What does masculinity have to do with it?: Men, fathers' rights groups, and the complexities of manhood

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Abstract

Research suggests that men and masculinity are in "crisis," because men's historically unquestioned privilege and patriarchal power are being challenged through advances toward equity for other groups. Yet, such scholarship does not sufficiently address the processes through which men may attempt to restore the power they feel has been lost. Through in-depth interviews, this research examines the experiences and beliefs of 14 men who were part of a rights-based social movement (i.e., fathers' rights movement). The resulting analysis highlights the barriers perceived as hindering men's fulfillment of ideal manhood and concludes with a consideration of these men's attempts to garner support for their movement and (re)claim more traditional masculinity. In sum, this research demonstrates the existence of a contradiction between situating these groups as a platform for men's advocacy and support and, in reality, their perpetuation and normalization of anti-women/feminist rhetoric through engaging in and upholding hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy.

Keywords: hegemonic masculinity; social performativity; power and control; fathers' rights; family law

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Chapter 1.   Introduction

There is a war between the rich and poor,
A war between the man and the woman,
There is a war between the ones who say there is a war,
And the ones who say there isn't.
Why don't you come on back to the war, that's right, get in it,
Why don't you come on back to the war, it's just beginning (Cohen, 1974).

1.1. A "Crisis" in Masculinity

Social movements predicated upon ideologies of civil rights and equitability, whether based on race, ethnicity, culture, or even gender, are prominent forces that have the potential to break the bonds of social oppression. The proliferation and success of even a single movement to garner advancements in social equality has the potential to incite future collective action. As such, men are currently demonstrating a willingness to engage collectively in a rights based social movement (i.e., fathers rights movements) signifying that there too is a "crisis" in masculinity. While social movements are traditionally based upon centuries of marginalization and subjugation, typically resultant from white men forcibly asserting dominance and control, a crisis in masculinity is instead predicated on men's current confusion as to what a "real man" is within a social environment that proclaims to no longer require or accept a masculine performance based upon the domination of others (Kimmel, 1987, p. 121). While men are consistently inundated with patriarcahl messages that limits their expression of intimacy and teaches them to suppress acts of vulnerability, they are simultaneously censured for upholding these very tenets of masculinity to which they were socialized. This contradiction in social expectation, leaves men with an uncertainty as to what is expected of them (Gourarier, 2019; Kimmel, 1987; Robinson, 2000). However, a contradiction in role expectations for men cannot merely be resolved through a modification in their gender ethos, as this conflict inherently threatens the legitimacy of their power and authority which has been traditionally enshrined within tenets of masculinity.

In an attempt to reconcile a strain in the masculine gender order, some men engage in anti-feminist rhetoric in which they posit that "masculinity has been sacrificed on the altar of gender equality," requiring social upheaval to promote *true* gender equality (Gourarier, 2019, p. 185). Accordingly, men are engaging in men's rights

movements, such as fathers' rights groups (hereafter FRGs), in response to the perceived social advancements of feminist movements. Akin to these past social movements, men are becoming more vocal in their attempt to demonstrate to society that their voices are being suppressed, and subsequently there is a need for gender equality (Dragiewicz, 2008; Gourarier, 2019; Robinson, 2000). While principles of equality resonates with current ideological social movements such as civil rights and feminist movements (for example, see Crowley, 2006), this rhetoric promotes an image of masculine subjugation in which men are painted as the victims of society. However, the rhetoric of men's social movements ultimately fails to acknowledge that men are lashing out against a system to which they fully participate in, that of patriarchy.

1.2. Introduction to Power(lessness) and Masculinities

Gender, along with race, class, and religion, among others, is one of the primary ways in which individuals are socialized, labelled, and assessed (Connell, 2020; Dummit, 2007; Messerschmidt, 2018; Schippers, 2007). There are a multitude of gender performances that exist, dependent upon the predominant and current social normative values (see section 2.2 for a further discussion) (Connell, 2020; Messerschmidt, 2018). A predominant masculine gender role fosters a belief that men are to be masculine[1]/manly at all times in that they adopt an uncompromising persona of strength (Connell, 2020). The social belief ultimately held by some men is that they must embody power and control while simultaneously resisting the control of others (Connell, 2000; Dummit, 2007; Schippers, 2007; Schwalbe, 2014). Thus, the ability of a man to present a normative masculine persona is often dependent upon his ability to embody and display forms of power and control. As a result, men, and more specifically white men[2], have historically monopolized power and resources, systematically excluding all other genders and gendered performances (e.g., femininity) (Kimmel, 2013).

The sense of entitlement to power and domination that is inseparable from many forms of masculinity is, according to many scholars, the result of the patriarchy which is

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[1] A set of role expectations, culminating in a socially normative and exemplified performance (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

[2] Patriarchy, as a form of social stratification, that imparts dominance upon the advantaged group and subjugation upon the imposed disadvantaged inherently intersects with other forms of social stratification such as race and class (Dragiewicz, 2008).

a social system enacted and upheld through men's everyday actions (for example, see Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Schippers, 2007; Schwalbe, 2014). Through processes of socialization men are perpetually bombarded with images and ideologies of a stereotypical man who is strong, unyielding, and unemotional, such as those men traditionally portrayed within Hollywood action movies (e.g., Sylvester Stallone, Arnold Schwarzenegger). While the work of many scholars illustrates how men are socialized and taught that they are entitled to power, authority and control, many men are unable to portray such an idealized masculine persona (Johnson, 2006, Kimmel, 2013; Schwalbe, 2014). While many men no longer perceive themselves as socially privileged, they often still feel entitled to power and continue to benefit from these patriarchal advantages.

As a result of social challenges to men's power and privilege, such as the women's liberation movements and a relative decline in the dominance of men in the economic domain, many men feel their power and authority is being challenged (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Faludi, 1999). For instance, although white men are the most privileged group within a western context, many do not feel they have any power or authority as a result of their perceived inability to personify a masculine ideal of social and physical strength (Faludi, 1999; Kimmel, 2013). Consequently, many of these men have come to blame women for their experiences with varying degrees of perceived powerlessness. However, the actual adversary of men's dominance is the patriarch that they themselves have created and to which they often vehemently adhere. However, the patriarchy is a social structural force that is uncontrollable by most men who are either unable to perceive this system or lack enough power to enact change. Instead, what men can see is the image of a woman who is gaining access to what they believe they alone are entitled to, such as political power (Durfee, 2011; Faludi, 1999; Lin, 2017).

Men's experiences with power(lessness), relative to their socialized expectations, can lead to feelings of being emasculated which may be a catalyst for an aggrieved sense of entitlement and a desire to restore feelings of control (Connell, 2020; Kimmel, 2013). Scholars illustrate that men often compensate for feelings of powerlessness through extreme demonstrations of masculine strength, such as violence, which they believe has the ability to restore their sense of masculinity (for example, see Connell, 2020; Hamberger et al., 2017; Kalmuss & Strauss, 1990; Kimmel, 2013; Morris & Ratajczak, 2019; Stark, 2007). However, these authors fail to elaborate on the process men utilize in an attempt to restore their power. While some authors have demonstrated

how acts of compensatory masculinity (i.e., violence) are enacted when men feel powerless (for example, see Doucet, 2004; Katz, 2006a) there is a lack of understanding of the processes in which men engage to restore power in the absence of a use of violence.

1.3. Studying Masculinity through Fathers' Rights Groups

This research highlights a contradiction between the framing of these groups as being a platform for men's advocacy and support and, in reality, these group's perpetuation and normalization of anti-women and anti-feminist rhetoric through engaging in and upholding ideologies of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy. In contrast data about gendered access to power that emphasizes how patriarchy ensures the continued empowerment of men over women and other genders, men within FRGs feel disadvantaged. These organizations are framed as necessitated support groups for men who have become the victims of gender oppression. While these groups claim to merely offer support to fathers within custody disputes, FRGs are a group in which men attempt to re-establish control over women (for a further discussion, see section 2.3) (Durfee, 2011; Dragiewicz, 2008; Flood, 2010, 2012; Kimmel, 1997). These men frame men's lived experiences through a lens of victimization and oppression resulting from social, psychological, and physical injustices. Individuals within these groups assert that men are the actual victims of gender inequality, especially because of women's alleged advantage in the private realm and family court matters (for example, see Rosin, 2010). For example, these men claim that during separation/divorce procedures and subsequent custody/access restrictions, especially cases that involve domestic violence (hereafter DV), women are advantaged in that their parental rights are perceived as favoured over men's, despite the fact that women are greatly disadvantaged within the family court system, such as through the forced imposition of economic deprivation (Boyd, 2004; Durfee, 2011; Gavanas, 2004; Kimmel, 1996).

FRGs can be understood as institutions of socialization that empower men to adopt a language of masculine victimization. These groups co-opt this language from feminist and civil rights movements to construct a rhetoric that conflates men/masculinities perceived disempowerment with a form of victimization. These men feel themselves to be the victims of society in general and, more specifically, victims of family court processes and women (Durfee, 2011; Kaye & Tolmie, 1998; Rosen et al.,

2009). Many scholars, however, have yet to demonstrate how a victimized label is reconciled and internalized by those who consistently uphold a masculine role and performance. The use of a victimized status has the potential to undermine and contradict a masculine identity of detached strength by signifying one's vulnerability and a lack of agency and control (Anderson, 2005; Durfee, 2011; Migliaccio, 2001). For example, in portraying a victimized persona these men "claim that one is not a real man. While a man has agency and control […] a victim is a rather passive, indeed helpless, recipient of injury or injustice" (Durfee, 2011, p. 320). A rhetoric of victimization, that inherently contrasts common characteristics of masculinity, such as strength, demonstrates the existence of a *convergence of opposites*, in which the conflict of this dichotomy is minimised. The suppression of opposing social frames, has the potential to reduce society's ability to adequately name and analyse the existence of power and privilege (for a further discussion, see section 5.4.1) (Taylor et al., 2016). For example, in adopting a language of victimization, the power ascribed to masculinity can become obscured and imperceptible behind a veil of rhetoric that demands a societal response to rectify notions of imposed harm.

Based on past research that has problematized masculinity in relation to entitled access to privileged resources of power and control, I conducted this research to examine the lived experiences of men who belong to FRGs within Canada. It is imperative to gain a greater understanding of the rise in anxious masculinity[3] which is resulting in collective anti-feminist movements, such as FRGs. An absence of such considerations would allow the perpetuation of risk to continue to be imposed upon women, children, and men themselves as the role conflict within masculinity facilitates a degradation in mental health, often leading to suicidal ideation and, in some instances, death by suicide. I engaged in a qualitative examination of individual and collective experiences[4] of men within these groups through the use of semi-structured interviews to allow the voices and perspectives of these men to emerge. The guiding research

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[3] Men are feeling anxious and uncertain as a result of a conflict between their socialized understanding of masculinity (e.g., an entitlement to power and control), and that of current socio-cultural norms that require an abdication of former masculine roles, norms, and performative scripts. As a result, a role conflict is present that can leave men with a sense of unease and anxiety, that is often either turned inwards towards the self, or outwards in a form of backlash (for further discussion, see section 4.3.1)

[4] The shared system of values and beliefs of a group used to make meaning of social phenomena and to further frame a common and shared response (Kende et al., 2022).

question was: *why do men join FRGs, and what do these men perceive that they gain as a result of belonging to such a group?* I further broke down my guiding research question into four specific research questions to unearth the experiences of these men:

1. What role do FRGs groups play in shaping these men's perceptions and understandings of, and experiences with gender and gender relations?

2. What are these men's experiences with and perceptions of masculinity/manhood, and how do they perceive their roles and rights, both socially and institutionally, in relation to women?

3. What are their perceptions of their roles in familial, relational/interpersonal, social and economic spheres, and what are these men's experiences within these spheres during different phases of their lives (e.g., pre/post separation/divorce)?

4. What are these men's experiences with and perception of their oppression?

5. How does the fathers' rights discourse of victimization of men/fathers relate to masculinity?

Through the following chapters, I unpack the existing literature and my research process, and make meaning of the findings related to the research questions outlined above. Chapter 2 examines the pre-existing scholarly literature on gender, masculinity, FRGs, and how these are interconnected. I present a review of past literature in order to contextualize my research. I begin by analysing masculinity as a performative action grounded in the ascendancy of an ideology of privilege and control. Chapter 2 demonstrates how past literature has made meaning of men's reactions to the perception of social encroachment upon their monopolized claim to power and control. Specifically, this discussion is situated within an exploration of the roles and functions of FRGs in relation to men, masculinity, and power(lessness). Finally, this chapter concludes with a theoretical analysis of how systems of power and control intersect with masculinity and compensatory acts by men in an effort to regain social and relational control.

In Chapter 3, I outline the methodological considerations and processes involved in conducting my qualitative research on masculinity. I discuss the semi-structured interview process used in my research, as well as the coding, analysis, and meaning-making processes. I elaborate on how a qualitative methodological approach,

specifically the use of grounded theory and a thematic analysis, allowed me to examine the critical concepts of masculinity, gender, power, and control.

Chapters 4 and 5 present the major findings from my research. Chapter 4 focuses on the theme of masculine disempowerment. The chapter begins with an analysis of the traditional systems that support and advance men's sense of entitlement to power, such as the patriarchy. From there, Chapter 4 illustrates the perceived barriers and impositions that these men identify as hindering their masculine identity and creating a sense of relative powerlessness. As the participants of this research are drawn from FRGs, their experiences of disempowerment often centre upon custodial rights and family court. Subsequently, the focus of this chapter turns to those in which these participants believe are fostering their disenfranchisement, that of women, feminist movements and larger social structures. This chapter will conclude with an analysis of the risk of the masculine role to individual men, specifically that of suicide.

Similar to Chapter 4, Chapter 5 unpacks these men's experiences and perceptions of disempowerment. However, in contrast to Chapter 4, this chapter concentrates on these men's experiences with, and attempts to, regain and reassert their power. A central theme of this chapter is the role of FRGs in perpetuating a social discourse that emboldens men and socializes them to accept the discourse of masculine victimization. FRGs are analyzed as a peer support group that has the ability to disseminate a monolithic narrative of imparted wrongdoing upon the masculine role in relation to the rhetoric of victimization. Finally, this chapter concludes with an analysis of the use of violence, specifically acts of DV perpetrated against ex-dyadic partners.

Chapter 6 concludes this work with an in-depth discussion and analysis of modern forms of masculinity as a social presentation that is not predicated upon power and control. Further, this chapter illustrates and makes meaning of the mechanisms through which FRGs empower men in both positive and problematic ways, with an emphasis on the use of the language both within these groups and as adopted by individual men.

Chapter 2.   Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

Gendered performances, such as hegemonic masculinity, which is the ascendancy of one group of men (i.e., a specific masculine social performance) over all others, act to maintain authority in private and public spheres. However, the imposition of authority through hegemony can only be accomplished through diffuse and often imperceivable means, such as through the dissemination of a dominant social performance within media or structural systems meant to impede all other performances and can not be accomplished through force or coercion (Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). While hegemony does not inherently signify the ascendency of a social performance through the use of force, it further does not preclude the use of force. These two actions tend to co-occur, in which the dissemination of dominant ideologies serve to legitimize the status and authority of a social performance while acts of force and violence bolster these performances from socio-cultural challenges (Connell, 1987). Thus, hegemonic masculinity is fostered through men's socially situated domination, which is reinforced through the persistent enactment of aggression and violence (e.g., DV) (Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmitt, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2018, 2019). These enactments of gender normalize the domination of men and the subjugation of all other genders (e.g., women) and gender performances (e.g., non-hegemonic men).

This chapter begins with an analysis of gender performance, specifically the enactment of masculinity and ascendancy of a dominant masculine ideology. From there, this chapter examines men's responses to perceived encroachments on their monopoly over power and control, such as reactionary involvement in radical men's groups and FRGs. Finally, this chapter provides a theoretical framework for understanding systems of power, control, and violence, as well as unpacks gaps in relevant past and present scholarship.

2.2. Men Doing Gender

Individuals seek to maintain a presentation of self in which they exemplify the norms, values, and behaviours of their socially situated role (e.g., gender) (Goffman,

1959). The role presented by an individual allows their social audience to make judgements related to their adherence to social norms, as well as apply stereotypes of behaviour to predict future actions. However, when an individual assumes a social role, a set of ascribed normative rules and regulations socialize and imbue an individual with an understanding of societies expectations for an acceptable presentation (i.e., 'doing' gender, gender performativity)[5] (Butler, 1999; Goffman, 1959; 1963; Messerschmidt, 2018). As such, we might expect men to seek to demonstrate and affirm their masculine role within patriarchal social structures by way of embodying and displaying a normalized gendered performance, such as adhering to masculine standards of speech, clothing, and social behaviour (Messerschmidt, 2018; Kimmel, 2008; Schwalbe, 2014). If a social actor deviates from these norms, their social value may be reduced, tainted, and stigmatized (Goffman, 1959, 1963).

A social actor seeks to uphold an idealized and normative performance that instils them with the prototypical characteristics of the role in which they are ascribed. Thus, social roles are not fixed, stable, or natural identities of an individual actor. Instead, they are socially upheld cultural ideologies of acceptable and normative performance at any given moment (Goffman, 1959; Messerschmidt, 2018). For example, ascribed social roles, such as one's gender (e.g., man/woman, gender fluid or nonconforming, masculine/feminine) instils an individual with an understanding of their social identity and the ways in which they are expected to perform. As such, individuals do not possess fixed gender identities; instead, they produce and uphold gender by engaging in socially normative and ascribed interactions (Butler, 2010; Connell, 2020; Messerschmidt, 2018; Schippers, 2007; Schwalbe, 2014). While the understandings of gender and social performativity used by these authors form the basis for my analysis, the work of Butler (1999, 2004) must be acknowledged for developing a key and foundational understanding how gender is performed.

As an ascribed social role, the fluid nature of gender counters the pervasive social narrative of gender essentialism which assumes the differences between men and women are genetic. Such essentialism and the social conception of biologically- and

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[5] Goffman's (1959) conception of performativity is parallel to Butler (2010) and West and Zimmerman's (1987) conception of doing gender in a performative nature in that they both express that roles are a social accomplishment enacted through "routine," "methodical," "perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p.126).

physiologically-based gender has promoted and legitimized male privilege, dominance, power, and control over women, non-hegemonic masculinities[6], and other genders (Connell, 1987, 2005; Schwalbe, 2014); it also upheld, and often continues to uphold, the ideology of a masculine hegemony, which is men's socially legitimized claim to power and privilege through the ascendancy and normalization of one group's exclusive domination of cultural and social structures (Connell, 1987, 2005; Gramsci, 1992). While there exists a plurality of gender identities and performances, including a wide range of masculine identities, within any one culture or society, it is the hegemonic masculine presentation that is socially idealized as the prototypical[7] performance. It is this performance by which the legitimacy of all other gender performances, both masculinities and femininities, are often evaluated. This idealized gender performance is an essentialized social standard to which all men utilize in order to gauge the social proficiency of their gender expression (Howson, 2012). However, the hegemonic ascendancy of a masculine performance does not denote the annihilation of all others. Instead hegemonic masculinity subordinates other social performances, establishing the framework for ongoing forms of daily social contests for the power to define gender role, performances, and patterns (Connell, 1987).

The social construction of gender is predicated upon social interactions and situational contexts. For example, the masculine gender role is constantly constructed, contested, and altered through social discursive and institutional practices. As such, this role is inherently a structure and product of relations of power (Messerschmidt, 2014; Schippers, 2007). Gender is a flexible pattern of social performances predicated upon preconceived notions of normative behaviours that further influence and alter future gender performances.

Specific gender performances are regarded as situationally, culturally, and institutionally prevailing normative practices that are socially interpreted as a genuine or legitimized enactment of masculinity[8] (Demetriou, 2001; Kimmel, 1996). However, other

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[6] Marginalized and subordinated masculine gender performances (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2018).

[7] Attributes that represent essentialized and fundamental normative traits of a group (Van Kleef et al., 2007).

[8] Such as the embodiment of patriarchal forms of violence, or that of a performance that demonstrates an ability to exert power and control.

performances are labelled as inferior enactments[9] that become stigmatized and deviant performances which can threaten a social actor's inclusion as a full member of that gender category[10] (Demetriou, 2001; Pascoe, 2007). Consequently, individual actors both consciously and unconsciously seek to construct, regulate, and participate in their gender performance through a process of ongoing censorship; simultaneously, they also monitor the gender embodiment of others (Kessler et al., 1985; Messerschmidt, 2014). For example, an individual's membership within a gender category is dependent upon an actor's ability to present a socially acceptable performance, which is subject to continued social evaluation. In addition to being socially and culturally situated, the evaluation of gendered performances intersect with other identities like race, class, and ethnicity, among others[11]. In seeking to uphold a socially condoned gendered performance, men often embody hegemonic masculinity to gain access to resources[12] that are socially withheld from a majority of society, specifically women and other forms of masculinity (Messerschmidt, 2018; Fontana, 1993; Gramsci, 1992; Schwalbe, 2014).

If an individual presents a culturally deviant gendered performance[13], their embodiment and enactment can be regarded as unsatisfactory, which risks social stigmatization, and, in some instances, retaliatory acts such as violence (Goffman, 1963; Messerschmidt, 2018; Schwalbe, 2014). Thus, social audiences act as a form of "gender police" who evaluate and scrutinize gender performances; they are prepared to enact sanctions when an individual crosses the established socially ascribed gender boundary (Kimmel, 2008, p. 47). For example, men who seek to present a normative masculine performance must demonstrate to an audience a social performance that adheres to social expectations of masculinity and hegemony. Every gender performance, even the

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[9] Such as those that occur at the intersection of race, socio-economic class, and sexual orientation to name but a few (Pascoe, 2007).

[10] For example, irrational and non-violent performances that do not demonstrate an ability to exert and resist power and control.

[11] The framing of this work centresm on performativity and, as such, an understanding of intersectional identities, specifically through the work of Black feminist scholars, must be acknowledged. For further readings please see Crenshaw (1991) and bell hooks (2000).

[12] Resources are social actions and performances that are infused with social legitimacy to enact power, control and domination.

[13] Social performances that diverge from a prototypical and normative representation of a role, such as those that do not fully embody hegemonic masculine traits, are labeled as deviant and inferior (Messerschmidt, 2018).

most benign social acts, carries the risk of being labelled by an audience as an illegitimate expression (Kimmel, 2008; Morris & Ratajczak, 2019).

Social culpability is vital for individual actors to be recognized as capable social agents and gain access to privileged resources of a gender category, such as the power and control afforded to conforming men within a patriarchal society, and in contrast a loss of such power to non-conforming actors (Messerschmidt, 2018; Schwalbe, 2014). The pressure to conform to gender roles and enact normative gendered performances is influenced by external social structures (Schwalbe, 2014). For example, in order to garner the privileges of masculinity, such as the ability to exert power, control, and dominance over others in a manner considered socially acceptable, men have to demonstrate that they uphold and support the hegemonic masculine cultural ideologies through their everyday performances (e.g., manner of speech and dress) (Schwalbe, 2014). However, if men fail to uphold the hegemonic masculine gender role, their social position could be challenged by audience members due to gender non-conformity (Demetriou, 2001; Schwalbe, 2014).

