cohabitation is associated with increased belief in autonomy (2000: 222), and this too implies a reduced tendency towards homogamy. This should be reinforced by rates of re-marriage. Even if heterogamy is a factor in divorce (because homogamy binds couples more strongly: Weiss and Willis 1997; Blossfeld and Müller 2003), there is some evidence that divorce is associated with higher levels of heterogamy in later relationships (Kalmijn 1998: 397). Causes might be that divorce reduces subsequent freedom to choose and circumstances might be more constrained. Xu, Hudspeth and Bartowski (2006) find that post-divorce cohabitation is associated with low levels of remarital happiness, which suggests that these relationships are less close than first relationships.

We have argued that the numerical explanation for a fall in homogamy – that is, simply, that an increase in more highly educated people raises the probability of educationally mixed marriage – is not enough, and also runs counter to what we know about the social basis of marriage. Nevertheless, the nature of relationships is itself changing. In the succeeding analysis we seek to find out whether the factors we believe could be changing patterns of homogamy are indeed having these effects.

Analysis

We test first for trends in homogamy, using census data for England and Wales from the ONS Longitudinal Study (LS), and after this for the effects on homogamy of cohabitation and repartnership. We then proceed to examine change in attitudinal homogamy over the period of the relationship, and finally we look at the association between homogamy and personal happiness. For most of the analysis we use the BHPS.

Trends

First, though, we make use of the census data in the ONS Longitudinal Study to calculate trends in homogamy (though we do not utilise the longitudinal component). As in many other studies, we construct odds ratios to demonstrate change, though we go further than some in looking at a number of dimensions: not only education but ethnicity and religion. Unfortunately, ethnicity cannot be used to examine trends effectively as this has been asked only in the last two censuses, while religion, available in these data only in 2001, cannot be used at all. Nevertheless, as we shall see, given the extremely low overall rate of marriage or partnership across ethnic and religious boundaries, trends hardly matter.

This is not the case with education. In 1971 the odds of a non-graduate marrying a graduate, compared to the odds of a graduate marrying a graduate, produced an odds ratio of around 45 to one (i.e. the odds against were very high).[3] This fell to 26 in 1981 and in 1991 slightly further to 23, which we put down to the rising number of female graduates. When the number was extremely small there was a very large pool of male graduates from which to choose, and thus most female graduates were likely, for instance by virtue of encounters at university, to marry a male graduate. In line with Hakim's prediction, therefore, educational expansion reduces homogamy. On the other hand, this changes in the opposite direction when virtual equality in education is achieved. In 2001 the odds are 132.[4]

The trend in the odds is therefore U-shaped, with first a fall in homogamy as a result of greater opportunity, followed by an increase as education approaches equality. Interestingly, this is the same as Schwartz and Mare (2005) find for the US, where educational homogamy decreased from 1940 to 1960 but increased thereafter. In Norway, looking only at people born between 1900 and 1949, Birkelund and Heldal (2003) find an increase in homogamy over the relevant period. It is possible to interpret this in purely numerical terms. As any social category becomes relatively large, if choice is random then people in that group have an increased probability of marrying within the group (Kalmijn 1998: 402). However, we prefer the alternative explanation that numerical equality provides the opportunity to partner homogamously, in line with most people's preferences.

It should also be noted that while odds ratios are symmetrical by gender, if we look at percentages instead we might find important differences. With greater female

entry into higher education it is easier for male graduates to find an educationally equivalent partner.[5] The proportion of female graduates who married graduates rose from 66% in 1971 to 80% in 2001 but the equivalent rise for men, as more female graduates came 'on stream', was from 15% to 74%.

The ethnicity results (based on the census definition) reveal very little inter-marriage. Virtually all inter-marriage is between white British and other groups and we therefore base our analysis simply on white against non-white. In 1991 the odds ratio was 449, in 2001 it was 454. Neither figure suggests much ethnic mixing, even at this very broad level. In the case of religion, unfortunately there is no breakdown between Christian denominations in the data. So we compare only Christian, non-Christian, and 'no religion'. There is a difficulty in interpreting the latter (does it mean truly anti-religious or just not very bothered?). The most meaningful ratio we can produce is between people stating they are Christian or non-Christian. This odds ratio is 2401. Religious mixing would probably depend on the decline in religion itself. The data suggest that people who declare a religion are prepared to live with someone who does not (but who perhaps has a similar religious background). The odds ratio for Christian and 'no religion' is 33, that for non-Christian and 'no religion' is 65 – still very high but lower than 2401.

We use here the full LS figures which, as stated earlier, would give different results from analysis of newly weds. Ideally we would like to know whether new marriages (or partnerships) are increasingly homogamous. But it is not possible to distinguish new marriages in the census. It is of course possible to produce figures by age cohort, but these would have an indeterminate relationship with new marriages (which would include remarriage). However, although our figures are affected by the survival of married couples, which inflates the trend, the figures reflect the balance of homogamy at the ten-year intervals, and the result of this shows that continuing and extensive homogamy is a profound social fact.

