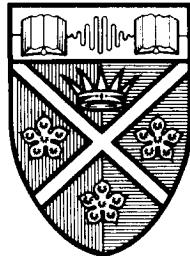


# STRATHCLYDE PAPERS ON GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS



*THE POLITICS OF  
SEPARATION AND DIVORCE:  
A STUDY IN ATTITUDE FORMATION*

*Jenny Chapman Robinson*

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THE POLITICS OF SEPARATION AND DIVORCE  
A Study in Attitude Formation

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This study is somewhat unusual in that instead of using election data to explain broad outcomes and large consequences as economically as possible, it sets out to examine the effect of two independent variables, marital status and sex, on political attitudes. It traces their interaction with each other and with a third variable, income, to define a distinct socio-political group with an associated political outlook.

A basic assumption is that it is intrinsically worthwhile to study relatively small groups and small effects - the detail which is lost in the narrow focus and expediency of electoral choice. In times of rapid social and economic change, it may be essential to do so if we are to understand what goes on in between elections (i.e. most of the time) or shape predictions, however tentatively, about the future. How much of the political interests of a citizen can be expressed in a single vote cast every few years is dubious at the best of times. It will always depend on the degree of fit between the party system and the characteristics of the community. Some groups and interests may not be reflected in the party system at all and yet have considerable political impact. In Britain major changes have come about in the last twenty years through legislation on political issues such as abortion, capital punishment and censorship which cut across party lines.

In the 1980s, question marks hang over the future of the economy, the kind of society that is in the making and the ability of political scientists to do more than describe events once they have happened. Unfortunately, though class could be used as a 'predictor' of voting behaviour in the elections of the 'fifties and 'sixties this was much less help in predicting the outcome of future elections when the class basis of our politics would have been eroded.(1) Now we must be on the alert for the emergence of new class distinctions which may act as future determinants of political attitudes and behaviour. However, it seems more likely that as society becomes fragmented by dimensions which cut across traditional lines of class and interest, the variables which account for political behaviour will become more numerous and particular in their effect. In that case we should orient our interests towards other and smaller subgroups of the population to assess how they interact and the direction of their influence.

We must expect that some groups, though large, will be too diffuse or fragmented to achieve direct representation in politics, a prediction which can be made fairly confidently about the female sex. Other groups may have an impact on public policy and political values out of all proportion to their numbers and organisation because of their relationship to key areas of social change and because of the political implications of their

demands. They may indeed be the most effective channel for expression of the more diffuse interests with which they interact. It is also possible of course that they will play a part in shaping a more flexible party system with more fluidity in political allegiance in the long run, too.

It is my contention that the divorced and separated, and in particular divorced and separated women, constitute such a group and they are the little bit of ivory on which this study of Britain in 1979 will focus.

THE POLITICS OF SEPARATION AND DIVORCE

As a group, the divorced and separated are people who have seen society from two distinct and inconsistent points of view. Formerly inside its normative institutions, marriage and the nuclear family, now they are outside them. (If they have children they are now in a new kind of family, the dispersed nuclear, but this lacks recognition as a family unit as yet.)(2) No matter how little personally inclined they may have been to question conventions and the distribution of political and economic power, they must either see themselves as deviant or society as far from perfectly arranged, or both.

It is a fundamental hypothesis in our culture that marriage answers the emotional, financial and life-cycle needs of the normal individual. Its support is considered to be the proper concern of politicians and the object of legal and economic arrangements, social work, welfare policies etc. Single people might be said to be those who have not yet put this hypothesis to the test, the married are in process of doing so and the divorced and separated are those who have found it invalid. Ironically the cumulative size and social diffusion of this last group is establishing divorce as almost as much the norm as marriage.(3)

The experiences of separation and divorce compel people to

relearn the social landscape, perhaps seeing it clearly for the first time. Their new points of reference may be very unwelcome. Separation for many performs their first introduction to matrimonial law, legal institutions and the legal profession. Problems with housing, personal finance and emotional stress bring many into new contacts with local authorities, financial institutions, the medical profession and employers. That is, divorce involves the individual in relations with the outside world which are to a considerable extent determined by public policy acting through legislation and the spirit in which it is implemented. Of course divorce, and separation, like marriage, are par excellence relations between the sexes, therefore public policy in the area of sex equality and the position of women is a highly salient factor in these experiences.

It is obvious that divorce and separation pose special problems for women. They usually have custody of children and are more likely to suffer severe financial hardship along with their dependents. For them, the availability of childcare facilities and the attitude of politicians, civil servants and the public at large to the working mother become matters of vital concern. Their own socially inculcated attitudes may not help, and if they attempt to avoid throwing themselves on the support of the state they are hampered at all turns by the situation of women in our society. As well as having inferior qualifications to men they are likely to have a history of interrupted

employment which compounds the difficulties facing all women. They cannot help but discover how constraints on the employment, remuneration, promotion and creditworthiness of women define the life-style and prospects of the single-parent family headed by a woman and limit the potential also of women without dependents. Since the courts have difficulty in enforcing maintenance orders, women with dependents and without resources may have literally nowhere else to turn but the state.(4)

Women are usually brought up to look upon economic dependence on men as natural and feminine, but dependence on the state has social connotations of shiftlessness, scrounging and guilt. A high price in personal rights and self-respect is exacted of a woman on social security, who may even have benefits withdrawn if she takes a lover and is therefore subject to the snooping of neighbours and the moral policing of administrators. Yet in the end of the day, social security payments cannot provide more than an existence without hope of self-improvement or security against changes in public policy.

The role of the state in this experience is central, both as regulator of society's response to change and as the provider in times of need. To these women, and to former husbands unwilling or unable to support them, the intervention of the state can be a positive factor in their situation - often the only one. For any improvement, it is hard to imagine where else they can look but

to the principle of state intervention.

This is not simply a matter of social security benefits. The alternative to dependence on the state, for the casualties of marriage, is that they be able to support themselves. This in turn depends on the existence of contingent services which are extensive enough, affordable and run on principles which are consonant with the needs of working women with dependents (or men, for that matter, since some men have custody of children). Given the constraints on women's earnings these must be provided by the public sector if they are to be adequate unless or until women achieve equality of opportunity and reward.(5)

Yet it is hard to see how the latter can be done without state intervention either, directly via legislation to advance women's rights (though of course the capacity of laws to shape such ends is severely limited) and indirectly through educational guidelines, training and employment practices and so on. It should be noted that the traditional battleground of left and right at the level of parties and organised economic interests overlaps with but does not by any means coincide with these dimensions of redistribution. The record of employers and trade unions is one of support for entrenched ideas about the peripheral economic role and rights of women. Both sides serve constituencies which are overwhelmingly male and comparatively privileged. They consist of the owners of the income which has

to be redistributed to support public services and security benefits, and they may also see women as unwelcome competitors in the job market.

So far, the advancement of the particular interest of divorced and separated people has been impossible without simultaneously advancing that of women. The existence, visibility and acute problems of this group have led to changes in the law affecting women and its interpretation in several divorce-related fields. Women now have a recognised right to share in the assets of the marriage, of which the home is the most crucial, their contribution of unpaid labour to the marriage has won some recognition in the courts, single parents have local authority housing priority and there has been a precarious advance in establishing the right of married women to share ownership and tenancy de jure and occupy the matrimonial home with their children in the event of a breakdown of the marriage.(6) The alteration in the grounds for divorce itself opened up avenues of escape from violent and abusive marriages without the difficulties of proof required under the old system. In a sense, divorced and separated women by their very misfortunes have spearheaded the cause of women in general at this level.

However, all this has not taken either women or the divorced or separated and their families very far, and the continuing

economic plight of the divorced and separated continues to throw into sharp relief the problems facing women. A great deal will depend on how they and others interpret their situation and project solutions to these problems.

#### The effect of Marital Status on Political Attitudes

The broad objective of the research reported below was simply to use survey data to study the attitudes of marital status groups in the light of current knowledge about the effects of separation and divorce and contemporary perspectives in feminist political thought. More precise objectives and the methods of analysis to be used emerged from the arguments already presented but were also shaped by the findings of exploratory analysis of the available data. It is therefore not in a spirit of pretension, but just for clarity's sake that I present the objectives in the form of the following eight hypotheses:-

1. That divorced and separated people, but women especially, would be more disposed than other people in general, and married people in particular, to favour change.
2. That this positive orientation to change would not be indiscriminate but would be oriented towards political and economic change which would reflect the connection between political values, public policy and their own economic situation.