Social norms and expectations regarding 'appropriate' and legitimized social performances of masculinity are created and perpetuated by dominant social discourses (e.g., media). However, hegemonic masculinities that men are socialized to uphold and perform often fail to resemble the lives of any non-fictional men (e.g., the archetype of strong men in movies). The normative conception of a hegemonic masculinity is based on a fantasized man who is an idealized and prototypical image, which is a social constructed standard that most men can only partially perform or uphold. A fictional social discourse of an ideal hegemonic masculinity is propagated through forms of mass media (i.e., movies, tv shows, books) which creates an idealized image of the masculine gender that actual men, and even those who portray these fictional characters (e.g., Stallone, Schwarzenegger), can rarely embody (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Every man will eventually fail to uphold the normative and prototypical conceptions of hegemonic masculinity[14]. This failure to achieve a normative ideal of

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[14] Feminist scholars (for example, see Beechey, 1979; Becker, 1999; bell hooks, 2000) have demonstrated how patriarchy is a detrimental force imposed upon all genders and identities. A language of patriarchy offers a means through which women's oppression and subordination within society can be understood. Scholars such as bell hooks (2000) refer to patriarchy as forms

one's socially ascribed role often generates a sense of inferiority, unworthiness, deviance, and, ultimately, a feeling of being unmanly (Kimmel, 2008). If followed and enacted, the hegemonic masculine ideal is a cultural script that promises access and entitlement to power, privilege, and control. Yet, when men fail to embody this fictionalized masculine norm, they may seek to reify their gender performance through compensatory acts to demonstrate the proximal proficiency of their enacted masculine performance through the domination of others (Kimmel, 2010).

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of institutionalized sexism, while others use a language of domination to make sense of how men hold power over and oppress women, other men (Millet, 1969), and all other genders. As such, patriarchy cannot be understood as a monolithic ideology, and it is a robust and expansive social construct. For example, Walby (1990) maintains that patriarchy is not a constant and, instead, changes form both over time and differing greatly within social and familial contexts. As a system of social stratification, patriarchy upholds a variety of mechanisms and practices of social control that privilege and (re)affirm the power of men. This inherently intersects with other systems of social stratification and oppression that reinforce the privilege of the dominant group, such as race and class (bell hooks, 2000; Dragiewicz, 2008). The utilization of a multitude of representations of patriarchy allows scholars to analyze more than social manifestations of masculine power, and, importantly, expand the focus to individual and group-based experiences (Beechey, 1979; Millet, 1969). For example, bell hooks (2000) emphasized women's lived experiences of oppression, exploitation, and victimization as a result of the institutionalization of patriarchy. While focus of early feminist literature stressed the detrimental restraints imposed upon women as a result of patriarchal social systems, there remained an active discourse emphasizing the inherent nature of patriarchy to impose harm upon all gender roles and identities, including those that have historically been the beneficiaries of patriarchy. Men, too, are subjected by patriarchal systems. Men are harmed when they are taught to repress non-hegemonic gender performances, such as displays of vulnerability, intimacy, and connection, as well as when they are required to continually guard themselves against attacks from other men if their masculine presentation faulters (Becker, 1999; bell hooks, 2000). A language of "crisis in masculinity" was adopted to demonstrate an image of a "powerfully vulnerable male body" in which emotional repression had become the norm for masculinity, imbuing harm through the stifling of men's ability to freely construct their own individual social performance (Robinson, 2000, p. 131). Men cannot be oppressed by patriarchy, as it is a system that inherently privileges them. Yet, men can experience a lessening of their power, status, and privilege as a result of adherence to patriarchal values. Conformity to patriarchy comes with a cost in which the ideals of masculinity are only offered through adoption of specific beliefs, such as the repression of vulnerability and emotion, along with garnering self-worth from one's performance (Becker, 1999). An absence of an ability to demonstrate emotional vulnerability perpetuates a need to acquire and uphold performances that demonstrate strength and control when presented with challenges. Men are socialized within patriarchal frames to normalized ideals of masculine anger, and a use of violence. Scholars such as bell hooks (2000) reflect upon this imposition as inherently harmful to women, but also harmful to men as they are made to uphold a sense of superiority, enacted through the exploitation, oppression and use of violence upon women. While the participants in this research emphasize the harms imposed upon men as a result of patriarchal expectations, this is not a novel observation and instead is a predominant facet of feminist literature and theory.

2.3. Fathers' Rights Groups

As women and other historically excluded groups began, and continue, to assert claims to realms in which men previously held a monopoly (e.g., public sphere), some men have desperately clung to the patriarchal social order. For example, Dragiewicz (2008) conceptualized the growing prevalence of men's rights social movements and organizations, such as FRGs, as an evident demonstration of men attempting to retain aspects of patriarchy. To some men, gender equality can be seen as an unjust process that challenges men's privileged positions, which is compounded by white men's experiences with advancements made toward racial equality (Grieg & Holloway, 2012; Kimmel, 2013). Through the perception of *social feminization*[15], some men believe that the once lauded social value of traditional masculine characteristics (e.g., physical strength, ability to exert control over one's environment), have been undermined and replaced by a feminized and bureaucratized social role that emphasizes being controlled rather than enacting control (Messner, 1997). As such, men who adhere to hegemonic ideals perceived a threat to the hegemonic masculine role through a social upheaval of their once ordained status and privilege. This fostered the co-occurrence of feminist and, subsequently, men's liberation movements predicated upon the perceived ideology that both men and women were equally oppressed by gender (Kimmel, 2013).

Stemming from men's rights groups/advocacy and the men's liberation movements[16] of the 1970s and 1980s, FRGs are a response to feminist movements. In the men's movement, it was believed that women had become fully empowered and equal; this allegedly resulted in stripping men of the privilege and power to which they felt entitled and making men the true victims of society and gendered expectations (Andronico, 2008; Kimmel, 2013; Messner, 1998). Comprised primarily of straight, white, middle-class men who have become overtly vocal about their perceived gendered victimization, these groups seek to re-empower men and fight against men's perceived gender oppression (Durfee, 2011; Lin, 2017). Flood (2010, 2012) illustrates that FRGs

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[15] For example, feminization refers to gender balancing symbolized positionally through a balanced representation of women and men within institutions and their location within decision making roles, and that of norms and social policies and their impact upon women and men (Griffiths, 2006).

[16] In response to the proliferation of feminist ideas and movements in the 1970's, men began to engage with feminist ideologies, adopting a rhetoric that overtly acknowledged the prevalence of sexism against women and framing this as equally harming men (Messner, 1998).

are a backlash against the alleged encroachment of women into traditionally masculine spheres (e.g., social, economic) and, through feminist movements, the patriarchal social order. These groups serve as a platform for men to attempt to re-establish patriarchal power and authority over women, while regaining the rights to which they assume they are entitled (Durfee, 2011; Dragiewicz, 2008; Flood, 2010, 2012; Kimmel, 1997).

FRGs are framed within the social discourse as advocacy and support groups for men who have, for example, been victims of DV and/or lost paternal rights. Similar to other men's rights groups, FRGs claim that men are the victims of systemic discrimination in which the social institutions are biased towards women and mothers (Dragiewicz, 2008; Flood, 2012). However, in contrast to men's rights groups, FRGs are an organised backlash to feminist movements. FRGs actively seek to undermine feminist-based movements by denying women's experiences with DV (e.g., false allegations), lobbying for joint custody, the termination of child support, and portraying women as primary perpetrators of DV (Dragiewicz, 2008; Flood, 2010, 2012). Thus, the father's rights movement proliferates the degradation of women's rights through the preservation of the patriarchal family and social structure while diminishing the social and physical harm of male perpetrated DV (Dragiewicz, 2008).

Through the *patriarchal peer support* offered by these groups, which is the "multidimensional attachments men form to male peers,"[17] men are constantly socialized to inequitable gendered language that creates an ideological discourse of masculine social and physical dominance over women, non-conforming men, and other genders (DeKeseredy et al., 2006, p. 231 as cited in Dragiewicz, 2008). For example, patriarchal peer support generates a social discourse of gender-based strain resulting from the conflicting expectations of patriarchal social values (e.g., ubiquitous and un-challenged masculine power and control); these realities of individual and social interactions are predicated on constantly negotiated and re-negotiated aspects of social and cultural power and capital (Bourdieu, 2002; Dragiewicz, 2008).

Within groups that foster forms of patriarchal peer support, men are "regularly exposed to messages from other men suggesting that a real man is not under the

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[17] Interpersonal attachments formed between men, predicated upon ideologies of masculine domination over women, provides and disseminates "informational" and "esteem" support that influences and legitimizes expressions of gendered dominance (DeKeseredy, 1990, p. 130).

control of a woman; a real man…does not accept attacks on his masculine authority" (Schwartz & Dekeseredy, 1997, p. 48). Within specific group dynamics, the actual or perceived ascendancy of women is construed as a challenge to the cultural and social hegemonic authority of masculinity, such as FRGs which uphold a monolithic ideology of masculine power and control. The proliferation of a singular *dominant social narrative*[18] within in-groups[19] (i.e., FRGs) can perpetuate the normalization and internalization of anti-feminist beliefs and forms of backlash into an individual's social identity through, for example, group-based social rewards and sanctions (Dragiewicz, 2008; Faludi, 1991; Kerr, 1995).

Patriarchal peer support has further been conceptualized as the proliferation of an "ol' boys network [or club]" that perpetuates in the dominate position of men through the subjugation of women (Websdale, 1998, p. 102). Patriarchal peer support often generates and reinforces anti-feminist rhetoric and beliefs within FRGs that consistently contradicts intra-group dominant social narratives of gender equitability and women's rights. Within FRGs, men ultimately learn to replace a vulnerable masculinity, predicated upon victimization, with an aggrieved sense of entitlement to a loss of power and control (Dragiewicz, 2008; Durfee, 2011; Lin, 2017). This sense of an aggrieved entitlement within FRGs, constructed and maintained through patriarchal peer support, acts as a coping mechanism whereby traditional ideologies of gender-based power and control are reified. These groups act as a form of an "echo chamber" in which group polarization, or the adoption of extreme ideologies, is facilitated through the inherent insular homogenous characteristics and perspectives of the group (Kitchens et al., 2020, p. 1621; Sunstein, 2002).

2.4. Power, Control and Violence

As a formative structure that predicates individual and institutional interactions, social power is the ability to control, manipulate, and dominate the actions of others

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[18] A dominant social narrative is an account, or ideological understanding of a social phenomena or characteristics belonging to an out-group that members of an in-group consider normative, desirable and often compulsory (Goddard et al., 2000; Shenhav, 2015).

[19] In-groups are a subjective social construction predicated upon a discourse in which members use the term 'we' to define themselves in relation to a subsequent out-group differentiated upon a set of ascribed characteristics. Group affiliation is a dynamic process dependent upon the primed social identity within any given context (Allport, 1979; Brown & Zegefka, 2005).

through the application or removal of social resources while simultaneously rebuking the control of others (Keltner et al., 2008; Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Russell, 1971; Van Kleef et al., 2011). Rather than a constant enactment of a specific dominating social protocol or narrative, such as the espousal of misogynistic language, power is an amending social force; such power is structured by the systemically enshrined social relations and/or forms of capital[20] granted to each individual actor dependent upon their intersecting positions of social privilege or marginalization. Within inter-group interactions, individuals with socially lauded and privileged forms of capital vie to occupy the dominant position by engaging in a social performance that affirms their gender-based claim to forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1996). As such, power can be understood as the ability to exert socially legitimized dominance and control predicated upon their groups appropriated capital.

While not fundamentally based on violence, power, control, and the ascendancy of masculine cultural ideologies may be supported through the use of violence. This violence can reinforce the dominant cultural norms whereby justifying men's monopolization and socially accepted use of power and control (Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Kimmel, 2013). This can be demonstrated through the acceptance, enactment, and celebration of men's violence within sports, fiction (e.g., movies, books), and military culture (Dummit, 2007; Schwalbe, 2014). As such, violence has become associated with acts and performances of socially expected and accepted masculinity. Men ascribe to these masculine performances to demonstrate their adoption and enactment of an acceptable gender performance in order to be positively evaluated, and subsequently garner a privileged social status. Some men may actively seek social approval for their enactment of a prototypical masculinity. However, through the processes of socialization, the social influence to conform is a formidable force that minimizes challenges to a perceived homogeneous masculinity (Goffman, 1959; Kimmel, 2008).

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[20] Capital is resources (e.g., economic, cultural, social) in which groups and their agents accumulate to the detriment of others in order to monopolize the functioning of social constraints (Bourdieu, 1986).

2.5. Critical Masculinities & My Theoretical Framework

Connell's (1987, 2005) conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity provides a valuable framework to analyse how masculine roles interact with power, control, and, in many instances, violence (Colpitts, 2020). Connell (1987, 2005) derives hegemonic masculinity from Gramsci's (1992) conception of hegemony, which is the ascendancy of a social role above others that inherently seeks to enact and maintain dominance over women, nonconforming masculinities (e.g., complicit, subordinate, marginalized), and other genders (Messerschmidt, 2019). Hegemonic social performances become understood as prototypical social performances; that is, they become seen as an idealized and fundamental attribute or normative trait of a group to which all others seek to embody and espouse.

As previously noted, the cultural and social conception of hegemonic masculinity rarely corresponds to the majority of men's social performances (Connell, 1987; Messerschmidt, 2018, 2019; Schippers, 2007). Hegemony is not what actual men are, nor a social role that most can perform in its entirety. Rather, hegemony is a conception of a social role and performance that sustains the power, privilege, and control over a majority of men who are motivated to uphold and endorse the prototypical ideology of masculinity (e.g., power, control, dominance) (Connell, 1987, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Morris & Ratajczak, 2019). The perpetual enactment by a few men and endorsement of hegemonic masculine performances by many men legitimates the patriarchal social order that ensures men's social and economic dominance over women, because all men garner a benefit from the patriarchal dividend (Connell, 1987, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2018, 2019; Schippers, 2007).

While hegemonic masculinity propagates social and gendered dominance of alternative performances, men within FRGs are increasingly identifying as victims of women's dominance, power, control, and allegedly frequent perpetration of DV (Durfee, 2011). Thus, a competing conceptualization of masculinity exists in which men seek to embody a hegemonic idealization of power/control and thus should be less likely to socially identify as a victim of DV, yet through fathers' rights discourse men are actively disseminating a victimized narrative (Connell, 2020; Durfee, 2011; Schippers, 2007). Through a hegemonic masculine theoretical framework men's social and physical

victimization by women, can be understood as a discursive mechanism to shift the power/control through a social and political narrative to the victim.

2.6. Conclusion

Current examinations of masculinity as a performance and manifestation of men's enactment of dominance, power, and control over others are situated within the framework of feminist/pro-feminist scholarship (for example, see Connell, 1987, 2005; Connell & Messerschmitt, 2005 Kimmel, 2008, 2013; Messerschmitt, 2018; Messner, 1997; Schippers, 2007). These evaluations of masculinity provide insight into socially accepted and normalized performances of masculinity and social perceptions of men's acts of men's dominance. However, what is absent from current literature is an understanding of:

1. Men's individual perceptions of their ability to enact power and control.
2. How they would react to and perceive a loss of an entitled access to privileged resources.
3. What institutions or systems men perceive as perpetuating this entitlement.

The inferentialized[21] nature of the hegemonic masculine structures of power, privilege, and control obscure the fact that all men benefit from the patriarchal dividend[22], even though most men will not uphold the prototypical performance of a hegemonic masculine role (Schippers, 2007). However, most men who benefit from the privilege and authority afforded to them through the patriarchal dividend will never be violent towards women, will demonstrate respect for their wives and mothers, do their part of the housework, and are caring fathers (Connell, 2020; Messerschmidt, 2018). Thus, hegemonic masculinity inherently includes both: 1) the positive behaviours of masculinity, such as being a father and earning a wage; and 2) negative behaviours (e.g., acts of violence) and pro-patriarchal beliefs. Rather than a ubiquitous category, it is the individual social actor's active construction of, and relation to, the discursive image of hegemonic masculinity that is essential to interpreting men's engagement in detrimental

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[21] Inferential refers to social events, actions, and performances that have become naturalized and taken for granted representations of society (Hall, 1990).

[22] The advantage afforded to men as a result of the unequal distribution of social and economic resources (Connell, 2020; Schippers, 2007).

expressions of masculinity, such as violence (Connell, 2020; Messerschmidt, 2018); this can occur, for example, through institutional socialization (i.e., patriarchal entitlement to power, normalization of men's violence).

The socialization of boys and men to be assertive, determined, competitive, and domineering to achieve a promised status (i.e., the American dream), increases the likelihood that men will use violence when they inevitably are unable to obtain culturally ascribed privilege. Katz (2006b) explores violence as a compensatory act[23] of masculinity that men are socialized to believe is a prototypical hegemonic performance in which they are to ascribe. More generally, masculinity scholars illustrate that violence is a common response when masculinity is challenged, threatened, or undermined, and acts of violence can restore a sense of patriarchal power (for example, see Anderson, 1997; Goode, 1971; Kimmel, 2008; Rutherford, 1988). Further, DV researchers suggest that violence or escalation of on-going violence occurs when a man loses control (for example, see Johnson 1995, 2008; Pitman, 2017; Stark, 2007). However, violence and the aspiration for power and control are not indistinguishable concepts; humans are capable of exerting self-control when their performance fails to meet normative expectations which elicit a sense of shame and humiliation (Miedzian, 1988).

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[23] Men who either occupy a subordinate masculine position or perceive themselves to be subordinate within a social context can attempt to reify their masculine identity and their proximal membership within the ascendant role by overtly demonstrating characteristics enshrined within the hegemonic performance (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009).

Chapter 3.   Methodology

3.1. Introduction

Many examinations of masculinity, power/control, and violence have utilized quantitative methodology to establish a casual effect among these paradigms (for example, see Anderson, 1997, 2005, 2009, 2011, 2013; Jakobsen, 2014). For the purposes of this research, however, I engaged in qualitative methodology using semi-structured interviews. A qualitative approach and interview-based narratives allowed me to gain a much deeper understanding of men's interpretations of their lived experiences and beliefs (e.g., perceptions of entitlement, reactions to barriers to patriarchal power/control) (for example, see James-Hawkins et al., 2019; Sikweyiya et al., 2020). This chapter discusses the methodological considerations that underpinned the development and enactment of this research. My research was guided by the following questions:

1. What role do FRGs groups play in shaping men's perceptions and understandings of, and experiences with, gender and gender relations?

2. What are men's experiences with and perceptions of masculinity/manhood in relation to women, and how do they perceive their roles and rights, both socially and institutionally?

3. What are men's perceptions of their roles in familial, relational/interpersonal, social and economic spheres, and how do these perceptions change during different phases of their lives (e.g., pre/post separation/divorce)?

4. What are men's experiences with and perceptions of oppression, and how does the fathers' rights discourse of victimization shape these views?

This methodological framework allowed me to critically examine these men's experiences with masculinity and fatherhood through a critical gender lens grounded within feminist and critical masculinity theories.

3.2. Qualitative Methodology and Grounded Theory

To gain a better understanding of human behaviour, which is inherently based within social normative values and interactions, it is imperative to conduct research that acknowledges these challenges. Thus, a methodology that promotes the analysis of contextually rich data which can provide insight into the participants individual lived experiences is necessary (Palys & Atchison, 2014). The utilization of a qualitative methodology promotes the analysis of data in the absence of a reductionist approach that disregards the nuanced complexity through the use of numeric coding. Instead qualitative research preserves the voices and lived experiences of participants by retaining a contextual examination[24] (Josselson, 2013; Magnusson & Marecek, 2015; Mazzei & Jackson, 2012). While qualitative methodology facilitates in the analysis of contextually rich data, it can innately promote the application of theory inadequately upon data. As such, a grounded theory approach will be further utilized in which social theory will be uncovered from and through the process of data analysis (Glaser & Straus, 1999).

3.2.1. Sampling

This research invited participants from FRGs across Canada; these groups were either formal organizations, such as those with connections to community centres or churches, or informal organizations, such as Facebook community groups. Regardless of their structure, FRG are framed as support and advocacy groups for men/fathers who had either gone through a divorce/separation and subsequent custodial disputes or were currently engaging in this process. FRGs are generally seen as men centric environments in which men can learn to be a single father and engage in caretaking roles/responsibilities. Yet, as this research demonstrates, the framing of these groups *by* these groups does not always align with what is actually occurring (see section 5.3).

I utilized purposive criterion and snowball sampling, as recommended by Palys and Atchison (2014; see also Palys, 2008), to garner a participant size of 14 men who were part of FRGs within Canada. These groups provided me access to men who were

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[24] Interviews require the constant engagement and understanding of the nuanced and complex context of both the social phenomena and that of the ongoing dynamics of the interactions between the interviewer and the participant (Josselson, 2013).

likely to uphold pro-patriarchal masculine ideologies (Andronico, 2008; Connell, 1987; Dragiewicz, 2008; Kimmel, 2013; Lin, 2017; Messner, 1997; Pleck, 1976, 1982; Stacy & Thorne, 1985). Similar to James-Hawkins and colleagues' (2019) work, I aimed for between eight (8) and twelve (12) participants in order to gain a broader and more inclusive understanding of masculine gender performances. However, my sample size was also dictated by my ability to adequately and comprehensively answer my research questions and attain data saturation (as recommended by Palys & Atchison, 2014; see also Brod et al., 2009). The inclusion criteria for potential participants are men over the age of 18 who belong to an FRG either virtually or in-person within Canada.

The preliminary call for participants[25] was made to the gatekeeper(s)[26] of each group and directly through publicly accessible emails and direct messaging services on either fathers' rights websites or social media platforms (i.e., Facebook)[27]. Palys and Atchison (2014) emphasized the benefit of in-person interaction in order to build rapport between a researcher and participant. However, to prioritize health and safety in the COVID-19 context, all interviews were conducted remotely (i.e., phone call, Zoom, and Facebook voice calls). While some scholars (for example, see Tungohan & Catungal, 2022) were able to demonstrate the advantages of network administered interviews to build rapport within focus groups, such as the ability to share memes and GIFs within the chat box, this was not a resource that was utilized within these single participant interviews. However, the use of network administered interviews allowed me to connect with participants beyond the Vancouver region, thus permitting access to a broader set of perspectives (Novick, 2008).

The age of the participants within this research varied greatly, with the youngest at the time of the interview being 29 and the oldest being 56. All participants, except for two, identified as Caucasian of European descent. The other two identified as being of Asian descent. On average the educational experience of these men was a high school diploma. Three of these men had university degrees, while only one had a graduate

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[25] See Appendix A for the call for participants

[26] Members of groups who hold positions of power relative to others in the group who control access to participants (Palys & Atchison, 2014).

[27] These FRGs were found through the use of google and facebook community searches. The groups varied in location, with the in-personal formal groups being centred within B.C., and the informal groups having no definitive location.

degree. Only one of the participants identified as not having obtained their high school diploma. All of these participants were either currently separated from the mother of their children or were going through a separation at the time of the interview. A small minority of participants were in a secondary relationship, being that of a woman who is not the mother of their children.

3.2.2. Semi-Structured Interviews and Transcription

Interviews took place between September and December 2021. The utilization of an interview guide[28] within this research was employed as a general framework to ensure consistency across each interview by serving as a memory guide and thematic prompt. Each interview was semi-structured, non-restrictive, and consisted of open-ended conversations. Where possible during the interview, I facilitated space that enabled each participant to engage with and make sense of their own lived experiences (as recommended by Magnusson & Marecek, 2015; see also, Brod et al., 2009). For example, I took part in active listening, engaging with the participant in conversational interviewing practices, such as providing responses that repeat and probe in the absence of leading further answers. This approach is consistent with a feminist epistemological perspective in which emphasis was placed upon the lived experiences of each participant (for example, see Oakley 2013).

Each interview was audio recorded to ensure that the accuracy and validity of the participants voices, perspectives, and experiences were maintained. The audio recordings were promptly transcribed and fully anonymized[29] after each interview to prevent the possibility of imprecisions in my recollection and to ensure the preservation of a contextual perspective (as recommended by Poland, 2008; see also Brod et al., 2009; Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). The recordings were transcribed verbatim, retaining grammatical and syntax errors as well as forms of unintelligible speech. When required, deciphers of incomprehensible speech were enclosed within square brackets to ensure the original wording and meaning was kept intact (as recommended by Brod et al., 2009). Following the initial transcription, I engaged in a validity check in which the

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[28] See Appendix B for the interview guide

[29] While each participant was given the opportunity to select a pseudonym of their choosing, only one participant opted to do so and thus the remaining participants (13) identifying information was replaced with participant numbers.

transcripts were compared to the audio recordings to ensure accuracy. Upon transcription and validity check, the raw data were deleted to maintain confidentiality.

