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Differences in the Effect of Women's Educational
Attainment in Sweden, the Federal Republic of
Germany and Italy**

**HANS-PETER BLOSSFELD
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BADIA FIESOLANA, SAN DOMENICO (FI)

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Alessandra De Rose, Götz Rohwer
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European University Institute
Badia Fiesolana
I-50016 San Domenico (FI)
Italy

1. INTRODUCTION

In the past several decades, the divorce rates in all Western European countries have changed dramatically.¹ From the mid-1960s to the beginning of the 1980s, total divorce rates increased rapidly and almost doubled in most of these countries.² During 1980s the pattern of change in divorce rates has then become heterogeneous: (1) in most Western European countries total divorce rate continued to rise steadily; in some countries, such as the (former) Federal Republic of Germany, Austria and Denmark, the increase in divorce rates levelled off; and in Sweden total divorce rates declined slightly (Council of Europe, 1990: 102). In 1988, the year for which the most recent comparable figures for major Western European countries are available, total divorce rates for Sweden (0.41), Denmark (0.47), and Norway (0.36), were at the highest level; in Finland (0.28), France (0.31), Belgium (0.31), the Netherlands (0.28), the (former) Federal Republic of Germany (0.31), Austria (0.29), and Switzerland (0.33) total divorce rates reached a moderately high level; and in Southern European countries, such as Greece (0.13) and Italy (0.08), total divorce rates were at their lowest recorded level (Council of Europe, 1990: 102).

These shifts in the lifetime divorce probability of cohorts over the last three decades did not occur in isolation. They are part of major transformations of the family and household relationships in modern societies which cannot be explained at the individual level. Rather, they point to changing role of societal institutions which structure individual life courses in modern societies in different ways (White, 1990:904).

¹ This paper focuses on Western European countries, but the same basic outline of trends could be repeated in virtually all countries in Central-Eastern Europe and the US (e.g. Thornton 1985; Trent and Scott 1989).

² The total divorce rate is the proportion of marriages which are expected to end in divorce in a fictitious marriage cohort (Council of Europe 1990:102). The total divorce rate is computed by summing the duration-specific divorce rates in a given year, and reflects the proportion of divorces which married couples would have if they experienced, throughout their lives, the duration-specific divorce rates observed for that specific year. This measure is better than the often used crude divorce rate, that is, the number of divorces per 1,000 population which is sensitive to the age and marital status composition of the population (England and Kunz, 1975). However, the total divorce rate is also problematic because it interprets cross-sectional information from a longitudinal point of view.

Many scientists have linked the almost universal increase in divorce rates with the process of social and economic modernization, including increasing educational attainment of women (Becker, 1981; Maneker and Rankin, 1985), increasing proportions of service jobs particularly suited to women (mainly within the welfare state sector) (Vannoy, 1991), increasing female labor force participation (South, 1985), expansion of welfare-state based extra-familial institutions that provide alternative sources of material security, personal services, satisfaction, and leisure (Hareven, 1976; Davis, 1985; Cherlin and Furstenberg, 1988), declining mortality (Thornton, 1985), increasing urbanization and declining social integration (Alwin, Converse and Martin, 1985; Glenn and Shelton, 1985), and increasing mobility rates (Trovato, 1986). It is thought that these structural changes engender attitude and value changes, which in turn affect family stability (Trent and South, 1989). As a consequence, the distinctions between marital and non-marital childbearing, and between marriage and cohabitation are losing their normative force, with marriage and divorce tending to become more of an option than a formal social requirement (Lee, 1982; White, 1990).

While these arguments suggest a positive relationship between divorce and modernization, we also observe great differences in the timing and rate of changes in divorce rates between major Western European countries with very similar levels of economic development. This variation attests to the strength of dominant country-specific cultures, differences in family traditions, and family policies in various European countries interacting with the process of modernization and producing different rates and levels of divorce rates (see, for example Lesthaeghe, 1980, 1983).

In this paper, we investigate one specific aspect of this complex interrelationship between the modernization process and nation-specific family contexts. We want to examine to what degree the impressive increase in women's educational attainment experienced by all industrialized countries (Blossfeld and Shavit, 1992) affects divorce within various nation-specific family contexts. Our emphasis on women's educational attainment reflects our recognition of its importance in the research literature, along with the fact that it is an indirect indicator of labor force participation and women's socioeconomic status (Mincer, 1974; Kalleberg and Rosenfeld, 1990).

Our analysis is based on comparative data on education and divorce in three major Western European countries with quite different family contexts and levels of divorce: Italy, which belongs to Europe's low-level divorce societies; the (former) Federal Republic of Germany, which holds a middle position in terms of the level of divorce rates among countries in Europe; and Sweden, which counts as one of Europe's high-level divorce countries. With such data and analysis, we can begin to see how one aspect of modernization (in this paper women's increasing educational attainment) leads to different outcomes for the family system (in this paper to different divorce intensities), within various nation-specific family contexts.

