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Who wants to be a wife? How divorce impacts the daughters' desire to marry

Cindee Richardson (cindeerichardson@hotmail.com)
University of New South Wales

Abstract

In the past forty years the number of divorces, mother led homes, and step and blended families has increased at a rate never experienced before. Nine Canadian adult daughters of divorce were interviewed in order to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of divorce and how the experience has shaped their perceptions of marriage and family. The daughters were all raised by working mothers and the lessons they learned through and from their relationships with their mothers, and their non residential fathers are explored.

Even after witnessing or experiencing poverty, abuse, neglect, loss and grief, violence or intense conflict between their parents, the daughters expressed a desire to get married and have children. They want to “do it better, get it right, make better choices” and live their adult lives in a way that compensates for their childhoods. Each of the women interviewed said parental divorce impacted “every facet of my life.” Their personal fears about adultery, abandonment and single parenting have motivated them to make education, financial independence, personal interests and solid same sex friendships as essential.

The marriage myth with all of its idealism and promise is deeply imbedded in our culture and perhaps is desired more so because it eluded the daughters in their youth. The daughters expect to have fulfilling careers, and husbands who will share the responsibilities of housework and childcare. They feel the institution can evolve to accommodate everyone’s needs equitably.

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