3.2.3. Coding and Analysis

After all interviews had been transcribed, I uploaded the transcripts into *NVivo 12* and began with open or initial coding in which I began to frame tentative initial themes. I engaged in a grounded theory approach during the coding and analysis phase of this research. This approach allowed for the emergence of themes and theory from these data through the implementation of a methodological rigour that is simultaneously systematic and flexible (as recommended by Charmaz 2006, 2014; Hansel & Glinka, 2014; Mills et al., 2017; Sparkes & Smith, 2014; Urquhart, 2013). As recommended by Charmaz (2006, 2014), within the open coding phase I allowed the data to influence possible theoretical ideologies. It is through the implementation of open coding in which data is refined, illustrating possible fundamental theoretical categories. To ensure the coding is consistently enmeshed with the data, I engaged with Charmaz's (2006) principle of not applying pre-existing categories by actively engaging with and questioning "what is the data a study of? What does the data suggest, pronounce? From whose point of view? [And] what theoretical category does the specific datum indicate?" (p. 47).

While Charmaz (2006, 2014) emphasizes the process of line-by-line coding within the open coding phase, it has been illustrated by Hensel and Glinka (2014) and Chenail (2012) that this method can unintentionally group content in the absence of provided context, causing researchers to arbitrarily over and/or under-size their units of analysis. Instead, as recommended by Hensel and Glinka (2014), I engaged in incident-to-incident coding in which "text analysis echoes to the greatest extent our natural perception of the narrative. This type of coding emphasizes the chronological order and reveals the sequence of events, along with the broader context in which they occur" (p. 35). As recommended by Charmaz (2006, 2014), I then engaged in focused coding in which I began to synthesize and refine the categorization of more salient and central themes to solidified links between various themes. As is illustrated by Charmaz (2006, 2014) and Benaquisto (2012), the coding process is non-linear and intuitive. I allowed the coding process to be informative and did not conclude the process of open or incident-to-incident coding at the onset of focused coding. In the process of conducting

focused coding, I utilized a thematic analysis (as recommended by Braun et al., 2019), in which I examined the data for recurring patterns of shared and common meanings that were consistently framed around a core conceptual idea. Through this process I engaged with the contextual meaning and implications within these data (as recommended by Bruan et al., 2019, p. 845; DeSantis & Ugarriza, 2000). This process emphasizes the analysis of the lived experiences of social groups and categories, while simultaneously engaging in a compatible interpretative framework co-exists with and reinforces a grounded theoretical approach.

3.2.4. Potential Barriers and Limitations

In conducting this research, to the best of my knowledge, I did not experience any barriers to gaining access to FRGs. After disseminating my initial call for participants, I promptly received positive responses to my research from the gatekeepers of these groups.

Berg (2001) emphasizes a dramaturgical qualitative interview process wherein it is the responsibility of the researcher to be attentive to both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication. However, due to interviews taking place via electronic communication, the absence of non-verbal forms of communication can result in a diminished contextual understanding and interpretation of data (for example, see Wharton, 2009). To account for a potential loss of non-verbal forms of communication, I was attentive to, and consistently made note of, each participant's implicit and explicit auditory cues (e.g., anger, sarcasm) (as recommended by Novick, 2008). Additionally, rapport building is a fundamental aspect for qualitative interviews. A loss or diminished sense of rapport has the capability of distorting data and limiting the quality and quantity of participant responses (Novick, 2008). The demonstrated loss of non-verbal forms of communication, such as maintained eye contact to demonstrate a researcher's engagement, and an absence of visual cues to preserve the conversation can hinder rapport (Sweet, 2002). To mitigate these potential limitations, I sought to cultivate rapport through informal conversation, both prior to and during the interview, and through empathetic and non-judgemental responses (Novick, 2008). Additionally, within qualitative research, the emphasis on face-to-face interviews and, subsequently, the

admonishment of network administered interviews[30] as "second best," inherently fails to take into consideration the nuanced complexities and modifications necessary to conducting participant-based research, such as the onerous cost in either time or money and that of a participant's potential reluctance or inability to take part in in-person interviews (Lawrence, 2022, p. 155). As such, the use of network administered interviews provided alternate modes of conducting research in which the common barriers of in-person interviews could be circumvented.

The emphasis within this study on men and fathers who belong to activist and rights-based groups and movements has the potential to misrepresent the experiences of men and fathers within larger gender, familial, and social contexts. A small minority of men join these groups, and an even smaller subset of those men chose to take part within this research. Consequently, the men within these groups might not be representative of most men and fathers. For example, a majority of men who took part in this research identified as white with Euro-centric familial origins. I was mindful of these potential limitations during the analysis phase of this research.

3.2.5. Ethical Considerations

This research involved human participants and required approval from the Research Ethics Board (REB) at Simon Fraser University. In consultation with my supervisor, a formal research ethics application was submitted to the REB. Once approval was granted, the call for participants was disseminated. With the call for participants, an information sheet was provided to all potential participants in which the details of the research project were illustrated, including but not limited to the topic and theme of the research, their individual role and rights as a participant (i.e., participant confidentiality, ability to withdraw their data at anytime prior to the final write-up), and how their data would be used (e.g., thesis write-up, conference presentations, future publications). Prior to beginning the interview process, all participants were given the information necessary to provide informed consent (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). Consent for this study was obtained orally, both prior to and at the onset of the audio recording.

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[30] Network administered interviews refers to conversations that take place over electronic networks such as zoom, telephone, Facebook.

In conducting this research, ethical considerations were not a singular phase, but instead were continually engaged in and upheld as an ongoing process (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). Further, the onus and obligation are imparted upon myself as the researcher to determine whether the potential benefits of this research are substantial enough to warrant conducting interviews with human participants, while further mitigating any potential harm to participants (as noted by Lawrence, 2022). However, with regard to this research, the potential risks were limited and minimal. All participants were part of outspoken and functioning public groups in which they actively sought to raise awareness to fatherhood, masculinity and the rights of fathers and children, and, as such, had experience sharing their perspectives and experiences. Additionally, a list of counsellors and support services was readily accessible to all participants during and after the interview.[31] No participants within this study chose to utilize these supports.

3.3. Epistemological Frame

3.3.1. Feminist Epistemology and Power Dynamics

I actively engaged in Oakley's (2013) non-hierarchical interviewing practices through which I aimed to reduce the divide between myself and the participants. This required me to be conscious of the power dynamics inherent in interviewer and interviewee relationships. For example, as a result of the commonly proliferated hierarchal nature of interviews, participants are often considered to be objects of data production. These imposed methodological barriers are inherently not conducive to the construction of rapport that is vital to engaged participation (Oakley, 2013). As such, I engaged in an interviewing methodology that supports a collaborative process which fosters the engagement of both interviewer and interviewee in a "joint enterprise" (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1976, p. 31, as cited in Gelsthorpe, 1990; Stanley & Wise, 1983). As recommended by Gelsthorpe (1990), this was accomplished through the use of open dialogue promoting collaborative interaction and conversation that could facilitate in the construction of rapport. For example, I engaged with the participants in open conversations about the aims of my research, while encouraging the input of their perspective and suggestions of future resources to shape and influence this research.

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[31] See Appendix C for a list of counsellors and services

3.3.2. Reflexivity in Qualitative Methodology

It is essential for researchers engaging in qualitative methodologies to ensure they consistently challenge not only the narrative and accounts of participants, but also their own practices. Inherent within a research design and application are the intrinsic and often subconscious predilections, predicated upon the unique social frame and experiences of the researcher which has the capacity to limit the creation of knowledge (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). As such, Bourdieu (1990) encouraged the use of a critically engaged frame in meaning-making. This perspective cultivates reflexivity to "buttress the epistemological security of sociology" in which researchers should be conscious of both their overt and subtle forms of power and privilege (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 36; see also, Bourdieu, 1990; Packer, 2011; Wacquant, 1989).

Reflexivity is interconnected with the researcher's conceptual interpretation of data as a performative process that is mutually constructed by both the holder of knowledge/interviewee and the receiver's/interviewer's lens which frames an understanding (Bourdieu, 1990; Pels, 2000). It is the role of researchers to translate practical lived experiences into theoretical paradigms in which practical conceptualizations of the social realm are artificially embedded within methodological instruments of data analysis. Underlying these instruments of analysis are the inherent and often implicit epistemological ideologies of a researcher that form objects of analysis (i.e., data) that are obfuscated as independent, objective observations (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Packer, 2011). Through engaging in a reflexive process, the researcher seeks to "objectify this objectifying practice in order to examine it, question it, and if necessary, change it," (Packer, 2011, p. 331). Thus, the process of critically engaging in reflexivity encourages researchers to reflect upon their position within the research topic and theory, which is integral to ensuring the inclusivity of the voices and lived experiences of interviewees (Alley et al., 2015; Gelsthorpe, 1990; Roberts, 2014). Reflexivity has the potential to threaten the essential tenets of research predicated upon ideologies of "value-free" data and that of an "interpersonal […] dispassionate inquiry" required to promote objectivity (Pels, 2000, p. 2). However, while awareness of one's positionality and the subsequent affects this has on the research process can elicit forms of subjectivity, it is actually the role of reflexivity to challenge this notion of fundamental objectivity (Gelsthorpe, 1990).

Reflexivity was a critical and on-going process for me within both the design and construction of this research, as well a consistent consideration when engaging in interviews, data analysis, and the final write-up. However, I acknowledge that engaging in qualitative research inherently precludes complete objectivity, as a researcher's presence will have some influence upon the data. Anderson (2008) illustrated that "in the social sciences, there is only interpretation, nothing speaks for itself," and that research is predicated upon the "premise that knowledge cannot be separated from the knower," (p. 184). Further, while there exists a multitude of methods to researchers engaging in reflexivity (for example see, Anderson, 2011; Hayes, 2012; Fine 1994) such as subjective, objective, and methodological reflexivity, I chose to adopt an introspective and epistemological reflexive frame. Introspective reflexivity involves researchers being self-conscious of their identity and beliefs, as well as how these affect the design and implementation of research (Anderson, 2011). This process, referred to as a "reflection-in-action," encourages researchers to incorporate a purposeful active reflection upon their thoughts and actions in contrast to a "post-hoc rationalization of events, (Anderson, 2011, p. 183; Schön, 1983). However, while this method emphasizes a reflective process-in-action, it inherently neglects a researcher's proclivity to interpret phenomena through a particular epistemological frame of reference. Knowledge cannot be objectively acquired; instead, it is constructed through and influenced by a researcher's perspective (Anderson, 2011). Thus, I further employed an epistemological reflexivity wherein I sought to be conscious and reflexive by "thinking about [my] own thinking," (Johnson & Cassell, 2001, p. 127 as cited in Anderson, 2011).

Within this research, it was pivotal for me to be conscious of and reflective of my alignment with and adoption of feminist ideologies and the ideologies of pro-feminist men (for example, see Messerschmidt, 2014, 2018, 2019). Specifically, I took part in an on-going reflection on how my pro-feminist alignment had the potential to influence my interaction with participants and understanding of these data. While I acknowledge that my epistemological understandings and perspectives influenced the construction of the conclusions (for example, see Chapter 6), I aimed to accurately represent the voices and lived experiences of the participants through structuring my findings section in a manner that the highlights the participants' narratives, perspectives, and experiences (i.e., when possible, letting the participants voices speak for themselves) (as recommended by Plays & Atchison, 2014). Further, I sought to accurately represent the perspectives and

experiences of participants to construct a balanced analysis. For example, Fabian (2012) illustrates the tendency within qualitative social scientific methodology to emphasize the voices and perspective of the researcher to the exclusion of the participant. As such, as a reflexive process, I emphasized a holistic representation of the original and unaltered voices of participants to counter and give equal representation to those perspectives (Fabian, 2012). This was achieved through verbatim transcription, in which all aspects of the conversations, including intonations and pauses, were included within the transcript to be coded.

I was continually conscious of my role as a cis-gender white man interviewing men, most of whom shared similar identities to mine. I was aware of the subsequent access to these groups and participants experiences I was afforded as a result of assumed shared masculine values and beliefs (e.g., patriarchal control). An assumption of "gender sameness" was likely to exist between myself and the participants in which these men presumed that I upheld similar hegemonic masculine ideologies (Pini & Pease, 2013, p. 8). This was demonstrated to me within a majority of the interviews in which these men spoke openly and candidly on their dislike, distrust and admonishment of feminism and feminist beliefs through the use of, for example, derogatory expletives. While it was imperative that I continually remained conscious of this imposed advantage as a male interviewer, it was crucial that I not utilize my observed positionality as a cis-gender white man to exploit information from participants (Pini & Pease, 2013). Thus, I adhered to the recommendation proposed by Cowburn (2007) and Schacht (1997) in which the role of pro-feminist masculine scholars interviewing men is not to challenge the perspective or information presented to them by participants. To mitigate forms of tacit compliance, I upheld Davidson's (2007) recommendation to continually challenge my preconceived notions of hegemonic masculinity in an attempt to limit unintentional forms of support or reactions of condemnation.

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter outlines the methodological considerations and methods that shaped the development and implementation of this research. These methodological principles were an essential aspect of this research and served to foster the ethical structure for the fieldwork and data analysis. In utilizing a feminist epistemological perspective, I was able to critically analyse positions of power and privilege, both as

inherent dynamics within qualitative interviews and as they pertain to analyzing concepts such as hegemonic masculinity. Through a grounded theory approach and in conjunction with a thematic analysis, I prioritized and engaged with the voices and experiences of the individual participants as a fundamental aspect of this methodological design. Further, through an on-going reflexive process, I was able to interpret this methodological frame and better understand the potential barriers and limitations of this research. The process of reflexivity allowed me to consider my own positionality within this research, and the inherent influences this can have upon the design, implementation, and meaning making processes.

Chapter 4.   Men and Masculinity

Well I live here with a woman and a child,
The situation makes me kind of nervous,
Yes, I rise up from her arms, she says "I guess you call this love,"
I call it service (Cohen, 1974).

4.1. Introduction

This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of some of the key findings of this research. The lived experiences of the participants are emphasized, with a specific focus on masculinity as a social performance. Overall, while masculinity was illustrated by the participants as providing numerous perceived benefits, it was underscored by a majority of them as a socialized concept of manhood in which they did not feel they could fully embody. Instead, these men contended that the social role of men and the idealized hegemonic[32] performance of manhood impaired their ability to fully take part within society. For example, as a result of normative masculine expectations that dictate men should be patriarchal providers, these men felt that they were hindered from being active caregivers to their children.

There are three sections in this chapter. In the first section (4.2), I analyze the patriarchal structure as it specifically relates to these participants while further detailing this relation to these men's perceived entitlement to power and control. The second section (4.3) examines the main challenges related to these men's masculine social performances, such as social expectation, social structures, institutions (e.g., family court) women, and feminism. The last section (4.4) offers a discussion of how disenfranchisement from a role one is socialized to perform (i.e., masculinity) has affected the participants, including the prevalence of suicide and suicidal ideation among men and fathers.

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[32] The cultural ascendancy of a role or category that propagates the socially legitimized dominance over other performances and groups (e.g., men over women) (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Gramsci, 1992).

4.2. Patriarchy and Personhood

A majority of men within this study expressed how men and women are still expected to uphold traditional gender roles. Specifically, these men detailed how these ideologies manifested within both their interactions with women and men in general and, more specifically, within their own heterosexual relationships. These men felt the pressure to be the breadwinner of the family, even though they stated this is not a role they wanted to be placed in and would instead prefer a more equitable partnership with their partners/spouses. While men have historically occupied the role of "financial provider" within a household, these men discussed a growing discontent with their responsibility to be the sole economic provider for their family (P09-27; see also, Kimmel, 2010; Schwalbe, 2014). For example, one participant stated:

> I had to go back to work, and I didn't ask [my wife] to be the provider, and it was like, her and her family just couldn't see it that way and again I was feeling pressured [to provide] (P09-28).

Participants found being the sole economic provider did not mean that they were in control of the family, such as being able to make important family decisions. That is, despite being the household provider in the family, the men in this study claimed that they had little choice in whether or not they would be the economic provider since this decision was made by their partners/spouses (Kimmel, 2010; Schwalbe, 2014). For these men, the patriarchal social system is working against their perceived right to power as the household provider.

Some participants raised concerns about how they were told they had to be the provider for the family on the one hand, but then they were criticized for not being sufficiently engaged fathers and caregivers on the other hand. They were dismayed to see the rhetoric of being lazy or "deadbeat dad[s]" applied to them when they felt they were doing their best to juggle both roles (Connell; 1987; Demetriou, 2001; Kimmel, 2010; Schwalbe, 2014). As one participant noted:

> I was working seasonally and for me it was like, okay I am working really hard nine months of the year and three months of the year I am laid off due to the weather and I would be on EI and trying to look for work […] my ex in-laws thought I was a dead beat piece of shit and it affected my ex-wife's perception of me. And [then] I was working out of town, so I was, again, living in hotel rooms, travelling all over western Canada. I was sending money home to my family, trying to do the right thing. But then we had our

second baby and I wasn't there to help at home so then I was getting attacked because, 'oh, you are sleeping in a hotel,' 'you are not here taking care of the baby,' 'you are not here helping me,' and it was like a lose-lose situation (P09-28).

These men believed that the role of economic provider was imposed on them as a means for their partner to control and limit their power. P10-29 illustrated this sentiment when he stated that "we are a wallet. We're an income. We have become an income since the 1970s." However, these men challenged the limitations of their assigned gender roles; specifically, they questioned the perception of unrealistic expectations their partners had of them and the presumption that they were not making an adequate effort to be an engaged father/caregiver. For example, as P10-15 explained, "I really think they should stop being like men are 'this, this and this,' like excuse me, like come on, give us a break, we are doing our best, we all have our faults."

The men in this study challenged the idea that they shared power with women. Many of the men did not believe they had power and that their partners held a majority of the power in their relationship, particularly when it came to decision-making and finances, regardless of how men generally occupy more powerful roles within society. The participants made statements such as "men are so powerless and hopeless," while further raising concerns about the growing empowerment of women over men.

4.2.1. Entitled to Power and Control

A majority of the men were aware that certain masculine traits had high social value, such as the ability to enact power and control over others. These men detailed how through their socialization into their gender role they learnt of men's socially prescribed ability to dominate others (Bourdieu, 1996; Kimmel, 2010; Schwalbe, 2014). Underlying this social presentation is the necessity to continually represent oneself as an "authority figure" in order to be seen as socially accepted (Bourdieu, 1996; Goffman, 1959). In this sense, masculinity and manhood were conceptualized by these men as:

> A set of attributes, behaviours and roles […] you must be strong, you must be courageous, independent, decisive, [demonstrate] leadership […] and [be] attracted to the opposite sex (P11-01).

> Men like to feel like they're in control, whether it's a fact, a relative factor, or reality or not. I think that's where a lot of controlling and abusive

personality traits and toxic traits come from and stem from is that level of feeling that need to be in control (RK).

P11-01 and RK's experiences are reinforced by Murnen and colleagues (2002) who found that acts of masculine dominance are exemplified through performances that seek to demonstrate strength and leadership, specifically as an imposition imparted upon others. The permeating ideology within this presented understanding of hegemonic masculine performances is a heteronormative frame in which gender and sexuality are essentialized and understood dichotomously (Connell, 1987, 2005; Rambukkana, 2015; Schwalbe, 2014). For example, this frame causes the filtering out and disempowering of what are seen to be illegitimate expressions and performances of masculinity (i.e., non-hegemonic men), which is done in an effort to uphold the power and privilege afforded to men who embody socially condoned forms of masculinity (Connell; 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Demetriou, 2001; Messerschmidt, 2018; Kimmel, 2010; Schwalbe, 2014).

4.2.2. Subordination and Oppression of Others

Retaining and centralizing power among men who fit the hegemonic norm requires the continual denigration of women, as well as subordinate and non-conforming masculinities (e.g., gay men, more feminine men), to ensure the ascendancy of a single gendered performance supported by those who passively sustain its socially situated power (i.e., complicit masculinity) (Connell; 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Demetriou, 2001; Messerschmidt, 2018; Kimmel, 2010; Schwalbe, 2014). For example, one participant illustrated this practice:

> My contempt charge was for calling [my ex-wife's lawyer] a homosexual in a court room. I told him straight out, you don't have kids […] you are attempting to try to limit the access to my children. Obviously, you have an issue with *people with children* [emphasis added]. Is it because you are gay? (P10-31).

Within this context, masculine performances require the continued demonstration of their rightful claim to, and monopolistic hold on, power and privilege through acts of domination (Bourdieu, 1996, 2002). These acts can be overt, such as the open denigration of one's sexual orientation, or through that of more subversive everyday rituals and practices that reinforces heterosexism as the default social normative standard for masculinity. The subversive practices, as demonstrated by P10-31's

comment, admonishes a homosexual identity while perpetuating a disciplinary regime in which the legitimacy and credibility of the lawyer's masculine identity is challenged. (Butler, 1993; Pascoe, 2007). For this distribution of power to remain unchallenged, it must not be viewed as arbitrary and/or lacking legitimacy. Instead, power must be hidden from public scrutiny (e.g., normalized), such as the association of dichotomous gendered experiences with one's biological sex or that of the enmeshment of sexuality with gender through a heterosexual normative standard (Pascoe, 2007). Nevertheless, at the very least, arbitrary gender characteristics are used to justify the distribution of power on gendered lines (Bourdieu, 1996, 2002). As such, the essentialization of gender characteristics as a natural phenomenon can be recognised as supporting and maintaining the domination of men over women while obscuring the social construction of power.

Women's social performances are constructed in contrast to, and dependent on, men's. P10-29 clarifies this through his belief that women require protection, which leads women to be "attracted to a powerful man." This essentialization of gender maintains the domination of the masculine gender performance and the socially enshrined capability of men to "do what you want" without fear of social condemnation or reprisal (P09-24). This sense of entitlement to dominate social and familial settings structured these men's understandings of masculinity, as well as women's roles and rights vis-à-vis men. This fosters inequitable gender relations and beliefs that gender groups are inherently different, which becomes a self-perpetuating and normalized frame.[33] These frames are socially ingrained and upheld as part of the gender relations and gender role embodiment (e.g., hegemonic masculine performances); in this way, men are socialized to uphold and endorse hegemonic masculinity in order to gain access to and retain capital (i.e., a self-fulfilling prophecy) (Bourdieu, 2001; Demetriou, 2001; Schwalbe, 2014). For instance, a man who believes that to access social resources and retain privilege he must continually dominate social settings will continue to support, normalize, and maintain the hegemonic norm, such as P11-02's statement that "[it is] your God-given right to be the head of the family" (see also Arnot, 1982; Bourdieu, 2001; Dummit, 2007; Hall, 1990; Kessler et al., 1985; Schippers, 2007).

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[33] Frames are social schematics that organize experiences which provides a structure to which individuals can draw from to make meaning of "otherwise meaningless (decontextualized) strips of daily occurrences" (Adams, 2006, p. 318; see also, Feagin, 2013).

4.2.3. Power, Control, and the Social Performance of Men

An entitlement to power and control can become an ingrained and fundamental characteristic of these men's social performances. P10-16 emphasized this when he stated that "controlling was part of" masculine performances. In contrast, if these men do not/cannot uphold this norm, it can denote a failure to embody appropriate masculinity.

> I was really managing people and being like, to my mom […] this is what you need to do. But just stepping in that way, had a really negative impact and put anxiety and pressure on people. Like [I was really] being direct and like control[ling]. And getting frustrated at them for not seeing it the way I did. And then having a bit of push back, why are you telling me to do this […] and then getting frustrated with them, you don't care what I think. Really having a… just an unstable connection… [it] was a lot of chaos (P10-16).

