

**Fathers investing in fatherhood: A qualitative  
examination of contemporary fathering in  
fatherhood groups in Canada**

**by  
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## Abstract

The existing literature and research on fathers in movements demonstrate differing approaches to understanding fatherhood, men's engagement in the family pre/post separation, family law, and fatherhood/fathers' rights activism. However, these approaches often fail to address the experiences of fathers, as well as fatherhood activists and movements, that exist outside the narrative created by the fathers' rights-based approaches and pro-feminist responses that currently dominate the dialogue surrounding the issues of fatherhood movements/groups and the *rights* of fathers. Based on this problematization of the existing frameworks for and examinations of fatherhood movements, this two-part study examined the social engagement and experiences of fathers who belong to fatherhood groups across Canada, with a strong focus on British Columbia (BC). Phase one was an investigation of the parallel fathers' rights movement (FRM) and involved fatherhood movement (IFM) Canada-wide. I conducted a qualitative content analysis of these two discourses through their online presence and activism, such as blogs, websites, and online resources. Phase two dovetailed off this analysis through in-depth interviews with fathers engaged in the FRM and IFM in BC, including a few fathers who reside outside of BC but were active in national groups engaged in this province. Together, the two phases provide an examination of fatherhood and fatherhood movements within a critical masculinities framework. This analysis highlights the privilege inherent within fatherhood groups and the exclusionary politics within these movements that resulted in the absence of the voices of Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC) and marginalized fathers (e.g., fathers of low-socioeconomic status). Further, this research reflects on these fathers' beliefs that they face disadvantage in family law proceedings, and problematizes and challenges their claims of bias, discrimination, and oppression. The concluding analysis also demonstrates the privilege, power, oppression, and inclusion/exclusion within fatherhood groups, movements, and discourses overall. Ultimately, this study captured men's nuanced experiences with fatherhood and parenting pre/post separation, within the current socio-legal and familial contexts.

**Keywords:** fatherhood, fatherhood groups, fatherhood movements, fathers' rights, family law, critical masculinities, social movements

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## List of Acronyms

ACFC	American Coalition for Fathers and Children
BC	British Columbia
BFG	Blended Fatherhood Groups
BIPOC	Black, Indigenous, and people of colour
DADS	Dads Aiming for Direction and Support
FACT	Fathers Are Capable Too
FFE	Fathers for Equality
FLA	Family Law Act
FR	Fathers' rights
FRA	Fathers' Rights Activist
FRG	Fathers' Rights Group
FRM	Fathers' Rights Movement
FN	Fatherhood Networks
FNF	Fathers' Need Families
F4J	Fathers-4-Justice
HEART	Human Equality Action & Resource Team
IF	Involved fatherhood
IFA	Involved fatherhood activists
IFG	Involved Fatherhood Group
LFA	Lone Fathers' Association
MERGE	Movement for the Establishment of Real Gender Equality
MESA	Men's Educational Support Association
NCCAHA	National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health
PA	Parental alienation
PAM	Parental Alienation Movement
PAS	Parental Alienation Syndrome

# Chapter 1. Introduction

The existing literature and research on fathers in movements demonstrate differing approaches to understanding fatherhood, men's engagement in the family pre/post separation, and family law. For example, the fathers' rights literature often draws on images of fatherhood consistent with ideals of male privilege and hegemonic masculinity (for example, see Kruk, 2008, 2010, 2013), while feminist critiques analyze the anti-feminist and misogynist undertones that exist within a fathers' rights framework that privileges patriarchal family structures and paternal control.<sup>1</sup> What these approaches often fail to address, however, is the large body of men and fathers in these groups/movements who exist outside of the narratives created by the fathers' rights-based approaches and feminist responses that currently dominate the dialogue surrounding the issues of fatherhood,<sup>2</sup> family law, and the *rights* of fathers.<sup>3</sup> These divergent discourses perpetuate the disenfranchisement of non-hegemonic fatherhood.

I acknowledge that the study of men is "neither new nor necessarily radical" because "men have been studying men for a long time," and much of world history is formulated as the history of men (i.e., "men's studies") (Hearn, 2004, p. 50). Prior to the early 1970s, however, men and masculinity(ies) were not examined through a critical lens. Men and their experiences with masculinity<sup>4</sup> were often conceptualized as "homogenous and monolithic" (Mutua, 2013, p. 349), and the critical study of gender focused almost exclusively on women's experiences with patriarchy and male domination, in addition to women's own subordination, exclusion, and powerlessness (pp. 349-350). While this approach examined the power men collectively held and continue to hold over women, it neglected an exploration of power differentials among men and differing gendered experiences of men.

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<sup>1</sup> See literature review for a more in-depth discuss of these issues.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this research, the discussion of fathers, fathering, and fatherhood is specific to fathers in fatherhood groups and movements.

<sup>3</sup> The phrasing of *rights* is used within this context not only to capture the use of this term by the fathers' rights movement (FRM), but also to reclaim the concept of *rights* for men external to the FRM who simply desire the right to be fathers.

<sup>4</sup> I acknowledge that masculinities is the broadly accepted term, and I use it throughout this paper in reference to men's complex and divergent experiences. On occasion, however, I intentionally use the term masculinity to refer to essentialist approaches to, and the hegemonic form of, masculinity.

With respect to fatherhood movements specifically, the existing examinations are situated within the contexts of family law and engagement in the family post-separation and approached from the standpoints of feminist legal scholarship (for example, see Boyd, 2013; Dragiewicz, 2010; Flood, 2012; Watson & Ancis, 2013) and pro-feminist men (for example, see Flood, 2010, 2012; Kaufman, 2001), as well as those that align more closely with traditional fathers' rights-based frameworks (for example, see Kruk, 2008, 2010, 2013). The feminist/pro-feminist evaluations of family law and fatherhood provide valuable insight into the problems that arise through groups who advance white hegemonic male and patriarchal agendas in the name of fathers' *rights*. What is absent from this dialogue, however, is an understanding of men and fathers who do not abide by, or buy into, the hegemonic ideals of masculinity and patriarchal fatherhood.

The fathers' rights movement (hereafter FRM) is grounded in the rhetoric of rights (Boyd, 2006, p. 39), which feeds into patriarchal notions of paternal control and maternal responsibility. Even in parenting arrangements that suggest shared or joint parental responsibility, fathers' rights activists (hereafter FRA) arguments underscore their belief that this *sharing* of responsibility should still occur with the traditional gendered division of labour. For instance, Bertoria and Drakich (1993) argue that FRAs conceptualize shared parenting as fathers maintaining control while mothers remain responsible for most of the caretaking (pp. 602-603). FRAs allege that this gendered division of rights and responsibilities should be considered shared parenting as there "is sharing going on" (p. 603); this emphasizes fathers' formal rights without subsequent responsibilities or, in other words, the formal equality model of fatherhood.

The fathers' rights discourse is somewhat disconnected from lived experiences of fathers. This disconnect may lead to FRAs misrepresenting fathers and fatherhood through the use of rhetoric and activism that focus on paternal authority in and control over families pre/post-separation. Further, while much of the feminist literature provides a framework for analyzing how the men's and fathers' rights are rooted in anti-feminist/pro-patriarchal approaches to masculinity and fatherhood, feminists' work seemingly unintentionally contributes to the misrepresentation of fathers. By focusing almost exclusively on the failings and biases of the FRM, feminist legal scholars politicize this discourse by neglecting the shifting landscape of fatherhood/family structures and frequently fail to address the disconnect between fathers' rights activism

and the experiences of actual fathers (for example, see Amyot, 2010; Rosen et al. 2009; Watson & Ancis, 2013).

In contemporary Western societies, the arrangement of many families has shifted from traditional patriarchal family structures based in “heterosexual reciprocity” (Connell, 1987, p. 91) to being more egalitarian in nature. For example, Kimmel<sup>5</sup> (2013) suggests that in general fathers are now more engaged in family life than they have been in any previous generation, and many fathers are taking on significantly more housework and childcare than their predecessors (pp. 141-143). In part, egalitarian families are the result of a shift to dual-earner/dual-caretaker models in many contemporary households (Wright et al., 2009, p. 4). However, while there has been a substantial increase in men’s engagement in fatherhood and fathering over the last 40 years, their engagement in household and childcare-related tasks is still disproportionately lower than that of women (Treloar & Boyd, 2014, p. 79). As illustrated by Miller (2017), in dual-earner families “caring activities may be shared” between parents (p. 62), and fathers are more likely to undertake care activities than in previous generations. Nevertheless, there appears to remain a gendered divide among fathers engaging in more “fun” care work and mothers undertaking more of the responsibility-based caretaking, “mental work,” and “24/7 thinking responsibility” (p. 59, 62). While this does not align with the “utopian” vision of absolute egalitarianism in families (for example, see Wright et al., 2009, pp. 1-12), this shift denotes the dismantling of some aspects of traditional patriarchal structures.

The disparity between men’s and women’s engagement in household activities and caretaking may be greater than the research suggests, because the methodologies used to explore these changes produce somewhat unreliable outcomes (e.g., logbooks, surveys) (Kimmel, 2013, pp. 144-145). Men and women alike “systematically overestimate” the hours they spend on housework and childcare, with men over-reporting “by about 150 percent” and “women by about 68 percent” (p. 144). Further, these measures often conflate caregiving and household responsibilities, which likely masks the ongoing nature and extent of gendered divisions of labour in contemporary

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<sup>5</sup> Kimmel’s character has been discredited as a result of his acts of sexual harassment/violence and gender discrimination, as well as deep-seated gender bias, which emerged in 2018 and remains on-going. However, Kimmel’s character issues and harmful behaviours were not exposed until after the development of this research, collection of these data, and write-up of the majority of the chapters in this doctoral thesis. I grapple with these issues and concerns in the conclusions section of this thesis (see chapter 6, section 6.5).

families. For example, men are likely doing “no more housework, but tons more childcare” (Kimmel, 2013, p. 145), which indicates that gender remains an influential marker for roles, tasks, and responsibilities within families. However, these estimates neglect disparities in paid versus unpaid labour and engagement in the workforce between mothers and fathers. Even though families are shifting toward egalitarianism, Kimmel (2013) cautions that a “disequilibrium” between maternal and paternal roles and responsibilities remains, which resembles traditional and patriarchal divisions of labour in the home (p. 145). Nevertheless, the persistence of some gender inequality within families should not minimize the positive shifts that emphasize the responsibility and engagement of fathers, albeit still reminiscent of patriarchal family order.

The FRM does little to address or support the needs and causes of actual fathers, and their focus on patriarchal authority and rights, but not responsibilities, undermines the credibility of the movement (Kimmel, 2013, p. 147). There is, however, a parallel Fatherhood Responsibility Movement in the US that reframes the social and political discourses of fatherhood through narratives of care and responsibility of fathers (Gavanas, 2002). Within the framework of paternal responsibility, this movement focuses on “fragile families,” such as young, minority fathers and those facing hardship due to low socio-economic status (Gavanas, 2002, p. 225; Kimmel, 2013, p. 156). Through developing policies and programs that keep young minority, dominantly African American “men in school and out of jail” and working with young minority fathers to create connections with their children, the Fatherhood Responsibility Movement aims to foster engaged and healthy relationships between fathers and children (pp. 155-156). Similarly, pro-fatherhood movements exist and include, for example, gay fathers’ groups who provide an alternate perspective on the discourse of rights that is grounded in fighting for the right to be fathers in the first place (Kimmel, 2013, p. 156). These movements, however, are often not foregrounded in the debate surrounding the rights and involvement of fathers, which further silences the voices of marginalized fathers (e.g., gay fathers, Indigenous fathers).

The tension between fathers’ rights and paternal responsibility is represented in the narratives of these discourses (Kimmel, 2013, p. 147). The rhetoric of rights is embedded in a larger discourse of patriarchal authority and resonates with the hegemonic masculine archetype. Alternatively, the movement for responsibility is grounded in notions of paternal engagement, nurturing, and caretaking, which are

associated with non-hegemonic, non-traditional masculinities. This tension and the socially situated pressure to *do* hegemonic masculinity, which is characterized by “robotic stoicism, competition, aggression” (Kimmel, 2013, p. 147) and emotional distance (Connell, 2005a, 2005b), hinder men’s abilities to become “the fathers they say they want to be” (p. 147). It is possible, then, as men continue to engage in non-conforming masculinities and forms of fatherhood that family models will continue to develop, thereby lessening the familial gender divide.

Based on this problematization of a rights-based framework of fatherhood, I completed a two-part study to examine the social engagement and experiences of fathers across Canada, with a strong focus on British Columbia (hereafter BC). Phase one was an investigation of the parallel fathers’ rights and involved fatherhood<sup>6</sup> movements (IFM) Canada-wide, which is comprised of a qualitative content analysis of these two discourses through their online presence and activism, such as blogs, websites, and online resources. Phase two dovetailed off this analysis through in-depth interviews with fathers engaged in the FRM and IFM in BC, including a few fathers who reside outside of BC but were active in national groups engaged in this province.<sup>7</sup> Combined, both phases of this study captured men’s nuanced experiences with fatherhood, parenting pre/post separation, and family law within the current socio-legal and familial contexts, which grapple with a shift toward semi-egalitarianism within Canadian family law systems and familial structures (see Treloar & Boyd, 2014). In this study, I also examine the stronghold that patriarchal ideologies retain within these spheres. I explored the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences, narratives, and beliefs that underlie fathers’ rights and involved fatherhood activism?
2. How do these groups, and fathers involved in these groups, grapple with and characterize fatherhood, the roles and responsibilities of fathers, experience

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<sup>6</sup> The term *involved fatherhood movement* refers to groups who provide support for fathers and emphasize responsibility, healthy engagement in the family, and egalitarian family models and caretaking responsibilities. It is similar to the parental responsibility groups present in the United States and pro-fatherhood activism within gay communities, which is outlined in the literature review.

<sup>7</sup> While involved fatherhood is not a formally recognized social movement, for the purposes of this study the accumulation of involved fatherhood groups will be referred to as a movement.

within the family pre/post separation, engagement with children and the extended family, the family law process, and custody/access issues?

3. What programs and resources are offered by FRGs and involved fatherhood groups (hereafter IFGs)? Further, what forms of fatherhood and masculinities and family structures do these groups and resources promote?
4. How are the experiences and perceptions of individual members of FRGs and IFGs situated by comparison to messages portrayed by these groups?
5. What are these fathers' experiences with and perceptions of fatherhood and family law?
6. How are the messages portrayed by FRGs and IFGs, as well as the perceptions and experiences of fathers engaged in FRGs and IFGs, situated within the broader contexts of patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, multidimensionality, and critical masculinities?

These guiding questions allowed for a more complex examination of fatherhood and fatherhood groups that is situated within critical gender (i.e., feminist theory, critical masculinities) and neoliberal frameworks. To provide a general outline of the structure, content, and findings of this research, the chapters are explained below.

## **Chapter 2: The Existing Frameworks for Fatherhood**

Chapter 2 provides an in-depth overview of the body of literature that explores the theoretical and conceptual frameworks through which fatherhood, fathers' rights, and fatherhood movements have traditionally been understood. At the outset, women's liberation and feminist movements provide a contextual basis for understanding how changes in gendered power dynamics in private and public spheres acted as catalysts for explorations of men's gendered experiences and enactments of gender through the lens of critical masculinities, in addition to the reactionary and oppressive politics that are present in the activism within men's and fatherhood movements. I explore the development of the men's movement from their initial critique of the oppressive male sex role to phases of the movement that focus on remasculinization of men and gender discrimination against men (e.g., institutional, societal).

The development and phases of the men's movement lends itself to a more in-depth understanding of the development of the FRM and politicization of fatherhood



within Canadian and international contexts. I explore the FRM as a support for fathers navigating and aiming to reform family law processes, in addition to being a form of reactionary politics aimed to reassert paternal control and patriarchal dominance through the re-subjugation of women/mothers. However, during this examination, I remain conscious of how the viewpoints promoted by these movements rely largely on essentialism in their political, social, and theoretical constructions of manhood/fatherhood and, as such, likely represent the minority of actual men and fathers.

I consider and problematize the men's movement and FRM in light of examinations of social movements, liquid modernity, and identity politics. More specifically, I examine the neoliberal social, legal, political, and economic climates that have resulted in fatherhood becoming a social and political entity. I conclude this section by unpacking FRGs, FRAs, and fatherhood through a critical gender lens in which I reflect on the gender performativity (e.g., "doing" gender) of men and fathers. I also situate fatherhood within the discourse of critical masculinities (e.g., hegemonic masculinities and fatherhood, power/powerlessness, violence).

### **Chapter 3: Methodological Considerations**

The methodologies creating the framework of this study are explored in Chapter 3. In this chapter I outline and explain the methodological considerations that served as the foundation for the development and execution of both phases of this research, including the techniques used for sampling, data collection, coding, and analysis and ethical considerations, barriers, and limitations. Phase one consisted of a qualitative content analysis of the rhetoric, dialogue, and discursive practices present on the online platforms of the parallel FRM and IFM in Canada. For phase 2, I engaged in semi-structure interviews with fathers who participate in FRGs and/or IFGs in BC to capture their voices and explore their experiences.

The epistemological and ontological underpinnings bring richness to the more practical methodological considerations outlined above. In this section of Chapter 3, I situate my approach within feminist epistemology and an exploration of the influence of power dynamics in research. I situate myself within the research through a discussion of reflexivity and my consciousness of my own presence in this study as a feminist

researcher examining men, fatherhood, and masculinities, and also how I aimed to honour and be inclusive of the voices and lived experiences of the participants. I conclude with a discussion of the frameworks that guided my analysis and meaning making of these data, including ground theory and narrative inquiry.

## **Chapter 4: The Online Narratives of Fatherhood**

The changes in gendered power dynamics in private and public spheres (e.g., women's liberation), albeit still within the context of persistent gender and racial inequalities, have solicited a variety of responses from men. Historically, these responses appear on a spectrum from: 1) men who have embraced and/or actively participated in the emancipatory efforts of women, gay men, and gender variant and/or racially and ethnically diverse populations (e.g., pro-feminist men, men against violence); to 2) a small, but loud, group of men who protest women's equality and actively fight against the gains made by women and non-hegemonic, nonconforming men (e.g., mythopoetic men, Promise Keepers). The internet has provided a new and more expansive platform for both advocacy and connection within social movements as well as much further social, political, and legal reaches of these groups. Chapter 4 provides insight into my examination of the online presence of fatherhood movements and how these platforms showcase their outward facing and collective group agendas, in addition to the social and political advocacy efforts and belief systems that underlie their work.

## **Chapter 5: The Voices of Fathers in the Movement**

The themes that emerged through my analysis of the phase two interviews with fathers who belong to Canadian FRGs and IFGs are presented in Chapter 5. This chapter focuses on the voices, beliefs, and experiences of the participants as fathers, group members, and participants in fatherhood movements across personal, social, and legal spheres. To begin, a contextual narrative provides insight into the participants and their involvement in fatherhood groups, including the events that served as catalysts for joining fatherhood groups, their perceived impacts of group membership, and the support they obtain within these groups. Of note, I explore how the overlap in ideologies and shared beliefs among many participants challenged my original categorizations of

FRGs and IFGs and demonstrates how these categories do not sufficiently capture the dynamics and complexities of these groups.

I consider the participants' advocacy and activism, and also the contemporary contexts of the FRM. This discussion draws attention to shifts in the FRM from the use of public spectacles to raise awareness to contemporary political and lobbying efforts aimed at family law reform. I contrast the participants' reframing of the rights-based rhetoric of earlier phases of the FRM (i.e., fathers' rights to equality for fathers) with the largely unchanged focus of their current activism (e.g., false allegations, parental alienation). That is, while FRGs have reframed and reformulated *how* their reform efforts are taking place, the rhetoric and underlying narrative remains dominantly the same.

The exploration of fathers and feminism is best summed up by a participant's statement of, "I'm a feminist, but..." (P27, IFG, BC). This section explores the tension that exists between fatherhood groups and feminism, as well as the way in which participants situated themselves in relation to feminism and their justifications for rejecting forms of feminism that do not locate inequality as a "struggle" shared among men and women (P8, FRG, national).

This chapter concludes with an examination of the participants' experiences with and beliefs about family law systems and processes in BC. This discussion is framed within the progressive socio-legal contexts within the province, including a shift toward and support for egalitarian family models and legislation that privileges contact with both parents post separation (e.g., the *Family Law Act/FLA*). However, despite the progressive social developments and legal reforms within BC, the participants' narratives echoed the same issues that fathers, fatherhood groups, and the FRM have focused on for the better part of three decades (e.g., bias and discrimination against fathers in family law processes, the best interest of the children being equated with shared parenting/equal guardianship arrangements). As P27 (IFG, BC) mused, what FRGs want is "... the same ol' story, because we still haven't gotten anything we're asking for."

## **Chapter 6: Analysis and Conclusions**

While there is some analysis present within Chapter 5, the voices of the participants are paramount. This is a purposeful decision to avoid creating a master

narrative and, for the most part, to allow the voices of the participants to speak for themselves. However, in this concluding chapter, the phase one and phase two findings are considered within more critical frameworks to explore the meanings of these narratives. Chapter 6 provides an examination of the privilege inherent within the fatherhood groups and the exclusionary politics within these movements that resulted in the absence of the voices of Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC) and marginalized fathers (e.g., fathers of low-socioeconomic status), and also an analysis of the interconnections among fatherhood and patriarchal power within a critical masculinities framework. I further reflect on the fathers' claims that they face disadvantage in family law proceedings,<sup>8</sup> and problematize and challenge their claims of bias, discrimination, and oppression. I conclude with a reflection on privilege, power, oppression, and inclusion/exclusion within fatherhood groups, movements, and discourses overall.

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<sup>8</sup> The purpose and intent of this thesis is an examination of these men's perceptions, beliefs, decision-making, and activism/advocacy related to fathering, fatherhood, and family law issues/processes. As such, an examination of current Canadian family law policies, processes, and issues is outside the scope of this research.

## **Chapter 2. The Existing Frameworks for Fatherhood**

### **2.1. Introduction**

The rise of the Women's Liberation Movement and second-wave feminism generated discussion around men's gendered experiences and problematized the essentialist approach to masculinity (Cooper & McGinley, 2012b, p. 2; Connell, 1995, p. xii; Howson, 2012, p. 2; Mutua, 2013, pp. 349-350). The Men's Liberation Movement correspondingly challenged the traditional male sex role, in addition to the constraints masculinity placed on men's gender enactment and gendered experiences (Adams, 2006, p. 28; Connell, 1995, p. xii; Mutua, 2013, pp. 349-350). Further, the Men's Liberation Movement generated political and academic discourses on the dynamics of "men, power, and change" (Connell, 1995, p. xii), but the production of research regarding the actual experiences of men and complexities surrounding men and masculinity was gradual and characterized by "deep conceptual confusion about gender" (Connell, 1995, p. xii). In addition to generating critical theorization on masculinities, women's liberation, and feminism, critical analyses of men's gendered experiences inadvertently elicited the reactionary and oppressive politics that are present in men's and fathers' rights activism.

Albeit within the context of persistent gender and racial inequality, changes in gendered power dynamics in private and public spheres (e.g., women's liberation) solicited a variety of responses from men, including: 1) men who have embraced and/or actively participated in the emancipatory efforts of women, gay men, gender variant individuals, and/or racially diverse populations (e.g., pro-feminist men, men against violence); and 2) a small, but loud, group of men who protest women's equality and actively fight against the gains made by women and non-hegemonic men (e.g., mythopoetic men, Promise Keepers) (Kimmel, 2010, p. 15). These responses have developed into a variety of social movements, which are broadly referred to as the men's movement, men's rights movement, and FRMs. It is important, however, not to conflate men's social movements with the majority of men's perspectives and experiences, as most men fall "somewhere between eager to embrace women's equality and resigned

acceptance” of women’s equality (e.g., neutral and complicit men) (Kimmel, 2010, p. 115).

## **2.2. Men’s Movements**

The men’s movement began with the Men’s Liberation Movement, which focused on the emancipation of men from traditional sex roles. The Men’s Liberation Movement is traced back to the second-wave feminist movement and women’s liberation which occurred during the 1970s (Adams, 2006, p. 28; Connell, 2005a, p. xii; Dummit, 2007, p. 159; Hamilton, 1978, pp. 76-77; Mutua, 2013, pp. 349-350). At the time, the men’s movement and feminism briefly shared common ground over the critique of traditional sex roles, which men’s activists contended were equally oppressive for men and women (Kimmel, 2010, p. 55; Kimmel, 2013, p. 104). This early phase of the men’s movement was characterized by parallelisms between men and women’s experiences (e.g., men’s “feeling of power” and women’s “power of feeling”) (Kimmel, 2013, p. 104).

While maintaining that their experiences were not entirely analogous to those of men, liberal feminists demonstrated empathy for men in their critique of sex roles by conceptualizing men as “fellow victims” who were “suffering from the outmoded masculine mystique that made them feel unnecessarily inadequate when there were no bears to kill” (Friedan, 1973, p. 386). However, Kimmel (2013) suggests it was when feminists began “making it personal” (p. 104) as feminism transitioned from a critique of the theoretical conception of sex roles to a critique of patriarchy and real acts of violence perpetrated by men that men’s liberation and the men’s movement parted ways with feminism (Dummit, 2007, p. 159; Messner, 1997, p. 16). Men’s liberationists continued their critique of the oppressive male sex role, but they shifted their analysis from parallelisms to institutional and societal gender discrimination against men (e.g., compulsory military service) (Kimmel, 2013, pp. 104-105).

In the late 1980s, the men’s movement reached an impasse. They collectively established that generally men were unhappy with the current state of their masculinity; some men, however, began to question the origins of their discontent outside of the traditional male sex role framework and contended there was a “crisis” in masculinity which required the re-masculinization of men (Messner, 1997, p. 9). The crisis of masculinity hypothesis caused many men in the moment to reject men’s liberationists’

critique of the barriers created by traditional understandings of masculinity (e.g., superficial relationships, suppression of emotionality). Alternatively, they located the displeasures of men in the inauthenticity of their gendered experiences that “had been both diluted and polluted by life in mass-consumer society” (p. 106) and modernization which allegedly “feminized men” (Messner, 1997, p. 17). Subsequently, these men sought to reclaim a “deep” and “essential” form of masculinity (Kimmel, 2010, pp. 126-127; Kimmel, 2013, pp. 105-106; Messner, 1997, pp. 17-18). This approach to analyzing men and masculinities developed into the mythopoetic men’s movement in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which caused a shift in ideology within the movement from a critical gender discourse to one of men’s rights and patriarchal politics that focused on the victimization of men and a crisis in contemporary masculinity (Messner, 1997, pp. 41-44).

The mythopoetic men’s movement considered themselves masculinists who were “of men, by men, for men” (Kimmel, 2013, p. 106). Mythopoets posited that modernity forced a dichotomous gendered experience among men where they became either feminized or hyper-masculinized (Messner, 1997, p. 17). For instance, Bly (1990), a leader in the mythopoetic men’s movement, expressed that men:

[...] have to accept the possibility that the true radiant energy of the male does not hide in, reside in, or wait for us in a feminine realm, nor in a macho/John Wayne realm, but in the magnetic field of the deeply masculine. (p. 8)

In line with their namesake and as denoted in Bly’s description of “instinctive” masculinity, mythopoets rely on mythology about the true nature of masculinity in order to re-masculinize men through the exclusion of feminizing forces, which they allege silence men’s voices; re-masculinizing men is done in an effort to create a truly masculine space that fosters a form of masculinity free from passivity and domesticity (Blais & Dupuis-Déri, 2012, pp. 22-23; Messner, 1997, pp. 16-23). Bly (1990) framed this experience as men connecting to their innate “Zeus energy” (p. 61).

The mythopoetic men’s movement is labeled by some as “gender separatists” (Kimmel, 2013, p. 106) and described cautiously by others as not overtly blaming feminists for the feminization of men (Messner, 1997, pp. 16-23). In contrast, however, Blais and Dupuis-Déri (2012) critique mythopoets and masculinists for not claiming an anti-feminist stance while spouting anti-feminist rhetoric and relying on politics which

assume that “women, women’s values in general and feminists in particular, dominate men and contemporary society at large” (p. 23). The mythopoetic discourse is also critiqued for espousing an essentialized view of men and women that relies on “primitive” understandings of masculinity and femininity (Schwalbe, 1996, p. 66; see also Messner, 1997, pp. 18-19). This suggests that mythopoets not only mask, or possibly misunderstand, their anti-feminist alignment, but also misrepresent men and masculinities by relying on antiquated conceptions of what it means to be a man.

By the late 1990s, some men sought to address their “shallowed-out sense of manhood” through religiosity and spirituality, which led to the development of religious and spirituality-based men’s movements (Kimmel, 2010, pp. 126-127; see also Nelson, 2010, pp. 101-103). Of these movements, the Promise Keepers, a masculinist movement based in Muscular Christianity,<sup>9</sup> is the most prominent (Messner, 1997, pp. 24-31). While the Promise Keepers share the gender essentialism that is present in other masculinist men’s movements, there is a key difference in the Promise Keepers’ essentialist approach. Mythopoets rely on “loose gender essentialism,” which allows for some “individual agency and flexibility” in how men shape and enact their masculinity (Messner, 1997, p. 27). Alternatively, the Promise Keepers base their approach in biblical and biological understandings of gendered roles and responsibilities (i.e., “biblical essentialism”) (p. 27). Further, with strict Christian fundamentalism and “mass-based evangelical ministry” as the basis for their standpoint, Promise Keepers assert that they need to restore masculine presence in and patriarchal order to religious and familial spheres (e.g., church, home, family) (Kimmel, 2010, p. 163). The Promise Keepers argued that these spheres (e.g., home, family) had been feminized as a result of women’s liberation and the alienation of men through the demands of modernity (Dube, 2012, p. 211).

Unlike their mythopoetic counterparts, Promise Keepers are overtly anti-feminist in their efforts to re-masculinize the church, restore patriarchy to the home, subordinate women to their alleged biblically and biologically determined submission, and ultimately revitalize hegemony among men. To illustrate, among its primary goals, the organization

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<sup>9</sup> In simple terms, Muscular Christianity is a form of Christianity that emphasizes masculinity, manliness, and remasculinization or, as Robertson (2004) explains, “a philosophy that blends Christian values with men’s physical embodiment of masculinity” and connects “gender and power” with religion and masculine physical prowess (p. 324).



places emphasis on “the commitment of men to respect and honor women” in exchange for women’s submission and servitude (Kimmel, 2010, p. 167). Kimmel (2010) suggests that many women may be willing to accept submission in exchange for engaged husbands who swear off vices (e.g., substance use/abuse, gambling) and promise to begin supporting their families as espoused by evangelicalism, as it may be more promising than the current dynamic of their relationship. Subsequently, the Promise Keepers launched a corresponding women’s organization entitled the “Suitable Helpers” to teach women how to provide “godly support” for their male partners and fulfill the duties ascribed to them through evangelical patriarchal order (Kimmel, 2010, p. 167), which might as well read as lessons in submission. The movement does not, however, explicitly address how violence aligns with their mandate to honour and respect women.

The Promise Keepers also address the issue of race in their advocacy, which is veiled in the rhetoric of “racial reconciliation” (Kimmel, 2010, p. 168) and posited from a viewpoint that male supremacy can heal the existing division among races (pp. 168-172). The Promise Keepers contend that this can only be done from the position of privilege that created the original divide. Subsequently, Kimmel (2010) poses the question, “... what’s wrong with this picture of white people taking responsibility for racism...?” (p. 168). The problem is there is no mandate within the Promise Keepers movement to rectify any of the harms of racism (e.g., no support for anti-discrimination legislation). Further, similar to the problem faced by women in the Promise Keepers movement, the Promise Keepers’ approach to racial reconciliation is aligned with politics of being “nicer” but not being “fairer” to other races (e.g., without any substantial restructuring of resources or equity) (pp. 168-169). Therefore, in exchange for espousing patriarchal evangelicalism and forgoing their previous religions and/or cultural alignments, men of colour (i.e., mostly black men) are promised civility but not substantive equality or equity. Seidler (1991) suggests this is a common means by which religious groups rectify the tension between the ideology of being equal before God and persistent social inequalities (pp. 66-68).

Messner (1997, p. 16) pinpoints the irony in the feminist roots of the men’s movement due to the gender separatist and anti-feminist politics following the writings and advocacy of early men’s liberationists. Not all men’s movements, however, rely on the anti-feminist or exclusionary politics of the traditional men’s movements. For example, Kimmel (2013) suggests that there are two general categories of men: 1) those

who have sought and embraced new, more complex, and emotionally fulfilling experiences of manhood and masculinities; and 2) those who “cling ever more tenaciously to old ideals” feeling like every “gain” made by women and minorities is a “loss” for privileged, generally white, men (p. 19). The latter group is made up of men who fight to maintain patriarchal authority and hegemony among men, and engage in reactionary, resistant, and exclusionary politics. These men are the loudest, but not the only, voices behind the men’s movement, and it is crucial to appreciate the efforts of men who have tried to locate, and successfully located, themselves within or as allies to the feminist movement.

Historically men have often had a tenuous relationship with feminism, and early attempts made by men to join forces with the feminist movement, or Kamuf’s (1987) short lived fem’men’ists (pp. 78-92), were met with resistance and seen as infringements upon a space that had been hard-won by and claimed for women (Heath, 1987; Kamuf, 1987; Kaufman, 1999; Seidler, 1991). For instance, Heath (1987) recounts his experiences trying to locate himself within feminism:

Men’s relation to feminism is an impossible one. This is not said sadly nor angrily (though sadness and anger are both known and common reactions) but politically [...] Women are the subjects of feminism, its initiators, its makers, its force; the move from being a woman to being a feminist is the grasp of that subjecthood. Men are objects, part of the analysis, agents of the structure to be transformed, representatives in, carriers of the patriarchal mode; and my desire to be a subject there too in feminism – to be a feminist – is then only also the last feint in the long history of *their* colonization (p. 1).

Heath’s (1987) discussion of the tension between men and feminism, or the inherent subject-object relationship, highlights men’s experiences while negotiating masculinities and their relationship to feminism during the second-wave feminist movement, radical feminism, and the men’s movement.

One of the men’s movements that has addressed the tension between men and feminism is the White Ribbon Campaign, which is a feminist men’s movement that developed as a response to the 1989 Montreal Massacre (DeKeseredy, 2012, pp. 76-77; Kaufman, 1999, p. 96). The White Ribbon Campaign was one of the first men’s groups to advocate in opposition of men’s violence against women, and they are considered to be the “world’s most successful” anti-violence men’s movement (Kimmel, 2010, p. 229).

Their advocacy extends across Canadian university campuses as well as in “more than twenty countries and nearly one hundred campuses in North America” (Kimmel, 2010, p. 11), and their work includes raising awareness about violence as “a major social problem,” “male silence about violence as complacency,” the “injurious symptoms” of gender inequality (Kimmel, 2010, pp. 76-77), and the patriarchal culture that underlies sexual and intimate violence (Kaufman, 1999, p. 96).

Kimmel (2010) challenges the terminology of “feminist men’s movement” and suggests that the White Ribbon Campaign is actually a “profeminist men’s movement” (pp. 212-214). Similar to Heath (1987), Kimmel (2010) seems to succumb to the tension between men and feminism. As a result, Kimmel (2010) contends that “profeminist men” should be used in the place of feminist men to indicate men who support or “do” feminism but by virtue of their gendered experiences cannot fully understand feminist standpoints or women’s experiences of gendered oppression and subordination (pp. 212-214). However, regardless of the term used to characterize feminist/profeminist men, the men against violence movement expands well beyond the narrow scope of masculinism that is present in much of the men’s movement (e.g., the mythopoetic men’s movement, the Promise Keepers) and more recently “Menimism”/“Menimists” which includes contemporary men’s rights groups and non-group affiliated antifeminist men (for example, see Thorpe, 2016).

### **2.3. The FRM and Politics of Fatherhood**

Similar to the men’s movements, the Father’s Rights Movement (FRM) developed in the early 1970s as a response to women’s liberation from the private sphere, including their traditional roles in family life and the home (Amyot, 2010, p. 28).<sup>10</sup> The initial advocacy of FRGs focused primarily on legal issues surrounding separation and divorce,<sup>11</sup> and their efforts were seen as a reaction to laws, such as the United Kingdom’s *Marital Causes Act of 1973* which allegedly favoured mothers during family law proceedings (Amyot, 2010, p. 28). The initial phase of the FRM was highlighted by Families Need Fathers in the United Kingdom (UK), who promoted paternal involvement

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<sup>10</sup> This liberation included, for example, increasing separation/divorce rates and changes to traditional patriarchal family structures.

<sup>11</sup> For example, child support payments and custody/access arrangements, property division, children’s education, and religious upbringing.

post-separation and were considered pro-family in their advocacy. By the mid-to-late 1970s and early 1980s, however, the FRM developed into a social movement based in anti-women's liberation and oppressive politics with a focus on fathers' rights and the value of paternal authority in line with patriarchal ideologies.

During the early 1980s, the FRM existed primarily in Australia and United States (US) and was formalized through the Australian Lone Fathers' Association in 1975 (Amyot, 2010, pp. 28-29; see also Kay & Tolmie, 1998a, 1998b). However, the development of the FRM in the US was "fragmented" as it largely began at the local level and did not gain national support until the establishment of the American Coalition for Fathers and Children in the early 1990s (p. 28). These branches of the FRM were rooted in the masculinist men's movement and shifted the political discourse from paternal involvement to an anti-feminism countermovement (Collier & Sheldon, 2006, p. 7; Flood, 2010, p. 328). Similarly, activism in the UK shifted from a seemingly moderate approach to fathers' rights, such as the pro-family advocacy of Families Need Fathers, to a more radical and patriarchal approach with the advent of Fathers-4-Justice in 2003. Fathers-4-Justice adopted "radical protest" politics (Amyot, 2010, p. 28) and engaged in "dramatic tactics" (e.g., donning superhero costumes and scaling buildings) to generate support for the rights to fatherhood and paternal involvement post-separation (Kimmel, 2013, p. 135). This phase of the FRM was not overtly anti-feminist in their politics (Alschech & Saini, 2019); however, some of their advocacy inadvertently targeted women with allegations such as bias against fathers in the legal system and family law processes.

Shortly thereafter, the FRM was established in Canada during the early-to-mid-1980s. The Canadian branch of the FRM was perceived as a reaction to the "stricter enforcement of child support payments" (Amyot, 2010, pp. 29-30). The Canadian FRM developed largely as a means to support fathers who were navigating family law processes and negotiating custody/access arrangements both during and post-separation. Their dominant focus was, and remains, policy reform (Amyot, 2010, pp. 29-30). Much like their Australian and American predecessors and the parallel masculinist men's movements, the Canadian FRM's political efforts are characterized by anti-feminist rhetoric, such as support for formal versus substantive equality, mother-blaming, and allegations of systemic bias against fathers in family law and court processes.

The FRM has attracted scrutiny and criticism. Many critical gender and feminist legal scholars suggest that fathers' rights activism is a reactionary attempt to reassert paternal control and patriarchal dominance in the private sphere through an anti-feminist counter movement that aims to re-subjugate women (for example, see Dragiewicz, 2010, pp. 197-206; Flood, 2010, pp. 328-333). Further, much like the parallel men's movements, the FRM is contextualized within the broader framework of a "crisis of masculinity" (Collier & Sheldon, 2006, p. 8; see also Collier & Sheldon, 2008), or at least a crisis in patriarchal notions of fatherhood and paternal control.

