



Equal Treatment for People with Mental Retardation: Having and Raising Children

Martha A. Field

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Engaging in sex, becoming parents, raising children: these are among the most personal decisions we make, and for people with mental retardation, these decisions are consistently challenged, regulated, and outlawed. This book is a comprehensive study of the American legal doctrines and social policies, past and present, that have governed procreation and parenting by persons with mental retardation. It argues persuasively that people with retardation should have legal authority to make their own decisions.

Despite the progress of the normalization movement, which has moved so many people with mental retardation into the mainstream

since the 1960s, negative myths about reproduction and child rearing among this population persist. Martha Field and Valerie Sanchez trace these prejudices to the eugenics movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

They show how misperceptions have led to inconsistent and discriminatory outcomes when third parties seek to make birth control or parenting decisions for people with mental retardation. They also explore the effect of these decisions

on those they purport to protect. Detailed, thorough, and just, their book is a sustained argument for reform of the legal practices and social policies it describes.

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