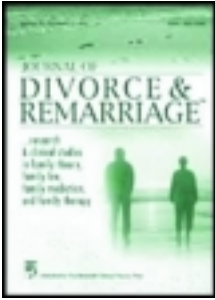


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Second Shifts and Political Awakenings

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Second Shifts and Political Awakenings: Divorce and the Political Socialization of Middle-Aged Women

Breanne Fahs

ABSTRACT. Links between personal life events (e.g., divorce) and political socialization have been understudied, particularly in midlife populations. This study examined a longitudinal sample of 98 female graduates from the University of Michigan class of 1967. Participants were divided into two groups: divorced ($N = 27$) and married ($N = 71$). T-tests and Chi-Square analyses were used to examine differences between groups for political orientation, power discontent, system blame, feminist identity, common fate, social responsibility, and political participation. Results showed that divorced women, when compared with married women, had a more liberal/radical political orientation, more system blame for gender, active commitment to feminist identity, and a sense of common fate with other women. No significant differences were found for measures of past or current political involvement. Implications for normative life events to restructure political viewpoints and attitudes are discussed. doi:10.1300/J087v47n03_03 [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2007 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

KEYWORDS. Divorce, political socialization, divorce and women, divorce and midlife

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INTRODUCTION

Studies of the interactions between sociopolitical environment and individual maturation have only recently extended to adult political development. As Sigel (1989) stated, "attention to political socialization over the entire lifespan—especially attention to adult *development* broadly defined—is still the exception rather than the rule" (p. x). Steckenrider and Cutler (1989) added that "role and role transitions have been largely ignored in systematic investigation of political attitudes and behavior over the lifespan" (p. 81). Gaps in the political socialization literature, focused on the ways in which one forms their political views and alliances, tend to place adult political development as secondary to the more widely studied areas of youth, adolescent, and young adult political development. This leaves important life events—such as marriage, divorce, having children, aging, and coping with death—understudied with regard to their impact on political socialization. The call to adopt a lifespan view of political development is thus essentially a demand that researchers incorporate adult life events more centrally to their work. The ways in which adults negotiate their role in their political system, the events that influence their behaviors, and the beliefs and actions they extend to this system, remain essential to the study of adult political socialization, particularly when considering important life events like divorce.

Lifespan Model of Politicization

Several studies have suggested that different stages of life yield different degrees and types of political identity and activity. The period of adolescence and early adulthood, for example, has been identified as a key period of political mobilization (Cole & Stewart, 1996; Stewart & Healy, 1989). Conway (1985) and Sigel (1989) found, though, that political participation reaches its height during midlife. Sigel (1989) also asserted that there are at least two distinct factors that affect the timing of political sensitization: cohort effects, reflecting differences inherent in one's generation, and the individual's age of exposure to politically sensitizing experiences. Stewart and Healy (1989) argued that the level of social change occurring before and during one's coming of age affected the construction of personal and political identities. Those who came of age during turbulent periods, with events such as World War II, the Vietnam War, the Women's Movement, and the Civil Rights Movement, following a low turbulence period, formed their identities around

the turbulent events and likely expressed a political identity based on these events. Consistent with this theory, cohort effects strongly predict the mechanisms of political socialization (Jennings & Niemi, 1981). For example, Duncan and Stewart's (2000) study found that, among women activists, those women who came of age during the 1950s were most sensitized to Civil Rights struggles, while those who came of age during the 1970s were most likely to identify as "feminist."

Like adolescence, midlife has been identified as a key period of social and political change for many adults. Apter (1996) found that women over age 50 often renew their political beliefs and experience what she terms "postmenopausal zest" (p. 557), whereby they cared less about public opinion and more about cultivating their own assertive identity. Women in midlife were less likely than young women to consistently reference others' needs, and more likely to pursue new goals, including political goals. In addition, concerns about generativity emerged, whereby those in midlife expanded their preoccupation beyond the immediate structures of family into larger commitments to their social and political environment (Grossbaum & Bates, 2002).

Collectivity, Activism, and Social Change

Research shows that in addition to cohort and life stage, our thoughts about social groups influence our personal feelings about political life. Cole and Stewart (1996) stated:

[T]heory and research in social psychology indicate that a central mechanism through which social movements mobilize is the creation of a collective identity that not only enlarges individual identity but also connects the participant to the social group, cementing his or her commitment. (p. 131)

A number of events have been shown to increase one's sense of collectivity with others. Stewart and Gold-Steinberg (1996), Crosby (1982), Gurin (1985), and Ryan (1971) argued that certain intense personal experiences that are deeply gendered can heighten one's gender consciousness and sense of "common fate" with other women, and contribute to a tendency to place blame for women's lower status on systemic power imbalances rather than individual failures. Mutz (1998) found that information about distant and impersonal others often influenced people's political attitudes and behaviors. This implies that seemingly isolated events (e.g., participation in a sociology course or

women's studies course, having an abortion) could indeed lead to a sensitization about collective struggle.

