

Deciding Whom to Marry in a Rural Two-Class Society: Social Homogamy and Constraints in the Marriage Market in Rendalen, Norway, 1750–1900*

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SUMMARY: This article presents the findings of a long-term study of social homogamy in the rural community of Rendalen, Norway, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Prior to 1870, the occupation of parents was not normally recorded in the Norwegian parish registers. It is therefore difficult to carry out historical studies of social homogamy in Norway over any length of time. The Rendalen database, however, provides this information from several other sources. Structural changes over time, which led to an increase in the number of farm workers, reduced the degree of homogamy among farmers as well as creating a larger marriage market for the farm workers, thereby increasing homogamy among these farm workers. Controlling for these structural changes, it is clear that social boundaries between farmers and farm workers prevailed at least until the end of the nineteenth century. Using a multivariate analysis, we are able to identify different family characteristics that led young men and woman to marry homogamously. The farmers, especially, exerted influence on their eldest sons to marry farmers' daughters, but the role of the father in the mating process also secured more economically viable partners for the other children too.

INTRODUCTION

In preindustrial rural society, a marriage did not involve simply forming a personal union; it also marked the start of a production unit. The choice of partner could have a great effect on economic outcome later in life. In this context, marriages could not be based solely on personal affection. This article presents the findings of a long-term study of social homogamy in the rural community of Rendalen, Norway, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It examines in what way social boundaries between the classes constrained the choice of marriage partner, and whether the role

* This article is part of my doctoral thesis. I am grateful to the Research Council of Norway for financial support. I am also grateful to the editorial committee of this journal for helpful comments and suggestions, and to Sølvi Sogner, Nico Keilman, George Alter, Mona Renate Ringvej, Svenn-Erik Mamelund, and Jennifer Høibråten.