Aspects of reactionary and crisis politics are evident in much of the rhetoric surrounding contemporary fathers' rights activism. Thematic analysis of the FRM reveals common issues within their activism and rhetoric, such as:

1. Efforts to contest feminist gains in private and legal spheres (Boyd, 2004, pp. 60-62; Boyd, 2006, p. 34; Collier & Sheldon, 2006, pp. 7-10; Crowley, 2006; Dragiewicz, 2010, pp. 197-206; Flaudi, 1991, p. 12; Flood, 2010, pp. 328-333; Menzies, 2007, p. 73);
2. Blaming women's liberation for the demise of the traditional patriarchal family model (Adams, 2006, pp. 1-8; Boyd, 2004, pp. 56-58; Boyd, 2006, p. 33; Boyd & Young, 2007, p. 203; Coltrane & Hickman, 1992, pp. 410-412; Flood, 2010, p. 330);
3. Contending that feminists favour their political agendas over their families (Boyd, 2004, p. 60);
4. Problematizing fatherlessness, single-mother households, and non-heteronormative families, such as those headed by lesbian mothers, through assertions that the presence of fathers is necessary to adequately raise sons (Boyd, 2004, pp. 55-56; Boyd, 2006, p. 32; Crowley, 2009a, p. 728; Young & Boyd, 2007);
5. Claims of bias towards women and mistreatment of fathers in family law processes (Boyd, 2004, pp. 62-64; Boyd, 2006, p. 35; Collier & Sheldon, 2006, p. 18; Crowley, 2009b, pp. 233-234; Davis, 2004, pp. 299-307; Flood, 2010, p. 328; Sen, 2012, pp. 1570-1601; Watson & Ancis, 2013, pp. 167-168);
6. Fighting for formal, but not substantive, equality post-separation (Boyd, 2004, pp. 64-66; Boyd, 2006, pp. 37-48; Collier & Sheldon, 2006, p. 15; Crowley, 2006, p. 105; Dragiewicz, 2008, p. 131; Flood, 2010, p. 329; Rosen et al., 2009, p. 518);

7. Advocating for joint custody/shared parenting, albeit often within the context of formal equality (Bertoia & Drakich, 1993, pp. 602-606; Boyd, 2004, p. 67-69; Boyd, 2006, p. 39; Braver & Griffin, 2000, p. 260; Rosen et al., 2009, p. 527; Watson & Ancis, 2013, p. 168);
8. Focusing on biological parentage and allegedly inherent rights of biological fathers over that of involved caretakers (Kelly, 2006, pp. 316-317).

The tactics and rhetoric noted above represent the tension between feminist and fathers' rights discourses.

Some fathers' rights-based approaches, such as Kruk (2008, 2010, 2013), equate the best interest of the child(ren) with a children-centred approach that is stated to shift the focus from rights to responsibilities of the parents and needs of children. However, this literature does not actually remove the rights-based discourse that it is argued to be distanced from, as parental responsibilities and children's needs are equated with "gender equality in parenting," which Kruk (2013) equates to "children spending equal amounts of time in each parent's household" even in "contested cases" (p. xiii) and support for the presumption of equal parenting by default post-separation (i.e., "equal-parental-responsibility presumption") (p. xiv).

Through rhetoric and advocacy, the FRM frames women's liberation as harmful to children and leading to the disenfranchisement of fathers (Dragiewicz, 2010, pp. 197-206). Within this simplistic framework, feminists, women, and mothers who challenge traditional patriarchal family structures (e.g., separation/divorce, single-mother households, lesbian parents, professional women) are faulted for the breakdown of paternal authority and "the demise of masculinity" (Menzies, 2007, pp. 73-79). Similar to the politics of the Promise Keepers, these challenges to patriarchal family order are frequently framed as an "affront to Christianity" (p. 79). Further, these politics align with the masculinist men's movements, as the subjugation of women and mothers is framed as the restoration of masculinity. Dragiewicz (2010) contends that members of FRGs who claim they are not opposed to feminism and are simply "caring fathers," in reality "often choose lobbying and legal tactics that attack services for abused women, laws criminalizing domestic violence, and family law policies that intend to ameliorate mothers' disproportionate poverty" during and post-separation/divorce (p. 202).

## 2.4. What's Wrong with the Men's Movement and FRM

Antifeminist phases of the men's movement (e.g., mythopoetic, Promise Keepers) and FRM's attempt to constrain non-conforming groups (e.g., women, racially and sexually diverse populations) and disregard the collective power men hold over women, as well as power differentials among men. According to Kimmel (2013), this should delegitimize the political and social efforts of the men's movement and FRM, even though historically it has not disempowered them (pp. 110-115). What began as marginal movements of "sad and angry middle-class white guys, moaning about how hard they have it" (pp. 112-113) now holds some social and political capital. This transformation is the result of changes in the capitalist structure and the advent of the neoliberal state which have fostered and compounded men's experiences of powerlessness (e.g., ascendant redistribution of wealth, downwardly mobile lower- and middle-classes, intense economic inequality, demise of social welfare systems); this is exacerbated by out-of-date laws governing custody/access and guardianship arrangements which have, in some instances, favoured mothers (Kimmel, 2013, p. 113). Further, the development of the internet as a platform for social and political advocacy has created a "manosphere" (p. 114) or "a man cave" which is a

... politically incorrect locker room, where you can say whatever you feel like saying without having to back it up with something as inconvenient as evidence and still hide behind a screen of anonymity so that no one knows that you're the jerk you secretly think you might be. (p. 115)

The internet is a seemingly protected space that fosters and legitimates the pro-patriarchal/anti-feminist approach that characterizes much of the advocacy with the men's movement and FRM (Kimmel, 2013, pp. 114-115; see also Menzies, 2007).

These politics, and these men, characterize the majority of the men's movement and FRM, but they represent the minority of men and fathers. Due to their public and political presence, these movements provide a distorted picture of and, according to Kimmel (2010), (mis)frame the debate surrounding men, masculinity(ies), fatherhood, and familial relations. Real experiences of masculinities and fatherhood are not as "stark" as the rhetoric and activism of these movements imply, nor are men the "villains" that some radical feminist theorization suggests (Kimmel, 2013, p. 113). In fact, these approaches rely largely on essentialism in their political, social, and theoretical constructions of manhood/fatherhood.

## 2.5. Social Movements

The development and advocacy of the men's movement and FRM provide historical context for the emergence of these movements, as well as the early and contemporary arguments, rhetoric, and messages of these groups (for example, see Dummit, 2007; Messner, 1997; Mutua, 2013). However, these analyses neglect fatherhood movements that are not rights-based, such as the Fatherhood Responsibility Movement which emphasizes paternal engagement, nurturing, and caretaking (see p. 4). As such, contemporary analyses of social movements in modern Canadian society and the neoliberal context provide a framework of understanding the recent development of non-rights oriented fatherhood groups (e.g., IFGs/IFM, the Fatherhood Responsibility Movement).

Meyer and Tarrow (1998) contend that from the 1960s through 1980s, social movements in Western societies denoted the precarious and, in some instances, contentious mobilization of groups who often combated institutionalized and potentially oppressive politics (p. 4). By the 1990s, however, these movements were "partially incorporated into the state," which has caused such activism to become more "predictable" and "common" (Ramos & Rodgers, 2015, p. 4). Jenkins et al. (2008) refer to this as political and social movements becoming "a routine part of political bargaining" (as cited in Ramos & Rodgers, 2015, p. 4).

The commonplace nature of social movements in contemporary society led Meyer and Tarrow (1998) to create the "social movement society thesis" (SMS thesis) to explain how social movements have transitioned from irregular and combative social protest to seemingly conformist politics through the institutionalization and professionalization of these movements (p. 4). Further, linked to the conformist and consistent nature of contemporary social movements, Ramos and Rodgers (2015) suggest that there is now an "institutionalization of state responses" and social reactions to such movements (pp. 5-6). Neoliberal social, legal, political, and economic climates, however, have given rise to recent shifts in contemporary Western societies; these shifts have led to the "blurring of political action" and other spheres of life (e.g., social, political) (Ramos & Rodgers, 2015, pp. 4-5, 10-11). Further, social movements have expanded through the pervasive use of the Internet, social media, and related technology. In this sense, through the FRM, fatherhood has transcended the familial realm to become a



social and political entity, which is seen within the activism and lobbying efforts of fatherhood groups.

### **2.5.1. Social Movements/Groups and Liquid Modernity**

Fathers' experiences are largely dependent on their relationships with contemporary social, legal, political, and familial institutions, and many existing analyses of men and fathers in movements rely on postmodern frameworks. However, Bauman's (2000) notion of "liquid" modernity (i.e., that modernity is unsolidified and continues to develop) situates these institutions broadly and provides the ability to locate fatherhood-based movements and groups more specifically, within the neoliberal context. Bauman (2000) critiques the idea of postmodernism through his suggestion the underlying components of social and political fragmentation within neoliberal societies demonstrates that modernity is ever-present and fluid in nature as opposed to being a solid postmodern state (pp. 108). Therefore, he (2000) proposes a shift in understanding to reflect that of *liquid* modernity, which echoes the chaotic and uncertain nature of social, legal, political, and familial landscapes. Accordingly, fatherhood-based groups, and the men within them, experience and navigate fatherhood in a shifting and fluid modernity that is constructed through the continual and disjointed development of social, legal, and political discourses and individual identities.

### **2.6. The Dialogue of Identity**

The nuances of men's experiences with and concepts of fatherhood are situated within the constructions of identity and gender in the narratives of individual fathers and FRGs more generally. For example, how these men and groups "do" or perform gender (for example, see West & Fenstermaker, 1995; West & Zimmerman, 1987; Messerschmitt, 2014) is often reflected in their politics, and the identities of fathers and FRGs are negotiated through social and structural constraints, such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and lived experiences (for example, see Bourdieu, 1977). As such, while FRGs and FRMs rely largely on essentialism in their political, social, and theoretical constructions of manhood/fatherhood, critical studies of men and masculinities (e.g., masculinities theory) reveal the complex nature of men's and fathers' experiences.

### **2.6.1. Doing Gender and “Doing” Men’s/Fathers’ Rights**

West and Zimmerman (1987) formulated the concept of doing gender to address the processes whereby men and women engage in, and accomplish, their gender through “routine,” “methodical,” “perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities” that fulfil the socially ascribed masculine and feminine traits of their respective genders (p. 126). Within this framework, gender is not characteristic but rather an accomplishment which functions as “an achieved property of situated conduct” (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 126). Further, they suggest that the situated “doing” of gender legitimates gendered divisions of power and labour through being both the basis for, and result of, the existing hierarchies (West & Fenstermaker, 1995, p. 9; West & Zimmerman, 1987, pp. 126-127; see also Messerschmidt, 2014, pp. 23-25). Similar notions of doing one’s gender are found in Butler’s (2004) articulation of gender performativity and symbolic gender relations (pp. 198-199, 209).

Messerschmidt (2014) suggests that the processes of doing gender are recurrent and situationally specific, because in doing gender “individuals construct patterns of embodied presentations and practices that suggest a particular gender in particular settings” (p. 24). Further, doing gender is a reflexive process whereby individuals adapt their masculine or feminine enactments in order to accomplish the socially and/or situationally negotiated “gendered self,” which fosters potential conflicts and multiplicity within each individual’s gendered identity (pp. 24-25). Situational enactments of gender are grounded in the notions of “fitting in” (Messerschmidt, 2014, p. 25) and “accountability” (West & Zimmerman, 1987, pp. 135-137) wherein social actors construct and enact their gender through interactions and reactions within any given context. Therefore, as Messerschmidt (2014) asserts, “in their daily activities individuals attempt to be identified bodily as ‘female’ or ‘male’ through gender and sexual practices” (p. 25), which are often constructed on the bases of emphasized femininity and hegemonic masculinity. As such, even situations and interactions that are not overtly gendered often function to “service the interests of doing gender” through the continual reinforcement of assumed masculine or feminine identities (West & Zimmerman, 1987, pp. 138-139), such as patriarchal order within families and the gendered division of household labour.

West and Fenstermaker (1995) suggest that the original formulation of “doing” gender neglects key inequalities (i.e., race and class) and is, therefore, an incomplete

approach to analyzing the enactment gender which is frequently raced and/or classed (p. 9). While this approach provides a more complex analysis of the production of power and inequality through raced/classed gender performativity, West and Fenstermaker (1995) nevertheless neglect the notion that women can “do” masculinity and men can “do” femininity, and also the historical and socio-cultural context of doing gender. This, too, has the capacity to essentialize gendered experiences.

The enactments of masculinity and fatherhood that underlie the men’s and fathers’ rights discourses denote the “doing” of heteronormative, patriarchal masculinity. As previously noted, the doing of gender relies on “fitting in” (Messerschmidt, 2014, p. 25) and “accountability” (West & Zimmerman, 1987, pp. 135-137); similarly, these movements are part of a subculture that is constructed and maintained through systems of patriarchal peer support (Dragiewicz, 2008, pp. 126-127; Dragiewicz, 2010, p. 203). Posited from a left-realist perspective, Dragiewicz (2010) suggests that the interconnectedness between macro-level factors that affect “men’s ability to achieve a certain type of masculinity” (e.g., neoliberal shifts in the marketplace) and micro-level factors (e.g., beliefs about gender roles and responsibilities rooted in traditional patriarchal norms) cause these men to seek out, engage in, and support these anti-feminist/pro-patriarchal sub/counter-cultures. This model is similar to that of DeKeseredy and Schwartz (as cited in Dragiewicz, 2010), as it attempts to explain “the disconnect between reality” and the beliefs, actions, and advocacy of these men (p. 203). Nevertheless, while these men/fathers do not represent the majority, their construction and enactment of masculinity premised on traditional expectations of man/fatherhood creates a subculture that is conducive to the doing of outdated gender roles. Further, this framework will be used to analyze how involved fathers may *do* or embody gender in non-conforming or alternative ways in relation to their fathers’ rights counterparts.

## **2.7. Masculinities and Fatherhood**

Much of the existing research conceptualizes fathers vis-à-vis mothers and the men’s/fathers’ movements vis-à-vis feminism (for example, see Amyot, 2010; Boyd, 2013; Dragiewicz, 2010; Flood, 2012; Watson & Ancis, 2013). However, critical approaches to masculinities provide more nuanced and multidimensional understandings of men and their experiences with engagement in fatherhood.

In the 1980s and early 1990s the body of research on masculinities focused on setting-specific (e.g., education, athletics) analyses of men's gendered performances and experiences (Connell, 2005a, p. xiv). Over the last two decades, however, research on masculinities has developed conceptually (e.g., domestic/sexual/institutional violence, fatherhood, power differentials among men, hegemony) and globally, and the focus has expanded to encompass more nuanced understandings of men, masculinities, power, and gendered experiences (pp. xiv-xxv). These developments aided in the "rejection of the conceptual singularity of masculinity" (Howson, 2012, p. 2) and the acknowledgement of plurality in masculinities (Aboim, 2010, pp. 1-7). Further, these advancements revealed the hierarchy that exists within the notion of gender equality. As Seidler (1991) notes, "some people are obviously more 'equal' than others" both within and between gender groupings (p. 107).

Connell (1987; 1995; 2005a) utilizes the concept of multiplicity to analyze masculinities and how men's intersecting identity markers (e.g., race, class, sexuality) impact their gendered experiences with power and powerlessness through either elevation or subjugation (i.e., the formation of the hierarchy among men). As such, she<sup>12</sup> (2005) contends that varying typologies of masculinity exist (e.g., subjugated, complicit), and that within this multiplicity of types exists an ideal, albeit fundamentally symbolic, form of masculinity from which a small subset of men derive power and privilege (i.e., the hegemonic norm) (pp. 67-86; see also Kaufman, 1999, pp. 77-78). This model hegemonic type, though emblematic, is legitimate in both the norms it imposes on other masculinities, and subsequently femininities, and its meaning-making capacities with respect to variant men's identities (Howson, 2012, pp. 2-3). Further, contemporary analyses of masculinity account for the oppression of men resulting from "the social construction of 'hegemonic masculinity'" (Burtch, 2007, pp. 462-463), which highlights the conflict between socially defined masculinity and the varying experiences and enactments of masculinities (see also Kaufman, 1999, pp. 77-78). The tension between societal expectations of men and men's own expressions of masculinity provides a framework for analyses of the subjugation of men who violate the norms of "hegemonic

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<sup>12</sup> Raewyn Connell is a transgender woman. During her earlier writings and in many citations of her work she was identified as Robert William (R. W.) Connell. In this dissertation, however, Connell is consistently referred to using feminine pronouns, as it is the gender with which she identifies. For more information, see <http://www.raewynconnell.net/2012/07/transsexual-women.html>.

masculinity” (e.g., homosexual, gender variant, racially diverse men) (Burtch, 2007, p. 463), and accounts for the interplay of power and alienation that characterizes masculine experiences (Kaufman, 1999, p. 84). This complex and nuanced gendered analysis was absent from earlier approaches to deconstructing gendered oppression, as dynamics of oppression were largely viewed exclusively as men’s dominance over or subjugation of women (Messerschmidt, 1993).

### **2.7.1. Hegemonic Masculinity**

The concept of hegemonic masculinity is rooted in or, as Connell (1983) suggests, “borrowed from” (p. 184) the Gramscian notion of hegemony, which Antonio Gramsci utilized for his analyses of the processes that underlie and construction of social, cultural, and private power-based class relations (Aboim, 2010, p. 2; Beasley, 2008, p. 93; Connell, 1987, p. 184; Connell, 2005a, p. 77; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 831; Howson, 2012, pp. 4-6; Messerschmidt, 1993, p. 81; Robidoux, 2012, p. 123). In its original Gramscian form, hegemony provides a conceptual framework for class-based analyses that demonstrate “the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life” (Connell, 2005a, p. 77). When applied to masculinities, however, hegemony denotes how men assert and maintain women’s subordination, as well as structure and maintain power among men, in private and public spheres.

Hegemonic masculinity was formulated through the work of Connell (1987; 1995; 2005). She (1983) began to theorize about masculinities, power, and, ultimately, hegemonic masculinity in the 1980s through a dialogue on the formation of masculinities and men’s embodied experiences; this was followed by her (1987) construction of “hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity” in her discussion on power differentials in hierarchal gender relations (pp. 183-188). In this articulation, Connell (1987) suggests that hegemonic masculinity defines gender relations by maintaining patriarchal order (i.e., the subordination of all women) and creates a hierarchal structure for the distribution of power among men (pp. 183-184). Therefore, hegemonic masculinity not only relies on emphasized femininity to ensure women enact their gender in a way that underscores their compliance, submission, and subordination, but also ensures the domination of only some men by creating multiple categories of “subordinated masculinities” (p. 183). Due to their subordinate status, Connell (1987)

suggests these non-hegemonic masculinities “need not be clearly defined” because hegemony prevents them from “gaining cultural definition and recognition as alternatives” to the hegemonic norm (p. 186). However, the hegemonic man is clearly defined by violence, misogyny, and heterosexuality (p. 186), which implies, although not explicitly stated in Connell’s early writings, that subordinated masculinities are characterized by non-violence, feminist leanings or at least neutrality toward women’s equality, and non-heteronormative behaviours. Further, Connell (1987) contends that the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity are dependent upon the socio-cultural makeup of the society in which the analyses occur (pp. 183-188; see also Donaldson, 1993, pp. 645-646), whereby acknowledging that the hegemonic norm is neither static nor uniform and subject to ideological and cultural shifts in meaning.

In Connell’s (2005a) later iteration of hegemonic masculinity, she develops the concept of hegemonic masculinity to explain its roots in patriarchal male dominance and how it operates within a framework of hegemony (i.e., society-wide cultural ascendancy), subordination (i.e., gender relations that highlight power differentials among men based in intersecting oppressions, such as race, class, sexual orientation, religion, culture), complicity (i.e., men who fall outside the normative hegemonic standard but nonetheless benefit from the patriarchal hegemonic structure), and marginalization (i.e., the dynamic between dominant and subordinated masculinities) (pp. 76-81; See also Connell, 1995). Through this framework, Connell (2005a) addresses the complex dynamic whereby hegemony, subordination, and complacency operate to create hegemonic masculinity, and also the intersecting dynamics of marginalization that produce and maintain the subordinate status of variant masculinities (p. 81). Connell’s (2005a) approach lends itself to more complex analyses of power relations among men, and thereby improves on previous conceptualizations such as those in her earlier work (for example, see Connell, 1983, 1987).

The framework for Connell’s (1987; 1995; 2005a) theory of hegemonic masculinity has been subject to critique. Howson (2012) contends that Connell’s conception of hegemony is an “obfuscation of the full complexity of Gramsci’s theory of hegemony through the underdevelopment of hegemony’s aspirational efficacy” which emphasizes a “more passive and historically deterministic view of a hegemonic situation” (p. 4). This critique, however, was addressed prior to its formulation, as Connell and

Messerschmidt (2005) acknowledged that the use of the term hegemony “risked significant misunderstanding” (p. 831) and note:

Gramsci’s writing focuses on the dynamics of structural change involving the mobilization and demobilization of whole classes. Without a very clear focus on the issue of historical change, the idea of hegemony would be reduced to a simple model of cultural control. And in a great deal of the debate about gender, large-scale historical change is not the focus. (p. 831)

Further, in Connell’s (1987) first articulation of hegemonic masculinity, she suggests that the term is “borrowed” from Gramsci (p. 184), which does not indicate strict adherence to the Gramscian formulation of hegemony.

Realist and poststructuralist critiques of hegemonic masculinity suggest that the conception of masculinity underlying this theory is inherently flawed (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, pp. 836-837). For example, realists contend that the definition of masculinity is unclear and ambiguous, as it lacks the necessary emphasis on authority and ascendancy (p. 836; see also Hearn, 1996, 2004 as cited in Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 836), and poststructuralists suggest that the underlying conception of masculinity is essentialist, because it assumes “false unity” in hegemony (p. 837; see also Collier, 1998 and MacInnes, 1998). Further, hegemonic masculinity has also been critiqued for:

1. “ambiguity and overlap” in its conceptualization, because many men are powerful without embodying the hegemonic norm (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 383);
2. “reification” through a focus on power rather than the “structural basis” for the subordination of variant groups (p. 839);
3. its association with solely negative masculine characteristics and behaviours (pp. 839-840);
4. an “unsatisfactory theory of the [masculine] subject” (p. 841; pp. 841-844); and
5. paying heed to Durkheimian notions of social order, a functionalist approach to gender relations (p. 844-845).

Accordingly, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) reconceived the theory of hegemonic masculinity to address these critiques.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) retained the concepts of plurality in masculinities and the hegemonic ordering of the masculine hierarchy (p. 846). However, they (2005) rejected two notions from the original conceptions of the theory: 1) the simplistic model of gendered social relations that relied on a “single pattern of power and the ‘global dominance’ of men over women” (pp. 846-847); and 2) the reliance on negative trait psychology/terminology that was perceived as essentializing (p. 846). They also re-conceptualized the theory of hegemonic masculinity to acknowledge the “agency of subordinated groups” (e.g., protest masculinities), locationally-specific/culturally-dependent nature of hegemony (i.e., globalized masculinities), and tension between hegemony and social embodiment to address the experiences of non-conforming masculinities (pp. 848-852). These revisions address previous Foucauldian and poststructuralist critiques by acknowledging that gender and power are “socially and historically constituted” (Seidler, 1991, p. 206), and they provide a more complex conceptualization of gendered social relations. Accordingly, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) note that future “conceptualizations of hegemonic masculinity should explicitly acknowledge the possibility of democratizing gender relations, of abolishing power differentials, not just reproducing hierarchy” (p. 853). This reconceptualization, however, does not address the notion present in Foucault’s work and Foucauldian discourses that power is so deeply entrenched in social arrangements and practices that even conflict and resistance often function to reinforce and re-legitimize these arrangements (Kimmel, 2012, p. xiv).

### **2.7.2. Hegemonic Fatherhood**

The fathers’ rights and masculinist men’s movements do not acknowledge that men maintain power over women at the “aggregate level” (Kimmel, 2013, p. 215) nor do they address the hierarchal power relations among and varying experiences of men. Rather, these movements emphasize the hegemonic norm by focusing on traditional patriarchal conceptions of masculinity and, to some degree, politically and socially reinforce hegemony among men. Further, the movements’ non-critical approach to masculinities impacts men and fathers, as it focuses much of the political debate on the rights of hegemonic men/fathers versus the real-life experiences, desires, needs, and roles of non-hegemonic men.



Modernity allows for, and in many circumstances requires, more egalitarian and progressive family models (e.g., paternal primary caregiver, stay-at-home fathers, maternal breadwinners, dual-breadwinner/dual-caregiver) (Petroski & Edley, 2006, para. 1-3). Further, Petroski and Edley (2006) suggest that the tension between non-traditional experiences of fathers and the political and social reliance on the traditional patriarchal notion of fatherhood “hinders the development of progressive, non-gendered policies in [...] the judicial system” (para. 2). Therefore, the conceptions of fatherhood that rely on hegemonic notions of and gendered expectations for masculinity, like those found in the men’s and fathers’ rights discourses, stagnate the political, legal, and social development of non-hegemonic and non-heteronormative fatherhood.

## **2.8. Power and Powerlessness in Masculinities**

Messerschmidt (1993) suggests that “obvious” gendered power relations occur between men and women, which are evidenced by how “men control the economic, religious, political, and military institutions of authority and coercion in society” (p. 71). The less obvious gender power dynamic is that which occurs among men, resulting in an unequal distribution of power based on race, class, and sexuality (p. 72). Within this framework, gendered power structures are entrenched in the multidimensional arrangement of relationships between men and women (i.e., the maintenance of patriarchy) and also among men (Connell, 2005b, p. 1801). These relationships occur within the context of capitalism, which, through competition, forces men to form their identities in comparison to others (i.e., the hegemonic norm) (Seidler, 1991, pp.76-78) and focuses on the individual versus the collective (p. 169). In the Marxist sense, this creates powerful (i.e., bourgeois) and subordinate (i.e., proletariat) groups among and between genders, by continuing the subordinate identity of women by comparison to men and creating a hierarchy among men.

The subjugation, subordination, and privileging of groups is predicated on gendered, economic, cultural, racial, and sexual bases. Within feminist research, intersectionality theory, a product of Black feminist theorization, is used to analyze how women’s experiences and subjugations, along with the violence perpetrated against them, differ based on their intersecting identity markers (Crenshaw, 1991; Mutua, 2013, p. 341-343). Within masculinities, however, multidimensionality theory is often used in the place of intersectionality in response to a perceived shortcoming of intersectional

research (Mutua, 2013, pp. 341-343; see also Connell, 2005b; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Cooper & McGinley 2012; Hutchinson, 2001). Mutua (2013) suggests that the intersectionality framework essentializes men's gendered experiences because it lacks "a model for using intersectionality as a tool for exploring partially privileged identities" (p. 360; see also Hutchinson, 2001).

Masculinities theorists adapted the theory of multidimensionality from critical legal scholarship in the 1980s, and they utilized it to create a framework that incorporated the premise of intersectionality with a non-essentialist approach to masculinities and power (Mutua, 2013, pp. 351-353). This multidimensional framework deconstructs masculinity by acknowledging the intersecting oppressions experienced by men, while maintaining an understanding that social relations exist within a patriarchal system that privileges their gender as a whole. For example, Black men are simultaneously privileged by their gender (i.e., a privileging identity) and oppressed by their race (i.e., a subjugating identity). This multidimensional approach rectifies the tension between patriarchal privilege and intersecting subordinating identity markers (e.g., race, culture, sexuality) through analyses of the "complex hierarchal systems... around which social power and disempowerment are distributed" (p. 354).

While masculinity is a partially privileged identity (Mutua, 2013, p. 36), it is crucial not to conflate privilege with power. Most men are complicit in their masculinity, because they do not hold positions of power or influence the hegemonic norm. Aboim (2010) explains:

They are not particularly powerful, nor do they influence the dominant cultural symbols of manhood. [...] [M]ost men do not explicitly defy the codes of masculinity. Yet, it would be a misnomer to see complicit men as merely passive subjects, sandwiched between those who are the most powerful and those who directly challenge hegemonic masculinity (e.g., gay men or pro-feminist activists). (p. 3)

Complicit men do not exemplify the epitome of hegemonic masculinity. However, through failing to contest or actively defy the hegemonic norm, complicit men could still benefit from the patriarchal system that socially, institutionally, and culturally privileges their gender (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). Ultimately, this large subset of men is "simply doing gender" (Aboim, 2010, p. 3).

### 2.8.1. Power(lessness) and Entitlement

Kimmel (2013) suggests that men, more specifically white men, “are beneficiaries of the single greatest affirmative action program in world history. It is called ‘world history’” (p. 9). Most men, however, do not experience this power or privilege at an individual level (Kimmel, 2010, pp. 214-126; Kimmel, 2013, pp. 111-112). He (2010) explains:

Sure, men are in power at the aggregate level [...] [T]he gender composition of those legislatures, boardrooms, and boards of trustees don't lie. But ask individual men to ‘give up’ power and you are more likely to get a blank, defensive stare, as if you were from another planet. ‘What are you talking about?’ the men will respond. ‘I have no power. My wife bosses me around, my children boss me around, my boss bosses me around. I am completely powerless!’ (p. 215).

Men’s feelings of powerlessness and the potential for anger resulting from perceived subjugation are “real” in the sense that men experience these feelings “deeply and sincerely” (Kimmel, 2013, p. 8). Kimmel (2013), however, contends that these feelings are not “true” (p. 8), as they do not accurately depict men’s collective position of power and privilege in the social and gender hierarchies (see also Kimmel, 2010, p. 215). Nevertheless, Kimmel (2013) contends that men “may not feel powerful, but they do feel entitled to feel powerful” (p. 111).

This sense of entitlement signifies a shift away from feelings of entrepreneurial anxiety that characterized masculinity in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Dummit, 2007, p. 4; Kimmel, 2013, p. 20). Within the neoliberal context, which was exacerbated by the plight of the American Dream and changes traditional patriarchal order, this anxiety developed into a sense of entitlement. Subsequently, this new masculine anger is reactionary and “seeks to restore, to retrieve, to reclaim something that is perceived to have been lost” (Kimmel, 2013, p. 21). Kimmel (2013) conceptualizes this anger as “aggrieved entitlement,” or the sense of entitlement to power that has been “thwarted” through women’s liberation and the emancipation of racially and sexually diverse populations (pp. 21-24). Aggrieved entitlement can be located in masculinist phrases of the men’s movement (p. 112), and also in the anti-feminist rhetoric of fathers’ rights activism; this

entitlement is the driving force behind what Kimmel (2013) terms “everyday Sodinis<sup>13</sup>,” which are men who go on “mini rampages” of sexual and intimate partner violence (pp. 173-176).

## **2.8.2. Masculinities, Power, and Violence**

Initial theorization linking masculinity, power, and violence is reflected in the radical, cultural, Marxist, and socialist feminist discourses. Radical and cultural feminists focused on the assumed differences between men and women and suggested that men’s violence was a form of “heteropatriarchy” (Connell, 1987, p. 58; see also Messerschmidt, 1993, p. 46). Of note, radical and cultural feminism played a crucial role in connecting patriarchal structures to action (e.g., men’s violence against women). Nevertheless, these discourses provided a less nuanced approach and lack a multidimensional lens to theorizing about gender and violence. Alternatively, Marxist feminists asserted that: 1) gender relations, and subsequently patriarchy, were secondary to that of the capitalist structure; and 2) men’s violence was a means maintaining “control over women’s productive capacity” (Robatham, 1973, as cited in Messerschmidt, 1993, p. 53). Building from this framework, but adopting a more critical approach, socialist feminists addressed how the “interconnectedness of social relations” (e.g., race, class, gender, sexuality) operated within patriarchal and capitalist structures to (re)produce gender relations, power, and gendered violence (Messerschmidt, 1993, pp. 54-55).

Messerschmidt (1993) adapted the socialist feminist framework in his theorization of men’s criminality and violence. He suggested that men’s violence was a by-product of the complex dynamics of gender, class, and power in the context of patriarchy and capitalism:

First, to comprehend criminality (of both the powerless and the powerful), we must consider simultaneously patriarchy and capitalism and their effects on human behavior. Second, from a socialist feminist perspective, power (in terms of gender and class) is central for understanding the serious forms of criminality. [...] Further, the interaction of gender and

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<sup>13</sup> The term “everyday Sodinis” is derived from the 2009 mass murder-suicide in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania committed by George Sodini, whose manifesto alleged that he was repeatedly denied sex from “frigid harpies” and subsequently executed his revenge (Kimmel, 2013, pp. 170-172). Sodini is constructed as a “hero” in many anti-feminist men’s rights blogs (p. 172). A more contemporary term for these men is incels.

class creates positions of power and powerlessness in the gender/class hierarchy, resulting in different types and degrees of criminality and varying opportunities to engage in them (p. 56).

This formulation was critiqued, however, as it conceptualized criminality as the result of social and economic structures, while failing to acknowledge individual agency and the meaning of action itself (p. 57). Subsequently, utilizing critical gender and social frameworks, Messerschmidt (1993) adapted his theory to include the socially situated “doing” and accomplishment of gender (pp. 77-81; Messerschmidt, 2014; see also West & Zimmerman, 1987) and hegemonic/subordinated masculinities (pp. 81-83; see also Connell, 1987, 1995, 2005a). This became known as structured action theory, which rectified the disconnect between structure (i.e., patriarchy, capitalism) and action (i.e., individual agency) that existed in previous conceptualizations of men’s violence (Comack, 2008, p. 16).

Structured action theory posits that men’s criminality and violence should be understood in a framework that explores the interconnectedness between “embodied gender, race, class, and sexual practices” in settings that are conducive to, or may even require, the *doing* of gendered violence (Messerschmidt, 2014, pp. 35-36). The continual enactment of gender/race/class/sexuality is located within inseparable and interdependent natures of structure and action, as well as the socially situated and intersectional nature of these identity markers (p. 119), which occur within the context of power and systems of patriarchy and capitalism. Within this framework, men’s violence against women is a by-product of the situated enactment and accomplishment of traditional patriarchal masculinity in an effort to maintain the gendered divisions of labour and control over women (Messerschmidt, 1993, pp. 142-158).

Messerschmidt’s (1993) work provides a useful framework for analyzing violence as a socially and structurally situated action that is embedded in the gendered practices of men. Hood-Williams (2001), however, contends that Messerschmidt’s analysis is tautological in nature:

And why is this masculine? Because men do it. The argument is clear: every (criminal) thing that men do is masculine. But if everything that men do is masculine then the concept of masculinity is an empty tautology: gender collapses into sex (p. 45).

Thus, structured action theory has the capacity to reify and conflate gender and violence, which suggests that Messerschmidt's (2014) framework does not demonstrate the intersectional nature of gender, race, class, and sexuality in the enactment and accomplishment of gender through violence.

Kimmel (2013) provides an alternative framework that demonstrates the inextricably linked natures of power, gender, and violence; however, his (2013) theorization is located in the dynamics of power and control. Kimmel (2013) suggests that senses of entitlement, and subsequently entitlement "thwarted" (e.g., aggrieved entitlement), relate to men's instrumental use of violence in an effort to restore their power and patriarchal dominance over women (pp. 176-179). Further, Kimmel (2013) dismisses Freudian notions of the interconnected nature of love/anger and sex/aggression; instead, he suggests that violence is a masculine response to experiences of vulnerability and shame. As such, Kimmel (2013) contends:

If masculinity is based on impermeable defenses and the feeling of being in control, then violence may be restorative, returning the situation to the moment before that sense of vulnerability and dependency was felt and one's sense of masculinity so compromised. But still, one needs an additional ingredient: the feeling of right or entitlement. One must feel entitled to use violence as a means of restoring what they experienced as threatened, the part of the self that is suddenly made vulnerable (p. 177).

In this sense, violence is restorative as it re-establishes men's honour and position as patriarch.

Conceptualizing male-perpetrated intimate violence as a means of maintaining power and responding to situations that challenge patriarchal authority (e.g., women asserting independence, dissolution of intimate relationships) suggests that men's use of violence is exercised to reassert control and maintain subordination (Bergen, 1996; DeKeseredy, 2011; DeKeseredy & MacLeod, 1997; Stark, 2007; Websdale, 1998, 1999). This is situated within many different frameworks:

1. Marxist feminist approaches that conceptualize violence against women as a means through which unequal gender relations between men and women are created and perpetuated within capitalist societies (DeKeseredy & MacLeod, 1997, pp. 44-45; see also Schwendinger & Schwendinger, 1983, pp. 178-79);

2. power and control models that suggest acts of violence are part of a larger system of domination (Braithwaite & Daly, 1994, pp. 189-211) and responses to challenges of patriarchal authority (Bergen, 1996; Seidler, 2006, pp. 52-54; Websdale, 1998, 1999);
3. analyses of violence as a means of responding to feelings of shame/emasculatation and restoring honour (Winlow, 2001, p. 44); and
4. ongoing emotional (e.g., isolation, alienation, manipulation) and routine physical violence to ensure women's subjugation, which Stark (2007) terms "coercive control" (p. 15).

Further, in line with a radical feminist discourse, McInnes (2008) contends that even compulsory heterosexuality (see Rich, 1983) and the politics of difference (for example, see Brownmiller, 1976) result in acts of sexual and intimate violence in an effort to maintain the gender divide (pp. 72-77). Regardless of their somewhat diverse theoretical frameworks, these approaches contextualise male-perpetrated intimate violence within the broader structures of patriarchy<sup>14</sup>, power/control, and entitlement. As Connell (2005a) notes,

[v]iolence is part of a system of domination, but is at the same time a measure of its imperfection. A thoroughly legitimate hierarchy would have less need to intimidate" (p. 84).

This indicates that while men's violence is bound to systems of power and control, acts of violence often reflect a real or perceived loss of power and an attempt to regain control through physical and/or emotional domination.

### **2.8.3. Men's and Fathers' Rights Approaches to Violence**

As Bertoria and Drakich (1993), Sen (2006), and Smart (2004) suggest, the issues of domestic violence and child abuse in relation to fathers' rights are often unaddressed by father's rights activists and critical legal scholars alike (see also Amyot, 2006; Braver & Griffin, 2000; Crowley, 2006). However, the common themes that arise in

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<sup>14</sup> Anderson et al. (2012) provide an example of how the link between patriarchy and violence plays out in the Canadian context with their discussion on Indigenous masculinities, colonization, and violence (pp. 266-280).

the small body of literature that acknowledges the role of violence and abuse in the FRM are analyses of FRGs attempts to:

1. minimize/discredit claims of violence through assertions of “scorned women fabricating abuse in attempts to alienate fathers” (i.e., the now discredited Paternal Alienation Syndrome/PAS) (Adams, 2006, pp. 1-8);
2. frame mothers as maniacal extortionists who falsify claims of violence to increase alimony/child support payments (Boyd, 2006; Coltrane & Hickman, 1992, pp. 411-412; Dragiewicz, 2010; Flood, 2010, pp. 338-339; Flood, 2012; Rosen et al., 2009);
3. prioritize paternal contact over women/children’s safety from violence (Boyd, 2006, pp. 26-27; Crowley, 2009; Flood, 2010, p. 33; Rosen et al., 2009; Watson & Ancis, 2013, p. 168);
4. frame claims of violence and anti-violence advocacy as a feminist assault on fathers (Crowley, 2009; Dragiewicz, 2008; Flood, 2010);
5. focus on gender symmetry in the perpetration of intimate partner violence (Boyd, 2006; Crowley, 2009a, p. 741; Dragiewicz, 2008, p. 137; Lysova et al., 2019; Rosen et al., 2009);
6. suggest that policies aimed at preventing violence are a hindrance to father-child relationships (Crowley, 2009, p. 226; Davis, 2004, p. 299) and exist at the “expense of honest, innocent dads” (Crowley, 2008, p. 160); and
7. dismiss the relationship between patriarchy and violence (Dragiewicz, 2008, p. 124; Rosen et al., 2009).

However, critical approaches to understanding men’s violence negate FRAs claims.