The effects of social change

To examine homogamy in new partnerships we use the British Household Panel Study (BHPS). In the BHPS we have around 150-200 marriages or cohabitations starting each year, which is clearly small, but pooling these produces a total of 2796 new couples (not all of which can in fact be used for the analysis on homogamy, though, because of lack of data on specific characteristics). In addition to looking at

new partnerships, another advantage of the BHPS is its extensive data on subjective indicators, enabling us to see, for instance, whether homogamy is important in respect of social values.

We hypothesised above that two aspects of social change in particular might induce a decrease in homogamy. One was increased education itself. Another was that cohabitation and repartnership would lower the level of homogamy. Yet our data show that the proportion of educationally homogamous couples is 61% for marriages and 65% for cohabitations (though these percentage would vary with the number of categories used: here we use five); social-class homogamy is slightly higher for cohabiting couples, 50% compared to 46%, when we use three broad groups. These figures become 30% and 28% in a more detailed version; religious homogamy is 53% in both cases. Thus, cohabitation does not after all seem to be associated with greater heterogamy.

We now turn in Table 1 to the full sample of relationships to compare marriage to cohabitation in general, but comparing these to homogamy in first and in later unions, to examine measures of social values. In the upper part of the table we show the percentages of these couples with similar views on gender roles (based on the question: *Do you personally agree or disagree.... A husband's jobs is to earn money; a wife's job is to look after the home and family?*). We distinguish between couples where both partners are egalitarian (agreeing with a 'liberal' view) and those where both are traditional in their views, but we also include here those expressing no clear view either way. Overall, homogamy is greater amongst cohabiting couples. Thus we see, for instance, that 33.5% of all married couples have egalitarian views, compared to 53.4% of cohabiting couples (while 51.2% of married couples and 61.7% of those cohabiting share the same views, whatever these are). We can also see, if less definitively, that people in later unions are more homogamous in their family values than those in first unions.

Both outcomes appear to contradict the hypothesis made above that the decline of marriage is likely to be associated with increasing heterogamy. However, we cannot ignore the substantive dimension when we are looking at values and attitudes. In the data, married men and women are on average 16 years older than their cohabiting counterparts, and younger people are likely to have more liberal views. In addition, the situation of cohabitation is likely to be strongly related to distinctly liberal views. Nevertheless, in combination these results suggest that while they are

not more heterogamous on the basis of their education, the fluidity of cohabitation and new unions is associated with a tendency for cohabiting individuals to have a specific view of the family, and for cohabiting couples to share this view.

Political homogamy gives a clearer picture as there is no direct relationship between the content of the views and the nature of the relationship. We find that political homogamy is substantially higher in marriages than in cohabitations, and, though less so, in first compared to later unions. This therefore accords with the hypothesis of greater homogamy in marriages. Nevertheless, here we get an interesting issue of definition. People may share the same views but also share *not* having a view. Does the latter imply similarity or, somewhat differently, an absence of dissimilarity? Cohabitees are less similar in their views but sharing the position of no identification with a political party is much more common in this group than in married couples. One reason is again that cohabiting couples tend to be younger and the young have less interest in politics.

Table 1: Attitudinal homogamy comparing cohabitation to marriage and first to later unions

	Married	Cohabiting	First union	Later union
Egalitarian	32.9	51.9	30.7	44.0
Traditional	8.3	2.4	9.5	3.7
Neither	9.5	5.8	9.8	7.6
All homogamy *(observations)*	*50.7* *(8012)*	*60.1* *(1271)*	*50.0* *(5996)*	*55.3* *(3288)*
Labour	31.4	27.6	31.5	30.1
Conservative	25.5	13.1	26.0	20.3
Liberal	5.2	3.7	5.4	4.3
No party	8.4	14.9	8.0	11.5
All homogamy *(observations)*	*70.5* *(15772)*	*59.3* *(1559)*	*70.9* *(12053)*	*66.2* *(5280)*

Note: The figures are the percentages of each of the four groups who fall into each homogamy pattern

Whether because of their age, particular situation or lifestyle, cohabitation can perhaps be seen as the coming together of people who lack a defined view of the world (except perhaps as this world is defined by their own circumstances). We therefore have a clear selection effect. In the remainder of the analysis we try to deal with this, at least indirectly.

Modelling homogamy

Our method is to regress homogamy on a range of variables, looking first at educational homogamy, and then at homogamy of attitudes to the family (while controlling for educational homogamy). Our aim in both cases is to see whether being in a later union (not the first marriage or partnership) and whether cohabiting rather than being married, reduces the probability of homogamy. As we are interested in a view of homogamy across the whole population we again use the full sample rather than only new relationships.