2. HYPOTHESES ABOUT THE EFFECTS OF CHANGES IN WOMEN'S EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT ON DIVORCE WITHIN NATION-SPECIFIC FAMILY CONTEXTS

Although much has been written on cross-national differences in family systems, explanations for cross-national variation in divorce rates are rare. Most theoretical frameworks point to the influence of changes in the larger social structure on the family system as such and, indirectly, on the incidence of divorce (Trent and Scott, 1989). One of the major explanations in the literature for increases in divorce rates across cohorts, however, is women's changing earnings capacity and bargaining power as a consequence of their increasing educational qualifications (Becker, 1981; Lee, 1982; White, 1990).

The Effect of Women's Increasing Educational Attainment

In particular economists have been prominent in offering explanations for the relationship between women's growing qualifications and the rise in divorce. According to Becker (1981), the main exponent of the economic theory of the family, unmarried men and women can be viewed as trading partners who decide to marry if each partner has more to gain by marrying than by remaining single. As in all trading relationships, the gains from marriage are based on the fact that each partner has something different to offer (Becker, 1981). In industrialized societies women traditionally rely on men for the provision of food and shelter, as well as protection; and men rely on women for the bearing and rearing of children and the main-

countries with respect to this conformity in terms of the distribution of household types (single, married, divorced), the age at which children leave the parental home, the proportion and importance of consensual unions, the fertility rate, the stability of marriage and the rate of entry into remarriage (Council of Europe, 1990).

Given relatively similar levels of economic modernization in the major countries of Western Europe, these differences must be explained with reference to the countries' dominant cultural values, family and religious traditions, and family policies.

In terms of dominant cultural values, in public life Swedes emphasize the principle of egalitarianism, while Germans and Italians, as most of the other European countries, try to find a balance between the concept of egalitarianism and the principle of individual freedom (Lesthaeghe and Surkyn, 1988). In addition, especially for Italians, religion continues to be an important element in the lives of men and women today, even if there have been important changes in the relationships between the Catholic church and individuals over the last several decades. It is well-known from historical studies of the family that changes in family and fertility in several Western European countries - including Sweden, Germany, and Italy - occurred earliest and most rapidly in areas where the influence of the organized religion was weakest and secularization strongest (Lesthaeghe, 1980; Lesthaeghe and Meekers, 1986; Thornton, 1985). Although the authority of the Catholic church over the behavior of individuals has declined in Italy since the 1960s, religion still tends to influence attitudes on family formation and family stability (Menniti, Palomba and Sabbadini, 1987).

The greater weight placed on egalitarianism in Sweden helps to explain that country's more coherent policies in promoting the integration of work and family (Kalleberg and Rosenfeld, 1990). In Germany and Italy, policies that affect the family have been developed in a piecemeal fashion, and are often designed to obtain non-family goals. In Sweden, more than in Germany and Italy, priority is given to ensuring a decent level of living for everyone rather than to letting market forces provide a wide range of choices to those who can afford it (Hoem and Hoem, 1987:4). These policies also affect labor market conditions and unemployment rates for young people and women, thus influencing entry into marriage

(Blossfeld and Huinink, 1991), and married women's labor force participation, which is higher in Sweden than in Germany, and higher in Germany than in Italy.

Compared to Germany and Italy, Sweden also provides the most generous parental leaves (even in Sweden, mothers are much more likely to take it than fathers), and has invested more in public child-care facilities (even if the supply of daycare still does not completely meet the demand) (Hoem and Hoem, 1987). However, many other European countries either have no systematic provisional general daycare at all (e.g. Germany), or the state provision of daycare facilities is well below demand (e.g. Italy).

Germany has some form of children's allowance, but these payments are often viewed as mere birth incentive payments. Finally, Sweden has an income tax policy which allows a couple to be taxed separately, thus encouraging women's employment. In Germany, the income of the couple is taxed, penalizing married couples with relatively equal earnings. Thus, even if in Sweden there is still a gap between the ideology of equality of sex-specific opportunities and everyday life, regulations promoting women's right to equality with men must be considered as being by far the most egalitarian among the three countries considered - if not in the world (Hoem and Hoem, 1987).

Because of dominant cultural and religious values as well as different family policies, a new style of living arrangements emerged earlier and developed at a faster rate in Sweden than in Germany, and in Germany earlier and faster than in Italy. The Swedes, who have a tradition of non-marital cohabitation that goes back more than a century, were among the first to show an increase in the number of young people living in consensual unions and to develop cohabitation as a separate, yet stable, way of living together (Hoem and Hoem, 1987). Germans followed about ten years later in the rise of consensual unions, reaching however only a far lower percentage today and still using cohabitation to a large extent only as a relatively short prelude for marriage (Blossfeld and Rohwer, 1992). In Italy, consensual unions are still almost unknown among young people (Blossfeld and De Rose, 1992; Pinnelli and De Rose, 1992). Young Italian men and women still tend to live either with their parents, or to be married (or both). This confirms the persistence of a behavioral norm in Italy that

leaving the parental home is marked by marriage, and rarely takes place for other reasons (Pinnelli and De Rose, 1992).