Specifically it should centre on the role of the state in the redistribution of wealth.

3. It seemed probable that the outlook of divorced and separated people would not fit the traditional left-right partisan dimension on matters of political economy, but rather form a dimension distinct from it.

4. That divorced and separated people would tend to see feminism as an economic and political issue as much as, or more than, a moral one.

5. As a corollary to 3, they would be unlikely, especially the females, to associate equality for women with "permissive" changes in society since they would be able to distinguish between things which render women more vulnerable to exploitation and constraint (e.g. the prevalence of pornographic material in everyday life) and changes which give women more control over their lives.

6. If this were so, they would tend to associate the right of women to choose for or against abortion with equality for women rather than permissiveness in sexual morality, since it gives women more control over a crucial aspect of their lives. However this is a matter of perception, not preference; it does not necessarily follow that people who perceive abortion this way

will be more in favour of abortions than other people.

7. With respect to the situation of women, I expected to find that divorced and separated people, but above all the women, would be more in favour of greater equality for women than other people.

8. It was also anticipated that feminist tendencies and perceptions in the population at large would be more developed among women than men and especially among younger women whose attitudes would resemble those of the divorced and separated and reflect similar underlying dimensions.

However, any conclusions based on the findings reported below must necessarily be tentative since they are derived from secondary analysis of data which, though possessing great advantages for my purpose, remained far from perfect. This must then be considered an exploratory project which awaits confirmation and extension in a purpose-built survey.

### III

#### THE DATA AND THE CONTEXT

The data came from the British Election Study of 1979 (7). 1979 is recent enough for the data to be considered contemporary and the study in question is far superior, for my purpose, to anything available before or since (a fact which unfortunately precludes comparison over time).

The superiority consists firstly in the marital status information; there is a separate category for divorced and separated people, which has made this research possible. It is hard to see a rational explanation for lumping the divorced or separated with other marital status groups such as single or widowed people,(8) yet this is just what is often done, sacrificing much of the point of having a marital status question at all and limiting the usefulness of the sex variable as well.

The identification of separated people along with the divorced also followed a far better logic than is usual, for separation is emphatically part of the divorce experience and the condition of divorced people and the separated is very similar.

Secondly, the NES questioned respondents on a very wide range of issues independently of party identification; these included economic and political change, social issues including

equality for women and minority rights, questions of social morality and questions relating to participation. They were framed in such a way as to elicit attitudes to change and to government action.

Thirdly, the sample of divorced and separated people was small (80 cases) but not impossibly so. The main findings stand up well to tests of statistical significance and the sample is large enough for such techniques as factor analysis to be credible. Usually, survey samples are too small to make analysis of small subgroups feasible and it is very frustrating to find a sophisticated battery of questions and categories rendered unusable simply because there are not enough cases. This was found to be the case, for example in the Scottish and Welsh studies, where marital status was concerned. Even so, the BES, in reflecting the preponderance of women among the divorced and separated population, had too small a sample of men in this category to provide results as firm as for the women. For this reason less detailed analysis of the men's characteristics is presented.

These are the strengths of the data; now for its imperfections. At 4.2%, the whole divorced and separated subgroup is unrepresentatively small as a proportion of the whole sample, since it purports to represent separated as well as divorced people. As well as sampling error, reluctance on the

part of respondents to identify themselves may be partly responsible along with confusion about the status of informal as opposed to judicial separation.

The problem is not just that there were undoubtedly more than 4.2% of the adult population in the category of divorced and separated in May 1979. It lies more seriously in the fact that this category is itself a poor guide to the size of the divorce and separation phenomenon in the adult population. The reason for this is the re-absorption of divorced people into the married population by remarriage. There is thus an unidentifiable element in the category "married" who share the experience of separation and divorce - and we have no reason to suppose that the marks of this experience are not lasting. For a discussion of the statistics of the divorce and separation phenomena, the reader is referred to the Appendix.

The effect of this unknown element among the married people should, however, have the effect of understating the differences between the two groups engendering more rather than less confidence in the significance of the findings. On the other hand there is an inescapable stress on the outlook of people who do not remarry since they must in logic be over-represented here.

## The Variables

### 1. Marital Status

The original marital status categories in the data are (1) single; (2) divorced and separated; (3) widowed; (4) married and (5) common law cohabitantes. The last group, a tiny one, was disregarded for purposes of analysis. All the other four were analysed, but given the theoretical approach to this study, the focus was naturally on comparison of the divorced and separated people with the rest and especially with married people to whom they are, as it were, the other side of the coin in terms of life-experience.

Table 1: Age Structure of Divorced/Separated and Married subsets.  
BES 1979.

	Divorced/ Separated	Married
Mean age (years) (st.dev)	44.7 (13.4)	45.4 (14.6)
Women - mean age (st.dev)	44.8 (13.4)	43.6 (14.4)
Men - mean age (st.dev)	44.4 (13.4)	47.2 (14.7)

The age structure of these two groups is so similar as to render them more immediately comparable than any other pair of

groups and the comparison is in itself a first step towards the elimination of distortion due to age.

Comparison with the marrieds was also a useful device to overcome the problem of disparity in size of sample which undermines comparison with the rest of the sample put together. This is the case because in all the analyses performed, results for the married group were very similar to those for the sample as a whole. The single and widowed groups (227 and 200 cases respectively) tend, because of the relationships of age to marital status and attitudes, to cancel each other out leaving the marrieds not just numerically dominant but in possession of the field. As a result comparison with married people is valid in its own right and as a substitute for comparison with the whole.(9)

## 2. Demographic, Social-structural and Political Background Variables.

To control for the effect of age it was introduced as an independent variable to all the regression analyses performed, as was sex where appropriate. However, it seemed advisable to beware of a possible cohort effect on the findings, so the divorced and separated were also compared with two age cohorts; younger people (under 35) and a mid-age cohort (35 to 54) which took in the modal distribution of the divorced and separated. Both cohorts cut across the marital status groups apart from the

divorced and separated themselves.

### 3. The Attitude Variables.

These consisted of a basic set of thirty selected from those available in the BES and fell into two main groups.

In the first, respondents were asked for their views on changes that have been taking place in Britain and were given a choice of five responses: that the changes have gone much too far, gone a little too far, are about right, have not gone quite far enough, have not gone nearly far enough. The questions dealt with:-

Welfare benefits; attempts to ensure equality for women; the right to show nudity and sex in films and magazines; people challenging authority; recent attempts to ensure equality for coloured people; the change toward modern methods in teaching children at school nowadays; the availability of abortion on the National Health Service; the reduction of Britain's military strength.

A second group dealt more specifically with government action. People were asked how they felt about things "some people believe a Government should do". Did they feel it was very important or fairly important that it should be done, that it doesn't matter either way or was fairly important or very

important that it should not be done? The subjects were:-

putting more money into the Health Service; establishing comprehensive schools in place of grammar schools throughout the country; sending coloured immigrants back to their own country; increasing state control of building land; giving more aid to poorer countries in Africa and Asia; bringing back the death penalty; giving workers more say in the running of the place where they work; taking tougher measures to prevent Communist influence in Britain; spending more money to get rid of poverty in Britain; redistributing income and wealth in favour of ordinary working people; making more efforts to protect the countryside and our finest buildings; giving stiffer sentences to people who break the law; giving council house tenants the right to buy their houses; going ahead with further expansion of the nuclear power industry; reducing the powers of the House of Lords.

Two further question, dichotomous in form, asked people their views on big businesses and the trade unions respectively; do they have too much power or not?

Three other questions posed distinct alternatives: is it more important to reduce taxes or keep up government services; should we attempt to improve race relations by stopping immigration or tackling the problems of jobs and housing in the

large cities; should the political system be changed to give more say in what goes on to ordinary people or to the country's political leaders.

Finally they were asked how they felt about social services and benefits: have they gone too far and should be cut back a lot, or cut back a bit, should they stay much as they are or are more social services and benefits needed?

In order to simplify interpretation, associated variables were recoded to point in the same direction. In order to maximise the extraction of information, further recoding took account of the distribution of responses to adopt the most meaningful cutting-points on each variable individually and direct the focus towards attitudes to change. In some cases, such as NHS spending, almost everyone was agreed on spending more and the question was how strongly they felt about it. In the case of pornography (nudity and sex...) hardly anyone wanted more of it, and not a single divorced or separated woman among them. In the final version of the analysis, some variables were dichotomous in form and other trichotomous, but this was after extensive experiment showed that no distortion was being introduced by any of the recoding adopted.\*

\*Note: Readers familiar with the BES may wonder at the omission of questions about attitudes to a woman P.M. or M.P.; in 1979 this data had too much partisan content to be usable.