Encouraging activism requires a continued commitment to political thought and action. Hodson (1999) found that the political socialization of teachers and students must be achieved through both political participation and political sensitization. These literatures also suggested that activists were more likely to recognize discrimination and stigma about their identities, and they were more likely to feel a sense of personal control and efficacy about their lives (Schur, 1998). Cole and Stewart (1996) argued that social responsibility was indeed a crucial prerequisite for developing a sense of shared collective identity and being motivated to enact social change.

Political Participation and Social Identities

Political participation is consistently influenced by demographic variables such as race and socioeconomic status. It is known that people more often participate in politics if they have the time, energy, and support to do so (Flacks, 1988). Research has also shown that race and class affect political participation, as women of color and lower socioeconomic status groups were more likely to adopt left-leaning political viewpoints, and were more likely to recognize structural and systemic inequalities (Cole & Stewart, 1996; Edelman, 1977).

Some studies argue for politicization through other outlets, such as family (Ichilov, 1988), friends, coworkers, and peers, news media (Jones, 1981), educational settings (Eitzen & Brouillette, 1979), and workplace environment (Gandz & Murray, 1980). Pettey's (1988) study adds that the perceived politicization of family, friends, and coworkers affected perceptions of one's social environment, political knowledge, and political participation. Peterson and Duncan (1999) found that right-wing authoritarianism was transmitted intergenerationally. Duncan and Stewart (1995) found that parental activism during the Vietnam War directly influenced children's activism during the Gulf War, both with regard to those in opposition to and in support of the war.

Politicizing Effects of Personal Life Events

After considering the impact of social identities on political behavior, it logically follows that personal events can be politicizing, and political events can be personalized. The former is especially true for potentially traumatic events, such as illegal abortion, sexual assault, and divorce.

Even though dramatically different personal meaning is assigned to each of these events, it is well documented that these experiences carry political meaning for many women. For example, studies on the correlations between abortion and politicization revealed links between political consciousness, political ideology, and personal life events (Zucker, 1999). Ginsburg (1989) and Stewart and Gold-Steinberg (1996) found that women associated their political activism with their personal reproductive histories, including experiences with abortion.

Sexual assault has also been associated with politicization. McCaffrey (1998) found that the strongest predictors of activism among victims of sexual assault included the absence of shame about their assault, degree of trauma following victimization, few currently experienced negative effects of the trauma, and networks supportive of activism. Koss and Cleveland (1997) found that sexual coercion often leads to a particular kind of politicization, one that directly combats rape-supportive environments and male aggression.

Divorce as Politicizing

Though research points to correlations between personal experiences like abortion and politicization, little is currently known about the politicizing effects of divorce on women. This is especially notable, given the vast amount of psychological research on divorce, separation, and marital discord. Compared with the experiences discussed so far, marriage and divorce are arguably even more common features of many women's lives. Rubenstein (1997) reported that an estimated 90% of young women will marry during their lifetimes. According to the National Vital Statistics Report (2002), 41% of American marriages end in divorce. These numbers, according to Krieder and Fields (2002) reflect the high rate of divorce from first marriages (52%) and the somewhat lower rate for older adults (36%). Projected rates for future years are well above 50%.

Both marriage and divorce conflate the personal and the political. Researchers argue that both marriage and divorce can have negative affects on women. In studying the unhealthy effects of marriage on women, Gove (1972) found that married women had higher rates of mental illness than married men, while single, divorced, or widowed women did not have higher rates of mental illness than their male counterparts. Gove also reported that, when we control for marital status, living conditions, and psychiatric symptoms, health differences between men and women disappeared, suggesting a key role of marriage in the poor mental

health of women (Gove & Hughes, 1979). In an expansion of this study, Gove (1984) found that women with highly nurturant roles experienced more psychological distress than men, had higher morbidity rates than men, and had poorer mental health. He also found that poor quality of marriage led to poor mental health (Gove, Hughes, & Style, 1983). It has also been widely cited, both inside and outside of feminist literatures, that women are expected to complete a "second shift" of caring for their husbands and children after they go to work, which affects their health (Hochschild, 1990).

