

Marriage Rituals as Reinforcers of Role Transitions: An Analysis of Weddings in The Netherlands

Using a nationally representative survey of married couples (N=572) in The Netherlands, I analyze three characteristics of the contemporary western marriage ceremony: (a) whether couples give a wedding party, (b) whether couples have their marriage consecrated in church, and (c) whether couples go away on a honeymoon. Hypotheses are developed arguing that marriage ceremonies reinforce role transitions in two complementary ways: They reduce uncertainty about the new roles that people will occupy, and they provide approval for norm-guided behavior. Multivariate analyses support the hypotheses. Elaborate marriage ceremonies are more common among couples for whom the transition to marriage is more drastic, and traditional values in the social context of the couple go hand in hand with a more elaborate marriage ceremony.

An important characteristic of role transitions is that they are generally accompanied by rituals, so-called *rites of passage* (e.g., Hogan, 2000; Van Gennep, 1960). The wedding is a classic example. The wedding is more than simply the expression of happiness that newlyweds and their families feel about the marriage; it also serves to socialize the bride and groom into their new roles as married persons. By celebrating the marriage in an elaborate fashion, newlyweds are

helped to define their new identity; they obtain information on how to act in the new role, obtain approval from the social network in which they are embedded, and reduce the uncertainty they may feel about the new step they have taken. In short, the wedding, like other rites of passage, acts as a role reinforcer.

In the social sciences, wedding customs have mainly been studied by anthropologists. Ever since Radcliffe-Brown's well-known account of rites of passage among the Andaman islanders (1964), anthropologists have studied wedding ceremonies in various non-Western societies (De Coppet, 1992; Munn, 1973; Turner, 1969; Young, 1965). Research on the much less dramatic Western wedding ceremony is scarce, however. Rich accounts exist of wedding customs in Western societies (for Dutch examples, see De Jager, 1981; Dekker, 1978), but these abstain from analyzing wedding customs in relation to sociological concepts. An important exception comes from Whyte (1990), who studied marriages in the Detroit area. Whyte constructed a measure of how elaborate weddings are, using information on a series of rituals, and showed, among other things, that elaborate ceremonies are associated with higher class positions and with religiosity, suggesting that social norms play an important role in the marriage ritual.

In this article, I present a new sociological analysis of contemporary Western marriage rituals. Using nationally representative survey data from The Netherlands, I examined the prevalence and correlates of three wedding customs: the wedding celebration or party, the church wedding, and the honeymoon. From a sociological point of view, these three customs represent important dimensions

Department of Sociology, Tilburg University, P.O. Box 90153, 5000 LE Tilburg, The Netherlands (M.Kalmijn@uvt.nl).

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of the marriage ritual. The nature of the wedding party reflects the degree to which the social circles of the bride and groom are involved in the marriage transition. The church wedding says something about the involvement of cultural institutions in the marriage transition. The honeymoon, finally, symbolizes the departure of the children from the two families of origin and is a way for the couple to present itself to an unknown outside world as married.

The first goal of this article is to describe trends in the way couples celebrate their wedding day. The importance of this question lies in the demographic changes of recent decades. More and more couples live together unmarried, there has been a sharp rise in the divorce rate, and people are marrying at later ages (Cherlin, 1992). These trends are often viewed as manifestations of individualization and secularization, two processes thought to have diminished the traditional value of marriage both in Europe (Lesthaeghe, 1983) and in the United States (Bumpass, 1990; Cherlin; Inglehart, 1997). If the value of marriage has indeed declined, it seems plausible that the way couples celebrate their wedding day has changed as well. More specifically, we would expect a less elaborate celebration of marriage in current times.

The second and more important question addresses the theoretical interpretation of marriage ceremonies in terms of role transitions. The basic argument is that the wedding celebration serves as a reinforcer of the transition to the new role of being married. Two specific hypotheses are derived from this perspective. The first argues that greater uncertainty about future marriage roles makes the function of the wedding more important. The second hypothesis argues that people use the wedding to seek social approval for the role transition they make. The novelty of my approach is that notions about the functions of marriage rituals are translated into concrete hypotheses that are subsequently tested by relating individual differences in wedding celebrations to characteristics of couples and the contexts in which they marry.

