



May 1994

Dividing the Child: Social and Legal Dilemmas of Custody. Eleanor E. Macoby and Robert H. Mnookin with Charlene E. Depner and H. Elizabeth Peters. Reviewed by Terri Combs-Orme, University of Tennessee.

*Terri Combs-Orme
University of Tennessee*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>

 Part of the [Social Work Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Combs-Orme, Terri (1994) "Dividing the Child: Social and Legal Dilemmas of Custody. Eleanor E. Macoby and Robert H. Mnookin with Charlene E. Depner and H. Elizabeth Peters. Reviewed by Terri Combs-Orme, University of Tennessee," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 21 : Iss. 2 , Article 12.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol21/iss2/12>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Social Work at ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.



"her", I wanted to know what she thought we should do about it all.

In spite of these few drawbacks, I remain attracted to the book's comprehensiveness and rich detail, and especially to its passion and clear social work perspective. Even though I am more optimistic about the potential of creating a rational and responsive mental health system, I believe Dr. Johnson's voice is an important one and should be heard . . . over and over again.

Kia J. Bentley
Virginia Commonwealth University

Charlene E. Depner and James H. Bray (Eds). *Nonresidential Parenting*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1993. \$23.95 papercover.

E. Maccoby and Robert H. Mnookin with Charlene E. Depner and H. Elizabeth Peters. *Dividing the Child: Social and Legal Dilemmas of Custody*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992. \$39.95 hardcover.

Both of these books deal in a scholarly way with issues related to parenting and custody, using different approaches to examine how parents perform the parenting role outside the traditional two-parent marital family. Each recognizes and attempts to document changes that are occurring in this area, for example, the trend toward joint custody in divorce cases. Together the books are a valuable resource. There are important differences between them, however.

Depner and Bray present a collection of edited pieces with reviews of the literature. Part I describes the demographics of the issue, with particular attention to differences among ethnic groups. Part II is a hodge-podge of issues that purports to deal with the contributions of social science to the question but is more a collection of interesting, but loosely connected, issues.

The descriptive information in Part I is well presented and informative, and in particular deals with ethnic differences that are not well addressed elsewhere. Unfortunately, the authors do not discuss how differences in social class, education, and

income may account for some of these ethnic differences; in areas such as health and family functioning, the effects of these variables are significant. Moreover, I was dissatisfied with the thin policy sections in Part I. Policies regarding custody and parenting are developing out of both legislation and court decisions at the state level, and I regret that the authors did not attempt to provide an overview and some suggestions for enlightened changes.

Part II contains some information that is critical to understanding this issue, for example the economics of two-household families, but lacks cohesiveness. The disparate topics contained in this section could have been enhanced by an overall framework that brings them together and relates them to the material in Part I more clearly. The last chapter, which aims to discuss "Multidimensional Approaches in Research, Policy, and Practice" makes an effort to do this but falls a bit short, again particularly in the discussions of policy.

Maccoby and Mnookin use data from an original study of over 1,000 divorcing families to address issues related to custody and parenting in cases of divorce, placing it within the context of California's family law system. They examine the parents', parenting behaviors longitudinally over a three-year span and demonstrate clearly that such arrangements as the division of child-rearing responsibilities, contribution to economic support, type of custody, visitation, and co-parenting change over time. A particularly interesting chapter discusses the effects of conflict between the parents on custody and economic issues. The final chapter provides a more comprehensive and critical discussion of policy questions than the Depner and Bray volume.

There is a subtle difference between the tone of the two books. Depner and Bray attempt to use a neutral tone regarding "nonresidential parents" that is akin to the "best interests of the child" principle; that is, they appear to presume that it is possible to address these issues in ways that will not harm the children involved. In fact, they struggle with neutral terms, eschewing terms such as "absent parent" as too pejorative. Their efforts seem overdone. It is clearly a reality that

the demographics of the American family have changed, that millions of American children live in one-parent households, and that parents often simply cannot live together in the same household with their children. The reality of this unfortunate situation does not make it advantageous for children, however, and taking pains to describe the phenomenon in neutral terms cannot change that reality. Maccoby and Mnookin deal with this issue more realistically; even their title recognizes that any time parents must divide their households it involves pain and other kinds of harm (such as financial) to the children. The essential question for professionals, and for parents alike, is how that harm can be minimized.

Terri Combs-Orme
University of Tennessee

Orr, Alberta L., *Vision and Aging: Crossroads for Service Delivery*. New York: American Foundation for the Blind. 1992. \$29.95 papercover.

"Increasing numbers of older persons will experience vision loss each year through at least the first three decades of the 21st century. Older blind and visually impaired persons will number nearly 6 million by the year 2030, doubling the number documented in 1990." So begins the forward by Carl R. Augusto, President and Executive Director of the American Foundation for the Blind. As an insightful and practical response to this burgeoning trend, Orr's book gives aging specialists and other human service providers an overview of the challenges that the loss of vision creates for aging adults. The book outlines the structure of both aging and blindness service delivery systems and describes the resources available. Orr's insights into necessary collaborative planning and mutual empowerment between the two fields will be of interest to blindness professionals as well as generalists.

Orr begins by documenting the current demographics of the visually-impaired older population. She defines types and degrees of vision loss, and she uses case studies to explore the