Some divorce research suggests both positive and negative consequences of divorce for women. Most psychological research suggests that divorce represents a major life turning point (Ahrons, 1980; Ebaugh, 1988; L'Hommedieu, 1984), bringing trauma, loss, life stress, opportunity for growth, and family transformation (Stewart et al., 1997). Though most of the research has focused on the impact of divorce on children, research suggests that divorce has a dramatic impact on adults. Yoder and Nichols (1980) asserted that divorced people were less satisfied with life, more liberal, and less optimistic than nondivorced people. Young, Stewart, and Miner-Rabino (2001) reported that, for adult women, divorce accessed three developmentally relevant psychological themes: identity, intimacy, and generativity.

In general, however, most researchers have emphasized a deficit model of divorce, constructing women as suffering from severe psychological fallout. Studies show that the deficit model has predominantly appeared in studies of single-parent families, women who are alone, and women with children adjusting to a recent divorce. Women reported feelings of guilt, anxiety, depression, anger, rage, self-blame, helplessness, hopelessness, and suicidal ideation (Johnston & Campbell, 1988; Rice, 1994). Divorce therapy has often focused on the depression and rage many women feel in the aftermath of divorce, and the lack of social support they often endure. The psychological vulnerability of women has been repeatedly reported, as women struggle to negotiate new social and personal roles within the family and the culture at large (Haffey & Cohen, 1992; Johnston & Campbell, 1988; Mason, 1988). Recently divorced women often blame themselves for the divorce, regardless of whether the divorce was initiated by themselves or their spouse.

Links between the psychological fallout of divorce and the public consequences of divorce have been understudied in recent years. Establishing these links is essential when challenging the deficit model of divorce. Brewer and Rawlings (1993) found that divorced women confronted legal, economic, parental, community, and psychological consequences

following the dissolution of marriage. Researchers have repeatedly shown that women were more vulnerable to economic losses following divorce, and were at a much higher risk of falling into poverty following divorce (Burkhauser, 1991; Duncan & Hoffman, 1985; Hoffman & Duncan, 1988; Peterson, 1989). This was especially true for women with children, as they were less likely to have jobs with well-defined career trajectories, and more likely to work part-time or temporarily (Gittleman & Joyce, 1999). Furthermore, these effects tended not to vary significantly with age. Women who worked more were only somewhat less likely to experience economic losses following a divorce (Gittleman & Joyce, 1999; Smock, 1993). Generally, however, economic losses consistently accompanied divorce for women with young children (Gittleman & Joyce, 1999), black women (Duncan, Smeeding, & Rodgers, 1993), older adults (Butrica & Iams, 2000; Gittleman & Joyce, 1999; Yabiku, 2000), and nonworking mothers (Moffit, 1992). Men, on the other hand, sometimes enjoyed financial benefits from divorce. On average, their disposable income following divorce increased by 15%, while women experienced an average 28% income loss (Sarler, 2000).

Gender, Culture, and the Positive Consequences of Divorce

These studies do not, however, take into consideration the gendered culture of marriage and divorce. Hendrix and Pearson (1995) stated that, "A recurrent speculation in the social science literature is that divorce rates climb when women gain more independence in marriage or more equality with men" (p. 217). The fact that increases in women's income were associated with higher divorce rates (Hannon, Tuma, & Groeneveld, 1977; Ross & Sawhill, 1975) indicates that divorce requires a gendered analysis. Studies have repeatedly found connections between women working outside of the home and divorce (Booth et al., 1984; Cain & Wisoker, 1990; D'Amico, 1983; Greenstein, 1990; Hannon & Tuma, 1990; Philliber & Hiller, 1983; Starkey, 1991). Cross-cultural research points to women's behavioral autonomy as one important cause of rising divorce rates. Women's access to participation in public ceremonies, property inheritance, achieved positions of power, and extramarital sex represented important elements of this burgeoning autonomy (Hendrix & Pearson, 1995). Hendrix and Pearson (1995) added that, "female power tends to push divorce frequency upwards under certain conditions" (p. 225). Other research has directly linked the increased divorce rates to women's increasing push for domestic equality (Schlegel, 1972). The centrality of financial independence, combined with the interpersonal

benefits of divorce for many women, remain important in the analyses of existing divorce rates, and the attribution of psychological meaning to the experience of divorce.