Why are some people divorced and separated rather than others?

The data available cannot answer this question, a fact which is interesting in itself.

In order to test for a socio-economic explanation of the incidence of divorce and separation, the married and divorced and separated samples were merged and a stepwise multiple regression analysis performed on the dependent variable 'Divorced or separated'. The set of indicators included socio-economic and political background, trade unionists in the family circle, belonging to a religious denomination, (10) years of education, parenthood and age. The object, of course, was to use social-structural variables which were logically and chronologically prior to marital experience, though without more complete information on children, religion and education, ambiguity in this respect could not be totally excluded.

In the event the only slightly significant predictors were father's vote (a standardised partial regression coefficient, or beta, of 0.08997 for father not voting Conservative) and absence of trade unionists from the family circle (beta = 0.06624) amounting to an  $r^2$  of 1.2% between them. The correlation between marital status and class background was practically zero.

This result disposed of the possibility that divorce should

be regarded as an intermediate variable in a causal relationship starting with variables known to have an independent effect on political attitudes and behaviour.(11)

There remains the possibility that the independent variable should be a divorce-prone personality type (or types). While I cannot rule this out, it is not only beyond the scope of this study but seems to me improbable. It is not only that divorce is so frequent and socially diffused(12) - which might suggest a prevalent type - but that the scenarios are so varied, as are the roles played by individuals.

A recent attempt to identify factors contributing to the breakdown of marriages came to the same conclusion as earlier studies, namely that divorce results from an interaction of unhappiness in marriage with external factors. The authors suggested that the unhappiness itself was linked with exposure to environmental disadvantages and personal stress, but beyond that were unable to reach any firm conclusions other than that the survival of marriages was more to be wondered at than their breakdown.(13) It seems likely that we should look to our culture, the pressure it puts on people to marry and the gap between the reality of marriage and the culturally-induced expectations people have about it, to answer the question "Why?"

When the identical regressions were performed with only the

women from the merged sample, the results were slightly more rewarding. Absence of trade unionism and a non-Conservative background had each a partial regression coefficient of 0.13 with divorce and separation. However the causal implications of this are very slight.

#### Identifying Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Divorced and Separated.

The outstanding difference between married people and the divorced and separated is the relative poverty of the latter.

The set of indicators used in the equations discussed above were expanded by the inclusion of income\* and other variables subsequent to marital experience. In the whole merged sample, low income was by far the best predictor of divorced and separated status. It explained 7.5% of the variance for both sexes, 3.4% for men and no less than 11.7% for women, with betas of 0.27, 0.18 and 0.34 respectively. Controlling for income, the divorced and separated are slightly younger and more educated, include more Labour voters, are more likely to belong to a union and less religious, but the effect of these additions to the equation is not great. (At each stage, the regression procedure controls for all the variables entered, so the role of a variable as predictor will not exactly mirror the correlation with marital status. Thus with education, which actually has a tiny negative correlation with being divorced and separated.) Nothing else

\* measured as the natural log of the mean annual income in each of the 15 original categories.

entered into the regression equation diminished the importance of income as the distinguishing characteristic of this group. Looked at the other way round, regression analysis found the best predictors of low income to be education (negative) and marital status (positive), each with a partial regression coefficient of 0.25.

In the case of the women studied on their own, the result showed some interesting nuances. Though the divorced and separated women are as a group slightly less educated than married women, they are likely to be more educated relative to income and current social grade. They are also more likely, controlling for income and education, to be in paid employment and to have children.

#### Variation between the sexes

Since the issues of separation and divorce bear so heavily on the situation of women and one of the objectives here was to investigate the interaction of sex with marital status, a preliminary understanding of variation in the attitudes of men and women in the sample as a whole was essential. The findings of earlier research into sex differences in political attitudes(14) and our understanding of the way in which the situation of women affects their sense of political efficacy warn us not to expect variation across the board between the sexes.

In any case we should not assume that sex differences will manifest themselves in a greater homogeneity of outlook among women than we expect to find among men. Unless we have a good theoretical reason for supposing that women's interests (and their contemporary perceptions thereof) will lead them to adopt a single approach, be it radical, conservative or whatever, then we should expect to find as much variety among the opinions of women as men. There may be issues which do not relate to sex at all. In others, social structural variables will affect the perceptions of both sexes in similar ways, especially in view of our cultural emphasis on the interests of men as determining, in every sense of the word, the fate of women.

One of the most valuable insights of feminist political thought is that the unequal distribution of power between the sexes and its superstructure of myth, socialisation and convention has combined with the physical dispersal of women among men in families to atomise the female population and inhibit their political consciousness and mobilisation. Recent research confirms this.(15) We should therefore expect to find that the emergence of distinctively female outlooks will be contingent on the exposure of numbers of women to experiences and ideas which conflict with early socialisation and the social context variables which reinforce it in adult life. To have an effect this exposure should be continuous and lasting and at best should involve women in the public exchange and development

of ideas. Paid employment, adult education and of course divorce and separation may constitute experiences of this kind.

Because of the roughly similar size of the single and widowed subgroups among women and their clustering at either end of the age spectrum, the findings for women in general really tell us most about the attitudes of married women, tempered by the presence among them of the divorced and separated (and of course the unidentifiable formerly divorced). The outlook of married women is numerically and circumstantially dominant. This is less true for men, who are comparatively skewed towards youth.

With this caveat in mind, the results of analysis confirm our expectations. In the sample as a whole, women differed from men almost entirely in areas of a non-economic character which reflect their situation and basic preoccupations within that situation. That is, variation centres on social aspects of relations between the sexes, on women's feelings of alienation from the political system and powerlessness within it, on their anxieties about violence, crime and social change associated with tension and on two areas which are less clearly related, the expansion of nuclear power and spending on public services, specifically the National Health Service. They were also less committed to two "left wing" issues which had its effect on the left-right dimension in their attitudes.

Of these differences, attitudes to the political system are

the most pertinent to this enquiry. Given the choice of changing our whole political system or leaving it more or less as it is, 73% of the people surveyed opted for change. Asked if they thought protest and demonstration against unpopular decisions were likely to be effective, 81% said they were not. On both questions women were markedly more alienated than men. In respect of political change, the difference consisted entirely of women who would like to see change of a populist character, giving people more say in what goes on, rather than giving leaders more power to "get on with the job". 60% of all women expressed this desire for a more populist political system. The proportion rose to 69% among women up to 30 years old with the gap between the sexes never less than 10% and over 15% in some age groups.

Multivariate regression analysis was used in an attempt to explain variation in feelings of alienation and powerlessness, correlations and factor analysis to discover any association with attitudinal dimensions, with somewhat intriguing results. Low social status (occupational) was the best predictor of populist sympathies, followed by sex in the mixed sample, but populism was not specific to any particular dimension among women; among men it was linked with hostility to big business and nuclear power. It appears to express a general yearning for radical change, particularly prevalent among women, to give people more control over their lives.

MARITAL STATUS AND POLITICAL ATTITUDESFocus on Political EconomyAttitudes to Change

Divorced and separated people as a group are distinctly more favourable to change in comparison with married people or the population as a whole, but the focus of their aspirations is highly specific.

Their attitude to change was measured in two ways. (1) Using the full range of responses on each variable, the mean response for the divorced and separated was compared with that of the married sample. (2) Attitudes were then crosstabulated with marital status, in both their raw form and recoded to emphasise change and assist comparison of degrees of desire for change, levels of satisfaction and desire to reverse change. In each case variation which was not significant at the 95% level of statistical significance was discounted; in fact these two approaches provided excellent corroboration of each other in terms both of content and significance.

Examining the basic set of thirty variables, significant levels of variation were found in the case of eleven.

Table 2: Attitudes to change of divorced/separated compared with married people.

Issue	% Divorced and Separated more in favour than Married	
	Whole group	Women only
	%	%
Social Services and Benefits	20	31
Welfare Benefits	18	24
Reduce powers of House of Lords (a)	16	15
Control over Land for Building	15	16
Equality for Women	No difference	12
Redistribution of Income and Wealth	14	12
Worker Participation	13	12
Populism	13	10*
Reducing military expenditure	10	6
Challenging Authority	9	7
Opposition to sending back immigrants	-6	No difference
Nationalisation (b)	5	7
Modern Teaching Methods (less opposed)	No difference	16

(a) This variable had an unusually high number of missing observations, particularly among women.