In respect of educational homogamy we use two methods. In the first, the dependent variable is educational homogamy itself, where this can be at any of five levels (both degree, both other post-school education, both A-level, both GCSE, both lower than this). This is clearly fairly refined; we could not claim that someone with an A-level marrying someone with, say, two GCSEs, was carrying educational outmarriage very far. Nevertheless, we have already shown, using LS data, that there is a tendency (no more than that) for people to cleave to others in marriage or partnership with a fairly closely related level of education.

For the purpose of this analysis we use logistic regression. As we are modelling homogamy we can think of the unit of analysis as the couple, and can include information about the couple as a unit, such as the length of the relationship, but also about her and/or about him. First we include her own education and her father's social class, whether this class is the same as the social class of the father of the partner (reflecting social-class homogamy, therefore), own age, similarity of age, the length of the partnership, wave, whether in a later union, and whether cohabiting. Through two of these variables - similarity of age and of paternal social class - we control for whether people are in some measure alike. In a variant of this analysis we include his education and father's social class instead of hers. Which – his or her

information – contributes most to educational homogamy? We then repeat the analysis excluding people with degrees, in order to see if the process works differently at lower levels of education.

We should note that although the sample is a panel (the observations are person years, not persons), little actually changes over time. Some people will increase their education, but not many. Some relationships will change – through separation or divorce, and re-partnership. This is therefore effectively a cross-sectional analysis, only slightly adjusted by time. But we do take account of time. The variables related to this, age and wave, work in different ways. Wave is common across all individuals and therefore shows the effect of time in the aggregate, for instance as a result of changing attitudes in the population. In addition to this trend factor is the effect of age. This itself works in two ways. Each person is either younger or older than another, so here we have a cohort effect: we would expect different cohorts to have different attitudes and experiences, over and above the trend effect. Each person also ages in the panel by one year, resulting no doubt in incremental change in their attitudes. These three interpretations of time are not easily, if at all, distinguishable, but would be expected to work in similar fashion (though as the dependent variable is largely static over time, the effect of ageing itself is unlikely to be important).

The first results of this analysis are shown in the first two columns of the table. This uses overall educational homogamy as the dependent variable. The figures show the odds, so that any figure above one denotes a positive impact of the variable on closeness of education within the couple, and less than one shows a negative effect. While the dependent variable shows homogamy at any level of education, which can mean a lot of things, therefore, it is helpful to control for this level for one partner. These effects are shown in the first four rows, where a middling sort of education (A-levels) is the reference category. Homogamy is more likely towards the extremes of the educational hierarchy. It is these extremes, therefore, which tend to be most cohesive through marriage. This seems to confirm the polarisation effect found by Schwartz and Mare (2005), pointed out above. Although our result partly reflects the fact that those in between can marry both up or down, the effects are far from marginal. The effect is especially strong where his education is low, while in her case having a degree has a stronger effect. This suggests that a woman with a degree is less likely to 'marry down' than a man with a degree, while a man with very low

education is less likely to marry up than the equivalent woman. Father's social class mostly makes little additional difference. However, homogamy is more likely where she has a relatively low paternal social class. This suggests some sort of 'ghetto' rather than polarisation effect: people already disadvantaged match with other disadvantaged people. Finally in respect of class, a similar class background reduces homogamy. This is an extremely interesting finding and suggests that homogamy does not necessarily pass down the generations. It is a free choice.

Being of a similar age (within three years either way) possibly lowers the probability of educational homogamy. This applies to all models, in fact, and is surprising. Length of relationship also reduces the probability of homogamy. Of course it should not have any effect, as subsequent relational survival can hardly have an impact on closeness of education at the time of marriage. Nevertheless, we can assume that a more enduring partnership reflects a closer emotional relationship from the outset, perhaps more likely in homogamous unions, while, as stated above, less homogamous relationships might also be more likely to break up. In contrast, our results appear to show that longer relationships are less homogamous. It is difficult to see why this should be the case but it implies that homogamy does not guarantee longer relationships.

Older people are slightly more likely to have similar education, and so younger people to be more heterogamous. This is reinforced by the trend factor, wave, which reveals reducing homogamy. Thus both the trend (wave) and cohort (age) effects point in the same direction, towards falling homogamy. Later unions have no effect, contrary to the hypothesis mooted earlier. If anything, cohabitation increases rather than reduces homogamy – even more in opposition to the idea that social change in the nature of relationships is reducing the tendency towards homogamy.

In the third and fourth columns of the table we compare homogamy amongst those with a relatively low education (that is, where neither is a graduate). The reference category for education as an explanatory variable is non-degree post-school education. Homogamy is less likely where the woman has lower than post-school education (all the coefficients are below one) but is far more likely where he has a low education. Of course less educated men who marry homogamously must be marrying less educated women. So how come his outcome reflects a 'ghetto' effect but not hers, given that the distributions of education by gender are not dissimilar?