Research Hypotheses: Divorce and Politicization

Despite the implicit conflation of the public and private elements of divorce in the empirical literatures, little is known about the empirical relationship between divorce and politicization. Though divorce has been discursively understood as a negative occurrence (e.g., the deficit model), a gendered analysis reveals that divorce may reflect women's increasing personal and economic independence. Additionally, it has been demonstrated that intensely personal events can have a significant impact on one's political views and beliefs. It seems reasonable given the access to a longitudinal dataset (which can show whether these women happened to be more politicized to begin with) to hypothesize that divorce could lead to political sensitization (e.g., awareness and acknowledgement) and political mobilization (e.g., activism and action). More specifically, it is hypothesized as follows:

- Because divorced women may have directly experienced gender inequalities in marriage and following divorce, they may become more critical of the status quo. This critique tends to be associated with left-wing ideology, with identifying the relative status of different social groups, and the flaws that lie in larger social systems (e.g., legal, professional, economic, educational, etc.). For this reason, divorced women may have different political attitudes than married women. These include (1) more liberal and radical political orientation, (2) more system blame than individual fault for these inequalities, and (3) more highly developed feminist views, including those leading to activism.
- Because divorced women are defined outside a heterosexual partnership, they may be more in tune with other women, the political meaning of gender, and the necessity of being in solidarity with other women. Therefore, divorced women should endorse a greater sense of common fate with other women.
- Because inequalities in marriage and divorce are potentially politicizing, it is not anticipated that divorced women, when compared with married women, will have different histories of political involvement from their youth. Despite this predicted similarity in

youth activism and participation, it is expected that divorced women will be more politically active in midlife, particularly engaging in actions based on their recognition of gender inequalities.

METHODS

This study drew on a sample of women from the Women's Life Paths Studies (WLPS), specifically a longitudinal sample of female graduates from the University of Michigan. These women, nearly all of whom, were white, graduated in 1967. Their racial backgrounds are significant in that participants were able to draw upon white privilege throughout their lives. This is especially important when examining feelings toward people of color, and measures of activism, since white people have typically had the least stake in the potential gains of political activism about racial injustice. Tangri (1969) conducted the first study on these women when they were seniors in college. For this study, the central focus is the fourth wave data collected in 1992, when the women averaged 48 years. Of the original 200 women in the 1967 sample, 107 participated in the 1992 wave of data collection. No major differences between women included and those excluded were noted. Of the women who actually received the 1992 questionnaire, the response rate was 72%. Of these 45% were currently employed full-time, 14% were employed part-time and 41% were unemployed. Additionally, 44% of the sample made at least \$50,000 annually, 60% had raised at least one child, 70% identified with some form of organized religion, and 24% obtained a graduate degree. Respondents and nonrespondents did not differ in terms of family religion, mother's employment, parents' income, number of siblings, or mother's/father's level of education.

The women were divided into two groups: those who had *ever* divorced ($N = 27$), and those who were married and had never divorced ($N = 71$). Single women were excluded from the sample, resulting in 98 participants.

Measures of Midlife Political Attitudes

Political orientation. Women reported their current political orientation, based on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (Very conservative) to 5 (Radical). Women were also divided into "liberal" and "conservative" as a dichotomized variable.

Power discontent. Participants were administered Gurin, Miller, and Gurin's (1980) measure of power discontent. This scale has often been used to indicate the degree of collective group consciousness one has developed. Women were asked to rate each group (e.g., black men, men in general, white women, black women, etc.) on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (Too much power) to 5 (Too little power), with a midpoint of about 3 (About right).

System blame. Participants were given a second measure of collective group consciousness designed by Gurin, Miller, and Gurin (1980), which assessed the degree to which they endorsed external (caused by sociopolitical environment) causes for the success and opportunities provided to women and blacks. Out of the 15 items on this scale, 7 assess explanations of gender inequality (e.g., "Men have more of the top jobs because our society discriminates against women"), and the remaining 8 items assess explanations for racial inequality (e.g., "If Blacks don't get a good education, they have no one to blame but themselves"). Items were measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (Strongly disagree) to 4 (Strongly agree), with higher scores indicating blame placed on the system rather than the individual. Scores were calculated separately for gender and race scales. Reliability was high for system blame both for gender inequality ($\alpha = .73$) and racial inequality ($\alpha = .77$).

Feminist identity. Feminist identity was measured using the revised version of the Feminist Identity Scale (Downing & Roush, 1985; revised version in Rickard, 1990; Henderson-King & Stewart, 1997b), a 42-item scale which identifies five stages of feminist identity development: Passive Acceptance, Revelation, Embeddedness, Synthesis, and Activism. Responses were measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (Strongly agree) to 5 (Strongly disagree) on all 5 scales, with higher scores indicating higher levels of the particular stage.