(b) Significantly higher mean due to greater satisfaction with the status quo on the part of the divorced and separated, particularly men.

\* Already known to be a sex-linked issue (see above).

In ten of these, the variation arises because the divorced and separated are more in favour of these things. Only in the eleventh (sending back immigrants) do they wish to reverse the contemporary trend. This has the corollary, of course, that in the case of the other, non-economic issues their views are similar to those of married people. Fractionally on the wrong side of significance were three other variables, two of which extend the picture of economic variation (spending to eliminate poverty and keeping services v. cutting taxes) and one which may balance the lower level of racial tolerance; the divorced and separated were 12.8% less in favour of restoring capital punishment.\*

\*Note: It is not feasible to use multivariate regression analysis straightforwardly to confirm the importance of divorce and separation in explaining this variation. This is because the main socio-economic indicators, income and social grade, which impinge on many attitudes, cannot be used as independent variables: in the case of the divorced and separated these variables, particularly income, are also dependent on marital status as we have seen. The figures in Table 2 can however be broadly confirmed by the correlations produced using a simple causal model which takes into account both the direct and indirect effects of marital status as illustrated below for the attitudes of women to social services and benefits:-

Income		Attitude to Social Services
.34	.14	
Divorce & Separation	.20	
.03	.13	
Social Grade		
Correlation of marital status and attitude = $.20 + (.34 \times .14)$		
$+ (.03 \times .13)$		
$= .25$		

It is striking that of the ten pro-change attitudes only two (cuts in military expenditure and challenging authority) relate indirectly rather than obviously to the redistribution of power and income. The variation is almost exclusively in terms of political economy and is in no way an indiscriminate enthusiasm for contemporary ideas.

This political and economic orientation of the divorced and separated holds good even when they are compared with the sample of single people, with younger people in general and with the mid-age cohort. There are slight departures from the pattern but significant results again point to a tendency of the divorced and separated to favour economic change but, in comparison with the single people, to reject contemporary trends in the area of 'permissive' social morality, immigration and penal reform, where their attitudes do not differ consistently or significantly from those of married people.

If we now extend our investigation to take in the interaction of sex with marital status the connection between the life-experience of the divorced and separated and their views on the distribution of power and the socio-economic role of the state becomes even clearer. Two additional issues must be taken into account because of variation between the two groups of women: attitudes to equality for women and modern teaching

methods. In the case of two other issues, a prior connection with sex has been established. On the lesser of these, sending back immigrants, it is clear that a greater tolerance on the part of the small group of divorced and separated men brings the group as a whole in line with the attitudes of women in general. In contrast the effect of variation in the attitudes of women to change in the political system is to magnify the difference in outlook producing extremes of opinion between married men and divorced and separated women.

Table 3: Attitudes to changing the political system.

	Proportion in favour of giving people more say in the political system
Married Men	50%
Divorced and Separated Women	71%

It is already possible to draw some conclusions from this evidence. Divorced and separated people are less satisfied with the present distribution of power and income and much more in favour of state intervention to redistribute it - indirectly through the provision of services and planning controls, directly through benefits for the disadvantaged. They are more positively oriented towards radical political reform and it is obvious even

from the findings presented so far that this is not exclusively or even particularly a conventional left-wing outlook.

Divorced and separated women share the characteristics of the group as a whole but are more alienated and their emphasis on the active role of the state in providing services and income is so much greater as to account entirely for the variation on the social services variable (but not welfare). The reader should beware, however of assuming at this stage that these attitudes among the women account for all there is to know about this aspect of the divorced and separated outlook. The divorced and separated women also include more feminists than married people, men and women and than divorced and separated men, who were more polarised on this issue than any other group of men.

If we compare these differences among marital status groups with the significant difference between men and women in general, it is immediately apparent that marital status variation does not cut across sex differences. What it does is interact with variation between the sexes to reinforce one aspect thereof and introduce the crucial area of political attitudes which is associated with the life-experience of divorced and separated people and is most prominent among the women in this group.

The data thus confirms the first three of our hypotheses. The divorced and separated are more in favour of change, the

changes they seek focus on redistribution and state intervention and this outlook is not contained in a traditional dimension of left-wing issues. Hypothesis 7 is only partly confirmed. They are not, as a group, more in favour of more equality for women, but the women among them decidedly are.

#### The political outlook of divorced and separated people

It was anticipated that further evidence would be found to illuminate the connection of these results with the life-experience of the divorced and separated. Given the reasoning behind this project, it was logical to expect that factor analysis of these attitudes would reveal a dimension, relating to the redistribution of power and resources, which was different from the conceptualisation of married people and did not belong to the traditional left-right dichotomy of British politics. Since factor analysis is a technique which cannot detect associations unless they are really there in the data, it is an appropriate method of testing this hypothesis.

The emphasis of the politics of left and right is on ownership and management of industry, seen as a battleground between capital and organised labour, with the left-wing proponents of change emphasising the role of the state as manager and planning agency and instrument for furthering the interests of the working-class. Only the last seems relevant to the

experience and needs of divorced and separated people as such and only to the extent that they may be incidental beneficiaries of changes which do not have their particular needs in view. The importance of the relationship of their situation to that of women is crucial here; capitalism, trade unions and working-class values are all bastions of the traditional social and economic life which restricts women in general to an isolated and dependent role, and does not provide the kind of services, equalities, legal rights or values which would meet the needs of most divorced and separated people of either sex, especially if they are heads of single parent families or trying to support two families.

On the other hand, there was no reason to expect that they would diverge, factorially speaking, where links of other kinds between issues were concerned, unless through association with attitudes in the crucial subset. To an extent so complete as to be surprising, both expectations were fulfilled.

Before reaching the results of this stage of the project, readers are invited to consider the methodology involved in the application of factor analysis to such a purpose and its use in this particular instance. Those who are uninterested or prepared to take the results on trust may care to proceed forthwith to page 40.

### Comparing the dimensionality of groups

If variation on a set of issues between men and women, or any other groups, is to have more than passing interest, it should be symptomatic of underlying conceptual dimensions. Anticipating that the observed variation between the sexes and marital status groups would indeed prove to be related to the theoretical approach behind this research, factor analysis was performed for the whole sample and each subgroup. The idea was not only to investigate the relationship between variables but to compare the actual dimensionality of the groups.

The comparison of the political dimensions revealed by factor analysis for the same variables in different populations is not a device often encountered in the literature. Probably the outstanding example is its use by Verba, Nie and Kim in their five-nation study of participation (17). In that instance, results were compared from five separate samples. In this project I am using separate groups drawn from a single large sample. However this should not affect the validity of comparison, though there is considerable disparity in size among the groups; if we accept the results of comparison using other techniques we should also accept the results of factor analysis, which is the best way of testing hypotheses about relationships among attitudes. It is of course essential to make equally careful study of the correlation matrix for each group in order to distinguish major differences from minor ones which may be

due to sampling error. This is also the only way to understand how the pull of different sets of associations makes for subtle variations in the outcome across groups, an effect which in this data was visible where attitudes to equality for women and coloured people were concerned.

One reason why the exercise may not often be performed is that it is so discouragingly time-consuming and tricky, the more so when the number of groups involved is large, as here. Thirteen separate factor analyses were made, for the whole sample, men, women and four marital status groups, three of them also by sex. To make the comparison as valid as possible the analysis should be performed as far as may be under identical conditions. Though nothing could be done about the inequity in size of groups, the same set of thirty variables, always coded the same way, was used in each analysis.

In the end, the same number of factors was extracted in each case (6). This number of factors was chosen with several criteria in mind and without a prior commitment to extracting the same numbers of factors in each analysis. Exploratory experiment indicated that six factors corresponded best to the various correlation matrices, accounting for the dimensionality better than or as well as any other. Since this was a secondary analysis and the original gigantic survey design reflected the goals of various interested parties, it was inevitable that some

unexpected associations would be found, some variables would add nothing and minor factors would be difficult to interpret. Setting the number extracted at six ensured that at least five intelligible factors were revealed in most cases and it was also possible to see how the loose ends tied up. It was also found to be the number which best illuminated similarities and differences across the groups. In no group was this number too few to account for the dimensionality (i.e. in terms of clear, identifiable factors loading sufficiently high on a sufficient number of variables).

