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DIVORCE CULTURE AND MARITAL GENDER EQUALITY
A Cross-National Study

CARRIE YODANIS
University of British Columbia, Vancouver

This article examines the cross-national relationship between a divorce culture on a national level and gender equality in intact marriages. Based on multilevel analysis of data from 22 countries in the International Social Survey Programme, the results indicate that a divorce culture on the national level is associated with greater marital equality. In other words, in countries where divorce is accepted and practiced, the distribution of work between women and men in marriage is more equal. These findings support the enhanced equality hypothesis that the possibility of divorce provides women with leverage to gain more equal status within marriage.

Keywords: divorce culture; gender equality; marriage; cross-national

One in two marriages ends in divorce. This statistic is a source of much attention in the United States. The focus, however, has largely been on the marriage that ends. Research examining why divorces occur and the impact of divorce on the members of divorcing families is abundant. This article takes a different focus and looks at the one marriage out of two that does not end. Previous research and theory propose that intact marriages and the level of marital gender equality are affected by a growing divorce culture, including both increasing divorce rates and acceptance of divorce. In this article, I explore these ideas cross-nationally and look to see if a national divorce culture is associated with more or less gender equality in marriage.

MARITAL GENDER INEQUALITY IN A DIVORCE CULTURE

Most studies on divorce examine the consequences of personally experiencing divorce for individual women, men, and children. However, divorce can also be
viewed as part of a macro, cultural-level phenomenon affecting people throughout a society regardless of whether they individually experience divorce. In her book *Marriage in a Culture of Divorce*, Karla Hackstaff (1999) contrasts marriage culture and divorce culture. A marriage culture includes the belief, assumption, and practice that marriage is a given and forever. A divorce culture, in comparison, is a set of beliefs and practices that define marriage as optional and conditional, with divorce being an option if the marriage does not work.

Research on the consequences of rising divorce rates and especially changing attitudes toward divorce on a national level is limited. There is some evidence that high national divorce rates are related to lower fertility rates, later age at marriage, and lower rates of spousal violence (Gibson 1976; Lester 1996; Sleebos 2003; Stevenson and Wolfers 2003; Wolfinger 2003). In addition, some research suggests that women’s increasing labor force participation is an outcome of high divorce rates. In societies characterized by high divorce rates, women may be less willing to be financially dependent on men in marriage and therefore more likely to participate in the labor force throughout the life course (Diekmann 1994; Hou and Omwanda 1997). Most notably, a debate continues regarding how a growing divorce culture affects gender equality in intact marriages. This article contributes to this debate.

Bargaining theory focuses on how couples negotiate agreements in the relationship, including how to divide the work. According to bargaining theory, partners have options both within and outside of marriage, and each partner’s ability to negotiate in the bargaining process is based on the options that are available to him or her. Particularly relevant is the concept of a “divorce threat point.” When bargaining occurs within the context of the possibility of divorce, partners consider their alternatives if their relationship should end, and the attractiveness of their anticipated alternatives affect their negotiations (Lundberg and Pollak 1996; Manser and Brown 1980; Muthoo 2000).

The divorce threat point operates on an individual level and is dependent on environmental factors, such as the level of public assistance to divorced single mothers and divorce laws regarding the division of property (Lundberg and Pollak 1996). Stevenson and Wolfers (2003) find support for the importance of the contextual dimension of the threat point when they find that the introduction of no-fault divorce laws across U.S. states is related to significant decreases in rates of spousal violence in the states. In other words, when it became easier to leave a relationship, gender dynamics within the relationship improved. As they conclude, “unilateral divorce changed the bargaining power in marriage and therefore impacted many marriages—not simply the extra few divorces enabled by unilateral divorce” (p. 19).

