

IDENTITIES UNDER SIEGE: THE FATHERS' RIGHTS MOVEMENT

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THE FATHERS' RIGHTS MOVEMENT

by

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ABSTRACT

Fathers' rights groups have been highly visible in Ontario in trying to maintain fatherhood identity after divorce through the exercise of their lobby for joint custody. The fathers' right movement is attempting to influence conceptions of fatherhood as they relate to child custody. This dissertation examine the functions of the fathers' rights movement at two levels -- the subjective and the social. At the subjective level the movement provides its members with a rhetoric that helps them to maintain or reconstruct their fatherhood identity postdivorce. At the social level, the movement provides both a way to translate personal troubles into a social issues -- the biased and gendered nature of child custody and child support laws -- and practical assistance to men going through the process of divorce. The focus of the these then is on the threats to men's identity as fathers that accompany marital breakdown and divorce, and on the reactions of fathers' rightists to these identity threats. This dissertation based on: eighteen month of participant observation; interviews with twenty-eight fathers, and four women from four fathers' rights groups about their reasons for joining the group, their conceptualization of fatherhood and their opinions on joint custody. The concept of "role fragmentation" was developed to describe this particular type

of identity transformation process. What can be drawn from this data is that the fathers' rights members are attempting to maintain their pre-divorce fatherhood identity. In addition, an interesting and important result of this work was the emergent description of fatherhood.

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INTRODUCTION

The latter half of the 20th century has witnessed considerable changes to family roles and structures including a notable rise in the number of fractured families. Since the 1968 liberalization of divorce laws in Canada, divorce has rocketed to 80,716 in 1989 (Statistics Canada, 1991) from 11,343 in 1968 (Peters, 1989: 214). In light of these changes it follows that a sizable number of people must negotiate and reconstruct their familial roles in the postdivorce context (Ahrons and Rogers, 1992). One group of divorced individuals that has organized around this task is the fathers' rights movement. Fathers' rights groups emerged in the 1980s and were visible in lobbying for joint custody, access enforcement, and mediation. The intended effects of these efforts were to improve the psychological, social, and material conditions for divorcing fathers. The fathers' rights movement activities offer the opportunity to examine how postdivorce parental roles are negotiated and constructed. As a result, I analyze the fathers' rights movement by highlighting the subjectivities of its members. In doing so, the analysis exposes their definitions of fatherhood in general and how they feel fatherhood is negatively impacted by the divorce process.

My analysis also focuses on the social activities of fathers' rightists in response to the effects of the divorce process upon their fatherhood identity. Lobbying for changes to family and divorce law and assisting fathers with their divorce troubles are facets of fathers' rightists' social activities that will be examined. The intended effect of these proposed changes amounts to an attempt to reconstruct their fatherhood role postdivorce.

The introduction begins with an overview of the social constructions of parental roles in intact and divorced families, an examination of the mediating factors influencing the construction of parental roles, and concludes with a statement of the research questions to be addressed.

Social Construction and Parental Roles: An Historical Overview

Parental roles are social constructions which "emerge from a dynamic interchange among individuals and social forces" (Hamilton, 1988: 4). Rather than being innate and immutable roles, motherhood and fatherhood are socially constructed (Friedman, 1995: 21). As a consequence, these roles are subject to change in their social significance and meaning. For instance, in the North American preindustrial period, the current conceptions of fatherhood associated with the physical care and nurturing of children were nonexistent. Fathers were believed to be

responsible for household discipline, providing the physical necessities of life, the skills that would be necessary for later life, and for the moral and spiritual growth of their children (Rotundo, 1985; Backhouse, 1991: 201). Mothers were responsible for the physical care of infants and toddlers, and were economic partners with their husbands in the subsistence of the family. Women were defined as too valuable a productive resource in agrarian and preindustrial life to have their time taken up exclusively with the raising of children (Margolis, 1993). Women were involved in essential household activities such as spinning and weaving, raising animals, and worked along side their husbands. Work and motherhood were thought to be compatible (Margolis, 1993: 121). Motherhood was constructed around the physical caring of children rather than their emotional well-being. This points out that the emphasis was not put on the emotional bonds between mother and child that are stressed in our contemporary social context (Coontz, 1988: 87).

New definitions and styles of parenthood emerged with the transformation from agrarian to industrial society. Fathers continued to play a significant role within the family. They were still providers but they were also expected to prepare their sons for the world of paid work. This link to paid work meant that fathers provided lessons to their sons on the work ethic, and property and money

management. The reliance on wages to survive meant that many fathers were working away from their families and left mothers at home facing evolving responsibilities of the emotional and physical care for children. Domestic labour, increasingly privatized through the segregation of work, took on a "new character" revising women's social identity in terms of domestic qualities (Fox and Luxton, 1993: 25). The role of mother became constructed in terms of domesticity and the emotional and physical care of her children. This construction emerged as a consequence of the gendered division of labour in industrial society where paid work outside the home and unpaid work in the home came to be "physically separated and socially differentiated" (Fox and Luxton, 1993: 25). The emergence of childhood ideology also contributed to the construction of motherhood (Backhouse, 1991: 202; Berry: 1993, 55). The construction of childhood as a distinctive phase in the lifecycle during this period reflected the changes in family life and work. Children were being defined as individuals who needed to be nurtured rather than as miniature adults with natural inclinations toward evil that had to be broken (Margolis, 1993: 125). Motherhood and childhood were thus defined and constructed in response to the changing social structure of work and gender relationships, the demands of the newly defined childhood period, and the belief that women were better suited to the task of nurturing and socializing children

(Margolis, 1993).

Historical Legal Context

While the history of the family reveals the influence of social forces in shaping family structure and family roles (Fox and Luxton, 1993: 25) the shape of these familial roles can be further examined in the annals of family law. Legal and social scholars have pointed out that law reflects social conditions and also reproduces social relationships (Boyd, 1989a; 1989b). Family law, in particular, socially reconstructs the relationship between parents and child in the postdivorce context. Boyd (1989a) argues that the laws that determine child custody reveal and reinforce social definitions of parenthood. For instance, prior to the turn of the 20th century, custody of children was awarded to fathers (Boyd, 1989b: 130; Backhouse, 1991: 201; Friedman, 1995: 17). Thus, the award of custody reflected and reenforced the power and rights of the role of father as head of the household. Moreover, paternal custody revealed the social conceptions of parenthood of the times. It is thus instructive to examine the transformations to divorce and child custody law to trace the shifting conceptions of fatherhood and motherhood.

There have been a number of changes to divorce and child custody law in Canadian history. Up until the end of the 19th century fathers held absolute and undisputed rights

to property and children. Upon divorce the rights of fathers to retain their property and their children were upheld by the courts. Even in the case of infants, fathers were awarded custody instead of mothers. In fact the law was very clear that mothers were not entitled to custody of children or to property and financial support after divorce. The following speech to British Parliament, by Sergeant Talfourd, illustrates this point.

The custody of all legitimate children from the hour of their birth belongs to the father. If circumstances, however urgent, should drive the mother from his roof, not only may she be prevented from tending upon the children in the extremity of sickness, but she may be denied the sight of them; and, if she should obtain possession of them, by whatever means, [she] may be compelled by the writ of habeas corpus to resign them to her husband or to his agents without condition--without hope. (Talfourd, 1837 cited in Chesler, 1986: 3)

The practice of awarding custody to fathers without consideration of children's needs or other factors demonstrates that the role of parenting to child development was not recognized in this period nor the needs or rights of children (Drakich, 1988: 478).

The domesticity of women and concomitant emphasis on their role in the development of children began to emerge as part of middle-class ideology (Grossberg, 1983: 235; Koven and Michel, 1993) in the 1850s and were solidified by the 1930s (Cott, 1993). The new social definition of motherhood was further influenced and reinforced by Freudian psychology

which emphasized the unique and important role of mother in the development of children (Weitzman and Dixon, 1979: 481; Badinter, 1981: 260). New motherhood and childhood ideologies which were emerging around the turn of the 20th century and into the 1930s influenced transformations to child custody laws (Boyd, 1989b: 131). Motherhood was central to what was seen as an important phase in human development, childhood (Boyd, 1989b: 133). As a result, child custody law slowly changed from paternal custody, to "tender years doctrine," then to maternal preference in order to accommodate the changing nature of childhood and the mother/children relationship. The following passage from a judicial decision demonstrates the importance placed upon preserving the mother/child relationship postdivorce.

For a boy of such tender years nothing can be an adequate substitute for mother love-- for that constant ministrations required during the period of nurture that only a mother can give because in her alone is duty swallowed up in desire; in her alone is service expressed in terms of love. She alone has the patience and sympathy required to mould and soothe the infant mind in its adjustment to its environment. The difference between fatherhood and motherhood in this respect is fundamental. (Jenkins v. Jenkins, 1921, 173 Wis. 592: cited in MacDonald, 1986: 12)

The shift in the definition of motherhood was first seen in 1855 with the establishment of the "tender years doctrine" which gave judges discretionary powers to award the custody of very young children to the mother (Backhouse, 1981: 216;

Boyd, 1989b, 133; Ursel, 1992: 104). However, when a child reached the age of being productively useful, custody then reverted to the father. Judges were reluctant to grant mothers custody of children even though the definition of motherhood was changing and legislation existed, as early as 1855, to give them the power to grant custody to children under 12 (Backhouse, 1981).

By 1925 fathers' automatic and absolute rights to children following divorce were eroded and replaced with the maternal preference doctrine which stated that children of all ages should be placed with their mother upon divorce (Friedman, 1995: 17). By this time "it was considered unnatural for a father to want or to have sole care of his children" (MacDonald, 1986: 12). Maternal custody became the norm in child custody decisions and fathers were expected to maintain their breadwinner role by contributing economic support to their family following divorce. The change from paternal rights to custody to maternal preference resulted from the changing perceptions of women as mothers and children in need of their care, as well as, the active lobbying efforts of pro-children advocates (Drakich, 1988: 481; Backhouse, 1991: 202). Social reformers and psychologists of the late 1800s and early 1900s worked to undermine and ultimately eradicate paternal preference (Drakich, 1988: 481). These groups utilized a discourse that centred on the supreme role of mother in the

nurturing and caring of children and displaced the authority and privilege of fathers to custody of their children.

Child custody law reforms remained unchanged in Canada from the thirties until the eighties. Although increased liberal attitudes caused a reevaluation of marriage and divorce in the sixties, maternal preference remained the standard until 1986. The initiative in the eighties to reform the Divorce Act was stimulated by the changing social attitudes towards traditional marriage, the changing role of women and men in society (Peters, 1989: 211), the equality ideology of the women's movement, and to acknowledge women's contribution to families by making the division of property and assets more equitable. Advocates lobbied for the recognition of children's rights in custody determination. Other groups, such as the Canadian Bar Association and the Law Reform Commission of Canada demanded that the grounds for divorce be expanded to include a type of no-fault divorce and argued for a shortened time requirement in obtaining a divorce (Peters, 1989: 211). Fathers' parenting role was recognized in the introduction of joint custody, and children's rights were entrenched in the "best interest of the child doctrine." The "best interests of the child doctrine" was introduced in the latter half of the 1970s to help judges make child custody decisions (Fassel and Majury, 1987: 3). Here, the determination of custody shifted away from paternal or

maternal preference to one that was based upon what was in the best interests of the child. As a result, neither parent was assured of custody solely based upon their parental role. Rather child custody was predicated upon which parent could best meet the needs of the child.

Contemporary Social Forces

The legal reforms that took place in the eighties were reflective of the changing definitions of gender roles that were precipitated by the women's movement, economic factors, social science research, and the media. For instance, women were calling for social and financial recognition of the importance of their role to families (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1984). The increased number of married women entering the waged labour force has also had an impact on families. This impact has been felt by men being asked to change their own behaviour in the family by taking part more fully in childcare and housework. And advocacy groups like the women's movement provided a critique of existing social arrangements between men, women, and children within families (Hamilton, 1988: 3). Traditionally held gender roles were seen by the women's movement as in need of overhauling (Kimmel, 1987: 9). For, in the fifties, it was generally assumed that most women would marry and would choose not to work outside of the household (Segal, 1990: 33). However, in the seventies more

women who had children were entering the labour force as can be seen by married women's participation in the waged labour force which tripled since 1950 (Labour Canada, 1987 cited in Drakich, 1989: 71). The migration of women into the workforce signalled that many women's roles were changing to include the role of breadwinner. The structural factors that made this possible were women's increasing access to education and jobs, greater availability of contraception, social welfare programmes, and a higher standard of living (Segal, 1990: 33).

The underlying theme of the women's movement was and continues to be equality; equal access to jobs and equity in wages. Equality rhetoric was not solely directed at the social sphere of waged labour, it was also applied to families. The equal sharing of childcare and housework by women and men was encouraged by the women's movement (Drakich, 1989: 71). Family research examining the division of labour in the home found that women who worked outside the home still did the majority of work inside the home (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1984; Hochschild, 1989; Lennon and Rosenfield, 1994). Women's groups were claiming that the behaviour of men within families should be changed and expanded to accommodate the changing roles of women. These changes would result in an equal sharing of the domestic work that was performed inside the household by men and women. Therefore, men were encouraged to participate more

fully in family activities in order to achieve equal childcare and housework arrangements with women. Men were essentially being asked to expand their traditional role to include these childcare and domestic activities.

Social science research contributed to the redefining of gender roles by challenging assumptions concerning maternal and paternal parenting abilities (Drakich, 1989). Much of the initial research on fatherhood emerged out of social concern for children with absent fathers that took place shortly after WWII (Drakich, 1989). Initial social scientific research focused on the importance of the presence of fathers in the lives of their children for their proper gender and cognitive development (Drakich, 1989). Fatherhood absence was believed to be especially harmful for boys' proper gender role development. Cognitive development in children was also believed to be negatively affected when fathers were absent. It was boys who were most harmed cognitively by absent fathers. Since the late sixties, a reexamination of the role of father was emerging in social scientific research which shifted its focus from the absent father effect on children to fathers' ability to parent (see Lamb, 1987; Pleck, 1987). The scholarly research emphasized a belief that fathers were competent, sensitive, nurturant, supportive, and capable parents (Drakich, 1989). Fatherhood was believed to be more important in the gender development of his children than even mothers (Drakich, 1989). For

instance, research emphasized the reciprocal masculine role that the father role provided for daughters' feminine role, as well as the importance it provided for the son's masculine identity (Drakich, 1989). Wallerstein and Kelly's (1980) research on the effects of divorce further amplified the importance of fathers to children in the postdivorce context. The construction of fatherhood that emerged from this scholarly literature reinforced the idea that fathers were extremely important and valuable in the lives of their children.

The new image of the participatory father has been accepted by the public. Segal (1990: 34) points out that in the fifties, fathers were defined as economic and emotional supporters of mothers. And as stated previously, the social science interest in fathers was mostly relegated to the concern with their absence from the home. But by the seventies there was a newly emerging image of father who was capable and interested in fathering (Segal, 1990: 34). This participatory father captured the interest of society which can be seen in the media popularization of the "new father" (Drakich, 1989: 79) in such films as *Kramer vs Kramer*, *Three Men and a Baby*, and *Mrs. Doubtfire*. These films point to the perceived belief that men desire to be fathers and/or are capable of being fathers. Thus, the media has also helped to construct the image of the participatory father.

The emerging social definition of the participant

father is being taken up in the child custody arena. Fathers are arguing that as caring loving fathers they are being denied custody of and a relationship with their children after divorce. Fathers' rights groups have organized around this problem that divorced fathers face and are lobbying for equal rights to custody of their children. Supported by social scientific research and the perceptions of a shifting fatherhood role (e.g., the participant father), fathers' rights groups are exerting pressure for change in the definition of fatherhood postdivorce. The fathers' rights movement is championing the rights of fathers postdivorce by pressuring for changes to the present divorce and child custody laws so that the divorce situation reflects the perceived changes in the fatherhood role that have been encouraged by the women's movement and espoused by social science research and the media. Fathers's rights groups are claiming that fathers are being discriminated against in the divorce process because of the prevailing gendered assumptions that affect custody decisions, i.e. maternal preference. They claim that fathers are no longer assuming the narrow role of breadwinner within families and are just as capable as the mothers in childrearing. Yet, fathers' rightists claim that they are being denied the right to be a participatory father after divorce because the courts still favour mothers in custody decisions. The existence of fathers' rights groups and their activities are

evidence of the changing definitions of parental roles and the agents of change in the 1990s.

Summary

Changes to custody law throughout the 20th century paralleled the shifting conceptions of parenting roles, rights, and responsibilities. The award of children to a parent was premised on the social definitions and practices in society. We saw that custody was first determined on the basis of fathers' power and prestige in the family, then on mothers' nurturance and care in child development, and then on the children's best interests which gave judges the option to consider either parent as custodian. Thus, the socially constructed and changing nature of parental roles over the past 150 years, attributable to dynamic economic and social forces, has affected law and court decisions (Walters & Elam, 1985: 78). The changes to divorce law have emerged as a result of social change and new concomitant definitions of family structures and roles but also because of campaigns by reform groups that have called for changes to law (Grossberg, 1983: 235; Backhouse, 1991: 202; Koven and Michel, 1993). Although social definitions influenced legal thinking on custody, the legislative changes were propelled by the intersection of these social definitions, social science research, the media, and the lobbying of advocates and interest groups. In tracing the social

construction of parenthood definitions and identifying the social influences in the social construction of parental roles, postdivorce, a striking parallel emerges between the transition from paternal to maternal primacy in the family and the current efforts to decrease mother's privilege and reassert fathers in the family. In the shift from paternal to maternal custody in the 1920s women were lobbying for changes to child custody laws that would recognize their motherhood role and relationship to their children and allow them to gain custody of their children upon divorce. Social forces, such as middle-class reformers, psychological sciences, and economic conditions supported the elevation of motherhood to a central role in children's lives and family life and influenced child custody laws which favoured women. Currently, fathers are lobbying for the recognition of their fatherhood role and relationship to their children postdivorce. The women's movement, economic conditions encouraging women to enter the wage labour force, social science research on fatherhood, the media's representation of fatherhood, and the fathers' rights movement are social forces contributing to the elevation of fatherhood in children's lives and influencing child custody laws in favour of joint custody. Thus, we are witnessing fathers' rights groups engaging in claims-making activity that is reminiscent of the kinds of actions that mothers in the early part of the 20th century were undertaking in trying to

reverse paternal custody.

Research Focus

The current custody landscape of flux and agitation for fathers provides sociologists with a unique opportunity to examine the layers of social construction and social change. The fathers' rights movement is one group that is attempting to influence conceptions of fatherhood as they relate to child custody. This dissertation examines two layers of the fathers' rights movement--the subjective and the social.

Missing from the literature is an understanding of the subjective experience of fathers involved in the wedge of competing definitions--emergent and legal constructions of parenthood. Much of the literature on divorced fathers examines the emotional and psychological difficulties experienced by men as a result of divorce (Ambrose, Harper and Pemberton, 1983; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980). Other research on divorce and fatherhood has focused on fathers who are absent (Furstenberg, Morgan & Allison, 1987: 695; Furstenberg, Winqest, Peterson & Zill, 1983: 656; Hetherington, Cox & Cox, 1976: 417; Koch & Lowery, 1985; Seltzer, Schaeffer & Wen-Charng, 1989) and/or who fail to pay child support (Weitzman, 1985; Teachman, 1991; Cassetty, 1978; Chambers, 1979; Haskins, 1988; Dudley, 1991). Neither area of the literature reveals much about the subjective

experiences of fathers through the divorce process.

Although, research done by Arendell (1992a; 1992b) focuses on divorced fathers' subjective experiences and definitions of family and gender issues, she examines the underlying "masculinist discourse of divorce" that men use to construct and to frame their postdivorce fatherhood practice.

Nevertheless, Arendell's examination of the subjective experiences of divorced fathers is instructive to this research in underscoring the importance of subjective experience to our understanding of fatherhood. The subjective layer of the investigation will examine the subjective experiences of fathers in terms of their role postdivorce, their experiences of, and reactions, to the divorce process, and their subjective experiences with the emergent and legal definitions of fatherhood that they encounter as a result of the divorce. This level of investigation is important because there is a lack of literature on the subjective experiences of divorced fathers.

Work that has been done on "personal troubles" suggests that the way we can gain entrée into the subjectivities of people is by examining their personal troubles discourse or talk (Mills, 1959). Personal troubles discourse is expressed by individuals in the form of grievances and complaints that individuals have concerning some aspect of their personal identity and social world

(Mills, 1959). Examining the personal troubles of separating and divorced fathers allows us to understand how the divorce process is subjectively experienced. The pathway to understanding subjectivities of those involved in the fathers' rights movement is by examining their discourse. Discourse of fathers' rightists reflects their personal troubles and embodies and reflects what is important to them (Hewitt: 1989). Therefore, the way that one can understand the subjectivities and issues of fathers' rightists is by examining the personal troubles that take the form of grievances and complaints in relation to their fatherhood role postdivorce.

The research of Coltrane and Hickman (1992) on how social movement groups transform personal troubles into social issues is helpful in directing the examination of the social layer of the fathers' rights movement. One aspect of the social layer investigation will focus on how the fathers' rights movement casts the subjective experiences of divorcing fathers into a political platform and movement. Coltrane and Hickman (1992: 400) found that personal troubles are cast into a social problems frame by advocates attempting to influence legislative processes and laws. For instance, fathers' rights groups have been highly vocal about the problems that divorced fathers face because of the gendered nature of child custody and child support laws. As a result of their experiences with the divorce process,

fathers' rightists are lobbying for specific reforms and changes to divorce law. The social issues that fathers' rights groups draw from the personal troubles of divorced father and concomitant attempts at divorce law reform will be one focus of the social layer investigation. The second focus of the social layer investigation will be how the fathers' rights groups help fathers with their more immediate personal troubles. Fathers' rights social activities also involve helping fathers practically with their separation and divorce. These troubles are concerned with the current and everyday problems that fathers have with their separation and divorce and postdivorce status.

A qualitative multi-method approach, which stresses meaning rather than numbers, was used to explore the subjective experiences of fathers' rightists and the issues of their movement. The way I came to understand the activities of the movement was through observing and listening to their talk and social behaviour at meetings. Approximately one hundred (100) members were observed in group meetings over a period of eighteen months. The way I came to a fuller understanding of the subjective experiences of the fathers' rightists was through in-depth interviews. Twenty-eight fathers, and four women from four fathers' rights groups were interviewed. I was interested in discovering: the appeal of the organization, i.e., their reasons for joining the group; the personal circumstances

that led them to such a group; and their opinions on joint custody, child access, and divorce mediation. While those interviewed are not homogeneous - some were divorced, others were in the process of separation; some held politically extreme view, others were more moderate - the research explores commonalities of experiences in their reactions to divorce and separation. Other sources of data pertaining to fathers' rights activities were also collected: newspapers, magazines, television programs, proceedings in the House of Commons and the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, fathers' rights groups' newsletters, brochures, campaign literature, self-help manuals, and public events such as the Fathers' Day March, an annual general meeting of a national umbrella organization representing fathers' rights groups and other pro-family groups, and public forums on family law issues.

The current activities of the fathers' rights movement contribute to an understanding of the subjective experiences of individuals in relation to parental roles postdivorce. Examining the subjectivities of fathers' rightists reveals how changes to parental roles are experienced by individuals. In looking at their subjective experiences and understanding their involvement in fathers' rights groups additional information can be gleaned on the role of fathers' rights movements.

Overview

Chapter two outlines the theories and concepts that are used to frame and analyze the qualitative data. Symbolic interactionist theory is the primary theory used in analyzing the data. Phenomenology and interpretive interactionist theory are adjunct theories that fill in some of the gaps in symbolic interactionist theory. Chapter three discusses how the research was undertaken.

Chapter four examines how fathers' rights groups address the fathers' personal troubles with divorce by providing support, advice, and counsel. Fathers' rightists learn either from their experiences with the legal profession and system, and/or from the fathers' rights group to which they belong, that the law treats them unfairly. As a result, they are denied their rights to be the kind of father they want to be postdivorce. As a result this chapter examines how fathers' rights groups help fathers with their more immediate divorce troubles. This chapter also provides a description of each group.

Chapter five presents and analyzes the data on the fathers' rightists social construction of fatherhood. The data reveal their construction of postdivorce fatherhood and who is seen as threatening this fatherhood in the postdivorce context. Chapter six examines the legal changes to child custody that fathers' rightists are advocating that would acknowledge their father role. Fathers' rights groups

advocate changes to the laws and policies that they feel adversely affect their fatherhood role. Theoretically, implicit in this is the position that the actual laws and their practice play a part in creating cultural meaning which impacts upon those individuals in terms "...of self, others and the world at large" (Regan, 1992: 1453).

Fathers' rightists seek changes to those specific laws that affect their fatherhood status postdivorce. From observation of membership meetings and interviews, fathers' rightists identify their troubles as lying within the broader social institution of divorce and family law.

Chapter seven summarizes and integrates the findings and analysis of fathers' rightists' subjectivities and social activities concerning child custody and fatherhood postdivorce. The role of fatherhood is addressed and conceptualized along dimensional lines in terms of the postdivorce context. The emergent concept - role fragmentation - generated from the data is developed and reviewed. Policy implications as they relate to the goals of the fathers' rights movement are discussed.

THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

Introduction

Symbolic interactionism provides the main theoretical orientation and conceptual underpinning for the study of fathers' subjective experiences. Symbolic interactionism's main focus is on "the cognitive constructions of the definition of self" (Lester, 1984: 29). Phenomenology (Schutz, 1970; Berger & Luckman, 1967) and interpretive interactionism (Denzin, 1989) are used as adjunct theories because of their relevance for understanding the taken-for-granted aspects of social reality and ability to deal with changes to social identity, respectively. Career, identity, self, role, ego-extensions, and turning points concepts central to my analysis - all are drawn from these theories.

Theoretical Underpinning

Symbolic Interaction

Symbolic interactionism grew out of the philosophical thought of G.H. Mead. Mead's social psychology focused on viewing the individual from the standpoint of society. Mead (1934: 6-7) stated that,

social psychology studies the activity or behaviour of the individual as it lies within the social process. The behaviour of

an individual can be understood only in terms of the behaviour of the whole social group of which he is a member. Since his individual acts are involved in larger, social acts which go beyond himself and which implicate the other members of the groups.

Mead's social psychological theory was a reaction to the narrow perspective of behavioral psychology dominant during the 1930s which viewed behaviour as a stimulus/response reaction in humans without regard to the cognitive aspects of the actors. Recognizing the limits of such a view, Mead (1934: 139) argued that individuals do not simply respond to the social world in which they live. Nor are they conditioned by society. Rather they play an active role in the construction of their social behaviour. He pointed out that people are able to discern and organize their thoughts in such a way that they act and determine their own behaviour within a broader social context. In other words, Mead suggested that human beings are capable of thought and they use this cognitive capacity to organize their behaviour (Couch, Saxton, & Katovich, 1986: xix). More specifically, it is symbolic thought and language which allows people to organize their conduct.

The Chicago School of symbolic interactionism was developed by Herbert Blumer, a student of Mead. As Blumer described it, symbolic interactionism is interested in examining and explaining how people interpret and define their own and others' actions and then act according to

these interpretations (Blumer, 1969: 79). "The implication of this is that in order to explain why people do what they do we must know how they think" (Lindesmith, Strauss & Denzin, 1975: 9). The main premises of symbolic interaction are

...human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them. Secondly, these meanings are a product of social interaction in human society. Thirdly, the meanings are modified and handled through an interpretive process that is used by each individual in dealing with the signs he/she encounters. (Blumer, 1969: 2-6).

