OUTLOOK

RULES OF ATTRACTION
– How do People Select Partners? – [1]

László LŐRINCZ

BCE Department of Sociology and Social Policy
Fővám tér 8, H-1093 Budapest; e-mail: lorincz@infrapont.hu

INTRODUCTION

In this paper I attempt to present an overview and a coherent theoretical framework of the existing literature explaining how people select partners. Of course, the answer depends on what kind of partner is considered. Is it marital spouse? Cohabiting partner? Dating partner? Friend? The main focus of this study is on marital and dating partner selection. However, many of the theories explain the selection of friends as well; therefore this question will also be touched upon in the overview at some point. After making an overview and a general theoretical framework, the special differences will be considered. These are the questions of how partner selection is different among men and women, and what is the difference in the case of dating and marital relationships?

Originally, this summary of literature was prepared for my research about on-line dating as a theoretical framework. When I studied how people select partners on-line, first I had to know, how they do it in the "general" case. Having made this overview, I have seen that it may be interesting for other researchers, especially for those who just begin to approach this topic. Additionally, creating a systematic description could be interesting, since the theories considered seem to have some imperfections: it is not clear, how they work together, and in what cases are they relevant? Moreover, partner selection is the subject of more disciplines, which reflect the results of each other to a surprisingly limited extent. Therefore, one aim of the study is to include the social psychological results beside the sociological theories. Finally, although considerable amount of research has been done on this subject, there are till many challenging questions, which are open to future research.

As Bukodi (2004) mentions, partner selection is a very human activity, therefore scientific analysis of that may seem to be inhuman. Partner selection, however, is important not only form the individual's point of view, but also from the society's one. Partner selection has implications on the social structure. Intergroup marriage indicates the openness or closeness of a society: marital mobility is a kind of social mobility. On the other hand, homophyly of friendships is interesting from the point of view of social network analysis.

Sociological theory usually names two factors which drives marital selection. The first of these are human preferences, and the second is social opportunities (Kalmijn 1998; Bukodi 2002), or in other words: mating and meeting (Verbrugge 1977). Preferences are important, because they describe whom people find attractive, while the significance of opportunities is that it defines the possible pool of which people can select according to their preferences. There are two theories describing mate preferences: social exchange theory, and attraction theory. Studies on the opportunities examine the effect of group properties (heterogeneity, size) on partner selection (homogamy).

PREFERENCES

Social Exchange

According to the "original" social exchange theory (Thibaut and Kelley 1959; Homans 1961) in social relationships people are faced with rewards which they can get from the other, and costs which they suffer (Thibaut and Kelley 1959). On the bases of the theory, people form and dissolve social relationships according to these costs and benefits: one forms a relationship with someone who offers higher rewards and lower costs for him. Possible rewards in the relationships are help and social support, so one reward can be willingness to provide these. For example, Jennings (1950) found that girls who have altruistic motivation, were selected as friends more often than girls who appear relatively self-bound and egocentric. Other examples for rewards are traits like generosity, enthusiasm, sociability, punctuality, fairmindedness, dependability (Thibaut and Kelley 1959: 37). These are characteristics which are generally rewarding. There are also traits, however, which are rewarding only for specific people. These are similar interests, similar attitudes or complementary needs. Costs in a relationship include physical distance, which makes it difficult to maintain the relationship, and possible rejection.

According to the theory people also have a "comparison level" (CL). This is a minimal level of the rewards over the costs, which they expect from a relationship. If no possible relationship offers this minimum level of rewards-costs difference, it means that the individual's best choice is to be alone. Moreover, the higher the rewards-costs difference over this CL level is, the more satisfying the relationship is. The authors also define a comparison level for alternatives: CL_{alt}. It represents the rewards from the possible alternative relationships. So if the CL_{alt} would be higher than the rewards-cost difference in the actual relationship, the person will leave the

relationship for another one. According to the authors the higher the difference between the actual rewards–cost levels is the CL_{alt}, the higher the commitment to the actual relationship will be.

Social exchange theory is often applied to marital selection. Some examples of this "applied version" of the theory are the following:

"…Individuals seek the »best value« they can achieve in a mate. Each individual is assumed to carry an approximate »market value«, depending on the degree to which he or she possesses valued traits such as beauty, intelligence, charm, wealth, and social status. It is assumed that if every individual seeks the best value in a mate, individuals of approximately equal value will tend to pair up. In this manner, individuals can be said to »exchange« their assets for those in a partner." (Kenrick et al. 1993: 951)

"…these theories posit a marriage market somewhat analogous to the market in which economic goods and services are exchanged, in which females offer characteristics desired by males in exchange for the characteristics and the status they desire from males." (Taylor and Glenn 1976: 484)

As one can see, this applied version of social exchange theory describes mate selection preferences as the preference to get someone with the best "market value".