This article adds a cross-national component to this argument. Nations, more so than the 50 states in the United States, have varying laws and dominant ideologies that make it easier or harder for individuals to divorce whether or not they want to. In the context of strict laws and attitudes against divorce, individual divorce threat points will be high or nonexistent.
Building on bargaining theory, the literature outlines two possible ways that a divorce culture on a national level can affect the level of gender equality in marriages. An enhanced equality hypothesis suggests that divorce culture may increase equality between partners. Unlike in a marriage culture where women stay in the relationship no matter how unsatisfied or unequal they are, men risk losing women in a divorce culture if the relationship does not move toward equality. Thus, divorce becomes a tool that women use to secure change and greater equality in marital relationships. Comparing archival in-depth interviews with couples married in the 1950s with her own in-depth interviews with couples married in 1970s, Hackstaff (1999) finds support for the enhanced equality hypothesis within the United States. While there is variation within each generation, the overall pattern that emerges is a correlated growth in divorce culture and equality in marriage.

In a counter diminished equality hypothesis, a divorce culture may increase inequality between marriage partners. The divorce alternative increases men’s power relative to women’s. In a marriage culture, men stay in the marriage no matter what. In a divorce culture, in comparison, women risk losing men if they push for change in the relationship. Divorce can be a threat that men use against women in an effort to thwart their attempts at marital equality and thereby can reduce women’s power in marriage. Given that women often experience declines in economic well-being with divorce, this threat can be powerful in controlling women’s attempts to strive for equality. In her classic study of dual-career couples, Hochschild (1989) finds support for the diminished equality hypothesis that women are not able to push for change in the unequal distribution of work in relationships because of the threat of divorce.

Other research contributes to this debate. Frisco and Williams (2003) found that women’s, but not men’s, perceptions of inequality in housework are related to divorce. In other words, when women believe they are doing more than their fair share, they were more than twice as likely to seek a divorce. This study adds support for the enhanced equality hypothesis that when divorce is more accepted and practiced, women may be able and willing to push for greater equality in the relationship, using the threat of divorce as leverage. In contrast, Sanchez and Gager (2000) found that while wives were more likely than husbands to believe that the division of household work was unfair, perceptions of unfairness are not related to increased likelihood of divorce. They also found that “women are less likely to act on feelings of dissatisfaction than men” (Gager and Sanchez 2003, 42). Building on aspects of bargaining theory, they attribute this to the fact that men perceive more alternatives to the relationship than do women. Thus, even though they perceived the relationship as unfair and may be dissatisfied with the relationship, their perceived lack of alternatives keeps women in unequal relationships. This supports the diminished equality hypothesis that men may be more likely than women to use divorce for greater power within their relationships and that a divorce culture should be related to less equality in marital relationships.

In this article, I address the question, How is a divorce culture, measured as both national practices and attitudes toward divorce, related to gender equality in
marriage on an individual level? In addressing this question, this article provides a cross-national examination of the enhanced and diminished marital equality hypotheses of divorce culture. Most of the research about these hypotheses is based on data from the United States, a country with a very high divorce culture. Looking across nations makes it possible to see if the theories hold up in different cultural contexts and if variation between countries in divorce culture is related to variation in marital relationships (Kohn 1987). This is what I set out to do in this article.

Cross-national research brings many challenges. Concerns in quantitative research, including rigor of measurement, ruling out spuriousness, and ensuring time order, are magnified when studying patterns across a range of countries that vary greatly in culture, language, and history (Lee and Haas 1993). To make cross-national comparisons, the research here relies on measures that are, in some cases, not as strong as those found in country-specific studies, and rather than establish causality, I examine interesting cross-national patterns. Given the challenges, modesty is required when considering one study’s implications. Yet cross-national research is a worthwhile endeavor that brings new and instructive perspectives to a topic.

While this study cannot establish causal order, the enhanced equality hypothesis will be supported over the diminished equality hypothesis if marriages are more egalitarian in countries characterized by strong divorce cultures and less egalitarian in countries with weak divorce cultures. The diminished equality hypothesis will be supported if the opposite pattern emerges—marriages are less egalitarian in countries characterized by strong divorce cultures.

