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The Experience of Social Mobility: Social Isolation, Utilitarian Individualism, and Social Disorientation

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Abstract The dissociative thesis states that social mobility is a disruptive and detrimental experience for the individual. Despite the absence of convincing evidence either for or against it, this thesis is generally accepted in sociology. I investigate this thesis by considering three dimensions of dissociation—i.e., social isolation, utilitarian individualism, and social disorientation. I use data from a large-scale survey in Flanders (Belgium) and apply Diagonal Reference Models to study consequences of intergenerational social mobility. I find support for asymmetric acculturation for each dimension, i.e., upwardly mobile individuals adapt more to the new social status position, compared to downwardly mobile individuals. Moreover, both for social disorientation and utilitarian individualism, I find detrimental effects of the experience of downward social mobility. As I find no detrimental consequences of both upward and downward mobility, the results do not provide evidence for the dissociative thesis.

Keywords Acculturation · Diagonal Reference Models · Dissociation · Dissociative thesis · Educational mobility · Social mobility

1 Introduction

Following Sorokin's classic work on social mobility, sociological theory embraced certain specific ideas about the consequences of social mobility for the individual. Sorokin (1927) argued that the experience of social mobility results in a greater versatility and plasticity of human behaviour; he subsequently linked mobility to mental health problems. Similarly,

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Durkheim ([1897]1930) associated rates of social mobility to rates of suicide. Cooley ([1909]1983), who links the mere possibility of social mobility to feelings of inferiority, made similar claims. This set of ideas connecting the experience of social mobility—both upward and downward—with a wide variety of detrimental consequences is commonly referred to as "Sorokin's dissociative thesis" (Ellis and Lane 1967).

The dissociative thesis originated in the social pathology and the social disorganisation perspective in the beginning of the twentieth century and is thus firmly rooted in sociological thinking (e.g., Rubington and Weinberg 1995). Because of its long tradition, the thesis seems to be commonly accepted in different strands of the sociological literature (Marshall and Firth 1999: 31; Seeman 1977: 757)—even though the empirical underpinnings of the thesis are rather meagre. Empirical research on the dissociative hypothesis flourished in the 1960s and 1970s. However, problems with the analytical strategies and in the statistical modelling techniques prevented these studies from providing convincing empirical evidence either for or against the dissociative thesis (Bean et al. 1973; Duncan 1966; Hendrickx et al. 1993; Sobel 1981; Vorwaller 1970). For example, by focusing exclusively on upward social mobility (e.g., Ellis and Lane 1967), or—as Duncan (1966) notes—by not comparing characteristics of mobile individuals with those of their immobile peers at the social position of origin and of destination.

In this article, I reconsider ideas about the dissociative thesis: I study detrimental consequences of the experience of intergenerational social mobility using Diagonal Reference Models (DRM). Prior research on this topic that applies DRM's has operationalized dissociation by means of mental health outcomes (Houle 2011; Houle and Martin 2011). In this article, I consider measures which better encapsulate Sorokin's conception of dissociation (as elaborated below). Thus, I study dissociation of socially mobile individuals and distinguish between status and mobility effects to achieve a better understanding of the experience of social mobility and to reassess its potentially detrimental consequences for the individual.

2 Theory

2.1 The Dissociative Thesis

Intergenerational social mobility refers to the situation where individuals have a different position in the social hierarchy—be it higher or lower—than their parents. Habits, attitudes, and preferences acquired in the social position of origin may not be suitable in the social position of destination. Sorokin argues that social mobility requires a "corresponding accommodation of body, mind, and reactions" (1927: 508). He considers this process of accommodation an inevitable part of the experience of social mobility and sees it as inherently uprooting and detrimental to the individual. Because the socially mobile individual is never completely able to overcome the influence of the social position of origin, that person "is doomed to think and to look at the world through the glasses of his 'social box'" (Sorokin 1927: 509). It is precisely the need to be versatile and to adapt to the new social status position that leads to dissociation, thus the dissociative thesis.