Scholars of marriage markets tested this theory about marital selection. They assume that people who have more valued characteristics on the market have greater chance to attract partners with more valued characteristics. Therefore some homogamy occurs, a correlation between the characteristics of the husband and the wife. This must be true, however, even for two different characteristics. Therefore a correlation should exist between different characteristics of the partners.

Several studies compare the relationship between men's and women's *physical attractiveness and education*. The basic question was, whether more attractive or more educated women have better chance to get educated husbands. Elder (1969) has found that education is more useful (has higher correlation) than attractiveness for women to get educated husbands. He also found an interaction effect between the social background (father's education) and these two variables: for lower status women attractiveness was more useful, than for women with higher origin.

Taylor and Glenn (1976) reproduced most findings of Elder (1969). They found a small but statistically significant correlation between the women's physical attractiveness and their husband's education controlled by the women's education, but they found that education is more important than attractiveness. They also found the mediating effect of the social background.

The idea of Stephens et al. (1990) was that previous studies found correlation between women's physical attractiveness and men's education because they did not control men's education. Controlling for this they found only small statistically significant correlation between men's education and women's attractiveness using zero-order correlations. Using regression models they found attractiveness statistically non-significant as a measurement of the spouse's education. They also did not find statistically significant sex differences in the importance the physical attractiveness as

predictor of the spouse's education. But they did find that physical attractiveness is a statistically significant predictor of the spouse's attractiveness.

Another group of studies investigated the relationship between *race and education*.

Kalmijn (1993) calculated odd ratios of marrying upward (marrying someone more educated) divided by marrying down. He found that a white woman who marries a black man has higher probability to marry upward than a black woman who marries a black man. Also a black woman has lower probability to marry upward if he marries a white man, than a white woman who marries a white man. On the other hand a white woman does not have higher probability to marry upward if she marries a black man than if she marries a white man. This is so simply because the distribution of the race and education. White men in average are more educated than black men. The general conclusion is that there is an interaction between marrying out and marrying upward, but it is sometimes overwhelmed by the effects of population distribution.

Schoen and Wooldredge (1989) found similar interaction effects using regression models. They have found that 23–25 year old black men are more likely to marry white women if their own education is one category higher. The other age groups, however, did not show this difference. Actually they have found stronger interactions between age and education. For almost all age groups for females below 32 years they have found that females are much more likely to marry more than 10 years older men if the men are two or more category higher educated than themselves.

Rosenfeld (2005) reviews existing evidence on this status-caste exchange. He shows that in many cases the apparent social exchange is only due to an improper methodological approach.

DiMaggio and Mohr (1985) examined the relationship between *cultural capital and education*. They measured cultural capital as interest and participation in high culture activities. The variable they used was a result of a factor analysis, and it includes variables like attending symphony concerts, having experience in stage performance, attending art events and having "cultivated self-image" (p.1237). The authors found significant relationship between cultural capital and the spouse's education, controlled by the respondent's own education, their general ability score, their father's education, and his occupational prestige. Beside the small but significant direct relationship, they have found larger indirect relationship through the respondents' own educational attainment.

The Investment Model

The investment model (Rusbult 1980, 1983) is a special version of the social exchange theory. The author extended Thibaut and Kelley's model with one element. She assumed that beside costs and rewards, investments also determine attraction and commitment to a relationship. She tested the effect of different investments. She called extrinsic investments the resources which are exogenous to the relationship, but one can lose with dissolving the relationship. Examples are home, if two people live

together, or friends, if they have common friends. She called intristic investments the resources, which have been invested directly into the relationship, such as time, money and emotional involvement. She found that both kinds of investments increase commitment to a romantic relationship.