People can thus sustain, modify and reject existing social situations. Fathers' rightists are actively engaged in this process of defining and constructing fatherhood because of their experience with the divorce process. As will be shown later, they are attempting to negotiate their fatherhood with others.

Symbolic interactionism posits that people do not merely react to each other, but rather interpret each other's actions. These interpretations then guide their conduct and behaviour (Blumer, 1969: 79). People are not simply a medium through which society or psychological drives flow. They play an active part in determining the course of interaction (Blumer, 1969: 65). Social organization is viewed as the framework within which this activity takes place, determining behaviour but built up from individuals' joint action (Blumer, 1969: 87). It is

therefore the social process which upholds the rules (Blumer, 1969: 19). Social reality is maintained by people interacting in conjoint activity in which they are continually role-taking, designating and interpreting the social situations they are engaged in with others. People then act based upon their role-taking, designations and interpretations.

Objectification of self and other is used in order to interpret, define and determine how to act. This objectifying process is a reflexive process. Reflexivity refers to the act of being self-conscious of ourselves and how we think others regard us. The meaning of who we are and who others are arises as a result of social interaction (Blumer, 1969: 4).

In addition to meaning that arises through interaction, individuals are also provided with meanings that are used as resources to cope or deal with their interactions with others and their, at times, problematic situations. For example, men who join fathers' rights groups are provided with a series of established devices, i.e. accounts, vocabulary of motives, and discourses. These are devices that help individuals to understand their troubles, as well as to accomplish their goals, i.e. maintenance of a particular identity. A two-fold process occurs: 1) individuals negotiate their reality through interaction with others and 2) at the same time, this takes

place within an established set of accounts, vocabulary of motives and discourses that are used to make sense of and help deal with the situations that individuals find problematic.

The fathers involved in the fathers' rights movement are actively interpreting how the divorce process is affecting their fatherhood role and status. As will be shown in the discussion and analysis of the data, fathers' rightists are concerned with the threats that are occurring to their father role. The data will reveal that the fathers objectify themselves and also perceive others as treating them as objects to be defined or redefined. This process is seen as threatening. Therefore, symbolic interactionist theory provides a useful framework within which to examine this negotiation of identity post-divorce.

The mechanisms that allow fathers to understand and react to their personal problems are self-idea or self-objectification (Cooley, 1902: 183) and role-taking (Mead, 1934: 254). Cooley described this self-objectification using the concept of the looking-glass self.

"A self-idea of this sort seems to have three principle elements: the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his judgement of that appearance, and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification" (Cooley, 1902: 184)

Role-taking is also important in the negotiation of identity and social interaction because it is through taking the role

of the other that interaction or conduct is guided and evaluations are made about the self.

"It is through taking this role of the other that he is able to come back on himself and so direct his own process of communication. This taking the role of the other...is not simply of passing importance. It is not something that just happens as an incidental result of the gesture, but it is of importance in the development of operative activity" (Mead, 1934:254).

Role-taking has strategic value as well. It is a way to second-guess the likely actions of others and in particular, the other as rival or opponent. Role-taking is, in this respect, an intelligence gathering exercise. The self, as a cognitive structure and mechanism, allows the individual to feel, understand and act in a meaningful manner to social situations. That is, the individual is able to communicate and negotiate the self and the definition of the situation. "The possession of a self provides the human being with a mechanism of self-interaction with which to meet the world-- a mechanism that is used in forming and guiding his conduct" (Blumer, 1969: 62). The self has to interpret and analyze the situation it finds itself in, as well as, modify itself.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology enters into this theoretical discussion because it examines and centres attention on commonsense knowledge and the taken-for-granted aspects of social reality. In the case of fathers' rightists, taken-

for-granted reality with the role-identity of fatherhood which is part of the broader male self-concept. How fatherhood is taken-for-granted and the common-sense knowledge that informs it is best explained by phenomenology. The purpose of phenomenology is to examine the subjective meaning that people bestow on certain experiences of daily life (Schutz, 1973: 210):

World of daily life shall mean the intersubjective world which existed long before our birth, experienced and interpreted by Others, our predecessors, as an organized world. Now it is given to our experience and interpretation. All interpretation of this world is based upon a stock of previous experiences of it, our own experiences and those handed down to us by our parents and teachers, which in the form of knowledge at hand function as a scheme or reference. To this stock of experiences at hand belongs our knowledge of the world we live in is a world of well circumscribed objects with definite qualities, objects among which we move, which resist us and upon which we may act. (Schutz, 1973: 208).

According to phenomenology, there are three social phenomena which account for social reality, commonsense knowledge or sense making: the stock of knowledge at hand, the natural attitude of everyday life and the practices of commonsense reasoning.

"The stock of knowledge at hand consists of recipes, rules of thumb, social types, maxims, and definitions" (Leiter, 1980: 5). The natural attitude of everyday life "is our knowledge of the world as a factual environment"

(Leiter, 1980: 7). "The significance of the practices of commonsense reasoning lies in their relation to the natural attitude and the stock of knowledge at hand. It is through the use of commonsense reasoning that people create and sustain the sense of social reality as a factual environment" (Leiter, 1980: 11).

Among the different realities within which individuals find themselves - dream states, spiritual awareness, psychotropic hallucinations - the most salient is that of day to day experience or as phenomenologists call it, the paramount reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1967: 21). "The reality of everyday life appears already objectified, that is, constituted by an order of objects that have been designated as objects before my appearance on the scene" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967: 21-22). Roles existed prior to the individuals and the role will continue to exist after the individual (Lauer & Handel, 1983: 121). In the case of men, the fatherhood role exists prior to the individuals existence. The role has a history of associated behaviours, attitudes and expectations which precede the individual who takes on the role. When adopting the father role-identity, the father acquires a recipe of knowledge associated with the role-identity of fatherhood. The fatherhood role also, after time, tacitly becomes taken-for-granted and objectified until a disruption occurs.

People experience their daily lives within this natural attitude until it is interrupted (Berger & Luckmann, 1967: 24). This natural attitude constitutes the world and its taken-for-granted objects until counterproof is imposed (Schutz, 1973: 228). The divorce process breaches taken-for-granted reality. Divorce challenges not only men's identity but their relationships as well. Relationships suddenly become impersonal, i.e. "we" relationships associated with the family suddenly change to "they" relationships with lawyers, judges and ex-wife. Fathers are presented with obstructions and threats to their fatherhood, as well as to familiar relationships, and in the divorce process have to legitimate and defend their fatherhood role in a post-divorce scenario. In this case the form that threats take are that of the turning points, the epiphany, the strange or the problem.

Interpretive Interactionism

Interpretive interactionism was developed by Denzin (1989) to address the "interrelationship between private lives and public responses to personal troubles" (Denzin, 1989: 10). It is theoretically rooted in symbolic interactionism and phenomenology (Denzin, 1989: 14). As such, it focuses on those "experiences that radically alter and shape the meanings persons give to themselves and their experiences" (Denzin, 1989: 10). Interpretive

interactionism posits that interpretation and understanding is a fundamental aspect of social life (Denzin, 1989: 11).

Denzin (1989: 7) bases his theoretical orientation on Mills' (1959) challenge "to develop a point of view and a methodological attitude that would allow them to examine how private troubles of individuals, which occur within the immediate world of experience, are connected to public issues and to public responses to these troubles". For Mills (1959: 8)

troubles occur within the character of the individual and within the range of his immediate relations with others; they have to do with the self and with those limited areas of social life of which he is directly and personally aware. Accordingly, the statement and the resolution of troubles properly lie within the individual as a biographical entity and within the scope of his immediate milieu--the social setting that is directly open to his personal experience and to some extent his wilful activity. A trouble is a private matter: values cherished by an individual are felt by him to be threatened.

Public issues on the other hand are

matters that transcend these local environments of the individual and the range of his inner life. They have to do with the organization of many such milieux into the institutions of an historical society as a whole, with the ways in which various milieux overlap and interpenetrate to form the larger structure of social and historical life. An issue is a public matter: some value cherished by public is felt to be threatened. (Mills, 1959: 8)

In order to explain the significance of the social inquiry the researcher must deal with both personal problems and

public issues. Father's rightists' personal troubles will be examined in order to view their subjective experiences regarding their postdivorce father role. These personal troubles are then transformed into public issues. An examination of child custody will reveal the public issues regarding personal troubles.

Major Concepts

Self

As a social process and object/subject, the self enables a person "to observe, respond to, and direct one's own behaviour" (Lauer & Handel, 1983: 111). The self has four distinct characteristics. 1) The first characteristic is described by Mead's (1934: 210) distinction between the "I" and the "me". The "I", as the first phase of the process, is seen as the unpredictable, emergent, impulsive aspect of the self. The "me", as the second phase of the process, is the organized community which is reflected in one's attitudes. As a process, the "I" calls out the "me" and then responds to the "me". The "me" is the socially structured element of the self, while the "I" allows for novel and emergent forms of behaviour. Self as a process, in the form of the "I" and the "me", accounts for both change and stability in the individual and society. More importantly, Mead's delineations of the self as the "I" and the "me" speak to the fact that as human beings we are self-

aware. The "me" is that part of the self which reflects back on the self, as well as, towards prospective actions.

2) The second characteristic of the self is its reflexivity (Lauer & Handel, 1983: 112). Mead (1934: 134) introduced the concept of reflexivity to explain the ability of the person to be both subject and object within the context of social interaction.

"It is by means of reflexiveness--the turning back of the experience of the individual upon himself--that the whole social process is thus brought into the experience of the individuals involved in it; it is by such means, which enable the individual to take the attitude of the other toward himself, that the individual is able consciously to adjust himself to that process, and to modify the resultant of that process in any given social act in terms of his adjustment to it." (Mead, 1934: 134)

The individual is capable of treating him/herself as both subject and object. Reflexivity allows the individual to assess his or her behaviour and the roles associated with those behaviours or performances.

3) A third characteristic of the self is that it is comprised of attitudes (Lauer & Handel, 1983: 112). Attitudes refer to "certain regularities of an individual's feelings, thoughts, and predispositions to act toward some aspect of his environment" (Secord & Backman, 1964: 97 as cited in Lauer & Handel, 1983: 92). We share attitudes with others but our attitudes may also differ from others. It is

this aspect of self that is associated with cultural norms, values and beliefs.

4) A final characteristic is that the self becomes a site where social control becomes self-control (Lauer & Handel, 1983: 113). Theoretically, this is explained by the "me" having dominance over the "I" (Lauer & Handel, 1983: 113). These four characteristics of the self are by no means the only definition of self. A certain amount of confusion still exists over the concept of self (Rosenberg, 1979: 5). However, for the purpose of this investigation the "[s]elf is both something that one has and something that constitutes a social process for symbolic interactionists" (Lester, 1984: 25).

Symbolic interactionists have put forth a fluid and ever changing theory of self. "However, they note that many people have rather fixed self-definitions, ones that they carry from situation to situation" (Lester, 1984: 27). Rosenberg's (1979: 7) focus is on the self as object: the self-concept. The self-concept is "...the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object" (Rosenberg, 1979: 7). The self-concept thus is a cognitive structure or a set of ideas about one's self (Rosenberg, 1979: 50): the self as object of attention and evaluation.

The self-concept can change over time if viewed in the context of the self as a biography. And people can have

varying concurrent self-appraisals of themselves depending upon the situations they are in. As such the self-concept can be reinterpreted at a later date, as in the example that some people give when they state that they are not the same person they were ten years ago. This could be due to changes in marital status, job status, changes in geographic location, books read, children born, etc. It is suggested here that the self-concept and its constituent parts are susceptible to change due to time, location and interaction with others.

How the self-concept is structured is important in explaining the behaviour of individuals in the fathers' rights movement. Also important in this analysis is the relationship between the various components of the self-concept. Rosenberg (1979: 18) argues that the self-concept's components are "...of unequal centrality to the individual's concerns and are hierarchically organized in a system of self-values." Also there is a relationship between the components of the self-concept (Rosenberg, 1979: 17). Within this context, the fathers' rightist is concerned with the changes to his self-concept.

Identity

The concepts of identity and self have often been used inconsistently and as a result they have sometimes come to mean the same thing (Rosenberg, 1979: 5). However,

distinct differences between the two concepts can be demonstrated. First, Stryker (1980: 60), Charmaz (1986), Rosenberg (1979: 9) and Burke and Reitzes (1981: 84) state that a number of identities comprises the self. Age, race, nationality, marital status, sex, gender, religion, and family status, when combined constitute one's identity. McCall and Simmons (1978: 65), Burke and Reitzes (1981: 84) and Rosenberg (1979) incorporate the concept of role into the theory of identity and conceptualize it as role-identity to explain how individuals think or attribute meaning to themselves based upon a particular position or role. In addition to the self being comprised of a number of social identities, it also is concerned with dispositions and physical characteristics (Rosenberg, 1979: 9). However, social identity will be the focus for the purpose of this discussion.

Charmaz (1986) points out that the social identity, the roles you identify with, emerges through, and is constructed through social interaction.

The symbolic interactionist tradition assumes that people's self concepts change as they interpret and accept new views of themselves. That process of change is an active one in which social actors make choices and respond to their situations, rather than passively receive and internalize the definitions of others. In keeping with the symbolic interactionist perspective, I look at the processes through which social and personal identities shape the on-going construction of self. Here, self refers to the organized set of attributes and internalized identifications

with which persons creates a concept of self. (Charmaz, 1986: 1)

Identity can be broken down empirically and theoretically into two analytically distinct units. One can have a social identity which can be one's "identification in terms of broad social categories like military ranks..." (McCall and Simmons, 1966: 64) or in this case fatherhood and marital status. And personal identity is arrived at by identifying a person in reference unique individual terms such as a person's name and city of residence (McCall and Simmons, 1966: 64-65). Thus, "personal identities serve as the pegs upon which social identities and personal biographies can be hung" (McCall and Simmons: 65). However unique one is in terms of identity, one's identity is ultimately arrived at through social interaction and the sociocultural system in which one lives. As such, it is maintained and transformed through social interaction and by the institutions that we pass through (McCall and Simmons, 1978: 66). The institutions that most affect the fathers' rightist are the family and the legal system. Institutions affect the roles that are made available for these individuals.

Role

A role is a set of socially prescribed, expected and enacted behaviours that influence individuals' self-concept

(Lauer & Handel, 1983: 126). We all take part in enacting and constructing various social roles and, in some cases, we incorporate roles into our self-concept. The role of father is a salient and fundamental feature of the role repertoire that many men possess. A role consists of behaviour which is regarded as making up a meaningful social unit (Turner, 1956: 317). For example, the role of father brings with it a number of expectations for how one should feel and act. Expectations concerning particular roles are dependent upon how well defined and broadly shared they are and practised.

Further, a role designates one's position in the social situations one encounters (Stryker, 1980: 54). Associated with these positions are the concomitant privileges, rights, and entitlements. Fatherhood is a case in point. The rights and privileges of a father were intact as long as he was married. This changes with separation and divorce.

Ego-Extensions

One's self-concept is not limited to a repertoire of role-identities (Rosenberg, 1979; Belk, 1988; James, [1890] 1983: 279). Other aspects of the self-concept are the individual's ego-extensions (Rosenberg, 1979: 34) or the possessions which are incorporated as part of the extended self (Belk, 1988). Our conception of social identity

recognizes our sense of separateness from others but also our connectedness to others and to objects. "We at once recognize the independent identity of these external things, people, or groups but at the same time feel they are part of us--indeed, that in a sense they are us" (Rosenberg, 1979: 34). Rosenberg and Belk both are indebted to James ([1890] 1983: 279) for their conception of ego-extensions.

In its widest possible sense, however, a man's Self is the sum total of all that he CAN call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes, and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and work, his land and horses, and yacht and bank-account. All these things give him the same emotions. If they wax and prosper, he feels triumphant; if they dwindle and die away, he feels cast down--not necessarily in the same degree for each thing but in much the same way for all. (James, [1890] 1983: 279)

The self can thus be seen as a possessive process incorporating roles, others and objects within itself.

Belk (1988) provides an extensive examination of those ego-extensions that are considered part of one's identity. Two types of ego-extensions in particular are relevant for this research: money (Belk, 1988: 155) and people (Belk, 1988: 156). A father's ability to earn a wage is related to the breadwinner role. The father's children, in a sense, make possible the ability for a male to take on the role of father. I will show that when custody of children is awarded to the mother, fathers experience a threat to their identity. The father, in the majority of

cases, is expected to pay child support. He experiences a double loss: his child and part of his salary.

Loss of an ego-extension such as money or a child is seen as a violation or threat to identity (Belk, 1988: 142). As a result, object loss is a traumatic loss of a possession (p.143) in which people will seek to replace or restore (p.144) in order to restore aspects of their identity. In the case of fathers' rightists, much of their behaviour can be understood as an attempt to restore lost objects and possessions which are part of their fatherhood role-identity. The concept of ego-extensions, as an aspect of the identity, can explain why an individual becomes involved in a fathers' rightist group. When these ego-extensions are lost the father's role-identity is threatened and transformed. In both cases, two types ego-extensions, e.g. children and money, have been lost and the concomitant responses are a retrieval and restoration of the object(s).

Career

Several concepts have been examined and discussed in this section - self, identity, roles, and ego-extensions. Tying these concepts together is the concept of career. The career concept has been expanded by sociologists (Hewitt, 1991: 246) to include social roles other than the occupational roles that have traditionally been viewed as careers. "The term is coming to be used... in a broadened

sense to refer to any social strand of any person's course through life" (Goffman: 1961: 127). For instance, Lindesmith, Strauss, and Denzin (1977: 431) have identified friendship, leisure, political, religious, and intimate careers. In this analysis the role of father is viewed as a career that a person can incorporate within their identity.

Rather than treating life in static terms the concept of career implies temporality, process, and movement. Beyond a strand of continuity, it also implies a sense of order and structure for individuals. A career can become taken-for-granted and thus provide the person with a sense of order and stability. Yet, careers can be changed and threatened. It is this threat to orderliness that is at stake in the case of fatherhood identities. Changes in one's career can transform identity (Hughes, 1958 cited in Lindesmith et al, 1977: 432; Thoits 1991: 106). These changes to career identity have been labelled by some as turning points (Lindesmith et al, 1977: 435; Strauss, 1959) and by others as strange (Schutz, 1973), problematic (Berger and Luckman, 1967), and epiphanic (Denzin, 1989).

Career Turning Points

Strauss (1959) argues that transformations in identity derive from career turning points. The strange is an interruption in our experience (career) which is not accountable under the stock of knowledge at hand or is

inconsistent with it (Schutz, 1973: 228). The problem, which seems to be taken from Schutz's concept of the strange, is an interruption in the natural attitude or taken-for-granted nature of the person's social experience (Berger & Luckmann, 1967: 24). Both the strange and problematic deal more with the individual's feeling of powerlessness because the event or situation is not explainable in terms of his or her stock of social knowledge. What these concepts have in common is their focus on the social situations and events that radically alter one's career identity and perception of social reality. "While differing greatly in their experiential content, all these transition points have in common a violent breakdown of the taken-for-granted routines of everyday life and ipso facto, an intimation of novel and strange modes of being" (Berger, 1978: 348).

This social process points to, not only the threat to a career identity but to the rupture in the taken-for-granted nature of that identity. The interpretive interactionist perspective looks at "those life experiences which radically alter and shape the meanings persons give to themselves and their life projects" (Denzin, 1989: 14-15). These disruptions have been identified as epiphanies. An epiphany is a "moment of problematic experience that illuminates personal character, and often signifies a turning point in a person's life" (Denzin, 1989: 141).

Epiphanies take place in "problematic interactional situations where the subject confronts and experiences crisis" (Denzin, 1989: 17). For fathers' rightists, the epiphany is cumulative. The cumulative epiphany occurs as a result of a series of events that have built up in the person's life" (Denzin, 1989: 17). It may begin with the disintegration of the marriage, separation, and the final divorce decree and continue long after the divorce has been finalized. The cumulative effect is that the father no longer feels nor experiences his full fatherhood identity. The event shatters the taken-for-granted world that the father lived in and experienced. It also forces him to account for his fatherhood; that is, to define his fatherhood for himself and others. Other types of epiphanies that Denzin (1989: 17) has described are: the major, "...an experience shatters a person's life, and makes it never the same again;" "the minor or illuminative, underlying tensions and problems in a situation or relationship are revealed;" and relived epiphany, "a person relives, or goes through again, a major turning point moment in his or her life."

I will show that for fathers' rightists a fracture of the taken-for-granted is the loss of or threat to their identity and concomitant rights, as a result of the separation and divorce. Fatherhood identity, as a taken-for-granted, is altered by the courts when custody and child support is determined by the judge. I will show that the

threat to identity in the case of father's rightist is seen as a surprising, unwelcomed, and threatening assault to their identity. While other turning points such as that from boyhood to adulthood or singlehood to married life are seen as natural status passage by participants and have a modicum of social clarity, I will show that for fathers going through divorce, the experience is threatening and destructive. Their stock of knowledge at hand is not capable of dealing with the strange or problematic. This is particularly confusing when the knowledge available to them indicates and reinforces the vestigial elements of masculine centrality and power (Arendell, 1992a).

Overall, fathers' rightists are experiencing a radical shift in their lives as it concerns their social identity and others' behaviour towards them. In a sense, it is an existential problem because part of their self-concept is being radically altered. They are then making claims about their rights to have their identity and concomitant role given back and maintained. In this process the vocalizing of their rights indicate what fatherhood means to them. Thus, the analysis is able to identify what the social identity and role of fatherhood means for this group of men.

In this analysis the concept of career is used as an organizing device in examining the individuals involved in fathers' rights activities. Rather than examining the

changing nature and transformations in the career as father however, this research takes a snapshot view of one part of the fatherhood career at one point in time - when a father is divorcing or is divorced. We can assume that the fatherhood career identities of fathers' rightists have undergone change over time. It is also beyond the scope or intention of this dissertation to make the connection between experiencing events, threats to fathers' identity, and joining a fathers' rights group. It is the current aspects of their fatherhood career identity that are the focus of this analysis.

Identity as Motive

The social behaviour of fathers' rightists is motivated by the desire to maintain a particular identity. Rosenberg (1979: 53) has describe two factors which motivate people to action. The first is that of self-preservation or maintenance of the self. The second is the protection or guarding against changes to one's self. The former deals with self-esteem and the latter with self-consistency (Rosenberg, 1979). This can be seen in the behaviour of the members of fathers' rights groups who are championing the rights, status, and identity of fathers in the postdivorce context.

For fathers' rightists, the attempt to maintain both self-esteem and self-consistency is challenged by the

separation and divorce process. I will show that they experience their social identity as under assault by their ex-wife, lawyers, and judges. As a result, the motivating factor for men's involvement in a social movement is to challenge this assault against their social identity. They feel that they have been stripped of salient aspects of their identity by the legal system. The assault on their identity motivates them to seek out others and to find mechanisms which will reaffirm their predivorce fatherhood identity. "...Individuals are motivated to formulate plans and achieve levels of performance or activity that reinforce, support, and confirm their identities" (Burke and Reitzes, 1981: 84). The matter seems to be, as noted by Rosenberg (1979: 45) "...that much of human behaviour is motivated by the wish to attain, to maintain, or to retain a desired self."

The motivation for a desired self becomes problematic within this analysis. That is, where does the process of self fit within a structural context and/or how does social structure affect and influence self and identity? At macro level, Arendell (1992b: 582) posits that "fathers [are] more typically 'locked in' to particular relational configurations and systems of meanings held by them and shaped by gendered ideology, practices, and social arrangements." Fathers' rightists are influenced by gendered ideology, practices, and social arrangements which

are also informed and influenced by the socio-historical circumstances that were discussed earlier. These gender ideologies, practices, and social arrangements provide fathers' rightists with a base from which to find the self-concept they want.

Temporality and Social Others

Examining threats to identity reveals that it is not a passive process on the part of the actors. Responses to identity threats is an active social process both temporally and socially. Individuals recall what they possessed in the past and seek to continue the previously enjoyed identity. This temporal ability enables the individual to act for or against these threats to identity:

...identity takes into account both past and future. Hence past identities, when validated, provide continuity in the present and expectation for the future. How people actively attempt to recreate and reaffirm past identities becomes visible when doing so has become problematic. People hope, plan or expect to achieve or to possess certain identities in the future. Such identity goals serve as sources of motivation.
(Charmaz, 1986: 1)

Individuals may self-support their lost identity (McCall and Simmons: 1978: 77). They may believe in and enjoy a particular identity which they occupy.

In other cases they may seek out others for "role support" in order to maintain their claims for a particular identity (McCall and Simmons, 1978: 70). Those who act as

role supporters legitimate and reinforce the person's claim to a particular identity. The individual when experiencing a threat or assault to her/his role and ultimately her/his identity, will seek out ways to validate and confirm his/her role and identity from others (Stryker, 1980: 64; Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 1992). This is accomplished through social interaction with "supportive others" or role supporters who will reaffirm the role the individual wishes to foster. Fathers' rights groups provide such supportive others.

Careers are thus played out in relation to others in terms of role-sets. Role-sets imply that every role has an associated role (Heiss, 1981: 95). For instance, father/child, husband/wife, employer/employee, teacher/student, etc. Therefore, "a career is accomplished in the company of a set of career others" (Lindesmith et al, 1977: 433). These role-sets can change as one's career unfolds (Lindesmith et al, 1977: 433). Students graduate and become employees who no longer have to interact with teachers and other students but with employers and other employees. In some cases other persons can positively or negatively influence a person's career (Lindesmith et al, 1977: 433). A wife can ask for a divorce from her spouse which negatively changes the careers paths of the husband if he did not anticipate such an event. Divorce also entails having to have others such as lawyers and judges enter and become career others. As a result individuals find

themselves in new areas and in new relationships with others (Lindesmith et al, 1977: 433).

Responses to Threats to Identity

How people respond to threats to career identity and ultimately to self becomes a relevant question to be answered in this research analysis. Breakwell (1983) has identified three types of responses to experienced threats: 1) reconstrual, 2) mobility or change, and 3) inertia.

1) The reconstrual strategy involves, a) devaluing or invalidating the threat or b) changing identity in light of new information or evaluation (Breakwell, 1983: 17). Breakwell (1983: 17) states that for most people "changing self-concept is difficult because consistency is too highly valued." 2) "Mobility" involves moving physically away from or avoiding the threat (Breakwell, 1983: 17). "Change" involves "seeking to move other people" in terms of their attitudes towards self (Breakwell, 1983: 17). The change strategy, in this case, is for the actor to change the norms and rules that govern the attitudes of the other so that the individual does not have to alter her/his identity. 3) And finally, inertia consists of doing nothing at all in face of threats to identity, that is, refraining from responding to and living with the threat. Some individuals voluntarily disengage (Ebaugh, 1988) or reject their roles (Bernard, 1989: 152). This can be seen in those people who call

themselves ex-athletes and ex-nuns or men who repudiated or rejected the role of father and its concomitant good-provider expectations were tramps and hobos (Bernard, 1989: 151-152).

Breakwell's (1983) typology of responses to threats to identity are important in determining the responses of fathers' rightists. The fact that fathers' rightists have mobilized and formed into groups reveals that they are not in a state of inertia in terms of threats to their fatherhood identity. Nor have they responded in terms of mobility by physically distancing themselves from the threat. Fathers' rightists seem to be responding to identity threats according to Breakwell's notion of change and the second aspect of reconstrual. However, the way that they are reconstruing their fatherhood identity postdivorce departs from Breakwell's idea of acceptance of the other's reconstruction of identity. Fathers' rightist response to identity threats attacks the troubles at two levels. 1) At the socio-legal fathers' rightists are attempting to change family and divorce law and thus, the way the law transforms their fatherhood identity postdivorce. 2) At the individual level fathers' rightists are involved in a process of reconstrual but not in the direction of others' definitions. Rather fathers' rightists are trying to reconstruct their fatherhood identity postdivorce according to how they wish to see it enacted rather than how others

are attempting to define fatherhood in that context.

