

Fathers' Rights Groups, Domestic Violence and Political Countermobilization

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Domestic violence continues to be a serious problem for women in the United States. As a result, the battered women's movement has been tireless in campaigning for greater awareness of the issue, tougher penalties against offenders, and public vigilance against potential batterers, including fathers from dissolving families. In reaction to this stance, a small but vocal countermovement composed of activists in the fathers' rights movement has argued that the BWM is guilty of what I term *enemy boundary creep*, a perception whereby these men maintain that they have been inappropriately targeted. Using 40 in-depth interviews with fathers' rights activists located across the country, this article details the narrative that these men have composed as to why the BWM is expanding the scope of its enemies, the tactics that the BWM is using in this campaign, and the insidious effects that these efforts are having on fathers across the country. This narrative formulates a *boundary-push back* response. This analysis thus articulates how an unlikely countermovement can use the accusation of enemy boundary creep by its social movement opponents in an effort to shift the political discourse on a significant public problem.

You have to realize that family violence now is very "politically correct." I don't say that to demean it, because it does happen and it needs to be dealt with, but it's also a high card in this conflict between moms and dads...

– Alvin, a fathers' rights activist

According to the Department of Justice (2005), in the years 1998-2002, there were approximately 1.7 million violent crimes committed between spouses, and 2 million violent crimes perpetrated between boyfriends and girlfriends. Of those acts occurring between spouses, 84.3 percent of the victims were women, and of those committed between boyfriends and girlfriends, 85.9 percent of the victims were women. Even more tragically, in 2002, there were 787 spousal murders and 668 boyfriend/girlfriend related murders; 81 percent of the spousal victims were women and 71 percent of the boyfriend/girlfriend victims were women.

This article explores the perceptions of men involved in the fathers' rights movement, which is composed of activists seeking justice for men confronted

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with contentious family dissolutions. More specifically, it examines the FRM's reactions to the BWM's efforts to reduce domestic violence in the United States. Over the past 30 years, the BWM has successfully transformed what was once a "private matter" between adults into an issue of national importance (Anderson and Umberson 2001; Schechter 1982; Tice 1990). Indeed, what was only a volunteer-based and scattered array of shelters and safe houses to protect women later evolved into a massive overhaul of both the judicial and legislative methods for dealing with the problem (Mitsch Bush 1992). At the state level, advocates within the BWM pushed for the passage of civil protection orders (also known as restraining orders), mandatory arrests (removing discretion from police officers in domestic violence calls), and no-drop prosecutions (requiring prosecutors to follow through on a charge whether the victim wants to pursue action or not). Policymakers designed these measures to transform domestic violence from a personal problem into a serious issue of criminality, and to re-educate law enforcement officials who tended to view domestic violence as an unavoidable part of family life.

Realizing that more could be done at the federal level to help victims, representatives from the BWM successfully lobbied Congress to pass the Violence Against Women Act in 1994. The act, which was reauthorized in 2000 and 2005, has provided billions of dollars in assistance in bringing social service, criminal justice and non-profit agencies together to work toward ending domestic violence (Abolfazli 2006; Swaminatha 2004). Moreover, it has brought the muscle of federal prosecution into incidents of interstate domestic violence and enforcement of protection orders, as well as sexual assault cases.

In recent years, the BWM has turned its attention to divorcing families, where allegations of abuse in hotly contested custody cases can be common. While empirical data are somewhat limited on the extent of this problem, the state of California in 1991 documented that in a study of 1,318 families involved in mandated mediations and custody investigations, domestic violence was alleged in 39 percent of the cases; studies involving smaller numbers of separating parents have demonstrated even higher rates of alleged domestic violence (Depner, Cannata and Simon 1992; Johnston, Girder and Sagatun-Edwards 1999; Johnston et al. 2005; Johnston and Roseby 1997). In response to these statistics, the BWM has demanded that local law enforcement, district attorney offices and state and national lawmakers punish all violent offenders and try to prevent future violent incidents, with a particular emphasis on safeguarding against fathers who might act out physically as a result of a volatile, family break-up.

Given this contextual framework, this article seeks to answer a simple question: can a political countermovement fight back against an overwhelmingly sympathetic movement such as the BWM? Indeed, because there is so much public agreement on the need to prevent domestic violence, it would seem highly unlikely. In fact, the literature on social movements suggests that the BWM is a clear

consensus movement with so much societal support that countermobilization is almost impossible (McCarthy and Wolfson 1992).¹

However, in the 1980s, a subset of men involved in the FRM began such an effort. These fathers did not contest the central goal of the BWM—to end abuse—but objected to the strategy of painting them as part of the opposition. This strategy also affected the ability of the FRM to fulfill its political mission—helping fathers reduce child support obligations and acquire higher levels of custody. More specifically, fathers' rights groups accused the BWM of inappropriately widening the scope of its opponents to include them as potentially dangerous men who are suspect because they might harbor intense resentment over the dissolution of their families. FRM members' perceptions of the BWM's actions constitute *enemy boundary creep*. The FRM has responded by constructing a *boundary-push back* narrative as to why the BWM is expanding the scope of its enemies, the tactics that it is using in this campaign,² and the insidious effects that these efforts are having on fathers across the country. This research thus addresses how an unlikely countermovement can accuse its social movement opponents of *enemy boundary creep* in an effort to shift the political discourse on a significant public problem.

Enemy Boundary Creep, Boundary-Push Back and Social Movements

Research on the development of social movements and countermovements has increased substantially over the past two decades. One of the most important contributions emerging from this scholarship is that these sets of opposing players not only interact with the state in pressing their claims, but perhaps more importantly influence and shape one another by appealing directly to—and competing for—their targeted audience in the general population (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996). In other words, while the state might be the final arbiter in the distribution of goods and services currently under contestation, social movements and countermovements recognize that it is the public's empathy toward their message that will ultimately bring them victory or defeat.

This point is even more profound when one considers the fact that social movements are rarely able to ignore their opposition, even in their own messages. Especially in open political systems with multiple avenues for access, social movements that achieve initial success in the legislative or judicial arenas must always be prepared for a counterattack. One of the most powerful ways to mount such a counterattack is to link the issue under consideration to a different and equally important set of values that are supported by the majority of the citizenry (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996). For example, abortion advocates have tied their cause to the importance of "choice," while the pro-life movement has countered these efforts by pointing to the significance of protecting all forms of life. Other well-known, value-laden battles include debates over partial birth abortion (Esacove 2004), the issue of animal rights (Jasper and Poulsen 1993; Munro 1999), and the merits of Scientology (Peckham 1998).