Evolutionary Theory

Evolutionary theory is not popular among sociologists. Therefore it may be worth to shortly present it here. The theory only concerns marital selection; it does not deal with friendships. Its hypothesis that people prefer those who have the best characteristics in some aspect is similar to the ones of social exchange theory. The difference is that according to evolutionary theory, the importance of a characteristic in partner selection is not a social parameter but people "value mates with traits that would (in our ancestor's time) have been related to (a) the likely possession of adaptive genes that might directly promote the survival of offspring and (b) the capacity and inclination to contribute tangible resources that could help the offspring survive." This happens because according to evolutionary theory, people are acting to maintain the persistence of their genes by maximizing the number of their viable offspring. However, it is not an intentional act, but it happens so, because preferences evolved this way. Similarly to the evolution of preference for sweet tastes (because it was the taste for more nutritive fruits) those partner selection preferences evolved in society, which guaranteed their survival (Kenrick et al. 1993: 951). According to the evolutionary approach (similarly to social exchange), people with the best traits select others with the best traits, therefore those with worse characteristics can select only among themselves. This is how homogamy evolves.

According to the evolutionary approach, physical attractiveness is one of the traits which help maximizing the potential offspring. Normal body build, health, absence of mental and functional disorders, sound teeth and smooth skin are attractive in many societies. (Sloman and Sloman 1988). Moreover, according to the theory, physical attractiveness of women is more connected to their youth, than men's, because fertility is more tied to youth in the case of women, while men's reproductive capacity is less dependent on their age (Buss 1989).

There is some kind of status hierarchy in every society. In this case higher rank in the hierarchy indicates more resources for bringing up offspring. If the resources are provided by men in the society a woman who mates a dominant man may acquire a long-term genetic advantage, a short-term material advantage or both (Sadalla et al. 1987). One may observe here that evolutionary theory itself does not explain why men have stronger preference for physical attractiveness and women for status. An assumption of the difference in gender roles is also necessary for this.

On the basis of the evolutionary theory, people select partners on the basis of the attributes which are related to the maximization of viable offspring. These are similar in every society; therefore people should have similar mating preferences all over the world. The demonstration of this was the aim of the intercultural study done by Buss (1989).

Attraction Theory and Similarity

Beside or instead of social exchange similarity might be the crucial mechanism driving mate selection. The fact that similar people attract each other is a cornerstone of social psychology, and of homophyly theory in sociology. The psychological explanation for this is that rejection of some basic values means the rejection of the self, and acceptance means validation of the self, a feeling that one is right (Festinger et al. 1950). Originally, the effect of similarity was tested about friendship, not about marriage.

Newcomb (1961) and his colleagues observed college students living together in a dormitory building for a year in an experiment. Next year they reproduced the experiment with other students. Newcomb measured attitudes of the students about different issues. He has found that attitude similarity measured in the beginning of the year predicted well attraction between students at the end of the year, but it did not predict attraction in the beginning when the students still did not know each other (p. 81.). He also found, however, that students tend to estimate values of the other similar to their own if they were attracted by the other even in the beginning of their acquaintance (p. 53). Newcomb also examined the role of similarity in five "objective" measures: age, field of study, religion, urban-rural background and room assignment. In the first year he found that these characteristics predict attraction in the beginning of the year, but it vanished as people get know each other. In the second year the data show no relationship at all (p. 95).

The respondents of Byrne (1971) filled out an attitude questionnaire. Afterwards they were given a filled-in questionnaire. Byrne has found that attraction towards the stranger who filled in the questionnaire was a linear function of the proportion of the similar attitudes (p. 58).

Some studies about mating preferences found the effect of similarity, too.

Based on the study of Buss and Barnes (1986), Kenrick et al. (1993) created 8 composite measures of attributes, which determine partner selection: dominance, status, attractiveness, family orientation, agreeableness, extraversion, intellect, emotional stability. They asked the participants that at least in which percentile would someone be, to be acceptable as a (dating, marital, or sexual) partner. They compared these measures to the self-ratings on the same attributes, and found considerable correlation (usually 0.3–0.6 in the case of the specific attributes) about marriage and also about dating. They interpreted this result as one supporting social exchange.

Sprecher et al. (1994) examined the importance of 12 factors, asking how willing participants would be to marry someone with these characteristics. These included "being more than 5 years older", "being more than 5 years younger", "earn less than you", "earn more", "having more education", "having less education", having a "different religion" and "different race". The results show that the importance of similarity is different across these characteristics. People were more likely to marry someone with different earning or education, than someone with more than 5 years' age difference, which were even better than someone with different religion, and they were the less likely to marry someone with different race. On the other hand, the data also support the social exchange-type preferences, because people were more likely to marry someone with more education or more earning than theirs, compared to having less than theirs.