To answer the research questions, I analyzed nationally representative survey data from The Netherlands. In terms of marriage, cohabitation, and divorce, the Dutch case is typical of the Western world (Goode, 1993; Statistics Netherlands, 1999). The period covered by the data, 1950 to 1994, is characterized by rapid demographic change. As in other countries (Cherlin, 1992), marriage timing has changed in

a cyclical fashion. The mean age at women's first marriage was 26 in 1950, reached a low of 23 in the early 1970s, and increased again to 28 in the 1990s (Kalmijn, 1994). Cohabitation and divorce have increased considerably since the 1970s, but cohabitation has not fully compensated recent postponements in the timing of first marriage (Kalmijn, 1994; Statistics Netherlands). Although The Netherlands is now rather liberal in terms of values about marriage, gender, and sexuality, the climate was originally quite conservative (Kalmijn, 2003; Kraaykamp, 2002). Wedding customs in The Netherlands appear in no way special, either. Bachelor parties, the throwing of rice, the white wedding dress and gown, a bridal bouquet, practical jokes in and around the new home of the newlyweds—these are customs that exist both in The Netherlands and in many other parts of the Western world (Dekker, 1978).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Both within and between societies, differences exist in how weddings are celebrated. In some non-Western countries, where parents play an important role in choosing the spouse and where women marry young, a wedding ceremony usually takes a few days and consists of numerous rituals (De Coppet, 1992; Goode, 1963; Turner, 1969; Young, 1965). Viewed from this perspective, the wedding ceremony in Western countries is relatively simple. Within Western societies, however, there are differences as well. At one extreme is the lavish public wedding ceremony of a member of a royal family; at the other extreme is the Las Vegas wedding in a quarter of an hour at a wedding chapel without a best man or bridesmaids, without announcements or invitations, and without the parents' consent. The former celebration is extremely social and public, the latter celebration is socially isolated and almost private.

From a theoretical point of view, the wedding celebration can be viewed as a rite of passage. In the classic texts, rites of passage are subdivided into rites of separation (e.g., funerals), rites of transition (e.g., birthdays), and rites of aggregation (Van Gennep, 1960). The wedding is an example of an aggregation ritual, but it may also include the other subtypes (e.g., the father giving away the bride is a separation rite). In addition, the wedding may be combined with other types of rituals (e.g., throwing rice is a

fertility rite). Wedding customs are often passed down from one generation to the next, and in Western countries, such customs are also formulated in etiquette books, popular magazines, special wedding journals, and at bride information markets.

Following the influential Durkheimian approach to rituals (Munn, 1973), this article emphasizes the social function of the wedding. An important social function of the wedding celebration is that it reinforces the transition to the role of being married. From this general notion, I developed two sets of hypotheses about individual differences in the way people celebrate their weddings.

Status Preparation and Uncertainty

The transition to marriage is often surrounded by considerable uncertainty (Oppenheimer, 1988). There can be uncertainty about the partner chosen, uncertainty about the wish to be married, uncertainty about what life will be like after marriage, and uncertainty about the ability to live up to the responsibilities of the new role. I argue that rituals during the transition to marriage can help to reduce that uncertainty. If the bride and groom engage in an elaborate and social marriage ritual, they confirm their decision to be married to each other via a third party—in one case, the social network, and in the other case, the church and God. By creating an audience that is a witness to their decision, the couple may increase the commitment they have toward each other and to their new role. By increasing commitment, the couple also reduces the uncertainty they may feel about their marriage.

To translate these theoretical notions into testable hypotheses, it is important to recognize that the transition to the role of a married person is more radical for some than for others. Following Goode (1963), I argue that marrying at a young age implies a more drastic role transition. When people marry at a young age, they are often less mature, they are faced with greater uncertainties about the type of life that they will lead, and the spouses have a higher chance of growing apart during the marriage (Oppenheimer, 1988). Another important source of differentiation lies in premarital cohabitation. It is plausible that the transition to the role of spouse is less drastic for couples who lived together. Cohabitation has often been regarded as a trial stage before marriage (Brines & Joyner, 1999; Manting, 1996;

Smock & Manning, 1997). People who cohabited before marriage already invested a great deal in the relationship and have already experienced being part of a joint household. I also argue that living alone before marriage is coupled with less uncertainty. In this case, the departure from the family of origin has already been made and there will be fewer worries about the ability to establish an independent household (Goldscheider & Waite, 1991). Finally, I argue that remarriage is less drastic than first marriage, which is plausible because the transition to marriage has been experienced before.

The reasoning above can be summarized with the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: The younger the age at marriage, the more elaborate the wedding ceremony (i.e., a larger wedding party, a higher probability of marrying in church, and a higher probability of going on a honeymoon).

Hypothesis 2: People who cohabited before marrying, and, to a lesser extent, people who lived alone before marrying, will have a less elaborate wedding ceremony than people who marry immediately after leaving home.

Hypothesis 3: People who marry for the second time will have a less elaborate wedding ceremony than people who marry for the first time.

Behavioral Confirmation

A second function of the wedding ceremony lies in the fact that the transition to marriage is surrounded by social norms. A particularly strong norm is the proscription that one should get married, but there are also norms about the appropriate timing of marriage (Hogan & Astone, 1986), about the type of person to marry (Kalmijn, 1998), and about cohabitation before marriage (Liefbroer, 1991). These norms can be internalized by the marriage candidates themselves, but they are also expressed by friends, parents, the community, and the church. The existence of social norms implies that positive or negative sanctions are given, and the wedding day is an important occasion for sanctioning behavior. By celebrating the marriage, the bride and groom show their friends and relatives the kind of spouse they have chosen, and they show others that they have chosen to go through life as a married couple. In other words, the wedding is an occasion for confirmation of a role transition. Next to status and affection, confirmation for norm-guided behavior is a central component of the social approval that people strive for in life (Lindenberg & Frey, 1993).

