

Book Review

*I. McNamara and J. Morrison,
'SEPARATION, DIVORCE AND AFTER'*

(University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, Brisbane, 1988), pp. xv. + 227)

The rate of divorce has quadrupled in the last decade, a rise that has brought with it a multitude of single-parent children and blended families. It sometimes seems as if every adult whom one meets has marriage problems, and every child is a victim!

There is, therefore, no doubt that a book such as this has a ready market. In a simple, clear way, it gives practical advice to couples contemplating separation, and those who undergoing, or have undergone, divorces.

The book deals well with the emotional reactions to marriage breakdown. It is decidedly non-judgmental, perhaps too much so. Some readers might find its emphasis on "identity and self-concept", at the expense of moral responsibility, a trifle disturbing.

A mandate "to give yourself permission to explore and experience your sexuality in order to discover that forms of sexual expression you are comfortable with" (p. 48) might be construed

more as an invitation to promiscuity than a serious attempt to advise victims of a broken marriage how to adjust. And the bland statement that "in rare cases a child may become a sexual partner to their parent", without apparent condemnation, may strike some readers as an implicit approval of pernicious incest (p63).

On the whole, however, the advice is sound and practical. As a lawyer, however, I was disappointed by the superficiality of some of the commentary, and the inadequate bibliography. Thus, on page 183, it is stated that the law as to surnames is "clear". If that were so, there would hardly be any litigated cases on the choice of surname for children. In fact, there are many instances in the law on reports of protracted disputes. On page 198, the impression is given that a client can choose and approach a barrister directly. This is not so. Barristers are briefed by solicitors.

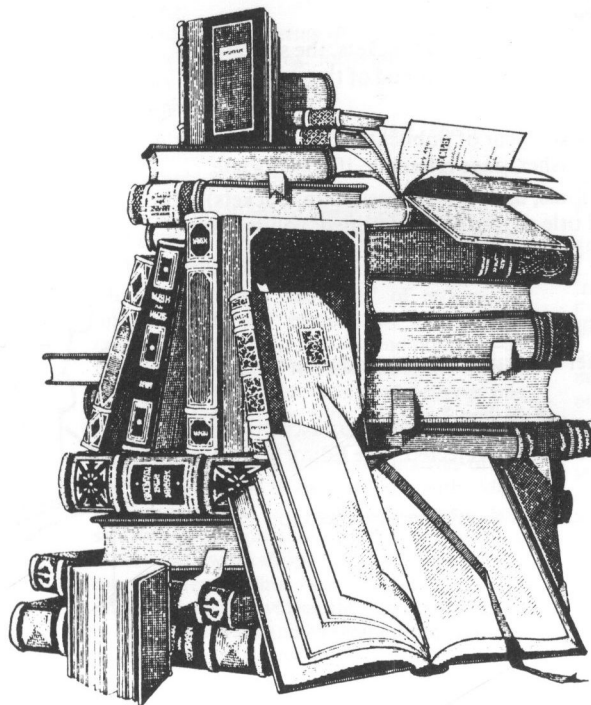
The good sense of the book is indisputable. The style and grammar are, however, not impeccable. Is there such a word as "nurturance" (p.30)? And the verb, "practice", is, in civilized countries, spelled "-se", not "-ce" (p.197). A parenting role "complements" the role of the access parent, though no doubt the access parent could be "complimented" for his co-operation. Further errors are the frequent mixing of singular and plural (e.g. P.199, "The length of waiting lists . . . are such . . . ") and the absence or misplacement of apostrophes.

If a little more care had been taken with the grammar and style, this book would have received unequivocal commendation. As it is, it must be regarded as a very useful, but not unflawed, manual for the myriad of Australian couples who are victims of a failed marriage.

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President

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