This sense of a failure can undermines these participants' patriarchal gendered capital and diminish the acceptance of future performances (Goffman, 1963). Challenges to one's authority can result in feelings of humiliation, frustration, and anger which can either be: 1) accepted, as demonstrated by P10-16 (see above quote); or 2) cause reactionary behaviour, such as violence, as a means to reinforce their sense of power (see Chapter 5 for the full discussion). While P10-16 made explicit reference to a sense of frustration, as a result of his inability to enact control and dominance over both social interactions, and that of other gender performances (e.g., women), it is imperative to acknowledge that traditionally men are often socialized to repress the development of communication skills that display emotions often interpreted as "feminine[34]," (McDermott et al., 2018, p. 341). As a result, many men, such as P10-16, could experience forms of frustration at an inability to adequately communicate their intentions and desires to others.

A majority of these men recognized the power bound to masculinity. Yet, they saw men's patriarchal authority and power as non-existent. Instead, what they emphasized was both their socialization to believe men are entitled to power and control, as well as their exposure to rhetoric and social discourse reinforcing their socially privileged gendered position. However, many did not see themselves in a privileged

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[34] Emotions equated with femininity are various and alter based upon the social and cultural context. However, traditionally, overt displays of emotions such as frustration, sadness, depression have been stigmatized in which men are taught to be "emotionally stoic," (McDermott et al., 2018, p. 341).

position and they claim they did not benefit from such power. Rather, they believe they experienced a greater propensity for subjugation and marginalization, in which they have become the "besieged minority," (Hochschild, 2016, p. 221).

> We are told that we are entitled, that everything is easier for men and yet, there is like an actual real-life experience that is completely opposite to that […] As a man you are always told how you have more chances, everything is based on the patriarchy that has been created for men to keep men in power… push women to the bottom. I have not experienced that at all… I feel like we are completely powerless. I would say it is more of a perceived sense of entitlement, because I have always heard how much better we have it as men, but I haven't experienced that (P09-24).

The discourse presented by these men centres on the shifting social fabric in which, as a result of steps toward equitability and egalitarianism, they felt men were no longer the dominant gender.

Within a social frame centred on the privilege of one group/category over others, power is understood as a resource within performances. For example, within a patriarchal social frame, power becomes naturalized and men are inherently constructed through, and subsequently uphold and reify, their everyday gender role performances (Foucault, 1990; Johnson, 2018). Although society privileges certain embodiments of masculinity (e.g., white, heterosexual, cisgender, middle-to-upper class), not all men have equitable access to such power/privilege (Bourdieu, 1996; Cronin, 1996; Gaventa, 2003; Johnson, 2018). Men who cannot or do not embody the hegemonic norm, in part or in full, are pressured to perform their gender in a way that as closely as possible resembles a hegemonic man. Those who fail to engage in this social presentation, and those who do not conform to hegemonic gender norms, are relegated to subordinate positions in which enactments of power and control are inaccessible (Connell, 1987). Thus, within a patriarchal social frame, not all men hold power over all women, nor do all men hold an equal social status; that is, there are varying degrees of power and privilege distributed among men. This was reaffirmed by the men in this study, along with other FRGs and pro-fathers' rights scholars (for example, see Dutton, 2007). However, while not all men can enact nor recognize powerful social performances in relation to hegemonic and patriarchal norms, all men's performances are inherently equated with power as an enshrined cultural trait of masculinity (Johnson, 2018; Pleck, 1976, 1982). In occupying a privileged position in a social hierarchy of domination (e.g., hegemonic

masculinity), men have an ability, whether they are able to identify it or not, to occupy powerful social positions in comparison to women.

4.3. Challenges to Masculinity

4.3.1. Masculine Performativity

Social and patriarchal notions of manhood within which men are socialized shape their understandings of appropriate masculine performances. Imparted by masculine role models (i.e., fathers, grandfathers) and socialized through media portrayals, hegemonic and patriarchal forms of masculinity were praised and upheld by the men in this study.

> That is what was taught to us by our fathers… you know it was to be cutthroat, be the biggest baddest person on the playground, things like that. It was guys beating the crap out of each other, getting into fights […] asserting dominance (P10-15).

These performances are centred around ideologies of strength (e.g., "the tough guy," P09-28), uncompromising principles (e.g., "hard-headed," P09-28), and the presentation of a persona that portrays unyielding power and control, both over other genders (e.g., women) and less powerful/nonconforming men (Connell, 1986; Messerschmidt, 2019). These men learned to individually vie for dominance within any given social context and avoid a presentation of self that is perceived as less powerful or powerlessness. This disapproval of a powerless/nonconforming embodiment of manhood were understood as presentations that demonstrated "emotional repression" through the continued endorsement of "aggression […] misogyny, homophobia, [and] racism" (P10-27). These learnt social performances are based on the condemnation of vulnerability and other "weak" traits among men. Specifically, the disapproval and suppression of other social and gendered performances, through prejudicial remarks, allows these men to position themselves and their embodiment of gender as superior to all others, based upon pre-existing and underlying ideologies of racialized (i.e., white), cisgender, heteronormative patriarchal frames (Demetriou, 2001; Feagin, 2013; Morris & Ratajczak, 2019; Schippers, 2007).

4.3.2. Modelling "Ideal" Masculinity

A majority of these men idealized patriarchal masculine performances and an ability to enact control within various social settings. For example, as P09-28 noted, "yeah, I think it is good to be tough." Yet, in contrast, they emphasized the growing social condemnation and stigmatization of men's overt displays of power, control, and domination. To illustrate, P10-15 expressed, "I think society has gotten too soft […] so it is harder for masculine men to act the way we were taught how we are." In this sense, the embodiment of socially condoned masculinity situates men's worth as the culmination of social performances that demonstrate their willingness and ability to be dominant and be assertive. The stigmatization of an individual's social identity can perpetuate feelings of uncertainty and ambiguity around their presentation of self. This perceived conflict between expectations of and reactions to men's expressions of power/domination was further expressed in P10-16's statement that:

> What I feel is just the confusion of what is expected, I feel like there is a pull in a couple of different directions and I think…you know that confusion of like…do you expect me to be kind of the traditional sense of a man…[or] that push over nice guy co-dependent. You know being confused between those two places, you know like what is expected of me, you know if I kind of stand up for myself and do what feels aggressive but is actually assertive, am I going to be attacked or rejected for it, (P10-16).

These men illustrated how social expectations of an acceptable masculine performance were multifaceted and often contradictory. They felt they no longer could be the "macho" man who previously held unquestioned social and patriarchal authority (P09-21). Further, these men expressed the presence of a stigmatizing gaze focused on men who deviated from men's socially normative hegemonic role (for example, see Demetriou, 2001; Goffman, 1963). Men are still perceived as "weak" for failing to take part in compensatory acts to reify traditional and overt embodiments of masculinity that demonstrate an individual's proximity to and membership within the hegemonic masculine gender category (P09-28). For instance, as P09-24 noted, "I am supposed to like sports…I am supposed to enjoy drinking…because I am a man. I'm not supposed to hug my friends."

4.3.3. Role Conflict

The confusion surrounding what constitutes a socially acceptable masculine performance, and subsequently what society expects of these men, perpetuates a social strain imparted as a result of a *role conflict.*[35]

> We kind of have to try to fit in with everyone's ideals and I feel like the ideals of manhood are very conflicting from traditional to now, what courts, feminists, the government expects from us, they are very different. So everything is about compromise, try not to take it personally, and still try to retain some shred of manhood as we are told that we are entitled, that everything is easier for men and yet, there is like an actual real life experience that is completely opposite to that, I feel like we are completely powerless (P09-24).

The expectations and norms associated with any given social performance are *inferentialized* as a naturalized facet of their social category (e.g., gender, race, class). Prominence is afforded to adequate enactments of masculinity, which is also to the detriment of all other non-hegemonic embodiments of manhood (Stryker & Macke, 1978). The complex nature of acceptable versus unacceptable ways of doing gender/masculinity can perpetuate a sense of frustration, anger, uncertainty, and confusion in understanding socially accepted and condoned conduct and demeanor (Merton, 1957; Stryker & Macke, 1978; Turner, 1990).

While uncertain gender role expectations were emphasized by these men, a few further alluded to the impact of social structures. Specifically, they situated the rapidly changing gender paradigms, such as shifts toward gender equality, as the sole basis for this role conflict. As P11-08 noted, "I think the challenges that men face were created by society. Society is constantly changing, is always expecting something else, [men] have to adapt." Thus, role conflict occurs when individuals concurrently inhabit multiple and conflicting structural positions[36] (Parsons, 1961). Structural frames are an imperative factor in the construction of social roles and, subsequently, an individual's understanding

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[35] Through the imposition of simultaneous conflicting expectations imparted upon a single social role, social frames predicating appropriate forms of interaction become unclear perpetuating a risk of spoiling one's social identity (Goffman, 1963; Stryker & Macke, 1978).

[36] A structural position denotes the role and performances to which an individual is socialized to uphold predicated upon the social structural paradigms (e.g., socio-economic status, gender, race, religion, age, culture) imbued upon them by larger institutional frames (Kunovich, 2004; Lukenbill & Doyle, 1989).

of appropriate and normalized social performances accessible to them (for example, see Feagin, 2013; Goffman, 1959). However, this understanding inherently perpetuates a top-down understanding of role acquisition that discredits the individual actor's ability to both influence the structural frame, and vice-versa, and to participate within social performances as a meaning-making agent (Stryker & Macke, 1978). Instead, the construction of masculine roles, and the subsequent socially infused expectations of normative performances, can be recognized as an ongoing negotiation between in-group performers and that of out-group audience members (Goffman, 1959; Turner, 1990). Further, social cues and symbols, such as acts of masculinity, are perceived differently by each individual actor; thus, the expectations of masculinity are the culmination of ongoing forms of interaction (Goffman, 1959; Turner, 1990). The expectations of masculine performativity is ultimately the objective of these ongoing verbal (e.g., language) and non-verbal (e.g., gestures) interactions and the recipients meaning-making processes, which either perpetuates or challenges these frames (Stryker, 1956; Stryker & Macke, 1978; Turner, 1990).

Masculinity, as a social construction, provides individual members the necessary social script to construct a salient[37] identity which fosters and maintains a privileged position. Thus, masculine role conflict requires grappling with a multitude of expectations placed on men's gender role (e.g., provider, active parent/caregiver) (Connell, 2020; Dummit, 2007; Goffman, 1959; Messerschmidt, 2018; Schippers, 2007; Stryker & Macke, 1978). The participants demonstrated this sense of uncertainty and conflicted understandings of gender, which challenged the cohesion and prominence of their social identity; further, such conflict challenged these men's access to the social resources to which they felt entitled, and much of this blame was placed on women.

4.3.4. Family Court

FRGs were under the pretenses of being support groups for men undergoing custody disputes. As such, all of the men who took part within this research were either currently going through or had recently gone through the family court system in Canada. An overall theme that emerged from this research is men's experiences with varying

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[37] A salient identity is a role imbedded within social networks to which individuals draw from to garner an understanding of appropriate forms of inter/intra group interaction (Stryker, 1968).

degrees of power(lessness) in their role as fathers. Most participants focused on the social and institutional structures that systematically limited their role as a caregiver and active parent. While these men blame women and feminist ideals for men's perceived social marginalization (for example, see section 4.3.3), they also blamed the family court system for limiting their parenting role.[38]

> I just think the courts are still biased against men. I think the family courts are incredibly biased and that its very rare for men to get custody of their children… regardless of why the relationship ended (09-28).

These men highlighted their belief that the family court system is unfair, and they feel it privileges the needs and desires of women/mothers over men/fathers. There was a persistent narrative that the family court system, and subsequently those who assisted in its functioning (e.g., lawyers, judges), maintained "sexist" beliefs and were "biased against men" (P10-29). As previously established, these men use gender essentialism to undermine women's strength and autonomy; gender essentialism was reframed by these men, and many FRGs, to suggest that women/mothers actually benefit from persistent and outdated social ideologies (e.g., that children belong in their mother's care) (Dummit; 2007; Kessler et al., 1985; Schippers, 2007; Schwalbe, 2014). In supporting this belief, FRGs use statistics that they believe showcase the preferential treatment of mothers in the family law process (e.g., mothers being granted full guardianship/sole custody of children within family court 86% of the time). However, what these groups and fathers fail to acknowledge is that these statistics are not representative of women's attempts to obtain sole custody; instead these statistics include both parents mutual decision for the mother to receive sole custody (Boyd, 1989, 1993; McKie et al., 1983). The persistent narrative upheld by most of these men is that patriarchy and gender role expectations harm men equally, if not more, than women. Bias against men and men's oppressive gender roles was a pivotal theme interconnected with seeking greater custodial control and access/guardianship. These men emphasized their goal of gaining equality in parenting through upholding their belief in a legal default of fifty-fifty custody/access or guardianship.

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[38] FRGs were created as support groups for men going through custody disputes. As such, all of the men who took part within this research were either currently going through or had recently gone through the family court system within Canada.

Canada has the 50/50 rule, that we are supposed to have the 50/50 rule automatically for the best interest of the children (P10-29).

In contrast to these men's beliefs, there is no guarantee of parental contact inscribed within the *Canadian Divorce Act* (Boyd, 2006). While FRGs advocate for shared parenting, what is absent from this rhetoric is an understanding that shared parental responsibilities typically do not exist within intact families. Thus, FRGs are ignoring the existence of prominent social norms that impart a majority of childcare responsibility upon mothers, and these groups are further promoting the persistence of women's burden of care while seeking to garner control over what maternal care looks like (Boyd, 2003; Boyd, 2004).

4.3.5. "Best Interest" of the Child(ren)

A majority of men claimed that they experienced the family court system as detrimental to their role as fathers. Specifically, these men used a narrative of "the best interest of the children" which they equated with a father's unrestricted access to their children, regardless of the mitigating circumstances such as ongoing criminal trials (P10-30). A heteronormative discourse was also echoed in these men's continued equal involvement within their children's lives through claims, such as "children who are raised without a father figure often have more difficulty dealing with life" (P10-29). FRGs uphold the traditional heteronormative family as a structure with the capability of remedying the social hardships they feel are imposed upon men and fathers, such as a removal of their familial patriarchal control (Boyd, 2004; Rambukkana, 2015). "All children have two parents, not one, not three, but two," (SJC, 1998 as cited in, Boyd, 2004, p. 53). This narrative not only detracts from the collective power and privilege men hold, it also disregards how men are awarded guardianship the majority of the time they seek it (Boyd, 2004; 2006). Further, this logic reinforces outdated arguments that single mothers cannot adequately raise children, especially boys (Boyd, 2004). This narrative has the ability to legitimize the perception of men's gendered disparity within the family court system, by shifting the focus of imposed harm from that of men and masculinity onto that of children. As children occupy roles with a pre-existing connotation of vulnerability, the connection of harm against fathers with that of their children has the potential to imbue these men's claims with legitimacy.

While the well-being of children and related concerns held by these men was evident within these conversations, their narratives recentred men as the ones harmed. For most of these men, the family court systems are "vindictive" and family court professionals and women/mothers just "wanted to hurt [men]" (P10-29). Their accounts continually focused on men and fathers' well-being. A discourse of parental rights based upon the welfare of children was consistently used by these men, even when it existed in conflict with children's rights and well-being.

> I even got told by a female judge, 'you don't have any rights, your child does, not you.' It's my right to be able to be a parent and a father and to father this child and the judge turned around and told me and says 'you don't have any rights' (P11-05).

FRGs narrative of equal parenting frames fathers as concerned parents attempting to uphold the best interest of the child. Within these groups, "the best interest of the child" has become synonymous with the idea of shared custody, or "50/50" parenting (P10-29). However, FRGs are reinterpreting a child's best interest in a way that actually privileges the best interest of the father over the interests of their children. These groups are aligning the rights of fathers with that of the best interest of the child[ren] (Boyd, 2006). Promoting universal shared custody disregards the potential existence of unequal parenting and violence within the home prior to separation. In practice judges have been inclined to promote the maintenance of a child's meaningful relationship with both parents.[39] While the *Divorce Act* upholds "contact with both parents [is] in the best interest of children," feminist groups were unsuccessful in campaigning for the inclusion of conditional requirements of "when it is safe and positive to do so," (Boyd, 2004, p. 70; see also, Boyd, 2006). As a result, the concerns of mothers/women for the safety of themselves and their children are frequently not adequately taken into consideration during custodial disputes. Instead, these men adopted rhetoric that reinforced their perception of parental disadvantage, such as parental alienation.[40]

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[39] Section 16(10) of the Divorce Act, RSC 1985 (2nd Supp), c 3, directs judges to 'give effect to the principle that a child of the marriage should have as much contact with each spouse as is consistent with the best interests of the child and, for that purpose, to take into consideration the willingness of the person for whom custody is sought to facilitate such contact'. (Boyd, 2006, p.27).

[40] The syndrome was first proposed in 1976 by divorce scholars Wallerstein and Kelly who conceptualized this phenomenon as a child's rejection of and refusal to interact with a parent as a result of the influence of a vindictive guardian (Meier, 2009).

4.3.6. Perceptions of Disadvantage

P11-02 defined parental alienation as when a "child has been […] brainwashed into hating, discarding, or minimizing the other parent." Parental alienation was presented as a corresponding concept to psychological forms of domestic violence. According to P11-02, this process is achieved through one parent's/a mother's alleged ability to present and control a prejudicial and one-sided narrative of the other parent/a father until the "child decides to reject you unjustifiably, where once there was a very strong relationship." Parental alienation was detailed by these men as a direct cause of their "emotional and mental stress" (P10-30), which FRGs framed as a form of abuse against fathers and, subsequently, their children. In contrast to this FRG narrative, feminist scholars have demonstrated that allegations of parental alienation are utilized by men to counter claims of domestic violence (Elrod, 2016). The use of parental alienation can evoke skepticism towards claims of domestic violence by redirecting attention from the aggressor of violence onto the alleged misconduct of the mother in which the legitimacy of a mother and child's allegations are challenged (Elrod, 2016; Neilson et al., 2019). For example, in family court proceedings "judges are more likely to focus on alienating behaviours than IPV when determining custody and access," (Sheehy & Boyd, 2020). The use of parental alienation is reflective of the existence of gender bias that favours men within the family court system. For example, parental alienation claims made by fathers are framed by FRGs as protecting a child's right to equal access to their parents; this is in contrast to mothers that express a desire for custodial access that are perceived as over-protective and adversely enmeshed with their child (Neilson, 2018).

Most of these men believed that the family court system is "ineffective, detrimental, and a for-profit service" that capitalizes on the "sorrow and grief" of men and fathers (P11-05). P10-29 explained, "It's very driven [by] money. They don't want to fix the issues. I feel they create conflict." These men highlighted their belief in "economisation" of social policy, including the judicial system, in which institutional practices are believed to be upheld to promote economic growth (Brown, 2015, p. 17; Mant, 2017). Of note, these men contend that conflicts were intentionally created within court proceedings, such as the alienation of fathers, which were assumed to be a tactic endorsed by lawyers and judges to prolong the litigation process and thereby increase profit. However, the efforts of FRGs in promoting of shared parenting or joint custody,

has been demonstrated by some feminist legal scholars as an attempt to reduce child support responsibilities (Boyd, 2006). For example, an FRG group in Calgary proposed that "child support guidelines be based on a sliding scale for time spent with the child," (Boyd, 2006, p. 39). Under this policy recommendation mothers would lose a substantial amount of financial support, while their expenditures remained consistent.

> It's called a silver bullet to keep you in family court as much and as long as possible. Often, those are initiated by the lawyer of the other parents because more time we spend in court, more money they make. That's how it goes (P10-29).

In particular, these men focused on the perception of economic harms experienced specifically by men/fathers in the family court process, as shown in P10-31's statement that:

> Most men have to earn their living, most men when they get home at the end of the day don't want to sit in front of the computer for ten hours and read about [parental] rights or read about how they can put a parenting order together, or read about access orders, or read about division of access.

Within this context, men are positioned as the patriarchal provider and suggest that they are burdened with economic responsibility. In contrast, inhabiting a role of caregiver and assumed to be free from the responsibilities of provider, it is presumed that women would have more time to better prepare and equip themselves for family court disputes thereby putting themselves at an advantage. Of note, however, this belief disregards that many mothers work and financially provide for their families while nevertheless assuming a significant amount of caretaking responsibilities pre- and post-separation. As a result of financial strain, such as an inability to afford a lawyer, and insufficient support offered through legal, women are more likely to self-represent within family court. In contrast, when men self-represented it was generally a result of their confidence in their ability and their desire to perpetuate their power and control over their former partner through direct confrontation (Birnbaum et al., 2017).

While FRGs assert that the family court unfairly disadvantages fathers over mothers, current scholarship maintains that women/mothers are more likely to be confronted with an adverse experience. For example, the family court system upholds patriarchal values of care in which mothers are held to a higher standard of parenting than fathers in which they are expected to be "friendly parents" that assists in the

maintenance of a relationship between a father and their child(ren) (Jaffe et al., 2003; Rivera et al., 2012, p. 237; Slote et al., 2005; Zorza, 2007). This assumption places the onus on women to concede to both the court and men/fathers to maintain a presentation as a competent woman/mother. As a result, women who have experienced domestic violence within the home often feel re-victimized by the family court process which can invalidate their experiences and further maintain the control of men/fathers (Zeoli et al., 2013).

4.3.7. The Power of Women

The overarching concern illustrated by a majority of these men was their ability to control their gender performances. These men believe they are entitled to power and control. A perceived or actual loss of power/control or barriers to gaining power was framed by these men as a result of the growing social, political, and economic power of women. Although women were seen as the main barriers, a majority of these participants refused to fully blame individual women, including ex-wives/partners and the mothers of their children. Instead, they discussed the empowerment of women through feminism and, subsequently, "blame[d] all women" as a wholistic group (P11-02). In attributing power to women, as a collective group, these men avoid framing accusations of wrongdoing against individual women, such as their ex-partner (Harstock, 1989; Jiwani, 2006; Memmi, 1991). As a result of attributing wrongdoing upon gender instead of an individual, this situates men/masculinity, as a collective group, as the targets of women's perceived wrongdoing.

> There is a battle between the patriarchy and the monarchy [sic]. There is a huge conflict for the last 10, 15 years [where] women want to be more empowered. There is only support for one ideology…it is giving [them] power, and that is what is causing a lot of issues (P10-29).

The assertion made here is that women are being given unequivocal support to acquire power through governmental institutions such as in family courts and through gender equality legislation. For example, P09-24 stated, "I would squarely place the blame on feminist beliefs and the government who have been scrambling to appease, reconcile, [and] recognize [women]." These men understand social power as a resource, specifically one that is limited and cannot be shared without significant costs, which in this situation translates for them into the loss of power for men (Mill, 1970; Okin 1989).

4.3.8. Perceptions of Women's Power and Men's Power(lessness)

These men identified women's newfound power to challenge men's overt and covert acts of sexism and misogyny, such as through women telling men how they should/should not speak and act in the presence of women:

> I feel that society has changed to the point where if you say the wrong thing to a female [sic], or if you kind of lead towards a sexual suggestion that might be taken the wrong way and you can have your job fired, like there is risk nowadays like 'hey man I didn't do anything, why am I here now, like I'm getting fired for this,' (P10-06).

As shown above, these men perceive a loss of power in which it is believed that women are now able to unfairly challenge men's sexualized comments and expressions of masculinity. When women transcend the confines of subordination and shift into the roles historically reserved for men, as the above quote demonstrates, men feel as if they are subjugated/reduced to lesser roles. A degradation in social position, or more accurately, men's perception of this loss, can evoke a sense of moral weakness, frustration, and anger in men (Herrera et al., 2012). These reactions from men remain linked to gendered structures that award men with a dominant position through the pervasiveness of the patriarchal social system (Johnson, 1976, 1978; Sargestano, 1992; Tichenor, 1999). Comments that are sexist and aimed at degrading women are used as a tool by men to undermine any wrongdoing levied at men, masculinity, and their actions of dominance (Herrera et al., 2012; Howson, 2012; Messner, 1997).

