

Opposites Attract – Is there Evidence of Status Exchange Patterns in Ethnic Intermarriages? Sweden 1991-2009

Extended Abstract

Racial intermarriage and intermarriage between immigrants and natives has attracted research interest for several decades. Of major interest has been the question if marriage patterns of endogamous and exogamous marriages are alike or divergent in regards to spouses' characteristics. Most focus in previous research has been on intermarriage of minority groups while much less attention has been devoted factors promoting exogamy among the majority population. However, to fully understand the process of intermarriage and its consequences this perspective is also necessary. The aim of this paper is to study the determinants of exogamy of the native born in Sweden, and the extent to which these determinants differ across spousal origins. More specifically we will study the intermarriage process from the perspective of status exchange to see if this popular model can explain the patterns observed. The study will cover the period 1990-2009 and make use of register data covering the entire Swedish population, which makes it possible to conduct detailed comparisons between different origin groups.

Background

A distinct feature of many marriage markets is homogamy in spousal choice. In endogamous marriages, people generally share similar characteristics in respect to their socio-economic status, their religion, and their race or ethnicity. These mating patterns can occur for different reasons, i.e. preferences and opportunities (cf. Kalmijn 1998). Preferences relate to both preferences for high socio-economic status and preference for similar cultural resources; and opportunities often restrict spousal choice to partners with similar characteristics due to stratified schooling and segregated urban areas. As in many societies traits such as ethnicity, religion, education and social class background correlate, multidimensional homogamy can be seen as a natural by-product of homogamy preferences on one dimension. In regards to interracial and interethnic marriages, a major question in the literature has been if couples that differ in one of these traits show homogamy on all other traits, or also differ on other traits, and this in a systematic way (Kalmijn 1998).

According to the status exchange hypothesis (Davis 1941; Merton 1941), it is assumed that heterogamy in one dimension (race or ethnicity) systematically coincides with heterogamy in another dimension (such as education). In stratified societies, partners with perceivably lower racial or ethnic status tend to compensate their lower 'caste' status by offering other characteristics, e.g. high socio-economic status, in return. Alternatively, spouses' preferences for cultural similarity could be generally weaker in interethnic marriages and heterogamy on the ethnicity dimension coincides with heterogamy on other dimensions, e.g. education. According to the latter hypothesis, marriage patterns in endogamous and exogamous marriages should not differ systematically.

The status exchange hypothesis has received support by findings on black-white intermarriage in the U.S. (e.g. Kalmijn 1993) but has since then been a matter for debate. Whereas several authors posit

the existence of status exchange among different ethnic and racial minorities and their white spouses in the U.S. (Qian 1997, 1999; Fu 2001; Gullickson 2006), Rosenfeld (2005) generally casts doubt on previous findings of status exchange. This is mainly motivated by methodological critique on the commonly used log-linear models and has triggered a general debate in the field (cf. Gullickson and Fu 2010; Kalmijn 2010; Rosenfeld 2010). Studies using different methodology and application in different contexts give largely different support to the status exchange hypothesis. Studies for the U.S., Brazil, and Israel (Muhsam 1990), Hawaii (Fu 2006, 2008), South Africa (Jacobson et al. 2004), the Netherlands (Kalmijn and Tubergen 2006), and different minority groups in the U.S. (Wang and Kao 2007) do not provide clear evidence for status exchange in intermarriages and interracial dating. However, other more recent studies do support the status exchange hypothesis in certain regards or for certain contexts (Sassler and Joyner 2011; Choi et al. 2012 for the U.S. and Australia; Gullickson and Torche 2014 for Brazil; Hou and Myles 2013). As Hou and Myles (2013, 91), who find modest evidence for status exchange for the U.S. but not for Canada, put it: “In sum, the generalizability of the [status exchange] thesis seems limited by historical context, national origin, and gender”.

Our study focuses on immigrant-native intermarriage patterns in Sweden. In Europe, Sweden is a particularly interesting case to study as it has an immigrant population with diverse ethnic and national background, and a relatively broad political consensus on anti-discrimination and ethnic diversity (Schierup 2006). We address determinants of intermarriage for native Swedes¹ and hence take characteristics of the natives (and their relative value compared to partners’ characteristics) into account. We are particularly interested if intermarriage patterns can be explained by status exchange theory, meaning that natives may have particular intentions to intermarry if it gives them the opportunity to marry upwards educationally, or if other characteristics explain native Swedes’ outmarriage.