Research on the dissociative thesis has thrived in the 1960s and 1970s. The inconclusiveness of its findings is characteristic of this literature. Some studies report detrimental consequences of upward and downward mobility which supports the dissociative these (e.g., Ellis and Lane 1967; Kessin 1971; Stuckert 1963). Other studies find no detrimental

consequences of mobility (e.g., Ashford 1990; Bean et al. 1973; Litwak 1960) or find detrimental consequences of upward mobility, but not of downward mobility (Mirande 1973). This inconclusiveness is echoed in other domains of social mobility effects research, for example with regard to fertility (e.g., Bean and Swicegood 1979; Berent 1952; Hope 1971; Kasarda and Billy 1985; Scott 1958; Stevens 1981) and political orientation (e.g., Jackman 1972; Knoke 1973; Lipset and Bendix 1959; Lopreato 1967; Lopreato and Chafetz 1970; Segal and Knoke 1968; Thompson 1971). The inconsistencies and contradictions in the findings and conclusions are striking. Despite the mixed findings and the absence of convincing evidence for the dissociative thesis, "sociologists seem reluctant to accept the disconfirmation of a favorite hypothesis" (Seeman 1977: 757; see also: Marshall and Firth 1999). Indeed, while convincing empirical evidence is lacking, numerous sociological studies assume that both upward and downward mobility are detrimental experiences for the individual (e.g., Reay 2013; Franceschelli et al. 2016).

The reasons for the inconsistencies in the conclusions of empirical studies of the dissociative thesis are twofold. Firstly, they are related to previous studies' failing to adequately measure dissociation. For example, by operationalizing social isolation as memberships in voluntary associations (Vorwaller 1970) or by—when studying lower class youth in prestigious universities—gauging popularity among peers (Ellis and Lane 1967). In this way, previous studies rely on very partial and/or indirect measures of dissociation. Secondly, the inconsistencies in the findings stem from the analytical strategy and statistical methods used. Duncan (1966) and Bean et al. (1973; see also: Vorwaller 1970) have noted serious shortcomings in most of these studies as they do not compare characteristics of mobile individuals with those of their immobile peers at social position of origin and social position of destination. Thus, many of the mobility effects claimed by these past studies may be due to additive origin and destination effects, rather than the experience of social mobility itself (Vorwaller 1970: 493). Those that do take into account characteristics of the social position of origin and the social position of destination have applied statistical methods that do not adequately disentangle origin and destination effects from mobility effects (Sobel 1981, 1985).

The statistical problems in modelling social mobility stem from the linear dependency of mobility on both social position of origin and social position of destination (Blalock 1967; Hope 1975). Sobel (1981) introduced a statistical technique that allowed the modelling of effects of social position of origin, of social position of destination, and of social mobility simultaneously, i.e., Diagonal Reference Models (DRM) (e.g., Sobel 1981, 1985; Hendrickx et al. 1993).[1] In the late 1980s and early 1990s, several applications of DRM were published (e.g., Clifford and Heath 1993; De Graaf, Nieuwbeerta and Heath 1995; De Graaf and Ganzeboom 1990; Sorenson 1989; Weakliem 1992), but especially since 2000 this method is consistently applied to study social mobility effects. These recent studies have focused on consequences of social mobility by applying DRMs on a wide variety of subjects, such as antagonistic attitudes towards ethnic minorities (Tolsma et al. 2009), personal satisfaction (Marshall and Firth 1999), cultural taste (Daenekindt and Roose 2013b, 2014), self-assessed health (Monden and De Graaf 2013), or voting behaviour (e.g., Nieuwbeerta et al. 2000; Weakliem 1992).

In this paper, I apply Diagonal Reference Models to test Sorokin's classic dissociative thesis. Among the recent DRM studies, two articles have addressed the dissociative

[1] Sobel originally termed these models Diagonal *Mobility* Models, but De Graaf and Ganzeboom (1990) argued that Diagonal Reference Models was more appropriate. Currently, Diagonal Reference Models is used to refer to the models developed by Sobel.

thesis—one in relation to intergenerational mobility (Houle and Martin 2011) and one in relation to intragenerational mobility (Houle 2011)—and found no evidence for it. Both articles study data from the Wisconsin Longitudinal Study on individuals who graduated high school in 1957 and operationalized dissociation using the WLS-modified Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression (CES-D) scale. This scale is designed to measure the frequency and severity of depressive symptoms (Radloff 1977). This operationalization captures—as acknowledged by Houle and Martin (2011)—the pathological consequences that may be only a small part of the possible detrimental consequences of social mobility. Additionally, the validity of depression as an indicator for dissociation can be questioned: Is depression a valid indicator of dissociation, or is depression a possible consequence of the experience of dissociation? I believe that my approach of focusing on dissociation itself—rather than possible outcomes of dissociation—provides a more direct test of the dissociative thesis.