What these men experience is interconnected with a greater societal and institutional awareness of masculine, patriarchal, and sexist practices that benefit men and harm women. For example, historically within family court, both women and men have been treated as 'equal;' through this practice, the reality of women's lived experiences with discrimination and oppression that perpetuate systemic gender injustice have been overlooked (e.g., workplace discrimination, barriers to accessing the paid labour market, and an unequal division of labour within the family (Howson, 2012; Okin, 1989). Feminist groups and movements have begun to call out the sexist practices that benefit men. There is now a "historic collapse of the *legitimacy of patriarchal power* [emphasis added]" (Connell, 1995, as cited in Messner, 1997, p. 10). While Connell's (1995) emphasis on collapse might exaggerate the degree to which the prominence of patriarchy has diminished, it exemplifies how feminist movements have and continue to

challenge the *legitimacy* of men's once uncontested power. This discourse demonstrates ability of feminist movements to call out their offensive behaviour, as well as men's reactions to these perceived challenges. Hegemonic masculinity requires the constant defence and protection of its ideologies and values to maintain its monopolization on privilege and dominance. Men's efforts to defend their patriarchal power has often resulted in the delegitimization of women's perceived encroachment on men's power and in spheres/roles that were previously dominated by men (Allen, 2022; de Beauvoir, 1974).

While the empowerment of women and subsequent harms to men were significant themes that emerged from the participants' narratives, most of these men support gender equality. As P09-28 explained, "There is this big push for women's rights and equality, and I completely agree with it." Some men even acknowledged the inequitable social structures that historically oppressed and subjugated women (i.e., patriarchy) through limiting their freedoms and opportunities, as well as, in some instances, facilitating forms of harm (i.e., DV).

> I think absolutely there was a time when men were able to get away with too much and beat, hurt, and abuse women and not have too much trouble with it […] there were horrible abusive situations (P09-24).

These men condemned harmful gender performances by men and women that are a result of patriarchal social structure. They see traditional gender roles as damaging to men and women as women were forced into domestic labour and men were relegated to the paid labour market where their caring and parental roles were limited and stigmatized:

> Like back in the '60s and the '70s and how the man went to work and then the woman who was at home taking care of the kids and cooking and taking care of the home. That's not what I want. I want that, but I want it to be equal so that whether or not it's a dad that goes and does all that, or it's a mother that goes and does all that. Just having an equal opportunity to be able to be in a family where both the husband and the wife are both people that look at each other as equals and equal responsibility for the children (P11-05).

The research participants regarded gender equality as an important social issue. They felt women's inequality was a problem for men as well. These men discussed the presence of a collective societal harm experienced by men and women alike as a result

of patriarchal role expectations. However, a conflict existed in these men's narratives as they often focused on their perception of women as occupying an inherent and naturalized subordinate role and position, such as P10-30's claim that "women are the weaker sex." Thus, while these men appear to support gender equality, there is a subtext of gender essentialism and support for patriarchal social roles and gendered relations nonetheless (Schwalbe, 2014). There is a disconnect within in these men's social narratives. In part, these men espouse ideologies of gender equality while simultaneously contradicting these beliefs by upholding essentializing and sexist attitudes. While FRGs proclaim themselves as equal rights groups, in reality they are promoting the self-interest of individual men and maintenance of patriarchal ideologies of dominance (Bertoia & Drakich, 1993; Crowley, 2006) (for a further discussion, see section 5.2.1). For example, FRGs claim that as a result of their biological sex, women have an advantage within family court over men because they have inherent skills, such as being a natural organizer, that allow them to better prepare for legal disputes (Crowley, 2006).

4.3.9. Men, Fathers, and Perceptions of Gender Equality

While most of these men said they support gender equality, at the same time they said feminist and gender equitable movements have harmed men:

> I guess it…like right now, originally the idea of feminism and raising people up who didn't have the same opportunities and who might not have been allowed or been hired for the same jobs, because of their race or etc., was a brilliant idea but instead of raising people up, what they have started to do is push [men] down (P09-24).

The need to share resources as a result of greater equality for women has been difficult for these men to accept. As P10-29 noted, "It becomes a circle, that you oppress one gender over the other" (P10-29). This framing perpetuates a perception of gender relations, and subsequently inter-group interactions, as all an all or nothing structure which dismisses the possibility that resources can be shared so that everyone benefits. Situating specific forms of capital as scarce resources, such as power, fosters a notion that equitable access to social resources is detrimental; this framing also relies on the social construction of the need for domination by one group over the subjugated other (Otomar & Wehr, 2002). As P10-31 expressed, "So, like men have no rights now because women have all the rights." A dispute over incompatible goals (e.g., men's goal

of social/political/economic domination), occurs as a result of the assumption that resources, like power and wealth, are inherently finite. As such, men's struggle over power is not a direct attempt to privilege masculinity, but instead, is an attempt to construct narrative that legitimizes masculine traits as inherently power (Bourdieu, 1996). For example, men will seek to define dominant masculine traits, such as attributes of strength, as essential characteristics of power. Ultimately the ability of a group to define their traits as powerful is perceived as a scarce commodity to which only one group can reasonably attain (Otomar & Wehr, 2002). Thus, challenges to existing power structures are often seen by men as an encroachment upon their fundamental and essentialized gendered domain in which a loss of some power/control is equated by them with absolute powerlessness (Otomar & Wehr, 2002). Further, as a result of the conflation of gender with biological sex, a loss of power is perceived as these men as a denunciation of their naturalized masculine characteristics instead of a social redefining of power (Bourdieu, 1996; Otomar & Wehr, 2002).

4.4. Modern Men and the Breakdown of Power

A dominant narrative presented by most of these men acknowledges men's inherent power and demonstrates their individual (in)ability to interact with power. Instead, men/masculinity is positioned as a subjugated role that is dominated and supressed by all other social/gender roles where they now occupy the position of being victims of discrimination:

> There is a strong feeling among white males that I speak to all the time, that we are actually the [most] discriminated against people out there now (P09-024).

These men understand this experience as transitional, whereby their power has been lost or stolen. For example, barriers to custodial access were discussed by the men in this research as both a perceived sense of powerlessness and a stolen tenet of their gendered right to power.

> Men do not tend to realize this until they have had an experience themselves. They actually think [society] is fair, and a man who had no interaction with law enforcement or with social services, they still think they have a chance, and they actually have a say, but they don't (P09-24).

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Many of these men situated ongoing confrontations with court systems (i.e., family, criminal), police, and feminist ideologies, and even their ex-dyadic partner(s), as the ones responsible for their loss of status/power.

4.4.1. Beliefs of Bias against Men

While these men see themselves, and men as a whole, as generally "discriminated against," many placed emphasis on the subjugation of "white [men]" specifically (P09-24). They believe that white men were more likely to experience more severe forms of subjugation and discrimination than other groups of men. These men spoke of detrimental experiences interconnected with their perceived loss of privilege and power, specifically as it relates to their own intersecting (privileged) identities. As a majority of these men occupied dominantly privileged roles (e.g., white, cisgender, heterosexual, middle-to-upper class), they differentiated their experiences with the dispossession of power from those who occupied fewer privileged roles, such as "Black [and] Chinese" men (P10-29). While men's loss of power was often framed as a result of growing gender equality, the reallocation of gender rights was also understood as a hostile act, a deliberate effort to engage in a "war on [men]" (P10-31) and, more specifically, white men. P10-29 even equated white men's oppression with "giving the power to one person who's trying to dominate you, it's like a bully" (P10-29). That these men equate the empowerment of women with the status of bullying illustrates their sense of frustration, growing resentment, and anger towards a system that has socialized them to believe they have a rightful claim on social, economic, and political capital but they felt they could no longer access (Kimmel, 2013).

According to these men, society has failed and oppressed them. As P10-29 states:

> Men have no power, whatsoever. [We] are being [told] to shut up and listen…as a straight male [sic] we are taught just to be quiet and follow the lead of the woman or the other genders. [Men] feel oppressed a little bit…they want [us] to become more submissive to women.

The stigmatization of dominant masculinity can perpetuate an individualized state of anomie[41] and disconnection from society through which an individual experiences a sense of powerlessness and strain that challenges their social position/identity (Cao et al., 2010). Experiencing anomie perpetuates a sense of "erasure" in which these men feel as if they are left without an adequate understanding of how to engage in society or with their gender role (P10-29). The participants spoke of uncertainty through their discussion that, for example, "it is a little bit scary" (P10-06) and "harder to be a man these days" (P10-15).

4.4.2. Men's Conflicted Relationships with Power(lessness)

Social expectations and established gender roles provide individuals with a *social frame of reference*; that is, an understanding of how to interpret and make meaning of social encounters and, accordingly, follow social cues to engage in a normative or socially accepted gender performance. However, rapid changes to gender relations and roles, especially those to which these men have become accustomed (e.g., patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity), causes uncertainty and insecurity. For a majority of these men, the absence of clearly defined social expectations of their gender role was a disconcerting experience; their emotional reactivity stemmed from this uncertainty in combination with a loss of gender-based social status/privilege through the use of language and social discourses perceived as stigmatizing (e.g., mansplaining[42]).

> It seems like all of that has been robbed of us, and no one wants us to have an opinion and you could almost sum up that whole ideal of how society wants men to act with the word *mansplaining* which basically takes all power…it takes, identity, and it takes any sense of respect from society away and basically what society says with the word mansplaining is that what you say or think does not matter, you are a man, you are a different class, we don't have to listen to you. So yeah, it is like any class that is discriminated against, they basically attack their intelligence, they attack what they stand for and you know demean them, so…you are not allowed to express your thoughts [emphasis added] (P09-24).

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[41] Anomie is a sense of normlessness in which social norms that regulate individual behaviour rapidly collapse inducing a sense of powerlessness, confusion, and isolation (Cullen, 1983; Merton, 1938; Cao et al., 2010).

[42] Mansplaining was coined by author Rebecca Solnit in 2008 to conceptualize explanations proffered by men that are patronizing and condescending to women's voices, experiences and pre-established knowledge (Lutzky & Lawson, 2019).

These men highlighted how the term mansplaining causes them to feel as is if their social role is being undermined and their voices are silenced, which is "robbing" them of power (P09-24). This experience has poignantly characterized women's experiences for centuries as they have had their beliefs and perspectives are of no importance as they are reminded to "be quiet."

The expression of other previously marginalized voices into mainstream discourse has directly diminished the once prominent role that men had occupied. The ability to speak and be heard is an important demonstration of power in which those who can monopolize the ability to define what constitutes acts of power, utilize language and narratives to undermine and delegitimize other groups representation of power (Harstock, 1989; Memmi, 1991). However, the presence of a social discourse that challenges and denounces hegemonic traits demonstrates that patriarchal power and masculinity is being contested (for example, see Harstock, 1989; Memmi, 1991). For instance, the interjection of mansplaining into the dominant social narrative demonstrates a contest for power. Marginalized roles are beginning to annex the prevailing discourse of the dominant group that had traditionally denounced and/or dehumanized other roles and expressions of gender (Harstock, 1989).

These men continually expressed a feeling of a loss of power and privilege associated with their social role, such as through status degradation. They experienced such degradation as social criticisms of their gender role expressions and enactments of power (e.g., mansplaining) However, as power is a diffuse mechanism that is (re)constituted through the interactions among individual actors and social institutions, a majority of men are unable to perceive their everyday access to and enactment of gendered privilege (Bourdieu, 1996; Foucault, 1990; Johnson, 2006, Kimmel, 2013; Schwalbe, 2014). Thus, an evaluation of challenges to masculine performances is felt as an attack on the individual man. While men belong to larger groups, such as those who benefit from hegemonic masculine norms, their actions are perceived as individual performances devoid of social and institutional influence.

It's kind of like those, those poor kids that died in Kamloops[43]. It's the same situation, just we're the guys and we are not getting killed off, we are getting abused and beat up (P10-06).

In drawing connections between the experiences of fathers and the genocidal practices of residential schooling (for example, see Churchill, 2004), P10-06 discursively constructs men's experiences as proximal to that of a prominent marginalized community. This was exemplified by Kay and Tolmie (1998) in their research on FRGs which demonstrated that these groups "borrow victim status;" that is, FRGs draw parallels between themselves as non-custodial fathers and oppression, violence, and harm experienced by marginalized groups, specifically Indigenous peoples (p. 173).

4.4.3. Men and Suicide

Men's perceived loss of status and power, as well as limitations placed on their gender expression (e.g., lack of emotionality) can have devasting consequences. Most of the men within this study pointed to the high rates of suicidal ideation and suicide among men, as well as their elevated mortality risk in comparison to women.

There have been thoughts of suicide a couple of times in the last four and a half years. You get into this whole feeling of you just lost all hope. You just feel so destroyed inside and that nothing else is going to come back and help you (P11-05).

A majority of these men spoke about the high risk of suicide among men by either recounting their own individual struggles with suicidal ideation and/or attempted death by suicide or by sharing similar experiences of friends and associates within their fathers' rights network. Some men commented on the staggering suicide rate of men and fathers, where they note it can range from "eighteen a week" to "twelve a day" (P11-08; P10-30). In contrast, the actual rates are far higher, with an average estimate of fifty men in Canada committing suicide every week (Whitley, 2021).

For the men in this research project, the central rationale for men's increased risk of suicide was often associated with a loss of access to their children. They highlighted how the systematic removal of their parental rights left them feeling "alienated" and "estranged" from their children (P11-08). This sense of estrangement tended to come

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[43] This participant was referring to the estimated 215 unmarked graves that were discovered at a residential school in British Columbia in May 2020 (Meissner, 2022).

about as the culmination of years of legal battles in which they felt the courts and society had failed to protect and uphold their parental rights, leaving them with various forms of trauma.

> There is no way to win when you are a father and you are trying to fight, there is just none. That is why so many guys are taking their own lives (P10-31).

A central issue that was stressed was social norms and legal precedents that are assumed to privilege maternal rights over paternal/fathers' rights; subsequently, these men see the family court process as a reflection of society's preferential treatment of women and mothers at the cost of fathers' perceived right to have equal access to their children. As a result, these men expressed their increased risk of suicide, citing that a "majority of all suicides in Canada … are [men]" (P10-30).

While the removal of parental rights was seen as a fundamental reason for increased rates of suicide, an underlying theme mentioned by the research participants consistently centred around an imposed social strain that resulted from these men's *role conflict* (for example, see section 4.3.1). The inconsistency between men's socialized entitlement to a prominent social status, a hegemonic patriarchal masculine role, and their perceived or actual social role can cause forms of social strain[44]. Thus, a disparity in a social role occurs between these men's social expectations, such as unfettered access to their children and/or patriarchal control of families, and the reality of the presented social reproach experienced by these men within the family court.

> Hundreds and hundreds of times I saw guys just so depressed, so hopeless, so near suicide because there is just no, no respect…no validation given to them because of their positions as fathers, males [sic], husbands, all of the above (P09-24).

As a result of strain and role conflict, individuals can experience mental health concerns, such as minor to severe forms of depression and, in some instances, suicidal ideation and suicide itself (Hornung, 1977; Starr, 1977). This strain ultimately emanates from an adherence to hegemonic masculine ideals and normative values, such as that of strength, stoicism, and control. While conformity to these values can precipitate strain

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[44] Strain is a result of an inconsistency between an individual's social expectations and their actual experiences resulting in forms of stress that threaten their social identity, and sense of self (Cooper et al., 2001; Haslam, 2005).

and a role conflict, mental health difficulties, such as depression, can facilitate feelings of being exposed and powerless which are ultimately incompatible with hegemonic masculine traits (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Courtney, 2000; Emslie et al., 2006; Struszczy, 2017; Warren, 1983).

4.5. Conclusion

Men's gender performances are socially constructed and upheld as normative human behaviour and, thus, men are not accustomed to social scrutiny and challenges to their power. Facets of masculinity have historically been framed as a natural, and reified aspects of society that cannot be altered (Miedzian, 1988; Schippers, 2007). For example, a majority of these men have illustrated their belief that, as a result of the empowerment of women, men are now powerless. While the participants maintained that gender equality is a positive aspect for society, they also believed that a loss of power, as an essential characteristic of masculinity, was equated with a challenge to men/masculinities natural and essentialized attributes.

Some scholars theorize that men's engrained sense of entitlement to power and control is a result of the patriarchal social order that many of the men in my study believe in (for example, see Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Schippers, 2007; Schwalbe, 2014). The more proximal an individual's performance is to the prototypical hegemonic idealization of masculinity, the greater the amount of power and control they are afforded (Morris & Ratajczak, 2019). While these men illustrated a shared understanding of men's traditional entitlement to power and control, they also demonstrated a disparity between perceived entitlement and one's actual ability to access power. A majority of these men found themselves unable to directly access the perceived benefits that they believed belonged to their gender (Johnson, 2006, Kimmel, 2013; Schwalbe, 2014).

While many men no longer perceive themselves as socially privileged, they still felt entitled to enact power and control to which they were socialized. This imposed sense of role conflict, the strain imparted because of differential socialized beliefs of a normative performance to that of current social expectations, is reflective of Kimmel (2013) and Faludi's (1991) illustration of the growing discontent inherent within masculinity. Specifically, the men within this study emphasized discontent as a result of an unkept social promise of entitlement to positions of status and privilege to which their

fathers, and grandfathers had held. While most of these conversations centred on the perceived disenfranchisement of men because of these imposed role conflicts and social strain, these men did emphasize the harm imparted upon the masculine role. For example, these men illustrated how social expectations and patriarchal ideologies limited their ability to be active parents or caregivers rather than just an economic provider. As well, the perceived loss of power and control led, in some cases, to self-harm and increased risk of suicide and this cannot be ignored.

Chapter 5. Reclaiming Power and Control

You cannot stand what I've become,
You much prefer the gentleman I was before,
I was so easy to defeat, I was so easy to control,
I didn't even know there was a war (Cohen, 1974).

5.1. Introduction

To build on the discussion from Chapter 4 that provided an analysis of my research participants experiences with a perceived breakdown in their power and privilege, this chapter makes meaning of the methods and social mechanisms men use to reassert their power and control. Specifically, this chapter focuses on attempts to regain control through the construction and use of sexist, patriarchal, and oppressive social narratives that have evolved from these men's participation in FRGs. The impact of these men's adoption of a FRG-based pro-patriarchal narrative are analysed in relation to how this discourse influences these men's gender-based interactions. While this chapter primarily focuses on the narratives that can generate and maintain masculine power and control, an analysis of men's perceptions of violence is offered as well. Violence, although not a central theme of this research, did arise as a response when challenges to masculinity could not be resolved through the application of a dominating narrative.

There are three sections in this chapter. In the first section (5.2), I analyse the construction of social frames. Specifically, I unpack how masculinity is upheld by FRGs as a dominant role with the ability to unilaterally construct acceptable/unacceptable social perceptions, roles, and norms, including gender. The second section (5.3) examines the beliefs and values of FRGs, as well as how these groups are perceived to support men and fathers. The last section (5.4) evaluates how, as a result of their involvement within FRGs, my interviewees seek to reassert/reclaim power, both through the use of social narratives and violence. I evaluate how these men sought to reclaim power, both through the use of discourse and direct actions. Within this section, the power and implications of a dominating narrative put forth by FRGs (e.g., men's oppression epitomized as victimization) are examined. Lastly, this section will conclude

with a consideration of men's use of violence, both against women (i.e., DV) and other individuals.

5.2. A Dominant Social Frame

In order to legitimize their claims to power and control, men in FRGs engage in a social narrative that obscures hegemonic masculine domination within a discourse of gender equality. While an aspect of masculine entitlement, these beliefs are upheld and normalized as a result of these men's membership within FRGs. These groups act as disseminators of social normative values, perpetuating a singular narrative of masculine entitlement to authority, power, and control (for example, see section 5.3.2). While these men endorse women's growing empowerment, they simultaneously attempt to delegitimize it by framing themselves as the victims of women's equity[45]-based gains. These narratives frame women as motivated to actively pursue social equality while nevertheless maintaining women's historical social advantages (i.e., benefitting from chivalry). For example, as previously shown, while these men have verbally endorsed women's equality (see section 4.3.3), they simultaneously challenge this perceived social intrusion into men's assumed domain by emphasizing women's alleged greed for power/equality and by devaluing their morals, characteristics, and motives.

> Like women want the same rights as men. But the thing is, they still want the guy to open the door and do all the stuff that men are expected to do, but then have their cake and eat it too. I look at it this way, if they want that it has to be a give and take relationship, otherwise someone is getting their way all the time, and that means someone is being emotionally abused all of the time (P10-30).

This narrative maintains the dominant *hegemonic masculine narrative* of society; that is, the subordination of women and other genders. Within this statement, P10-30 shows his belief that women are also attempting to maintain the perceived social advantages of subjugation (e.g., socially expected acts of chivalry) while seeking to gain gender

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[45] The term equity is often utilized within this work instead of equality, as the term equity more aptly demonstrates the complex and multifaceted ways in which gender roles are either provided, or restricted from, access to privileged resources. The term equity lends to this understanding with connotations of fairness and justice while taking into consideration the group-based circumstances that determine a role's level of privilege. In contrast, equality denotes group-based disparity as resulting from a lack of similar social treatment in the absence of an understanding of the contextual nature of intersecting circumstances and identities (Espinoza, 2007).

equality with men (Schwalbe, 2014). This is in line with FRGs' rhetoric which frames women are as occupying two advantageous positions: one in which they are provided formal gender equality and one in which they are believed to benefit from the social expectation for men to care for women. This is akin to Schwalbe's (2014) argument that men believe that they are required to continually care for women, inherent within chivalry, which symbolizes women's alleged weakness and inferiority.

5.2.1. Compensatory Acts of Masculinity

The empowerment of women has led many men to perform compensatory acts of masculinity, such as those actions that demonstrate a man's "inherent" authority in order to reassert their connection to patriarchal control (Kimmel, 2010). As a result of FRG beliefs, many of these men see patriarchy as a system that women both consciously and subconsciously exploit to the detriment of men, especially when these men felt uncertain of what the social expectations of masculinity were (for example, see section 4.3). Yet, these men further understood patriarchy as a system that upholds hegemonic masculine traits that are essential for their monopolization of power and control. These men spoke about how they had to uphold and present a gendered performance in line with social expectations of hegemonic masculinity to gain/maintain privilege. For example, as P10-31 stated, "It means I am an authority." This illustration of a hegemonic masculine ideal was centred within traditional tropes of strength and sacrifice, as well as a social discourse that condones masculine performances (e.g., boys will be boys, boys don't cry).

> We expect men to you know, the kind of saying that *boys will be boys* [emphasis added]*,* that we expect men to be…like traditional, hardcore, tough, like sacrificing… sacrificing to the detriment of themselves. And kind of at the same time, expecting them to… [take] less responsibility (P 10-16).

However, when men are unable to uphold a hegemonic masculine social presentation, they can experience a spoiled identity[46] and sense of a diminished social position.

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[46] Individuals continually take part in forms of identity management in which they self-monitor their social performances to ensure their actions are representative of any given social role and thus accepted by the audience to which they currently identify (Goffman, 1963).

They will be seen as weak or the odd man out…they will be cast out or looked down upon because they don't have that same kind of level of masculinity as some others (P10-15).

Most of these men acknowledged that being expected to demonstrate patriarchal characteristics, such as strength and stoicism, was detrimental to men in general and themselves personally. Yet, their attitudes, beliefs, and actions demonstrated that they embodied this vision of manhood that they saw as harmful to men (Schwalbe, 2014). A recurring theme raised by these men centred on how men, like women, are similarly victimized by patriarchy. As P11-01 noted, "Women [are] more independent … they [have] become like the queen, and the man [has] become like the slave."

As a social construct, manhood and masculinity are characterized as a set of attributes that characterize acts of power and, consequently, resist acts of power and control enacted by subordinate groups (Bourdieu, 1996; Schwalbe, 2014). That is, men both hold power and define what it means to be powerful and, as a consequence of their positionality, ensure that women and other genders remain oppressed. Thus, to reassert control in the absence of violence, men's social narratives ironically vilify the fundamental systems that have historically granted men power, such as patriarchy.

