Transitions within and from ethno-linguistically mixed and endogamous first unions in Finland

Jan Saarela
Åbo Akademi University and University of Helsinki, Finland

Fjalar Finnäs
Åbo Akademi University, Finland

Abstract
Utilizing longitudinal population register data from Finland, this study examines the influence of exogamy on transitions within and from first unions. The aim is to assess how ethno-linguistically mixed unions, consisting of Swedish speakers and Finnish speakers, differ from endogamous unions with respect to various transitions in the family formation process subsequent to entry into childless cohabitation. We find evidence of notable selection. The proportion of endogamous relationships increases during the course of the courtship process, and this selection is primarily driven by a higher separation risk of ethno-linguistically mixed unions. The stages in family formation consequently seem to work as a social filter, where the exogamy effect on the dissolution risk is particularly strong for couples who have come a long way in the process.

Keywords
cohabitation, ethnicity, ethno-linguistic groups, exogamy, Finland, marriage, parenthood, separation

Introduction
In ethnically mixed unions, the partners’ behaviours reflect the interplay of divergent norms in tastes, values and communication styles (Jones, 1996; Kalmijn, 1998). By analysing the formation and stability of such unions, we can therefore learn about intergroup relations. Each person’s ethncial identity shapes his or her values and relationship expectations, which in turn serve to mediate the relationship between
identity and relationship quality (Gaines et al., 2006). Distinctive attitudes towards marriage, the family and divorce can therefore make it more difficult for the partners to understand each other, reduce the number of activities they enjoy doing together, and limit the degree to which they can confirm each other’s values and world-views. Living in an ethnically mixed relationship also implies that the partners have crossed a social boundary in society, because the union is generally less normatively approved of than ethnically homogamous relationships (Kalmijn et al., 2005). Inequalities between ethnic groups may additionally influence how a person sees oneself in terms of own ethnic identity, self-esteem and self-concept (Fang et al., 1998).

So far, most studies on ethnically mixed unions have been concerned with formal marriages and divorce risks (see, e.g., Bumpass and Sweet, 1972; Eeckhout et al., 2011; Finnäs, 1997; Kalmijn et al., 2005; Kalmijn and van Tubergen, 2006). It is reasonable, however, to expect exogamy effects for other types of relationships and transitions as well (Dribe and Lundh, 2012; Joyner and Kao, 2005). Cohabitation is generally considered to provide a staging ground for evaluating potential marital partners and fostering better matches in marriage (Blackwell and Lichter, 2000, 2004). Because the formation and continuation of a relationship is a process, insight into effects of exogamy can therefore be gained by examining transitions between different states in the process. This is highly essential from the viewpoint that most people in unions have started as cohabiters, many children are born within cohabiting unions, and a considerable share of intact cohabiting unions never proceed into marriage.

In Finland, which is the country under study here, only one-fifth of the women born in the late 1950s married at the start of their first union, whereas in the cohorts born in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, the proportion was less than one-tenth (Jalovaara, 2012; Nikander, 1992, 1996). For an increasing proportion of the couples, cohabitation seems to have become a more long-term arrangement also after childbearing. About one-third of Finnish mothers aged 25–29 years live in cohabiting unions, and in ages 40–49 years the proportion exceeds one-fifth (Statistics Finland, 2011a). Particularly in the latter group, some have re-partnered of course. An increasing number of children are also born within cohabiting unions. In 2010, the proportion of all first children of women in Finland was approximately 55 per cent (Statistics Finland, 2011b).

To understand the formation and stability of ethnically mixed unions, one therefore needs to look at family formation models that include the birth of the first child, rather than the formation of cohabiting unions and marriages only. The case of Finland provides an unusual opportunity in this respect. In the country, there are two indigenous ethno-linguistic groups, Finnish speakers and Swedish speakers. They live intermingled and exogamy is common, but there is a substantial degree of social separation (O’Leary and Finnäs, 2002). Finland is also one of the few countries in the world where cohabiting unions with and without children can be explicitly observed in population registers. Detailed information from longitudinal population data makes it possible to follow unions over time, and consequently observe stages in the family formation process.

In this article, we study the influence of exogamy on transitions within and from first unions in Finland, using an extended version of the model applied by Schwartz (2010), where we also include childbearing (Figure 1). If one starts from the onset of childless cohabitation (state A), partners are followed until they potentially reach the ‘final’ state married with children (state D) unless they remain in one of the intermediate states or separate. Our primary aim is to compare ethno-linguistically mixed unions (hereafter referred to as ‘ethnically mixed’ or ‘exogamous’ unions) with endogamous unions in terms of the various transitions within and from first unions, and see how exogamy effects differ across these transitions. By doing so, we also highlight that, in a secularized society like that in Finland, there is a need for using extended models of this kind in the empirical study of family formation and family disruption.

