



Intimate Associations: The Law and Culture of American Families

J. Herbie DiFonzo, Ruth C. Stern

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The rise in divorce, cohabitation, single parenthood, and same-sex partnerships, along with an increase in surrogacy, adoption, and assisted reproductive technologies, has led to many diverse configurations of families, or intimate associations. J. Herbie DiFonzo and Ruth C. Stern chart these trends over the past several decades and investigate their social, legal, and economic implications.

Drawing upon a wealth of social science data, they show that, by a number of measures, children of married parents fare better than children in a household formed by cohabiting adults. This is not to condemn nontraditional families, but to point out that society and the law do not yet adequately provide for their needs. The authors applaud the ways in which courts and legislatures are beginning to replace rigid concepts of marriage and parenthood with the more flexible concept of “functional” family roles. In the conclusion, they call for a legal system that can adapt to the continually changing reality of family life.

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