Midlife Measure of Common Fate

Sense of common fate. Common fate was measured using two items (Gurin & Markus, 1989; Gurin & Townsend, 1986), which assessed how much women felt they had in common with other women (e.g., "To what extent do you believe that what happens to women generally in this country will have something to do with what happens in your life?"). Women reported on a 1-5 scale ranging from 1 (Hardly anything) to 5 (Very much).

Measures of Past Politicization

Retrospective past political participation. Using a measure developed by Fendrich and Lovoy (1988), participants were asked to retrospectively report how often they had engaged in a variety of political behaviors during their college years, in order to determine whether past political participation predicted current political attitudes (Stewart, Settles, & Winter, 1998). Women were asked to report how often they had engaged in 18 different political activities while they were students (e.g., joined a protest march, was a candidate for office, contacted local officials on social issues). Each item was measured on a 4-point scale ranging from 0 (Never) to 3 (Regularly). Internal consistency for this measure was high ($\alpha = .83$).

1970s reported political participation. Using data from Wave 1 of the WLPS study, differences were examined between married and divorced women, as reported in 1970, 22 years earlier than the retrospective reports of activism. This single item asked the women, "Have you heard about the new Women's Rights Movement?" Responses ranged in proximity to the movement, from 1 (Through the media) to 4 (Attended activities) and 5 (Helped to organize the movement). This item was treated as a continuous variable assessing the relative proximity of exposure to and involvement with the Women's Movement. Cole and Stewart (1996) found that this item correlated with retrospective report of student activism on the previous measure (.37, $p < .001$).

Impact of political movements. To measure the women's relationships to past social movements throughout their life, participants were asked to indicate the personal meaning of different events (e.g., Vietnam War) from different eras in their lives, including: pre-1960s, 1960s, and 1980s. Using Stewart and Healy's (1989) measure, participants rated on a 3-point scale the meaning of each movement to them. Answers ranged from 1 (Not at all personally meaningful) to 3 (Very personally meaningful).

Measures of Midlife Organizational Involvement

Midlife political participation. To examine current political behavior, the same measure used to assess student political participation was administered at midlife. This scale differed from the previous measure in two ways: It asked women to report on their political participation from the past 2 years, and it added a measure of civic participation (e.g., voting and patriotism). Reliability for this scale was high ($\alpha = .87$).

Organizational participation. Political participation was also measured according to the amount of organizational activity. Women described the past 10 years of political involvement in community organizations, political organizations, and organizations primarily concerned with women's issues. Self-generated lists and descriptions were coded into these categories. Scores included the total number of organizations to which women belonged, as well as the number of hours spent per month in these organization and any leadership roles.

The data were analyzed using t-tests comparing the two groups: married women and divorced women. The alpha level for significance was set at $p < .05$. Because with a sample of this size one risks missing effects that would be detectable with a larger sample, trends with a significance of .05 to .1 are reported here.

RESULTS

Comparison of Midlife Political Attitudes

Chi-square analyses were performed to assess the differences in political orientation (divided as liberal/conservative) between the two groups of women (see Table 1), while one-tailed t-tests were used to assess differences in power discontent and system blame (see Table 2). When examined as a dichotomized variable, results showed that divorced women were significantly more likely to endorse a liberal political orientation than were married women. When looking at specific percentages of all five categories (e.g., "radical political orientation"), it was found that 100% of the women with a radical political orientation were from the divorced group. Though divorced women were only

TABLE 1. Divorce and Political Orientation

| Political Orientation | Marital Status | | | | χ^2 | df | p |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|------|----------------------------|------|----------|----|-------|
| | Married Women (N = 68) | | Divorced Women (N = 25) | | | | |
| | n | % | n | % | | | |
| Conservative | 46 | 49.5 | 9 | 9.7 | | | |
| Liberal | 22 | 23.7 | 16 | 17.2 | | | |
| Total | 68 | 73.1 | 25 | 26.9 | 7.58 | 1 | < .00 |

TABLE 2. Divorce and Midlife Political Attitudes, Collectivity, and Feminist Identification