**Background**

Approximately 90 per cent of the population in Finland consists of native Finnish speakers, while there is also an indigenous group of Swedish speakers amounting to 291,000 persons or 5.5 per cent of the
population. These two ethnic groups are the focal points of interest in this article. In the central population register, each person is uniquely identified according to mother tongue.

The roots of the Swedish-speaking population go far back in history, when Finland was an integrated and equal part of the Swedish realm (Liebkind et al., 1995). At that time, Swedish was the dominant language of government, business and culture. In 1809, Finland became part of the Russian Empire. During the latter part of the nineteenth century, the Finnish language achieved equal status with Swedish. When Finland declared its independence in 1917 it became a bilingual republic in which Swedish speakers and Finnish speakers were guaranteed equal constitutional rights.

The public administration provides for the cultural and social needs of both ethnic groups. There are two parallel school systems from the elementary level to university level with the same curriculum, a diocese for all the Swedish-speaking parishes within the Lutheran Church of Finland, one brigade of the Finnish Army is Swedish-speaking, and there are a number of Swedish organizations and societies for politics, culture, media, sports, science and agriculture (McRae, 1997). Hence, Finnish and Swedish speakers can be separated on the basis of the critical features that characterize an ethnic group (cf. Barth, 1969; Gordon, 1964). Each makes up a field of communication and interaction, and has a membership that identifies itself, and is identified by others as constituting a distinguishable category. Within an ethnic group, persons interact along communal lines of much of social life, including the family, schools, the church and friendship cliques.

The Swedish-speaking population is consequently not an underprivileged minority but an indigenous ethnic group with a strong position in society. There are no apparent differences in religiosity between the two groups. Approximately 90 per cent of all Finnish speakers and all Swedish speakers belong to the Lutheran Church. Due to their history, Swedish speakers are overrepresented in administrative and clerical professions and in the agricultural sector, and underrepresented among manual workers (Finnäs, 2003). Swedish speakers are higher educated than Finnish speakers, although regional differences within the country are far larger than the ethnic group variation (Saarela and Finnäs, 2003a). Swedish speakers

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**Figure 1.** Stock and flow diagram of transitions within and from first unions.
also have lower unemployment rates than Finnish speakers (Saarela and Finnäs, 2003b), and they are healthier and live longer (Saarela and Finnäs, 2005).

The main settlement area of Swedish speakers in Finland is situated along the Southern and Western coastlines of the country. At the beginning of the twentieth century they dominated these regions (Finnäs, 1986). Due to massive immigration of Finnish speakers from other parts of the country the situation has changed. Nowadays, about half of the Swedish speakers live as the local majority, but more than one-third live in municipalities where they constitute less than 15 per cent of the total population.

During the first decades of independence, the attitudes to the Swedish language issue sharpened, but the wars against the Soviet Union in 1939–1940 and 1941–1944 united the population. Mixed marriages seem to have been accepted in both groups (there are nevertheless no explicit studies about these attitudes) and they have existed for long (Fougstedt, 1951). However, because the partner is often found in close geographic proximity, ethnically mixed marriages were rare until the second half of the twentieth century.

The proportion of Swedish speakers who married a Finnish speaker increased greatly in the 1950s to 1970s (Finnäs, 1986). Since the 1980s, the proportion has been fairly stable, with almost 40 per cent of the Swedish speakers marrying a Finnish speaker (Finnäs, 2010). The ethno-linguistic composition of the local marriage market is the most decisive factor for partner selection, but the level of education is also important. The probability of having a Finnish-speaking partner decreases by increasing level of education among Swedish speakers (Finnäs, 2002). This is presumably more because of opportunities than of attitudes, as the higher educated Swedish speakers tend to remain in contexts where the probability of meeting a Swedish-speaking partner is relatively high, such as at the university (see Monden and Smits (2005) for a similar finding on ethnic intermarriage in Latvia). In present-day Finland, there are consequently no harsh attitudes towards the institution of intermarriage, and approximately 60 per cent of all newborn children in ethnically mixed families are registered as Swedish speakers (Finnäs, 2010).

Interrmarriage between a Swedish-speaking man and a Finnish-speaking woman is more frequent than between a Finnish-speaking man and a Swedish-speaking woman. During the past two decades, on average 43 per cent of all Swedish-speaking men in new marriages have married a Finnish-speaking woman, whereas on average 35 per cent of all Swedish-speaking women in new marriages have married a Finnish-speaking man (Finnäs, 2010). Previous research does not provide an exhaustive explanation to this asymmetry. Status exchange theory could provide some answers, however. The original ideas proposed by Davis (1941) and Merton (1941) predict that mixed unions involve an exchange of ethnic (or actually racial) status for some other status characteristic. Empirical research based on U.S. data has found some support for the theory (see, e.g., Fu, 2001; Kalmijn, 1993; Qian, 1997), although there is a great deal of controversy with respect to the findings (Rosenfeld, 2005, 2010).

