



Regional value differences in Europe and the social consequences of divorce: A test of the stigmatization hypothesis [☆]

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Abstract

In this paper, we develop a novel way of testing the stigmatization hypothesis. The stigmatization hypothesis argues that people who break traditional norms, experience sanctions from the people that surround them. We apply this hypothesis to the case of divorce and examine whether higher normative intolerance toward divorce in the region of residence lead to declines in social contacts after divorce. To test the hypothesis, we match data from the European Community Household Panel (ECHP) to data from the European Values Study (EVS). The ECHP data are used to model individual changes in social contacts after divorce. The EVS data are used to develop measures of individual attitudes against divorce in 65 European regions. Multilevel analyses are used to link the two, where individuals are nested in regions. The results provide partial confirmation for the stigmatization hypothesis. We first find that attitudes about divorce not only differ significantly between countries, they also differ significantly between regions within countries. Second, in regions where there is more disapproval of divorce, women experience greater declines in contacts with friends and relatives after divorce, men and women experience greater declines in neighborhood contacts, and men are more likely to end their club memberships. Third, we find that the stigmatization effect is primarily present for divorcees who did not move after divorce. Our analyses provide more direct evidence for the operation of social norms than previous studies on family behavior have done.

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1. Introduction

The values that people have, vary both among countries and among regions within countries. Countries in the north and west of Europe are more liberal in a number of life domains, for example, than countries in the south of Europe (Arts et al., 2003; Inglehart and Baker, 2000). Within countries, there exist differences as well: people in the south of Italy are more traditional than people in the north of Italy, people in Bayern in Germany are more traditional than people in other *Bundesländer*, and people in Murcia in Spain are more traditional than people in Asturias (Gubert, 1995). In this paper, we argue that such value differences go together with divergent regional normative climates that may have consequences for individual behavior. More specifically, we argue that when a social norm exists in a certain geographic area, the people who break this norm in that area will experience sanctions.

To examine this argument, we focus on regional differences in traditional family values in Europe and we link these differences to the social consequences that individuals experience when they divorce. Our expectation is that in regions where divorce is less accepted, changes in social contacts will be greater after divorce and it will be more likely that divorcees experience a loss in social contacts. We call this the stigmatization hypothesis. To test the stigmatization hypothesis, information on regional values is obtained from multinational cross-sectional data (i.e., the European Values Studies). Information on the social consequences of divorce for individuals is taken from multinational prospective panel data (i.e., the European Community Household Panel). Both datasets have information for a large number of European countries and include detailed regional information. By combining the two multinational datasets in a multilevel analysis, we are able to test our ecological hypothesis.

There are several reasons why our approach is novel. First, our paper adds to the literature on European values. This literature has described in detail how values differ between countries, but it has said little about how regions differ within countries (for an exception, see Beugelsdijk and Noorderhaven, 2003). In addition, the literature on European values is largely descriptive (Arts and Halman, 2004; Arts et al., 2003). Little attention is paid to the question of whether value differences have consequences for individual behavior. We try to assess in a systematic fashion whether regional climates matter for one aspect of an individual's life chances, his or her social contacts.

Second, our paper adds to the literature on marriage and divorce by emphasizing the contextual level. There have been several studies examining how divorce affects the social contacts and social networks of individuals, but these have primarily examined the issue from an individual perspective and have not yet incorporated explicit measures of community characteristics (Amato, 2000). There are studies that relate family behavior—and divorce in particular—to other regional characteristics, but these studies do not consider the individual level and are therefore purely aggregate (Lester, 1999; Lester and Abe, 1993; Yang and Lester, 1991).

Third, our paper tries to come closer to establishing the existence of social norms. Most research on social norms is experimental and it has been difficult to establish the operation of norms using large-scale survey data (Cialdini and Trost, 1998). Prior survey analyses of

social norms in the family area generally look at how internalized norms, as reflected in individual attitudes, affect life course behavior (Lesthaeghe, 2002). These analyses provide incomplete evidence of norms because they do not have information on the attitudes and behavior of the people connected to the individual. In a sense, these studies are more about values than about norms. Because norms operate in a social fashion, an ecological approach is more suitable.

More recently, the ecological approach has been applied to other forms of demographic behavior, such as teenage pregnancy and premarital childbearing (Sucoff and Upchurch, 1998). These studies relate structural characteristics at the aggregate level to individual behavior (e.g., average income in a neighborhood and individual marriage choices). Although the community effects in these studies are often interpreted in terms of social norms, the structural measures that are used are far removed from such interpretations (South and Baumer, 2000). Nonetheless, these studies come closer to the notion of norms in that characteristics of the social setting are included in models of individual behavior. Our work falls in this upcoming tradition of research and extends it in two ways: by applying the issue to multiple regions in multiple countries and by using data about cultural rather than structural characteristics at the aggregate level.

2. Theoretical background

The sociological and psychological literature on divorce has presented competing hypotheses about the social consequences of divorce. One hypothesis is that a divorce only leads to the disappearance of the marital relationship, without consequences for social integration in other life domains. Another theory holds that a divorce is not simply the end of the marital relationship, but also an experience that isolates people from the contexts in which they were embedded when married (Jacobson, 1983). A third theory is that divorced people actively respond to their divorce by rebuilding their networks and reorganizing their social life. Such a response may compensate for the loss of the spouse and perhaps even increase a person's integration in society (Gerstel, 1988). The more optimistic perspective on divorce fits into a theoretical perspective which regards marriage as a form of 'dyadic withdrawal' from the social world (Milardo and Allan, 2000), whereas the more pessimistic perspective on divorce fits into a theoretical perspective which views marriage as a facilitator of other forms of integration (Waite and Gallagher, 2000).

To examine effects of divorce on social contacts empirically, different approaches have been followed. Some authors focus on subjective indicators of a person's social life, such as loneliness (Dykstra, 1995; Peters and Liefbroer, 1997), whereas other authors describe objective features of integration, such as the size and composition of the social (support) network (Broese van Groenou, 1994; Miller et al., 1998; Terhell et al., 2004). Yet other authors focus on more general indicators of social contact, such as the number of contacts with friends, family members and neighbors and indicators of social participation, such as membership in church and social clubs (Kalmijn and Broese van Groenou, 2005). The research design is often cross-sectional and few authors are able to make comparisons in contacts before and after divorce. In addition, many studies zoom in on life *after* divorce and examine how differences in networks among divorcees can be explained.

