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PAUL PUSCHMANN & TIM RISWICK [eds.]

# BUILDING BRIDGES



## *Scholars, History and Historical Demography*

*A Festschrift in Honor of Professor Theo Engelen*

Valkhof Pers

## Family systems and spousal age differences in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Netherlands

### INTRODUCTION

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The age difference between spouses is one of the most concrete and measurable indicators of the power relationship between men and women as it relates to marriage. Large age differences, particularly between an older husband and his younger wife, can be seen as an indication of patriarchal gender relations (Atkinson & Glass, 1985; Cain, 1993; Mitterauer & Sieder, 1983; Therborn, 2004; Wheeler & Gunter, 1987), meaning that women have less power and agency in the relationship. Such age differences may affect the quality of marital relations by impeding conjugal intimacy (Barbierbi & Hertrich, 2005) and the standard of marital sexuality (Mitterauer & Sieder, 1983). The age difference also reflects the extent to which the life courses of the two spouses were synchronous, i.e. whether or not they were generational peers and (could) share conjugal projects. This is particularly relevant in the context of fertility declines. The equality and intimacy between spouses necessary for facilitating discussions of sexual and reproductive matters can most easily be reached in couples formed of age peers (Fisher, 2006; Janssens, 2007; Safilios-Rothchild, 1972).

During the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, spousal age differences in Western societies strongly declined (Van de Putte et al., 2009). This development was part of a set of related shifts in family patterns, including earlier and more universal marriage and declining fertility. In explaining the rise of marital age homogamy, previous authors have emphasized the effects of industrialization, rising standards of living and the increasing importance of education and employment on widening marriage horizons (Berardo, Appel & Berardo, 1993; Van de Putte, 2005). Others have stressed cultural reasons and pointed to the rise of a new, less

instrumental, and more egalitarian view on partner selection (Coontz, 2005; Van de Putte et al., 2009). However, these explanations, alone or in tandem, do not clarify the substantial spatial variation in spousal age differences that has been prevalent, despite a trend of decreasing age differences (Barbieri & Hertrich, 2005; Laslett, 1977; Casterline, Williams & McDonald, 1986; Van de Putte et al., 2009). The question of how these regional differences can be explained has potentially an important bearing on our understanding of spatio-temporal differences in fertility transitions.

422 The few studies that have considered spatial differences in spousal age gap in the past have mainly juxtaposed the (small) spousal age gaps in the West with the large one in the East (Hajnal, 1965; Laslett, 1977). However, recent historical demographic research increasingly shows the substantial regional variations in demographic behavior that also exist within Western (or for that matter Eastern) societies (Ruggles, 2012). Such 'differences in difference' may stem from cultural variations in household organization, or in other words, from different family systems (Bengtsson, Campbell & Lee et al., 2004; Chuang, Engelen & Wolf, 2006; Engelen & Hsieh, 2007; Lundh & Kurosu et al., 2014; Tsuya, Feng, Alter & Lee et al., 2010;). Family systems or family types can be seen as clusters of norms, values and practices surrounding family and kinship, which are geographically anchored and particular to a certain region (Das Gupta, 1999; Davis, 1955; Duranton, Rodríguez-Pose & Sandall, 2009; Hajnal, 1982; Kertzer, 1991; Lorimer, 1954; Skinner, 1997; Therborn, 2004; Todd, 1990). This chapter looks in detail at such cultural differences related to the institution of the family in order to explain regional variations in spousal age gaps in the 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Netherlands. We use a classification of family systems formulated by Todd (1985; 1990) who stressed the extent of liberty versus authority in parent-child relations and the degree of equality versus inequality in sibling relations as the defining blocks of family systems. Concretely, we study the relation between family systems and same-age, husband-older and wife-older marriages on the basis of a large-scale database, which contains indexes of more than a million marriage certificates related to five of the eleven Dutch provinces during the period 1812-1922. In addition to the household information from the marriage records, macro-level information on the religious and demographic structure of the marriage communities was added, as well as community-level indicators of the extant family system. Specifically, we include variables indicating meeting and courting practices from a unique Folklore Survey. We

also include the type of inheritance system in the community. Our dataset thus allows for a large-scale, comparative, and multilevel approach to the relationship between local family systems and spousal age differences for a substantial part of the Dutch population for almost a century.

In the next section, we present mechanisms that link characteristics of family systems to spousal age differences, building further on the work of Emmanuel Todd (1985; 1990). We then describe the case of the Netherlands, and its family types, and formulate hypotheses. Next, our data are introduced and we describe our measures and methods. In order to obtain a first impression of regional differences in spousal age gaps at marriage, we present graphs showing percentages of same-age marriages, husband-older marriages, and wife-older marriages over time in the five Dutch provinces under study. Through a series of two-level logistic models, we then test our hypotheses and assess the effects of family system attributes, and of other community characteristics, on the different types of marriage. In the final section, we summarize and discuss our findings.

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## BACKGROUND

### *DETERMINANTS OF SPOUSAL AGE DIFFERENCES*

Determinants of spousal age differences or similarities (i.e. marital age heterogamy or homogamy) can be divided into three clusters: structural constraints of the marriage market, third-party influences, and individual preferences (Kalmijn, 1998). Structural constraints comprise the likelihood of meeting a potential spouse on the marriage market in a given locality, at least long enough to have some sense of whether they would be suitable, and factors dealing with the degree to which marriage horizons expanded or shrank (Van Leeuwen & Maas, 2005, p. 5). Naturally, in larger local marriage markets it is easier to meet someone of one's own age. When transportation and infrastructure facilities improve, meeting a larger number of potential spouses becomes possible. Secondly, social pressure from parents, peers and the community may favor partners from some age groups and reject others. The third group deals with personal agency or autonomy – the extent to which one can resist such pressure and cultivate one's personal preferences.