| Variable | Marital Status | | | | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>p</i> |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------|------------------------------------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| | Married Women (<i>N</i> = 71) | | Divorced Women (<i>N</i> = 27) | | | | |
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | | | |
| <i>Power Discontent</i> | | | | | | | |
| Men | 1.63 | .71 | 1.38 | .49 | 1.94 | 88 | < .10 |
| White | 1.56 | .70 | 1.38 | .71 | 1.10 | 90 | ns |
| Black | 4.34 | .64 | 4.13 | .95 | 1.25 | 89 | ns |
| Women | 4.24 | .71 | 4.38 | .58 | -.86 | 90 | ns |
| White | 3.97 | .85 | 4.26 | .86 | -1.41 | 88 | ns |
| Black | 4.39 | .70 | 4.38 | 1.13 | .05 | 88 | ns |
| <i>System Blame</i> | | | | | | | |
| Sex | 18.76 | 4.89 | 21.27 | 3.60 | -2.39 | 94 | < .05 |
| Race | 19.59 | 5.22 | 21.96 | 6.18 | -1.872 | 93 | < .10 |
| <i>Common Fate</i> | | | | | | | |
| Common fate | 1.70 | 1.52 | 2.35 | 1.35 | -1.90 | 94 | < .10 |
| Self/other connection | 2.42 | 1.09 | 2.92 | .98 | -2.06 | 95 | < .05 |
| <i>Feminist Identity</i> | | | | | | | |
| Passive acceptance | 2.01 | .84 | 1.50 | .74 | 2.70 | 90 | < .00 |
| Revelation | 1.82 | .72 | 2.22 | .62 | -2.46 | 87 | < .05 |
| Embeddedness | 2.05 | .74 | 2.15 | .83 | -.61 | 81 | ns |
| Synthesis | 2.95 | .49 | 2.99 | .68 | -.33 | 86 | ns |
| Active commitment | 2.22 | .91 | 2.80 | .78 | -2.89 | 93 | < .01 |

26.9% of the total sample, they were 42% of those espousing liberal politics. Married women were most likely to endorse a moderate or conservative viewpoint, representing 83.6% of the moderate views. Both married and divorced women rarely endorsed very conservative views. Together, these findings point to a significantly more liberal and radical orientation adopted by divorced women, even in this generally left-leaning sample.

Using *t*-tests (see Table 2), results also showed that married and divorced women differed only slightly on measures of power discontent. Divorced women tended ($p < .10$) to claim that men in general have too much power. No other differences were found.

The results for system blame were significant (see Table 2). Divorced women were significantly more likely to express a system-blaming view of the origins of gender inequality. There was a trend for divorced women to adopt a system-blaming view for racial inequality as well. This supports my expectation that divorced women are less likely to blame individuals for the inequalities they face, whether based on gender or, to a lesser extent, race. It also suggests that divorced women may experience a heightened sensitization toward inequality in general.

Significant differences were found for the Feminist Identity Scale (see Table 2). Married women were significantly more likely to endorse passive acceptance views of gender inequality. Divorced women were more likely to be in the revelation or active commitment stages of feminist development, in which the focus is on the discovery of gender inequality and activism. Divorced women reported experiences with the highest stage of feminist identity development.

Midlife Measure of Common Fate

On measures of common fate, significant differences were found (see Table 2). Divorced women significantly differed from married women in their feelings that they had things in common with other women. There was a trend for divorced women to be more likely to feel that what happens to other women will affect their own lives. No differences were found for common fate within racial groups, in that white women did not feel their whiteness connected them to other white people.

Measures of Organizational Involvement

Past political participation did not differ between the two groups, either on the measure of college political participation assessed in 1970, or on retrospective reports of college political participation assessed in 1992 (see Table 3). Divorced women also did not differ from married women in their retrospective assessment of the meaning of past social movements or eras (e.g., 1960s, Gulf War, Reagan Presidency). For the measure taken in the 1970s, later-divorced women were no more likely to have heard of, or participated in, the Women's Movement as college students. These findings lend some credibility to the expectation that divorced women were no more politicized during their youth than were married women.

However, differences did emerge between divorced and married women on measures of midlife political participation. Interestingly, married

TABLE 3. Past and Present Organizational Involvement

| Variable | Marital Status | | | | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>p</i> |
|--|-----------------------------------|-----------|------------------------------------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| | Married Women (<i>N</i> = 71) | | Divorced Women (<i>N</i> = 27) | | | | |
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | | | |
| 1970s Political awareness of women's movement | 2.61 | 1.33 | 2.87 | 1.29 | .89 | 90 | ns |
| Past political involvement | 15.10 | 7.51 | 14.84 | 6.86 | .15 | 95 | ns |
| Impact of political movements | | | | | | | |
| Pre-1960s | 1.59 | .55 | 1.66 | .55 | -.61 | 96 | ns |
| 1960s | 2.11 | .44 | 2.31 | .48 | -1.92 | 96 | < .05 |
| 1980s | 1.85 | .48 | 1.85 | .55 | -.02 | 96 | ns |
| Midlife political participation | | | | | | | |
| All types of organizations | 6.14 | 5.41 | 4.00 | 3.09 | 1.94 | 96 | < .05 |
| Hours spent generally | 17.98 | 20.17 | 28.41 | 33.30 | -1.74 | 83 | < .10 |
| Leadership roles | 1.85 | 1.61 | 2.05 | 1.33 | -.51 | 87 | ns |
| Women members | 1.93 | 1.52 | 1.70 | 1.22 | .66 | 88 | ns |
| Women community organisations | .15 | .36 | .33 | .48 | -1.73 | 32.36 | < .10 |
| Hours on political organizations | 1.06 | 4.89 | 4.17 | .20 | 1.71 | 67.66 | < .10 |