The evidence does not generally suggest that a decline in social integration occurs. Although there are clear effects on loneliness—divorcees are lonelier (Peters and Liefbroer, 1997)—effects on integration vary, depending on the type of indicator studied. Contacts

with friends are sometimes intensified, especially among women, contacts with neighbors decline, although more for men than for women and contacts with adult children suffer as well, although primarily for men (Booth et al., 1991; Gerstel, 1988; Kalmijn and Broese van Groenou, 2005; Seltzer, 1991).

To explain changes in social interaction after divorce, the distinction between demand- and supply-side perspectives on social networks is helpful (Fischer et al., 1977; Flap, 1999; Marsden, 1990). The supply-side perspective argues that the social contexts in which people participate, mold their networks by shaping the pool from which they draw their contacts. Demand-side theories, in contrast, emphasize the preferences and needs that people have to meet and select a specific type of partner. The two perspectives provide complementary insights in the way personal relationships are formed and are sometimes combined into the notion of filtering. Opportunities delimit the pool from which people can choose, and preferences determine how people choose interaction partners out of the pool they face.

Although we recognize that the preferences and needs of the divorcee are important in understanding how his or her social life will change after divorce, our work emphasizes the supply-side of social interaction. More specifically, we argue that the normative climate in the setting of the divorced person serves as a restriction for his or her level of interaction: the more intolerant the community is about divorce, the less positive the change in interaction, and the greater the chance of losing social contacts after divorce.

There are several reasons why the normative climate may affect the level of social interaction of the divorced person. If there are norms against divorce, it means that people who divorce will be sanctioned. Sanctions can take several forms. There can be minor sanctions, such as making a small negative remark or gossiping. There can also be severe sanctions, such as public condemnation, shivarees, and ostracism. In the case of ostracism, the social consequences are most clear, but even if sanctions do not take such an extreme form, we may expect that sanctions will reduce social contacts. Members of the community may avoid having regular contact with the divorced person; in this case, the sanction takes the form of avoidance.

It is important to emphasize that a decline in social contacts may also occur in the absence of direct sanctions. If a community is traditional and condemns divorce, divorcees may also withdraw themselves from that community. Several mechanisms may lie behind withdrawal. It may simply be a way to prevent receiving sanctions from the community—without interacting with others, one will not receive sanctions. People may also be motivated by feelings of shame and guilt, which may lead to withdrawal. Finally, withdrawal may be a form of self-punishment because a decline in interaction is part of the sanction.

The effect of the normative climate in a geographical context will also depend on whether the person moves to a different place after divorce. A divorce implies the move of at least one of the two partners. Because some forms of contact are locally based (e.g., contacts with neighbors and voluntary organizations and to some extent friendships), one can argue that the effect of the normative climate will be weaker when people move. People who move may experience a decline in contact but this will depend less on the norms of the people in their immediate context. Their (marital) history will be less well known in the new neighborhood and in some sense, they can start a new life with a ‘clean’ slate in the new place of residence. When people do not move after a divorce, their contacts will perhaps decline less in the short term, but the effect of the normative climate may be stronger. Finally, there may be an effect of the normative climate on the decision to move. Persons

who anticipate strong social sanctions may be more likely to move to a different place or region to avoid these sanctions.

We also need to recognize that in the process of divorce, more than one norm is at stake. First, there is a general norm against divorce that is directed toward the community at large. This norm serves to protect the marriage institution. If the norm is traditional, it implies that a divorce is considered immoral regardless of the reasons for a divorce. Second, there are various sorts of norms about how people should behave in a marriage. It is clear from research that divorces are sometimes preceded by misbehavior, such as drinking too much, sexual infidelity, being physically or verbally aggressive, and so forth (De Graaf and Kalmijn, 2006). Sanctions after divorce may therefore also be targeted at the person who has broken other norms. For example, when the marital breakdown was partly the result of a husband's drinking and gambling behavior, the husband may also be sanctioned for his drinking and gambling behavior. Nonetheless, the community norm against divorce will also exist, which means that the 'innocent' wife in this case will be blamed for taking part in the divorce. It may even occur that the husband is only blamed for his bad habits, whereas the wife who responded to her husband's bad behavior by filing for divorce is sanctioned more severely for threatening the institution of marriage.

In this paper, we treat regions as the context in which to measure community norms against divorce. Regional differences have rarely been studied, but there are important national differences in the rate of divorce, suggesting that the normative climate against divorce also differs between countries. Southern European countries and Ireland have the lowest rate of divorce, while Northern European countries have the highest rate (Goode, 1993). Western European countries are in between, although even within this group of countries important differences exist. Country differences in marital instability are related to differences in divorce legislation, differences in gender and family roles, and differences in religious strength and composition (Blossfeld and Muller, 2002; Goode, 1993; South and Trent, 1989). Partly as a result of religious differences, there are also important country differences in social norms against divorce. In addition, comparative research on European countries shows that the degree of tolerance towards divorce correlates quite strongly with the national rate of divorce (Gelissen, 2003).

Whether there are also regional differences within countries in the degree of tolerance towards divorce is not known. American research has shown that the divorce rate itself varies from state to state (Lester, 1999). European research has shown that even in small countries like the Netherlands, there are quite substantial differences in the divorce rate among municipalities and provinces (De Graaf and Kalmijn, 1999). In addition, European research shows that other values, such as approval of abortion, vary between regions within countries (Gubert, 1995). Finally, classic research in historical demography has documented important regional variations in other forms of demographic behavior, in particular for marriage formation and fertility (Coale and Watkins, 1986). In short, we have good reasons to expect that regions will differ in their degree of intolerance towards divorce and our study will examine whether such differences indeed exist.

Our stigmatization hypothesis is that changes in social contacts after divorce are more negative in regions where there is more intolerance towards divorce. Social contacts are distinguished into (a) contacts with friends and relatives, (b) contacts with neighbors, and (c) membership in voluntary associations. We expect strongest effects for neighbors and

clubs and weaker effects for friends and family because the more intimate the tie, the more forgiving others will be and the weaker the sanctions that will be applied. We also expect stronger effects for persons who did not move after the divorce, especially when considering neighborhood contacts and club memberships. Effects will be examined for both men and women. We expect greater effects for men because the divorce literature generally suggests that men are more often blamed for the divorce, even though they less often are the instigators (Gray and Cohen Siver, 1990).