Gender Differences

A group of scholars has done research on the question of what attribute of the other is important for partner selection, and how it is different between men and women (Buss and Barnes 1986; Kenrick et al. 1993; Sprecher et al. 1994; Li et al. 2002). Since the authors are social psychologists they mostly examined the role of personality traits. They used survey methodology, which means that instead of examining the traits of couples who actually have selected each other they asked the respondents about their preferences for partners.

Buss and Barnes (1986) have found that most importantly one's partner must be "kind and understanding". It was followed by "exciting personality" and "intelligent". For men physical attractiveness of the partner was significantly more important than for women, while for women college degree and earning capacity of the partner was more important than for men.

Sprecher et al. (1994) have shown that men were more likely than women to marry younger ones, someone with lower education and earning capacity, and from another race. On the other hand, women were more likely to accept older men or unattractive ones as a mate than men.

The study of Li et al. (2002) provided evidence that the minimal necessities in men's preferences are that the partner should be physically attractive and intelligent at least to some extent. Women's minimal expectations for their partners are to be intelligent to some extent and to have some earning potential.

Stronger preference for physical attractiveness among men and for status among women was found by the study of Deaux and Hanna (1984) on the basis of dating ads. The study additionally compared the ads according to sexual orientation, and found that sexual roles are more important for homosexuals than for heterosexuals.

THE EFFECT OF OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE

The Proximity Hypothesis

It were again social psychologists, who first have shown that people who see each other more will also like each other more, in their terms: proximity promotes attraction. These studies were also about friendships, not about marriage.

Festinger et al. (1950) have found that among students in a university dormitory the best predictor of friendship formation was their place of their room in the building. The study of Segal (1974) found very high (rank) correlation of the names of friends in the alphabet in a police academy. The reason for this was that classes and room assignment for students were created according to their name. On the other hand, Newcomb's (1961) experiment did not support the hypothesis of proximity and attraction. He did not find that between floormates attraction would be higher, and for roommates he found it only in one of the two experimental years. This may be the consequence that he had a small community in the experiment (N=17), living in one building, where it was easy to know all the others quite well.

Effect of Group Properties
on Marriage and Friendship Choice

An interesting application of the proximity hypothesis has been tested by sociological researchers. They assumed that if we form more relationships with those whom we see more often than meeting more often people who are different from us would result in more relationship with these kinds of people.

This was one of the hypotheses of Blau and Schwartz (1984), who actually tested it about marriage. They analyzed aggregate data of 125 American metropolitan areas (SMAs) on population characteristics, and the marriage relations between groups. Their first hypothesis concerned size distributions. They assumed that if a group is smaller in a metropolitan area members of it are more likely to marry different people, because the ratio of different people in the group will be higher. Groups defined here included ethnicity (nonwhites, natives or foreigners) birth regions (born in the region or not), industry (manufacturing and other), occupation (3 categories). So they tested the correlations across the metropolitan areas that if the ratio of whites is higher in the area, they will be more likely to marry whites, if the ratio of foreigners is higher, they will be less likely to marry Americans, and so on. They found these correlations significant for all groups mentioned above, as expected (p. 37). An even more interesting result of the authors concerned group heterogeneity. They assumed that if heterogeneity in a metropolitan area is higher, heterogamy (out-marriage rate) will be also higher, because in more heterogeneous areas people have greater chance to meet different people, so they actually will form more relationships with unlike people, and heterogeneity in marriage increases. They tested the correlations for race, national origin, mother tongue, ethnic background, birth region, industry and occupation. They found significant positive correlation for all these characteristics. For example, the heterogeneity of ethnic background and the ethnic out-marriage rates correlated across regions, the same for industry, and so on.

On the effected group properties on partner selection the one of Kalmijn and Flap (2001) is a key study, which analyzes the effect of shared social settings of couples on homogamy. They take into account five organized settings: whether the couple were in the same school (14.5% of couples), whether their family knew each other (14.4%), if they grew up in the same neighborhood (11.5%), if they are members of the same voluntary organizations (10.7%), and if they have the same workplace (8.8%). Overlap was possible among these settings – altogether 42.3% of the couples shared one of these. The authors asked about non-organized settings too, they examined if the partners visited the same bars or places to go out, or if they had common friends. The authors assumed that those couples who shared a setting which is more homogeneous according to a special characteristic tend to be more often similar in that aspect. The only problem was that they did not have data about the homogeneity level of the different settings. Therefore they could only build their hypotheses on "educated guesses". They supposed that in school people meet more often someone with the same age and they will have the same education. Thus partners who met at school will be more homogeneous according to education and age. They also put forward that the higher level of school they meet, they would be more homogeneous educationally.

