

The Long-Term Effects of Divorce on Children:  
Can They Succeed in Personal  
Relationships?

by

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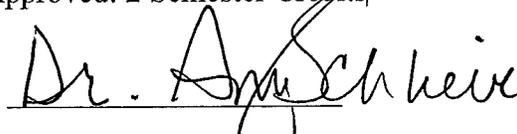
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**ABSTRACT**

Within this thesis the reader will be informed of the current statistical results of a survey conducted with University of Wisconsin-Stout students during the spring 2009 semester. The survey focused mainly on the students' current personal/intimate relationships and how/if they have been affected by their parents' divorce.

Through the research it was found that during the 1980s and early 1990s it was considered not unusual to many to be from a "broken" or divorced home. Divorce rates were at all time highs during these years and now many of those children are at the ages where they are entering into serious relationships and learning who they are becoming as individuals. This bit of information is looked at more in-depth within the research paper.

A main goal of the research was to help children of divorce to gain knowledge and resources necessary to help them overcome whatever issues and/or obstacles they may currently be dealing with as a result of their parents' divorce.

The expected outcome the researcher wished to accomplish through this study was to make statistical connections between a parental divorce and issues found within the child of divorces' current personal/intimate relationships (as a young adult). The researcher also aimed to use the statistics from the survey to make connections that may help young adults overcome some of the main issues that may result from parental divorce at a young age. The researcher especially focused on survey questions that would assist in making those connections.

The Graduate School  
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## Chapter I: Introduction

“American society may have erased the stigma that once accompanied divorce, but it can no longer ignore divorce’s massive effects, divorce is hurting American society and devastating children’s lives” (Fagan & Rector, 2000, p.56). “Each year, over one million children suffer as their parents’ divorce. Half of all children born in wedlock will see their parents’ divorce before reaching their eighteenth birthday, this fact alone should give those whose careers focus on children reason for concern” (Fagan & Rector, 2000, p.56).

After years and years of divorce rates rising in the United States, they are finally starting to fall, and have been for the past few years (*Divorce Magazine*, 2008). The simple statement makes one wonder what could be the cause behind the divorce rates falling. Could it be that the children of divorce are now coming of age and marrying, but with a different mindset and a new approach to marriage - staying married? Could it be because even though the population continues to grow, the number of marriages does not?

It is also more acceptable than it has been in previous years for couples to cohabitate. Is this the choice that more and more American couples are making? In 2005 it was reported that 8.1% of “coupled households consist of unmarried heterosexual individuals” (*Divorce Magazine*, 2008).

Some more interesting statistics regarding marriage and divorce rates (per 1,000 people) according to *Divorce Magazine* (2008) are as follows:

- The highest reported divorce rates occurred in 1981, with a rate of 5.3.
- The marriage rate in 2005 was 7.5, down from 7.8 in 2004.
- Nevada had the highest (reported) divorce rate of 6.4 in 2004.
- The District of Colombia had the lowest (reported) divorce rate of 1.7 in 2004.

- 43.7 % of custody holding mothers and 56.2 % of custody holding fathers in 2003 were either divorced or separated.
- In 2005 the number of marriages (to take place) fell by nearly 50,000 compared to 2004, this statistic holds true even though there was a population increase of 2.9 million people from 2004 to 2005.
- 2005 had the lowest (recorded) divorce rate since 1970, with a rate of 3.6

The previously stated statistics are intriguing. Why are the marriage and divorce trends changing, and why they are changing so rapidly? These statistics also must make one consider how growing up in a household where a mother or father holds full custody of a child due to separation or divorce will affect a child later in life. What choices will those children make in their future relationships? "Research is showing that the effects of divorce continue into adulthood and affect the next generation of children as well" (Fagan & Rector, 2000, p.56).

Will the children be able to move on from this difficult and most often confusing time in their young lives? Will they be affected in such ways as suffering from physical, mental, and emotional problems in their daily lives, as well as issues surrounding trust, control, and commitment in personal relationships? Will these children be more "susceptible" or "prone" to unsuccessful relationships of their own? Will they, too, go through a divorce - this time not as a child, but as an adult or parent?