It might be argued that family systems shape all three clusters of determinants. They mold local opportunities for meeting prospective spouses,

are associated – via the degree of authority versus liberty in parental-offspring relations – with the degree of social pressure, and linked to this, also to the possibilities for individual agency and the development of personal preferences. Of course, the availability of meeting opportunities might also result from purely demographic mechanisms. The age structure of the marriage market may simply make meeting and marrying an age peer easier or more difficult. Although previous research by Casterline, Williams and McDonalds (1986) showed that the variation in age-difference distributions in present-day developing societies was mainly related to the society's kinship structure, and that age structure constraints on the pool of possible matches was less important, we will have to take (changes in) age structure constraints of the marriage market into account. However, for the remainder of this section, we will focus on elaborating how meeting opportunities, social norms and personal autonomy are shaped by family systems.

#### FAMILY SYSTEMS AND SPOUSAL AGE DIFFERENCES

Family systems, defined as clusters of norms, values, and practices surrounding family and kinship, can be seen, to use Wallerstein's (1991) term, as 'geocultures' (see also Therborn, 2004). It has been argued that family systems have been in place for a long time, at least since the Middle Ages, and that they have been resilient in the face of social change, having a strong path-dependent nature. Even if concrete attributes of family types, such as multi-generational households or impartible inheritance, are no longer visible or existent, their underlying norms and values may have persisted until the present day. Such continuity may develop as a consequence of socialization and transmission of family traditions from parents to children and / or through intermediate factors, such as political or economic institutions that have been shaped by family structures and continue to influence our society and behaviors (Duranton, Rodríguez-Pose & Sandall, 2009; Todd, 1985). There are several definitions of family systems, stressing different aspects and using different characterizations (Das Gupta, 1997; Dalla Zuanna, 2001; Micheli, 2000; Reher, 1998; Skinner, 1997; Therborn, 2004; Todd, 1985; 1990; 2011). In this chapter, we apply the conceptualization of family types by Emmanuel Todd (1985) in his book, *The Explanation of Ideology: Family Structures and Social Systems*, where he follows up on earlier work by Le Play (1884).

According to Todd, family systems vary along two axes indicating *lib-*

*erty versus authority* on the one hand and *equality versus inequality* on the other. Relations between father and son determine people's concept of liberty or its opposite; the bond between brothers creates an idea of equality or of inequality (Todd, 1985). Four family systems are accordingly distinguished: *the absolute nuclear family*, which combines liberal parent-child relations and inegalitarian sibling ties, *the egalitarian nuclear family*, which combines liberal parent-child relations with egalitarian sibling relations, *the authoritarian or stem family*, which combines authoritarian parent-child and inegalitarian sibling relations, and the communitarian family, where authoritarian parent-child relations are combined with egalitarian sibling relations (see Table 1, left panel). Thus, families are thought to diverge in their approach to intergenerational and generational (sibling) relations.

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But how does this influence the power balance between men and women? According to Todd, both absolute and egalitarian nuclear family systems, fitting in with systems of bilateral inheritance, give equal weight to maternal and paternal roles, while women are eligible to receive part of the inheritance. A nuclear household is a situation of exclusive dialog between a man and woman, implying some degree of equality. The principle of symmetry between brothers has consequences for male-female relations, which differ between the two nuclear models (absolute and egalitarian). The absolute family type, which has no interest in equality or symmetry, has, according to Todd, in practice taken equality between the sexes further than the 'egalitarian' family. The principle of solidarity between brothers implies masculine solidarity and reinforces inequality between the sexes. The absolute nuclear family on the other hand is indifferent to equality between brothers and to male solidarity. It leads to the most egalitarian conjugal bonds of all family systems. An examination by Todd of the ages at marriage of husband and wife showed that the age difference between spouses is greater in egalitarian nuclear systems than in absolute nuclear family systems (Todd, 1985).

The authoritarian family has the most unequal parent-child relations and is contradictory in the sense that it emphasizes continuity in the male line yet gives women an important role through consciously exalting the power of the father and unconsciously elevating respect for the mother (Todd, 1985). This may also translate into inegalitarian, yet contradictory, spousal relations. Moreover, the authoritarian family produces very variable marriage ages. Only one son or daughter is actually required to marry; this child, remaining under the protection of the parents, can marry

young. The other siblings have to make their own way and their marriage ages might diverge considerably. Thus, the variation in marriage ages is wide and it is likely that the same will be true of the range in spousal age differences. Empirical research on present-day developing countries shows that in patriarchal societies and in societies organized by patrilineal kinship organization the age difference is much larger than in societies where Western forms of family formation are more common (Casterline, Williams & McDonald, 1986).

Table 1. Family types and their association with spousal relations and spousal age differences

Family type	Parent-child relations	Sibling relations	Spousal relations	Marriage age	Spousal age gap	Age homogamy
<i>Authoritarian family</i>	Authoritarian	Unequal	Inegalitarian	Variable	Large	-
<i>Egalitarian nuclear family</i>	Liberal / authoritarian	Equal	Egalitarian/inegalitarian	High	Medium	+/-
<i>Absolute nuclear family</i>	Liberal	Indifferent	Egalitarian	High	Small	+