The number of original factors (i.e. according to the convention that requires an eigenvalue equal to or greater than 1) varied from eight in the larger groups to eleven in the smaller and the percentage of variation explained varied even more. This last is not difficult to understand; the larger the aggregate and the more heterogeneous and numerous its parts, the less the variation that can be explained by a few underlying dimensions. Factor analysis can reduce data to the simplest solution, but only at the cost of losing increasing amounts of information.

If one is expecting to find the identical model confirmed in each group, then variation of this kind will be disturbing. If, as here, one is looking for differences as well as similarities, it is reassuring to find that the identity of the groups is

confirmed at the outset by differences in (a) the number of significant, original factors (b) the amount of total variation explained by significant factors and (c) the communalities (i.e. % variation explained for each variable). Analysis confirmed that there was a difference of fit in these senses among the groups, with the factor analysis model best fitting the single and the divorced and separated groups, but with considerable fluctuation in both the original and final communalities on individual variables.

There are three reasons why this fluctuation in communalities occurred. Firstly some variables were comparatively unrelated to the rest, so that their variation was not explicable by factor analysis. Secondly this lack of connectedness varied from group to group and was in itself an indication of dimensional divergence. Thirdly, the choice of number of factors to be extracted can affect final communalities; a further criterion for the choice of six factors was to achieve the best balance among communalities compatible with the evidence of the correlation matrix and the exploratory analyses.

It is ironical that the single and divorced-and-separated groups provided the most satisfactory results in terms of variation explained, since they were the groups which least fit the dimensional model provided by analysis of the whole sample and replicated in analysis of the largest subgroup, married

people.

The first comparative exercise involved the sexes; this was followed by comparison of the marital status groups, starting with the divorced-and-separated and married groups. Marital status groups were then subdivided by sex for further comparison. In all these instances the groups compared were independent of each other (i.e. not overlapping) which is necessary if the exercise is to be valid. The type of rotation was oblique; since correlation between dimensions was not ruled out, it seemed best to use a method which showed conclusively where it did not occur as well as supplying measurements, albeit controversial, where it did.

Apart from a weak sixth factor in the case of men, the clear dimensions of political outlook among the undifferentiated groups of men and women were found to be very similar, with only slight differences on what were essentially the same factors. Five clear factors emerged in both cases. Since these similarities and differences were replicated in the results for men and women, there is no need to report them separately.

It was immediately apparent that the result obtained by factor analysis of married people's attitudes simply mirrored that obtained from the whole sample (with similar lack of variation between the sexes) while major divergences appeared in

comparison with other groups. This was taken as confirmation of the fundamental assumption behind this project that it is sensible to direct research towards new and smaller subgroups of the population. Factor analysis of a whole population can be misleading unless it is a very homogeneous population; fairly minor loadings on factors, normally disregarded, may be clues to substantial divergence of underlying ideas among subgroups and apparently unintelligible factors may be the result of the "ironing-out" of the differences in the minor factors of subgroups. Returning after this research was completed to the original factor pattern for the whole sample, examples of both could be detected. Of course there is a lower limit on the size of group, or sample, that is appropriate for authentic factor analysis, generally held to be twice the number of cases as there are variables. Below that ratio of 2:1 sample error and the eccentricities of the sample in question render the exercise useless. For this reason factor analysis of the whole set of variables for divorced and separated men and women separately was not really feasible.

#### Dimensions of political economy

The main divergence between the married and the divorced-and-separated groups occurred in the content and significance of two political economy dimensions occurring in each case and obviously reminiscent of factors found in the whole sample and

Table 4: Political economy factors compared for married and divorced-and-separated groups. Extracted from factor pattern produced by Direct Oblimin Rotation

Variables	Married People		Divorced and Separated	
	F1	F5	F1	F5
	Left-wing issues	Redistributive	Redistributive	Left-wing issues
Equality for coloured people	-.03	.04	.34	.06
Equality for women	-.06	.10	.43	-.11
Social Services and benefits	-.01	.62	.80	.06
Welfare	.02	.71	.58	.14
Modern teaching methods	.26	.17	.56	-.16
Antibusiness	.19	.00	.47	.01
Redistribute income to working people	.52	.11	.38	.38
Nationalisation	.59	.10	.03	.67
Comprehensive schools	.51	.12	.02	.52
House of Lords reform	.45	.07	-.06	.37
Pro-union	.38	.18	.02	.44
Control of land for building	.51	.02	-.10	.03
Reduce military expenditure	.38	.01	-.01	.30
Workers participation	.37	.03	.08	.08

Correlation = .46      Correlation = .32

Note: a cut-off of  $\pm .35$  has been adopted as the minimum significant loading.

the subsets of men and women. The subset of variables which composes these two factors coincides almost exactly with those on which the two groups have been found to vary, listed in Table 2 above, plus the two on which the groups of women vary but not the men. Only two out of that set, populism and sending back immigrants do not appear on these dimensions for one or other group and the factors include only three additional variables (comprehensive schools and attitudes to big business and the unions).

Table 4 illustrates the content of these dimensions and gives the factor loadings for each variable. A cut-off of  $\pm .35$  for significance has been adopted and one variable which does not quite satisfy this requirement is included for reasons which will be discussed in a later part of this paper.

The factors which were extracted as F1 and F5 for the married group have a clearly political and economic character. The first is a familiar dimension made up of left-wing issues which describe quite comprehensively the ideological approach of the left to the question of political and economic power. It includes an education variable, comprehensive schools. The other is a bare redistributive factor, narrowly focussed on welfare and services. The factors are highly correlated; in the structures matrix, not illustrated, they are less distinct.

The contrast with the divorced and separated group is remarkable. In their case, the first factor is a highly-developed form of the redistributive dimension, emphasising social services and benefits and welfare with teaching methods, attitudes to the power of big business, equality for women and redistribution of income to ordinary working people. Only on this last issue does it overlap with the other political economy dimension, F6 in this group, which is by comparison a shadowy and insubstantial left-wing issues factor. Correlation between the factors is not so high; the effect of this, combined with the signs of minor loadings and the correlation coefficient, is to help produce a factor structure very similar to the factor pattern. The only differences are that equality for coloured people joins the first (Redistributive) dimension and spending to eliminate poverty the sixth (Left-wing issues). Readers tempted to identify this factor as "populist" should note the absence from it of attitudes to populist change in the political system.

In both groups, the Left-wing issues factor is very strongly associated with voting Labour and not voting Conservative while the other, Redistributive factor is much less linked with partisan voting. In the case of the divorced and separated this is particularly interesting since they were more Labour-voting than any other marital status group in 1979, especially the men. It means that party cannot be held to account for the

distinctiveness of their outlook; party voting is still associated mainly with the traditional dimension. In fact the voting history of this group (based on recall in 1979) indicated a flight from Labour and much shifting of allegiance over February and October 1974 and May 1979.

Differences between the sexes played almost no part in constructing the factor pattern for married people. It was impossible to make direct comparison in this respect with the divorced and separated because the groups were too small for factor analysis with such a very large set of variables, but results of analyses performed on subsets of variables suggested that though the Left-wing issues dimension was more prominent among the men, both sexes maintained the separation of Left-wing and Redistributive factors, with the latter a very dominant dimension among the women. The association of equality for women with this dimension was actually more pronounced among the men than the women.

If the original comparison is extended to the other marital status groups, we find that measured by the appearance and differentiation of political economy dimensions, there is a progression from the widowed, for whom a single rather insubstantial economic factor is found (combining social services and welfare with controls over building land, House of Lords reform and attitudes to dealing with communists) to the

differentiation we have seen among the divorced and separated. Single people occupied an interesting intermediate position between the married and the divorced and separated, with their Redistributive factor 5 showing a marked difference from that of married people.

Table 5: Redistributive dimensions compared  
Extract from Direct Oblimin Factor Pattern

Variables	Married	Single	Divorced & Separated
Equality for coloured people	.04	.11	.34
Equality for women	.10	.46	.43
Social services and benefits	.62	.82	.80
Welfare	.71	.43	.58
Modern teaching methods	.17	-.02	.56
Antibusiness	.00	.12	.47
Redistribute to working people	.11	-.05	.38

Note: cut-off of  $\pm .35$  for minimum significant loading.

The strong element of equality for women in this dimension for single people was wholly accounted for by correlations in the case of men. For single women, feminism had quite different associations which will be discussed later and they did not have distinct economic dimensions at all. In this respect single women resembled the widowed more than their male counterparts.