Many Swedes who marry have lived in a consensual union for quite some time, and it has become rather common to have at least one child before marriage (Hoem and Hoem, 1987). This underlines the fact that there is very little conventional pressure to get married in Sweden, and it shows that the composition of this Swedish group that does get married has changed completely during the last twenty years. Marriage formation in Sweden has become progressively more selective towards groups that traditionally have had relatively low divorce risks: fewer teenage and/or "forced" marriages due to unplanned pregnancies, and more couples with children (Hoem and Hoem, 1987). Given these changes, it is easy to understand that the (in terms of international standards) very high total divorce rate in Sweden has dropped slightly during the 1980s.

Although the percentage of young men and women who live for a short period in consensual unions before marriage has been increasing rapidly in Germany during the last decade or so, studies of transition into marriage show that being pregnant is still the most important influence. This means that, even if the proportion of children born outside of marriage is slightly rising among young German women, the birth of a child is closely connected with the desire to legalize the union (Blossfeld and Rohwer, 1992). In Italy, the percentage of children born to young unmarried women is by far the lowest among the three countries examined, but shows a slight tendency to increase (Pinnelli and De Rose, 1992).

Finally, as already shown in the introductory section, there are great differences between Sweden, Germany, and Italy in the incidence of divorce (and separation) today. Consequently, in Sweden more than in Germany, and in Germany more than in Italy, people will view divorce as a normal and acceptable alternative to an unsatisfactory marriage (Amato, 1987).³ This also means that in Sweden more than in Germany, and in Germany more than in Italy, divorce becomes less dependent on women's bargaining power and earnings capacity and thus less selective with respect to educational attainment. This could be considered as one of the

³ These differences are also reflected in differences in the timing and content of changes in divorce laws in these countries.

counterbalancing mechanisms by which the effect of women's increasing educational attainment on the divorce rate in societies with highly differentiated living arrangements is reduced.

On the other hand, divorce is still a stressful experience for most people in Sweden, and men and women view marital dissolution as unfavorable for themselves and enter marriage more consciously and carefully than in Germany (and even more than Italy) where marriage is still a more effective norm for all people who want to live together (Emery, 1988; Amato and Booth, 1991). If marriage becomes a more conscious decision in terms of a lifelong commitment, it is plausible that the effectiveness of these decisions will be strongly dependent on education. This means that marriage will become more selective in Sweden than in Germany, and in Germany more selective than in Italy. This could be viewed as the second counterbalancing mechanism by which the effect of women's increasing educational attainment on the divorce rate is reduced in societies with highly differentiated living arrangements (see also Hoem and Hoem, 1988).

Both the increasing marriage selectivity and the decreasing divorce selectivity in the course of the development and differentiation of family systems could explain the divergent trends experienced during the 1980s whereby in Sweden the divorce rate has been declining, while in Germany the increase in the divorce rate has levelled off and in Italy the divorce rate is still increasing.

Hypotheses

In this paper we will try to test these relationships with respect to women's educational attainment and divorce and formulate the following two hypotheses:

- (1) If other important factors such as cohort membership, duration dependence, children and age at marriage are taken into account, that is, if they are statistically controlled, increases in the level of women's educational attainment (as a global indicator for women's earning capacity or bargaining power) will increase the rate of divorce.

- (2) We expect that this "liberating effect" of women's educational attainment on divorce will differ among countries with different family systems both because of marriage selectivity and divorce selectivity. In particular, we hypothesize that the effect of women's educational attainment will be the stronger the more the real family system of a country is in conformity with the economists' model of a "conventional" or "traditional" family system and the less the family system is differentiated. In other words, we expect that the effect of women's educational attainment should be highest in Italy, not as high in the (former) Republic of Germany, and lowest in Sweden.

3. DATA, METHODS AND VARIABLES

Data

Data to address these hypotheses need to be based on representative samples in Italy, the Federal Republic of Germany and Sweden, and should contain comparable longitudinal measures on divorce as well as on educational attainment of women. These criteria are largely met by the three data sets used in this analysis.

The Swedish data come from the 1981 Swedish Fertility Survey (SFS). The target sample was drawn by simple random sampling from women of the cohorts 1936-60 born in Sweden and registered as resident in Sweden when the sample was drawn, irrespective of marital status. The data contain complete marital and cohabitational histories, childbearing histories, rudimentary activity or occupational histories, and a wealth of other data about the respondents. For further general information about the SFS, see the papers by Hoem and Rennermalm (1985) and Hoem (1986).

The German data come from the German Socio-economic Panel (GSP). The GSP is a longitudinal project that was part of Sonderforschungsbereich 3 "Micro-analytical Foundations of Social Politics" (Mikroanalytische Grundlagen der Gesellschaftspolitik) of the Universities of Frankfurt am Main and Mannheim and has since 1983 been based at the German Institute

for Economic Research (Hanefeld, 1987). The aim of the GSP is to produce a representative longitudinal data base for the Federal Republic of Germany, to be used in the analysis of a broad range of socioeconomic questions. The first data collection was carried out in 1984 with a further panel wave annually. Analyses in this paper use retrospective data on women of selected birth cohorts who participated in the panel waves 1984 and 1985 in the former Federal Republic of Germany.