Fathers’ rights assertions that women falsify claims of abuse to gain advantage during family court proceedings are grounded in outdated theories, such as Paternal Alienation Syndrome (PAS), Threatened Mother Syndrome (TMS), and Malicious Mother Syndrome (MAS) (Adams, 2006, pp. 1-8). These alleged syndromes are not scientifically supported and have been discredited, as proponents of these syndromes are unable to provide evidence to uphold their assertions that mothers fabricate stories of abuse. Nevertheless, PAS, TMS, and MAS are powerful in practice, even though they are not theoretically sound or scientifically proven. Those involved in family law proceedings (e.g., lawyers, judges, and mediators) may utilize these syndromes assuming that they



are “scientifically established” and supported mental health diagnoses (p. 5). Similarly, many FRAs contend that:

charges of sexual and emotional abuse are routinely manufactured during custody hearings by ‘female social workers who have a history of being molested themselves, lawyers who coach women to make false accusations, and vindictive, vicious mothers who coach and work with their children’ (Coltrane & Hickman, 1992, p. 412; see also Crowley, 2008, p. 183).

Dragiewicz (2008), however, argues that there is no evidence to substantiate, or even support, these claims (p. 137; see also Meier, 2009; Neilson et al., 2019).

Critical approaches to understanding men’s violence contradict some of fathers’ rights assertions. As previously noted, power, patriarchy, and violence are intrinsically interconnected in many of the frameworks that critically analyze men’s violence against women, which challenges FRAs contentions that patriarchy and violence are not linked (Dragiewicz, 2008, p. 124; Rosen et al., 2009). Further, through patriarchal peer support, these groups create a subculture that supports and condones violence as a means of maintaining control and authority (Dragiewicz, 2008, pp. 126-127; Dragiewicz, 2010, p. 203), which further evidences the relationship between patriarchy and violence.

Men’s/fathers’ rights assertions regarding gender symmetry in violence (Boyd, 2006; Crowley, 2009, Dragiewicz, 2008; Rosen et al. 2009) and claims that men are the true victims of intimate partner violence (Dragiewicz, 2010; Flood, 2010) are often based on the Conflict Tactic Scales (CTS) which measure occurrences, but not the severity or on-going nature, of violence (DeKeseredy, 2011, pp. 44-46). Subsequently, Kimmel (2010) suggests that the CTS is “less a reliable instrument and more like a massage school for data on interpersonal violence” (p. 67), because it disregards the context (i.e., initiation, nature of relationship, strength of involved parties), motivation (i.e., expressive/instrumental), and impact (i.e., severity, injury/ies) of such violence (pp. 105-110). Further, as Crowley (2009) contends, analyses ground in the CTS fail to acknowledge the difference between perpetration and impact of violence (p. 741). It is well established that men’s violence causes significantly more harm than acts of violence perpetrated by women (p. 741; DeKeseredy, 2011, pp. 44-46; Kimmel, 2010, pp. 105-110).

Even if there were some truth to these claims, they are nevertheless rooted in anti-feminist/pro-patriarchal discourses. As Kimmel (2013) notes:

[...] what if we take such ridiculous claims on their face? Here's a question I often ask [men's rights activists] about the claims they make about domestic violence. They claim that women hit men as often as men hit women, *not* that men don't hit women as often as feminist women claim they do. That is, their claim of 'gender symmetry' is that women's rates of violence are equal to men's rates. What if we were to assume that their claims are true? Then they should be advocating for more shelters for battered men – but not challenging the number of shelters for battered women. That is, domestic violence, by their logic, is not a zero-sum game. If these guys were really interested in serving legions of battered men, they would ally themselves with feminist women in the antiviolence movement and advocate for greater funding for men's shelters in addition to maintaining funding for women's shelters. They're actually not interested in those legions of battered men, only in discrediting feminist women's efforts to protect women who have been battered. (p. 120)

Kimmel's (2013) analysis demonstrates the fundamental flaw in men's rights and fathers' rights discourses on violence. They are not contending that women/feminists are incorrect in their assertions about men's violence; rather, they attempt to absolve men's violence by equating it with women's violence.

## 2.9. Conclusion

This chapter provides an in-depth overview of the existing literature that explores the theoretical and conceptual frameworks through which fatherhood, fathers' rights, and fatherhood movements have traditionally been understood. Contemporary examinations of the rights and responsibilities of fathers, along with understandings of fatherhood within the contexts of families pre/post-separation and family law, are predominantly portrayed through the conflicting discourses of the FRM and feminist legal analyses. The FRM is grounded in the rhetoric of rights (for example, see Brownstone, 2009; Leving, 1997), but this activism is critiqued for not requesting the corresponding *responsibilities* that go hand-in-hand with these *rights* (Boyd, 2006, p. 39). For example, feminist legal scholars deconstruct how fathers' rights advocacy, which denotes a dialogue of paternal control and maternal responsibility, perpetuates the marginalization of women (for example, see Amyot, 2010; Boyd, 2013; Dragiewicz, 2010; Flood, 2010, 2012; Watson & Ancis, 2013). Both of these competing discourses, however, often neglect how men

negotiate fatherhood outside of the dichotomous framework of paternal control and maternal responsibility, and also the gendered and multidimensional experiences of men and fathers. Further, these dialogues politicize fatherhood, which shifts the discourse further away from everyday domestic experiences of fathers regarding fatherhood, dissolution of the family, and family law.

## **Chapter 3. Methodology and Methodological Considerations**

### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter outlines the methodological considerations that served as the foundation for the development and execution of both phases of this research (i.e., phase 1/qualitative content analysis and phase 2/in-depth semi-structured interviews), which, as noted in Chapter 1, were guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences, narratives, and beliefs that underlie fathers' rights and involved fatherhood activism?
2. How do these groups, and fathers involved in these groups, grapple with and characterize fatherhood, the roles and responsibilities of fathers, experience within the family pre/post separation, engagement with children and the extended family, the family law process, and custody/access issues?
3. What programs and resources are offered by FRGs and involved fatherhood groups (hereafter IFGs)? Further, what forms of fatherhood and masculinities and family structures do these groups and resources promote?
4. How are the experiences and perceptions of individual members of FRGs and IFGs situated by comparison to messages portrayed by these groups?
5. What are these fathers' experiences with and perceptions of fatherhood and family law?
6. How are the messages portrayed by FRGs and IFGs, as well as the perceptions and experiences of fathers engaged in FRGs and IFGs, situated within the broader contexts of patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, multidimensionality, and critical masculinities?

These guiding questions allowed for a more complex examination fatherhood and fatherhood groups that is situated within critical gender (i.e., feminist theory, critical masculinities) and neoliberal frameworks.

### 3.2. Phase One and Sampling

The FRM is heavily documented and analyzed (for example, see Amyot, 2010; Boyd, 2013; Dragiewicz, 2010; Watson & Ancis, 2013). As previously established, however, limited research and literature exist regarding fathers involved in groups and social movements outside of the critical examinations of the FRM. Therefore, I conducted a qualitative content analysis of the rhetoric, dialogue, and discursive practices of the parallel FRM and IFM in Canada to develop this body of research. The sample for phase one of this study consisted of the websites, online resources, and web presence<sup>15</sup> of Canadian FRGs and IFGs from, or with a connection to, Canada. The inclusion criteria for this sample are as follows:

1. Groups and support networks must be fatherhood-focused or, in the instance of larger men's groups, provide resources and support specifically for fathers;
2. Groups and support networks must be Canadian-based or have a Canadian sector; and
3. The websites, online resources, and web presence must be accessible.<sup>16</sup>

Using purposive sampling, I conducted an extensive online search to compile a database of FRGs and IFGs from across Canada between 2016-2019 (see table 1). Consistent with purposive sampling techniques (see Palys & Atchison, 2013, pp. 113-115; see also Robinson, 2014), I identified a "target sample" (p. 153) based on the inclusion criteria noted above, which is also known as "criterion sampling" (p. 114). This target sample echoes the study's focus, which is indicative of purposive sampling. To avoid imposing existing definitions of concepts such as fatherhood, families, and social groups/movements, I selected broad inclusion criteria to allow definitions, themes, and key issues to emerge naturally through these data.

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<sup>15</sup> In this context, the term "web presence" refers to platforms such as blogs, forums, and public group pages on Facebook.

<sup>16</sup> See Appendix C for a provincial and territorial breakdown of the less accessible, inaccessible, and potentially disbanded groups across Canada.

**Table 1: Canada-wide FRGs and IFGs<sup>17</sup>**

<i>FRGs in Canada</i>	<i>IFGs in Canada</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC Fathers</li> <li>• BC Men’s Resource Centre</li> <li>• Canadian Equal Parenting Council</li> <li>• Dads Aiming for Direction and Support</li> <li>• DADS Canada</li> <li>• Divorce for Men</li> <li>• Equal Parenting BC</li> <li>• Equitable Child Maintenance and Access Society</li> <li>• Ex-Fathers</li> <li>• Family of Men Support Society</li> <li>• Fathers Are Capable Too (F.A.C.T): Parenting Association</li> <li>• Fathers Canada</li> <li>• Fathers’ Resources International</li> <li>• Fathers’ Rights Alberta</li> <li>• Fathers-4-Justice Canada</li> <li>• Human Equality Action &amp; Resource Team (HEART)</li> <li>• In Search of Justice</li> <li>• Movement for the Establishment of Real Gender Equality (MERGE)</li> <li>• Nanaimo Men’s Centre: Resources for Men and Their Families</li> <li>• Occupy Family Court! Fathers’ Rights in Canada</li> <li>• Ottawa Men’s Resource Centre</li> <li>• Parent &amp; Child Advocacy Coalition</li> <li>• Winnipeg DADS</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abby Dads: Father Involvement Program</li> <li>• Alberta Father Involvement Initiative</li> <li>• BC Council for Families</li> <li>• Better Fathers Inc.</li> <li>• Canadian Father Involvement Network</li> <li>• Dad Central</li> <li>• Fatherhood Visibility Working Group</li> <li>• Father Involvement Research Alliance</li> <li>• Fathers For Equality</li> <li>• Fathers For Life</li> <li>• Gay Men Who Want To Be Dads</li> <li>• Gays with Kids</li> <li>• Gay Fathers of Toronto</li> <li>• Men for Change</li> <li>• Men’s Educational Support Association (MESA)</li> <li>• National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health (NCCAH)<sup>18</sup></li> <li>• Nobody’s Perfect</li> <li>• The Nurturing Fathers Program</li> <li>• Parents Coalition of British Columbia</li> <li>• Parents Without Partners<sup>19</sup></li> <li>• Parent Support Circles</li> <li>• Parent Support Services Society of BC</li> <li>• Saskatoon Men’s Resource Centre</li> <li>• Victoria Men’s Centre</li> <li>• Young and Potential Fathers</li> </ul>

<sup>17</sup> See Appendix B for a provincial and territorial breakdown of these groups and Appendix D for the primary websites associated with each group listed in table 1.

<sup>18</sup> The NCCAH is not a formal father’s group, but they do provide support services for, and advocate on behalf of, Indigenous fathers.

<sup>19</sup> Parents Without Partners is a support group for single parents with an emphasis on fatherhood. It is based out of the United States, but there are two chapters in Ontario.

The above noted sample is not comprehensive, as some provinces and territories had groups that were inaccessible, accessible through limited means, or disbanded.<sup>20</sup> Further, I could not locate active groups in the territories and some of the provinces. Accordingly, groups in these areas have not been included in the sample.

These data were preliminarily categorized based on the rhetoric and dialogue on the groups' websites and online resources. Groups and group members who demonstrated rhetoric consistent with that of the FRM were categorized as FRGs (e.g., rights without responsibilities, paternal control, parental alienation), while groups whose online presence emphasized issues such as engagement in the family pre/post separation, responsible fathering, and programs aimed to improve father-child relationships were categorized as IFGs. These were preliminary categorizations but served to provide a clearer picture of the sample at the outset. Through in-depth coding and analysis, which is described below, the categorization of each group was reconsidered and, when necessary, adjusted.

### **3.2.1. Coding and Analysis**

I engaged in a grounded theory approach during the processes of coding and analysis, which allowed the theoretical framework to emerge from these data (as recommended by Charmaz & Bryant, 2008, pp. 374-376; Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012; Saldaña, 2013, pp. 28-29). To familiarize myself with these data, I began with open coding of the websites, online resources, and web presences belonging to these groups (as recommended by Saldaña, 2013, pp. 100-104; see also Benaquisto, 2008, pp. 86-87; Corbin & Strauss, 2015), which unearthed tentative themes to guide the formal coding process. As recommended by Charmaz (2014), I used line-by-line coding during the initial coding process to “assess what is happening in each line of the data and what theoretical ideas exist” (p. 343). The line-by-line coding process produced an initial framework and themes which were the foundation for the more in-depth coding process that followed (Charmaz, 2005; Charmaz, 2014, p. 343; Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012). Further, consistent with the line-by-line approach, a careful analysis of each line of these data fostered more meaningful themes, because through this process these data were

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<sup>20</sup> See the full breakdown of less accessible groups and unrepresented provinces/territories in Appendix B.

deconstructed into smaller, individual entities (Chenail, 2012, p. 266). Further, the use of thoughtful line-by-line coding during the initial coding process minimized the possibility that themes were misidentified or miscoded (Charmaz, 2005; Charmaz, 2014).

Nevertheless, many of these initial themes developed through the on-going engagement in this process (i.e., clarified, expanded, discarded).

After initial coding was complete and tentative overarching thematic categories were established, these data were uploaded into *NVivo 12*<sup>21</sup> and each group's websites and online resources were individually and inductively coded to allow the concepts and themes to emerge from these textual data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). At the outset of the focused coding process, I continued to engage in the line-by-line method and incorporated "vivo codes," which are codes that are obtained from and emerged through these data (Benaquisto, 2008, p. 86; see also Saldaña, 2013, pp. 91-92, 213). At this stage, these data were coded separately (i.e., each group's web presence was coded individually).

Emergent themes were grouped into nodes/thematic categories and sub-nodes (i.e., themes that emerge within and/or are related to the primary thematic category). While these nodes and sub-nodes identified the connection between each broad theme and each additional theme grouped within, *NVivo's* relationships' function was used to identify connections between sub-nodes within each category, as well as the relationships between and among nodes and sub-nodes in two or more different categories. During this interpretive process, nodes and sub-nodes were reformulated and merged to account for themes that emerged and/or became heavily interconnected during later stages of coding. Each of the websites and online resources were reviewed several times in differing orders to ensure that they were coded fully and appropriately. Lastly, using *NVivo's* relationships' function, these data were re-coded to identify any additional connections.

### **3.2.2. Potential Barriers**

With respect to phase one of this study, there were some barriers to accessing these groups. As previously noted, some groups had limited accessibility, and, to the

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<sup>21</sup> *NVivo 12* is qualitative data analysis software.



best of my knowledge, some provinces and territories had no active groups at the time of data collection.<sup>22</sup> Aside from the barriers created by limited accessibility of groups in the territories and some provinces, there were no known barriers in gaining access to these data.

### **3.2.3. Ethical Considerations**

The websites, online resources, and web presence that constituted the data for phase one of this research were publicly available. Accordingly, there were no requirements regarding ethics approval or anonymizing these data for the first phase of this study. Therefore, the names of groups were not anonymized in the write-up of the first phase, which is consistent with the approach taken by previous researchers (for example, see Amyot, 2010; Boyd, 2013; Dragiewicz, 2010; Watson & Ancis, 2013).

## **3.3. Phase Two**

Through the use of in-depth, semi-structured interviews, phase two of this study focused on the voices and experiences of fathers who participate in FRGs and/or IFGs in BC, along with fathers from national groups who engage in oversight and activism within BC. The rationale behind this refined focus was the progressive socio-legal context present within the province. The *Family Law Act* (FLA), which came into force in BC in 2013, aimed to alter the familial and legal landscapes by supporting egalitarian family models, privileging contact with both parents, and affording fathers more access to their children post-separation through progressive guardianship provisions.

### **3.3.1. Sampling**

In phase two, study participants consisted of 27 men who were engaged in fatherhood groups and activism in BC. As recommended by Palys and Atchison (2013, pp. 113-115; see also Palys, 2008, pp. 697-698), I utilized purposive sampling, which dictated that my sample size was dependent on generating enough data to thoroughly answer the research questions and reach the point of saturation (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Further, the inclusion criteria for potential participants were as follows:

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<sup>22</sup> A full breakdown of these groups is available in Appendix A.

1. Over the age of 18;
2. Previous or current involvement in one or more of the BC-based FRGs and/or IFGs, as well as those from national fathers' groups with engagement in BC; and
3. A father to one or more children.<sup>23</sup>

This sampling approach excluded fathers who were not affiliated with fatherhood groups active in and/or connected to BC, as they were unable to provide insights consistent with the parameters established for this study.

**Table 2: BC-Based FRGs and IFGs<sup>24</sup>**

FRGs in BC	IFGs in BC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC Fathers</li> <li>• BC Men's Resource Centre</li> <li>• Divorce for Men</li> <li>• Equal Parenting BC</li> <li>• Parent &amp; Child Advocacy Coalition</li> <li>• Fathers' Rights Action Team (FRAT)</li> <li>• Nanaimo Men's Centre: Resources for Men and Their Families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abby Dads: Father Involvement Program</li> <li>• BC Council for Families</li> <li>• Fathers for Equality</li> <li>• Father's Support Group White Rock</li> <li>• Nobody's Perfect</li> <li>• Parents Coalition of British Columbia</li> <li>• Parent Support Circles</li> <li>• Parent Support Services Society of BC</li> <li>• Single Fathers Support Group</li> <li>• Vancouver Dads Group: #YVRDads</li> <li>• Vancouver Gay Dads Group</li> <li>• Victoria Men's Centre</li> </ul>

<sup>23</sup> I did not set parameters on the concepts of fatherhood or having children. Rather, I examined men's experiences and perceptions of being fathers, which is predicated on the basis of what they experience as fatherhood (e.g., biological, adopted, step-children) instead of traditional or legal conceptions.

<sup>24</sup> See Appendix C for a list of the primary websites associated with each group listed in table 2.

A combination of purposive sampling, based on the above noted inclusion criteria, and snowball sampling were used to recruit participants (see Palys, 2008, pp. 697-698). The initial contact and call for participants were made through the gatekeeper(s) of each group.<sup>25</sup> This initial contact was made via publicly accessible e-mails listed on fathers' rights and involved fatherhood websites. I acknowledge that physical presence and in-person interactions are important elements of building rapport (see Palys & Atchison, 2013), but for the purposes of recruitment I did not attend any meetings or access these spaces. These spaces are typically considered safe spaces for men and fathers, and entering these spaces uninvited and without approval had the potential to harm relationships and infringe on the group members' privacy.<sup>26</sup>

### **3.3.2. Semi-structured Interviews**

To account for differences in men's experiences and understandings of fatherhood, and also the complexity that is inherent to human experience, I engaged in qualitative in-depth, semi-structured interviews. This semi-structured approach allowed me to engage in open-ended conversation with the participants about the themes identified on the interview guide,<sup>27</sup> as well as let each conversation be guided by the participant's unique experiences (as recommended by Cook, 2008, pp. 422-423). These interviews were conducted in-person whenever possible (i.e., 6 participants), as I value this interaction and depth it can bring to each interview. Due to necessity (e.g., participants located in isolated and rural locations in northern BC) and, in some instances, participant preference, telephone and Skype interviews were also conducted (i.e., 21 participants). With the participants' informed consent, which was obtained verbally, all of the interviews were audio recorded.

Interviews took place from 2017 to 2018.<sup>28</sup> Each interview consisted of non-restrictive, open-ended conversation, and the interview guide was used to provide a framework for each interview and ensure comparability among these data. I began by

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<sup>25</sup> The term gatekeeper refers to the individual listed as the primary contact for each group.

<sup>26</sup> See Appendix D for the call for participants and Appendix E for the study information sheet.

<sup>27</sup> See Appendix F for the full interview guide

<sup>28</sup> The interviews took place shortly before the start of the major law reform process to revise the federal *Divorce Act*.

introducing myself, the research, and overall ethical considerations, such as participant confidentiality, in addition to answering any questions the participant had about the study and overall process. Then, I transitioned to asking the participant to tell me about their experiences as fathers; the themes and questions on the interview guide provided a general framework for each interview, while nevertheless allowing the participants to talk freely about their experiences. Consistent with feminist epistemology in general, and masculinity theory specifically, the interviews were semi-structured in order to allow the participants to freely express their beliefs and values, as well as their understandings of and perspectives on their experiences. Engaging in a conversation-style interview not only created dialogic space for participants' voices to emerge, but also fostered rapport between participant and researcher. During each interview, demographic data were also obtained from the participant, such as age, race/ethnicity, location, and family structure.

### **3.3.3. Transcription**

The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim soon after they took place, which helped to avoid any inaccuracies in my recollections whereby minimizing the loss of non-verbal and contextual elements of these data (as recommended by Poland, 2008, pp. 884-855). I anonymized each interview using pseudonyms as participant identifiers, and also removed other possible identifiers from these data, to ensure participant confidentiality (as recommended by Palys & Atchison, 2013, pp. 75-76). Each participant was given the opportunity to select their own pseudonym. However, none of the participants identified names by which they would like to be referred in the write-up, so participant numbers are used in the place of pseudonyms in this dissertation. Further, I completed a validity check of each transcript to ensure it was consistent with the audio recording. As stipulated in the ethics approval for this study, upon transcription and validity check the raw data was deleted to maintain participant confidentiality. However, the fully anonymized transcripts will be retained in a secure location indefinitely.

### **3.3.4. Coding and Analysis**

Coding and analysis for phase two largely echoed that of phase one. After the transcription process detailed above, I uploaded the transcripts into *NVivo 12* and engaged in the initial line-by-line coding and analytic processes (see phase one coding

section for a detailed explanation of this process; see also Charmaz, 2014; Chenail, 2012; Saldaña, 2013). After the completion of initial coding, the focused coding process began for each transcript, then transitioned to identifying relationships among codes and themes. Throughout the coding process, I engaged in line-by-line coding, as it is the most effective means of coding and allows for in-depth engagement with these data (as recommended by Charmaz, 2014; see also Saldaña, 2013). The meaningful and engaged coding of these data allowed themes to emerge and speak for themselves. Following the coding and analysis of phase two data, I used the relationships' function on *NVivo* to re-code the phase one and phase two data to identify commonalities, differences, and any relationships that exist among these data. Further, the analysis was an *iterative* process. For me, the iterative process meant shifting among my research questions, these data, emerging themes, and the literature. This process informed the formation of the theoretical framework and meaning-making within my findings and conclusions. For example, I began this research with two established categories of fatherhood groups (i.e., FRG, IFG). My initial thought was that the distinction would be fairly clear cut between the two groups. However, through analyzing these data, revisiting and reformulating emergent themes, and reflecting on the literature related to masculinities and modern social movements, it became clear that the groups were more fluid in nature and did not have clearly structured identities. This resulted in the creation of additional and less structured categories of fatherhood groups (i.e., blended fatherhood groups, fatherhood networks) (see section 5.1 of Chapter 5).<sup>29</sup>

### **3.3.5. Potential Barriers and Limitations**

To the best of my knowledge, I did not encounter any barriers gaining access to this population, and within a week of the first call for participants many fathers responded indicating their interest in participating in this research. Nevertheless, a common critique of women researching men suggests that men may be less likely to participate (Pini & Pease, 2013, p. 6). However, I do not consider this to be a legitimate critique, and contend that women should not be dissuaded from engaging in such research. Further, men who engaged in fathers' rights and pro-fatherhood activism are consistently involved in research conducted by women and men alike (for example, see Crowley, 2009a, 2009b), and previous researchers have not indicated difficulties

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<sup>29</sup> The phase 2 *NVivo* codebook is available in Appendix H.

accessing this population. I was conscious of the issue of access as a potential barrier during data collection, but did not encounter any issues recruiting and engaging participants.

I acknowledge that making the option of telephone or Skype interviews available to participants in remote locations raises concerns regarding building rapport between the interviewer and interviewee. The root of these concerns is that telephone interviews “compromise rapport, probing, and interpretation of responses” (Novick, 2008, p. 391). As previously noted and recommended by Novick (2008, pp. 391-394), however, I afforded the option of telephone and Skype interviews to my participants in instances when face-to-face interviews were not practical and/or possible. The potential depth added to this study by including the voices and experiences of fathers in remote locations outweighed the potential disadvantages associated with using telephone or Skype as an interview platform.

The focus on men allied with social movements and activist groups has the potential to misrepresent or neglect some of the issues surrounding the common experiences of fathers, as most men and fathers are not affiliated with social/political movements. For example, the men who join these groups may not be representative of most fathers, as their experiences are either indicative of privilege and entitlement (i.e., fathers’ rights activism) or the result of subjugation and inequality (e.g., the fatherhood responsibility movement’s focus on fragile families, gay fathers fighting for rights). I was mindful of this during my analysis and addressed this limitation in my conclusions (see Chapter 6).

### **3.3.6. Ethical Considerations**

Phase two involved human participants. Thus, it was reviewed and received approval by the Research Ethics Board (REB) at Simon Fraser University. Prior to beginning phase two, a formal ethics application was prepared in collaboration with my senior supervisor and submitted to the REB. Upon review and approval, phase two of this study commenced.

Potential participants were provided with an information sheet on the details of this project, including the topic overall, their role as a participant, how the information

would be used and disseminated (i.e., dissertation, publications, presentations), protection of the data and eventual destruction of these data, confidentiality, ability to withdraw from the study at any time prior to the final write-up, and any potential risks. Further, they were asked to provide informed consent, which was obtained orally and recorded prior to the interview taking place. This is consistent with Canadian Institutes of Health Research's (2010) recommendation, because the use of verbal consent minimizes potential risks to maintaining participant confidentiality that may occur with the use of written consent (p. 44).

All research involves risk, and ethical practice in qualitative research requires an appreciation of the potential benefits and also understanding and mitigation of any possible harms (Holt, 2012). However, with respect to this research, potential risks to participants were minimal. While the participants were asked to share their experiences as fathers within familial, social, political, and legal spheres, they were recruited as group members and advocates who had experience discussing these issues. Further, participants were not asked directly about topics that posed risk to them or others (e.g., violence). Nevertheless, a detailed list of local counsellors and support services was readily available during each interview. Further, the study information sheet contained my and my senior supervisor's contact information should questions or concerns arise following the interview, which provided an additional opportunity to refer participants to counselling and support services (see Appendix E). None of the participants raised a need for these resources.

### **3.4. Epistemological and Ontological Underpinnings**

#### **3.4.1. Feminist Epistemology**

Similar to Oakley's (1981) non-hierarchical interviewing and in keeping with feminist epistemology, I was conscious of the power dynamic that exists between myself (i.e., the interviewer) and interviewee in traditional forms of interviewing. For instance, there are potential barriers created through hierarchical interviewing, as the interviewer maintains a higher status than the interviewee by treating "interviewees as an object or data-producing machine which, when handled correctly, will function properly" (p. 37). This form of interviewing is considered "proper," because it creates barriers and emphasizes objectivity (pp. 37-41). I rejected these notions, however, as creating

barriers and a false sense of objectivity is not conducive to building rapport or creating a safe space that allowed participants to openly discuss their experiences.

Assuming objectivity in research is counter to reflexivity, which is crucial in qualitative research. As such, I engaged in Oakley's (1981) approach to non-hierarchical interviewing, which she characterizes as "no intimacy without reciprocity" (p. 49). This reduced the divide between me and the participants. Further, I also engaged in Gelsthorpe and Morris' (1990) approach to collaborative interviewing, which involved mutually engaging the interviewer and the interviewee in the research process by emphasizing relationships "as an important element of achieving the quality of information" (p. 91). This approach emphasized interaction, conversation, and dialogue between me (i.e., interviewer) and the participants (i.e., interviewees), which strengthened the relationships and allows each participant the space to open up about their experiences (as recommended by Gelsthorpe & Morris, 1990). For example, the participants and I had open conversations about my role as a feminist researcher, and many had researched me prior to the interview and had in-depth knowledge of my background. P25 (FRG, national) even referred to the principal investigator on a national research project of which I am a part as the "rabid feminist of Canada," and others reflected on what "side" I would take on these issues at the end of this research. Many also referred me to resources that showcased former feminists who, once seeing the FRM from the inside, forwent their feminist allegiances and became men's/fathers' rights activists (e.g., *The Red Pill*).

### **3.4.2. Reflexivity in the Research**

Reflexivity is an instrumental part of qualitative research, because researchers must recognize and fully appreciate their own positioning and understandings in order to not only locate themselves in the research process, but also honour and be inclusive of the voices and lived experiences of the participants (Bryman, 2007; Dowling, 2008; May, 2002; Packer, 2011). Engaging in the on-going process of reflexivity allows researchers to continually evaluate their experiences, beliefs, engagement, and interpretations throughout the research (for example, see Anderson, 2008), as well as develop a theoretical understanding of the research findings without interfering with the narrative (Beuving & Vries, 2015). This process is far more in-depth and complex than simply reflecting on one's own research practices and processes. As Hibbert et al. (2010)



distinguish, reflection is akin to a researcher observing and considering their research practices, while reflexivity requires continually being conscious of, questioning, and analyzing research decisions and processes, and also a researcher's own place within and influence on their research (see also Hayes, 2012).

Reflexivity was a constant consideration regarding my approach to this research and these methodologies because the researcher must remain conscious of their presence in the research; this is interlinked with the proposition that "knowledge cannot be separated from the knower" (Steedman, 1991 as cited in Anderson, 2008, pp. 183-184). The reflexive process allows the researcher to be conscious of and account for their involvement in and influence on the research, including research decisions and interpretations (Anderson, 2008; Hayes, 2012). Through acknowledging one's presence and the existence of subjectivity in research, the continual practice of reflexivity allows the researcher to make thoughtful research decisions and meaningful interpretations of these data. As Denzin contends (1994), "nothing speaks for itself," and researchers cannot make meaning of data while remaining "outside" of the research (as cited in Anderson, 2008, p. 184).

There are both objectivist and subjectivist approaches to reflexivity (Hayes, 2012). Objective reflexivity assumes that there are pre-established realities which allows the researcher and the objects/subjects being researched to remain independent and at an impartial distance from one another. Subjective reflexivity, however, calls into question the potential for distance, impartiality, and truly bias-free research and emphasizes the socially constructed nature of interpretation, meaning-making, and representation in qualitative research (Hayes, 2012; see also Fine, 1994). The ontological and epistemological underpinnings of this research are intertwined with subjective reflexivity, which is echoed in my approach to reflexivity is an active practice that took place throughout the research process (as recommended by Fine, 1994, p. 73). The importance of this practice is two-fold. First, while no research is ever truly objective, remaining reflexive throughout the research process creates space for the researcher to remain open-minded and flexible throughout the research. Second, engaging in reflexivity promotes a more holistic view of the issues at hand, which produces a more credible product.

One way in which reflexivity played a role in this research was on-going reflection on my alignment as a feminist researcher and consciousness of how my views may impact my interpretation of and manner in which I conveyed these data. I remained conscious of the feminist lens at all stages of the research process, especially when engaging in analysis, interpretation, and meaning-making. Further, I understood throughout this process that I ran the risk of inadvertently creating a *master narrative* (see Fine, 1994) that could essentialize the identities and experiences of the participants. For example, I acknowledge that my feminist outlook inevitably shaped the conclusions drawn in this study. However, I structured the phase two findings chapter (i.e., Chapter 5) in a way that conveyed the findings in a more narrative and less analytical form to allow the voices of the participants to speak for themselves. Additionally, in my discussion and conclusions (i.e., Chapter 6) I aimed to maintain a balanced analysis which deconstructed the participants' narratives through the lens of feminist theory and critical masculinities to address themes of power, privilege, and patriarchy, among others, while also emphasizing the participants' accounts, beliefs, and experiences.

One way in which I engaged in reflexivity was to listen to and incorporate *messy* or negative cases (as recommended by Palys & Atchison, 2013), such as participants who reported that they were awarded the guardianship arrangements that they sought and simultaneously expressed the disadvantage that they face in family law processes. Doing this not only allowed me to gain a more complete picture of the issues being studied, but also ensured that all participants' voices were heard, acknowledged, and incorporated into my understanding and analysis of men's experiences as fathers within contemporary neoliberal familial, social, legal, and political spheres. This incorporation of *messy* narrative and promotion of participants' voices addressed a core critique of reflexivity in practice. That is, as Fournier and Grey (2000) suggest, researchers' have a tendency to "privilege" their own voice and keep the experiences and beliefs of participants at an effacing "distance," which is minimized when messy and/or negative cases are included in the findings (p. 22).

Using a feminist epistemology and mutually engaged approach to my research required emphasizing reflexivity in my role as a researcher and locating myself in my research (Gelsthorpe & Morris, 1990, p. 93). As Stanley and Wise (1983) suggest, this process allows researchers to acknowledge that they:

[...] [r]emain human beings complete with all the usual assembly of feelings, failings, and moods. And all of these things influence how we feel about and understand what is going on. Our consciousness is always the medium through which research occurs; there is no method or technique for doing research other than through the medium of the researcher. (p. 157)

Feminist methodologists consider open acknowledgement and understanding of a researcher's own presence in their work to be an asset to their research. Nevertheless, acknowledging one's own presence in research has also generated criticisms that a lack of "objectivity" weakens the analysis by "giving too much focus to the researcher... with an emphasis on self-disclosure rather than on presenting meaningful research" (Anderson, 2008, p. 184). Gelsthorpe and Morris (1990), however, note that these criticisms fail to address that acknowledging and understanding one's own subjectivity improves the quality and depth of qualitative research (p. 93).

I was conscious of both feminist and masculinities methodologies throughout this research. I did not approach this research through a masculinist lens, as this was not a study for/on men, nor for/on women (as recommended by Pini & Pease, 2013, p. 3). Rather, this research was designed to examine diversity and equality in gender, family, and fatherhood, and also generate understanding related to the research questions and produce original knowledge with respect to these issues.

In keeping with a feminist tradition, I problematized the issues of patriarchy, inequalities bound to gender and power in the law, and masculinist approaches to fatherhood, while remaining conscious of my position as a feminist and woman researching men, fatherhood, and masculinities. As Riley et al. (2003, as cited in Pini & Pease, 2013) suggest, male interviewees may "express sexist and derogatory views" (p. 7), which have the potential to harm and silence the voices of female interviewers. In instances such as this, and throughout the research, engaging in reflexive practices allowed me to be conscious of my own vulnerabilities and experiences as a researcher during the data collection and meaning-making processes. Further, thoughtful and reflexive analysis regarding gendered power dynamics within the research process, as well as awareness of the gendered expectations, roles, and relationships during interviews, impact the construction of meaning.

My research gives voice to powerful, subordinated, and other variations of

fatherhood and masculinities. As such, I was conscious of and continually reflexive about the issue of voice, which Fabian (2008) defines as “[...] the multiple, and often conflicting, interpretive positions that must be engaged in the representation of data” (p. 943). Therefore, in my analysis, interpretation, and write-up of these data, I honoured the authenticity of men’s accounts, even if as a feminist I may not always agree with them. For example, Kimmel (2013) suggests that men’s feelings of powerlessness, in addition to those of anger toward non-conforming groups such as feminists and subordinated masculinities, are not “true” in the sense that they are not indicative of their collective position of power (p. 8). These feelings are, however, very much “real,” because men experience them both “deeply and sincerely” (p. 8; see also Kimmel, 2010, p. 215). I was conscious of this during my analysis and write-up by hopefully representing men’s accounts and voices, both powerful and subordinated, as they experience them, not as I perceive them.

### **3.4.3. Power Dynamics in Research**

Power dynamics and asymmetry are common features in qualitative research generally and interviewing more specifically, and these dynamics are created and negotiated on an on-going basis during the research process (Anyan, 2013; Pini & Pease, 2013). As Anyan (2013) suggests, relationships with power in qualitative research are “built up and determined by socioeconomic status, educational or professional background, and gender or ethnic identity of the parties involved” (p. 2). With respect to this research, the most apparent dimension of power that existed within were gender dynamics that were established between me (i.e., a female interviewer) and the participants (i.e., male interviewees), which Anyan (2013) refers to as “powerful participants” (p. 2). However, my position as an academic and researcher had a balancing effect on this power dynamic. For instance, participants often felt that my status afforded me credibility in spheres where they felt silenced (e.g., policy and legal reform).

Much like the debate surrounding men in feminism (e.g., feminist men, pro-feminist men, fem‘men’ists), Pini and Pease (2013) suggest that there are gender and power dynamics underlying women, and more importantly feminists, researching men. Echoing my approach to feminist interviewing discussed above, I was mindful of these power dynamics and used collaborative, mutually-engaged interviewing techniques.

There was, however, the on-going concern of men who subscribe to traditional gender roles challenging this non-hierarchical approach and attempting to situate themselves in a dominant position (Pini & Pease, 2013, pp. 6-8). I was conscious of this power dynamic and the possibility of a negotiation of roles during each of the interviews, and also throughout my analysis, with respect to its potential impact on each participant, myself as the researcher, and these data. In instances in which this issue arose during interviews, however, I did not attempt to renegotiate this dynamic, as it represents issues of gender and power in these data. Choosing not to challenge the power dynamic established by the participant is in line with Hoffman's (2007) recommendation for the interviewer to "abandon some of his or her power" when necessary as a reflexive practice (p. 321). Further, Pini and Pease (2013) suggest that this dynamic is "potentially useful" as it may "enable access" to this population and be conducive to men sharing their experiences and vulnerabilities as women are often seen as "non-threatening" (p. 7).

In research with apparent asymmetrical power dynamics, power and reflexivity are interconnected and inseparable. During the data collection, collaborative, mutually-engaged, and non-hierarchical interviewing techniques and acceptance of each participant's established power dynamic mitigates the potential for the researcher to influence the narrative. During data analysis, however, the researcher reassumes the position of power, which Anyun (2013) refers to as the researcher maintaining "an infrangible privilege to interpret and report what the interviewee actually meant" (p. 6; see also Kvale, 2006). To address this concern, I utilized Coltart and Henwood's (2012) approach to the "ethics of representation," which they suggest is the "very fine line between locating the men's accounts within the representational context" and "fixing them with the evaluative logic" of class, race, gender, and sexual inequalities (p. 39). Similarly, Flicker (2004) emphasizes the importance of both honouring and representing voice even in instances of unclear, inconsistent, or contradictory accounts. Accordingly, I contextualized men's voices within the broader frameworks of multidimensionality and critical masculinities through being conscious of their aggregate position of power that is divided based on the lines of race/class/sexuality, but I did not "fix" or change their accounts, experiences, and beliefs. This honours men's gendered experiences, while nevertheless acknowledging that their voices exist within the context of plurality in men's power(lessness) and gendered experiences and are often reflective of patriarchal

structures.

#### **3.4.4. Grounded Theory**

A grounded theory approach formed the analytical framework for this research, which allowed themes, findings, and ultimately theory to emerge from these data (as recommended by Charmaz & Bryant, 2008, pp. 374-376; Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012; Saldaña, 2013, pp. 28-29). As such, through meaningful and on-going engagement in both the practice of reflexivity and grounded theory, I was able to remain aware of my own thoughts, experiences, and potential biases as a feminist researcher engaging in research both about and, more importantly, *with* men while not imposing my perspectives and beliefs onto these data.

A critique of qualitative research generally and research conducted by outsiders more specifically is the potential for the researcher's analysis to create an othering narrative that is not consistent with the participants' truths and misrepresents their voices (for example, see Fine, 1994). The grounded theory approach, however, requires flexibility and openness when unexpected and unforeseen themes and findings emerge from the data (Charmaz & Bryant, 2008). I admit there were occasions when my beliefs and understandings unintentionally influenced my initial analyses of these data. For example, the anti-feminist beliefs present within facets of fatherhood movements and men therein challenged my ability to honour my participants' voices and accept valid points they raised about socio-legal structures that disenfranchise fathers in the family law process while simultaneously critiquing their patriarchal ideologies and subordinating practices. However, the inherently flexible and inductive nature of grounded theory allowed me to be open to these kinds of unexpected findings, which was of paramount importance when they challenged any preconceived notions I had at the outset of this research (e.g., the credibility of some claims of disadvantage).