In conclusion then, the divorced and separated have been found to differ from others in just the kind of economic and political outlook we expected to find. It envisions the general changes and specific kinds of state intervention which would make society a more appropriate environment for most divorced and separated people, not only the women among them. It embraces provision of services which would enable them to provide for themselves, equality for women which would allow them to be genuinely self-supporting and cannot come about without legal guarantees of their security and changes in the attitude of employers, changes in education and an adequate safety-net of welfare for the temporarily helpless. Since these are not changes which can be expected to come without resistance from business, unions and the traditional parties, let alone spontaneously, it is only logical that this outlook should not constitute an elaboration of the traditional left-right dichotomy but be quite distinct from it. There is of course no reason why such changes would be more likely to come about in a "socialist" society as it is usually understood. In fact it is possible that the mixed economy makes it possible for some of these changes to come about piecemeal whereas the traditional values of a "socialist" and highly centralised system may be more difficult to breach.

### The Comparison of non economic factors

In order to deal with the complex problem of the remaining dimensional comparison in the most comprehensible way, three other common factors will be examined in turn before returning to the overall comparison of the married and divorced-and-separated groups.

#### Race Relations and Penal Reforms

The correlation matrix and factor analysis showed that attitudes to immigration, race relations and sentencing of criminals were closely related. Sarlvik and Crewe, whose report on the British Election Study(16) came out as this was being written, found them to constitute two separate but correlated factors. I have been unable to discover even this degree of separation; in every group they formed a single strong factor with some variation in the relative balance.(See Table 6) The interpretation of this factor must embrace concepts of ethnocentrism, racial intolerance and fear of social deviance (and the converse, penal reform and racial tolerance).

The principal variation concerned the presence or absence of the issues of stiffer sentences and equality for coloured people. In some cases their absence was accounted for by the pull of their associations with other dimensions - stiffer

Table 6. Comparison of race relations and penal reform dimensions; a 'liberal v. reactionary' dimension

<u>Groups</u>	<u>Stiffer Sentences</u>	<u>Death Penalty</u>	<u>Immigration</u>	<u>Foreign Aid</u>	<u>Jobs v stop immigration</u>	<u>Sending back immigrants</u>	<u>Race Equality</u>	<u>Other</u>
Married		.35	.56	.42	.63	.59	.35	
Single		.50	.63	.46	.72	.67	.50	
Divorced & separated	.46	.49	.53	.56	.71	.62		
Widowed		.51	.46	.40	.52	.49	.43	
<hr/>								
Married men		.36	.53	.39	.67	.58		
" women	.39	.40	.63	.43	.56	.60	.38	
Single men	.48	.62	.72	.38	.63	.67	.45	
women	.37	.50	.52	.56	.87	.60	.49	

Notes 1. Cut off is  $\pm .35$  for significant loading

2. Liberal attitudes associate on all variables (conversely so do non-liberal)

3. Groups above dotted line are non-overlapping, as are groups below the line.

sentences with the variants of a patriotic, protection of our heritage dimension discussed below and race equality because of its association among the divorced and separated with equality for women.

Permissive Social Morality

This not-so-common factor is shown in Table 7.

Table 7: "Permissive" dimensions compared.

<u>Groups</u>	<u>Issues</u>			
	Challenging Authority	Pornography	Abortion	Equality for Women
Married	.35	.62	.39	
Single	.67	.45		
Divorced & Separated	.40	.69	.66	
Widowed		.66	.61	
Married men	.36	.72		
Married women	.36	.59	.45	
Single men	This factor not identifiable			
Single women	.65	.44		.42

Note: Cut-off is +.35 for minimum significant loading.

Pornography appears to be the core issue of this dimension, which usually appeared as the fourth factor, since it is the constant element, variously associated with abortion or challenging authority or both, but the loadings varying considerably in their emphasis in the case of single people (and single women) for whom challenging authority is the identifying variable on this dimension.

A discrepancy occurs in the comparison of single men and women with the other groups. The factor cannot be identified in the case of single men, for whom the correlations involved in the other groups simply do not exist. In this group, challenging authority, and to a lesser extent pornography, are associated with opposition to stiffer sentences in the courts rather than with each other directly and the links of approving abortion are with penal reform (positive), social services and equality for women (negative) and the National Health Service (positive).

Where single women are concerned a remarkable variation in this dimension occurred with the inclusion of equality for women.

#### Protecting our Heritage

Here we have a factor, shown in Table 8, which is common to married people, male and female and the widowed and is distinctively patriotic, involving sternness to offenders and benevolence to the poor.

Table 8: "Protecting our heritage" dimensions compared

	Toughness with Communists	Stiffer Sentences	Protect Heritage	Anti- Poverty	Re- distribute to working people
Married		.55	.37	.34	
Single			Not Identifiable		
Divorced and Separated			Not Identifiable		
Widowed		.41	.47	.63	.35
Married - men	.46	.52	.39	.35	
Married - women		.50	.38	.40	
Single - men			Not Identifiable		
Single - women			Not Identifiable		

Notes: 1. Cut-off is +.35 for minimum significant loading.

2. To simplify presentation, variables have been re-labelled to indicate common direction of opinion and signs for loadings adjusted according so that all are positive.

Men appear more concerned in this dimension with the defence of our heritage against criminals and communists, the widowed with the protection of the poor and ordinary people.

In the case of single people and single men the factor could not be identified. Single women showed a factor so different as to be difficult to identify as the same; it linked protection of other heritage and eliminating poverty with populism and control of building land but had no connection with sentencing policy. A similar set appeared for the divorced and separated but was linked also with opposition to the death penalty; perhaps this group has a different conception of our heritage from married people.

If we now return to the full factor pattern of the married and the divorced and separated groups we find that we have four common factors with significant differences in two of them, and a fifth factor difficult to identify at all in the case of the divorced and separated. What of the sixth factor? Continuing as we have begun, using the factor pattern of the married people as our point of reference it is impossible to proceed further since the sixth 'factor' has no loadings high enough to be significant. If however we reverse the process and start with the factor pattern of the divorced and separated, a clear sixth factor is visible, factor 3 in this group, of which the married groups sixth factor is a faint echo. This dimension involves a dichotomy between liberal attitudes to communists and criminals on the one hand and a desire for populist change in the political system and greater equality for coloured people on the other. Among loadings which are not quite high enough to achieve

significance is an association of the desire for more sex equality with populism and race equality. It is these last three variables along with opposition to nuclear power which make the most small show in the case of married people. The most interesting aspects of this factor are firstly that it involves populism - one of the two variables with a significant variation between these two groups which has not hitherto been accounted for by the comparison of factor analyses. The second point of interest is the association between race and sex equality, occurring on no less than three dimensions of the divorced and separated group. The implications of this form the subject of the next stage in this investigation.

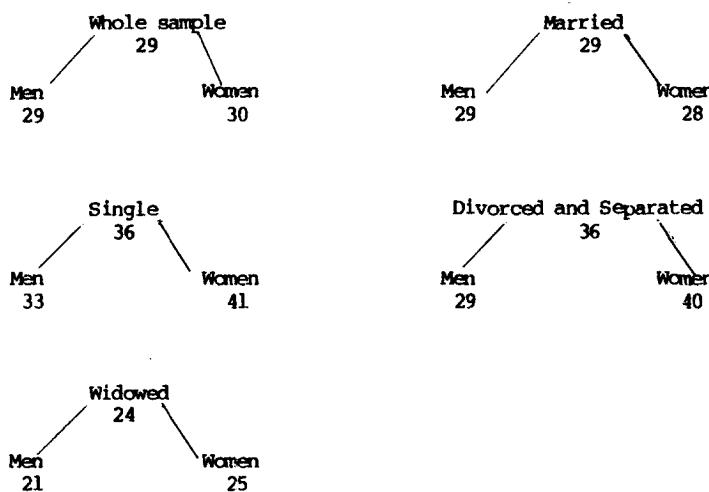
V

EQUALITY FOR WOMEN AND ATTITUDINAL DIMENSIONS

Whereas the orientation of the divorced and separated towards change of a political and economic character, the non-traditional dimensionality of this orientation and its link with their attitude to equality for women have all been established, the same cannot be said of the remaining hypotheses which must now be re-examined in the light of the evidence. Were women more feminist than men, were the divorced and separated, especially women, more feminist than married people, did they associate abortion with feminism rather than permissiveness and were divorced and separated women and single women alike in their responses to these issues?

Some of these questions are easily answered by the data given in Table 9.

