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Researching the Intersection between Collective Identity and Conceptions of Post-separation and Divorced Fatherhood: A Case Study Fathers For Justice, Fathers For Just Us, or Fathers are Us?

Abstract

This article explores the methodological implications of investigating the collective identity of Fathers For Justice (FFJ). More specifically, a three-pronged approach of employing participant observation, interviews, and content analysis is assessed as the basis for understanding FFJ's collective identity. This methodological approach reveals that meanings and practices related to post-separation and divorced fatherhood as well as the importance of children are a significant dimension of a FFJ collective identity. I conclude that an important part of the FFJ collective identity is not based on these activists perceiving themselves as self-serving (Fathers for Just Us), but as those seeking equality in terms of being recognized as continuous parents after separation and divorce (Fathers are Us).

Keywords

Fathers rights movement; collective identity; participant observation; interviews; content analysis

Introduction

The Canadian fathers' rights movement is often viewed as a right-wing "backlash" against feminism, in terms of attempting to re-affirm patriarchal rights in post-separation/divorced¹ families (Crean, 1988; Boyd, 1989). Fathers' rights activists are criticized for creating a "fathers' rights discourse" based on the "rhetoric of equality" (Drakich, 1989; Bertoia and Drakich, 1993; Bertoia, 1998; Arendell, 1992a, 1992b; Coltrane and Hickman, 1992). Is FFJ, as part of the fathers' rights movement, really about "justice", or is it a self-serving group of activists who are about "just us"? Alternatively, is it about "continued parenting" after separation and divorce in terms of "Fathers are Us"?

The research challenge of examining contentious organizations such as FFJ warrants a careful methodological strategy in order to understand important

dimensions of an “FFJ collective identity”. As a result, I will take a case study approach and focus on the collective identity of FFJ, employing a three pronged methodology - participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and content analysis. While the first two methodologies are primary, documentation from FFJ and related sources occupy a secondary position of corroborating participant observation and interview material.

This article has two main objectives:

1) To investigate the FFJ collective identity associated with post-separation and divorced fatherhood in relation to children.

2) To discuss and evaluate the three-pronged methodological approach used to research the collective identity of FFJ.

Literature Review of the Fathers’ Rights Movement

The Canadian Fathers Rights literature provides some insight into how the fathers’ rights movement is portrayed. The trend noted by Crean (1988), Boyd (1989), Drakich (1989), Bertoia and Drakich (1993), Bertoia (1998), Arendell (1992a, 1992b), Coltrane and Hickman (1992) throughout this literature suggests that fathers’ rights activists are self-serving. Those who write about the fathers’ rights movement perceive it as being concerned with acquiring power and rights over children and former spouses.

Susan Crean (1988) characterizes Fathers For Justice as part of the backlash against feminism. Participants and supporters of Fathers For Justice disagree with Crean, advocating that FFJ members are proactive, interested in fathering issues, and furthering the agenda of the 1960s feminist movementⁱⁱ. While this reactive-proactive debate requires further investigation, Fathers For Justice members maintain that the organization continues to have an impact on legislation related to parenting, custody, access and support. They cite the backing of various Members of the Ontario Provincial Parliament and Members of Parliament in Canada throughout Ontario as evidence that the organization is gaining momentumⁱⁱⁱ. At the same time that Fathers For Justice expands and acquires respect as an established organization with increasing support, many activists believe that this organization has a bright and influential future.

Crean (1988: 102) presents an image of fathers’ rights activists as “...using the language of equality, assuming a stance that resembles that of an oppressed minority...” in order to subvert the gains of feminism. Crean perceives this movement as a backlash, not only intending to erode women’s gains in family law, but also as a way of re-asserting the “authority of men in the family” (Crean, *ibidem*: 102).

Boyd’s account (1989) of the fathers’ rights movement suggests that the focus of Fathers For Justice on parental equality is detrimental to both mothers and children. Regarding joint custody, she notes: “A misplaced application of equality is also evident in legislative and judicial trends towards recognizing fathers’ rights...” (Boyd, 1989:143). She maintains that viewing parents equally obscures the importance of “... seemingly more ‘mundane’ input by mothers who tend to be responsible for day-to-day physical and emotional nurturing” (Boyd, *ibidem*: 143). According to Boyd, the portrayal of fathers’ rights and the movement in general is not perceived as being interested in the quest for equality, but to discount women’s contribution as the primary caregiver. Boyd believes this discounting of the mother’s contribution erodes her rights to her children in the cases of sole custody and joint custody (Boyd insists that joint custody is yet another way in which fathers can control women and children).

Boyd faces the same problem encountered by Crean, namely, it is not clear how Boyd has informed herself about the fathers' rights movement. Her work appears to be primarily based on an analysis of literature. She does not endeavour to become familiar with fathers' rights activists through participant-observational research or interviews. Instead, she takes a legalistic stance as a speculative commentator, not as a researcher in the field.

Drakich (1989) provides a more accurate portrayal of fathers' rights groups in contrast to others (Crean, 1988; Boyd, 1989). She (1989: 69) examines "... the role played by social science research in concert with the media and fathers' rights groups in the social construction of a new ideology of fatherhood." She believes a fatherhood ideology is being "... socially rather than empirically constructed" in order to present a "new portrait of the father" that may influence mothers and children in custody decisions and social legislation (Drakich, 1989: 70). Drakich (1989: 81) insists that fathers' rights groups are a small, but vocal minority who "... purport to represent all fathers' interests in their battle for control over children". Drakich reports that these groups use the media to present their stories and employ their interpretations of the social science literature to support their positions. She believes fathers' rights groups lobby for fathers' rights outside of marriage and after divorce, rather than for fathers' rights in the intact family. Still, she does not accept fathers' rights activists call for equal legal rights as parents upholding responsibilities to their children. For her, the concept of shared parenting and what she calls the "rhetoric of equality [...]" is not part of their legal responsibility to children" (Drakich, 1989: 82). However, Drakich (1989) does mention that fathers' rights activists:

argue fathers get a raw deal in access and custody decisions. Excluded from parenting their children because of sexist bias in the courts—maternal preference in custody—they say that children are deprived of love and nurturance of their fathers ... and the realities of men's decreasing child visitation after divorce, somehow never make the same impact as the isolated case of participant father. (p.15)

Drakich frames the quest for equal and continued parenting desired by fathers' rights activists as being entwined in constructing an ideology of fatherhood intended to advance their position.

