

## Trust Issues Among Children of Divorce<sup>1</sup>

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In this study relationships between divorce and trust variables were examined. Specifically, marital status (married, divorced) was compared against degree of trust in government, technology, romantic relationships, family, and school. The study showed statistical significance ( $p < .05$ ) in terms of the relationship between marital status and romantic relationships. However, no other outcomes were significant (all  $p > .05$ ). These findings support the conclusion that children's trust issues may be important considerations when dealing with the erosion of parental relationships. The findings also suggest that trust issues that may develop from parental divorce do not appear to generalize to other non-romantic-relationship domains.

### Introduction

Trust is a feeling that could be defined as a belief, faith or hope in a person, place or thing. Parents who are attentive learn to establish a form of trust with their children. It seems, however, that such trust can become jaded by events or circumstances. One such circumstance is parental divorce; in today's society divorce is becoming more accepted and the effects it has on families involved may be more important than parents have yet considered (Ross, 2009). While parents may feel that the divorce will alleviate issues in the marriage, it might provide an unstable support system for the children involved. This lack of support can cause the children to develop trust issues (Coontz, 2007). Having trust issues can be frustrating and pervasive; therefore, the degree to which parental divorce affects trust among young adults is an important relationship to be studied (Coontz, 2007). It is especially important given the range of things that often require trust such as our government system, trust within current romantic relationships, trust within relationships with strangers, trust in technology, and even trust in motor vehicles. All these areas of underdeveloped trust play important roles in our lives. Lack of trust affects how we act and react in situations based off of positive or negative outcomes in our day-to-day lives.

Parental Divorce could play a role in a child's future; however, there is a question if the timing and age of the children during the divorce play a role in how much trust is affected in the future of

the children involved. Gender of the child might also be an important variable to consider because females and males may process information differently. Males and females view much of the world through different eyes and when it comes to trust levels it is also unmistakably true. When it comes to issues of the child involved in parent divorce studies show that children tend to be overly needy and sensitive yet lack full trust across the board due to the fear of loss that exists (Schaick, 2001).

Trust issues expand beyond relations in one's personal life. It makes sense that people would have doubts in our government systems and politics in general due to all the controversies and conspiracies that exist today. Schiffman, Thelen, and Sherman(2010) concluded from their studies on cynical and non-cynical people that individuals who are politically cynical have a harder time trusting our politicians and government more than those who are less skeptical. Schiffman et. Al. did not include parental divorce, however, that does not disprove the ideology that those individuals, who are more politically cynical, are also children of divorced parents. Cynical people tend to be very skeptical people, this doubt could be stemming from deep rooted trust issues.

Much research has been done concerning trust issues among intimate partners and parental interaction. It has been found that parental involvement within a child's upbringing is an important factor in the overall quality of that child's adult intimate relationships. Issues within a

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parent's marriage, including divorce, may have had a direct effects on a child's psychological well-being, intimate relationships, trusting friends or acquaintances and trust overall (Schaick & Stolberg, 2001). This could mean there are links between divorce and the child's future relationships obtaining trust issues. The more parental involvement the higher the chances of the child having quality intimacy, trust, and commitment in their future relationships, according to Schaick and Stolberg (2001). In their study they came to a conclusion through descriptive statistics and measurements of parental involvement, age, gender, and relationship status. It is logical to conclude that if parents are no longer involved in a child's life that the children will have future issues when it comes to trust, intimacy, and commitment. The reasoning behind this is the lack of emotional and physical support a child receives after parents split up causes unstable foundations in the child's life (Schiffman, 2010). This instability damages their trust levels and increases amendment fears. If a parental figure is not part of the child's life, after the divorce, it may cause insecurity and attachment issues that result in them being overly trusting or completely untrusting in future relationships (Schaick & Stolberg, 2001). This information may also relate to a trust issues related to other aspects in an individual's life; such as politics and technology.

When it comes to technology and interpersonal trust issues, there is a lack of trust among certain populations regarding the internet communication world. While the world is vastly improving technology daily to make lives easier, face to face communication is being forgotten and people have to depend on technological devices to keep in contact with one another. There is evidence that people doubt the safety of their lines of communication and feel their technology could be monitored. There is also a lack of trust in artificial intelligence in that it may break down or lead us astray from the truth (Ess, 2010). Having a lack of trust in technology may be related to more conditions outside of the fact that it is a manmade product. It could be the case that people have doubt in technology because they lacked parental involvement while growing up and now deal with trust issues among devices in their everyday lives. A lack of parental involvement, as mentioned

earlier, has been proved by Manolova that coincide with trust issues in the future conditions of their lives. Therefore, if one is already untrusting, having doubt in technology would be a logical conclusion to make (Manolova, 2007).