Other hypotheses were that sharing workplace promotes class homogeneity, and that sharing neighborhood, school or family ties will result in religious homogamy. All of these hypotheses were supported by the data. The propositions, however, that sharing workplace result in higher educational and voluntary organizations promote age homogamy were not supported by the data.

The problem of not knowing group homogeneity was overcome by McPherson and Smith-Lovin (1987) by choosing voluntary organizations as groups. They found that voluntary organizations are most homogeneous according to sex, then according to age, next according to occupation, then according to education, reflecting the difference levels of population heterogeneity in these aspects. Their data also supported that heterogeneity of the groups promotes more heterogeneous friendships. They also found that in larger groups friendships were more homogeneous. Their hypothesis that correlated variables cause higher homogeneity (which also came from Blau's works) was not supported.

The three studies define differently the level of opportunities: as metropolitan areas, as marriage markets and as voluntary organizations. Each support, however, that more heterogeneous selection pools promote heterogeneous friendship or marriage choices.

PARTNER SELECTION
FROM THE FIRST IMPRESSION TO MARRIAGE

Until now the same theoretical framework was used to describe partner selection in the case of a single date, steady dating, cohabiting and marriage. Now theories describing the differences are presented.

Dating, Cohabiting and Marriage:
Stages of a Process or Alternative Forms?

When examining this question, Schoen and Weinick (1993) presumed that "if cohabitations are informal marriages, (…) like will cohabit with like and any departures from homogamy will reflect women's economic and men's noneconomic concerns" (p. 409). Alternatively, if these are different forms the homogamy of married couples must be higher than the one of cohabiting couples in ethnic and religious aspects, since in cohabitations kinship issues are less concerned. Data have shown that the two forms do differ. Cohabiting couples have more often similar educational background, while married ones have more frequently similar religion and age. Furthermore, in the case of marriages the man has more frequently higher education, than in cohabitations. To avoid selection bias the authors examined only those couples, who have got to know each other in the last two years.

Blackwell and Lichter (2004) examined a similar hypothesis about dating, cohabiting and marriage. They compared the educational homogamy of those who married without cohabiting before with those who first cohabited, and with those who

did not convert their cohabitation to marriage. They found somewhat lower homagamy in the first group, which supports the hypothesis. On the other hand, they did not provide evidence that religious homogamy is higher in marriage than in dating and cohabiting. The data neither shows the expected clear tendency in the case of racial homogamy.

The Winnowing (Filtering) Hypothesis

According to the winnowing hypothesis, "heterogeneous dating and cohabiting relationships end, while homogeneous partners progress toward marriage". (Blackwell and Lichter 2004: 719–720) The authors have examined whether homogamy is higher in case of married couples than in cohabitations and dating relationships, as the hypothesis predicts. However, the data did not support the proposition.

Results from an earlier study contradict this finding. Henz and Sundström (2001) have found that cohabiting couples are significantly less similar according to their income compared to married ones. Since the sample consisted of couples after the birth of the first child, in my opinion the data rather supports that cohabitations and marriages are different forms. According to the winnowing hypothesis, dissimilar couples should have broken up instead of having children and continue cohabiting.

Stimulus-Value-Role (SVR) Theory

Stimulus – value – role theory (Murstein 1971, 1987) could have been considered as an improved version of the filtering hypotheses if one did not know that it has been created earlier. According to the theory partners "filter" each other on the basis of different characteristics throughout the relationship. In the first step (stimulus) people choose others according to characteristics which they can observe before beginning a relationship. Examples for these characteristics are physical attractiveness, voice, dress, etc. (Murstein 1987: 929). The phrase "Love at first sight" illustrates the importance of visual impression at the beginning of the relationship. When selecting others, people also take into account the same characteristics of their own, which would be valuable for others, because they do not want to be rejected. Then in second (value) stage they check if their basic values are compatible. Compatible values are important, because rejection of some basic values means rejection of the self, and acceptance means validation of the self, a feeling that one is right. Before marriage couples need to consider their views on living together, too. This third stage is called the role stage, and includes consideration of perceived role fit, personal adequacy and sexual compatibility (Murstein 1971: 118). To validate the theory Murstein (1971) has shown that premarital couples have higher similarity in physical attractiveness than couples paired at random, and that they have greater than chance similarity of values. Another test of the theory is the test of chronological order of the stages. The author has shown that selection criteria of the stimulus and value phase already do not matter in the third (role) phase. It has been done by showing that neither value similarity nor similarity in the aspect of physical

attractiveness affects satisfaction with the relationship in the role phase. He did not, however, test the sequence of the stimulus and the value stage against each other, which is actually my central interest. A serious methodological problem about the theory was to define when the value phase ends and the role phase begins. In his later article Murstein (1987: 930) defined this boundary as "dating some" should be regarded as the value phase, and dating extensively as role phase. Of course, "going steady" and "being engaged" means also to be in the role phase.