Source: based on Todd (1985), additional columns by the authors

In order to assess the association between family systems and spousal age differences, the crucial issue is how to measure the main dimensions of family systems, the degree of liberty and of equality. First, Todd measures the extent of liberty versus authority by the speed and extent of the process of children leaving home. This varies, according to him, between societies or regions characterized by liberal ties where children depart early and form an independent household through marriage, and societies or regions characterized by authoritarian ties where the process of leaving home is protracted or does not occur at all and the child continues to live with the parents, forming a vertical relationship within an extended family group. As an indicator, Todd (1990) used regional percentages of multi-generational households. However there are several other ways of measuring liberty and authority in parent-child relations; in fact, what is needed is data that deal with the degree of normative control by parents over their children. Since we study as our main variable of interest an attribute of the marriage behavior of children, i.e. spousal age differences, it is better to measure liberty in parent-child relations *before* marriage and not, as Todd does, at the moment of marriage itself. In this chapter we specifically exploit data on the meeting and courting practices of unmarried young-

sters as indicators of the degree of liberty versus authority in parent-child relations. Courting practices may be highly supervised and monitored by parents, or occur relatively free from parental and communal supervision. Moreover, they influenced the opportunities of young people to meet prospective marriage partners and defined their opportunities in time and space for searching for similar or suitable spouses.

Secondly, equality or inequality in sibling ties is measured by Todd by the rules of inheritance in a region, which may vary between egalitarian ties, in cases where inheritance is fully partible, and inegalitarian ties, when property is passed on to just one child (impartible inheritance). Todd also distinguishes regions that are marked by indifference, where parents expect their children to set up their own household but divide their property in a will or testament in their own way, without being bound by precise conventions. We follow Todd's footsteps where inheritance practices are used to indicate the equality-inequality dimension of family systems. In the next section, we describe what is known about the content and spatial variation of inheritance customs and courting practices in the five Dutch provinces under study in this paper and we then formulate hypotheses.

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#### *REGIONAL DIFFERENCES IN THE NETHERLANDS*

Since the sixteenth century, the Netherlands combined a rural, agricultural economy with a highly developed urban services sector. Industrialization came relatively late to the Netherlands, starting off around 1860 in the urban heartland of Holland, and was characterized above all by an intensification of the tertiary sector (Van Zanden & Van Riel, 2004). In the 1890s this process accelerated, accompanied by urbanization, massive rural-urban migration and the broadening of urban labor markets. In the five provinces for which we have data – Groningen, Overijssel, Gelderland, Zeeland, and Limburg – the pace of industrialization was considerably slower than in urbanized Holland. Although in the provincial towns in these regions the services sector grew and a number of (rural) industries developed, all five regions remained highly dependent on their agricultural economies during the period 1840-1925.

In the eastern part of the Netherlands, stem families and impartible inheritance had been common at least since the sixteenth century (Verduin, 1985). In our dataset, a number of communities from the regions of Salland, Twente and the Achterhoek in the provinces of Overijssel and Gel-

derland belonged to this impartible inheritance area. Inheritance customs in Groningen and Zeeland, in contrast, were under the reign of partible inheritance law. In the sea clay provinces of Zeeland and Groningen, in which farms were large, parents often transmitted their property to just one child while compensating the other children, making for an inegalitarian or at least indifferent type of inheritance. Thus, these provinces can, on the basis of their system of property devolution, be classified as absolute nuclear. The larger part of the southern province of Limburg had an egalitarian nuclear family system with partible inheritance. Children often waited long and married late in order to receive their share of the inheritance or family fund (Klep, 2004). Extended households consisting of unmarried co-residing siblings were the unintended effect of this fully partible system of property devolution (Verduin, 1985).

Several customs and practices of meeting and courting existed in the Netherlands, as in other European societies (Wikman, 1937). Courting practices were a means of selecting partners. Except for the nobility and the elite, marriages in the Netherlands were not arranged. However, particularly for farmers, instrumental motivations were at the heart of partner selection and marriage well into the twentieth century. One had to marry a partner from an equally sized farm. More generally, the criteria of marrying into one's own social class and religious group, as well as within the village, were applicable to all.

However, within their group, young people had opportunities to choose. Several courtship rituals, places and events allowed youngsters to meet, such as weddings and funerals, annual markets or fairs, and during carnival, spring or summer festivals. Also, youngsters gathered at home or in the neighborhood. The most striking aspect in which courting rituals varied was their degree of parental and (public) control. Some courtship customs were ritualized public meeting events that were firmly under parental and social control. These included all sorts of annual events, including fairs, markets, and the like, where youngsters could meet (in the presence of the elder generation). Also, visits of boys to the houses of girls, which in some cases led to sexual activities (bundling), were most of the time under the control of parents. The largest part of the afternoon and evening that the young couple spent together was in the company of family, who had a large say in approving the presence of the visiting boy. Other courting practices allowed youngsters more time and more freedom to seek and be together with prospective partners. Among these were special places in villages and towns where youngsters were known to get

together without parental supervision. This might be a certain street, or a place in the field outside the village where young people would play games, covering each other with freshly mown grass ('grazelen'). Another custom that was under less parental supervision was the 'peer group meeting at home'. These could be spinning bees, where girls span wool and the boys arrived later in the evening to play games, which mostly took place during winter nights in January and February and persisted particularly in the eastern and southern provinces. They could also be peer group evenings that were not connected to agricultural activities (De Jager, 1981).

How important were these courting practices for actually finding a spouse? It has been noted that for some social groups, particularly for farmers' children, who did not have much leisure time because of their time-consuming occupation, annual events and other courting customs might have been even more essential for meeting prospective partners than for other social groups. Moreover, over time, most of these courting practices dwindled, earlier in towns than in villages and persisting longest in remote areas, and earlier among the middle classes than among farmers and farm laboring folk. More modern 'engagement' and dating rituals replaced these traditional courting practices (De Jager, 1981).