A quite common presumption in Finland is that Swedish speakers are overrepresented among those well-do-to (Saarela and Finnäs, 2004). This prejudice has found only limited empirical support, however. Wealth levels appear higher among Swedish-speaking men than among Finnish-speaking men, but a similar difference has not been observed in women (Saarela, 2006). A wage discrepancy in favour of the Swedish speakers has been found only among men in the Helsinki area, and it could primarily be attributed to education and age differences (Saarela and Finnäs, 2004). Outside the Helsinki area, and among women, there is no consistent pattern in support of higher wages among Swedish speakers than among Finnish speakers (Saarela, 2004). If one assumes that the socio-economic resources of Swedish-speaking women are less valuable in the marriage market than those of Swedish-speaking men, we might have a situation where Finnish-speaking women, to a greater extent than Finnish-speaking men, choose to exchange their majority position. If Finnish-speaking women trade their majority position against an assumed high status position of Swedish-speaking men, the gender asymmetry with respect to intermarriage might consequently be a result of status exchange.

Higher fluency in Swedish among Finnish-speaking women than among Finnish-speaking men could be another reason, which means that they are in a better position simply in terms of communicating and therefore in establishing a mixed relationship. There is indirect evidence that points towards better
Swedish language skills among Finnish-speaking women than among Finnish-speaking men (see Rooth and Saarela (2007) for a discussion). The documentation, though, is not overwhelming. We know fairly little about individuals’ abilities to speak both Swedish and Finnish, and there are no reliable statistics on the matter. Despite there being mandatory teaching in Swedish for Finnish speakers at compulsory schools since the mid-1970s, and in Finnish for Swedish speakers, far from all individuals can speak both languages. Finland is an officially bilingual country, but most regions are heavily dominated by the Finnish language. Constituting the majority group, Finnish speakers’ contact with the Swedish is therefore notably lower than the Swedish speakers’ contact with the Finnish language. These circumstances alone indicate a greater degree of bilingualism among Swedish speakers than among Finnish speakers.

**Previous research and theoretical underpinnings**

A study by Finna¨s in 1997 showed that divorce rates of endogamous Finnish marriages in Finland were almost twice those of endogamous Swedish marriages. This difference could not be attributed to structural factors such as socio-economic position, education, urbanization or the ethnic composition of the couple’s residence area. Between-group differences in attitudes towards marriage, the family and divorce are therefore likely important.

Finna¨s (1997) also found that the divorce risk in exogamous marriages lay above the highest level of the two groups. Marriages between a Finnish speaker and a Swedish speaker had a 10 per cent higher divorce risk than endogamous Finnish marriages. This is usually referred to as a strong exogamy effect, because the risk of making a transition is higher than the maximum of both types of endogamous unions or, when other transitions are concerned, lower than the minimum (Kalmijn et al., 2005). A weak exogamy effect, on the other hand, would mean that some behavioural adaption has taken place, so that the risk of making a transition in an exogamous union lies above (or below) the average of the risks of the two endogamous groups. Exogamy has no effect if the risk is the same as the average of the risks of the two endogamous groups. This might be considered as convergence towards the mean (Jones, 1996).

Researchers have long argued that social distance attitudes, or preferences for contact with other ethnic groups, are more restrictive the more intimate is the relationship (Park, 1924; Schuman et al., 1997). The criteria for selection into marriage can be assumed more stringent than for cohabitation because it involves more and longer-term commitments, a public acknowledgement (among other things often a church wedding), and presumably also a stronger intention to remain with the partner. In addition, since most people start as cohabitants, marriage generally occurs at a later stage in the individual’s partner selection process. Entry into marriage might therefore be more selective of ethnicity and other partner characteristics than entry into cohabitation (Blackwell and Lichter, 2000, 2004). If preferences for marriage are weaker in ethnically mixed cohabiting unions than in ethnically homogamous ones, endogamy will increase as the partners progress along the dating-cohabiting-married continuum. Accordingly, studies have found that marriages are less likely to be inter-ethnic than cohabiting unions (Heaton and Albrecht, 1996; Jepsen and Jepsen, 2002; Laumann et al., 1994).

Stages in the process of partner selection might therefore function as a social filter. Because marital stability is lower in ethnically mixed relationships than in endogamous ones, it is reasonable to expect that ethnically mixed cohabiting unions are more likely to dissolve than ethnically homogamous cohabiting unions. Differences in the exogamy effect between union types might therefore be a reflection of a winnowing process and must, hence, be studied as a courtship continuum (Joyner and Kao, 2005).

The occurrence of childbirth within cohabiting unions implies that the concept of family is equivocal. Families should therefore not be restricted to formal marriages but also to consensual unions with children. In the long term, people desire a partner who projects a particular image to others, who has a similar taste in cultural related issues, and who will share their fertility expectations and child-rearing goals (Sherkat, 2004). During the course of the courtship process, individuals are thought to select partners they expect to be not only more acceptable marriage partners, but also more acceptable prospective parents. This behaviour is known as anticipatory socialization, or the process whereby individuals ease into
role transitions by taking on the values of the groups to which they aspire (Merton, 1964). Like the transition from cohabitation to marriage, the transition from being childless to being a parent might consequently differ between ethnically mixed and ethnically homogamous relationships due to anticipatory mate selection (cf. Bean et al., 1987; Krishnan, 1993).