Table 9: Percentages of people who think equality for women has not gone far enough, by marital status and sex.



Women were not proportionately more feminist than men, but this was because of the numerical dominance of the married people, among whom the response of the sexes was similarly distributed. The single and the divorced-and-separated groups did indeed contain more people who were in favour of more equality for women and this is accounted for entirely in the latter case, partly in the former, by the greater proportion of feminists among the women.

It would be misleading, however, to assume that the same

concept of equality for women is always at issue. The similarities between the outlook of single and divorced and separated people are less apparent than their differences when we consider how attitudes to equality for women correlate with other variables and the implications this has for how the different groups understand the concept. The table of correlations (Table 10) which illustrates how this variable, sex equality, correlates with other issues in each marital status and sex group, should make this clear:-

Table 10: Correlation of attitudes to equality for women with other issues by marital status and marital status and sex.

	Social Services	Welfare	Race Equality	Abortion	Challenge Authority	Pornography
Married	.15	.13	.24	.13	.15	.06
Widowed	.08	.22	.12	.05	.12	.03
Single	.34	.22	.21	-.04	.15	.17
Divorced and Separated	.33	.28	.39	.22	.09	.08
Married men	.14	.14	.25	.15	.11	.06
Married women	.15	.12	.24	.11	.19	.06
Single men	.40	.27	.29	-.20	.04	.17
Single women	.27	.15	.08	.15	.35	.21

It is evident that three aspects of equality for women are manifested in the associations that exist with other issues; sexual, economic and political in the strict sense. It is also obvious that sex equality means a different mix of these aspects for different groups.

The connotation of lack of sexual restraints is found most prominently in the case of single people, especially women, for whom a sizeable correlation exists between attitude to equality for women and pornography. Among single women the correlation with challenging authority is greater still with the effect that in factor analysis sex equality joins these two in a unique form of the permissive dimension, in spite of the fact that the association of feminism with social services is also evident. In sharp contrast is the absence of an identifiable permissive dimension among single men and their clear association of equality for women with economic redistribution.

The economic aspect of equality for women is expressed as we have seen in the correlation with social services and benefits and welfare which actually exist in every group,<sup>6</sup> but at their weakest in the groups of married people and single women.

The third aspect of feminism, which was not separately accounted for in the factor analysis results presented so far but is the most obvious feature of the correlation matrix, is the

most fundamental - the purely political sense of equality for women as a group of people who do not enjoy the same privileges as others because of their group identifying characteristic. As a political outgroup they have much in common with minorities, such as racial groups, though not as obviously in Britain as in the USA where the law has been used extensively against coloured people in the past as it was in Britain against women and religious minorities.

If the concept of political equality is fully understood and honestly applied it must stretch to everybody regardless of sex, skin colour etc. Since prejudices are known to exist against women and racial minorities, attitude to sex and race equality are particularly good issues with which to tap an underlying conceptualisation of universal political rights and acceptance or rejection thereof. An apparent commitment to equality (or freedom, democracy or other universal "goods") which coexists with a willingness to exclude people because of particular characteristics of appearance, sexual organs or religious belief is really a commitment to inequality.(18)

Sarlvik and Crewe noted that the distributions of responses on these two issues, race and sex equality, were very similar in the British Election Study data of 1979.(19) As we see from Table 10, they were also correlated in every group except single women, most strongly among the divorced and separated. The fact

that a purely political egalitarian dimension does not emerge through factor analysis is due to the presence of other, multiple associations with economic aspects of equality. With the divorced and separated this has the effect of detaching race equality from its links with other race-related issues and bringing it, in association with equality for women, into the dimension of redistributive political economy.

How can we interpret these subtle differences in dimensionality? We must first of all regret our lack of additional information. A tailor-made survey design would have included questions exploring further attitudes to political equality and eliciting responses to the sensitive issues of the education, pay, promotion and career structures of girls and women.

As it stands, the evidence points to three levels of political consciousness about the situation of women. At the least conceptually developed, it is seen in terms of sexual restraint, suggesting the limited horizon of a latter-day 'Cinderella' outlook, which assumed that the economic needs of women and the consequences of sex will be taken care of. In the fairy-story, marriage to a well-heeled Prince provided for the future; in modern Britain a women outside traditional social bonds must look elsewhere for the wherewithal to survive. The second level of consciousness, which links equality for women

with state support, would seem to be addressed to this problem. If such women are to be independent of individual men, men (and women) taxpayers must still support them indirectly and collectively through state intervention. It is fascinating to find that this approach to equality for women is especially noticeable among single men, who in this respect may see more clearly than their female counterparts.

However, the horizons of feminist thought extend a deal further than a vision of the future in which women spend their prime as dependents on the state. If this were all for which women could exchange dependence on fathers and husbands, it would be a poor bargain for all but the most unfortunate few for whom welfare benefits are a steadier and kindlier source of subsistence than their menfolk. Small wonder that many women are more alarmed by the risks of equality than excited by the opportunities, for these are few as society is presently arranged. Women cannot have independence without equal access to security and rewards and that would require radical changes in the attitude of employers, conditions of work and the education and socialisation of men and women themselves.

This more fundamental conception of equality - the third level of consciousness - is evident in this data in the association of feminism with a wider redistribution of economic and political power which involves changes in education, income

distribution, the power of business as we know it and the level and quality of state support. At the highest it involves awareness of the political character of the situation of women, parallel to that of any disadvantaged group. It is among the divorced and separated that this awareness - a lesson of life - is most clearly established.

VI

CONCLUSION

This project has demonstrated the need to think in terms of complexity as well as simplicity in political analysis. It has found that attitudinal data can be a treasure-trove of material for the investigation of subsets of the population. It has, I hope, given the reader an insight into the intimacy of the link between politics and the lives of individuals. The remoteness of politics is a myth that only some kinds of experience can explode for ordinary people; in a changing society these kinds of experience, such as divorce and separation, redundancy and being brought up in a single-parent family, themselves become everyday. War is, of course, such an experience too and its political consequences were very clear in 1945.

As a tentative first step in the direction of analysis oriented towards prediction rather than history, I count this study as a success. As a secondary analysis, lacking information about the life-histories and other attitudes of the respondents and using a rather small sample of divorced and separated people, it is necessarily a qualified success. It lacked, above all, data on the attitudes of formerly divorced people reabsorbed into the married group by remarriage. A second stage of the investigation should also acquire data on the effect of parental separation and divorce on the political

attitude of offspring. The reader is referred once more to the Appendix for a discussion of the statistical frequency of these phenomena.

I should like to conclude with an anecdote which neatly illustrates the relationship between the state, its financial resources and the divorced and separated. It also points to a growing conflict of interest; the needs of this group act as a spearhead for the rights of women in general and yet in a situation of scarce resources they monopolise the response of the authorities so far that they exclude other women from sharing the results.

'The Scotsman' newspaper recently (20) reported that in Glasgow 54% of single-parent families live on supplementary benefit. The major reason, according to the Scottish Council for Single Parents, is the lack of reliable child-care facilities and a new body is being launched to push for further out-of-school care. Such facilities have been given priority by Scotland's largest region, Strathclyde, and are being funded with urban aid money. A Strathclyde councillor who had investigated the region's financial commitment pointed to the pressures on families and the need of single mothers to work in areas where family help is not available. He commented, "We haven't done a survey on the problem as we're concerned it might unleash a demand we couldn't meet."

There is no lack of evidence to support his apprehension. Some kinds of care do not exist at all in many areas of our cities and the most successful, the day nurseries, are not accessible to the traditionally circumstanced woman, who with rising male unemployment is driven back to work early by economic need, or, if a career woman stays in work after maternity leave in order to hold on to her job. As an administrator said to this writer when she was looking for day-care for her small child, "It's a pity you are married - you know what I mean - if you had come to us as a single-parent you'd have got a place, no trouble!" Her remark seems a fitting epitaph to this first stage of a long-term project to investigate the politics of sex and marital status.

## FOOTNOTES

\*As a newcomer to the field of statistical analysis, I should like to record my particular thanks to Ann Mair, who introduced me to the computer and kept a friendly eye on the subsequent relationship and to the colleagues who provided just the right mixture of encouragement and scepticism to keep me on the trail.