3. Data and methods

3.1. Data

To test theories about social norms, multi-actor data are needed in which information on the person who breaks the norm is combined with information on people who may or may not sanction the norm. In this study, we translate this design into a multilevel problem in which we link data on the divorcee to data on the setting in which the divorcee lives. The setting consists of the geographic region in a country in which he or she lives. We consider how tolerant the people in the setting are toward the divorce and this gives us information about the possible people who may sanction the divorced person.

Data on divorcees and their social contacts are obtained from the European Community Household Panel (ECHP), waves 1994–2001. The ECHP is a large-scale, cross-national comparative, longitudinal data set containing panel data from 15 Member States of the European Union (for further details see Eurostat, 1996; Clémenceau and Verma, 1996; Wirtz and Mejer, 2002). The surveys are household surveys in which detailed questions on income and employment and more limited questions on demographic and social characteristics were addressed to household members. The data have the combined attraction of containing many countries and being a panel. In other words, we can make comparisons of social interaction before and after divorce and we can compare these changes in multiple countries and regions in countries. With longitudinal analyses, the effect of divorce on social interaction can with higher certainty be assessed as a causal effect.

In the first wave (1994) of the ECHP, a sample of some 60,500 nationally representative households—approximately 130,000 adults aged 16 years and over—was interviewed in the then 12 Member States. Austria (in 1995), Finland (in 1996) and Sweden (in 1997) have joined the project since then. The interview waves were done on a yearly basis and include in total eight waves, from 1994 to 2001, for 14 countries: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom.¹ Sweden is excluded from the analyses because the data for this country are pooled cross-sections. It has to be noted that the ECHP data can be well compared cross-nationally because national panel surveys followed similar sampling, interview and follow-up rules. Furthermore, a study of Watson (2003) on attrition rates in the ECHP data did not show much country variation.

¹ Because in the fourth wave of the ECHP (1997) the original ECHP surveys were ended in Germany, Luxembourg, and the United Kingdom, we use longitudinal panel data from the underlying country panel surveys (respectively the German Socio-Economic Panel, the Luxembourg Household Panel, and the British Household Panel Survey), back from 1994 onwards.

Data on intolerance towards divorce are obtained from surveys of the *European Values Study* (EVS). The EVS is a large-scale, cross-national survey research program on basic human values conducted in 26 nations. So far, three cross-sections have been carried out, in 1981, 1990, and 1999. In our study, we use data from the EVS 1990 and 1999 (European Values Study, 1990, 1999). The samples are nationally representative and consist of adult citizens, 18 years and older. In the EVS surveys, questions were addressed on issues of normative tolerance, among others on (in)tolerance toward divorce.

3.2. Method for analyzing divorce

The sample of analysis consists of men and women who experienced a separation from their marriage partner between two consecutive interview years. We focus on the timing of marital separation and not on the timing of legal divorce since legal divorce can be a lengthy process during which people already experience changes in social interaction. Marital separation (also termed ‘divorce’ hereafter) is defined as a transition from marital cohabitation at the time of interview (say interview year k) to living single at the time of the subsequent interview year (interview year $k + 1$). Because the ECHP does not contain information on prior marriages, marital separations refer to first and later separations.² We exclude men and women who experienced a separation from non-marital cohabitation because there are probably much weaker sanctions against the breakup of a cohabiting relationship. We include men and women who remarried or cohabitated with a new partner after separation. In total, our sample of analysis comprises 2561 divorced men and women.

The time window of our study comprises three consecutive interview waves: the pre-divorce year (k), the year the respondent mentions to be divorced ($k + 1$), and the post-divorce year ($k + 2$). We measure pre-divorce social interaction in year k and post-divorce social interaction in year $k + 2$. We do not choose the first divorce year (year $k + 1$) because it is often a turbulent year in which the daily behavioral patterns are not yet settled. A wider time window measuring social interaction after year $k + 2$ was not feasible due to the limited number of divorcees in our panel.

We investigate three forms of social contacts: (a) contacts with friends and relatives, (b) contacts with neighbors, and (c) membership in voluntary associations. These three aspects cover (available) questions addressed in the ECHP. The question on contacts with friends and relatives is: ‘How often do you meet friends or relatives not living with you, whether here at home or elsewhere?’ The question on social contacts with neighbors is: ‘How often do you talk to any of your neighbors?’ Response categories for both questions are: (1) ‘on most days’, (2) ‘once or twice a week’, (3) ‘once or twice a month’, (4) ‘less often than once a month’, and (5) ‘never’. In order to investigate the amount of change in social contacts with friends and relatives and with neighbors, we recoded the response categories of these questions to the approximate number of contacts per month.³ The question on membership of clubs is: ‘Are you a member of any club, such as

² Persons who separated twice or more during the panel observation period are excluded by design since these persons do not match in the time window of our study.

³ The recode statement is as follows: (1) ‘on most days’ = 21.7, (2) ‘once or twice a week’ = 6.5, (3) ‘once or twice a month’ = 1.5, (4) ‘less often than once a month’ = 0.3, and (5) ‘never’ = 0.

a sport or entertainment club, a local or neighborhood group, a party etc.?"⁴ The available indicators for social contacts are fairly crude. They lump together distinct groups with whom one can interact (for example, friends and outside relatives, and relatives of the own family and relatives of the family-in-law). Yet, still we think the indicators are interesting to study since quantitative measures of social contacts provide a fairly good indication of social isolation.

Following the advice of Allison (1990), we use change scores as dependent variables in our regression models for the first two aspects of contact—contacts with friends and relatives and contacts with neighbors. We constructed a variable that is equal to contacts in year k minus contacts in year $(k + 2)$. Hence, positive scores indicate losses in social contacts and negative scores indicate gains. Note that the term loss does not mean that a person loses contact with a specific friend or neighbor. It means that the total number of contacts with friends or neighbors after divorce is lower than before the divorce. For people who moved, a loss in neighborhood contact means that there were fewer contacts with the new neighbors than there were contacts with the old neighbors. For membership, we consider the chance of not being a member in year $(k + 2)$ and we control for whether one was a member in year k . The data do not have information about which club people were a member of so that direct change cannot be measured.