#### **3.4.5. Narrative Inquiry and Analysis**

While thematic analysis occurred for both phases of this research, thematic analysis neglects the important nuances and complexities of the narratives that exist within these data. As such, interlinking with reflexive practice and grounded theory, I utilized a narrative analysis when examining and making sense of these data. Narrative

analysis allows for inductive inquiry, which moves beyond the question of *what* (i.e., thematic analysis) to the questions of *how* and *why* by engaging in in-depth analysis of the individually and socially situated content, functions, and meanings of both the fatherhood groups websites, online resources, and web presence (i.e., phase one content analysis) and the individual father's expression of their own beliefs and lived experiences (i.e., phase two interviews) (as recommended by Figgou & Pavlopoulos, 2015).

Garcia Rodriguez (2016) highlights the importance of narrative inquiry when examining narratives online, because unlike in-person communication in which the narrative is "transitory," the written and more permanent nature of online communication allows for widespread "connection and solidarity" which influences many contextual components of these data (e.g., social, interpersonal) (pp. 125-126). These online narratives also have the potential to transcend social, cultural, and geographic bounds that exist with face-to-face communication, which alters not only the reach but also the socio-structural influence of these narratives. As such, the fatherhood groups' websites, online resources, and web presence posed a unique challenge in not only situating and making meaning of the groups' beliefs, ideologies, and messages, but also the interpersonal relational contexts and social implications of connecting socially, culturally, and geographically diverse individuals via the internet.

### **3.5. Conclusion**

The methodological framework and practical considerations, such as the techniques used for sampling, data collection, coding, and analysis and ethical considerations, barriers, and limitations, served as the foundation for the development and execution of phase one and phase two of this research. The epistemological and ontological foundations, as well as use of grounded theory and narrative inquiry, added richness to the more practical methodological considerations. Feminist epistemology and an exploration of the influence of power dynamics in research allowed me to situate myself within this study. These underpinnings were enhanced through a discussion of reflexivity and my consciousness of my own presence in this research as a feminist researcher examining men, fatherhood, and masculinities.

## Chapter 4. The Online Narrative of Fatherhood

### 4.1. Introduction

Through an in-depth qualitative analysis of the online platforms of fatherhood groups, which includes their websites, online resources, and overall web presence (e.g., publicly accessible Facebook groups and online forums as identified in Chapter 3), the narrative of fatherhood within this activism emerged on a spectrum similar to earlier forms of fatherhood activism from conservative, pro-patriarchal traditional conceptions of fatherhood that align with the original FRM (e.g., patriarchal fatherhood) to progressive IFGs that situated fatherhood as meaningful, healthy involvement in families (hereafter referred to as involved fatherhood activism/activists or IFA). These narratives place the groups into three distinct categories: 1) radical pro-patriarchal fathers' rights groups (FRG); 2) father's rights activists (FRA) with a more moderate agenda but fighting similar battles to their traditional and radical counterparts; and 3) IFAs whose online presence focuses on healthy, involved fathering and, in some instances, the right to be fathers in the first place (e.g., gay fathers). Interestingly, the groups share common ground on the types of issues they address (e.g., rights to fatherhood), but the manner in which they address these issues and their stances overall vary dramatically. For example, FRGs focus on rights to control and authority in the family, while the advocacy of gay fatherhood groups advocated for substantively equal access to fatherhood.

This chapter discusses the following themes that emerged from the phase one analysis of these online narratives: 1) the emphasis on fathers' *rights* remains in the online presence of some groups, but there is a noticeable shift toward highlighting healthy relationships, involvement of fathers, and inclusion of non-traditional parenthood in more contemporary and progressive fatherhood groups (see sections 4.2); 2) the clear divide between FRGs who foregrounded ideologies consistent with hegemonic masculinities and IFGs who conveyed more inclusive and multidimensional forms of fatherhood (see sections 4.3 and 4.5); and 3) the continued existence of oppressive and patriarchal politics in response to feminism (see section 4.4) and rhetoric consistent with earlier phases of the FRM on the platforms of some groups (e.g., bias and discrimination against fathers, parental alienation) (see sections 4.6 and 4.7).



## 4.2. The Disappearing FRM

A key emergent theme was how the narrative of the FRM has shifted dramatically within contemporary activism. At the time of my study (2016-2019), the phrase *fathers' rights* itself had largely disappeared from the online discourse, and only a few groups openly used this terminology on their online platforms, resources, and advocacy. The traditional pro-patriarchal rights-based advocacy is simply absent from most groups, and instead many focus on healthy families and fathers' positive involvement in the family pre- and post-separation, such as healthy relationships and fathering, parenting programs and co-parenting strategies, communication, managing anger and other harmful emotions (e.g., loss, grief), working with child services, addictions, and childhood education and development (for example, see Abby Dads, Alberta Father Involvement Initiative, Dads Can, Dads with Dads).

In some cases, groups have made their disconnection from the FRM explicit and actively reject such ideologies. For instance, the Saskatoon Men's Centre notes that they are "not a fathers or men's rights organization" and instead provide services for men and boys that promote "pro-feminist, anti-racist, and gay affirmative" ideologies.

We strive to help men strengthen and reveal their essential nature, which is to be loving, caring and sensitive, and to be healthy partners, fathers, role models, and community members... We are a male-positive, pro-feminist, gay-affirmative and anti-racist non-profit society open to men of all backgrounds, experiences and perspectives.... We do this through providing support, resources and referrals and by offering a safe environment where men's experiences are honoured and respected. (Saskatoon Men's Centre)

The mandates of the other IFGs outline similar ideologies:

Abby Dads is actively involved in supporting dads moving toward healthier relationships with their families. We offer relationship-based training programs for dads such as Anger Awareness and Men in Relationships, and do attachment parenting programming for both parents, including Nobody's Perfect. (Abby Dads)

The mission of Dads Can is to "re-enculture" a fatherhood ideal by promoting responsible and involved fathering through the support of men's personal development into fatherhood and healthy fathering patterns in our society. (Dads Can)

Every man at GFT is a father, step-father, or the partner of one; and all struggle with questions about sexuality, parenting, and responsibilities. Nearly all of us also began suppressing those questions at an early age, but now those questions need answers. “To love unreservedly”, “to end the lie”, “to be true to myself”, “to live authentically” are some typical ways these men describe that need. As fathers they also want to reconcile their dreams with their responsibilities as fathers – even grandfathers. We understand that coming out — to yourself, to your wife, to your children, to family and to friends — is daunting and emotionally challenging. Through the GFT, these dads find common values, a realization they are not alone, and a support as we move forward in our lives. (Gay Fathers of Toronto)

Their mandates are a clear divergence from the traditional rights-based framework of earlier fatherhood activism and outline diverse forms of fatherhood and emphasis healthy, involved fatherhood.

The groups that still espouse the language of *fathers' rights* in the traditional sense are those that openly embrace more radical and patriarchal ideologies, such as Canadian Equal Parenting Council, the Canadian FRM, DADS, Dads&Things, Dads for Life, Hamilton Dads, Fathers for Life, Ottawa Men's Resource Centre, and Toronto Dads. The traditional rights-based narrative is illustrated in the Canadian FRM's mandate:

The plans for the Fathers Rights movement must not be pre-occupied with the tactics of how to deal with radical feminism or judicial inequities and anti-male legislation, although those tactics are important and should under no circumstance be neglected. More importantly, the plans for the Fathers Rights movement must deal with the reasons for its existence: the promotion and nurturance of the concept of fathers within, not without families.

Their mandate echoes many of their FRM predecessors (e.g., the mythopoetic men's movement, Promise Keepers), including allegations of legislation related to families being “anti-male,” promotion of combatting “radical feminism” and “judicial inequities,” and the continued advancement of the belief that all families need fathers (for example, see Blais & Dupuis-Déri, 2012; Messner, 1997).

Some traditional FRG have addressed the visible shift away from the rights-based framework occurring within fatherhood movements and groups, and the Canadian FRM problematized this divergence, which they refer to as “subversion from within,” as

“one of the most prominent problems” in contemporary fatherhood movements. The Canadian FRM explains,

Some of that is motivated by the hatred that gender activists have, for a variety of reasons, for all maleness — even if they are themselves male. Out of that comes dissent that prevents the Fathers Rights movement from becoming a unified social force. Some of the disagreements are over the purpose of the Fathers Rights movement or over irreconcilable ideological objectives.

Logic such as this locates some of the failings within the FRM in alleged betrayal by more progressive gender activism, including more liberal men’s and fatherhood movements (e.g., IFA), which does not align with traditional conceptions of patriarchal masculinity and fatherhood.

Some groups maintained a rights-based narrative similar to the traditional FRM’s conception of *rights* but, while not a new tactic, reframed the articulation of rights to highlight the *rights* of children to be with their fathers. On the surface, these reframing efforts mask the heavily critiqued ideologies of the traditional FRM (e.g., anti-feminism, pro-patriarchy, paternal control), but the meanings that underlie this rights-based narrative remain intact. For example, Fathers Are Capable Too (FACT) defines themselves as a “moderate group that is inclusive of both genders, all races, colours, creeds and denominations” which promotes:

... an unbiased image of fatherhood and motherhood, shared and equal parenting, and preserving the rights of our children, and future children, to a complete relationship with both parents...

While the identification as ideologically “moderate” with emphasis on children’s rights instead of fathers’ rights and inclusion of both fathers and mothers in the framing of their group demonstrates a clear separation from their more openly radical FRM counterparts, the messages conveyed through their narrative remain consistent with traditional fathers’ rights activism. Akin to other FRGs, Fathers Are Capable Too’s primary aims include addressing fatherlessness, parental alienation, and fathers’ unquestioned rights to their children post-separation. Fathers Are Capable Too contends that:

Fatherlessness is the most harmful demographic trend of this generation. It is the leading cause of declining child well-being in our society. It is also the engine driving our most urgent social problems from crime to adolescent pregnancy to child sexual abuse to domestic violence.

While the framing of the message has changed from fathers' rights to children's rights, the meaning underlying the message itself remains the same. Many other groups have adopted a similar strategy by reframing their rights-based activism to focus on children's rights or human rights while maintaining traditional FRA agendas and messages, such as the Canadian Association for Equality (CAFE) who situate their traditional fathers' rights platform as a "equality, diversity, and human rights" campaign and Dads for Life who, despite openly identifying as part of the FRM, uses the platform of children's rights as opposed to fathers' rights.

#### **4.2.1. Defining Fathers**

There is visible split in the discourse surrounding how fatherhood is defined and framed by fatherhood groups, which demonstrates more progressive leanings by comparison to earlier phases of this movement. Previous research on fatherhood groups and activism found definitions of fathers that were exclusive and grounded in heteronormative and patriarchal ideals of fatherhood (for example, see Blais & Dupuis-Déri, 2012; Messner, 1997; Mutua, 2013). The contemporary online platforms of fatherhood groups, however, often demonstrated a much larger and more inclusionary scope for how fatherhood is defined.

Groups that provided clear definitions of what it meant to be a father were generally multidimensional and inclusive. Some definitions were broad enough to include anyone "fulfilling the role of primary caregiver," although unclear if this was inclusive of women, (Abby Dads) and those who consider themselves "pro-feminist, anti-racist, and gay affirmative" (Saskatoon Men's Centre). Other groups were more specific with respect to their constructions of fatherhood but nevertheless diverted from heteronormative, patriarchal fatherhood, including both biological and adoptive gay, bi, and queer fathers (for example, see Gays with Kids, Alberta Father Involvement Initiative, Saskatoon Men's Centre, LGBTQ Parenting Network), Indigenous fathers (for example, see Alberta Father Involvement Initiative, Brighter Futures, Dad Central BC, Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre), immigrant fathers (for example, see Alberta Father Involvement Initiative), rural fathers (see Brighter Futures), incarcerated fathers (see Alberta Father Involvement Initiative), young fathers (see Alberta Father Involvement Initiative), step fathers (see Gay Fathers of Toronto), and fathers of children with complex needs (e.g., children on the autism spectrum, trans children, queer

children, gender non-conforming children) (for example, see Alberta Father Involvement Initiative). Further, instead of a rights-based focus, several groups emphasized healthy relationships and involvement of fathers in children's lives which shaped their definitions of fatherhood. For instance, Dads Can's aim is to "re-enculture a fatherhood ideal by promoting responsible and involved fathering through the support of men's personal development into fatherhood and healthy fathering." The programs offered by these groups are aligned with these mandates, such as anger awareness/management (e.g., Emotions and Me by Dad Central), healthy relationships, and responsible parenting.

The narrative of involved fatherhood has also been integrated into some of the more traditional FRG's advocacy, but their versions of fatherhood involvement differ in both purpose and intended outcome from the more progressive fatherhood groups and IFAs. For example, the Men's Centre developed the concept of an involved father and "24/7 Dad," which was defined as:

We believe that every child needs one. What we are talking about is an involved, responsible, and committed father. We are talking about a dad who knows his role in the family. He understands he is a model for his sons on how to be a good man. Likewise, if he has daughters, he models what they should look for in a husband and an eventual father for their children.

In this sense, some depictions of involved fatherhood have co-opted this concept in order to continue reinforcing traditional patriarchal gender role socialization and paternal control-oriented agenda that FRGs have espoused for decades (i.e., sons need fathers to become "good" men).

Many online platforms and resources did not provide a clear definition of the fathers included in or excluded from their groups and services, but the absence of clearly defined inclusion/exclusion was accompanied by narratives and images that nevertheless provided some framework for their understanding of fatherhood. Many groups provided photographs of fathers and their children (e.g., stock photos, non-stock photos) that depicted dominantly white, cisgender and heterosexual passing men. The narrative also aligned with the identities of privileged fathers by disregarding varying and marginalizing social identity factors that impact fathers' experiences and instead treat fathers as a monolithic and homogenous group. As such, the equality for fathers for which FRG fight did not address the substantive inequalities faced by these men and

fathers on the grounds of, for example, race, ethnicity, culture, gender identity, sexuality, and income, nor did FRAs meaningfully address the differential experiences of marginalized fathers socially, politically, and legally.

### **4.3. Gender Roles, Masculinities, and Fatherhood**

The rhetoric on most of the FRA platforms reinforce hegemonic forms of masculinity, while IFA largely frame masculinity in a multidimensional sense and privileged non-conforming masculinities. The more nuanced reinforcements of hegemonic masculinity were present in programs such as the 24/7 Dad program run by the Men's Centre. 24/7 Dad focuses on building fathers' self-care and emotional capacity, while simultaneously confirming parenting roles based on gender:

The 24/7 dad uses his knowledge of the unique skills he and the mother of his children bring to raising their children. In other words, he knows the difference between 'fathering' and 'mothering'. (the Men's Centre)

This narrative is reminiscent of FRA's mythopoetic predecessors, who were labeled as "gender separatists" (Kimmel, 2013, p. 106) who did not overtly blame feminists or women's liberation for the alleged feminisation of men, but clearly identified men's/father's and women's/mother's roles in the family (Messner, 1997, pp. 16-23).

Many IFG actively tried to dismantle the pro-patriarchal and hegemonic masculinity discourses through their conceptions of fathers as involved, nurturing, and diverse (for example, see Men for Change, Movement for the Real Establishment of Gender Equality). These groups also placed an emphasis on healthy relationships within all formations of families (e.g., intact, going through separation, separated, divorced, non-traditional) and health of fathers themselves as opposed to paternally controlled families pre- and post-separation (for example, see Abby Dads, Dads Can, Dad Central and Dad Central BC, Fathers Moving Forward). Further, unlike the FRAs, IFAs focused on the importance of healthy and involved parenting in raising children without any emphasis on a gendered division of labour. Of note, Parent Support Society of BC explained that they aim to "...protect the safety and wellbeing of children and promote the health of all families by partnering with those in a parenting role..." which fully removes the gender role element of parenting emphasized by FRG.

The narrative of IFA's promoted diverse, inclusive forms of masculinity and non-traditional gender roles in fatherhood, as well as the harms caused by traditional patriarchal models of fatherhood present in the FRM:

The traditional social roles of man as provider and woman as nurturer have caused great injustice regarding both the rights and the responsibilities of both mothers and fathers. (Movement for the Real Establishment of Gender Equality)

The majority of men are not physically violent against women. But we live in a society that raises men to believe that aggression and violence are acceptable forms of self-expression. Young boys are encouraged to demonstrate strength and dominance rather than empathetic, caring, and nurturing attributes characteristics that are devalued and seen as "feminine." We forget that the strongest people are actually the most self-aware and caring. Socializing processes teach men to equate masculinity with power and urges them to try to control others who have less power. As a result, some men learn to express their masculinity by using verbal or physical violence against women or other men. (Men for Change)

These narratives challenge traditional patriarchal forms of masculinity and are interconnected with the advocacy of pro-feminist groups (e.g., the White Ribbon Campaign) whose advocacy includes raising awareness the "injurious symptoms" of gender inequality (Kimmel, 2010, pp. 76-77).

#### **4.4. The "F" Words: Fathers and Feminism**

Beginning with the gender separatist and anti-feminist early men's liberationists and continuing throughout the different phases of the FRM (for example, see Messner, 1997), traditional and pro-patriarchal men's and fatherhood movements fight to maintain patriarchal authority and hegemony among men, and engage in reactionary, resistant, and exclusionary politics. More moderate FRAs platforms propagated forms of so-called equality that emphasized formal but not substantively equal rights for men and women within families. For instance, Fathers are Capable Too states as part of their mandate that they "will change the legal and social attitudes to promote shared parenting and formal equality," and throughout their advocacy focus on the familial and social ills of fatherlessness. Similarly, Fathers for Equality "is an active association in support of equality concerning fathers right to parent," but their focus remains in line with traditional FRAs in aiming to "help fathers acquire equal opportunities in gaining custodial care of their children," "organize and implement political action so current and future fathers

receive equal treatment from the law,” and “educate the public about the importance of fathers to children.” This neglects measures that would emphasize substantive equality<sup>30</sup> within relationships and meaningful involvement of fathers in families.

By comparison to the more subtle exclusionary politics of formal equality proposed by moderate-leaning FRAs, more radical and traditional pro-patriarchal FRAs actively and openly oppose feminism on their platforms. For example, Fathers for Life refers to women who challenge traditional patriarchal structures within families and/or have non-traditional family structures as “heterophobic feminists” who have characterized men’s and fathers’ movements as akin to the “Nazi holocaust” through their “... all-out campaign garnering sympathy for the plight of the legions of women who are victims of ‘male brutality’.” Fathers for Life further characterizes feminists as “family-hostile” women who engage in “the vilification of men in the planned destruction of our families.” Other FRAs attempt to advance similar radical anti-feminist agendas:

Now that feminism spread from its communist roots... to the whole world, the forcible removal of children from their parents' homes is escalating and spreading throughout the world as well, foremost in those countries where feminist totalitarianism made the greatest advances. (Dads for Life)

Radical feminism, the currently controlling faction of feminism, governs just about everything that is happening in your life. (Fathers for Life)

It seems to me that many men who are presently unhappy for a variety of reasons have only vague notions that some of their unhappiness at work, at home or in the courts, is caused by discrimination and anti-male sexism fostered by feminism. In essence, the reason for their dissatisfaction is that, throughout the world, feminism causes unhappiness. Modern feminism came about to make women happy. It gained much popularity and support on account of that premise. For much of the ten-thousand years of the existence of civilization (and probably for much longer before that), mankind’s major objective was to make women happy, in attempts to regulate human sexuality, by instituting the concept of the traditional nuclear family, by assigning individual men and women to one another — either through design or by having them make their own choices — but, suddenly, the institution of the family was no longer good enough. It caused some women unhappiness that was often nothing more than boredom (as Betty Friedan put it when she put her finger on the mysterious reason for so many women’s unhappiness, in her 1964 book *The Feminine Mystique*). Right

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<sup>30</sup> Moving beyond gender neutral equality and formal legal equality models, substantive equality challenges systemic discrimination against marginalized peoples (e.g., women) and recognizes that marginalization, discrimination, and oppression must be addressed in law, policy, and practice to promote equitable access and meaningfully equal outcomes.



away, Mankind did an about-turn, after going into the right direction for ten-thousand years, declared marriage to be the cause of women's unhappiness that needed to be fixed by discarding it, or that needed at least re-categorizing it as a social institution that was a convenient, temporary living-arrangement, from which women could remove themselves at their convenience (with men footing the bill for that), and that is one reason why it came that feminism causes unhappiness. The law of unintended consequences set in. The cure for women's unhappiness proved itself to be worse than the malaise it was intended to address. (Dads&Things)

This anti-feminist narrative blames women's strides toward equality for the breakdown of traditional family structures and social ills such as men's high rates of suicide. These are not, however, the most radical portrayals; Dads for Life went so far as to equate feminism to communism and the alleged oppression of fathers through the family law system as "Stalinist."

The Canadian Fathers' Rights mission statement acknowledges the anti-feminist focus of this movement:

One of the primary missions of the Fathers Rights movement appears to be the fight against radical feminism. That active and effective opposition is necessary, but it is no more than a fight against problem symptoms... What should the goals and objectives of the Fathers Rights movement be? Whatever they are, what do they relate to? Should they be motivated by the wish to address an ever-escalating deluge of anti-male judgments and instances of anti-male discrimination, or should they be directed at creating the conditions that make anti-male discrimination and the persecution of fatherhood impossible? Just as when anyone who wants to build something will have to have a plan before he can even draw up blueprints for his construction project, the Fathers Rights movement needs to have a plan. Such a plan needs to relate to the purpose of what is to be constructed. Plans for a building don't generally deal with fixing leaks in the roof. They deal instead with what the building is intended to be [sic]used for. Is it to be a football stadium, an outhouse, a bridge, a monument or a place to live in? Even if the latter, is the building to be used as a hotel or as a place for a family to raise children — the next generation of functioning, law-abiding and productive citizens? The plans for the Fathers Rights movement must not be pre-occupied with the tactics of how to deal with radical feminism or judicial inequities and anti-male legislation, although those tactics are important and should under no circumstance be neglected. More importantly, the plans for the Fathers Rights movement must deal with the reasons for its existence: the promotion and nurturance of the concept of fathers within, not without families.

This narrative, however, attempts to reframe the overall “fight against radical feminism” and focus on “anti-male discrimination” as one of the reasons for the FRM’s lack of united vision. Of note, feminists were nevertheless assigned fault and assumed to engage in the active oppression and “vilification” (Fathers for Life) of fathers. Governments on national and international scales were also targeted as sources of both the subjugation of fathers and dissolution of the traditional patriarchal family structure:

Massive, government-sponsored hate-propaganda that demonizes all Canadian men at the Canadian National Clearing House on Family Violence, a Health Canada web site. (Dads for Life)

Our website illustrates how the all-pervasive vilification of men, of fathers and of the traditional nuclear family grew out of the systematic implementation of the international agenda for the planned destruction of the family. (Fathers for Life)

Fathers&Things further suggested that FRAs online presence as a whole, along with platforms with a “pro-family activist or... skeptic of environmental alarmism” focus, were being “slandered and censored” on the “sly.”

Demonstrating some internal conflict, many anti-feminist FRA platforms espouse equality and mask their anti-feminist roots in an attempt to re-focus the FRM while simultaneously actively opposing “affirmative action feminism” (see Dads for Life) and engaging in the promotion of men’s equality through tactics that oppress and re-assert men’s control over women, such as anti-abortion campaigns and the “#MeToo. Justice... or a Lynch Mob?” event hosted by CAFE Ottawa. Of note, Dads for Life anti-abortion campaign explains:

Contrary to what some people are telling us, the new life developing in a mother is not that of a mouse, nor is it simply like a wart that may need removal. Things are not quite that simple.

Within the “fight against radical feminism” (Canadian Father’s Rights), such activism is situated within a traditional men’s/fathers’ rights and control-based framework. However, this discourse is not restricted to the FRAs platforms. The Movement for Real Gender Equality, which is largely framed as an IFA platform, articulates a similar fathers’ rights stance on men’s *right* to have a say in women’s reproduction, including the right to a insist on birth or abortion:

In the case of unwed pregnancy, a special biological burden falls on the woman. But under traditional laws, unwed fathers have no legal rights, only legal obligations. Be it therefore resolved that unmarried fathers have a responsibility to share the burdens of unplanned pregnancy, with emotional and financial support wherever possible. Be it further resolved that whatever legal rights unmarried women are to have to claim or to renounce legal parenthood of a child shall be matched by corresponding rights for unmarried men.

Findings such as this denote the remanence of traditional pro-patriarchal ideologies imbedded within fatherhood movements and demonstrates that, while dramatically more progressive, IFAs nevertheless promote some oppressive gender-based power dynamics.

IFA generally demonstrated pro-feminist ideologies but were often not outwardly or openly feminist. Further, while the most vocal FRAs establish an anti-feminist discourse, there is a small but visible movement of fatherhood groups who openly identify as pro-feminist in their mandates, and feminist activism and advocacy are present within their platforms. For example, Men for Change is a self-identified pro-feminist group that supports both men and fathers, and their mandate expresses their dedication to “promoting gender equality and ending sexism and violence,” and they frame their resources and programs as valuable “to all those who desire to end men’s violence.”

Similar to Kimmel’s (2013) findings, this suggests that there are at least two general categories of men: 1) those who have sought and embraced new, more complex, and emotionally fulfilling experiences of manhood and masculinities; and 2) those who “cling ever more tenaciously to old ideals” feeling like every “gain” made by women and minorities is a “loss” for privileged, generally white, men (p. 19). The latter group is made up of men who fight to maintain patriarchal authority and hegemony among men, and engage in reactionary, resistant, and exclusionary politics. These men are the loudest, but not the only, voices behind the men’s movement, and it is crucial to acknowledge the efforts men who have tried to locate, and successfully located, themselves within the feminist movement.

## **4.5. Multidimensional Fatherhood**

The majority of the platforms I examined, both FRA and IFA alike, failed to address the socio-demographic factors that impact fathers' experiences. The implicit meanings behind their messages, however, focused on privileged forms of fatherhood and manifestations of fathers that embodied whiteness and heterosexuality, and also implied a one-size-fits all model of fatherhood. While FRAs suggest the oppression and disadvantage of men within families and legal processes, they often treat fatherhood as a homogenous whole, and while IFA focused on more diverse and non-hegemonic forms of fatherhood they often, but not exclusively, neglected diversity among the lived experiences of fathers. However, there are multidimensional factors, both privileging and marginalizing, that impact fathers' experiences with these systems (e.g., race, ethnicity, sexually, gender identity) (Messerschmidt, 1993; Mutua, 2013, pp. 351-353). These multidimensional aspects of men's and fathers' identities have started to emerge within the fatherhood movement to draw attention to the lived experiences of men and highlighting how the traditional FRM has often rendered the experiences of marginalized fathers invisible and/or amalgamated them into the collective experiences of fathers with privileged identities.

### **4.5.1. Queering Fatherhood**

A sub-movement within fatherhood groups is that of gay and queer fathers. These groups align closely in values with the IFM, but their platform moves beyond meaningful involvement of fathers in families pre- and post-separation to focus on gay and queer men who are fighting for the substantively equal social, political, legal, and familial rights to be fathers in the first place (for example, see LGBTQ Parenting Network, Father Visibility Working Group, Gay Fathers of Toronto, Gays with Kids). This movement focuses on addressing "invisibility" of queer parents/fathers and fighting for foundational rights for these men. For instance, the Father Visibility Working Group, which is run by the LGBTQ Parenting Network, addresses three primary issues in their activism: 1) "extreme invisibility experienced by GBQ fathers;" 2) "issues related to entitlement or lack of entitlement to be parents;" and 3) "impact of negative stereotypes associated with GBQ men as parents." They argue that:

The combination of lack of visibility and negative stereotypes has meant that many GBQ men give up the idea of bringing children into their lives. Many are unaware of the options available to them for becoming parents. As well, many men who have had children in heterosexual contexts experience high levels of fear about accessing legal systems to gain access to their children because of perceived homophobia and heterosexism of these systems. (Father Visibility Working Group)

This narrative highlights how while fathers may experience some disadvantage with respect to access to their children and fundamental rights as parents, the multidimensionality of men's experiences puts minority men at a distinct disadvantage. This new facet of fatherhood movements has constructed a different vision of fathers' rights: the right to be fathers in the first place and equal access to supports and resources for all fathers (e.g., paid paternity leave).

#### **4.5.2. Indigenous Fatherhood**

While the voices of some marginalized fathers (e.g., gay dads) are relatively absent from the IFA and rendered almost non-existent within one-size-fits-all approaches to fatherhood, IFA has made strides to be inclusive of and highlight the unique challenges of Indigenous fathers within the Canadian context, such as historical and intergenerational trauma and the residential school legacy. The National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health, which supports fatherhood groups such as Dads: Strengthening the Circle of Care, explains that Indigenous fathers are the "greatest untapped resources in the lives of Aboriginal children." Some IFA platforms (for example, see Alberta Father Involvement Network, BC Association of Family Resource Programs, Dad Central BC, Parent Support Services of BC) and Indigenous advocacy and friendship centres that ran programming and groups for fathers (for example, see National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health and Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre) brought a new dimension to IFA which focused on "decolonizing" fatherhood and parenting (see BC Association of Family Resource Programs), expanding understandings of fatherhood to include kinship networks (see Parent Support Society of BC), and meaningfully addressing the harms and traumas of historical and contemporary oppressions faced by Indigenous fathers and families through culturally-informed (e.g., connection to the land) programs and supports (for example, see Dads: Strengthening the Circle of Care, Warrior-Caregiver Program).

Of note, one FRG, the Canadian Equal Parenting Council, also addressed the experiences of Indigenous men. However, their approach was not intended to support Indigenous fatherhood and instead demonstrated an anti-feminist attack on Indigenous women and the murdered and missing Indigenous women, girls, and two spirit inquiry (MMIWG2SI) specifically and women more generally. The Canadian Equal Parenting Council notes:

... more native men are “missing and murdered” than native women. Like the domestic violence issue, only female victims get government concern, media attention and prompt funding. The issue may have more to do with a scramble for government funding, sexist media bias and using the issue as a political weapon than any real concern for victims of violence. Conflating the missing with the murdered does a disservice to both groups. Not all missing are murdered (missing can mean suicide, runaways, accident or other causes). It is not clear that successful anti-murder strategies (and none seem to be agreed upon at the national roundtable) can work on those missing. We do know that the courts and the government have made great efforts to excuse women who kill fathers, husbands and boyfriends. In fact, the “female discount” as it is called, is taught in Canada’s law schools and statistics from Professor Grant Brown show that it is practiced in Canada’s courts. If tough on crime works, it makes no sense to be excessively lenient on women. If leniency works, it makes no sense to be excessively tough on men. Perhaps the aim is to bias the courts for women and against men.

This narrative uses Indigenous men to not so subtly mask the FRA agenda of drawing attention to alleged bias against men in court.

#### **4.6. Separation, Divorce, “Desertion,” and Alienation**

Similar to the findings of previous research, the dissolution of relationships (e.g., separation, divorce) is a key focus of all fatherhood groups. The approaches to the issue of separation and parenting, however, showcased the two divergent discourses of FRA and IFA within contemporary fatherhood movements. Of the dissimilarities between these two discourses, the differences were most pronounced in their approaches and advocacy related to divorce/separation. FRA presented a narrative of “demonized” fathers (Canadian Association for Equality) who experience significant disadvantage in the family court system, which includes themes of child “abduction,” parental alienation syndrome, and mothers’ alleged false allegations of abuse to gain advantage in family court. Conversely, IFA emphasized positive and healthy father-child relationships pre-

and post-separation together with programs and supports that would assist in “promoting responsible and involved fathering” (Dads Can).

The rhetoric and discursive practices of FRA, which includes groups with both radical and moderate leanings, echoed that of the traditional pro-patriarchal FRM who protested women’s equality and actively fought against the gains made by women and non-hegemonic men (e.g., mythopoetic men, Promise Keepers) (Kimmel, 2010). Across many FRA platforms, separation/divorce were framed as a tactic of women for personal and/or financial gain, which is illustrated through Dads&Things claim that:

The reason why solicitors create this confusion is because they have been assisting spouses who are the deserters to profit at the expense of the actual deserted spouse for the past thirty years. They tell the deserted spouse that the other spouse – the actual deserter – is entitled to separate and tell them that they should just accept that they are now “separated” and deal with it. By doing this the deserted spouse loses everything and especially is seen to be going along with the breakdown of the marriage instead of getting help to reconcile it. (Dads&Things)

In this narrative, Dads&Things makes the distinction between amicable separation and “desertion” (i.e., a woman leaving her husband), which is similar to the reframing done by other radically aligned FRA who claim mothers assuming primary care of the children post-separation as a form of child “abduction” (see BC Men’s Resource Centre, Parent Child Advocacy Coalition).

IFAs took a starkly different approach to advocacy surrounding separation and divorce. The majority of their platforms did not engage in claims-making and focused instead on improving the well-being of fathers and healthy father-child relationships post-separation. Of note, the John Howard Society of Ontario runs the group Dads Aiming for Direct Support (DADS) with the mandate:

We believe that a child deserves to have a positive relationship with both of their parents. We offer a dynamic weekly cognitive skills based support group structured to meet the specific needs of fathers experiencing loss and change associated with separation and divorce.

In line with its mandate, the Dads Aiming for Direct Support program explores issues of: “effects of separation and divorce on children;” “parenting issues, how to effectively co-parent;” “anger management, letting go of hurt and resentment;” “conflict resolution,

learning positive communication skills;” “building personal support systems;” “healthy relationships;” and “self-care and stress management.” Other IFG share a similar focus:

The group will come together to discuss such topics as: How fathers play an essential role in their children’s development; Developing trust in your parenting skills – trust us you have them! Balancing time for self, children, work and social activity; How to have fun raising your children; Co-parenting strategies; Working well with MCFD; Creating workable communication strategies to deal with ‘difficult’ people; Making sense of any separation, loss or grief issues; Custody arrangements that have a chance of working; setting boundaries; Creating a sense of fun, good times, and optimism for self and with others. (Dads with Dads)

This exists in blatant contrast to FRA who, instead of focusing on capacity-building, provide supports for strategic approaches to court processes:

Our unique services include: Strategic Analysis, Divorce-Management Services, Divorce Coaching, Divorce Education programs and father-friendly referral network of hand-picked legal and/or other professionals has assisted fathers with positive solutions to their custody, access and support problems. (Fathers Resources International)

Some FRA platforms did include relationships with children post-separation but focused on unquestioned rights to equal access to children/shared parenting by default instead of the capacity-building emphasis of their IFA counterparts.

#### **4.6.1. Parental Alienation**

A visible difference in the discourses on fatherhood among these groups became apparent when addressing raising children post-separation/divorce. More specifically, parental alienation or “hostile aggressive parenting” (see Fathers Are Capable Too, The Men’s Centre) was a focus of most FRGs, but had no presence whatsoever on the platforms of IFA. While the definitions of parental alienation varied slightly across these platforms, the meaning that underlies them was the same. This is illustrated through The Men’s Centre description of parental alienation as:

... a group of behaviors that are damaging to children’s mental and emotional well-being, and can interfere with a relationship of a child and either parent. These behaviors most often accompany high conflict marriages, separation or divorce. These behaviors whether verbal or non-verbal, cause a child to be mentally manipulated or bullied into believing a loving parent is the cause of all their problems, and/or the enemy, to be feared, hated, disrespected and/or avoided. Parental alienation and



hostile aggressive parenting deprive children of their right to be loved by and showing love for both of their parents. The destructive actions by an alienating parent or other third person (like another family member, or even a well-meaning mental health care worker) can become abusive to the child – as the alienating behaviors are disturbing, confusing and often frightening, to the child, and can rob the child of their sense of security and safety leading to maladaptive emotional or psychiatric reactions. Most people do not know about Parental Alienation and Hostile Aggressive Parenting until they experience it... We need your help to protect the innocent... the children.

Similarly, Canadian Equal Parenting Council refers to this as “emotional incest.”

FRAs utilized sensationalized framing to portray the harms of parental alienation to support their assertions:

Unhealthy attachment is one which excludes the other parent, or irrationally leads to hatred. This may be a form of “emotional incest”. Alienation leads to seriously disturbed adults. It used to be thought that children don’t lie, so if they have an irrational hostility, it is based on real abuse. Now we know differently. Children can be induced into taking sides against a loving parent by a disturbed, controlling parent. (Canadian Equal Parenting Council)

If you don't act now, it may be many decades before your children have a relationship with you who will be raised brainwashed with hatred towards a loving devoted father. (Ottawa Men’s Centre)

The characteristic psychopathology of the narcissistic/(borderline) parent draws the child into a role-reversal relationship to help the narcissistic/(borderline) parent regulate three separate but interrelated sources of intense anxiety. (Canadian Association for Equality)

Alternatively, the Canadian Equal Parenting Council used “Ron” to support their assertions about parental alienation:

When his wife left Ron, he expected to share custody of his two sons, and after all, he had been a “hands-on dad”, taking the boys to sports activities, school events and camping. That’s how it worked for six months until his wife’s lawyer proposed a property settlement in which his ex-wife got the house and their assets, while he was expected to shoulder their debts. When his lawyer proposed an equal division, access to his sons became difficult, and strange, untrue or wildly exaggerated accusations appeared in the affidavits from his wife’s lawyer. When he picked up the boys at her house, they would appear to Ron as fearful, sad and not talkative. When they boys were alone with Ron, they appeared happy, talkative and playful, but occasionally made comments that Ron found odd, like, “you don’t support us” and “you shouldn’t control mommy,” Ron felt these comments were unusual for boys of 7 and 9, but said to them, “I

am sure Mom and I can work this out. It is not your fault. We both love you and want the best for you.” Ron sought help to understand what was going on, and after a considerable search, found a shared parenting support group on the Internet. Some fellow parents in the group identified what was happening as “parental alienation” or PA. Ron felt relief to finally put a name to what was going on, and to understand that it was not just happening to him, and that it was not something he imagined. Will Ron get his children back? He is up against a highly adversarial family law system, gender bias and an ex-spouse who may be seriously mentally ill. At the very least she has a deeply entrenched personality disorder. Normal parents do not alienate their children from the other parent. When parental alienation occurs, children lose not only a loving parent, and are completely controlled by a deeply disturbed parent, but often they are cut off from grandparents and other extended family. Courts often enable parental alienation by not taking it seriously or by referring the alienating parent to therapy, which that parent usually sabotages, playing a delaying game in order to further alienate the children. PA can be thought of as cult behavior and tactics. (Canadian Equal Parenting Council)

There is, however, much evidence disputing and disproving parental alienation (PA) and Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS) (see section 6.4.1 of Chapter 6). P12 (FRG, BC) focuses a lot of his advocacy efforts on PAS, but is further developing his work to include “attachment theory.”

## **4.7. (Un)equal in Front of the Law**

Family law issues were rarely the focus of IFA while simultaneously being a strong presence on the majority of FRA platforms. The FRA provided lengthy critiques of family law systems and alleged bias against fathers on provincial and national scales.

ECMAS does not believe... that the current family law system is fair, neutral, or serves the purpose of resolving conflict in ways that lead to peaceful and acceptable outcomes. (Equitable Child Maintenance and Accountability Society)

... the family law system is seriously biased and flawed, in a way that is damaging to children and to everyone else in the family. (HEART)

For those who understand the difficulties fathers face, it may involve informing others of the need for reform to our biased and troubled family law system. (Ottawa Men’s Centre)

However, instead of grounding their claims in the barriers fathers face to equitable access to family law systems, FRA interlink the failings family law system with evidence

that has been disproven, such as parental alienation syndrome and false claims of abuse:

Currently, misguided laws and family court practices often eliminate one parent from children's lives after family breakups. Usually it is the fathers who are alienated, but mothers are also affected, with half of these parents becoming weekend visitors. (CAFE)

The [Family Law Act White Paper] fails to list parental alientation [sic], denial of access, and making false allegations as forms of family violence. In a chapter entitled "Children's Best Interests", a list is provided that refers to partner abuse. One has to question whose best interests are really being served. This leads one to be suspicious of the document. The people of BC deserve better than this. (BC Men's Resource Centre)

The problem is that by using disproven assertions to support their claims of disadvantage, FRA are undercutting the validity of their argument for more equal treatment in family court.<sup>31</sup>

Another problematic theme that emerged from this analysis is that many active FRA platforms had largely outdated information about the family law systems both provincially and nationally. For example, BC-based FRG focused on the alleged discrimination they experienced under the *Family Relations Act*, which is no longer in force and predates the current *Family Law Act* (2013) by seven years. Similarly, they cite and problematize the *White Paper on the Family Relations Act* (2010) which proposes the *New Family Law Act* but have not updated their resources to reflect the actual *Family Law Act* that is now in force. Similar trends exist nationally, with groups citing a proposed amendment to the *Divorce Act* that was rejected in 2015 (i.e., Bill C-560) and Ontario's *New Family Law Rules* from 1997.

