

This paper is taken from the closing chapters of *Family, Law, and Community: Supporting the Covenant* (University of Chicago Press, 2010). The book argues that much behavior in families, like that in the wider community, can be explained better using mimetic theory than sociobiology or economics. Understanding mimetic rivalry helps us to see not only how marriages go wrong, but also why disabled children, especially those with learning disabilities, tend disproportionately to be the victims of family violence. The competing theories will be described and explored using a wide variety of data.