Compared with endogamous unions, partners in ethnically mixed unions can be assumed to have more divergent cultural norms and tastes, which will make it more difficult to make joint decisions about the future, including plans about marriage, childbearing, and upbringing (Kalmijn, 1998). Separation risks from each potential state can consequently be expected to be higher in exogamous unions, whereas the probabilities of marriage and of becoming parents would be lower. As a consequence, endogamy will become more frequent along the process from cohabitation to marriage with children (cf. Blackwell and Lichter, 2000, 2004), and exogamy effects will be greater if preferences for contact with other ethnic groups are more restrictive the more intimate the relationship (Joyner and Kao, 2005). The elevated dissolution risks and the depressed risks of childbearing and marriage in exogamous relationships as compared to endogamous ones would then be stronger the further partners proceed in the process.

The argumentation above makes us expect the following:

1. Endogamous Swedish-speaking unions should have lower separation risks than endogamous Finnish-speaking unions irrespective of the origin state.
2. Considering their higher stability, endogamous Swedish-speaking unions might also be more likely to proceed into marriage or/and parenthood than endogamous Finnish-speaking unions.
3. Separation risks should be higher in exogamous unions than in both types of endogamous unions, corresponding to a strong exogamy effect.
4. If individual preferences become increasingly more restrictive over the courtship continuum, the exogamy effect with respect to the transition to proceed would increase in magnitude from childless cohabitation, to marriage (or parenthood), to marriage with children. The same pattern would hold true for separations in the case ‘love makes you blind, but marriage makes you see’. On the other hand, people who progress far in exogamous unions might be exceptionally committed to the relationship because they do not adhere much to the values and practices of their ethnic group. In that case, the exogamy effect with respect to separation would decrease over the course of the process.
5. The exogamy effect with respect to the transition into marriage would be higher than that for the transition into parenthood if marriage involves a stronger commitment to the partner, wider social acceptance and stronger social bonds. A dissident’s view would suggest the opposite effect, since, in contrast to marriage, parenthood is permanent. However, becoming a parent does not necessarily mean that the partners see themselves as equally compatible as those who intend to marry, and not all pregnancies are planned.
6. If Swedish-speaking men are assumed to have a relatively high socio-economic position, Finnish-speaking women might exchange their majority position. Pairs of a Swedish-speaking man and a Finnish-speaking woman would then have a higher risk of marriage than pairs of a Finnish-speaking man and a Swedish-speaking woman, whereas differences between these two combinations with respect to the other transitions are not predictable.

**Data and methods**

The data used (permission TK-53-186-09) come from the population register files known as ‘Palapeli’ (Statistics Finland, 2011c). These files were formed by combining information from Statistics Finland’s longitudinal population census file, the longitudinal employment statistics file, the register of completed education and degrees, marriages and divorces, entry into cohabiting unions, dissolved cohabiting unions, and birth of children. The registers made it possible to construct families for all individuals and
their family members from 1972 onwards. At the time data were obtained for this study, the registers had been updated to and including the year 2003. Consensual unions are not explicitly registered by the authorities, but Statistics Finland produces statistics on them based on persons living in the same dwelling. A consensual union consists of a co-residential couple of opposite sex, who are not close relatives or married to each other, and whose age difference is no more than 20 years. Information about transitions into and out of cohabitation (as events) is not available before the year 1987. We therefore studied unions that were initiated during the period 1987–2003 and observed them until the end of 2003. By using information from the censuses about each person’s family type and position in the family we were able to distinguish people who had lived in a cohabiting union prior to 1987.

The data were based on an 8 per cent random sample of all Finnish speakers and a 50 per cent random sample of all Swedish speakers who were living in Finland at some of the population censuses 1970, 1975, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995, 2000 or 2003. In the analyses, each sample was weighted according to its sampling proportion. In addition, the weights were adjusted to account for the fact that some couples appeared twice in the data, which was the case especially in unions where both partners were Swedish speaking. For all the individuals in the sample, there was information from the different censuses and about all unions initiated. For the partner there was corresponding longitudinal information. We know the calendar year of all events, i.e., cohabiting union formation and potential dissolution, marriages, divorces, the birth of children, as well as potential migration abroad, immigration and death. This study was restricted to unions residing in provinces with Swedish-speaking settlement. These provinces include about 97 per cent of all Swedish speakers in the country and 35 per cent of all Finnish speakers.