The majority of FRAs critiques of the family law system are grounded in sensationalized claims and anecdotal evidence, while simultaneously disregarding any evidence to the contrary:

Our children are being short-changed in the rush to discriminate against fathers in the courts. (Dads for Life)

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<sup>31</sup> The claims of disadvantage in family court levied by FRAs disregard how women face many disadvantages in family law (e.g., lack of access to legal aid), and the issues FRGs advocate against are often also systemic barriers for women (e.g., costs associated with the family law system).

The pursuit of the planned destruction of the family is part of the systematic re-engineering not only of civilization but of humanity itself. Think of it as evolution in action. (Dads for Life)

Government sexism and the profits to be made in adversarial family law are driving the problems that fathers have in staying in the lives of their children. So it is ironic that the key factor in the likelihood of runaways, suicides and other “missing” children is that the father is “missing” or not parenting the children. (Canadian Equal Parenting Council)

Similarly, these groups often highlighted the costs of the family court (e.g., court fees, lawyers) that created inequality within these processes:

There is increasing agreement that the current adversarial family law process, with its emphasis on affidavits without proof, high costs to the point of inaccessibility for most families, and procedural game-playing, is the problem. Surveys of the public confirm that most Canadians believe that money and careers in the divorce industry are the obstacles to reforms. (Canadian Equal Parenting Council)

Intertwined within these narratives, FRA highlight some key points for change needed within family law systems: 1) shifting away from adversarial justice in family courts; and 2) moving away from the for profit model interlinked with the high cost of court and lawyers’ fees or the “divorce industry” (Canadian Equal Parenting Council). However, these points get lost within the rhetoric and exclusionary stance that these processes are “anti-father” (Canadian Equal Parenting Council), which continues to undermine the validity of these claims.

#### **4.7.1. The Best Interest of the Child(ren)**

The best interest of the child(ren) was a dominant focus across FRA platforms and was used synonymously with “shared parenting as a default position” post-separation/divorce (BC Men’s Resource Centre).

Parents were good enough to rear their child before separation; they are good enough to rear their child after separation. This is the essence of shared parenting as a default position. (BC Men’s Centre)

IT IS IN THE CHILD’S BEST INTEREST: 1. To have equal parental guidance from both father and mother. 2. To spend equal quality time with both parents. (Fathers for Equality)

This advocacy, however, failed to acknowledge or address the potential for unequal parenting responsibilities prior to separation, as well as issues that would compromise a

child's well-being (e.g., presence of violence in the home). However, despite its presence in law (i.e., the *Family Law Act*), the narrative of "best interest" did not translate across all fatherhood groups. IFA did not use the language of "best interest of the child(ren)," and instead they focused on the well-being of children and families (e.g., emotional, financial, social).

The advocacy for equal and shared parenting was often framed as a concern for the best interest of the child(ren), but the accounts indicated an alternative agenda. Specifically, reducing and/or removing spousal maintenance and child support payments.

Children suffer because one parent (often referred to as the "payer" – an abhorrent term) is forced into near poverty while the other gains financially. Here again, the presumption of Equal Shared Parenting may provide a means of preventing such inequity. If shared parenting is the norm, then the standards of living of both parents will be affected equally. Surely this is justice? And surely this is in the best interests of the children? (BC Men's Resource Centre).

Earlier phases of the FRM focused largely on the right to make decisions for and gaining access to their children, and contemporary FRAs advocate for default shared parenting regardless of the contexts within their families pre- and post-separation (e.g., division of labour, violence). However, a counter-movement exists within some contemporary groups which alleges that the access for which these groups once fought is no longer sufficient. Dads for Life expressed that:

Any "gains" that appear to have been made over the past few years in favour of 'joint custody' were made at the expense of reducing sole custody awards to fathers.

Similarly, Kids Need Their Dads, who support equal shared parenting and analyzes the harms to children raised in single parent (mother) households, note that

... it is improper to ignore the positive benefits to children when raised in the Sole Custody of their fathers. The discipline and behaviour improvement are remarkable...

This highlights irony within the advocacy of FRA who suggest single mother households are harmful to children but fully support households headed by single fathers.

Similar to the findings of Crowley (2009a), FRAs argue that single mothers are incapable parents. The groups drive home their point of the need for fathers in families by suggesting that:

... where there is no police car, there is no speed limit,” suggesting that the absence of fathers means there would be an absence of rules in the home. They note, “[t]he same discipline and proper behaviour in a child from firm and forceful dad parenting, keeps the child out of jail, avoids police visits to the home, and removes the child from conflict with teachers, authorities, and employers. Bullying seems to decline when a child knows there are serious repercussions when he arrives home. Teachers, when supported by strong father rules, have control returned to the class. Father discipline has been shown to reduce kids smoking, alcohol use, drug abuse, impaired driver fatalities, and driving offences, all of which bodes well for a child’s successful future, career, family and productivity... the value of children raised by fathers seems to be considerable. (Kids Need Their Dads)

Fatherlessness is the most harmful demographic trend of this generation. It is the leading cause of declining child well-being in our society. It is also the engine driving our most urgent social problems from crime to adolescent pregnancy to child sexual abuse to domestic violence. (Fathers Are Capable Too)

These claims are consistent with previous findings that the rhetoric and activism within the FRM problematize fatherlessness by suggesting that kids without both parents, and specifically sons without fathers, are prone to violence and criminality (Crowley, 2009a). These claims, however, are unsubstantiated.

This narrative plays on gender role stereotypes and hegemonic masculinity by suggesting that “firm and forceful” parenting and discipline by fathers stops social ills. In the same vein, many FRA advocate against “fatherlessness,” which they assert is a harmful by-product of both the “divorce industry” (Dads&things) and mothers seeking financial gain through sole custody (see BC Men’s Resource Centre, Dads for Life). The Canadian Association For Equality refers to this trend as “disappearing dads” and the “declining status of fathers,” which they attribute to the biased family court processes and parental alienation. Contrary to these depictions, IFA share the belief that it is important for fathers to be involved in their children’s lives, but only when that involvement is healthy:

When a dad is positively involved in his child’s life, everyone benefits. Mothers have someone to share parenting responsibilities with and

children grow up resilient and stronger developmentally, emotionally and academically. (Fathers Moving Forward)

They propose the similar outcomes to that of Kids Need Their Dads, but with a pro-involvement, healthy family frame.

#### **4.7.2. False Allegations**

Domestic and family violence are central to legislation surrounding and responses to families both pre- and post-separation, such as the Ministry of Children and Family Development of BC (MCFD), national child service organizations, and provincial (e.g., BC's *Family Law Act*) laws.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, despite domestic and family violence being core issues related to promoting the true best interest of children and families both pre- and post-separation, fatherhood groups largely did not address violence in their online advocacy and resources. However, of the FRA platforms that addressed violence in relationships, they tended re-framing violence against women as a falsehood and tactic used by women to gain advantage in family court. To illustrate, the BC Men's Resource Centre asserts that:

It should be recognized that, in order to further a personal agenda, or to ensure maximum gain from the legal process (e.g., securing sole possession of the matrimonial home, access to child support, or as leverage in custody disputes), false or spurious claims of neglect or abuse are made.

To support this claim, the BC Men's Resource Centre cited the Special Joint Committee on Child Custody and Access report, which was published in 1998, and also self-proclaimed "anecdotal evidence."

Similar efforts have been made by other groups who chose to highlight single stories as evidence of false allegations being a wide-spread occurrence in family court. Dads for Life, for example, used the story of a "4-year-old girl [who] is abducted by social workers and subjected to invasive 'rape examinations' to prove sexual abuse in false abuse allegation" and the BC Men's Resource Centre noted that they took issue with the

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<sup>32</sup> At the federal level, only the recent *Divorce Act*, which came into force in March 2021, lists family violence as central to the legislation and best interest of the child(ren) determinations.

assumption that “research shows that deliberately false or maliciously false allegations of violence are in fact few.”

The reality of the situation is that currently, almost any allegation of domestic violence or abuse leads immediately to arrest, a restraining order, and an order for sole possession of the matrimonial home. It does not take a rocket scientist to realize that this is a very easy way to obtain that which the courts would not normally grant. Like thousands of other fathers across Canada, I have experienced this myself. A dispute about money led to a call to the police, who informed me (even though I had done absolutely nothing wrong) that they had little to no discretion in such matters, and that if there were any further calls they would be forced to arrest me. The police agreed that I had not broken any laws, but that they were mandated by Government to act. This is surely wrong. (BC Men’s Resource Centre)

Relying largely on what the FRAs acknowledge to be anecdotal evidence, they argue that false allegations are not only frequent but maliciously exacted by mothers and lawyers to gain strategic advantage and also to alienate the other parent (i.e., parental alienation).

## **4.8. Conclusion**

As articulated in previous research (for example, see Kimmel, 2013), the FRM and movements toward involved fathering, such as the Fatherhood Responsibility movement, have been present in the social discourse since the late 1990s/early 2000s (Gavanas, 2002). Similarly, my analysis demonstrates the progression of fatherhood movements, and also the solidification of oppressive and regressive belief systems present within the more traditional patriarchal forms of this movement. However, a refreshing theme emerged from the first phase of the research – progress. From its conservative and radical roots, the online platforms have provided a safe space to further expand fatherhood movements to provide meaningful support for fathers pre- and post-separation, the movement toward supporting fathers, and helping fathers address their individual and familial problems at a more holistic level. However, the same far-reaching platform that provided the basis for the IFM to expand also increased the reach for the FRM on the same local, provincial, and national scales. The patriarchal and oppressive ideologies that may have once been confined to narratives within individual groups and showcased through larger scale activism now have a much stronger, unchecked reach to transmit their ideologies. In this sense, the internet expanding the



ability to connect fathers has caused both progression and regression in these movements.

## **Chapter 5. The Voices of Fathers in the Movement**

### **5.1. Introduction**

This chapter provides insight into the following themes that emerged from the analysis of the phase two semi-structured interviews with 27 members of fatherhood groups: 1) the innerworkings of fatherhood groups, including group membership (e.g., motivation for joining, formal versus informal groups), personal impacts of group involvement, and the less than clear division that exists between FRGs and IFGs (see section 5.2); 2) involvement in activism, advocacy, and fatherhood movements, including developments in the dynamics between earlier and more contemporary activism (e.g., the shift from public spectacles to political and legal lobbying, efforts to integrate other causes such as Innocence Canada into the FRM), the focus of their activism (e.g., legal reform), negative responses they have experienced, and insight into how, while the tactics have changed, much of the rhetoric and focus of their activism remains largely unaffected (e.g., parental alienation, false accusations, bias against men and fathers) (see section 5.3); 3) responses to feminism and how the participants situated themselves in relation to feminism (see section 5.4); 4) the tense relationship between fathers, fatherhood groups, and family law, such as beliefs of bias against fathers in court processes, experiences with custody/access and guardianship arrangements, discontent with BC's *Family Law Act* (FLA), and the desire to keep money out of family law and family matters out of court (see section 5.5); and 5) the participants' narratives surrounding individual and group identity (see section 6).

### **5.2. Fatherhood Groups**

The majority of participants had been involved in fatherhood groups for between three to six years, and they spoke predominantly of these groups within contemporary settings. There were a few outliers, including two participants who joined their groups only a few months prior to when the interviews took place.

It hasn't been a long time. It's been a couple of months. I only went to a few of their meetings, but I haven't been able to be in any of their programs or anything like that. They have a program on Wednesday, but I have my kids on Wednesdays, so I haven't been able to go to that one.

Yes, it's been recent, and I don't have a lot of experience. (P15, FRG, national)

The new group members perspectives were situated within an outsider frame, because they had not participated in many group activities and hesitantly spoke of their experiences with the groups. Of note, five participants had longstanding involvement in fatherhood groups ranging from fifteen to almost thirty years and were able to provide much more in-depth insight into both historical and contemporary dynamics of their groups and the FRM.

At the outset of this research, the distinction was preliminarily made between FRGs and IFGs. However, the narratives of the fathers themselves demonstrated that the distinction between these groups is not necessarily that well-defined. Over half of the participants were members of FRGs (n = 16; 10 BC-based, 5 national)<sup>33</sup> and members of IFGs (n = 7; all BC-based) were underrepresented. However, an unanticipated number of participants were members of fatherhood groups that were not clearly identifiable as either FRGs or IFGs. Instead, these groups shared characteristics of both FRGs and IFGs, because their narratives and groups' approaches were both rights-based and involvement-based, although rights-based ideologies were more deeply entrenched; hereafter, these groups are referred to as blended fatherhood groups (BFG) (n = 4; all BC-based). Additionally, a couple of participants were involved in informal fatherhood groups that could be more accurately described as fatherhood networks (FN) (n = 2; 1 BC-based, 1 with both BC and national experience), because they were informal support networks for fathers that did not have official titles or engage in advocacy of any kind. The FNs were similar to BFGs in that they shared characteristics of both FRGs and IFGs but ideologically were more closely aligned with IFGs.

The participants ranged in age, including mid-20s (n = 1), 30s (n = 3), 40s (n = 14), 50s (n = 5), and over 60 (n = 2); however, a couple of participants did not disclose their ages (n = 2). The backgrounds of participants were telling of the group dynamics, because most of the participants were in relatively privileged positions. The vast majority identified as white/Caucasian (n = 23), had university educations or greater (n = 20),

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<sup>33</sup> These numbers do not align with the number of participants (i.e., 27), because two fathers belonged to more than one group.

were heterosexual (n = 27), and appeared to be middle-to-upper class.<sup>34</sup> The participants' backgrounds demonstrated how their experiences may be interconnected with their positions of privilege, but also highlighted an absence of voices of socioeconomically disadvantaged fathers and those who are Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC).<sup>35</sup> Of note, while some participants were BIPOC (n = 4), only one participant spoke meaningfully of the interlinking nature of race/ethnicity and fatherhood experiences.

### 5.2.1. Becoming Group Members

The participants shared common ground regarding *why* they became involved in fatherhood groups. Most of the fathers expressed that negative experiences with separation/divorce, custody/access and guardianship arrangements, and family law processes more generally motivated them to join fatherhood groups. However, some participants diverted from this narrative and expressed joining fatherhood groups due to feelings of isolation and loneliness following their separation/divorce.

The guys I'm [in the group] with, they're pissed. Their ladies are real pieces of work and took them for everything they got in court. Maybe they had bad lawyers, no lawyers. Maybe they had a feminist judge. Maybe they lose (sic) everything. They all got gripes, gripes, real gripes, you know what I mean [...] my ex, she's a piece of work, too, but we settled things with no judge and though I'd rather, don't want to see her, that's why we divorced. We ended it because I didn't like her, she didn't like me. But my guys, those guys, they had it bad, real bad. They came to us [the group] because they had it bad, real. Then there are guys like me, the lonely guys. Us guys need guys who are figuring out the same shit, alone like us. Us guys come together, work on being alone, being dads with no support [...] I get the guys who are mad, got the short end of the, are mad. That's not me, I got comrad (sic), what's the, guess I got guys who got my back now. (P27, IFG, BC)

As P18 (FRG, national) noted that “the whole divorce thing kind of put me down this path.” However, a few participants indicated that, in addition to joining the fatherhood groups as a result of negative experiences during divorce/separation and/or family court proceedings, they were motivated to join these groups as a platform for legal and

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<sup>34</sup> The participants were not asked directly about their incomes or finances, but during the interviews most spoke of their income, the amount of money involved in their separation/divorce proceedings, and other factors that were telling of their socioeconomic standings.

<sup>35</sup> The interconnections among privilege, group involvement, and fatherhood movements are discussed further in Chapter 6.

political activism. For example, P23 (FRG, BC) referred to himself as “politically motivated” and ran for local office because “nobody should have to go through what I’ve gone through.”

Most of the participants were only involved in a single fatherhood group (i.e., FRG, IFG, BFG, FN), and the majority remained in the same group throughout their time in the movement. Only two participants were engaged in multiple groups at the same time, and they both expressed that their involvement in more than one group was a result of the groups offering different forms of engagement. For instance, P18 (FRG & BFG, national) expressed that he was involved in one group for support and the other for advocacy.

I'm involved in two groups that are related ... [BFG] is a support network that is offering services or directing men and families to the services whereas [FRG] is an advocacy group.

Additionally, some members have shifted across different groups. The majority of participants who changed groups did so largely out of necessity. To illustrate, P14 (FRG, BC) was originally involved in a FRG focused on parental alienation advocacy, but moved to a new FRG when his original parental alienation group relocated their base to the United States.

Yes, I finally started to get involved with the [current FRG]. When they first started up, I was still pretty heavily invested in [parental alienation group], but I got involved with them. I saw a positive energy and potential for social change from a couple of the people that were involved there and moved over to that. Currently, the [parental alienation group] ... they're running it out of Texas now. It hasn't really died, it's slowed down a little bit. There isn't quite as much time from the people down there's perspective. I still keep a hand in some of the administrative stuff around that and I certainly help this current group ... to do some work around the [parental] alienation. (P14, FRG, BC)

P23 (IFG, BC) and P27 (IFG, BC) were the only participants who changed groups by choice. Both participants had originally joined FRGs, but within a few years shifted to IFGs.

When I was settling this with [ex-wife's name], all the legal stuff, I sought legal support and found it with [name of FRG] ... after we made [the divorce] official, I stuck 'round, offered advice to the guys, didn't myself get stuff from it anymore. Me, I had new stuff to worry 'bout, like my kids,

getting back on track, life. I found a new group of guys who were lookin' for the same stuff as me ... help being a dad." (P27, IFG, BC)

P23 (IFG, BC) expressed similar sentiment noting that he found FRGs to be "too political." Other reasons for changing groups were because their original group had disbanded or the participant had moved to a different province (e.g., relocated from BC to Ontario). However, as previously noted, the vast majority of participants had not changed or left their groups.

## **5.2.2. Impacts of Group Involvement**

A key theme across many of the participants' narratives was the impact being involved in the group had on them.

[involvement in the groups has] given me an outlet for a positive way to channel the advocacy that I want to do for my family, and broaden that to everybody else's family that I can think of, while at the same time doing work for my family [...] Some of the people that I've been able to form relationships with I wouldn't know existed were it not for the work that I'm doing. I'm very happy to say that they take my calls quite readily and are happy to help out in what I think is good work that we as a collective do. (P14, FRG, BC)

Many identified these groups as a constructive outlet, both for the way in which the groups supported them individually and provided a space for them to advocate for change. While the majority spoke to positive impacts, a primary concern shared among the participants was the negative financial impact of being involved in these groups.

... my time, myself, is unpaid working with the groups, past and present. I dedicated myself, my time, my resources to these groups and never received a penny, not even one cent, in return. For myself, the hardest thing was the financial hit I took, I take. (P10, IFG).

I spend a lot of time dealing with both groups. I've dealt with both groups, so my time doesn't get a lot into earning an income as much as it should. That's one very substantial effect that it's had with me. (P14, FRG, BC)

Many fathers spoke of working up to 20 hours a week "pro-bono" (P27, IFG, BC) to keep their groups running and reported that only groups based out of existing programs had any core funding (e.g., men's resource centres). Of note, the financial cost of group involvement is one possible explanation for the underrepresentation of fathers of lower

socioeconomic statuses (see section 6.2 of Chapter 6). This was also the basis for a few participants becoming less involved in their group and, in some cases, the FRM overall.

The FRGs were dominantly, and in many instances exclusively, focused on activism within the FRM. These groups provided little to no support for their members and were focused on political and legal reform. BFGs tended to balance advocacy (e.g., political, legal) with support for their members (e.g., support circles, legal clinics). However, the primary function of the IFGs and FNs was to provide support for fathers, including emotional and mental health support, informal legal advice (e.g., custody/guardianship proceedings, division of assets), and resources for fathers experiencing separation/divorced, in the family court process, and engaging in parenting post-separation. As P16 (BC, IFG) noted, they provide informal support on a “pay it forward philosophy.” However, some groups had more formal supports in place than others. For example, the BFG to which P18 (BFG & FRG, national) belongs to a group that runs a legal clinic. He suggested that at the moment they are “more of a referral centre” when it comes to anything beyond legal support, but they are working to bring in counselling and have started parenting support groups.

Though the groups’ formal supports were identified as being a helpful resource for fathers, the participants narratives demonstrated that they benefitted more from the formation of friendships and support networks. P26 (IFG, BC) explained that groups provide outlets for men who otherwise experience barriers to help seeking due to feelings that men “are not supposed to need support.”

There's even, especially in men ... the sense that it's not appropriate for us in the way it's appropriate for other identifiable subgroups because we're not supposed to need support. We're supposed to be self-contained and we're supposed to yada, yada, yada. If I go and seek support specifically for something like that, I'm abdicating my decision as a male in the biological environment here. Then I can see that. I don't think that that's rare. I think that's pretty common and I can see that that would be really difficult for somebody trying to set up support groups. I never went and looked. I just thought I'll be alone with this. I'm in my bed. I'm lying there. I can't really blame anybody else for it. The best I can do is stay clean and start living real life from that. I suppose it could have been easier if I was sitting with other guys. (P26, IFG, BC)

P18 (BFG & FRG, national) echoed this sentiment when discussing the supports provided by his BFG. He noted, “men have trouble asking for help.”

As previously noted, most FRGs were solely focused on activism and advocacy, and the majority of participants who belonged to groups that were advocacy focused and did not provided formal or informal support for their members. P14 (FRG, BC) explained, “we didn’t provide any kind of support groups. It was one thing that we stayed away from.” However, some FRGs also had a “dudes group” element in which informal support was provided among members, but this was not an established focus of their groups (P18, FRG & BFG, national). P18 also partook in some informal advocacy and stated that he often “hangs out” at courthouses to provide informal legal advice to fathers and, although not an intended outcome, invite them to join his group.

While there were many shared experiences, beliefs, and values among participants from all groups, the divide was apparent among participants who were actively involved in the FRM and those who were not. All of the participants from FRGs were involved primarily in advocacy, and those in BFGs balanced their activism with support for their members. Only a few members of IFGs and FNs participated in any form of activism and, as noted above, supports for fathers were meaningfully integrated into how IFGs and FNs operated and interlinked with their emphasis on healthy parenting and relationships. However, the vast majority of FRGs concentrated on law reform and distanced themselves from providing “self-help” (P14, FRG, BC).

## **5.3. Advocacy, Activism, and the FRM**

### **5.3.1. From Public Spectacles to Politics**

The beginning of the FRM in most nations, including Canada, was characterized by the use of public spectacles to raise awareness about fathers’ rights and push for legal reform. Consistent with other scholars’ findings (for example, see Amyot, 2010), the participants who were involved in FRGs for longer periods of time (i.e., 15-30 years) spoke of the tactics they used to draw attention to their calls for legal and policy reform during the earlier phases of the Canadian FRM (i.e., 1990s-2000s).

I have a big X on me because of, I don't know if you Googled me and saw that I climbed a major bridge here back [...] I was elected president and as I was elected president, the role of a president is to lead. If anybody had to climb the bridge, it was me. What I did is, I went and I climbed the bridge and I stood on the bridge basically because I was forced to the whole day. That whole thing itself was all a setup, which the public



doesn't understand. I wanted to come down after I hung up the poster, [the police] didn't want me to come down. They actually sent the special squad up there and attached me to the bridge to prevent me from coming down. The guy who was attaching me to the bridge was laughing, saying, "This is a big scam." Some of the cops, very few of them were reasonable.

The problem is the public doesn't understand what really goes... It was a political thing because prior to me climbing the bridge, I had been all over the TV basically denigrating the judges, telling everybody how corrupt the system is and it was causing a lot of damage in the industry. I was telling people don't hire divorce lawyers. Just go to court on your own. It's not even worth it, it's a big scam. Either way, you're going to lose. It was causing enormous amounts of problems in the divorce industry because at the time this was happening, there were so many people going through it, which it hasn't stopped. It's still as bad as it was.

It's just the timing was such that I was on every TV program, every radio station and then when I climbed the bridge, it got even, even worse. Now, because I climbed the bridge and stopped basically all of the traffic going in and out [...] When you block a major bridge, you're blocking hundreds and thousands of people from going into work and leaving work. With that stunt that I caused, my intent was to go up and come down. We had planned on me staying up there for a week on the bridge but we realized very quickly afterward, after the planning that it would never happen.

The point is, and I say this with all transparency, what I'm trying to disclose to you is that our, when I say 'our', I'm talking about myself and my members' original intent was that I would be on that bridge for a week or more and I actually climbed the bridge with a ton of bottles of water on my back and everything to be able to stay up there for... I'd done a fast, I hadn't eaten in about two weeks to empty my body, to be able to stay up there for a month without eating. In any case, what I'm trying to say is that by being forced to stay up there by the police in the manner that they kept me up there because it was a whole plan of doing it differently, but their intention was to put all of the population against us because we had essentially blocked the traffic for the whole day in the morning and in the evening, causing outrageous traffic all across the city and what they wanted to do by keeping me up there until 7:00pm after rush hour in the evening, because I climbed up at around five, six in the morning so I blocked the morning rush hour and then in the evening, I blocked the evening rush hour.

What they wanted to do was to turn everybody against me. What they didn't realize is that there were just too many people going through it that it didn't work that way. I ended up being on every television show, the most popular TV shows, highest rating shows, and radio and TV shows ... had me on the air. Everywhere I went, I told them blatantly that the judges were lying. They were corrupt, it was criminal activity. Of course, I was denigrating a whole group of people who were not very happy about this. (P13, FRG, national)

Other participants who were longstanding FRAs shared engaging in similar acts to garner attention for the FRM, such as P4 who shared, "...my whole parental life had fallen to pieces, so I said, 'What the hey?' I made a Spiderman costume and climbed a 200 foot crane." P4 also wore a Spiderman tie to his family court hearings to pay homage to his earlier fathers' rights activism in BC. Similarly, P25 (FRG, national) drove a brightly painted van across Canada that, by his description, resembled a children's television character to raise awareness about fathers' rights and the need for shared parenting by default post-separation. P25 also recounted dressing as the Flash and Batman as part of his advocacy efforts because "kids see fathers as superheroes."

While the focus of the FRM in Canada has always been legal reform (e.g., reduced child support payments) (Amyot, 2010), a marked shift has occurred within the FRM over the last decade. Canadian fathers' rights advocacy has dominantly move away from the spectacle-based activism of the 1990s-2000s. Instead, FRGs have begun undertaking social, legal, and political advocacy in the form of lobbying efforts and education targeted at legislative and political reform.

We still don't have money, but we're evolving that way and we're evolving to be stronger internationally. We're also working closer with the legal community and the academics to support shared parenting. As I mentioned, we now have the academics on board as of two years ago, and more important and especially at this conference that just finished. That's a major breakthrough and that'll have a big ripple effect. (P8, FRG, BC)

To become an advocate for something does carry the type of experience that you want to eradicate, through advocacy. One does try to move on, and I am not fully consumed by all of this, because it can get completely over-consumed. But my aim is to actually hold the BC government accountable. (P24, IFG, BC)

Canadian FRGs have also begun to form connections with international FRGs to expand their reach and improve the credibility of their platforms.

The majority of the FRGs focused on lobbying for political and legal reform to the exclusion of any other activism (e.g., awareness raising, education).

I used to be a member of the board of directors of the [FRG], and that's a fathers', parenting, group. We tried to advocate for within the confines of parliament, using politics to try and advocate for equal parenting by default as the marriage gets dissolved, then the two parents by default

get equal parenting rights, as long as they can, obviously. Yes, that's kind of my story. (P24, IFG, BC)

As P24 (IFG, BC) stated, before he found himself on the “outskirts of the movement” (i.e., left the FRG with which he was previously affiliated), his goal was to “hold the BC government accountable” with a focus on dismantling family maintenance enforcement and reducing child support payments (i.e., “mothers shouldn’t be paid for having more children”).

Some FRGs balanced lobbying and education efforts (e.g., hosting talks, screening documentaries).

We advocate on campuses, we collaborate with a number of other organizations. We bring out experts, speakers. We talk about men's health issues, we talk about the rate of suicide, we talk about boys' education and how the system fails boys in particular in ways that are numbers that are similar to the way it used to fail girls. We're not doing anything about the boys. (P14, FRG, BC)

I guess my approach is, as a therapist, I've always been psychoeducational, so I haven't stopped doing that. In terms of being therapeutic to my community and now maybe if I can get traction and get some airplay, I think I'd like to see if I can serve even more people than just my local community by getting the message out there and teaching people how to fix this from, I haven't come across anyone else that's explaining how it went all wrong. I've looked at how I think it's going wrong, and I have an explanation. That explanation then is my model to guide me how to intervene, where to stick a lever in. (P12, FRG, BC)

In addition to education, lobbying, and reform efforts, some FRGs engaged in fundraising to create services for men, such as men’s centres and transition housing. Nevertheless, educational and fund-raising efforts were not common, and most FRGs had a strong, if not exclusive, focus on legal reform and lobbying. As (P7, FRG, BC) noted, “we worry about politicians, not the public.” However, P18 (FRG & BFG, national) reported a heavier focus on education within both of the groups to which he belongs.

It's an advocacy group [...] We might be able to influence MPs and sit on committees or at least contribute to committees and hearings and stuff like that [...] We just put on talks about various issues trying to get people to come out to the talks [...] Most of it is just education. Bringing the issues that men have out to the public because it's suppressed. You look in the media about gendered issues or even divorce courts and stuff but also the domestic violence and sexual assault and all that kind of stuff it's pretty well focused on women only.

However, P18 often conflated his experiences with the FRG and BFG, so it is unclear if the primary focus on education truly exists across both groups.

### 5.3.2. Rights-Based Rhetoric

The explicit rhetoric of fathers' *rights* was minimized by comparison to the findings of earlier research on the FRM and fatherhood groups. Regardless of group affiliation, many participants avoided using the terminology of rights altogether and, instead, focused on a narrative that implied rights without specifically stating that they are advocating for rights, such as equal or 50/50 guardianship by default post-separation. Of note, P8 (FRG, national) suggested that the narrative of fathers' rights is beginning to disappear in the movement overall and is instead becoming a "family rights" discourse.

I would say that the movement is now transitioning away from a fathers' rights perspective more to a family rights perspective because we recognize that this is not only fathers that have been hurt. It's grandparents and second spouses, as well as the children themselves. We're aligned with children's rights, second spouses' women's groups. We're evolving that way. (P8, FRG, national)

This view was not widely shared among participants, as most only spoke of fathers and not extended family. A few participants did, however, reframe fathers' rights as children's rights. As P4 (FRG, BC) noted:

I'm not a father (sic) rights activist. I'm not going to push for grownups because grownups can push for themselves [...] I defend those that cannot defend themselves. In this case, it's the kids.

Even P14 (FRG, BC) noted that the movement is moving away from a rights focus, and his group is now only concerned with "alienating behaviours."

The majority of fathers expressed an equality-based approach. Instead of advocating for fathers' *rights*, the participants often framed their work as the fight for *equality* for fathers. As P24 (IFG, BC) suggested, he and members of his group do not consider themselves rights activists; instead, they are focused on "equality and bridging." However, the narratives that underlie the equality-based framing were reminiscent of the rhetoric that was used in earlier rights-based eras in the movement. For instance, the focus on false accusations, parental alienation, a presumption of shared parenting, kids

needing both parents/sons needing fathers, and discrimination against and silencing of fathers remain staples within fathers' rights activism despite avoiding the terminology of rights. As P27 (IFG, BC) expressed, what fathers advocating for is "... the same ol' story, because we still haven't gotten what we're asking for."

### **5.3.3. False Allegations**

Consistent with the findings of previous research (for example, see Coltrane & Hickman, 1992, Crowley, 2008; Dragiewicz, 2008) and remaining largely unchanged from earlier eras of the FRM, a primary concern for the participants across all groups was false allegations; this is both due to reports of personal experiences with being falsely accused and also a suggested common nature of these allegations. As the fathers' discussions illustrated, the reported frequency of false allegations was the reason behind their groups' strong focus on this phenomenon.

In Canada, I think there's been over 10,000 cases of false allegations, but only one case where a person has been put in jail or sentenced. (P1, BFG, BC)

[In the] group everyone has been accused falsely. Every single one. (P6, IFG, BC)

The participants generally described educational and political advocacy as their groups' responses to false allegations. Those who focused on educational efforts engaged in activities such as hosting events with speakers who "survived" their experience with false allegations (P27, IFG, BC speaking of prior his involvement with a FRG) and lawyers who had experience dealing with such accusations in court. More commonly, however, political lobbying and advocacy aimed at remedying false allegations was taking place within many of the groups.

I met with [...] the Minister of Family and Children's Services and I brought this to her attention. She was actually sympathetic, she told me she had met with a lot of fathers in past but she said they were quite irate that they didn't have a package together or not. She said that she's definitely seeing it in a different light now that I brought it forward. Especially about false allegations, but her key objective which I agree with, is about the children. (P1, BFG, BC)

False allegations were also an issue on which some groups aimed to create partnerships with larger, more established organizations addressing false allegations on

a broader scale (i.e., outside the context of fathers and family court proceedings). In particular, P14 (FRG, BC) expressed a desire for Innocence Canada<sup>36</sup> to "... become a member of the coalition" that his group was forming related to false allegations of abuse made against fathers in family court.

Of note, false allegations are an issue on which some of the groups are divided. While they share the emphasis, more "radical" FRGs moved beyond advocacy to making falsified claims and allegations of their own. P1 explained that FRGs are:

... splintered because some had more radical thoughts than others. Like for example, one of the groups wanted to just put out their own false allegations. They said, "Well if the mothers get to do it, let's, let's just do the false allegation in defense." Obviously, that would crash the entire system.

This distinction is important because it suggests a range of beliefs among FRGs, including radicalization.

#### **5.3.4. Fatherlessness**

A mainstay of the FRM has been advocating against fatherlessness and single-mother households, which FRAs problematize as children needing both parents. This theme remains a staple of the contemporary FRM, and is reminiscent of previous rights-based dialogue which asserted that a father is necessary to adequately raise their children and, more specifically, sons.

According to numerous studies conducted in Canada, the US, the UK, and Australia, fatherless children, when compared to "normal families," are eleven times more likely to exhibit violent behaviour [...] Fatherless children are nine times more likely to run away from home, which makes them much more likely to become either victims or perpetrators of crimes. They are nine times more likely to join gangs. I see just about every RCMP car out there has on it somewhere, "Say no to gang life." Fatherless children are six times more likely to end up in prison [and] more likely to be involved in teen pregnancies, which means more fatherless children. (P4, FRG, BC)

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<sup>36</sup> Innocence Canada is a "non-profit organization dedicated to identifying, advocating for, and exonerating individuals convicted of a crime that they did not commit" as well as "work to prevent future injustices through legal education and reform." More information about Innocence Canada is available here: <https://www.innocencecanada.com/exonerations>

The ills of fatherlessness conveyed in the participants' activism included, but are not limited to, teen pregnancy, criminality, violence, and weakness in male children. These findings are not new, as the phase one findings of this research and earlier examinations of the FRM unearthed similar rhetoric (for example, see Crowley, 2009a). While fatherlessness was a topic most participants discussed, a marked difference existed between more activism-based groups (i.e., dominantly FRGs) and involvement-based groups (i.e., mostly IFGs). FRGs framed the issue of fatherlessness as the cause of social ills (e.g., crime, violence) while IFGs focused on the importance of building relationships and staying involved in their children's lives post-separation.

### **5.3.5. Parental Alienation**

Since as early as the 1980s, fathers' rights activism has concentrated on parental alienation (PA) and Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS)<sup>37</sup> (Adams, 2006). While PA and, more specifically, PAS have been largely discredited, alienation has been used as a tool and advocacy strategy since the beginning of the FRM (Crowley, 2009a) and remained a common theme across these interviews. For example, P14 (FRG, BC) spent seven years as the vice president of a group with the sole goal of raising awareness about PA.

A lot of fathers were involved in that, not exclusively fathers and probably not a lot more than 50 percent fathers, but a lot of fathers. I still got a very close interest in that but it's no longer something that I do exclusively. It wasn't a well-defined role but what we did was advocate on behalf of kids in alienated circumstances. We spoke to judges, lawyers, mental health workers, other advocates. We put on events, we put on conferences, we distributed brochures, we had a fairly popular website, we put together a day called Parental Alienation Awareness Day [...] The Parental Alienation Awareness Day was an advocacy event that became international, I think at the end, we had something like 75 nations participating or represented. We would get petitions from local governments, proclaiming April 25th as Parental Alienation Awareness Day, the Bubbles of Love thing was so that we could get kids involved and blow bubbles that would float in the air to their missing parents or something soft like that. (P14, FRG, BC)

Similarly, P23 (FRG & IFG, BC) suggested that PA is more than an advocacy tool and has developed into the Parental Alienation Movement (PAM).

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<sup>37</sup> See section 6.4.1 of Chapter 6 for a more in-depth exploration of PA and PAS.

A parental alienation movement was sprung into action by a father in Ontario. I believe he was physically disabled. He was earning somewhere around \$1,000 a month, give or take, I'm pulling a number out of here for purposes of illustration. Court told him, "We understand your circumstances. We understand that you're physically disabled and all the other circumstances around it. The court orders you to pay \$1,600 a month in four payments." He fought the court and fought the court and fought the court and wasn't able to achieve any headway. He was in a situation of having to pay \$1,600 a month when his pay was \$1,000 a month. He took the other way out and he killed himself.

When the participants spoke of PA, it was usually framed in a similar way to P23's (FRG & IFG, BC) statement; that is, fathers are the victims of PA and alienation has harmful impacts on fathers resulting in, but not limited to, suicide. As P17 (FRG, national) explained, "I don't know if you did know, one of the activists who has become a victim of alienation in BC, just committed suicide over the weekend."

While most participants focused on the emotional harms experienced by fathers and potential results of such harms (e.g., death by suicide), a few also focused on the harms PA had on their sons, to the exclusion of their daughters. For example, P23 (FRG & IFG, BC) who had both a daughter and sons with which he did not have contact, noted that his sons have "gone through their entire formative years being told that they hate me. That I'm [P23], not dad."

P14 (FRG, BC) re-framed PA as a form of domestic violence perpetrated against men.

I've been pushing people to understand the link between parental alienation and domestic violence. Parental alienation is a form of domestic violence. When you define domestic violence partially as control and isolation, and you understand parental alienation, you see that that's what alienation is, or at least that's one of the main effects of the purposes of an alienator is to control an individual and isolate them from their children and the rest of the family.

No other participants shared P14's the belief that PA is a form of domestic violence. However, the feeling was common that PA and PAS victimizes fathers. Of note, a couple of fathers expressed that PA was not just something that occurred post-separation and that PA is something that is on-going in relationships from the beginning (P20, FN, BC & national).



Similar to the divide that existed among FRGs and IFGs with respect to fatherlessness, the participants from IFGs very rarely spoke of PA or PAS. However, PA and PAS were a central focus of discussion for most participants from FRGs, BFGs, and FNs. As P27 (IFG, BC), who spoke at length about his drug and alcohol dependency, explained “it was never about punishing me. It was always about protecting my children from me.”

### **5.3.6. Canada is the “Anti-Male Capital of the World”**

The participants who were involved in groups that engage in advocacy reported being subject to negative reactions and responses on group and individual levels, which was suggested to be a result of Canada being the “anti-male capital of the world” (P25, FRG, national). The majority of the negative responses the groups experience were cancelled events and protests, as well as charges being laid against them in some incidents.