Constructions of fatherhood and related fathers' rights issues are also examined by those looking at Canadian Fathers' rights activists (Bertoia and Drakich, 1993; Bertoia, 1998) and American activists (Arendell, 1992a, 1992b; Coltrane and Hickman, 1992). These authors focus more on interview data and the examination of fathers' rights rhetoric around issues such as post-divorce/separation fatherhood, access, custody, support, and related topics. For the most part, these authors examine what they see as a "masculinist discourse of divorce" (Bertoia and Drakich, 1993: 610). Their critical analyses of fathers' rights discourse suggest that activists feel they are discriminated against based on gender arrangements (Bertoia and Drakich, *ibidem*). The data collected by Bertoia (with Drakich 1993) was based primarily on interviews with 32 members of fathers' rights and related groups in south-central Ontario. He also made observations between 1988 and 1990 through attending group meetings, as well as reviewing various material generated by fathers rights activists. Of all the research done on fathers' rights activists, Bertoia's research is probably the most methodologically extensive in terms of using three methodologies. Arendell (1992a, 1992b) also did interviews. Arendell (*ibidem*) completed 75 interviews with various divorced men. Coltrane and Hickman (1992: 401) focus more on a content analysis of various books, statistics, media accounts, "fathers' and mothers' groups...newsletters, press releases, pamphlets..." and other

information. They also completed "...a series of interviews with eight prominent advocacy groups in southern California" (Coltrane and Hickman, 1992: 401). Arendell (1992a, 1992b), Bertoia (1998; and with Drakich, 1993), and Coltrane and Hickman, (1992) offer accounts of fathers rights activists and divorced men based on field research. These researchers believe fathers' rights activists are self-serving and what they said about parental equality is essentially "public rhetoric" (Arendell, 1992a, 1992b; Bertoia and Drakich, 1993 and Bertoia, 1998). There also seems to be a focus on Mills' (1959 in Bertoia, 1998) notion of confusing personal and public troubles that result in discourse around fathers' rights. This literature also suggests that their real goal is not the best interest of the children, children's rights, or gender neutrality regarding parenting, but instead a sense of entitlement for fathers.

Overall, most of the literature presents a perspective of fathers' rights activists that is critical of them as self-serving and not "child-centred" (Bertoia and Drakich, 1993; Bertoia, 1998; Arendell, 1992a, 1992b; Coltrane and Hickman, 1992). This literature along with other academic accounts (Crean, 1988; Boyd, 1989) portrays fathers' rights activists in skeptical terms. In short, the literature seems to find many of the fathers' rights activist's claims to be, at best, dubious, and more about being self-absorbed, possibly angry, and ultimately, interested in gaining power over their children and former spouses.

A Brief Profile of Fathers For Justice

In May 1985, Fathers For Justice was established as a grass-roots organization located in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario. By May 1991, it was totally self-funded, with a Revenue Canada charitable registration number and a fully functioning office. In September 1991, Fathers For Justice expanded, eventually creating the first self-funded chapter in Hamilton, Ontario^{iv}. The Bradford, London, Owen Sound, and Sudbury^v chapters were created in 1992; The Peterborough and Brantford chapters were established in 1993. At this point in time, Fathers For Justice was one of the largest organizations exclusively devoted to fathers' rights and parenting issues in Ontario.

Fathers For Justice has evolved into a self-help group that lobbies for legislative changes in areas related to parenting issues including custody, access, and support^{vi}. The primary focus, according to past president, Ron Sauvé, is "continued parenting". In an interview I conducted with Sauvé (March, 1993), he told me:

We [Fathers For Justice] are interested in continuing what the feminists of the 1960s began. They wanted fathers to be [involved] with [their] children. Today, when a marriage ends, they [feminists] do not want fathers to continue this contact [custody or continued visitation] with their children.

According to the Fathers For Justice pamphlet (1993), the organization is "child-oriented" and "for the children". They hold that "children need both parents", and it is in the "best interest of the child" for both parents to be involved in their children's lives.

The membership of Fathers For Justice consists of non-custodial and custodial (i.e., both male and female) parents; non-custodial and custodial grandparents and relatives; current (or second) spouses of members; and others concerned about the present system of family law^{vii}. In 1993, all but one member were volunteers (i.e., on the executive and other committees): one paid member was a part-time office administrator at the Kitchener-Waterloo chapter.

Researching Collective Identity: A Three-Pronged Methodological Approach

I employed collective identity theory, studies of collective identity, and preliminary research as the basis for the three-pronged methodological approach. This strategy encompassed participant observation, audiotaped interviews, and a review of documentation. The participant observation of FFJ took place over a two-year period, from October 1991 through October 1993, and was a preliminary methodology. This technique afforded a way of gaining information about the organization as well as a means of selecting other appropriate methodologies.

As a result of my participant observation work, along with collective identity theory and research, the foundation for interviewing members and considering relevant documentation was established. I completed seven “historical” interviews with early members^{viii} of FFJ, fifteen individual and couple interviews with contemporary members, and eight group interviews with seven chapters. Finally, a review of relevant documentation was a supplementary means to understand contextual aspects of the FFJ collective identity, which may not have been evident during the participant observation work and interviews. This documentation included Fathers For Justice newsletters, position papers, pamphlets and other documents associated or related to the organization.

The participant observation study was conducted with the full knowledge of the Fathers For Justice membership. I obtained permission to attend meetings and other functions from leaders and the membership.

Attendance of weekly meetings at the Kitchener-Waterloo chapter and other chapters was a priority throughout my research. In addition, I observed and attended all Fathers For Justice functions (i.e., openings of chapters, dinners and celebrations, conferences, etc.) and protests (i.e., pickets, marches, etc.) during October 1991 through to October 1993 in order to gain an understanding of organizational goals and how FFJ members present themselves to the public. In short, attending Fathers For Justice events aided me in acquiring an “insider’s view” of the organization.

Initial contact with FFJ occurred through a fax message sent to them in September of 1991. In the letter the purpose and intentions of doing research on FFJ was made clear. As a result of this fax, contact was established with Ron Sauvé, the FFJ president at the time. He wanted to know more about me and the proposed research. Specifics about the theoretical approach and methodology were discussed, along with important points about FFJ such as the history, structure and activities. It was also made clear by Mr. Sauvé that FFJ required copies of the research report or document, once completed. After these terms were agreed upon, I interviewed Mr. Sauvé. Following the interview, I was introduced to the office administrator, other leaders, and FFJ members.

My role was primarily that of an observer. From the beginning of my research, I made it clear that I was observing the group and, consequently, could not become a member of FFJ. Babbie (1989) refers to this position as “observer-participant”. He defines this research role as “...one who identifies himself or herself as a researcher who interacts in the social process but makes no pretence of actually being a participant” (Babbie, 1989: 266). I did not have any membership privileges, but I could observe executive meetings. Beyond this, my role as participant was limited to attending weekly meetings where I listened, took notes (with permission), and answered questions, if asked (i.e., about my research, the university, or other points of interest)^{ix}.

The purpose of the participant observation method was to make contact with various levels of the organizational membership and to discover how the organization

functions from the “inside”. Ascertaining the FFJ goals, aspirations and “collective subjective worldviews”^x of events, laws, issues and other social movements (e.g., other fathers’ rights movements, men’s rights groups, profeminists, conscious men or mythopoetics and the various feminist movements, etc.) was a cornerstone in this research. Beyond making contact and meeting with various members, I gained a basic understanding that facilitated in the construction of the interview schedule and gave the members an opportunity to become comfortable with my presence. Also, the participant observation facilitated getting access to documentation, in order to review it. In short, participant observation was the preliminary methodology in the context of the “three-pronged approach”.