In the social movement literature, the values of one group can be tightly linked to those of rivals. Indeed, values become associated with the groups in the process of collective identity formation and evolution. Collective identity refers to “the (often implicitly) agreed upon definition of membership, boundaries, and activities” for the movement as a whole (Johnston, Larana and Gusfield 1994:15). In order to be successful, a social movement must create a valued collective identity among its members and its potential supporters that can then sustain political activity over the long run (Crane 1994; Gamson 1997; Melucci 1989; Melucci 1995; Stryker 2000; Taylor 1999). At the same time that a movement is striving to create a collective identity that resonates among the general public, it must also work to cast opponents as less worthy or righteous. The establishment of these organizational boundaries is critical in that they function to define who the social movement represents—along with their positive attributes—and identify the opposition and define its negative attributes (Gamson 1997, 1992; Hunt and Benford 1994; Klandermans 1997). On this point, Taylor and Whittier (1992) discussed the significant ways in which the lesbian feminist movement employed social, psychological and physical institutions to distinguish its members from its opponents. In a similar vein, Hunt, Benford and Snow (1994) analyzed the practice of collective identity formation more generally and argue that social movements attempt to be extremely savvy in their construction of three separate actors in the political drama over scarce resources: protagonists (or those noble individuals affiliated with a movement), antagonists (their less than noble opposition) and audiences (neutral observers).

However, underresearched in the social movement literature is the important observation that these value-infused, boundary-defining processes constitute, in many ways, a difficult balancing act. A social movement wants to mobilize sympathizers, but not cast too many people as opponents, nor can it afford to demonize a category of people highly prized in the general society (McVeigh, Myers and Sikink 2004). The consequences of overreaching can, indeed, be grave. If a social movement’s web of enemies gets too big over time, it can be accused of *enemy boundary creep* by an emerging countermovement composed of those who argue that they have been unfairly included.

Once in the web of enemies, however, what can a countermovement do to extricate itself? To be effective in disassociating itself from this negative characterization by a well-regarded social movement, the countermovement must construct a compelling *boundary-push back* narrative claiming it has been mistakenly identified as an opponent. This will typically involve endorsing the initial goals of the highly popular social movement in order to portray itself as composed of reasonable political actors. From this starting point, the countermovement will then need to carefully describe how the social movement went astray by wrongly casting the countermovement’s members as enemies. Key components of this narrative include specifying exactly why the initial movement has widened its range of op-

ponents, the methods by which it is conducting this expansion, and the negative ramifications of this *enemy boundary creep* on the countermovement's members. Ultimately, how well this narrative is constructed will determine how effective the countermovement is in removing itself from the highly reviled opponent category.

Research Context: The Rise of the Fathers' Rights Movement in the United States

What is the history of fathers' rights groups in America, and how have they positioned themselves with respect to the domestic violence issue? Fathers' rights groups started to grow in number during the 1980s with grievances similar to those articulated by similar groups in Canada (Bertoia and Drakich 1993; Boyd 2003, 2006; DeKeseredy 1999; Kenedy 2004; Mann 2008), the United Kingdom (Collier 1995, 2006; Collier and Sheldon 2006), Sweden (Eriksson and Pringle 2006), and Australia (Flood 1998, 2004, 2006), among others. The shape of the fathers' rights movements in other countries, of course, is informed by their national culture and values. However, all of these groups, including those in the United States, have incorporated notions of what constitutes a "good father" into their missions, and stress that the current legal infrastructure prevents them from being the best fathers they can be.

What is a good father? According to Dowd (2000), there is a stark difference between being a biological father and a social father. A biological father is simply one who makes a genetic contribution to having a child. A social father, on the other hand, is one who engages in all of those activities with his children that help them develop into healthy, prosperous adults. Of course, the attributes of ideal social fathers varies over time. Currently, in the United States, fathers' rights activists have tapped into the emerging cultural notion that in the healthiest families fathers are involved in all aspects of their children's daily lives (van Krieken 2005). In doing so, this social movement casts itself in the most positive light possible by using the image of nurturing parents and the argument that children's best interests are concordant with their own (Kaye and Tolmie 1998). They have been assisted in their efforts by an evolving societal belief in the government's ability to stabilize families, even those that dissolve. This rise of the "therapeutic state" in recent decades has meant that citizens now expect the government to play a central role in assisting—and not harming—families as they transition to new forms after they break down (Reece 2003).

Embracing its version of the therapeutic state, the FRM has thus rejected the idea that its members are to blame for their current predicament; instead, the legal system is the culprit that must be contained and reformed. Fathers began using these groups to find other men who were also struggling to cope under hostile legal conditions.³ Taking a variety of forms, from national offices with state-level chapters, such as the Children's Rights Council, to freestanding state units with local chapters, such as Families and Children's Equality in Pennsylvania and Wisconsin

Fathers for Children and Families, these groups began holding meetings to: (1. provide legal information for those going through the dissolution process; (2. offer emotional support, and (3. advocate for public policy reforms (Crowley 2006b).⁴ How many people are involved in these groups, and how many groups are there in total? These questions are difficult to answer. Many fathers' rights groups are fleeting in nature, and those that are more stable are hesitant to reveal membership numbers. However, several estimates place their membership number at 10,000 (Crowley 2008b; Goldberg 1997). Regardless of their precise numbers, the mostly white, middle-class men who join these organizations see the problems of father absence and alienation through the lens of individual, parental rights, which they claim they lose after their families break up (Coltrane and Hickman 1992; Fineman 1991; Williams and Williams 1995). The majority of fathers' rights groups in the United States assert that men are victims of discrimination in the area of family law, especially with respect to child support and custody issues (Crowley 2006a).

First consider these groups' approach to child support. The Child Support Enforcement Program, begun in 1975, is open to any family requesting assistance in securing support from an absent parent (Crowley 2003). The program locates parents, facilitates paternity tests, issues orders for awards, and most importantly, uses a variety of collection techniques to transfer money between parents. By most measures, the program is extremely effective, collecting more than \$23 billion dollars for the 15.9 million cases receiving services at the end of fiscal year 2005 (OCSE 2006). While there is significant evidence that regular child support enforcement helps women exit welfare, aids in preventing them from applying for welfare in the first place, and/or assists in maintaining their pre-family breakdown standard of living (Garfinkel 2001; Huang, Kunz and Garfinkel 2002), most fathers' rights activists object to the program as inherently unfair to men. They note that of all parents awarded child support in 2005, 90 percent were women (Grall 2007). In addition, they argue that past forms of occupational segregation and discrimination no longer affect women—even though there is substantial academic evidence to the contrary (Bianchi, Subaiya and Kahn 1999; Holden and Smock 1991; Smock 1994)—and that women are free to earn as much in the labor market as men. Child support payments are thus not justified, unless a child spends substantially more time with one parent than with the other, which is, in fact, a commonplace occurrence. This reality leads directly to fathers' rights groups' central objections to the child custody system.

