“They’re Stealing My Opportunity to Be a Father”:
The Child Support System and State Intervention in the Family

Table of Contents

Introduction - Morality, Responsibility, and Criminality: State Intervention in the Family

Chapter One
“Deservingness,” “Dependency,” and “Deadbeat Dads:” The Sociocognitive, Sociopolitical, and Historical Foundations of the Child Support System
This chapter explores the development and organization of the modern child support system. I examine how the idea of “child support” came to (primarily) represent financial matters, and what this means for society’s conceptualization of childhood, family, and responsibility.

Chapter Two
“I Keep Getting Two Different Answers Depending on Who I Talk To:” The Bureaucracy of the Child Support System
This chapter examines the complex bureaucratic organization of the child support system and how parents navigate its structure. I also discuss the consequences of conceptualizing parenthood as a legal construct.

Chapter Three
“Not Necessarily Deadbeats, But Dead Broke:” Monetizing Relationships and Criminalizing Parents
This chapter explores the collateral consequences of involvement with the child support system, specifically criminal justice and economic outcomes. I also discuss the policy implications of the system sitting at the intersection of the welfare and criminal justice systems, which monetizes relationships and criminalizes non-custodial parenthood.

Chapter Four
“I Didn’t Need Help Making ‘Em, So I Don’t Your Help Taking Care of ‘Em:” Parents’ Responses to the Child Support System
This chapter explores how involvement in the child support system impacts parents’ identity. I also discuss the impact of the organization of the system on the ways that custodial and non-custodial parents engage with each other and their children, as well as how parents both resist and accept the system.

Chapter Five
“They Look at You Like You’re Nothing:” Stigma and Shame in the Child Support System
This chapter explores how parents are treated in the child support system. I examine the use of stigmatization and shaming and its consequences for social interactions. I examine the ways that these processes are used as social control and a form of punishment. I also discuss the emotional and relational implications of involvement with the system.

Conclusion