The Italian data come from the 1983 Family Structure and Behavior Study (FSBS). The aim of this study was to identify the transformations of the Italian family in quantitative and qualitative terms. The family cycle of women between the ages of fifteen and sixty-four at the time of the interview were retrospectively reconstructed from entry into the first stable union - whether conjugal or consensual - through entry into marriage, childbirth, separation and legal divorce, widowhood etc. Although demographic events were recorded with their exact timing, this was not the case as other domains of life (educational history, occupational history etc.) are concerned. As a consequence, this does not allow us to undertake a comparative analysis of women's labor force participation across the three countries. However, education is also a good indirect indicator for labor force participation and women's earnings capacity (Mincer, 1984). For further information on the FSBS see De Rose (1992).

From all three data sets we have selected women who entered into their first marriage and have their first child within this marriage. There are at least three reasons to consider only married women with at least one child (see Hoem, 1988): (1) married women without a first child represent a very specific group because they are mostly newly-married and have a genuinely low dissolution rate; (2) many married women without a first child will have been pregnant at marriage with very low dissolution risks; and (3) married women without a first child have a very high non-response rate in surveys. An extended discussion of these methodological aspects in modeling divorce rates can be found in Hoem (1988).

Methods

Our goal using two event history models, is to specify women's divorce rate as a function of time-constant and time-dependent covariates: (1) an exponential model with marriage-duration specific piecewise constant baseline rates; and (2) a proportional hazards model that does not specify the baseline hazard rate at all (see, for example Tuma and Hannan, 1984; Blossfeld, Hamerle and Mayer, 1989).

Observation begins with the time of the first birth within the first marriage and ends with the event of first divorce or, for right censored cases - with the date of the interview, fifteen years of marriage, the date of birth of the fourth child, or some very specific life event such as the death of the husband, the birth of twins etc., whichever occurs first. The reason not to go beyond a marriage duration of fifteen years and to exclude women with more than three children is a methodological one: these marriages take place under very specific conditions with very specific divorce risks (see Hoem, 1988). Only in the German data set was the date of the legal divorce used (because only this information is available). In the Italian (see De Rose, 1992) and the Swedish (Hoem, 1988) data sets we used the date of de facto separation prior to legal divorce. For descriptive statistics on the number of events and censored observations for the three countries, see Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Variables

The independent variables include measures of the effect of marriage-duration (modeled with period-specific constant baseline hazard rates over the marriage duration), birth cohort, age at entry into marriage (modeled using five age groups: (1) "under 20 years" (reference group); (2) "between the ages 20-22"; (3) "between the ages of 23-25"; (4) "between the ages of 26-28"; and (5) "over 28"), the birth of a second and a third child as a time-dependent covariate,

whether women were pregnant during the time of marriage, and women's educational attainment.

Given the differences in educational systems between Sweden, the Federal Republic of Germany and Italy (Blossfeld and Shavit, 1992) and in order to model women's highest educational attainment as comparably as possible, we constructed the following three basic levels of educational attainment: low, middle and high. "Low" educational level refers to women who left the educational system with not more than a lower secondary school qualification. "Middle" refers to women who completed at least some kind of middle school education. "High" refers to women who have at least an upper secondary school qualification.

As time-dependent covariates, the birth of a second and a third child were introduced into the rate equation on the basis of episode-splitting (see Blossfeld, Hamerle and Mayer, 1989). A separate data record was created for each of these intervals between the births, and four different pieces of information were provided for these sub-episodes: (i) time at the beginning and end of the interval to which the record pertains; (ii) the values of the time-dependent covariates at the beginning of these intervals; (iii) whether the interval ended with an event or not; and (iv) the values of the other covariates relevant for the analysis.

Our analysis examines the process of divorce during a historical period of about 30 years. The oldest cohorts studied were born between 1934 and 1938 and entered into marriage and motherhood during the period stretching from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s. Thus, they began family formation during a historical period in which divorce rates were relatively low and stable in all three studied countries. The youngest cohorts analyzed were born between 1954 and 1958 and started to enter marriage and motherhood during the 1970s. Thus, they began family formation during a period of high educational expansion and rapidly increasing divorce rates. To control cohort effects generated by historical events, changes in values and economic development, we used a set of dummy variables each representing five-year birth groups from 1934-38 through to 1954-58 (reference group: cohort 1934-38).

4. RESULTS

Effects of Educational Expansion

As discussed above, changes in the divorce rate are frequently attributed to changes in women's educational attainments (as indicators of women's earnings capacity). Accordingly, we start our cross-national empirical analysis by asking the question: What are the effects of the educational expansion on the levels of women's educational attainment in successive cohorts in Sweden, Germany and Italy?

Insert Table 2 about here

Distributions of educational attainment for women from successive cohorts in the three countries are shown in Table 2. If we compare the educational attainments of the cohort 1934-38 with those of the 1949-53 and 1954-58 cohorts, then the improvement in educational chances for women in Italy, Germany and Sweden is clear. In all three countries, women have profited from the educational expansion at both higher levels of qualification (see also Blossfeld, 1987, 1989).