I conducted the individual and group interviews over a period of approximately one month from August 6, 1993 to September 16, 1993. The ordering of interviews depended primarily on the availability of those interested in participating. A concerted effort, however, was made to conduct the individual audiotaped in-depth interviews with seven historical members who helped to establish FFJ from 1985 to 1987, followed by fifteen interviews with contemporary members^{xi}, and eight group interviews with seven chapters. Out of the eight interviews, two interviews were completed with the Kitchener-Waterloo chapter: one with leaders, the other with rank-and-file members. The other group interviews were with the remaining chapters (except the Sudbury chapter, which disbanded by the summer of 1993).

Three interview schedules were used for the historical interviews, contemporary individual interviews, and the group interviews. While these interview schedules differed, they were based on the same master interview guide that was modified according to the type of interviews. The semi-structured interview schedule was modified in order to be used during the interviews with contemporary members, group interviews, and historical members. Generally, the first section focused on involvement in Fathers For Justice, the members’ present and past family situations, and questions pertaining to the organization. Section two was a general inquiry about FFJ and the possibility of a collective identity. The third section focused on FFJ strategies and tactics. Section four highlighted information about each chapter and how the members view their particular chapters. The fifth section was concerned with how members think other groups, organizations and movements perceive FFJ. Section six emphasized members’ perception of community and government views of Fathers For Justice. The demographic section contained questions concerning age, occupation, class, religiosity, and other personal information. Finally, a “wrap up” section included questions regarding items the respondent(s) wanted to cover, suggestions for further members to be interviewed, and concluding remarks (e.g., asking them not to discuss specific aspects of the interview and thanking them for their participation).

The “historical” interviews included an extended interview schedule that focused on early (i.e., 1985-86) activities. This “historical” interview schedule preceded the interview schedule discussed above. The major variation between the interviews, besides those already mentioned was the possibility of handing out a sheet of demographic questions to those in the group interview, which were usually asked during the audiotaped individual and couple interviews^{xii}.

The individual interviews were face to face, in-depth, and lasted between two and three hours. They were audiotaped, conducted in privacy, and therefore confidential. For convenience and comfort, the interviewee selected the venue for conducting the interview (e.g., in the person’s home, workplace, organization office, etc.). After the interviews, transcripts were sent to members to check for mistakes or other problems.

The three samples were drawn from the FFJ population. This FFJ population

was composed of non-members attending FFJ meetings^{xiii}, members who have paid annual membership fees, and historical members of FFJ. One sample consisted of seven historical members, who were selected in order to chart the early collective identity of FFJ and to clarify the history of the organization^{xiv}. Another sample of fifteen contemporary members was selected in order to gauge the current collective identity of the organization. The third sample consisted of eight groups based on memberships in particular chapters in FFJ.

FFJ members included male and female leaders, male and female rank-and-file members and those in the seven FFJ chapters. Leaders were defined as those who had a significant leadership role from 1992-1993 or occupied a position on a FFJ chapter executive as of September 1993^{xv}. The rank-and-file were members who did not occupy leadership or executive positions in the above time frame from 1992-1993^{xvi}. Males and females were defined according to biological designations. FFJ "chapters" refers to the contemporary chapter personnel who participated in group interviews carried out in all seven chapters^{xvii}.

A combination judgmental-purposive and snowball sampling techniques were employed. A purposive or judgmental sampling technique entails selecting a sample "...based on your judgment of the population and purpose of the study" (Babbie and Benaquisto, 2002: 165). The snowball sampling technique "...refers to the process of accumulation as each located subject suggests other subjects" (Babbie and Benaquisto, 2002: 166). First I utilized a snowball technique. I asked leaders and other members during informal conversations who they felt were significant members in FFJ. In addition, after each interview, I asked each member to recommend others who they thought should be interviewed. Also, employing a judgmental purposive sample, through my own observations, I decided who should be interviewed based on their leadership status, involvement and dedication to FFJ, and the status and respect they had in the organization. Other less involved members were interviewed as a means for understanding their view of the FFJ collective identity, as peripheral members to the organization, not serving on the executive committee of FFJ. The sample resulted in six leaders and nine rank-and-file members being interviewed.

Sampling chapters also included preliminary information gathered during the period of participant observation. Based on observations and informal discussions with the leaders and relevant members, specific information was collected about each chapter. As a result of this information, group interviews were conducted with all chapters. A judgmental purposive sample was selected in order to understand the varied collective identities of each chapter and their views of the FFJ collective identity. Only the Kitchener-Waterloo chapter had two group interviews as I perceived a difference between the leadership (i.e., executive of FFJ) and rank-and-file members, as this chapter was the largest chapter at the time. Although such differences were marginally evident in the other chapters, the differences in the Kitchener-Waterloo chapter seemed very obvious during preliminary observations when attending the executive and weekly meetings.

Through participant observation with current members, historical or "long-time members"^{xviii} were contacted and interviewed utilizing a snowball sampling technique. The snowball technique was central, as current members could be asked to recall the names of historical members. From these verbal sources, historical members were selected utilizing a judgmental purposive sampling technique based on whether they were core members of the early group. In addition, at the end of all interviews, historical members were asked whether they could suggest others to be interviewed^{xix}.

The content analysis of documentation was a less formal procedure. It was mainly intended as a means to supplement the data from the participant observation

and interviews. In some cases, the documentation was a means for verifying or confirming attitudes, opinions, goals and other aspects of FFJ. For instance, the use of FFJ pamphlets and other literature may confirm a source of an idea mentioned during interviews.

Fathers For Justice documentation (e.g., newspaper letters to the editor by FFJ members, opinion pieces, minutes from meetings, etc.), newsletters, position papers (to government agencies), correspondence from the government, other organizations and individuals, were considered in order to highlight various themes related to the collective identity of the organization. These themes included concerns, issues and legislations noted in the literature pertaining to meanings, practices, ideas, and positions on legislation which helped to define the Fathers For Justice collective identity.

The purpose of reviewing documentation was to understand how Fathers For Justice members present themselves in the written text. In addition to the participant observation technique, review of documentation afforded another way of examining the organization and the particular "Fathers For Justice collective identity". Furthermore, an opportunity to obtain an historical understanding of the "Fathers For Justice collective identity" in the written text between 1985 and 1993 was also provided.