Fathers' rights groups spend significant time and resources attacking the ways in which custody determinations are made. Two types of custody are at issue here: legal custody, which pertains to decision-making power over children's lives, and physical custody, which refers to the residential placement of children. Currently, 42 states have laws that either have a presumption for joint custody or permit judges to consider it as an option; however, these laws tend to focus on promoting

joint legal custody rather than an equal sharing of physical time between parents (Elrod and Spector 2002). To determine residential placement, most states use the *best interest of the child* standard, a guiding principle that can encompass many different factors, such as the children's preferences, their emotional, physical and spiritual needs, and each parent's ability to meet these needs (May 2001). Because mothers do most of the care related to raising children when families are intact (Sandberg and Hofferth 2001; Sayer, Bianchi and Robinson 2004), the use of the *best interest of the child* standard has resulted in mothers receiving custody in the majority of cases. Although the states do not report custody statistics in a consistent fashion (Douglas 2006), some estimates are available. According to the 2005 Current Population Survey, approximately 84 percent of all custodial parents were mothers, while only 16 percent were fathers (Grall 2007). Only about 28 percent of these custodial parents reported having some type of joint legal or joint physical custody order in place.⁵ These outcomes that tilt toward maternal residential placement are also buttressed by social science research that has provided mixed evidence on the benefits of joint custody. While children in sole custody situations see less of their non-custodial parents than children in joint custody arrangements (Amato and Gilbreth 1999), whether joint custody arrangements help or hurt children's emotional and developmental well-being is an ongoing debate (Bauserman 2002; Johnston, Kline and Tschann 1989). Despite the controversy, fathers' rights activists continue to assail the fairness of a system that still grants sole custody to mothers in the majority of cases. Indeed, the FRM maintains that all state laws should mandate a presumption of 50-50 joint physical custody between parents in all but the most extraordinary circumstances.

The two issues of child support and child custody, then, are highly interrelated. Fathers' rights activists want more time with their children, which they propose would then have the effect of reducing their child support obligations—potentially to zero. Standing in their way, of course, are the efforts of the BWM, whose members worry that joint custody legislation exposes women unnecessarily to the threat of ongoing violence by promoting regular interaction between former partners (Cahn 1991; Johnston and Campbell 1993; Levin and Mills 2004). The BWM also stresses that there can be severe, negative ramifications for children who observe violence between their parents. The BWM is quick to point out that many children who witness family violence have enduring emotional and psychological problems such as depression, aggression and delinquency (Carlson 1996; O'Keefe 1994a, 1994b, 1995). Moreover, several studies have indicated that in 40-70 percent of cases where there is domestic violence between partners (Edleson 1988; Pagelow 1990; Quirion et al. 1997), children are abused as well, and that patterns of violence can be transmitted intergenerationally (Hotaling and Sugarman 1990; Quirion et al. 1997; Silverman et al. 2004).

Currently, all but four states have adopted one of two methods to handle custody cases when domestic violence is suspected: (1. A rebuttable presumption

statute, which states that it is not in the best interest of a child to be placed with a batterer (10 states), and (2. factor tests, which ask that judges consider domestic violence between partners in determining a child's best interests for placement purposes (34 states) (Levin and Mills 2004).⁶ Yet, for a variety of reasons, members of the BWM view these laws as inadequate in fully protecting women from the harms of domestic violence. For example, factor tests are a particularly ambiguous standard for making child placement decisions. In these states, judges who hold the popular view that any father contact—even by violent individuals—is “good-enough” contact, will continue to award custody rights to these men (Eriksson and Hester 2001). In addition, at least 32 states have some type of “friendly parent” statutes that encourage judges to give more custody to the parent who will encourage frequent and continuing contact with the other parent (DeKeseredy 1999). This can have a chilling effect on the willingness of some domestic violence victims to report abuse. Still others note that because batterers have had years' worth of experience intimidating their partners and children into fearing their authority, these men often appear as the “more competent” parents during custody evaluations (Bancroft and Silverman 2002). As a result of these shortcomings related to the protection of women and children, the BWM continues to oppose any type of legislation that promotes joint custody.

To combat the BWM's efforts, the FRM has sought to cast its own members not as abusers, but rather as an innocent, victim-class of loving and caring fathers. By presenting themselves to the public as this highly valued group and accusing the BWM of inappropriate *enemy boundary creep*, the FRM aims to neutralize its opponents' quest to target these men through restrictive, interpersonal contact policies. In this way, the FRM is engaging in active *boundary-push back*.

Methodology

The data collected here are part of a larger project on the FRM in the United States. To understand and map out the motivations of participants in fathers' rights groups, I aimed to conduct one-hour, telephone interviews with members across the United States. These interviews were designed to provide information about how these members viewed their involvement in these groups, and also to situate their organizational activities in the broader context of their lives. This approach follows that of other scholars whose research has focused on analyzing fathers and how they attach meaning to their interpersonal relationships (Arendell 1995; Waller 2002).

In undertaking this project, I first had to construct a list of all fathers' rights groups in operation. I found there is no centralized compilation, so I began by searching the internet and non-profit directories for possible groups to study. After this preliminary process, I attempted to identify at least three to four viable groups per state that remained in operation over the early period of the research project. I further winnowed the list based on the activity levels of each

group and my desire for geographic diversity in the project. In the end, I had a potential sampling pool of 50 groups.

Next, I had to secure permission from each group's leader in order to conduct the study. After this initial contact, four leaders decided against participation on behalf of their group and two leaders declined because their groups were no longer active. Fourteen group leaders never replied to the request for information, and four group leaders' contact information was no longer in service at the time of the request. My final sample was composed of 26 groups, including seven from the Northeast, eight from the Midwest, nine from the South, and two from the West.⁷

I initially interviewed the leader of each organization, and then turned toward publicizing the study to group members. I notified potential respondents via e-mail lists, postings on websites and in person at meetings (as part of the larger study, I conducted observational work on eight groups). This is the typical "snowball sampling" technique, a procedure that it is necessary when no central directory of group members exists. While most leaders provided enormous assistance as I attempted to secure interviews, a small minority provided only marginal aid. As a result, there was substantial variation in the number of respondents who were successfully recruited. More specifically, the maximum number of interviews I obtained from one group was 20, while the minimum was only one. In the end, I secured a total of 158 interviews in 2003. Respondents were asked questions on six topics: (1. Demographics, (2. Group Patterns of Recruitment and Goals, (3. Relationships with Past Partners, (4. Relationships with their Children, (5. Political Behavior, and (6. Challenges Related to Leadership (asked of leaders only).

Initially, I searched through the 158 interviews for mentions of the following keywords: abuse, allegation, allege, battered, battery, domestic violence, hit, order of protection, protective order and violence. Using these selection criteria, I noted that 97, or 61 percent of respondents, discussed domestic violence in some way. I then further narrowed down the search to only include those interviews that specifically mentioned the BWM or the organizational components of the BWM, such as domestic violence groups and shelters; most, but not all of this discussion was in direct response to a question that asked, "Are there any interest groups, or sets of people that you think are mobilized against you (the FRM)?"

