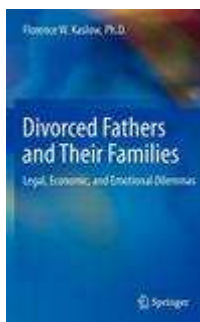


Voices of the Fathers of Divorce

A review of



Divorced Fathers and Their Families: Legal, Economic, and Emotional Dilemmas

by Florence W. Kaslow

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Reviewed by

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Any reviewer of the extensive literature on divorce quickly would note that it consists mostly of the voices or concerns of the mothers of divorce, to the neglect of the voices and concerns of the children and fathers of divorce. A growing literature finally is beginning to emerge that gives voice to the children of divorce (Fabricius, Braver, Diaz, & Velez, 2010; Finley, 2006; Finley & Schwartz, 2010; Marquardt, 2005). Florence Kaslow's book *Divorced Fathers and Their Families: Legal, Economic, and Emotional Dilemmas* gives voice to the experiences and concerns of the fathers of divorce.

There are at least two primary audiences for this book. First, given the high frequency of divorce in today's society, this is a "heads-up" book for men before they marry and husbands before they become fathers. The 13 highly personal case study narratives show the downsides and the intensely painful long-term consequences of divorce for fathers and their children. Further, and of perhaps the greatest value to men before they marry, the

penultimate chapter describes the personality disorders of women no man ever should marry but often do because they do not see the “red flags” in time.

The second audience comprises those who more broadly seek fairness and justice in family law and family court practice and want the best possible outcomes for all members of the postdivorce family. Kaslow provides case study evidence for the dramatic need for reform, and in the later chapters she provides concrete suggestions for what kinds of changes in which parts of the “divorce industry” are needed to accomplish it.

Regarding husbands and fathers, should a married couple divorce, they will experience the family law and family court systems. But, as the author painfully illustrates, divorce is not a level playing field for fathers, and only one member of the couple generally holds all the cards—the mother. Worst of all, family law and family court practice in most states follow a cookie-cutter formula that, essentially, marginalizes or severs the father–child relationship and creates single-mother families with fathers as visitors. This practice bodes ill for children, fathers, and society; research consistently shows that, on average, the children of single mothers have the worst developmental outcomes of children in all family forms (Nielsen, 2013; Waldfogel, Craigie, & Brooks-Gunn, 2010).

The case studies in this book illustrate just how the lives of these “devoted dads” (p. 13) were ravaged as they were caught in the cross-fire between their heartfelt wishes to do their best by their children and the bias they faced at the hands of family law practitioners and family court judges. These biases gave full rein to the psychopathologies of their former spouses, with little concern for the well-being of either the children or the fathers of divorce. Contrary to their mandate to honor “the best interests of the child,” family court judges appear to consider primarily “the best interests of the mother.”

Kaslow seeks to convince readers that fathers are human beings with feelings and love for their children, not the heartless brutes as portrayed by the feminist media over the past half century. Fathers have been denigrated, despised, demeaned, and mostly falsely “dead-beaten” to death. The present case studies are compelling, and few will come away from them with the same views of the fathers of divorce that they held prior to reading *Divorced Fathers and Their Families*.

The picture portrayed in this book largely is one of upper-middle to upper-class divorce, and the sample is skewed toward the highly educated. The sample is disproportionately Jewish, disproportionately from Florida, ranges in age from 38 to 77 at the time of the interviews, and, in more than half of the cases, the divorce was caused by the former wives having affairs. Despite many differences among the participants, Kaslow emphasizes,

All [participants] shared stories that encapsulated the long-term pain, sense of loss, and bereavement they had experienced and how difficult it was during their children’s growing-up years not to be part of their daily lives. Many emphasized their continuous sadness about not being able to have breakfast together each morning, to help with

homework, to know their children's friends, to hear the stories of the day at dinner, and to just be together to play games, coach sports, chat, guide, and influence. (p. 126)

Clearly, Kaslow's "devoted dads" did not want to be divorced from their children. It was the women who sought the divorce, often ordering the man out of the house, sometimes changing the locks, and sometimes emptying financial accounts. Nationally, wives initiate divorce upward of 75 percent of the time (Braver & O'Connell, 1998, p. 113), likely because they know that they will fare well (and often very well) in family court.

