Changing Attitudes toward Marriage and Children in Six Countries

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Abstract

This paper examines changes in individual attitudes toward marriage and children using International Social Survey Program (ISSP) data for 1988, 1994, and 2002 in Austria, (West) Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, the Netherlands, and the U.S. Consistent with the idea of deinstitutionalization of marriage and the second demographic transition theory, public opinion in these countries is moving away from traditional norms of universal marriage and obligatory fertility. The changes are mainly cohort-driven. In all countries, female, never married, better educated, employed, and less religious individuals hold less traditional views about marriage and children. However, cross-country differences are also significant. Polarization of public opinion between males and females in all countries; married and never married in Austria and Germany might have implications for family policies.

Introduction

Since the 1960s, Western industrialized societies have experienced dramatic changes in family formation behavior. Marriage and fertility rates have declined, and now the period fertility rates in most European countries are well below the replacement level (e.g. Bongaarts 2002). Other changes, such as the increase in divorce, cohabitation, non-marital births, and voluntary childlessness, have spurred the diversity of living arrangements and life course trajectories (Bumpass and Lu 2000; Cherlin 1992; Heuveline, Timberlake and Furstenberg 2003; Kalmijn 2007; Kiernan 2004; Kuijsten 1996; Raley 2000; Schoenmaeckers and Lodewijckx 1999; Teachman, Tedrow and Crowder 2000; Thornton, Axinn and Xie 2007).

These demographic changes were accompanied by "deinstitutionalization of marriage"(Cherlin 2004) – a shift in attitudes and values away from traditional familistic norms. During the second half of the twentieth century people became more accepting and approving of non-traditional gender roles (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004; Cherlin and Walters 1981; Mason, Czajka and Arber 1976; Mason and Lu 1988; Rindfuss, Brewster and Kavee 1996); premarital sex and same-sex relationships (Loftus 2001; Treas 2002); as well as divorce, cohabitation, non-marital childbearing and childlessness (Cherlin 1992; Pagnini and Rindfuss 1993; Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001; Thornton 1989).

There is also growing evidence of linkages between family attitudes and behavior. Women with positive attitudes toward marriage marry more quickly than those with less positive attitudes (Sassler and Schoen 1999) and are less likely to cohabit (Clarkberg, Stolzenberg and Waite 1995). Positive attitudes toward children and childrearing lead to earlier childbearing and increase marital fertility (Barber 2001).

Despite pervasive demographic and ideational changes, the trends in attitudes toward marriage and children have received relatively little attention. There are studies on changes in family-related attitudes over time in the U.S. (Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001; Thornton 1989), and there are a few studies of family attitudes in different countries at a given time point (Jones and Brayfield 1997). But no study to my knowledge has looked specifically at attitudes toward marriage and children cross-nationally and over time. Furthermore, we do not know whether individual changes or population turnover account

for changes in attitudes on the aggregate level. Finally, it is unclear how U.S. trends will compare to changes in attitudes toward marriage and children in Western European countries. A cross-national analysis of such trends is important to determine whether changes in public opinion vary in countries presenting different cultural, historical and political contexts.

This paper considers changes in individual attitudes toward marriage and children based on International Social Survey Program (ISSP) data for 1988, 1994, and 2002 in six countries: Austria, (West) Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, the Netherlands, and the U.S. I compare the trends in attitudes in European countries to the U.S. trends and theorize the factors leading to similar or diverse patterns of attitude change. Then, I explore what factors predict non-traditional attitudes toward marriage and children and how the salience of these predictors changed over time in the six countries.

This article builds on previous research on trends in social attitudes in the U.S., mechanisms of attitude change, factors predicting individual attitudes, and cross-national studies on ideational change. At issues is whether the mechanisms proposed to understand changes in values and attitudes can be applied to changes in attitudes toward marriage and children. Moving beyond studies of single countries, cross-national data is used to analyze the differences in individual attitudes within and between countries.

Trends in Family-Related Attitudes

Since the 1960s, family-related attitudes have moved away from pro-marriage and pro-natalist norms. In the U.S., declines in disapproval of premarital sex, divorce, and cohabitation were particularly dramatic during the 1960s and the 1970s (Axinn and Thornton 2000; Thornton 1985; Thornton 1989; Treas 2002). Non-marital childbearing has become more accepted (Axinn and Thornton 2000; Pagnini and Rindfuss 1993). The attitudes toward voluntary childlessness have also shifted toward greater approval: 85% of American women in 1962 agreed that all married couple who can ought to have children compared to only 43% in 1980 (Thornton 1989). But at least in the U.S., the trends toward less traditional attitudes on family issues leveled off during the 1980s and 1990s (Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001). Moreover, approval of marriage among young people remained constant between 1962 and 1994 (Axinn and Thornton 2000; Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001; Thornton 1989): most young

Americans reported that they think about getting married in the future and believe that a good marriage is extremely important. At the same time, about 40% of young women and about 35% of men disagree that married people are happier; the numbers were fairly stable from 1976 to 1997 for women and declined slightly for men (Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001).

The limited cross-national research on trends in attitudes toward marriage and children shows that a shift away from traditional views on marriage and children is present in many European countries (Scott 2006). Although the ideal number of children long remained around two, there is some attitudinal evidence that a below-replacement fertility ideal is emerging among younger cohorts in Germany and Austria (Goldstein, Lutz and Testa 2003). A comparative analysis of the trends in family attitudes in the U.S. and Western European countries is still needed to better understand ideational change in different national contexts.

Theories Explaining Attitude Change

There are two major mechanisms of attitude change described in the literature: cohort-replacement (i.e., inter-cohort) change and intra-cohort change.

Cohort replacement or inter-cohort change

The cohort-replacement mechanism has long been used to explain social change (e.g. Ryder 1965). Birth cohorts differ from one another due to exposure to different historical and socio-economic conditions during their early formative years. Because of diverse socialization experiences, each successive cohort adopts distinctive attitudes and values, which remain relatively stable over the life course. Indeed, inter-cohort differences are seen for a wide range of social and political attitudes (Alwin 1990; Brewster and Padavic 2000; Brooks and Bolzendahl 2004; Inglehart and Baker 2000; Lesthaeghe and Surkyn 2004; Mason, Czajka and Arber 1976; Thornton, Alwin and Camburn 1983; Treas 2002). Many researchers focus on factors related to socialization of children such as gender, education, parental characteristics, parental family structure and place of residence explaining changes in family related attitudes (Amato 1988; Axinn and Thornton 1996; Kiecolt and Acock 1988; Trent and South 1992).