A total of 40 respondents, or approximately 25 percent of all of these interviewees, discussed the BWM as their political opposition; these 40 respondents became the final sample for this project. They represent 19 groups in total, contributing between one and six interviews each. I then analyzed the written transcriptions of these data using standard grounded theory methodology with the assistance of Atlas.ti software. This method enabled me to construct categories of meaning on the topic of the BWM across the interviews (Strauss and Corbin 1990). I developed thematic codes to encapsulate these central concepts. Finally, it is important to note that throughout this article, I illustrate respondents' views and perceptions of the BWM with direct quotes; as such, all names of my respondents have been changed to protect their identities.

Results

Table 1 contains the descriptive statistics of this sample, while providing comparative data for the 97 members who discussed domestic violence in some way and the total 158 respondents in the larger project sample. In brief, the mean age of the 40 respondents studied in this article was 46, and their average number of biological children was 2. A little less than half (43 percent) were divorced or separated, with the remainder married (45 percent) or widowed/single (12 percent). In addition, most of the respondents were male, at 92.5 percent of the sample, while 7.5 percent were female. In terms of other socio-demographic characteristics, the sample of fathers' rights activists who discussed the BWM during the course of their interviews was a relatively advantaged group. The overwhelming majority of these respondents—92.5 percent—were white, and 7.5 percent were black. There were no other races represented in the sample. The sample was also extremely well-educated, with 37.5 percent holding a bachelor's degree and 30 percent holding an advanced degree. In terms of their occupations, 80 percent were employed in white collar jobs, and 15 percent held blue collar jobs. About 5 percent were retired, and 5 percent were either unemployed, volunteers or students. A plurality of the respondents (40 percent) were self-identified Republicans, while 22.5 percent were Democrats and 37.5 percent were Independents.

In their discussions about their political opponents, fathers' rights activists elaborated on the ways in which they perceive that the BWM engages in inappropriate *enemy boundary creep* and vilifies them, in contrast to how they view themselves as caring fathers. In the results, I categorize how the FRM has constructed its own *boundary-push back* narrative. More specifically, in creating this narrative, members of the FRM pointed to the reasons why the BWM is involved in this practice, how they are accomplishing this goal of linking all fathers involved in a family dissolution unfairly to the problem of domestic violence, and the effects of these practices on fathers everywhere.

The "Why" of Enemy Boundary Creep

The first component of the narrative that the FRM is composing defines the BWM's motivation. While members of the BWM publicly maintain that they are only interested in protecting the health of women and children, those involved in the FRM charge that the movement has two, less noble motivations: first, making money for the women they represent and for child custody professionals, and second, increasing custody for mothers without regard for the wishes of fathers.

In setting the framework for its narrative, the FRM argues that the *enemy boundary creep* imposed on them is centrally driven by a conglomerate of greed, or what they label as the "domestic violence industry." (Crowley 2008) The domestic violence industry, according to this perspective, is composed of battered women's shelters, women's organizations, judges, attorneys and anyone else connected with

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Fathers' Rights Group Members

Socio-Demographic Characteristics	Subsample that Discussed BWM as Political Opponents		Subsample that Discussed Domestic Violence		All Fathers' Rights Members
	BWM as Political Opponents		Domestic Violence		
Mean age	46		46		46
Mean number of biological children	2		2		2
Current Marital Status %					
Married	45		38		41
Divorced/ Separated	43		53		51
Widowed/ Single	12		9		8
Gender %					
Male	92.5		90		85
Female	7.5		10		15
Race %					
Caucasian	92.5		89		87
Black	7.5		6		8
Hispanic	0		1		2
Asian	0		1		1
Multiple/ Unspecified	0		2		1
Refuse	0		1		1
Education %					
High school diploma/ GED	7.5		10		9
Associate's degree/ Some college/ Vocational training	25		31		31
Bachelor's degree	37.5		29		30
Graduate degree (Master's, Doctorate or Professional)	30		30		30
Employment %					
White collar	80		76		78
Blue collar	15		15		13
Retired	0		4		6
Unemployed/ Student/ Volunteer	5		5		3

the child custody system in the United States who profits from injecting allegations of violence in determining children's residential placement. Expressing his belief in the perniciousness of this system, for example, was Ethan, a 44-year-old father of an 11-year-old daughter and a very committed fathers' rights activist. He spent much of his free time attending legislative sessions at his state capitol on topics related to men, divorce and custody. It was during these political outings that he discovered what he believed to be the true intentions of the BWM—extracting money from fathers in order to promote profiteering on behalf of mothers.

“In this past year... a domestic violence group said that [its members] didn't want to change [child support or child custody law] because [its members] felt that less money would end up going to moms. So, on the surface, these groups seem like they are just promoting moms' rights, not children's rights, to enjoy money directly from their dads the way a married family would, I think.” –Ethan

Reflecting a similar concern, Carlos, a 53-year-old father of three children, described how he was shocked when he brought what he viewed as a narrow child support case to his state supreme court for adjudication. To his surprise, several domestic violence organizations opposed him. According to his account, he was quick to learn why: concerns over money.

“I took a case on child support to [my state's supreme court], and the amicus brief on the other side came from [a child support advocacy group], [my state's] NOW Legal Defense Fund (not the national), and two domestic violence shelters. My case had to do with a very narrow issue about how you calculate child support in the case where both parents were custodial and residential parents. I argued that both parents' obligations should be treated in the same way, and to have it opposed by domestic violence shelters just stunned me because, there's never even been a whiff of a hint of any domestic violence [in my case].” –Carlos

Interestingly, later on in his interview, Carlos did acknowledge that members of the BWM were probably correct in arguing that if his case had succeeded, abused women might not leave their partners because they would fear receiving less child support. However, Carlos disagreed with their tactics in intervening in his personal lawsuit. He did not believe that he should be responsible, through his legal case, for guaranteeing that all abused women receive enough child support to leave their partners. In his view, domestic violence advocates should focus

solely on providing services to violence victims, not on pursuing social change by interfering in cases that did not specifically involve them.

In a similar way, Jonathan maintained that he was the victim of an unfounded order of protection. The scholarly research on false allegations of domestic violence is scant and varied; for example, one study examining abuse in 120 high-conflict custody cases found that 41 percent of domestic violence allegations against fathers were substantiated, leaving 59 percent indeterminate (Johnston et al. 2005), while another study with 42 cases reported the substantiated rate at 74 percent, leaving 26 percent indeterminate (Shaffer and Bala 2003). Indeterminate simply means that the allegations may or may not be true. Because there is no scholarly convergence on the “true” rates of false allegations, both sides of the debate have engaged in vocal efforts to influence public opinion on the issue. From the fathers’ rights perspective, Jonathan characterized himself as a pacifist who would never harm another individual. However, his ex-wife obtained an order of protection against him, in his view, in order to position herself for a better property settlement during the divorce proceedings.

