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Paper submitted by

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Relative education and couples' employment patterns

Objectives. Educational expansion and homogamous mating are two of the most important demographic processes of the last centuries. Studying the effects of these phenomena is crucial to our understanding of the production and reproduction of social inequalities across cohorts, over the life course as well as in and between couples. In our paper, we analyze the association between couples' relative education and their respective working arrangements in Germany. Theoretically, we draw on two competing perspectives of the effects of education.

On the one hand, education indicates one's level of resources on the labor market and thus represents human capital. Following bargaining or dependence models, the partner with the higher educational attainment and therefore the higher earnings potential is expected to spend more time on the labor market than the partner with lower education. Couples with equal educational achievements are expected to share their weekly working hours equally.

On the other hand, education represents the extent of approval to gender egalitarianism. Higher educational achievements correspond with higher consent to liberal attitudes as well as democratic and egalitarian values (van Berkel and De Graaf 1999). Women or men with lower education are said to be more prone to adopt traditional patterns of spousal specialization (Bianchi et al. 2000; Bittman et al. 2003; Lück 2009). Thus, we hypothesize that higher educated couples show a higher propensity and potential of equality.

Recent research has provided clues for the latter model in other spheres of daily life, questioning the symmetrical approach of the resource perspective. The results of van Berkel and de Graaf (1999) as well as Schulz (2010) strengthened the “egalitarian values” perspective for the division of household labor, and Bonke and Esping-Andersen (2011) have documented evidence for this assumption for childcare.

Method. We use data from the German Microcensus of 2011 to test both models for the case of couples' employment patterns. Our population of interest contains approximately 60,000 heterosexual German couples (unweighted). We map couples' total working hours and female partners' share of couples' total working hours for each educational constellation, controlling for the educational level of both partners. In addition, we will control for boundary conditions like for example the family situation (marriage, presence of children). There are several advantages of the German

Microcensus data. First, our analyses are based on a representative sample of households in Germany containing a high number of cases. Second, the data are very detailed in terms of labor market participation and education. Last, it would be possible in future research to extend the analyses by using time series until back to the 1970s.

Results. The results are preliminary as the paper is work in progress at the time of submission. First regression analyses yield evidence for both theoretical perspectives, as especially homogamous couples significantly deviate from the resource model. These analyses indicate that homogamous couples on a high educational level are more likely tend to an egalitarian division of paid work than homogamous couples with lower educational attainments.

Conclusions. The paper concludes with discussing the results in the light of changing inequalities in society and sheds a light on possible policy conclusions. As the paper is work in progress at the time of submission, final conclusions do not exist yet.

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