2.2 Unravelling Consequences of Social Mobility

2.2.1 Social Mobility Effects

The experience of social mobility—be it upward or downward—may be a disruptive, dislocating, and subsequently detrimental experience for the individual; this is in line with Sorokin's ideas (Sorokin 1927; see also: Ashford 1990; Friedman 2014, 2015; Van Der Waal and De Koster 2014). Social mobility is uprooting and constructs a permanent cleavage between past and present in the individual (Luckmann and Berger 1964). The incongruity and conflicting demands between the social position of origin and social position of destination generate insecurity and frustration. Bourdieu experienced social mobility himself and expresses similar ideas. He describes his experience of upward mobility as "my path through social space and the practical incompatibility of the social worlds than it links without reconciling them" (Bourdieu 2007: 1). In line with the dissociative thesis, he describes the consequences of this experience as detrimental, giving rise to "a destabilized habitus, torn by contradiction and internal division, generating suffering" (Bourdieu 2000: 160). Consequently, I expect that *the experience of social mobility—upward and downward—results in dissociation (hypothesis 1).*

In the literature, a disproportionate amount of attention has been paid to upward social mobility. For example, several studies in the 60s studied the consequences of social mobility by focusing exclusively on upward social mobility (e.g., Ellis and Lane 1967; Lopreato 1967; Thompson 1971). This was justified because upward and downward mobility—in line with Sorokin's claims—were thought of as identical experiences. However, upward mobility and downward social mobility involve two different experiences (e.g., Newman 1989). The experience of downward mobility—in contrast to upward mobility—may spur feelings of frustration and failure (Blau 1956; Luckmann and Berger 1964; Tolsma et al. 2009). Additionally, downwardly mobile individuals may blame the system for their social demise (Lopreato and Chafetz 1970; Newman 1989). This makes it more likely that downward social mobility is a dislocating and disruptive experience resulting in dissociation. Therefore, I expect that *the experience of downward social mobility results dissociation (hypothesis 2).*

2.2.2 *Social Mobility as Acculturation*

The acculturation thesis—associated with Blau (1956)—describes the possibility that social mobility is not a dislocating, disruptive experience. According to this perspective, social mobility simply involves a process of resocialization, which does not necessarily generate dissociation or psychosocial problems (Blau 1956; see also: Jackman 1972; Goldthorpe 1980). Thus, socially mobile individuals gradually shed values, norms, and customs from the social position of origin and adopt those of their newly acquired status position. This results in the hypothesis that *dissociation of socially mobile individuals resembles the levels of dissociation characteristic for the social position of destination (hypothesis 3a).*

The acculturation thesis may very well apply to upwardly mobile individuals, as they are proud of their achievements. Downwardly mobile individuals on the other hand may—due to feelings of failure—resist the status implications of their downward mobility (Wilensky and Edwards 1959). They may stubbornly resist processes of acculturation, denying their failure. So, processes of acculturation may be asymmetric as they are more plausible among upwardly mobile individuals than among downwardly mobile individuals. This asymmetry may occur because of different mechanisms. For example, because of their success, upwardly mobile individuals have more incentives to adopt the culture of their new social environment and to manifest their newly acquired, more prestigious social position. They feel positive about the system that produced their success (Jackman 1972). This is referred to as "the cult of gratitude" (Tumin 1957; see also: Lopreato 1967)—i.e., having a sense of gratitude towards the system that made their acquired pleasures and privileges possible, which expresses itself in a willingness to conform to the culture of the social position of destination. It is also possible, as argued by Weakliem (1992), that upwardly mobile individuals—much more than downwardly mobile individuals—are moulded by institutions: Gate-keeping institutions, such as the educational system, provide very effective contexts for resocialization, preparing these individuals for the culture of higher social strata in society. In line with these ideas, I expect *acculturation to be more present among upwardly mobile individuals compared to the downwardly mobile individuals (hypothesis 3b).*