There are, however, also important country-specific differences. For the 1934-38 birth cohort, the proportion of women with a lower secondary school qualification ("low educational level") was 72.0% in Italy, in 77.7% Germany and 58.9% in Sweden; and the proportion of women in this cohort with upper secondary school qualification ("high educational level") was 2.8% in Italy, 2.2% in Germany and 15.3% in Sweden. This means that during the immediate post World War II period, Italian and German women had more or less the same low educational opportunities, while Swedish women already had a far better chance of attaining high educational levels. This may be explained by Sweden's long tradition in the emphasis of the principle of egalitarianism.

If we look at the 1949-53 birth cohort,⁴ then we observe that the proportion of women with lower secondary school qualification was 41.0% in Italy, 66.1% in Germany and 30.2% in Sweden. This means that at the lowest educational level the decrease was very strong in Italy and Sweden and far less pronounced in Germany. In Italy the shift was mainly towards the "middle educational level" and in Sweden mainly towards the "high educational level".

In general, in all three countries educational expansion led to an impressive decrease in the proportion of women with low educational levels, a marked increase in the middle of the educational "pyramid", and a slight increase at the highest level. Thus, one can say that there has been a uniform long-term trend across successive birth cohorts in women's educational attainment.

Changes in Divorce Rates Across Birth Cohorts

Next, we consider changes in the process of divorce rates across successive birth cohorts in Italy, Germany and Sweden. Table 3 shows the proportion of women who have not yet experienced a divorce in their first marriage by birth cohort and duration of marriage. These proportions are based on estimations of survivor functions for each cohort for the event of divorce (see, for example Blossfeld, Hamerle and Mayer, 1989).

Insert Table 3 about here

As shown in Table 3, proportions of divorces increase in all three countries from the 1934-38 cohort to the 1954-58 cohort. Compared to official statistics based on mass-data, such as census or microcensus data, the divorce rates are slightly underestimated with the surveys used in this paper. However, the beginning and end levels together with the speed of the change in divorce rates is well represented in their differences between Italy, Germany and Sweden. If we look at the proportion of women who are divorced after a marriage lasting 10

⁴ The information for the 1954-1958 birth-cohort is not comparable because many women of these cohort were still attending school and university and had not yet attained their highest educational level.

years (120 months), then we see that divorce in Italy for the 1934-38 cohort was virtually non-existent (0.06%), and was still rare for the 1949-53 cohort (1.6%). In Germany after 10 years of marriage duration about 4.7% of the 1934-38 cohort and 10.1% of the 1949-53 cohort of women were divorced. This means that the incidence of divorce among the cohort of 1949-53 was more than six times higher in Germany than in Italy. In Sweden, however, the respective figures are almost double those of Germany (7.2% and 17%).

Both, the level and the direction of changes of divorce rates across cohorts in Italy, Germany and Sweden are in line with their respective trends in women's educational attainment across cohorts. This supports the hypothesis that changes in divorce rates can be partially attributed to women's growing economic independence (as a result of better education and improved career opportunities), as argued for example by Becker (1981). To assess Becker's hypothesis, however, a more detailed analysis of the processes of marriage duration and divorce is necessary.

Effects of Education on the Rate of Divorce in Country-specific Contexts

We conducted this more detailed analysis of divorce rates in Italy, Germany and Sweden step by step controlling first four other important influences before focusing on women's educational attainment.

All coefficients in the models are metric coefficients and the relative magnitude of the effects of one and the same variable can be compared between the countries because they are measured in the same way. However, we cannot compare the relative magnitude of the effects of different variables within each of the countries because they depend on the scale by which different variables are measured. We rely therefore on the significance level of variables to decide whether there is an important influence of a variable in one country or not. Because the significance tests are dependent on the observed number of events (separations or divorces) in these countries (see Table 1), one must however be careful in comparing the results of these tests across countries (Blossfeld, Hamerle and Mayer, 1989). The number of events is comparatively low in the German dataset, so that the evaluation of significance tests across countries should be treated with caution. In evaluating a model's performance we also

report the log-likelihood value for each of the models which can be used to conduct a likelihood ratio test.

Insert Table 4 about here

Model A in Table 4 includes in an exponential model in a first step changes in the historical background, measured on the basis of a detailed set of cohort dummy variables. The reference category is the oldest birth cohort, 1934-38. As expected on the basis of the results in Table 4, we observe that there are great differences in the constant of the equations between Italy, Germany and Sweden. The baseline risk in Sweden is much higher than Germany and in Germany much higher than in Italy. Within each of the countries Table 4 shows a monotonous increase of divorce risks across the cohorts. The strongest positive and statistically significant cohort effect is found for the 1954-58 cohort. In a later step of our analysis, we shall see how much of this delaying effect can be attributed to the expansion of women's educational attainment across cohort.

Model B in Table 4 divides, in a second step, the constant term of model A into a set of constants for different periods of marriage duration. It is easy to see that over the entire duration of the marriage the divorce rate is continuously lower in Italy than in Germany and continuously lower in Germany than in Sweden. Country-specific differences in divorce rates cannot therefore be attributed to different country-specific mechanisms in different phases of the marriage process (see also Heaton, Albrecht and Martin, 1985; Melichar and Chiriboga, 1985). There are persistent differences in divorce risks across age in each country. In all three countries the divorce rate is, however, slightly increasing with marriage duration up to a duration of about 10 years. Then, in Sweden and Germany divorce rates become more or less stable, while in Italy we observe a sort of a trend reversal with long-term marriages become increasingly stable. How much of these marriage duration effects is due to selective attrition through divorce and how much to actual changes in propensity to divorce with duration cannot be differentiated here. Neither can we give an answer to the question of whether the reasons for divorce change by duration (see also White, 1990). Controlling for marriage

duration patterns however does not change the basic pattern across cohort and between countries observed in model A.