We focused on first unions, meaning that both the reference person and the partner studied had not been cohabiting or married prior to observation. We therefore restricted the data to unions where both partners were childless (based on longitudinal information), the woman was aged between 18 and 40 years and the man between 20 and 42 years at the time of union formation. Both partners were unmarried and they had not (according to census data) lived in a cohabiting union prior to 1987.

To technically distinguish the various transitions in Figure 1 one would need the exact dates of each event. In the present case, we cannot determine the order of the events if they took place during the same calendar year. This taxonomy has the following consequences. If marriage and entry into cohabiting union took place during the same calendar year, which was the case for only one-tenth of all unions, it is impossible to know whether people started as cohabiters without children (transition #1) or if they went directly into marriage (transition #2). There exists no unambiguous decision rule for how these unions should be treated, because neither choice can be considered fully correct. This is not a sensitive issue here, however, because transitions #1 and #2 are not our focus, and only estimates for transition #3 might be affected. In addition, 3.2 per cent of all unions lacked information about the start of cohabitation. Excluding them from analysis has no impact on the estimates, however (results are available upon request).

We have chosen a setting where all unions start as cohabiting unions without children (state A), primarily because this approach allows us to study the aggregate shift into marriage with children (see Figure 2 in the next section), which otherwise would not have been directly possible. Furthermore, if marriage and the birth of a child occurred during the same calendar year, the decision rule was that marriage preceded child birth, meaning that cohabitation with children is a union in this state over the turn of a calendar year. Hence, for couples who married, became parents, or separated during the same calendar year as they became cohabiters, duration was set to half a year, implying that the contribution to total risk time is small.

In total, the number of unique (unweighted) unions was 39,694, whereof 21,259 were endogamous Finnish-speaking, 9,824 were endogamous Swedish-speaking, and 8,611 were exogamous. The number of exogamous unions with a Swedish-speaking man and a Finnish-speaking woman was 4,675, and those with a Finnish-speaking man and a Swedish-speaking woman 3,936.

Each change of state was analysed by modelling the hazards for making a transition, using Cox regressions, implying that the models were of the form:
where $\lambda(t)$ represents the risk of making a transition at time $t$. The baseline hazard is represented by $\lambda_0(t)$. This gives the risk for a person with the reference characteristic on all the explanatory variables. These are represented by the vector $x$ and its associated vector of parameters $\beta$. Dividing both sides of the expression by $\lambda_0(t)$ gives the hazard ratio, or the risk ratio:

$$\frac{\lambda(t)}{\lambda_0(t)} = \exp(\beta x).$$

Duration is time since entry into the current state. The maximum period of follow-up was 15 years. Follow-up was until censoring through a competing event or at the end of 2003, or until potential death or migration abroad. Because time was measured at the one-year level, all events were assumed to have taken place in the middle of the observation year. Table 1 gives the number of different transitions in the data, with a categorization corresponding to Figure 1. The covariates used are described below.

The ethno-linguistic composition of the union was the key variable of interest. It consisted of the categories ‘exogamous’, ‘endogamous Finnish-speaking’ and ‘endogamous Swedish-speaking’. Exogamous unions were further separated according to whether the man was Finnish-speaking and the woman Swedish-speaking, or the man was Swedish-speaking and the woman Finnish-speaking. In the weighted data, 85.3 per cent of all unions were endogamous Finnish-speaking, 6.3 per cent were endogamous Swedish-speaking, 3.8 percent consisted of a Finnish-speaking man and a Swedish-speaking woman, and 4.6 per cent of a Swedish-speaking man and a Finnish-speaking woman. The question of whether individuals in the data themselves are children of mixed marriages could not be adequately analysed. For the partners there is no information whatsoever about mother’s or father’s ethno-linguistic group, and for the reference persons only for those born after 1953. Yet most of the people registered as Swedish speakers can be considered as part of Swedish-speaking society (school, sport clubs, etc.), so there is no reason to believe that conclusions would change dramatically if it had been possible to conduct analyses concerned with each partner’s ethno-linguistic background.

Control variables used were both spouses’ age, their education, region of residence and calendar year. Separation risks are in general negatively correlated with both age and educational level, and partners with dissimilar characteristics more likely to split up than those who are more alike with respect to age and education (Bumpass and Sweet, 1972; Kalmijn, 1998; Qian, 1998; Schwartz, 2010; Saarela and Finnäs, 2012). We therefore used the joint age distribution and the joint educational distribution of the partners. Age was measured at entry into the current state. Because age was categorized within five categories for each partner, the combined age variable had 25 categories. Educational level referred to the highest level of completed education observed for an individual in the data, separating primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education. The combined education variable consequently had nine categories. Primary level refers to basic education only, which is nine years of mandatory schooling. Secondary level is two to three additional years of education, and roughly corresponds to high school education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Transition</th>
<th>Unweighted number of different transitions in the data.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>From cohabitation without children to marriage without children</td>
<td>13,583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>From cohabitation without children to cohabitation with children</td>
<td>7,334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>From cohabitation without children to separation</td>
<td>11,301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>From marriage without children to marriage with children</td>
<td>10,644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>From cohabitation with children to marriage with children</td>
<td>2,452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>From cohabitation with children to separation</td>
<td>1,587</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>From marriage without children to separation</td>
<td>758</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>From marriage with children to separation</td>
<td>1,956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total number of pairs entering cohabiting union</td>
<td>39,694</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
in the United States. Tertiary level is all formal schooling above the secondary level. Region of residence and calendar year were measured at entry into the current state. They accounted for geographic variation and cohort differences in separation risks and the incidence of cohabitation (with children). The former consisted of nine categories and the latter of four.