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#### HYPOTHESES

On the basis of the above, the following hypotheses are formulated:

- We expect that in communities with impartible inheritance, the chances of same-age marriage are lower, while chances of husband-older and wife-older marriages are likely higher (H1).
- We expect that in communities where courting practices comprised ritualized, publicly supervised annual events (such as markets and fairs) – indicating high parental authority – the chances of same-age marriages were lower and the chances of husband-older and wife-older marriage were higher (H2).
- We expect that in communities with courting practices that offered youngsters the freedom to be together for an extended period without parental supervision, such as peer group gatherings at home or separate local meeting places – indicating liberal parent-child relations – the chances of same-age marriage are expected to be higher, while the chances of wife-older and husband-older marriages are expected to be lower (H3).

## DATA

The data for this study are taken from GENLIAS, a large-scale database consisting of indexes to all marriage certificates that were contracted between 1812 and 1922 in five Dutch provinces. Data are available for the provinces of Groningen ( $N=208,000$ ), Overijssel ( $N=221,000$ ), Gelderland (327,000), Zeeland (164,000) and Limburg (190,000). In total, there are 1,110,878 marriage certificates within the dataset. For our study, we selected only first marriages that were contracted before the bride or bridegroom were 40 years old. The upper limit of 40 years was chosen because other mechanisms might be at work when marrying after the age of 40 (since reproduction is less of an issue). Additionally, marriages after the age of 40 were relatively rare; in our population, only 2.5 percent married after this age.

For individuals for whom a marriage certificate was available, data on their sibling set was created in three steps. In the first step, the marriage certificate of the research person was linked to the marriage certificate of the parents. This link was made on the basis of the first and last name of both parents as registered on the marriage certificate of the parents and the child. The age of the child and the year in which the child married were used to determine how long the parents are likely to have been married, by considering the period in which people can give birth to children. Parents and children were linked by considering all data that were available for the five provinces. In the dataset constructed in this way, each record has information on the bride, bridegroom and both sets of parents. The nationwide registration system in the Netherlands was not introduced until 1812 and therefore we rely on data after 1840 in which a 28-year difference is taken into account in order to allow for intergenerational linkage. Data on the two generations are most often available for those who married in 1900 or later. The final intergenerational database consisted of 946,943 marrying persons.

In a second step, 404,872 sets of siblings with the same parents were created. Since only married siblings are included in the dataset, there is systematic under-representation of the number of siblings within each family. If remaining single was more common in some social groups, such as Catholic families, this could result in a substantial bias in the estimates. In order to determine whether or not this causes a problem, a comparison

was made with the marriages of complete sibling sets in 237 small and large families in the vicinity of Akersloot. This comparison showed that there were no significant differences in the percentage of never-married siblings between large and small families or between Catholic and Protestant families. In other words, the incorporation of only married respondents in our sample does not result in a bias with regard to religion in the estimation of the total number of siblings in a family across different types of families.

Next, community characteristics were linked to the GENLIAS database. A number of these, including religious structure (% of Catholics and % of Orthodox Protestants), net migration, mobility, birth rate, urbanization, and population size, were derived from the *Historical Database of Dutch Municipalities (HDNG)*. Data on communities' inheritance practices were taken from monographs and regional surveys of notaries concerning the type of property transfer (Best, 1941; Baert, 1949). Data on customs of meeting and courting were derived from the *Folklore Questionnaires [Volkskundefragenlijsten]* (1989), which were collected by the *Dutch Meertens Institute* between 1934 and 1988.

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These questionnaires were sent out to approximately 1,200 informants from mainly rural municipalities scattered throughout the Netherlands. The informants filled out the questionnaires with pen or pencil, while some were typed out. With informants usually being elderly people in a municipality, the information broadly covers the first half of the twentieth century.

Such systematic information on cultural rituals and customs in their local contexts is hard to find in any other source, though the questionnaires also have their limitations. The main problem is that informants had to report back about beliefs that were supposed to be held generally or by certain social groups in the municipality. The larger the municipality, the more difficult it was for one respondent to be aware of the existence of beliefs or customs in different subgroups. However, in pre-war Dutch rural municipalities, community cultures were still strong and, although divided across class and religious lines, often quite homogeneous. Moreover, the informants were frequently the village notables, such as heads of schools, teachers and notaries, who came into contact with people from all classes and denominations. Another limitation was that the answers to the questions were not closed or pre-defined, so that informants were basically free to decide how to respond to a question. This has the advantage of allowing for lengthy, interesting observations, but among the disadvan-

tages are the very dissimilar answers which then had to be standardized and coded by the researchers. Questions to which the answers were not filled in but were left blank also posed a problem, for it was not always clear whether the informant had not answered because he or she did not know the answer or whether the answer was negative and there was simply nothing to report. Moreover 'not responding' was very much clustered within respondents; 'unknowns' correlated heavily across the questions and caused problems with multicollinearity in the regression analyses. Therefore in the end we were unable to include all questions in the analyses and had to select a number of them.

432 For this paper, questionnaire #40 on dating practices, which was sent out in 1971, was used. The questionnaire contained 56 questions concerning, among other things, the ages at which boys and girls could start courting and whether and how this was made visible in terms of clothing or hairstyle, questions about visiting (bundling) where the girl waited in her room at home during the afternoon or at night for a visit from a boy, questions about peer group gatherings or spinning bees, questions about annual events such as markets and fairs where youngsters could meet, and about visiting patterns and the extent of parental supervision, and finally questions about the existence (generally, and in particular social groups) of more modern engagement practices.