METHODS, SOURCES, AND RESEARCH NEEDS

This research was located in and informed by the symbolic interactionist perspective discussed in chapter two. It rejects the logical positivist's sociological assumptions that advocate adherence to quantifiable, observable, scientifically controlled conditions for gathering and analyzing data (Denzin, 1989: 24). The methodology does not seek to make generalizations from the sample to the population. Typically, as is demonstrated by this research, qualitative methodology is used to explore and describe new or unknown social terrain. Qualitative interactionist methodology seeks to understand the subjective meanings that people construct from their social experience and interaction. This is accomplished by talking to people and listening to their discourse. Discourse reflects what is important in the lives of individuals (Hewitt, 1989: 20). Discourse allows people to understand problematic situations and construct lines of action to deal with the problematic (Hewitt, 1989: 20). Discourse is seen within this analysis as talk that is centred on a particular theme and used mainly by a particular social group.

The methodological approaches that best deal with this orientation are outlined and discussed by Schatzman and

Strauss (1973) and Strauss (1987) as field methods and by Lofland and Lofland (1984) as qualitative methods. The issue of reconciling theory and method, as well as the subject matter, were taken into account in determining a methodology which would gain access to the subjective experiences of the fathers' rightist. For the theory of symbolic interactionism is premised on the assumption that individuals actively interpret, negotiate and construct their lives. Qualitative or field methods best suit the stated goals of the interpretive perspective for it observes, listens to, and often times engages in or participates in the lives of those studied.

The field method does not start out with a clearly articulated research question or problem to solve as that exhibited by positivists (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973: 3). The approach, when viewed on a continuum, is on the inductive rather than deductive end. "...The field method process of discovery may lead the researcher to his problem after it has led him through much of the substance of his field" (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973: 3). As such, the focus on personal troubles and social issues was arrived at after many hours in the field and analysis of the in-depth interviews.

The emergent focus on understanding grievances and complaints indicated the need to use a number of methods. Principally, the methods were in-depth open-ended

interviews, participant observational analysis, text analysis (reading newspaper articles and fathers' rights literature), review of the scholarly literature, and experiential data. The process that I went through as a field researcher emerged as I better understood fathers' rightists' discourse. One of the reasons that the method emerged as a process was the fact that I, as a researcher, had to learn to interact with the people I was studying. As such, I had to learn their particular vocabulary of motive, personal troubles, and the public issues they were espousing. Schatzman and Strauss (1973: 7) also point out this fact when they state that the method emerges from the operation based upon "...strategic decisions, instrumental actions, and analytical processes--which go on throughout the entire research enterprise." I had to negotiate, determine, and develop a line or lines of action that were based upon and influenced by the people under investigation, as well as my own emergent observational and theoretical insights.

It was through the observational stage that I was able to develop some sensitizing concepts and was able to theoretically sample (Strauss, 1987) them through further observation and interviews. Blumerian symbolic interactionist methodology prescribes sensitizing concepts as opposed to definitive concepts because of the nature of social reality. Social reality is one which is open to

change rather than determined and static. Definitive concepts were seen as imposing a static view of social interaction rather than a processual one. "Whereas definitive concepts provide prescriptions of what to see, sensitizing concepts merely suggest directions along which to look" (Blumer, 1969: 148). It was from the meetings that I was able to understand the centrally held issues. This provided me with a certain amount of knowledge with which to use in the interviews. I did not want to appear as a total novice to the participants of the movement. I at least needed to know the foundations of the movement.

The themes that are presented in the findings and analysis resulted in part from recurring topics that emerged during the course of the data collection and analysis. For instance, lawyers as adversarial others, were often spoken of as a source of personal troubles by many of the fathers' rightists. This sensitized (Blumer, 1969: 148-49) me to probe and ask questions concerning fathers' rightists' experiences with lawyers in the interviews. From this strategy I organized, under thematic headings, the meanings that lawyers had for fathers' rightists. At this point in the analysis what I accomplished was an adding of different members subjective experiences centring around the theme of lawyers. The same analytical strategy was used for the other dominant themes which emerged in the research process. Revealed in the findings and analysis chapters are the

themes, as expressed as personal troubles and social issues, of the fathers' rights movement as expressed by its various members. Overall, the qualitative approach is looking for typical themes and not trying to identify the variation and association among social variables.

In keeping with this method of analysis, I engaged in data collection and analytic processing simultaneously. Thus, the choice of methods and how these data were used reveals the basic assumptions of the interpretive perspective: people actively interpret, define, and construct their reality. Participant observation, in-depth interviews, and text analysis gathers fathers' rightists' discourse which is essentially how they talk about and respond to their personal troubles. This use of multiple methods has been described as triangulated methodology (Denzin, 1978).

Triangulated Methodology

Denzin (1978: 292) prescribes the use of a triangulated methodological approach in order to come to a better understanding and analysis of those under study. Triangulation, or a combination of methods is oriented toward common units of observation (Denzin, 1978: 292). As a result, a between-method triangulation was used to collect data: participant observation, in-depth open-ended interviews, and textual analysis. The methodology also

allows for different methods to be used at different periods within the research process. For instance, I began the research process by reading articles from popular magazines and newspapers and then used participant observation in order to familiarize myself with fathers' rightists' activities, issues, and personnel. In a sense, this period of research, which lasted approximately eight months, helped to sensitize me to the more salient aspects of the fathers' rights movement and the subjective meanings that the members produce.

What I call textual or document analysis was also used to gather and analyze data. Many of these groups provide written information which may be of relevance to their membership. This material was provided at the meetings. These texts or documents were analyzed as part of the triangulated methodology. The interviews took place after I had been in the field for approximately eight months. In this time, I had been doing participant observation on one particular fathers' rights group, Human Equality Action Resource Team (HEART). The site for these meetings was in a library's multi-purpose room. I observed their meetings in order to determine what the salient troubles and issues were. I also attended the meetings in order to secure the trust of the members so that I could interview them at a later date. By this time I had an overall understanding of the group members' troubles and

issues. After I had completed about five interviews, it became apparent that what the members were expressing at meetings, in terms of personal troubles and social issues, were also emerging in the interviews.

In-depth interviews were conducted to further explore the theoretical and substantive issues that were emerging from the data that the fathers' rightists were providing me. The interviews provided the accounts (Lyman & Scott: 1970) of fathers' rightists pertaining to their behaviour and beliefs. Similar themes were found when analyzing the other data sources, e.g. field notes and documents. However, the interviews were the main source of the presentational data or what appears in the body of this text. The interview quotations that appear in the body of the text were chosen because they were expressions that showed the typical points of view of these people.

Current Biography, Remote Biography and Personal History

Lofland and Lofland (1984: 2) encourage social researchers to use their personal experience as a starting point from which to conduct their research. For instance, if you are a taxi-driver, study taxi-drivers (Davis, 1959). "The concerns you bring to the doing of social analysis also arise from accidents of remote biography and personal history--of residence, ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, past identities or experiences, family customs, class of

origin, religion and so forth" (Lofland and Lofland, 1984: 8). The current biography of researchers is important in directing them to a particular topic. This is true in my own case. I had been interested in protest activities for some time. A colleague, who had been working with a women's organization critical of fathers' rights groups, encouraged me to take on this topic as an area of study. Prior to this, I had an interest in the study of masculinity and saw this as an opportunity to further this interest by studying fathers as part of masculinity.

On a more personal note, I live in a divorced family. Although, custody was not an issue, child support and money were. As a result, I have always been interested in issues of divorce and families. Other factors that led me to take on this research were the geographical proximity to the people, in this case fathers' rightists, I wanted to understand. Hamilton is within an hour of Toronto and Kitchener/Waterloo by public transit and Ottawa could be travelled to quite easily by bus or train. Other input into the analysis came from my advisers.

Overall, current and remote as well as my personal history worked in a serendipitous manner. The process was not linear or pragmatic, but a series of events that culminated in pursuing the research. At the research level, the flow of this research developed from examining the movement in general to a focus on questions about the

subjectivities and social activities of the fathers' rightists.

Entering the Field

I entered the field once I had familiarized myself with the relevant literature. Strauss (1987: 10) has conceptualized the product of this method as "experiential data." Experiential data are "data 'in the head,' drawn from the researcher's personal, research, and literature experiences" (Strauss, 1987: 20). As a researcher, I initially read a number of books and articles that related to the area of study (Peacock, 1982; Peters, 1989; Crean, 1988; Drakich, 1988; Dixon & Weitzman, 1982). These readings provided me with information as to a number of the issues and the competing ideological perspectives that revolve around the fathers' rights movement.

My site selection was more by chance; when I finally did find my entry point, it was as a result of a friend who had given me a leaflet advertising a public fathers' rights group meeting which was to be held at a public library. I decided to go to the group's public meetings which were held once a month. The group that was meeting was Human Equality Action Resource Team (HEART). I went to the location and observed what took place at the meeting. I was surprised that both men and women were attending these meetings. However, three quarters of the

people in attendance at this meeting were men and later I would learn that the women attending were second wives and girlfriends of the men. At the end of the meeting, I spoke to the president of HEART and explained my purpose for being there. I told her that I was a sociology student working on a doctoral dissertation which had as its focus groups who were advocating joint custody and mediation. These groups have overlapping membership and lines of communication with fathers' rights groups. Her reaction was positive to my studying the group. She felt having someone study the group would lend some legitimacy or credibility to the troubles and social issues they were dealing with. Participant observation, but of a limited nature, of two other fathers' rights groups was conducted in order to confirm or disconfirm the findings of the other groups i.e., In Search of Justice (ISOJ) and Fathers for Justice (FFJ).

Entrance into In Search of Justice was problematic and coincidental. I had tried to seek permission to attend these meetings but the president of the group never returned my calls. Meetings of this group were also highly secretive and men who attended them were screened to see if they had legitimate fathers' rights interests, i.e., were they separated or divorced fathers with personal troubles. A member of the group I had sought a ride from decided he wanted to go to a Saturday night meeting of ISOJ on the way back from a Fathers' Rights Convention that was being held

in Toronto. When we arrived at the ISOJ office there was no sign in the window identifying the office. The fathers' rightist who was driving was asked to pick someone up at the bus station and when we returned a sign was posted in the window. The reason they allowed me access was because I would have had to otherwise wait in the car. The other group that I observed was Fathers for Justice (FFJ). I had interviewed the president and vice-president and asked each of them for permission to attend their meetings. Permission was granted. I attended a series of FFJ monthly meetings.

Getting In and Developing a Research Role

Getting in involves "gaining the acceptance of the people being studied" (Lofland & Lofland, 1984: 20). With any fieldwork the researcher must consciously present her or himself to the individuals under study. "Every field work role is at once a social interaction device for securing information for scientific purposes and a set of behaviours in which an observer's self is involved" (Gold, 1969: 31). This presentation of research self could be either as the unknown or known investigator in relationship to those under study (Lofland & Lofland, 1984: 21-24). I did not want to take the role of unknown investigator because it could prove too problematic for me. For example, it would entail having to construct an artificial biography. Furthermore, I was afraid of the consequences if my real role was discovered.

In addition to this, there is an ethical debate over investigators entering the setting in this role because it could threaten other researchers activities in these settings (see Erikson, 1970; Davis, 1970; Lofland, 1970; Roth; 1970). I therefore made a conscious decision to make my role of investigator or researcher known. Thus, the role I was going to play was extremely important in securing my presence at meetings and obtaining interviews with the fathers' rights group members.

My intention at the first meeting was to introduce myself and the purpose of my research and ask for permission to attend and observe meetings of the group. In stating my research purpose I explained that I was not a father but that I had experienced many of the problems that these individuals encounter indirectly as a child of separating and divorcing parents. In providing this information I also wanted to ascribe a role for myself as a graduate student doing sociological research for the completion of a Ph.D. This procedure was part of my presentation of self and impression management I used in order to secure my position in the research situation and setting. This presentation of self provided the participants with an account of my purpose and allowed them to determine access. In other words, I was trying to gain the trust of the fathers' rightists so that they would let me stay and observe them. Also, I found out later that some of these people are suspicious of others.

Some felt that their exwives may have hired a private investigator.

Once my role was known, it was then a matter of the degree to which I was going to play the role and the level at which I was going to participate in the activities of the group. Junker (1960: 35-38) identifies four research roles: complete participant, participant as observer, observer as participant, and complete observer. "In this role (complete participant), the observer's activities as such are wholly concealed" (Junker, 1960: 35). The participant as observer role is not entirely concealed but is open to ascription by the observed (Junker, 1960: 36-37). The role that is most applicable to my research behaviour was the observer as participant. "This role is the role in which the observer's activities as such are made publicly known at the outset, are more or less publicly sponsored by people in the situation studied, and are intentionally not kept under wraps" (Junker, 1960: 37). The final field work role that Junker identifies is the complete observer role. This role involves activities such as observing behind a one-way mirror to observing group dynamics in a laboratory.

Another issue needs to be discussed in terms of getting in; the issue of trade-offs with the participants. I promised to give a copy of the final written work to every group in which I had interviewed members: a total of four. I felt that this would demonstrate my trustworthiness. It

would also give them a chance to read what I had written and give something back for their time, the interviews, and letting me into their world. Another kind of trade-off seemed to be the fact that I regularly attended meetings of HEART. One executive member made the observation that I attended the meetings more regularly than some of the executives. This may have influenced how they viewed me in terms of my interest in their world and my trustworthiness.

Learning the Ropes

HEART was the main group whose meetings I attended on a regular basis. My role was known to the executive of the group and became better known to the members of the group as time progressed. My role of observer as participant at these meetings was more complex than the concept denotes. Initially, I felt a great deal of apprehension in approaching people. I therefore sat quietly at meetings and jotted down notes. This practice of note taking was used to keep track of what was said at meetings, as well as, to keep a running tally of how many people were in attendance and gender composition of the meetings. Observable note taking was also done by other members of the group who wrote down information that they felt was useful. I never spoke during the meetings to voice my opinions or ask questions. I talked to people before and after the meetings, as well as during the breaks. These were very

good times at which to approach people for information and to secure interviews. At these times, many people were in the process of seeking or giving advice.

Interview Subjects

The subjects were chosen for the interviews from fathers' rights groups located in Ottawa, Waterloo/Kitchener, and Toronto, Ontario. Thirty-two members were interviewed. These people were selected for their level of participation and availability. As such, every attempt was made to interview fathers' rightists who were executive members, active members, and casual members whose only activity was attending group meetings. As a result, I would be able to gain data that would represent the types of members based upon their levels of involvement in the fathers' rights groups. Twenty-eight men and four women were interviewed. Only one woman interviewed was not a second wife or girlfriend; however, she was a joint custodial parent. All of the people interviewed, except one, were caucasian. The individual who was the exception was Afro-Canadian. Most were from urban areas.

A further breakdown of fathers' rightists' members along custody and access lines revealed that: 15 fathers were noncustodial parents with access, 3 fathers had no access, 5 fathers had joint custody (one couple (2) has joint custody of his two boys; one female member has joint

custody of her two children), 5 fathers had sole custody of their children except for one father who had custody of his son and access to his daughter. The total number of children that these fathers rightists had was 52 and the mean = 1.62. The age range for the children was 2.5 to 19 years. There were a number of anomalies in this sample. For instance, one couple who were fathers' rights members had no children from their marriage but sought out a fathers' rights group because he was seeking to stop support payments to a previous partner. Another female fathers' rights member was involved because her husband was having problems with access and she had been involved in a support group for second wives.

The age range of fathers rightists was from mid-twenties to late-forties. This was either assessed by observation or arrived at in the interview. The gender breakdown for the interview sample was 28 males and 4 females. Thirty-one were employed at the time and one was unemployed. Approximately a third of those interviewed were classified as professionals, i.e., doctors, dentists, teachers, etc. Again, approximately one third were classified in the white collar occupational status, i.e., civil servants, computer programmers, executives, etc. A third would be considered blue collar, i.e., mechanic, electrician, firefighter, transportation, etc. And a small proportion were in sales or entrepreneurial occupations.

The women who were interviewed were all employed in full-time occupations and occupied blue collar to white collar positions.

Membership in a fathers' rights group was the primary criterion for securing interviews from subjects. Table 1 shows the raw number of people interviewed from each fathers' rights group. A number of fathers' rightists had memberships in more than one fathers' rights group. This multiple membership is also demonstrated in the table shown below. Multiple membership within the movement can be explained by the close geographical proximity of the groups to each other.

Table #1 Interviewee Group Membership

| | ISOJ | HEART | CCC | FFJ | CCFR | TOTAL |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|-------|
| ISOJ | 4 | | | | | 4 |
| HEART | 6, 1a | 2f, 1 | | | 1 | 11 |
| CCC | | | 5, 1f | | 1 | 7 |
| FFJ | | | | 8, 1f | | 9 |
| CCFR | | | | | 1 | 1 |
| | 11 | 3 | 6 | 9 | 3 | 32 |

f = female member

a = membership in ISOJ, HEART and FFJ

ISOJ= In Search of Justice (Toronto)

HEART= Human Equality Action Resource Team (Toronto)

FFJ= Fathers For Justice (Kitchener/Waterloo)

CCC= Canadian Council for Co-Parenting (Ottawa)

CCFR= Canadian Council for Family Rights (Ottawa)

The Interviews

My interviewing began in Ottawa with members of the

Canadian Council for Co-parenting (CCC). I had been given the name of a person who had been involved with the group in its earlier days. I looked up the phone number of the group and left a message on their answering machine that I wished to speak to them. I also was given the name of another member who was a mediator by profession and contacted him to arrange an interview. Three interviews were conducted on this trip to Ottawa. Names and phone numbers of other members were given to me so that I could contact them at a later date. One of the respondents also provided me with names and phone numbers of members from In Search of Justice and Fathers For Justice. These proved to be helpful for securing interviews and access to these groups. Thus, a snowball sample was used to organize and seek out people to interview. I was also able to secure interviews by attending meetings and asking people if they would be willing to talk to me.

The next set of interviews was conducted in the Toronto area. I approached members at the HEART meetings for interviews. I secured their phone number and told them that I would be calling them shortly to arrange for the interview. Since some of the members belonged to In Search of Justice I asked for names and phone numbers of members of ISOJ. ISOJ members were harder to speak to because the president would not return my phone calls and their meetings were not open to the public. I, therefore, had to ask

members of HEART for names and telephone numbers of ISOJ members they thought would be receptive to my speaking with them. The interviews were usually done in clusters because of the geographical locations of the interviewees, i.e., Kitchener/Waterloo, Toronto, Ottawa.

Interviews were two to three hours in length. The interviews were secured over the phone and the respondents were asked for permission to have the interviews audio-taped. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured at this time. All interviews were tape-recorded, and transcribed at a later date. The interviews took place in members' homes and offices, in restaurants, bars, and libraries. The locations were arranged so that they would be convenient for the respondents and myself.

Open-ended, in-depth interviews were used to gather data from fathers' rightists. This style of interviewing allows for more flexibility in asking questions of the informants. In addition, it is more effective in collecting subjective experiences of the people being studied since the interviews are more like conversations with a purpose and less like a quantitative questionnaire. I was able to probe for the meaning of various themes and statements that emerged during the interviews. The interviews began by asking fathers' rightists "how" they began their involvement in a fathers' rightist group. Asking "how" usually led to the why, what, when, and where kinds of answers that these

people gave for their involvement in fathers' rights activities.

Each interview did cover a number of main points that were theoretically relevant to the study (see appendix for interview guide). For instance, each interview involved questions about the meaning of joint custody. From reading various articles from newspapers and magazines, attending meetings of fathers' rights groups and reading their literature, I ascertained that this was the main public issue that fathers' rightist identified as the driving force of the fathers' rights movement. Therefore, each interview touched on questions concerning the reasons for legal reforms and the impact that these reforms would have for fathers' rightists and divorce in general. Other areas of questioning and discussion concerned fathers' rights perceptions and feelings concerning adversarial others such as their exwives, lawyers, and judges, as well as, the court system. Questions and discussions about adversarial others and the court system became a salient issue that emerged from the participant observation period of the research and it was fleshed out in the interview process. Other questions concerning their childrens' ages and sex and to some extent their fathering before the divorce were discussed. Another salient issue that was discussed in the interview context was money or child support. This became a part of the interview process because the issue of money

invariably came up at the group meetings.

Questioning along these lines encouraged fathers' rightists to voice their subjective experiences about themselves and the fathers' rights movement. As a result, the central issue that emerged from the interviews was personal troubles to their fatherhood identity. Thus, I was able to theoretically sample for this particular theme while also probing for other potential theoretical and substantive themes. Interview themes also built up in a successive fashion. The first few interviews influenced the proceeding interviews. Even though the interviews raised a number of consistent questions, they also were flexible enough to allow the opportunity for the fathers' rightists to bring up ideas and issues that they felt were important and relevant.

Summary

The collection of the data and their analysis is the culmination of a constant comparative process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The following chapters are the result of this process. The subjective experiences of fathers' rightists are presented and analyzed. The purpose in using this particular qualitative and inductive methodology is to generate theory that is grounded in the data. The theoretical perspectives of symbolic interactionism, phenomenology and interpretive interaction were also applied and provided an overall perspective in which to embed the

analysis. However, this does not preclude the generation of a theory to explain the particulars of this research.

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

The data and discussion presented in this chapter examine the social activities of the fathers' rights movement. First, a brief description will be made of the groups observed. Second, the discussion will examine how groups attract potential members. Third, the individual's motivations for seeking out fathers' rights groups will be established. Fourth, observations of activities that occur in group meetings will be provided. And, lastly, the services that the group provides to members will be discussed.

It will be shown that the main activities of the fathers' rights groups studied revolve around helping separating or divorced fathers with their personal troubles. The groups' lobbying efforts for joint custody and the rights of separating and divorced fathers serve to attract separating or divorced fathers who are experiencing personal troubles. These fathers see the fathers' rights groups as supportive others who will help them with the personal troubles associated with their role postdivorce father role.

The Groups

This section describes the different groups and also

provides some observational accounts of what takes place at the meetings. Fathers' rights groups socially occupy specific geographic and social locations. For instance, the groups that I observed had specific locations in which they met as a group to discuss the problems that they faced. These locations were libraries, rented office spaces, and church meeting rooms. All these groups met on a routine basis, whether it was on the third Tuesday of the month, every Wednesday, the first Monday of the month or every Saturday. The space which they met around became socially situated in the form of public meetings, newcomers' meetings, and regular membership meetings. Each had a specific social meaning and function attached, as well as expected behaviour. For instance, ISOJ has regular meetings which only members could attend. There were introductory meetings held to introduce potential members to the group and its activities. At these meetings, individuals were shown a videotape of interviews with the group's president that had been recorded from television programmes. The individuals were told not to ask any questions or interrupt the presentation made by the meeting organizers. They were told that questions should be written down and asked after the presentation. Around the room were signs with messages like "child support is not alimony." Also there were letters to the editor and pictures of men who had been physically hurt by their spouses. The members were then

told that if they wanted to be a member of the group, they had to make a contribution to the group, i.e., write letters to the newspaper, to members of government, post notices, attend meetings, organize meetings, etc. The reason for these expectations was that the group would lose members once their personal troubles had been alleviated, and thus only use the services of the group rather than contribute to the group. As a result, members were asked to commit themselves to helping the group, as well as being helped by the group. If they were comfortable with this, they could pay a membership fee (\$20) and attend the regular meetings.

Some events at regular meeting of ISOJ caused some of the people that I interviewed to express their distress and discomfort because of the type of conversations that went on in these meetings, especially in terms of what they described as "women bashing." HEART's and CCC's meetings were open to the public and they usually had guest speakers with a question and answer period afterwards. FFJ had regular Wednesday meetings which were open to the public but usually were organized to discuss members' troubles and handle newcomers' problems.

I attended the HEART meetings on a regular basis for one and a half years. I attended one introductory meeting of ISOJ and four meetings of FFJ. Again this was done to compare and contrast the personal troubles and social issues that were discussed and addressed at the various groups'

meetings. The meetings of HEART were mostly organized around a guest speaker. These structured meetings, for me as an observer, were usually rather uneventful. However, meetings that lacked a guest speaker were more interesting. It was at these unstructured meetings that members and newcomers divulged the troubles and issues that they were experiencing. Troubles with access, child support, control of children's diets, etc., were vocalized by the people. Some of these same concerns were expressed at the structured meetings but usually prior to, at breaks, and at the end of the scheduled events.

There were differences amongst the fathers' rights groups in terms of organization, leadership, themes and group character for lack of a better word. The following descriptions of the groups reveals these group differences.

In Search of Justice (ISOJ)

In Search of Justice had a strong, autocratic leader who controlled all aspects of his fathers' rights group activities. This included authorizing members' interviews with me. I had interviewed two members of ISOJ and found out that they had asked permission from their leader to meet with me. When the interview began they asked for confirmation of who I was and where I was from. This and their interview experience were reported back to the leader of their group. This was the only fathers' rights group

without an executive committee. Members of ISOJ told me that the meetings are tightly organized and that only men who are members are allowed to attend. Members must sign in, in order to be allowed entrance into meetings. Potential members contact the groups' answering machine and are asked to leave their name and phone number. A member will call them back and talk to them and they are told about the group and about the introductory meetings. Again, in order to come to an introductory meeting potential members are screened over the phone and only then are they told when and where the meetings take place. All members of ISOJ are men. The issues that this group deals with extend beyond the issues of divorced fathers. Their topics of focus are men's input on abortion and adoption decision-making, and gender and pay equity effects upon men. ISOJ has a formal structure in which there are various "departments" which are comprised of members who are responsible for running introductory meetings, talking to potential members, legal advice, etc. There was a women's group or department composed of second wives and girlfriends of ISOJ members but they were not treated well by the leader. Because of his autocratic style and his treatment of women, several members left and formed Human Equality Action Resource Team (HEART).

Human Equality Action Resource Team (HEART)

HEART prided itself on being a democratically run

organization with an executive. However, this executive was not democratically elected by its membership. Appointed executive members were comprised of men and women. It claimed that it was interested in divorce problems and issues of both men and women. When I first asked for entrance to the HEART meetings I was told quite strongly that it was not a fathers' rights group but a parents' rights group. However, upon further discussion and observation, I found it to be a fathers' rights group because the majority of those at meetings were men. They also attracted a number of members from ISOJ because of their displeasure with ISOJ's leader. The women who did attend were mainly second wives and girlfriends of the male members. The issues that this group deals with are strictly centred on the divorce experience of its members.

HEART general meetings, which I attended, were open to the public and took place at 7:30 p.m. until approximately 10:00 p.m. on the third Tuesday of every month. Group meetings took place in a library meeting room. A small library section was set up with books on divorce, legal texts, etc. Other relevant information from newspapers was photocopied and distributed to members. Attendance at these general meetings ranged from 9 to 23 people. This would fluctuate from meeting to meeting.

Canadian Council for Co-parenting (CCC)

The CCC also claimed to be a parents' rights organization. It originally formed as a group for fathers experiencing problems with their divorce. Later in its history, it allowed women into the group because it claimed that men and women experience the same problems as a result of divorce. Again, their beginnings were as a fathers' rights group and then they allowed women, who were usually the partners of the men, to attend meetings. However, I was informed that the majority of the membership of these groups are fathers. Canadian Council for Co-parenting was structured in a similar way to HEART. Its executive is comprised of both men and women. It has monthly general membership meetings. This was the only group that I did not observe because of the great geographical distance involved in attending meetings.