There are so many unanswered questions at this point. By conducting research and an online survey the researcher planned to make some solid statistical connections through UW-Stout students' firsthand experiences. Looking at the results of the survey and making comparisons with the research has assisted the researcher in making these statistical connections.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to detail the long-term effects of divorce in regards to children from divorce as they become young adults and enter into their own personal relationships. The study was conducted with students attending the University of Wisconsin-Stout during the spring semester of 2009 by sending a self-made survey through UW-Stout email services.

Overall, helping children of divorce (who are presently young adults entering into their own personal relationships) to gain knowledge and resources that will help them to overcome whatever issues and obstacles they may have currently in their lives as a result of their parents' divorce was the goal of this research.

The outcome that the researcher wanted to accomplish through this study was to help young adults overcome some of the main issues that can result from parental divorce at a young age. The researcher especially focused on those whom were currently affected in their personal relationships with issues such as trust and health related issues (anxiety and depression).

The first step to fixing a problem is admitting that there is a problem. Many children of divorce like to appear strong and unaffected, always seeming to be in control. Through this study young adults coming from these circumstances will be able to look within and work on certain issues that they may have, allowing them to fully enjoy and feel happy with their lives.

### *My Story*

As the author and researcher of this study I first chose a topic that was of extreme interest to me and close to my heart. My parents divorced when I was one year old. I didn't fully realize the effects that their divorce had on me personally until I was about twenty years old and attempted to start my own life as an adult in a committed relationship.

Four years ago, after I had graduated with my bachelor's degree, my boyfriend of four years and I purchased our first home and began cohabitating as a committed couple. Shortly after, I began to suffer from situational depression and anxiety. That is what the counselor that I spoke with referred to it as. I had a really rough year following graduation, but slowly I took hold of my life realizing that I really did have control.

This is where my real interest in the topic of divorce comes from, personal growth and recovery. Talking with a counselor, who helped me to turn my life around in a positive direction, also helped me to realize my true passion in life, helping others. This is why I chose to follow through with my dream of becoming a School Counselor.

After four years of cohabitating with my boyfriend, a lot of self-evaluation, work, and a lot of research, I am truly happy and feel very fortunate to be able to appreciate the true love that I have been lucky enough to find. For so long I kept my "safety wall" built up around me, fearing that I would get hurt or abandoned. I now realize that thought there are no guarantees in life; you cannot truly live life with a wall built around you.

### *Statement of the Problem*

During the 1980s and early 1990s it was considered not unusual to many to be from a "broken" or divorced home. Divorce rates were at all time highs during these years and now many of those children are at the ages where they are entering into serious relationships and learning a lot about who they are as individuals. Some of these individuals are noticing issues coming up in their own personal relationships. The researcher is interested in researching and in figuring out why these issues are occurring in young adults lives (from divorced families), as well as approaches to avoid/prevent such issues altogether.

The researcher conducted this research by deploying an online survey to be sent out to students attending the University of Wisconsin-Stout during the early spring of 2009. The survey questioned those students regarding their thoughts of the long-term effects of divorce on children from their own personal experiences.

### *Research Questions*

There are three research questions this study will attempt to answer. They are as follows:

1. Do UW-Stout college students feel that their parents' divorce has affected their current personal/intimate relationships (trust, commitment ability, etc.)?
2. Do UW-Stout students from divorced families still believe in the concept of marriage?
3. Is a young adult's ability to "commit" in an intimate relationship affected (negatively) by their parent's divorce? If so, has the young adult's decision to remain single, single in an intimate/committed relationship, or to marry, been influenced by their parents' divorce?

### *Definition of Terms*

*Anxiety* – “painful uneasiness of mind, usually over an anticipated ill; abnormal apprehension and fear, often accompanied by physiological signs (as sweating and increased pulse), by doubt about the nature and reality of the threat itself, and by self-doubt” (*Merriam-Webster*, 1997, p.49).

*Commitment* – “to pledge or assign to some particular course or use” (*Merriam-Webster*, 1997, p. 162).

*Depression* – “an act of depressing; a state of being depressed; a pressing down; lowering; a state of feeling sad; a psychological disorder marked especially by sadness, inactivity, difficulty in thinking and concentration, and feelings of dejection; a depressed part” (*Merriam-Webster*, 1997, p. 210).

