

After Swedish Intermarriage

Introduction

One of almost inevitable consequences of contemporary migration processes in Europe is an increased occurrence of marriages between natives and immigrants. An increased interest for this type of intermarriage among social scientists can thus be explained by the view that it is no longer possible to obtain a complete picture of general marital patterns in the Western societies without studying marriages between natives and immigrants. However, one may have an impression that the interest for intermarriage among social scientists is somewhat overproportional to the share of intermarriages in the total number of marital unions. One possible reason for this may be the fact that a majority of mixed-nativity marriages in Western Europe are also interethnic marriages, which are believed to be an important indicator of social interaction in any multiethnic society. This view can be traced back to the year 1925 and early works of Emory S. Bogardus, whose social distance scale regards the willingness to form a marital union with a member of another social group as the strongest indicator of the absence of social distance between the two groups, while the scale itself was largely inspired by social boundaries imposed by ethnic differences (Parrillo and Donoghue, 2005). Contemporary authors especially emphasize the intimate nature of marriage and argue that intermarriage therefore may be the strongest test of social boundaries (Alba and Golden, 1986) as well as the maximal extent of social integration (Choi et al., 2012). However, it is not only ethnicity, but also nativity per se that matters in this context. For example, two individuals of the same ethnicity born in different countries had been exposed to different norms and values prior to formation of marriage, which may increase the risk of divorce among these couples (see Eeckhaut et al., 2011). Moreover, not only is intermarriage an indicator of social integration, but is also considered an agent producing it, as it enforces a more frequent interaction between social groups and indicates even to those not directly involved in intermarriage that intimate relationships between members of different social groups are possible and acceptable (Kalmijn, 1998, Blau, Becker and Fitzpatrick, 1984). However, the enthusiasm about the integrative role of intermarriage is somewhat undermined by the empirical evidence of increased divorce risk among those who marry exogamously, which prompted some researchers (Kalmijn, 1998; Zhang and Van Hook, 2009) to call for more research on intermarriage. This paper starts from the assumption that divorced individuals bring with them the experience of a failed marriage which may shape their future choices on the marriage market (Sweeney 1997; Gelissen, 2004) and aims to contribute to our knowledge of intermarriage, and social interaction in a multiethnic society in general, by comparing the subsequent partner choices of immigrants and natives in Sweden who had made what still is considered an atypical choice of entering intermarriage with the partner choices of natives and immigrants whose previous union was not exogamous.

Previous related research

Numerous studies have shown that, in line with the homogamy theory, there is an elevated risk of divorce for interethnic couples or couples of mixed nativity. Some recent European studies with conclusions along these lines include Kalmijn et al. (2005) and Smith et al. (2012) from the Netherlands and Dribe and Lundh (2012) from Sweden. All three European studies also reveal that the risk of divorce rises if the spouses stem from countries that are culturally distinct from each other. The findings about the increased divorce risk in interethnic marriages are corroborated by Hohmann-Marriott and Amato (2008) who look at marital conflict rather than directly at divorce and find that partners in interethnic unions generally reported lower levels of relationship quality than partners in mono-ethnic unions and that these differences hold for both women and men, and for married as well as cohabiting couples. Another prominent theory on the stability of intermarriages (and, very importantly, not mutually exclusive with the homogamy theory) is the convergence theory. It is based

on the evidence that divorce risks vary substantially across ethnicities and on the assumption that partners of different ethnicities inherit the criteria for divorce from their respective ethnic backgrounds. Consequently, the divorce risk of intermarriage should fall between divorce risks of ethnicities involved in the relationship. There is some empirical support for this theory too (see a recent evidence from the UK by Feng et al, 2012), but it is less prevalent than for homogamy theory.

The literature on remarriage patterns is sizeable, but only a relative small share of the previous work focuses on the comparison of assortative mating in transition from the one marriage to the next. Two major hypotheses have been forwarded to explain how sorting in remarriages may differ from sorting in first marriages (Dean and Gurak, 1978). According to the learning-hypothesis, divorced people will be more selective the second time around and will search for a more similar partner. By contrast, the marriage market hypothesis posits that remarriages are less likely to be homogamous than the first marriages simply because the second marriage market is smaller and more heterogeneous. Drawing on the previous research Fu (2010) argues that two additional factors may contribute to a possibly higher degree of heterogeneity in remarriage: 1) the divorced may be more unconventional and prefer less homogamous unions and 2) remarriages may experience a weaker pressure from the third parties (who are usually assumed to have a preference for endogamous unions). This paper differs from the previous related research in two aspects. First, most of the previous literature has been concerned with the comparison of marital heterogamy in the previous and the subsequent union. This paper has a very similar yet somewhat different aim, namely to establish the association between the previous and the subsequent partner choices. Second, the scholars have so far sought to explore the link between remarriage and heterogamy with respect to characteristics such as education (Gelissen, 2004) and race (Fu, 2010), but, to the best of my knowledge, no research has been done that focuses on heterogamy with respect to ethnicity or nativity. It is also important to note that the goal of this paper is not to test either of these hypotheses, but they may rather provide a framework for the interpretation of some results.