The independent variables from the ECHP at the individual-level are year of investigation (wave number), sex (men are the reference group), age, marriage duration, presence of children, residence move, repartnering, education and employment.⁵ We include these variables in our explanatory analyses because these characteristics are known to influence (changes in) social contacts and because cross-national and cross-regional differences in these characteristics may bias the effect of regional intolerance on social contacts. Marriage duration is the number of years married up to marital separation (until year $k + 1$). The presence of children is measured as having one or more children in the household in the post-divorce year (year $k + 2$). The variable residence move refers to whether or not the person lives at the same address up to the post-divorce year $(k + 2)$. Repartnering is measured by two separate variables: repartnering in the immediate post-divorce year (year $k + 1$) and repartnering in the second year after divorce (year $k + 2$). Education is measured as the highest level of education achieved before divorce (at year k). The ECHP data make a distinction in three levels: (a) less than second stage of secondary education (International Standard Classification of Education [ISCED] levels 0–2), (b) second stage of secondary education (ISCED level 3), (c) tertiary education (university degree or comparable degree; ISCED levels 5–7). Those still at school without a certificate are assigned the lowest educational level. Employment is measured as having any paid job in the post-divorce year $(k + 2)$. Table 1 lists means and standard deviations of the variables used in the analyses.

⁴ The questions were not addressed in every country of the ECHP. The question on contacts with friends and relatives was not addressed in France and Luxemburg, and in Germany in waves 7 and 8. The question on contacts with neighbors was not addressed in France, Germany and Luxemburg, and in UK in waves 1–3. The question on club membership was not addressed in the German survey in waves 7 and 8, and in the British survey in waves 5, 7, and 8.

⁵ We do not control for time-1 levels of integration because that would make the model equivalent to a regressor variable approach to change, which is the less preferred method (Allison, 1990).

Table 1
Means of dependent and independent variables

	Mean	Standard deviation	<i>N</i>
Change in meeting friends and outside relatives (t1–t2) ^a	0.15	9.05	2148
Change in meeting neighbors (t1–t2) ^b	0.68	9.49	1705
Membership clubs (t2) ^c	0.34	0.47	2208
Wave	3.54	1.58	2561
Woman	0.54	0.50	2561
Age at t1	39.37	11.68	2561
Log of duration of prior marriage	2.41	0.84	2561
Children in the household at t2	0.41	0.49	2561
Residence move after divorce (t1, t2)	0.28	0.45	2561
Remarriage at t1	0.22	0.42	2561
Remarriage at t2	0.13	0.34	2561
Middle level education at t1	0.38	0.49	2561
Higher level education at t1	0.22	0.41	2561
Paid work at t2	0.72	0.45	2561
Regional intolerance toward divorce 1990–1999	5.25	0.62	2561

Source: ECHP 1994–2001 (own calculations).

^a Survey question not asked in France and Luxemburg, and in the German survey in waves 7 and 8.

^b Survey question not asked in France, Germany and Luxemburg, and in the British survey in waves 1 to 3.

^c Survey question not asked in the German survey in waves 7 and 8, and in the British survey in waves 5, 7 and 8.

3.3. Method for analyzing regional intolerance

To test the effect of regional intolerance on changes in social contacts of divorcees, we construct a regional measure of intolerance towards divorce using the EVS data. This measure is matched to the individual (divorcee) data of the ECHP. In both databases, regions are classified according to the NUTS classification. This is the European Union's official regional classification system (NUTS, *Nomenclature des Unités Territoriales Statistiques*, Eurostat, 1995). The common classification of regions in the two data sets is at NUTS level 1, that is, major regions within countries (of approximately 3–7 million inhabitants). The number of regions for which we have data is 65.⁶

The measure of intolerance is based on an attitudinal item in a list of items on normative tolerance: 'Please tell me for each of the following statements whether you think it can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between, using this card'. Items are, among others, cheating on tax, buying something you knew was stolen, taking drugs, having an affair while married, homosexuality, abortion, euthanasia, and driving under influence of alcohol. The fifteenth item of the 24 items addressed is 'divorce'. Response categories are 'never be justified' (coded as 1) to 'always be justified' (coded as 10). We recoded these responses so that a high score (10) stands for strong intolerance and a low score (1) for weak intolerance.

The question about the reliability and validity of our measure is an important one. We developed several measures to address this issue. First, in order to increase the reliability of the intolerance measure, we averaged the tolerance scores for 1990 and 1999. Because

⁶ We have regional data for Austria, Belgium, Germany, Spain, France, Italy, and the United Kingdom. For Denmark, the Netherlands, Finland, Portugal, Ireland, and Greece we only have national data.

measures often vary from survey to survey, we think using two surveys rather than one to measure a contextual characteristic improves the reliability of the measure. The correlation between the intolerance measures for the 1990 and 1999 data is $r = .57$ ($p < .01$) at the regional level ($N = 58$), which underscores the importance of combining the measures. Important to emphasize is that the number of individual respondents per region is substantial in the EVS data, ranging from 45 in Hamburg (Germany) to 2381 in Flanders (Belgium). The average sample size per region is about 430 respondents.

Second, we assessed the validity by investigating whether our measure corresponds to more detailed questions on tolerance towards divorce. For this purpose, we analyzed data from the EVS 1981, the only EVS survey in which multiple questions on tolerance towards divorce were addressed. The more detailed questions refer to the reasons for divorce. For each of 10 reasons presented, respondents had to mention whether they find this an acceptable reason for divorce or not (more than one reason could be mentioned). Among the ten reasons listed are, for example, ‘divorce when partner is a heavy drinker’, ‘divorce when partner is unfaithful’, ‘divorce when personalities do not match’. At the individual-level, the number of reasons a respondent mentions (a measure of tolerance towards divorce) correlates moderately with the single-item measure for intolerance towards divorce ($r = -.39$, $p < .01$, $N = 12,886$). At the regional level (for the countries we have in our sample), the correlation is fairly high ($r = -.70$, $p < .01$, $N = 80$). This is an indication that our regional single-item construct is a valid measurement of regional intolerance towards divorce.

Third, we did an additional check on validity by correlating our measure with other measures of traditionality in the EVS 1990 and EVS 1999 surveys. At the regional level, the correlation between church attendance and our single-item construct of intolerance proved quite strong, with a correlation of $r = .55$ ($p < .01$, $N = 58$) for EVS 1990 and $r = .56$ ($p < .01$, $N = 65$) for EVS 1999. That is, in regions where church attendance is higher, intolerance toward divorce is greater. This result gives us increased confidence in the validity of our intolerance measure. We also considered using items on religiosity and church attendance but we decided nevertheless not to use this information for two reasons. First, our measure of attitudes toward divorce is more direct than a measure of religion. Second, we think that the effect of aggregate measures of religion would run via attitudes.