*Divorce* – “an act or instance of legally dissolving a marriage” (*Merriam-Webster*, 1997, p. 228).

*Fulfilling* – “to put into effect; to bring to an end; SATISFY” (*Merriam-Webster*, 1997, p. 308).

*Issues* – “outcome, result; a point of debate or controversy; the point at which an unsettled matter is ready for a decision; something coming forth from a specified source; to descend from a specified parent or ancestor; to result in” (*Merriam-Webster*, 1997, p. 401).

*Long-term* – “extending over or involving a long period of time; constituting a financial obligation based on a term, usually of more than 10 years” (*Merriam-Webster*, 1997, p. 437).

*Trust* – “assured reliance on the character, strength, or truth of someone or something; a basis of reliance, faith, or hope; confident hope” (*Merriam-Webster*, 1997, p. 777).

#### *Assumptions and Limitations of the Research*

It is assumed that not all students on campus come from a divorced family. It is also assumed that not all of the students to whom the survey is sent will be eligible or able to respond (if the student does not come from a family of divorce). Some students may not answer all of the questions fully or truthfully. This would be a major limitation to the research survey. Another possible limitation to the study would be if students do not respond to the survey because they do not have time or are unwilling to participate.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

This chapter addresses the many different effects that a divorce during one's childhood can have on a young person. According to *Pediatrics for Parents* (1997), "the effect of the divorce on the child depends on the family situation before the divorce" (p.5).

This chapter examines the following: the child's family situation pre-divorce, personal relationship status and their relationship with that person (if there is one), personal relationships with close family members, such as, each parent, siblings, etc., custody arrangements while growing up, relationship-related issues, health-related issues, behavioral-related issues, and school or social-related issues.

Main issues within the young adult's personal relationships and how they are related or connected to their parents' divorce will be a key focus in this chapter. The researcher is interested in this connection because it is important to first find the source of the problem in order to be able make any personal progress.

### *Family Situation before the Divorce*

Although divorce is commonly thought of as generally "bad" for the children involved, it is not always the case. In circumstances where the family and home environment is unstable or hostile and the children are well aware of the hostility, the children tend to be less "harmed" by the divorce. If, however, the children are unaware of the hostility between parents in the home and are virtually unaware of any problems or issues, a divorce tends to be more "harmful" to the children (*Pediatrics for Parents*, 1997, p.5). In circumstances such as this it has also been found that these children tend to become adults who are "more likely to have problems forming relationships and are generally less happy than children who grew up in two-parent families" (*Pediatrics for Parents*, 1997, p.5). According to Pasley (1996): "much, but not all, of the

negative outcomes (on children of divorce) can be explained by pre-divorce characteristics” (p.11). Pasley also stated that: “the effects of divorce on children begin long before parents physically separate; these effects are primarily the result of family dysfunction” (p.11).

#### *Personal Relationship Status/ Relationship with that Person*

- *Single/Engaged/Co-Habiting/Married/Divorced*

According to Chambers (1991), “the baggage of low self-esteem (caused by the divorce) also leads to selecting partners for reasons that do not lead to lasting relationships” (p.6).

Jacobson (1997) found that many children of divorce have “trouble forming romantic relationships in their late 20s and early 30s due to the fear that their own relationships would fail, as their parents’ marriages had” (p.3). Chambers stated that if the child (of divorce) leaves home early “to get out of undesirable home situations”, they may take part in some risky behavior or marry early, both of which are “associated with a higher risk of divorce” (Chambers, 1991, p.6).

#### *Custody Arrangements*

- *Full Custody of Child by One Parent*

According to the *USA Today Magazine* (1996), “it is best to keep kids in the same house and school so they can retain the same friends, the same routines, and have some sense of stability in their lives” (p.8). This doesn’t mean that only one parent should remain involved in the child’s life. It simply means that it is best to change as few other things as possible in the child’s life at this fragile time. Moreover, in the long-term, it is in everyone’s best interest if the child and non-custodial parent still have contact and a relationship with one another (*USA Today Magazine*, 1996, p.6). Jacobson (1997) stated that: “growing up in a broken home does not mean that the children cannot live happy lives, but it does superimpose a serious of special and difficult tasks on top of the normative tasks of growing up” (p.3).

