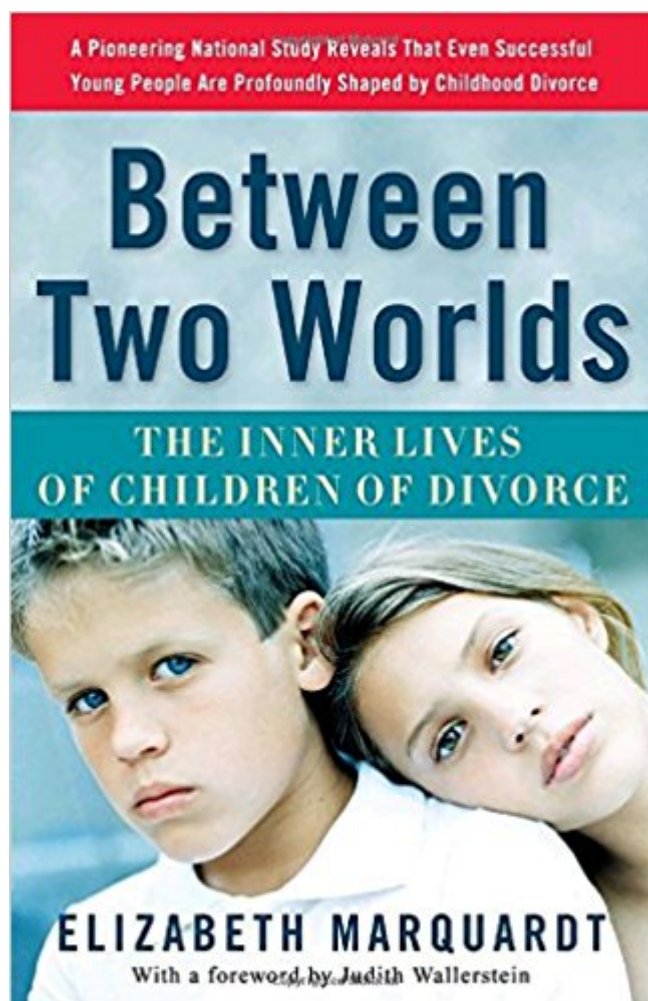


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# Between Two Worlds: The Inner Lives Of Children Of Divorce



## Synopsis

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*

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

There's no such thing as a "good divorce," argues Marquardt, a scholar with the Institute for American Values. Divorce harms children for the rest of their lives, she says; it turns them into "little adults" who anxiously protect their fragile parents, instead of being protected, the way they are in "intact" families. Divorce forces children to guard parental secrets—protecting Mom by not telling Dad, or vice versa. At increased risk from pedophilic attacks (from their mothers' boyfriends or new husbands) and substance abuse, "children of divorce" may also feel alienated from organized religion, although Marquardt's survey finds them more likely to feel their spirituality strengthened by adversity. Marquardt says she's based her book on her own experiences as a child of divorce and on the results of a "nationally representative survey," yet her own bias strongly colors this work. Intact-family envy—the kids with parents sit in the front pews at church, while the children of divorce sit alone in the back, eyeing them; a 20-something Marquardt "sobbing" as she tries to decide which of her divorced parents will walk her down the wedding aisle—permeates this feisty tract. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Elizabeth Marquardt is the director of the Center for Marriage and Families at the Institute for American Values, a nonpartisan think tank focused on children, families, and civil society. Her essays and op-ed pieces have appeared in the New York Times, Washington Post, Chicago Tribune, and elsewhere. She lives in Chicago with her husband and two children.

I read "Between Two Worlds" nine months ago and have struggled ever since to complete this review. It was painful to read and even more painful to review. Elizabeth Marquardt has authored an extremely valuable book - one that can stand tall next to the works of Judith Wallerstein. "Between" is the first book to deal with the moral and spiritual development of the children of divorce. How do children make sense of a parent's different beliefs, values, and ways of living when parents no longer must confront these differences themselves? How do the feelings of loss and loneliness, so widespread in the lives of children of divorce, affect their spiritual journeys? How might divorce divide and shape the inner lives of many children, even those who appear to be successful in life? A fierce moral drama unfolds in the wake of our parent's divorce, revolving around a core of common questions....what do my parent's think and believe" What is the right thing to do? For Marquardt and other children of divorce, "The moral drama kindled by our parent's divorce has burned quietly inside us for years-for all our lives." Marquardt, an adult child of divorce, based this "Between" on a

