



Between Two Worlds: The Inner Lives of Children of Divorce

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Is there really such a thing as a “good divorce”? Determined to uncover the truth, Elizabeth Marquardt—herself a child of divorce—conducted, with Professor Norval Glenn, a pioneering national study of children of divorce, surveying 1,500 young adults from both divorced and intact families between 2001 and 2003. In *Between Two Worlds*, she weaves the findings of that study together with powerful, unsentimental stories of the childhoods of young people from divorced families.

The hard truth, she says, is that while divorce is sometimes necessary, even amicable divorces sow lasting inner conflict in the lives of children. When a family breaks in two, children who stay in touch with both parents must travel between two worlds, trying alone to reconcile their parents’ often strikingly different beliefs, values, and ways of living. Authoritative, beautifully written, and alive with the voices of men and women whose lives were changed by divorce, Marquardt’s book is essential reading for anyone who grew up “between two worlds.”

“Makes a persuasive case against the culture of casual divorce.” —*Washington Post*

“A poignant narrative of her own experience . . . Marquardt says she and other young adults who grew up in the divorce explosion of the 1970s and 1980s are still dealing with wounds that they could never talk about with their parents.”—*Chicago Tribune*

Between Two Worlds: The Inner Lives of Children of Divorce Details

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Blaze Pearson says

This is a great book!! My parents divorced when I was barely a year old and I felt like this book was telling my story and helping me to put my emotions into words. I also have two older siblings that went through the same family split but felt it from a different angle and I feel as though Elizabeth Marquardt nailed what they went through as well. Before I read this book I thought my problems were exclusive to me but as I read this book it was clear that I was not alone. As cheesy as that sounds it completely changed my life. I highly recommend this book to anyone that is married, thinking of divorce, going through a divorce, a parent that is divorced or a child of divorce.

Jocelyn says

Spoiler alert: There is no such thing as a good divorce if it's your parents who are divorcing.

The American Conservative says

'Based on a random survey of 1,500 women and men aged 18-35, as well as 70 in-depth interviews within that group, Marquardt and co-researcher Norval Glenn have delivered an empirical record that makes the appendices alone reason enough to study this book. In them one finds the fascinating differences of this random sample of young adults—half from divorced families and half from intact—manifest themselves repeatedly in the course of 125 probing survey questions.

Even so, the significance of this book goes deeper than its empirical contribution. In a bold move that will doubtless launch a thousand complaining missives from her fellow sociologists, Marquardt frames her discussion of these results in the first person, weaving her own personal story as a child of divorced parents in and out of the text. The polemical result ranges from effective to devastating. As a result, Between Two Worlds achieves not only a breakthrough in empiricism but also in the quality most lacking elsewhere in current sociology: empathy for the children and former children of these homes.'

Read the full review, "Broken Homes, Broken Children," on our website:
<http://www.theamericanconservative.co...>

Julia says

While this book has some good insights, I think better, less biased information is available from Judith Wallerstein (namely "Legacy of Divorce" and "What About the Kids"). This book felt a bit resentful, and the topic may be a bit too close to the authors heart to be objective.

It's not always as hopeless as this author made it seem. As a stepmom, I appreciated the different perspective but when I tossed around some of the ideas presented in this book to my stepdaughter, she scoffed at them. I

think if my husband read this book he'd be inclined to think that he ruined his children for life by agreeing to a divorce. If someone does read this book, I hope it's amongst many others.

The literature on divorce and stepfamilies (along with the negativity I often find on stepparent support websites) would make one think there is never a happy ending. But with a lot of work, time and an open mind, life after divorce can be okay. Kids can actually feel that their life is better and that they are happier and have more opportunities and supports. They won't all trot off with lifelong resentment. Not to say it is an easier life or won't take lots of adjusting. But it's not actually as hopeless as this book left me feeling.