By contrast, the "devoted dads" feel unwanted, discarded, rejected, and thrown out, and these feelings linger for years along with a pervasive sense of unfairness. It also appears that these fathers continue to be taken advantage of financially long after the divorce as they are expected to pay the majority of the costs of all later events and of items such as cars, graduations, higher education, weddings, and young adult launchings.

In addition to the case studies, there is an introductory chapter on the history of child custody decisions and a lengthy chapter (Chapter 16) written from five perspectives by five authors regarding how the case studies might have turned out better if the various members of the divorce industry had done things differently. The perspectives and alternative approaches include divorce therapy, divorce mediation, collaborative divorce, choice of lawyer, family evaluation, parent coordination, and the risks and rewards of a child advocate.

Chapter 18 is titled "Harken All Professionals Involved in the Tragedy of Divorce! The Urgency of Humanizing the Legal, Judicial, and Psychological Aspects of Divorce." Taken together, Chapters 16 and 18 provide a devastating critique of current family law and family court practice. More important, they provide detailed blueprints and guidelines for the kinds of reforms that are required to improve the well-being of the postdivorce family.

Perhaps the most valuable chapter for men contemplating marriage is Chapter 17, which is titled "Why Can Some Individuals Share Their Children, While Others Cannot, or Will Not? Is Personality a Major Key?" Given that the author is a clinically oriented family psychologist, the answer, of course, is "yes"! From a clinical perspective, Kaslow addresses why these fathers were attracted to women who later devastated their lives and the lives of their children. Of practical importance to men, some of the common personality patterns and psychopathologies found among the former spouses of these fathers are discussed. The chapter thus provides a critically important heads-up. Borderline, narcissistic, dependent, antisocial, and histrionic personality disorders are surmised by Kaslow on the basis of the fathers' descriptions of their wives' behavior.

Finally, a few brief quotes from one case study should give a flavor for all 13:

Arturo wanted joint and equal custody. . . . His lawyer advised him that he had no chance . . . which he found unfair, unjust, and unbearable. . . . But the loss of his boys and being unable to live together with them . . . on a daily basis was devastating. . . . He was

relegated to being a father on an every other weekend basis only and believes Barbara's decision to divorce accompanied by the court's rubber stamp custody award severely damaged three lives—his two sons' and his. (p. 90)


And,

he remains bitter and angry about the “injustice of it all” . . . still feels like the children were “kidnapped from him.” . . . Barbara . . . surreptitiously took all of the money they had saved out of their safe deposit box and also withdrew all of the funds from their checking and savings accounts . . . leaving nothing in any account for him. (p. 92)

I highly recommend *Divorced Fathers and Their Families* to all who want to understand the lived experiences of the fathers of divorce and to those who more broadly seek family court reform. Two things set this book apart from earlier books on divorced fathers (e.g., Braver & O'Connell, 1998; Farrell, 2001). The first is the detailed individual case studies that give the reader an emotive as well as a cognitive understanding of the genuine pain and suffering experienced by these fathers. Such an understanding permits an empathetic appraisal of the lifelong consequences of divorce for fathers and their children and suggests how changes in family law and family court practice—such as equal shared parenting—can improve the life trajectories of all.

Second, for those seeking family court reforms, this book not only demonstrates the need for such reform but also provides blueprints and guidelines for what needs to be changed to accomplish it. Family law reform and family court reform ultimately were Kaslow's goals in writing this book, and she admirably accomplishes both with the empathetic case studies and her detailed recommendations for all parties involved in the divorce process.

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