Table 2: Models of educational homogamy (logistic regression) and of relationship between partners' education (ordered logit)

	Homogamy			
	Same education		Neither have degree	
	Her education & class	*His education & class*	*Her education & class*	*His education & class*
Degree	6.50***	4.34***	-	-
Post-school	3.15***	2.39***		
A-level			0.16***	0.25***
GCSE	1.30	2.09***	0.20***	0.51***
Low-none	4.71***	8.02***	0.74**	2.05***
Father class 1	1.08	1.21	1.36*	1.60***
Father class 2	1.05	1.13	1.18	1.17
Father class 3	1.27*	1.07	1.22	0.94
Father class 4	1.52***	1.03	1.38**	0.91
Father class same	0.88**	0.90*	0.86**	0.90*
Similar age	0.83**	0.94	0.83**	0.94
Years partnered	0.99*	0.99*	0.99***	0.99***
Age	1.02***	1.01***	1.02***	1.01***
Wave	0.99*	1.00	0.99(*)	1.00
Later union	1.00	0.99	1.00	0.99
Cohabiting	1.16	1.20(*)	1.17	1.16
Pseudo R^2	*.08*	*.08*	*.09*	*.08*
Observations	*31291*	*31690*	*27462*	*27852*

*** p < .001 ** p <.01 * p <.05 (*) p <.1

Notes: Using her education and father's social class as explanatory variables in columns 1 and 3; his in columns 2 and 4.

Some difference in the distribution accounts for the effect. More important, the probability of homogamy for men at that level is relative to the probability of men at higher levels (specifically, with post-school education) of marrying homogamously, not relative to women. Father's social class also works differently at the non-graduate level, with a polarisation effect in the case of women (which does not happen for female graduates) but a clear tendency for higher paternal class amongst men to promote homogamy. The other variables are much the same as for the first two columns.

While some of these results are slightly puzzling, two outcomes seem clear. First, educational homogamy is polarised amongst those with high and with low levels of education (and in the case of low education, more especially for men). Second, neither later unions nor cohabitation reduce homogamy. In fact, cohabiting couples seem more rather than less likely to match on the basis of education.

Homogamy based on attitudes might work differently from that based on more objective measures such as education. For this analysis we use a single variable, the same as in Table 1 (*Do you personally agree or disagree.... A husband's jobs is to earn money; a wife's job is to look after the home and family?*) This is coded to test similarity of a liberal stance. As the battery of questions of which this forms part appears in alternate waves of the BHPS this considerably reduces the sample in comparison with Table 2.

We stated earlier that we would attempt to deal with the problem of selection. Here do so here indirectly through controlling for education and for homogamy. However, cohabitation is related to age (on average, younger people cohabit) as is, differently, being in a later union (by construction). Both types of relationships are also increasing over time. Finally, later unions and cohabitations are likely to be shorter than first marriages, which could reduce the sense of commitment not by virtue of the situation itself but simply because time has had less effect. All in all we would expect that the inclusion of the time-related variables, age, wave and length of union would reduce any effect of at least of cohabitation and perhaps of later unions. By running the model with and without these we hope to deal at least partially with the selection problem.

The results are shown in Table 3. We can see in both models the positive effect of education on similarity of attitudes (ie both are liberal), especially of higher

education. Paternal social class has little clear effect, which suggests that similarity of attitudes depends more on education than on the individuals' background.

Table 3: Models of homogamy in liberal family values: (logistic regression)

	Her education and father's social class	
Degree	3.09***	3.72***
Post-school	1.04	1.32
GCSE	0.56***	0.61*
Low-none	0.14***	0.22***
Father class 1	1.15	1.11
Father class 2	1.48	1.75(*)
Father class 4	1.11	1.17
Father class 5	1.10	1.17
Same education	1.17	1.16
Father's class same	0.77*	1.14
Similar age	1.10	1.06
Age		0.95***
Wave		0.95***
Years partnered		0.99
Later union	1.40***	1.32***
Cohabiting	2.33***	1.39*
Pseudo R²	*.13*	*.17*
N	*17608*	*17608*

*** $p < .001$ * $p < .05$ (*) $p < .1$

Notes: The question is: Do you personally agree or disagree.... A husband's jobs is to earn money; a wife's job is to look after the home and family? This is coded so that the outcome is 'liberal' (in favour of mother working). The individual-level variables relate to the woman.

There are three measures of homogamy. Educational homogamy increases the probability of both partners having liberal views. Similarity of paternal class appears to lower the probability of similar views but not in the full model. Age similarity has no noticeable effect. Most important of all, we can see a positive effect of later unions and a positive, extremely large effect of cohabitation.

When we add the time-related variables things change. Age itself is unsurprisingly associated with less liberal views; interestingly, so is the trend (denoted by *wave*) - at least the trend within the sample; years partnered appears to have no effect. The changes to the other, key variables are different. No substantial change occurs to the coefficient for later unions but the cohabitation effect falls drastically, though it is still positive. This suggest the probability that some of the relationship between cohabitation and family and gender views is a selection effect - in fact quite a large part. Cohabitation is in this sense not driving social change. Liberal people are simply more likely to cohabit.

