

Incomplete Role Exit and the Alimony Reform Movement

Rutgers University has made this article freely available. Please share how this access benefits you.
Your story matters. [\[https://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu/rutgers-lib/55400/story/\]](https://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu/rutgers-lib/55400/story/)

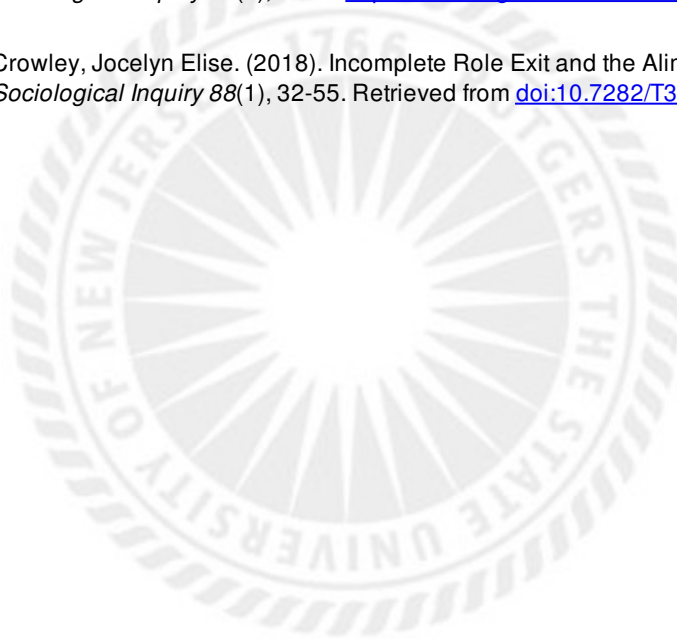
This work is an **ACCEPTED MANUSCRIPT (AM)**

This is the author's manuscript for a work that has been accepted for publication. Changes resulting from the publishing process, such as copyediting, final layout, and pagination, may not be reflected in this document. The publisher takes permanent responsibility for the work. Content and layout follow publisher's submission requirements.

Citation for this version and the definitive version are shown below.

Citation to Publisher Crowley, Jocelyn Elise. (2018). Incomplete Role Exit and the Alimony Reform Movement.
Version: *Sociological Inquiry* 88(1), 32-55. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/soin.12177>.

Citation to *this* Version: Crowley, Jocelyn Elise. (2018). Incomplete Role Exit and the Alimony Reform Movement.
Sociological Inquiry 88(1), 32-55. Retrieved from [doi:10.7282/T3SX6HBH](https://doi.org/10.7282/T3SX6HBH).



Terms of Use: Copyright for scholarly resources published in RUcore is retained by the copyright holder. By virtue of its appearance in this open access medium, you are free to use this resource, with proper attribution, in educational and other non-commercial settings. Other uses, such as reproduction or republication, may require the permission of the copyright holder.

Article begins on next page

Incomplete Role Exit and the Alimony Reform Movement

BIOGRAPHY

Jocelyn Elise Crowley is a Professor of Public Policy at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. Her research focuses on American social policy. She has published books and numerous peer-reviewed articles on child support enforcement, child custody, workplace flexibility and motherhood, and mid-life divorce.

Crowley, Jocelyn Elise. 2018. "Incomplete Role Exit and the Alimony Reform Movement." *Sociological Inquiry* 88(1): 32-55.

Abstract:

This analysis explores men's role exit process from being married to divorced in the context of the alimony reform movement in the United States. Those considering potential role exit may face governmental policies that either support or oppose them in making these personal changes. In this case, mostly men want to leave their husband roles behind but legally-imposed alimony, in their view, unfairly binds them to their former spouses. This analysis uses 182 narratives to map out how major collective action frames—based upon the highly valued, masculine concept of autonomy—are generated in this social movement. Overall, this research demonstrates the importance of both considering the operation of governmental policies in producing successful or incomplete role exit for individuals, and how these same individuals can respond using collective action frames drawn from privileged notions of masculinity as they aim for significant life change.

Introduction

Divorce remains a difficult but common experience across contemporary American families (Usdansky 2008; Cherlin 2010). While there has been a decline in divorce among younger ever-married people, the rise in divorce among individuals older than 50 has been much more significant. Overall, this means that by the year 2010, about one-half of ever-married persons will have had experienced a divorce or separation by their late 50s (Kennedy and Ruggles 2014). Those undergoing such a marital breakdown frequently report that it is a highly stressful event (Simon 2002). Couples that used to live under one roof have to learn to disentangle their once deeply intertwined lives. This process not only involves the division of material assets, but also the separation of two identities that used to be merged in the form of a unified couple (Amato 2010).

For sociologists, these changes for each half of the couple can also be thought of as cases of role exit (Ebaugh 1988; Turner 1990). With life transitions and role theory as its conceptual foundation (Merton 1957; Goffman 1961; Glaser and Strauss 1971), role exit is the process by which an individual casts off an old role and establishes a new one that society recognizes in an emerging social order, potentially leading to better overall personal outcomes, including health and well-being (Kitson and Raschke 1981; Antonovsky 1987; Kitson and Morgan 1990). Research has suggested that role exit can be aided by internal aspirations and interpersonal networks of support (Oselin 2010). However, role exit can be incomplete if individuals are not fully committed to change or if they lack supportive social systems (Decker, Pyrooz, and Moule 2014). In addition, but much less studied, is the influence of governmental policies in either encouraging or discouraging the role exit transition (Turner 1990).