However, several theories point to global cultural and structural changes as responsible for the differences in socialization and, therefore, changes in attitudes and values.

Economic modernization and changes in opportunity structure: Changes in family formation attitudes can be seen as part of the global shift away from materialist and traditional values and toward postmaterialist and secular-rational values (Inglehart and Baker 2000; Inglehart 1997). According to the post-materialist argument, economic development brings rising affluence. This economic security gives individuals the luxury of pursuing self-realization and other higher-order goals over basic material needs and liberates them from the normative constraints that go along with economic dependence on family and community. In contrast to materialist values, postmaterialist values are associated with high levels of tolerance for abortion, divorce, and homosexuality and low levels of support for the importance of family life and children, male dominance, and traditional gender-roles (Inglehart and Baker 2000; Inglehart 1997). Inglehart (1997) links the shift from materialist to postmaterialist value priorities to cohort replacement mechanism: thus, a cultural shift emerges among birth cohorts that have grown up with conditions under which survival is taken for granted.

Of course, economic development is associated with many structural and technological changes, including the expansion of educational systems, growth in employment in the service and information sector, the improvement of birth control, and, in a related development, the rise in women's labor force participation. Structural factors influence people's attitudes toward marriage and children as they either prevent individuals from realization of traditional norms regarding marriage and childbearing or open up new opportunities (for women) that compete with or even outweigh the benefits of traditional marriage.

The Second Demographic Transition: This theory also links changes in attitudes on family issues to a global shift in values, insisting on a role for ideology independent of economic factors. As Lesthaeghe and Meekers (1986) put it, "[F]amily formation is conditioned not only by economic factors or opportunity structures, but also by ideational changes: the economic factors produce period fluctuations that are superimposed on long-term (and often cohort-driven) ideational effects".

The term "second demographic transition" (SDT) has been proposed to describe the post 1960s changes in fertility, family formation, and attitudes/values of interest in this paper (Lesthaeghe and Surkyn 2004; Surkyn and Lesthaeghe 2004; Van de Kaa 1987; Van de Kaa 2002). Since 1960, the fertility decline has largely been due to the rise of individualistic values incompatible with traditional marriage. Individual self-realization has become a priority even in marriage (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Giddens 1992; Inglehart and Baker 2000), and career and educational goals have dominated plans to start a family. SDT stresses the importance of increased levels of education and secularization as predictors of changes in attitudes and values.

The limited time series of ISSP data do not permit to test which of these perspectives more accurately reflects the reality. However, both modernization and the SDT theories predict that, on aggregate level, attitudes toward marriage and family will become less traditional due to greater individualism of younger cohorts linked to increased economic security, education and secularism.

Intra-cohort change

In addition to cohort succession, the attitudes of individuals can change over time. Social psychological theories make the mechanism of attitude change seem plausible even after young adulthood. Interactions with others stimulate an active process of social learning through the availability of particular reference groups (Kelley 1952; Merton 1957) or by social comparison processes (Festinger 1954). Alternatively, new life experiences may require adaptation of attitudes to avoid cognitive dissonance (Lesthaeghe and Moors 2002). Although the study of individual-level change has been limited by the lack of panel data to test the relationship between attitudes and life course events, there is ample evidence that people can change their attitudes because of new life experiences (Barber et al. 2002; Lesthaeghe and Moors 2002; Liao and Cai 1995; Morgan and Waite 1987).

Certainly, events such as marriage, cohabitation, childbearing, and divorce may alter or reaffirm views about family. Premarital cohabitation, for example, leads to less traditional attitudes toward family issues (Axinn and Barber 1997). Previous experience with cohabitation and divorce may undermine traditional attitudes toward family (Thornton 1985). Even though people with more traditional attitudes

are more likely to marry and have children in the first place, transitioning to parenthood promotes traditional attitudes toward marriage and children (Moors 2000; Morgan and Waite 1987).

Hypotheses and Rationale

As several theories described above argue, individual-level factors are important predictors of attitudes toward marriage and children and of changes in attitudes over time. Apart from analyzing trends, this paper also tests how gender, age/cohort, marital status, education, employment and religiosity influence support for marriage and children. Gender, education and religiosity are closely related to socialization process while marital status and employment reflect life-course experiences.

Gender: Most women assume primary responsibility for raising children, taking care of elderly relatives, and doing housework. Having to combine or even choose between career and family, they were found to be less enthusiastic about marriage and childbearing than men. In the U.S., women are more likely to think that people, and especially women, can lead satisfying lives without marriage (Kaufman and Goldscheider 2007); more likely to disagree that it is better to be married than single (Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001) and that marriage is for life (Trent and South 1992). Men are more likely to believe that married people are happier (Axinn and Thornton 2000). American women are more accepting of childlessness (Koropeckyj-Cox and Pendell 2007). British and Dutch women voice lower levels of support than men for the centrality of children (Jones and Brayfield 1997). Thus, I expect women to express greater disagreement than men with traditional attitudes toward marriage and children.

Age/Cohort: Age, cohort and period effects are confounded in cross-sectional studies, but previous research suggests that changes in attitudes and values are mostly cohort-driven with younger cohort holding less traditional attitudes. Older people are more supportive of traditional marriage (Pagnini and Rindfuss 1993) and less supportive of voluntary childlessness (Koropeckyj-Cox and Pendell 2007); they also view children as more central to their lives compared to younger people (Jones and Brayfield 1997). Because the early socialization of older cohorts occurred when marriage was a stronger institution, I expect older people to hold more traditional attitudes than younger ones toward marriage and children.

