

# Is There Life After Divorce?

## Books In Brief

By Jeffrey J. Froh, M.S.  
and John D. Hogan, Ph.D.

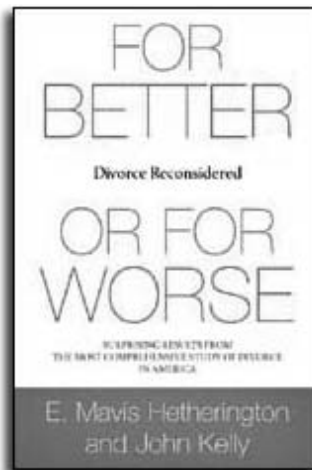
Hetherington, E. M., &  
Kelly, J. (2002).

*For better or for worse:  
Divorce reconsidered.*  
New York: W.W. Norton  
& Company.

ISBN: 0-393-04862-4

E. Mavis Hetherington has been studying families for more than 45 years and is well known in psychology as one of the foremost researchers on divorce and its aftermath. Judith Wallerstein is also an important researcher in the area, but Hetherington is generally considered to be more “hard-nosed.” This book is a highly-readable account of Hetherington’s research. With the help of John Kelly, a New York-based writer, she presents her data in a lively and informative way, with particularly good use made of case studies.

Hetherington’s results are largely derived from three longitudinal studies: the Virginia Longitudinal Study of Divorce and Remarriage — which receives the most emphasis — the Hetherington and Clingempeel Study of



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Divorce, and the National Study of Nonshared Environment. Each of the studies employed approximately the same number of male and female children, and used non-divorced families as comparison groups. In all, nearly 1,400 families and more than 2,500 children were followed for three decades or more — the most extensive and comprehensive longitudinal study on divorce to date.

The media and pop psychology books have helped to perpetuate the myth that the effects of divorce are almost always negative. Hetherington counters this claim with empirical evidence. She believes that divorce is a “high-risk situation” and puts individuals in jeopardy

for increased physical and psychological problems. However, 20 years after divorce, “the majority of divorced parents and their children are resilient and able to cope with the challenges in their post-divorce life. They emerge as reasonably happy, competent individuals.”

The first few years after divorce are extremely stressful for adults, and many children display emotional, social, and behavioral problems. Nonetheless, “two years after divorce, most boys and girls are beginning to function reasonably well again” and parenting skills are refreshed and gain strength. “Eighty per cent of children from divorced homes eventually are able

to adapt to their new life and become reasonably well adjusted.” Hetherington found less than a 10 percent difference in the marital failure rate between those individuals who came from divorced families and those who did not.

What are the risk and protective factors associated with divorce? According to Hetherington’s data, divorcees are at greater risk for long-term problems if they are antisocial, impulsive, neurotic, attached emotionally to former spouses, promiscuous, low in SES, have a family history of divorce, and become involved in a cohabiting relationship. Individuals are more likely to grow and conquer the adversities of divorce if they are socially mature, autonomous, religious, and have an internal locus of control, strong social support system, and stable work experience.

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*For Better or for  
Worse: Divorce*

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## Harm Reduction Psychotherapy

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exemplify various concepts and aspects of treatment, and Tatarsky discusses each. In two emotionally moving stories, Gail Hammer and Valerie Frankfeldt describe situations in which they altered the expected forms of treatment to meet the individual needs of their clients. Fred Rotgers vividly describes the application of cognitive behavioral techniques to the treatment

of substance misuse, while Mark Sehl takes a psychoanalytic approach. Both Barbara Wallace and Jeannie Little present cases in which a harm reduction philosophy pervades a therapy group. In Little's case, we see the issues that arise with dually diagnosed clients. This case is reflective of cutting edge changes occurring in the field today. Traditionally, substance

abuse and mental health treatments have been separated. With the advent of harm reduction, they are becoming increasingly integrated, taking place simultaneously under one roof.

Throughout Tatarsky's book, we see treatment approaches that reflect philosophies and ideas that have pervaded psychology for ages: respect for the clients and their defenses, limitations and wishes; individualized treatment; and a flexible approach that

allows for growth and continually adapts to the changing needs of the client. Much like harm reduction itself, the book presents a universal philosophy that addresses individual needs and interests, in this case the interests of substance use counselors, psychotherapists and interested lay readers. ♦

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*Reconsidered* offers a refreshing look at what

has become a contemporary cultural epidemic.

Hetherington and Kelly do a superb job, not only of painting a realistic picture of divorce and remarriage and the long-term psycho-

logical consequences that follow, but also of reminding us of the resilience and strength that lie within all of us. ♦

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