In the literature it is often argued that divorce is strongly dependent on age at entry into marriage. The hypothesis is that early marriage increases the chances of divorce because of poorer role performance in youthful marriages (Booth and Edwards, 1985; Maneker and Rankin, 1985; Teti, Lamb and Elster, 1987). Age at entry into marriage is also closely connected with women's educational attainment in Italy, Germany and Sweden (Blossfeld and De Rose, 1992; Blossfeld and Huinink, 1991; Blossfeld and Jaenichen, 1992; Hoem, 1986). We therefore have to control for this influence in model C of Table 4 before we introduce women's educational attainment in a later step of the analysis. Surprisingly, however, there are no consistent patterns for the age-group dummy variables, either across age groups, or across countries (model C in Table 4). The only consequence of the inclusion of this variable is that the differences between the marriage duration periods become less pronounced in all three countries. This indicates that one very important factor behind the marriage duration dependence of divorce is the age pattern of entry into marriage (and its supposed connection to role performance).

We also know from the literature that marriages tend to become more stable the higher the number of children (Becker, 1981) and that marriages are strongly dependent on the circumstances surrounding entry into motherhood. In particular, the risk of being divorced increases if a woman is pregnant at the time of marriage. We therefore introduced in model D of Table 4 two time-dependent covariates for the second and third child and a time-constant dummy variable indicating whether a woman was already pregnant at marriage. Table 4 reports that each additional child indeed stabilizes marriage in Italy, that additional children have no significant effect in Germany (however, this may also be a consequence of the comparatively low number of events in the German dataset and the absolute sizes of the coefficients point in the same direction as in Italy), and that the difference in Sweden is mainly between the first and the second child and less significant between the second and the third child. As expected, pregnancy at the time of marriage increases the risk of divorce in all three countries. However, the effect is much stronger in Italy and Germany than in Sweden. This points to the fact that in Sweden men and women are much less forced through

social norms to enter into marriage when the woman becomes pregnant than in Germany and Italy and is in conformity with the hypothesis formulated in this paper that marriage is much more selective in Sweden than in the other two countries.

Insert Table 5 about here

Finally, after having controlled for important influences on the rate of divorce, we tested the two main hypothesis developed in the theoretical section: that increases in the level of women's educational attainment (as a global indicator for women's earnings capacity or bargaining power) will increase the rate of divorce; and that this "liberating effect" of women's educational attainment on divorce will be highest in Italy, less marked in the (former) Republic of Germany, and lowest in Sweden because these three countries represent three different stages in the development and differentiation of social accepted living arrangements. The exponential model in Table 5, which includes women's educational attainment in the form of three levels (reference category: "low educational level"), shows that an increasing level of educational attainment does indeed have a positive effect on the rate of divorce in all three countries;⁵ and this model shows that there is indeed the expected order of these effects between the three countries. Compared to women with lower secondary qualification, the inclination of women with upper secondary qualification is in Italy about 470% ($((\exp(1.74) - 1) \times 100\% = 470\%)$), in Germany about 246% ($((\exp(1.24) - 1) \times 100\% = 246\%)$) and in Sweden 72% ($((\exp(0.54) - 1) \times 100\% = 12\%)$) higher. We should also note that the cohort effects became much weaker after including women's education attainment as a covariate in all three countries. This result means that in all three countries women's educational attainment can in fact be considered at least as part of the explanation for high divorce rates. This is especially true in Italy where all significant cohort effects on the divorce rate could be explained by women's increasing educational attainment. All these results are

⁵ The effect of the middle level of education in Germany is only significant at the 0.10 level. However, this may be because the number of events in the German sample is much smaller than in the Italian and Swedish ones.

relatively robust against the model specification as is shown by the results of an equivalent Cox model in Table 5.

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this paper has been to assess empirically the question of whether women's growing economic independence, arising from better education, has different effects on divorce in Italy, the (former) Federal Republic of Germany and Sweden. Using comparable data for these three countries we first described women's long-term educational attainment and women's divorce rates. Then we estimated the effect of women's educational investments on the rate of divorce. There are several important results for theory and public policy:

- First, in describing the effects of educational expansion on the levels of women's educational attainment in successive birth cohorts, we found a uniform, long-term trend in Italy, Germany and Sweden: women's average levels of educational attainment have steadily risen from birth cohort to birth cohort.
- Second, in charting changes in the process of women's divorce rates across cohorts, we have seen that the long-term trend in marriage duration is in line with the long-term trend in women's educational attainment in Italy, Germany and Sweden: marriage durations fell across cohorts and the proportion of divorces is increasing across cohorts. On the basis of this observation, it seemed very plausible that women's growing economic independence (as a result of better education and improved career opportunities) could be a major factor for the increases in marriage duration across cohort.
- Third, although our understanding of the causes of the change in divorce rates is still incomplete, on the basis of the present analysis, we can at least say that women's increasing educational attainment can explain part of the changes in the process of family dissolution. However, in analyzing the processes of first divorce, we also showed that the effect of women's educational attainment on the duration of marriage is dependent on the country-specific level of differentiation in social accepted living arrangements. We argued

that in Sweden more than in Germany, and in Germany more than in Italy, divorce becomes less selective and marriage becomes more selective with respect to women's educational attainment and that this explains that the effect of women's educational attainment is highest in Italy, less strong in the (former) Republic of Germany, and lowest in Sweden.