2.3 Dissociation

Despite being studied extensively, research on the dissociative thesis often lacks a clear understanding of dissociation itself as the exact nature of dissociation remains vague and general. For example, Sorokin describes dissociation in terms of "mental strain" or "mental disease".[2] Others have, for example, studied the dissociative thesis by focussing on social isolation (Ellis and Lane 1967; Stuckert 1963), emotional maladjustment (Kessin 1971), or participation with friends, with kin and in voluntary associations (Mirande 1973). This lack of conceptual consensus is likely an additional source of the inconsistent findings of previous empirical research on the dissociative thesis. To obtain an integrative understanding, I explicitly considering dissociation as a multi-dimensional concept. Based on Sorokin's writing and on studies that build on Sorokin's ideas, I distinguish three relevant subdimensions.

[2] Sorokin mentions additional specific dimensions of dissociation, e.g., "superficiality," "cynicism," "the hunt for sensual pleasure". However, an overarching framework on the exact nature of dissociation is lacking in his writing.

2.3.1 Social Isolation

An obvious dimension of dissociation is social isolation, which refers to experiencing a lack of social acceptance. Many studies have argued that social mobility is associated with experiencing social isolation. Upwardly mobile individuals sacrifice social ties from their past; downwardly mobile individuals lose social acceptance from individuals from their social position of origin. So, socially mobile individuals experience a disruption of the relationships of the social position of origin (Luckmann and Berger 1964). Stuckert (1963), for example, reports that married women who are mobile have less frequent and more superficial contact with the extended family compared to married women who are not mobile (see also: Litwak 1960). Additionally, socially mobile individuals have problems to forms close relationships in the social position of destination because of their inability to adapt completely to their new social status position (Blau 1956; Sorokin 1927). For example, several authors have suggested that—because of the social position of origin's imprint—socially mobile individuals have lower levels of social participation (Kessin 1971; Mirande 1973) and are unable to form satisfactory and intimate personal relationships in their new social environment (Ellis and Lane 1967; Kessin 1971; Sorokin 1927; Warner and Abegglen 1963). They are "stuck in a kind of social purgatory" (Friedman 2014: 353; see also: Friedman 2015).

2.3.2 Utilitarian Individualism

Utilitarian individualism refers to the individual's expectations of and commitments to established norms regarding social conduct. It refers to the degree of agreement the individual has with behaviour that is prescribed, proscribed, or permitted in society (Seeman 1975; Jessor et al. 1968) and denotes an attitude where the individual pursues self-interest, without much concern for other people (Bellah et al. 1985). It stems from a "generalized discontent" (Seeman 1975; see also: Dean 1961; Merton 1968) and depicts the idea that socially unapproved behaviour—counter-mores and antisocial behaviour—is necessary to attain goals. In the context of downward social mobility, utilitarian individualism can stem from a frustration of ambition related to involuntary downward movements (Reynolds and Baird 2010; Simpson 1970; Wilensky 1966). Upwardly mobile individuals, on the other hand, may feel 'homeless' and consider values less stringent resulting in a lack of solidarity with fellow people and in utilitarian individualism (cf. Friedman 2012; Reay 2013).

2.3.3 Social Disorientation

Social disorientation refers to the individual's low sense of understanding the events in which s/he is engaged and the absence/loss of values that give direction and purpose to life (Dean 1961; Seeman 1959).[3] Because socially mobile individuals have been confronted with different sets of norms and values during their transition within the social stratification system, they become aware of the arbitrariness of each set and values and norms lose their self-evident character (Coser 1975, 1991; Daenekindt and Roose 2013a). In this way, social mobility hinders the inculcation of norms and values (Sorokin 1927). Because socially mobile individuals are confronted with different social contexts that present

[3] The concept of social disorientation aligns with the concepts of "purposelessness" (Dean 1961) and "meaninglessness" (Seeman 1975).

different values and a different sense of purpose, they feel lost and find it difficult to make sense of reality (see also: Geyer 1974).

The three dimensions outlined here are by no means an exhaustive list of possible dimensions of dissociation. However, I believe them to represent key aspects of dissociation as theorized by Sorokin; thus allowing me to test the dissociative thesis adequately.