Fathers for Justice (FFJ)

FFJ is the only group in Ontario that promotes itself as a fathers' rights group. Its members are exclusively fathers experiencing problems with their divorce. It has an executive committee and rental office space. The office has an answering machine, meeting rooms and a small library space where information on divorce and related materials are on display and only available for its members. General meetings are held on a weekly basis with

no fixed format. The meetings that I attended were informal and lacking in any sort of structure or agenda. Members provide advice for fathers with troubles who are attending the meetings. On a number of occasions I witnessed fathers who were having access and child support difficulties receive advice from the FFJ members. This same sort of behaviour took place at HEART meetings, as well as the ISOJ meeting I attended. FFJ attained charitable status so that it can receive donations and run bingos in order to finance its activities. It had a female counterpart called Mothers for Justice. This part of their organization fell into decline for lack of membership and support from women.

Attracting Members

All fathers' rights groups attract potential members by publicly advocating for the rights of fathers postdivorce. For instance, the troubles of divorced fathers are publicly voiced by fathers' rights groups through the various mass media. This kind of activity attracts fathers who are experiencing troubles with their separation and/or divorce. Fathers' rights groups also attract divorcing fathers by distributing literature dealing with their grievance issues and advertising when the groups meet. Some target strategic public places such as court houses where they will drop off their groups' literature.

The appeals and goals of the fathers' rights groups

can be seen in the following statements from their brochures.

To assist non-custodial parents to obtain equitable access with their children in cases where share parenting is not possible. To give moral support to members going through difficult court battles, access denial, unfair maintenance etc. To promote equality!

We are dedicated to assist all non-custodial parents and their children with problems relating to access, custody, support, separation and divorce. Fathers for Justice can and does provide the following: Information concerning your rights and the rights of your children.

In Search of Justice provides peer support, information and assistance to members involved in: custody and access disputes; child support, alimony and division of asset battles; and wrongful allegations or charges of sexual harassment, child abuse and sexual assault. The group also lobbies for political support of men's rights and solicits media coverage of issues that affect men.

The impression that these groups wish to foster is that the noncustodial parent, usually the father, is treated unfairly. The groups' literature publicly identifies the personal troubles and concomitant services and activities that it provides. Emphasized is the fact that these groups provide services to help separating and divorced fathers with their personal troubles. Only one group emphasized its lobbying efforts and it has broadened the scope of these efforts to men in general rather than specifically to fathers. What is evident from the public posturing of these groups, in terms of their literature, is that the groups

function to deal with the personal troubles of separating and divorcing fathers rather than actively encouraging people to join the groups' lobbying efforts.

Other types of public posturing by fathers' rights groups are: setting up information booths in malls, encouraging their members to photocopy, at their expense, literature to give to their friends and drop off at locations they frequent. Certain events, e.g. fathers' rights rally held on Father's Day, are timed and organized to highlight the plight of divorced fathers. Press releases are mailed out to promote public awareness of their personal troubles and move them into the social issues arena. These strategies serve a dual purpose. First, they are used to attract potential members who are experiencing personal troubles. Secondly, they transform divorced fathers' personal troubles into public issues. These groups attract potential members by a reconceptualizing and reframing of the personal troubles that separated and divorced fathers are experiencing and transforming them into social issues.

Motivations for Seeking Help

The fathers' rightists that I interviewed and observed were at different points in terms of marital breakdown. Their entry into a fathers' rights group occurred from periods prior to their divorce to after they had completed their divorce. There were no identifiable or

specific points in the divorce process where these fathers became involved in fathers' rightists' activities. In spite of this fact, the common thread present were the troubles associated with the fatherhood role postdivorce. These two fathers explain that they sought out a fathers' rights group either after their divorce or while they were separating.

It was after my divorce that I heard of ISOJ. I became involved in it. (Male, mid-40s: Int.16.1) (Quotations are identified in brackets by their interview number and page from which the quotation is taken.)

Interviewer: I just want to ask you about when you were going through this with your exwife were you in ISOJ? (asked of husband but second wife responded)

Fathers' rightist: At the beginning we weren't. Then we joined ISOJ just after two years of court at the time. Then we realized that we weren't getting anywhere. We didn't know what to do. Lawyers were lying to us right, left and centre. We didn't know the law. We didn't know what our rights were. That's when I phoned into ISOJ. (Female late 40s, whose husband was experiencing troubles: Int.13.5)

The key epiphanic event within the divorce episode seems to be the moment when fathers became conscious or aware of their troubles and acknowledged the loss of control over the separation and divorce process in relation to their fatherhood role. This is described by the following fathers as a shock.

Being kicked out and kicked in the teeth as a being a father and then finding out you're second rate is quite a heavy shock. It is not an easy thing to swallow. Because you have to change your lifestyle. You have to

rechange your thinking. (Male mid 30s:
Int.9.17)

After being jerked all over the place. Like we had four remands or what you call adjournments. Then when I got into court and the master awarded Jill (former wife) fourteen hundred dollars a month support which was two thirds of my income, and I was not allowed to see my daughter until I had a psychological assessment...And it was such a major loss. I went into shock...So that is how I got involved in ISOJ because I felt like I was being royally raped. (Male early 40s: Int.5.3)

What these examples seem to suggest is a kind of evolutionary process which culminates with a particular incident or event that triggers an epiphanic awareness which functions retrospectively to frame the past into a different kind of relief. They became cognizant of the fact that they were losing their role as father in terms of lifestyle in the postdivorce context. The following father described how his life has negatively changed after divorce.

What the women try to do is they try and freeze you up. They want a clean break, but they want your money. They want to go and start a new life. Wreck you life because they want that money and I call it a freeze out. And they try and freeze you out and you have to fight and scrimp and save and go after and fight that. (Male early 40s:
Int.18.19)

The following quotation further identifies the nature of the lifestyle changes that fathers' rightists identify as personal troubles.

The sad thing is that you get this guy who is making fifty to one hundred thousand dollars a year. Had a nice family or what he thought was a nice family. Then he goes

home one night, mom is about five miles ahead of him in his thinking process and says dear John I'm leaving you. I'm taking the kids and by the way I'm hitting you for fifteen hundred dollars a month child support. That's it. That's all. And see my lawyer. Then bang and slams the door. He has a cardiac arrest there. Reels and falls in the hall and falls over. Next thing you know he is living in some sleaze-bag bachelor apartment, driving a shitbox car that barely goes and he's being a bank machine to his exwife. (Male mid 30s: Int.2.35)

The nature of this change seems to be more economic rather than social in terms of his relationship with his children.

For some, these events spur them to seek out help as the following father states.

I realized what condition I was in terms of not being able to get what I wanted: which was what was left of my family deal...They were pretty well the only voice in the wilderness that were saying there was a chance. (Male early 30s: Int.10.1)

In this case the father realized that he was losing something, his family and concomitant father role. The second part of the quotation voices the fact that he feels that he is alone in the divorce episode. There is a need to make sense of, and cope with, his personal trouble which is the threat to his fatherhood role. These men have to make sense of the experience and find support for their personal troubles situation. This father explains that when he separated from his wife he looked towards the FRG to explain and help him understand his divorce situation.

How I got involved? I split up. I had some problems knowing what my rights were. What

I could do and what I couldn't do. You don't know the legal system. So you are wondering how does everything work as far as separation, divorce and custody. (Male early 40s: Int 26. 1)

They seek out and find supportive others who can help them deal with their problems and who make them feel comfortable in a threatening situation. The following is typical of what motivated most fathers to seek a FRG:

[I] liked what I heard and went with them because basically the lawyers that I had previous as far as I'm concerned were incompetent. (Male early 40s: Int.18. 1)

Others who recognize the troubles of separating and divorced fathers can encourage their entry into the fathers' rights movement. For example, many sought out these groups at the urging of friends, partners, the mass media, and co-workers. One father states that he found out about the fathers' rights group

Through a ex-girlfriend. She heard of them then I phoned them. (Male early 40s: Int.18. 1)

Others found out about the FRG's through newspaper articles about these groups.

An article was in the newspaper that a group had started up. And I've been a member now, it has been my second year. (Male early 30s: Int.23. 1)

Others had co-workers refer them to a FRG's.

It was funny because I have a lot of support from my fellow workers. I told them one on one that I was going through a separation and I was going through a divorce and my wife and I weren't going to be together any more. And if I seem out of character tell

me. So they did that. And in the meantime one of them had mentioned ISOJ. Well of course I wasn't listening. Well after a few weeks of watching me deteriorate he dialled the phone and I got the answering machine. I got an appointment. That is how I got in contact with ISOJ. (Male mid 30s: Int.15. 2)

Through the influence of friends, co-workers, and the media, fathers sought to remedy their problems by seeking out the advice and help of fathers' rights groups.

The main reason that fathers seek out such groups will be examined in more detail in chapter five: fathers find themselves victimized by judges, the law, and lawyers and feel that their fatherhood role is threatened. Their fatherhood identity, as well as their lifestyle, is modified or threatened by the divorce episode. In an attempt to remedy the situation, they seek out a fathers' rights group to help them gain support. Help usually comes in the form of advice from other members who have gone through similar episodes. Most groups will educate their members or show them where to find the information needed so that they will not feel confused and victimized by the divorce process. Taking charge and understanding the divorce process empowers these fathers and helps them to maintain and protect their father role-identity. This type of behaviour is a crucial part of the fathers' rights social response to their threatened fatherhood role-identity. The first contact that many separating divorced fathers have with fathers' rights groups is at their meetings.

The Meetings

The following part of the discussion will report on the activities of one fathers' rights group I observed over a period of a year and a half. This will help to contextualize the fathers' rights groups social activities that individual members encounter. I will use my data from the group I spent the most time observing as the source for this part of the discussion.

HEART meetings started by the reading of a prayer followed by the chair reading HEART's constitution which made direct mention to the democratic principles of the group. Each meeting usually had a guest speaker, e.g., lawyers, mediators, social workers, who spoke about various issues pertinent to HEART members. These meetings are more instrumental in that speakers are brought in to educate and apprise members of the roles of these professionals within the context of separation and divorce. Speakers are also used to educate members on the process of divorce as well. Members of the executive who had some experience with various aspects of the separation and divorce process also gave presentations. In one meeting an executive member explained the separation and divorce process to the members who may not have yet gone to court. Another member, at this same meeting, explained the purpose and ways to fill out certain legal forms that were required when one is seeking a divorce, e.g., financial statements. These two members were

seen by others in the group as having expertise in specific areas of divorce. In addition to bringing in experts and using their own experts, HEART would also ask members of other organizations to attend and give presentations at general meetings, e.g. GRAND (a grandparents' rights group), CCFR (Canadian Council for Family Rights), and the Self Help Clearing House.

The tone of these meetings were usually fairly subdued and at times even dull. This could be due to the fact that most of the meetings were organized around a formal presentation by the speaker. However, on several occasions some members would make pejorative comments about their ex-spouses. At breaks, and after the general meetings, people would interact and discuss their problems or other's problems in a more emotionally charged manner. It was during these moments that people would discuss the problems they were experiencing and strategies they were using to deal with these problems. Also advice was given by certain members to those having problems.

Sometimes the tone of the meetings did get angry and bitter. At one meeting where this occurred a member gave a presentation on lawyers entitled "The terrible truth about lawyers." Meetings that did not have formal presentations by speakers also generated more interesting information. It was at these meetings that fathers would divulge their personal troubles to members of the group and elicit help.

Members of the group would ask questions of the individual in order to clarify their personal trouble. If this was taking up too much time then the individual would be asked to meet with someone after the meeting or during the break for help.

HEART organized a separate group meeting one night a month where members could discuss with a social worker the emotional difficulties they were having as a result of their separation and/or divorce. These meetings were organized so that members could resolve the emotional consequences of separation and divorce. Whereas, the general membership meetings dealt more with the substantive social and legal troubles of the separation and divorce.

It was not uncommon for members and newcomers to be accompanied by a companion. These companions were usually relatives and new partners of the members and newcomers. In some cases these companions remained silent. On a number of occasions these companions would speak and ask questions on behalf of the person experiencing the troubles. Some fathers' rightists' partners did accompany them to the meetings which account for minority of membership.

Mainly, HEART provided information and help to the personal troubles that the fathers were experiencing. There was little in the way of active lobby strategizing at these meetings. What follows are the ways that are employed by fathers' rightists in helping their members with their

personal troubles.

Informal Advice Given at Meetings

Fathers' rights meetings become situations where members come to get information and advice. Meetings are also a place where fathers gain insights about problems with their own cases. Attending meetings may cause a father to realize that his lawyer is not performing in a manner which is beneficial to the father. The group sets parameters of expectations when it comes to lawyers. This father had this to say concerning what he had learned about his lawyer from his attendance at a meeting.

I had gone to the general meetings and sort of picking up some general information and that was when I realized that my case was really being mishandled. Not only mishandled, but that the onus was on me. I was like leaving it all to the lawyers. And being just blown about by the winds of what was going on. Not being in charge of it at all. I was totally out of control. Spending all this cash. Relying on this man's expert opinion and going nowhere. Well in ISOJ, the first thing they say to you is your lawyer, he is your supplier. You're the client. You're in charge of your case. He isn't. You tell him what you want him to do. So what you have to do is you have to upgrade your expertise. You have to learn a bit about family law. I got copies of the Children's Law Reform Act, the Divorce Act. (Male mid 30s: Int.17.4)

At meetings held by fathers' rights activists, members can get information about their case by listening to what others have already experienced. One father states that his reason for his activity in the movement is to gain

information.

Certainly it is useful to know what the issues are just so you don't fall into any pits. It is useful in that you find out and get a better idea of what the norms are. You get a chance to compare notes with other people. It gives you some kind of touchstone. And also to let you know what is possible. You hear other people being able to do certain things and you say hey what's wrong with my lawyer? Why can't he do this? Maybe you have the wrong lawyer. Maybe you got someone who maintains the status quo there. In that sense the information you pick up is useful. (Male mid 30s: Int.14.1-2)

Many fathers go to the group meetings to seek advice from others who have already gone through some or all of the separation and divorce process.

You get the experience of other guys who have had the same problems or are going through the same problems. You get insights into what to do. What not to do. I'd say more support is one of the biggest attributes of the whole deal. (Male early 30s: Int.10.3)

An example of the kinds of advice that one may hear at a meeting is the following given by one father.

You got a quarter of a million dollar house and she says you give me the whole house and you don't have to pay support. Hey great. Okay. Fine. Except for next year it's all gone and I want support. And they will get it. So you wheel them away from deals like that. And say here's what can happen and will happen. Like maybe not this year or next year. But until those kids are through university that can happen to you. (Male late 30s: Int.11.5)

The personal troubles that I witnessed at meeting and heard in interviews were not necessarily associated with their

relationship with their children. Many newcomers came to the group's meeting because they were experiencing personal troubles with child support payments. The payments were felt to be too large and/or an unfair burden to them. This is demonstrated by the above quotation and further reinforced by the observation of one fathers' rights legal adviser in the following quotation.

Most people who come to me don't even talk about their kids. They are totally wound up with their own problems. And rightly so.
(Male late 30s: Int.16.11)

My observations and interview material also indicate that the troubles this fathers' rightist is speaking of are mainly economic. There were a few occasions where I witnessed fathers who were experiencing access denial problems. And in one case a newcomer attended a meeting to get advice on how to counter a charge of child abuse by his exwife. In order to deal with these problems individuals were educated as to their rights.

Education: Know Your Rights

The primary social activity that takes place at group meetings is education and giving advice to separating and divorced fathers with personal troubles. Personal troubles revolve around the issue of rights, or regaining a right to exercise their role as father in the postdivorce context. Since many of these men feel that they have lost part of their fatherhood identity and status as a result of

their experience with judges, lawyers, and the legal system, they try to regain their fatherhood identity by seeking out a fathers' rights group.

Most fathers did not realize what would happen to them when they went through the divorce process and more importantly in regaining recognition of their fatherhood. For some, the reframing of their experience by members of fathers' rights groups acts to open up their awareness of their troubles. The following epiphanic moment was expressed by one father about his divorce:

I didn't realize what was involved in the whole deal till I got involved. And how much was involved in getting your rights back. How little you had. (Male early 30s: Int.10.1)

This statement points to the father's epiphanic realization of the lack of rights he had upon separation. At the fathers' rights group's meetings he was apprised of his rights as father. He indicates that his troubles were recast by the fathers' rights group into a father' rights agenda.

The individuals in fathers' rights groups provide information and strategies explaining how to work with lawyers or avoid lawyers, how to deal with judges or avoid judges and how to work within the legal system. An example of the advice given at meetings is described by this father who is in charge of his group's introductory meetings. He tells newcomers the following,

We are Fathers Demand Justice but there is no justice. And you have no rights. So start from there. Start thinking in those terms. Don't bash your head against your disqualification from rights. Don't bash your head against that because it is just going to kill you. Back off that. Don't think that my rights are being denied and that is your issue. Just start thinking really pragmatic about this thing. You have got to settle down and you've got to start on a very practical basis and start organizing. (Male mid 30s: Int.17.8)

The intended effect is to recast the fathers' perception of their postdivorce status and give them a new direction which will empower them to take control of their personal trouble rather than feel helpless and the victim of the legal situation.

These fathers' rights groups empower separating fathers to change their tactics and/or direction in terms of divorce litigation. The effect is to give permission or legitimize fathers to seek out alternative courses of action in terms of rectifying their personal troubles. The following father demonstrates this point.

First of all I got involved with the Fathers Demand Justice group. And my fears took me there. I went to their meetings. And they said "no you don't have to take what is happening to you. You can do something about it. And we advise you to do something about it." And I saw lots of other men there who seemed to be almost in a helpless state. (Male late 30s: Int.12.1)

Individuals are educated and instructed about the family law system and concomitantly clarify what they have experienced or will experience in the divorce process. As

mentioned previously, many of these men had confusing and negative experiences with the legal system. Therefore, all of the groups provide information and interpretation about the laws and legal processes the fathers will experience when they actual get their divorce. I witnessed this during presentations at meetings, interaction between members at breaks, and in interviews. This fathers' rightist explains what is done for the members of his group.

What we did was try to prepare people who were going into court. What to expect. How to handle themselves. How to contact a lawyer. Most of the time people are so blitzed that they couldn't remember that. But this is what we thought the approach would be. We ended up going to appointments with lawyers with the people. A lot of lawyers didn't like that. (Male mid 40s: Int.19.2)

The following members of a fathers' rights group state how their groups help their members with their personal troubles by providing them with help and understanding.

What we have tried to do over the years is offer support to the people. One is an educational process. So people understand and are aware of what they are getting into. (Male mid 30s: Int.2.2)

Educating members about the legal process is a social activity that takes place within fathers' rights groups. Members are informed about how the legal system works and about laws that they will encounter in the divorce process. This helps to diffuse the potential troubles that fathers will face when they enter the divorce process.

The other thing that we do is teach them

that what it is all about is about the court system. What's a court system all about? What happens to you? Read up on what you are getting yourself into. Read the Family Law Act. Read the Child Reform Act. Read the SCOE (Support, Custody Office of Enforcement Act). We teach the guys to read all the information because there is something in there that is affecting them. And without knowing what is affecting you you won't know what you are dealing with. The reason being that there is a lot of people will go "God this court system is really weird. I don't know what is going on." So what we do is try and teach them this is what is being involved and be aware. (Male mid 30s: Int.9.10-11)

Assisting fathers with filling out legal forms is another service that these groups provide in addition to education.

Interviewer: Also what I see is that they really don't understand the divorce process. So once they do get their interim interim custody statements they come back and say that "I didn't want that. And I don't understand how to change it."

Fathers' rightist: That's where we can help them. Like there's forms. When you first start out you say like this is it. There's all kinds of levels of like provincial court, supreme court that should I go through that is better? What's a motion? Can I put an order in myself? You can go to the court house and there are tonnes and tonnes of different forms, applications, variance for a motion. Or just about anything. Actually that was one of our goals was to try and pull a package together with samples of everything in it. And attached to form this is what you could use this for and that type of thing. (Female mid 30s: Int.6.7)

Another form of assistance that fathers' rights groups provide is giving practical advice on issues concerning rights and expectations. Fathers' rights members will

instruct separating and divorcing fathers as to what they are entitled to and what to expect in terms of their divorce settlement.

First we inform people what the laws are. What their rights are. What they can ask for. Which most of them don't have a clue as to what they are entitled to. What to ask for. What is reasonable. How they can reasonably be treated in court. What to draw off. What type of settlements to make. If you get this offer is that good? (Male late 30s: Int.11.5)

In the process of educating and providing advice fathers' rights members also provide a sympathetic ear for the problems that members are facing as a result of the divorce process. This involves listening to members fears and anger.

We have also counselling which means a lot of different things. I don't do a lot of counselling myself. But of those people who do counselling, it means just listening to people ventilate. And sometimes it means offering them specific advice, which is what Joe does, of different approaches and different ways of changing the course or direction of what is happening for people. (Male early 40s: Int.5.4)

It is a kind of support group because it has provided a sort of environmental setting for these guys to let out their anger. Plus providing them a solution for how they deal with it or cope with it at least. (Male late 30s: Int.8.5)

Many of the men expressed that they felt more in control or positive as a result of being more involved in the intricacies of their case. The following father has this to say.

I felt helpless. I was helpless. I felt very bad in placing a trust in someone I didn't even know. My lawyer. And not only that, paying for it. It didn't feel good at all...I felt very unsure. I felt disillusioned at the time. I felt anxious. And now I feel very good because I've taken it into my own hands. I know the law. I've learned the law. I have a very good idea of what has happened to me and my kids. (Male late 30"s: Int.12.6)

As a result of the group's influence, some fathers will eventually go on to represent themselves in court without the use of a lawyer; thereby, avoiding the alienating and financial effect of lawyers. The following father describes how he prepared for his divorce without the use of a lawyer.

I got involved in helping other people. Got really involved in the legal system. Went to court and watched legal proceedings. Went to university and took law courses. Studied procedural guides and eventually represented myself virtually all of my court proceedings from family court provincial level all the way to supreme court divorce. (Male early 30s: Int.20.1)

The reasons for taking on one's own case is that many fathers feel that lawyers do not adequately represent a father.

Interviewer: Did you find yourself taking more responsibility for your case?

Fathers' rightist: Yes I did. That was part of why I joined the CCC. Because the CCC is part of what we do is have access to all this information. And yes, I took more responsibility. And when the lawyer wouldn't take action I prepared the motions and went to court on blasted steam and found out how to do it. I also found that there was such things as paralegals who had computers and paperwork and documentation to

take the motion to court. I've used every angle that I could in order to cut down on my use of the lawyers. (Male late 40s: Int.21.11)

However, if a father decides to use the services of a lawyer, the members of the fathers' rights groups will teach its member how to deal with lawyers. This father's rightist explains what he tells his members.

The people don't know any better. If you don't know how to deal with lawyers. That is another thing we do in our organization. We try and teach them. Listen, you are a customer, you are paying for a service, and when you pay for a service this no longer becomes a hidden system any more. The lawyers are not God...You pay them for a service to render. And they have to render it fully by doing their job and reporting to you everything all the way down the line. No more hidden games. You are a consumer and you have the right as a consumer to make sure your dollar is well spent. So what we do is we teach the members that first of all you have a lawyer, he will advise you. But you will tell him everything there is to know. You will give him information. You feed him everything and then he'll advise you as to is that proper. Is that illegal? Is that legal? Can it be used? Can it not be used? He's the man who knows the legal jargons and legal system. But if you tell him how you want to handle the situation and the other thing that we always try to teach is to get him into your head. Because he doesn't know anything about you until he gets in here (points to his head) (Male mid 30s: Int.9.10)

The onus is again placed upon the father to be a pro-active agent rather than a passive recipient of the services of the legal profession. As a result, some fathers felt that the ability to work with one's lawyer was a positive experience.

During the course of my divorce I had

learned to work with my lawyer and was self taught. I didn't think that he was doing anything. And I was angry like most people get with their lawyer. So I developed a system that allowed me to work with him. He was going to win in spite of himself. It worked very well. (Male late 30s: Int.16.1)

There are several reasons that seem to account for fathers taking on more responsibility for their legal cases: feeling of helplessness with lawyers and with the court system, high legal fees, loss of control and confusion.

Legal Specialists

Within all the groups observed are members who are considered by others in the groups to be legal specialists in family law. These legal specialists have demonstrated a sound knowledge of the legal system and legal procedures. The groups form legal departments which are composed of these legal specialists. These legal departments are usually made up of volunteers who have been through the process themselves and have a very good grasp of legal aspects of divorce.

We have a legal department where we have a particular member that sits down and helps people come to the terms with what they want and don't want. And gives them all this stuff to do and not to do. (Female late 40s: Int.13.22)

One member of ISOJ describes how the group's members help themselves with legal preparation.

What we are basically with the ISOJ legal system is we're preparing our own case.

Helping the other guys who have some experience of getting what they want. But it is more of less giving guidelines on how to set up your case. Where to get stuff you're going to need. You end up preparing your own case. It's pretty good. (Male early 30s: Int.10.4)

Some groups get more involved with their members divorce troubles. For instance, HEART will meet with its members and help them with their court preparation. As two fathers' rightists elaborate,

We are involved with the deals of the actual members with their problems on a one on one basis. We actually have them come here and we actually help them with their counter suit. We help them with their financial statements. We help them with their affidavits. (Male late 40s: Int.13.8)

We get everything down. The ones I work with, I get it all. Custody and access orders made out for them before they even see their lawyer. Get everything that they want down on paper. What their goals are. What they feel they can afford to pay in support. If they have to put a counter affidavit in. (Female late 40s: Int.13.8)

The other benefit with ISOJ (is that) we do our own work. I lived at Osgoode Hall. I could take you to Osgoode Hall. Hey I know my way around legal circles. And I can show other guys what I've found: which I've done. And we go down there before your case we sit there a couple of nights a week and pull your own cases. (Male late 30s: Int.18.20)

Another service that group members provide is attending one another's court sessions. All of these groups have members who will attend the court sessions if a member wants to have a chaperon or someone that can comfort. Thus, individuals may request this to counteract the court system

and its threatening and confusing adversarial others. A member/friend helps to alleviate some of these feelings.

One of the other things that we do is that if a person is nervous about the court system and we've drafted up his papers and we've got him pretty well on a good road to recovery and he knows how to use his lawyer and he knows what he wants and is all prepared to go but is still nervous. We'll send someone along with him. And we'll sit there as a support person. And that is another function that we do. And people really appreciate when you got a friend there sitting with you in court. (Male mid 30s: Int.15.13)

A reason for the help and advice giving component of fathers' rights groups is that it cuts down on the fees that members pay out to lawyers. One fathers' rightist pointed out why he is better to come to for advice than a lawyer would be:

You can't go to a lawyer, well you can, but that is going to cost you thousands. You walk into a lawyer's office and he doesn't know you from Adam. And he is going to say what can I do for you. Nine times out of ten you sit there and blank out. And he can only use a fifth of what you tell him because he doesn't know any more. And you are going to say why didn't he do this? Oh well you didn't tell him. You didn't tell him that. So if I can which is what I prefer to do and I am open to anybody who really asks for it but a lot of people don't. Like they come to a meeting and go away. And you don't get a chance to help them really...But if you can get a person who has only been in court once or twice or better still before they even see a lawyer. (Female late 40s: Int.13.9)

Not only do the groups provide information about all areas of your case, e.g. paperwork, guidance, moral and physical

support, most groups state that you can represent yourself in court if you feel comfortable with the idea.