The relationship over time

Do partners influence each other's views over time, and if so, do they as a result become more similar to each other? Here we focus on two very different sorts of attitudes. One relates to marriage itself, and is therefore especially interesting. Of the six measures in the BHPS we select two which are particularly strong statements: whether a pre-school child suffers if the mother works, and the one used above, whether the husband should work and the wife stay at home. The correlations between partners on these are in fact not that high – between 0.3 and 0.4 for the two values questions. Thus while people are likely to be married to someone with similar views this is far from being a one-to-one relationship. These beliefs about coupledom give some sense of how the social basis of marriage itself might be changing. For instance, marital 'quality' and stability have been shown to depend on agreement over the gender balance between paid work and family commitments (Greenstein 1995), but by the same token, such beliefs are 'endogenous' to the marriage situation itself. So we cannot be sure whether responses reflect the personal circumstances of each marriage, we again turn to party political support. Interestingly, Zuckerman, Dasović and Fitzgerald[6] find that the 'more years couples live together, the more likely they are to choose the same political party' (2007: 88).

It is not homogamy itself we are interested in here but within-couple influence. The problem in any test of this, though, is that we have no counter-factual: we do not know how much the same individuals would have changed had they married someone else (or indeed not married at all, though we do not test this here). However, the concept of homogamy itself (using education or class as the basis) gives us a means of tackling this. To use education as an example, if partners where both have a degree are more inclined to a particular view of society than the average married individual with a degree, this implies an additional effect of the partnership. Mutual influence after marriage seems the most probably source of any difference.

In the first two columns of Table 4 we show the relationship between a liberal stance on the first family values question and education and own social class, first for individuals and then for individuals in couples. High education means a degree, low means non-graduate; high class means the 'service' class (higher managerial or professional, using the Goldthorpe class schema), low means not in the service class.

Table 4: Percentage of married individuals strongly disagreeing with conservative family values, by own (individual) education and social class and by joint (couple) education and social class

	Strongly disagrees:					
	Child suffers if mother works		Wife should stay at home, husband work		*N*	
	Individual	*Couple*	*Individual*	*Couple*	*I*	*C*
Graduate (w)	12.2	15.9	41.1	45.2	*2107*	*1079*
Graduate (m)	6.8	10.9	24.6	33.1	*2422*	*1087*
Service class (w)	13.3	13.0	36.6	38.5	*4627*	*2502*
Service class (m)	5.4	7.9	19.1	26.7	*6231*	*2426*

Note: w=woman, m=man N is for individual sample (I) in column 5, for couple sample (C) in column 6

What we observe in the second and fourth columns is the percentage of individuals with a conservative view in couples homogamous on the basis of both being a graduate or both being in the service class. It can be seen that the figures are almost all higher when we look at homogamous couples - though not always by much. For

instance, 12.2% of married women who are graduates have a liberal view on the first question but 15.9% of women do so where both partners are graduates. For men the figures are 6.8% and 10.9% respectively. In the case of the second question, for men the difference is much greater. It appears that educational and class homogamy are both associated with a sometimes slight but nearly always distinctive intensification of family values. The sum is greater than the parts.

Joining together in couples, individuals are more inclined to specific views of society than on average they would be alone. But we still do not know for certain if this is a selection or an adaptation effect. We examine this issue here. To do so we need to control as far as possible for as many factors as we can which might be correlated with the original selection decision. The dependent variable in the next analysis is expressed in terms of change over time, showing individuals becoming more liberal in their views. These values questions, based on a five-point Likert scale, appear in the survey every other wave, so change is over a two-year period (which means an individual can of course change views more than once). What factors are associated with such change? In particular, what factors relating to the couple situation influence them?

We show the results in Table 5. The level of analysis is the couple, of which we have around 200-300 every year. These years are pooled and the resulting variable, wave, included as a trend indicator. While our main interest is in the effect of each partner's values and education on the other's values, we also include cohabitation and whether the marriage is a first or later union; as in our earlier analysis we take these to be important indicators of social change. One might expect more liberal views in cohabiting relationships and later unions. We showed above that this did not reduce homogamy, but that was a selection issue: people who form a non-marital relationship are not less concerned than married people to partner someone like themselves. Here we produce a different test of this idea: whatever the basis of the selection, do partners in a cohabiting or in a second/later union influence each other more than people in marriages and in first marriages? In an analysis of young German women, using panel data, Moors suggests that changes in family situation have a causal impact on family values in the direction of belief in autonomy (2000: 224). Presumably this could in turn give rise to reciprocal influences within the couple.

We test in the first column factors that are associated with the man acquiring more liberal views on the above question and, in the second, with the woman changing her views. Clearly, movement towards more liberal views is more possible from a conservative starting position, and this is what we see in the second row for him and the first for her. The effect of own liberal views is negative (ie people with liberal views are less likely to become more liberal). The effect of her liberal views on his change is positive (first row, first column) as is the equivalent effect of his views on her.