Paige says

Any parent considering divorce should read this, but it's not easy to do. It does not offer solutions, but as a single parent understanding the challenges my child faces emotionally and developmentally, not glazed over and white washed, helped us immensely.

In cases of abuse or repeated infidelity it is better for parents to separate. That aside, I wince when someone considering a separation tells me that their child will be better off when mom and dad are happier in their two separate happy homes. It does not work that way. Fess up to how it is harder on them so that can be part of your decision. Then, whatever path you choose, do all you can for them to make it easier for them.

Kirsti says

Interesting and sensitively written book that showcases the author's research on children of divorce. Marquardt points out that there has been almost no research on the spiritual development of children whose parents have split up. Based on her study, those children interpret religious imagery very differently than children from intact families do. The notion of God as a parent affects them in a different way--some say, "Great, a father who is with me everywhere I go and whom I can always talk to," while others say, "Thanks, but I already have a mysterious, faraway father who ignores me."

Children of divorce also struggle with moral questions much earlier than most children—Why did this happen to me? How come Mom has one truth and Dad has another? Am I a different person with Mom than I am with Dad, or do I just feel different? Is it disloyal to act like (or sound like, or look like) one parent when I am with the other?

The author describes many of her own experiences as a child who suffered through her parents' divorces and remarriages. She believes that she became a fundamentalist Christian as a teenager for the same reasons that other teenage girls develop eating disorders--to control the body and numb the mind.

Marquardt has little good to say about society's idea of a "good divorce" and hates the term "blended family." (She says "divided family" would be more accurate, and she has a point.)

Michael Silverman says

I remember why I initially liked this this, and now why I'm mixed.

Let me start by saying this can be an important book for someone trying to understand that they are not alone. That the experiences they had as a child of divorce may be more shared than unique. When I first read this, as my initial exposure to the thoughts of those who went through a divorce, I found it extremely enlightening. As a psychologist, understanding another's place, history, experience is very important. Not being a child of divorce, these aspects were new to me. They are indeed important.

As an academic, I found the book problematic. The experiences detailed are anecdotal. The reported study, while large, was more sociological than scientific. As a scientist, I feel this should have been more thoroughly explained - in some ways, it may be misleading to the lay reader. That said, I published a book in 2007, which is admittedly anecdotal. My book suffers from some of the same problems.

The author touches on some very important aspects of marriage and modeling. That any relationship is a negotiation. That a marriage is essentially an attempt by two people to create something more than its individual parts - two strands of wool slowing knitted into a blanket which can provide comfort, warmth and security. More importantly, that even a "good" divorce results in a tearing of this fabric.

For the child or adult of a divorce, this can be an enlightening read. I think for the early clinician, this book is also extremely valuable. However, maybe the best audience is the newly married - for Marquardt describes quite nicely what a good marriage does, and what a conflictual marriage may do.

Julie Biles says

"There is no such thing as a good divorce" and "Children are resilient because we need them to be." These are two repeated themes in this excellent compilation of stories collected by this sociologist. As a teacher, reading this work has helped me understand a growing majority of vulnerable, not so resilient children who fill my classroom. Marquardt's thesis, with which I must agree, divorce is devastating to children, regardless of the circumstances.

Ann Garth says

This book gets it.

Jenni Frencham says

I found this book by visiting the blog of Lauren Winner, an author I have recently discovered. She had chosen to read this book because she said she saw herself on every page. Although I generally avoid the victim mentality that often comes from reading books about how traumas in a person's life have warped that person so he or she cannot choose to behave differently, I was intrigued by this particular book.

This book is the culmination of a study of children who both came from divorced families and completed at least one college degree. The author's hypothesis was that such children would generally be considered successful by the world around them, yet she wanted to see how growing up in a divorced home changed the way children think and feel and approach the world.

Alanna says

This book is so important. Honestly, I think it should be made into mandatory reading for any divorcing/separating parents. Elizabeth Marquardt breathes life into the silent experiences of all children of divorce as she attempts to shatter our complacent view of divorce and its effect on children.