Long and Forehand (2002) stated in their book that “it is important that a noncustodial parent continue to be involved with his child not just in the time immediately following the divorce but throughout his child’s life” (p. 83). They also stated that “a divorce ends a marriage but not parenthood” (p.83).

- *Shared Custody of Child by Both Parents*

“Two parents are clearly better than one.” This was a statement found in an article in the *USA Today Magazine* (1996, p.8). Although there are many variables to be taken into consideration, such as physical or verbal abuse, hostility, and other conflict, if possible it is in the child’s best interest to maintain the relationship between the child and both of the parents.

#### *Relationship Related Issues*

- Trust/Mistrust

Regardless of the person’s relationship status, it has been found that “these people (young adults/children of divorce) find it hard to trust other people’s assertions that they are valuable, and fear that increased intimacy with another will only result in more pain” (Chambers, 1991, p.6).

It was also found in the same study that “mistrust develops, and they tend to withdraw into themselves, not letting anyone in on their thoughts or feelings” (Chambers, 1991, p.6). With these specific “withdrawals” from a relationship, it makes it very difficult for anyone to succeed in a healthy relationship until the withdrawals are “fixed.”

- Commitment/Control (of the relationship)

Chambers (1991) found that at times children of divorce will “find themselves cutting off potential intimate relationships, so they can at least feel in control”; this may occur because

many times (in the past) the child has felt “powerless” due to issues surrounding their parents’ divorce (p.6).

#### *Related Health Issues*

- Anxiety

According to Pasley (1996), children of divorce have nearly a 40% increased risk of “psychopathology as young adults, only part of which could be explained by pre-divorce conditions” (p.11). She also stated that “82 percent of women and 94 percent of men whose parents divorced did not fall in the poor mental health categories” (p.11).

- Overall Personal Happiness

According to Chambers (1991), many children from a divorced family feel that the divorce is in a sense a personal rejection of them by their parents. In turn these feelings can turn into a low self-esteem and continued “emotional baggage” in the child’s adult years (p.6).

#### *Related Behavior Issues*

- Drug/Alcohol Abuse

Jacobson (1997) found that “once they (children of divorce) reached their teenage years, half had problems with drugs and alcohol” (p.3). Half is a large portion of children from divorced households to be partaking in risky behavior such as drug and alcohol use, and this type of behavior needs to be addressed. Fagan & Rector found that “children who use drugs and abuse alcohol are more likely to come from family backgrounds characterized by parental conflict and rejection” (Fagan & Rector, 2000, p.57).

- Problems in School

According to Jacobson (1997), “the emotional damage (from childhood divorce) is felt well into the adult years, even taking a toll on educational attainment” (p.3). “Children of divorce

are at risk for problems in school, they have more disruptive classroom behavior, are absent more often, as well as having generally lower IQ scores than children from non-divorced families” (Jacobson, 1997, p.3). Children from divorced families were also found to repeat grade levels and have “decreased academic performance” after a separation or divorce had occurred (Richardson & Rosen, 1999, p.21). Richardson & Rosen also found that: “emotional support in the school setting is effective in helping children of divorce cope with their situation” (p.21).

Four out of five children who use drugs and alcohol and also come from divorced families admitted that their schoolwork was affected in a negative way as a result (Wallerstein, Lewis, & Blakeslee, 2000, p.188).

### Chapter III: Methodology

This chapter presents information regarding the selection of the sample group (UW-Stout college students) as well as a brief description of the sample group. With this information, the reader will also find information regarding the survey that has been used to conduct the research, data collection and survey analysis procedures. Methodological limitations can be found at the end of this chapter.

#### *Description and Selection of Subjects*

A random sample of students attending the University of Wisconsin-Stout, (regardless of parental marital status) was asked to participate in this study through an emailed survey. The researcher made the decision to use a random sample of UW-Stout students because the researcher was interested in seeing the varied results/answers from the numerous students participating. A random sample of students means that students, both male and female (regardless of age), were randomly selected and asked to participate in this study. The students ranged in age from 18 years of age through “non-traditional students” who may be in their fifties or sixties (this was not specified other than a group listed as “fifty or over”).