Self Representation in Court

As was previously stated, many groups counsel their members not only to read up on the laws that govern separation and divorce but also to represent themselves in court. Representing oneself entails a smaller legal bill, a certain amount of flexibility in court, and as a result a better chance of having a favourable settlement. One father felt that one stands a better chance of having the case come out in your favour, when you represent yourself rather than having a lawyer represent you.

Interviewer: You really haven't used a lawyer in any of these cases? You've done all the work yourself?

Fathers' rightist: Yes. You do better if you don't have a lawyer. It's the old thing that if I want to call you a sonofabitch without getting you mad I talk to the guy next to you and say "tell him he's a sonofabitch." I don't have to look at you. But when you force someone to look you in the eye and tell you "you are a sonofabitch" then it changes the whole dynamics of it...As soon as you remove a lawyer from that you now break it down to a level where they have to deal with people. And the judges at that point must earn his money.
(Male late 30s: Int.11.4)

One father states what his experience has been when he represented himself in court.

Because I'm a layman, you can get away with stuff if you are not abusive. There are exceptions made to you. And I also don't

have to kiss butt to the law society. If I think a lawyer is out of line I will turn to the judge and say this guy is out of line. (Male mid 40s: Int.19.17)

Another reason for representing yourself is that it is much cheaper than hiring a lawyer.

Why devastate yourself financially?...There are people who have gone down the tubes in hundreds of thousands of dollars. That is another reason why I decided on my own (to represent myself). I paid two thousand five hundred dollars to give away my children. That is ridiculous. (Male late 30s: Int.12.14)

Summary and Analysis

This section has been primarily concerned with the manner in which the fathers' rightists directly respond to their personal troubles and concomitant threats to their fatherhood role. Taking charge and becoming proactive is a response to threats to their postdivorce fatherhood identity. The first way that separating and divorced fathers with troubles take charge is by seeking out a fathers' rights group.

Brochures and the mass media are used to attract potential members and to foster a "father as victim" image to the general public. The discourse of equality and equity are used by the fathers' rights groups. Fathers' rights groups are sought out by separating and divorced fathers who are experiencing troubles with their father role. Fathers' rights groups offer their services to help these fathers'

with their divorce problems. Personal troubles that most fathers' rightists have are the result of dealing with lawyers, judges and the court system which leave them feeling victimized. Feelings of victimization are treated analytically as an epiphany. The epiphanic experiences of fathers' rightists are cumulative ones which build up through a series of events in the personal lives of fathers going through divorce. Fathers' rightists spoke of being shocked that their fatherhood was being threatened by divorce. They identified those adversarial others (judges and lawyers) and the law and legal system that were responsible for the threats to their fatherhood identity. Children and money were the ego-extensions that were the aspects of their identity that were felt to be threatened. As a result, divorcing fathers' seek out supportive others to help them counter the threats to their fatherhood that occur within the context and process of divorce. Fathers' rights groups function to change the way that fathers perceive their situations from negative and threatening ones to more positive and empowering ones.

The fathers' rights groups foster and nurture these men to become more proactive and involved with their divorces. This entails being less reliant on lawyers and defending and restoring their own rights. The fathers are encouraged to read and do their own research on divorce laws and procedural rules. While at group meetings, fathers

interact with other fathers and discuss their personal troubles and give advice to rectify these troubles. The end result seems to be a more proactive, capable and motivated father. Taking more control of their separation and divorce is immediate in its impact upon the father's ability to change a negative and undesirable situation or personal trouble into a less problematic situation. Membership in the groups empowers men, but it is important to stress that this comes not only from the new solidarities it gives them, but also to how the groups socialized their members in the practicalities of dealing with the legal system. The groups form to redistribute specialized knowledge. This can be an enormous source of morale, heightened self-respect, and the feelings of empowerment which resound in some of the quotations.

Not all fathers who are experiencing a separation and/or divorce seek out fathers' rights groups, as can be seen from the small number of men who actually join these fathers' rights groups. This being the case, an analysis was undertaken examining the fathers' reasons or social motivations for seeking out a fathers' rightist groups. The question of control--of being in control, of losing control to others is an important motivational process for fathers' rightists. The manner in which they resist and struggle against, vis a vis the legal system, is hinged upon knowledge and the distribution of knowledge. Clearly, part

of social function and activities of fathers' rights groups is the redistribution of knowledge. This enables members to reclaim or maintain aspects of their fatherhood identity. Feelings of helplessness are replaced by feelings of empowerment as a result of interacting with other people who are going or have gone through divorce. The groups foster and promote patterns of behaviour that will help separating and divorced fathers to alleviate their personal troubles.

The fathers' rights groups socialize their members in the practicalities of dealing with the legal system. The groups seem to be a classic case of how 'lay' groups form to redistribute specialized knowledge to those who do not have any formal expertise. This can be an enormous source of morale, heightened self-respect, and feelings of empowerment. These feelings are heard in the previous quotations. Knowledge is power, not only in the instrumental sense but also as a source of self-esteem and self-control.

But the groups, as well as performing a solidarizing role, also act in divisive ways. HEART formed as a splinter group from ISOJ, so clearly there are divisions and rivalries within the movement resulting from a mixture of factors such as personality politics, ideology, tactics, etc. ISOJ was seen by some of the people that I interviewed as a radical men's group. Female partners of ISOJ members, as well as, male members expressed their discomfort with the

leadership style of ISOJ. As a result, some of the people that I interviewed became members of HEART which was seen as a more moderate and egalitarian group. Because of its perceived radical nature, ISOJ was not allowed to become a member of the Canadian Council for Co-parenting, an umbrella organization for many of these profather groups. Even though these groups were fairly unique in terms of organization, ideology, tactics, and personal politics they all attracted fathers that were experiencing divorce troubles. They all lobbied for and counselled members on the merits of joint custody as a practical solution for maintaining their fatherhood status postdivorce. These groups also provided other miscellaneous legal advice and support to their members.

The lobbying efforts of the groups I observed were small. Most individuals did not approach fathers' rights groups with the intent to lobby for changes to child custody law. Most individuals came to the groups because they were experiencing problems with their father role as a result of separation and divorce. As a result, the main social activity of these groups is to help individuals with their personal troubles that are brought on by the divorce. Overall, the underlying motivation of fathers' rightists social activities is self-interest. The data in this chapter suggest that the main social activities of the groups are to help alleviate and ameliorate the personal

troubles of separating and divorced fathers. However, this contradicts, to some extent, the fathers' rights groups public issues rhetoric of equality in divorce and family law. The data indicates that there is a privileging of the fathers' rightists' personal troubles rather than the active lobbying for equality within divorce and family law. Fathers' rightists that I interviewed and observed were more concerned with the threats to ego-extensions of their fatherhood role, e.g. control issues relating to their children and child support payments in the postdivorce context. Most sought out a fathers' rights group in response to the threats to their postdivorce fatherhood and lifestyle and not with the pursuit of the fathers' rightists' public issues lobbying agenda.

FATHERHOOD: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS AND ADVERSARIAL OTHERS

The findings presented in this chapter examine the personal troubles that divorced fathers experience as a result of child custody determinations. Personal troubles arise because of the discrepancies between the various social constructions of fatherhood that intersect within the child custody component of divorce. These findings reveal that fathers' rightists are guided by a participatory father definition which they feel diverges from the traditional father role that judges, the law, and lawyers invoke when negotiating and deciding child custody. Fathers' rightists point out that the root of the troubles that fathers experience postdivorce are due to the fact that judges, the law, and lawyers are using a different definition of fatherhood. The different definition of fatherhood results in fathers' rightists stating that fathers are excluded from fathering in the postdivorce context.

In order to investigate their fatherhood troubles postdivorce we need to first examine how fathers' rightists construct and define the role of father. Following this is an examination of the mediating factors that fathers' rightists believe are responsible for their exclusion from fathering postdivorce.

The Participatory Father

Fathers' rightists claim that massive economic and social changes have taken place which have dramatically transformed the roles of men and women. More mothers are entering the waged labour force and more fathers are increasing their involvement in domestic activities.

Times are changing and society has got to realize that when things went a little crazy and prices went up that fathers took more of the responsibility around the house. Two people worked in the household. All of a sudden we are doing the washing. We are doing more than just cutting the grass and taking the garbage out. We are doing the washing and doing the dishes. We are looking after Junior because the wife had a bad day at work. So fine I'll take that. It became a partnership and that partnership hasn't been reached. We are still living in those old values where the women looked after the children and the husband went out and made all the bucks. That went out years ago. (Male late 30s: Int.18. 20-21)

As a result, fathers' rightists claim that traditional family roles are being replaced with contemporary roles, e.g. the participatory father and the breadwinner mother.

I think gone are the days of the...They are recognizing that men want to be involved. We are no longer just cash receipt machines or breadwinners. We are playing an active role. With the wife out working it is a necessity that men are willing to take over and help. We are no longer back when our parents or our parent's parents, where the man went out to work, came home to read his papers and smoke his pipe. And the wife did everything else. That's history. (Male mid 30s: Int.2.6)

Fathers are not only more engaged with their children they are also giving their father role a higher

place in their role repertoire.

More and more men in particular are becoming more aware of parenting roles. I think that in society, the businessman is not just interested in business any more. He is more interested in the family and that is what is happening as we change in that attitude. There is also a change in the woman's role. The woman's role is now one of woman in the work force. The majority of them now. Marriages, both parents are working. It changes the role of the woman who would stay home, bake the pies and wash the clothes. And now we know that they are not doing this. (Male early 40s: Int.1.2)

Change is the dominant motif in the preceding statements concerning the fatherhood role. Fathers' rightists posit that recent economic changes meant that more women entered the waged labour force and this necessitated an adjustment to the father role in the household. Men, in turn, are doing more housework and are more interested in their fathering role to the point where it is seen as more important than their breadwinner role. For fathers' rightists the broader economic and social changes have meant that the traditional father has been replaced with what Rotundo (1987) has labelled the "participant father". The participant father places the family above work and rejects the notion that he is solely the breadwinner. The definition of fatherhood that fathers' rightists hold and use as part of their discourse is that of the participatory as opposed to traditional father.

Socio-historical research by Rotundo (1987: 70) offers similar observations to those given by fathers'

rightists. The traditional or "modern father" role was one that encompassed the dimensions of the economic provider and moral guidance to sons (Rotundo, 1987: 70). Rotundo (1987: 75) posits that the emergence of the participant father was encouraged by the women's movement of the 1970s and was a response to the increased numbers of women/wives/mothers entering the labour market. With both parents working came the issue of dual parenting and "the development of egalitarian ideals that lend support to this kind of participation" (Rotundo, 1987: 76). However, research on the division of labour in dual income families disputes the notion of pervasive equality and egalitarian fathering behaviour that Rotundo and fathers' rightists posit (Hochschild, 1989; Blain, 1993; Lennon and Rosenfield, 1994; Armstrong and Armstrong, 1984). Researchers found that men still are performing less of the household and childcare tasks in relationship to women. The popular belief in the participant father has little in the way of social scientific support. It is however, a powerful new fatherhood image which has been adopted into the beliefs and rhetoric of the fathers' rightists movement to highlight their personal troubles and justify their social issues claims concerning the father role postdivorce.

Fathers Perceptions of Fatherhood Postdivorce

Armed with this new image of the participant father,

fathers' rightists are demanding that it be acknowledged and used in deciding child custody. Fathers' rightists point out that judges, the law, and lawyers are relying upon outdated and traditional parental ideologies to determine child custody. These traditional assumptions favour, or privilege, mothers and not fathers when it comes to the determination of child custody. Mothers are seen as custodial parent and the fathers as noncustodial parent. As a result, fathers' rightists feel that their participatory father role is denied and they are excluded from being able to father in the postdivorce context.

There is no role for the noncustodial parent. There is no such creature as a parent who is not a parent any more. How can you be a parent who is not a parent any more and still follow through with all your responsibilities as a parent and yet not get in the way of the other parent? It is a nonexistent creature. Nobody knows that.
(Male late 30s: Int.24.8)

Being labelled an access or noncustodial parent is perceived as depriving them of their father role postdivorce. The labelling that the court does is felt to damage or threaten their fatherhood identity. The following fathers expressed their consternation with being labelled an access or noncustodial parent by the courts.

Interviewer: You said the last time I talked to you that you didn't like the concept of access parent.

Fathers' rightist: It is like you are less than what you used to be. Like I say access parent versus custodial parent. I could see why some agreements do not contain the word

custody. I think they substitute the word care and control. Apparently, legally, there is little distinction. It certainly makes a difference as far as your feelings go. (Male mid 30s: Int.14.6)

The noncustodial parent was quite often referred to as the disneyland parent. (Male mid 30s: Int.2.37)

Both of these fathers felt that being labelled a noncustodial parent deprived them of their participant fatherhood role. They felt that they were no longer considered legitimate parents.

Equality rhetoric is used to reinforce their claims to fatherhood postdivorce. Many of these fathers believe that if women are entitled to equality within the workplace, then men should be entitled to the same treatment in the arena of custody. Fathers' rightists use an equality rhetoric which is constructed upon a formal model of reciprocal rights as the basis for legitimizing their actions and their grievances. They are dealing with equality as a formal or abstract notion, not in many cases, as a substantive condition. For most of these men there is a perceived postdivorce inequality that exists in terms of their parental status. Thus they make claims for equality vis a vis custody by pointing to the equality claims that women make in terms of their workforce participation. The following fathers' rightists invoke a contemporary discourse of equality in and outside of the family to describe why they should be treated equally as a parent.

I am concerned that the women want equality in the workplace but they do not want equality in the home...The attitudes that seemed to be portrayed is that men and women are not equal when it comes to childrearing. Men and women are definitely not equal in terms of gestation. Men and women are definitely not equal in terms of the ability to feed the child from mammary glands. Men and women are definitely not equal in their life long and many years long responsibility that reproduction causes many responsibilities. The ability to reproduce causes different responsibilities for the women that does for a man on a monthly basis. But in spite of that we are, men and women, I believe are created in God's image. And I believe that God is neither male nor female. (Male early 40s: Int.5.17)

When you say equality in the workplace fine. And there is a lot of men who believe in equality. But it's when you take equality in some areas and not in others that is where you are being dishonest. (Male early 40s: Int.1.16)

These fathers' rightists believe that the issues surrounding child custody are areas where they are not being treated equally in comparison to their exwives and where they are being excluded from a relationship with their children. Because equality in child custody is not being realized, fathers' rightists feel that they are being victimized and excluded from being able to enact their participatory fatherhood role. They perceive women as making social and economic strides outside of the home in the male dominated sphere. However, in the postdivorce family context fathers feel that they are not being afforded equal opportunity to father in relation to child custody. Many fathers felt that this was unfair and sexist. As one

father stated,

Mommy get the kids and daddy gets the bills. (Male
early 40's: Int.18.23)

Therefore, they feel discriminated against because the participatory fathers role has not been acknowledged by judges in their child custody decisions.

Judges

The reason judges are seen as causing personal troubles for fathers has to do with the power they have in making child custody decisions and the definitions of parental roles they use in making these decisions. Fundamentally, judges are vested with the power to alter the relationship that fathers have with their children in the postdivorce context. Child custody decisions made by judges that favour mothers are viewed as being based upon gender assumptions that fathers' rightists feel are outdated and unfair in terms of their participant fatherhood role.

The absolute power a judge has in being able to determine and structure their postdivorce father/child relationship is viewed as a source of trouble for fathers' rightists.

For a judge to say that you had that relationship and now you can't have that relationship. Now that relationship is something that will be exclusively the mothers. But that one parent will be excluded from that and no longer have that same relationship. I can't think of any other parallels where a third party comes in and interferes in a relationship. That is

one of the things that we consider sacrosanct in our free society is that people can make relationships without fear of them being artificially interfered with. (Male late 30s: Int.24.4)

The judge as third party, deciding child custody, is repugnant to fathers' rightists. The privacy of the family is violated by the judge. His or her decisions are seen as impinging upon the rights and freedoms of the father. The judge is viewed by fathers' rightists as a threat to their post-divorce status. The following fathers' rightist expressed this opinion about the interference of the judge into family matters,

I mean it took two people to conceive the child. The child's got the blood of both parents floating in its veins. You can't take that away no matter how much you try. And I don't feel morally that any legal system has the right to take that away from one parent. (Female mid 30s: Int.6.4)

In this case, the fathers' rightist is refuting and opposing the fact that a judge can make a decision about the relationship between father and children.

In addition to the feeling that judges have the power to determine father/child relationships, they are also criticized for their traditional and conservative views on marriage and parental roles. The attitudes of judges are seen by fathers' rightists as incompatible and out of date with contemporary parental roles and marital arrangements such as the participatory father and working mother. The prime example that these fathers put forward is that judges

favour mothers in terms of child custody in divorce settlements. Fathers' rightists believe that child custody works under the principle of maternal preference which is rooted in a more traditional era:

I still think that the attitude within the legal profession and the judiciary is still the maternal ideology. Mothers are better at raising children. And it is borne out by decisions. (Male mid 40s: Int.4.4)

The father is cast as the noncustodial and breadwinner parent who must pay child support to his wife.

So the whole concept that the children belong to the mother and that the husband has to pay support to the mother and children because she can't earn as much money in the work place. I find a problem with that. (Male early 40s: Int.5.18)

The participatory fatherhood role that fathers' rightists believe in is felt to be fundamentally denied by judges who determine child custody in favour of the mother. Fathers' rightists feel that the reason for this has to do with the judges using a traditional model of family and family roles as the basis for their child custody decisions.

People say there is an injustice in the courts favouring women over men. There is no way of proving it. The laws are very unbiased, nonsexually discriminating. That's fine, but it is how the laws are being carried out. How the judges are [deciding]. (Male mid 30s: Int.2.26)

Fathers' rightists tend to see judges as antiquated and traditional because they favour mothers when it comes to making decisions about child custody. The maternal preference that judges are seen to be favouring in child

custody decisions acknowledges their breadwinner role rather than their participatory father role.

Fathers' rightists state that the reasons that judges still determine custody in favour of women and deny the change in parental roles are rooted in the age of the judge. As these fathers' rightists comment:

Most judges are fifty-five, sixty-five years of age. They've have been sitting on the bench for twenty years and they sort of get used to breast is best. (Male mid 30s: Int.2.11)

It says in the family law act that each parent has equal rights to apply for custody. But we know that we still got a bunch of old farts on the bench and society has been trained to think that women should have the children. And it is just basic cut and dry like that. (Female mid 30s: Int.6.3)

The big problem is judges. You know by the time you go through law school and become Queen's Counsel or get some law experience and finally get appointed as a judge you are probably a graduate from law school maybe thirty or forty years ago. So the way you think is a generation apart...Old-fashioned judges have old-fashioned views about what men's roles are. (Male mid 30s: Int.7.13)

In these cases the fathers are pointing out that judges who are elderly are using traditional gender stereotypes about maternal and paternal parental roles to make decisions about custody. The result of such traditional and gender biased child custody decisions, fathers' rightists believe, is that fathers assume a noncustodial parent role while mothers maintain their custodial parental role because fathers are seen as breadwinners and mothers as nurturers. These are

perceived as outdated stereotypes which are then entrenched in their legal divorce agreement and deprive them of their right to exercise their participatory father role and thus threatens their fatherhood role-identity postdivorce.

Therefore, the new participatory father role is not considered when awarding custody because traditional child custody decisions have awarded custody to the mother. This is seen by these fathers' rightists as unfair and detrimental to their participatory father role because it denies them the right to practice it.

The Law and the Legal System

In addition to their experiences with judges, the law and the legal system as the arena where parents and legal others meet to settle divorces are another source of personal troubles for fathers' rights. Fathers' rightists entered the divorce process with little or no knowledge of the law or legal system. In many cases, the personal accounts that these people provide reveal that the legal system leaves them feeling victimized. In terms of their fatherhood many expressed the feeling that divorce laws and the legal system favours mothers and harms fathers postdivorce.

Now the men that you hear in our meetings are men that are at the extreme. They've been abused by the system. And it is very difficult to support yourself on a third of your income. Most of these men are just average wage earners. They are not doctors

or whatever making a real good salary.
(Female mid 30's: Int.6.5)

Much of the blame for their loss of fatherhood, however, is directed at the legal system that allows their exwives to remain a parent by virtue of having been granted custody of the children.

Both parents who divorce should still be parents after. But it doesn't seem to be what the legal community wants. (Female early 40s: Int.26.10)

The law and divorce process is also very confusing and intimidating for many of these fathers. Many did not have knowledge of the actual divorce process on which they were embarking in settling their divorce. Most had not been in a family court of law until their divorce and were therefore unprepared for the actual legal process. Thus, the fathers feel that they are not in control of what is happening to them and ultimately that this impacts upon their fatherhood role postdivorce. As a result of their experience with the legal system, the following fathers' statements demonstrate the shock that engaging in a divorce creates.

You are manipulated by the system. The system itself is intimidating to begin with. Some people, just walking into court, just freaks them out. (Male mid 40s: Int.19.9)

I still feel very confused. And what I would like to see is that I'd like to see it done on a chalk board. I would like to see a paper hand-out that we could prepare and have available...I would like to sit down with people and give them an explanation as to how the court system works. (Male early

40s: Int.5.11)

Some of these poor people have never had to deal with this type of thing. They don't know how to defend themselves. They just sit in the courtroom with their mouths open saying this can't be going on. And yes, they feel unjustly treated. (Female mid 30s: Int.6.6)

Feelings of being manipulated, confused, shocked, and helpless are common experiences for these men. These feelings helped to destabilize fathers' roles because they are not in control of the situation of which they are a party to.

Others feel that the family court system is not properly set up to deal with sensitive issues such as marital separation and divorce. Fathers' rightists felt the legal system was one that treated them as criminals rather than as parents. For fathers' rightists the legal system is organized to place blame on one party, usually the father, and reward the other, usually the mother. Thus, they feel that their fatherhood is further compromised.

I realized the system was just totally inadequate to deal with (divorce). They are dealing with the family issues as if they were criminals. They were bringing you in before a judge. You're guilty. Get them out of here. Give him or her forty days. (Male mid 30s: Int.2.5)

Fathers' rightist believe that the court system is looking for culpability. Guilt or blame within the divorce context implies for fathers the transformation of their fatherhood role to that of access or noncustodial parent.

This is viewed as being an unfair and inappropriate use of power. As a result, the following fathers believe that the law and legal system are designed to fault and punish them by denying custody of their children.

If you're a father and there is a custody thing going on. And if it is a win/lose court system that is being implemented and you're a judge and you like your one or one hundred and fifty thousand dollar job, then you're looking for a loser and you're looking for a winner... It is not because the judge is a bad judge. It is not because they're prejudiced. It is because the system is designed that way. (Male mid 40s: Int.3.3-4)

I felt that I was being charged as a criminal. I was being treated as a criminal. And of course you are using a criminal system to deal with a human relations family matter. And when I got into court and found out the attitudes of the court towards me was that it basically that I was at fault for everything that happened. And therefore I was obligated to pay in whatever way the court saw fit. Whether it was monetarily or minimizing the amount of time with my kids or not saying to my wife you have to cooperate with transportation. (Male mid 40s: Int.19.9)

Therefore, fathers' rightists felt that the legal system was not designed properly to deal with separation and divorce.

Well the court system is just not geared at all to deal with what is best for the children and what is best for the families involved. It is just not geared to do that. And our court system is geared at defending the rights of one party versus the rights of another. And then fighting those out. (Male late 30s: Int.24.11)

Other fathers see the court's hands being tied by inflexible laws that have been created by the state.

I feel sorry for the courts. Because the courts are given certain guidelines to deal with things. They're not given very much flexibility. They are trying to deal in an unbiased situation where they can't be. And they have to look at what the legislators have written and wrote for us. This is what we have to deal with everyday. And it is tough. (Male mid 30s: Int.9.11)

Some father's rightists believe that the law is not fair in the manner in which it sets out rules.

I believed that our system was fair. I found out the first shot around that it wasn't. Then after a lot of research I realized that the law is the law. It has nothing to do with being fair. When you understand the law, the law is a very self-serving thing. And it has nothing to do with being fair. And in family law in Canada today if you think that there is fairness, you are going to be sadly disappointed. You are setting yourself up. (Male late 30s: Int.11.16)

Fathers' rightists posit that the family law and legal system is essentially biased against fathers. It is a system that is seen to be hostile to fathers. It treats them as criminals and ultimately harm the fathers' postdivorce role.

Lawyers

Lawyers also figure prominently in contributing to the personal troubles experienced by fathers' rightists in terms of their postdivorce fatherhood. The fathers' rightists did not foresee the personal troubles that they would encounter in their interaction with lawyers. Fathers' rightists initially felt that hiring a lawyer would support

and help them in protecting their fatherhood status postdivorce. For many this proved not to be the case. The following discussion and findings examines the kind of negative treatment that fathers' rightists experienced in terms of their fatherhood by their lawyers.

Fathers' rightists felt that lawyers use traditional gender constructions of parental roles to determine how much or to what extent they will represent and defend the interests of fathers. Lawyers represented divorcing parents differently depending upon their gender. Noncustodial parents, who are usually fathers, were felt to be less properly represented than the custodial parent.

I've gone so far as to run into lawyers who basically think that noncustodial parents should be pissed off the face of the earth with everything except their bank accounts. And who as representatives of custodial parents will do anything. Any dirty trick. Any slimy remark. Anything they can grasp at. They'll go after to defend their client. As representatives of noncustodial parents you will be lucky if they return your phone call. (Male early 30s: Int.20.9)

Another father expressed his feelings that lawyers will attempt to hurt the noncustodial parent.

I never trusted lawyers before. Now it all solidifies even more. Because they are the biggest cause of a lot of grief now more than anything else in the world....(2)
Because if they find out that the mother or the father whoever has control, custody lets say, they can do everything in the world possible to make it miserable for the other person. And they do it intentionally. And I don't care what anybody, any legislative person says or anything. From my own personal experiences they do it

intentionally. It is done (10). (Male mid 30s: Int.9.2-10)

Fathers' rightists feel that lawyers do not fight for fathers' cases because they are fathers. They feel that lawyers will not want to take on an issue, father custody, if they believe that it is futile.

The problem with the lawyers is that their common sense tells them that if it is a male asking for joint custody that their chances of getting it are not very good. They are not going to waste time and energy or money going for something that is a loser to start with. However, if the lawyer believes in the cause of the individual then you will find them helpful. (Male late 40s: Int.21.4)

Fathers' rightists believe that fathers need lawyers who believe in their vision of their postdivorce father role. They also believe that fathers need lawyers that are able to properly represent them before judges that have traditional views of parenting and a legal system that favours mothers in terms of child custody.

Fathers' rightists believe that lawyers need to use different defense strategies for fathers because of the bias against fathers by judges and the legal system.

Your average lawyer doesn't have the expertise in family law. And then it is a totally different approach that you must take when you are representing a man. (Male early 40s: Int.18.20)

The two lawyers we had before that, the first one we started, that is when Tom lost his shirt, and that is basically because this guy doesn't know how to defend a man. He's only defended women. Not that he's only, it's easier to defend a woman the way the court system is set up. (Female mid 30s:

Int.6.7)

In addition to these issues fathers' rightists in their interviews also faulted lawyers for not having any social science training in dealing with matters such as family and divorce.

Lawyers...have extremely little background in the social and psychological and emotional health of children. So they have nothing to base their decisions on except legal precedence. Which is perhaps years and years of making mistakes. (Male late 30s: Int.24.11)

Lawyers are faulted by most fathers' rightists as being too adversarial. Many felt that the adversarial role that lawyers play is detrimental to their postdivorce fatherhood because it meant that decisions were not determined in a fair manner. A good lawyer does not encourage fighting but rather tries to get the client fair divorce settlements.