Another technology that is advancing daily is our methods of transportation. This generation has a created a smart car that can park and navigate without passengers. This requires humans to put a large amount of trust in the vehicles ability to transport them safely. There is something known as the adaptive cruise control system which is also known as (ACC), which requires complete trust from the driver that the vehicle can navigate and operate individually from the drivers actions (Verberne, Hame, Midden, & Cees, 2012). Although this technology is advanced and productive to society, skeptics will always exist and will always find fault in such advances. It is possible that the people who find these doubts in our advancing motor vehicles are also individuals that come from parents of divorce. It could also be true that the skeptics were not capable of providing enough affection and interaction throughout their childhood (Verberne, et. al. 2012). The fact that people are doubtful of a popular technology that has been tested and proven safe, says a lot about how much trust they are willing to invest in aspects of their lives.

Given the status of our countries economy, it is understandably hard to put our trust into investments and our banking systems. According to Manolova, Gyoshev, and Manev(2007), our economy is determined by our exchange of money for products and the stability of our economy is directly relates to our trust in our investments. It could be possible that individuals are particularly untrusting when it comes to their finances because of their parental relationships during their adolescent years. It may be concluded that the lack of stability in an individual's home life as a child affects their faith in stability in the country's economy. Again, the fact that parental divorce causes a lack of parental involvement, which ultimately will lead to trust issues in some children's futures, creates these possible links in trust issues (Schaick & Stolberg, 2001).

The purpose of this study is to determine if there is a relationship between young adults who

## Trust issues

have experienced parental divorce and trust issues across a variety of circumstances such as current relationships (intimate and non), politics, government, objects such as cars and technology. One prediction based off of this research I have found is that children who are younger during the parental divorce show to be overly attached and overly trusting whereas children who were older when their parents went through their divorce will tend to have a lack of faith in marriage and intimate relationships. A second prediction based off of the research is that females of parental divorce will be much more affected when it comes to interpersonal trust issues in their future than males are because their sensitivity levels are much higher causing them to be affected much more severely during the time of divorce.

### Method

#### Participants

The subjects used in this study were college students from a small private university in western Pennsylvania. Subjects were chosen at random in the local fitness center, cafeteria, and four different psychology classrooms. Subjects were informed they had as much time as they needed to complete the 20 question survey. Subjects were offered no incentive other than helping complete a research study.

#### Design

This study used a correlational design among different variables which included the dependent variable: Trust. Trust was measured using a 10 point Likert scale (1 being no trust and 10 being full trust). Subscales included: Trust of Media, Trust of Government; Trust of Romantic Partners, Trust of Family, and Trust of School. The independent variable was parental relationship status (divorced, married).

#### Materials

The survey contained 20 items (see appendix). The survey included five subscales. (1) The first subscale was Trust in Government which was represent with questions such as, "*When it comes to local, state, and federal government and politics, how trusting are you?*" (2) The next subscale was Trust of Media and was represented in questions for example, "*How much do you trust*

*media reports of police corruption?*" (3) Another subscale included Trust in Romantic Partner; these questions looked like, "*How much trust do you have towards a romantic partner after a year of dating if they never gave you reasons to not trust them?*" (4) A fourth subscale was directed towards Trust of Family which looked like, "*How strongly do you trust your parents?*" (5) Lastly participants were asked about Trust of School (RMU). An example of this sub-type question was, "*How strongly do you trust the RMU campus police?*" Each question was based upon a 10 point Likert scale with some questions being reversed to avoid response patterns. A score of 1 on the Likert scale meant there was no trust and a score of 10 represented complete trust. Participants were also asked to provide age, relationship status, and their parents' relationship status.

#### Procedure

This was a random assignment at a small university and consisted of a 20 questions survey given out to random students at various locations on campus whom agreed. The survey took no longer than 10 minutes to complete.

### Results

Through a twenty question survey trust was compared to participants of married parents and of divorced. Also, there were certain sub-scales that were compared with trust levels among children of married parents and those of divorce.

I found no statistical significance correlating trust overall when comparing participants of married parents and of divorced. (Note that simple analyses of variance were used rather than point biserial correlations.) When it came to the sub scales, no statistical significance was found between parental marital status and trust in government, trust in technology, trust in media, trust in family and trust in school. There was, however, a statistically significant finding between parental marital status and trust in romantic relationships,  $F(1,143) = 4.58, p < .05$ .