#### *Instrumentation*

*Content description/construction.* The instrument that the researcher used for this research was an online survey sent out through UW-Stout’s email services. The researcher designed her own survey gathering ideas from various resources (books and online information). The format that the researcher used was an online survey. The survey was 22 questions and approximately two pages in length. The researcher made sure the survey was thorough, and covered all of the important and necessary areas, without being too long and boring for the prospective survey participants.

*Validity and reliability discussed.* No measures of validity or reliability have been documented due to this survey being designed specifically for this research study.

#### *Data Collection Procedures*

The researcher planned to collect her data by sending out an online survey through UW-Stouts email system. The researcher requested for the subject to fill out the survey and then reply to the online survey also using the UW-Stout email system. The researcher had the survey set up so that she was able to collect the data in an orderly fashion, keeping all of the data clear and concise.

#### *Data Analysis Procedures*

The researcher collected the data received from the online survey and had it prepared into a statistical analysis layout. By using the statistical analysis information provided the researcher was able to easily read through each question and response set. Using this information the researcher was able to make statistical connections between a parental divorce during the student's childhood and their current personal/intimate relationships.

#### *Limitations of Method, Sample, and Procedures*

The main limitation of the survey anticipated would be if students would not participate in the survey; therefore, not enough data would be collected to make any comparisons or conclusions. Another possible limitation to the survey would be if not enough students on campus have actually come from households of divorced parents. The survey also has no measures of validity or reliability documented due to it being designed for this study alone.

## Chapter IV: Results

This chapter will include the results of the researcher's study, specifically the results of the online survey. Demographic information of the students surveyed as well as an item analysis of the survey will be discussed. To conclude the chapter the researcher will discuss the research questions that have been under investigation.

### *Demographic Information*

The random sample provided to the researcher consisted of approximately 1,500 student email addresses, of those 670 students responded and 138 were eligible to participate in the full survey (they had divorced parents). All of the students that participated in the survey were enrolled at the University of Wisconsin-Stout during the spring 2009 semester.

### *Item Analysis*

The following questions were included in the researcher's survey. Each question is paired with the results found.

Item 1- *Are your parents divorced?* This was the first question of the survey. It is important because this question alone determined the eligibility of the student to take the survey. If the student replied "No" to this answer they were immediately eliminated from the survey along with a thank you for participating. Of the students who participated in the survey 138 answered yes to this question; therefore, 138 students that participated in the survey were eligible to take the survey in full.

Item 2- *Are you Male or Female?* The results of this question were as follows: 62.3% of students who participated were female, 33.3% of students who participated were male.

Item 3- *What is your current age?* The results to this question were as follows: 45.7% of students who participated were between the ages of 18 and 22; 29.7% of participants were

between the ages of 23 and 27; 10.9% of participants were between the ages of 28 and 35; 4.3% of participants were between the ages of 36 and 49; and 4.3% of participants were over 50 years old.

Item 4- *How old were you when your parents divorced?* The results to this question were as follows: 20.3% of participants were between the ages of 0 and 3; 32.6% of participants were between the ages of 4 and 10; 22.5% of participants were between the ages of 11 and 15; 15.9% of participants were between the ages of 16 and 20; and 8.7% of participants were over 20 years of age at the time of their parents' divorce.

Item 5- *How many years were your parents married?* The results to this question were as follows: 11.6% of participants answered that their parents were married 0-3 years; 22.5% of participants answered that their parents were married 4-9 years; 34.1% of participants answered that their parents were married 10-15 years; 2.8% of participants answered that their parents were married 16-25 years and 5.1% of participants answered that their parents were married over 25 years.

Item 6- *How did you find out about your parents' divorce?* The results to this question were as follows: 35.5% of participants answered they were told by their mom or dad; 30.4% of participants answered they were told by mom and dad together; 14.5% of participants answered that they don't remember or they were too young; 7.2% of participants answered that they overheard the news; 5.8% of participants answered "other"; 4.3% of participants answered that they were told by a sibling; and 2.2% of participants answered that they were told by a grandparent.

Item 7- *What reason were you given, if any, for your parents' divorce?* The results to this question were as follows: 44.9% of participants answered that their parents couldn't get along;

19.6% of participants answered that one parent had an affair; 11.6% answered that their parents weren't in love anymore; 8.7% of participants answered "other"; 4.3% of participants answered that they don't know/don't remember; 4.3% of participants answered that there was abuse; 3.6% of participants answered that there were AODA issues; and .7% of participants answered that both parents had an affair.