Marital status: The greater traditionalism of married people found in cross-sectional studies may result from self-selection into marriage of people who hold more traditional marital views and/or from marital experiences encouraging married people to adopt more traditional outlooks. Married people are particularly likely to think that marriage is important for life satisfaction (Kaufman and Goldscheider 2007). They are also more supportive of marriage and disapproving of divorce and non-marital fertility (Trent and South 1992). Those who have experienced marriage feel more negative about remaining single (Axinn and Barber 1997). I hypothesize that married people will hold more traditional attitudes toward marriage and children than those with other marital statuses.

Education and employment: Besides leading to higher income, education brings exposure to new ideas and social networks producing enduring effect on social attitudes. In many countries the better educated delay marriage, have fewer children and view family roles as less central (e.g Sobotka 2008). They also place less emphasis on marriage and hold more positive attitudes toward voluntary childlessness (Kaufman and Goldscheider 2007; Koropeckyj-Cox and Pendell 2007; Trent and South 1992). Participation in the labor force also exposes both men and women to non-traditional ideas about family and gender roles; it also increases economic resources and the share of non-kin in personal networks. Employed men and women have less traditional attitudes toward family and children (Trent and South 1992) compared to those individuals who are not in the labor force, and these differences increased for American women from 1972 to 1986 (Glass 1992). Thus, I expect that better educated and employed people will hold less traditional attitudes toward marriage and children.

Religiosity: Religious institutions promote traditional views on marriage and family. Religious affiliation and religiosity have been linked with disapproval of divorce (Thornton 1985), non-marital childbearing (Pagnini and Rindfuss 1993) and voluntary childlessness (Koropeckyj-Cox and Pendell 2007). Religious people also view children as more central to life (Jones and Brayfield 1997). I expect that those who frequently attend religious services will express more traditional views about marriage and children than people who do not go to church or who attend religious services infrequently.

Unfortunately, because of the data constraints, it is impossible to test in this research the extent to which parental status and previous experiences of divorce and cohabitation [1] influence people's attitudes toward marriage and children.

The Country Context

Social scientists interested in cross-national research argue that individual-level factors, whether they work through inter- or intra-cohort mechanisms, cannot fully explain cross-national differences in attitudes and values. Consequently, they pay close attention to contextual factors, such as demographic trends, political regime, educational system, family laws, welfare regime and policies. Cross-national differences in attitudes are often larger than the within-country differences between socio-demographic groups (Inglehart and Baker 2000; Lesthaeghe and Meekers 1986). For example, within religious denominations, people residing in more secularized countries tend to hold less traditional attitudes and values (Inglehart and Baker 2000). Then, family laws and welfare policies have been linked to gender-role attitudes and family formation behavior (e.g. Sainsbury 1999; Sjoberg 2004). Although the effect of pronatalist policies on fertility behavior is limited, family policies do seem to affect fertility intentions by influencing the cost of raising children (Gauthier 2007).

The 1988, 1994, and 2002 Family and Gender modules of ISSP offer several comparable attitudinal items on marriage and children with which to test time trends in attitudes, their individual-level correlates, and their comparability across different countries. Six countries participated in all three waves: Austria, West Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, the Netherlands, and the U.S. [2] These countries are often grouped together under the label "Western developed countries in demographic and sociological research as they reached approximately the same level of economic development. However, as Table 1 shows, demographic differences between these countries are notable. The U.S. and Ireland have the highest fertility levels among Western industrialized countries while Germany and Austria are among the lowest in Europe (Eurostat, 2002). Germany also has one of the highest proportions childless in Europe (Dorbritz 2008). In terms of marriage, the Dutch have the highest mean age at first marriage (and first childbearing) in Europe while the Irish are distinguished by low divorce rates.

[Table 1: Selected demographic characteristics, 2002]

These six countries also represent at least two of the welfare regime types identified by Esping-Anderson (1990), thus allowing for several strategic comparisons. The U.S. can be compared to European countries, specifically to Great Britain and Ireland, two other English-speaking countries with liberal welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1990) characterized by non-interventionist stances toward family policy. Austria and Germany are conservative-corporatist welfare regimes with family policies promoting the male-breadwinner family type with half-day childcare, child allowances, and taxation discouraging second earners in the family (Dorbritz 2008; Prskawetz 2008). The Netherlands is a hybrid case, grouped with the Nordic social-democratic welfare states by Esping-Andersen but sharing some characteristics with conservative welfare states (Pfau-Effinger 2004). Since the 1980s, Dutch cohabitants have enjoyed the same legal rights as married people; in 2001, The Netherlands became the first to legalize same-sex marriage. At the same time, relatively large child allowances support women leaving the labor force once they have children. However, greater availability of part-time jobs and flexible work schedules also support part-time employment of mothers of small children in the Netherlands (Fokkema 2008)

Macro-level country characteristics inform the theorizing and interpretation of this paper, but a formal test of macro-level characteristics is not possible, because data are limited to six countries. Based on demographic and policy differences, we might expect the Irish – with laisser-faire family policies, relatively high fertility and low female employment, strong Catholic influence, and late legalization of divorce – to have been slower to abandon traditional attitudes favoring marriage and children. The expectations for other countries are less clear. Despite pro-natalist policies, fertility has been low Germany and Austria compared to the U.S. and Great Britain where policies are more indifferent to family issues (Sigle-Rushton 2008). Although Dutch policies have been aimed more at protecting families with children from poverty rather than increasing fertility, birth rate remains relatively high (Fokkema 2008). Low fertility might indicate decreasing support for marriage and children, but it might also be indicative of structural constrains on fertility.

Data, Method and Measures

Common ISSP questionnaires were fielded by independent survey organizations in different countries, often as part of another survey. The sampling schemes and modes of survey administration differ from country to country, but final samples are representative of the national populations.

Dependent variables in this research are based on three questions on attitudes toward marriage and children from the 1988, 1994, and 2002 surveys: "To what extent do you agree or disagree…"

"Married people are generally happier than unmarried people."

"People who want children ought to get married."

"People who have never had children lead empty lives."

The usefulness of other attitude items is questionable due to limited variation in responses.

The response categories ("strongly agree", "agree", "neither agree nor disagree", "disagree", and "strongly disagree") were reverse-coded so that larger scores represent greater agreement with traditional attitudes.

