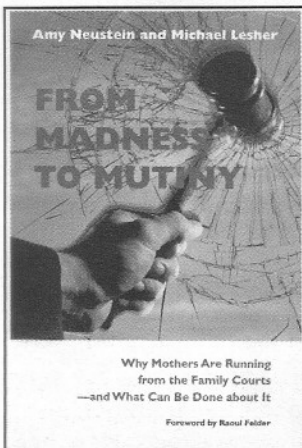


A New Release examines why Family Courts are failing; Another look at the Waves of Feminism



Sociologist Amy Neustein and lawyer Michael Leshner have collaborated on the disturbing *From Madness to Mutiny: Why Mothers Are Running from the Family Courts—and What Can Be Done about It* (Northeastern University Press, 2005). They illustrate what all too often happens when mothers report suspicions or evidence that their children have been sexually abused by their fathers, often during or after a divorce or separation. Family court records are closed to

the public and most people are unaware of its rulings.

Mothers who make charges of abuse are often disbelieved and disparaged or are considered to be unstable or unfit parents. Not infrequently they lose their children to foster parents or to the fathers, even when there is medical or other evidence that the fathers are indeed molesting their children. This devastating outcome leads some mothers to drop the charges of sexual assault. Others rebel and some flee with their children and go into hiding via an “underground railroad.”

The writers, who have long experience with the family court system, show how and why it fails to protect children and why so many mothers are punished, discredited, tormented and falsely accused of being mentally ill. Not only are lawyers, judges and law guardians at fault but mental health experts and child welfare agencies too often seem indifferent to the welfare of the children involved. It is not unusual for cases to be postponed for trivial reasons even when children seem to be in imminent peril. Mothers who appear to be aggressive or overly concerned about their children are more likely to have those children taken away than are more passive mothers. Often court personnel seem more concerned with retaliating against women they consider to be overprotective or hysterical rather than with protecting children. The writers point out that many of the lawyers, judges and child welfare agents involved in such cases are women so there is more than misogyny involved; the whole system is at fault. They also show that women rarely make false accusations of child sexual abuse to retaliate against their husbands or ex-husbands.

Several chapters are devoted to ways that the family court system should be reformed and Neustein and Leshner believe that this will happen only when the citizenry demands it. They feel that “most people believe—wrongly—that no one in the United States can lose something as precious as a child without something resembling basic due process of law.”

This volume will be revealing and distressing to those readers who have never been involved in family court and who trust

that those charged with protecting children are actually doing so, rather than placing them in situations where they are likely to suffer even more trauma. Most people assume that the cases involving outrageous treatment of mothers and children that have been publicized in the popular media are rare occurrences but the writers show that this is far from being the case.

Different Wavelengths: Studies of the Contemporary Women's Movement (Routledge, 2005)

explores the complex topics of second and third wave feminism and the interactions between them. The editor, Jo Reger, understood that feminism was far from dead and that it is a broad and often divisive topic, frequently denoting different concepts to different people. She states that “By examining issues of divisions and inclusivity in contemporary feminism; shifts in feminist ideology and strategy; and the origins and delineation of feminist “waves,” this volume provides a lens through which to comprehend the complexity of contemporary feminism.”

Reger, an assistant professor of sociology at Oakland University in Michigan, explains how the term “waves” originated and explains that the second wave, which centered on bringing about equality for women, is usually considered to date from about 1960 to the 1980s. The third wave began in the 1990s and continues to the present. The writer found it advantageous that she had not defined the term “third wave” for the writers from whom she sought articles, for their varying opinions show how the term can be defined and interpreted in different ways or even rejected. The chapters, contributed mainly by academic women of diverse backgrounds and ages, are arranged in four categories, covering the themes of diversity in the third wave, relations between the second and third waves, the tactics of the third wave, and the third wave confronting the future. Individual chapters focus on such topics as Chicana feminists; Riot Grrrls and white privilege; sex and sexuality in a second wave organization; transgender women, men and feminism; zines and third wave feminists; and the third wave and ecofeminism.



Barbara Clarke
Women's Center
Librarian