Results

Table 2 summarizes the results of the Cox regressions for transitions 3–10 outlined in Figure 1. The control variables were consistently included in the analyses, and generally improved the fit of each model. Their estimates were as expected, but the effects varied between transitions. For instance, the probability of marriage increased and the risk of separation decreased with education and age. By stepwise procedures we concluded that the control variables had no substantial effect on the estimate for the ethnicity variable. For the sake of brevity, we report only the estimates for the variable that reflects the ethnic composition of the union. The numbers give hazard ratios of making a transition by union type. Couples in which both the man and the woman are Finnish-speaking serve as the reference category.

Table 2. Risk ratios of transition by ethnicity (unweighted N = 39,694).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Union type</th>
<th>Exogamous mix</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Endo-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>gamous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finn.- speak.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3: Cohabitation to marriage</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4: Cohabitation to parenthood</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5: Cohabitation to separation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6: Marriage to parenthood</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7: Cohabitation with children to marriage</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#8: Cohabitation with children to separation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#9: Marriage to separation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#10: Marriage with children to separation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All estimates are standardised for effects of the control variables. The right-most column refers to testing whether the estimate for Finnish-speaking man & Swedish-speaking woman is statistically different from the estimate for Swedish-speaking man & Finnish-speaking woman. Unweighted n for transitions 3, 4, and 5, respectively, is 39,694, for transitions 6 and 9, respectively, 13,583, for transitions 7 and 8, respectively, 7,334, and for transition 10, 13,096.

† p < .10. * p < .05. ** p < .01.

in the United States. Tertiary level is all formal schooling above the secondary level. Region of residence and calendar year were measured at entry into the current state. They accounted for geographic variation and cohort differences in separation risks and the incidence of cohabitation (with children). The former consisted of nine categories and the latter of four.

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First, we focus on the endogamous unions. As expected, the separation risk from a cohabiting childless union (#5) was lower in endogamous Swedish-speaking unions than in endogamous Finnish-speaking unions. The ratio was 0.75, or 25 per cent lower, which is clearly a smaller difference than that previously reported for separation from marriage (Finnäs, 1997). Nevertheless this should not be interpreted as caused by marital status, but rather as related to the different stages in the family formation process. As can be seen, the difference between endogamous unions in the separation risk was larger for later transitions. For separation from cohabitation with children (#8) the ratio was 0.62, and for separation from marriage with children (#10) it was 0.71.

Few couples remain as childless cohabiters; the estimated average proportion remaining in this state 15 years subsequent to union entry was less than 4 per cent (not shown). Corresponding to the differences in separation risk the hazards for entry into marriage (#3) or parenthood (#4) were consequently clearly higher in endogamous Swedish-speaking unions. The rates were 1.12 and 1.38, respectively, which indicates that Swedish speakers to a greater extent than Finnish speakers choose parenthood before marriage.
Subsequent to this first step, differences between the endogamous groups were small, but the hazard for the final step to both marriage (#6) and parenthood (#7) was higher in Swedish-speaking unions than in Finnish-speaking. To summarize these combined steps we also computed corresponding Cox regressions that defined the event of interest as both marriage and birth of the first child. Schematically this can be illustrated as in Figure 2, where we also discriminate between the two alternative routes. Separation includes all separations before marriage with children. The corresponding results are presented in Table 3. The hazard for completed family formation was 16 per cent higher in Swedish-speaking unions than in Finnish-speaking unions, and the difference was especially marked for the route via unmarried parenthood.

Shifting attention towards exogamy effects, we are primarily concerned with two aspects. Does the relative risk of separation in ethnically mixed unions increase over the course of the family formation process? How do ethnically mixed partners advance in the process compared with endogamous ones? For three out of the four types of separation (in Table 2) we found strong exogamy effects. For divorce (#9), in particular, the relative risk of separation in ethnically mixed unions was high. For entry into marriage from cohabitation (#3) there was also a strong exogamy effect, because the risk in ethnically mixed

Table 3. Risk ratios of transition by ethnicity based on the diagram in Figure 2 (unweighted N = 39,694).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Union type</th>
<th>Exogamous mix</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Endogamous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From cohabitation without children to marriage with children</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- via marriage</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- via parenthood</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation before marriage with children</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All estimates are standardised for effects of the control variables. The right-most column refers to testing whether the estimate for Finnish-speaking man & Swedish-speaking woman is statistically different from the estimate for Swedish-speaking man & Finnish-speaking woman.

