

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

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*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*