Some people can get more social approval than others, depending on the characteristics of third parties involved in the marriage. I first focused on parents and friends. (There are no data on siblings and other family members in the survey that I use.) Parents and friends who have a traditional orientation toward marriage will give more behavioral confirmation to the bride and groom on the wedding day than less traditional parents and friends. If the couple can get more behavioral confirmation from third parties, it is likely that they will celebrate the marriage in a more elaborate way. Alternatively, if they expect negative rather than positive sanctions, they have a clear incentive to keep the wedding simple. As a result, I expected a larger wedding party and a higher chance of a church wedding for couples in a traditional setting. Note that for parents, the incentives also work in another way: Approval is given not only to the bride and groom themselves but also to the parents. Hence, when a person in a traditional setting decides to marry, it is not only the marriage candidates who opt for a larger wedding; it is also the parents.

Second, I examined the community in which the bride and groom are embedded. People who live in the neighborhood play a role in how a wedding is celebrated (Dekker, 1978; Whyte, 1990). An important distinction is that between rural and urban communities. In rural communities in The Netherlands, and especially where farming is important, there is a more traditional orientation to marriage than elsewhere (De Jager, 1981; Dekker; Van Poppel, 1992). It is therefore likely that couples in rural communities will obtain more confirmation for their role transition than couples elsewhere, and they will consequently have a more elaborate wedding ceremony. Note that the presumed greater tendency to obtain normative confirmation in rural communities is often coupled with a greater wish on the part of the community to give this confirmation (De Jager; Dekker). In some sense, the role transition of the bride and groom also serves to confirm the norms that the community holds, and this creates an incentive for the community to give approval.

The reasoning above can be summarized with three specific hypotheses. I primarily expected effects on the wedding party and the church wedding, but not on the honeymoon. The reason is that the positive sanctions of parents, friends, and community members will be felt less clearly

during the honeymoon. The hypotheses are formulated as follows:

Hypothesis 1: The more supportive the parents are toward the institution of marriage, the more elaborate the wedding ceremony (i.e., a larger wedding party and a higher probability of marrying in church).

Hypothesis 2: The more supportive the friends are toward the institution of marriage, the more elaborate the wedding ceremony.

Hypothesis 3: Couples living in rural communities have a more elaborate wedding ceremony than couples living in other areas.

Competing Interpretations and Control Variables

When considering the approval of third parties, it is important to take into account the orientation of the bride and groom themselves. The confirmation hypothesis argues that couples will have an elaborate wedding ceremony because it is a way for them to obtain confirmation from others for their role transition. An alternative interpretation suggests that couples in traditional settings have an elaborate wedding ceremony because they attach more importance to the marriage bond. This interpretation is important because couples who have traditional family values tend to have more traditional parents than couples with more modern values (Cunningham, 2001). Because the values of the couple and their social context often overlap, we need to control for the influence of the value orientation of the couple to test the confirmation hypothesis directly.

When considering the uncertainty hypotheses, competing interpretations are also possible. People who marry young or directly after leaving home not only make a radical transition but they also follow traditional marriage norms and may therefore receive more social approval while celebrating their marriage. Similarly, couples who cohabit before marriage might also celebrate their wedding in a simpler way because they or their parents attach less importance to the traditional world of marriage. Numerous studies have shown that the values of cohabitants are less traditional than average (Clarkberg, Stolzenberg, & Waite, 1995; Liefbroer, 1991), and that people who marry late are more liberal than people who marry early (Sassler & Schoen, 1999). The question arises: Do these couples have a less elaborate wedding celebration because they are less traditional, or because they are less uncertain? To reduce these interpretation problems, it is essential to test the uncertainty hypothesis while controlling for the importance that the couple attaches to the institution of marriage.

Finally, there are other characteristics that may be associated with how couples celebrate their marriage (Whyte, 1990), and some of these may also be related to the concepts derived from the two hypotheses. In addition to the variables mentioned above, I took into account the socioeconomic characteristics of the parents and the couple. I examined whether a higher occupational status of the parents is associated with a more elaborate wedding ceremony, and I examined whether a better financial situation of the newlyweds is linked to the wedding ceremony. I also included the year of marriage in the models. If there are trends in marriage rituals, omitting the year of marriage will lead to bias in the effects of independent variables that have changed over time (e.g., cohabitation, age at marriage).