**METHOD**

The data used in this article come primarily from the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP). The ISSP, analogous to a cross-nationally comparative General Social Survey, is an annual social survey conducted in countries throughout the world. Since 1986, a different topic is selected each year as a module of focus in addition to the repeated items. For this analysis, data from the 1994 Family and Changing Gender Roles module are used.

The data are gathered through a 15-minute questionnaire, conducted as a supplement to regular national surveys or as a separate survey. The samples for each country are national household probability samples. The questionnaire is originally written in English and translated into the national language(s) for conducting the survey. The data are then compiled into English-language data sets.

Twenty-two countries are included in the analysis. In the 1994 ISSP data set, Spain and the Netherlands were dropped due to insufficient data. For this analysis, I use two levels of data: country and individual level. At the individual level, the total sample is 9,529 married women. To be included in the sample, participants had to be currently married. People who were currently cohabiting were dropped from the sample. Only women were included in the analysis. This decision was made based
on the nature of the research questions as well as the fact that key variables about
wives, such as education, age, gender ideology, and opinions about women’s
employment, were available only for the respondent.

At the country level, data are based on the entire sample, including married and
not married women and men. This decision is based on the need to measure the
overall dominant ideology and practices of the country.

Outcome Variable: Marital Gender Inequality

The level of marital gender inequality is measured using the division of house-
hold labor. The distribution of housework between husband and wife is measured
using reports of who does the following four household tasks: shopping for grocer-
ies, deciding what to have for dinner, doing the laundry, and caring for the sick.
Responses include “always or usually the woman,” “equally,” “usually or always
the man,” and “a third person.” Those who responded that a third person did the task
were dropped. A mean score was computed by summing the responses and divid-
ing by the number of completed answers for each case. The scale has a Cronbach’s
alpha of .68. A high score indicates a traditional division of labor with women
doing more housework than do men.

Over the years, there has been much research and debate surrounding the best
measure of housework. Survey-based, self-reported measures of time spent on
household work are susceptible to overestimations as well as discrepancies
between spouses. In particular, proportionate measures used here provide less pre-
cise information on housework and cannot measure variation in the extent of differ-
ences in household work (Coltrane 2000). Time diaries provide more precision in
the amount and differences in hours of housework. However, there is not consensus
that one measure is clearly advantageous over the other. Indeed, time diary data are
often converted to proportionate measures to estimate relative contribution
(Coltrane 2000; Shelton and Daphne 1996). While there are weaknesses to this
measure, similar measures have been used regularly in cross-national research
(Batalova and Cohen 2002; Davis and Greenstein 2004; Diefenbach 2002).

Individual-Level Independent Variables

Gender role ideology is conceptualized as beliefs about gender roles in mar-
rriage. The variable is a composite measure of the following three questions from
the ISSP: “Do you agree or disagree . . . (1) A job is all right, but what most women
really want is a home and children, (2) Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as
working for pay, (3) A man’s job is to earn money; a woman’s job is to look after the
home and family.” For each statement, respondents indicated whether they strongly
agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree. These
three indicators were confirmed for selection based on factor analysis and theory.
The composite measure was created by summing the scores on the items and divid-
ing by the number of the responses given. A high score indicates a nontraditional
gender ideology. The scale has a Cronbach’s alpha of .68. The range in average scores across countries is not large. The most traditional ideology is found in Russia, with a mean score of 2.16, and the most nontraditional ideology is in East Germany, with a mean score of 3.80.

Relative earnings is included to account for the relative resource theory of marital gender equality, which explains that valued resources, including income, can be exchanged within the relationship to opt out of doing housework (Brines 1993). This variable measures who earns more, the husband or wife. The five responses include “the man earns much more,” “the man earns a bit more,” “we earn about the same amount,” “the woman earns a bit more,” and “the woman earns much more.” A high score indicates the woman earns more. The variable was recoded to include respondents who were not employed. Using questions regarding the employment status of each partner, the variable is coded as “man earns much more” if the husband is employed and the wife is not. Likewise, the variable is coded “woman earns much more” if the wife is employed and the husband is not. Slightly more than 68 percent of the women are employed either full- or part-time or retired. In nearly 77 percent of the couples, the man earns much or a bit more, while in 10 percent of the couples, women do.