As several studies on determinants of intermarriage in Sweden focus on the characteristics of immigrants (Dribe and Lundh 2008, 2011; Çelikaksoy et al. 2010; Çelikaksoy 2012), only few studies have addressed characteristics of natives who intermarry. Niedomysl et al. (2010) find that native partners (especially Swedish men) are older and more often have lower education than their immigrant wives, particularly when the immigrant partner comes from a middle or low income country. Behtoui (2010) similarly finds that men and women with a background from non-Western countries are more likely to be younger and more likely to have higher education than their native partners. The authors interpret their results in light of exchange theory and conclude that the results “evidence [...] the negative assortative mating hypothesis – derived from the social exchange theory – for partners from middle- and low-income countries” (Niedomysl et al. 2010, 1134) and that “men and women with ONW immigrant backgrounds [outside north-western Europe and North America] are likely to have compensated for their stigma with their age differences (are more likely to be younger than their native partner) and educational superiority (are more likely to have higher education) (Behtoui 2010, 431).

We argue, however, that status exchange is not the dominant pattern in marriages between immigrants and natives. In regards to status exchange theory, clear expectations of how intermarriage patterns of different immigrant groups should differ from endogamous marriage patterns can be formulated. Our results do not support the theory in the Swedish context.

¹ Defined as being Swedish born with two Swedish born parents

As compared to the U.S. context, a major social division is not made by racial lines but is between (first generation) immigrants and Swedish natives. Behtoui (2010) points out that in Sweden there is a high degree of social acceptance of immigrants from north-western Europe and North America whereas immigrants from outside these regions face more exclusionary attitudes. The increase of (female) marriage migrants from economically poorer countries in South-East Asia as well as Eastern Europe and Russia in recent years (Niedomysl et al. 2010) could be an indication for an internationalization of the marriage market. Relating to status exchange theory, in an international marriage market Swedes can recruit partners from abroad (cf. Östh et al. 2011) and cannot only use their race/ethnicity but also their nationality and the opportunity of granting residence in an economically developed country to exchange this against higher physical attractiveness, younger age, or higher education of their spouses.

Data and methods

The period under study is 1991-2009. We use data from Swedish population registers maintained by Statistics Sweden that comprise the total population. The main registers in use are total population registers, income registers, employment and education registers, and the register of civil status. Since non-marital cohabitation is common in Sweden, marriage is defined as formal marriage and cohabitation with common children. We compare marriage patterns of Swedes in endogamous marriages, marriages between Swedes and immigrants from high-income countries, marriages with immigrants from non-EU 15 countries that have already resided in Sweden at the time of relationship formation (*Residing Immigrants*), and marriages with immigrants from non-EU 15 countries that immigrated to Sweden for the purpose of marriage² (*Marriage Migrants*).

Table 1. Frequency of native Swedes' intra- and intermarriages with different immigrant groups, 1991-2009. First marriages only.

	Men		Women	
	N	percent	N	percent
Swedish endogamous	490 188	91.96	455 584	93.08
Residing immigrant, non-EU 15	17 473	3.28	11 368	2.32
Marriage migrant, non-EU 15	5 244	0.98	2 143	0.44
Immigrant, high income countries	20 145	3.78	20 336	4.16
Total	533 050	100.00	489 431	100.00

We restrict our sample to first marriages and study spousal characteristics at time of marriage. In order to study individuals with a (somewhat) completed educational history, we restrict our sample to age at first marriage at ages 23-59. We apply multinomial logistic regressions with educational status exchange as the outcome (partner having same level of education (ref.), higher or lower level of

² Similar to previous studies (Niedomysl et al. 2010; Östh et al. 2011), I define marriage migrants as people who immigrate to Sweden and marry a Swede within one year

education). We control for age, level of education, income from employment (CPI adjusted), and area of residence (based on population density).

Preliminary results

In line with status exchange theory, we expect (inter-)marriage patterns of these four groups to differ. As pointed out above, immigrants from non-EU countries³ have a different standing in the Swedish society than immigrants from North/Western Europe and other *high income countries*⁴. We expect to see status exchange patterns in the former, but not in the latter. We further divide this immigrant group into immigrants that were already residing in Sweden and marriage migrants that moved to Sweden in close relation to marriage. We expect to see differences in these groups as the latter group's residence permits are likely to depend on their partners which would give more incentives for status exchange. We expect the major 'currency' of status exchange to be residency/access to the Swedish society rather than racial or ethnic caste status⁵.