METHOD

My data are from the survey *Households in The Netherlands* (Weesie & Ganzeboom, 1994), an extensive telephone survey on the relationships and family life of 1,035 respondents between the ages of 21 and 65 in The Netherlands. The survey is not specifically focused on wedding celebrations, but it does contain a number of questions about the wedding day. The data are based on a stratified random sample of the Dutch population. The stratification was designed to produce an oversample of unmarried couples who live together, but this does not affect the married respondents, who are the focus here. At the time of the survey, 572 of the respondents were married; they got married in the period from 1950 to 1994. Questions about the wedding day were asked retrospectively. Because this is usually an important day in everyone's life, these reports are believed to be fairly accurate.

Measures of Dependent Variables

Several questions were asked about the wedding celebration. The first question was whether there was a party, and if so, approximately how many guests there were. As can be seen from Table 1, almost everyone gives a party after the wedding ceremony (94%), and 69% give a large party. The dependent variable in the analyses is the contrast between a large party and a small party or no party.

The second question was whether the couple married in church. Slightly more than half the couples (58%) had a church wedding. The dependent variable is whether the couple married in church.

Table 1. *Description of Marriage Ceremonies in The Netherlands (N = 572)*

	Percentage
Wedding party	
No party	5.9
Small party	25.5
Large party	68.6
Married in church	57.6
Honeymoon	33.7
Destination of honeymoon	
The Netherlands	28.2
Neighboring countries	14.0
Farther away	57.8
Duration of honeymoon	
Less than 1 week	31.4
1 week	29.2
2–3 weeks	37.1
One month or longer	2.2

Third, we asked whether the couple went on a honeymoon. Only 34% of the couples went on a honeymoon, and 61% did not stay away for more than a week (Table 1). Of those who did go on a honeymoon, only 28% stayed within The Netherlands. The dependent variable is whether the couple went away on honeymoon, regardless of the destination or duration.

To what extent do the three aspects overlap? To answer this question, I used log odds ratios to calculate the association between the various ways of celebrating a wedding. According to these measures (results not shown), giving a large party often goes together with having a church wedding. The log odds ratio here is 1.58 ($p < .05$), which is indicative of a relatively strong overlap. The honeymoon and the church wedding are not significantly related, nor are the honeymoon and the wedding party related. This suggests that the honeymoon has a different nature than the wedding party and the church wedding. The honeymoon has more private aspects than the other two dimensions and is also more sensitive to commercial influences.

Measures of Independent Variables

To measure the role of status preparation, I used the following variables:

Age at marriage. The age of the respondent at the time of the wedding.

Type of entry. Three mutually exclusive groups of respondents are created: respondents who entered marriage following cohabitation, respondents who lived on their own before they married (without cohabitation), and respondents who married directly after leaving home (the reference category).

Second marriage. Whether the respondent married for the second time.

To measure the role of social approval, the following variables are used:

Perceived parental support of marriage. Respondents were asked whether their parents, at the time of marriage, found marriage more acceptable than living together without being married. The answers of the respondent are coded on an interval scale as follows: parents *preferred cohabitation* (1), parents *were indifferent* (2), parents *regarded marriage as self-evident* (i.e., the obvious thing to do) (3), and parents *explicitly preferred marriage* (4). It is plausible that attitudes against unmarried cohabitation are a good indicator of how strongly the parents were attached to the institution of marriage. Note that the measure refers to the perception of the respondent, which is an indirect measure of parental attitudes.

Cohabitation by friends. To measure the orientation of friends, we asked respondents to indicate approximately how many of their friends cohabited before marriage. The variable is coded 1 if most friends married without cohabiting first, and 0 otherwise.

Farm background. To measure whether the couple was part of a rural community before marriage, I relied on information about the respondent's father's occupation, and more specifically, on whether the father of the respondent had a farming occupation. The father's occupation was used because no information was available about the place of residence before marriage. Caution must be used in interpreting this variable because my measure only pertains to a subset of rural communities.

To control for the influence of the couple's own orientation to marriage, two variables are available in the data:

Church member. A variable indicating whether the respondent is currently a church member.

Because church membership is highly correlated with traditional family values (Lesthaeghe & Meekers, 1986), it presents an attractive way to control for the respondent's own orientation to marriage. Measured at the time of the survey, it pertains to persons who remained religiously involved during their lives.

Attitudes toward marriage. Respondents were asked what they thought about marriage and cohabitation at the time they decided to live together. Using this question, I constructed a scale that ranges from 1 for people who *preferred to cohabit first* to 4 for people who *preferred to marry right away*.

Three additional control variables are included in the models:

Financial situation of the couple. Two items are used: (a) a variable indicating whether either the respondent or the partner had enough savings before marriage to buy a new car; (b) a question evaluating the financial situation just before the wedding (on a 4-point scale ranging from *very good* to *very bad*). The two items correlate positively ($r=.34$) and are standardized and summed into a single variable.

Father's occupation. The occupation of the father when the respondent was growing up is included. It indicates the financial support that parents may give for the wedding celebration and is also related to possible status-seeking behavior. I converted detailed occupations to the average income level of occupations, using a scale developed by De Graaf and Kalmijn (2001).