The Convergence Hypothesis

Murstein's SVR theory was highly debated in the '80s. (Surra 1990) One of the critics was Stephen (1984, 1985) who argued that values of partners in their later phase of relationship are more similar not because people continuously filter out those who are not compatible with themselves, but because "the development of a relationship involves partners' constructing a shared world view, or set of common assumptions about the way things are". Stephen (1984, 1985) has proven this assumption using longitudinal data showing that values of the couple are getting more similar during the dating process. These findings, however, did not prove that Murstein's theory was wrong; it can be true that the two effects (filtering partners and convergence of values) exist parallel.

Differences in Preferences

About the differences between preferences for dating and marriage partners the study of Kenrick et al. (1993) is interesting, too. As previously described, the authors computed correlations between self-rating and the minimum level for accepting someone as dating and marriage partners (and for sexual relations and a single date). The correlations do not differ too much between dating and marriage, which shows that people do not prefer more similar others for dating than for marriage (in the examined 8 characteristics including attractiveness, status and 6 personality traits). Neither is the case that some kind of similarity is more important for dating and some of them for marriage. If we examine the preferences themselves we see that family orientation is somewhat more important for marriage. If we compare preferences for a single date with dating and marriage we see that correlations are lower, therefore similarity is not as important, and that thresholds of acceptance are generally lower for a single date.

CONCLUSIONS

The theories presented in this paper are the results of a selection process, and like in movies, there are also some "deleted scenes". For example, the economic theory of marriage, originally created my Becker (1973), is omitted. Studies about social opportunities, which analyze the effect of gender ratios on partner selection are neither included. For further readings in these topics I suggest the overview by Bukodi (2004).

Furthermore, the present study did not concern itself with the economic-game theoretical models of marriage markets, of which a basic study is Roth and Sotomayor (1990).

On the basis of the overview, it is apparent that although a significant number of studies have been conducted to explain partner selection, there are many theories which still lack clear supporting or disclaiming evidence. The justification of exchange theory is still an open question. The attraction for similarity originally has been shown about attitudes. About other characteristics it was not verified, especially with data where the preferences were measured using the revealed preferences method (analyzing the decisions actually made), instead of asking hypothetical questions. It would be also interesting to test the SVR and the convergence hypotheses on the basis of longitudinal data.

It can be also seen that partner selection cannot simply be explained by using the rational decision theory. There is a need of interdisciplinary approach; sociological research must be based on social psychological and psychological observations.

Homogamy is a persistent phenomenon in society, which has been analyzed for a long time by sociologists. About this Kalmijn (1998) and Mare (1991) presented the recent trends (mostly about the US). Trends of the first half of the last century have been summarized by Hollingshead (1950). About the Hungarian tendencies see Bukodi (2004).

Since each theory predicts homogamy, by observing homogamy it cannot be decided which theory is, or which theories are true. It cannot be determined whether homogamy is a result of preferences or opportunities, or if both, what the size of their relative effect is. One can neither decide if preferences cause the observed homogamy, is it because people are attracted to similar others, or because everyone aspires partners with the best characteristics? The correlation of characteristics may be a further explanation. If education is correlated with cultural interests (see DiMaggio and Mohr 1985) preferences for similar interests lead to homogamy in education as well. Therefore it is also possible that about some characteristics there are preferences for similarity, while for others the exchange theory is true.

Consequently, beside the necessity of clarification of the question about preferences there is need for research which can separate the effect of preferences and opportunities in homogamy. Here the problem arises which was experienced by Kalmijn and Flap (2001): one cannot measure the effect of opportunities as far as the heterogeneity of contexts (where couples have got to know each other) cannot be measured. Therefore an innovative method to overcome this problem is required from the sociologists.

The author's own research aims to examine this question by the analysis of on-line dating, where heterogeneity of groups is known. However, research into on-line dating itself raises many difficulties, and many other research plans are possible.

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