Table 5: Factors associated with change in family values: whether agrees pre-school child suffers if mother works (OLS)

	His views become more liberal	Her views become more liberal
Her liberal views	0.11***	-0.46***
His liberal views	-0.49***	0.11***
Age	-0.009***	-0.007***
Number children	-0.02**	-0.03***
Cohabiting	0.06***	-0.01
Later union	0.02*	0.01
Length of union	0.00	0.00
Wave	0.004**	0.001
She is graduate	0.10***	0.04(*)
He is graduate	-0.03	-0.05*
She works	0.06***	0.10***
He works	-0.04*	-0.06***
Similar age	0.011	0.032*
Constant	-1.06***	-0.71***
R squared	*.25*	*.23*
Observations	*19106*	*19312*

*** p < .001 ** p <.01 * p <.05 (*) p <.1

So, partners do appear to influence each other (though this could in principle still be a selection effect insofar as that person might have selected a liberal person because, for instance, he or she was in some way predisposed to change his or her own views.) Moreover, this exchange is symmetrical. Men and women have equal effects on each other.

As against this, when we look at the effects of education these are asymmetrical, and in fact highly gendered. The effect of her being a graduate on change in both her own and his views (especially his – her own being more likely to be liberal already) is positive. The effect of his being a graduate is negative in both cases, as well as being roughly equal. (It is possible that this is an income effect, with male graduates being able to 'buy out' women from work.) Precisely the same relationships apply to their relative work situations. If she works, the attitudes of both are more liberal; if he works (which perhaps helps to confirm the 'buying out' hypothesis) they are less so. Overall, the results strongly suggest that her education and work are the driving forces of change in values.

Our other key variables are cohabitation and later unions. Both have an effect on change in his views - far more powerful for cohabitation - but not on hers. It would appear that the family views of men who live in a cohabiting union become more liberal (while the woman perhaps needs less persuasion). Finally, the indicators of time – age, similarity in age, length of union and wave – have different, but secondary effects.

We get a 'purer' indication of intra-couple influence through an analysis of party political support, which we would not expect to be influenced directly by the family situation itself. We do this by examining switches in party support across two waves. Do differences in views between partners cause these switches? The results are shown in Table 6. This compares people who switch party support to those who do not (eg those changing from Conservative to Labour compared to those who remain Conservative). The labels in the left-hand column indicate various relationships between partners' views which *precede* the switch. We would expect people who have a partner who supports a party which they do not themselves support to be more likely to switch to that party at a later time. Does this happen?

Table 6: Effects of partner's party support on changes in party support (standard errors in brackets)

	(1) She changes to Conservative	(2) He changes to Conservative	(3) She changes to Labour	(4) He changes to Labour
She is Tory :				
partner Tory			0.122*** (0.020)	0.122*** (0.021)
partner Labour		0.472** (0.129)	0.800 (0.160)	
partner other		2.065*** (0.286)	0.257*** (0.059)	0.640** (0.115)
She is Labour :				
partner Tory	0.409*** (0.118)			0.480*** (0.117)
partner Labour	0.062*** (0.112)	0.077*** (0.115)		
partner other	0.072*** (0.126)	0.052*** (0.083)		1.803*** (0.164)
She is other:				
partner Tory	1.677*** (0.209)		0.661*** (0.091)	0.364*** (0.065)
partner Labour	0.212*** (0.043)	0.220*** (0.041)	1.711*** (0.140)	
partner other	0.455*** (0.053)	0.727** (0.082)	0.905 (0.070)	0.986 (0.079)

*** $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$

In the first column we show cases where the woman supports Labour and her husband, either the Tories, Labour, or another party or no party (we combine these two last positions for the sake of simplicity), followed in the final three rows by cases where she holds the 'other' position while her husband is either Tory, Labour or other.

So these combinations represent either matches (eg Labour-Labour) weak mismatches (Labour-other) or strong mismatches (Labour-Conservative). Any figure above one indicates a positive effect (raising the odds of the change) while a figure below one is a negative effect. In both of the first two columns the reference category is 'both Tory'.

The first column indicates that if she is Labour she is unlikely to switch to the Tories, but least likely to if her partner is also Labour. If she has a weaker party position (our label 'other'), she is very likely to switch to the Tories if her partner is Tory and unlikely to otherwise. The picture for his switches to the Conservatives is similar. Where she is Tory and he is 'other' the odds of him switching to the Tories are doubled (though if he is Labour her being a Tory cannot persuade him to change). All other cases reduce the odds of a switch, but where both partners are other they are reduced the least. Switches to Labour reflect the same patterns.

