



System Kids: Adolescent Mothers and the Politics of Regulation

Lauren J. Silver

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System Kids considers the daily lives of adolescent mothers as they negotiate the child welfare system to meet the needs of their children and themselves. Often categorized as dependent and delinquent, these young women routinely become wards of the state as they move across the legal and social borders of a fragmented urban bureaucracy. Combining critical policy study and ethnography, and drawing on current scholarship as well as her own experience as a welfare program manager, Lauren Silver demonstrates how social welfare "silos" construct the lives of youth as disconnected, reinforcing unforgiving policies and imposing demands on women the system was intended to help. As clients of a supervised independent living program, they are expected to make the transition into independent adulthood, but Silver finds a vast divide between these expectations and the young women's lived reality.

Digging beneath the bureaucratic layers of urban America and bringing to light the daily experiences of young mothers and the caseworkers who assist them, *System Kids* illuminates the ignored work and personal ingenuity of clients and caseworkers alike. Ultimately reflecting on how her own understanding of the young women has changed in the years since she worked in the same social welfare program that is the focus of the book, Silver emphasizes the importance of empathy in research and in the formation of welfare policies.

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