Analyzing Collective Identity

According to Melucci (1995: 44) "collective identity is an interactive and shared definition produced by several individuals... [that is] constructed and negotiated..." through various interactions. There is a group dynamic that is influenced by members' perceptions of the issues and how they collectively view them. In the analysis of FFJ, Melucci's understanding of collective identity will be used as the basis for analyzing their sense of how they define their collective perspectives of issues that are central to them as activists. This becomes the basis for their "w-ness" (Melucci, 1989). My analysis of collective identity focuses on the process of how collective identity formation is negotiated among activists during FFJ group interviews when FFJ members agreed and disagreed with one another about issues related to fatherhood and children. Melucci (1989) also takes into account how collective identity is influenced by external factors such as those outside FFJ that are critics in opposition to these activists' specific viewpoints. Touraine's (1988, 1981) work is also used in this analysis of collective identity, as Touraine focuses on the symbolic challenges in the cultural realm related to the struggles over production of culture. He points out that the central struggle of who controls the production of culture often includes collective actors rejecting, challenging and creating new meanings and practices within dominant cultures. These challenges and constructions become associated with the collective identity of (collective) actors or social movements (Kenedy, 2005). Therefore, this research focuses on FFJ members' shared "meanings" and "practices". More specifically, FFJ members' collective perceptions will be investigated^{xx}. While Touraine (1988, 1981) does not clearly define meanings and practices, Escobar (1992) offers an understanding of these terms in relation to culture. Escobar (1992) loosely defines meanings as a set of beliefs. Tradition can be seen as a reservoir of meaning. These beliefs are embedded in practices, and practices are linked to behaviours in everyday life. These behaviours may be present in symbolic creativity involving language, the body, performative rituals, work and both individual and collective identities. Meanings are articulated through practices. Shibutani (1987: 98) concurs with Escobar's work

stating, "...we learn meanings through actions, but also *meanings are primarily a property of behaviour and only secondarily a property of objects* [his emphasis]". Both Escobar and Shibutani emphasize that meanings can be articulated through behaviours. These theorists believe collectivities are constantly expounding meanings and practices. For the purpose of this analysis, meanings can be understood as emerging through peoples' interpretations of perceptions, attitudes and ideas about the world. Practices are behaviours, modes of conduct, procedures, and actions.

A spreadsheet was used for assisting analysis. It provided a means to chart identity in relation to how various members articulate meanings and practices, along with an overall identity. The specific social and legal constructs utilized in the spreadsheet were selected as a result of a combination of observations during FFJ meetings (from 1991-1993) and selectively reading through the interviews for common themes and categories. The result of this dual-method was to choose legal and related constructs such as: access, support, custody, joint custody, mediation, self-representation, Cobb County Educational Initiative, judges, lawyers and the legal system. The social constructs consisted of: fatherhood, motherhood, parenthood, grandparents, peer influence, femininity, masculinity, children, chapter identity, cooperation and overall identity.

Overall, there were three apparent benefits of utilizing a spreadsheet:

- 1) It visually displayed and clearly organized variables related to an overall FFJ collective identity.
- 2) It enabled the examination of FFJ members' re-articulation of dominant meaning and practices.
- 3) Finally, variations in the re-articulated meaning and practices among the membership could be compared.

Analyzing Collective Identity: Fathers For Justice Meanings and Practices

My construction of the FFJ collective identity was a result of selecting themes that pertained to the FFJ members' collective reality, and how they viewed themselves. Results from the participant observation work and relevant FFJ documents were also considered as an independent source (from the interview data) in selecting what issues were important to FFJ members. I selected themes from the interview data based both on the quantity and quality of FFJ members' responses during the interview. Quantity was measured in terms of frequency: what issues arose most often during the interviews; and volume: how much members said about each issue. Indicators of frequency included how often issues were brought up by the respondent as major points or as part of another issue; for example, if issues were discussed as major points frequently, or only occasionally. Volume was measured in terms of respondents making specific or general statements about an issue; for example, if a lot was said about an issue, mentioning specifics, or alternatively, only general statements were made.

To assess quality of the members' responses, I used indicators such as insightfulness and depth in terms of the thought and emotion evident in the interview responses. Insightfulness was measured relative to how much contemplation, reflection and articulation was evident in the interviewees' responses. Indicators of depth included the level of emotion such as the respondent's voice cracking (with feeling), whether they cried, if they sounded upset or angry, or if they gave answers with passion and conviction.

The outcome of considering the quantity and quality of the interview data were presented as meanings and practices associated with two issues: fatherhood and

children. Other constructs were only mentioned by certain members, therefore not receiving the quantitative coverage and often limited in terms of qualitative responses.

Beyond the quantity and quality of data, the final factor that aided in my understanding of there being an “FFJ collective identity” included interview responses, resulting from direct questions such as:

- “When someone asks you what FFJ is and what the organization is about, what do you tell them?”
- “What does FFJ stand for?”
- “Does FFJ have an overall organizational or group identity?”
- “What is the FFJ view of children?”
- “What is the FFJ view of fatherhood?”
- “Is there unity among the chapters?”
- “Is there a united feeling of “we-ness” among the chapters?”

The outcome of the interview responses could be seen as the basis for understanding an FFJ collective identity. The two quotes below were a summary of how two members perceived FFJ. These quotes also exemplified an overall view of FFJ evident during interviews with FFJ members. A male leader from Hamilton believed FFJ has two important aspects and goals:

To sum it up in a few words, I guess I would say it [FFJ] is a support group for non-custodial parents. I think that statement itself doesn't really say it's a support group for men or women. It just means if you're a non-custodial parent, then the services we [FFJ] provide may help...that is the general statement I would feel comfortable with.... [Also,] I think it [FFJ] has two goals. One of them would be equality, equality for both men and women...fairness and the right of a child to see both parents. (Member 2, Chapter B, 29/8/93)

FFJ members perceived the organization as being a support group for all parents who were interested in equality and maintaining the child-parent relationship. A similar response from an Owen Sound female leader revealed what she thought FFJ “stands for”. She states:

The whole thing goes right around the circle and back to the children. The children are what it is all about, giving them the kind of caring that they need to grow up to be...normal people...FFJ stands for support, for caring, for people banding together for a common cause. And that cause is to protect the children... (Member 4, Chapter D, 18/8/93)

These quotes sum up what could be seen as the basis for an FFJ collective identity. A further explanation focuses on specific points members made about the above mentioned issues.

Post-Separation/Divorce Fatherhood

FFJ members' meanings of post-separation/divorce fatherhood were prominent throughout the interviews. They challenged negative meanings of post-separation/divorced fatherhood and proposed notions such as “continued parenting” and the recognition of fathers as capable, nurturing and equal parents (relative to mothers). In addition, practicing the above meanings of fatherhood was promoted at

FFJ meetings. Members were encouraged to be involved with their children, considering the best interests of the children. They often said this goal of fathering can be accomplished when access was not impeded, support payments were determined in an equitable fashion, and custody was determined through consideration of the best interest of the child(ren) (FFJ meetings, 1991-1993).

Variations between male members and the chapters were based on members who emphasized different aspects of post-separation/divorce fathering. All males offered an overall positive portrayal of fathering. Female members' responses regarding the general notion of fatherhood and post-separation/divorce fatherhood ranged from defending to supporting, all the way to a qualified support of post-separation/divorce fatherhood. While female members' responses were positive throughout the interviews, female members tended to be more discerning and exacting in their concerns about how much fathers have really changed. In this way, they did not share males' collective meanings of fatherhood.