#### MEASUREMENTS

In our analysis, the chances of contracting 1) same-age, 2) husband-older and 3) wife-older marriages are the main dependent variables. Our key independent variables are the regional family system characteristics, i.e. the inheritance system and the courting practices in the community. Although partible inheritance was stipulated in the civil code of the Netherlands in the nineteenth century, several communities adhered to their tradition of impartible inheritance. A dichotomous variable was constructed to indicate whether or not the marriage took place in a community practicing impartible inheritance. In the province of Overijssel, 67% of all brides and grooms lived in a community with impartible inheritance; in Gelderland, this was about one-fifth. In the other three provinces, only partible inheritance was practiced (see Table 1).

We included the following courting variables, 1a/b) the ages at entry into courting of girls and boys; 2) the existence of annual meeting events, such as markets and fairs in the community; 3) the existence of local meet-

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the dependent and independent variables

	Zeeland	Groningen	Limburg	Overijssel	Gelderland	
Same age marriages (< 2 year differences between spouses)	48%	45%	47%	44%	38%	***
Husband older marriages (husband > 2 years older)	41%	42%	38%	44%	49%	***
Wife older marriages (wife > 2 years older)	11%	13%	15%	12%	13%	***
Mean age at marriage husband	26.1	26.5	27.6	26.9	27.8	***
Mean age at marriage wife	24.1	24.6	26.2	24.6	25.1	***
Mean age difference (age husband- age wife)	2.0	1.9	1.4	2.3	2.7	***
<i>Individual and parental household characteristics</i>						
Sex (1=male)	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	
Sibship size	4.0	3.8	3.6	3.6	3.9	***
Birth order	2.4	2.3	2.2	2.2	2.4	***
Social class father						
– Higher and middle classes (ref.)	16%	29%	14%	24%	18%	***
– Farmers and fishermen	13%	14%	26%	30%	29%	
– Lower skilled and unskilled laborers	5%	16%	8%	24%	16%	
– Farm laborers	29%	30%	7%	16%	27%	
– Father's occupation unknown	39%	10%	44%	7%	10%	
Migration (0=no, 1=yes)	41%	59%	35%	37%	43%	***
Marriage year	1883	1886	1885	1888	1888	***
<i>Community characteristics</i>						
Proportion of Catholics %	26%	7%	95%	27%	21%	***
Proportion of Orthodox Protestants %	7%	14%	0%	6%	6%	***
Urban (0=no, 1=yes)	0%	40%	0%	0%	9%	***
Net migration	-7.2	-2.8	-6	1.0	-2.9	***
Mobility	103.7	110.5	93.7	103.1	104.9	***
Population size	2855.1	19386.4	12431.5	12973.5	8670.1	***
Birthrate	36.2	31.2	31.7	31.7	31.2	***
Impartible inheritance (0=no, 1=yes)	0%	0%	0%	67%	19%	***
Age at entry courtship of girls						***
– 17 years or younger	5%	63%	0%	24%	7%	
– 18-19 years	25%	28%	16%	39%	39%	
– 20 years or older	42%	5%	53%	31%	40%	
– Unknown	28%	5%	31%	7%	15%	
Age at entry courtship of boys						***
– 17 years or younger	6%	18%	0%	0%	3%	
– 18-19 years	16%	30%	14%	41%	22%	
– 20 years or older	50%	41%	52%	31%	59%	
– Unknown	28%	12%	35%	28%	16%	
Girls stayed at home						***
– Yes	25%	19%	19%	38%	22%	
– No	32%	33%	44%	54%	42%	
– Unknown	43%	48%	37%	8%	36%	
Peer group gatherings at home (0=no, 1=yes)	30%	23%	39%	85%	24%	***
Existence of annual meeting events (0=no or unknown, 1=yes)	82%	52%	50%	74%	62%	***
Female agency in courting						***
– Yes, by girl	28%	57%	26%	35%	24%	
– Yes, by parents and family	0%	6%	9%	15%	11%	
– No or unknown	72%	37%	65%	50%	65%	
Local meeting places (0=no or unknown, 1=yes)	78%	66%	15%	54%	29%	***
Supervision of parents in visits						***
Yes	9%	44%	0%	11%	2%	
No, parents absent	59%	29%	52%	66%	66%	
Unknown or inconsistent	33%	27%	48%	23%	32%	
N communities	153					
N individuals	321016					

Source: Database Genlias\_2007\_3

\* significant at 0.05 level, \*\* significant at 0.01 level, \*\*\* significant at 0.001 level.

ing places where youngsters could be together without communal and parental supervision; and 4) the existence of a communal custom of peer group gatherings without parental supervision. The answers of the informants on these sub-questions were coded as 'yes', 'no', or 'unknown'.

434 As control variables we included first of all a number of characteristics pertaining to regions and communities. We included a variable for the province in which the marriage took place (Groningen, Overijssel, Gelderland, Zeeland, and Limburg). As community characteristics of the marriage municipality, we incorporated measurements related to the religious climate and the degree of urbanization of the community. As an indicator for the religious climate of the marriage community, we included the percentage of Catholics in the population and the percentage of voters for the main orthodox Calvinist party, the SGP, for the municipal and provincial elections in 1935 (1935 being the first year in which it was possible to chart voters for this party). Municipalities were classified as urban or rural on the basis of information on city rights (Suanet & Bras, 2010; 2014).

