



In Defense of Single-Parent Families

Nancy E. Dowd

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Single-parent families succeed. Within these families children thrive, develop, and grow, just as they do in a variety of family structures. Tragically, they must do so in the face of powerful legal and social stigma that works to undermine them.

As Nancy E. Dowd argues in this bold and original book, the justifications for stigmatizing single-parent families are founded largely on myths, myths used to rationalize harshly punitive social policies. Children, in increasing numbers, bear the brunt of those policies. In this generation, more than two-thirds of all children will spend some time in a single-parent family before reaching age 18. The damage done in the name of justified stigma, therefore, harms a great many children.

Dowd details the primary justifications for stigmatizing single-parent families, marshalling an impressive array of resources about single parents that portray a very different picture of these families. She describes them in all their forms, with particular attention to the differential treatment given never-married and divorced single parents, and to the impact of gender, race, and class. Emphasizing that all families face significant conflicts between work and family responsibilities, Dowd argues many two-parent families, in fact, function as single-parent caregiving households. The success or failure of families, she contends, has little to do with form. Many of the problems faced by single-parent families mirror problems faced by all families.

Illustrating the harmful impact of current laws concerning divorce, welfare, and employment, Dowd makes a powerful case for centering policy around the welfare and equality of all children. A thought-provoking examination of the stereotypes, realities and possibilities of single-parent families, **In Defense of Single-Parent Families** asks us to consider the true purpose or goal of a family.

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