women reported higher levels of overall organizational involvement. Divorced women tended ($p < .10$) to be involved in community organizations more often than married women, and divorced women spent more hours working for political organizations than did married women. This suggests that, although married women generally spent more time in organizational involvements, divorced women were somewhat more likely to participate in specifically political organizations and devote more hours than married women to those organizations.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study suggest that divorced women and married women sometimes experience their political worlds in different ways. In sum, divorced women, when compared with married women, were more liberal and given to being left-wing radicals, had somewhat

greater power discontent, more frequently endorsed system-blaming viewpoints with regard to gender, more often had feminist ideology based on active change, endorsed group strategies of social change, felt a sense of common fate with other women, and devoted more time to political and community organizations.

The significant findings for midlife political attitudes suggest that divorced women were more sensitized to inequalities than married women. Divorced women were not simply more extreme in their political views (which could include right-wing or left-wing politics), but were more liberal and radical in their political orientation. Because left-wing ideology often corresponds with critiques of the status quo, it is expected that divorced women more often endorsed democratic viewpoints, and were motivated toward liberal goals of social change.

This shift toward liberal and radical political orientation was again confirmed by both the system blame results. At the trend level, divorced women saw inequalities for blacks as being based on a flawed system, while they (to a stronger extent) saw inequalities for women based on this same flawed system. This suggests that divorced women may see cultural biases and inequalities for both gender and race. Because divorced women extended their cultural critiques beyond groups with which they self-identified (e.g., other women), divorced women may also acknowledge other categorical inequalities, such as those based on class and sexuality.

Findings for midlife sense of common fate and political self-concept seem highly complementary. Because divorced women more often endorsed group strategies of social change over individual strategies, it makes sense that divorced women supported movements advocating collective change, such as feminism. The significant findings on the Feminist Identity Scale confirm this, since divorced women scored higher than married women in the stage of revelation, and in the highest stages of active social concern (note that these stages are not mutually exclusive, but rather reflect an increasingly intense identification with feminist ideology in various manifestations).

Divorced women's organizational involvement sharpens our understanding of these findings. They participated less in general organizational activity than married women, but were somewhat more activity directed toward politics and community. This pattern may reflect the need for divorced women to select their organizational commitments carefully, possibly because they have less time than married women to participate in organizational activities. It is known that divorced women often have a great deal of immediate personal responsibility, often without the assistance

of a partner, while married women can share their responsibilities with a partner. Because divorced women have, or have had, these responsibilities—whether in raising children on their own, paying bills independently, combating structural inequalities in childcare, child support, financial losses, etc., or simply in reconciling conflicting feelings following the reshuffling of their family unit—they may simply have less time, energy, and enthusiasm for many organizations. Divorced women's lower general involvement may also reflect their distrust of many organizations, feelings of alienation from these groups, or lack of opportunity to join different organizations. Despite pressing personal commitments, though, divorced women are investing themselves in their communities and devoting time to their political goals.

Finally, it is important to emphasize the lack of difference found for past political involvement or interpretation of the meaning of past events. This suggests that divorced women did not differ from married women in their political history preceding marriage and divorce, and implies that divorced women were not already politicized. Here, we see that divorced and married women did not differ in attention paid to, or participation in, the Women's Movement, or in the personal significance they attached to different political eras. We cannot "type" divorced women as more or less political prior to marriage.

Limitations and Future Directions

Though these findings have important implications for the processes of politicization, and the psychological effects of divorce, there are certain limitations. Given that the sample includes only white women who graduated from the University of Michigan, it will be necessary to expand further studies to address other populations. More specifically, future studies should address how women of color experience themselves politically following divorce. We already know that black women tend to be more politicized than white women (Cole & Stewart, 1996), but the addition of a divorce variable may elaborate these findings. It seems reasonable to hypothesize that divorced women of color would differ from married women of color in similar ways as white women, as all women exist in the largely patriarchal structures that govern divorce proceedings. Indeed, women of color may experience an even higher degree of politicization, becoming sensitized not only to issues of gender, but also increasingly aware of racial inequalities. On the other hand, owing to the varieties in family structure found in many communities of color, we may find fewer politicizing effects following divorce.