A male leader from Hamilton who emotionally recounted his concerns about how fatherhood was viewed in Canadian society, stated: "...The attitude that fathers are uncaring, not nurturing, incapable of looking after their children...[pause] You're going to have to stop it [the tape] for a sec[ond] [the member became quite emotionally upset and almost cried]" (Member 2, Chapter B, 29/8/93). The Hamilton member's reaction revealed how he felt about his children and how he thought fathers were portrayed: as poor and incompetent parents. This stereotype of fatherhood is what FFJ members contested. FFJ members believed they practiced and promoted a more nurturing and capable notion of post-separation/divorce fatherhood among the membership. As a male leader from Hamilton recounted:

You ask a lot of people you meet on the street what they think about men of divorce, it's: 'Ah they don't pay child support, they don't give a shit about their kids, all they want to do is have a girlfriend or two.... That's what we want to change, because we want people to see that fathers are concerned, fathers care, fathers love, fathers hurt. We're human beings and we really need to be part of the family unit, whether it's intact or separated.... (Member 3, Chapter B, 22/8/93)

Ultimately, FFJ members wanted to go beyond challenging these negative stereotypes associated with fatherhood and attempted to change these stereotypes. FFJ members were attempting to promote a meaning of post-separation/divorce fatherhood that they wanted all FFJ members to practice. FFJ members believed this will result in a more favourable view of fathers, not only in society, but specifically among judges, social service agencies, and others (FFJ meetings, 1991-1993).

A male leader from Hamilton provided a cynical view associated with the practice of post-divorce/separation fatherhood:

How to be a father in the nineties: keep your mouth shut, maintain self-control, don't bitch much, show love not aggression, cry once in a while, all those politically-correct things that men are noted not to do.... (Member 3, Chapter B, 22/8/93)

This view of fatherhood poked fun at the perceived "new" fathering, suggesting ways of being a new father or male. What seems to be important was that this member recognized the social expectation of a new type of fatherhood.

Female members also supported the notion of the "caring father". They advocated the meaning that fathers were capable of child-rearing and should be involved in a child's life. A female member from Hamilton notes:

FFJ wants people to recognize that fathers are not monsters, just because

they are divorced from their wives. FFJ wants people to see that fathers care as much about children as mothers.... [R]ecognition is there [at FFJ] that men are very capable of performing every aspect of rearing a child that women can provide. They're good at being nurturing parents, they're good at being providers.... That it should be equal, that fathers should participate in all aspects of children's lives. (Member 5, Chapter B, 29/8/93)

This female member clearly stated the importance of fathers and fatherhood for the FFJ membership. She also clarified not only the pro-father position, but also the point that FFJ advocated a positive meaning or position concerning fathers in relation to children. Contradicting the negative image of post-separation/divorce fathers as "monsters", this female member from Hamilton offered what she believes FFJ members contested and the positive image of fathers they advocated.

A female member from Owen Sound perceived a crisis with the way men, and more particularly fathers, were being viewed. She stated:

[The war against men] which blows into the children and the family and society and the jobs; I am surprised the fathers who have been hit in some of these ways don't commit suicide. (Group 5, Chapter D, 19/8/93)

She suggested that the state of fatherhood was a casualty of the "war against men". Particularly, what she referred to were "radical feminists" (mentioned in the interview) demeaning men and fatherhood. In relation to this, she went on to mention Gairdner's (1990) work *The Trouble with Canada*.

During the group interviews male members emphasized positive meanings and practices related to fatherhood. The group interview dynamic, however, offered members the opportunity of disagreeing and of opposing the status quo (as in the above-mentioned case when a female member disagreed with a male member over the issue of support). The female members in the Peterborough interview, for instance, did not always agree with the male members' perceptions of fatherhood. Still, FFJ members provided an overall positive image of fatherhood in terms of it being a continuous and equal role (relative to motherhood), with some female members cautioning males not to be idealistic about fatherhood.

A male rank-and-file member from Hamilton asserted:

Fathers make good parents. Fatherhood and fathering does not stop after separation and divorce. You are the same person and father before and after separation and divorce and deserve to be treated with equal parental status.... It is the fathering role that should be considered in equitable terms regardless of gender, custodial or access privileges. Fathering is continuous and an ongoing responsibility. (Group 3, Chapter B, 17/8/93)

This quote summarized the meaning of fatherhood as an important part of a child's life before and after separation and divorce. The concept of "continuous parenting" mentioned in Chapter 1, emphasized parenting that was boundless. Members often remarked how parenting does not cease once court orders related to separation/divorce were decreed. Being a parent/father was a commitment and entailed a responsibility to children that was unbroken regardless of marital status or living arrangements.

Those in the Peterborough chapter advocated contesting meanings of fatherhood through educating people that fathers have changed and continue to do so. A male leader from Peterborough noted:

we want to educate the general public, that fathers have changed [a female member interjected, pointing out "some" fathers have changed]...There are

a lot more fathers who want to stay at home and spend that time with the children. (Group 8, Chapter G, 1/9/93)

The correction made by the female member was an example of how male members were often “equalized” by female members’ views on issues of fatherhood. Following the disagreement between these members, they reached a consensus concerning the meaning of fatherhood which led to the final stage of the collective meaning that “some fathers have changed”. Thus, it was apparent FFJ members believed certain fathers have changed and that many other fathers are changing. With an almost equal number of males and females, and a female member as president, the Peterborough chapter had an evident female perspective. The effect of female members’ involvement was apparent throughout FFJ meetings where female members did not always agree with male members, thus challenging some views held by many male members (FFJ meetings, 1991–1993).

As noted earlier, confrontations between members during interviews or meetings were not uncommon. According to Melucci (1989), the process of confrontation leads to negotiation, which is an essential part of forming collective identity. As the above example of confrontation indicated, confrontation often evolved into consensus-building, or in the above case a shared understanding of fatherhood.

While there were disagreements during the Peterborough interview, most members agreed with what a male leader from Peterborough declared:

There are a lot more fathers who want custody of the children, but they have no possible way of getting that. This is why we want to change the system so a father can get custody. (Group 8, Chapter G, 1/9/93)

This declaration challenged societal meanings and perceptions associated with fathers: both in obtaining custody and staying at home with their children. Members were upset that fathers who have changed do not receive recognition in family court; FFJ members wanted to challenge this practice.

Members in the Brantford chapter interview considered both parents to be equal. A male member from Brantford maintained:

the fathering role should be considered in equitable terms regardless of gender, custodial or access [status], or privileges. Fathering is continuous and an ongoing responsibility. (Group 7, Chapter F, 8/9/93)

As noted by other FFJ members, continued parenting was seen as having an important meaning for FFJ members. These FFJ members often maintained that they were fathers before separation and divorce. Furthermore, FFJ members challenged the notion that after divorce they were seen as secondary parents, unequal to mothers. FFJ members put forth the meaning that there were fathers who deserve custody and access privileges and should not be discriminated against based on gender. Another Brantford member contended:

After separation and divorce you are not [perceived as being] the same father anymore. That does not change [being a father]. FFJ wants to maintain fathering roles as being compatible before and after separation and divorce. (Group 7, Chapter F, 8/9/93)

It was clear that FFJ members advocated the meaning that they were fathers who were nurturing, capable parents.

Overall, the meaning that post-separation/divorce fathers were capable and nurturing parents was put forth by most FFJ members. This challenged the notion that these fathers were traditionally secondary parents who were not capable of

being nurturing or able to take care of children. FFJ members also maintained that fathers could be custodial parents; they did not always have to be thought of as non-custodial parents. This meaning accompanied the practice of FFJ members that wanted judges to recognize fathers as capable and nurturing parents, instead of the traditional view that fathers were secondary parents.