questionnaire completed by 1500 adults between the ages of 18 and 35 years supplemented by face-to-face interviews with more than 70 college graduates. Her focus on college graduates stemmed from a desire to highlight the experiences of young people like herself who were reasonably successful. 50% of the interviewees came from divorced families and 50% from intact families. "Between" reaffirms Wallerstein's finding that the idea of a "good divorce" is attractive to many. It reassures parents and is a construct to alleviate much of the anxiety our society has about divorce. This adult centered vision, however, does not reflect children's true experience. Divorce powerfully changes the structure of childhood itself and while a good divorce is better than a bad divorce, it is still not good divorce. Marquardt adds that no amount of success in adulthood can compensate for an unhappy childhood or erase the memory of the pain and confusion of the divided world of the child of divorce. Marquardt notes that "lack of commitment" is the most cited reason for divorce. My bet is that this is also the primary reason for the problems being addressed by books like "Between" - no, not the "lack of commitment" between two adults but rather the "lack of commitment" of two adults to provide love, stability, consistent moral guidance, and affirmation of their budding spiritual lives to their children. Divorce affects all of society. It is a shared experience in our culture because it shapes the lives of so many children and adults and reflects on collective values. I highly recommend "Between" to those considering, going through, or being divorced. It is also a "must read" for professionals in family, marriage, and/or divorce counseling. We must come to grips with what is happening to the children and, hence, our society.

What a powerful and poignant book about the effects of divorce on children. In a culture that has bought the lie that divorce doesn't have significant adverse effects on children, Marquardt begs to differ; and not only with the facts of her own personal experience, but based on her cutting-edge research of the subject. Marquardt begins the book stating what is obvious to all children of divorce, but is often overlooked by so many others - that while divorce is perceived by most to be an ending (the end of a marriage relationship), from the child's perspective, it is the beginning of a life-long struggle for security, meaning, identity and wholeness. Even in the so-called "good divorces" where there is little conflict between the parents and the child is able to remain in contact with both parents following the divorce, Marquardt raises several powerful concerns from the child's perspective. Regardless of the proverbial "good" or "bad" divorce, every child is faced with a new reality - two parents, two homes, two different and often conflicting worlds. And the child, most often, is left to deal with their feelings, with their anger, with their questions alone. Building on the revolutionary research of Judith Wallerstein (*The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: A 25 Year Landmark Study*),

Marquardt echoes the concerns that divorce has far more significant and lasting effects on children than previously realized or recognized. While in college, I actually took a course based on the research of Wallerstein and this issue has been very interesting to me and became much more real when, at age 26, my parents divorced. Working with students today, I can see so many of the powerful and damaging effects of divorce on their lives. As Marquardt points out in her book, children of divorce are often lonely, confused, angry, and tired of having to live two completely different lives to survive in two separate worlds created by each parent. Marquardt also notes, and from personal experience I can echo her words, that children deal with the effects of divorce long after the actual incident - it affects their own marriage, their vacations and holidays, and their sense of wholeness and security long into their adult lives. While Marquardt is clear that her intent is not to make divorced parents feel burdened, this is a heavy and profound book for every parent who is divorced (and might be good medicine for any parent thinking about divorce). But while that secondary effect may or may not exist, the book is aimed at the children of divorce themselves and the divorce-permissive culture in which they live. Marquardt shares her heart and experiences to give strength and wisdom to others, like her, caught between the two worlds created by divorce. And she challenges the culture at large to honestly examine the concept of marriage and the handling of divorce considering the perspective of what might be best for the interests of the children, not just the rights of the parents. *Between Two Worlds* is a powerful book and would be an excellent read for anyone, but will be especially meaningful for those who are children of a divorced family or the parents themselves. The lie that children are resilient and will easily adapt to the new realities created by divorce are not found in the research and are definitely not born out in the personal testimonies and experiences of Marquardt and others she studied. Divorced parents would be wise to read this book and change their approach to the parenting of their children.

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