So she (lawyer) really has a good understanding of what is going on. And she makes you look at everything in a fair way. She doesn't try to encourage fighting. (Female mid 30s: Int.6.7)

It is important to recognize that these fathers are not only addressing their lawyers, but also their wives' lawyers. However, overall, lawyers are seen to cause bitterness and friction because they are trained to be antagonists and act in an adversarial manner on behalf of their clients. As one fathers' rightist explains,

Typically a couple get separated, they don't know what to do. So the immediate thought

is, oh, we go see a lawyer. So they go see a lawyer and the lawyer says, well these are your rights. These are your rights and all of a sudden the next thing you know something that could have been possibly an amicable settlement and with minimal acrimony ends up being this god damn battle between two lawyers going for what is supposedly equal rights. (Male mid 30s: Int.2.2)

Another father explains his feelings about adversarial lawyers in this way.

The lawyers are nothing but the hired gunslingers of the old west. But they are using words right now. But they are out to slay the opponent...They wound their clients. They screw peoples lives up. (Male mid 40s: Int.19.6)

They want their lawyers to behave in their best interest and on their behalf even if this means acting adversarially. This is voiced by one fathers' rightist who implied that a good lawyer is one who will fight for a father.

He is a damn good lawyer because he will fight for them. He doesn't ball them around. He doesn't lie to them. He's up front with them. (Female late 40s: Int.13.6)

And a bad lawyer was one who did not know how to fight for the father/client.

I was with this lawyer and he was mishandling my case. He didn't know how to cope. We were always on the defensive because she (exwife's lawyer) was always coming after me. (Male mid 30s: Int.17.3)

The adversarial behaviour of lawyers in combination with their unwillingness to defend fathers role postdivorce is perceived as another personal trouble for fathers'

rightists.

On the whole I think that lawyers are part of the problem. And I also believe that they are why the presumption of joint custody isn't going through as easily as it should. (Female, mid 30s: Int.6.7)

Summary and Analysis

The image of the "participatory father" underlies and frames much of the subjective experiences of fatherhood postdivorce. The individuals in the fathers' rights groups whom I interviewed believed that the traditional father or what Rotundo (1987) refers to as the "modern father" was transformed into the participant father as a result of a number of social and economic forces. The women's movements call for fathers to participate more in household activities and care more for children is one social force that fathers' rightists cite as a reason for the changing role of fatherhood. Another reason for the emergence of the participatory father that fathers' rightists mentions is the increased amount of women entering the labour force. This trend is believed by fathers' rightists to have motivated fathers to take on more household and childcare activities. As a result, the traditional father who was mainly responsible for the economic well-being of his family was replaced by the participatory father whose relationship with his family and children is more important to him than his relationship to work. This image of the participatory father is used by fathers' rightists as a framework in which

to point out the troubles that fathers experience postdivorce.

The troubles that fathers state they experience postdivorce centre around being excluded from being the participatory father to their children. The reason they believe they are being excluded from the participatory father role postdivorce is because of the way they are defined and treated by judges, the law, and lawyers.

Judges are seen as upholding traditional conceptions of parental roles in their custody decisions, e.g. fathers are seen as breadwinners and mothers as childrearers. As a result of these traditional beliefs concerning parental roles fathers' rightists believe that judges favour mothers in custody decisions. It is based upon these impressions of judges that fathers feel that they are being excluded from being able to engage in the participatory father role in the postdivorce context.

The law and legal system are additional sources of personal troubles for fathers' rightists. They believe the law and legal system work to exclude them from participatory fathering postdivorce. When fathers' rightists talk about divorce law and the legal process they highlight how intimidated, confused, and frustrated they felt. These perceptions of the legal process point out that they did not feel in control of how the law was being used to determine their postdivorce fatherhood status. Additionally, the

actual legal process was also problematic to them because they did not know the rules which they were to use in defending their fatherhood role. They sensed that fathers were treated as criminals and that this negatively affected their fatherhood status postdivorce. As a result, they felt that the treatment they received in the court system was unjust because the law was geared to finding one party at fault. In addition to the preceding findings, fathers' rightists feel that divorce law favours mothers and punishes fathers by subjecting them to such criminal treatment in the court system and by favouring mothers in terms of child custody.

The majority of fathers' rightists that I spoke to, or observed, also felt that lawyers were a major source of personal troubles. Lawyers were seen as adversarial, hostile, and indifferent towards fathers. However, the primary focus of this part of the investigation is not how fathers' rightists view lawyers in general but how they think lawyers have affected their fatherhood status postdivorce. With this in mind fathers' rightists have pointed out that lawyers who represent fathers in divorce do not do so in the same manner that they would a mother. Lawyers do not fight to insure that fathers postdivorce status is maintained. A reason that is given, by fathers' rightists, for this behaviour is that lawyers do not think judges will rule in the favour of fathers in custody

decisions. Therefore, lawyers advise their father clients not to seek custody given these circumstances. A second complaint that fathers' rightists have of lawyers is that they are not fully knowledgeable in social issues concerning families. Lawyers, like judges, may be using traditional assumptions of family and parental roles and therefore, do not pursue more aggressive strategies to ensure that the fatherhood status of their clients is maintained in the postdivorce context. However, their adversarial behaviour adds stress to what fathers' rightists believe is an already hostile environment.

Fathers' rightists' relations with and experience with the legal system, judges, and lawyers demonstrate how much they personalize their troubles. It's not the system so much as the judges and lawyers who inhabit and control it that are to blame for their troubles. This might be a reflection of the way in which they experience their own plight in a personalized way. It is not the system so much as the judges and lawyers who inhabit and control it that are to personally blame for their misery. Therefore, they see the legal system which is grounded in and legitimated by the rule of precedent as the social problem, and judges and lawyers as the cause of their personal troubles.

The self is the mechanism that equips fathers' rightists with the ability to identify their troubles. The site of these troubles is the self or more specifically the

roles that are incorporated into one's identity. The self as a reflexive process enables fathers' rightists to be both subject and object. The fathers' rightists see themselves as participatory fathers. However, as a result of child custody decisions, they believe that judges, lawyers, and the law define them and see them as traditional fathers. The fatherhood role constructed by these others is inconsistent with the fathers' rightists definition of fatherhood. The behaviour that fathers' rightists are engaging in is reflexive where they are viewing themselves as objects but also using others such as judges, lawyers, and the law as mirrors in which to see themselves in terms of their father role postdivorce. However, what they see in this mirror is quite different from how they see the postdivorce fatherhood role. The personal troubles talk reveals the competing definitions of fatherhood as seen through the subjective experiences of fathers' rightists. These troubles centre around the negotiation and construction of the fatherhood role in the postdivorce context. Fathers' rightists link the personal troubles of postdivorce fathers to public issues of fathers in general. The public issue that emerges from the fathers' rightists' talk is the fact that divorced fathers in general are denied child custody because of maternal preference determinations. Fathers' rightists personal troubles and social issues seem to be used in the same breath. When they are talking about

their own troubles they also appear to be generalizing to other divorced fathers.

Another aspect of the troubles talk is the matter of the divorce negotiation being asymmetrical. The "adversarial others" fathers' rightists identify in the negotiation process have more power than they do. Judges, lawyers, and the law are these adversarial others. Adversarial others are seen as threatening the role of father postdivorce by having the authority, in the case of judges, to enforce their view of fatherhood in the postdivorce context upon fathers. Lawyers are adversarial others because they do not fully support and defend the participatory fatherhood role in the postdivorce context. Or they are seen as adversarial others because they may be working for the mother in challenging the fathers right to custody of children in the postdivorce context. The law and legal system is reified by fathers' rightists as a overarching structure of rules which also has not incorporated the changing definitions of fatherhood into legal practice. The law influences judges and lawyers behaviour and decision-making concerning the construction of the father role postdivorce by favouring mothers and not fathers in terms of child custody.

A further dimension of the troubles talk that fathers' rightists engage in is the fact that the information used to negotiate by adversarial others of the

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fatherhood role postdivorce is dated and not in line with their contemporary construction of fatherhood. They point out that judges, lawyers, and the law have constructed the postdivorce father role in terms of its economic or breadwinner dimension. They also point out that the social relationship with their children in the postdivorce context, as constructed by adversarial others, affects their fatherhood role by negatively transforming it into a noncustodial or access parental role. The construction by adversarial others of the postdivorce fatherhood role can negate their parental status or diminish it, e.g. Disneyland parent. Fathers' rightists counter these adversarial other's construction of the postdivorce father role by providing an alternative participatory fatherhood role. Participatory fathers are more active in their children's lives and take more responsibility for the day to day care of their children. Whereas, the traditional father was more concerned with breadwinner and control aspects of fatherhood, e.g. education, religion, and health decisions and not concerned with childcare. The participatory father role is a salient feature of their self-concept rather than secondary to their waged work role. Fathers' rightists feel that these new fatherhood dimensions should not be negated, but rather be incorporated into child custody decisions.

By examining child custody in the postdivorce context we are able to view the wedge of competing social

constructions of fatherhood. It would appear that the role of father is in a state of flux in terms of the subjectivities of the fathers' rightists perceptions. Judges, lawyers, and the law use traditional images of fatherhood in order to determine child custody. While fathers' rightists are employing a participatory image of fatherhood in order to counter and negotiate the traditional fatherhood role postdivorce.

This chapter has examined the subjective aspects of the father role that members of the fathers' rights hold. Fathers' rightists uphold a participatory as opposed to traditional image of father. They believe that the participatory father role has not been incorporated into child custody decisions. This is confirmed by: judges who still award custody of children to mothers; a legal system that has not translated and incorporated contemporary parental role changes into law; and lawyers who do not believe fathers can win custody of their children in the face of these odds or that lawyers themselves still hold traditional beliefs about parental roles. As a consequence of this, changing custody preference from maternal to the presumption of joint custody is advocated by fathers' rightist in order to maintain their fatherhood role and concomitant identity postdivorce. Changing child custody laws to favour joint custody is the main public issue and goal that propels the fathers' rights movement.

JOINT CUSTODY

The findings in this chapter focus on the fathers' rightists' rhetoric concerning child custody. One route by which the fathers' rights movement takes up the personal troubles of divorced fathers is by advocating changes to the manner in which child custody is determined. Fathers' rightists cast personal troubles into pressing social issues. For instance, it was shown that fathers' rightists claim that fathers are discriminated against by judges, the law, and by lawyers who use a traditional construction of fatherhood to determine child custody. The resulting maternal preference in child custody decisions is seen as disallowing men to be fathers to their children in the postdivorce context. Fathers' rightists believe that the participatory father role is hurt by the legal system's and law's use of the traditional definition of fatherhood in determining child custody. One way in which fathers' rights tackle the personal troubles of divorcing fathers is by lobbying for divorce law reforms that would acknowledge the role of father to children. Fathers' rights groups promote joint custody as a gender neutral alternative to maternal preference that would enable them to retain their father role.

The definition of joint custody is vague and ambiguous and open to interpretation (Pearson, Munson, & Thoennes, 1982: 5). Some researchers have identified two types of joint custody: the first is shared parental decision making and the second is shared physical custody (Bowman & Ahrons, 1985: 481). Rapaport, et al's (1977: 77) definition of care and control has some relevance for this discussion. Care concerns itself with the day to day management of children while control is described as the power to decide major questions concerning the childrens' education and religion (Rapaport, et al, 1977: 77). Joint custody, generally speaking, is assumed to be concerned with care and control. However, joint custody can be relegated to control and not care (Polikoff, 1982 cited Brown, 1984: 207). The wide, varied, and at times contradictory, discourse that fathers' rightists employ concerning joint custody reflects the ambiguity of the term. But it also reflects their motivation to lobby for joint custody. The following findings provide reasons and appeals that fathers' rightists give for joint custody.

Maintenance of Father Role Postdivorce

The looking glass self (Cooley, 1902) and role-taking (Mead, 1934) are the social psychological processes that these men use to evaluate themselves and which construct their fatherhood role-identity. If the "other,"

in this case the judges, the law, and lawyers, legally recognizes them as father through joint custody, then they have their role as father confirmed. This father's rightist demonstrates this point.

What I believe in is continued or cooperative parenting after you are divorced. And joint custody is a legal way of showing that you are sharing parenting. (Male mid 30, Int.20.3)

What is important is the legal recognition of fatherhood. The discourse of joint custody reveals that these fathers want to be symbolically and legally recognized as parents. Joint custody is viewed as a way for these divorced fathers to preserve their fatherhood role in the postdivorce context.

Having joint custody determined by the courts would maintain and replicate the fatherhood role they had while they were married.

It is shared by both parents before and it should be shared after, and it is equal before and it should be equal after, and there is no reason why that should change because the initial relationship has changed. (Male late 30s: Int.24.4)

What's the difference of that marriage/joint custody and not being married and having joint custody? None. Still got joint custody but we are just living separate and apart. That's all. That's what it states in the books separated and apart but we had joint custody. (Male mid 30s: Int.9.15)

Interviewer: What you want to do is replicate your role when you were married outside of the marriage relationship? You want to continue that same sort of role?

Fathers' rightist: Yes. (Male late 30s: Int.11.10)

To these fathers, marriage was seen as a situation in which joint custody existed and should continue after the marriage has ended. These fathers' rightists feel that they should not have lost their fatherhood role because they are no longer married. Joint custody is advocated as a way in which to maintain their fatherhood role postdivorce. Rather than being a noncustodial or access parent they would see themselves as joint custodial parent.

Paternal Right to Influence Children

Fathers' rightists use a number of contradictory father discourses in order to make claims to parenting. The invocation of the new participatory father discourse and the traditional father discourse were made at times by fathers' rightists without recognizing the contradictions between the two. The new participatory father discourse states that fathers are taking on a much greater share of childcare responsibilities and also indicates that fathers are equally capable of parenting. The traditional discourse rests on the assumption that there are natural or functional differences between fathers and mothers in meeting needs of children and that these differences are essential to the growth and lives of children. Being able to influence children is one way that fathers' rightists feel their role is maintained.

In the following example, the fathers' rightist felt that if he was not available to influence his children then his role and identity as father is diminished.

My availability and influence on the children is...well the influence is based on availability. If you're not there to influence someone, to talk to someone about it. You're role is in a sense reduced.
(Male early 40s: Int.1.3)

Note the reference to his sense of having his fatherhood role reduced. His fatherhood is predicated upon his ability to influence his children, to act as the moral guidance father. His ability to influence his children is denied when he does not have time with them.

In the following quotation a new participatory father discourse is used by fathers' rightists to appeal for joint custody: equality. This discourse maintains that the child should have equal access to both parents. Fathers' rightists state that sole parenting is detrimental to children.

We are into children's rights to make sure that the children have the best approach that is possible. In terms of having equal access to both parents and having a peer or mother or father figure both to deal with.
(Male late 40s: Int.21.15)

Having equal access to both parents is seen as being in the best interest of the children.

However, fathers' rightists also invoke a traditional discourse which states that the two parents are best at meeting the socio-emotional needs of the child.

Detrimental socio-psychological effects could occur if a parent, namely the father, is denied custody and therefore influence upon his child(ren). Traditional discourse maintains that there are natural differences that both parents possess and that children need. This traditional discourse is invoked by the following fathers to demonstrate negative consequences that occur if the father is not present in the lives of his children.

Both parents have different strengths and weaknesses as far as parent capabilities and parenting roles. And a child needs both once the marriage breaks up and children are grown, one or the other. I can see the effects on children on behaviour patterns especially when they are in their adolescent years of life. (Male early 40s: Int.1.2)

Think of the effect on the children when one parent is cut out. In some places that is good and I won't deny that. But in the majority of cases that is unhealthy for the child. So any focus that puts stress on the relationship and says to one party or the other that you are not a fit parent or I doubt your parenting abilities or gives me power to keep you away and thereby alter your personality or later your drive and defeat you and keep you away from that child affects the child. (Male late 40s: Int.11.12)

Not only do fathers' rightists state that the children's best interest are served by having access to both parents, but also that they should not be denied the male or fatherly influence. Fathers who want to be male role models felt that they could not influence their children if those children were solely in the custody of their mother.

There are essential parental characteristics which

are beneficial to children that fathers' rightists put forward. This father posits that fathers and mothers are unique in what they can contribute to the upbringing of their children, and as a result, are indispensable to their children's lives.

They should have the influence of both parents whatever that means. Both parents can contribute to their upbringing. There are certain things that a father can provide that a mother can't provide. The more physical thing and the self esteem thing and maybe the male that both a female and a male child need. A female child needs the father's input in her life too because it keeps her head on straight. (Male mid 30s: Int.17.9)

This fathers' rightists emphasis is upon some innate gender trait he possesses that both his children need. However, this discourse is more attenuated when a male child is involved. A male child needs his father in order to grow and develop. Joint custody would ensure for these men that their masculine influence on the male offspring would be maintained.

But to me that says a lot about the need to try and preserve the relationship between the father and the child. Especially where there is a male involved. A son really needs the [male] role model. (Male mid 30s: Int.7.11)

The age of the children is also a very important element of this discourse. Very young children need their mothers. This was a dominant belief embedded in the maternal preference doctrine of child custody and is still part of the present best interest of the child doctrine.

However, as children get older, they need their fathers.

In the developmental phases of the children there comes a point where a father figure is necessary and which the mother figure is necessary. As the child develops the need for a mother or father varies. So that they have higher needs under age five for the maternal care and it is 50 percent from age five to ten. And I would think further on there is a greater need for the paternal figure to be present. Joint custody doesn't really continue the marriage situation, one of the major things it does is provide a father figure or a figure which the child has some contact with and to which to develop his own personality and develop his own identity. (Male late 40s: Int.21.9)

The age of their children also determines whether they think joint custody is appropriate to fight for. If an offspring is an adolescent then seeking joint custody becomes moot. The child is believed to be old enough to make decisions for her or himself and therefore joint custody is not an option because the child can determine the preferred parental arrangement as these fathers allude to.

My daughter is twelve and she's got that choice. But I think that joint custody is good. I don't feel like her father. Even though she regards me as her father. The title of parent has been taken away from me. (Male early 40s: Int.26.16.)

Well they're teenagers. And consequently you're not going to be able to make many decisions for them. (Male early 40s: Int.1.3)

Again we hear in the first quotation that the title of parent and concomitant recognition of their fatherhood by others is important to these fathers' rightists. Even though the father acknowledges that his daughter has a

choice in seeing him, he still feels the need to have his fatherhood role acknowledged by seeking joint custody. Overall, the traditional discourse of father and family thread their way through the fathers' rightists discourse. Yet they also appeal to a contemporary discourse that claims that the roles of men and women have changed and become more flexible and overlapping.

Further evidence of the traditional family discourse held by fathers' rightists is their belief that not only does a child need two parents but sole parent families are incapable of adequately rearing children. A pro-family ideology forms the groundwork for these claims (Eichler, 1988). This pro-family ideology ignores the fact that a large number of women are successfully sole-parenting. However, the following traditional belief is prevalent in the discourse of fathers' rightists.

If they only had one parent, a single parent, they lose. But if they have the male aspect and the female aspect it's balanced. Humans are not meant to bring up children alone. We're just not designed for that. Very few can cope with the pressures of single parenthood and not have the children suffer at all. (Male mid 30s: Int.2.31)

I just can't on the basis of principle and on my own personal beliefs see how you can have effective parenting unless both parents are involved. Everyone has two parents. So the ideal of course is to encourage both parents to not only be involved but to be good parents. That's the real ideal...It is very important that the relationship between parents and children be nurtured and protected. I think that it is a very good

social investment. Because when you think of the cost of education and the costs of the criminal system and the social service system. I think that many of these costs could be reduced if the parents were more involved with their kids. (Male mid 30s: Int.7.1)

I'm not saying that children growing up in single parent families can't grow up to be well adjusted, well educated good people. They can but it is not in their best interest to live in a single parent home. It is in their best interest to have two family figures. And joint custody maintains that. (Male early 30s: Int.20.14)

Fathers' rightists' believe that joint custody is a contemporary solution to their personal troubles. Yet they employ traditional and contemporary discourses to solve this problem. Contradictory aspects of the fathers' rights movement emerge in these accounts. On the one hand they state that the roles of men and women have changed. That is, men and women are now sharing in many forms of behaviour that were once traditionally held only by men or women. Yet, they also believe that there are essential differences between men and women and that children need to be exposed to these essential differences.

Joint Custody Will Help Mother

Fathers' rightists promote joint custody as a solution for mothers to improve their economically inferior and isolated role as solo mother postdivorce. Joint custody would free up mothers' time so that they could go back to school or retrain themselves while the children are being

cared for by their fathers.

What a lot of women don't realize is that when the child is over with dad 90 percent he is probably a fully competent parent. Mom can get on with her life. Mom can go back to school, go to college at night. But if she is stuck with being a sole parent for the next ten or fifteen years you can't do that. Who suffers? The child again. (Male mid 30s: Int.2.21)

The following father states this by pointing out the similarities of the feminist movement with the goals of the fathers' rights movement.

I think that there's really a lot to say for the identification of the goals of the fathers' movement in terms of shared parenting with the goals of the feminists. Because many feminists would like to see women freed of many of the responsibilities for child-rearing and child-nurturing. Or at least to share those responsibilities so they weren't exclusively in the domain of women. So that women are free to pursue more effective careers. Careers that would get them more money and power in society. (Male mid 30s: Int.7.12)

Again fathers' rightists appeal to a contemporary discourse in seeking joint custody instead of sole custody and do so by adopting a feminist discourse. Fathers' rightists align their reasons for joint custody with the lobbying efforts of the feminist movement. Feminist and fathers' rightists are portrayed as wanting to increase women's economic independence and share childcare responsibilities. According to fathers's rightists, these two social goals can be achieved by changing maternal custody to joint custody. However, the underlying feature of this argument may be that

fathers' rightists want mothers to be less economically dependent on fathers.

No Losers

Fathers' rightists organize the divorce context into a win/lose scenario where mothers win because they are awarded custody and fathers lose because they are designated as noncustodial and breadwinner parent. Joint custody would eliminate this experience because both the mother and father would be seen as parents.

A criminal has a better chance of guilty or not guilty than does a parent going in before the system today. But you see that's where we are in a win/lose situation where someone is going for sole custody. If it was a win/win solution going for joint custody. (Male mid 30s: Int.2.15)

The court system itself is another aspect of the divorce process that fathers' rightists find problematic. Fathers' rightists believe that much of the fighting revolves around the issue of child custody. Acrimony over custody would be eased if joint custody were to be the only form of custody arrangement.

A presumption of joint custody. What that does is automatically destroys a lot of weaponry of the adversarial system right there. As I often say it is hard to play hockey on a baseball diamond. And this is what we are trying to do right now. We are saying hockey, i.e. joint custody being better because nobody loses their contact in law. Nobody loses there contact in reality unless there are mitigating circumstances. (Male mid 40s: Int.19.7)

Fathers' rightists point out that much of the fighting over custody is by the noncustodial parent, usually the father, feeling that they have lost their parental status and role-identity. If granted joint custody they would not have to fight for custody because their fatherhood remains intact. Therefore a potentially hostile situation for them and their wives is defused with joint custody. This father points out that,

Joint custody reduces a lot of hostility certainly from the noncustodial parents point of view. Because that person still feels that they are important, they feel that they are a parent. They don't feel like they have lost anything. In any situation if you tell somebody you've lost something, that person is going to be hostile. (Male late 30s: Int.24.6)

Joint custody would also eliminate the stigmatizing effect that noncustodial male parents feel. Being stigmatized is an assault and threat to the fatherhood role. Fathers' rightists come to view the awarding of custody to the mother as a sign that they are, as this father states, a deadbeat or jerk.

It is suggesting that you start from the point of view of joint custody. That both parents are decent parents and then you work from there. You shouldn't have to start at the point where one of the parents has been made out to be a real deadbeat or real jerk. And then it is up to that parent to try and undo the damage just to get to a level of being a decent parent again and then they work. (Female mid 30s: Int.6.2)

Maternal Power and Control

Fathers' rightists believe that mothers are privileged because of maternal preference. Because she is the legal parent of his children, she is capable of denying him his rights as father. As a result, many men felt that their exwives had too much power and control over the children. They do not like the fact that the mother is in a dominant position. Maternal power thus reduces fathers' status. Being a noncustodial parent makes fathers' rights feel that they are not a parent to their children. Without the legal recognition that joint custody would provide, fathers' rightists believe that they are relegated to an inferior parental role. These fathers' rightists express their powerlessness in their noncustodial parental status.

She has all the marbles and I'm constantly kowtowing. And I don't like it. It is not good for me psychologically. If I don't feel good psychologically there I'm not going to have the best relationship with my child because I'm going to be defensive in certain junctures. (Male mid 30s: Int.7.9)

A nonaccess, noncustodial parent they are basically a nonparent. They are no longer a parent to that child. They have no rights to that child at all. (Male early 30s: Int.20.4)

And so to restrict a parent to visits with their children is to minimize their role as a parent. And say that they are really only friends and not parents. (Male early 40s: Int.5.6)

Joint custody is the mechanism for them to redress the perceived power imbalance and loss of fathers' rights that

they experienced as a result of the divorce.

What we are dealing with are parents that are trying to save what little is left of their lives with their children and your comment a little while ago about fathers fighting for custody. No they are not fighting for custody they are fighting for shared parenting. Fighting for a share, to remain a human being. To remain a parent to their child. Sole custody deprives them of that. They have no rights. (Male mid 30s: Int.2.33)

Therefore, fathers' rights groups advise their members to petition for joint legal custody so that the father can maintain some power and control over his children.

The group advises everybody to go for at least joint legal custody. Because you do lose some rights as a noncustodial parent. You don't have much control over your child's life legally and at least on paper. (Male early 40s: Int.26.4.)

Control and Influence Over Children

Even though the Ontario Children's Law Reform Act 20(5) states that the noncustodial access parent has the right to make inquiries and receive information about the health, education, and welfare of the child(ren), many fathers' rightists feel and are under the impression that they are unable to get this information because they are not legally recognized as a parent. The following fathers' rightist explains why legal recognition of his fatherhood status is so important.

It has to be legally recognized so that both parents are still parents....With sole custody the noncustodial parent is not able

to make decisions regarding the child when it is with them. There are cases when the noncustodial parent has been chastised when the parent has brought the child to the hospital. If you were a regular parent you would never think twice about taking your kid to the hospital. (Male late 30s: Int.24.7-8)

As a noncustodial parent, fathers feel that they do not have legal power or control over their children. They see the custodial parent, which in most cases is the mother, as holding most of the power associated with the legal dimension of the fatherhood. Joint custody would allow them to retrieve this lost power. When asked about the custodial parents power over him, this father had this to say.

Fathers' rightist: The custodial parent has all the power. The noncustodial parent has no power. That is an absolute.

Interviewer: What kind of power are we talking about?

Fathers' rightist: Absolute power.

Interviewer: Over what?

Fathers' rightist: Everything.

Interviewer: Like what?

Fathers' rightist: Name anything. Education, health, welfare, clothing. (Male late 30s: Int.11.6)

This father feels that if he is granted joint custody that the power that is inherent in the fatherhood role can be maintained. The following member describes how joint custody would rectify the dilemma of his noncustodial fatherhood position.

As far as legal joint custody I believe that

the father or the mother have as much right to know everything that is going on in the child's life. School, church, doctor and they should both have a say in the upbringing of the children. (Female late 40s: Int.13.12)

As such, they feel that they cannot exercise their rights as fathers because they believe their exwives and others, teachers and doctors, have the power to deny information concerning their children as a result of their noncustodial parental status. With the present legislation, denial of this information on the part of the exwife is illegal. However, fathers' rightists still perceive their noncustodial role as the source of the personal troubles for divorced fathers. This father felt that having joint custody would give him more power and control in maintaining access to certain information about his children than he would have if he were a noncustodial parent.