3 Data and Methods

3.1 Data and Measures

3.1.1 Data

I used data from the survey "Cultural Participation in Flanders 2003–2004" ($n = 2849$). Flanders is the northern, Dutch-speaking part of Belgium and has a high population density and is highly urbanized. In addition to information on a variety of cultural behaviours, attitudes, and dispositions, this survey includes a wide range of items assessing the different aspects of dissociation. The data are representative of the Flemish population and were collected by means of computer-assisted, face-to-face interviews, with a response rate of 61.0 percent (Lievens et al. 2006).

Table 1 Pattern matrix of dependent variables after factor analysis with Promax rotation

	Social disorientation	Utilitarian individualism	Social isolation
Today, everything is so complicated that I do not know anymore what to do	**.886**	.055	−.176
These days we have so much new information coming at us that, in the end, we do not understand anything anymore	**.911**	.017	−.159
Lately, things have become so speedy and hurried that I sometimes feel like I cannot keep up	**.833**	−.123	−.022
Today, I no longer understand what is going on	**.630**	.017	.212
These days everything changes so fast that I do not know how to behave anymore	**.685**	.029	.025
Humanity, our dear ones—this is all crap; people should look after themselves first and protect their own interests	.009	**.702**	.035
People should pursue their own interests and not care too much about others	−.003	**.709**	.071
In our society, people better take care of themselves first	−.024	**.789**	−.031
Capable people should be allowed to use their talents mainly for their own benefit	−.012	**.667**	−.090
In our society, you have to fight for your own position; other things will follow from there	.008	**.760**	−.013
Today, you really do not know whom you can trust anymore	.234	−.034	**.616**
Most people are disappointing once you get to know them better	.146	.083	**.567**
Today, most people can be trusted	.212	.044	**−.562**

High factor loadings are printed in bold

3.1.2 Dissociation

The three dimensions of dissociation—social isolation, utilitarian individualism, and social disorientation—are measured using an exploratory factor analysis that includes 13 items using promax rotation. Promax rotation is an oblique rotation which allows factors to be correlated and was chosen because it is theoretically unlikely that the different dimensions of dissociation are orthogonal/independent. Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed or disagreed with statements on a 7-point Likert scale. Answers ranged from "totally disagree" to "totally agree". Regression scores were retained for each individual. Table 1 shows the pattern matrix after factor analysis with Promax rotation.

The analysis yields three factors (Eigenvalue ≥ 1). The first factor refers to social disorientation. It denotes the extent that individuals find the world to be complex and that they are lost in a world where they feel there is not enough purpose and direction to guide them. The second factor represents utilitarian individualism: It expresses counter-mores and antisocial attitudes that are perceived to be legitimate means of reaching goals. Finally, the items loading on the third factor are used to measure social isolation. Sorokin's ideas on social isolation resonate strongly with what is in contemporary research referred to as generalized trust (e.g., Putnam 2007). Moreover, as the items assessing generalized trust are the best proxies available in the data, these are used to operationalize social isolation. This factor captures a lack of trust in fellow man and an inability to establish meaningful and intimate social relations in their new social environment. It denotes the experience of social isolation and an absence of perceived social acceptance in the new social environment.

3.1.3 Social Position and Social Mobility

I operationalize social mobility as educational mobility. There are two theoretical reasons for this. Firstly, educational level functions as a status marker in contemporary Western societies (Kingston et al. 2003; Meyer 1977). Research also has convincingly shown that social isolation, utilitarian individualism and social disorientation are especially stratified according to educational level (e.g., Feldman 2003; Hirtenlehner et al. 2013; McPherson et al. 2006; Middleton 1963). Secondly—as Newman (1989) convincingly argues—feelings of failure and pride are intrinsic aspects of the experience of social mobility, and research shows that educational position is strongly perceived and evaluated from a meritocratic perspective. That is, an individual's educational level is in public discourse mainly considered as the result of effort and dedication (Spruyt 2015), and is thus strongly associated with feelings of pride or failure.

A means of measuring occupational mobility would be a valuable addition to this article, but the survey does not include a reliable measure for this. Additionally, educational mobility yields an analytical advantage as it allows the inclusion of the unemployed, non-employed, and homemakers in the analysis (Monden and de Graaf 2013). The educational categories in the survey are based on the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). I recoded education into three categories: "no, or primary school", "secondary school," and "higher education". As an indicator of the social position of origin, I take the average of the educational attainment of both parents and round it up (e.g., Sorenson 1994; Willekens et al. 2014).[4] Table 2 presents the mobility table. Social mobility, as a difference score between social position of origin and destination, is included as a covariate (Sobel 1985).

