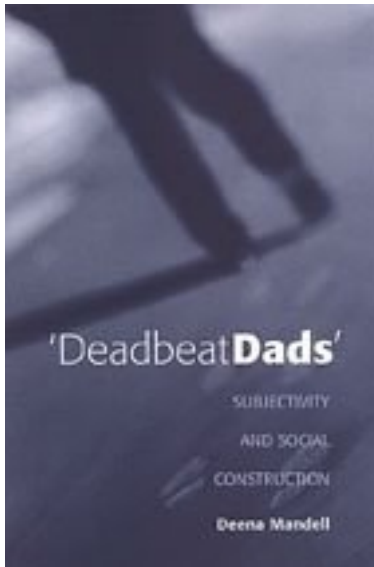


Deadbeat Dads



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The "deadbeat dad" is a common figure in today's news media. As an experienced social worker, family therapist and mediator, Deena Mandell is intimate with legal and institutional discourses on the topic, but also with the lived reality of those involved in support conflict. In *Deadbeat Dads*, she addresses the question: "Why hasn't child support enforcement solved the problem of non-payment?" Non-payment of child support is all-too-easily categorized as an individual act of deviance or moral failing, or as having purely economic ill effects. One consequence of this is to actually reinforce resistance and disengagement on the part of fathers, by causing them to see themselves as victims, whose personal rights are under threat. Thus, in the author's words, "In the discursive struggle between the state's protection of its financial interests and the fathers' focus on their personal rights, the needs of children literally disappear." Dr Mandell constructs a complex, nuanced argument around findings from interviews with a small sample of separated fathers, augmented with the perspectives

of enforcement personnel such as judges, mediators and lawyers, and with firsthand observation of courtroom discussion. This is a qualitative study that lets informants speak for themselves, but subjects the resulting insights to critical analysis.

作者介绍:

目录:

[Deadbeat Dads_ 下载链接1](#)

标签

评论

[Deadbeat Dads_ 下载链接1](#)

书评

[Deadbeat Dads_ 下载链接1](#)