What I did learn is that joint custody is extremely beneficial of maintaining certain access rights to information. Information about the child and access rights to the child. Without joint custody I had a lot of things that I could not do. (Male early 30s: Int.20.3)

As this father demonstrates, fathers' rightists believed that if they were granted legal status as a parent through joint custody that this would enable them to exert parental rights over their children. One of the parental rights that fathers want to exercise is the moral guidance dimension of their fatherhood role as it concerns their child's education.

Well school was an issue. My exwife is catholic and I'm protestant. See you can't even get into which school does she go to. If I'm a noncustodial parent I have absolutely no input. Nothing. (Male mid 30s: Int.2.8)

That I do not have joint custody with my ex for my son and my relationship with my son suffers in my opinion because of that. I've had trouble getting information from the school. I have trouble even talking to school. I had trouble trying to make them see that my getting information is any kind of priority. Because as far as they're concerned they only have to deal with one parent. When there is a sole custody situation that is the only parent they have to deal with. Anything else is something that they might get around to. I don't think that that is fair. Common sense I don't think that that is fair. Legally I think that it is something that we have to work at. So legal joint custody would at least ensure that both parents are recognized legally as parents. (Male mid 30s: Int.7.9)

The way I look at it with joint custody it does not deprive the one parent, make them smaller than the other parent. The parent still keeps rights, has his or her rights. The children can be maintained in one household. And the other parent can support that household in the upbringing of the children. That parent still has rights in discussing the education of the children. (Male mid 30s: Int.15.8)

The other area of their children's lives which fathers felt that they could influence if they were available would be religion.

Interviewer: What sort of things do you think would be detrimental to your kids if they didn't have you in their lives in relation to your exposure?

Fathers' rightist: One of them is religious practice. And the other one is education

right now. (Male early 40s: Int.1.4)

Joint custody becomes the lynch-pin which would rectify the problems that children would encounter if they were in a sole-female parent family. The main concern for fathers' rightists is that they are recognized by others as the legal parent of their children. As such, they are able to exercise their parental rights.

When fathers' rightists speak of rights they usually mean having the power and control to influence their child(ren) not the care of their children. The following fathers' rightist when asked about the definition of rights answered this way.

Interviewer: What do you mean by rights?

Fathers' rightist: Well under the Divorce Act once one person has sole custody the other person doesn't have any right to interfere with education, their religion or any of the upbringing, medical care or anything of the children. With joint custody agreements that parent has a say. And the two of them have to get together and do it in a businesslike way on how they are going to bring up the children, together even though they are not together. So there is a difference. It makes the other parent feel like I'm not left out. I'm not just a visitor. I'm less than an uncle. Yet I am the natural parent of the children and suddenly I'm less than a number. (Male mid 30s: Int.15.8)

The emphasis of this fathers' rightist is on control aspect of parenting or decision-making rather than on child-rearing or the housework that this parenting also entails. This kind of parenting would be done in a businesslike manner in

which decisions are made and carried out. The effect of this arrangement would be legal recognition of his fatherhood status and thus the confirmation by others of his fatherhood identity. It would not leave him out of decisions concerning his children nor reduce his role to that of an uncle. His right to exercise power and control over his children would remain. This would carry over to when the children are in his custody. Again also heard in this statement was that he does not want to be considered a visitor or an "uncle." He wants to be recognized as the father to his children.

Control Over Exwife

Joint custody, fathers' rightists believe, would allow them to exercise their rights as father to their children. However, it is also believed that joint custody would also allow them a certain amount of power and control over their exwives. Their ability to control their exwives emerges when her mobility becomes an issue. Some fathers' rightists believe that if they are granted joint custody their exwives and children must maintain a residence nearby or within easy commuting distance from where they live. With joint custody their exwives would not be able to move to a different city. If she has sole custody, fathers' rightists believe she can move with the children without his consent. The following fathers' rightists express their

distress at the potential movement of their exwives and their belief that they should have some control over their mobility.

The other one of my concerns is her mobility. That is one of my fears is that she is waiting for the court. If she gets sole custody, there are very little restrictions on her. She will move away from me. Not out of Ontario. And that would make contact with my children extremely difficult...I guess I'm saying, legal, I guess I'm saying in the law do we put the best interests of the child ahead of the mobility rights of the parent? I mean if the mobility rights and the best interests coincide that's fine. But if they don't... (Male early 40s: Int.1.7)

And what the women try to do is they try and freeze you out. They want a clean break, but they want your money. They want to go and start a new life. Wreck your life because they want that money and I call it a freeze out. And they try and freeze you out and you have to fight and scrimp and save and go after and fight that. My wife threatened to move and I said don't. Because I'll go to court and I'll get an injunction or I'll do something and that will be the end of that. You are not going to move. (Male late 30s: Int.18.19)

Defining Joint Custody

As stated before, the concept of joint custody has many meanings for members of the fathers' rights movement. However, two types of joint custody have been identified by fathers' rightists: physical and legal joint custody. These two definitions will help to further clarify the difference between being symbolically recognized as a father and actually physically and socially behaving as a father. The

following fathers' rightist defines the two types of joint custody as follows.

Joint custody I just feel is the ideal situation. I find that the biggest problem with that and why so many people are saying no to joint custody is number one they don't understand it. So they are afraid of it. They don't understand that you have to start from two points. Either you're looking at joint physical custody or joint legal custody. Joint physical custody is not for everyone. You have to have two pretty reasonable parents living in the same vicinity to be able to run that kind of situation. Joint legal custody is probably going to cover the majority of people. Where you are going to have a residential parent and a nonresidential parent. I think that is going to work out very well in the system. (Female mid 30s: Int.6.4)

In this case, this member's particular group advocates joint legal custody as opposed to joint physical custody. This definition of joint legal custody parallels sole custody arrangements. The main difference is that both parents are symbolically, and therefore, legally recognized as parents. The following father's definition of his joint legal custody arrangement demonstrates the importance of the symbolic nature that joint custody has for these fathers. For all intents and purposes he still is a noncustodial parent but is called a joint custodial parent.

I have a definition that is worded in our agreement. We finally did agree on a wording which was that she has what is quote called care and control of the children and I have access on specified times. But I am still a joint custodial parent. In other words I maintain all the rights of a parent. The only difference is my time with the children is specified. (Male early 30s:

Int.20.4)

Overall, joint custody is put forward as a method for the legal and symbolic recognition of their fatherhood. Their fatherhood identity is affirmed through judges, lawyers, and the law. Their actual post-divorce parenting would still be rather limited. However, their fatherhood role is recognized.

Another area of concern for fathers is the denial of access to their children. Many felt that access to their children had been refused by their exwives. Joint custody is seen as a method in which child access is guaranteed. If they had joint custody then access would not be a problem.

It is really a problem from the prevalence of sole custody and noncustodial parents not existing. Because you have that distinction made right from the very start you have the problem of access enforcement. You don't have the problem of access enforcement problems in joint custody. (Male late 30s: Int.24.12)

And if they experienced access denial then fathers rights felt that maternal custody should be reversed.

Fathers' rightist: If that person is that vicious and would not allow you to have access after you have paid your support, anyways, that person should be dealt with by the courts. And courts should deal with it. They shouldn't just slap your fingers. They deal with it severely. And say either you tow the line and go by the order or we are going to put you here.

Interviewer: What? In jail?

Fathers' rightist: Well I'm not going to say. Something is going to happen. Whether it is put them in jail or they reverse

custody. Something has to happen. (Male mid 30s: Int.15.11)

Contradictory aspects of fathers' rights rhetoric can be seen in the preceding statement. The best interest of the profamily doctrine of a child needing both parents is contradicted when fathers' rightists state that custody should be reversed if access is denied. If ex-wives deny them court ordered access, then possible solutions are: incarceration of the mother, fining the mother, and removing custody of the children from the mother. The former and the latter solutions to access denial contradict the best interest of the child doctrine which states that children's best interests are served when they have generous access to both parents.

Equal Does Not Mean Equality

Much of the fathers' rightist's "impression management" (Goffman, 1959) concerns itself with the presentation of themselves as participatory fathers. As was pointed out previously, they favour and advocate joint custody because it would allow them to be a participatory fathers. This, coupled with the equality rhetoric, would leave the impression that joint custody as it relates to childcare would be shared equally. However, joint custody or shared parenting does not necessarily mean equality of childcare or of child support as these fathers point out.

Joint custody doesn't have to be fifty-

fifty. You can have a joint custody arrangement where you only see the child ten, fifteen, twenty percent. But at least you have an input into the child's life. (Male mid 30s: Int.2.34)

You can have ten percent, ninety percent and it's still shared parenting. Sharing one percent with the father and ninety-nine percent with the mother is shared parenting. Coparenting implies that it is not one person cut off. There is a sharing going on. (Male mid 40s: Int.3.9)

Interviewer: When you talk to your lawyer about joint custody what kind were you talking about?

Fathers' rightist: Again, the same basic arrangement that exists in the draft agreement. In terms of how often I see them. How long and that is really it. Like I say no change to the way the agreement is written up other than it would be joint custody as opposed to sole custody. I would like it because it makes me feel more like a real father even though morally I am." (Male mid 30s; Int.14.7) [this father sees his children every other weekend and once during the week]

We can see from the preceding statements that the meaning of joint custody does not denote equal childcare between spouses. In fact, what this type of joint custody arrangement resembles is the prevalent maternal child custody arrangement. The care of the children resides with the mother and the father is the noncustodial parent. What then is the significant difference between sole maternal custody and joint custody? As the father quoted above pointed out, "I would like it because it makes me feel more like a real father even though morally I am." This is significant because for fathers' rightists joint custody

recognizes them as legal and symbolic fathers. As a legal father his role and concomitant status is recognized by others.

As much as these fathers want joint custody, it becomes problematic as to whether they want legal or physical joint custody. For some, legal joint custody would give them rights but not affect their access situation. Whereas, physical joint custody would give them more access and time with their children. However, more time with their children also presents a dilemma for these men. A dilemma that few of them recognize.

On the one hand I want to fight for custody of the kids. I would like to have them with me full-time instead of with her. On the other hand to do it on my own would be more than I would want to do right now. Cause even having them with me for the weeks that I had them I wasn't used to it. I just wasn't set up for it. It was an aggravation running here and there and stuff. (Male early 30s: Int.10.11)

It is interesting to note that this particular father at least has the ability to decide whether or not he wants to spend more time with his children: a luxury which many mothers do not have.

The preceding statements by fathers' rightists puts into question the participatory father image that fathers' rightists exploit in their lobbying efforts for changes to child custody law. Equality rhetoric used by fathers' rightists also comes into question as a result of these statements. Joint custody does not mean shared and equal

parenting for many of these fathers' rightists. Fathers' rightists seem to want the control rather than care aspects of child custody maintained. In addition to this fathers' rightists want their postdivorce fatherhood identity legally acknowledged.

Reduces Child Support Payments

Another reason fathers seek joint custody is to reduce or eliminate their child support payments. The belief is that since joint custody implies shared parenting, then child support costs should be shared equally by each parent. Therefore, joint custody would reduce or eliminate the amount of child support that men have to pay. The following fathers discuss the logic behind joint custody and child support payments.

Interviewer: How about things like support payments? Do you have any problems there?

Fathers' rightist: I think that if we have more joint custody that that would eliminate most of the problem.

Interviewer: You mean you wouldn't have to pay as much?

Fathers' rightist: That's right. For example, in my case I wouldn't have to pay a penny. My wife and I make roughly about the same. She is a [professional]. So we both have pretty good incomes. (Male late 30s: Int.8.10)

This is why when you talk joint custody, I think it's beautiful because of the fact that both parents wouldn't have to pay anything. So we are eliminating one factor which is what one is going to be looking for

in the other is that of money. Keeping that money, greediness out what do you have next? Nothing...I'm not saying that I would agree to a shared joint custody. I'm not pushing that. I'm just saying the definition in law of joint custody where father can have Wednesdays and every other weekend, they call that joint custody. That's not a joint custody. You know why? Why is the father paying six hundred dollars a month? If it is shared joint custody as per law one should not pay the other. If you are talking equal share, an equal split...True joint custody the essence of joint custody is shared equally. (Male mid 30s: Int.9.13)

The amount of support has to be varied so that people who are getting a great deal of support because they have sole custody would only get fifty percent of that support with joint custody...This is supported by the equal rights movements and the women's movement. (Male late 40s: Int.21.10)

For these fathers' rightists joint custody is not associated with participatory fathering but with reducing the child support payments given to their exwives. And in the final quote we see the alignment of the fathers' rights movement with the women's movement.

These fathers' rightists postulate that the reason their exwives seek and file for custody of the children is to get alimony in the form of child support from their exhusbands.

I know why she's doing what she's doing to me, to get sole custody and have child support is because she wants to have six hundred dollars a month. It's that money. Six hundred dollars free a month that they get clear to control a child to do whatever they want. Go anywhere they want. And they can sit back and literally retire and have money coming in. (Male mid 30s: Int.9.13)

Right now she is asking for one thousand dollars support from me. While she is working. She also wanted five hundred dollars for each child. That is two thousand dollars a month. She doesn't want the children she wants the money. (Male late 30s: Int.12.4)

Part of the reason for taking the children in the way that my wife did, and she is going for sole custody, is financial. (Male late 30s: Int.12.12)

Therefore, these fathers' rightists are asking for joint custody to eliminate this perception of child support being used as alimony. They account for their exwives' motives for seeking custody in financial terms rather than emotional or relational ones. This approach neutralizes and delegitimizes the exwives' behaviour for seeking sole custody as a violation of her mothering and nurturing qualities and shifts their motives to more selfish and financial qualities.

I think it is sad that if the only reason a woman doesn't want to give joint custody to her husband is so that she can continue to keep welfare payments. Because I'm paying for them. (Female late 40s: Int.13.20)

Summary and Analysis

The data presented on the fathers' rights movement's claims for joint custody demonstrates the numerous approaches used for the introduction of joint custody into divorce law. Fathers' rightists state that joint custody would allow them to maintain their father role in the post divorce context. One reason they give is that their father

role should not be transformed because of divorce. Joint custody, they state, existed within the intact family context. Thus, divorce should replicate the parental roles that mothers and fathers had. Not only would joint custody preserve their father role it would also preserve the relationship that the child has with both parents. They stress that divorce denies children a relationship with the noncustodial parent, usually the father. The problem of a child having an absent father would be eliminated with joint custody.

Fathers' rightists state that joint custody would allow them to continue to be an influence upon their children. They posit that detrimental psychological effects can occur for children if a father is not present. This is exacerbated if that child is a male. Problems with gender socialization would be alleviated if children had access to both parents. The father role-model they believe is essential for the proper socialization of their children.

Divorced mothers would also be helped by joint custody. If fathers were sharing custody, then much of the childcare burden would be eased for mothers. Mothers could use the time that children are with their fathers to improve and update their skills by going to school. Thereby improving their economic condition. Thus, joint custody not only helps children in the postdivorce context but it also helps divorced mothers.

Joint custody would also reduce the hostility for the divorcing parents. The reason given by fathers' rightists is that parents would not be contesting custody and trying to find fault in the others parenting abilities. It would in other words preclude any wrangling by fathers over child custody that they believe presently occurs because of maternal preference.

Fathers' rightists indicated that maternal custody gives mothers an inordinate amount of power and control over the father/child relationship. Fathers spoke of the feelings of not having any rights over their children and that this minimized their role as father. Joint custody would allow fathers more control over their children because they would be legally defined as a parent in the postdivorce context. This would mean that fathers could be involved in the decision-making processes over their children's education, religion, and health care. Joint custody would also extend the fathers control over their exwives mobility. Many believed that joint custody would ensure that their exwives would not be able to move households to a location that would hinder access to children.

.Much of the data so far indicates that joint custody is concerned with control rather than care issues. The type of joint custody that fathers' rightists maintain would be most beneficial to divorcing fathers is legal joint custody. Legal joint custody concerns itself more with the control,

rather than care, of children. In fact, it resembles the maternal custody situation where children reside with their mothers and fathers have access to children on specified times. For fathers' rightists, joint legal custody would legally recognize them as fathers but would not necessarily entail an increase in the amount of time spent caring for their children. In addition, the fathers' rightists view joint custody as a vehicle to enforce their access to their children. If a mother was not willing to abide by the nature of the joint custody agreement, then custody would revert to the father.

We can see from the preceding findings that joint custody does not mean equal childcare responsibility. Joint custody for one fathers' rightists could be a situation where the children are cared for by the mother 99% of the time by and 1% by the father. Joint custody therefore does not require equal sharing of the childcare. These reports indicate that joint custody within the fathers' rights discourse does not necessarily entail participatory fathering. However, equality operates in terms of child support. Fathers' rightists firmly believe that mothers are not entitled to the same amount of child support that would be received if they had sole custody of children. Joint custody would either reduce or eliminate the amount of child support that mothers received.

Joint custody becomes a linking rhetoric for fathers

to restore their fatherhood status, because through it they believe extensions of self will be restored, e.g. exwives, children and their money. Through the court process the latter two are usually legally appropriated from the father and awarded to the exwife. Not only are these extensions of self restored with joint custody, but so is his father role. Fathers' rightists find support for their father role when joint custody legally recognizes them as fathers. Child custody, for fathers' rightists, is centred on control or rights rather than care. A right is thus a claim for more power, control, and autonomy. Whereas, a care is a recognition of the need to give not only morally and socially but economically.

The data and discussion of joint custody reveals how fathers' rightists are actively engaged in negotiating their role postdivorce. The examination of the fathers' rights' rhetoric of joint custody uncovers the dimensions of the postdivorce fatherhood role. The claims for joint custody also show the motives for defining their postdivorce father role.

There are a number of weaknesses in argument and contradictory elements in the fathers' rights rhetoric concerning joint custody. The first to be addressed is their claim that fathers are engaging in the participatory father role and abandoning the traditional father role. The data suggest that these fathers are seeking joint

custody to maintain the control elements of fatherhood. The desired postdivorce fatherhood incorporates traditional dimensions of fatherhood, e.g. education, health, and religious authority and decision-making over their children. Another area of fathering that is of concern to fathers' rightists is the issue of the socialization of their children in terms of gender role development. Many fathers' rightists felt that there are detrimental effects on their children, or children in general, if they are not exposed to a father role model. Maternal custody is believed to be detrimental to children because it prevents fathers from influencing their children. In this case fathering for fathers' rightists is concerned with their influence upon children. 'Fathers' rightists are constructing fatherhood in terms of influence rather than day to day care of children. This belief assumes that fathers and mothers are different. Yet fathers' rightists claim that fathers and mothers are sharing gender role attributes such as childcare, waged work, etc. Thus, one contradiction that emerges in their arguments for joint custody concerns parental roles being the same and yet different.

A second contradictory element of the fathers' rights joint custody claims is presenting joint custody as a way for fathers to father in the postdivorce context. Appeals for joint custody are premised on the notion of equality. Women are seen as having equality in waged work

and fathers' rightists are requesting that equality in the sphere of the family be extended to child custody. Joint custody denotes that both parents are sharing equally in childcare postdivorce. However, the data reveal that fathers' rightists are not primarily encouraging physical joint custody. In fact, many of the fathers' rightists that I had spoken with felt that legal joint custody was the ideal form of child custody because it allows divorced fathers to maintain their rights and control over their children. Also when asked how joint custody would look in the postdivorce context many said that it would resemble what they presently have, maternal custody, but that it maintains their rights over their children. The contradiction of their equality rhetoric concerning joint custody is exposed. Here again, we see that fathers' rightists are invoking a traditional discourse concerning the father role and not the participatory father role that they believe widely exists.

The third significant contradiction identified is centred on the fathers' rightist concern for their financial situation postdivorce. Fathers' rightists claims for joint custody emphasize the positive aspects of joint custody for their exwives. Joint custody would allow their exwives to use the time that their children are with their fathers to pursue education improvements and careers. However, joint custody in terms of the interviews and observations does not

mean that physical custody of children is shared equally. The help that physical joint custody would provide their exwives appears moot. In fact what this rhetoric reveals is that these fathers' rightists are acknowledging their exwives unequal and dependent financial position upon men.

Fathers' rightists' claims for joint custody reveal a significant weakness in their appeals. Joint custody would reduce or eliminate the child support payments they make to their exwives. They state that joint custody denotes equality and they then tie this to child support payments. As such both parents would be responsible for the financial care of children. This is muddied by their argument that women are finding equality in the workforce yet they acknowledge that joint custody would allow women to improve their economically inferior position. The caring and concerned father is cast into doubt, as well, by their willingness to reduce or eliminate their child support payments. What is interesting about the economic aspect of fathers' rightists joint custody rhetoric is its attempt to cast off the traditional economic dimension of their fatherhood role. If they are concerned about their children's well-being then why are they willing to reduce or eliminate child support?

The fathers' rightists' appeals for joint custody show that there are several dimensions to the role of father. Fathers' rightists feel that the social dimension

of their fatherhood has been reduced as a result of maternal custody preference. They believe that maternal preference does not allow them to socialize or have adequate contact with their children. The patriarchal dimension in terms of control of children is also reduced because of maternal preference. They state that maternal custody gives mothers total power over decisions concerning their children's education, health, and religion. Fathers' rightists believe that they have little if any input into those decisions because they are a noncustodial parent. The moral and legal dimensions are stripped from them because of maternal custody. They believe that they cannot influence the moral development of their children or have input in decisions concerning their children because they are not acknowledged by others as a legitimate and legal parent. The economic dimension of fatherhood, however, is something that fathers' rightists find problematic. It is this dimension of fatherhood that they are trying to remove rather than maintain in the postdivorce context. But the economic dimension is maintained through child support because of the link to the biological dimension of their fatherhood role.

Fathers' rightists use joint custody in negotiating for their desired postdivorce father role. The postdivorce father role is constructed along strengthening and maintaining the legal, moral, and patriarchal dimensions of fatherhood. The economic dimension of fatherhood is either

reduced or eliminated while they are trying to have more discretionary control over how they will maintain the social dimension of the fatherhood role postdivorce. Fathers' rightists are seeking more control over the way in which fatherhood is constructed in the postdivorce context. They are seeking changes to child custody as a way of accomplishing this task.

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

I began this dissertation by explaining how the definitions of parental roles are influenced by various social forces. For instance, mother and father roles changed as a result of the shift from agrarian to industrial society. As a result of industrialization, mothers were defined in terms of their domestic and nurturing functions, while fathers were being defined in terms of their economic and occupational functions. These changing definitions of parenthood emerged in response to the separation of family and work. Other social forces that contributed to changing definitions of parental roles were the rising middle-class, the development of psychological sciences, the initiatives of social reformers, and the emergence of a child ideology. The influence of these social forces on parental roles is reflected as well in divorce and family law. For instance, in child custody cases, paternal preference was replaced with maternal preference in terms of child custody.

I also stated that we are witnessing a striking challenge to conventional definitions of parental roles with efforts to neutralize or decrease mother's rights and privileges vis-a-vis their children and to reassert fathers

familial rights. The women's movement, economic conditions encouraging women to enter the wage labour force, social science research on fatherhood, the media's representation of fatherhood, and the fathers' rights movement have all underscored the importance of fathers in children's lives and had an impact custody laws. This current state of fluctuation and agitation around parental roles provided me with a unique opportunity to examine how the definition of fatherhood is changing and in particular how one group, the fathers' rights movement is contributing to that change.

This research revealed that in their appeal for changes to child custody law fathers' rightists are contributing to the social construction of the participatory father. By examining subjectivities of separating and divorced fathers I was able to understand the definitions and issues that are at stake for these fathers. Access was gained to these subjectivities by focusing on the personal troubles of fathers in the context of divorce. From this it was shown how these subjectivities are transposed into the public issue of child custody.

In this chapter I attempt to accomplish a number of tasks. 1) I briefly summarize my findings concerning the fathers' rights movement. 2) I direct attention to the contradictory aspects of the fathers' rights movements lobbying efforts. 3) I describe the dimensions of the fatherhood role that emerged from this research. 4) I

discuss the concept of role fragmentation is revealed and addressed. 5) I consider policy implications. And finally 6) I address the question of "how does the self respond to threats to identity?"

Fathers' Rightists' Subjectivities and Social Activities

These data reveal that fathers' rightists believed that they were denied child custody because of outdated and traditional views of parenting. The fathers in fathers' rights groups portray themselves as participatory fathers who are being discriminated by judges, lawyers, and the law, all of which favour mothers in child custody determinations. Fathers' rightists believe that there has been a transformation in the father role from the traditional father to the participatory father. The transformation in the father role, they claim, emerged as a result of the women's movement and economic changes that restructured the family and waged work. The ensuing parental role changes have not made their way through the divorce process where the issues are perhaps most visible and salient. Divorce highlights and exposes social constructions of parental roles because it is the public arena in which parents often have to defend their parental role. By studying fathers' rightists' subjectivities and social activities I have been able to examine the role of father in the present day context to determine its attributes or dimensions.

At the same time however, there were contradictory discourses in the claims for maintaining a fatherhood role postdivorce, reflecting contradictions among the individuals who make up the fathers' rights movement. For instance, the groups foster the impression that they are concerned with helping separating and divorced fathers maintain their participatory father role postdivorce. Yet much of their rhetoric and social actions revolve around protecting the fathers' economic resources and the control aspects of the fatherhood role. Fineman and Opie (1987: 116) state the fathers' rights movement is a reaction to the maternal custody preference and deadbeat father issue. Their observations seem to be confirmed by this research. Fathers' rightists are concerned about how maternal preference in deciding custody affects their fatherhood role and concomitant status and power. Their concern about the deadbeat dad stigma is relevant but in a manner more complex than suggested by Fineman and Opie (1987). Fathers' rightists are attempting to reconfigure their economic role by using joint custody to exit this dimension of their role without the stigmatizing effect of appearing as a deadbeat father.

Child custody, more specifically joint custody is the mechanism that fathers' rightists use to maintain their predivorce status. Upon careful examination of these data concerning the fathers' rightists' rhetoric on joint

custody, we can see that joint custody does not entail equality or fairness to both parties. Nor does it really encourage active parenting with their children as one might suppose. The rhetoric and justifications that fathers' rightists have for joint custody are many and often contradictory. People are attracted to fathers' rights groups because these groups claim to help them solve their personal troubles. Many learn that joint custody is perhaps the key to solving these personal troubles. The individuals learn about joint custody and its potential solution to their troubles from supportive others in the groups.

Fathers' rightists claim that joint custody will preserve the parent/child relationship in the postdivorce context. They point out that sole maternal child custody harms childrens' social and gender development because it denies them access to their fathers. The father role is seen as especially important in the healthy development of male children. Joint custody, the argument goes, would also serve the best interests of divorced mothers because they would be relieved of some childcare work and could therefore devote some time towards improving their education and/or work skills. Mothers would have greater opportunity to be independent and not reliant on their exhusbands for their economic wellbeing. However, altruistic this may sound, the argument for joint custody begins to break down when one actually examines what fathers' rightists believe joint

custody would entail in a practical sense.

Joint custody would give fathers "control" rights. Control rights deal with decisions-making concerns about their children's education, health, and religion. What was missing from the data and from the interviews pertaining to joint custody were "care" matters concerning children. As a result, most fathers' rightists believed that legal joint custody would solve their postdivorce father troubles. Legal joint custody would provide fathers with rights over their children without necessarily having to be equally responsible for their physical care. This is revealed by how joint custody would be practised. Joint custody for many of these men would resemble the status quo maternal custody situation and not physical joint custody. This is articulated when fathers' rightists state that joint custody could be a situation where the children are with the father one percent of the time and with the mother ninety-nine percent of the time.