All in all, one partner's party position seems to predict switches by the other partner. A change to one of the two main parties is more likely where the other partner supports that party, especially where the switch is not from a strongly opposed position. Where both support a party, a switch is least likely. In the case of both family values and party political support, therefore, we observe a relationship between one partner's position and change in the other partner's position over time. Marriage changes the structure of opinions in society.

Homogamy and Happiness

What does homogamy mean in terms of human happiness? Does it matter if partners are like each other or not? Certainly, in terms of the distribution of resources across the generations, and also of the distribution of social, family or political values across society, it does matter. But whether it does to the individuals themselves is less clear. There is some evidence, albeit disputed, that people who are not similar to each other are more likely to divorce (Weiss and Willis 1997; Blossfeld and Müller 2002). This implies that similarity makes life easier. In reviewing British Social Attitudes data Lampard (1997: 94) notes that 79% of respondents said having tastes and interests in common was at least fairly important to the success of a marriage. Same social background was deemed equally important in fewer cases (48% of respondents) . In contrast, agreement on politics was ranked by only 15%. Yet political homogamy in Lampard's data, as well as our own, is much higher than this suggests. Further, in his

own analysis Lampard notes a relationship between extreme political heterogamy (Labour/Conservative) and remarriage: either people with very different views are more prone to split up or, as we argued in our earlier chapter, remarriages may be heterogamous by force of circumstances. But the first explanation is not inconsistent with the latter. People seek similarity where they can and may pay a price when they fail. We mentioned above research which shows that religious homogamy in the U.S. is linked to higher marital quality and to reduced marital conflict.

We would expect individuals in homogamous relationships to suffer less stress than those who are not. That this is so is demonstrated in Table 7, where we regress the General Health Questionnaire score (the 'caseness' version) on educational, age and attitudinal homogamy.[7] It should be noted that the R^2 is low, so there is – unsurprisingly - plenty about the nature of stress that we do not know in a survey like this. But some things seem clear enough. The first two columns look at the effect on the GHQ score of wives (where a higher score indicates more stress), including as a central measure whether she believes that the family suffers if the woman works full-time. In the first column her opinion on this is entered as well as his. More traditional women suffer greater stress, even when we control for whether cohabiting or married, education, age, the age similarity between partners, and, though we do not show the results for these controls, for tenure, and whether people believe they are either comfortably off financially or in financial difficulties. The husband's family values, though, make no difference. Nevertheless, when we enter the values homogamy indicator (showing the two share the same values) in the second column instead of her husband's values, this is negative. It reduces stress. We find very much the same sort of result (but do not show this) in respect of the other values question we have used above.

Still looking at wives, the same outcomes do not apply to more objective bases for homogamy. Age similarity makes no difference, and nor does educational similarity. It is of some note, though, that having some form of medium or higher education seems to be associated with greater stress scores, even though, as pointed out above, education is also associated with more liberal views. Similarly, cohabitation seems to be linked to greater stress, although our earlier chapter showed that cohabiting couples have more liberal views, which, as we have just shown, are linked to less stress. Using the American General Social Survey 1972-96, Waite (2000: 372-8) shows that cohabiting people, both men and women, score less well on

an admittedly fairly simplistic general happiness question than married people (which, though, perhaps because of the relatively small size of the cohabiting group, fails to reach statistical significance). It is possible, of course, that cohabitation is linked to some other factor we have failed to measure or include in our models, so this might not be a direct effect. Yet, despite possibly more complex inter-relationships, the results suggest that attitudinal homogamy reduces stress.

Table 7: Factors associated with higher stress score using values measure: family suffers if woman works full-time

	Wives		Husbands	
Wife has traditional values	0.18***	0.18***	-0.01	0.02
Husband has traditional values	-0.01		0.11***	
Couple share same values		-0.10**		-0.04
Cohabiting	0.12$^{(*)}$	0.12$^{(*)}$	-0.05	0.06
Age	0.004$^{(*)}$	0.004$^{(*)}$	0.002	0.004*
Same age	-0.07	-0.07	-0.07	-0.07
Degree	0.29***	0.29***	0.39***	0.37***
Further education	0.16**	0.16**	0.13**	0.12*
A-level	0.26***	0.26***	0.15*	0.14*
Same education	0.04	0.04	0.12**	0.12**
Constant	0.44**	0.44*	0.41**	0.64***
R^2	.06	.06	.08	.08
Observations	26828	26828	26819	26819

*** $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$ (*) $p < .1$

The picture for men is similar up to a point. One important difference is that cohabitation has no apparent effect. Men do not find living as a couple any more stressful than they would if they were married. A more important difference, though, is apparent in that attitudinal homogamy does not reduce stress while educational homogamy increases it. This seems to have little to do with the education of the

partner as such. When we enter the education of both partners in the same model, without the homogamy indicator, the wife's education has a slight gradient (higher education going with higher stress) but the coefficient is always small and is nowhere near statistically significant. Thus, even if her having a higher education is materially beneficial to him, this does not reduce his stress levels. It would appear that men do not like their wives to have the same education as themselves. And so, we cannot say that homogamy makes married life more equable; the effects are highly gendered.