Year of marriage. This variable is centered and scaled in decades. A quadratic term was included as well (if significant), to take into account nonlinearities.

The means and standard deviations of the independent variables are presented in Table 2.

Models

To describe trends, I calculated proportions having a large wedding party, a church wedding, and a honeymoon for 3-year marriage cohorts (Figure 1). Because the number of cases within cohorts is small, it is important to test for trends. I therefore analyzed the individual data using a logistic regression model with year as the only independent variable. To allow for possible nonlinearities,

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations of Independent Variables (N = 572)

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Trend variables		
Year of marriage (1950–1994)	1977	11
Transition characteristics		
Unmarried cohabitation with spouse before marrying spouse (respondent)	0.35	0.48
Lived alone after leaving home and then married (respondent)	0.12	0.32
Married directly after leaving home (respondent)	0.53	0.25
Age at marriage (of wife)	24.46	5.20
Second marriage (of respondent)	0.05	0.21
Social confirmation characteristics		
Perceived support of parents for marriage vs. cohabitation ^a	0.64	0.48
Friends mostly married rather than cohabiting ^a	0.61	0.49
Respondent's father farming occupation at age 15	0.12	0.32
Control variables		
Respondent's father's economic occupational status at age 15 (z-score)	0.00	1.00
Amount of savings and positive evaluation of financial position (summed; z-score) ^a	0.00	1.00
Church member (respondent; current)	0.48	0.50
Respondent favoring marriage to cohabitation (z-score) ^a	0.00	1.00

^aPertaining to the time of marriage.

I compared first-, second-, and third-order polynomial models. The best fitting function for each of the three indicators is included in the figure, using a χ^2 test for the change in model fit (e.g., Pindyck & Rubinfeld, 1991). Second-order polynomials fit best for church weddings and wedding parties, and a third-order polynomial fit best for the honeymoon.

To test the hypothesis, multivariate logistic regression models are used. The regression coefficients of these models are presented in Table 3. For each aspect of the wedding ceremony, two models are estimated. Model A contains the variables pertaining to the two central hypotheses. Model B adds control variables (i.e., father's occupational status, the couple's financial position, church membership, and the couple's orientation to marriage). By comparing coefficients across models, we gain insight into the importance of competing normative interpretations of findings for the uncertainty and confirmation hypotheses.

ANALYSES

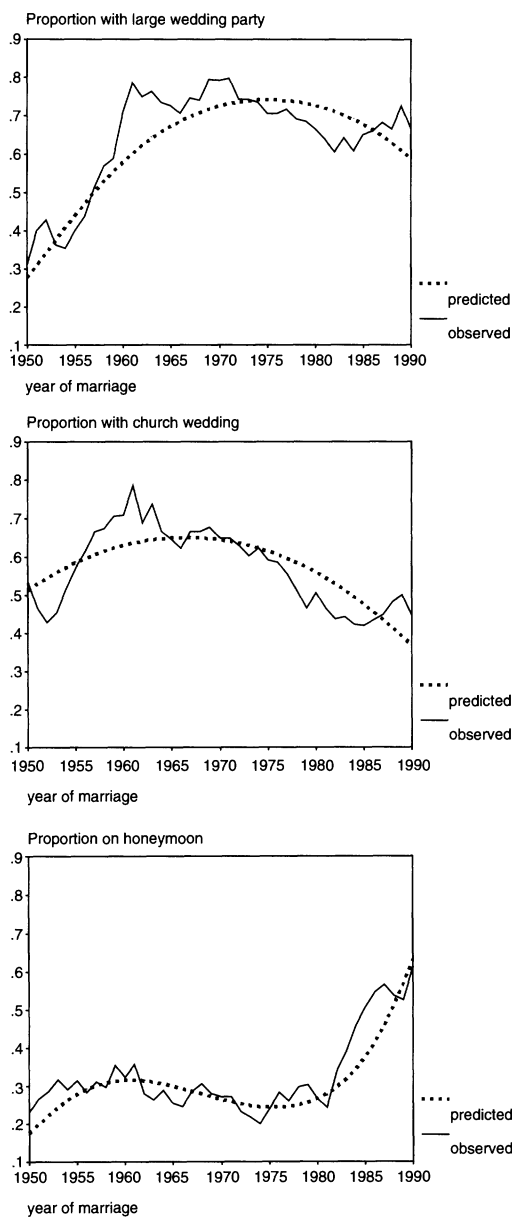
Before turning to the hypotheses, I will describe the extent to which wedding ceremonies changed in the period from 1950 to 1994. By connecting

the wedding ceremonies to the year of marriage, we obtain a novel picture of possible changes in the nature of marriage.

