

# **Exploring Change and Variation in the Economic Underpinnings of Non-Marriage for Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century Europe**

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## **Background:**

Starting in the 1970s, marriage rates started to decline for young people in Western Europe and the United States, while the age of first marriage increased steadily throughout the remainder of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Van de Kaa 1987; Lesthaeghe 1995). Cohabitation rates steadily increased for younger people over this same time period, suggesting that large numbers of young people were delaying marriage, but cohabiting while doing so ( Bumpass et al. 1991). In most developed countries this time period was also one of tremendous change in the educational and economic standing of men and women (Oppenheimer 1994). As such, much research has focused on trying to understand how the economic characteristics of individuals are associated with the delay of marriage, entry into cohabitation, the transition from cohabitation into marriage, and the ordering and timing of these transitions. What is far less clear, however, is who never makes the transition into marriage at all—whether directly or after cohabitation.

Conclusively researching non-marriage beyond using predicted estimations was not possible for birth cohorts of the late 1950s to mid-1960s until recently, because it remained to be seen what percentage of individuals would eventually marry, albeit at a very late age. Although recent data on the 1950-1955 birth cohorts indicates that marriage has remained near universal (90%-95%) in almost all developed countries (UN), as it has been since the 1950s (Hajnal 1965; Dixon 1978), studies of the economic underpinnings of delayed marriage and cohabitation suggests that there may be inequality regarding who eventually marries at all: Working with estimates of future behavior, while 90% of American women in the 1950 to 1965 birth cohorts are expected to marry, only 88.6% of non-college educated women will do so while 94.6% of college educated women will likely marry (Goldstein & Kenney 2001). This statistic and others also suggests that women's educational attainment may have come to matter more for non-marriage over time, yet little research has explored this phenomenon in Europe. Moreover, a relationship between non-marriage and social class has a strong, historic precedence in Western Europe, dating back to patterns of higher non-marriage rates in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century and prior (Hajnal

1965; Coontz 2005). The macro-level economic well-being of entire nations has historically been linked to these individual-level patterns of inequality in marriage (or non-marriage) (Dixon 1978). Much recent research looking at marriage timing suggests that as labor markets became more competitive and unstable (due to increasing levels of globalization over the 1980s-2000s) men with poor education are the least likely to marry (by a given time) (Blossfeld et. al. 2005). In countries where gender equality is high (often countries where female labor force participation rates are high) research similarly finds that women with the highest education are the most likely to marry (by a given time) compared to their less educated counterparts (Kalmijn 2013). Other theories suggest that a social class gradient of marriage may be non-existent or negligible in countries with generous welfare regimes where the economic consequences of an individual's poor economic standing may be cushioned by the state (Blossfeld et. al. 2005).

### **Research Questions:**

The primary question is whether a historic return to unequal entry into marriage by social class has occurred across Europe and if so, can the patterns of countries be explained by economic and social changes in recent European history, such as increased globalization levels (liberalization of markets) and increased gender equality? More specifically, for men and women in Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland, how does the probability of non-marriage vary across educational groups for pre-1960 birth cohorts (cohorts born 1934-1953) and post-1960 birth cohorts (cohorts born 1954-1963)? Can differences across countries in the association between education and non-marriage be explained by country-level characteristics, such as female labor force participation rates, globalization level, and/or welfare regime type, (over the periods individuals were marrying, i.e. 1950s to 1990s)? In other words, do patterns of gradients for groups of countries match groupings by level of female labor force participation rates, globalization level, or welfare regime type?

To highlight change over time, are there countries in which the relationship between women's economic standing and ever-marrying has changed between the birth cohorts of '34-'53 and '54-'63? Has women's economic potential come to matter more over time? Is change observed for men? Specifically, for men and women separately within each country of Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, and Switzerland, is there

significant change over time in the educational gradient of non-marriage between the 1953-1963 birth cohort and the 1934-1952 birth cohort? For each of these countries and sexes, can observed change over time in the educational gradient of non-marriage be explained by change over time in these countries' macro-level indicators? Is there evidence that the likelihood of non-marriage increased for less educated men in countries where globalization levels substantially increased from 1970 to 1980? Similarly, is there evidence that the likelihood of non-marriage increased for less educated women in countries where female labor force participation rates substantially increased from 1970 to 1980? Are the gradients unchanging (and less steep) in countries with generous welfare regimes?

### **Data & Methods:**

Data on complete, first marital histories of the focal cohorts is only available in two distinct datasets; Data for the 1934-1953 cohort comes from Waves 1-3 of the Survey of Health, Aging, and Retirement in Europe (SHARE). Data for the 1954-1963 cohort come from the Generations and Gender Surveys (GGS). Both datasets provide nationally representative samples and because of their complex sampling designs, the analyses are weighted using survey commands in STATA. Both datasets measure educational attainment, year of first marriage, and other control variables which allow merging of the two dataset for the following countries: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, and Sweden (after release in June 2014). For Switzerland, available in SHARE, data for the younger cohort comes from its Families and Generations Survey 2013 and will be publically available in early 2015 (UNECE 2013). Within each country, the analyses separately focus on men and women with completed first marriage histories—i.e. ages 40 to 70 at the time of interview. Logistic regression models first test the educational gradient of non-marriage for each cohort separately and then directly test change over time in the educational gradient of non-marriage (interacting cohort with educational attainment). Findings from the separate cohort and combined cohort analyses are contextualized by welfare regime type (using the Esping-Anderson 1990 typology) and the relative ranking (and ranking of percent change over time) of macro-level variables such as Female Labor Force Participation Rate (from the OECD Labor Statistics Unit) and Globalization Level (from KOF-ETH Swiss Economic Institute) which include measures for all study countries for every year from 1950 through 2010.

## **Preliminary Results:**

In looking only at men born between 1934-1953, Denmark, France, and Germany demonstrate significant gradients of non-marriage in which the least educated men are the most likely to never marry. Czech Republic is the only other country in the dataset which demonstrates a significant relationship between educational attainment and non-marriage for men, demonstrating that those with mid-level education are the most likely to ever marry compared to those with more or less education. For women born 1934-1953, Belgium, Greece, Italy, and Poland demonstrate significant gradients in which the highest educated women are the most likely to never marry. Czech Republic was the only other country in the dataset with a significant relationship, demonstrating that the most educated as well as the least educated women were the most likely to marry in comparison to mid-level educated women.

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