“You essentially lose your rights [when you are the subject of a false order of protection]... That was instrumental in my losing of my property rights because the judge noted that there was a restraining order applied for—even though it was investigated and dismissed—that was used by him to decide that the house should go to her because she might be inclined to seek another restraining order... It seems all very well and good what [the BWM is] trying to accomplish to protect women from violence. But what is really being accomplished is the ones who are using these laws are not the ones who are truly in jeopardy, because a piece of paper isn’t very effective in protecting a woman from violence but it is very effective in establishing a firm upper hand in a divorce situation.” —Jonathan

Jonathan, then, had many of the same objections to the BWM as did Carlos. However, in Jonathan’s case, the central financial prize at stake was a property settlement rather than higher levels of child support.

According to fathers’ rights activists, members of the BWM also want to make money for the many professionals with whom they are affiliated during child custody proceedings. More specifically, in addition to judges and lawyers earning their salaries based on the conflict that is generated from the practice of primary maternal custody, and battered women’s shelters and women’s organizations receiving ever-larger grants to spread their fallacious message about all fathers from dissolving families being potentially dangerous, a whole new profession of parent-

ing coordinators has emerged to monitor these high-conflict families (Coates et al. 2004; Guyot 2005). Fathers' rights activists complain that in many cases, judges, with the advice of these parenting coordinators, will typically order supervised visitation when domestic violence is suspected. Much to their outrage, fathers then have to pay a fee to see their own children, frequently at a qualified center monitored by trained supervisors who then document and report the nature of all scheduled parent-child interactions to the court (Perkins and Ansay 1998; Straus 1995). Gerard, a 52-year-old father of two children, explained his frustration in the following way.

“One of the other groups [that our fathers' rights group] battles with is the domestic violence group. Here in [our state] as well as in other places, anybody just has to pick up the phone and say, I fear for myself and child, and [the man is] guilty of domestic violence until [he proves himself] innocent.... The custodial parent [then] gets sole custody for two years and the noncustodial parent will probably get supervised visitation at [his] expense. And that can range anywhere from \$45 to \$80 dollars an hour, which means [that these fathers] are not going to see their kids.” – Gerard

To fathers' rights activists like Gerard, members of the BWM collude with other professionals in the court system in order to maximize their income at the expense of fathers.

The FRM's arguments go beyond alleging that the BWM is only interested in generating better financial settlements for these mothers and child custody professionals. More specifically, the FRM maintains that rather than focusing on preventing violence, the BWM is also simply motivated to secure more custodial time for mothers at the expense of fathers across the country. All too often, fathers' rights groups claim, women make false allegations of domestic violence for the express purpose of obtaining orders of protection from the courts (Jaffe, Crooks and Wolfe 2003; Jaffe, Lemon and Poisson 2003). After orders like these are obtained and a father's access to his children is initially curtailed, the mother becomes the temporary custodial parent of their children. Much to the indignation of fathers' rights activists, judges find it difficult to undo these arrangements later. If and when these cases go to a family court judge for a final placement determination, mothers end up with permanent physical custody. Owen, a 50-year-old father of three children, articulated this concern in the following way.

“Another group that we always had trouble with as a local chapter is a [community woman's shelter], a place for basically battered woman. The reason that [this group] sometimes comes across as an adversary is that many of our

members would testify that if their ex-wives or girlfriends get involved with [this shelter], the people [at the shelter] will actually encourage women to file charges that are exaggerated to use as leverage in custody and other court proceedings.” – Owen

To Owen, then, as well as other fathers' rights activists, the BWM has engaged in *enemy boundary creep* for reasons that have nothing to do with reducing violence in American families. Rather, the dual goals of making money for the numerous involved parties and increasing custodial time for mothers are now driving the BWM's core activities.

The "How" of Enemy Boundary Creep

With the BWM's motivations clearly laid out, fathers' rights activists have also begun to construct the second component of their narrative regarding the "how" of the BWM's activities. That is, the motivations or the why of *enemy boundary creep* must not only be exposed, according to these fathers' rights activists, but in advancing their *boundary-push back* narrative, the exact processes behind how the BWM inappropriately vilifies all fathers from dissolving families also must be revealed to the general public. According to the FRM's account, the BWM utilizes three primary vehicles to target fathers as enemies: equating all men with violent behavior, misrepresenting research that links men to abuse, and infiltrating governmental bodies to advance its view of violence.

The first way that the BWM promotes *enemy boundary creep* is by perpetuating the myth that all men are naturally violent. One fathers' rights activist named Wayne, a 51-year-old father of three teenaged daughters, was having a difficult time at his job due to his separation from his wife. His employer, who had an on-site counselor, recommended that he attend a program that could help him handle his anger management issues, including the many highly volatile feelings that he had toward his former partner. Like many domestic violence intervention programs in operation throughout the country, Wayne's program utilized the Power and Control Wheel developed by victims of domestic violence during the early 1980s in Duluth, Minnesota to illustrate the multiple ways batterers can intimidate their partners (Pence and Paymar 1993). One central message of the Wheel is that batterers have a strong need to control their partners, and can do so using a variety of techniques, of which physical violence may only play a small part (Johnson 1995). More specifically, there are a total of eight categories or types of power and control on the Wheel, including (1. Using Coercion and Threats, (2. Using Intimidation, (3. Using Emotional Abuse, (4. Using Isolation, (5. Minimizing, Denying and Blaming, (6. Using Children, (7. Using Male Privilege, and (8. Using Economic Abuse. Because Wayne did not view himself as an abuser, he reported that he was stunned by the presentation of the Wheel

at his program's workshop where he thought he would just be learning about controlling his anger.

“[What I was told at this counseling session run by domestic violence advocates was] that women were nothing more than innocent victims of male domination and abuse... They had this Power and Control [Wheel] that showed the eight ways in which men abuse woman. And if your case didn't fit into... one of [the seven categories], there was [another category] called male privilege, which meant the fact that you were born male and raised male, by default you were abusive... basically what I learned about this group is [that it is] just very gender-biased.” – Wayne

Instead of receiving the help that he needed to deal with his personal life, Wayne felt as if he were placed in a no-win situation, because, as a male, “by default” he was abusive.

In addition to perpetuating the myth that all men are violent, members of the BWM, according to fathers' rights activists, also refuse to listen to men and their side of disputes when domestic violence is alleged. In other words, because members of the BWM argue that men are automatically at fault in these cases, there is no other side of the story. Daniel, a 44-year-old father of a 7-year-old son, discovered this practice quite dramatically when he attempted to seek out help to overturn an order of protection from a domestic violence unit located in his county courthouse.

“I tried to reach out [to representatives of the domestic violence community] a couple of times [in my county], right in the courthouse, and they will not even talk to me.... When I went in there after the restraining order [was filed against me], I wanted to know how to appeal it and just to talk to somebody... [I was] literally laughed at by two of the workers there... [The manager] did sit down with me and said if you want to appeal this, this is where you go. But the two [other] women were laughing at me. The last time I was in court, I wanted to speak to [one of those] women, [and one of them] said, I am not talking to you. She wouldn't get my side of the story. I'm the victim.” – Daniel

Edmund, a 49-year-old father of a 6-year-old daughter, witnessed some of the same practices in his own courthouse.