Given the theoretical importance of this variable, it is included in the model although a substantial portion (16 percent) of the data was missing, which is not unusual for income-related questions. The results for all models are similar with and without the adjustments for missing values. However, to correct for the possibility of selection bias, which could result if these cases were dropped from the analysis, the missing cases were replaced at the mean, and a dummy variable indicating a missing value on this variable is added to the model to control for possible effects of nonresponse.

Age is included in the equation to control for cohort effects in marital relations. The respondent’s age is measured in years. For the sample, the mean age is 45 years.

Education is constructed as a dummy variable, indicating whether the respondent has a university degree (1 = university degree). Nearly 11 percent of the sample has a university degree.

Cohabitation is also associated with greater marital equality (Batalova and Cohen 2002). Thus, a dummy variable is included in the equation, indicating whether the couple lived together before marrying (1 = cohabited). Nearly 29 percent of the sample cohabited before marriage.

Additional people in the household is a variable included to serve as a proxy for presence of children in the household. The presence of children affects gender roles in marriage, often resulting in more traditional gender arrangements (Nomaguchi and Milkie 2003). In the ISSP, the best variable available to control for the presence of children is the measure of number of people in the household. The variable is dichotomized, with three or more people in the household coded as 1. While this variable indicates the possibility that children live with the married couple, it
cannot distinguish between children and others, such as an elderly parent or other adults. The average number of people in a household is 3.5, and 71.4 percent of the sample are households with three or more people.

Divorce attitudes are based on the following three questions from the ISSP: “Do you agree or disagree . . . (1) Divorce is usually the best solution when a couple can’t seem to work out their marriage problems, (2) When there are children in the family, parents should stay together even if they don’t get along, (3) Even when there are no children, a married couple should stay together even if they don’t get along.” Responses are given on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Items were coded so that a high score indicates an acceptance of divorce or high divorce culture. Items were combined by summing the scores and dividing by the number of responses given. The scale has a Cronbach’s alpha of .57.

Divorce experiences can also be related to gender equality in marriage. In particular, there is evidence that women who have been previously divorced may be more reluctant to remarry and thereby have more power when they do (Pyke 1994). Therefore, two variables measuring if the husband and wife had been previously divorced are included in the models (1 = has been divorced). More than 13 percent of women and men report a previous divorce. In 4 percent of couples, both the husband and wife were previously divorced. Divorce experience of respondent and partner explains 1 percent of the variance in divorce attitudes.

Country-Level Independent Variables

Divorce culture is a composite measure of attitudes toward divorce and divorce rates. The measure is a factor score combining these two items using principal components analysis. National aggregates of divorce attitudes, based on the mean score on the divorce attitudes measure for each country, are used. Divorce rates are based on data from the 1997 and 1998 United Nations Demographic Yearbooks. For each country, the rates are based on the number of divorces per 1,000 midyear population, and the running average of divorce rates from 1993, 1994, and 1995 are used to correspond with the 1994 ISSP data. In the UN Yearbook, rates are provided only for those countries where there were more than 100 divorces in a given year. In Ireland (where divorce was illegal until 1997) and the Philippines (where divorce is also illegal), rates are set at 0. West and East Germany receive the same divorce rate, that reported for Germany, and Northern Ireland and England receive the divorce rate reported for the United Kingdom.

Gender role ideology. A second country-level variable, dominant gender ideology, is included to account for the fact that part of the country-level effect of a divorce culture on marital equality may be spurious since nontraditional values are related both to greater marital equality (Komter 1989) and to a higher divorce culture. Gender ideology on the country level is measured using the mean score for
each country on the individual-level gender role ideology index. The correlation between the national measures of divorce culture and gender role ideology is rather weak ($r = .386, p = .076$).