I compare the country means over time using each question separately to discern the trend in the attitudes. The three questions are reasonably highly correlated and load on one factor, so I average the scores to construct a scale (alpha=.6) ranging from 1 (non-traditional) to 5 (traditional). I use the scale to compare the country means within 10-year age-cohorts over time and to estimate OLS regression models. Missing data on the dependent variable is 9%. Cases with missing data were not significantly different in their characteristics from those with complete data.

The first model includes only dummy variables for the six countries and the three survey years. The second model adds age-cohort dummy variables. Model 3 incorporates individual-level predictors: gender, marital status, education, employment status, and religiosity. Gender is a dummy variable (female = 1, else male). Marital status is a nominal variable that consists of single/never married (reference), widowed, divorced/separated and married categories. Education is measured in years of schooling [3]. People who work either full- or part-time are coded as employed. Religiosity is measured as frequency of attendance at religious services: people who attend religious services once a month or more are coded as

religious and those who attend religious services less frequently form the reference category. Descriptive statistics for all variables are presented in Appendix A.

Model 4 includes significant interactions between the year of the survey and individual-level factors to determine whether the importance of these predictors changes over time and whether the changes in attitudes are consistent with the cohort-replacement hypothesis. Estimating Models 3 and 4 for each country separately tests how the effects of individual-level factors vary cross-nationally.

Results

Trends

Figure 1 addresses the question of whether public opinion in the six countries has shifted in a uniform way toward the non-traditional beliefs.

[Figure 1: Trends in the attitudes toward marriage and children (weighted means)]

For the item, "Married people are generally happier," there were three distinct patterns of significant change ($p<.05$) in public opinion. 1) The U.S. shows relatively steady decline in the support for the statement from 1988 to 1994 to 2002. 2) Changing very little from 1988 to 1994, the Germans and particularly the Austrians grew less certain of the benefits of marriage from 1994 to 2002. In Great Britain, Ireland, and The Netherlands, there was a 1988-1994 drop in the belief that married people are happier but support rebounded between 1994 and 2002, although only the change for The Netherlands was statistically significant.

There is more consistency across countries for the statement, "Marriage is better if people want to have children." In all six countries, there were 1998-1994 and 1994-2002 declines in mean approval (although the declines for the U.S. were not statistically significant). The 1988-1994 decline was especially steep in Germany and The Netherlands as was the 1994-2002 decline in Austria. Because of the different pace of the declines, the differences between the country means were greater in 1994 and 2002 than in 1988.

Responses to "People without children lead empty lives" show two distinctive patterns of change. 1) The support for the statement declined gradually from 1988 to 1994 to 2002 in Great Britain, the U.S.

and Ireland. 2) Surprisingly, Austrians and Germans expressed greater support for this opinion in 1994 than 1988 although only for Germany was the change statistically significant.

To evaluate the extent to which these data support the idea that Western public opinion is trending uniformly away from traditional attitudes supportive of marriage and children, Table 2 shows that over the entire 1988-2002 period, none of the countries became more traditional on any of the items. On the contrary, 5 out of 6 grew significantly less likely to insist that married people were happier or that people without children led empty lives. And, all the countries, including Ireland and the U.S., became less likely to agree that marriage is better if people want children.

[Table 2: Number of Countries with Attitude Change on Marriage and Children: Austria, West Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, Netherlands, and U.S.]

Cohort differences

The analysis of the means does not tell us whether the changes in attitudes were due to cohort-replacement or inter-cohort change. For the family attitudes scale, Figure 2 presents the means over time by age-cohort for each country. As expected, younger cohorts are consistently less traditional than older cohorts for every country and time point. Moreover, the trends in attitudes for different cohorts within countries are more similar than the trends for given cohorts between countries. This is consistent with the cohort-replacement mechanism and offers one explanation for the common trend toward less traditional views of family.

[Figure 2: Age-cohort differences in support for marriage and children]

Multivariate analysis

Differences between countries or cohorts might reflect cross-country or cross-cohort differences in education, religiosity and other compositional factors. To explore the mechanisms of attitude change further and to test the effect of individual-level factors on attitudes toward marriage and children, the multivariate results of OLS regression models in Table 3 consider the association of variables hypothesized to predict the three-item family attitude scale.

[Table 3: Predictors of support for marriage and children (unstandardized coefficients)]

In Model 1, the coefficients for year are negative and statistically significant, consistent with our observation of declining support for traditional family attitudes across both 1988-1994 and 1994-2002 periods. Compared to U.S. (the omitted reference country), only Austrians hold significantly more traditional attitudes. Germans are not significantly different, but the British and Irish hold somewhat less traditional attitudes toward marriage and children and the Dutch have attitudes that are the least traditional. Overall, country and survey year explain about 11% of the variation in individual family attitudes.

Adding age cohorts, Model 2 shows that support for traditional family views increases monotonically with advancing age, net of the time period and country of residence. The differences are substantial: on a 5-point scale, the mean approval of traditional attitudes toward marriage and children for respondents ages 65 and older is almost one point greater than the mean for respondents ages 18-24. However, since the country coefficients remained significant, age differences do not explain cross-national variations in attitudes toward marriage and children. Nor do they explain liberalization of attitudes toward marriage and children over time as the coefficients for years also remain statistically significant. Nonetheless, the importance of age cohorts is seen in the increase of explained variation to 24%.

Although the data are poorly suited to separate age, cohort and period effects, note that the coefficients for survey year and for age cohorts 25-34 and 35-44 are of roughly the same magnitude but have opposite signs. In other words, they will cancel each other out if predicted means are calculated for these time points and age groups. This suggests that intra-cohort changes in attitudes toward marriage and children were small (at least for these cohorts from 1988 to 1994 to 2002).

Model 3 adds to Model 2 gender, marital status, education, employment status and religiosity, and these factors greatly reduce the size of the age coefficients. Now the support for marriage and children in age cohort 25-34 is not different from the attitudes of age cohort 18-24. As expected, older cohorts are consistently more traditional than younger generations.

