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Dead-beat Dads and Paternity Fraud: Paternity Policies and Family Formation

In the United States, the use of paternity testing has necessitated a critical examination of how “family” will be defined in the 21st century and what sorts of resources those families will receive. The paternity test is an object that prompts larger questions of motherhood, fatherhood, and parenting as well as government, legal and scientific understandings of families, children, men and women. As such, interrogating policies formed around the paternity test offers new possibilities for rethinking social, legal and economic institutions and apparatuses that define families and the roles that individuals play in them. This paper seeks to denaturalize the question of paternity, making the ruptures in the hegemony of family/father/mother apparent. Focusing on US welfare policies created in light of paternity testing, I demonstrate how the paternity test functions to direct and define how people relate to each other and to social, economic and legal institutions.