Black women, for example, may have more social and community support for raising children on their own. Women of color may be more buffered against the effects of divorce.

Future research could also account for issues of class by examining non-college educated populations. This limited sample includes only those respondents who graduated from college, and those who attended the University of Michigan, an institution known for its political activism during the 1960s and 1970s. Though no differences were found between divorced and married women for college political involvement, respondents probably had at least some exposure to the Women's Movement and Civil Rights struggles, as well as access to upwardly mobile careers and more income. Other populations, without the privilege of a college education and the climate of political activism, may experience marriage and divorce differently.

Finally, there are other limitations to consider: remarriage variables, location, and gender. Women who remarry may be less likely to have power discontentment, and may subscribe to more conservative modes of thinking as they reenter the marital dyad. Their second marriages may subject them to marital inequalities similar to those of their first marriages. Alternatively, remarried women may have made better marital choices, allowing them to retain a sense of political activism within the context of married life. Differences between remarried women and women who have chosen to remain single could elaborate the findings in this study.

Research should also direct more attention toward the private experiences of politics, and the shifting attitudes and feelings produced by intensely personal events. Additions to the existing literatures on abortion, rape, infertility, and domestic violence are needed. Future populations to study could include women of color, members of differing socioeconomic classes, regional and cultural variety. Besides shifts in demographic characteristics, other research could pursue ways to channel women's societal disenchantment into activist venues, or ways to harness the political energy of divorced women in a broader range of organizational groups. Precursors of divorce, and their specific effects on politicization, may also prove interesting. Such factors as which partner initiated divorce, the reasons for divorce, presence or absence of children, number of previous divorces, and previous attitudes about divorce could lend further insight into these findings. Additional research is necessary about the specific processes of political socialization across the lifespan, and the positive effects of divorce on middle-aged women.

CONCLUSIONS

The results from this study complement some of the new directions seen emerging in the divorce and politicization literatures. In contrast to the, often dismal, outlook projected by much of the psychological literatures about the negative meaning of divorce for middle-aged women, this study suggests that divorce may facilitate a restructuring of political viewpoints and attitudes. Divorced women may experience a kind of political reawakening, whereby they become conscious of things they were not previously aware of, and become interested in things they may not have been interested in before. They may restructure their political beliefs, develop new modes of cultural criticism, and become increasingly aware of issues around gender, race, class, and sexuality. Similarly, while it seems more likely (given the results of past political participation) that divorced and married women did not differ in their political participation during college, it may also be important to consider the possibility that other factors besides divorce affected their political outlooks, and that causal direction cannot definitely be determined. For example, it can be hypothesized that divorced women differ from married women in other characteristics, which may have predicted their divorce (e.g., personality, family background, education, income, employment, socioeconomic status, etc.). This issue is one that cannot be fully resolved simply by looking at past political participation, though it is interesting to note that the groups did not differ in the 1970 study.

Collectively, these results comment on the complications that arise from fusing major life events with social identities. Divorce is an intensely personal life event, which influences women's public, political views and actions. It is intriguing that divorced white women are sensitized to issues of both gender and, to a lesser degree, race. This suggests that political socialization is both about developing awareness of one's own social identities, and also about planting the seeds to see the effects of *other* social identities. This includes awareness about the ways in which inequalities intersect and support each other. If white women, for example, learn to see whiteness as a politicized identity, they may engage in antiracist behaviors. Feeling the direct, personal effects of gender inequality can lead to political awareness of inequalities for oneself and for others, possibly even across identity boundary lines. This does not suggest, however, that political sensitization leads directly to political mobilization.

Most importantly, because divorce is so commonplace, and thus a normative occurrence, this research touched upon a politicizing experience that reaches a large number of women. Unlike research conducted about

other life experiences that politicize women—such as sexual violence—divorce is not necessarily negative. These results affirm the feminist view that “the personal is political” in ways that refer to ordinary life experiences. These findings also add to the existing divorce literature by discussing some of the more distal consequences of divorce. In addition to the effects produced in women’s immediate family environments—such as rearranging family life, coping with potential income losses, and helping children adjust to divorce—divorce influences women’s lives in many other, less obvious ways, such as politicization. Divorce can facilitate different perspectives about their structural position in our culture. By understanding the broader impact of divorce as a life experience, we can more fully contextualize and complicate our understanding of divorce and political socialization.

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