As both a child of divorce and a single parent, this book was especially poignant. This book gives light to an experience that I myself have faced but never been able to put into words. There were passages that I would read and think, "Holy shit, that's a scene right out of my life," the stories were so eerily similar.

Nate says

The book claims to be a study about children of divorce who come from "good divorces," however, overwhelmingly it appears to be about this woman's life with a study she conducted to back up her own feelings of confusion, imbalance, etc.

I think it would be fair to say that the author already had the conclusion of her study written (and perhaps this whole book) before the study was even started. It doesn't mean that what she says is wrong, but it does make the stated intent of this book inaccurate.

To illustrate how biased the author is, based on her conclusions of "good divorces" you could surmise that it would be better for your spouse to die than to divorce him/her. If you go back over all of her reasoning, you'll notice they are all solved by becoming a widow.

For instance, a child of a "good divorce" will feel:

Expecting to keep secrets from their parents: solved by being a widow

Feel like a different person with each of their parents: solved by being a widow

Moral questions early in life: solved by being a widow

Feeling like a football being hurtled between parents: solved by being a widow

Trying to make sense of two different ways of living: solved by being a widow

Family income to plummet: solved by being a widow who had a good life insurance policy.

Difficulty interacting with two people who are separate: solved by being a widow

Two different places: solved

Two different ideas: solved

Even the title of the book, "Between Two Worlds," again, all solved by being a widow.

In her defense, after 180+ pages in a paragraph during the conclusion, she did address the hole in her research (although not framing it that way) by saying: "For now, I suspect that on average it is no better, and probably much worse, for children of divorce to lose contact completely with a parent - often the father."

So interesting topic, but the author is far too close to the issue to conduct a scientific study that is not filled with bias, as even her summary data illustrates (if you look at her data tables they overwhelmingly do not show the strong emphasis or correlation that she uses in her wording).

You learn later in the book that she experienced three different divorces as a child, and that in one of them, the step-dad, whom she grew close to, committed suicide. I felt that this death really scarred her, and that she felt that if her parents had never originally divorced that she would have never been exposed to an adult who was playing the role of a parent, but was not completely responsible for her; feeling that this loss was far more catastrophic to her than her biological parents divorcing, I wonder if this book would have been written if he would have survived.

Either way, I'm glad it was written, but more research from less biased people will hopefully contribute to this genre in the future.

Farah says

This book sets out to challenge some of the myths surrounding a "good divorce." Even if the parents move on and create new lives for themselves that are happy and positive, the divorce still has an impact on the kids that most people don't want to admit. She talks about how children of divorce are forced to become "little adults" and how they don't have a unified sense of home. Because they travel between two homes, these kids have to keep their guard up and always watch to see what the rules are at Mom's and how things are different at Dad's house. It was an interesting critique on all of the "happy divorce talk."

Jeff says

This is one of the best books I've ever read on the effects of divorce on children and teens. The premise is that as the divorcing parents pursue their separate lives, the children increasingly find themselves caught in a no man's land between the two worlds of their parents, where they are left to figure out their morals and values in a vacuum. The key element to this book is an extensive survey of children of divorce that was done to get their thoughts and feelings on the experience, coupled with dozens of longer interviews done with children of divorce. This book gives voice to those who are often voiceless in a divorce. One of Marquardt's more provocative points is concerning what she calls the myth of the "good divorce." She examines the arguments that children are resilient and will get through the trauma of divorce unscathed after a couple of years of upheaval and dismisses the notions as "happy talk" designed to soothe the consciences of adults. She argues that while a good divorce is better than a bad divorce, it is not better than a good marriage. Anyone who works with children and teens and wants to gain a better understanding of a phenomenon that is greatly affecting almost half of our children in will need to read this book and hear their voice.

Ronald says

As a divorce lawyer, I highly recommend this book. It contains no happy talk, only the truth about the pain and problems that the children of divorce experience. Nuff said.