Data and methodology

The empirical analysis in this paper is based on the Swedish register data from the STAR database (Sweden over Time: Activities and Relations) and covers the period between 1990 and 2007. This compilation of datasets makes it possible to obtain detailed longitudinal information on the civil status, household composition, partner information and a number of other socio-demographic characteristics that may contribute to disentangling post-divorce trajectories. It is very important to point out that in this paper, the cohabitants with at least one common child are treated the same as the married couples. In other words, cohabitation dissolution is treated equally as a divorce, while cohabitation formation after a union dissolution is an equivalent to a remarriage. On the other hand, cohabitation with no common children is not considered a union in this paper. This methodological choice was largely dictated by the structure of the Swedish register data, which regard cohabitants with no common children as two separate households, which makes it impossible to identify them. All the analyses in the paper only include individuals who are between 20 and 55 years of age at the time of divorce. Individuals who are at risk of entering a new union due to death of partner are not considered, as is also the case with the individuals who emigrate from Sweden after divorce and before remarriage. The individuals who divorce and then remarry the same person are excluded from all the analyses, while those who divorce and marry another person within the same calendar year are excluded from the multivariate analysis. Only the first observed post-marriage spell is considered in both descriptive and multivariate analysis. All the descriptive and multivariate analyses are done separately for four groups defined by sex and nativity: native men, native women, immigrant men and immigrant women. The model assumes that each divorced native is at risk of experiencing one of four competing risks: 1) new union with a native-born person, 2) new union with an immigrant from Western countries (persons born in EU-15, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand), 3) new union with an immigrant born in some other country and 4) new union with a second-generation immigrant. The competing risks for divorced foreign-born persons are: 1) new union with a native-born person, 2) new union with a co-ethnic 3) new union with a person from other immigrant groups, and 4) new union with a second-generation immigrant. The multivariate analysis is based on event history models of competing risks

or, more precisely, discrete-time multinomial logistic regression. The explanatory variable of major interest is the *origin of the previous partner in the union*, by which the classifications by origin correspond to those used when identifying competing risks. A wide range of other potentially relevant independent variables are also used in the model.

Results

Descriptive statistics indicate that, regardless of the type of previous union, natives tend to choose a native partner the second time around and that this pattern is especially pronounced among women. The only possible exception are native men who were previously with non-Western women, as somewhat less than a half of them form the subsequent union with a native woman of Swedish parental background, but the share also exceeds 50% for this group if all the Swedish-born are counted in. On a similar note, native women start a new union with a non-Western partner less frequently than native men who were previously in the same type of union. It is interesting to note that the distribution of origin of the subsequent partner for natives who were previously with natives looks almost identical to that for natives who were previously with the second-generation immigrants. As for the foreign-born, women are more inclined to forming a new union with a native partner as compared to men, while marrying a co-ethnic the second time around is a more frequent outcome among immigrant men. The interpretation of some results may depend on the angle of view. For instance, it is undoubtedly interesting that somewhat more than a half of foreign-born men who were previously with a native woman and who form a new union do so with a foreign-born woman. This result becomes even more interesting when we remember that the number of native women on the marriage market clearly exceeds that of foreign-born women. So, this finding may be seen as a confirmation of the learning hypothesis, at least more than any other finding in the paper. However, the other side of the coin is that the highest percentage of those who form a new union with a native woman is found precisely among those who already were in the same type of union. This brings us to a very important result, the silhouettes of which could be seen in the descriptive statistics, and which was then confirmed in the multivariate analysis: for all four groups defined by sex and nativity, the risk of entering one of four types of union is the highest for individuals who previously were in the same type of union. Among other things this also implies that those who were previously in intermarriage are also most likely to enter an intermarriage the second time around. How can we interpret this association, which in some regressions is also fairly strong? The first interpretation would be that the preferences that led to exogamy the previous time persist and are still at work when making subsequent choices. This might appear surprising given the evidence on the increased divorce risk in intermarriage. However, the increased risk does not mean that all intermarriages that end in divorce do so due to differences caused by differences in origin. Moreover, a dissolution of an intermarriage might negatively affect the view on the idea of intermarriage among the former partners, but it may also strengthen a less enthusiastic view on exogamy among the individuals in their environment who have not experienced an intermarriage, but are also at risk of remarriage themselves. But, it takes two to marry and one should not discard the possible effect of the preferences of potential partners when explaining the main result of the multivariate analysis either, as it is well possible that they also contribute to the positive association between the previous experience of intermarriage and likelihood of entering intermarriage when forming the subsequent union. Finally, the preference is most likely not the only explanation for this association. Although the model controls for some characteristics of the local marriage market, unfortunately not much is known about the personal social networks of the individuals included in the study, whereas at the same time we have good reasons to believe that they also increase the chances of entering the same type of union again.

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