**Analysis**

Multilevel analysis is conducted using the Hierarchical Linear Modeling software program (HLM 5.0). HLM is useful when analyzing data in which individuals are nested within larger groupings. It is possible to take advantage of the layered structure of the data by simultaneously examining the effects of individual- and country-level variables on an individual outcome variable, while adjusting for the correlation between errors that results from layered data (Hox 1995; Teachman and Crowder 2002). The analysis presented in this article incorporates two levels of data—individual- and country-level variables on the outcome variable, marital equality.

On the individual level, relative income, individual gender ideology, age, education, and divorce attitudes are centered at the grand mean. To explore the country-level impact, I test if the intercept of the individual-level equation varies by levels of divorce culture and gender ideology. Both country-level variables are centered at the grand mean. Age, education, relative income, cohabitation, presence of children, and individual divorce attitudes have fixed effects across countries.

**RESULTS**

**Country-Level Description of Divorce Culture and Marital Equality**

Country-level descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1. Countries are ranked according to the level of divorce culture. Surprisingly, given the vast variation between countries in their history, religion, family laws, and the status of women, there is not a large amount of variation in attitudes toward divorce. Austria has the strongest acceptance of divorce (with a mean score of 4 on a 5-point scale), and Japan has the lowest acceptance (with a mean score of 2.87). Divorce rates range from a high of 4.29 in the United States to lows of .46 in Italy and 0 in Ireland and the Philippines, where divorce is not legal. The United States has the strongest divorce culture. Catholic, familialistic, and collectivist countries, including Italy, Ireland, Poland, and the Philippines, have the lowest culture of divorce.

Turning to average measure of marital equality across countries, again it is interesting to see that despite large variation between the countries, the housework on average remains unequally distributed, with women being responsible for most of the work. In no country was the housework on average distributed equally or primarily done by men (as would be indicated by a score of 1 to 3).
Bivariate, Country-Level Analysis

In a preliminary examination of the relationship between a divorce culture and marital gender equality, Figure 1 shows a scatterplot graphing national average aggregate scores on housework by each country’s level of divorce culture. The countries fall primarily in the upper left hand and lower right hand quadrants of the graph, indicating that low divorce cultures correspond with women doing on average most of the housework and that high divorce cultures correspond with a more

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Divorce Culture</th>
<th>Marital Inequality</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attitude Rate</td>
<td>Index Score</td>
<td>Housework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>1.13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
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<td>3.96</td>
<td>2.01</td>
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<td>Canada</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>0.71</td>
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<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>2.97</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>−2.28</td>
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</table>

a. Countries are ranked according to divorce culture.
b. Divorce rate (divorces per 1,000 population), average of 1993, 1994, and 1995.
c. Factor score from factor analysis with divorce attitudes and divorce rates.
d. Based on the sample of married women.
e. Score on division of housework index, ranges from 1 to 5, with a high score indicating women’s doing more of the work.
f. Given the rates for Germany.
g. Given the rates for the United Kingdom.
h. Divorce was illegal in the Philippines and Ireland (until 1997).
equal division of labor between women and men. The countries in the upper left quadrant include Japan, the Philippines, Poland, Ireland, Italy, and Bulgaria. These countries tend to be characterized by traditional gender role ideologies and Catholicism. The countries in the lower right quadrant include Russia, the United States, Canada, Norway, and Sweden, among others. These countries, with the exception of Russia, tend to have less traditional gender role ideologies. Russia is an interesting and complicated case, where after dramatic economic and cultural changes, beliefs about ideal gender roles are quite different from the reality where women always worked for pay and often must continue to work for reasons of economic hardship rather than personal choice (Ashwin 2000). While a few countries fall into the upper right and lower left quadrants, these countries tend to fall close to the means of the variables. In other words, no country has either a very high divorce culture and a highly unequal division of household labor or a low divorce culture and an egalitarian division of labor.
Multilevel Analysis

Individual-level effects. Looking first at the relationship between individual-level variables and the division of housework, findings from previous research are supported. Results are shown in Table 2. Model 1 shows the effects of individual-level variables commonly used to explain the division of household labor. Supporting resource theory, the more women earn relative to men, the more equal the division of housework. In addition, women with university degrees report a more egalitarian division of labor than women with less education. In models 1 and 2, the nonresponses for the income variable do not differ significantly on the division of household labor. In the later models, there is a small yet significant difference.