With regard to the family characteristics, we included the number of siblings, the birth order of the research person within the sibling set, and the parental social class. As stated above, the measure of the number of siblings is based on those siblings who ever married. The social class of the parental family is based on the occupation of the father; occupations were coded on the basis of the HISCO classification system, a historical classification of occupations that is synchronized with the International Standard Classification of Occupations. These occupational codes have been grouped into occupational categories according to the HISCLASS scheme, as proposed by Van Leeuwen & Maas (2002; 2011), and consisted of seven categories: higher managers and professionals; lower managers and professionals including clerks and salesmen; foremen and skilled laborers; farmers and fisherman; semi-skilled laborers; unskilled laborers; and farm laborers. Subsequently, several categories were collapsed and we here distinguish between five occupational categories: 1) higher and middle classes (higher managers and professionals combined with clerks and salesmen); 2) farmers and fisherman, 3) skilled and unskilled laborers (skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers); 4) farm laborers; and 5) father's occupation unknown. We also included a variable measuring whether or not research persons had migrated by comparing their birth and marriage communities (0 = no difference between the birth and marriage community, 1 = migration, i.e. different birth and marriage communities). Those individuals who moved away and married outside the

provinces of observation cannot be studied. Thus, although the area studied is large, our results might partly suffer from selection bias with regard to out-migration.

Finally, we also controlled for period effects by including dummies for the marriage year (1840-1859, 1860-1879, 1880-1899, and 1900-1925).

#### METHODS

We first conducted descriptive analyses of regional (i.e. provincial) trends of same-age, husband-older and wife-older marriages. Subsequently, we performed a series of multivariate multilevel logistic regression models in order to estimate the effects of community characteristics on each of these types of marriage. Multilevel models are based on the idea that individuals within specific categories, for example those who marry within the same community, are more similar as a result of observed and unobserved characteristics. If no random term was included, intra-community correlation could result in biased standard errors and therefore in incorrect significance tests of parameters. The advantage of multilevel models is therefore that we can allow for dependency between observations from the same community, even if these are unmeasured by the community characteristics included in the model.

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#### RESULTS

##### REGIONAL TRENDS IN SAME-AGE, HUSBAND-OLDER AND WIFE-OLDER MARRIAGES

In Figure 1 the development of same-age marriages (marriages between partners with an age difference of two years or less) between 1840 and 1913 is presented for the five provinces. Clearly, we observe a steady increase in same-age marriages from 1875 onward. This rise is visible for all provinces. Strikingly, there are substantial and continuing differences in the level of same-age marriages. For instance, around 1895 the share of same-age marriages differs between 53% of all marriages in the western province of Zeeland and 38% in the eastern, inland province of Gelderland. In general, the provinces with an absolute nuclear family system (Zeeland, Groningen) and with an egalitarian nuclear family system (Limburg) have the

Figure 1. Percentage of Same-Age Marriages by Region and Period of Marriage, First Marriages

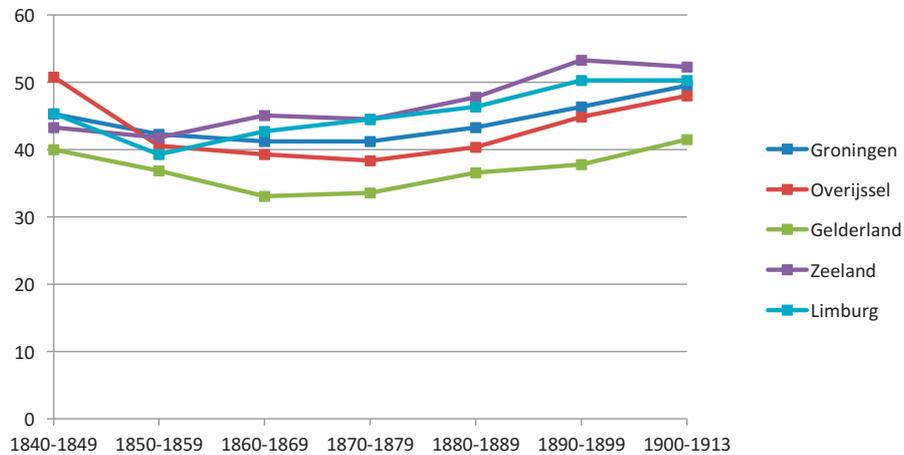
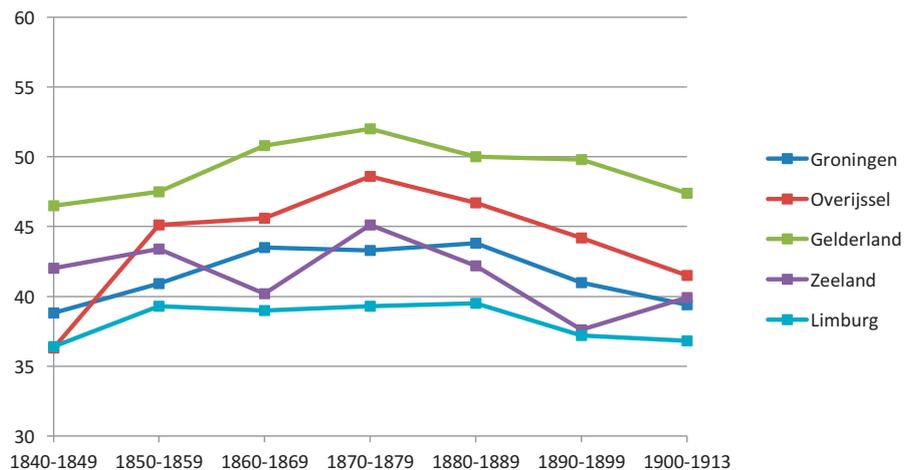