† p < .10. * p < .05. ** p < .01.
unions lay below that of both types of endogamous unions. For the birth of the first child (#4 or #6), on the other hand, there was only a weak exogamy effect, which suggests that marriage might be considered a bigger step on the courtship continuum than parenthood.

For separations, the size of the exogamy effect tended to be larger the further partners had proceeded in the process (#5 vs. #8 and #9 vs. #10), albeit the pattern was not perfectly consistent. For the final transition to marriage with children, from cohabitation with children (#7) or from childless marriage (#6), there were only modest exogamy effects.

The strong exogamy effect pertaining to (childless) marriage (#3 in Table 2) was also reflected in the hazard for completing the family formation process (Table 3). It was 4 per cent lower compared with endogamous Finnish-speaking unions, and the hazard for separation 3 per cent higher.

There were no large differences between the two types of ethnically mixed unions (exogamous mix in Table 2) with respect to the separation risk (#5), but for the other transitions from childless cohabitation (#3 and #4). The hazard for marriage (#3) was higher for unions with a Swedish-speaking man and a Finnish-speaking woman than for unions with a Finnish-speaking man and a Swedish-speaking woman, whereas the opposite was the case for transition into parenthood (#4). The latter aspect was compensated for by a higher probability of marriage in the next step (#7), but unions with a Swedish-speaking man and a Finnish-speaking woman still had a higher, albeit not statistically significant, probability of completing the family formation process than unions with a Finnish-speaking man and a Swedish-speaking woman (Table 3).

To obtain an overview of the entire process, we provide the proportions of the partners in the five different states (in Figure 1) eight years after entry into cohabiting union. More than half of the unions in the data could be observed for that long. Excluded here were emigrated pairs and those in which at least one partner died. Among the separated, some individuals had formed a new union with another partner, but these calculations refer to first unions only. Using multinomial regression models, we standardized the proportions by accounting for effects of the same control variables as before. The results, which are summarized in Table 4, naturally correspond to the conclusions based on the risk ratios discussed above. In endogamous Swedish-speaking unions, the proportion married with children was much higher than in endogamous Finnish-speaking unions, or 45.1 per cent as compared to 35.7 per cent, and the proportion separated substantially lower, or 33.9 per cent as compared to 45.6 per cent. A strong effect of exogamy is reflected by the proportions separated and married with children, since in ethnically mixed unions the proportion separated was 47.7 per cent and the proportion married with children 33.5 per cent. The share of couples who remained as cohabiters with children was higher in endogamous Swedish-speaking unions than in endogamous Finnish-speaking, or 12.3 per cent as compared to 8.1 per cent, whereas in ethnically mixed unions it was 9.4 per cent.

**Table 4.** Percentage shares of couples in the five different states eight years after entry into cohabitation union by ethnicity (unweighted N = 23,302).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Union type</th>
<th>Endogamous Finn.-speak.</th>
<th>Endogamous Swed.-speak.</th>
<th>Exogamous</th>
<th>Fi.-sp. man &amp; Sw.-sp. woman</th>
<th>Sw.-sp. Fi.-sp. woman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[A]: Cohabitation without children</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[B]: Marriage without children</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[C]: Cohabitation with children</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[D]: Marriage with children</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>33.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[E]: Separated</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>47.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weighted % of all unions</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All estimates are standardized for effects of the control variables using multinomial regression models.
The influence of winnowing is evident. First, the family process strengthens the gender asymmetry, because eight years after entry into cohabitation the proportion married was 38.4 per cent (33.8 + 4.6) for unions with a Swedish-speaking man and a Finnish-speaking woman, as compared to 36.4 per cent (33.2 + 3.2) for unions with a Finnish-speaking man and a Swedish-speaking woman. Second, due to the higher separation rate in ethnically mixed unions, their share of all intact unions also diminished over time. At entry into cohabitation, 42 per cent of all Swedish-speaking men lived in an ethnically mixed union, whereas the proportion after eight years was 37 per cent (not shown). For Swedish-speaking women, the corresponding shares were 39 per cent and 33 per cent (not shown). Compared with the situation at entry into cohabitation, the proportion of exogamous unions had consequently become smaller over the course of the process and the gender asymmetry had increased slightly.

**Discussion**

This study has illustrated that, in a society where cohabitation and parenthood within cohabiting unions are common, and most couples start as cohabitants before proceeding into potential marriage, it is essential to study the continuation of a relationship and, hence, family formation as a dynamic process. Focusing on differences between ethnically mixed and endogamous unions in Finland, we find that the prevalence of exogamous relationships is not related only to their relative survival as compared with endogamous ones, but also dependent on whether the partners proceed in the process of forming a family with children. Using longitudinal population register data, we have examined the two indigenous ethno-linguistic groups of Finland – Swedish speakers and Finnish speakers. They are guaranteed similar constitutional rights, similar on most observable characteristics, and intermarriage is common. Previous research (Finna¨s, 1997) has found that the divorce risk of endogamous Finnish-speaking unions was almost twice that of endogamous Swedish-speaking unions. The present results support those findings, albeit the risk ratio we document is smaller.