Previous findings regarding the effect of gender ideology on the distribution of housework are also supported. When women have a nontraditional gender role ideology, the division of labor is less unequal. In addition, as a cohort effect would expect, older women do significantly more housework compared to younger women. Women who cohabited before marriage are significantly more likely to...
report greater equality in the distribution of housework, and the number of people in the household is related to women’s doing more housework relative to men.

Model 2 adds individual-level variables regarding divorce experience and attitudes. Neither husbands’ nor wives’ previous experiences with divorce nor women’s individual divorce attitudes are significantly related to the distribution of housework.

*Country-level effects.* Model 3 adds the country-level measure of divorce culture, the focus of this article. In this multilevel model, the intercept of housework, or the mean distribution of housework across countries of average divorce culture for women of average age, gender ideology, and relative income; with no university education; and who did not cohabit before marriage, is 3.98, indicating a general tendency toward women’s doing most of the work. The divorce culture of a country is related to the distribution of housework within marriage. The stronger the divorce culture, the more equal the division of housework. Specifically, controlling for women’s resource contribution, gender role ideology, and other characteristics found to be related to marital equality, with each increase of 1 on the divorce culture index, the average score on the housework index decreases by .09, moving toward a more equal division of labor. The size of the effect is not very large but is not inconsequential given the rigidity of the gendered division of labor across cultures. This is addressed in more detail in the Discussion. Model 4 adds the country-level variable, dominant gender ideology, to the model. The gender ideology of a country is not directly related to the distribution of housework.

Comparing the variance components between models 1 and 2, individual-level divorce variables do not explain additional variation in the division of household labor. Looking at model 3, it is apparent that national divorce culture explains a substantial portion of the variation in the intercept across countries. Divorce culture reduces the amount of unexplained variance in the intercept by a third.

**DISCUSSION**

The main objective of this article is to examine the cross-national relationship between a divorce culture on a national level and gender equality in intact marriages. In particular, I look across countries to see if there is more support for the argument that a divorce culture is associated with enhanced or diminished equality for women in marriage.

Overall, the results provide support for the enhanced equality theory over the diminished equality hypothesis. A strong divorce culture on the national level is associated with a more, not less, equal distribution of work in marriages. Thus, it appears that the concern that divorce would limit women’s ability to push for equality in marriage does not appear to be the overall pattern. In countries where divorce
is more accepted and widely practiced, women’s position within marriages is better.

In addition, the national divorce culture of a country, rather than individual divorce attitudes or experiences, appears to be particularly important. This adds confirmation to the argument that divorce threat points and, correspondingly, women and men’s options and perceived alternatives within relationships are influenced by social and cultural context. If divorce is not an accepted or available option within a society, the divorce threat point is remote, limiting the extent to which alternatives to the relationship can be used to bargain for equality within the relationship.

This study also adds new perspectives on the study of divorce. First, the findings raise the often underresearched issue that divorce is not merely behavior on the micro level but is associated with shifting cultures on the macro level. By conceptualizing and operationalizing divorce culture as a composite measure of both the attitudes toward and the practices of divorce on a national level, divorce can be viewed as not merely a personal experience but a part of a dramatic cultural and social change. As such, the influence of these changes may not be limited to those individuals and families who directly experience divorce. Rather, these changes affect everyone within a society, including married couples. This follows the longtime call by feminist researchers to move away from thinking about the family as an autonomous unit and toward realizing the complex ways in which the social contextual shapes family relationships (Little Fox and McBride Murry 2000; Thorne and Yalom 1982).