While differences between chapters arose, members in the various chapters seemed to have said the same thing: fathers were equal parents and should be perceived this way. Also, that parenting and fathering were “continuous responsibilities”. The main dissimilarities that arose occurred between certain female and male members.

The differences between members throughout the interviews were apparent along gender lines. Female members engaged in a spectrum of responses that range from the idea that “fathers were being attacked unfairly” (a defense of fatherhood), to a basic recognition that “fathers were caring and nurturing parents” (supporting the notion of fathers being caring), to the assertion that “some fathers have changed and are becoming more concerned, yet not all fathers were caring, nurturing, or involved with their children before and after divorce” (a qualified support of fatherhood). Male members were willing to accept what female members said about only some fathers changing. However, male members believed that fathers have changed from the traditional version and have become more caring and concerned about their children.

There may be several reasons why male members were supportive of fatherhood, whereas female members varied in their support. The apparent reasons for male support was that they believe fathers—like themselves—have changed and continued to become more involved as caring parents. These fathers perceived the world from their own perspective. The basis for female members defending fatherhood may also have been an outcome of what they see (as grandmothers): their adult sons limited or lack of access privileges. If a son lost access privileges, the grandmother of the children often did not see her grandchildren. This predicament of limited access and consequent denied contact with the child(ren) curtailed the opportunity of being an available and constantly participating (grand) parent. Some female members may have supported fatherhood as a result of the commitment of their current spouses toward becoming more involved and nurturing fathers. Through providing qualified support, they suggested that only some fathers have changed. This limited endorsement likely stemmed from experiences with former spouses’ commitment and other life experiences.

Children

Many members said that FFJ existed for the children (FFJ meetings, 1991-1993). FFJ members who were parents maintained their main goal was to be with their children. Members often asserted that they had the best interests of the children at heart. Children were also regarded as the focal point of the organization (FFJ meetings, 1991–1993). A male leader from Hamilton recounted: “We are not Fathers for Just Us” (Group 3, Chapter B, 17/8/93). This comment was directed at critics of FFJ who accused members of only being focused on their own concerns and ignoring their children. According to a leader from Hamilton: “I think the children are paramount, I don’t think there is any question....” (Group 3, Chapter B, 17/8/93). A male leader from Owen Sound expanded on the salience of children for FFJ members: “The people that come to us are all concerned with the quality of the relationship with their children and the denial of contact....” (Member 4, Chapter D, 18/8/93). FFJ members remarked at meetings that they would not have attended FFJ

meetings, or joined the organization, if it were not for their children. They noted that it was not often that a person without children going through separation or divorce attended an FFJ meeting (FFJ meetings, 1991–1993).

Having a relationship with children depended on unimpeded access privileges. Thus, members suggested that the FFJ identity was about children, parenting and having legal access. A male leader from Kitchener-Waterloo clarified the position of FFJ: “Kids need both parents. [That is] What it says on the FFJ pamphlet” (Group 1, Chapter A, 7/9/93). The above quote was the FFJ motto.

A male member from Hamilton asserted: “The main goal is to look after children’s rights. Without children there would not be an FFJ” (Group 3, Chapter B, 17/8/93). Another male leader from Hamilton further stated: “Number one [children], that’s the whole idea, we want to see our kids, that’s what we are after, to see our kids on an equal basis” (Member 3, Chapter B, 22/8/93). Many FFJ members viewed children’s and parent’s rights as being synonymous in cases of separation and divorce. FFJ members wanted to see their children on a regular basis: to have access equal to the custodial parent. Access to children appeared to be a large part of FFJ members’ conception of why the organization exists. Other issues such as support revolved around children, yet access to visit with children and the importance of children seemed paramount. While FFJ members may have varied slightly regarding the meanings concerning children, they unanimously agreed that FFJ’s concerns revolved around the children.

There were several indications that members promoted the notion that children were the focal point of FFJ. FFJ members not only promoted the children, but their relationship with their children. When visiting the Hamilton and Kitchener-Waterloo chapter offices one of the first things visible was the pictures of members’ children on the wall^{xxi}. While this may have been visual evidence, it seemed to clarify the importance of children to these activists. A more practical example that FFJ members promoted their relationship with their children as a central concern was parent-child outings and gatherings. These events helped to strengthen ties between adults and children, and reminded members why FFJ existed. Also, during meetings members would not only discuss the legal problems of access, support, and custody, but also their children and how they felt about them, issues of concern regarding parenting, and other concerns revolving around their children; issues too numerous to discuss. However, members who had surpassed the emotional bitterness of separation/divorce said that they were not just paying “lip service” or utilizing children as a way to usurp power over ex-spouses; FFJ members’ emphasized that their concerns were sincere.

Discussion of the Findings: “Sifting out” Collective Identity

Putting aside the difficulties with the method of “sifting out” meanings and practices of FFJ members and attempting to make sense of a possible FFJ collective identity, the similarities and differences between members needs to be addressed. Most FFJ members agreed on meanings and definitions regarding children, yet there remained dissension among members in relation to fathering. The differences among the leaders and rank-and-file members and between the members from various chapters were based more on emphasis rather than discrepancy. Members in each chapter, and those of different leadership status, emphasized certain meanings and practices. Some leaders did mention emotional aspects and certain rank-and-file members pointed out legal aspects.

FFJ members seemed to agree that access to children was an overarching

issue. It was suggested that their organization's primary interest revolved around issues that encompassed children and parenting. FFJ members challenged social and legal views of non-custodial parenting and related constructs. The constructs that were specifically challenged were the notions of non-custodial fatherhood and the importance of children. In sum, members constructed themselves on the basis of their challenges to various social constructions related to fathering and children. This in turn seemed to be a dimension of a FFJ collective identity.

Attempting to gauge an overall FFJ identity is a daunting task. While a semblance of an FFJ collective identity may be evident through pointing out how FFJ members delineated meanings and practices associated with the above issues, this research is only an indication of a possible identity. The meaning and practices could only be one dimension of distinguishing collective identity. In any event, these meanings and practices seemed to be a product of FFJ members who coalesced and formed opinions through interactions that have become evident during interviews. These shared meanings and practices could have been an indicator of FFJ members' positions or viewpoints on the issues: perhaps one possible dimension of collective identity.

Fathers For Justice, Fathers For Just Us, or Fathers' R Us?

The findings in this research present an alternative view of fathers' rights activists that is absent in the literature. Many authors have given the impression that custody issues are a first priority for fathers' rights organizations. And, admittedly, there were many FFJ members who were interested in being sole or joint custodial parents and some members who constantly emphasized this issue. Most members interviewed and those who attended many FFJ meetings, however, more frequently discussed access issues.

Most of the literature did not mention the existence of female members in the fathers' rights movement. It was a non-custodial father and his second wife who started Fathers For Justice. Women were always an important part of FFJ, which included second spouses, grandmothers, and other female supporters. Even though the name FFJ only indicates fathers, FFJ was a post-separation/divorce parenting organization. This important detail is rarely highlighted in much of the literature reviewed.