### Discussion

The hypothesis I began this study with was that overall trust among participants with divorced parents would be less than the amount of overall trust among participants of married parents. I also

predicted that each sub-scale of trust (government, romantic relationships, technology, family, and media) would be lower among participants whose parents had divorced versus participants whose parents had still currently remained married.

This study found that there was a ( $p < .05$ ) statistical significance when comparing the trust among divorced parents and of married when it comes to the sub-scale of romantic relationships. One possible reason why participants of divorced parents have less trust when in romantic relationships than participants with parents still currently married could be that the divorce jaded the way they feel about relationships and the possibility of a relationship enduring long term. Another possible reason could be that a child of parental divorce may have just had a less trusting family in general which may have caused the parents to divorce. Therefore the issues of trust may precede divorce, rather than the other way around.

All other sub-scales and overall trust did not show significant differences between children of divorce and children of married parents. A possible reason this is true is the idea that parental divorce does not affect a child's trust in general and the child does not let the parents' divorce overtake their views on the world as a whole.

In conclusion, parental divorce does affect a child's view of trust among romantic partner's in their future. Future research could attempt to see

the differences of age the divorce occurred and how that relates to trust among romantic relationships.

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Trust issues

Appendix

**QUESTIONNAIRE OF TRUST**

**Instructions:** Please rate your trust level for each circumstance below. Circle the number that applies best to your personal feelings.

1.) When it comes to local, state, and federal government and politics, how trusting are you?

NO TRUST  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
FULLY TRUST

2.) When it comes to negative conspiracies that exist against the US government (e.g., 9-11 attacks were orchestrated by the CIA), how much do you trust that they are accurate?

R NO TRUST  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
FULLY TRUST

3.) How strongly do you trust that the government lets you live your own life (is not trying to control it)?

NO TRUST  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
FULLY TRUST

4.) How much trust do you have towards a romantic partner after a year of dating if they never gave you reasons to not trust them?

NO TRUST  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
FULLY TRUST

5.) When you disagree with someone, how much do you trust that they argue fairly?

NO TRUST  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
FULLY TRUST

6.) How much do you trust members of the opposite sex?

NO TRUST  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
FULLY TRUST

7.) How much would you trust a friend who claimed that another one of your friends was saying bad things about you behind your back?

R NO TRUST  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
FULLY TRUST

8.) How much trust would you have of another student from Robert Morris University?

NO TRUST  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
FULLY TRUST

9.) How strongly do you trust your parents?

NO TRUST  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
FULLY TRUST

10.) If you have siblings, how much trust is there between you?

NO TRUST  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
FULLY TRUST

11.) How much do you trust media reports of police corruption?

R NO TRUST  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
FULLY TRUST

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- 12.) How strongly do you trust the RMU campus police?  
 NO TRUST 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 FULLY TRUST
- 13.) How strongly do you trust the RMU administration (president, vice-president, etc.)?  
 NO TRUST 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 FULLY TRUST
- 14.) How much do you trust current technology (cell phones, laptops, GPS, TV, etc.)?  
 NO TRUST 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 FULLY TRUST
- 15.) How much do you trust the rumor that government agencies routinely tap into your technology (monitor where you surf the web, record your phone conversations, etc.)?  
 R NO TRUST 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 FULLY TRUST
- 16.) How much do you trust the vehicles you operate?  
 NO TRUST 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 FULLY TRUST
- 17.) How much trust do you have for smart cars (fuel and energy efficient micro-cars)?  
 NO TRUST 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 FULLY TRUST
- 18.) How much do you trust your bank?  
 NO TRUST 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 FULLY TRUST
- 19.) How much do you trust the current President of the United States?  
 NO TRUST 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 FULLY TRUST
- 20.) How much do you trust the accusations made that most politicians are either corrupt or are more concerned with their own personal interests than the public's interests?  
 R NO TRUST 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 FULLY TRUST

**PARTICIPANT BACKGROUND**

1.) Sex: Male Female

2.) Age: \_\_\_\_\_ years old.

3.) Your Relationship Status: Dating Married Divorced Single

4.) Are your biological parents currently:

Married Separated Divorced One/Both Deceased Other

If Other: Please explain \_\_\_\_\_

If Divorced: What age were you when it occurred? \_\_\_\_\_