Second, the research reaffirms that like many social and cultural changes, the correlates of a growing divorce culture are complex, including simultaneous advantages and disadvantages. While much research shows the potential negative consequences of divorce, this study provides support for the often overlooked positive correlates of a divorce culture. Researchers have long argued that divorce can provide physical and psychological safety for women and children by providing opportunities to leave abusive or unhealthy relationships (Katz et al. 1995). This study adds to the evidence that there may be benefits to the availability of divorce that extend beyond extreme, life-threatening situations and ironically may contribute to the strengthening of marriages. At a time when efforts such as the implementation of covenant marriages are trying to reverse the divorce culture and make it more difficult to leave marriages, understanding the positive outcomes of a divorce culture is more important than ever (Rosier and Feld 2000).

When considering the results, there are some methodological limitations to keep in mind. First, the relationship between the divorce culture and the division of housework is present and significant but not very strong. This is not surprising given previous research that shows a strong persistence of an unequal division of household labor regardless of women’s resource contribution or couples’ gender ideology (Bittman et al. 2003; Brines 1994; Greenstein 2000). The striking
consistency in women’s responsibility for household labor across countries that vary greatly in culture, social structures, and social institutions is itself a testament to the rigidity of the gender imbalance in the division of labor. Under these conditions, a weak relationship is to be expected. Indeed, it is not unreasonable to argue that the relationship is substantial given the phenomenon under study.

As is often the case with cross-sectional data, it is important to caution against making claims of causal order. It is possible that divorce is more likely to be accepted and possible in countries characterized by greater marital equality. Nonetheless, this does not negate the finding that marriages are less, not more, unequal in strong divorce cultures.

Furthermore, the possibility of a selectivity bias should also be considered. According to the enhanced equality hypothesis, women in unequal couples will use divorce as a threat to create change. Following from this reasoning, unequal couples may be selected out of the sample in divorce cultures because they have already divorced. Again, however, the dissolution of unequal marriages and the persistence of egalitarian marriages in a divorce culture do not contradict the support for the enhanced equality hypothesis.

Gender role ideology is included in the analysis to try to rule out some possible spurious national-level factors that might explain the relationship between divorce culture and marital gender equality. There are likely to be other variables that affect this relationship. For example, religious history and culture unquestionably explain variation in the divorce culture across countries. Some of these variables, such as religion, may be less likely to have direct relationships to marital equality than indirect relationships through such variables as gender ideology. Other variables such as women’s political and occupational status relative to men’s may also explain part of the relationship. To test for another possible spurious measure, the model was rerun replacing the country-level measure of gender role ideology with the United Nations measure of gender empowerment, a composite measure of women’s representation in political office and women’s occupational status and pay relative to men’s (results not shown here). This measure was strongly correlated with the measure of gender ideology used in the analysis in this article. The results of the model incorporating this second measure were very similar to the results presented in this article, with the country-level effect of divorce culture on marital gender equality remaining significant. The national measure of gender empowerment was not significantly related to marital equality.

This does not rule out the possibility of spuriousness, and there are also likely to be questions regarding other unmeasured historical, political, economic, and cultural variation among the countries. In research focusing on a few countries, it is possible to consider the detailed specifics of each case and variable, such as marital gender equality, and to consider the complex factors that led to variation in divorce cultures across countries. This unquestionably is an interesting future direction for cross-national research on divorce culture. Such questions, however, involve a different type of cross-national research than the one presented in this article. This study seeks to examine patterns across a larger sample of countries—an approach
that Kohn (1987) calls “country as the unit of analysis.” While this approach necessitates a loss in the depth of detail for each specific variable and case, it provides the advantage of a breadth of information across more cases. Using this approach, Kohn argues that it is not imperative to explain how the countries got to their current status. Such questions are better left to other cross-national research designs. Rather, the focus is on studying the correlates of the current social circumstances of nations, regardless of the various historical or cultural processes that lead to them.

REFERENCES


Carrie Yodanis is an assistant professor in the School of Social Work and Family Studies at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, British Columbia. Integrating diverse data sources, her current research explores how and why inequality and violence in marriage and intimate relationships vary across countries.

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