Models 3 and 4 show that support for marriage and children depends on gender. Net of the other factors, women tend to agree less than men that married people are happier, marriage better if people want to have children and people without children lead empty lives. Moreover, the statistically significant and negative interaction effect of gender with year 2002 in Model 4 shows that male-female differences in attitudes toward marriage and children increased in 2002 compared to 1988 and 1994.

Consistent with the previous research and expectations, married and widowed individuals are more traditional in their attitudes toward marriage and children than never married, net of the other factors. Divorced or separated individuals are also more supportive of marriage and children than single/never married, but less supportive than currently married.

Better educated and employed people express less support for marriage and children, net of the other factors. However, the effect of education decreased in 2002 compared to 1988 and 1994, indicating that non-traditional attitudes have become common among less educated people. People who attend religious services at least once a month hold more traditional views about marriage and children, net of the other factors, consistent with the previous research and expectations. Overall, Model 3 explains about 30% of variation in the individual attitudes toward marriage and children, and Model 4 only slightly improves the model fit.

Taking into account the characteristics of respondents reduces time period coefficients indicating that population composition became more favorable toward non-traditional attitudes toward marriage and children. Despite population aging conducive of more traditional outlook on family issues in societies, younger cohorts are, on average, better educated, less religious, and less likely to be married. Nevertheless, the time period coefficients remain significant, supporting cohort-replacement mechanism of attitude change. Also, individual-level factors do not explain away the country differences in attitudes toward marriage and children. Contrary to my expectation, the U.S. and Austria, not Ireland, are the most traditional followed closely by West Germany and then by Great Britain and Ireland; The Netherlands is the most non-traditional. The unexplained cross-national differences point out to the importance of contextual factors for understanding country variations in attitudes.

Cross-national differences

Does the effect of individual-level factors vary across countries? I ran Model 3 (without interactions) and Model 4 (with time interactions) for each country separately. The results are presented in Table 4. Only significant time interactions were retained in the final models.

[Table 4: Predictors of support for marriage and children by country (unstandardized coefficients)]

Overall, the effects of individual-level factors on attitudes toward marriage and children are strikingly similar across the nations. In all countries, older cohorts hold more traditional attitudes toward marriage and children, and the differences between 18-24, 25-34, and 35-44 age cohorts are not statistically significant once other individual-level variables are controlled. Females, never married, widowed, better educated and non-religious people are significantly less traditional in all countries. The divorced and separated are more traditional in Austria, Germany, and the U.S., but not in Great Britain, Ireland, and The Netherlands. Divorced/separated Austrians hold significantly more traditional attitudes than divorced/separated British or Irish ($p<.05$) [4]. The effect of employment is not significant in Ireland, marginally significant in Germany and Austria, but highly significant in Great Britain, the U.S. and The Netherlands where people who have a job hold less traditional attitudes toward marriage and children.

The interaction effects also differ across countries. In Austria, the effect of education and religiosity became more important in 2002 compared to 1988 and 1994. Moreover, the increased traditionalism of frequent church-goers and decreased traditionalism of better educated [5] people explain the differences in attitudes toward marriage and children from 1994 to 2002. Thus, the changes in attitudes over time in Austria, as presented in Figure 1, were largely due to changes in population composition and to inter-cohort change. In Germany, the effect of employment was larger in 2002, and the inclusion of interaction effects reduced the period coefficients, although they remained significant. What also interesting about Germany and Austria is that married individuals in these countries are considerably more traditional than single/never married, compared to Great Britain, Ireland and the

Netherlands. German and Austrian societies seem to be polarized by marital status with regard to the support for marriage and children.

In Great Britain, women were more non-traditional than men in 1988 and 2002, but not in 1994. Roughly equal survey year coefficients mean that the support for marriage and children in this country decreased from 1988 to 1994 but remained stable from 1994 to 2002, net of the other factors. On the other hand, in the U.S., the effect of gender increased dramatically from 1988 to 2002, making the effect of year 2002 insignificant. This means that in the U.S., the changes in attitudes toward marriage and children from 1994 to 2002 were largely due to increased non-traditionalism of American women. It also suggests that U.S. attitudes toward marriage and children have become polarized by gender. A similar effect of gender was found in Ireland as women in this country became less traditional in their attitudes toward marriage and children in 2002 compared to 1988. But married Irish became even more traditional in 1994 compared to 1988 despite the general shift away from traditional views about marriage and children during this period. Similar to Great Britain, the support for marriage and children in Ireland decreased significantly from 1988 to 1994 but not from 1994 to 2002.

In The Netherlands, the effect of being married was smaller in 1994 and 2002 compared to 1988 and the effect of education was smaller in 2002 compared to 1988 and 1994 amid the general 1988-2002 shift toward greater non-traditionalism in attitudes toward marriage and children. Thus, the differences in attitudes by education and marital status have become less pronounced in the Netherlands. However, the substantial differences in the support for marriage and children by religiosity level endure.

Conclusion and Discussion

The analysis of the 1988-2002 trends in attitudes toward marriage and children revealed that public opinion in Austria, West Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, Netherlands, and U.S. moved away from traditional norms of universal marriage and obligatory fertility – the development predicted by the second demographic transition theory. This attitudinal change also indicates that the deinstitutionalization of marriage – "the weakening of the social norms that define people's behavior in a social institution such as marriage" (Cherlin 2004) – is underway in both the U.S. and Western Europe. Furthermore, there is

sufficient evidence that the changes in family attitudes are predominately cohort driven, which is in line with much previous research on attitude and value change. At the same time, significant time interactions suggest that at least some liberalization in attitudes toward marriage and children during the 1988-2002 period was due to intra-cohort changes. Specifically, females and less educated people have become less supportive of traditional views on marriage and children.

Demographic characteristics are important predictors of support for marriage and children, and many of them have similar effects in the West European countries and the U.S. In all countries, women never married, better educated, employed, and relatively secularized individuals hold less traditional views about marriage and children. This is consistent with previous findings on changes in other social attitudes and with theoretical expectations. Women are significantly more non-traditional than men, and this seems to be equally true for countries belonging to conservative and liberal welfare regimes. Greater non-traditionalism of women might indicate the salience of work-family conflict that disproportionately affects women in countries with "non-interventionist" or "modified male bread-winner" family policies.