"I work at the courts, and a lot of time I see domestic violence issues. I saw one specific example and it just floored me. There was this father in there with his two kids. He was all cut up. He was taken to the hospital the night before. The mother, his wife, stabbed him with a knife and was arrested. She attacked him. They basically laughed at him in court and wouldn't do a thing to help him. I tried to get the domestic violence group to help him. They wouldn't [help] because he was a guy. I said, let me guess, [you won't help] because he is a guy? Well, [they said], you know, our funding is for women. We can't do that." – Edmund

For Daniel and Edmund, then, the BWM tarred all fathers with the brush of abuse by refusing to even consider that there might be a male point of view when it came to accounting for intra-family violence.

The second most significant way that the BWM spreads the erroneous message that all fathers are implicated in the domestic violence problem, according to fathers' rights activists, is through the manipulation of research on this topic. For some activists, this problem is simply that the BWM will not consider flaws in the studies that it cites regarding male-on-female violence. For example, to Robert, a 59-year-old father of two adult daughters, one of the most egregious offenses of the BWM is that its members do not intellectually engage with or question any research that they offer in support of their views.

"[Members of the BWM] don't think critically, they're ignorant, and they're uneducable. There was a woman [at a public meeting sponsored by the League of Women Voters who was quoting a study that said] that 70 percent of fathers were responsible for abuse... And she took questions. So the question I asked her was, wasn't [this study] flawed [because it] failed to distinguish mom's live-in boyfriend and the biological father and if you separate it out, it showed [that] fathers were less abusive.... Since that was the case, and abuse and molestation occur in an environment of isolation, a strong relationship with the father is better and could be expected to help the child. So in that case, wouldn't joint physical custody be better? She knit her brows and said, first of all that doesn't compute, and second of all, no, [joint custody] would increase access. So the woman was not only ignorant, she was uneducable. And I find this to be typical of the field." – Robert

To Robert, all academic research has flaws. The key, of course, is being a vigilant enough and a conscientious enough activist to acknowledge these weaknesses. On this point, according to Robert, the BWM fails miserably.

While Robert made the case that the BWM does not analyze the shortcomings of research that supports its agenda, other respondents discussed the ways in which the BWM refuses to even consider evaluating research on topics that might prove inimical to its goals. One highly salient example involves newly emerging research pertaining to Parental Alienation Syndrome. According to fathers' rights members' accounts, PAS can materialize when one parent systematically denigrates the other parent in the presence of the children. PAS can assume a variety of forms, including hostile behaviors, words or accusations of abuse; in each of these circumstances, the end result is the same in that the children express a strong desire not to be in the presence of the alienated parent (Carbone 2000). With this in mind, fathers' rights activists argue that judges should consider the impact of this syndrome when making custody and visitation determinations (Schepard 2004). Significantly, however, there are currently no large-scale academic studies that document the existence of PAS, nor does it appear in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, the manual which is used by mental health professionals to diagnose and treat psychological disorders. Moreover, critics of PAS maintain that it is a pseudoscience designed chiefly to strip mothers of their custody rights, and therefore should never be used in custody evaluations (Bond 2007). Nevertheless, fathers' rights activists strongly argue that PAS is a commonly used weapon by their ex-partners, and frustratingly the BWM refuses to acknowledge this. For example, Issac, a 49-year-old father of two adult sons, echoed this theme when he described his inability to even discuss PAS research in his capacity as a mental health professional.

“Both my wife and I are presenting [research] at a [research] conference... and what we were talking about is the Parental Alienation Syndrome... [The BWM] actually sent people to our workshop to disrupt it and... yell and scream and say don't believe him, don't listen to him... They stood up, and they wouldn't sit down, and people in the audience started yelling at them... Finally, [the event organizers] sent some people in to take them out.” – Issac

Notably, Issac reported that he shared the same goals as members of the BWM in terms of protecting women and children from abuse. However, as a mental health professional, he decried the membership's inability to consider any research trajectories that might implicate mothers in fomenting poor relationships between fathers and children.

While PAS continues to be extremely controversial, an even more hotly contested issue involves domestic violence research related to the topic of gender

symmetry—the assertion from fathers' rights activists that men and women batter each other at equal rates. In making this claim, fathers' rights activists rely on the research conducted by Murray Straus, Richard Gelles and Suzanne Steinmetz, among others, who developed a Conflict Tactics Scale in 1979 to measure intimate partner violence between currently co-habiting or married partners (Straus and Gelles 1986, Gelles 1990; Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz 1980). Notably, while extremely influential, this research is intensely debated for a variety of reasons (Johnson and Ferraro 2000). Kimmel (2002), in a comprehensive review of the research related to the gender symmetry issue, points out several of its many limitations. First, regardless of the rate of violence between the sexes, the CTS does not measure the consequences of violence, whereby men are much more likely to severely harm women than women are to harm men. Second, the CTS leaves out critical types of violence, such as sexual assault, scratching, stalking and murder; it also decontextualizes the violence from the categories of self-defense and fear/intimidation tactics. Third, there is substantial research employing different methodologies that contradicts results used in the CTS analyses. These alternative studies, based on all forms of crime victimization regardless of the relationship between the victim and perpetrator, tend to be based on nationally representative samples and demonstrate much less gender symmetry in violence than the CTS studies (Bachman and Saltzman 1995; Tjaden and Thoennes 2000).

Despite these limitations, fathers' rights groups tend to view research that employs the CTS as the final, legitimate word on domestic violence. As a result, fathers' rights activists chide the BWM for not accepting what they maintain is the consensus-driven, gender-symmetry argument. For example, Aaron, a 46-year-old father of two children, described what he viewed as the dishonest educational campaigns of the BWM.

“Now the domestic violence groups have always maintained, you know, on the extreme end—I am not talking about the reputable ones—that domestic violence is strictly a male-on-female phenomenon. Now, clinical studies have shown something somewhat different... The... most reputable long-term study of domestic violence has been the family violence project conducted by Straus and Gelles... Anyway, they have conducted a government-financed project over a period of 30 years that pretty much has shown, you know, that domestic violence is a 50/50 proposition. Half the time one gender instigates it, the other half of the time, the other gender instigates it. However, when you have an advocacy movement that promulgates a point of view that does not support the research out there, you can have dangerous social policy being enacted where you may target

one group. In this case we are talking about men; men may be targeted for enforcement procedures, whereas women are given kind of a pass.” –Aaron

Mel, a 55-year-old father of four children, three of whom are now adults, echoed this perspective when he declared that most domestic violence groups are not interested in understanding the irrefutable claims—in his mind—of the CTS studies.