To test the stigmatization hypothesis, multilevel models are used. Multilevel regression models correct for the nesting of individuals within higher-level units (here: regions), and take account of the variability associated with each level of nesting. In comparison to analyses where the effect of macro-level characteristics are ‘disaggregated’ to the individual level, multilevel models provide less biased estimates of the effects of macro-level characteristics since standard errors are corrected appropriately (see, for example, [Snijders and Bosker, 1999](#)). The particular multilevel model we use is the random intercept model. This model assumes that the intercept (the change in social contacts) varies among individuals and among regions, yet effects of individual-level covariates are assumed to be constant across regions. The multilevel regression models are estimated within STATA ([Statacorp, 2004](#)).

4. Results

We present results of our analyses in the following order. First, we display results of analyses of regional variation in intolerance towards divorce using the EVS data set. Then, we show results of analyses of changes in social contacts following divorce, using the individual data from the ECHP. And finally, we show results of explanatory analyses linking

divorcee's changes in social contacts to individual-level characteristics and to regional intolerance towards divorce.

4.1. Regional variation in intolerance towards divorce

To what extent do regions differ in their degree of intolerance? And to what extent are there differences within regions? We postulate that regions differ in their normative climate and we intend to measure this by examining the values of the individuals who are living in these regions. As has been argued in the literature, however, the existence of norms assumes that there is some degree of consensus in the population (Rossi and Berk, 1985; Jasso and Opp, 1997). If people disagree about the strength of their disapproval or if they disagree about the cases to which a specific norm should be applied, it is difficult to speak of a social norm. For that reason, we first examine value differences among regions *and* individuals.⁷

To do this, we present the mean levels of intolerance towards divorce in Table 2, broken down by country and region. The means vary from a low of 4.0 for Berlin (Germany), to a high of 6.6 for Southern Italy. There seems to exist a pattern that people from countries of the northern part of the European Union are less traditional than people from the countries of the southern part of the European Union, and that within countries regional differences vary with the level of urbanization. Regional intolerance in Southern Italy, for example, is with a score of 6.6 substantially higher than in the more urbanized northern parts of Italy (North East 5.4 and North West 5.2).

In Table 3, we test whether differences between countries and regions are statistically significant, using regression models with dummy variables (similar to ANOVA models). The models are presented separately for the two years (1990 and 1999). The first model in Table 3 shows that differences between countries are statistically significant. The second model shows that differences between regions are significant as well. Another question is whether the differences between regions *within* countries are significant. To test this, we add in the third model parameters for regional differences to the model for differences between countries and test the improvement in fit. In both years, this change in fit is statistically significant, showing that regional differences *within* countries are significant. We also note in Table 3 that the total amount of variance explained by regions is not high. This suggests that there is quite some variation among individuals within regions. It is therefore implausible to speak of regions as homogeneous units, even though regions do differ among each other.

4.2. Changes in social contacts following divorce

Table 4 provides descriptive information on changes in social contacts after divorce. The figures are shown for men and women and for the three types of social contact. We also provide a test of significance of changes in contacts (*t*-tests). Contacts with friends and relatives decline only marginally after divorce and the change is statistically not significant. Women

⁷ It is also possible to use information on the variance within regions as an additional aspect of norms in the analysis (e.g., Jasso and Opp, 1997), but we leave such elaborations for future study. Our first aim is to establish the basic effect of the normative climate in a region, after we have established significant differences across regions.

Table 2
Average degree of intolerance towards divorce^a and number of cases by region^b

Region	Mean (1–10)	<i>N</i>
Austria		
Ostösterreich	5.24	1302
Südösterreich	5.95	703
Westösterreich	5.87	977
Belgium		
Région bruxelles	5.19	994
Vlaams gewest	5.96	2381
Région wallonne	5.66	1329
Germany		
Baden-württemberg	5.44	446
Bayern	5.95	561
Berlin	4.02	201
Brandenburg	5.13	170
Bremen	4.94	50
Hamburg	4.40	45
Hessen	5.79	294
Mecklenburg-vorpommern	5.11	115
Niedersachsen	5.19	375
Nordrhein-westfalen	4.80	915
Sachsen	4.70	290
Sachsen-anhalt	5.53	175
Schleswig-holstein	4.64	115
Thüringen	5.58	155
Rheinland-Pfalz & Saarland	5.21	230
Denmark		
Denmark	4.38	2053
Spain		
Noroeste	5.54	434
Noreste	4.91	406
Comunidad de madrid	5.12	480
Centro (e)	6.42	532
Este	4.77	1047
Sur	5.52	786
Canarias	4.89	152
Finland		
Finland	4.06	1626
France		
Ile de france	4.48	484
Bassin parisien	5.50	464
Nord-pas-de-calais	5.50	175
Est	5.07	207
Ouest	5.04	343
Sud-ouest	5.02	272
Centre-est	4.99	332
Méditerranée	4.89	340
Greece		
Greece	4.91	1142
Ireland		
Ireland	6.54	2012
Italy		
Nord ovest	5.15	510
Lombardia	5.66	567

Table 2 (continued)

Region	Mean (1–10)	N
Nord est	5.44	484
Emilia-romagna	5.23	255
Centro (i)	5.99	418
Lazio	5.16	337
Abruzzo-molise	6.63	117
Campania	6.61	498
Sud	6.64	386
Sicilia	6.53	368
Sardegna	5.90	77
Luxembourg		
Luxembourg	5.05	1211
Netherlands		
Netherlands	4.62	2020
Portugal		
Portugal	5.58	2185
United Kingdom		
North East	6.14	113
North West	5.71	272
Yorkshire and the Humber	5.77	195
East Midlands	5.41	124
West Midlands	5.51	238
East of England	5.47	121
London	5.25	146
South East	5.35	356
South West	5.36	162
Wales	5.74	341
Scotland	5.67	375

Source: European Values Studies 1990 and 1999 (own calculations).

^a Scores averaged for 1990 and 1999.