Despite the obvious similarities between countries, the cross-national differences are also significant. First, the trends in attitudes toward marriage and children are relatively similar in countries with shared cultural context and welfare regimes. Thus, Germany and Austria, Great Britain and Ireland experienced fairly similar trajectories of change in attitudes toward marriage and children from 1988 to 2002. The U.S. trend resembles Great Britain's more than any other country, and the Netherlands stand apart due to far greater non-traditionalism of Dutch.

Second, there are country differences in the magnitude of the effects of individual-level factors on support for marriage and children, which points to polarizations of public opinion by specific socio-demographic groups within the countries. Married people are much more traditional than single/never married in Austria and Germany compared to Great Britain, Ireland and the Netherlands. This might be attributed to a conservative gender regime supporting the male-breadwinner family type and discouraging women with small children from combining work and family. Enjoying certain financial benefits, married

people might be satisfied with their own situation while those who have non-traditional attitudes are likely to avoid getting married and having children in the first place.

Finally, the countries differ in how the effects of individual characteristics have changed over time. From 1988 to 2002, women have become even less traditional than men in the U.S. and Ireland. The differences in attitudes toward marriage and children based on marital status and education decreased in the Netherlands. This indicates that shifts in public opinion do not proceed linearly in time and uniformly across socio-demographic groups. The cohort-replacement mechanism might be too simplistic to account for relatively short-term trends. Furthermore, large unexplained cross-national differences point to the importance of contextual factors, especially family policies, for understanding country variations in support for marriage and children.

The changes away from traditional attitudes toward marriage and children indicate that ideational change is pervasive and warrants revisions of family policies and regulations. In Austria and Germany, the attempts to boost fertility levels by increasing child transfers and making parental leave more generous were largely unsuccessful. But they may well have led to polarization of public opinion with regard to benefits of marriage and importance of children between married and single/never married individuals. Greater non-traditionalism of women in all six countries might indicate that the current family policies (or their absence) produce high level of family-work conflict for women. In those countries where fertility levels remain relatively high (Great Britain, Ireland, U.S.) this situation might have negative consequences for children because of insufficient time or/and financial resources of parents. Indeed, the poverty rates among families with small children are relatively high in both the U.S. and Great Britain compared to other European countries.

Future surveys that extend the time series with more countries will help in teasing out the long-term trends in attitudes toward marriage and children. More countries will enable the refined multilevel test of the effect of the different contextual factors on public opinion. More longitudinal data would also be helpful to distinguish between age, period and cohort effects on attitude change. Furthermore,

additional questions about attitudes toward marriage and children that take into account the changing meaning of marriage would improve the reliability of measurement.

Endnotes:

1. ISSP does not provide information about respondents' number of children. Although there is a question about the number of children in the household, it was missing for the U.S. in 1988. The questions about previous experiences with divorce and cohabitation were asked only in 1988.
2. Hungary also participated in all three waves of the program, but it was not included in the analysis because of the missing data on one of the key independent variables.
3. The years of education variable was missing for Germany in 1988 and 1994 and for Austria in 2002. I recoded them from the level of education variable that was available for these countries and years.
4. The significance of differences in coefficients between countries was tested by $z = (b_1 - b_2)/(sqr(SE_{b1}^2 - SE_{b2}^2))$.
5. Because the *years* of education variable for Austria in 2002 was recoded from the *level* of education variable, these results should be treated with caution.

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Table 1. Selected demographic characteristics, 2002

	U.S.	Austria	West Germany	Ireland	UK	Netherlands
Non-marital births (%)	34.0	33.8	26.1	31.2	40.6	29.1
Total fertility rate (TFR)	2.00	1.33	1.34	1.97	1.63	1.73
Mean age at child-bearing	27.3	28.8	30.0	30.7	28.8	30.3
Crude divorce rate (CDR)	3.6	2.4	2.5	0.7	2.7	2.1
Crude marriage rate (CMR)	7.5	4.5	4.8	5.1	5.0	5.2
Women labor force participation	66.1	61.3	58.9	55.4	65.2	66.2
Type of welfare state	Liberal	Conser-vative	Conser-vative	Liberal	Liberal	Social-democratic

Source: Eurostat; National Center for Health Statistics; U.S. Bureau of Census; Esping-Andersen (1990)

Figure 1. Trends in the attitudes toward marriage and children (weighted means)