Yes and that happened to almost every one of our events that we had after that too, they pulled fire alarms, they blocked the entrances, they pulled fire alarms twice actually, again blocked the entrance one time, they got big guys to stand in front of the doorway. (P18, FRG & BFG, national)

In women (sic) parades, we very often put up banners. I went up on the walkway over the Mary Hill Bypass in 2007. Again, I got charged and convicted with mischief. Got a 90-day conditional sentence for that one. [They said] that I was denying people the use of public whatever. Because the RCMP shut down a Mary Hill Bypass in the neighbourhood. (P4, FRG, BC)

Of note, those who reported negative responses experienced by their groups often, but not exclusively, belonged to large scale provincial groups and national oversight groups.

Some participants spoke of “micro-aggressions” (P10, FRG, national) that they faced during their advocacy work. For instance, P14 (FRG, BC) discussed the “strong reactions” to the activism in which he engaged on behalf of his group, which dominantly focused on false allegations. As previously noted, P14 (FRG, BC) spoke of his efforts to bring Innocence Canada into his FRG to help advocate against false allegations of abuse levied against fathers in family court. He recounted Innocence Canada’s reaction

to his request and used that encounter to illustrate the “strong reactions” he had experienced:

What a coincidence that we're talking about it today. Last week, I was at a couple of events around false findings of guilt and false guilty pleas. The Innocence Canada Project put on in advance, I think last Monday that I attempted (sic), and there were I think six panelists. The Innocence Canada Project is a group of lawyers who have gotten together to review people who claim that they have been falsely convicted of murder and manslaughter. It's a very serious thing.

They talk about how people in general can be falsely convicted of crimes. Innocent people going to jail, having their lives ruined, having their families' lives ruined, all that stuff. There was a number of fairly well-credentialed people on the panel. One of them was a lawyer [...] I approached her and I said, “[our group] love to talk to you about how you might become a member of the coalition that we're putting together around this stuff.”

She was so receptive that she suggested that I get in touch with another group who I had been in touch with, and I said to her, “I've been in touch with them, but it's pretty difficult to get a return phone call.” She said, “Well, I take the picture, [P14's FRG] is one that they may not really be anxious to work together with.” I said, “Yes, no, I get that but we really are not that kind of group. We're a very different group and I'd be happy to talk to you about who we are if you're interested in listening.” She says, “Absolutely sure. Why don't you send me an email?”

[...] I typed her out an email and sent it off to her. The event finished and they asked for comments or questions, and I stood up and said “[...] The majority of false convictions are boys and men.” I talked in general terms about how I substantiated that and then went on to policy 51, which is the bill that the liberals are proposing to do a number of things. [...] I asked for their response and sat down. Everybody laughed and I buttonholed this woman in the hall that I had spoken to, and she turned to me with the most vicious eyes, started yelling and screaming at me as to how I really had no place to talk about these things, and that I was a destructive person. I started to respond to her and she cut me off and said, “No, let me finish.” She went on for another couple of minutes and then just turned around and left. My colleague happened to ride down the elevator with her, and she was still yelling and screaming about how I had no place to talk about these things, and eventually said to her friend, “He ought to go fist himself.” [...] I've had strong reactions but generally not from people that are highly credentialed in places of authority when they're speaking for those places of authority. To go have someone sodomized is, that's scary. [...] I know when I'm being confrontational. I know when I'm being provocative, and I was not any of those things. Not that that would justify her comment. (P14, FRG, BC)

Of note, in addition to his efforts to bring Innocence Canada into the FRM, P14 also attempted to integrate their advocacy into the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit Peoples Inquiry (MMIWG2SI). This was unsuccessful, as P14 noted, “they made it very clear that they were excluding boys and men as the only group that they wouldn't interview.” However, P14 did express that he feels the advocacy of FRGs to include men and boys in the MMIWG2SI aided in the inquiry becoming inclusive of two-spirit people. That is, “we became successful in another way because they've shifted their focus to be more inclusive by including LGBTQ, two-spirited people in the inquiry partially as a result of our work, certainly.”

Many participants perceived Members of Parliament (MP) and other government officials refusing their calls and meeting requests as a common form of resistance to their activism. For example, P8 (FRG, national) noted “I asked to talk to my MP [...] She doesn't want to get involved or anything like that [...] All they care about is how it would translate into votes.”

While some participants spoke of the negative responses faced by their groups, most focused on how their legal and political advocacy also had harmful repercussions in their personal lives. To illustrate, P16 (FRG, BC) suggested that his active engagement in the FRM and the social and media attention his advocacy had garnered impacted the family court judge's decision in his case.

I had a big X on my back. So, when I was in court with my ex, they weren't so much, at this point doing everything against me to help her, they were doing everything against me to punish me for what I'd done. You follow what I'm saying? (P16, FRG, BC)

P11 (FRG, BC) also experienced personal impacts of his political advocacy and discussed the negative effect this had on his relationship with his current wife.

**P11:** Women Canada published a book called... well, it was a research report actually. Anyway, to make the long story short, they put my name in it and a bunch of other guys' names and called us every dirty name in the book and wanted us charged for hate crimes and terrorism and you name it. They wanted the laws changed so that we could be jailed. [...] That's a serious thing. These people have a lot of power and a lot of money.

**Sarah:** They used your legal name, you could be found from that?

**P11:** Yes. I'm first on the list.

**Sarah:** Did that have an impact on you, on your life?

**P11:** Well, it pretty much ruined my life, damn near ruined my marriage. My poor wife here, she damn near had a, well, she did have a nervous breakdown actually and ended up on Paxil and all the rest of it.

**Sarah:** Did you experience a lot of backlash?

**P11:** Huge. There was feminist discussion groups. There was one out of Edmonton actually that had a bunch of people and they're speculating that since I was such an evil woman-hating blah, blah, blah, that maybe I was involved with these murders on the Highway of Tears. [...] These are not nice people. These people, I don't know what's wrong, but they've got some anger issues.

Many other participants reported experiences of tension within their communities and loss of friendships. P27 (IFG, BC) spoke of his previous involvement in a FRG, and he referred to “backlash” as “when the political became personal,” which the vast majority of participants attributed to feminism and the feminist movement.

Quite a bit of backlash. Yes, I would say. Especially when you ruffle the status quo. I lost many, many friends on Facebook and all that, because I speak out. I tell it how it is, in terms of equality and all that. Especially, the more feminist among my peers. They're really, really offended by some of the stuff. Take men's rights activism versus feminism groups. There's blows and everybody hating each other. When it comes to parenting after divorce, it's... recognize at least, that fathers don't have many rights over their children after divorce. The feminist movement does recognize that. They want to keep it. [...] It's this duality of their approach, of only one equality. "We want equality but we don't really want you to be equal to us, because if we lose the power over the children then we lose power in general." Something like that. It just proves to me that it's never really about the children. It's about the power over their children. (P24, IFG, BC)

Interestingly, while P24 was speaking of his past involvement in a FRG in the quote above, he nevertheless perceived “ruffling the status quo” as challenging feminism. This was one of the instances in which anti-feminist ideologies were present within IFGs.

Of note, a few participants suggested that part of their activism was actually intended to reduce stigma associated with men's and fatherhood groups. As P18 (BFG & FRG, national) explained, “once you tell people what it is about, they're very welcoming of the idea.” However, this was not a common belief among politically active participants. The vast majority did not find people outside of the FRM to be “welcoming” to their groups and/or advocacy work.

## 5.4. Feminists and Fathers

### 5.4.1. The “F” Word

A few participants did not directly discuss feminists and feminism. Nevertheless, without specifically stating the word feminism/feminist, the majority of participants addressed their stance on feminist issues. For instance, a common theme that existed across interviews was a discussion of their feelings of disadvantage and inequality in light of mothers being “favoured” above fathers in family law, which was often attributed to being a feminist issue.

Most of the participants spoke directly of feminists and feminism. The distinction between “equality feminists” and “gender feminists” (P8, FRG, national), was pronounced in their narratives. These participants dominantly identified with a form of feminism aligned closely with a formal equality model, and it was articulated as a version of feminism that did not challenge men’s authority and control. P8 (FRG, national) referred to this as “equality feminism.”

... you can divide the feminist camp into gender feminists and equality feminists ... equality feminists believe that men and women are equal under the law ... gender feminists” believe that ... it’s always a gender struggle between men and women, it’s a zero-sum game. For a woman to win man has to lose, so therefore it becomes a perpetual battle.

P8 further described that gender feminists “also believe in the equality above costs,” meaning substantive equality for women as opposed to understanding inequality as a “struggle” shared among men and women. These narratives centred on feminism not being “inclusive” of men (P18, BFG & FRG, national), as P24 (IFG, BC) suggested “anti-male.”

I will just say this, the third wave feminist agenda, specifically about a very highly politicized, very anti-male rhetoric that you see nowadays. Especially with the current world map of gender and all of the stuff that is happening around Hollywood etcetera [...] I see that there's a lot of anti-male rhetoric out there.

P1’s (BFG, BC) words echoed other misconceptions about feminism when he noted “a lot of feminists will say, this is the one area where they’ll say, they gave birth so they should own the child, right?”

#### 5.4.2. “I’m a feminist, but...”

A few participants self-identified as feminists. However, most of the participants who self-identified as feminists added qualifying language to distinguish the type of feminism to which they ascribed, such as P8 (FRG, national) who considered himself aligned with “equality feminists.” This is similar to P27’s (IFG, BC) conception of “pro-men feminism,” which he suggested demonstrated an understanding of how “men are oppressed” alongside women. P27’s added additional qualifying language when he explained that “yes, I believe in feminism. I’m a feminist, but don’t confuse me [with] *those* types of feminists [...] the archaic ones.” When prompted to further explain his expression “archaic ones,” P27 stated that these feminists are “radical” and want equality “at the obvious express (sic) of men.”

The distinction was often made between the forms of feminism with which the participants identified and radical feminists and “feminazis” who engage in “exclusionary politics” (P4, FRG, BC).

**P4:** In the '60s, the feminists took some of the men's clubs and gyms to court to say, "You can't be just male." No, they're not. Some guy tried to take Curves to court and the judge threw it out ... I was a scout leader. We have one guy. He was a single parent and his wife had dropped off the face of the earth, I gather. I asked who was going to take his daughter to the end-of-the-year banquet for Brownies. He said, "Well, I thought I would," and they said, "No. No men are allowed." Four or five years later, that girl won the Chief Scouts Award.

**Sarah:** Oh, really?

**P4:** Really. [It's like] the guy in the States that said, "I'm not racist. I only pick on Whites." ... Well, I remember in the '70s, the Navy saying, "No, no, no, sir. You're not allowed to do that to the women. You're not allowed to cut them out of the picture like that." Well, I was basically a feminist, but I have no time whatsoever for feminazis.

The versions of feminism and equality that the participants seemingly supported often times only aligned with a vision of feminism that fought for inclusion of men as fellow oppressed peoples.

A couple of participants expressed that they previously allied themselves with feminists but now no longer support feminism. For example, P11 (FRG, BC) was quite

clear that he was once a feminist, but due to feelings of being “misled” he has disassociated himself from the movement.

I would go, rather naively went, and participated in various feminist endeavors believing that these were fellow travelers, these were people who were sincere in their commitment to equality. I explain a little bit about what was happening in the family law situation. The reception I got was not friendly, it was very, very hostile. Again, full of the same assumptions, men are trying to get control of their children in order to oppress their ex-wives or control their ex-wives and this type of thing. There were these assumptions coming. Now, I believe that type of assumption does come from feminist ideas. I found that really, really unfair. At the time I was considered myself a feminist but after about a year of thinking at first maybe I just met some really nasty ones, I realized that this was common. This was basically the view. (P11, FRG, BC)

P19 (FRG, BC) spoke of a similar experience which resulted in him rejecting notions of feminism. He suggested that men’s rights have been “supressed,” which led women in the feminist movement to perceive him a misogynist for advocating for men’s and fathers’ rights.

Well, it is quite for a number of reasons. To me, [men’s rights are] almost suppressed. Like say once I open up this club, I’m going to get a lot of lash back that I’m a misogynist and all that kind of stuff. Because I’m against certain things and just about equality for both of them. Not about he versus she or anything like that, but that’s what we’re used to for the last how many years, and it’s women against men kind of stuff, and because I speak out on men’s issues, that means I must be against women’s issues ... It’s either all or nothing. (P19, FRG, BC)

P4 (FRG, BC) referred to this as “exclusionary politics,” which caused him to question his own identification as a feminist, such as when “the women’s transition house worked to squash us from starting a men’s transition house.” Additionally, some participants expressed that the “problem” of feminism spanned all spheres, and not just that of family law. To illustrate, P19 (FRG, BC) expressed that even teaching in universities is “men are bad propaganda” and that higher education is creating “a culture against men.”

In the discussions surrounding feminism, there were some conflicts within the participants’ narratives. A few participants would express anti-feminist views, but nevertheless indicated that they are in support of feminism. For example, as P24 (IFG, BC) referred to third wave feminism as “anti-male,” but later in our conversation expressed that he “still believes in” and understands “why we need” feminism.

### 5.4.3. “They only ever listen to feminists”

The participants who openly discussed their anti-feminist views often interconnected their opposition to feminism with feelings of not being heard and the absence of the voices of men and fathers socially, legally, politically, and, in some instances, academically.

If they want to do a scientific study, they only ever listen to feminists ... I say to myself, what exactly does feminism have to do with raising children say a dad wouldn't also know? (P11, FRG, BC)

There needs to be a study on that and there needs to be a perspective, those in the bill with themselves because today, almost all of the studies, about 99% have been done from a point of view about women studies and feminism. (P8, FRG, national)

The lack of fathers' voices and perspectives in research was a point of concern for some participants. However, the majority were most troubled by absence of their voices and not being heard or taken seriously politically and legally.

Many participants suggested that politicians and law makers often did not meet with men who are advocating for fathers' rights and FRGs. Due to what they experienced as bias against men and fathers, the participants believed that officials were more likely to only meet with women's groups and feminist advocates. For instance, P1 (BFG, BC) expressed that "... basically a lot of these parties won't even meet with us [...] because they know, they know it's a controversial topic." This connected with P1's comment from earlier in our conversation that I, a woman, would have a much better chance of setting up a similar meeting (i.e., "I think you should go talk to the bar, see if they will accept your meeting," P1, BFG, BC).

A few participants indicated that the women who have legal and political platforms are those who engage in forms of feminism that oppress men (e.g., radical feminism, "gender feminism"). These participants suggested that many women who are not "radical," including those who would advocate on the behalf of men, are often excluded from political and legal advocacy.

The gender feminists are probably 10 to 20% of the feminist population, but these days they have about 90% of the voice. Yes, now it's a very easy voice to have because all you have to do is say, well, this is against



women and probably it's very difficult for a politician to be put in that situation. (P8, FRG, BC)

The law and politics (sic) don't want to hear us guys, they don't want to hear the women who support us. We are shut out, shut up at every turn. (P27, IFG, BC)

The participants spoke of their frustration with their perceived voicelessness in legal and political realms, including the exclusion of women who would advocate for men and fathers, such as "pro-men feminists" (P27, IFG, BC) and "equality feminists" (P8, FRG, BC); they suggested this further silenced and minimized the voices and needs of fathers, and also evidenced the bias and discrimination that fathers and FRGs face.

#### **5.4.4. The Red Pill**

A common theme within the participants' discussion of feminism was the documentary *The Red Pill*, which is described by the filmmaker, Cassie Jaye, as:

When feminist filmmaker Cassie Jaye sets out to document the mysterious and polarizing world of the Men's Rights Movement, she begins to question her own beliefs. Jaye had only heard about the Men's Rights Movement as being a misogynist hate-group aiming to turn back the clock on women's rights, but when she spends a year filming the leaders and followers within the movement, she learns the various ways men are disadvantaged and discriminated against. *The Red Pill* challenges the audience to pull back the veil, question societal norms, and expose themselves to an alternate perspective on gender equality, power and privilege (Jaye, 2018, para. 1).

Many participants used the film as support for their narratives regarding feminists who fight for and support the rights and equality of men and fathers.

You should watch a movie called *The Red Pill*... This one lady, she decided to do the voice of men, right? She considered herself a feminist. She did the study and she felt very conflicted. Actually, feminists in theory are on the same side as us, right? Because they're just looking for equality like we are, right?

After *The Red Pill*, [Cassie Jaye] did a follow-up one, the key point for me in her follow-up was dads are always complaining they don't get to see their kids. She said that's because it's discrimination against women and women are always seen as caregivers, so they're forced to take care of the kids and that's why they have to have 100% custody. She said, "Oops, that doesn't make sense, does it?" That was [Cassie Jay] speaking, pretending that she was a feminist and saying, "this is why I changed from being a feminist." ... I don't know how much that's

changed. I see a change. I see Cassie Jaye out there, I see people talking about it but then the Prime Minister says he's a feminist and he wants to stop violence against women. That's certainly a bad thing. (P20, FN, BC)

*The Red Pill* was used as evidence to substantiate two primary arguments: 1) that there are feminists who support the Men's Rights Movement and, subsequently, the FRM; and 2) that once feminists get an insider perspective on men's and fathers' rights, they will stop demonizing the movement and give up their oppressive feminist allegiances. However, not all participants endorsed *The Red Pill*, such as P24 (IFG, BC) referred to the film as "not for me" because he believes society still "needs" feminism.

Participants spoke of how their group, and other FRGs, use *The Red Pill* as an advocacy and educational tool to highlight how feminists misrepresent the men's and FRM and how feminism oppresses men and fathers.

**P18 (FRG & BFG, national):** We just put on talks about various issues trying to get people to come out to the talks. We hosted *The Red Pill*, we did a screening of *The Red Pill* movie. That was very controversial. It got canceled by the theatre.

**Sarah:** It did?

**P18:** Yes. Three days before it was supposed to happen.

**Sarah:** What was their rationale for that?

**P18:** There is a feminist group that phoned the theatre and talked to other groups who said they're going to pull their sponsorship of the theatre. It was a private theatre sort of thing that showed off the wall movies. It wasn't like whatever you call those Hollywood, independent theatre ... The feminists got a word that *The Red Pill* was being shown, they put pressure on the theatre owner and he folded and said, "I'm not showing it because they convinced some major groups to pull their sponsorship from the theatre." ... We were the second one that happened to. It happened in Australia just a couple of weeks before we were having our screening.

These groups have experienced negative responses for using *The Red Pill* as an advocacy tool. As P18 (FRG & BFG, national) noted in the above passage, their showing of the film had been cancelled due to "the feminists." P14 (FRG, national), whose group hosted 12 screenings of *The Red Pill* Canada-wide over the previous year (i.e., 2016-2017), had a very similar experience:

There was a lot of negative comments from feminists who felt that it was a misogynistic film although none of them had seen any of the movie. There was one woman in particular who spoke on behalf of an organization that was very negative and very vocal in their opposition to not only the film but to our group.

Of note, many participants would share a single source that supported their claims (e.g., *The Red Pill*, anecdotal evidence, unnamed research) and exclude any evidence to the contrary.

## **5.5. Fatherhood and Family Law**

One of the foci of this research was examining the experiences of fathers, as well as fatherhood groups and activists, within contemporary and more progressive socio-legal contexts that exist in Canada generally and BC more specifically. These progressive contexts include a shift toward and support for egalitarian family models, along with legislation (e.g., the *Family Law Act/FLA*) that privileges contact with both parents and affords fathers more access to their children post-separation as a result of new guardianship provisions. In theory, this progressive socio-legal context could address some of the concerns raised by fathers and fatherhood activists over the last few decades and has the potential to alter the fatherhood and fathers' rights discourses within the Canadian context.

### **5.5.1. The FLA**

None of the participants were supportive of the FLA. In fact, despite the progressive focus of the FLA, many suggested that act was a continuation of previous legislation such as the *Family Relations Act* and *Divorce Act* (e.g., "a system born out of the failings of the *Divorce Act*" P24, IFG, BC). The vast majority of the participants who went through the family law process in BC also felt that their interests were not adequately represented in the *FLA*.

They've working on this for years. Like 10 years in the making. The new FLA is their baby. They take so much pride in it which is great, except they never changed the new FLA to represent society. (P1, BFG, BC)

... within the legal community it's felt to be the most progressive act, but it doesn't support shared parenting in any way, as I know, as far as I know. (P8, FRG, national)

One of the primary reasons fathers felt their interests were not represented in the FLA was because they were not included in the development of the legislation.

They have a working group with twelve people, you'll find this very interesting. We found it so interesting. The working group of twelve people consists of eleven lawyers. The Bar Association, judges which are obviously lawyers, and the Ministry which are obviously lawyers, and they have one representative from the community, which is appointed by the Bar. These people, they created the family law legislation. They don't have any interaction with actual users. They created it, basically, they created a legislation by lawyers, for lawyers. Their whole point, when I brought this up to [Minister of Justice], she said to me, she goes, "She thinks her solution to the problem is that they need more lawyers. They need to hire, open up more modern court lawyer shops." I'm like, "Wait a minute, you don't want to just change the legislation and make it easier for everyone?" She goes, "No, we should get more lawyers." I'm like, "Oh my God." That just shows you how out of touch they are. (P1, BFG, BC)

P3 (BFG, BC) expressed similar concerns, which he illustrated through a meeting he had with the Chief Justice.

... they were all very, "I wrote this, I worked on this for 5 years, and I believe in it. [I said], "That's good, and by the way, do you have a family?" [They responded] "Yes." [I asked] "Are there kids?" [They responded] "Yes." [I asked] "Are you happily married?" [They responded] "Yes." [I replied] "So you don't understand our views sir."

Of note, a few participants felt that the manner in which the FLA is written could support some rights of fathers.

The last letter I wrote [to the Premier expressed that] there's a military maxim which states that one should not give orders that one knows will not or cannot be obeyed, because that undermines your authority and makes future orders more likely to be disobeyed. The family law system ignores this completely. It's ridiculous. They don't follow their own guidelines. [...] No one's listening. No one's reading the rules and following the rules. They're making them up as they go. It seems to be, "Make them up so that we look good in the eyes of John Q Public." (P4, FRG, BC)

It talks about as I recall, joint legal custody, but we've had that in the federal law for a long time. If you look at what is it, section 16.9, it's we should have maximum contact. There should be actually joint legal and joint physical custody. That's been there in law for years, but it simply has not been implemented by the courts or at most they assigned joint custody because I think they started reacting to the political pressure of sole parental custody. Really what it ends up being is sole custody with some decision-making authority, joint decision-making authority, but

typically very weak. There are no speeches on that but that's what we're finding anecdotally. (P8, FRG, national)

Well, you know what, the answer to that is actually very simple. We already have the statutes within the law, that have been introduced. The Family Law Act in 2013. The issue is the implementation of such and the interpretation because a lot of the time, specifically with family law, it is about interpretation because every case is different, etc., etc. We all know that. With the introduction of the family law, I think that most of the statutes are already there. For example, I can now go, as a Family Law Act in 2013, I can now go to court and say, "Okay, my ex is not giving me access and here is some proof of why and I want to have a good relationship, blah, blah, blah." So, the judge looks at that and says, "Okay, yeah I can see that there is nothing impeding your relationship with your kid, but the Mom being difficult. So, Mom, here is the fine against you." I was awarded that and I always considered that a massive win. It was a \$500 fine that she got out of the money that I owed her. [laughs] It basically amounted to nothing, right? This was because she denied him access to me, the child I mean, over Father's Day. The next year she did it again because there is nothing stopping her from doing it again. Unless I go back to court and start the whole process again and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. The short of it, in terms of what can we do to move forward is to simply implement the Family Law Act, because there are statutes that allow for this. (P24, IFG, BC).

However, while the participants believed the FLA was written in a way that could put them on a more equal footing, they felt that the FLA was not being implemented in a way that actually afforded fathers what they were requesting (e.g., equal guardianship rights by default, reduced child support payments).

Many participants sought information on the effectiveness of the FLA, especially with respect to if and/or how in practice it represents fathers' interests and custody/access or guardianship.

**P1 (BFG, BC):** Here's the funny thing. When I went to meet with [justice officials in BC], I'm like, "Can you tell us how the new FLA has been? What are the new stats in custody access?" They're like, "We can't tell you that." "Have the legal fees decreased?" All these kinds of things. They're like, "We can't tell you." I'm like, "Well, are you guys willing to make changes so that there's equal custody?" They're like, "No, we can't do anything until we have a study done to verify the effects of the new FLA." Which is now four years old. They're like, "Well, we can't do it until the study's completed." We're like, "When's the study going to happen?" [...] They haven't commissioned the study. I'm like, "Okay, you're not going to make any changes. You're going to allow all these families to be disrupted by this Family Law Act, which has no social science backing it and you're basically going to allow this to keep going as social

experiment. You don't even have a study commissioned." I have requested from them, that they have provided funding to start this study.

**Sarah:** Do you think that'll happen?

**P1:** We're going to have 'til the new Attorney General's appointed. Once that person's appointed, I'll for sure approach them and I'll make that same request, so I have an official request done. Anyhow, we'll see.

**Sarah:** Has anyone else taken the time to listen?

**P1:** I met with many of the Liberal Ministers, they're all, I'd say all of them without a legal background are sympathetic. Do they believe it could happen? Not any time soon.

However, they expressed concerns that, to the best of their knowledge, research had not been done to explore the outcomes of the FLA.

Two participants had experience in family law both prior to and once the FLA came into force in 2013. Both suggested that they hadn't seen any changes in how their previous and current cases were handled. As P24 (IFG, BC) explained:

When I talked to the head of... I don't know if he is still in office but he was under the last government and I don't know if it's the political appointment or not but it could be his appointment. He asked me this literal questions. He said, "Okay, look Divorce Act and now the Family Law Act. Do you think that there have been any changes? Does it-- and I suppose you know what? So, we don't talk in terms of custody anymore. It's semantic." We used the terms parental responsibilities as opposed to custody because they decided that custody was very, very, adversarial and it's against the very biology of who we are as parents.

Similarly, P27 (IFG, BC) expressed his discontent by stating, "new piece of paper, same shit system."

## **5.5.2. Guardianship and the Best Interest of the Child(ren)**

There was a relative consensus among participants that guardianship should be determined based on what is in the best interest of the child(ren). Similar to earlier eras of fatherhood movements, the majority of participants articulated the best interest of the children in line with their on-going advocacy for children needing both parents and the need for mandated shared parenting arrangements. Of note, the best interest of the child(ren) is a primary emphasis and guiding presumption in the FLA, and also the UN

Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). However, many participants disagreed with how this provision was being implemented in practice.

**Sarah:** Under the Family Law Act, it is, in fact, the presumption of the best interest of the children...

**P4:** Well, that's what they say.

**Sarah:** What do you think that actually means?

**P4:** Well, the best interest of the children would be to have shared parenting. This has been proven over and over and over again.

Most felt as if this presumption “means nothing” (P1, BFG, BC).

[...] the best interest of the child is the child has both parents in their lives. Unless one parent is abusive or something, right? Or unless a parent offs out on their own. The stats I showed you are cases where fathers are basically putting about 100,000 of their money and time into winning custody with the kids and you see the stats, 79.6% wanted custody. That shows, is that the best interest of the child? Then when it becomes exclusive custody, that means the father's out. [...] Most often, the father loses all contact because when a mother has custody, they make all the parental decisions. They can change the schedule whenever they want, and usually that's where the father loses custody and any time. (P1, BFG, BC)

Of note, P1 and many other participants who expressed that the best interest of the child(ren) provision was not being followed did, in fact, have 50/50 guardianship arrangements under the FLA. Further, a couple of participants disagreed with shared parenting equating the best interest of the child(ren). As P26 (IFG, BC) stated, “I don't think anything supersedes the safety of the child.”

P5 (BFG, BC) recounted his family court experience to illustrate how he believes the FLA's best interest of the child(ren) provision was not correctly interpreted his case.

After a seven-day trial, the judge decides that's the way it's going to stay. I'm not going to get any more parenting time. The funny thing, too, was, in the FLA what they based for the sake of the child, not for the sake of the child, but in the best interest of the child, there is this, there is these 10 points. Does the child have a bond with the parent? Anyways, you go down to these points. One of them is, I can't remember exactly. It's easy enough to look up too. It's something to do with essentially drugs and alcohol. It doesn't say it that way, though. It says, could their decision-making be... further down the list, it doesn't mention drugs and alcohol specifically, but is that parent's decision-making compromised by

whatever? It's like point number seven. He puts that in his summary, that my decision-making could be.. well, the other thing too is, I told you about Al-Anon and AA. When I started going to Al-Anon, this is 1993, I've been going for a few years. I was a pot smoker and a cigarette smoker. I thought, "I feel like a hypocrite. I should just get rid of everything." I was never a drinker. Anyways. The short time I've been trying this out turned into 20 years of living a completely sober life. This judge has the nerve to put it into his summary, that my thinking could be compromised just by emotional, or anger, or whatever. He's totally twisting what this Section 37 of the FLA. The other part of it, too, down at the bottom says that only that particular factor should be weighted. There is eight or nine out of the 10 that are fine, but it seems the weight is, there shouldn't be a problem with shared parenting.

In addition to the best interest provision, some participants were skeptical of other developments in the FLA such as the shift to guardianship in the place of custody/access. As P9 (FRG, BC) noted, "I think in the new act, although nominally, parents have equal rights [...] at least to begin with, because they've done away with custody. It's called now guardianship, but I'm not really quite sure what that's worth."

Under the FLA, only a couple of participants reported being denied guardianship rights, and a few had guardianship arrangements with which they were unsatisfied.

**P3 (BFG, BC):** The access agreement meant nothing it's piece of paper. She has custody she has all the rights to make decisions for the child in the best interest for the child.

**Sarah:** What kind of decision-making authority would you have over...

**P3:** I really didn't have any decision-making power. In the beginning I thought I did but as time went on I realized that I really didn't have any power at all. My ex-wife [...] she was anxious about a lot of things and one was the dentist. When it was time for [daughter] to go to a dentist, for the very first time I took her the very first time when we were living here in Vancouver. She was four and it was just for a meet the dentist, sit in a chair and just get comfortable the dentist is going to look after your tooth for the rest of your life. I took her for the visit. From then on I took every visit and it turns out she's going to leave tomorrow for work. We're just trying talking [sic] about that and I would communicate with her. When [daughter] was eight or nine I'd say she cut that out, I couldn't take [daughter] to the dentist anymore and I got no information about what was going on with her mouth. [...] I just wanted to be involved.

**Sarah:** Yes, of course.

**P3:** Again, I talked to my lawyer about that, again huge cost, \$250 an hour and she said, "You don't have the rights in this I'm sorry, that's how



legislation is written. She's got custody so you really have no rights." It's hard to hear.

P3's custody/guardianship was originally determined under the FRA, but the earlier arrangements remain unchanged regardless of his efforts in court after the implementation of the FLA.

The participants' concerns regarding best interest of the child(ren) provision were ultimately that the phrasing is "intentionally ambiguous" (P10) and "deliberately vague" (P6) which results in what they argue to be inconsistent interpretations and applications of the provision.

The best interest of the child is a standard everywhere. The problem is that it's not defined. It's an indeterminate standard, and that's one of the problems. By the way, it's not only in Canada. It's also in the States, in England, and for that matter, in all the UN declarations and treaties. The best interest of the child is not defined in any document. Therefore legally, you can drive a truck through it and the courts do. What we want to do is essentially equate the best interest of the child with shared parenting. Shared parenting should be the first mandatory consideration, absence of domestic abuse. We wanted to find out because otherwise, it doesn't matter what you say. You can present the shared parenting, but it's always going to be tied to the best interest of the child, and the best interest of the child is always going to be deemed to be sole custody. (P8, FRG, BC)

Many participants are seeking law reform in which the best interest provision is clarified to include shared parenting or 50/50 guardianship as the default arrangement post-separation. However, a few participants believe that the provision is problematic enough that it should be removed from the FLA altogether.

**P6 (IFG, BC):** It's an arbitrary call, right? What is the best interest of the children, nobody knows. It's deliberately vague so that people fight about it. It's deliberately vague because what's, is little Johnny benefiting from ski lessons or soccer, who knows? People fight about this. Is little Johnny going to live in Richmond or Vancouver, what's the best for Johnny? What's wrong with this one? Here or Burnaby for that matter.

**Sarah:** Richmond is not a far drive from here.

**P6:** No, but what I'm saying is a lot of times people get caught up in these things, these questions and they spend a lot of amount of money trying to figure it out. Like excuse me, this is not Zimbabwe, alright? I mean, there is no place here that is terrible or dangerous or whatever. [...]What is best for the kids, they live in the west side or, which is a fact. Quality of life is quality of life. If you cannot afford a home here, you can afford one there,

why not move there. Isn't it in the best interest of the kids to have a nice home to live in? Isn't it? Why should you even be forced to rent here, for example, to have the westside lifestyle, or whatever that is. Everything is so arbitrary, what is in the best interest of the kids, so arbitrary. You can argue it one way or you can argue it another way and you end up fighting over that. I think you should just remove it. [...] it's catch all, best interest of the children, what does that mean?

However, there were a few positive results of, but simultaneously conflict responses to, the best interest of the child(ren) provision. For instance, P9 (FRG, BC) reported that the provision resulted in him obtaining full legal custody of his children; he recounted that the judge in his case informed his ex-wife who was “screaming” in court that “it’s in the children’s best interest for you to just be quiet.” Nevertheless, P9 felt that the provision was potentially harmful, especially in cases where false allegations were made, because “how can you make a decision about what’s in the best interest of the children” when “one person is perjuring themselves.” He felt this was compounded by “the clause that dealt with false allegations” being removed from the FLA. However, it is unclear to which actual or perceived clause P9 was referring.

In contrast to the other participants, P27 (IFG, BC) reflected on guardianship decision in his case and explained how the best interest of his children was reflected in the judge’s ruling. He explained, “the conditions didn’t impact my access. My own behaviour did.” During our conversation he recounted signing the court documents while “very high,” and said that he “doesn’t remember any of it.”

Regardless of group affiliation, most participants argued that a presumption of 50/50 guardianship should be the “starting point” for parenting arrangements post-separation (P18, BFG & FRG, national), regardless of what the parenting roles and responsibilities were prior to when the separation took place. For example, P19 (FRG, BC) saw the only fair arrangement to be a “automatic 50/50 split” and you can “work from there.” P16 (FRG, BC) argued that 50/50 guardianship is the only way to have equality in parenting, because in any other arrangement (e.g., 40/60 split) “you are still the junior parent.” However, participants called for more than guardianship arrangements to be automatically divided equally post-separation, such as P22 (IFG, BC) who wanted the law to reflect “50/50 [division of] everything,” including children, assets, and debts.

### 5.5.3. Bias against Fathers and the “Golden Vagina”

Regardless of the group with which the participants were associated, a common theme across the interviews was a belief that fathers face bias and discrimination in family law processes and proceedings. P1 (BFG, BC) expressed that the “population that is most discriminated [against] now is the divorced father,” which he reported experiencing in his own guardianship proceedings and witnessing among his group members. Accusations of bias were levied against all those who were involved in some degree with family law, including policy makers, ministry workers, law enforcement, lawyers, and judges. To illustrate, P7 (FRG, BC) expressed his belief that “the police and the ministry are working with the mom.”

Their articulation of the bias clearly situated fathers in a position of disadvantage and systems working in the favour of mothers.

The system has built-in biases obviously, and I needed advice on how do I go overcome those biases, how strong is the bias versus a more honest lawyer, a more thoughtful lawyer would say, "It's really stacked against you buddy, so this is what you're going to have to do to overcome that."  
(P17, FRG, national)

... they're like Karla Homolka can parent without any interference from anybody, but man, they've not done anything [chuckles], have their access to their children taken away in courts constantly. She's a registered sex offender, [chuckles] she can bring this, but she wants to for example, because she's a woman. Otherwise, men don't have that privilege, of course. (P9, FRG, BC)

I thought the court system was reasonably fair. I had no idea what it was really like, but it turns out it wasn't really fair. Anyway, she ended up with sole custody. I ended up with a big monthly payment, and I visited the kids at her discretion. She kept drinking, and I felt that kids weren't being looked after properly, and there wasn't really anything I could about it. Then she kept the house and didn't make the mortgage payments. To make a long story short, that drove me into bankruptcy and this thing.  
(P11, FRG, BC)

P23 (FRG & IFG, BC) referred to the favouring of mothers as the “golden vagina” rule in which women “can do nothing wrong” and men “can do nothing right.” He suggested that it would “take an act of God” to address the bias against men in family law processes. Most participants spoke of covert forms of bias against fathers. However, P7 (FRG, BC) recounted his experience, in which he recalled being asked by the judge “what do kids

need?" P7 stated "food shelter," to which the judge replied "no, a mother's love." The evidence that participants used to support their allegations of bias was dominantly personal experience and anecdotal evidence. For example, when asked how he knew that bias against fathers was a frequent experience in the BC family court system, P10 (FRG, national) stated that he "learned" of the favouritism shown to mothers by observing family court proceedings and outcomes, his own included.

The participants' beliefs of bias and discrimination against fathers went hand-in-hand with accusations that they were not heard and their voices were silenced in family court proceedings. P4 (FRG, BC) expressed, "no one's listening," which was echoed in many participants' narratives.

Judges don't hear from people like me. They don't see the results of their actions, other than to say, "That case is closed, it's done. Those people are no longer in front of us. They haven't come back to us for a year or two or three. Therefore, we must have done a good job." Sorry, that's not the way it is. It's not that you've done a good job, it's that people have given up. (P23, FRG & IFG, BC)

I was instantly the bad guy who'd could have just got, and nobody seemed to want to hear anything different. It didn't matter what I said. They just didn't believe me. Well, I said, it's understandable. There are people in my own family didn't believe me, but anyway, things went downhill from there. (P11, FRG, BC)

Alternatively, as P27 (IFG, BC) put it, "if I speak softly, they don't hear me. If I scream, they throw me out of court [...] whatever I say, however I say [it], they don't hear me." Some participants also expressed that they experienced direct mistreatment in family court, which P11 (FRG, BC) illustrated in his statement that he was "treated as an animal."

One of the common ways participants suggested how bias is present in family law is the use of false allegations of abuse by fathers in custody/access and guardianship proceedings to undermine fathers' requests for shared parenting.

Two weeks ago when [my ex-wife] came around me, it was at a track event. She showed up on my time and she showed up and then, bang. She hits me with the false allegation. Whenever she comes around me and she sees that I'm happy, bang. She hits me with something. [laughs] [...] I brought it up many a time in court myself because I've been hit with so many false allegations. Even after that false allegation of abuse. [...] If there's an allegation of any sort, bang. She's got to take the kids. Take

the kids, ask questions later. Which I agree with, right? What I asked her is, "What happens when there's a false allegation?" What she said to me was, it's not in her domain. I agree with her. It's in the domain of Ministry of Justice and when you bring this up with the Ministry of Justice, they don't care. They really don't care. (P1, BFG, BC)

He went on to explain that:

I meet professionals [...], other lawyers, I meet doctors, I meet accountants, stand up guys, every single time, they're hit with some false allegation and boom, their whole life is destroyed. It is very scary what the legal system can do to you. It is very scary.

P1 (BFG, BC) framed false allegations as "the silver bullet in family law [...] because there's no repercussion and the other side gets hurt by it." Most of the participants expressed similar feelings, such as P22 (IFG, BC) who explained, once his "gaslighter" ex-wife "started lying I knew I was screwed."

P5 (BFG, BC) attempted to disprove the accusations of violence his ex-wife made against him by re-enacting the incident in court.

[The judge] gave me a big lecture about that he'll be acting in the best interest of the child and this is about the child and it's not about you and blah-blah-blah. His ruling was completely gender-biased. What happened too was we did one section 211 reports [...] I thought, "I'm just going to be positive about the whole thing. I'm just going to show him I'm a good enough father. That's it." I do that. He comes over to our house, he meets [current wife], we have a baby. I have a daughter who's now five. She just a little infant at the time and everything is fine.