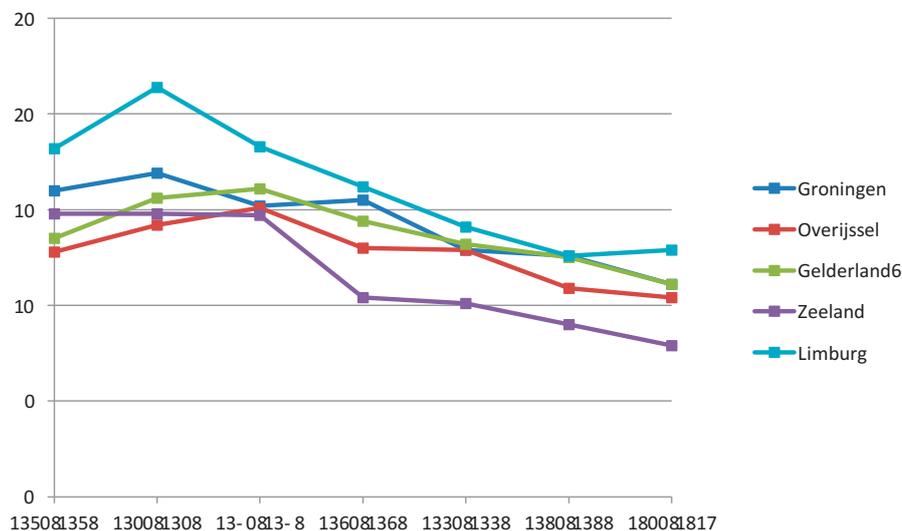
Figure 2. Percentage of Husband-Older Marriages by Region and Period of Marriage, First Marriages



highest rates of age-homogamy. In contrast, those provinces containing substantial regions with an authoritarian family system (Overijssel, Gelderland) have lower shares of age peer marriages.

Figure 2 shows a somewhat different trend for the incidence of husband-older marriages. In general, a rise to a peak around 1875 can be noted, followed by a decline. In terms of provincial levels, the trend lines show an almost reversed picture from that of the age-homogamous marriages.

Figure 3. Percentage of Wife-Older Marriages by Region and Period of Marriage, First Marriages



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However, the Catholic province of Limburg, with an egalitarian nuclear family system, has by far the lowest incidence of husband-older marriages.

Wife-older marriages, on average about 12% of all marriages, were very much on the decline from the middle of the nineteenth century onward, decreasing from 21% in Limburg in 1855 to 7% in Zeeland in 1905 (see Figure 3). Intriguingly, the ordering of the provinces is different for this type of marriage, and is not easily relatable to the type of family system. The egalitarian family system in Limburg, but also the absolute nuclear and authoritarian family systems in Gelderland, have higher rates in comparison with Overijssel and particularly with Zeeland. In the multivariate analyses we will see whether and in what ways family system characteristics determined these types of marriage.

DETERMINANTS OF SAME-AGE, HUSBAND-OLDER AND WIFE-OLDER MARRIAGES

In Table 2, we present the results of our two-level logistic regressions for same-age, husband-older and wife-older marriages. In model 1, we observe that the chances of a same-age marriage are significantly smaller for couples in the northern province of Groningen (absolute nuclear) and in

the eastern (stem family) areas of Gelderland and Overijssel compared to those in Zeeland. Limburg (egalitarian nuclear) does not differ significantly from Zeeland. We also observe that several of the family system characteristics have a significant effect on the chances of a same-age marriage. Marrying in a community with an impartible inheritance system is, as we expected, *less often* associated with marrying an age peer. The same held true for those marrying in communities where girls were allowed to start dating only after the age of 20, showing the prohibitive effects of strong parental control over courtship and for places where youngsters could (only) meet prospective spouses at annual meeting events, such as fairs and markets. Such events were under strict public and parental surveillance and youngsters were often accompanied by chaperones, so these communities probably did not offer much leeway for really searching for equitable partners or developing romantic relationships. The existence of the custom of peer group gatherings, often in the form of spinning bees, did have – as we expected – a positive effect on the chance of finding a partner of approximately the same age.

A number of community-level variables are also important predictors of same-age marriages. In terms of temporal differences in the chances of same-age marriage, we see the rising trend in age homogamy reflected in the coefficients for marriage year. Living in a community with a higher percentage of Orthodox Protestants increased the likelihood of marrying an age peer. Strangely enough, we find that the chance of a same-age marriage is lower in urban than in rural places. Marrying an age peer more often occurred in places with a high in- and outflow of migrants and in places with larger population sizes. Thus the urban effect probably captures small urban places with traditional city rights.

There were also important social class differentials in the probability of contracting a same-age marriage. Both the higher and middle classes and the laborers and farm laborers had higher chances of doing so in comparison with persons whose father's occupation was unknown, while brides and grooms from a farming background had a significantly smaller chance of marrying an age peer.

In model 2, we present the determinants of husband-older marriages (marriages in which the husband was more than two years older than his wife). We find that the chances of contracting an husband-older marriage are higher for women from the absolute nuclear family system province of Groningen and the stem family provinces of Overijssel and Gelderland

Table 2. Two-Level Logistic Regression Analyses predicting Same-Age, Husband-Older, and Wife-Older Marriages