FFJ members focused on ensuring that the best interests of their children were being served at home and in the complicated system of family law. "Continued parenting" as opposed to power over children and ex-spouses emerged as the central concern during the interviews and at FFJ meetings (FFJ meetings, 1991–1993). This point of "continued parenting" seems to be missed by most Canadian authors, often negating the possibility of a "balanced" view of fathers' rights activists and organizations. Fathers For Justice was about the need to reinvent fathering, particularly when separated from the family.

While FFJ members may not have seen themselves as part of a right-wing movement, Crean (1988) pointed out these activists wanted to create social change that was seen as an undesirable "backlash", which may have been repressive and more about regulation and rights than any type of equality or responsibility (Kenedy, 2004, 2005). Furthermore, right-wing movements are often viewed primarily as being concerned with creating social change that benefits a minority, such as fathers' rights activists, at the expense of the majority. It can be argued that by challenging conceptions of post-separation/divorced fatherhood, FFJ members were primarily benefiting themselves. Therefore, is it fair to say that FFJ and the fathers' rights

movement was essentially a countermovement (Mottl, 1980; Pichardo, 1995; and Zald and Unseem, 1987) rather than a right-wing social movement? The literature on the fathers' rights movement strongly suggested a self-serving bias based on rhetoric and discourse (Drakich, 1989; Bertoia and Drakich, 1993; Bertoia, 1998; Arendell, 1992a, 1992b; Coltrane and Hickman, 1992), which essentially favoured fathers over mothers, and challenged aspects of the feminist movement (Crean, 1988; Boyd, 1989). When researching these activists it was always clear that the focus on "equality" varied among the members. As Harris (2000: 371) states, equality "...is a socially constructed phenomenon". FFJ activists seem to present a very specific view of equality that critics such as Crean (1988) argues really only represent FFJ activists and do not always include ex-spouses of various male members. Primarily it was the implication of (fathers') "rights" that implied a conservative movement, which seemed to be about re-asserting the dominant position of fathers in the family. Another important issue regarding fatherhood seemed to be the differences in opinions between male and female members regarding how much fathers have changed and perception of how involved fathers are today. FFJ members did, for the most part, agree about is the notion of "continued parenting". Female members agreed with males members regarding the possibility of caring and non-abusive fathers being involved in their children's lives after the parents were no longer together. Though the males often said fathers should be ongoing parents after separation or divorce, the disagreements between members seemed to point to male members advocating "Fathers R Us", where as the female members were more cautious. Male members often pointed out that they continue being fathers after separation or divorce. This notion of "Fathers R Us" also implied that fathers should be recognized as "capable" of parenting children, especially after separation and divorce. FFJ activists advocated their role as non-custodial fathers may be more essential once families separate in order to maintain contact with their children, so the fathers and children do not become estranged from one another. In short, "continued parenting" or "fathering" is emphasized throughout the interviews as well as an FFJ collective identity being intricately connected with their individual identity as fathers.

Beyond this, should the organization be called "Fathers For Justice" or "Fathers For Just Us"? Critics certainly agree with the cynical assessment of "Fathers For Just Us", as FFJ activists said in the interviews. Those suspicious of organizations such as FFJ like Crean (1988) think that the "equality discourse" seemed more like rhetoric that is exclusive in terms of focusing on fathers than being inclusive of all family members. In addition, what FFJ members said about fathers' rights, fatherhood, and continued parenting did not seem to be emphasizing what may be good for children or what is known as the "best interest of the child(ren)". Since the importance of mothers as parents was not emphasized, was there a "father-centric" focus of "Fathers R Us" in the interviews? I would argue FFJ members tried to challenge what they perceived as a lack of equality concerning their roles as post-separation/divorced fathers. These FFJ members did not see themselves as part of a "backlash" (Crean, 1988), nor as self-serving, but instead concerned parents who cared about their children. They often cited, their concern for their children as being one of the main reasons they joined FFJ. As Harris (2000: 390) points out, there is the "...interpretative aspect of equality..." and it was evident that FFJ activists' view equality from their own perspective, which many of their critics seemed to not share.

Reconsidering the Use of a Three-Pronged Methodology

Most of the extant literature on the fathers' rights movement lacks a comprehensive methodology. Usually, the participant observation technique,

interviewing process and a review of documentation are not combined. The research in the literature often includes interviews, or a review of documentation, but not participant observation work. The application of these three research techniques was a way of learning about FFJ. Taking the time to observe these activists, interview them, and consider their documentation, seemed to be a more effective way of coherently studying such an organization. Most of the literature reviewed lacks a comprehensive methodology, possibly producing a constricted view of the movement.

Utilizing the three methodologies in this exploratory research of FFJ and collective identity helped me understand the group. The sequence of beginning with participant observation research helped me during the interviews. Collecting documentation throughout the research proved to be useful; especially when I analyzed the interviews and the observations. I found that the interview data was verified utilizing the participant observation research and documentation. The progression of beginning participant observation and collecting and reviewing documentation, provided the basis for interview questions. It also made interviewing FFJ members easier as most FFJ members became familiar with me and my research. Overall, the two year period of observation was invaluable, affording a dimension which the interviews, literature or documentation could not provide. Once FFJ members became accustomed to me and my research project, the insights gained through observations clarified much of what other authors who have written about the fathers' rights movement either neglected or misunderstood.

The individual interviews gave members a private occasion to express more personal views that were not always shared by all FFJ members. They usually spoke more freely in private than in group interviews with me, and were especially forthright with details regarding their personal situations. When a limited attempt was made to use a questionnaire to collect demographic information, in all cases data was missing.

Group interviews offered me the opportunity to observe the dynamics of FFJ members discussing—and disagreeing about—issues. As noted by Melucci (1989), the group process yielded insight into the formation of collective identity through negotiation. FFJ members almost always presented controversial views and were not inhibited by me or others from doing so. During certain group interviews, however, some members were uncomfortable with disclosing personal and demographic information about themselves such as income, education, and in some cases religion. Also, not all members always had a chance to speak as discussions were vibrant and the less assertive members often did not get a chance to express their opinions. In addition, relative to private interviews, during group interviews members would often go off on tangents.

The three-pronged approach allowed for stages in the research. The first stage of participant observation research afforded members the opportunity to become familiar with the research and for the researcher to learn about the organization and membership. This stage also facilitated in the collection of documentation, which continued throughout the research. Documentation and participant observations were utilized to “inform” the interviews. Throughout the second stage of interviewing, this task was made easier as a consequence of stage one research.

Through utilizing the three-pronged approach, disadvantages became evident. The first difficulty was that of familiarity with me and the research. While the challenge of subjects' familiarity was, for the most part, an advantage, some members may have provided answers during the interviews that they thought were expected. This could have been a result of members trying to help me in my research. Another challenge was the time-consuming nature of the three-pronged

approach. While it took time to do this research, I felt that the sequence was necessary for members to get to know me before they were interviewed. Spending time with them over 3 years also helped me obtain many documents about FFJ members and their related issues.