Our main conclusion is therefore that both increasing marriage selectivity and decreasing divorce selectivity in the course of the development and differentiation of family systems help to explain observed divorce rate in the 1980s: a decline in Sweden; a levelling off in Germany; and an increase in Italy. We can thus expect that future divorce rates in Germany and Italy will reach a ceiling or will also even decrease when their family systems are sufficiently differentiated and developed. Because of different traditions in Germany and Italy the turning points for the changes in divorce rates will however be located at respective lower levels of divorce.

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Table 1: Sample Size and Number of Events for the Italian, German and Swedish Data Sets

	Italy		FRG		Sweden	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Events	153	1.3	94	7.2	246	13.9
Censored	11834	98.7	1210	92.8	1529	86.1
Total	11987	100.0	1304	100.0	1775	100.0

Table 2: Changes of Women's Highest Educational Attainment in Italy, the Federal Republic of Germany, and Sweden

Country	Educational Level	Cohort 1934-38	Cohort 1939-43	Cohort 1944-48	Cohort 1949-53	Cohort 1954-58
Italy	Low	72.8	64.4	54.5	41.0	30.0
	Medium	24.4	31.4	38.8	50.9	66.6
	High	2.8	4.1	6.7	8.0	3.4
	Total	100	100	100	100	100
	N	2370	2616	2587	2525	1889
FRG	Low	77.7	71.5	67.3	66.1	58.0
	Medium	20.1	24.2	25.1	27.2	35.2
	High	2.2	4.1	7.6	6.7	6.7
	Total	100	100	100	100	100
	N	278	316	263	254	193
Sweden	Low	58.9	51.8	48.7	30.2	30.7
	Medium	25.7	30.6	29.9	44.4	50.9
	High	15.3	17.6	21.4	25.4	18.4
	Total	100	100	100	100	100
	N	202	510	571	378	114

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Table 3: Changes in the Marriage Duration until Divorce in Italy, the Federal Republic of Germany, and Sweden

Country	Duration (Months)	Cohort 1934-38	Cohort 1939-43	Cohort 1944-48	Cohort 1949-53	Cohort 1954-58
Italy	12	99.94	99.88	99.84	99.90	99.90
	24	99.89	99.77	99.74	99.78	99.66
	36	99.81	99.68	99.66	99.70	99.43
	48	99.78	99.54	99.50	99.62	99.33
	60	99.72	99.49	99.33	99.50	99.20
	72	99.64	99.47	99.11	99.32	99.08
	84	99.60	99.41	98.90	99.27	98.79
	96	99.58	99.25	98.66	99.08	97.76
	108	99.51	99.11	98.44	98.80	97.05
	120	99.41	98.94	98.37	98.39	--
	132	99.36	98.71	98.30	98.05	--
	144	99.23	98.46	98.24	97.80	--
	156	99.15	98.30	98.19	--	--
	168	98.98	98.24	--	--	--
	FRG	12	99.42	99.79	99.49	99.67
24		98.84	99.37	99.03	99.33	98.31
36		98.19	98.73	98.64	98.95	96.60
48		97.64	98.09	97.85	98.39	94.30
60		97.37	97.69	97.05	97.11	91.74
72		97.18	97.52	96.64	96.59	88.93
84		96.79	97.35	95.80	95.04	84.61
96		96.21	97.18	94.50	92.29	82.54
108		95.72	96.92	93.66	90.62	79.25
120		95.31	96.56	93.31	89.89	--
132		94.69	96.09	92.97	89.16	--
144		93.65	95.51	92.22	87.18	--
156		92.59	95.02	91.32	--	--
168		91.72	--	90.45	--	--
Sweden		12	99.38	99.67	98.86	98.70
	24	99.08	98.43	96.82	96.91	91.47
	36	98.11	97.69	95.21	94.31	83.78
	48	97.62	96.16	92.89	92.68	--
	60	96.50	94.38	91.72	91.14	--
	72	95.35	93.35	89.47	89.55	--
	84	95.04	92.45	88.33	89.02	--
	96	94.31	91.42	86.66	88.48	--
	108	93.71	90.75	84.88	84.84	--
	120	92.83	89.00	84.18	83.19	--
	132	91.12	88.21	81.69	--	--
	144	88.93	86.43	79.67	--	--
	156	86.61	85.48	78.04	--	--
	168	85.94	84.16	77.26	--	--

Table 4: Estimations of Piecewise Constant Exponential Models for the Divorce Rate