	Same-Age		Husband-Older		Wife-Older	
	B	Sig	B	Sig	B	Sig
Intercept	-0.11		0.09	***	0.08	***
Sibship size	0.01	***	0.00	**	0.00	***
Birth rank	0.02	***	0.00	***	0.00	***
Regions (Zeeland=-ref.)						
Groningen	-0.26	***	0.07	*	0.06	*
Overijssel	-0.29	***	0.08	**	0.07	
Gelderland	-0.42	***	0.06	***	0.06	***
Limburg	0.01		0.08	*	0.06	***
Fathers occupation (unknown=ref.)						
Higher or middle class occupations	0.13	***	0.01	***	0.01	#
Farmers	-0.03	**	0.01	***	0.01	***
Laborers	0.19	***	0.01	***	0.01	
Farm laborers	0.12	***	0.01	***	0.01	
Migration(1=yes)	-0.09	***	0.01	***	0.01	***
Marriage year (1900-1925=ref.)						
1840-1859	-0.14	***	0.02		0.02	***
1860-1879	-0.22	***	0.01	***	0.01	***
1880-1899	-0.11	***	0.01	***	0.01	***
Community characteristics			0.06			
% Catholic	-0.11	*	0.09		0.05	*
% Orthodox Protestant	0.17	#	0.02	#	0.09	
Urban	-0.04	*	0.07		0.02	***
Net migration (/100)	0.00		0.02		0.06	*
Mobility (/100)	0.05	**	0.01	#	0.02	
Population size (/10000)	0.06	***	0.01	*	0.01	***
Birth rate (/10)	-0.02	#	0.06	***	0.01	#
Family system variables						
Impartible inheritance	-0.10	*			0.05	
Age at entry courtship of girls (18-19=ref.)			0.06			
17 years or younger	0.00		0.05		0.05	
20 years or older	-0.07	#	0.09		0.04	
Unknown	0.08				0.07	
Age at entry courtship of boys (18-19=ref.)			0.09			
17 years or younger	0.10		0.05		0.07	
20 years or older	0.03		0.08		0.04	
Unknown	-0.03		0.04		0.06	
Peer group gatherings at home	0.06	#	0.04	#	0.03	
Existence of annual meeting events	-0.07	*	0.04	#	0.03	
Local meeting places	0.06	#	0.09		0.03	
<b>Random part</b>						
Community level intercept	0.18	***				
Deviance	-215784.5					

n individuals = 321,016; n communities = 153

Sources: Database Genlias\_2007\_3; Historical Database Dutch Municipalities;  
# significant at 0.10 level, \* significant at 0.05 level, \*\* significant at 0.01 level, \*\*\* significant at 0.001 level.

as compared with the absolute nuclear province of Zeeland. Only in the egalitarian nuclear province of Limburg are the chances of contracting an husband-older marriages significantly lower. Only two family system attributes have a significant effect: the existence in the community of the custom of peer group gatherings (without parental control!) diminishes the chance of an husband-older marriage, while the existence of publicly-controlled annual meeting events augments chances of women marrying older men.

440 In particular, women from farming families seem to have had higher odds of marrying an older husband compared to those whose father's occupation was unknown, while women from the higher and middle classes and from (farm) laboring classes had smaller chances of doing so. Husband-older marriages occurred significantly more often in the nineteenth century than among those marrying in the first quarter of the twentieth century. In communities with high shares of Orthodox Protestants, a mobile population, and a large population size, husband-older marriages were less often formed. On the contrary, in places with high birth rates we find such marriages relatively more often.

In model 3, we analyze the determinants of wife-older marriages (marriages where the woman is more than two years older than the man). Wife-older marriage happened least often in Zeeland. Those from egalitarian nuclear Limburg and stem family Gelderland have significantly higher chances than individuals in Zeeland of entering such a union. None of the family system characteristics is significant. Also, young people from the higher and middle classes more often contracted wife-older marriages, while those from farmers' families did so less often. This indicates that this type of marriage might be related to the continuity of a family businesses (of the older wife) and / or to economic advantages of the wife's family. Migration is also associated with wife-older marriages. Our dummy for period reflects the declining trend of wife-older marriages, which was visible in Figure 3, falling to very low numbers in the twentieth century. Finally, wife-older marriages more often occurred in urban places, in Catholic communities, and in communities with high net migration, and less often in places with a large population size and high birth rate.

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, we investigated to what extent characteristics of family systems determined spousal age differences. We measured the degree of liberty versus authority in parent-child relations by courting practices, and the degree of equality versus inequality, which mark sibling relations, by inheritance systems. Our main results show that characteristics of family systems were indeed associated with spousal age differences. Marrying in a community with an impartible inheritance system was less often associated with marrying an age peer. The same held true for marriages in communities where girls began courting at a late age and where youngsters could (only) meet prospective spouses at annual meeting events, such as fairs and markets. These attributes signaled strong parental control. The existence of the custom of peer group gatherings and of local meeting places where youngsters could seek partners and spend considerable time together without parental supervision resulted more often in same-age marriages.

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The idea behind this chapter was that spousal relations with a large age difference, specifically between an older husband and his younger wife, were more patriarchal and inhibited modern demographic behavior, for instance family limitation. In a study on structural and diffusion effects in the Dutch fertility decline, it was found that couples with age-homogamous social networks stopped childbearing earlier and had smaller families. The lack of such networks of age peers was one of the reasons that the unskilled laboring class and the farm laboring class lagged behind in the fertility transition (Bras, 2014). This paper complements this evidence by looking at assortive age mating in the spousal relationship, showing that the chance of marrying an age peer was partly determined by one's cultural context, i.e. by the characteristics of the family system in one's community and region. It has been argued that equitable spousal relations were an important precondition for fertility decline, and as a matter of fact, also a consequence of this (McDonald, 2000). A recent study showed that childbearing trajectories characterized by early stopping were most common among Dutch couples with egalitarian spousal relations (Bras & Schumacher, forthcoming). Hence, we agree with Van de Putte et al. (2009), who argue that when studying the 19<sup>th</sup> century fertility decline and its socio-spatial variation, age homogamy must be taken into account to identify the reasons why some groups lagged behind in that decline. The results of this study point in the direction of an at least partly cultural

explanation of regional levels and lags in fertility transitions related to regional family systems. Future research might further advance this finding by examining how family systems, directly or indirectly, via (in)equality in spousal and other personal relations, influenced regional differences in the fertility transition.

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