Table I: "Other" Responses

<u>Completely wrong for each other</u>
<u>Father couldn't handle child's disability</u>
<u>Father left mother, moved back to his parents' home</u>
<u>Grew apart, still loved each other and the kids</u>
<u>Money issues</u>
<u>My father is gay</u>
<u>My fault</u>
<u>Mental Health issues</u>
<u>Many reasons</u>
<u>One parent "changed"</u>
<u>Living arrangements</u>

Item 8- *What was your initial reaction to your parents' divorce?* The results to this question were as follows: 30.4% of participants answered that they were upset; 21.7% of participants answered that they were devastated; 21.7% of participants answered that they don't recall their initial reaction; 11.6% of participants answered that they were relieved; and 10.1% of participants answered that their initial reaction was indifferent.

Item 9- *Are you currently in a committed relationship?* The results to this question were as follows: 55.1% of participants answered that, yes, they were currently in a committed relationship while 39.9% of participants answered that, no, they were currently not in a committed relationship.

Item 10- *Are you currently married?* The results to this question were as follows: 20.3% of participants answered that, yes, they were currently married at the time of the survey while

74.6% of participants answered that, no, they were not currently married at the time of the survey.

Item 11- *What has been your longest relationship?* The results to this question were as follows: 25.4% of participants answered that their longest relationship has been 2-3 years; 24.6% of participants answered that their longest relationship has been more than five years; 20.3% answered that their longest relationship has been less than 1 year; 13.0% of participants answered that their longest relationship has been 3-5 years; and 11.6% of participants answered that their longest relationship has been 1 year.

Item 12- *In general, do you "believe" in the concept of marriage?* The results of this question were as follows: 85.5% of participants answered that, yes, they do believe in the concept of marriage while 9.4% of participants answered that, no, they do not believe in the concept of marriage.

Item 13- *If you are married, how old were you when you were married?* The results of this question were as follows: 71.0% of participants answered that they were not married; 13.8% of participants answered that they were 22-27 years old when they were married; 5.1% of participants answered that they were 18-21 years old when they were married; 2.9% of participants answered that they were 28-35 years old when they were married; .7% of participants answered that they were 36-45 years old when they were married; and .7% of participants answered that they were above 45 when they were married.

Item 14- *If you are married, would you consider yourself happy?* The results to this question were as follows: 73.2% of participants answered that they were not married; 9.4% of participants answered that they were very happy; 7.2% of participants answered that they were happy; and 4.3% of participants answered that they were mediocre.

Item 15- *How long has it been since your parents divorced (in years)?* The results to this question were as follows: 23.2% of participants answered that their parents have been divorced for over 20 years; 21.0% of participants answered that their parents have been divorced 5-10 years; 18.8% of participants answered that their parents have been divorced 11-15 years; 16.7% of participants answered that their parents have been divorced 0-4 years; and 14.5% of participants answered that their parents have been divorced 16-20 years.

Item 16- *How do you feel about your parents' divorce at this point in your life?* The results to this question were as follows: 64.5% of participants answered that they fully accept their parents' divorce; 26.1% of participants answered that they accept their parents' divorce; and 3.6% of participants answered that they cannot accept their parents' divorce.

Item 17- *Do you feel your parents' divorce has affected your past adult personal/intimate relationships?* The results to this question were as follows: 30.4% of participants answered that they felt their parents' divorce has affected their past relationships slightly; 25.4% of participants answered that they felt their parents' divorce has affected their past relationships moderately; 19.6% of participants answered that they felt their parents' divorce has not affected their past relationships at all; and 18.8% of participants answered that they felt their parents' divorce has affected their past relationships extremely.

Item 18- *Do you feel your parents' divorce is affecting your current personal/intimate relationships?* The results to this question were as follows: 37.0% of participants answered that their parents' divorce is not affecting their current relationship at all; 28.3% of participants answered that their parents' divorce is affecting their current relationship slightly; 21.0% of participants answered that their parents' divorce is affecting their current relationship

moderately; and 8.0% of participants answered that their parents' divorce is affecting their current relationship extremely.