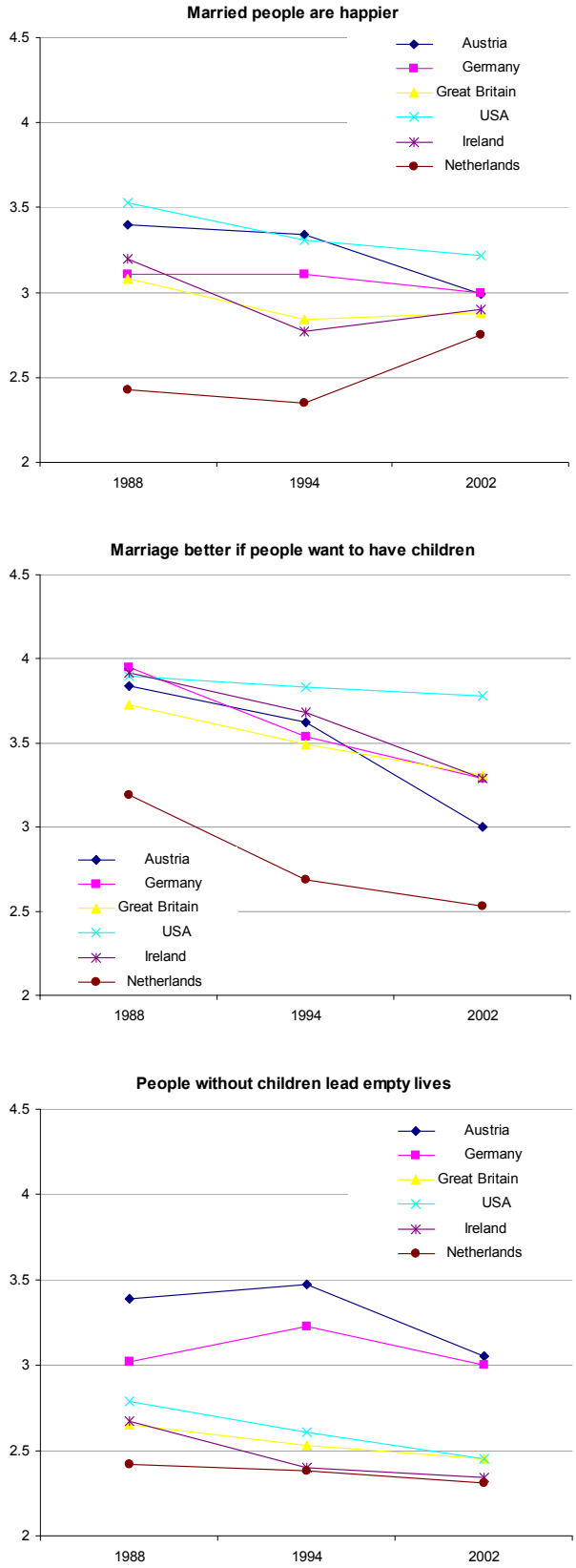

Table 2. Number of Countries with Attitude Change on Marriage and Children: Austria, West Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, Netherlands, and U.S.

	1988-1994	1994-2002	1988-2002
Married people are happier			
Less traditional	4	3	5
More traditional	0	1	0
Marriage better if people want to have children			
Less traditional	5	5	6
More traditional	0	0	0
People without children lead empty lives			
Less traditional	3	3	5
More traditional	1	0	0

$p<.05$

Figure 2. Age-cohort differences in support for marriage and children

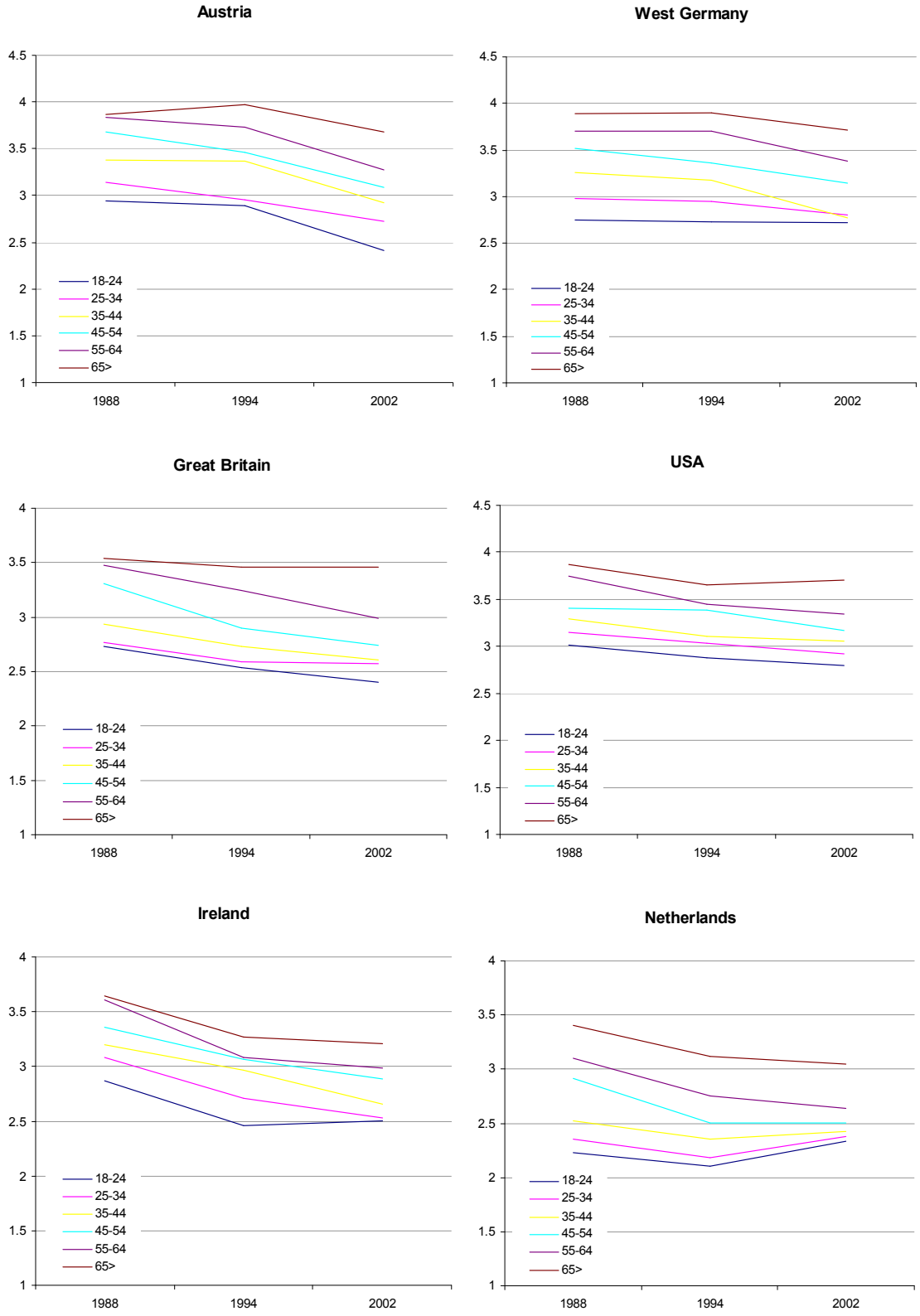

Table 3. Predictors of support for marriage and children (unstandardized coefficients)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Year (1988)				
1994	-.156***	-.166***	-.131***	-.128***
2002	-.321***	-.337***	-.246***	-.292***
Country (USA)				
Austria	.058*	.018	-.033	-.025
W. Germany	-.005	-.023	-.064***	-.067***
Great Britain	-.231***	-.316***	-.286***	-.285***
Ireland	-.246***	-.268***	-.412***	-.410***
Netherlands	-.750***	-.707***	-.694***	-.695***
Age (18-24)				
25-34		.151***	-.001	-.003
35-44		.318***	.065**	.062**
45-54		.520***	.217***	.212***
44-64		.738***	.363***	.359***
65+		.970***	.543***	.539***
Female			-.229***	-.192***
Female x 2002			-	-.112***
Marital status (never married)				
Married			.420***	.420***
Widowed			.396***	.396***
Divorced/Separated			.133***	.135***
Years of education			-.025***	-.028***
Years of education x 2002			-	.010**
Employed			-.077***	-.075***
Church attendance			.261***	.261***
Constant	3.428***	2.993***	3.065***	3.154***
R-squared	.114	.237	.303	.304
N	*23,146*	*23,146*	*23,146*	*23,146*