Conclusions

Our interest is in whether the modern couple is a building block of society in some, functionalist sense, where partners are attracted to each other by their similarity and presumably passing on these characteristics to offspring, or whether, alternatively, society is changing, in particular through the expansion of higher education and changes in marital behaviour. If the latter is true, not only are relationships more fluid than in the past, but the transmission and circulation of social characteristics and of social views are also more fluid. If more educated people have liberal views, the new family relationships they form might serve to break up long-standing social boundaries. If relationships become more flexible, marked by reduced reliance on marriage, then we might expect social similarity within couples to decline.

Overall, though, we can find no or only very marginal effects of changing education or of new forms of relationship on the degree of homogamy. The couple relationship continues to be marked by strong social and cultural ties. We find only limited evidence of such effects in the case of objective measures of homogamy, whether of social status, education, or religion or ethnicity. Some but not much marrying up (and therefore also marrying down) does occur, but this by no means describes the nature of the modern relationship.

The above characteristics, such as ethnicity, mostly do not change with circumstances. Homogamy of attitudes and social values (which perhaps should be called similarity rather than homogamy, as they are subject to change), remains strong, but do seem to be affected by the circumstances of the partnership – whether a first or later union, and whether the partners are married or cohabiting. We cannot say for sure is how much this reflects the characteristics of people in these situations but it would appear that the outcome in the case of cohabitation at least is primarily because

younger people are more liberal in their views and because such people select into cohabitation.

It seems reasonable that people do change their views during a relationship and thus the views of both partners could become less similar over time. In fact we find the reverse. Marriage increases attitudinal homogamy to an even higher level than at the time of marriage. Further, the reciprocal influences are not always equal. In respect of views about marriage itself, it would seem that the woman's views predominate.

We should not view marriage as akin to cloning. It is difficult for couples to use similarity as a criterion across a wide range of dimensions. If they tried to do so they would soon run out of potential partners. Even if we would unrealistically expect a preference homogamy to be perfect, serendipity, limited information, and errors of judgement would all reduce this. Our data also suggest that homogamy falls off quite sharply across dimensions. So there are strong limits to the homogenising effect of marriage.

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[1] Though Curtis and Ellison (2002) argue that denominational homogamy has no effect, at least on marital conflict; it is disagreement about intensity of and observance which counts.

[2] This selection process is probably also more refined than this suggests. People with the same field of study also have a slight tendency to inter-marry (Nielsen and Svarer 2006: 7-9).

[3] 'The odds ratio is defined as the odds that an A-type male marries an A-type female (rather than a B-type female), divided by the odds that a B-type male marries an A-type female' (Kalmijn 1998: 405). A figure of one would mean the odds are equal. In our data, in 1971 0.39% of men without a degree married graduates. The remainder, 99.61% therefore, married non-graduates. The odds of a non-graduate marrying a graduate are the first figure divided by the second, which in this case equals 0.0039. They are therefore virtually zero. But this has to be compared to the odds of a male graduate marrying a graduate, which may or may not be high. In fact, 14.99% of male graduates married a graduate, and so 85.01% did not. This produces odds of a graduate marrying a graduate of 14.99 divided by 85.01, which equals 0.176. So the odds are not particularly high. However, they are a great deal higher than the odds of a non-graduate marrying a graduate. If we divide the two odds, 0.176 by 0.0039, we get an odds ratio of 45.23. It is much more likely (forty five times more likely) that a graduate will marry a graduate than will a non-graduate.

[4] Unfortunately, the education variable is highly inconsistent across censuses and it is only possible to compare at the graduate/non-graduate level across all four censuses. However, for more detail we can look at 1971 and 2001, that is, at the beginning and end period, as full information is available in these years. We find that inter-marriage between graduates and those with A-levels is much more widespread than the above figures imply. In 1991 the odds ratio was four, rising to seven (a big change in proportional terms) in 2001. The ratio for degree against a very low education falls, from 133 to 79, but the ratio for A-level against low education rises from 11 to 43. Thus, educational homogamy is more complex than might be inferred solely from the rise of the university. It is also highly graduated. There are barriers to crossing even slight educational boundaries.

[5] It should be made clear that homogamy describes couples, so that the odds ratios apply equally to both partners. In contrast, the probability that either a man or a woman marries homogamously need not be equal. This depends on the gender distribution of (in this case) education. Clearly, if, say, 20% of men and 10% of women are graduates, it is harder for men to marry a graduate than it is for women. If the female proportion changes to equal the male proportion, their chances are equal. Whether that gives rise to greater homogamy is, though, an empirical question.

[6] Who in fact examine the extent of political partisanship in entire families, not just amongst couples.

[7] This variable converts the valid answers to a battery of twelve Likert-type questions dealing with subjective well-being into a single 12-point scale