Overall, the three-pronged methodological approach provides the opportunity of not only “sifting out” (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991) an FFJ collective identity, but giving FFJ members a “voice”. This approach is not concerned with intervening and leading activists^{xxii}. It is also not about trying to tell activists who they are and what they believe. Rather, it is a means to allow the members to speak about their ideas, issues, and concerns. It is a way of collecting activists’ thoughts and presenting what they want to say about their issues and organization.

Conclusions: Future Research Directions

The result of “sifting out” meanings and practices evident during FFJ interviews seemed to be one possible dimension of collective identity. Melucci (1989) suggests that an organization such as FFJ needs to evolve into a cohesive collectivity before members can articulate meanings and practices. FFJ members would have had to interact often with one another and to be able to draw on ideas that were evident in the FFJ pamphlet and other FFJ literature in order to have a common understanding of meanings and practices.

The obstacles evident in the analysis of meanings and practices were significant. Even though the concepts of meanings and practices are defined, it was difficult to separate meanings from practices in the interview data. It was not always clear if members were advocating applying the meaning (practicing it) or defining a meaning that could be practiced. This confusion made the analysis exacting and time-consuming. Conceivably, meanings and practices are not intended to be separate. It may be useful, however, to view meanings as definitions and practices as application of the meanings or definitions.

A technical problem with employing the spreadsheet in Excel is that the size of the cells is limited. When attempting to place large quotes into a cell, most often the quotes had to be reduced in size. This resulted in eliminating important information or placing the quote into two cells. An improved spreadsheet program may remedy this problem. Or, a more effective qualitative analysis of meanings and practices could be developed. Possibly using N-Vivo to analyze the data may have been more helpful.

In order to ameliorate some these methodological issues, survey research such as paper and on-line questionnaires can be used to research collective identity. Based on this exploratory research using the three-pronged approach, the data from this study can be used as a basis for designing a questionnaire and distributing it to fathers’ rights activists in Canada in order to understand broader aspects of activists’ collective identity.

An overall survey of fathers’ rights activists in Canada may also help to determine to what extent the Fathers’ rights movement is a right-wing social movement. Clear criteria for understanding right and left wing movements in terms of collective identity are also required. Possibly, going beyond Canada and considering the international fathers’ rights movement would be helpful in order to compare Fathers For Justice in Canada to other Fathers Rights Organizations.

A recent journalistic account of the “global fathers’ rights movement”, which seems to be coalescing primarily in Western Europe and North America, is viewed cautiously by Dominus (2005). Profiling fathers’ rights activists such as Jason Hatch who uses the publicity he gained from dressing up as the super-hero Batman,

through “[h]is stunts at Buckingham Palace and York Minster Cathedral, according to Dominus, [he has become]...a public face of fathers’ rights activists in Britain” (Dominus, 2005:26). Dominus’ article also seems to be signaling a change in the global fathers’ rights movement that includes “[d]ivorced men banding together to change custody law” (Dominus, *ibidem*). Through Internet communications such as e-mail, listserves, and websites in order to move toward becoming a global movement, Dominus (2005) notes that “Fathers 4 Justice” activists in England are beginning to be noticed by the international media. These Fathers 4 Justice activists are networking with American fathers’ rights activists. Canadian activists are also networking through the Internet with fathers’ rights activists in the US and Britain, as well as throughout Europe and other parts of the world. Globally, fathers’ rights activists often see their issues of post-separation/divorce fathering as being very similar, even though laws vary in different jurisdictions. Throughout her article she questions the message of fathers’ rights activists in terms of “[I]s what’s best for Dad really best for the child?” (Dominus, 2005: 26) and also asking “...what about what’s fair?” (Dominus, *ibidem*). What is new seems to be the reality of the beginning of a global movement. This global movement may have an impact on the specific collective identity of organizations like Fathers For Justice in terms of expanding the identity of more localized organizations that includes global and “pan-issues” that influence activists in various countries with specific family laws.

Overall, examining the collective identity of the fathers’ rights movement globally may be done using paper and on-line questionnaires. Exploring interesting aspects of these activists using “Batman” and other superheroes may also be linked to a collective identity that is strategic and attractive to the media. Is this the future of a fathers’ rights collective identity? Is this an important augmentation of a fathers’ rights collective identity that is media savvy? These questions need to be considered for future research in order to understand the fathers’ rights movement in Canada, as well as how the global fathers’ rights movement impacts the collective identity of organizations such as Fathers For Justice in Canada.

Endnotes

- i Post-divorce is related to legally ending a marriage. Conversely, post-separation may mean the couple is no longer together couple, but still legally married, therefore, not legally divorced. Or, post-separation may imply the couple never have been married, but had a “common-law” relationship.
- ii Fathers For Justice members and supporters have expressed this opinion as quoted above.
- iii An observation based on preliminary research and informal discussions with various politicians and community leaders
- iv In March 1992, the Hamilton chapter acquired permanent office space and began the process of self-funding
- v Shortly after the Sudbury chapter was established, it disbanded
- vi Other related issues such as joint custody, mediation, and paternity issues are also of concern to Fathers For Justice members.
- vii Activists concerned with men’s rights, researchers, etc.

- viii The early members were those who helped establish Fathers For Justice from 1985-1986.
- ix Some of the Fathers For Justice functions and meetings that I was not a part of included some parent-child social events, confidential meetings with specific topics, and the regular activities and administration of the FFJ chapter offices.
- x "Collective subjective worldviews" are basic assumptions, beliefs, shared attitudes, values and ideas (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991).
- xi Six of the current members are considered leaders and nine are rank-and-file members.
- xii This sheet of demographic questions was only used in the Bradford chapter interview, or with those who had to leave the group interview early or who were not comfortable with sharing this type of information. It was found that more complete information could be ascertained if demographic questions were asked during the taped session. Most often, members would omit information on the demographic sheets.
- xiii Those attending FFJ meetings may not have FFJ memberships for several reasons: either they are new members and still deciding whether to join FFJ, or they could not afford the membership due to economic circumstances.
- xiv As early written records and documents from FFJ are scarce, the oral history is the only technique available to assess the early history of the group.
- xv The determination of the FFJ leadership was also decided by the ability of the persons to provide direction for FFJ, made during the period of participant observation.
- xvi Rank-and-file members could have served on the executive committee of their respective chapter. However, if their leadership role was not significant, as noted throughout the participant observation, they would be designated as rank-and-file members.
- xvii The various FFJ chapters seem to have their own unique identities based on their individual members (i.e., size, commitment, etc.), where the chapter is located and the specific types of court systems, legal community (i.e., judges, lawyers, police) in their area, how long the chapter has existed, and the chapter's resources.
- xviii Long time members include those who have been members since 1987.
- xix The purposive judgmental technique was also utilized in the "historical" interviews as the purpose of the study was to assess the early collective identity.
- xx Initially historical members' (1985–1989) views of meanings and practices were examined. However, there were very few differences between historical and contemporary members' views.
- xxi Pictures of children are especially visible in the Hamilton office of FFJ.
- xxii Researchers need to be respectful of activists' ideas and abilities to direct themselves.

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