^b Number of respondents from EVS 1990–99 per NUTS1 region. For Denmark, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Netherlands and Portugal no regions are distinguished in the individual (ECHP) data. For these countries, country means are displayed.

seem to lose contacts with friends and relatives more than men, who even show a marginal increase. Yet, these changes are also not statistically significant. Contacts with neighbors decline to a stronger extent after divorce: the loss in contacts is 6%, a statistically significant change. This change is fairly equal among the sexes. Membership of clubs hardly decreases

Table 3

Analysis of variance of countries and regions with respect to intolerance toward divorce

	1990		1999	
	F-test	R-square	F-test	R-square
1. Differences between countries	65.5*	0.039	58.5*	0.043
2. Differences between regions	20.2*	0.061	18.6*	0.062
3. Differences between regions given country differences ^a	9.0*	0.022	7.1*	0.019
Number of countries	12		15	
Number of regions	58		65	

Source: European Values Studies 1990 and 1999 (own calculations).

^a F-test for improvement in R-square when adding parameters for regional differences.

* $p < .05$.

Table 4
Social contacts before and after divorce by gender

	Before divorce (mean)	After divorce (mean)	% Change	<i>t</i> -test of pairs	<i>p</i> -value	<i>N</i>
With friends/relatives ^a						
Men	10.2	10.4	1	0.13	0.64	976
Women	10.9	10.5	-4	-0.39	0.14	1172
Total	10.6	10.5	-1	-0.15	0.43	2148
With neighbors ^b						
Men	11.9	11.5	-4	-0.47	0.16	777
Women	12.4	11.5	-7	-0.86*	0.01	928
Total	12.2	11.5	-6	-0.68*	0.00	1705
Membership clubs ^c						
Men	0.40	0.40	-1	0.00	0.84	1028
Women	0.29	0.28	-3	-0.01	0.48	1180
Total	0.34	0.34	-2	-0.01	0.51	2208

^a Survey question not asked in France and Luxemburg, and in the German survey in waves 7 and 8.

^b Survey question not asked in France, Germany, and Luxemburg, and in the British survey in waves 1–3.

^c Survey question not asked in the German survey in waves 7 and 8, and in the British survey in waves 5, 7 and 8.

* $p < 0.05$; Source: ECHP 1994–2001 (own calculations).

(change is not significant), and this applies both to men and women. Hence, changes in social contacts following divorce appear to be minor (cf. Kalmijn and Broese van Groenou, 2005). Contacts with friends and relatives and club membership hardly suffer from divorce, yet contacts with neighbors show a modest decrease. The absence of a general decline in contacts does not mean that our test of the stigmatization hypothesis is not relevant anymore. A general null-effect can be composed of a positive effect of intolerance for some divorcees and a negative effect for other divorcees.

4.3. The effect of regional intolerance on changes in social contacts

Despite the modest general decrease in social contacts after divorce, individual divorcees may vary in the extent to which they suffer from divorce. The current question is: does regional intolerance toward divorce affect the changes in social contacts following divorce? Do divorcees in regions with high intolerance experience a stronger decline in social contacts than divorcees in regions with low intolerance? To answer these questions we relate individual changes in social contacts to regional intolerance toward divorce, respectively, for contacts with friends and relatives (Table 5), contacts with neighbors (Table 6) and membership of clubs (Table 7). The tables display results of multilevel models of the change in social contacts. All models control for relevant individual-level variables and estimate the effect of regional intolerance towards divorce. The models are estimated for the whole sample and for men and women separately. All models include interaction effects of regional intolerance and residence move. Hence, the main effect of regional intolerance refers to people who did not move and the interaction effect tells us whether the effect of regional intolerance is weaker (or stronger) for people who moved.

We start with discussing results of the analyses of changes in social contacts with friends and relatives in Table 5. The first model for men and women jointly show that higher

Table 5

Multilevel regression models of changes in contacts (t1–t2) with friends or relatives outside the household after divorce^a

	Men and women		Men		Women	
	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i> -value	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i> -value	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i> -value
Wave number	–0.261*	0.02	–0.232	0.11	–0.289	0.05
Woman	0.515	0.11				
Age (t1)	–0.014	0.26	–0.050	0.05	0.023	0.23
Marriage duration (ln)	0.016	0.48	0.280	0.24	–0.272	0.24
Children at home (t2)	0.005	0.50	0.114	0.44	0.066	0.46
Residence move (t1, t2)	1.442	0.34	–7.701	0.07	8.932*	0.03
Remarriage (t1)	1.498*	0.00	1.643*	0.01	1.450*	0.02
Remarriage (t2)	1.426*	0.01	1.475	0.05	1.489*	0.04
Education—middle	–0.262	0.28	–0.632	0.18	–0.015	0.49
Education—high	–0.929*	0.04	–1.457*	0.03	–0.642	0.20
Employed (t2)	–0.033	0.47	–0.345	0.33	0.158	0.39
Regional intolerance	0.310	0.20	–0.483	0.22	0.833	0.06
Move * intolerance	–0.344	0.30	1.313	0.09	–1.700*	0.03
Intercept	–0.480	0.42	5.159	0.09	–3.785	0.12
<i>N</i> of individuals	2148		976		1172	
<i>N</i> of regions	56		56		54	
<i>R</i> -square within	0.011		0.018		0.013	
<i>R</i> -square between	0.020		0.038		0.014	
<i>R</i> -square overall	0.013		0.019		0.014	

Source: ECHP 1994–2001 (own calculations).

^a Survey question not asked in France and Luxemburg, and in the German survey in waves 7 and 8.* $p < 0.05$ (one-tailed test).

educated divorcees experience a smaller decrease in the number of contacts with friends and relatives. Repartnering is associated with greater declines in contact. This can probably be explained in terms of the dyadic withdrawal hypothesis: those who enter a (new) union after divorce will have fewer friendship contacts than those who remain single (Milardo and Allan, 2000). Gender, age, marriage duration, children, and employment do not affect the changes in contacts with friends and relatives following divorce. The main effect of migration can be interpreted as the migration effect for an average region since regional intolerance is centered. The effect of migration appears to be gender-specific: for women the effect is positive and significant and for men the effect men is negative and marginally significant. That is, for women a residence move decreases contacts with friends and relatives after divorce, while for men a residence move increases contacts. This may be explained by the gendered division of social contacts prior to divorce: since within marriage women more often have contacts with family and friends than men and since contacts are often locally bound, migration implies a loss in contacts for women whereas for migrated men there may exist a need to rebuild their social network in the new neighborhood.