[We] were bad to the … [we] treated the natives [sic] evilly, [we] enslaved people, [we] created this patriarchal institution where women weren't allowed to vote and had to fight for recognition, and I do agree with, especially with the woman thing, and the other stuff happened for sure. Like women did need to be able to work and take care of themselves, and be recognized, and be researchers and doctors, and police officers (P09-24).

Gender equitable movements have empowered those historically subjugated by men/masculinity by revealing the inherent inequity that men draw upon, specifically patriarchy (Bierema, 2003). As a result, the historical foundation of men's legitimized claim to power and control has become stigmatized.

As demonstrated above, men who uphold an association between their acts of authority and patriarchal ideologies, risk the delegitimization of their access to power and control by association their tenets of authority with a stigmatized social resource, such as patriarchy. While social power is often conceptualized as a tangible structure or social tool that can be wielded by one individual against another, power is in fact a disperse mechanism that constructs individual social performances and, likewise, is composed of these very same actions (Gaventa, 2003). For example, masculine power is a result of

patriarchal ideologies that have subsequently influenced the construction of the masculine role which in-turn frames a societal representation and common understanding of what constitutes patriarchy. Thus, power is the ability of men to determine and define the social characteristics and social performances that demonstrate and garner power. For these actions to remain powerful, they must not be recognized as arbitrary in nature (e.g., masculine strength) and, instead, must be regarded as essentialized and legitimate traits of masculinity (Bourdieu, 1996). Masculine power is ultimately predicated upon the conditionality of societies inability to discern the framework of men's dominance and control, that being whiteness and patriarchy. So long as men's foundation of power remains obscure then "one cannot question, let alone dismantle, what remains hidden from view," (Robinson, 2000, p. 1). That which remains invisible avoids societal scrutiny and forms of discipline, such as acts of reformation. Further, the invisibility of such a basis of power serves to inherently inhibit the recognition of an actor's performance as predicated upon a group identity, thus framing an individual man's foundation of power and authority as a naturalized internal facet of the individual (Robinson, 2000). While invisibility is a privilege of advantaged social groups, such as men, it can also paradoxically serve to identify and draw undesirable attention to masculinity within a society that is organized around identifiable group characteristics. As social movements continually label and identify men's once obscure form of power, patriarchy, there is a necessity for men to find a way to obscure and perceptually re-frame the basis of their power (Levy, 2022; Robinson, 2000).

5.2.2. Men as the "True" Victims of Society

In an attempt to re-frame the foundation of masculine power, FRGs promote a discourse of men's oppression, epitomized through a discourse of men's victimization, in which the visible tenets of patriarchy are actively refuted and stigmatized as these men claim that they are the "true" victims of society, the patriarchy and feminism (for example, see section 5.4.1). In naming the patriarchy as their *praxis of power*, specifically in adopting a feminist language that admonishes a social practice that gives men power, it appears as if these men also oppose the patriarchy. Naming social structures and practices is a means of knowing in which the existence of the system, and its inherent transgressions, are illuminated (Charmaz, 2006). However, admonishing

a social system does not inherently eradicate it, nor its influence. Instead, it merely prescribes a form of categorization. Naming the patriarchy as a source of wrongdoing, against both men and women, creates a social frame in which men have seemingly distanced themselves from the patriarchy as they simultaneously reframe their basis of patriarchal power to a model of gender oppression (see section 5.4.1).

In addition to obscuring their power, the men in this study sought to further reframe the patriarchy. There was an attempt to transition the possession of patriarchal ideologies from a historical system that has enshrined men's power and control to a system that women utilize to men's detriment.

> I think this was capitalized on by the whole feminist movement from the fifties until now. The feminist movement is not over, it is stronger than ever. It is all about shifting the balance of power. A man […] has no say, and he has no […] like he is not recognized as being someone who is able to have a valid opinion […] whatever he thinks, does, or acts is…just considered not given any weight or value (P09-24).

The patriarchy is labeled as a system that has been co-opted by women in order to harm men, such as through confining, limiting, and resigning men to a tertiary role within families (e.g., economic provider, rather than an active collaborator) (e.g., caregiver) (for example, see section 4.2).

5.2.3. Reclaiming the Social Narrative

Men within FRGs focused on gender roles from eras such as the 1960s-70s, which they saw as the high point of sexist familial relations; that is, the eras during which norms dictated a patriarchal division of labour and childcare (Crowley, 2006).

> Like back in the '60s and the '70s and how the man went to work and then the woman who was at home taking care of the kids and cooking and taking care of the home. That's not what I want […] I want it to be equal so that whether or not it's a dad that goes and does all that, or it's a mother that goes and does all that. Just having an equal opportunity to be able to be in a family where both the husband and the wife are both people that look at each other as equals and equal responsibility for the children (P11-05).

These men consistently shared their beliefs and understandings that women have been disproportionately discriminated against as a result of gendered frames. For example, P10-06 talked about how "women aren't getting paid the same [amount] as men. They

are getting paid what ninety cents to the dollar compared to men, right like, why is there that difference? They are doing the same capable work and stuff like that." While these types of comments engage with women's need for greater gender equality, FRG predicated claims such as those made by P11-05 simultaneously positions men as equally marginalized and oppressed. That is, this narrative has the potential to undermine decades of advocacy for women's equality and attempts to challenge the systemic oppression of women (Crowley, 2006). The perspective of these men and focus of their advocacy is that gender equality needs to be advanced for both men and women alike. FRGs use the language of equality to support their assertations that men/fathers are equally discriminated against, if not even more so than women in specific realms (e.g., child custody/guardianship, separation/divorce, and family court matters) (see section 4.3.2 that challenges this claim). This narrative is used to support their advocacy against the oppression of men/fathers and justify their attempts to reclaim power and control as the oppressed instead of the oppressor (Bertoia & Drakich, 1993; Crowley, 2006). While these ideologies are not unique to FRG based rhetoric, these men consistently utilized a common language of oppression.

5.2.4. What does Feminism Have to do With it?

FRGs often argue that men are subordinate to women as a result of feminist movements which have empowered women at the alleged cost of men's equality, which is shown in P10-31's statement:

> Every time I walk into the courtroom, every time because you are walking in there at a disadvantage as a male, and if you don't see that you are going to learn it real quick, like thirty seconds or less, when you walk in there you are like 'what the?', men are just treated like second class citizens in a courtroom, so my masculinity is non-existent. They say that it is because they try to be gender neutral, that is not gender neutral, that is feminine neutral.

The allegations of men's/fathers' oppression levied by FRGs conceals the inherent contradiction within their advocacy. That is, FRGs promote a need for greater gender equality, for both men and women, while simultaneously positioning women as the most advantaged group and, by comparison, men as the most disadvantaged. Specifically, these men adopt feminist narratives that advocate for women's equality within the public sphere on the one hand, while on the other hand, upholding their own masculine self-

interest within the private sphere (Bertoia & Drakich, 1993). For example, to garner public support, FRGs employ a moral-laden language that highlights their fight for equality in their names, advocacy, and materials (e.g., brochures, literature). The names of these groups, such as "human equality action resource team," "fathers for justice, and in search of justice," and "*children's rights",* frame FRGs as gender neutral organizations that support egalitarianism while also obscuring the forms of advocacy that prioritize the self-interest of these men (Bertoia & Drakich, 1993, p.592). However, there is little indication within academic literature to suggest that men join FRGs under the pretences of seeking greater gender equality for both women and men alike (for example, see Adams, 2006; Bertoia & Drakich, 1993). However, what has been demonstrated both within this research and other scholar's work (for example, see Bertoia & Drakich, 1993), is that men join FRGs to promote their own rights, such as the right to "equally" access their children, the right to not pay child support, and the right to retain control over their ex-partner. It is therefore difficult, not to see their claims to support gender equality as somewhat disingenuous and merely a strategic effort to generate support for their cause.

While FRG discourse explicitly upholds overt frames and sentiments of gender equality, the emphasis on using the language of subjugated men and empowered women, challenges these very notions of gender equitability. For example, P10-31 expressed both his belief in women's lack of equal rights and, in contrast, his belief that women were empowered beyond what was reasonable or fair:

> [Women] weren't getting equal rights, they were getting beyond rights. You know when the women got killed at Montreal Polytechnique, Montreal blew up about women's rights. This guy went in there and killed so many women, 13 women died[47], it was in all the media, and everything else […] And every year to this day they still have this memorial, and they still do stuff. But they never talk about how many men died to save this country, and their families being left without their fathers. You know, those men went to war and I am pretty sure we still go to war as men. You know it is not very equal there, I would love to see that get more equal. I think women should learn to have to fight you know, they are pretty good at it in court. I have seen some stuff, I am telling you man. I have been in a courtroom where I am just shocked that the judge is getting away with what she is getting away with. If I even said 'boo' I would be in handcuffs in a holding cell.

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[47] In actuality 14 women were killed on December 6th, 1989 at École Polytechnique Université de Montréal as a result of a man's perceived aggrieved entitlement (Tonso, 2009).

That is, the view is that women can have some power, but not too much. Further, the comparison in this quote between women who were killed by a gunman that denounced feminists at École Polytechnique in Montreal and the men who died "virtuously" protecting their country is an odd comparison and one that highlights how P10-31 resents the attention given to women. Ironically, his words demonstrate the perpetual risk and harm of men's violence against women, and not the oppression of men. It should also be pointed out that Canada, along with many other nations, take part in some form of Remembrance Day on November 11th as a way to honour men who go to war, a fact that P10-31 has seemingly forgotten. Hence, one could say these two annual events are equal acknowledgement of how we honour the loss of women and men.

In the latter half of the above quote P10-31 further emphasizes his belief that men experience a greater degree of inequality and subjugation, specifically within the family court system, by comparison to women/mothers (for a full discussion on these men's perceptions of inequality within the family court, see section 4.3.2). An entitlement to privilege, that being an unrestricted ability to gain access to all resources, has been demonstrated thus far as an inherent ideology embedded within masculinity. As a result, when men no longer feel they have the opportunity to assert this entitlement, such as an when they experience the barriers to being granted unrestrained access to/control over their children by the family courts, they feel that their gender performance was unduly spoiled and, subsequently, can feel emasculated (Pease, 2021). However, men's sense of entitlement to power, control, and authority is no longer guaranteed. It is this sense of entitlement, and subsequently a sense of mistreatment, that perpetuates FRGs and their members to adopt anti-feminist ideologies and discourses akin to right-wing populist groups and fosters acts of violence (Flood et al., 2018; Pease, 2021; Vito et al., 2018). For example, P10-31 drew evident parallels between the beliefs of FRGs and the perpetrator[48] of the École Polytechnique massacre. The perpetrator of this massacre similarly attributed his actions to women's empowerment, specifically their ability to retain the essentialized gender advantages of women (e.g., maternity leave, acts of chivalry) (for a further discussion, see section 5.2) while further "seizing for themselves those advantages of men" (Mallette & Chalouh, 1991, p. 181). These ideologies are inherently similar to those expressed by members of FRGs, specifically P10-30 (for

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[48] The perpetrator of this act will remain nameless within this work to avoid empowering his actions or providing notoriety to him as an individual.

example, see section 5.2). The perpetrator's actions, along with P10-31's statement, demonstrates a belief in the supremacy of men, while justifying men's violence against women as a tool to maintain the patriarchal gender order (Tonso, 2009). P10-31 demonstrated a willingness to draw a parallel frame between the evident victimization imparted upon these fourteen women via gender-based violence and the perceived victimization enacted upon men/fathers at the hands of their intimate partner and the family court system (for a further discussion, see section 5.4.1). However, a comparison such as this is inappropriate as the women of the Polytechnique were murdered with "the premeditation of three thousand years of women hating, reinforced by patriarchal societies built upon the domination of women and their children" (Mallette & Chalouh, 1991, p. 44).

5.2.5. A Social Movements Frame

FRGs' rhetoric of justice, equality, and morality is taken from past social movements of marginalized groups, such as women and Black communities (for example, see Adams, 2006; Crowley, 2006; Minow, 1993). The success of these past social movements has demonstrated the possibility for social change, so it is no surprise that the rhetoric of these movements would be co-opted by men and FRGs. Feminist movements reveal how gender based socio-political instability and inequality could be exploited while also providing a framework for collective action (Crowley, 2006). For example, feminist movements have established a precedent for equality-based advocacy which is utilized by FRGs in child custody disputes. This equality-based framing uses easily accessible language that evokes social sympathy that requires vindication (for a further discussion, see section 5.4.1) (Adams, 2006; Crowley, 2006; Minow, 1993).

While many of the men within this study reinforced their belief in gender equality, others undermined this belief by addressing the perceived attempt of women to undermine their power with the use of derogatory labels. For example, some of the men demonstrated a willingness to undermine women's perceived encroachment into "their" domain of authority by questioning their sexuality and thus the "legitimacy" of their gender and ability to challenge masculine power.

> She ended up calling the RCMP […] so there's two women [officers] that were both gay […] I'm tagging it only because of the feminist movement and most women stick together, especially if they're gay women […] there were two women that were both gay. You could totally see it in how they presented themselves. Obviously in our society, as some people would call them dykes. They were already walking in there knowing that they were going to come and help this woman (P11-05).

P11-05's authority was challenged by three women during a domestic dispute (i.e., an ex-partner and two police officers who were women). The participant conveyed this dispute as originally centred around a custodial disagreement about who was more equipped to care for the child. However, the interjection of police, as authority figures, especially since they were women, threatened the participant's masculinity (Marquis, 1994). An individual's privilege is framed as being socially constructed through a "matrix of privilege/domination,"[49] as a result of intersecting identities through which access to privilege and power depends on the presence of a socially identifiable dominant performance (Johnson, 2018, p. 45; see also, Diangelo, 2018). Thus, the application of a narrative/frame that focuses on the marginalization of an individual's intersecting identities is an attempt to discredit the legitimacy of an individual's power and dominance; this is shown in how P11-05 labeled these officers as "gay women" in an attempt to highlight two marginalized identities and simultaneously undermine their actions that subverted his authority. P11-05 applied a counter discourse directed at these officer's actual (i.e., women) and presumed (i.e., lesbian) marginalized identities in which these "women [were] called lesbians as a way to discredit them" (Johnson, 2018, p. 46). The application of a heterosexist discourse is an attempt to label these women and their authority as invalid, thereby discrediting the expression of their legitimate enactment of power and privilege. Thus, when men's privilege is seen as being challenged by a legitimate authority figure, such as a police officer, these men can attempt to defend their actions and privilege by using an individual's marginalized identity to undercut their power.

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[49] Privilege is the culmination of a multitude of social identities that intersect and connect to one another that denotes one's ability to legitimately elicit power/control dependent upon their position within a social frame (Johnson, 2018).

5.3. Fathers' Rights Groups

A central focus of this research is to understand the experiences of men who are involved with an FRG and how this involvement shapes their views of gender relations. While numerous scholars have illustrated how these groups are anti-feminist (for example, see Dragiewicz, 2008; Durfee, 2011; Flood, 2010, 2012; Lin, 2017), most of the men in this study voiced a narrative that upheld FRGs solely as a beneficial group that supports men and fathers rather than engaging in anti-feminist rhetoric. As the previous section highlights, FRGs play a critical role in providing men with a narrative and a social frame to understand their experiences. FRGs also act as a support system for men. Participant P09-21 spoke of the benefits he derived from participating in a FRGs, such as the groups allowing men to "just hang out, just be together." The group dynamics were presented as a supportive and necessary environment for these men who merely sought to find a safe place to share their experiences within the context of like-minded individuals.

> You know it is that emotional support that is really important, that place to connect with men, where they don't feel judged and just feel safe to talk about whatever (P10-16).

> It is great that you can sit down and have a group of friends [...] where you can actually know it is a safe environment and talk about what is going on (P09-27).

The implication here is that men feel they are not safe to speak freely, particularly in the presence of women. In contrast, a majority of academic literature emphasizes the existence of women's socially and systemically imposed sense of precariousness and risk within private and public spheres, and even virtual environments, as a result of their gender (for example, see Lewis et al., 2015). While these men accurately demonstrate a general need for the existence of safe spaces, it is imperative to recognize how spaces are traditionally gendered in which "women's perceptions of risk … the actual risks they are exposed to and … their behavioural responses have implications for their equal participation in society" (Pain, 1991, p. 415). FRGs and the men who participate in them generally do not recognize either the actual/anticipated risks men pose to women in private and public spaces, or the narratives women are inundated with that perpetually positions them as sexualized objects of men's desire. These images are diffuse within every social domain, such as benign advertising that portrays women as "pin-up" girls,

that masculinises public spaces and perpetuates a "wallpaper of sexism" [50] (Lewis et al., 2015, p. 3; Rosewarne, 2007). Beyond being a safe space for men to *be men*, these men claimed that FRGs allow men to both share experiences and gain advice on being a single parent.

> We meet once a week and basically people who are group members take turns sharing an update, their story, like a small goal they are working on, kind of what is happening in their lives, usually things to do with kids and family (P09-27).

> You can talk about if you had a bad time with your kid because he was acting out, like how can I do this differently. And you have a whole network of guys who can be like this is my opinion […] and you can take from that, and you can form your own opinion, or even just take one of there's and you know see if it works (P10-15).

5.3.1. Patriarchy and Familial Gender Roles

Both women and men's roles within the family have been constrained to traditional performances as a result of patriarchal social expectations of the family. Specifically, the men within this study frequently shared how they were socialized to uphold traditional hegemonic traits (e.g., economic provider) and subsequently avoid behaviours and beliefs that were perceived as feminine (e.g., caretaking) (Rushing & Powell, 2015; Perrone et al., 2009; Rochlen et al., 2008). Thus, these men viewed FRGS as a necessary resource in order to resist the traditional constraints of the patriarchy and begin acquiring "non-traditional roles" (Rushing & Powell, 2015, p. 411).

> I just want to be the best dad that I can. I mean I know I am not perfect, but if I can achieve excellence then you know, I am going to need some information to get to that level you know (P10-15).

Clearly there is a need for these spaces so that men can also gain support for their well-being. Unlike many other support groups however, these groups also create an environment that has the potential to reinforce toxic masculine traits and beliefs.

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[50] Coined by Lewis and colleagues (2015) which refers to the normalization of gendered and heterosexualised spaces that become routine experiences perpetuating women and girls construction of a "fearful state" whereby they adopt a perpetual vigilance within all social domains (p. 3).

5.3.2. FRGs and Spaces for Men

While these men highlighted the importance of FRGs for supporting both their masculine senses of self and identities as fathers, they raised concerns with the limited availability of such groups. Most of these men began participating in FRGs as they saw themselves beginning to step outside of the confines of the patriarchal role of traditional fatherhood and economic provider. These men sought support and guidance on how to engage in these new forms of fatherhood and masculinity. However, the absence of accessible parenting groups that focused on masculinity and fatherhood was a substantial barrier for these men. For example, participant P10-31 demonstrated the unavailability of support, "when I was going through all the stuff I was going through, there was nobody there for me." While masculinity has traditionally been based on performances that refrain from help-seeking behaviour (for example, see Addis & Mahalik, 2003), the men within this study demonstrated a willingness to disregard these historically normative masculine practices.

> There are so many programs for mothers and there are so many programs for single mothers…I think society can do a better job providing resources to [men] (P09-28).

The concern raised by these men is illustrated within previous research (for example, see Berlin et al., 2020; Petersson et al., 2003), which describes how parental services on average are oriented toward either the mother or both parents; there are far fewer services being tailored and provided to men and fathers.

> It is very unusual, there is very few around, even nationally, it is a rarity that is becoming less rare but still fairly rare. There is an appetite for it, but there is not a real follow through (P09-21).

Further, P09-28 made a comparison between the lack of FRGs to an abundance of women only exclusionary groups, stating "you have commercial gyms like She's Fit, which is only for women, but you don't have commercial gyms that are allowed to be just men because that is sexist." However, as mentioned earlier, from a young age women are instilled with a sense of fear as a result of feeling unsafe in public and private spaces *because* of the risks posed by, and actions of, men. As a result, the proliferation of gendered spaces that are "only for women," allows women the opportunity to temporarily disengage from performances that are predicated upon acts of vigilance to mitigate actual or perceived risk (Lewis et al., 2015).

Most of the participants felt their involvement within FRGs was stigmatized by women, feminist movements, and, subsequently, social and governmental institutions. They emphasized how their attempts to create a masculine centred domain in which to adequately develop and grow the masculine role, was seen as consistently under threat.

> We tried running groups…and the city police tried infiltrating, they would send undercover cops in to check on us because women were complaining that we were getting together […] intimidating [them…] because we were becoming a group. The justice minister came after us for fathers' rights, because we were apparently going to far, slandering women and attacking women. That is what fathers' rights is apparently. They have decided it is a movement, an organization opposed to women (P10-31).

Through this narrative, men have positioned themselves as both the sole source of equitability and, simultaneously, the victim of gendered-based discrimination (for a full discussion see section 5.4).

5.3.3. The Perceived Benefits of FRG

These men found FRGs to be a supportive community with the ability to assist men and fathers negotiate difficult, stressful, and new challenges, such as being an engaged father and navigating family law processes. Some FRGs were connected to larger organizations, such as community out-reach programs which had the capability to offer private counselling, substance recovery, anger management and other tangible services. However, most of the participants belonged to informal FRGs with limited to no resources in which their mandate was simply to provide a forum for men to gain support and advice. Nevertheless, the overarching benefit of FRGs, as illustrated by all of these men was that they instilled a sense of "community and a sense of identity" (P09-21).

> I think it has partly been hearing from other people, other men, just hearing their stories. I keep going back to that, like knowing you are not alone, the connection aspect of it, having a place where you feel encouraged by these men, which was something that I obviously didn't expect because I was scared to interact because I didn't feel worth the effort or the time. So, seeing that people were interested in who I am, these men were interested in who I am, really changed how I could connect to other men and fathers in particular, whereas I probably would have been far more timid to ask, what to me now would seem like a pretty simple question about you know, am I doing the right thing with my son. Or what, you know what kind of tips do you guys have when he is crying all night or something like that. You know having that community and belief that they are there (P10-16).

FRGs offer a supportive environment and sense of community which assists men's sense of identity through the ability to consistently draw upon a reinforced collective identity, such hegemonic masculine ideals (Gasparini, 2010). These men can reinforce their individual decisions and actions by framing them within the context of group-based beliefs. As a result, when these men feel individually attacked and discriminated against in their daily familial interactions, such as through family court processes (for example, see Chapter 4), they can reframe these encounters as collective actions against men/FRGs rather than themselves as an individual (Gasparini, 2010).

5.3.4. Safe Spaces for Emotionality

As previously noted, many of the men within this study spoke of an increased risk of suicide, either personally or that of other members of their FRG (for example, see section 4.4.1). These men claimed that prior to entering these groups they felt isolated and incapable of expressing emotions due to fears of being stigmatized (Demetriou, 2001).

> You know that's an outstanding outlet for men to have especially because, like we are talking about masculinity, we are not supposed to talk about our problems, we are supposed to just shove everything down and I found that that drove me to the point where I wanted to kill myself (P10-15).

However, men within these groups feel they can find support from other men in an environment that is free of stigma and where emotional expressions of vulnerability are encouraged. For example, in discussing how he joined a FRG, P09-24 stated "if I hadn't, I would be dead for sure, I would have committed suicide without a doubt." While there exists a contentious debate on the purpose and consequences of these groups (for example, see Dragiewicz, 2008; Durfee, 2011; Flood, 2010, 2012; Lin, 2017), it is evident that men require a support network that allows them to fully express and engage with their emotional capacity.

> I am a little hesitant to kind of get myself out there but I have opened myself up…I have been able to talk about a lot of stuff, especially about my suicide attempt a year ago and then everything progressing from positively from there on and you know I was able to open up to these guys about it, and they cried a little bit, I had a couple friends that just passed away recently too. You know being able to just open up, even if it is just complete strangers, it gets it off your chest, it doesn't manifest so much (P10-15).