Figure 1 shows a curvilinear trend in the prevalence of large wedding parties. From 1950 to 1970, there was an increase, but the trend reversed after 1970, and interest in wedding parties appeared to decline slowly but steadily. Theoretically, the decline in the frequency of wedding parties in the more recent decades is consistent with notions of individualization, but that wedding parties became more popular in the earlier period is not. A similar cyclical pattern can be found in trends in the age at marriage and in marriage rates (Kalmijn, 1994). The growing prosperity of Western societies is one explanation for the rising marriage rates in the first two decades after World War II (Cherlin, 1992; Kalmijn, 1994; Oppenheimer, 1988), and may also be a factor in the initial rise of the prevalence of the wedding party.

Figure 1 also shows the trend in the importance of the religious aspect of the wedding ceremony. The percentage of couples who have a church wedding shows a slight increase in the first two decades, and a clear decline in the last two decades. The initial increase is difficult to interpret, but the downward trend since the early 1960s is consistent with what one might expect from

Figure 1. Observed and Predicted Trends in Three Aspects of the Wedding Celebration in The Netherlands



secularization. In The Netherlands, this was also the period with the sharpest decline in church attendance (Sociaal and Cultureel Planbureau, 1998).

Although recent declines in the prevalence of the church wedding and the wedding party are consistent with the hypothesis that the institution of marriage has become less important in con-

temporary society, the honeymoon reveals a different pattern. The trend in the prevalence of the honeymoon, also presented in Figure 1, is complex and was fitted with a third-order polynomial. The predicted values show that there was no clear trend in the honeymoon until the 1970s. After 1970, the honeymoon became more popular. Perhaps this deviation is related to the more general increase in vacation traveling in Western societies. In The Netherlands, the number of vacation trips per person increased by 50% between 1970 and 1996 (Sociaal and Cultureel Planbureau, 1998).

Tests of Hypotheses

From a theoretical perspective, I expected that the more radical the transition to the married role, the more uncertainty, and the larger the wedding celebration. I tested this hypothesis by examining how the three aspects of the wedding celebration are affected by characteristics of the way couples made the transition to marriage.

I first looked at the couples' marriage timing as measured by the age of the bride. Table 3 shows that couples who married late gave a large wedding party less frequently. The effect of age at marriage is substantial. One year increase in the age at marriage is associated with a 7% decline in the odds of having a wedding party (i.e., $1 - \exp[-.070]$). This effect is not changed when I take into account the influence of the control variables (Model B). In other words, the more limited way of celebrating among couples who marry late is probably not due to late couples being less traditional about marriage. I also found a negative effect of age at marriage on the probability of giving a church wedding, and this effect is statistically significant in Model B. A year increase in the age at marriage is associated with a 6% decline in the odds of having a church wedding (i.e., $1 - \exp[-.059]$). Results were different for the honeymoon. Persons who marry late are more likely to go away on a honeymoon than persons who marry early.

Another important transition characteristic is whether the spouses lived together before they married. Table 3 shows that there are significant negative effects of premarital cohabitation on wedding ceremonies. Couples who lived together before they married generally celebrated their wedding less lavishly than couples who married directly when leaving the parental home. The coefficient is $-.916$, which implies a 60% lower

Table 3. Logistic Regression of Wedding Party, Church Wedding, and Honeymoon on Selected Independent Variables: Unstandardized Regression Coefficients (N = 572)

	Wedding Party		Church Wedding		Honeymoon	
	Model A	Model B	Model A	Model B	Model A	Model B
Trend variables						
Year of marriage (1950 = 0, 1994 = 4.4)	.853**	.736**	.576**	.427**	-.808*	-.877*
Year of marriage squared					.190*	.198*
Transition characteristics						
Lived together before marriage	-.916**	-.757*	-.944**	-.841*	.540*	.671*
Lived alone before marriage	-.343	-.362	-.170	-.220	.571*	.459*
Married directly (reference)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Age at marriage	-.070**	-.074**	-.037	-.059*	.087**	.082**
Second marriage	-.775	-.748	-1.565**	-1.916**	-.945*	-.789
Social confirmation variables						
Perceived parental attitude to marriage (z-score)	.002	-.043	.393**	.324**	-.047	-.041
Friends married vs. cohabiting	.962**	.748*	1.075**	.700*	.027	.005
Farming background	.999*	.715*	.804*	-.188	-1.480**	-1.550**
Control variables						
Father's occupational status (z-score)		.072		.225*		.306**
Financial situation of newlyweds (z-score)		.256**		.094		.042
Church member		.587**		2.827**		.039
Respondent favoring marriage (z-score)		.104		.270*		.154
Constant	-1.048**	-1.006**	-.887**	-1.530**	-.252	-.214
χ^2 (df)	79.5 (8)	94.8 (12)	115.8 (8)	273.8 (12)	69.1 (9)	80.1 (13)

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ (one-tailed).

odds of giving a large party (i.e., $1 - \exp[-.916]$). In addition, couples who cohabited had a church wedding less frequently than couples who married directly after leaving home, a 61% lower odds. Although this finding is consistent with the hypothesis about role transitions, the differences can also be interpreted as an expression of a difference in personal orientation to marriage. Cohabiting couples generally attach less significance to the institution of marriage (Clarkberg et al., 1995), and may therefore want or receive less approval on their wedding day. This alternative interpretation is supported because the influence of premarital cohabitation is smaller when the control variables are added to the model (Model B versus Model A). The effect of cohabitation is still strong and significant in Model B, however, showing that the alternative interpretation does not suffice.