“I go out and have testified many times in the state capitol on legislation, and I sit here in the House of Representatives and listen to these [domestic violence] people testify. I say, what are they even doing here? ...Basically [Dr. Straus and Dr. Gelles] indicated that domestic violence is equal against men and women.... I talked to [Straus] many times and he doesn't care what goes on so much as [he reveals] what is really happening as a scientist. He wants the actual answers; if the research favors men, fine; [if the research favors] women, fine. He doesn't care; he's a scientist, [and] he wants results.” –Mel

As Mel argues here, the BWM should be doing much more in the name of respecting social science as embodied by the CTS studies; in other words, the BWM should be looking at all of the data and acknowledging female responsibility for violence where it exists.

The third way, according to the FRM, that the BWM promotes the view that all fathers are implicated in the domestic violence problem is by encouraging law enforcement to pursue, arrest and jail only men if any physical incidents are suspected between couples. One way that the BWM does this is by encouraging women to engage in fraudulent behaviors in order to attract the attention of law enforcement. Jose, a 42-year-old father of two teenaged children, infiltrated a local domestic violence group under the guise of helping his fictitious sister cope with her abusive husband. He hoped that by gaining entrée into the group, he would learn about what he claimed the organization instructed his ex-wife to do in making up domestic violence charges against him.

“[This local domestic violence group taught my ex-wife] how to manipulate things in such a way that you are not seeing the other side of it... Let's put it this way, they teach [women] how to dial 911 and at the time that they make their phone call, to pinch their arms so that they have bruises on their arms so that when the police officers get there, they see marks and bruises... [I know this because I

went to the group under the ruse of helping my sister deal with an abusive husband] . . . I started to listen and basically they did teach that if you wanted the upper hand in court, charge the ex-spouse with violence because when it comes to defending violence, women know that law enforcement officers will always act on the complaint.” – Jose

In addition to promoting fraud in order to prompt the strongest police response, according to the FRM, the BWM also implements its anti-father agenda by actually formally participating in the training of law enforcement officials in terms of their appropriate response when they are called to resolve domestic violence incidents. Christian, a 52-year-old father of two girls and one boy, explained how the members of the BWM influence the thinking of the police on matters of domestic violence.

“These are the same people (the BWM) that are out there training law enforcement, getting the ear of many government bureaucracies, whether it be law enforcement, child support, or some kind of enforcement of one type or another. So [now] we’ve got this mind set out there [that] if there is any domestic violence, it has got to be the man’s fault. I’ve heard that specifically from a police chief. His opinion was that if there is anything going on in the house, he is pretty much going to arrest the man. I said, well, why is that? He said, well, men are just naturally the aggressors. That is part of the training that he has received and [the BWM] is where he has received his training.” – Christian

In sum, then, fathers’ rights activists have methodically laid out how they perceive that the BWM is attempting to implicate all fathers in the abuse problem, not simply those with a history of violence. The BWM does this, according to fathers’ rights activists, by implying that all men are capable of violent behavior, misrepresenting research that links men to abuse, and disproportionately influencing members of governmental bodies, in particular law enforcement, to promote its view of the likely perpetrators of abuse.

The “Effects” of Enemy Boundary Creep

The third and last part of the *boundary-push back* narrative is the BWM’s improper efforts to implicate fathers in the abuse problem. According to fathers’ rights activists, there are two major ramifications from the BWM’s ill-advised pursuit of *enemy boundary creep*. The most significant impact has been the BWM’s support of primary maternal custody policies that make it more difficult for fathers to gain

significant time with their children; this stance, in the view of the FRM, punishes the many fathers for the negative actions of the few. A related effect of this zero-tolerance policy against joint custody laws is that it prevents political alliances across both mothers' and fathers' groups that could potentially help all children.

For fathers trying to be active participants in their children's lives, the most egregious result of the BWM's portrayal of all separating and divorcing fathers as potential abusers is that it keeps them from actually caring for their offspring. To be sure, scholars have concluded that in cases where there is a primary custodial parent (usually the mother) and a noncustodial parent (usually the father), contact between children and their noncustodial father tends to decrease over time; this "dropping out" effect may be even more prevalent among low-income families (Carlson, McLanahan and Brooks-Gunn 2008; Furstenberg and Nord 1985; Nepomnyaschy 2008; Seltzer 1991). It is therefore not surprising that preferences for joint custody divide along gender lines, with fathers consistently favoring joint custody and mothers consistently advocating for sole custody (Arditti and Madden-Derdich 1997; Shrier et al. 1991). But joint custody is not always the panacea for separating families. In fact, the research demonstrates that joint custody can be detrimental in terms of childhood developmental outcomes and positive parent-child relationships, especially if the relationship between the two former adult partners is tense (Johnston, Kline and Tschann 1989; Kline, Johnston and Tschann 1991; Maccoby et al. 1993).

Despite this mixed evidence as to the benefits of joint custody, fathers' rights activists remain firmly committed to the policy. Standing in their path, of course, is the BWM. Henry, a 53-year-old father of one adult and one teenaged daughter, described the problem in the following way:

"The domestic violence groups seem to try to do whatever they can to make it difficult for dads. Most domestic violence groups are [in existence] to provide services to women only or mothers only through the Violence Against Women Act... Since these organizations have a lot of funding and programs going on throughout the state, and in order to protect the women in domestic violence situations, they like to have laws minimizing the dad's role and make it easy for the moms to keep dad away. But if 10 percent of the cases may warrant some restrictions, they are trying to impose [restrictions] on all cases. The problem is in order to make it easier for them, they've got to make it more difficult for dads in all cases when there is no domestic violence involved." – Henry

In other words, as a result of this single-minded motivation to stop all violence, according to Henry, members of the BWM do not care if a significant number

of fathers suffer under this particular set of policies. To Edmund, a 49-year-old father of a 6-year-old daughter, an overwhelming majority of BWM members believes that all men are inherently bad anyway, so they do not really care if more men are separated from their children. His overall perception of the BWM was thus decidedly negative.

“[The BWM’s] point of view is that [its members] think men are wolves in sheep’s clothing. Well, I wouldn’t say all men, but let’s say 9 out of 10 men are like that in their opinion. That one person may be very good, but if they agree to this [joint custody] law, what they are saying is that there are other men that may take advantage of that law [and the abuse could persist]. For them, the only stance [that] they can take is not to agree with that.” –Edmund

Barry, a 26-year-old father of a 6-year-old daughter, on the other hand, disagreed with Edmund in that he maintained that the BWM has noble goals in terms of stopping abuse. However, the end result of the movement opposing all joint custody is negative for fathers across the board.

“Now for people who are in unique, sometimes, and desperate situations, they may fall through the cracks, and what I see, the people that are in what I call the domestic violence industry, is that they want to close all the cracks for every circumstance. [But] in doing so, they really don’t care who else they offend or hurt because they have an agenda to protect. It’s a very noble cause, but they really, in my mind, are kind of selfish to the majority in looking out for the few minorities. Do you understand what I’m saying?” –Barry

In this case, Barry tried his best to be empathetic with the BWM; he even admitted in his interview to dating a woman who had been physically, emotionally and sexually abused in the past. Nonetheless, he still maintained that because the BWM is intent on protecting all women from abuse at all costs, its members end up harming the majority of fathers by isolating them from their children.