Our analyses indicate that there is notable selection with respect to the ethnic composition of relationships from entry into childless cohabitation to marriage and children. The proportion of endogamous relationships increases during the course of the process. The selection is driven primarily by a higher separation risk of exogamous partners, in particular as related to endogamous Swedish-speaking unions, but also in comparison with endogamous Finnish-speaking unions. This strong exogamy effect suggests that Swedish speakers’ relatively low risk of union dissolution does not compensate for the Finnish speakers’ relatively high risk when they form a pair.

In line with expectations, we find that endogamous Swedish-speaking unions have lower separation risks than endogamous Finnish-speaking unions irrespective of the origin state. They also have a higher tendency to proceed in the family formation process, particularly when it comes to parenthood before marriage. Nevertheless, it needs to be stressed that, in spite of a higher marriage propensity after the birth of the first child, the proportion of pairs who choose cohabitation with children as a more long-term way of life is also higher in the Swedish-speaking unions.

The data further reveal that the size of the exogamy effect with respect to separation is greater for later stages of the courtship process, which signals that individual preferences might become more restrictive the further in the process a relationship proceeds. The exogamy effect for marriage tends to be higher than that for parenthood, which might be a reflection of a stronger commitment to the partner.

Finally, we also find that ethnically mixed unions in which the man is Swedish-speaking and the woman Finnish-speaking are more prone to marry, but have only a slightly higher tendency to make the step into marriage with children, than those consisting of a Finnish-speaking man and a Swedish-speaking woman. This might be the outcome of status exchange, if Finnish-speaking women trade their majority position against an assumed high status of Swedish-speaking men. Since we find no clear evidence in the data that these women ‘marry upwards’ in terms of observable status characteristics (not shown), the finding might consequently be a reflection of ethnic prejudice in the Finnish
society (cf. Kalmijn, 2010). Another support for the argument of status exchange is that these unions have a lower tendency to move into parenthood, whereas there is no difference with respect to separation.

Age, educational level and region of residence were found to have substantial effects on the risks of making the transitions studied, but they contributed modestly to the variation by ethnic composition of the unions. The exogamy effects and the substantial differences between endogamous Swedish-speaking and Finnish-speaking unions cannot consequently be attributed to these structural factors. One plausible, but yet not verified, explanation to the ethnic-group differential is that the level of social integration is higher in the Swedish-speaking society in Finland, because the Swedish speakers are much more stable with respect to internal migration than the Finnish speakers (Saarela, 2006). If the Swedish speakers are better integrated into the local or regional society because of stronger geographical roots, this might benefit them with respect to union stability and family formation (Finnäs, 1997). Such structural differences seem to provide only a partial explanation, however, as we could not find any marked differences in separation and family formation between the Finnish speakers studied here, living in the coastal area, and those who live elsewhere in Finland (not shown).

This study’s contribution to a larger research field can be summarized as follows. First, the results indicate that there are social barriers between ethnic groups other than those that refer to marriage only. Advanced understanding of ethnic preferences might teach us how to overcome or erode such barriers and to question ethnic stereotypes. Second, we show that within the same study population exogamy effects might occur with respect to both the formation and the dissolution of a relationship. Third, it needs to be stressed that, since both ethnic groups under study here are indigenous, the results are not sensitive to potential confounding factors related to one group’s immigrant background and potential integration difficulties (unless one claims that Finnish speakers should be considered as first or second generation local-level immigrants).

We have shown that knowledge about relationship behaviours can be gained by the inclusion of cohabitation and parenthood into the framework of union formation and dissolution. At the same time, this article still highlights the limitations of register data, because explicit answers to the unexplained variation within exogamous unions, between exogamous and endogamous unions, and across the two types of endogamous unions cannot be provided. Novel evidence must therefore be sought in data that might capture individuals’ attitudes, norms and values towards marriage, parenthood and separation. Future studies of preferences, social distance attitudes and norms will presumably gain from analyses of how the partners in ethnically mixed unions relate to each ethnic community.

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References


Author biographies

Jan Saarela is Senior Lecturer in social policy and Associate Professor in population economics at Åbo Akademi University, and was recently appointed Professor in ethnic relations at the University of Helsinki. His research focuses on the use of register-based data for analysing various population issues related to living conditions, labour market outcomes, health, migration and immigrant integration.

Fjalar Finnäs is Professor in demography and statistics, especially the demography of the Swedish-speaking population in Finland, at Åbo Akademi University. His research covers several fields of population studies, with interest in family formation and dissolution.