We now come to the effect of regional intolerance. Table 5 displays that regional intolerance has no effect in the full sample and in the male sample. For the female sample, we see an interesting pattern. The main effect of regional intolerance is marginally significant and in the predicted direction. It shows that for those women who do not migrate, a stronger degree of regional intolerance increases the loss in contacts with friends and relatives. Moreover, we find a significant, negative interaction effect of

Table 6
Multilevel regression models of changes (t1–t2) in contacts with neighbors after divorce^a

	Men and women		Men		Women	
	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i> -value	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i> -value	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i> -value
Wave number	0.129	0.19	−0.047	0.41	0.273	0.09
Woman	0.452	0.18				
Age (t1)	−0.032	0.10	−0.040	0.12	−0.029	0.22
Marriage duration (ln)	0.722*	0.01	0.451	0.16	0.986*	0.02
Children at home (t2)	−0.166	0.38	−0.120	0.45	−0.107	0.44
Residence move (t1, t2)	2.138	0.29	4.063	0.23	0.007	0.50
Remarriage (t1)	0.148	0.40	−0.392	0.33	0.829	0.15
Remarriage (t2)	−0.165	0.41	1.019	0.17	−1.243	0.11
Education—middle	0.242	0.33	−0.220	0.39	0.674	0.18
Education—high	0.535	0.20	0.105	0.45	0.965	0.15
Employed (t2)	0.656	0.12	−0.107	0.45	1.001	0.08
Regional intolerance	0.881*	0.02	0.933	0.06	0.773	0.08
Move * intolerance	−0.446	0.27	−0.756	0.24	−0.068	0.47
Intercept	−5.733*	0.01	−3.607	0.17	−6.471*	0.03
<i>N</i> of individuals	1705		777		928	
<i>N</i> of regions	41		41		41	
<i>R</i> -square within	0.005		0.005		0.016	
<i>R</i> -square between	0.105		0.022		0.022	
<i>R</i> -square overall	0.009		0.008		0.018	

Source: ECHP 1994–2001 (own calculations).

^a Survey question not asked in France, Germany and Luxemburg, and in the British survey in waves 1 to 3.

* $p < 0.05$ (one-tailed test).

regional intolerance with migration. That is, for those women who move, the effect of regional tolerance is significantly lower. This migration-specific effect of intolerance is in line with our hypotheses since we expected that migrants' social contacts depend less on the norms of the people in their immediate context. However, that men's changes in social contacts are less affected by the level stigmatization is not in line with our hypotheses. We expected greater effects for men because men are more often blamed for the divorce.

Table 6 shows results for contacts with neighbors. The estimates show that few individual-level characteristics have an effect on changes in neighborhood contacts. The only significant effect is of marriage duration. Divorcees who were married for a longer period of time experience greater losses in neighborhood contacts after divorce.

The effect of regional intolerance towards divorce appears to be significant and in the predicted direction for the full sample. For the male and female samples, the coefficients are not very different in magnitude and the coefficients themselves are marginally significant. Hence, for people who did not move, we can conclude that a higher degree of intolerance in one's region of residence leads to a greater decline in contacts with neighbors. This effect of regional intolerance is stronger than the corresponding effect on contacts with relatives and friends. The latter finding is also in line with our predictions, since we expected that the more intimate the tie, the more forgiving others will be and the weaker the sanctions will be applied. We finally see a negative interaction effect of regional tolerance and migration. Although this is in the predicted direction (and not trivial in magnitude), the interaction effect is not statistically significant.

Table 7
Multilevel logit models of the odds of not being a member of a club after divorce^a

	Men and women		Men		Women	
	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i> -value	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i> -value	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i> -value
Not a club member (t1)	2.351*	0.00	2.537*	0.00	2.254*	0.00
Wave number	−0.030	0.21	−0.030	0.29	−0.024	0.33
Woman	0.283*	0.01				
Age (t1)	−0.012*	0.03	−0.008	0.17	−0.017	0.05
Marriage duration (ln)	−0.046	0.29	−0.050	0.33	−0.058	0.31
Children at home (t2)	0.033	0.40	−0.199	0.17	0.202	0.13
Residence move (t1, t2)	0.407	0.34	1.535	0.14	−0.531	0.36
Remarriage (t1)	−0.193	0.09	−0.088	0.34	−0.257	0.11
Remarriage (t2)	0.101	0.28	0.081	0.37	0.148	0.27
Education—middle	−0.148	0.14	−0.069	0.36	−0.267	0.09
Education—high	−0.648*	0.00	−0.260	0.13	−1.098*	0.00
Employed (t2)	−0.490*	0.00	−0.619*	0.00	−0.342*	0.03
Regional intolerance	0.108	0.22	0.301*	0.04	−0.051	0.40
Move * intolerance	−0.050	0.40	−0.258	0.17	0.108	0.35
Intercept	−0.138	0.44	−1.417	0.10	1.176	0.16
<i>N</i> of individuals	2208		1028		1180	
<i>N</i> of regions	64		63		62	
−2*Log Likelihood	2077.0		1012.3		1058.9	

Source: ECHP 1994–2001 (own calculations).

^a Survey question not asked in the German survey in waves 7 and 8, and in the British survey in waves 5, 7 and 8.

* $p < 0.05$ (one-tailed test).

The last table, Table 7, displays results of multilevel logit models of the odds of not being a member of a voluntary membership controlled for whether one was a member in the prior wave. The joint analyses for men and women document that women, younger people, lower educated and non-employed people are more likely to not being a member after divorce than other persons. Other individual-level variables have no effect on the change in membership.

Does regional intolerance of divorce affect club membership of divorcees? For men, we find a significant main effect in the predicted direction: increases in regional intolerance are associated with increases in the odds of not being a club member. Again, this is an indication that men are more isolated after divorce if the stigma of divorce is stronger. The interaction of regional intolerance and migration is again negative and substantial in magnitude, but it is not statistically significant. For women, we find no main effect of regional intolerance.

Although we found significant effects of regional intolerance in some of the models, the question arises about how strong these are. In addition, we need to examine more directly how movers and stayers differ, depending on the level of regional intolerance. To do this, we present the results graphically in Fig. 1. The top part presents the effects of regional intolerance on changes in contacts with friends and relatives for women, the middle part presents effects on changes in contacts with neighbors for men and women combined, and the bottom part presents the results for membership for men. This selection is based on models that yield significant effects of regional intolerance. The expected values are based on regression models where all other variables are set at their mean values.