Because the control variables are not perfect, it is possible that the effect of premarital cohabitation picks up residual effects of cultural values. For that reason, it is important to look at more subtle distinctions in role transitions as well. One important factor is the group of respondents who did not cohabit but who lived on their own before

they married. For these respondents, the transition to an independent household is less radical than for people who married directly after leaving home, but more radical than for people who cohabited first (Goldscheider & Waite, 1991). Table 3 shows that people who lived on their own indeed occupy an intermediate position. They generally celebrated their weddings less lavishly than people who lived at their parents' homes until they married, but more lavishly than people who cohabited first. This applies to both the wedding party and to the church wedding, and can be observed in both the basic model and in the fully controlled model. Although the effects of living alone are not significant, this group lies in between the group who married directly and the group who married after cohabitation.

Results for the honeymoon were not supportive of the hypothesis. I found positive rather than negative effects of cohabitation and living alone. Persons who cohabited or lived alone before marriage were more likely to go away on a honeymoon than persons who married directly after leaving home.

The order of the marriage is another potentially important transition characteristic. Approximately 5% ($n=23$) of the respondents married for the second time, and these are virtually all divorcees. The small n suggests caution in drawing conclusions. Table 3 shows that second marriages are celebrated less lavishly than first marriages. There are negative effects on all three indicators, although the effects are not always statistically significant. Moreover, the effect on church weddings is particularly strong, which suggests that social norms are relevant here as well. Virtually all etiquette books, for example, deem an elaborate wedding celebration inappropriate for a second marriage. Moreover, the church can have a negative stance toward divorce, which may make the couple more hesitant to marry in church.

I assessed the second hypothesis, the role of social confirmation in how weddings are celebrated, by examining the norms and values with which the bride and groom are confronted. I focused on parents, friends, and, in a more limited fashion, the community. Table 3 shows that when parents are more supportive of the institution of marriage, the couple is more likely to marry in church. In line with expectations, this effect does not disappear when the respondent's own church membership and marriage attitudes are included. In contrast, however, there appears to be no effect of perceived parental attitudes on giving a large party. Consistent with our hypothesis, couples with traditional parents were neither more nor less likely to go on a honeymoon. Because the honeymoon is physically removed from the social circles of the respondent, I did not expect that social confirmation of the parents would play an important role in the honeymoon.

In addition to parents, friends can play a role in how a wedding is celebrated. To measure their influence, I looked at the relative share of friends who married directly. This variable had the expected positive effects on the wedding party and on the church wedding. If most friends married directly, it was more likely that the couple would give a large party and that the couple would marry in church. The effects are substantial. After controlling for the couple's own orientation (via church membership and their attitudes toward marriage), the effect of friends was smaller, in line with expectations. The effects did not disappear, however, and they are still strong and significant in Model B.

The influence of the community is assessed by whether a person comes from a farming back-

ground, as measured by the father's occupation. Table 3 reveals a clear difference regarding how weddings are celebrated. People from a farming background are 2.7 times more likely to give a large party, and 2.2 times more likely to marry in a church. There is also a significant negative effect on the honeymoon. The honeymoon is much less common among people of farm origins. When control variables were added, the effect of farm origin on the church wedding disappeared. Detailed analyses showed that this is entirely due to the inclusion of the respondent's own church membership. The influence of farm origins on the large wedding party, however, remains significant when control variables are added.

I now turn to the effects of the control variables. Consistent with the notion that church members attach more importance to marriage, results presented in Table 3 show that church members have a more lavish way of celebrating the wedding. The effect is quite substantial: Church members have a 1.8 times higher odds of having a large wedding party. Church members, however, are neither more nor less likely to go away on a honeymoon. This again suggests that the honeymoon has a somewhat different nature than the church wedding and the wedding party. The attitudes of the respondent toward marriage also influence the way that the wedding is celebrated. Respondents with a more traditional outlook on marriage are more likely to marry in church. The effects on a wedding party and the honeymoon are not significant, however.