If fathers' rightists really do not want to share in the care of their children as the participatory father image would suggest what do they want? What can be drawn from these data is that the fathers' rights members are attempting to maintain some aspects of their pre-divorce fatherhood identity. The people that were observed and interviewed were at various stages in their divorce process. Yet they expressed some common concerns or personal

troubles. They see the divorce process as a threat to their father role-identity because adversarial others, such as lawyers, judges, and the law employ a traditional or modern fatherhood definition to transform the fatherhood role post-divorce.

The changes to their fatherhood role and associated rights are unwanted and threatening. Threats to the fatherhood identity are socially experienced in a cumulative fashion. This has been discussed as a cumulative epiphany whereby events or situations build up over time to change one's perception of self (Denzin, 1989). The primary trouble which initiates the cumulative epiphany is the separation or divorce. However, the people interviewed were not interested in reconciling their marriage. The secondary troubles associated with the actual separation and divorce experience were the salient troubles they were trying to resolve. Of concern were the effects of divorce on their sense of self, more particularly their fatherhood identity.

There were two types of others who were seen by fathers' rightists as either supportive or adversarial. Supportive others, such as fathers' rights members, second wives, girl-friends, and co-workers who helped them respond to threats to their fatherhood identity. Adversarial others such as exwives, lawyers, judges, and the law were viewed as being responsible for the threats to fatherhood identity. Curiously, wives and children are not the social others that

fathers' rightists are appealing to in their quest for the restoration of their fatherhood identity. Appeals are made to those that have the legal power to transform the father's identity and status within the divorced family situation. There was no direct mention of blame directed towards their ex-wives for their personal troubles other than in the area of finances, i.e. child support, division of assets, and their power over fathers. However, even here, fathers' rightists blame lawyers, judges and the court system for their troubles. For it is the lawyers, judges, and the law that structure the post-divorce family and vest more power and control over children with mothers rather than fathers.

Fathers' rights groups help to frame their members' experiences and transform their experiences into a public issue, thus connecting it to broader social structures such as the legal and political systems. They identify joint custody as a way to restore their fatherhood postdivorce or relieve them of the personal troubles that they experience as a result of the divorce process.

The main problem for these men, as they experience the legal system, is the unwanted identity transformation that the divorce process creates. In this respect, what seems to take place is a kind of replacement identity from which fatherhood as a taken-for-granted identity based on implicit autonomy or conventional notions of fatherhood is transformed into a package of legal rights and opportunities

for initiative. They move, in a sense, from being fathers vis a vis their children to fathers vis a vis the legal system. This act of shoring up their fatherhood identity via the legal system, rather than the child, is a kind of leitmotif that underlies the divorce laws (public issues) that fathers' rightists are addressing, through joint custody.

The process of threats to fatherhood identity leads these people to fathers' rightist groups. Most individuals who seek out fathers' rights groups do so because they are undergoing personal troubles with their divorce and fatherhood status. Many separating or divorced fathers do not gravitate to fathers' rights groups because they are concerned with promoting and encouraging fathers to be more involved and active with their children. Those that seek out such groups find that fathers' rights groups provide them with substance and initiative for achieving the goal of its members e.g. the maintenance of their fatherhood identity. Thus, these groups give advice and counsel for their personal troubles. They furnish a reconceptualization of their experiences with adversarial others. And they provide them with a fathers' rights discourse which elevates the personal troubles to the public issues realm, e.g. child custody. These public issues are the substance of the fathers' rights movement which also have the potential to alleviate the personal troubles they are experiencing or

have experienced, as separated and divorced fathers. An examination of the rhetoric pertaining to each of the social issues of the movement reveals contradictions.

Contradictory Aspects of Fathers' Rights Rhetoric

Fathers' rightists employed contradictory discourses in their appeal for joint custody. These appeals revolved around participatory and modern or traditional images of fatherhood. Appeals to contemporary and traditional definitions of gender and family were used by fathers' rightists to further strengthen their claims to rights and equality. However, the nature of these contradictions points to the privileging of personal troubles over the public issues they are advocating, as well as, their children's and exwife's postdivorce situation.

Fathers' rightists appeal for equality in custody decisions. Fathers' rightists assert that women have achieved equality in the waged work sphere and therefore the equality should be accorded men within the family sphere postdivorce. Their belief is premised on women having been privileged in the postdivorce context by maternal custody preferencing and child support payments. And men have been discriminated in these awards. Equality rhetoric invoking the contemporary participatory father image is used to bolster this argument. Upon further inspection equality breaks down and becomes problematic. The appeal for joint

custody is concerned more with the legal position of father rather than the physical care of children. Joint custody does not entail physical custody but could resemble the traditional maternal custody arrangement.

Equality is a rather flexible concept within the joint custody rhetoric. The major impetus behind joint custody does not necessarily have to do with the best interest of the child but more to do with the father's self and material interests. Joint custody is seen as a mechanism of reducing or eliminating child support payments. The fathers' rightists employ various rhetorical strategies to bolster their claims to joint custody, e.g. ease the mother childcare burden, provide her with more leisure time, allow her to retrain, etc. The motivation behind joint custody is more of self and material interest than of concern for the best interests of the children or their exwife.

Money, in the form of child support payments to the exwives who receive it, is a major issue for these men. In fact, it is one of the underlying issues of the movement. Money is an ego-extension of the fatherhood role-identity. Money, in form of child support, is no longer something the father can control in terms of to whom it is given. The literature and research on child support finds that many divorced fathers are delinquent in paying child support (Teachman, 1991: 368; Weitzman, 1988: 252; Seltzer, 1991;

Dudley, 1991; Weiss & Willis, 1985; Arditti, 1991; Berkman, 1986; Chambers, 1979). The research points out that divorced fathers are seen as abandoning their fatherhood responsibilities. However, another way that fathers can respond to the issue of child support payments is to respond in the manner of the fathers' rightists. They are seeking joint custody as a legal way of eliminating or reducing child support payments in order to avoid being seen as deadbeat dads. They are trying to find legitimate ways out of paying child support rather than defaulting or they are trying to reduce their child support payments. Their posturing on child support contradicts their caring father image and the concern for their children. The fathers did not see a connection between the withdrawal of child support and a reversal of the children's predivorce material conditions.

These contradictions in fathers' rights rhetoric highlight the privileging of the father's self interest over his children and exwife. They have taken their personal troubles and recast them into public issues of equality and rights in relation to child custody and support. They portray themselves as contemporary participant fathers who are the victims of discriminatory divorce practices. However, their self-disclosures are telling. They point to the economic and hegemonic underpinnings of their discourse. Their rhetoric gives the illusion of equality yet their

demands imply otherwise. For instance, in many of their appeals to contemporary family roles, they often invoke traditional appeals as well. However, underlying these contradictory aspects of the fathers' rights rhetoric is a concern with the fragmentation of self that occurs within the context of threats to identity.

Overall, there seems to be a kind of shared rhetoric of justice and equality at work here. These men see the situation as a kind of exchange relationship where the inequality they suffer (more at the hands of the legal system than their exwives) is seen to be in need of redress. What emerges in many of the quotations is that these men have almost reconciled themselves to the hostility of their exwives. Their anger and feelings of victimization are directed to the judge, lawyers, and the law and legal system for employing traditional parental roles which strip them of their fatherhood role. Women are seen as privileged by these parental definitions and fathers are victimized by the manner in which child custody is decided.

The Fatherhood Role

An interesting and important result of this work was its emergent description of fatherhood. It was posited in the theoretical section that divorce creates problematic situations for fathers. Their self-concept until their divorce was taken-for-granted and embedded within a broader

cultural and social framework. The divorce shatters the taken-for-granted role of fatherhood that they once occupied and maintained. Threats to their identity take place and make them defend their fatherhood role. As a result, they become conscious of what their fatherhood is precisely because they now feel it is being threatened. It is in these threatening situations that fathers articulate the meaning of fatherhood. It is also at this time that those interested in the definition of fatherhood can examine its meaning, content, and form.

Fatherhood, instead of being seen as a monolithic and homogenous role, can be viewed as a dimensional and complex role. It has intradimensional qualities: biological, economic, social, legal, moral, and patriarchal. These intradimensional qualities can be examined by looking at child custody in relationship to the fatherhood role.

Biological Dimension

The biological definition of fatherhood is retained in the divorce process and this becomes the underpinning for many of the threats to their identity. The biological dimension is important for fathers' rightists because it points to their paternity. It gives them a legitimate voice with which to seek out and reclaim their lost fatherhood status and it is embedded in a broader cultural and social context that values blood relations. It is precisely

because they are biological parents to their children that they claim rights over their children.

Economic Dimension

Fathers' rightists articulated their concern about being seen merely as a breadwinner after divorce. The breadwinner role points to the fact that there is an economic dimension to the role of father. The economic dimension of their fatherhood identity is seen as threatened because they no longer have discretionary control over the economic resources derived from their labour. The amount of child support is seen to be determined by judges and lawyers with little regard to the fathers' rightists' economic circumstances. Also, the fact that the judge, as adversarial other, is enforcing a dimension of the role they do not necessarily want post-divorce, is seen by fathers' rightists as a violation of their autonomy.

Social Dimension

Maternal child custody preference also threatens the social dimension of the fatherhood role because it physically and thereby socially removes them from their children. Therefore, the issue of joint custody is extremely important to noncustodial fathers' rightists because it enables them to maintain some modicum of the social dimension of their fatherhood role. Sex-role

socialization rhetoric is employed to legitimate their fatherhood to children. Children, especially males, will suffer if they are not exposed to father role models because their access to their children is restricted to weekends and visits during the week. Therefore, there is a social dimension to their role because the courts specify when father and child can interact.

·Legal Dimension

The legal dimension of fatherhood is also threatened because the court has mainly used the maternal preference doctrine to award child custody. Thus, the court legally recognizes mothers as the guardian of the children with care and control responsibilities. Fathers' rightists perceive this to mean that they do not have legal rights to exercise their role as father to their children. The legal dimension of fatherhood emerges when fathers' rightists speak of not being granted information about their children's health and school records. They make this claim because they believe that they are not legally recognized as parents by schools and physicians. Others, therefore, do not recognize or grant them parental status.

Fathers' rightists voiced their anxiety about being cast into the noncustodial parental role. This occurs because of the maternal custody preference. They are labelled noncustodial or access parents and not custodial

fathers. Other delegitimate roles which fathers' rightists felt they were cast in were that of an uncle or "disneyland" parent. Therefore, their role, as father has been changed and in their cognitive framework devalued and diminished. In an attempt to alleviate the delegitimizing change in their role fathers' rightist point to the fact that joint custody would legally acknowledge them as a legitimate parent and not a noncustodial or access parent.

Moral Dimension

The moral dimension overlaps with the legal dimension to a certain degree. The moral dimension of fatherhood emerges when fathers' rightists speak about wanting to influence their children in terms of gender identity and about decision-making in the areas of school and religion. Many fathers' rightists wanted to be present to influence their children in this regard. But because they were not seen or legitimized as parents this dimension of their fatherhood was denied them. This dimension is a vestige of the modern father role as identified by Rotundo (1987).

Patriarchal Dimension

Another dimension of fatherhood is the patriarchal dimension. This is most vividly seen when they speak about rights: the rights to control or make decisions concerning

their children; the rights to information about their children; and the rights to control their ex-wives' mobility. Essentially, power and control issues are associated with rights. The focus of this power and control are on the children and ex-wife in the post-divorce context. The patriarchal dimension also appears to be a vestige of the modern father which was identified by Rotundo (1987).

* * *

The notion of fatherhood being a monolithic role is cast aside in favour of a more dimensional one. It is the process of threats to identity that the taken-for-granted of fatherhood becomes problematic. In the process of maintaining the role, the father has to articulate that role in order to negotiate its existence. As a result, the fatherhood role stands out and becomes a salient feature for analysis.

Theoretically, the concepts of self and identity are central to understanding and explaining fathers' rights behaviour. However, the theory of self has overlooked the feature of the self that is possessive. The person possesses a self, but on the other hand, the self can be possessed by others. The judges and lawyers can strip away parts of the self. But the father can also either disengage or retain and reinforce aspects of self, as is demonstrated by fathers' rightists action towards the disengagement or retention of certain dimensions of fatherhood identity.

Therefore, negotiations over self as object take place between the individual and others. Another aspect of this discussion is the denial of access to dimensions of a role. One can be denied access to certain parts of a role or the entire role. In the case of the father's rights the issue is somewhat more complex than this. The divorce process re-enforces certain dimensions of the father role while stripping away other dimensions of the role.

The child custody determination process highlights these various dimensions and points to how these are maintained or eliminated from the fatherhood role. For instance, the legal dimension of the father role is stripped away when custody is awarded to the mother. The economic dimension of the father role is enforced by the courts through child-support responsibilities. The social role is limited by the courts in determining the type of visitation that will be granted. The biological dimension is the anchoring aspect that sets up this complex scenario. The moral guidance dimension is also diminished as a result of infrequent or reduced contact with his children; he is not physically present to influence his children. Overall, the fatherhood role is not eliminated but sculpted. Certain dimensions of the role-set are enhanced, reduced, or eliminated. As a result, the father is not left with a void to fill but a role which has been altered. As the self is formed, so its various dimensions are interconnected, each

thereby acquiring an interest in the state of the other components. Several dimensions of their fatherhood role-set are maintained or enforced by the divorce agreement while other dimensions are stripped from them. So fathers are never able to exit from their role entirely. However, there are certain dimensions of their role that they would like to have more power over or be relieved from, i.e. legal rights and economic responsibilities respectively.

Role Fragmentation

One of the underlying premises of qualitative inductive research is the creation of useful theory or concepts. Glaser and Strauss (1967) encourage social scientists to generate theories and concepts from their data. This research was able to develop the concept of role fragmentation in order to explain the behaviour of individuals who were undergoing a transformation to their role. Fathers' rightists vocalize their resistance to their fatherhood role being threatened. However, the entire role of father is not necessarily being threatened. Rather, the fatherhood role is undergoing "role fragmentation." Certain dimensions of the role are cast off while other dimensions are left intact. In some sense fathers' rightists are realistic in knowing that this will happen. However, their problem is with how this is done and the balance of responsibility and prerogatives left to them. In a sense,

the father is left with what he perceives to be a distorted role precisely because it is fragmented. It can be unexpected, involuntary, and experienced as a threatening change to fatherhood role-identity.

Role fragmentation as a concept and social process differs from Ebaugh's (1988) elaboration of role exiting. Ebaugh (1988: 1) states that "[t]he process of disengagement from a role is central to one's self-identity and the reestablishment of an identity in a new role that takes into account one's ex-role constitutes the process I call role exit." Ex-nuns, ex-cons, and divorcees would constitute ex-roles. However, for fathers' rightists the role exit from fatherhood is not complete. Their married role as husband may be completely exited, but their parental role is not. Research by Arendell (1992b) offers some insight into why many divorced fathers totally exit their fatherhood role. Arendell (1992b: 563) states that a masculinist discourse of divorce provides divorced men an option of completely exiting the father role by not supporting or seeing their children. However, in this analysis, vestiges and residues of what I called role dimensions still remain for the fathers' rightist. Therefore, fathers' rightists are activated against the fragmentation of their pre-divorce intact fatherhood role. As a result, I have labelled this particular threat to identity as role fragmentation.

This research also demonstrates that roles are much

more dimensional than have been acknowledged. Not only does a person possess and create a number of roles, i.e. a role repertoire, but each role has dimensional characteristics. In role-exiting people incorporate their total ex-role into their new self-concept. Perhaps if a person was stripped of, or exits her or his role entirely, the process of exiting would be easier. However, for fathers' rightists their fatherhood role is altered rather than exited. This is evident when they claim to have lost their rights, express the feeling that they are an uncle or visitor to their children, or are looked upon as money machines. They still possess dimensions of the father role but not in its entirety. When fragments of the role are left they are reminded of what they once had or were. This makes the exiting the role much more difficult and threatening. Also the involuntary nature of the process makes exiting the role problematic and unwelcome.

The loss of some role dimensions, or the accentuation of other, e.g. breadwinner, highlights the way that role dimensions exist in relations of exchange or reciprocity with one another. The mutuality or complementarity of role dimensions exist in a certain range of relational possibilities, a kind of dimensional equilibrium or tolerance. When some elements are lost or diminished, others, such as material provider or bread winner, become accentuated. Thus, a sense of equilibrium

occurs. This, in turn causes feelings of hostility, injustice, and resentment that are central to the experiences of these men. It is not, therefore, simply that the remaining fragments provide memories of what is lost: they also remind the subject of what they still have, but which is seen as a burden or imposition. Fathers' rightists speak of feeling trapped as the providers of money in the form of child support. Much of this process lies within a socio-political context which is now demanding that fathers remain responsible for the financial support of children.

The other parameter of Ebaugh's (1988) concept of role exiting that is important for this analysis is the fact that role exiting is voluntary. For many fathers' rightists, exiting the father role was not voluntary. Perhaps when a role is exited voluntarily it is done so in a less threatening and more complete fashion. They may be more aware of the implications when they make the decision unilaterally or with their wives to end the marital relationship. But if a role is exited involuntarily, the process may well be experienced as threatening and may generate a sense of role fragmentation. In the case of the fathers' rightists, this occurs because 1) adversarial others are involved in the process and 2) the fathers wish to maintain dimensions of their fatherhood role while others are trying to mould the role for them. The role fragmentation process also exists because fathers' rightists

offer help to those who feel they are losing control over the child custody process through which the divorce fatherhood role gets determined. Therefore, role fragmentation involves the active participation, consciously or unconsciously, of others and the participant.

Role-fragmentation implies that the role is not totally exited. Rather, fragments of the role are left intact while others are not. The image of a broken mirror comes to mind to explain this process. Sometimes the fragments that are left are not wanted while those fragments that have been removed are wanted. This again is demonstrated by the fathers' rightist claims that they wish to maintain their legal status but want to have the economic status removed, diminished, or under their control. They want to have some control over the economic dimension of their post-divorce fatherhood role-identity and they blame much of this on maternal custody and preference.

Responses to Threats to Identity

In the latter part of the theoretical chapter I briefly outlined Breakwell's (1983) types of responses to subjectively experienced threats to identity. Of the various types of responses that Breakwell (1983) identified, I asserted that fathers' rightists responded to threats to identity by "change" and partly by "reconstrual." However, I also stated that I believed that reconstrual was more

complicated a process than Breakwell envisioned. In terms of Breakwell's concept of change, fathers' rightists are seeking to alter the beliefs about parenthood postdivorce and thus the manner in which judges, lawyers, and law determine child custody and concomitantly fatherhood identity.

The second aspect of the reconstrual response does not fully take into consideration the novel responses that individuals can make to threats to identity. Breakwell (1983: 17) argues that the "individual may respond to threat by reconstruing his or her identity." The individual will make the change to identity that is required of her or him as a result of these threats. In regard to reconstrual, I argued that reconstrual indicated a passive acceptance of identity change by the individual. Whereas, I believed that my research indicates that the reconstrual response for fathers' rightists points to the active resistance to unwanted changes to identity. Breakwell (1983: 17) does state that "changing the self-concept is difficult because consistency is to highly valued." But Breakwell does not discuss the resistance to and the active maintenance of identity by the individual when they are threatened. My research indicates that resistance and identity maintenance, for some, are other types of possible responses to threats to identity that can be made.

Suggestions

Threats to identity was the main underlying tension of the fathers' rights movement. Fathers, undergoing divorce, experience a threat to their fatherhood status and identity. Maternal custody removes the children from their daily interaction. Child support is directly given to the ex-wife in order to care and support his children. Prior to separation and divorce, economic income for the family would have been of a diffuse nature in that father's income would have been beneficial to all members of the family. After divorce, his economic income is divided into 1) his income and 2) child support for his children. To complicate matters, child support is also viewed by some as alimony or income for his ex-wife from whom he has separated or divorced. Even though child support and alimony are separate forms of monetary maintenances, they have merging and similar meanings for fathers' rightists. These post-divorce arrangements maintain and reinforce certain dimensions of the father's role and role-identity while other dimensions are denied. Thus, the threats to identity for fathers are seen as ongoing and without finality. There seems to be no institutional status passage for men who divorce. There is no clear articulation of the role they will perform after divorce other than the one circumscribed by the divorce process itself. This seems to be inadequate considering the high number of marriages ending in divorce

(Statistics Canada, 1991).

Death of a spouse was the main cause of marital breakdown prior to divorce (Uhlenberg, 1992). The role of the widow or widower was firmly embedded as a post-marital role and this can be seen by the fact that we have a name or label for those roles post-marriage. The divorcee role is one that we have given to divorced people but it has a negative connotation. A post-divorce role for parents seems to be required in order that people can place themselves into a social context. A helpful divorce passage of some kind would help to signify to others and the people going through divorce of this transition in identity and status.

What seems to be needed is a post-divorce role that will provide the identity that fathers' rightists complain about losing without the negative consequences that this would have upon their ex-spouse and children, either economically or socially. However, at this point in time, there is social ambivalence about divorce and this is reflected by problems that people encounter post-divorce. For example, fathers feel that their identity has been threatened and fractured, women and children experience a drastic economic decline post-divorce, and fathers neglect to interact with their children, or maintain their child support payments. This seems to point to the fact that as a society we are concerned with the issue of divorce as a social problem, but have done little to address the troubles

that all parties are experiencing in order to adequately help them continue their lives post-divorce.

Analytical Summary

While the data I have collected do not examine changes to the career identity of fathers, they do reveal one particular moment of that unfolding process. The research was able to take a snap-shot of the career of father within the context of divorce and examine how divorce is subjectively experienced and socially responded to by fathers' rightists. The concept of identity career allowed me to show how the different identities make up the self, and the different elements that make an identity (usually derived from role sets) interact in that each provides a standpoint and point of reference from which to readjust to changes in any of the others, e.g. wives, children, judges, lawyers, fathers' rightists, etc.

What is important about the way that these fathers cope with changes to their father role and identity is that part of the role and identity does remain stable and fixed, and as such act as the grounding from which to re-arrange, reconstruct, redefine, and reposition the other parts that are under assault or at risk. It is, for example, precisely because the legal system retains and imposes on them their sense of paternal obligations (primarily financial), that they are able to feel resentment about and resist the

removal of their rights of paternal control. What is at stake internally, within the fatherhood role and identity, is a kind of balance of power or weighting between the different dimensions. Therefore, the struggle for things like joint custody is about a kind of re-equilibration of those dimensions as determined by their sense of self-interest. The parts of the self and its identities form a kind of signifying chain in which each can only be viewed and understood from the standpoint of the others. Certain dimensions (economic and biological) of fatherhood signify or bring attention to other dimensions (social, moral, patriarchal, and legal). The divorce breaks the taken-for-granted wholeness or unity of their fatherhood career and forces them to seek out an equilibrium in their postdivorce fatherhood identity. As a result, we learn that the self is organized in a intricate way. Certain dimensions, the economic and biological, link or thread through other dimensions of the self. And the fathers, in this study, subjectively experience threats to self because some of these dimensions are retained and allow them to view the other dimensions that are stripped away or are altered.

Career identities are played out in relation to others or within role sets. Upon divorce, the others that fathers encounter revise their role and thus their identity. For instance, in divorce, judges and lawyers are adversarial others who influence the career of fathers. Prior to the

divorce their fatherhood career identity was maintained in relation to wives and children. As a result of divorce, the career of fathers shifts because of the others in their lives. And still, for some, another role set is added to the career of father when they seek out supportive others like fathers' rightists for divorce help and advise. Fathers' rights act as a counter mechanism to the unwanted identity transformations and role fragmentation that divorcing or divorced fathers are experiencing as a result their interaction in other role sets, e.g. lawyers and judges.

What my research also indicates is that when the self is under threat it is predisposed to an instrumental strategy for identity maintenance. Rather than exclusively responding emotionally, individuals engage in utilitarian types of responses. This was demonstrated by fathers' rightists' rhetoric concerning changing parental roles and joint custody. As a result, fathers' rightists work to change the manner in which family law is practised and thus, how fathers, mothers, and children are treated by the legal system. Their instrumental activity is not solely organized around legal change. It was demonstrated that the social activities of the groups also centred on the practicalities of solving the fathers' rights groups' members' personal divorce troubles. As a result, the fathers' rights groups also acted instrumentally to the support the fatherhood

identity of its members on a practical and everyday basis.

Even though much of the fathers' rightists' activities took place within the social context of personal encounters with other fathers' rightists, fathers' rightists' meetings and marches, etc., the struggle was more on an individual rather collective basis. The privileging of the individual's troubles was more commonly heard than the collective rhetoric of the fathers' rights groups. Members were mainly motivated to seek out fathers' rights groups because of their personal divorce troubles and not necessarily because of the political goals of the groups which fostered the impression of the participant father. The importance of the children in their lives and the influence of their children upon them as fathers is mostly absent in the interviews, meetings, and much of their literature. They spoke of importance of fathers to children in philosophical or theoretical terms. Yet, little was said about their personal relationship with their children. For instance, the people I spoke to and observed rarely mentioned the names of their children. When they did talk about their children it was usually concerning issues of control rather than in terms of love, affection, etc, or how others like their exwives, lawyers, and judges were interfering with their relationship with their children.

Overall, fathers' rightists did not speak about their intimate relationships with their children. This

could be due to the fact that men in North American society are not comfortable talking about their fatherhood and relationship with their children in emotional terms. Even fathers who are involved emotionally may not talk about their children. The discourse seems to be bent on representing fatherhood as a role of work, responsibility, and effectiveness. Also, the legal process frames their relationship with their children along formal lines. The absence of this sort of talk could also be due to the objectifying process of the law rhetoric, their adoption of legal rhetoric to explain their troubles, and the troubles that they are experiencing in their everyday lives.

Conclusion

We learn from the responses to threats to identity that individuals can respond, not by changing identity, but by trying to change the social structure in which they live. This is not a new idea. However, it does point to Breakwell's position that people try to maintain rather than yield to threats to their identity. On the other hand, this research also indicates that the response to threats to identity is more of an individual rather than collective struggle. Even though individuals seek out groups for assistance and support they are doing so in terms of their own self-interests rather than for the goals of the fathers' rights groups. It may help to know that others are having

similar experiences and that there are strategies for changing the "system." However, the instrumental strategies of responding to their own identity threats and attempts to eliminate or cope with the threats are more important for many of these individuals than the goals of the fathers' rights movement itself.

APPENDIX

Interview Guide

1. How did you get involved with _____ (fathers' rights group)?
2. Tell me about why you want joint custody as opposed to sole custody?
3. Define joint custody. What are the benefits of joint custody?
3. Tell me about why you want access enforcement?
4. Tell me about why you want mediation?
5. Probe for information on lawyers and judges.
6. Probe for information on child support.
7. What do you mean by fathers' rights?
8. How do you feel about your level of child support?
9. How would joint custody impact on your child support payments?
10. How do you feel about your exwife?
11. Have you ever been denied access to your children? (if applicable)
12. Are there any problems that you have experience or are experiencing because of the divorce?

Group Information

1. How did your group get started?
2. How is your group organized
3. What are the aims of your group?
4. What is your group lobbying for?

5. How are politicians responding to your group's issues?
6. Probe for information dealing with adversaries who are opposed to the movement.

Demographic Information

1. Age: assessed visually or through interviews.
2. Occupation.
3. Number of children:
4. Age of children.
5. City of residence.
6. Level of membership: how active are you involved in the activities of the group.
7. How long have you been with the group?
8. Residence.
9. Marital or divorce status:
10. Child custody status: visitation, sole or joint custody, none.
10. Race.

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