Item 19- *Do you feel your ability to commit in an intimate relationship has been negatively affected by your parents' divorce?* The results to this question were as follows: 42.8% of participants answered that their ability to commit in an intimate relationship has not been affected by their parents divorce; 28.3% of participants answered that their ability to commit in an intimate relationship has been slightly affected by their parents divorce; 16.7% of participants answered that their ability to commit in an intimate relationship has been moderately affected by their parents divorce; and 5.8% of participants answered that their ability to commit in an intimate relationship has been extremely affected by their parents divorce.

Item 20- *Does/did your parents' divorce influence your decision to remain single, single in a committed relationship or to marry?* The results to this research question were as follows: 58.0% of participants answered that their decision to remain single, commit, or to marry has not been affected by their parents divorce; 16.7% of participants answered that their decision to remain single, commit, or to marry has been slightly affected by their parents divorce; 13.8% of participants answered that their decision to remain single, commit, or to marry has been moderately affected by their parents divorce; and 4.3% of participants answered that their decision to remain single, commit, or to marry has been extremely affected by their parents divorce.

Item 21- *In general, do you trust others with ease?* The results to this question were as follows: 49.3% of participants answered that, yes, they do trust others with ease while 43.5% of participants answered that, no, they do not trust others with ease.

Item 22- *Do you feel you are able to fully open yourself up in personal/intimate relationships?* The results to this question were as follows: 58.0% of participants answered that, yes, they are able to fully open up in a personal/intimate relationship while 34.1% of participants answered that, no, they are not able to fully open up in a personal/intimate relationship.

### *Research Questions*

*Research question #1. Do UW-Stout college students feel that their parents' divorce has affected their current personal/intimate relationships (trust, commitment ability, etc.)?*

Survey questions 17,18,19,20,21, and 22 address this research question. Question 17 stated: "Do you feel your parents' divorce has affected your past adult personal/intimate relationships?" The results to this question were as follows: 19.6% of students answered that their parents' divorce has not affected their past adult personal/intimate relationships while 80.4% of students answered that their parents' divorce has affected their adult personal/intimate relationships in some way (extremely, moderately, or slightly).

Question 18 stated: "Do you feel your parents' divorce is affecting your current personal/intimate relationships?" The results to this question were as follows: 37% of students answered that their parents' divorce has not affected their current personal/intimate relationships while 53% of students answered that their parents' divorce has affected their current personal/intimate relationships.

Question 19 stated "Do you feel your ability to commit in an intimate relationship has been negatively affected by your parents' divorce?" The results to this question were as follows: 42.8% of students answered that their parents' divorce did not affect their ability to commit in an intimate/personal relationship while 57.2% of students answered that their parents' divorce did affect their ability to commit in an intimate/personal relationship.

Question 20 stated: “Does/Did your parents’ divorce influence your decision to: remain single, single in a committed relationship or to marry?” The results to this question were as follows: 58% of students answered that their parents’ divorce has not affected their decision to remain single, commit, or to marry while 34.8% of students answered that their parents’ divorce has effect their decision to remain single, commit or to marry.

Question 21 stated: “In general, do you trust others with ease?” The results to this question were as follows: 43.5% of students answered that they do not trust others with ease while 49.3% of students answered that they do trust others with ease.

Question 22 stated: “Do you feel you are able to fully open yourself up in personal/intimate relationships?” The results to this question were as follows: 34.1% of students answered that they do not fully open up in personal/intimate relationships while 58% of students answered that they are able to fully open up in personal/intimate relationships.

*Research question #2.* Do UW-Stout students from divorced families still believe in the concept of marriage?

Survey question 11 addressed this research question. Question 11 stated: “In general do you “believe” in the concept of marriage?” The results to this question were as follows: 9.4% of students answered that they do not believe in the concept of marriage while 85.5% of students answered that they do believe in the concept of marriage.

*Research question #3.* Is a young adult’s ability to “commit” in an intimate relationship affected (negatively) by their parent’s divorce? If so, has the young adults decision to remain single, single in an intimate/committed relationship, or to marry, been influenced by their parents divorce?