Table 3 also shows that a high socioeconomic position generally coincides with a more elaborate wedding celebration. There is a significant effect of the couple's financial position on the probability of giving a large party. One standard deviation improvement in the financial situation of newlyweds is associated with a 29% increase in the odds of giving a large wedding party. There is also a significant effect of father's economic status on the probability of going on a honeymoon. One standard deviation increase in father's status is associated with a 36% higher odds of going on a honeymoon. It is interesting that the socioeconomic position of the parents exerts more influence on the honeymoon than on the wedding party, whereas the financial position of the newlyweds has a significant influence on the party but not on the honeymoon. Although both cost money, perhaps this difference is because the wedding party is a more suitable

way for displaying family status than is the honeymoon. The analyses also show that the socioeconomic status of the parents has an influence on the probability of a church wedding. This may reflect the fact that church weddings are often paid for.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Classic theoretical work on rites of passage suggests that weddings intentionally or unintentionally reinforce role transitions. These functions have often been studied in non-Western countries, and in these analyses, the focus has been exclusively on the marriage rituals themselves. This article has taken a different approach. First, the focus is on a Western country where the marriage ritual is generally much less dramatic. Second, the functions of weddings are examined by linking characteristics of weddings to characteristics of the married couple and the circumstances under which they married. By analyzing individual variations in wedding ceremonies, two hypotheses could be tested.

My multivariate analyses first lend support to the hypothesis that wedding celebrations reduce uncertainty about the marital role transition. Respondents whose transition to the conjugal state is less radical (as is the case if they cohabit before marriage, live on their own after leaving the parental home, or marry at a later age) appear to place less emphasis on the social components of the wedding celebration. When the transition is less radical, couples less often give a large wedding party and less often marry in church. There is also evidence for a second and related hypothesis. Couples more frequently give a wedding party and have a church wedding if their parents and friends are more strongly in favor of the marriage institution. These results support the hypothesis that wedding ceremonies are a way to obtain approval for the entry into normatively prescribed roles. In a more general sense, the results are consistent with the notion that wedding ceremonies can reinforce role transitions.

The effects of transition characteristics and the effects of the social context are also present in a model that controls for the influence of the couple's own orientation to marriage and the couple's church membership. Both variables have the expected effects on wedding ceremonies. Couples who are church members and who are more positive about the institution of marriage generally have a more elaborate way of celebrat-

ing the marriage. The importance of controlling for these variables is twofold. First, it offers a more direct test of the uncertainty hypothesis. It can be argued that persons who make the transition to marriage in a nonstandard way (e.g., by cohabiting first) also celebrate their marriage in a more limited way because they have more liberal views on marriage. Such views will not only lead to a weaker wish to celebrate the marriage but may also lead to less normative support from the social network. By controlling for the views of the marriage candidates themselves, this alternative, more cultural interpretation of the uncertainty hypothesis is made less plausible. Second, these controls are important for the confirmation hypothesis. There will often be a normative correspondence between the couple and the context in which the couple is embedded. As a result, the effects of traditional parents and friends on wedding celebrations may also be due to the couple being more traditional. Because the hypothesis focuses on the approval that couples can get from third parties and not on the approval couples want from others, it is important to estimate the effects of the couple and the effects of their context simultaneously. The analyses show that these have independent effects.

In several respects, the results for the honeymoon deviate from the main results. I find reverse effects of transition characteristics for the honeymoon. Respondents who cohabited before marriage and respondents who marry late more frequently go on a honeymoon than others. In addition, I found little or no effect of confirmation variables on the honeymoon. Some of these findings are consistent with expectations. Because the honeymoon is often removed from friends and parents, it does not serve as a source of social approval, which is possibly why norms and values cannot be expected to influence whether the couple goes on a honeymoon. The other findings ask for new interpretations. Perhaps residual cultural effects play a role. Late marriage and premarital cohabitation are part of a more individualistic orientation toward marriage (Rindfuss & VandenHeuvel, 1990), and the honeymoon may correspond better with such an orientation than the church wedding and the wedding party.

Some limitations of the study should be noted. Because the survey was designed to address a number of issues about marriage and family life and not exclusively for the purpose of analyzing weddings, some of the measures of the independent variables were limited. The role of the

community, for example, was addressed by examining farm origins, and although this variable has strong effects, there are obviously other community characteristics that could be relevant. In addition, the measure pertaining to parents was asked of respondents and not of the parents themselves. Finally, there is some concern about the retrospective nature of the data. Prospective data are generally preferred, but in the case of the wedding, this is probably not a large problem. Most people remember their wedding well, and it is unlikely that these memories are distorted by experiences since the event.

This study has presented a new sociological analysis of Western wedding celebrations. Future research could expand the analysis to other relationship rituals. Because it is quite common for unmarried couples to live together, it is conceivable that such relationships have their own symbols, certainly if couples live together for a long time or do not plan to marry. Do unmarried couples who live together celebrate the day they moved into their new house the same way other couples celebrate their wedding day? Do they annually celebrate the anniversary of the day they moved in together? Do they wear friendship rings instead of wedding rings? Answers to questions such as these could provide new insight into whether living together is becoming an institution that serves as an alternative to marriage.

NOTE

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