[4] Models were also estimated using two alternative operationalizations of social position of origin, i.e., "educational level of the father" and "highest educational level of the parents". These analyses result in the same conclusions as the analyses presented here.

3.1.4 Control variables

Gender (51.6 % female) and age (centred around the mean of 44; SD 18.3) are also included in the analyses.

3.2 Statistical Procedure: Diagonal Reference Models

To analyse the consequences of social mobility I apply Diagonal Reference Models (DRMs). DRMs were developed specifically by Sobel (1981, 1985) to model effects of social mobility.[5] This statistical method was developed in response to previous methods—e.g., the linear additive model (Lenski 1954, 1956; Jackson 1962) and the square additive model (Duncan 1966)—which were found to be inadequate to study effects of social mobility (Blalock 1967; Sobel 1981, 1985; Hope 1971, 1975; Hendrickx et al. 1993). Using DRMs allows me to simultaneously estimate effects of social position of origin, social position of destination, and social mobility (Sobel 1981). The method models the value of dependent variables of socially mobile individuals as a function of the immobile individuals of the two associated social positions. The characteristics of these immobile individuals are considered to represent the "core" culture of the different social strata. In this way, aspects of this statistical technique directly express theoretical thinking about social mobility (Cox 1990). Thus, this method offers the possibility of comparing socially mobile individuals with their peers in both social position of origin and social position of destination and to adequately tests the hypotheses outlined above. The baseline model can be specified as:

$$Y_{ijk} = p * \mu_{ii} + (1 - p) * \mu_{jj} + \sum \beta x_{ijkl} + e_{ijk}$$

Subscript i and j represent the social position of origin and destination, respectively. Y_{ijk} is the value of the dependent variable in cell ij, which has k observations. μ_{ii} and μ_{jj} are both estimates of Y in the diagonal cells. The former refers to the corresponding diagonal cell for the position of origin, while the latter refers to the corresponding diagonal cell for the position of destination. These estimated means are used to estimate the value for the dependent variable for mobile individuals. p represents the weight parameter which estimates the influence of social position of origin relative to that of position of destination.

4 Results

To test the different hypotheses, I specify different models (cf. Table 3). Model A specifies the weight parameters for the social position of origin (p) and of destination ($1 - p$). If only acculturation processes (hypothesis 3a) apply, this model would fit best. Model A is the baseline model and all the other models are extensions of it. Model B includes a mobility effect. This parameter allows to test hypothesis 1—that is, upward and downward mobility results in higher levels of dissociation. Model C additionally includes a parameter for downward social mobility to test hypothesis 2. Model D and Model E include an interaction of downward social mobility on the p-parameter. This allows the effect of the

[5] Diagonal Reference Models are also applied to study effects of other forms of status inconsistency, for example, heterogamy (e.g., Eeckhaut et al. 2013; Sorenson and Brownfield 1991; van der Slik *et al.* 2002).

Table 2 Mobility table: relative cell frequencies

Origin: Educational level parents	Destination: educational level respondent			Total
	No, or primary school	Secondary school	Higher education	
No, or primary school	36.0	21.9	12.5	70.4
Secondary school	2.2	7.5	10.2	19.9
Higher education	.5	1.7	7.5	9.7
Total	38.7	31.1	30.2	100