As demonstrated by P10-15, men are traditionally hesitant to demonstrate forms of emotional vulnerability, especially amongst other men. These groups can provide men the opportunity to express diverging masculine performances that are not predicated upon traditional characteristics of "competitiveness, aggression, and independence" (Stein, 1983, p. 151). Thus, FRGs have the potential to offer men support, that is often absent from society, while reinforcing non-hegemonic masculine traits.

5.3.5. Patriarchal Peer Support

FRGs provide systems of support for these men in which they feel they are able to engage in stigmatized forms of masculinity, such as emotionality. Most of the men within this study emphasized their desire to demonstrate a sense of socially acceptable "vulnerability" (P09-27). This was seen as an essential aspect of FRGs in which these men are able to adopt alternative forms of masculinity as a result of constant exposure to similar values/beliefs.

Membership within FRGs is based on a shared and common sentiment in which these men collectively feel they are "robbed" of their manhood/masculinity and left without a sense of worth (P11-08). This sense of a societal harm is imbedded within patriarchal social narratives that support a belief among men that they have been wrongfully stripped of power (Dragiewicz, 2008; Durfee, 2011; Lin, 2017). However, as a result of *patriarchal peer support*[51], men are provided the opportunity to draw upon a new and revived sense of worth from the larger collective identity that reinforces patriarchal principles of masculine hegemony based upon a supposedly righteous rage (Gasparini, 2010).

> You actually get to interact with people who have been through the same thing as you and understand. Unless you have actually experienced it no one can even imagine the depth of despair and hopelessness and powerlessness that modern men experience. The men's groups give you value. Everything else is taken away from you on every level of your life, but there someone actually listens to you (P09-24).

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[51] The attachment that men form to other masculine peers that perpetuates a narrative of masculine authority over other gender performances (Dragiewicz, 2008; Schwartz & Dekeseredy, 1997).

A majority of these men spoke of the importance they placed upon FRGs as a form of socialization and support for their masculinity. These men illustrated FRGs as providing a sense of "community" in which a "brotherhood" was established that made "male role models" accessible (P09-28). When individuals place prominence and significance upon a group, their individual identity can become intertwined with the characteristics of the group. This process of enmeshment facilitates in the internalization of group-based values whereby group beliefs and rhetoric become inseparable from an individual's identity (Livingstone et al., 2011; Turner, 1985; Turner et al., 1987; Turner et al., 1994). The establishment of an individual's sense of identity based upon their membership within FRGs requires individuals to accept larger group norms in order to maintain access to social rewards, such as a sense of brotherhood within these groups, while avoiding sanctions, such as ostracism (Dragiewicz, 2008; Faludi, 1991; Kerr, 1995).

Patriarchal peer support within FRGs creates a group-based narrative that positions women and feminism as transgressing patriarchal control.

> [FRGs] provide the knowledge that was there, kind of like the similar problems that people are facing, that men are facing, kind of like how women take advantage of men in some sense. Like how to kind of keep that to a minimal…[FRGs] are basically trying to make sure you have a better understanding of what you as a father, you as a man have (P10-06).

The discourse of FRGs creates a narrative that positions women as a dominant and empowered group that challenges the power and control of masculinity (Schwartz & Dekeseredy, 1997). Most of the rhetoric shared by these groups blames women and feminism for empowering individual women over men (for example, see section 4.3.3). However, some men did demonstrate a belief that their disempowerment was the result of an individual woman, specifically their ex-partner. These men emphasized the malicious intent of women to undermine the strength and autonomy of men through the use of feminine support groups, similar to FRGs, whose sole purpose is to help women make false accusation of domestic violence against men.

> So, like she got me out of the house, and then I find out afterwards that there are websites that expressly contain the exact circumstances to my removal from my home. There are websites out there that were designed to help women get rid of their husbands (P10-31).

FRG rhetoric blames women for men's unpleasant experiences, and it fosters a belief in the righteousness of hegemonic masculinity and men's entitlement to power and control. P10-31's assertions of falsely imposed harm onto men, specifically through malicious manipulation, validates these men's perception of masculine persecution and women's attempts to undermine men's entitlement. This belief has the capability to further justify men's anti-feminist stance which these groups have been widely accused of (Dragiewicz, 2008; Faludi, 1991; Kerr, 1995). For example, as a result of widespread adoption of this discourse within FRGs, some of these men have adopted anti-feminist language to undermine the strength and validity of women's power through terms such as "cunt" (P11-05). The ability of FRGs to seemingly validate patriarchal ideologies is a result of an underlying essentialized discourse that frames conflict as an inherent gendered experience that is imposed upon men by women (Dragiewicz, 2008, p. 125; see also, Dekeseredy et al., 2006).

> You have someone who's basically said "I'm going to take away your role as a father. Who says "I'm going to lie. I'm going to do everything I have to do," (P11-02).
>
> Her narrative was always the same, "yes he did this, yes he did this, and yes it is all his fault, he is a bad guy, he knows bikers, he knows these people, he doesn't take care of his kids, and he doesn't care for his family," and now I am called a deadbeat dad (P10-31).

These men demonstrate how they adopted a gendered frame in which women are constructed as spiteful, vindictive, and the perpetrators of wrongdoing. Women are positioned as both projecting blame on these men/fathers in an attempt to gain power and control, and as the initial instigators of conflict, "like she basically instigated the situation" (P10-06). While these men claim that women are the sole instigators, their use of deflection is a defense mechanism to protect their identity as victims (for example, see section 5.4.1) that rationalizes their sense of righteous rage and thus further attempts to reassert power and control (Kaufmann et al., 2022).

Patriarchal peer support within FRGs, creates an insular homogenous structure in which access to counter-narratives is discouraged and challenging for many of these members. These groups become a form of an "echo chamber" in which groups adopt ever greater extreme beliefs (Kitchens et al., 2020, p. 1621; Sunstein, 2002).

They were toxic or specifically misogynist kind of groups. Yes, there's always those echo chambers that exist. I think if you're trying to find something specific, and you know those logic traps and toxic echo chambers exist, you can avoid those pitfalls (P11-08).

The focus of FRGs is on the inclusion of like-minded men/fathers who share similar beliefs and experiences. As a result, there is the potential for a "narrowing of information diversity" in which each member of the group would continually seek to support their established beliefs through an exclusionary adoption of content and new members that reinforce and further narrow the established perspectives of the group (Kitchens et al., 2020, p. 1620).

5.4. Reclaiming the Masculine Gender Role

The narratives of my research participants reveal a complex understanding of masculinity in which the expectations for men's gender roles are not always apparent. For example, these men demonstrated either their inability or unwillingness to fulfill norms imbedded within hegemonic masculinity. Connell (1987) originally proposed that hegemonic masculinity, or the dominant representation of masculinity within a particular society, is not one in which a majority of men can successfully enact. However, men continue to strive to uphold and demonstrate a performance that closely resembles a hegemonic masculine performance as much as possible in order to gain power and/or retain privilege, but often fail to fully embody a powerful masculine presentation (Demetriou, 2001; Kessler et al., 1985). Accordingly, these men may seek to embrace a new masculine role to garner social power in which, as "modern men," they are willing to openly express their experiences with the harmful effects of the patriarchal social frame (for example, see chapter 4) (P09-24). With the support of FRGs, my participants were able to gain clarity over how to understand their role as men in contemporary society (or something like this).

5.4.1. The Construction of the Victim

A prominent theme emerging from conversations with men in FRGs was their perceived experiences as a victim of gender discrimination. The men within this study continually shared their desire for social equity and gender equality, specifically within the domain of parental rights. As a result of their membership within FRGs, that shape

their beliefs and ideals, these men perceive themselves as the *true victims* of society, in which all power has been stripped from them by social institutions (i.e., courts) because of prominent and widespread feminist beliefs (for example, see section 4.3.2 and 4.3.3.).

> The whole legal system is on the side of my ex as a miserable victim and criticized me as the father! But in reality, the real victim is me (P11-01).

According to this quote, women's empowerment has resulted in men's victimization. While most of these men were critical of traditional masculine roles (e.g., sole breadwinner, non-caregiver) (for example, see section 4.2), the interjection of women within domains traditionally controlled by men prompted a *backlash* whereby these participants became framed as the victims of women's *over-empowerment*. These men ultimately emphasized that "there is no equality" (P10-31) and that feminist movements "have started to push [men] down" (P09-24).

The discourse of gender equality supported by FRGs (for example, see Adams, 2006) and echoed by the men within this research is that they support gender equality and women's empowerment as long as men retain dominance over women. When equality transgresses men's dominance, they rely upon a traditional discourse utilized by marginalized groups, such as feminist and civil rights movements (for example, see section 5.2.1) of oppression[52] and marginalization to demonstrate the harm they believe is being inflicted upon men. The success of these past movements provides a framework for these men to construct pre-established and familiar arguments predicated upon a language of morality. While these past social movements provide a frame of reference for FRGs, the co-opting of this rhetoric is ultimately inaccurately applied. While these prior social movements were predicated upon the collective action of marginalized groups in which they sought to garner power which they never held, FRGs, in contrast, are enacting such rhetoric from a defensive position of pre-established power and privilege that they demand to retain (Crowley, 2006).

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[52] Feminist movements in the 1960swere predicated upon the ideological notion that as a result of systemic oppression, discrimination, and marginalization that had historically limited women's freedom and opportunity, they required gender equality within society (Adams, 2006).

5.4.2. Tension between Privilege and Men's Victimhood

The rhetoric of oppression and marginalization is employed by these men in the form of a victimized label despite the multi-dimensional racial and gendered privilege (i.e., white men) they retain (Johnson, 2017). As P10-31 notes,

> My ex-wife had had to spend weeks on figuring out how to get me, because she did it so well. Nobody does it that well by mistake, and that is what I brought up in court too. Seriously look at the circumstances, how I was removed, how my bank account was cleaned out, how everything was done, it was just too easy. In an hour's time from the minute I was put in the car, to the minute I got to the police station, she had cleaned out all of my bank accounts, she had made arrangements with her brother to change all the locks on the house, he was already on his way. Like how do you do that if you weren't planning it. And I know I am not the only father that had this happen. Whatever, the things that we talk about is how…the setup happened, and how well we have been setup. Like it is just phenomenal how well these women have set us up and how easy it is for them, and you know like we didn't even see it coming.

Situating these experiences as forms of victimization has the capability to elicit societal sympathy and support for men (Minow, 1993). The use of a victimized narrative allows these men to legitimize their gendered oppression. Amato (1990) explains, "[t]here is an elemental moral requirement to respond to innocent suffering. If we were not to respond to it and its claim upon us, we would be without conscience, and in some basic sense, not completely human" (as cited in Minow, 1993, p. 1413). The language of victimization is a discursive mechanism that draws attention upon those who are labeled as harmed, providing them a viable stage within the social domain in which to share their perspective. Specifically, a victim label allows these men to control the "meaning making process" through the use of value laden language that evokes societally based moral indignation of imposed harm and wrongdoing (Adams, 2006, p. 317; Minow, 1993).

The use of a victimized label has the potential to undermine the strength of a masculine performance as it inherently denotes vulnerability, diverging from the established masculine principles of strength and stoicism. However, the participants demonstrated their use of a *modern masculine* performance which they construct in contrast to the traditional masculinity they were socialized into.

> I feel like it's like you are allowed to go there and be vulnerable and share your struggles and people don't judge you and people like, like support, we

support each other. I have cried countless times in front of these guys and I have never been shamed or judged (P09-28).

In expressing their feelings of victimization, these men were forced to confront two conflicting social traits: 1) a traditional hegemonic masculinity that requires constant emotional control; and 2) a modern man's presentation that allows for acts of vulnerability. However, men continue to instill acts of vulnerability with hegemonic masculine traits in which they attempt to present themselves as composed men with the ability to maintain control and dominance over the social situation and, more specifically, women. This is accomplished through masculinity by proving that their actions and reactions to harm and vulnerability are deliberate rather than passive, and through actions and narratives that devalue both the transgressor and the severity of the harm (Burcar & Akerstrom, 2009; Durfee, 2011). Thus, these men's assertions of victimization are interconnected with perceived transgressions against their dominance and control. Some of the participants claim that their victimization was a result of an ex partners use of "suburb bullets"/false allegations (P10-29). This type of discourse allows men to maintain control of the social narrative while deflecting the label of domestic abuser (Durfee, 2011).

> I was falsely accused of beating my kids and many other things. I went, I tried to defend myself and still at that point I had some faith in the law, there is no way this can happen, I know there is no evidence because it can't happen, like it didn't happen so there is no evidence, there is no way evidence can exist. Well, I soon found out if a woman says something in Canada it is considered evidence, so you don't need evidence, all you need to do is have someone say something about you and. So, my experience was I expected fairness, and I expected that I would be given a chance, I was never once able to tell my story to law enforcement, umm, based on advice from my lawyer because they say, police do not charge to find nor do they look for innocence, the police only investigate to charge, they never ever look for innocence. The system is set up to get charges and if a police officer of any level does not have his or her charges stick or at least some of them, and what they do is take a whole handful of charges, they throw them at the wall and hope some stick. Most of this is based on, just a woman's word (P09-24).

Having self-assigned victim status allowed these men to contest allegations of DV. Within FRGs, this status is promoted and inherently powerful as a result of its ability to evoke emotional reactivity, such as sympathy and a vocabulary of justice (Kaye & Tomie, 1998; Sinclair, 1995). FRGs engage in existing societal meaning making processes that are readily available to these men and their audience members. They are

able to add to the social narrative, portraying themselves as victims rather than perpetrators (Moore, 1990).

> We got into a fight and stuff like that, she was shoving me around and basically I ended up calling the cops and I got arrested. And because she was a nurse, she listened to her, or like they listened to her and not me and just went from there. She basically instigated the situation. She was using her nursing tactics to keep me in a downplayed role (P10-06).

The use of these narratives has the capability to instill the victim with power through the use of language based upon injustice that evokes social connotations of wrongdoing that requires vindication. Thus, these narratives are utilizing traditionally legitimized social normative values, specifically those of fairness and equality, which have historically been employed by feminist movements to contest patriarchal control and violence (Sinclair, 1995). When narratives reproduce social norms rather than attempt to create them, they are more likely to be admitted into the existing social frame. The capacity of a social narrative to construct and influence the thought process of society is ultimately dependent upon its ability to obscure the underlying premise, rhetoric, and motives within a seemingly naturalized and accepted description of the event (Minow, 1993; Reich, 1990; Sinclair, 1995).

Established social norms are value laden, often imperceptible, and are taken for granted as a form of common-sense. The language of oppression utilized by FRGs, epitomized by these groups as a victim label, thus is often an undetectable incursion into a discourse originally utilized by feminist movements to assist domestic violence survivors. Feminist movements have demonstrated that a language of oppression attracts societal attention in which people feel compelled to defend the victim, although unwittingly (Brown & Hogg, 1996; Kaye & Tolmie, 1998). It is an appeal to logic and reason predicated upon gender-based equality, traditionally upheld by women and feminist movements, in which the narrative merely illustrates a social imperative to assist both gender roles if they equally experience forms of DV.

5.4.3. Deconstructing the Victim Narrative

These men use a common-sense narrative to emphasize that men are victims of women, and women's empowerment. Of note, while a majority of these men stressed their victimized status as a result of actions imposed upon them by an ex-partner, some

men equated their own victimization as actions of injustice enacted against their children.

> As I get there to the door, and I'm going to hand him over, I said, "Okay buddy." I give him a hug…then we go to leave. We're not even two seconds in the door for him, he comes right back out the door comes running out, and he says," Daddy, please don't leave. Please don't leave me." He comes up to me and I go down on my knees. I want to give him a big hug. He's crying and he's like, "Daddy, I don't want to go, I want to stay, I want to go with you." Then [his mother] comes out the door and calls him by his full name with an angry voice and is like, "get the hell back in your room." I'm like, "What the hell?" He goes back in there. As we're walking away, I start to break down… She's not a well person. She's using my child as a pawn. She's using the child as a weapon against me. There's no other way that she can hurt me except for that way. It's just not going to happen. That's the only way that she can hurt me and she's done it (P11-05).

A central theme of FRGs is children's rights and well-being, specifically the allegedly inequitable treatment and abuse children experience through forced separation from their fathers (for example, see section 4.3.2 for parental alienation). FRGs enmesh the well-being of fathers with their children. As a result, actions perceived as taken against children's right to equal parenting time are interpreted as an incursion against fathers and their own individual rights (Kaye & Tolmie, 1998).

The use of a victimized language, especially when interconnected with children's rights and protections, is difficult to challenge. A discourse of victimization based upon the infringement of children's well-being follows a similar pattern to how men speak about their experiences of domestic violence, a violation of the fundamental social values of equality and justice (Kay & Tolmie, 1998). A discourse that equates potential abuse against children with harm imposed upon men/fathers can legitimize men's claims of victimization. As children have a pre-existing label of innocence requiring protection, a discourse of men's victimization enacted in parallel to this can socially legitimize and imbue this FRG rhetoric with a sense of credibility (Kay & Tolmie, 1998).

The use of a language based upon a moral confrontation, challenging the legitimacy of a child's vulnerability and, by proxy, men/fathers, legitimizes the FRG discourse of bias and discrimination against these men. Such a social narrative protects the label of men's victimization as disputes of harm against children are problematic to uphold (Kaye & Tolmie, 1998).

We had a big fight and my son fell asleep on me in my arms and she went to go and grab him and take him from me. I said, "Well, no, don't do that, he's sleeping on my chest, just let him asleep." She says, "Well, I'm taking my kid, I'm going home… I wasn't about to let her, because of the state that she was in, I wasn't about to allow her to go all the way home in a car ride which would've taken them about 20 minutes, 25 minutes to get there. In that time she could have been so messed up in her head that she wouldn't have been able to see something and all of a sudden, they may get into an accident. I'm like, "No, you're violent, well, your temper is skyrocketing and that's not going to happen." The cops are out there and almost the whole family's like out there in my front yard. I'm the only one I'm by myself, I have no backing. I've nobody protecting me and nobody helping me with the situation that's going on here. I'm alone, I'm by myself and I'm just holding on to my child knowing that I have rights and that this child is going to be safer with me tonight, than going home with mom, where she could get in an accident because of the way she is (P11-08).

When confronted with having his child removed from his custody, this participant saw the need to protect the child's well-being, over his own desire to retain control. P11-08 maintained an appearance of control while engaging in language that evokes a sense of men's victimization. Thus, while demonstrating a victimized status, he simultaneously demonstrated an ability to maintain control while his rights were concurrently being infringed (Durfee, 2011). The consistent demonstration of control allows these men to adopt a victimized and oppressed status while upholding hegemonic masculine traits.

The proliferation of FRG rhetoric that labels men as the "true" victims of society, feminism, and institutional practices has the potential to once again obscure men's praxis of power, legitimizing their claims of imparted wrongdoing and ultimately justifying their calls for vindication. However, the reliance of FRGs on a victimized narrative is predicated upon the recognition of men's suffering resulting from their social identification as *white men*. In utilizing a rhetoric that acknowledges gendered and racial categorization as an essential assessment to access societal power and control, FRGs are unwittingly acknowledge that social privilege is inherently predicated on the inequitable principles of racial and gender categories instead of lauded principles of hard work and merit (Kimmel, 2013; Robinson, 2000).

While this section has analysed the narrative of victimization as an aspect of FRG rhetoric that acts as a mechanism for men to (re)gain control, it is imperative to understand how this is not always a conscious act (Kaye & Tolmie, 1998). It is beyond the scope of this research to determine whether this victimization discourse was

intentionally exploited, or if it is a consequence of these men's actual perceptions of victimization. In concurrence with past research on narratives of victimization (for example, see Adams, 2006; Brown & Hogg, 1996; Durfee, 2011; Kaye & Tolmie, 1998; Minow; 1993 Sinclair, 1995), the social implications of perpetuating a status of men's victimization to forms of masculine power and control were analysed rather than the existence of intentionality. While the manifest function of FRG discourse might merely represent an emerging capability to publicise victimization that was once obscured within masculine rhetoric of stoicism, the latent function ultimately perpetuates a social frame that empowers the claims and perspectives of these men. FR discourse relies upon anecdotal stories that evoke strong emotional reactions which become naturalized and taken for granted sentiments (Adams, 2006; Kaye & Tolmie, 1998; Messner, 1997). Social frames are not a reflection of reality and, instead, are a result of the ongoing dissemination of these prominent FRG narratives. That is, these ideas represent the interests, values, and beliefs of the dominant group from which they emanate (Adams, 2006; Goffman, 1986). Thus, while these narratives might be a latent function of the perceived experiences of these men, the appropriation of a traditional feminist discourse of oppression has the capability to become naturalized as a facet of masculine experience, normalizing an ideology and social perception that women have a universal capability to enact dominance over men.

5.4.4. Violence

Most of the participants discussed their feelings of powerlessness and oppression (for example, see Chapter 4). As a result, these men have employed a range of FRG discursive tools that proffers the use of social mechanisms to restore their power and control, either through the use of traditional masculine traits or the adoption of discrete pro-patriarchal rhetoric. However, if these tactics fail to restore men's feelings of entitled power, they can enact more overt and direct forms (e.g., violence) of dominance in an attempt to reclaim a threatened masculinity (Morris & Ratajczak, 2019).

> That happens a lot, and it happened in my relationships. That's something that I felt attacked, felt attacked and so I attacked back, and it never should have happened, and I know better now (P09-28).

A thwarted sense of entitlement can foster an individual sense of anger through which men will seek to reclaim their control and/or mitigate feelings of humiliation

(Kimmel, 2013; Schwalbe, 2014). Thus, men's anger is an aggrieved sense of entitlement that stems from humiliation, a form of emasculation that strips men of their manhood that they consciously and unconsciously aim to avenge. Further, men learn that they can mitigate the sense of a failed masculine performance through socially imbued and lauded compensatory acts of masculinity (Schwalbe, 2014). For example, enacting violence against another, especially those perceived as challenging one's entitled sense of privilege and power, can be a way to regain control. Ultimately violence can be a means by which men seek to enact retribution, diminish an internalized sense of humiliation and re-establish their privileged entitled claim to power and control (Faludi, 1999; Kimmel, 2013).

> You know I have been in that situation before, surprised to say I am a little bit stronger than I give myself credit for I know a little bit more than I give myself credit for, so when I get into a fight I usually lose that control. So I have done some pretty big damage before (P10-15).

When men are challenged and/or humiliated, violence can serve as a restorative practice to reaffirm their allegedly rightful sense of power and control. Violence is a tool and a socially condoned expression of masculinity, as well as a means through which privileged groups have historically sustained their dominance. As such, violence becomes the ultimate expression and demonstration of power and control (Connell, 2020; Hamberger et al., 2017; Kalmuss & Strauss, 1990; Morris & Ratajczak, 2019; Stark, 2007). As a culturally and socially inscribed expression of masculinity, men's violence against women is a widespread phenomenon through which men continually harass, intimidate, and assault women. While violence is a normalized expression of the hegemonic masculine gender role, a man may also feel entitled to use violence to restore a threatened or damaged masculine role or performance that has been made to appear vulnerable and weak (Connell, 2020; Kimmel, 2013).

> No matter what I do…okay so some background on my information, I have always been a bit of a hard ass, bit of an asshole, bit of a badass type of guy. So in 2013 I spanked my daughter four times on the bum with a slipper… I spanked my daughter four times on the bum with a night slipper, I spent thirty plus hours in a jail cell for this. I was separated from my wife and EPO[53] was placed on me that was a one year EPO, I didn't know what an EPO was at the time, I didn't know any of this could happen, my bank accounts were cleaned out, I am that guy. When people say that their wives cleaned them out, I was one of those guys. I slept on my mothers floor for

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[53] Emergency Protection Order

five days, my accountant was the only thing that saved me at the time. He covered all of my bills, helped me out. My ex wife didn't care, she left me a note and a truck saying be thankful you got a truck. I burned the note and I wanted to burn her too. But I didn't, I never did, she is still the mother of my kids (P10-31).