1. The decline in class voting is graphically depicted in Franklin, M.F., Is Class Still the Basis of British Politics?, Strathclyde Papers on Government and Politics, No. 2, 1983, Fig.1.
2. See Hale, L. Divorced and Separated Women, Greenwood Press, 1982, pp. 235-46, for discussion of this point.
3. This is not a function of the number of divorced people in the population at any one time, which is actually very small and likely to remain so if present rates of remarriage continue. See Appendix.
4. Report of the Committee on One Parent Families, Vols. I & II, 1974 (Cmnd. 5629) - the Finer Report - first identified the problem which remains unresolved.
5. The gross average weekly wage of a woman working full-time at present is £97.50, compared to £151.50 for a man. In Glasgow, 1983, a private sector nursery place costs £16 per child. In the State sector priority is given to single parents, but the hours and administration of state nursery schools are often inimical to the interest of working parents and may even be perceived as punitive in character.
6. See Stetson, D., A Woman's Issue: The Politics of Family Law Reform in England, Greenwood Press, 1982, p. 237ff. for an account of the evolution of the concept of family property in law and the confusion in the courts as to the roles of husband and wife in marriage and divorce. Wild variation in the implementation of the Matrimonial Homes Acts in 1983 north and south of the Scottish border continues the uncertainty; see The Guardian.
7. British Election Study, 1979 directed by Ivor Crewe and Bo Sarlvik, hereafter cited as BES.
8. In for example the BBC/Gallup Election Survey of May 1983.
9. Of course this raises interesting questions about what we really learn from analysis of large undifferentiated, or at best dichotomised samples. In their illuminating and sophisticated study of attitudes to political protest, Democratic or Violent Protest? attitudes towards direct action in Scotland and Wales,

CSPP, University of Strathclyde, 1982 p. 27, W.L. Miller et al. oddly compared attitudes of married people towards forms of political action with those of a group consisting of all the other marital status groups put together, to which they are referred as "single". The effect was probably to compare the married with the divorced and separated.

10. Another regression, using Catholicism was performed, but seemed to be no more powerful. It showed a slight positive effect but on reflection this is not surprising, as the group includes separated people. Catholics might well choose separation rather than divorce or, if divorced by their partner, be reluctant to remarry.

11. Though divorce in the U.S.A. is known to be slightly correlated with lower socio-economic status, and this is thought to be the case here, the relationship detected so far is very slight and would not necessarily be expected to show up in a sample which represents the group of divorced and separated in the population rather than the rate of divorce. For a discussion of class and divorce, see Thorne, B and Collard, J., Who Divorces?, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1979.

12. Leete, R., "Marriage and Divorce" Population Trends 3, Spring 1976, investigated divorce rates in relation to age, duration of marriage and year of marriage, but found that, apart from the well-known greater likelihood of divorce among those who marry very young, "...the substantial rise in divorce, particularly since 1971, has affected all marriage cohorts at all durations of marriage."

13. Thorne and Collard, op.cit.

14. See Evans, J., "Women and Politics : a Re-appraisal", Political Studies, Vol. XXVIII, No. 2, 1980, for a re-examination of our knowledge about sex and politics, and a discussion of aspects of subgroup interaction with sex.

15. Verba, S., Nie, N., and Kim, J-O., Participation and Political Equality, Cambridge University Press, 1978, chapter 12, p. 234 ff. is incomparably the best empirical investigation to date into sex differences in political behaviour. The authors find that as well as the effect of variation in socio-economic resources and institutional mobilisation, "Such pervasive differences in political activity are a manifestation of general patterns of sex-role differentiation found in all societies."

16. Sarlvik, B., and Crewe, I., Decade of Dealignment, Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 173.

17. Verba, Nie & Kim, op.cit.

18. In her Women in Western Political Thought, Virago, 1980, Susan Moller Okin provides a fascinating analysis of the development of supposedly universal values by some male political philosophers and their failure to extend them to women.

19. Decade of Dealignment, p. 170.

20. 3 September, 1983.

## APPENDIX

To appreciate the statistical and socio-political significance of divorce and separation in our society, these must be understood to be life-experiences which people may go through, not simply as conditions in which an individual may be found to be at a particular point in time. At first glance the divorced seem to be a very small element in the population - an estimated 1,243,000 persons, or 3% of the U.K. population over 18 in 1979, the year of the BES - but such figures are misleading. The 1970s had seen a sharp rise in the number of divorces, in both absolute and proportional (rate of divorce) terms but because the rate of remarriage did not change, except for a slight decline among the younger age groups, there was also a dramatic increase in the number of people reabsorbed into the married population by remarriage. To quote a leading analyst of marriage and divorce statistics, writing as early as 1977, "...the remarried population has become an increasingly important demographic and social group in, for example, the analysis of family structure." (Leete, R. "Changing Marital Composition", Population Trends 10, 1977).

In 1976 there were an estimated 465,000 former divorcees in the married population, with the increase particularly noticeable in the 30-39 age group. The corresponding figure for men was unknown but certainly greater, so that there were about 1 million formerly divorced who had remarried by that time. Table 1 shows how the numbers have continued to rise.

Table 1. Remarriage of Divorced people, 1977-80.

	1977	1978	1979	1980
Men	76,732	84,637	85,255	87,663
Women	73,340	81,560	81,846	83,376
Total	150,072	166,197	167,101	171,039

Compiled from Annual Abstract of Statistics, 1983  
p. 17, Table 2.7

By the end of 1978, therefore, at least a further 316,269

people had joined the stock of formerly divorced ('at least' because these figures are based on mid-year estimates), enabling us to calculate as follows:-

Formerly divorced remarried by 1976	1,000,000 approx.
"      "      "      in 1977-8	316,269     "
People in the divorced state in 1979	1,243,000
	<hr/>
Total	2,559,269

This means that about 6.2% of the adult population in 1979 had gone through the divorce experience. However, these figures still do not describe the statistical impact of marital breakdown. There were also the separated people, impossible to quantify exactly because informal separation, unlike divorce and the comparatively rare cases of judicial separation, does not bring people into the kinds of contact with the authorities which would result in registration of their state. Some of the separated couples will never divorce, for others separation is the precursor to legal termination of marriage. There are however some clues to their numbers.

For example, we can make calculations based on the number of divorces in which separation for 2 or 5 years is cited as grounds for divorce. Another guide can be found in the statistics relating to single-parent families. In 1976 there were 503,000 divorced women in the population of mainland Britain (Annual Abstract of Statistics, 1977, p. 20). 230,000 of these were estimated to be heads of single parent families, while there were 185,000 separated women in the same single-parent situation (Leete, R., "One-parent families; numbers and characteristics," *Population Trends* 13, 1978). A similar ratio in 1979 would give a figure of 234,618 female separated single parents and if we add them and the husbands from whom they were separated to our stock of divorced and formerly divorced we reach a total of 3,028,505. Separated people without dependent children have still to be accounted for. For every 100 lone-parent divorcees in 1976 there were 245 without families. A similar ratio among the separated would render a further 1,149,500 persons in 1979. This brings us to a grand total of approximately 4,178,000 people in 1979 affected by the experience of divorce and/or separation, or 10.2% of the adult population, a sizeable chunk. As this figure does not include separated male lone-parents and their ex-partners, or separated people of either sex in Northern Ireland, it may be considered a fairly cautious estimate.

Projecting ahead from current marriage, divorce and remarriage rates, statistical analysts have come up with estimates which suggest that the significance of this group will continue to grow. Leete projects a future in which "...22% of

all females will divorce at least once by age 45" (Leete, R., "Marriage and Divorce, Population Trends 3, 1976). Using the life-tables method Hoskey predicts that 1 in 10 couples will divorce before the sixth anniversary of marriage, 1 in 5 by the twelfth and that 1 in 3 marriages will end in divorce eventually. (Hoskey, J. "The Proportion of Marriages ending in Divorce". Population Trends 27, 1982). It is the last of these predictions, frequently quoted in the press without the qualifying "eventually" which has given rise to a widespread and ridiculous notion that one in three couples are already in the process of divorcing. However, the true projection is sufficiently arresting.

Of course the impact of divorce and separation is not confined to adults. The lives of their children are affected too, with results which remain to be seen. In 1976, 11% of all families with dependent children were lone-parent families, the vast majority headed by divorced or separated women, and more than 1.25 million children were living in these families. (Leete, R., Population Trends, 13). The proportion has since risen to one in eight. This figure of course takes no account of the children and young adults who had lived in such families at some time in the past.

Every year adds to the great number of British people whose lives have been affected by the experience of divorce, separation and lone-parenthood. The study of the politics of sex and marital status which I have begun in these pages will not be complete until the political implications of all these facts have been explored and understood.