He goes over to [ex-wife's] place, my ex's place and everything is fine there, good enough, both parents are good enough. She just starts telling the report writer, Dr. [name], all this stuff about me. Just smearing me that my son had witnessed abuse, that I had, one of the things was that I had picked up my son's highchair at the time and held it over my head and threatened to smash it down on her. Every time I heard that story I thought, "That's so far not true. That's so beyond true and it sounds like a wrestling. Like WWF. [laughs] She's describing.

Anyways, in court, I'm saying to the judge, because I go home and I'm telling [current wife] about this and demonstrating and my daughter has a highchair and [current wife] goes, "If you picked up that highchair because I'm almost 6'5", held it over your head. You'd hit the ceiling. They would just crash down on you.' You go, "Oh, yes." I go back to court and say to the judge this highchair thing, which is really the one and only demonstration of violence.

The other thing, too, is there is no accusation, whatsoever, of violence or abuse prior. This is her story on the day we split up, that I picked up this highchair. If anything, I can't remember much on that day. I remember kicking the plants down against the wall and putting a dent in the wall that I fixed. I think I might have tripped over the highchair. [...] The idea of me picking it up and holding it over my head. I do the whole thing for the judge and say, "Look, I can actually, an eight-foot ceiling, if I put my hand up I'm tall enough to touch the eight-foot ceiling. You're not going to get a highchair in between there."

P5 expressed that while “no evidence was produced” to support the highchair ever took place or prove any other allegations made against him (e.g., removing his daughter from school without consent), that the judge determined he’s “not a good enough parent” based on the Section 211 assessment.

#### **5.5.4. “We need to keep family out of court”**

None of the participants were supportive of how the family law system runs in BC specifically and Canada more generally. Even those who had the outcome they desired (e.g., shared parenting or 50/50 guardianship, sole custody, reduced child support payments) expressed at length both what the problems of the system were/are and what they envision to be an improved model for family law. The recommendations for change included implementing a ruling of 50/50 guardianship by default, keeping family matters out of court, reducing and/or removing the costs associated with family court, and ensuring that the family law system as we know it is “totally wrecked, thrown out, and redone” (P19, FRG, BC).

The participants spoke at length of the financial costs of family law, and contended that money needs to be taken out of family law which is actually a capitalist industry. As P23 (IFG, BC) explained, “it’s all about the money, the money, the money and bulldozing of a human being doesn’t matter to them.” To illustrate his point, P23 explained that he was being “held ransom for 30k” in back child support payments while simultaneously being “expected to be a father.” Many fathers also suggested that the “money-making industry” (P27, IFG, BC) of family court is the reason that out of court resolutions are not taking place more often. The potential impact of financial incentive for family law lawyers was of concern for many. For instance, P19 (FRG, BC) speculated that the FLA was put into place because as a result of lawyer’s seeking financial gains, and explained that “these lawyers are making more arguments for the clients so that

they can charge them more.” However, one of the most powerful arguments a participant made for prioritizing out of court resolutions was P27 (IFG, BC) who advocated for culturally safe family law processes and suggested that the family “never would have become a legal matter if it stayed in Indigenous hands.”

P27 (IFG, BC) was one of the strongest advocates for separating family matters from the court, but he was also one of the only participants who was successful in making guardianship arrangements and dividing assets informally.

I heard it somewhere once that the only things that belong in court are crime and property. My family is neither. We need to keep family out of the court, and I kept my family out of court.

Fathers who went through formal family court processes also prioritized alternate measures, such as mediation, as a means through which family matters should be addressed. Most fathers focused on the costs associated with formal court proceedings and legal representation as the primary reason for seeking out of court resolutions, but a few also expressed their concerns about the negative impact court has on children. P4 (FRG, BC) noted, “I’ve talked to people that have been in court 20, 30, 60 plus times over custody of their children. Children know it. This is extremely stressful on a child.” P23 (FRG & IFG, BC) made a similar argument that the “stakeholders” (e.g., lawyers) are claiming that family law processes are about protecting the children while in reality focusing on the financial gains (i.e., “stakeholders don’t care about the kids. It’s never been about the children”). Of note, very few of the fathers found mediation and alternative measures accessible, regardless of the emphasis placed on out of court resolutions like mediation by the FLA and fathers themselves.

The fathers shared their frustration related to the current family law system and also their visions for how the system should run. Many expressed that a starting point for reforming the family law system is to implement automatic 50/50 guardianship or shared parenting.

It needs to be totally wrecked, thrown out, and redone. What has to change is that from the day of separation it has to be a 50/50 split automatically, no questions asked that both parties have access to those children until one or the other can prove in court that one isn’t fit for the child. Instead of what we have right now is that the woman has access to the children right away and the guy is thrown out of the house. You guys can figure it out down the road kind of idea. (P19, FRG, BC)

Others had more multifaceted visions for family law reform on provincial and national scales. To illustrate, P8 (FRG, national) shared his frustration with the current system and what he believes needs to be addressed moving forward.

Well, first of all, the family justice system in Canada is broken, which everyone has pointed out, including, I think the Chief Justice of the family court. The [Chief Justice] says, "yes, the system is broken," they all mean different things. Typically, if a judge points that out, like the [Chief Justice], what they want is more money for the system because there aren't enough judges and enough resources. I would agree with that, the horrible wait times, a lot of unnecessary costs.

The biggest thing is that they're just outright biased in the courts. The question is well, why do you have the bias? Can it be that so many judges are morally corrupt? I've done a statistical study [...] over 10 years in family law cases, not a single appellate level judge ruled more in favour of men than women, not one. There is bias on the system and then you can say, well, why is there bias? Here you can say that people believe in the tender years' doctrine. A lot of people believe that women have been unfairly treated and that this is something for equality.

A lot of people believe that sole custody is awarded because that means mothers get more money and women historically, and to this day continue to make less than men. Therefore, really, it's not about the trial, it's about giving money to the mother so that she doesn't take welfare.

I would also say, which isn't myself and I haven't heard too many people argue this, but I don't like the argument that judges are inherently biased because most people go into law and they're much more idealistic than that. As an engineer, I tend to look at things structurally and I've come to the conclusion that judges are inherently biased because, under the constitutions of all advanced countries, legislation, parliament, or congress has the budgetary authority, the judiciary doesn't. Judges are very reluctant, historically have been very reluctant, not only in family law but in any area of law to come up with rulings where government funding is involved. Where they make an imposition on government funding because that gets involved in the gray area of constitutional boundaries, and they want to steer clear of that by a country mile. I suspect that the family law system, the way it's written does not take that into account. It puts judges in a situation where mama's going to be put on, on welfare, and that means it's government funding. I don't want to be responsible for drawing in government funding, so, therefore, we're just going to have sole custody. I suspect that might be a very subtle, but probably very real reason why we have inherent bias in the courts.

However, while an outlier with respect to both his beliefs about why the family law system is "broken" and what needs to be done to repair it, P26 (IFG, BC) was focused



on the injustices faced by Indigenous fathers. When asked about barriers fathers experience in family court, he stated:

Well, like I got to be blunt. I just, I got to say that it's racial. I'm not saying that every individual in the system that they were set up against... it was the problem that way, but the entire process of just keep wanting to say abduction. The abduction of [Indigenous] children by the state, the process, and that happen, and then the process by which they're supposedly going to be able to regain access stacked against Indigenous individuals every step of the way. Certainly, race, and then I think probably something else that's really devastating there is that there is almost inevitable sense of depression and hopelessness sets in following setback after setback, after setback. Many times finding out that the lawyer that they've retained or usually someone doing pro bono work, doesn't either have the time or doesn't have the inclination to make good representation there and what they're hearing so you just got to give up. When they hear that enough times, then they start to give up and for anybody who has got a history of drug and alcohol abuse [...] Being shoved into a depressing hole, it makes it almost inevitable that they're going to relapse. Then, everybody stands around and says, see, we knew it, when in fact that's the last response to a really inhumane process that they're involved in.

P26 further suggested that even “[Indigenous] fathers that have fought vigorously and nobly for years to get their kids back” face a system that prioritizes “keeping the child away from the father,” even with the father had “a history they had broken from.” He contextualized this narrative with both “the hoops [Indigenous fathers] have to jump through to be considered worthy parents” and the history of “abduction of Indigenous children by the state” (e.g., MCFD, 60’s scoop). P26 was the only participant who demonstrated awareness of the increased barriers faced by marginalized fathers generally and Indigenous fathers more specifically.

## **5.6. The Men in the Movement**

The participants’ identity constructions were a telling theme that emerged from this research. The participants often distanced themselves from the perceptions that others held of them, their fatherhood groups, and/or fatherhood movements overall. P27 (IFG, BC) attributed this to fathers being “misunderstood” and “misrepresented,” so he and other participants both overtly (i.e., explicitly stating) and covertly (e.g., expressing their perceptions of self) tried to “set the record straight.”

When we have our meetings, I look around the room and I don't see anybody with horns. I think most of us are decent guys and once you get to know somebody, it's more difficult to dislike them. (P14, FRG, BC)

Similarly, P1 (BFG, BC) and a few others described a split between their groups and the more "radical" members of the FRM. P27 (IFG, BC) who was a member of a FRG before joining an IFG expressed that the more radical FRGs are "angrier," but that many members of FRGs and IFGs are "good guys needing somewhere to go."

The vast majority of participants saw themselves as good fathers who were victimized by the family law system. For example, P8 (FRG, BC) characterized himself as a "chivalrous white knight" who was "absolutely chewed [...] up" by the family law process:

In terms of experiences with the legal system, I went into the legal system saying, "I know it's not exactly fair, but I'm a nice guy. I've got no criminal record. I'm an outstanding citizen. Served in the Armed Forces, so I'll play it fair. I'll also, maybe I can advance the cause a little bit of family reform." Being a chivalrous white knight, I suppose, was a very stupid thing to do because the court absolutely chewed me up.

Most of the participants shared their backgrounds (e.g., coaching their son's sports, military service, charity work) to illustrate the content of their character and compared it with how they felt they were treated during the court process (e.g., P11, FRG, who was "treated as an animal"). These characterizations existed in contrast to their perceptions of their ex-wives/partners, such as "fucking bitch" (P7, FRG, BC), "a piece of work" (P27, IFG, BC), "my wife is shit" (P9, FRG, BC), and, as the vast majority argued, struggling with mental health and addictions.

The participants generally situated their victimhood comparatively with the favouritism from which they allege their ex-wives/partners benefitted.

[...] assumptions that if you're in there, your wife is the victim and you're the criminal and then that is really how you're treated very difficult to get anything. All the resources that might normally be available to deal with a family law situation, you don't get because you don't deserve. The barriers, they're not like walls that say you can't do this. It's more like it's just not available. Whereas she got all kinds of extra help. (P11, FRG, BC)

I felt really like the victim right there. Because now, judges in the law system is going against me for no reason. [...] Why am I being treated differently based on my gender? If was a woman, holy shit, if I just say

one little thing you'll have the SWAT team over the guy's house. (P19, FRG, BC)

Many also felt that women “play the victim” (P15, FRG, national), of which “men don’t have that privilege, of course” (P9, FRG, BC).

Some suggested they were not perceived as victims, even in situations in which they believe they were victimized (e.g., false allegations of abuse). P20 (FN, BC & national) reported being a *victim* of false allegations and shared his conversation with victim services: “I said, ‘I’m the victim here obviously’ and they said, ‘Well, no. Not necessarily on paper. It looks like you’re the perpetrator.’” Similarly, P17 (FRG, BC) explained:

Liberalism, the modern concept of about 50 years of liberalism is I feel your pain. They love a victim. The one segment of society which is not apropos to be a victim is a White Anglo male heterosexual. Now, if I came out as gay at any point in this process, I would have had a lot more friends, politically speaking but that's not my orientation and not going to lie for that.

The participants’ narratives often challenged the privilege they hold in private and public spheres, and some, such as P17, suggested that they would experience less bias within the family law process if they were in some way marginalized.

## **5.7. Conclusion**

Throughout the interviews, the participants spoke of a diverse range of experiences with fatherhood and family law. They shed light on the historical and contemporary dynamics of the FRM, fatherhood groups, advocacy, and activism. Their narratives demonstrated the individual and collective experiences and challenges with fatherhood spanning personal, social, and legal spheres.

The contextual narratives provided insight into the participants’ involvement in fatherhood groups. The overlap in ideologies and shared beliefs among many participants challenged my original categorizations of FRGs and IFGs and demonstrated how these categories do not sufficiently capture the dynamics and complexities of these groups. The analysis of advocacy and activism, as well as the contemporary contexts of the FRM, draws attention to shifts in the FRM from the use of public spectacles to raise awareness to contemporary political and lobbying efforts aimed at family law reform.

However, while FRGs have reframed and reformulated *how* their reform efforts are taking place, the rhetoric and underlying narrative remained dominantly the same. The concluding discussion of the participants' experiences with and beliefs about family law systems and processes in BC is framed within the progressive socio-legal contexts within the province. However, despite the progressive social developments and legal reforms within BC, the participants' narratives echoed the same issues that fathers, fatherhood groups, and the FRM have focused on for the better part of three decades.

## Chapter 6. Analysis and Conclusions

*Though men hold power and reap the privileges that come with our sex, that power is tainted. There is, in the lives of men, a strange combination of power and privilege, pain and powerlessness. Men enjoy social power, many forms of privilege, and a sense of often unconscious entitlement by virtue of being male. But the way we have set up that world of power causes immense pain, isolation, and alienation not only for women, but also for men. This is not to equate men's pain with systemic and systematic forms of women's oppression. Rather, it is to say that men's worldly power – as we sit in our homes or walk the street, apply ourselves at work or march through history – comes with a price for us. This combination of power and pain is the hidden story in the lives of men. It is men's contradictory experiences of power.*

*(Kaufman, 1999, p. 59)*

### 6.1. Introduction

This chapter provides discussion and analysis of the phase 1 and 2 findings of this research, as well as consideration of the conclusions that can be drawn from these analyses including: 1) the privilege inherent within fatherhood groups and the exclusionary politics within these movements that resulted in the absence of the voices of BIPOC and marginalized fathers; 2) an analysis of fatherhood and patriarchal power within a critical masculinities framework; 3) an examination of developments within the advocacy and activism of fatherhood groups (e.g., a shift from publicly perceptible activism to lobbying, the persistence of problematic politics from earlier eras of the FRM, and the creation of spaces that protect pro-patriarchal and anti-feminist attitudes within these groups); and 4) the problematic conflict between Kimmel's professional and personal ideologies and actions. This chapter concludes with a discussion of fathers' claims that they face disadvantage in family law proceedings and a reflection on privilege, power, oppression, and inclusion/exclusion within the fatherhood discourses.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> The discussion and conclusions in this chapter are specific to the beliefs, understandings, and experiences of fathers who belong to fatherhood movements and groups. These findings cannot be generalized to all fathers going through family law processes.

## 6.2. Marginalized and Privileged Fathers

As previously discussed, regardless of group affiliation the vast majority participants in phase two held largely privileged identities (e.g., white, heterosexual, middle-to-upper class). Even P26 (IFG, BC), who was the only participant who spoke in-depth about the struggles faced by racialized and Indigenous men/fathers, identified as white. Further, while a few visible minority men participated in this research, none of the participants identified as Black or Indigenous, and all the participants were heterosexual. While the exclusionary dynamics were not as pronounced in the phase one data, the majority of fatherhood groups' online platforms were nevertheless spaces devoted largely to privilege, especially whiteness. Similar to Blais and Dupuis-Déri's (2012) findings, this suggests that through the politics of exclusion, fatherhood movements and groups, either intentionally or inadvertently, advocate for privileged middle-to-upper-class white men and suppress the voices and needs marginalized men and fathers.

Within social spheres, race has been and remains an “organizing feature” (Pinckney et al., 2018, p. 267; see also Kobayashi & Peake, 2000). Social groupings are not racially neutral, which is echoed in group settings and social movements in-person and online (Boler, 2007; McAdam & Kloos, 2014; Pinckney et al., 2018). Pinckney et al. (2018) suggests that this racial division of space is visible through how “our very identities are imported into these spaces,” as are the “structures and ideologies of our respective societies” (p. 268).

Within in-person and virtual spaces, including groups and social movements online and offline, racial oppression is replicated, perpetuated, and enforced, as is the privilege and dominance of whiteness (McAdam & Kloos, 2014; Pinckney et al., 2018); this process results in the creation of *white spaces* which do not represent the voices of BIPOC and concurrently systematically excludes and oppresses them. The same can be said for the reproduction of heteronormativity and heterosexual privilege within groups and social movements (for example, see Burgess, 2007; Weier, 2020). Economic oppression is also deeply interconnected, as many of the participants expressed the financial costs and “pro-bono” time associated with involvement in fatherhood groups and movements, which potentially excludes fathers of lower socioeconomic statuses. As such, through overt and covert politics of exclusion, power dynamics and imbalances, racism, and homophobia, oppression has the potential to be both created and replicated

with in-person and online fatherhood groups and movements. However, simultaneously there is the potential for progress, such as the development of spaces for Indigenous and queer fathers that are present within online Canadian IFA which has fostered the political engagement and empowerment of BIPOC fathers.

### **6.3. Fatherhood, Masculinities, and Power(lessness)**

Akin to Kaufman's (1999) approach, the participants' narratives and experiences can be understood in the framework of "men's contradictory experiences of power" (p. 60) wherein they hold power and privilege while simultaneously feeling oppressed and discriminated against within the family court process. That is, the power that men collectively hold within society acts to privilege individual men, but is also the source of their feelings of anger, pain, and disenfranchisement when the patriarchal power and control bound to their gender identity is challenged (Kaufman, 1999, p. 60, 65). These feelings of entitlement to power, and subsequent reactions to perceived and actual losses of power and control, also exist in combination with their unwillingness to acknowledge their collective position of power vis-à-vis women (Kimmel, 2013).

The tension between men's collective social power and the participants' individual feelings of discrimination and powerlessness was reflected in many facets of their narratives, including their responses to feminism and advocacy for men's equality. The participants' calls for equality tended to disregard the oppression, subjugation, marginalization, and patriarchal authority that women and the feminist movement have been fighting against. It became clear that the form of feminism with which the participants identified was one that safeguards the patriarchal power and authority from which they are accustomed to benefiting.

When the participants' images of equality *for men* did not align with their perceptions of what feminism should or should not be, they balanced their narrative with support for some forms of feminism (e.g., "equality feminism") and rejection of what they deemed to be radical feminism and/or "gender feminism" (P8, FRG & BFG, national). As P27 (IFG, BC) explained, "we're the movement against radical feminists," which is a form of feminism he described as being "angry" and a "viewpoint on women versus men and mothers versus fathers." Of note, however, participants' understandings of radical feminism were often not consistent with the actual radical feminist movement and

instead reflected any form of feminism that did not see men as oppressed and “fellow travellers” (P11, FRG, BC) fighting for their own equality. The participants’ experiences reflect how men’s collective familial, social, political, legal, and economic powers that once “buried” their pain related to complex relationships with gender and masculinity have been challenged through feminism (Kaufman, 1999, p. 71). In this sense, the participants’ rejection of feminism is situated within attempts to regain the patriarchal power that once masked their pain; these beliefs and actions are aimed at restoring the previously unquestioned systems of domination from which they benefitted.

For the participants, there was a clear disconnect between the power that they individually and, as men, collectively hold and their perceptions of powerlessness in the family law process. This was evidenced through P21 (FN, BC) his case “broke ground” toward promoting men’s equality in family court by having his ex-wife’s degrees classified as assets that were acquired during the marriage.

It was incredibly stressful, and it ate up a lot of my time doing the research and preparing stuff. I did actually break some ground in the Canadian court system when I argued that my wife's degrees that she earned while we were married, it should be considered a family asset. She also had incurred student debt because of that, so she had argued that I should take on some of that student loan debt as well. The court agreed with my argument that she acquired the debt to acquire that asset of the University degree. Therefore, she is walking away with the University degrees, as she needs to take the debt back along with it, which in my research hadn't been, courts had not given degrees assets status. I felt like I really conquered something in that way.

P21 (FN, BC) situated this as a win for men and fathers in family court, and did not see this as an enactment of patriarchal power or perpetuation of gender systems of oppression (e.g., disparities in income between men and women/the pay gap, systemic sexism).

Participants were also not reflexive about the gendered power dynamics that existed within their own relationships, as well as their own attempts to reassert such power and control during the family court process. As P7 (FRG, BC) recounted:

They were trying to get protection orders, because once you make a protection order stick, you can build so much on it. They were saying that she was claiming that I go into her work to intimidate her. [...] I'm like, "No, I just admitted to doing something that first of all, physically would be impossible for me to do because I would be..." You know what I mean,



they would call the cops because I've, what do they call, like trespassed. You know what I mean. I entered a space that I shouldn't before I even get anywhere near her. You know what I mean. If I were to do that I know where she lives, I would go put brick through her house, through her window. I'm like, "It's easier than to actually assault her in full view of her employees, customers, and all this stuff." I'm like, "I'm way smarter than that."

Further, P7 (FRG, BC) contested claims he was attempting to intimidate both his ex-wife and her lawyer. Of note, his FRG was also involved in intimidation attempts and threats against his ex-wife's lawyer.

One of them goes and makes a YouTube video about what he observed. [...] He does a video and basically he's like, "I attended court, I observed this lawyer." He's like, "What you would call a troll." He did not name her, he didn't draw [sic] her, nothing like that. She goes in, she finds closed matters, resolved matters and this was his word, injects conflict into matters that have been closed. I'm trying to remember his exact words. Find things like that and just rattle things up and then walks away from the situation making it worse, creating more conflict. It's like, okay we solved this part, let's work on this one. She comes in, rattles this one that was resolved which then makes this one even bigger and steps up. That's what she's done in my case in trial. This guy had observed her do it for all these other people before we went, so he talked about that. He never named her, he never really said fucking bitch or anything like that. He used very polite words to describe her in a very negative way. It's an observation point. She's somehow seen that video, she decides that since he was in the courtroom, I was in the courtroom, he's my friend and he did it specifically to intimidate her and because somebody down the list... There's a whole bunch of comments, somebody in those comments, I actually went back to look at it, said, "Kill the bitch." I did not find that comment but she's claiming that somebody had made that comment in there, "Kill that bitch," that now I am indirectly threatening her. You have a YouTube video put up by an organization, other than a professional connection I have nothing to do with them, who some fucking internet idiot, I don't understand how they still make these... Not everything is traceable you know what I mean? Some fucking idiot on the internet, "Yes. Fucking bitch. Kill her." I didn't see that comment. I went through all the comments, I didn't see it. Now she's trying to connect that to the organization, organization to the video, the video to me, and I'm intimidating her. She presented that in front of the judge.

P7's feelings of loss of control of his ex-wife and family challenged his patriarchal authority and resulted in efforts to reclaim the power to which he felt entitled.

The findings from phases one and two of this research highlighted a general lack of awareness of men's collective positions of power. As Messerschmidt (1993) suggests,

there are both powerful and powerless forms of masculinity, and the voices of power and privilege echoed throughout this research. While the patriarchal power relations between men and women are clear (Messerschmidt, 1993, p. 71), the power differentials among men are less obvious due to their collective position of privilege vis-à-vis women; this results in an unequal distribution of power based on race, class, and sexuality (p. 72). With the exception of a few of the fatherhood groups' web presences that focused on the needs of marginalized fathers (e.g., gay fathers, Indigenous fathers) and P26 (IFG, BC) who spoke of the barriers for racialized and Indigenous fathers, there was seemingly also a lack of understanding about the power differentials among men.

Feelings of loss of control and navigating fatherhood in the absence of complete patriarchal authority demonstrated an internal conflict for many fathers. Kaufman (1999) referred to these struggles as "the price" to which men are subjected through patriarchy and being socialized to embody hegemonic masculinity (e.g., suppression of nurturing tendencies and empathy, belief that men should not experience weakness or pain) (p. 65). The narratives of fatherhood groups and the individual fathers within them situate challenges to patriarchal authority within families in a manner that is interconnected with claims of emotional, psychological, and physical harms to men. For example, the web presence of fatherhood groups (i.e., phase one data) and the participants emphasized the price these men pay through high rates of depression, substance abuse, and death by suicide among divorced and *alienated* men/fathers. Without question, these negative outcomes experienced by men/fathers need to be addressed, but these do not result from men's inequality and oppression. Rather, a necessary step for men is to understand and dismantle patriarchal systems and hegemonic forms of masculinity that create barriers to emotion and help-seeking among men. In part, this could occur through the provision of support and integration of services (e.g., mental health) within men's/fathers' groups.

#### **6.4. The Current State of Fatherhood Groups and the FRM**

Two key developments have changed the face and potential impacts of fatherhood groups and movements: 1) the shift from public spectacles to lobbying for

political and legal reform;<sup>39</sup> and 2) the role of technology. These developments increased both the reach these groups and potential influence of these groups and their advocacy.

The use of public spectacles, which has previously been referred to as adopted “radical protest” politics (Amyot, 2010, p. 28) and “dramatic tactics” (Kimmel, 2013, p. 135), denoted reactionary and crisis politics on behalf of FRAs; these were commonly met with negative reactions and resistance. However, while some participants reported that their lobbying efforts were not well received, lobbying for legal and political reform holds a much greater capacity for these groups to influence processes, procedures, legislation, and policy development (Ozzy, 2010; Scott, 2015). This development in tactics utilized by FRAs seemed both purposeful and impactful.

Technology has altered the landscape of social movements, and the internet as a platform for fatherhood groups has changed how they connect, offer supports, advocate, and mobilize. Prior to social movements and groups developing online platforms, they had far less reach and relied heavily on attention-seeking demonstrations to bring attention to their causes and group their groups. However, today many groups rely almost exclusively on their online platforms to connect with and support fathers, and also to convey their social and political messages. For example, Kids Need Their Dads notes, “our help for fathers is 90% through e-mail, and thus we can reach you anywhere in the world.” Similarly, Fathers Resources International hosts international fatherhood groups which is made possible by “tele-webcast technology.” As noted on their website, their group now hosts “200 divorced dads via the telephone call and 2000 divorced dads listening via the internet.”

Of note, while still underrepresented among fatherhood groups and movements, technology has facilitated important advancements in these movements, such as the creation of spaces for fathers who were previously excluded (e.g., gay, BIPOC) and the ability to provide support to marginalized fathers on local, provincial, and national scales. However, in contrast, these websites have also provided a platform for retaining more radical views on fatherhood and fathers’ rights. This change has created a protected and largely unquestioned space for fathers to ascribe to more patriarchal notions of

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<sup>39</sup> While there has been a pronounced shift from public spectacles to lobbying efforts, the focus of all phases of the Canadian FRM have been on law reform.

fatherhood, views on men's rights to power and control within relationships and families, and anti-feminist discourses.

#### **6.4.1. Problematic Politics**

Despite some shifts and developments, the problematic politics of earlier eras of the FRM existed across FRGs and BFGs, including support for a presumption of equal/shared parenting (for example, see Crowley, 2009a), assertions of bias and discrimination against fathers within family law processes (for example, see Flood, 2010; Sen, 2012; Watson & Ancis, 2013), beliefs that fatherlessness harms children and, more specifically, sons (for example, see Crowley, 2009a), and claims of parental alienation as a legal tactic utilized by mothers (for example, see Adams, 2006). Regardless of the absence of political involvement and a focus on support for fathers, even IFGs and FNs retained these ideologies. These assertions have been negated by the large body of research that provides more critical approaches to understanding fatherhood. For instance, Dragiewicz (2010) characterized these strategies as “[...] lobbying and legal tactics that attack services for abused women” and other processes and laws in place that aim to protect and empower women during and post-separation/divorce (p. 202). Similarly, for Kimmel (2013), the majority of fathers’ rights activism is predicated on “unhinged claims” (p. 113) that reveal their feelings of entitlement to power and pro-patriarchal leanings while failing to acknowledge their collective position of power by comparison to women and their maternal counterparts (pp. 111-113).

In addition to the critical examinations of power, control, and patriarchy, some of the assertions made by fathers and fatherhood groups/movements have been outright disproven. There is limited support for, and significant empirical evidence that disputes, fathers’ questioning of the credibility of family court processes (e.g., false allegations, PA) and their allegations of bias against men/fathers in family court. For instance, PA is “the theory that children in divorcing families may be turned against one parent by the other favored parent” (Meier, 2009, p. 233). Based on PA, Richard Gardner “invented” PAS in the 1980s, which he “based solely on his interpretation of his own clinical experience” (Meier, 2009, p. 235). PAS was created to minimize claims of abuse aimed at fathers in family court, which Gardner alleged were fabricated by mothers with “vendettas” which were a product of a mother’s “mental illness” or “intentional malice” (p. 236). PAS is intended to provide support for men who claim false allegations of abuse

have been made against them, and also situate claims of abuse “as false tools for alienation” (p. 236). Gardner’s work on PAS has largely been discredited (Adams, 2006, pp. 1-8) as a result of the absence of any clinical backing (e.g., research) and his own “bizarre beliefs about human sexuality” (Meier, 2009, p. 236).

Despite being discredited, Gardner’s original work on PA and PAS has developed into PA theory. While lacking a clear or commonly accepted definition, within the context of PA theory, PA is defined as “a parental figure engaging in the long-term use of a variety of aggressive behaviors to harm the relationship between their child and another parental figure” (Harman et al., 2018, p. 1275; see also Baker, 2018; Kruk, 2018). PA is further described by the Amici brief to the Court of Appeals for the State of New York as “the presumption that a child’s fear or rejection of one parent (typically the non-custodial parent) stems from the malevolent influence of the preferred (typically custodial) parent” (as cited in Neilson et al., 2019, p. 2).

Parents may demonstrate negative feelings toward one another both pre- and post-separation, but research consistently shows that children are generally not easily manipulated by these attitudes. To illustrate, Rowen and Emery (2014) suggest that a parent expressing harmful attitudes toward the other parental figure results in a *boomerang effect*. That is, a child reacts negatively toward the allegedly alienating parent and does not reject the other parent (Rowen & Emery, 2014; see also Silverberg Koerner et al., 2004). Alternatively, these attitudes may compound a child’s existing negative feelings and/or desires to distance themselves from a parent (for example, see Huff, 2015). Of their own volition and in the absence of supposedly alienating behaviours, children may still resist or reject parental contact (Johnston et al., 2005; see also Neilson et al., 2019). Ultimately, allegations of child abuse are very rarely found to be false and malicious (for example, see Saini et al., 2020). Even though there is little to no scientific evidence to support the PA, PAS, or the theory of PA (Adams, 2006; Meier, 2009; Neilson et al., 2019), PA is nevertheless argued to be a form of *emotional child abuse* (Kruk, 2018) and family violence (see Harman et al., 2018).

PA remains a problematic strategy used in family court to undermine and/or counter allegations of abuse made by mothers and children (Elrod, 2016; Neilson et al., 2019). With respect to family court proceedings and determinations, Sheehy and Boyd (2014) suggested that “... judges are more likely to focus on alienating behaviours than

[intimate partner violence] when determining custody and access” (as cited in Hrymak & Hawkins, 2021a, p. 45). Neilson’s (2018) research illustrates this issue in cases where both guardianship determinations and domestic/family violence and/or child abuse are present (i.e., cross claim cases):

... courts accepting parental alienation theory in cross claim cases are placing protective parents (primarily mothers) in a horrifying double bind: if the parent insists of presenting evidence of domestic violence or child abuse in order to protect the children she risks her efforts being categorized as attempts to alienate the children from the other parent.  
(p. 35)

Hrymak and Hawkins (2021b) also found that in some cases, at the advice of their lawyers, women have not voiced their victimization and/or instances of family violence/child abuse (p. 6). These dynamics impact women’s willingness to: 1) raise the violence perpetrated against them or their children in court; and/or 2) try to put any limitations on their (ex)partner’s access to their children (Hrymak & Hawkins, 2021a; Hrymak & Hawkins, 2021b, p. 6). These findings suggest that the on-going use of PA as a strategy in family court puts women and children at risk (Neilson, 2018, p. 35), and silences women and survivors of violence.

PA is a highly gendered phenomenon and, as Neilson (2018) suggests, reflective of gender bias in family court proceedings (p. 16). For example, PA claims made by fathers are being understood within the framework of “children’s rights to maximum contact with both parents” (p. 16). In contrast, children who voice a desire to remain within the care of their mothers are seen negatively and “as the result of ‘unusual’ parent-child closeness, enmeshment, or the mother’s over-protection” (pp. 16-17). Neilson (2018) also examined cases that were interpreted in line with the father’s rights discourse (i.e., fathers’ entitlement to their children being paramount) (p. 17). These findings exist in contrast to fathers’ claims of disadvantage and bias in family court, because primarily mothers are subject to this gender bias (for example, see Hrymak & Hawkins, 2021a; Neilson, 2018).

#### **6.4.2. Reframing “Rights”**

The rhetoric of rights within the fathers’ *rights* discourse has developed to include “family rights,” such as “grandparents and second spouses” (P8, FRG, national), and the

rights of children themselves. However, the concept of “family rights” echoed the traditional fathers’ rights framework, because “family rights” was used in a manner which suggested that fathers and families have rights *to* children. The participants’ framing of the rights of children was similarly problematic, because it was articulated as a father’s paternalistic right to determine what is in the child(ren)’s best interests and defend his child(ren) because they “cannot defend themselves” (P4, FRG, BC). Framings such as these continue to emphasize fathers and families having rights *to* children, as opposed to children having rights of their own. These rights-based narratives (e.g., fathers’ rights, family rights) undermine the autonomy, agency, voice, and *rights* of children in family court matters.

Within the Canadian context, as well as internationally, law, policy, and literature alike emphasize a child’s rights approach that prioritizes children’s participation in family court proceedings (e.g., guardianship determinations), and also privileges the voices and perspectives of the children themselves within decision-making processes (Bendo & Mitchell, 2017; Birnbaum, & Saini, 2012; Martinson & Tempesta, 2018; Tempesta, 2019). An approach to family law that is child-centred and advances children’s rights is key, and it requires children’s meaningful participation in family court matters and giving due weight to children’s views. A child’s rights approach and supporting children’s participation in BC and Canadian courts can occur through means such as: 1) involving children early and on an on-going basis in decision-making processes that impact them (for example, see Birnbaum, 2017; Birnbaum & Saini, 2012; Birnbaum & Saini, 2013); 2) including children’s perspectives in determinations regarding what is in their best interests (for example, see Birnbaum, 2017; Dundee, 2016); 3) ensuring children’s participation rights in all family law cases, even those that are deemed high risk (e.g., domestic violence, allegations of parental alienation) (for example, see Birnbaum & Saini, 2013; Martinson & Raven, 2020; Morrison et al., 2020); and 4) providing legal representation for children in all cases involving their best interests (for example, see Martinson & Tempesta, 2018). This child’s rights approach exists in stark contrast to the fathers’ rights narrative, family rights frameworks, and other discourses that are based on adult’s rights and/or those that prioritize adult’s ideas of what is in the child(ren)’s best interests. Of note, Canada’s new *Divorce Act*, which was influenced by BC’s FLA and came into force on March 1, 2021, has a strong focus on the best interest of the

child(ren) which could support a child's rights approach to custody/access and guardianship issues both provincially and nationally.

### **6.4.3. Protected Spaces**

Fatherhood groups, in-person and online, create and maintain safe spaces in which men gain support for viewpoints and ideologies, such as patriarchal and anti-feminist attitudes, that are challenged and suppressed in more public settings. These settings foster dynamics in which villainizing women/ mothers/feminism, framing men and fathers as victims of bias/discrimination, and glorification of patriarchal power and control often go unchecked and unchallenged, as well as provide venues for fathers who feel wronged by the family law process to find comradery and support for their existing viewpoints. The more radical groups, such as traditional FRGs, provide a visible and overt platform for disseminating patriarchal views on fatherhood and families. However, even the more progressive and politically neutral groups reflected these outdated views. Fueled by the expansive reach of the internet, fathers who may not have previous been involved in the movement are also recruited and indoctrinated into these groups and viewpoints.

## **6.5. The Conflict of Michael Kimmel**

Although not a direct finding of this study, an unforeseen issue arose that I found particularly troubling. It is obvious through reading this thesis that Kimmel's research aided in the development of and analysis that underpins this research (for example, see Kimmel, 2010, 2013). In 2018, after this research had been developed, these data collected, and most chapters written (i.e., except for the data chapters), allegations of sexual harassment and misconduct were made against Kimmel (Flaherty, 2018) which sparked a dialogue on #MeTooSociology (Coston, 2018).

Sufficient evidence exists to largely substantiate these allegations. Multiple graduate students who worked with Kimmel have come forward and detailed encounters with Kimmel in which he harassed and made sexual advances on them and demonstrated his homophobia and transphobia (Coston, 2018; Flaherty, 2018; Ratcliffe, 2018). For example, in Coston's (2018) essay entitled *Reclaiming my fear: I will no longer stay silent about Michael Kimmel*, they recounted "explicit sexual talk," "a lack of



respect for anyone but cisgender heterosexual (or presumed cis het) men,” “homophobia in both academic and interpersonal spaces,” and “transphobia in both academic and interpersonal spaces” they experienced while working with Kimmel at the State of New York University at Stony Brook (paras. 9, 10, 11, 12). Kimmel has faced some repercussions as a result of these allegations and the #MeTooSociology movement, such as leaving his position “on the board of a gender equality group” (Ratcliffe, 2018, para, 1) and the suspension of the Jesse Bernard award that he was set to receive from the American Sociological Association (Ratcliffe, 2018).

Kimmel’s identification as a pro-feminist man in professional spheres and research focused on women’s rights and the problems of patriarchy exist in contrast to his personal behaviours and ideologies. Coston (2018) also aptly critiqued and problematized Kimmel’s work in a manner that I had not previously considered. That is, benevolent sexism and “homophobic understandings of sexuality” are subtle themes throughout much of his work (para. 8). There is great irony in Kimmel embodying everything that he critiques and challenges with regarding the problems inherent within masculinity, privilege, power, and patriarchy. However, irony does not even begin to capture the harms of his actions and conflicts that it generates within this discourse. Ultimately, Kimmel’s character has been discredited, but this only came to light near the end of the writing of this doctoral thesis.

I am unable to determine what merit remains in Kimmel’s research and findings related to fatherhood and fathers’ rights, because it is impossible to separate his work from his obvious and deep-seated biases about many men, women, and LGBTQIP2SAA<sup>40</sup> people. However, findings of other scholars support some of Kimmel’s conclusions. For example, in line with Kimmel’s (2013) analysis of aggrieved entitlement, many scholars suggest that reactionary politics and acts of resistance, including violence, can function to restore or reassert men’s feelings of power, control, and dominance (for example, see Kelly et al., 1987; Mytetiak, 2016; Vito et al., 2018). Of note, Madfis’ (2014) work demonstrates violence as a response of men who feel their entitlement has been challenged, but he builds on Kimmel’s (2013) work by integrating

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<sup>40</sup> Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, queer, intersex, pansexual, two-spirited (2S), androgynous, and asexual.

the elements of masculinity, heterosexuality, social class, and whiteness in his conception of *triple entitlement*.

## 6.6. Disadvantaged Compared to Whom?

Some feminist legal scholars rightfully question FRAs claims that family law processes are unjust or biased (for example, see Boyd, 2006; Crowley, 2009a, 2009b), because fathers “obtain primary or joint physical custody a majority of the time when they actively seek it” (Watson & Ancis, 2013, p. 167).<sup>41</sup> Further, allegations of unfair child support payments disregard the tendency for disparate income between men and women, and also on-going patriarchal oppression of women and systemic sexism that are at the root of this pay gap.

The online fatherhood platforms and participants in this research largely focus on their shared belief that fathers face disadvantage in family court proceedings. Earlier research from the United States suggests that there may be some legitimacy to fathers’ claims of disadvantage. As Kimmel (2013) explains:

Although the story is far more complicated than the fathers’ rights movement would have it, there is some truth to their claims that the reasons so many fathers feel utterly screwed by divorce and custody proceedings is because the laws, and their enforcement, are woefully out of date. (p. 113)

For example, Kimmel (2013) suggests that many of the laws that govern divorce/separation and custody/access/guardianship arrangements do not recognize the dual-earner/dual-caretaker model or other egalitarian and non-traditional models of many families (p. 113, 125). However, Kimmel’s (2013) findings are specific to the United States and, as previously noted, the merit of his research is in question.