Preliminary results from multinomial logit models clearly show that status exchange in regards to education is not the dominant pattern in intermarriages between immigrants and Swedes. Swedish men with immigrant partners indeed have higher odds of having a partner with higher education than themselves as compared to endogamous relationships. As expected, this pattern is relatively weak in relationships with immigrants from highly developed countries, more obvious in relationships with immigrants from non-EU countries and most apparent in relationships with marriage migrants from non-EU countries. This could indeed be interpreted as evidence for status exchange but the result is counteracted by increased odds of having a partner with lower education. The odds of having a partner with lower education are again highest for Swedish men who are in relationships with marriage migrants from non-EU countries and lowest for Swedes who are in relationships with immigrants from highly developed countries. Results for Swedish women show very similar patterns as results for Swedish men. Odds of having an immigrant partner with higher education are more pronounced which is particularly noticeable as Swedish women in endogamous relationships more often have similar or higher levels of education than their spouses.

Table 2. Multinomial Logit Models: Status exchange pattern in intermarriages for Swedish men and women, 1991-2009.

	Men		Women	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Partner higher education				
Origin of partner				
Swedish endogamous	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)
Residing immigrant, non-EU 15	1.228*** (0.024)	1.124*** (0.024)	1.465*** (0.037)	1.221*** (0.034)
Marriage migrant, non-EU 15	2.385*** (0.133)	2.004*** (0.124)	3.123*** (0.280)	2.539*** (0.246)
Immigrants, high income countries	1.021	1.083***	1.556***	1.450***

3 Non-EU countries here are defined as non-EU 15 countries as the majority of the period under study is prior to the accession of ten candidate countries on 1 May 2004.

4 The high income countries group comprises EU15 countries, and other high income countries such as Australia, Barbados, Hong Kong, Israel, Japan, Canada, South Korea, New Zealand, Singapore, and the USA.

5 However, we did not observe any indications for status exchange when dividing immigrant groups according to nationality or ethnic groups either.

	(0.018)	(0.022)	(0.031)	(0.031)
Partner lower education				
Origin of partner				
Swedish endogamous	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)	1.000 (.)
Residing immigrant, non-EU 15	1.884** (0.037)	1.768** (0.035)	1.238** (0.028)	1.350** (0.031)
Marriage migrant, non-EU 15	2.459** (0.148)	2.105** (0.127)	1.757** (0.157)	1.793** (0.162)
Immigrants, high income countries	1.177** (0.023)	1.123** (0.022)	1.031 (0.019)	1.052** (0.020)
Observations	507 271	507 271	467 341	467 341

Exponentiated coefficients; Standard errors in parentheses

Dependent Variable: Status Exchange (partner higher education, homogamy, partner lower education) with homogamy as reference

Model 2 controls for age, education, income and metropolitan area

*** $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Overall, the results show that homogamy is indeed lower in intermarriages as compared to Swedish endogamous relationships but that no direction of heterogamy in line with status exchange theory can be identified. Both Behtoui (2010) and Niedomysl et al. (2010) argued that intermarriage patterns in Sweden are in line with status exchange theory. In our study we also find less homogamy and a tendency for hypergamy, but a concurrent tendency for hypogamy which makes it unlikely that status exchange is the main explanation for intermarriage. As these couples are less homogamous both in terms of their ethnicity and their education, results could be interpreted as weaker preferences for cultural similarity in intermarriages.

Exploring further differences between intermarried Swedes and their immigrant spouses shows less homogamy even regarding other characteristics such as age at marriage and order of marriage. In exogamous marriages compared to endogamous marriages we find Swedish men to be distinctively older than their spouses, and this holds particularly for marriage migrants from non-EU 15 countries. Swedish women in endogamous marriages are slightly younger than their spouses and this is reversed in exogamous marriages, with women being slightly older than their spouses. When expanding the view to second and higher order marriages, marriages with marriage migrants from non-EU 15 countries stand out by being more likely to be second or higher order marriages compared to being first marriages (for the Swedish spouse). This shows that endogamous and exogamous marriages do differ systematically, particularly when taking the origin of the immigrant spouse into consideration. The higher occurrence of heterogamy does nevertheless not necessarily show a situation of status exchange in conventional terms (educational status). In our paper we aim at giving new insights to the debate on status exchange in Sweden by taking various dimensions into account.

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