Table 3 Model specifications

Model A (baseline model, H3a):	$Y_{ijk} = p * \mu_{ii} + (1 - p) * \mu_{jj} + \sum \beta x_{ijkl} + e_{ijk}$
	Where: i = social position of origin j = social position of destination p = weight of social position of origin k = number of observations l = number of covariates e = error term
Model B (H1):	$Y_{ijk} = p * \mu_{ii} + (1 - p) * \mu_{jj} + m * mob + \sum \beta x_{ijkl} + e_{ijk}$
	Where: mob = social mobility (1 if mobile; 0 otherwise)
Model C (H1 and H2):	$Y_{ijk} = p * \mu_{ii} + (1 - p) * \mu_{jj} + m * mob + d * dsm + \sum \beta x_{ijkl} + e_{ijk}$
	Where: mob = social mobility (1 if mobile; 0 otherwise) dsm = downward social mobility (1 if downwardly mobile; 0 otherwise)
Model D (H3b):	$Y_{ijk} = w * \mu_{ii} + (1 - w) * \mu_{jj} + \sum \beta x_{ijkl} + e_{ijk}$
	Same specification as Model A, but where: weight of social position of origin = w = (p + p_{dsm} * dsm)*
Model E (H1, H2 and H3b)	$Y_{ijk} = w * \mu_{ii} + (1 - w) * \mu_{jj} + m * mob + d * dsm + \sum \beta x_{ijkl} + e_{ijk}$
	Same specification as Model C, but where: weight of social position of origin = w = (p + p_{dsm} * dsm)*

social position of origin to differ between upwardly and downwardly mobile individuals, thus allowing to test for asymmetric acculturation (hypothesis 3b).

I estimate Models A–E for each dimension of dissociation. The model fit indices for each model are presented in Table 4. Based on the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC), Model E fits best for social disorientation and utilitarian individualism; Model D fits best for social isolation.

The parameter estimates for these best fitting models are presented in Table 5. The diagonal intercepts show that the different dimensions of dissociation are stratified. These estimated means refer to the levels of dissociation that are characteristic for each social position. For all dimensions, high social strata are associated with lower levels on each dimension of dissociation compared to low social strata. For example, the score on social disorientation for immobile individuals who achieved—like their parents—no educational or primary education is .339. Immobile individuals with higher educational degrees score −.672. Moving up the social ladder, the diagonal intercepts show a clear monotonic decrease of each dimension of dissociation.

Table 4 Goodness-of-fit statistics for the Diagonal Reference Models (AICs)

	Social disorientation	Utilitarian individualism	Social isolation
Model A	5378.473	5653.593	5037.386
Model B	5376.215	5628.345	5034.952
Model C	5377.561	5629.505	5035.828
Model D	5376.468	5642.094	**5033.598**
Model E	**5375.377**	**5627.588**	5034.543

Selected models are printed in bold

Table 5 Parameter estimates from the Diagonal Reference Models on 'social disorientation', 'utilitarian individualism' and 'social isolation'

	Social disorientation	Utilitarian individualism	Social isolation
Diagonal intercepts			
μ_{11}: No, or primary school	.339 (.044)***	.523 (.046)***	.333 (.035)***
μ_{22}: Secondary school	−.121 (.052)*	.129 (.056)*	−.023 (.041)
μ_{33}: Higher education	−.672 (.058)***	−.456 (.064)***	−.685 (.057)***
Origin and destination weights			
Position of origin (p)	.235 (.086)[a]	.321 (.093)	.139 (.063)[a]
Position of destination (1 − p)	.765 (.086)[b]	.679 (.093)	.861 (.063)[b]
p_{dsm}	.556 (.256)*	.577 (.278)*	.378 (.138)**
Mobility effects			
m (mobility)	−.084 (.054)	−.244 (.057)***	–
d (downward mobility)	.259 (.132)*	.269 (.136)*	–
Control variables			
Gender: female	.235 (.035)***	−.061 (.037)	.185 (.033)***
Age (centred)	.014 (.001)***	−.001 (.001)	.004 (.001)**

[a] Significantly lower than .5 ($p < .05$)

[b] Significantly higher than .5 ($p < .05$)

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

4.1 Asymmetric acculturation

The results provide evidence for asymmetric acculturation for the three dimensions of dissociation. This is indicated by parameter p_{dsm} which is significant for each dimension. This parameter shows that the impact of the social position of destination differs between upwardly and downwardly mobile individuals. For example, the weight parameter of the position of destination for social disorientation is .765 for upwardly mobile individuals and .209 (=1 − (.235 + .556)) for downwardly mobile individuals. This means that social disorientation for upwardly mobile individuals is predominantly related to the social position of destination, while for downwardly mobile individuals it is predominantly related to the social position of origin. The same pattern can be observed for utilitarian individualism and social isolation. This provides evidence for hypothesis 3b, i.e. processes

of acculturation are more pervasive and influential among upwardly mobile individuals, compared to downwardly mobile individuals.