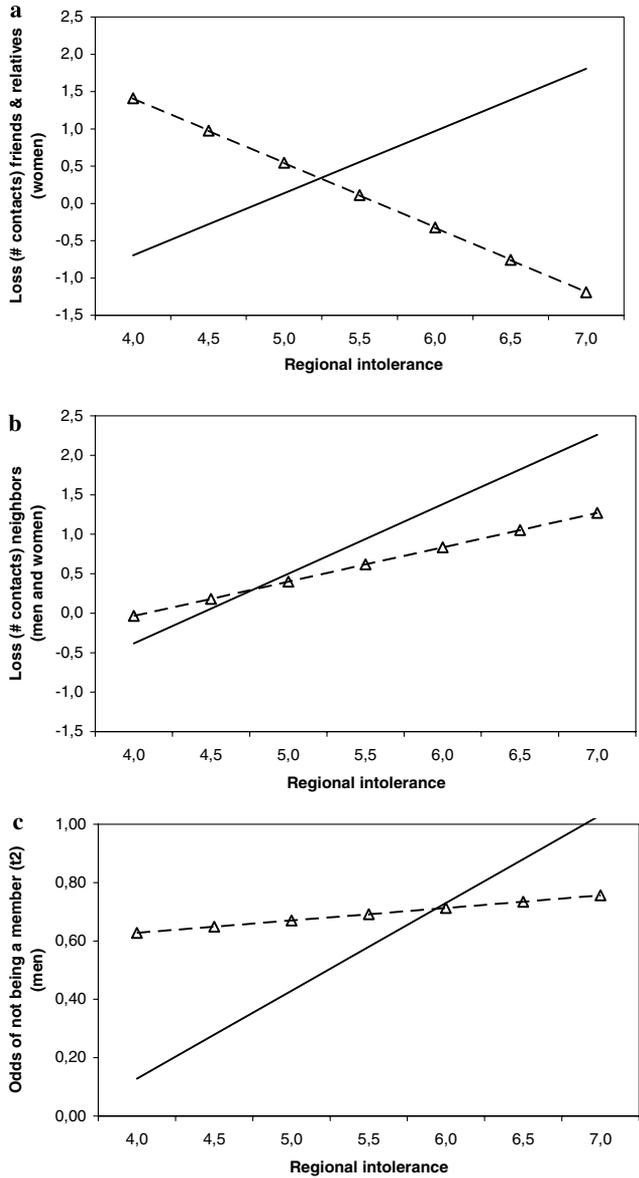


Fig. 1. Predicted effects of regional intolerance toward divorce on (a) loss in social contacts with friends and relatives after divorce (women), (b) loss in social contacts with neighbors after divorce (men and women), and (c) the odds of not being a member of a club (men); for 'stayers' (straight line) and 'movers' (dotted line).

Fig. 1 shows that effects of regional intolerance are modest in size for the first two types of social contacts. For those who do not move residence, the change in social contacts varies from an increase of half a contact a month in the most tolerant regions to a decrease of about two contacts a months in the most intolerant regions. The maximum difference amounts to almost 30 percent of the standard deviation (see Table 1). This applies to

contacts with friends and relatives and to contacts with neighbors. The odds for 'stayers' to not being a member of a club after divorce are more strongly affected by regional intolerance: the odds vary from 13% for those living in the least intolerant regions to nearly one for those living in the most intolerant regions. For divorcees who moved the effect of regional intolerance is weaker, indicated by the flatter regression lines. For these divorcees, contacts with friends and relatives depend even in a negative way on the level of regional intolerance: the higher the intolerance in a region, the more contacts. The latter finding is hard to explain.

We finally examined whether the decision to move itself is affected by regional tolerance. To do this, we estimated a multilevel logistic regression model where moving after divorce is the dependent variable. The independent variables are the same as those listed in [Tables 5–7](#). In this model, we found no significant effect of regional intolerance on moving after the divorce. Hence, there does not seem to be an 'evasion' effect.

5. Conclusion and discussion

Our analyses of the effect of regional intolerance on individual changes in social contacts following divorce has provided some evidence in favor of contextual effects of social norms on individual behavior. In line with our hypothesis on stigmatization, persons who live in regions in Europe in which divorce is less tolerated, experience a greater decline in social contacts with divorce than persons who live in regions where divorce is more tolerated. This holds primarily for people who do not move after a divorce. The contextual effects are similar for men and women when we look at neighborhood contacts but the effects appear stronger for men when we look at memberships and stronger for women when we look at contacts with friends and relatives.

That the normative climate affects the level of social interaction of the divorced person can be explained by sanctions and the expected behavior of the parties involved. Members of the community may avoid having regular contact with the sanctioned divorcees and the divorced person may want to avoid the sanction by isolating him- or herself from the community. The sanctions may be more severe when the person or partner is to blame for the divorce.

We also found some evidence that contextual effects were stronger for persons who did not move after the divorce. This can be interpreted in terms of our theoretical approach. Sanctions can be applied less strongly when a person moves away, especially when contacts are locally based. It is also possible that people move away to avoid sanctions. Additional analyses, however, did not show that regional intolerance increases the chances to move after a divorce. We should acknowledge, however, that regional differences in residential migration require more refined macro-level data and variables than we had available in our data. Another caveat to be made is that the ECHP data do not have good information on the type of move so that we were unable to separate short- and long-distance moves.

An issue of the data to be discussed is the level of aggregation of regional intolerance. We acknowledge that norms may differ within countries and therefore focus on regional variation in attitudes towards divorce. Regions are defined, for reasons of availability in the data sets, as rather large geographical areas coded along administrative criteria as laid down in the official European Union classification of regions. Although our analyses did show regional variation in intolerance towards divorce, regional variation was

less than country variation and regional variation within countries was limited. This shows that there is much variation among individuals within regions. It is therefore implausible to speak of regions as homogeneous units. This may suggest that even though regions are more appropriate units than countries, smaller units than regions are more suitable. It may also suggest, however, that the measurement of regional climates must be improved. With stronger measures, random variation at the individual level may be minimized, and this may yield better options of finding regional differences and effects.

Our ecological approach has tried to test the operation of social norms in a novel way. Prior survey analyses of social norms in the family area generally look at how internalized norms, as reflected in individual attitudes, affect life course behavior. A disadvantage of such analyses is that they do not provide direct evidence for the existence of norms; they merely show that individual attitudes lead to behavior. To prove the operation of norms, it is necessary to have information on the people that surround the individual and this makes an ecological approach more suitable. Extensions of our approach can be done as well. It would be interesting, for example, to study how regional norms affect women's employment and household task division and what the influence of these regional value differences is on women's behavior, net of their own attitudes.

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