Variable	Model A			Model B		
	Italy	FRG	Sweden	Italy	FRG	Sweden
Constant	-9.72 (46.63)	-7.64 (35.85)	-7.08 (36.77)			
TP 0- 24				-10.13 (34.10)	-9.70 (15.61)	-7.49 (29.68)
TP 24- 48				-10.04 (34.12)	-7.61 (24.63)	-7.03 (29.88)
TP 48- 72				-9.90 (34.05)	-7.76 (23.45)	-7.07 (29.29)
TP 72- 96				-9.67 (34.07)	-7.62 (23.02)	-7.43 (27.28)
TP 96-120				-9.32 (34.38)	-7.40 (22.75)	-7.21 (26.75)
TP 120-144				-9.52 (31.29)	-7.66 (20.26)	-6.75 (26.67)
TP 144-168				-9.61 (28.43)	-6.97 (22.16)	-6.93 (23.91)
TP 168-				-9.79 (18.58)	-7.73 (14.77)	-6.53 (18.41)
Cohort 1939-43	0.49 (1.88)	-0.51 (1.52)	0.22 (0.96)	0.50 (1.90)	-0.51 (1.51)	0.24 (1.05)
Cohort 1944-48	0.68 (2.62)	0.18 (0.58)	0.58 (2.66)	0.71 (2.73)	0.21 (0.70)	0.66 (2.98)
Cohort 1949-53	0.69 (2.47)	0.46 (1.48)	0.49 (1.91)	0.80 (2.80)	0.61 (1.94)	0.64 (2.40)
Cohort 1954-58	1.10 (3.61)	1.11 (3.33)	1.29 (3.60)	1.34 (4.20)	1.54 (4.30)	1.49 (4.03)
AgeM 20-22						
AgeM 23-25						
AgeM 26-28						
AgeM 29-						
Child 2						
Child 3						
Pregnant at Marriage						
Log Likelihood	-1550.9	-790.3	-1883.0	-1545.4	-774.8	-1875.1
DF DF	4	4	4	11	11	11

t statistics are given in brackets.

Model C			Model D		
Italy	FRG	Sweden	Italy	FRG	Sweden
-9.59	-9.24	-6.94	-9.59	-9.59	-7.11
(27.41)	(14.06)	(24.86)	(27.65)	(14.45)	(24.52)
-9.52	-7.18	-6.51	-9.28	-7.44	-6.46
(27.64)	(19.34)	(24.78)	(26.76)	(19.22)	(23.21)
-9.40	-7.36	-6.56	-8.95	-7.52	-6.26
(27.83)	(19.04)	(24.56)	(25.71)	(18.31)	(21.22)
-9.18	-7.24	-6.93	-8.59	-7.36	-6.56
(27.94)	(18.94)	(23.60)	(24.84)	(17.71)	(20.12)
-8.84	-7.03	-6.73	-8.18	-7.13	-6.34
(28.11)	(18.83)	(23.26)	(24.25)	(17.27)	(19.47)
-9.06	-7.30	-6.29	-8.34	-7.39	-5.91
(26.54)	(17.39)	(23.10)	(22.82)	(16.14)	(18.77)
-9.15	-6.63	-6.51	-8.41	-6.71	-6.12
(24.79)	(18.34)	(21.32)	(21.33)	(16.53)	(17.65)
-9.35	-7.39	-6.14	-8.58	-7.48	-5.76
(17.10)	(13.37)	(16.75)	(15.21)	(12.80)	(14.26)
0.49	-0.52	0.20	0.47	-0.48	0.19
(1.85)	(1.55)	(0.88)	(1.79)	(1.43)	(0.84)
0.66	0.06	0.58	0.61	0.06	0.55
(2.46)	(0.20)	(2.60)	(2.31)	(0.21)	(2.48)
0.68	0.39	0.52	0.54	0.41	0.50
(2.29)	(1.20)	(1.94)	(1.83)	(1.24)	(1.85)
1.11	1.28	1.26	0.80	1.20	1.16
(3.27)	(3.42)	(3.35)	(2.35)	(3.22)	(3.10)
-0.68	-0.25	-0.55	-0.71	-0.17	-0.46
(3.12)	(1.07)	(3.69)	(3.28)	(0.69)	(3.00)
-0.41	-0.63	-0.66	-0.44	-0.40	-0.57
(1.85)	(1.85)	(3.48)	(1.97)	(1.15)	(2.89)
-0.76	-0.50	-0.51	-0.79	-0.34	-0.43
(2.26)	(0.92)	(1.73)	(2.33)	(0.63)	(1.44)
-0.43	-1.06	-0.99	-0.58	-1.02	-1.02
(1.02)	(1.03)	(1.67)	(1.36)	(0.99)	(1.72)
			-1.04	-0.40	-0.73
			(5.35)	(1.73)	(4.47)
			-1.40	-0.63	-0.69
			(4.31)	(1.58)	(2.84)
			0.80	0.88	0.33
			(4.35)	(4.13)	(2.46)
-1539.9	-772.6	-1866.3	-1513.3	-762.7	-1853.8
15	15	15	18	18	18



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