4.2 Mobility Effects

For social disorientation and utilitarian individualism, including the mobility parameters for mobility and for downward mobility resulted in a better fit. For example, the *d*-parameter for social disorientation indicates that individuals who have experienced downward mobility score .259 higher on this dimension of dissociation. The same logic applies for utilitarian individualism (.269). This provides evidence for hypothesis 2, i.e., downward social mobility results in higher levels of dissociation. For utilitarian individualism, the effect of mobility is also significant. This mobility parameter grasps individuals who have experienced mobility. Of course, as the downward mobility parameter is also present in this model, the m-parameter catches upwardly mobile individuals, thus showing that upwardly mobile individuals score lower on utilitarian individualism. This provides evidence for positive consequences of social mobility where upward social mobility results in lower levels of dissociation.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

In this paper I revisited the dissociative thesis, i.e., the idea that social mobility is a disruptive and detrimental experience for the individual. I studied three different dimensions of dissociation, i.e., social isolation, utilitarian individualism and social disorientation. I found evidence for processes of acculturation. That is, regarding these three dimensions, socially mobile individuals adapt to the characteristics of the social position of destination, suggesting that social mobility is simply a process of resocialization. Interestingly, processes of acculturation are asymmetric as they differ between upwardly and downwardly mobile individuals: Acculturation is more pervasive for upwardly mobile individuals.

Processes of acculturation are in line with recent research studying effects of mobility on cultural taste, political preferences, preventive healthcare use, antagonistic attitudes, etc. which finds evidence for acculturation (e.g., Daenekindt and Roose 2013a; de Graaf et al. 1995; Missinne et al. 2015; Nieuwbeerta and de Graaf 1993; Tolsma et al. 2009). Because of the finding that socially mobile individuals exhibit behaviours and characteristics that fall between those of social position of origin and destination, with a tendency towards dominance of destination, some authors make the polemical suggestion that there might not be anything sociologically interesting about social mobility (e.g., Marshall and Firth 1999).

However, over and above these processes of acculturation, I find mobility effects on social disorientation and utilitarian individualism. That is, I find evidence for the fact that downward social mobility is a dislocating and detrimental experience for the individual as downward social mobility—but not upward mobility—results in higher levels of dissociation. This is a confirmation of hypothesis 2: The experience of downward social mobility spurs feelings of frustration and failure, expressing itself in dissociation (cf., Newman 1989; Tolsma et al. 2009). This finding is not in line with the dissociative thesis which predicts that both downward and upward social mobility are detrimental for the individual. The finding that downward—and not upward—mobility results in dissociation, and the

finding of asymmetric processes of acculturation highlight the pervasive differences between upward and downward social mobility.

The detrimental effect of downward mobility is not found for social isolation. This may associate to the level/scope of this dimension. Unlike social disorientation and utilitarian individualism, social isolation directly refers to the interpersonal sphere. The other two dimensions reflect a more general outlook on society and its dominant norms and values. The finding that detrimental consequences of mobility are present for social disorientation and utilitarian individualism suggests that repercussions of the experience of social mobility are manifested in general attitudes and perceptions regarding the social system, but not in aspects which are more embedded in the interpersonal sphere. This may be related to attributions as individuals may hold the system responsible—but not their immediate social environment—for their mobility.

The dissociative thesis, and thus this article, pertains to detrimental consequences of social mobility for the individual. Of course, mobility may also yield consequences on other domains. For example, Sorokin (1927) associates mobility with a reduction of narrow-mindedness and a facilitation of inventions and discoveries, because socially mobile individuals are more likely to think outside the (social) box. Similarly, Kohn and Schooler (e.g., 1978) show how substantive complexity of an individual's social environment stimulates cognitive development and benefits intellectual flexibility. Applying Sorokin's ideas on consequences of mobility in other domains than dissociation thus provides seminal ground for future research.

This article contributes to the literature by revisiting a classic sociological premise. Based on my findings, I do not agree with the statement of Marshall and Firth (1999) that there is nothing sociologically interesting to be found in the consequences of social mobility. Both the processes of asymmetric acculturation and the mobility effects show that social mobility has pervasive effects on the individual. While I do not find confirmation for the dissociative thesis as formulated by Sorokin, my analyses clearly demonstrate that social mobility is associated in different ways to different dimensions of dissociation.

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