Violence is the method through which a man restores a challenged sense of inherent masculine characteristics, such as honour and respect, while rectifying an imposed humiliation (Kimmel, 2013; Morris & Ratajczak, 2019; Rutherford, 1988). Kimmel (2013) illustrates:

> The purpose of violence is to diminish the intensity of shame and replace it as far as possible with its opposite, pride, thus preventing the individual from being overwhelmed by the feeling of shame (p. 179).

Consequently, many men do not engage in acts of violence against women when their power is intact and unquestioned. Rather they enact violence when their sense of entitled power and authority over women is threatened and becomes tenuously insecure (Kimmel, 2013). For example, white men perceive a societal dispossession of the masculine role from their positions of power and authority which has predicated an increased sense of masculine vulnerability and humiliation. Violence against women becomes a means to compensate for a diminished or failed masculine performance in which rage displaces humiliation and restores a mans entitled sense of power and control (Kimmel, 2008, 2013).

5.5. Conclusion

While scholars (for example, see Dummit, 2007; Pleck, 1976, 1982; Schwalbe, 2014) contend that masculinity continues to uphold a monopolization on defining which forms of capital are infused with privilege, and subsequently who can enact performances that demonstrate power and control, the men within this study contested this sentiment. They emphasized that as a result of the presentation of men as males, men are ultimately the most victimized and powerless individuals. However, while these men demonstrated a societal vilification of men's traditionally privileged position, they further exhibited sentiments that demonstrated an attempt to reclaim masculine social dominance. As a result of ongoing peer associations with like-minded men within FRGs, these men were socialized to ideologies that reinforced their sense of disempowerment while perpetuating a desire to reinforce a faltering masculinity. Within FRGs, *patriarchal*

peer support, the attachment that men form to other masculine peers that perpetuates a monolithic ideology of gendered dominance, these men acquired rhetoric that promotes a motivation to control the social narrative (Dragiewicz, 2008; Schwartz & Dekeseredy, 1997). For example, because of patriarchal peer support, these men were socialized to a language of masculine victimization that frames men as the actual victims of gender discrimination and DV (Durfee, 2011).

The adoption of a victimized narrative contrasts with traditional masculinity, a stoic individual devoid of emotions, or at least one who is unwilling to demonstrate such emotions in front of others (Rutherford, 1988). However, these men continually emphasized their acceptance of a victimized status in the absence of a loss of a sense of masculinity. Some scholars (for example, see Durfee, 2011; Kaye & Tolmie, 1998) have illustrated that men balance the two performances of victim (i.e., one who is inherently vulnerable) and masculinity (i.e., a role based upon strength and impenetrable resolve) through the careful construction of their narrative that creates a sense of victimization without contesting their individual strength. For example, when men express their victimization, they emphasize their ability to maintain control of the situation and the ultimate ineffectiveness of the assault. This ultimately characterizes their victimization as a transgression against equality and fairness (Durfee, 2011). However, as the narrative of victimization is aided through FRGs, the facilitation of peer support that upholds victimization as a shared identity, can bolster a masculine identity hindering a sense of a spoiled identity. A status of victim, when shared with a larger group, can create a sense of solidarity with those who are positioned as having similarly suffered (Minow, 1993; Wendell, 1992). The perception of a shared commonality of victimization, can diminish an individual's sense of responsibility and self-blame. However, the masculine control over the social narrative does not prevent the use of violence. While a majority of these men did not demonstrate an individual tendency to use violence, either towards an ex-partner or their children, violence was still a common overarching theme that arose when these men felt that their masculine identity was threatened. Specifically, violence was utilized when their masculine power and control was contested by those perceived as occupying a traditionally marginalized status (e.g., women). Violence remains a capacity of masculinity to which a demonstration has the ability to signify their capability to exert control while simultaneously resist the imposition of control on the part of others (Morris & Ratajczak, 2019; Rutherford, 1988).

Chapter 6.   Conclusion

Why don't you come on back to the war, pick up your tiny burden,
Why don't you come on back to the war, let's all get even,
Why don't you come on back to the war, can't you hear me speaking?
(Cohen, 1975)

To better understand men's entitlement to power and control, as an inherent aspect of the masculine gender role, I explored men's social responses to perceived challenges to their patriarchal authority. Specifically, within this research, I sought to understand how men understand and respond to what they perceive to be infringements on men's domination, such as the empowerment of women, use of feminist ideologies, and the family court processes. While current research examines masculinity from a feminist/pro-feminist framework, what is currently absent is an understanding of men's individual perceptions, understandings, and reactions to their perceived encroachment upon "their" domain. To construct a nuanced understanding of men's experiences with, and perspectives on, power and control, I utilized a qualitative research design in which I interviewed men who were part of FRGs in Canada; that is, a group that traditionally demonstrates and adheres to hegemonic masculine ideologies and outdated notions of patriarchal control.

Power and control are central to masculinity, especially within patriarchal societies. Men are socialized to believe that, in order to gain or retain power, they must replicate hegemonic masculinity to the best of their ability. While a majority of men will never embody a form of manhood that meets the expectations of a hegemonic masculine gender role, they nevertheless benefit from the dividends of patriarchy (Kimmel, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2019; Morris & Ratajczak, 2019). Masculinity is saturated with social connotations of power and control. As men move through social domains, they have the ability to enact a greater degree of control and dominance over other genders, as well as less powerful men (Kimmel, 2005).

As a result of equating masculinity with power, the dominance of a singular man's performance is based on his capacity to successfully demonstrate power over others. Men are perceived as powerful only if they have a greater access and ability to define what constitutes powerful performances more than anyone else (Bourdieu, 2001; Kaufman, 1999; Otomar & Wehr, 2002). In this sense, social equality between gender

performances becomes framed as a "zero-sum game" in which it is believed that as women gain greater access to social domains and capital, then men must lose (Kimmel, 2010, p. 20). This was a common theme within this research; a majority of participants emphasized their unease around gender equality through sentiments that blamed feminist social movements for encroaching on men's privileges and facilitating the subjection of men. While most of these men did not demonize feminism or women, they still believed that equality movements had gone too far; that is, they saw feminist movements, and society in general, as "start[ing] to … push [men] down," (P09-24). As a result, these men began seeking out communities where they could express themselves more freely. FRGs emerged out of this perceived need for community support by and for men. These FRGs became a collective of men that allowed them to bolster and often reorganize their sense of what constitutes masculinity (Kimmel, 2010).

FRGs have been labeled anti-feminists who fight for men's superiority over women, as well as patriarchal order both within and outside of families (for example, see Dragiewicz, 2008; Durfee, 2011; Flood, 2010, 2012; Lin, 2017). However, most of the men within this study expressed a belief that FRGs are necessary and actually beneficial support groups for men. Specifically, these men voiced a need for such groups, as there is a perceived absence of support groups solely intended to help men. This research demonstrates that there is a need for greater accessibility of men-centred resources and supports, specifically mental health resources to alleviate a prevalence of suicide among men. However, the fathers' rights discourse advocates for exclusionary, and often pro-patriarchal, groups that they equated with "commercial gyms like she's fit, which is only for women" (P09-28). What is absent from this understanding is the gendered power dynamics within society in which women are constantly made to feel unsafe within social and private domains (Lewis et al., 2015). Of note, as this research demonstrates, there is a contradiction between the framing of these groups as being a platform for men's advocacy and support and, in reality, their perpetuation and normalization of anti-women and anti-feminist rhetoric through engaging in and upholding ideologies of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy.

Through the proliferation of *patriarchal peer support* men within these groups come to adopt anti-feminist and anti-women-based ideologies that frame men as oppressed and victims of women's and society's attempts to dismantle patriarchy and strip men of their power (Dragiewicz, 2008; Durfee, 2011; Lin, 2017). The men within this

research continually framed themselves as the victims of gender discrimination and subjugated alongside women. In contrast to traditional understandings of masculinity, this narrative portrayed these men as susceptible to harm and subjects of oppression; as such, they believe they are capable of being the victim. However, privilege, status, and dominance, upheld as a facet of masculinity, legitimizes men's entitlement to such resources (Bourdieu, 1996; DiAngelo, 2018). While these men emphasized their believed vulnerability and oppression over their patriarchal authority, this narrative perpetuates power through its ability to reframe social awareness and sympathy back to the alleged plight of men. Power and control are not singular and fixed social mechanisms; instead, they are constituted as the "power over different forms of power, or the capital granting power over capital" (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 265). Thus, individuals who can enact capital defined as powerful (e.g., masculine strength), can do so in whichever way is most useful to defend and protect their social role (e.g., masculine vulnerability). The use of a victim label on the part of men was demonstrated within this research as a deafening call for assistance that positions men as the transgressed, legitimizing in the re-allocation of resources and attention back onto their social role (DiAngelo, 2018).

6.1. Limitations and Future Research

All of the interviews were conducted electronically via Zoom, telephone or Facebook voice class as a result of COVID-19 safety precautions that were in place during data collection. As such, a potential methodological limitation of this research was an inability to build adequate rapport that is present within face-to-face interactions in which there is a possibility for limited or distorted data (for example, see Novick, 2008). However, a majority of the participants willingly took part in in-depth and engaged conversations despite this limitation. A further possible limitation of this research comes as a result of my pre-established theoretical positioning in which I actively adopted and utilized a feminist and pro-feminist frame. It has been made evident within this research that these men uphold anti-feminist sentiments. While my sociological perspective does not align with these men, as a researcher I have an obligation to the participants to accurately represent their voices and experiences without imposing my own perspective. As such, in analysing their narrative I ensured that their perspectives were iterated

verbatim in which an analytical frame could naturally arise from their voices in the absence of a compulsory application.

Based upon the findings of this research what is absent is an in-depth analysis of masculinity through other critical lenses, such as race and class. While this research sought to understand masculinity, and specifically men's understanding of challenges to power and control, there was a lack of racial and socio-economic diversity among the participants. Future research should further engage with the multitude of intersecting identities that affect access to power and control, and specifically one's believed entitlement to power and control.

This research ultimately analysed the construction of masculinity as an identity and its subsequent performances within the realm of FRGs. While this research aimed to better understand how these groups can socialize men to rhetoric predicated upon ideologies of masculine power, control, and domination, it was beyond the scope of this work to engage with these men's actions from a fathering/parenting perspective. Future research thus could analyse and make meaning of how FRG gender ideals shape their interactions with both their children and the familial structure (for example, see Doucet, 2006).

6.2. What's Gender Got to do With it?

The sentiments, perspectives and actions of these men can be reconciled as reflective of a crisis in masculinity to which scholars (for example, see Gourarier, 2019; Kimmel, 1987, 1996, 2008, 2010, 2013; Robinson, 2000) emphasize is a result of conflicting role expectations culminating from a rapid change in the social framework. While the prevalence of hegemonic masculine role expectations has the potential to perpetuate harmful performances, such as compensatory acts of masculinity (for example, see section 4.3 and 5.4.2) gender roles can be attributed as perpetuating the confining principles that guide the availability of performative scripts to which all are socialized to abide. However, it cannot be ignored that historically women have not only been the bearers of similar confines but are also simultaneously subjected to systematic forms of marginalization, subjugation, and oppression as a result of the confines of men's gender role that relentlessly imposes its will upon all other social performances.

This research has provided an analysis of individual men's actions as they relate to a social construction of gender and masculinity within a patriarchal society. While all actors perform their gender role, reaffirming, contesting, and expanding their social frame through everyday social interactions, this learnt social representation is ultimately not an expression of one's character but is instead a set of practices. While gender, specifically masculinity, has been obscured and naturalized as a facet to protect challenges to its authority, it is important when analysing acts of men to not let the individual actor vanish within the role (Schwalbe, 2014). Instead, as a social construct, gender needs to be identified as a guiding frame through which individuals are influenced but still capable of making independent decisions.

6.3. Considerations

This research demonstrates that as a result of patriarchal peer support, FRGs act as a form of socialization that instills men with a righteous rage. These groups provide men with rhetorical devices based on common-sense and normative social values that allow these men to bolster their masculine claim to dominance (Durfee, 2011; Kaye & Tolmie, 1998). Specifically, the rhetoric of "equality" was a prominent theme employed by FRGs to emphasize the presence of a transgression against their human rights (P09-28). While the narrative of equality often centred upon infringements directly enacted against men, a majority of FRGs rhetoric conflated the rights and equality of children with the interests of these fathers (Kaye & Tolmie, 1998). These participants offered no rationalization as to why custodial equality was in the best interest of the children. Instead, the benefits presented to children were assumed, as a natural facet of a heteronormative nuclear family (Kaye & Tolmie, 1998; Munro, 1992).

The alignment of men's interests with their children reinforces their claims of injustice with moral superiority through the conflation of children's best interest with that of these men's individual self-interest. When transgressions against children are exemplified, they become an transgression against the father, a legitimized claim to victimization (Kaye & Tolmie, 1998). Thus, while children's equality and rights were continually emphasized by these men as the core rationale for their actions, the FRG discourse put forth within this research was unable to substantiate what the rights and interests of children were beyond custodial fascination.

What was ultimately absent from the language of children's rights, well-being, and equality, was an admission of responsibility in which parenting requires sacrificing one's own self-interest to benefit the child (Kaye & Tolmie, 1998). Instead, these men expressed their desire to gain custodial access as a way to counter the control and domination imposed by ex-partners through children. Past research reflects the sentiments drawn from this research, that men within FRGs utilize children as a further tactic of control to maintain their continued dominance over ex-partners (Kaye & Tolmie, 1998).

The possession of such an entitled social position, especially one that has been unchallenged for a majority of human history, is a comforting attribute that has systematically been attributed to men as a naturalized characteristic of their biological sex (DiAngelo, 2018; Kessler et al., 1985). Subsequently a challenge to this engrained sense of superiority causes both social and individual discomfort as a conflict arises between a socialized entitlement to power and that of societies current condemnation of such performances. As gender is internalized by most of these men as a naturalized and individual characteristic, such indiscretions against masculinity, is perceived as an incursion against themselves personally. Thus, when these men perceive their privilege and power as being challenged, they find this to be an unbearable experience that requires a resolution (DiAngelo, 2018).

The prevalence of violence committed by these men was modest. However, any enactments of violence as a result of one's adherence to a masculine role requires consideration, especially those acts of violence that are an attempt to reassert power and control. While hegemonic roles are not based upon acts of aggression, violence can be a resource by which individuals assert their social membership within a hegemonic role/category. As such, in pursuit of attaining a hegemonic masculine presentation, violence becomes a legitimized means in which men can defend a challenged masculinity (Goffman, 1959; Messerschmidt, 2018; Morris & Ratajczak, 2019). However, men's use of violence inherently illustrates a crisis in masculinity, for a truly legitimized hierarchy does not require the use of violence. Hegemonic masculinity is consequently not a fixed position nor a permanently normalized and legitimized masculine performance. Instead, it is a descriptive practice that has come into existence through patriarchal institutions that confers a privileged status upon men and could be replaced with a less oppressive form of masculinity, one that is not based upon entitlement to

power and control (Connell, 2020; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2018).

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Appendix A. Call for Participants

Dear Mr. _____,

I am researching the experiences of men who participate in fathers' rights groups as part of my Master's degree. The purpose of this study is to examine how men experience and engage with forms of manhood and masculinity in different phases of their lives in familial/relational, social, and economic environments. I also seek to better understand men's engagement with fathers' rights groups, and how these groups shape their experiences with manhood.

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

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

Sincerely,

Connor MacMillan, M.A. Student

Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Simon Fraser University

8888 University Drive

Burnaby, BC V5A 1S6

Appendix B. Interview Guide

Introductory Dialogue & Notes for Interviewer

Interviews will be semi-structured, and this interview schedule provides a general structure for interviews and helps to retain comparability of these data.

Participants' responses and experiences will guide each interview. Therefore, the questions listed below may not be asked in this specific order, and topics may arise that are not contained on this guide. Further, this guide is a working document that may develop over time based on themes and issues that arise during interviews.

Introduce self and purpose of the study

Review study information sheet with the participant

Explain confidentiality

Explain right to not answer questions and/or end the interview at any time

Obtain consent to begin recording. If the participant is uncomfortable with recording the interview detailed notes will be taken.

Begin recording and obtain verbal consent to participate

Section 1: Background

Let's start first with some background information. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself.

Prompts:

    What is your educational background?

    High school? Did you go to university? Where? What was your major?

    If you were asked to describe your ethnicity, what would you say?

    Do you identify as a man?

What gender label do you use?

How old are you?

What is your marital status?

Section 2: Masculinity/Manhood and Gender

Intro script: I'm now going to ask you some general questions about masculinity and manhood.

What does manhood or being a man mean to you?

> Prompts: Define and explain manhood or manliness?

Can you provide a real-life example, like something you experience in your day-to-day life, that shows the meaning of manhood/manliness?

How did you learn what it means to be a man?

> Who or what taught you how to be a man?

> Prompts: Media representations, friends, associates?

What does the ideal manly person look or act like?

> Can you tell me more about how you learned who/what the ideal man is?

> Do you think society expects different things of men than women?

> If so, what? If not, why do you feel that there aren't any different expectations for men?

> > Prompts: As a man, are you expected to act a certain way?

> What is expected of a men in the home?

> In relationships?

> At work?

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When socializing with other men?

When socializing with women?

What happens when men don't meet these expectations?

Have you ever experienced this? If yes, can you give me an example?

Can you tell me about a time when you felt "manly"?

Can you tell me about a time when you felt your manhood was being scrutinized?

Did you change how you act because of this?

What makes it difficult to be a man in our society?

Who or what makes the experience of being a man difficult or challenging?

What challenges do men face in the home? Relationships? Social life? Job/economic environment?

Barriers?

Can you tell me about a time you experienced these challenges?

How did you react or respond?

Can you tell me a story of a time when you experienced barriers to getting something you wanted or needed, such as respect, a relationship, new job, promotion, or raise?

How did this make you feel? How do you react or respond?

How would you define success for men??

Based on this definition, do you consider yourself successful?

If not, why? What do you feel has stopped you from or gotten in the way of your success?

In which parts of your life have you experienced the most success, such as jobs, relationships, income, education, or fatherhood?

Can you describe your own efforts to achieve such success?

Were you responsible for your own success?

If your experiences with manhood were to be turned into a book, movie, TV show, or song, what would the title be?

Section 3: Fathers' rights groups

Intro script: This next set of questions is focused on your involvement with father's rights groups.

When did you first join a fathers' rights/fatherhood group?

Do you belong to more than one fatherhood group?

How did you find out about these groups?

What motivated you to join?

What are the goals of the group(s) to which you belong?

What does "fathers' rights" mean to you? Define/explain.

What are the "rights" of fathers'?

What rights do fathers have?

What rights are fathers being denied?

Does your group and/or the members of your group share similar beliefs?

What benefits do they have for men and/or fathers?

What benefits does the group have for you personally?

Disadvantages?

What activities does your group take part in?

Do you participate in these activities? If so, please describe your experiences. If not, why?

What supports are offered by the group?

       Prompt: Emotional? Financial? Legal advice?

           Do you find these supports helpful?

           Are there supports you wish were available in your group?

Is there a sense of a personal connection to your group?

           Please describe it.

           What kind of relationships have you formed in this group?

              How about the individuals in your group?

What have you learned by participating in this group?

       Prompt: About yourself? Manhood? Family? Relationships?

Has your understanding of manhood changed through your participation within fatherhood groups?

       Why or why not?

       If so, how has it changed? If not, why do you feel it hasn't changed?

How would you describe your sense of manhood prior to entering this group in comparison to now?

Can you describe your experiences with your fathers' rights group?

What do you like about what they do? What doesn't really work for you?

       Please give examples of positive experiences. Negative experiences?

Given your experiences, what is your opinion of fatherhood groups?

Would you recommend them to others? Why/why not?

Section 4: Concluding thoughts

Intro script: We're almost done now. I just have a few more final questions to wrap things up.

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about masculinity, manhood, fathers' rights groups, or related issues that we have not yet discussed?

Do you have any thoughts or observations you would like to add?

Would you be willing to refer me to members of your group who might be interested in participating?

Members of other groups?

Can you refer me to members of your group whose views on these issues might differ from yours?

Thank for participation and **stop recording**

Appendix C. Study Information Sheet

Purpose of the study:

The purpose of this study is to examine men's engagement in and experiences with fathers' rights groups. This study seeks to better understand these men's perceptions and understandings of masculinity and manhood, as well as how they experience gender and gender relations. Further, men's understandings and perceptions of their roles and rights in familial, social, and economic spheres will be explored during different phases of their lives.

Who is conducting this study?

The Student Lead is Mr. Connor MacMillan, a Master's student in the Department of Sociology at Simon Fraser University.

The Principal Investigator is Dr. Wendy Chan, a Professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Simon Fraser University.

Participation in this study:

You are invited to participate in an individual interview to discuss your experiences with fathers' rights groups and perceptions of manhood, masculinity, gender and gender rights. Interviews will be conducted either in person or via an online mode of communication such as Zoom, Skype, Teams, phone, or any other electronic means that are convenient for potential participants. Interviews are expected to last 60-90 minutes.

Voluntary participation and withdrawal:

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you should in no way feel any obligation or pressure to participate. If you do, you should not participate. If you choose to participate, you may stop participating in the interview and/or withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose to withdraw your contributions up to the point of the completion of this study, as your contributions are unable to be removed after the write-up is complete. The estimated completion date for the write-up is August 2022. You may also choose not to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable discussing and still remain in the study.

Potential risks and discomforts:

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

Please know that if you reveal that there has been an incident that involves abuse and/or neglect of a child, or that there is a risk of such incident occurring, as a researcher I am bound by the law to report this information to the appropriate authorities.

Potential benefits:

By participating in this study, you will be aiding in the development of new knowledge regarding fathers' rights groups, men's experiences with masculinity, and social expectations of manhood. Your contributions will aid in the development of ways of understanding and theorizing about men's lived experiences, and your voice and experiences will aid in identifying concerns and opportunities for change. Further, the results of this study may assist men who are faced with similar experiences and/or struggles.

Remuneration:

No direct payments or financial incentives are offered in return for participating in this study. However, fees incurred by the participant while partaking in the interview, such as parking or transit fees, will be reimbursed as long as the participant makes the request for potential reimbursement prior to the interview taking place.

Current and future use of data:

This study is being conducted as a required component of my Master's degree. Upon completion, the findings of this study will be included in the write-up of my graduate thesis paper, and may be used for conference presentations and/or publications. The fully anonymized transcripts will be retained in a secure location for up to three years after final write-up.

Statement of confidentiality:

Your name and the contributions you make will remain confidential. Your identity will be protected, and no information revealing your identity will be disclosed or published. Your contributions will be identified with a pseudonym of your choice. If you do not select a pseudonym, one will be selected on your behalf.

If you are participating in this study via phone, note that telephones are not a secure means of communication and strict confidentiality cannot be guaranteed through this medium.

If you are participating in this study via Zoom, Skype, Whatsapp, or any U.S. owned video conferencing software, know that any data you provide may be transmitted and stored in countries outside of Canada, as well as in Canada. It is important to remember that privacy laws vary in different countries and may not be the same as in Canada.

Consent to participate:

You will be asked to provide verbal consent to participate in this study. Additionally, with your permission, the interview will be digitally recorded to ensure that your words, experiences, and perspectives are represented as accurately as possible. Digital audio files will be erased following transcription of the interviews. If you do not consent to digital recording but would like to participant in this study, anonymized handwritten notes can be taken during the interview in the place of a digital recording.

Questions or concerns about the study:

If you have any questions about the research or the results of the study, you may contact Connor MacMillan, the Principal Investigator or Professor Wendy Chan, the Senior Supervisor.

If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, you may contact Dr. Jeffrey Toward, Director, Office of Research Ethics.

To learn more about the study or to find out how you can participate, please contact:

Connor MacMillan, BA (with distinction)