



AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY
OF BOOKS ON

Children of Divorce

Plus a Few Films



PREPARED BY

ELIZABETH MARQUARDT

Editor, FamilyScholars.org

Design by Alma Phipps & Associates.

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Institute for American Values

1841 Broadway, Suite 211

New York, New York 10023

Tel: 212.246.3942

Fax: 212.541.6665

Website: www.americanvalues.org

E-mail: info@americanvalues.org

RESEARCH

Elizabeth Marquardt, *Between Two Worlds: The Inner Lives of Children of Divorce* (New York: Crown Publishers, September 2005)

Based on a national study, this book takes on the idea of the “good divorce,” arguing that while an amicable divorce is certainly better than a bitter one, even amicable divorces sow lasting inner conflict in the lives of children. It is the first nationally representative study in the U.S. of the inner lives of children of divorce and the first to examine the moral and spiritual impact of divorce in children.

Judith Wallerstein, Julia Lewis, and Sandra Blakeslee, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: A 25 Year Landmark Study* (New York: Hyperion, 2000)

This is the third book that Judith Wallerstein wrote on a group of children of divorce she followed for more than twenty-five years. She finds, among other things, that divorce has a “sleeper effect,” that its most troubling consequences arise when these children reach their young adult years and experience difficulty in establishing trusting and stable intimate relationships.

E. Mavis Hetherington and John Kelly, *For Better or For Worse: Divorce Reconsidered* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2002)

The discussion about this book when it was released was that divorce, on the whole, is not so bad for kids. E. Mavis Hetherington noted in interviews that just twenty to twenty-five percent of children of divorce in her sample continued to suffer lasting social and psychological problems in adulthood—this was compared to ten percent of children from intact families who suffered similarly severe problems in adulthood. Other seemingly troubling insights about children of divorce in her book are also presented as good news, but the book nevertheless offers a data-rich portrait of the lives of children of divorce.

Constance Ahrons, *We're Still Family: What Grown Children Have to Say About Their Parents' Divorce* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004)

In this book Ahrons returns to interview the now-grown children from her earlier study, published as *The Good Divorce* in 1992. For this follow up she used assistants to conduct telephone interviews with most of the original sample of now-grown children. The anecdotes these young people share are often quite moving and sometimes troubling, but Ahrons wraps their experience in a thesis that seems to deny what they say. For instance, she asks them leading questions about what was “positive” about their parents’ divorce. Some replied their parents’ divorce taught them that they want to work hard on their marriages and never divorce because they don’t want to “do that” to their kids. Ahrons uses responses like these to support her thesis that children of divorce have many positive things to say about divorce but the culture doesn’t hear about them because no one thinks to ask them if anything good came out of the divorce. Another major problem with her study is that it has no control group, so although she speculates that the young people in her sample don’t differ developmentally from their peers from intact families, she offers no data to back up that claim.

Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, *Growing Up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994)

An excellent, readable account of the social and economic impact of divorce on children, based on the authors’ analysis of national survey data.

Paul R. Amato and Alan Booth, *A Generation at Risk: Growing Up in an Era of Family Upheaval* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997)

A widely respected, rigorous study of widespread family changes and their effects on children. This book was based on a nationally representative, longitudinal study conducted by the authors. One of their key findings was that one-third of divorces ended high conflict marriages, and children did better after those divorces. However, two-thirds of divorces ended low conflict marriages, and children did worse after those divorces.

Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr. and Andrew Cherlin, *Divided Families: What Happens to Children When Parents Part* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991)

A widely-cited contribution to the literature, examining the social and economic effects of divorce on children.

SOCIAL HISTORY/CRITICISM

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, *The Divorce Culture: Rethinking Our Commitments to Marriage and Family* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997)

Whitehead argues that we have become a “divorce culture,” one in which those who question the impact of divorce on children are seen as attacking adults’ freedom to divorce. Chapter Five, “The Children’s Story of Divorce,” is a remarkable examination of the children’s book and greeting card industries, which provide insight into children’s experiences of divorce as well as revealing how our culture seeks to manage their experience and bring it into line with adult perspectives on divorce.

PERSONAL STORIES/SELF-HELP FROM A SECULAR PERSPECTIVE

Stephanie Staal, *The Love They Lost: Living with the Legacy of Our Parents’ Divorce* (New York: Delacorte Press, 2000)

An absorbing and often sad journalistic account of the child’s experience of divorce, based on Staal’s own experience of childhood divorce and her online interviews with over one hundred adult children of divorce.