Survey questions 19 and 20 addressed this research question. Question 19 stated: “Do you feel your ability to commit in an intimate relationship has been negatively affected by your parents’ divorce?” The results to this question were as follows: 42.8% of participants answered that they did not feel their parents’ divorce effected them in this way at all while 57.2% of students answered that their parents’ divorce did effect them (extremely, moderately, or slightly) in this way. Question 20 stated: “Does/Did your parents’ divorce influence your decision to: remain single, single in a committed relationship or to marry?” The results to this question were as follows: 58.0% of participants answered that their parents’ divorce did not affect this decision at all; 16.7% of participants answered that their parents’ divorce affected this decision slightly; 13.8% of participants answered that their parents’ divorce affected this decision moderately; and 4.3% of participants answered that their parents’ divorce affected this decision extremely.

## Chapter V: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

In this chapter the researcher will address the research and findings. The researcher will also give recommendations based on the results of the survey and research. Finally, this chapter will include a conclusion to the overall study.

### *Discussion*

Chapter II looked at the following: the child's family situation pre-divorce, personal relationship status and the individuals relationship with that person, personal relationships with close family members, such as, each parent, siblings, etc., custody arrangements while growing up, relationship-related issues, health-related issues, behavioral-related issues, and school or social-related issues.

Through the research and online survey many of these topics were addressed. It was found that a child's family situation pre-divorce could many times affect how the child reacts to the parental divorce. Many relationship-related issues were also addressed within the survey. It was found that the majority of participants reported feeling that their parents' divorce has at least affected their past or current personal/intimate relationships in some way.

By attaining this information (from the survey) the researcher has found that in almost all circumstances it was reported that parental divorce does in some way affect the children involved. Some children seem to be more affected than others and the research shows that the family situation both pre and post-divorce is many times a contributing factor to the degree that the child is affected.

### *Conclusions*

Overall, the researcher found the results of the survey and research to be informative and useful. The results proved the researchers initial ideas regarding the long-term effects of divorce on children; parental divorce does affect a child's relationships over the long-term.

Though the research showed that parental divorce may affect a young adult's personal/intimate relationships in a negative manner, it is important to remember that that is not always the case. Most importantly, it is essential to remember that it is also entirely possible to live a full, healthy and happy life whether you come from a divorced family or not.

### *Recommendations*

If the researcher were to conduct this research and survey again there would only be a few small changes made to the overall process. The main issue that the researcher would change would be to send the email survey to all UW-Stout students versus just a small random sample of students. By sending the survey to all students the number of students that would be eligible to take the survey would increase, giving a larger sample study.

As a recommendation to the field of School Counseling, the researcher would like counselors within the schools to be aware of the effects that a family divorce can have on a child, no matter what the age of the child is. As a school counselor, it will be important to be a strong support within the school for the child.

The researcher would also like the participants of the survey and this study to be aware of the resources available to them on the University of Wisconsin-Stout campus and within the surrounding area. UW-Stout offers free counseling at the University Counseling Center. They are also able to recommend numerous resources within the community.

“The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams” –Eleanor Roosevelt.

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### Appendix A: Survey

1. Are your parents divorced?
2. Are you Male or Female?
3. What is your CURRENT age?
4. How old were you when your parents divorced?
5. How many years were your parents married?
6. How did you find out about your parents' divorce?
7. What reason were you given, if any, for your parents' divorce?
8. What was your initial reaction to your parents' divorce?
9. Are you currently in a committed relationship?
10. Are you currently married?
11. What has been your longest relationship?
12. In general do you "believe" in the concept of marriage?
13. If you are married how old were you when you married?
14. If you are married would you consider yourself: Very Happy, Happy, or Mediocre.
15. How long has it been since your parents' divorce (in years)?
16. How do you feel about your parents' divorce at this point in your life?
17. Do you feel your parents' divorce has affected your past adult personal/intimate relationships?
18. Do you feel your parents' divorce is affecting your current personal/intimate relationship?
19. Do you feel your ability to commit in an intimate relationship has been negatively affected by your parents' divorce?

20. Does/did your parents' divorce influence your decision to: remain single, single in a committed relationship or to marry?
21. In general, do you trust others with ease?
22. Do you feel you are able to fully open yourself up in personal/intimate relationships?