Although limited, some research on the validity of fathers’ claims of disadvantage in family court applies to the Canadian family law context. For example, McBean (1987) found that “if there is a [custody] dispute, fathers have a very high success rate in court” (p. 188); to be specific, McBean’s (1987) analysis demonstrated an approximately 50

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<sup>41</sup> In this instance, the term actively refers to fathers who seek custody through formal, legally recognized channels, such as the courts. Many men may seek custody but do not have the means or the inclination to make formal appeals.

percent success rate for fathers in formal custody/access disputes. Similarly, Boyd (1991) suggests that “awards to fathers have been increasing; more men are succeeding in challenging their former wives for custody in court than 20 years ago” (p. 87). Although more contemporary research is needed, these findings show no bias in favour of mothers or against fathers. Of note, recent research suggests that Canadian courts may actually privilege “the applications of fathers who can provide a ‘mother figure’ for the child” and fathers “who will spend time at home with the children” (Shaw, 2021, p. 137). Nevertheless, engaging in an analysis of fathers’ allegations of disadvantage in Canadian family court proceedings would be complex and is well beyond the scope of this research. However, these fathers’ concerns and allegations are considered in these findings, because claims of disadvantage were a common theme throughout phases 1 and 2 of this study.

Considerations of these fathers’ claims of disadvantage in family court processes also raises an important question, *disadvantaged compared to whom?* It is important not to conflate the participants’ experiences and claims of disadvantage in family law processes with discrimination. An assertion of discrimination “relies on policies implemented to single out certain groups for unequal treatment” (Kimmel, 2013, p. 125), which is not reflected in the treatment of fathers in contemporary family law systems. Further, inherent class bias exists within many family law policies, including those that govern separation/divorce, custody/access and guardianship, and issues of family violence; this inherent class bias generally “favours economically privileged men” over all other populations (Comack, 2008, p. 108). As such, while lower-class and BIPOC fathers may be at a disadvantage in family court processes, this critique is not present in much of fathers’ rights activism. FRAs are dominantly privileged middle-to-upper-class white men and often exclude the voices and needs of marginalized men (Blais & Dupuis-Déri, 2012, p. 30).

## **6.7. Considerations and Conclusions**

This research continued and expanded a needed dialogue on the fathers’ rights discourse and fatherhood movements and groups within the Canadian context. The inclusion of IFGs and subsequent emergence of BFGs and FNs contributes to a more in-depth understanding of fatherhood groups, activism, advocacy, and the FRM that integrates more nuanced understandings that exist beyond the deeply entrenched and

pro-patriarchal rights-based advocacy of FRGs. However, the narratives of inclusion, support, and healthy parenting present in fatherhood groups that exist beyond the social and political presence of the FRM nevertheless also explicitly and implicitly present problematic pro-patriarchal and antifeminist ideologies from which they claim to be distanced. The claims-making and advocacy within fatherhood movements and groups both on and offline is largely based in exclusionary politics, unsupported and disproven claims, and patriarchal ideologies. While more pronounced within FRGs and BFGs, these assertions, attitudes, and beliefs existed both explicitly and implicitly across all fatherhood groups and movements.

Seeing the FRM and fatherhood groups from the perspectives of those inside the movement expanded my outlook on these issues. Unlike Jaye in *The Red Pill*, I did not give up feminism and/or become a men's/fathers' rights activist through the process of this research. However, this examination creates a space for future exploration and analysis of fathering and fatherhood groups and movements that exists somewhere in between absolute rejection of their advocacy and the treacherous fallacy that fathers are victimized and deeply oppressed by the existing systems.

The voices and experiences of BIPOC and marginalized fathers (e.g., those of low socio-economic stats) requires further exploration, as their exclusion from the fatherhood groups and movements that were examined perpetuates the absence of their values, beliefs, and needs within this advocacy and, more importantly, as fathers. There is a need to examine fatherhood groups and movements in a way that dismantles the collective privilege that they hold as groups of dominantly white heterosexual middle-to-upper class men. This interconnects with Kaufman's (1990) argument that:

An understanding of men's contradictory experiences of power enables us, when possible, to reach out to men with compassion, even as we are highly critical of particular actions and beliefs, even as we challenge dominant forms of masculinity. This concept can be one vehicle to understand how good human beings can do horrible things, and how some beautiful baby boys can turn into horrible adults. And it can help us understand how the majority of men can be reached with a message of change. It is, in a nutshell, the basis for men's embrace of feminism. (p. 60)

As such, it is necessary to not only support men's expressions of more complex and vulnerable forms of masculinity, but also continue to challenge and unravel patriarchal systems of power and oppression which harm all of us, including men and boys.

Ultimately, the complex relationships among men and power/control/privilege were obscured not only by the absence of understanding related to gendered power relations (i.e., men's power by comparison to women and power differentials among men), but also by the participants' claims of men's and fathers' inequality (e.g., "It's truly amazing in this day and age that we don't have equality," P1, BFG, BC). Further, the formation of the identities of men and fathers as oppressed and unequal led to many calls for equality for men. While not reflective of the actual social position of men and fathers, these feelings of oppression and subjugation were nevertheless true in how the participants experienced them. Although problematic, their visions of equality often interlinked with visions of a society in which patriarchal authority and the status quo are restored seemingly without an understanding that substantive equality among genders cannot be equated with oppression of men. As Nicholas (2017) expressed, "when you're accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression" (p. 9).

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## Appendix A. Regional Breakdown of Canada-wide FR & IF groups

The table below is provincial and territorial breakdown of the fathers' rights and pro-fatherhood groups provided on table one.<sup>42</sup>

<i><b>FRGs in Canada</b></i>	<i><b>IFGs in Canada</b></i>
<b>Canada-Wide</b>	<b>Canada-Wide</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DADS Canada</li> <li>• Dads with Dads</li> <li>• Fathers Canada</li> <li>• Fathers-4-Justice Canada</li> <li>• Occupy Family Court! Fathers' Rights in Canada</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Canadian Father Involvement Network</li> <li>• Father Involvement Research Alliance</li> <li>• Gay Men Who Want To Be Dads</li> <li>• Men for Change</li> <li>• National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health (NCCAHA)</li> <li>• The Nurturing Fathers Program</li> </ul>
<b>British Columbia</b>	<b>British Columbia</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC Fathers</li> <li>• BC Men's Resource Centre</li> <li>• Divorce for Men</li> <li>• Equal Parenting BC</li> <li>• Parent &amp; Child Advocacy Coalition</li> <li>• Fathers' Rights Action Team (FRAT)</li> <li>• Nanaimo Men's Centre: Resources for Men and Their Families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abby Dads: Father Involvement Program</li> <li>• BC Council for Families</li> <li>• Fathers For Equality</li> <li>• Nobody's Perfect</li> <li>• Parents Coalition of British Columbia</li> <li>• Parent Support Circles</li> <li>• Parent Support Services Society of BC</li> <li>• Victoria Men's Centre</li> </ul>

<sup>42</sup> The territories (i.e., Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut) and some provinces (i.e., Quebec, Newfoundland, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island) are not represented in this sample, as they do not have an accessible online presence. Some groups and organizations provided web addresses that linked to websites that were either unavailable or had been removed. Other groups and organizations either provided some form of contact information (i.e., phone number, e-mail address) or were listed on websites belonging to other groups but had no identifiable contact information. Due to their inaccessibility and/or lack of presence online, these groups will be excluded from the sample. See Appendix C for full breakdown of excluded groups and services.

<b>Alberta</b>	<b>Alberta</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fathers' Rights Alberta</li> <li>• Family of Men Support Society</li> <li>• Movement for the Establishment of Real Gender Equality (MERGE)</li> <li>• Equitable Child Maintenance and Access Society</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alberta Father Involvement Initiative</li> <li>• Fathers For Life</li> <li>• Men's Educational Support Association (MESA)</li> </ul>
<b>Saskatchewan</b>	<b>Saskatchewan</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• N/A (unable to locate province-specific groups operating in this location)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Saskatoon Men's Resource Centre</li> </ul>
<b>Manitoba</b>	<b>Manitoba</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Winnipeg DADS</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better Fathers Inc</li> </ul>
<b>Ontario</b>	<b>Ontario</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Canadian Equal Parenting Council</li> <li>• Dads Aiming for Direction and Support</li> <li>• Ex-Fathers</li> <li>• Fathers' Resources International</li> <li>• Human Equality Action &amp; Resource Team (HEART)</li> <li>• In Search of Justice</li> <li>• Ottawa Men's Resource Centre</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dad Central</li> <li>• Fatherhood Visibility Working Group</li> <li>• Gays with Kids</li> <li>• Gay Fathers of Toronto</li> <li>• Parents Without Partners</li> <li>• Young and Potential Fathers</li> </ul>

## Appendix B. Less Accessible & Excluded FR & IF Groups

The table below is provincial and territorial breakdown of the less accessible, inaccessible, and potentially disbanded groups across Canada.

<b><i>Fathers' Rights Groups</i></b>	<b><i>Pro-Fatherhood Groups in Canada</i></b>
<b>Canada-Wide</b>	<b>Canada-Wide</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dads Wanting Truth Support Group</li> <li>• Fathers for Family Justice</li> <li>• Fathers' Battling Injustice</li> <li>• Men's Divorce Centre</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fathers Helping Fathers</li> </ul>
<b>British Columbia</b>	<b>British Columbia</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dads' Support Group: Political and Legal Focus</li> <li>• False Memory Support Groups of BC</li> <li>• Father's Support Group Kelowna</li> <li>• Fathers' Rights Action Team (FRAT)</li> <li>• Parents of Broken Families</li> <li>• Men Supporting Men Inc.</li> <li>• Non-Custodial Parents Association of BC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent Child Advocacy Coalition</li> <li>• Shuswap Men's Resource Centre: Men's issues, parenting, and work</li> </ul>
<b>Alberta</b>	<b>Alberta</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Movement to Establish Real Gender Equality (MERGE)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Part-time Fathers</li> </ul>
<b>Saskatchewan</b>	<b>Saskatchewan</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• N/A (unable to locate province-specific groups operating in this location)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Family Healing Circle Lodge</li> <li>• Journeys of Men</li> <li>• Regina Shared Parenting Network</li> <li>• National Shared Parenting Association</li> </ul>

Manitoba	Manitoba
N/A (see groups listed on Appendix B)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better Fathering</li> <li>• Indian Family Centre</li> <li>• Neah Kee Papa: Every Child Deserves a Father</li> </ul>
Ontario	Ontario
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Canadian Committee for Fairness in Family Law</li> <li>• Fairness in Family Law Society</li> <li>• False Memory Support Group</li> <li>• Family Forum</li> <li>• Fathers After Rights Equalization (FARE)</li> <li>• Fathers For Justice Ontario</li> <li>• Help Us Get Support (H.U.G.S.)</li> <li>• Kids Need Both Parents</li> <li>• Men's Divorce Centre</li> <li>• Not All Dads are Deadbeats</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active Parenting</li> <li>• Canadian Association for Equality</li> <li>• Dad's Time Out</li> <li>• Equal Parenting of Durham</li> <li>• Family Conflict Resolution Centre</li> <li>• Freedom for Kids</li> <li>• London Equal Parenting Organization</li> <li>• National Shared Parenting Organization</li> <li>• Toronto Fathers' Resources</li> </ul>
Quebec	Quebec
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Association Masculine d'Entraide pour la Famille<sup>43</sup></li> <li>• False Memory Support Group</li> <li>• Parental Alienation Info Inc.</li> <li>• Mystique Masculine Men's Centre</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Dads Project</li> </ul>
Newfoundland & Labrador	Newfoundland & Labrador
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• N/A (unable to locate province-specific groups operating in this location)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• N/A (unable to locate province-specific groups operating in this location)</li> </ul>

<sup>43</sup> Translates to: Masculine Self Help for the Family

<b>New Brunswick</b>	<b>New Brunswick</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>False Memory Support Group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New Brunswick Children’s Equal Parenting Association</li> <li>New Brunswick Shared Parenting Association</li> </ul>
<b>Nova Scotia</b>	<b>Nova Scotia</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents Without Custody</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>N/A (unable to locate province-specific groups operating in this location)</li> </ul>
<b>Prince Edward Island</b>	<b>Prince Edward Island</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>N/A (unable to locate province-specific groups operating in this location)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>N/A (unable to locate province-specific groups operating in this location)</li> </ul>
<b>Yukon</b>	<b>Yukon</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>N/A (no province-specific groups operating in this location)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>N/A (unable to locate territory-specific groups operating in this location)</li> </ul>
<b>Northwest Territories</b>	<b>Northwest Territories</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>N/A (unable to locate territory-specific groups operating in this location)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>N/A (unable to locate territory-specific groups operating in this location)</li> </ul>
<b>Nunavut</b>	<b>Nunavut</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>N/A (unable to locate territory-specific groups operating in this location)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>N/A (unable to locate territory-specific groups operating in this location)</li> </ul>



## Appendix C. Websites for FR & IF Groups

Group Name	Website
Abby Dads: Father Involvement Program	<a href="http://www.abbydads.ca/">http://www.abbydads.ca/</a>
Alberta Father Involvement Initiative	<a href="http://www.abdads.ca/resources">http://www.abdads.ca/resources</a>
BC Council for Families	<a href="https://www.bccf.ca/">https://www.bccf.ca/</a>
BC Fathers	<a href="http://www.fathers.bc.ca/">http://www.fathers.bc.ca/</a>
BC Men's Resource Centre	<a href="http://menbc.webs.com/">http://menbc.webs.com/</a>
Better Fathers Inc.	<a href="http://betterfathersinc.com/">http://betterfathersinc.com/</a>
Canadian Equal Parenting Council	<a href="http://canadianepc.org/">http://canadianepc.org/</a>
Canadian Father Involvement Network	<a href="http://www.candads.ca/">http://www.candads.ca/</a>
Dads Aiming for Direction and Support (DADS)	<a href="http://www.jhsdurham.on.ca/">http://www.jhsdurham.on.ca/</a>
DADS Canada	<a href="http://www.dadscanada.com/">http://www.dadscanada.com/</a>
Dad Central	<a href="http://dadcentral.ca/">http://dadcentral.ca/</a>
Divorce for Men	<a href="http://www.divorce-for-men.com/">http://www.divorce-for-men.com/</a>
Equal Parenting BC	<a href="http://www.equalparenting-bc.ca/">http://www.equalparenting-bc.ca/</a>
Equitable Child Maintenance and Access Society	<a href="http://www.ecmas.org/">http://www.ecmas.org/</a>
Ex-Fathers	<a href="http://www.ex-fathers.org/wp_blog/">http://www.ex-fathers.org/wp_blog/</a>
Family of Men Support Society	<a href="http://blog.fathersforlife.org/">http://blog.fathersforlife.org/</a>
Father Involvement Research Alliance	<a href="http://www.fira.ca/page.php?id=9">http://www.fira.ca/page.php?id=9</a>
Fatherhood Visibility Working Group	<a href="http://lgbtqpn.ca/fvwp/">http://lgbtqpn.ca/fvwp/</a>
Fathers are Capable Too (FACT)	<a href="http://www.fact.on.ca/">http://www.fact.on.ca/</a>
Fathers Canada	<a href="http://www.fathers.ca/">http://www.fathers.ca/</a>
Fathers for Equality	<a href="http://victoria.tc.ca/Community/MensCentre/ffe.html">http://victoria.tc.ca/Community/MensCentre/ffe.html</a>
Fathers for Life	<a href="http://www.fathersforlife.org/">http://www.fathersforlife.org/</a> <a href="http://blog.fathersforlife.org/">http://blog.fathersforlife.org/</a>
Fathers' Resources International	<a href="http://www.fathers-resources.com/">http://www.fathers-resources.com/</a>
Fathers' Rights Alberta	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/FathersRightsAlberta">https://www.facebook.com/FathersRightsAlberta</a>

Fathers Support Group in White Rock	No website available. Contact information provided: (604) 535-0399
Fathers-4-Justice Canada	<a href="http://f4jquebec.org/en/index.shtml">http://f4jquebec.org/en/index.shtml</a>
Gay Fathers Toronto	<a href="http://www.gayfathers-toronto.com/">http://www.gayfathers-toronto.com/</a> <a href="http://www.gaycanada.com/GC_directory/?StartCategoryID=126">http://www.gaycanada.com/GC_directory/?StartCategoryID=126</a>
Gay Men Who Want to Be Dads	<a href="http://www.lgbtqparentingconnection.ca/programs.cfm?fuseaction=events.PublicProgramDetails&amp;eventID=d17443de-3048-8bc6-e85d-a07067a31fce">http://www.lgbtqparentingconnection.ca/programs.cfm?fuseaction=events.PublicProgramDetails&amp;eventID=d17443de-3048-8bc6-e85d-a07067a31fce</a>
Gays with Kids	<a href="https://gayswithkids.com/">https://gayswithkids.com/</a>
Human Equality Action & Resource Team (HEART)	<a href="http://www.interlog.com/~parental/home.htm">http://www.interlog.com/~parental/home.htm</a>
In Search for Justice	<a href="http://www.rossvirgin.com/">http://www.rossvirgin.com/</a>
Movement for the Establishment of Real Gender Equality (MERGE)	<a href="http://www.ualberta.ca/~fchriste/LawsuitDocA/Brochure-MERGE.htm">http://www.ualberta.ca/~fchriste/LawsuitDocA/Brochure-MERGE.htm</a>
Men's Educational Support Association (MESA)	<a href="http://www.mesacanada.com/index.html">http://www.mesacanada.com/index.html</a>
Men and Their Families	<a href="http://themenscentre.ca/">http://themenscentre.ca/</a>
Men for Change	<a href="http://www.chebucto.ns.ca/CommunitySupport/Men4Change/the_group.htm">http://www.chebucto.ns.ca/CommunitySupport/Men4Change/the_group.htm</a>
National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health (NCCAHA)	<a href="http://www.nccah-ccnsa.ca/286/With_Dad__Strengthening_the_Circle_of_Care.nccah">http://www.nccah-ccnsa.ca/286/With_Dad__Strengthening_the_Circle_of_Care.nccah</a>

Nobody's Perfect	<a href="http://www.options.bc.ca/families-children/nobody-s-perfect-parenting-program">http://www.options.bc.ca/families-children/nobody-s-perfect-parenting-program</a>
Nurturing Fathers Program	<a href="http://nurturingfathers.com/2013/07/strengthening-families-one-dad-at-a-time/">http://nurturingfathers.com/2013/07/strengthening-families-one-dad-at-a-time/</a>
Occupy Family Court! Fathers: Rights in Canada	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/pages/Occupy-Family-Court-Fathers-Rights-in-Canada/142317435849654">https://www.facebook.com/pages/Occupy-Family-Court-Fathers-Rights-in-Canada/142317435849654</a>
Ottawa Men's Resource Centre	<a href="http://www.ottawamenscentre.com/">http://www.ottawamenscentre.com/</a>
Parent & Child Advocacy Coalition	<a href="http://pcaccanada.tripod.com/">http://pcaccanada.tripod.com/</a>
Parent Support Circles	<a href="http://www.parentsupportbc.ca/parent_support_circles">http://www.parentsupportbc.ca/parent_support_circles</a>
Parent Support Services Society of BC	<a href="http://www.parentsupportbc.ca/">http://www.parentsupportbc.ca/</a>
Parents Coalition of British Columbia	<a href="http://www.parentswhocare.ca/">http://www.parentswhocare.ca/</a>
Parents Without Partners	<a href="http://www.parentswithoutpartners.org/">http://www.parentswithoutpartners.org/</a>
Saskatoon Men's Resource Centre	<a href="http://www.saskatoonmenscenter.com/">http://www.saskatoonmenscenter.com/</a>
Single Fathers Support Group	No website available. Contact information provided: (604) 879-7104
Vancouver Dads Group: #YVRDads	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/Vancouver-Dads-Group-YVRDads/">http://www.meetup.com/Vancouver-Dads-Group-YVRDads/</a>
Vancouver Gay Dads Group	<a href="http://www.meetup.com/Vancouver-Gay-Dads-Group/">http://www.meetup.com/Vancouver-Gay-Dads-Group/</a>
Victoria Men's Resource Centre	<a href="http://vicmen.org/VMC/Home_page.html">http://vicmen.org/VMC/Home_page.html</a>

Winnipeg DADS	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/442416909273470/?pnref=lhs">https://www.facebook.com/groups/442416909273470/?pnref=lhs</a>
Young and Potential Fathers	<a href="http://youngpfathers.org/">http://youngpfathers.org/</a>

## Appendix D. Call for Participants

Dear Mr. X

I am conducting a study on men's experiences with fatherhood, fathering, and family law as part of my dissertation research. The purpose of this study is to examine the social engagement and experiences of fathers. This study seeks to better understand men's experiences with fatherhood and engagement in the family pre- and post-separation, as well as fathers' experiences with and insights into family law and custody/access issues here in Canada.

See the attached study information sheet for additional details about this study and information on how to participate. If you are willing, please also circulate this information to fathers involved your group or support network.

Please let me know if you have any questions about this.

Sincerely,

Sarah Yercich, M.Sc.

Ph.D. Candidate

School of Criminology

Simon Fraser University

8888 University Drive

Burnaby, BC V5A 1S6

# **Appendix E. Study Information Sheet**

## **Fathers Investing in Fatherhood: a Qualitative Examination of Contemporary Fathering in Fatherhood Groups in Canada**

### **Purpose of the study:**

The purpose of this study is to examine the social engagement and experiences of fathers. This study seeks to better understand men's experiences with fatherhood and engagement in the family pre- and post-separation, as well as fathers' experiences with and insights into family law and custody/access issues in the current socio-legal and familial contexts present in Canada. Further, men's involvement in fatherhood groups will be explored to gain a better understanding of support networks and resources available to fathers.

### **Who is conducting this study?**

The Principal Investigator is Sarah Yercich, a Ph.D. Candidate in the School of Criminology at Simon Fraser University.

The Senior Supervisor is Joan Brockman, a Professor in the School of Criminology at Simon Fraser University.

### **Participation in this study:**

You are invited to participate in an individual interview to discuss your perceptions of and experiences with fatherhood, fathering, and family law. Interviews will be conducted in-person at locations that are convenient for potential participants or via phone for participants who are unable to participate in an in-person interview due to constraints related to time and/or location. Interviews are expected to last 60-90 minutes.

### **Voluntary participation and withdrawal:**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose whether or not to participate in this study. You may choose to stop participating in the interview and/or withdraw your consent at any time without penalty. You may choose to withdraw your contributions up to the point of the completion of this study, as your contributions are

unable to be removed after the write-up is complete. You may also choose not to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable discussing and still remain in the study.

**Potential risks and discomforts:**

The risks associated with this study are minimal, but some of the questions I will ask may be of a personal or sensitive nature. You do not have to answer any question to which you do not feel comfortable providing an answer, and you are able to stop the interview at any time.

Please know that if you reveal that there has been an incident that involves abuse and/or neglect of a child, or that there is a risk of such incident occurring, as a researcher I am bound by the law to report this information to the appropriate authorities.

**Potential benefits:**

By participating in this study you will be aiding in the development of new knowledge regarding fatherhood and fathering, as well as fathers' engagement in families pre/post separate and fathers' overall experiences with the family law and custody/access processes in Canada. Your contributions will aid in the development of theory, and your voice and experiences will aid in identifying concerns and opportunities for change. Further, the results of this study may assist fathers who are faced with similar experiences and struggles.

**Current and future use of data:**

This study is being conducted as a required component of my doctoral studies. Upon completion, the findings of this study will be included in the write-up of my doctoral dissertation, as well as in future presentations and publications. Data will also be used for educational purposes, such as lectures. The fully anonymized transcripts will be retained in a secure location indefinitely.

**Statement of confidentiality:**

Your name and the contributions you make will remain confidential. Your identity will be protected, and no information revealing your identity will be disclosed or

published. Your contributions will be identified with a pseudonym of your choice. If you do not select a pseudonym, one will be selected on your behalf.

At any point in the study, if you reveal that there has been an incident that involves abuse and/or neglect of a child, or that there is a risk of such incident occurring, please know that as a researcher I am bound by the law to report this information to the Ministry of Children and Family Development, who may choose to get involved and report the incident to the appropriate authorities.

If you are participating in this study via phone, note that telephones are not a secure means of communication, so strict confidentiality cannot be guaranteed through this medium.

**Consent to participate:**

You will be asked to provide verbal consent to participate in this study. Additionally, with your permission, the interview will be digitally recorded to ensure that your words, experiences, and perspectives are represented as accurately as possible. Digital audio files will be erased following transcription of the interviews. If you do not consent to digital recording but would like to participate in this study, anonymized handwritten notes can be taken during the interview in the place of a digital recording.

**Questions or concerns about the study:**

This study has been approved by the Office of Research Ethics at Simon Fraser University. If you have any questions about the research or the results of the study, you may contact Sarah Yercich, the Principal Investigator or Professor Joan Brockman, the Senior Supervisor. Questions or concerns about the study or your rights as a research participant may be directed to Dr. Jeffrey Toward, Director, Office of Research Ethics at Simon Fraser University, British Columbia.

To learn more about the study or to find out how you can participate, please contact:

**Sarah Yercich, M.Sc.**



## Appendix F. Interview Guide

Interviews will be semi-structured. This interview schedule is in place to provide a general structure for interviews and retain comparability of these data. Participants' responses and experiences will guide each interview. Therefore, the questions listed below may not be asked in this specific order, and topics may arise that are not contained on this guide. Further, this guide is a working document that may develop over time based on themes and issues that arise during interviews.

### Section 1: Introduction

Introduce self and purpose of the study

Review study information sheet with the participant

Explain confidentiality

Explain right to not answer questions and/or end the interview at any time

Obtain consent to begin recording. If the participant is uncomfortable with recording the interview detailed notes will be taken.

Begin recording and obtain verbal consent to participate

### Section 2: Background

Tell me a little bit about yourself.

Where did you go to school?

Prompts: High school? Where? Did you go to university? Where? What was your major?

Do you speak more than one language?

If you were asked to describe your ethnicity, what would you say?

In what year were you born?

Are you presently married or living with someone?

Are there children who live with you full or part-time?

### **Section 3: Family Law**

How would you describe your personal involvement with family law systems in British Columbia?

Do you have experiences with family law in any other provinces, territories, or countries? If so, describe.

How were these issues handled? Formally? Informally?

During this process did you have access to a lawyer? Did your spouse have access to a lawyer?

Please describe your experiences.

Have you experienced any barriers in the family law processes?

If so, please describe these barriers?

What was the outcome of these processes?

Do you feel that your views and/or needs were given serious consideration during these processes?

If so, how? Describe your experiences.

If not, why do you feel this occurred? Describe your experiences.

### **Section 4: Family Law**

What are your opinions of family law processes in British Columbia?

Custody/access (guardianship) arrangements?

Who should have a “say” in determining custody and access (guardianship)?

Why?

How should their wishes be weighed in these determinations? Describe your position.

How should custody and access (guardianship) be determined?

Possible prompts: informal negotiations, settlement negotiations by lawyers, voluntary or mandatory mediation, judicial decisions, mandatory parenting plans and/or classes, mandatory shared parenting

What information *should* be taken into consideration when making custody and access (guardianship) determinations? Why?

What information shouldn't? Why?

Possible prompts: relocation of one or more parents; non-payment of child support; economic position; sexual orientation; race/ethnicity; religion; caregiving patterns; allegations of child abuse; evidence of child abuse; allegations of spousal abuse; evidence of spousal abuse.

Which factors do you think are more relevant to custody/access (guardianship) determinations? Why?

What principles *should* guide these decisions? Which shouldn't?

Possible prompts: best interest of the child(ren), primary caregiver presumption, mandatory shared parenting

Values?

Possible prompts: equality, security of person, well-being

Child support payments?

Who should be responsible for child support? (e.g., private parties, social support system).

How should child support be determined?

What factors should be considered? What factors shouldn't be considered?

What should be the basis for awarding child support?

Possible prompts: well-being of the child? Income of the caregiver or payer? Childcare responsibilities?

What do you think about linking child support to custody and access (guardianship)? Why?

From your perspective, what are the dominant influences on law and policy reform?

Influences on: Family law? Child custody/access (guardianship)? Child support? / Government decision-making on these matters?

What/who *should* influence these processes? What/who shouldn't?

## **Section 5: Groups**

Describe your involvement with a fatherhood group/fatherhood groups.

How did you become a part of the group(s)?

How long have you been involved?

What motivated you to become involved?

What is your role in the group?

How frequently do you attend group meetings?

What supports are offered by the group(s)? Programs?

Describe your experiences with these supports. Programs?

Gaps?

Tell me about any impacts being involved in the group(s) has had on your life.

E.g., fathering, relationships, friendships, support, mental/emotional health, access to programs, legal advice

Given your experiences, what is your opinion of fatherhood groups?

### **Section 6: Activism**

Does the group engage in activism? (E.g., social or political campaigning, protesting, demonstrations, awareness raising)

If so, tell me about this activism.

What are your experiences with this activism?

Do you participate? If so, what type(s)?

What is the focus of this activism? Goals?

Have you participated in any activities aimed at influencing or reforming law or policy reform?

Federal? Provincial?

If so, what was the focus?

Prompts: Family law? Custody/access (guardianship)? Child support?

Federal child support guidelines?

What was the aim of these efforts?

What did these activities involve? (e.g., submissions to government, activism, media?)

What were the outcomes of these reform efforts?

What changes did/do you want to achieve through these reform efforts?

Do you feel that your/your group's views were/are being given serious consideration?

How have government and policy-makers responded to the activism of your group?

Positive/successful responses? Negative/unsatisfactory responses?

Has your group ever experienced backlash or resistance as a result of this activism?

If so, what was this backlash/resistance?

What is your opinion of it?

Have you ever experienced this backlash directly?

Given your experiences, what are your opinions of this activism?

Are you aware of other groups engaged in activism on fatherhood, fathering, and/or family law reform?

Which groups? What is their focus?

Describe your experiences and interactions with these groups.

### **Section 7: Family and Fathering**

When did you first become a father?

How old were you?

How many children do you have? How old is/are your child(ren)?

Biological father? Stepfather?

Have you separated from your children's mother?

If so, when? Tell me about this experience.

Describe your role as a father prior to your separation.

Responsibilities? Have these changed since you separated?

What are your current custody/guardianship arrangements?

How were these arrangements determined?

Describe your experiences with these arrangements.

Potential prompts: Access? Time spent with each parent? Care-giving? Decision-making?

What is your relationship like with the other parent of your child(ren)? Tell me about this relationship.

Do you have any conflicts raising your child(ren) with your separated spouse(s)? If so, please describe your experiences.

Potential prompts: General responsibilities? Decision-making? Child-care? Education? Religion?

Tell me about positive experiences with co-parenting your child(ren). What do you do that works?

Tell me about your current parenting arrangements.

Potential prompts: living arrangements? Full-time/part-time?

Describe your parenting time prior to separating from your spouse/partner.

How often did you see your children?

How often do you see your children now?

What are your opinions of these arrangements?

Do you pay child support? Describe your experiences with this.

How were these arrangements determined?

Are you satisfied with the current arrangements? Why/why not?

Tell me about your household prior to your separation.

Tell me about your current household. Have any of these aspects changed post-separation? Which ones? Describe your experiences with this.

### **Section 9: Concluding Thoughts**

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about fatherhood, family law, group involvement, or related issues that we have not yet discussed?

Do you have any thoughts or observations you would like to add?

Do you have any written material related to your group and/or their activism you can share with me or provide locations for?

Would you be willing to refer me to members of your group who might be interested in participating?

Members of other groups?

Can you refer me to members of your group whose views on these issues might differ from yours?

Thank for participation and **stop recording**



## Appendix G. NVivo Codebook for Phase 2

Name	Files	References
Barriers	24	33
Barriers to contact	4	12
Gender	9	17
Best Interest of the Children	19	132
Bias against men and fathers	27	2408
Child support	22	247
Custody, access, guardianship	21	225
Discrimination	14	95
Bias	9	57
False allegations	16	92
Family court system	19	502
Father's groups	22	230
Harassment	6	16
Judges	17	359
Karla Homolka	1	2
Legal representation	25	610
Ministry	10	121
No contact	19	109
Characterization of women and mothers	27	819
Mother of children	24	607
Abandoned children	1	1
Abusive	1	3
Bitch	4	9
Child abduction -- allegations	6	14
Childhood trauma, difficult childhood	10	19
Controlling	18	59
Denying access to kids	20	117
Greed, financial motivation	3	9
Lier	18	78
Manipulative	8	51
Mental health	17	58
Met someone new	12	45
Abusive new partner	2	5
Nazi Germany	2	3
Parenting	2	2
Positive	1	1
Smart, intelligent	1	1
Poverty	1	1
Substances	10	39
Well off	1	1
Women, mothers generally	27	240
Abandoned children	3	5
Abuse	1	2
Bad mothers	1	1
Bitch	4	10
Kill the bitch	1	4

Name	Files	References
Lady, ladies	6	39
Lying, manipulative	5	25
Child support	24	548
Failure to pay	16	78
Jail	12	47
Lost passport, drivers licence, etc.	12	37
Family maintenance enforcement	11	46
Good experience	1	1
Costs, impacts	27	634
Cost of court proceedings	19	108
Emotional, mental costs	24	237
Anxiety	4	4
Depression	12	31
Suicide	19	83
Financial impact	23	336
General discussion of	24	180
Crime, criminality	10	23
Not allowed in the presence of children	1	2
Custody, access, and guardianship	27	1481
Child abduction	6	29
Against father - allegations	1	1
Against mother - allegations	3	20
Missing Children of Canada	1	7
Court process, proceedings	27	672
Bias, unfair, mishandled	25	519
Allegations of mishandling of case	2	3
Questioning of father's parenting	2	5
Equal parenting	24	318
Canada	1	4
Financial motivation	1	1
Opposed	1	4
Other countries	4	14
Presumption of EP	17	112
Seeking 50-50 split	15	96
Fathers disadvantage	12	65
For The Sake Of The Children	3	14
Joint custody	9	46
No contact, denial of contact	18	108
Parenting arrangements, responsibilities	23	165
Participant's arrangements	16	75
Equal, 50-50	1	5
Joint custody	1	4
Lost custody	2	5
Seeking, sought full custody	1	2
Sole custody	1	1
Reports	1	3
Custody recommendations	1	2
Section 211	9	85
Divorce, separation	27	248

Name	Files	References
Divorce	16	132
Separation	23	125
Equality, meaning of	23	151
False allegations	20	122
Absentee	1	2
Abuse	5	38
Against mothers	1	1
Common	1	3
Drugs, alcohol	1	1
Impact	1	4
Kidnapping	6	14
Neglect	9	17
Tactic in proceedings	4	12
Family law, family court	27	1923
Adversarial, antiquated	10	22
Allegations of incompetence, neglect family court officials	4	9
Business, industry	9	23
Family court experience	27	904
Addressing false allegations	15	96
Bias against fathers in court	15	124
Discrimination	8	25
Inaccessible	2	2
Money, money grab	22	269
Perjury	3	18
Unheard, voiceless	23	82
Process	1	2
Fathers motivation	1	1
Friendly parent role	1	1
Hostile, hostility	3	5
Investigating	10	57
Ex investigating participant	4	14
Participant investigating ex	3	8
Judges, judiciary	14	290
Decision-making	1	1
Judicial education	1	1
Lack of faith	3	7
Lack of understanding, confused by process	21	197
Mother's advantage	25	199
Favouring, bias toward mothers	4	13
More funding	1	1
More knowledge of processes	1	2
Out of court	1	4
Powerless	17	75
Time, no resolution	1	5
Fathers' Rights Movement	20	319
Fathers' characterizations of themselves	27	227
Anger	11	27
Education, educated	18	105
Fathers as victims	15	47

Name	Files	References
Frustrated	13	22
Good father	6	9
Good, upstanding person	3	6
I'm not...	5	7
Intelligent, knowledgeable	5	11
Poor, bad father	1	2
Feminists and feminism, women	19	133
Advocating for men	3	8
Bias toward feminist	2	7
Feminist agenda	1	2
Identifies as a feminist	2	4
Liberal	1	1
Little Red Pill	14	29
Negative portrayal	18	102
Anti-feminist	4	10
Radical feminism	2	6
Groups, group involvement	27	1194
Activism, advocacy	25	379
Assessments, formal responses, position papers	1	1
Conferences	10	36
Equal rights	2	10
Swedish model	1	2
False allegations	1	1
Legal representation	6	14
Legal, policy	2	10
Mental health	14	37
Motivation for	1	1
Optics, spectator	7	20
Political	16	94
Declined meeting with FRAs	1	2
Lobbying	14	51
Reforms	12	25
Protest	4	7
Representation, voice	21	74
Advice	16	41
Became involved	19	178
Collaboration	6	17
Cross-sector	1	2
International	1	1
National networks	2	2
Other provinces	1	1
Divide among groups	1	1
For the sake of the children	1	1
Funded groups	2	4
Self-funded	1	1
Gay fathers, support for	5	8
Grassroots	6	7
Group type	19	141
FRG	18	137

Name	Files	References
Grey area	1	1
IFG	0	0
Informal groups, societies	3	4
Indigenous fathers, support for	6	15
Limited funding, resources	13	62
Lobbying, limitations of funding	1	1
Members	17	57
Negative responses, backlash	12	22
Radical FRAs	2	7
Resources, guides	19	57
Services and supports	13	22
Helpline	3	5
Sources in support	1	5
Specific groups	2	4
Equal Parents of Canada	1	1
Fathers for Equality	1	1
Nanaimo Men's Resource Centre	1	1
National groups, unnamed	1	1
Victoria Men's Centre	2	2
Helpline	1	1
Support groups, support	2	8
Helpline	1	1
Informal support	1	4
Support groups	1	1
Ideal family law system	1	1
Isolation, helplessness	2	4
Kids need both parents	8	26
Impact of fatherlessness	3	8
Instances of abuse	2	2
Sons	19	140
Laws, legislation	20	184
Bias	1	2
Divorce Act	2	4
Division of assets	1	1
FLA	19	122
Best Interest	16	66
Calls for evaluation	1	4
Confusion, questions	1	2
FRA v FLA	1	2
No progress	1	1
Recommendations for change	2	3
Section 13	1	3
Section 211	9	63
FRA	5	8
Gender neutral	6	13
Interpretation	7	11
Presumption of equal parenting	10	29
Provincial	11	48
Lawyers	22	410

Name	Files	References
Mediation	13	39
Mental health	25	283
Anxiety	8	14
Depression	12	31
General discussion	20	77
Help, intervention, therapy	17	57
Substances	16	79
Suicide, suicidal ideation	14	38
Money, finances	26	678
Assets	17	61
Assets frozen	3	6
Division of assets	14	28
Pensions	3	7
Child support	20	322
Financial motivation of mothers	1	1
Cost to fathers	2	9
Impoverished fathers	1	5
Wealthy fathers	1	1
Financial benefits for lawyers	1	2
Money motivated	1	2
Remove money from family law	1	3
Role of	1	1
Spousal support	10	47
Opinion BC family law system	21	64
Parental Alienation Syndrome	13	80
Participants' stories, experiences	2	4
Loss of child	1	6
Need to remember	9	38
Wife initiated separation, divorce	2	2
Patriarchal authority	21	73
Privilege	18	30
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Wealth	1	1
Race	16	30
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Rates	15	29
Relationships	27	119
With child(ren)	3	7
Accusations by children	1	1
Good relationship with children	2	3
Used as weapons	1	1
With mother of child(ren)	3	15
Characterization of mother	3	14
Child abduction - allegation	2	2
Childhood trauma, difficult childhood	1	1
Denial of contact	1	1
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Name	Files	References
Substances	1	1
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Homicide, death	12	35
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