Ava Chin, Ed. *Split: Stories from a Generation Raised on Divorce* (New York: Contemporary Books, 2002)

A collection of edgy essays by young adult children of divorce. The quality varies, some are quite good. Most books by children of divorce seem to be by women. This collection offers essays by men too.

Rebecca Walker, *Black, White, and Jewish: Autobiography of a Shifting Self* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2001)

Walker is the Gen X daughter of the well-known author Alice Walker, and in this book she tells the story of growing up with a Black parent and a Jewish parent. Interestingly, the title of the book and most of the reviews when it came out emphasize Walker's story of growing up biracial, but it is clear when reading the book that the overriding division in her young life—and what contributes to her sense of being a “shifting self”—results not so much from her parents' being of different races but rather their divorce when the author was in third grade. Walker grew up after that living alternately, two years at a time, with her mother on the west coast and her father on the east coast. She writes evocatively of what those passages and separations were like.

Brooke Lea Foster, *The Way They Were: Dealing with Your Parents' Divorce After a Lifetime of Marriage* (New York: Three Rivers Press, January 2006)

A book about people who experience their parents' divorce when they themselves are older than 18 (i.e. they are adults when their parents divorce).

Jolyn Rudelson, *It's Not About You: A Grandparent's Guide to Surviving Divorce in the Family* (New York: Park East Press, 2011)

Grandparents are often on the front lines of their grown child's divorce, trying to help or stay out of the way, worrying about the grandchildren, sometimes fearing the loss of a relationship with them, and often offering or feeling the need to provide financial, emotional, or logistical support. In emotionally intelligent and well-argued prose, this book takes grandparents by the hand on the journey that will be their child's divorce.

THEOLOGICAL OR FAITH PERSPECTIVES

Andrew Root, *Children of Divorce: The Loss of Family as the Loss of Being* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2010)

In this unique contribution to the literature, youth ministry expert and Luther Seminary professor Andrew Root explores how parental divorce threatens the core identity of children and young people, shaking the ontological foundation on which their selves were built.

Jen Abbas, *Generation Ex: Adult Children of Divorce and the Healing of Our Pain* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2004)

An exploration by a thoughtful young adult child of divorce about the lifelong effects of divorce, informed by a Christian faith perspective.

Beverly and Tom Rodgers, *Adult Children of Divorced Parents: Making Your Marriage Work* (Resources Publications, 2002)

An exploration of the effects of childhood divorce on the grown child's ability to form an intimate, lasting relationship and marriage. Written by two Christian (Protestant) family therapists who are married to each other and who are children of divorce. The book explores what they've learned both as therapists and in their own marriage.

Lynn Cassella, *Making Your Way After Your Parents' Divorce: A supportive guide for personal growth* (Ligouri, Missouri: Ligouri Lifespan, 2002)

Written by a Catholic child of divorce who is founder of an organization devoted to supporting children of divorce in spiritual growth. The book is aimed at teenagers and young adults.

FICTION

Jhumpa Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999)

One short story in this Pulitzer Prize winning story collection, titled “Mrs. Sen’s”, is a remarkable exploration of a young American child of divorce and his experience with his babysitter, a recent Indian immigrant named Mrs. Sen. As the story progresses it becomes clear that the young American boy and Mrs. Sen share something in common: both lack a secure sense of home. The Gen X author, Jhumpa Lahiri, was born in London of Indian parents and later moved to Rhode Island, where she grew up. It is interesting that this young writer, who herself is both an insider and an outsider in American culture, understands the experience of children of divorce, who often feel like outsiders in their own homes, better than many American observers do.

Henry James, *What Maisie Knew*, a novel about a child of divorce (1897)

Edith Wharton, *The Children*, a novel about children of divorce who grow up too soon (1928)

RECOMMENDED FILMS

Kramer vs. Kramer

The Squid and the Whale (has some scenes not appropriate for some audiences)

!Zusammen! (Swedish, year 2000) (has some scenes not appropriate for some audiences)

Unaccompanied Minors (suitable for young viewers)

What Maisie Knew, based on the 1897 Henry James novel, is being released in 2012 as a Hollywood movie set in contemporary New York City and starring Julianne Moore.

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