***p<.001, **p<.05, *p<.01

Table 4. Predictors of support for marriage and children by country (unstandardized coefficients)

	Austria		W. Germany		Great Britain	
	Model 3	Model 4	Model 3	Model 4	Model 3	Model 4
Female	-.237***	-.223***	-.192***	-.191***	-.235***	-.284***
Female x 1994						.213**
Female x 2002						
Age (18-24)						
25-34	.036	.040	-.062	-.063	.017	.025
35-44	.147*	.149*	-.017	-.014	.077	.086
45-54	.273***	.280***	.172**	.176**	.259***	.269***
44-64	.366***	.375***	.353***	.354***	.450***	.456***
65+	.569***	.560***	.517***	.516***	.642***	.647***
Marital st. (never married)						
Married	.539***	.521***	.609***	.608***	.260***	.255***
Married x 1994						
Married x 2002						
Widowed	.495***	.473***	.586***	.591***	.238**	.230**
Divorced/Separated	.316**	.308**	.192**	.192**	-.007	-.045
Years of education	-.046***	-.030**	-.029***	-.028***	-.017*	-.017*
Years of education x 2002		-.041**				
Employed	-.099*	-.096*	-.067*	-.045	-.118***	-.122***
Employed x 2002				-.141***		
Church attendance	.294***	.207***	.206***	.205***	.233***	.228***
Church att. x 2002		.186***				
Year (1988)						
1994	.033	.015	-.060**	-.063*	-.177***	-.298***
2002	-.326***	-.000	-.236***	-.166***	-.239***	-.237***
Constant	3.348***	3.243***	3.146***	3.128***	3.044***	3.072***
R-squared	.264	.269	.243	.244	.255	.258
N	3,389	3,389	5,171	5,171	3,611	3,611

***p<.001, **p<.05, *p<.01

Shaded areas indicate significant differences in coefficients between countries (p<.05). Specifically: a) the coefficients for married in Austria and Germany are larger than in Great Britain, Ireland, and the Netherlands; b) the coefficient for married in the U.S. is larger than in Germany; c) the coefficient for divorced in Austria is larger than in Great Britain and Ireland.

Table 4. (continued)

	USA		Ireland		Netherlands	
	Model 3	Model 4	Model 3	Model 4	Model 3	Model 4
Female	-.220***	-.150***	-.230***	-.171***	-.264***	-.263***
Female x 1994						
Female x 2002		-.234***		-.148*		
Age (18-24)						
25-34	.031	.029	-.005	.002	.029	.001
35-44	.078	.074	.049	.057	.045	.014
45-54	.235***	.233***	.172**	.172**	.149**	.118*
44-64	.367***	.361***	.228***	.237***	.274***	.243***
65+	.506***	.504***	.352***	.354***	.545***	.510***
Marital st. (never married)						
Married	.402***	.406***	.350***	.306***	.323***	.414***
Married x 1994				.155*		-.131**
Married x 2002						-.115*
Widowed	.389***	.385***	.280***	.276**	.362***	.367***
Divorced/Separated	.176***	.175***	-.037	-.062	-.067	-.069
Years of education	-.013**	-.013**	-.025***	-.025***	-.032***	-.039***
Years of education x 2002						.023***
Employed	-.088**	-.088**	-.039***	-.040***	-.073**	-.074**
Employed x 2002						
Church attendance	.203***	.205***	.229***	.226***	.364***	.361***
Church att. x 2002						
Year (1988)						
1994	-.132***	-.133***	-.328***	-.424***	-.177***	-.093
2002	-.192***	-.058	-.420***	-.328***	-.035	-.255***
Constant	3.168***	3.128***	3.155***	3.150***	2.749***	2.790***
R-squared	.214	.218	.216	.220	.262	.266
N	3,810	3,810	2,784	2,784	4,379	4,379

Appendix A. Descriptive statistics (all numbers are percents unless noted otherwise)

	Austria	W. Germany	Great Britain	USA	Ireland	Netherlands
Scale (mean)	3.27	3.31	3.02	3.28	3.00	2.53
Age (mean)	45.3	45.8	46.8	45.2	43.9	42.5
18-24	12.4	11.9	10.2	10.1	14.8	15.6
25-34	20.2	20.9	18.6	22.4	20.4	20.2
35-44	18.7	18.4	19.6	23.0	20.4	23.1
45-54	17.1	15.8	17.9	15.1	17.0	16.1
55-64	14.4	15.2	15.2	11.9	12.4	13.1
65+	17.2	18.1	18.6	17.5	15.0	12.0
Female	52.1	53.0	54.4	57.5	53.3	54.9
Single/Never married	25.1	23.2	16.5	21.0	32.0	30.2
Married	57.9	60.4	69.6	51.8	58.8	57.3
Widowed	8.8	10.0	7.1	9.4	7.3	6.1
Divorced/Separated	8.2	5.4	6.8	17.9	1.9	6.3
Years of education	10.2	10.1	11.5	13.1	12.0	12.3
Employed	52.8	50.2	57.8	62.8	51.1	44.6
Religious (attend services at least once a month)	34.9	25.2	21.4	49.5	78.1	24.9
N 1988	833	2,358	1,146	1,334	956	1,507
N 1994	826	1,990	840	1,355	801	1,770
N 2000	1,730	825	1,625	1,121	1,028	1,102
N	3,389	5,173	3,611	3,810	2,785	4,379