The second disturbing effect of this inappropriate *enemy boundary creep*, according to fathers’ rights activists, is that it thwarts groups with a variety of perspectives on joint custody from listening to each other. Lawrence, a 47-year-old father of a 9-year-old daughter, described how by including all fathers from dissolving families in its web of opponents, the BWM prevented itself from forming a set of productive alliances with fathers’ rights groups.

“The other group that has been pretty vocal in opposition to shared parenting and joint custody legislation in [our state] has been the Domestic Violence Coalition. I have personally met with representatives of the Domestic Violence Coalition... I asked to meet because I told them that joint custody legislation had been proposed and was being considered in the judiciary committee [of our state legislature]. [I wanted to] meet with them and collaborate with them to develop something cooperatively so that we could make this a win-win situation. [That way] we would allow the good fathers to be able to have more contact with their children through joint custody legislation and still address their concern that potentially abusive spouses might gain greater access to the custodial parent or their children. They in no uncertain terms told me that they categorically oppose joint custody legislation and the director of the Family Violence Counsel told me that in his estimation if one out of a thousand abusive fathers [were] allowed greater access to his former spouse or their children, [the group] would oppose it even if it meant 999 good fathers could not have greater access to their children.” –Lawrence

To Lawrence, this position of the BWM was extremely alarming. In his mind, he was reaching out and trying to craft legislation that he maintained would meet the needs of both groups. However, because the BWM had cast such a wide net in its efforts to prevent abuse, its leaders were unwilling to help well-adjusted and loving fathers take care of their children. The end result was that no political coalition could be formed, and non-abusive fathers would have to continue to pay the price of a custody policy that painfully limited their contact with their offspring.

Conclusions

In their insightful work on social movement dynamics, Meyer and Staggenborg (1996) argue that effective activists operating in the political arena must always tirelessly scan the landscape for new, strategic opportunities to promote their agendas. To extract valuable resources from the state, for example, activists must consistently be on the lookout for new venues in which to advocate on behalf of their claims. In addition, they must be vigilant in grooming new leaders to serve in the future if the battle that they are fighting is expected to last. They also might need to change their organizational structure over time—such as adding new offices or establishing enhanced fundraising capacity—in order to best compete in the marketplace of ideas. Perhaps most critically, successful activists must con-

tinually re-examine the nature of their demands to ensure that the majority of the public views their cause in a positive light.

Key to the public's perception that activists' demands are reasonable is how a particular movement defines its enemies. One of the most critical risks that a winning social movement faces is having the public come to believe that it has inappropriately identified a highly valued group as an opponent. This process of *enemy boundary creep* can prompt the emergence of a formidable countermovement composed of these highly valued members of society who then push back these boundaries. In order to accomplish this task, the countermovement must craft a compelling *boundary-push back* narrative giving the reasons why the original social movement has engaged in this *enemy boundary creep*, describing the unsavory measures that the movement has taken to justify this opponent expansion, and highlighting the pernicious effects on the innocent victim-class.

In illustrating these dynamics, this article has pointed to the ways in which fathers' rights groups have constructed their own *boundary-push back* narrative in portraying members of the BWM as unfairly engaged in enemy boundary creep. In their narrative's totality, fathers' rights activists argue that a major injustice runs rampant in America's family court system. The central component of their grievance is that the BWM has wrongly painted all men as potential abusers in their dissolving families, instead of focusing solely on imposing stronger penalties on known abusers. Until this injustice is properly addressed, according to these activists, fathers will make little progress in achieving their child support and custody goals. Pointing out and publicly critiquing this *enemy boundary creep* is thus a central part of the fathers' rights agenda.

Does the narrative constructed by fathers' rights activists show any signs of being persuasive in pushing back the BWM's boundaries? So far, the fathers' rights perspective has garnered only minimal attention, especially given the overwhelming statistics that demonstrate that violence against women continues to be a problem of critical importance. Indeed, it is essential to emphasize that this article has focused only on the perspectives of FRM members in terms of their reactions to the BWM and has not directly presented the views of the BWM itself. The devastating violence suffered by women at the hands of their partners and family members, and the motivations that these experiences prompt in terms of a mother's desire to protect her children, cannot be underestimated. This is where, rightly so, public sympathies should lie.

However, this does not mean that the FRM's *boundary-push back* narrative will not gain traction in the future. In order to formulate predictions concerning the success of countermovement narratives in this case, as well as others, we first need to know much more about the ways in which opponent definition takes place by the original social movement, and the methods by which these initial movements attempt to alter their selected list of enemies (if at all) in order to move their agendas forward. After we identify cases in which these processes are occurring,

we can then search for the conditions under which a countermovement claiming inappropriate *enemy boundary creep* can emerge.

Ultimately, scholars could move toward cataloging the distinguishing traits and patterns of commonalities among these countermovement *boundary-push back* narratives. Then, these data can be used to predict whether there is a relationship between these notable narrative characteristics and a tipping point in public discourse either for or against the initial movement's articulation of its appropriate opponents. These findings will not only be helpful to academic scholars researching collective action, but also instructive to social movements wanting to maintain political gains and to countermovements that want to challenge them.

Notes

1. By "consensus movement," I mean that there is significant scholarship that documents that Americans have increasingly viewed interpersonal violence with disapproval over time. There is much less agreement, however, on the proper punishment for this violence (Carlson and Pollitz Worden 2005; Johnson and Sigler 2000).
2. Throughout this article, I will discuss the views of the FRM on various components of the domestic violence problem. Of course, this is an oversimplification of the composition of the FRM; not everyone in the FRM holds these views. The language is used, therefore, for purposes of parsimony. Fathers' rights groups also should be distinguished from other groups that are currently working on fatherhood initiatives in the United States. Two of the most important include pro-marriage groups, which emphasize that fathers need to take back their roles as heads of the family, and economic empowerment groups, organizations that focus on improving the economic prospects of mostly Black men (Gavanoas 2004). These groups tend to be research, professional, or advocacy organizations, not groups based on grassroots membership.
3. Women join these groups as well, but in much smaller numbers. They are typically new wives, sisters/sisters-in-law, grandmothers, and mothers of men experiencing child support and child custody problems. Other women join as non-custodial mothers and as child advocates (Crowley 2009).
4. These groups are named for illustrative purposes only; their inclusion here does not imply that they were actually involved in this study.
5. See Table 9 at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/childsupport/chlds05.pdf>.
6. The four states with no domestic violence provisions are Connecticut, Mississippi, Utah, and West Virginia. Two additional states do not consider domestic violence in their general custody laws, but only in their joint custody legislation. They are New Hampshire and New Mexico.
7. These 26 groups constitute the total of each respondent's primary affiliation. Some were members of multiple groups at one point in time—belonging to other groups in this study or, in most cases, groups that I did not have permission to study. Counting these second and third affiliations would bring the total groups studied to 34.

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