In the case of divorce, state legislators clearly define how couples must resolve a distinct set of financial matters. For example, state laws regulate which grounds can be used for a divorce action, as well as how property and other material acquisitions will be divided between couples. In addition, one of the most prominent areas where obligations must be determined pertains to the issue of alimony (Ellman 1989).¹ Alimony involves payments from the higher-earning party, typically the husband, to the lower-earning party, typically the wife, after a divorce.² One of the pivotal questions in the area of alimony law is how long states should be involved in addressing these inequities. That is, should alimony be required to be paid for long periods of time between former spouses? On this point, many men across the states have started to make a series of arguments that governmental policy in the form of long-term alimony payments is preventing them from fully leaving their husband roles. This analysis interrogates exactly how these actors have shaped, defined, and structured these arguments—or collective action frames—based upon the masculine value of autonomy as they have come together to form the modern alimony reform social movement in the United States.

Alimony Policy in the United States

Currently in the United States, legal scholars have noted that alimony primarily should exist to address two central problems: (1) Different roles for a couple within a marriage can produce different economic outcomes for each upon divorce; and (2) Inequality between the sexes can emerge if the courts do not address it (Starnes 2011). In this model that is primarily based on white, middle class experiences, a couple makes a joint investment in running a family, whereby a woman frequently specializes in taking care of their children at the expense of a career, while the man invests in additional education and employment to further expand his future income. They both, as a married couple, aim to share in the fruits of this mutual

investment over the course of their marriage. In the event of a divorce, however, a woman loses all of her expected rewards from this partnership, while the man loses none. She, in essence, shoulders a disproportionate loss from a marital breakdown (Ellman 1989).

To address these issues, while short-term or transitional alimony is common, most states also permit judges to award long-term alimony, the primary subject of discussion here (Shehan et al. 2002). Over the past several decades, legal theorists have tried to quantify the appropriate amount and length of time for these types of awards. Some have argued that alimony should be awarded for one year based on every two years of marriage such that divorcing couples end up sharing income over a set period of time after a divorce (Singer 1988). Others have asserted that alimony should continue until all children reach adulthood, and then for one-half of the length of the marriage afterwards as a way to equalize post-divorce standards of living (Williams 1993). Still other proposals exist with varying degrees of complexity, factoring in the size of the disparity in income at the time of the divorce and then combining both child care years and marriage length to determine the final duration of the alimony award (Starnes 2011). In most of these cases, these awards typically end when the recipient remarries.

One major sociodemographic trend, however, has reduced the centrality of the states' interest in implementing long-term alimony awards: the increasing relevance of women as fundamental players in the labor market. Over the course of the period 1975-2014, women's labor force participation grew from 46.3% to 57%.³ Mothers with children up to the age of 18 entered paid employment as well, increasing their labor force participation during this same time period from 47.4% to 70.8%.⁴ In addition to participating more heavily in the labor market, women also started to earn more income than they had in the past. Over the course of the time period 1970-2013, wives moved from providing a median percentage of 26.6% of all household income to 37.3% of all household income.⁵ These statistics reflect that women were also successful in at least partially closing some of the pay gap with men. In 1979, they earned only 62.3% of male earnings, but by 2014, they made 82.5% of male earnings.⁶ As a result of these changes, in the contemporary United States, the number of alimony awards has been decreasing over time. In fact, in 1994, approximately 416,000 women were receiving alimony; by 2013, that number had dropped to approximately 344,000 (Proquest 2015).⁷

For women, these changes have not all been beneficial. Their increased labor force participation only provided them with some security; women have been working more than they have in the past, but still at fewer hours than their male counterparts and at lower levels of earnings. Without alimony as a force to level the playing field between former partners, research has consistently shown that the financial consequences of divorce are much worse for women than for men (Smock, Manning, and Gupta 1999; Amato 2010). Nonetheless, long-term alimony awards still are a significant source of discontent for the many of the mostly men who still have to pay them, and they began to organize to reduce them even further with their most visible activist push in the 2000s.

Role Exit and Collective Action Frames within the Alimony Reform Movement

Two main theoretical constructs help map out the behavior of modern alimony activists in the United States. First is the concept of role exit, and second is the creation and deployment of gender-based collective action frames within this burgeoning social movement. First consider role exit. Heterosexual marriage within the United States presupposes gendered identities for men and women. This means that men and women “do gender,” or engage in practices that produce and reproduce expected sets of behavior for each sex (West and Zimmerman 1987). However, upon the decision to divorce, both men and women have the opportunity to “redo” gender in creating their new lives without the confining expectations that were once imposed upon them by being married (Duran-Aydintug 1995; Walzer 2008). More generally, according to Ebaugh (1988), role exit involves individuals leaving “a role that is central to one’s self-identity and [establishing] an identity in a new role that takes account of one’s ex-role” (1). Research on role exits in a variety of settings has indicated that the ease of transition is complicated and proceeds through various developmental spurts and setbacks (Mansson and Hedin 1999; Leverentz 2010; Abrams 2012; Decker, Pyrooz, and Moule 2014).⁸

Early research on these transitions focused on the internal process of role change for the affected individuals (Ebaugh 1988). Broadly speaking, individuals first start to experience initial doubts about their current social roles. Next, they seek out information on alternatives to their current roles. If they decide to go forward, they face a turning point of moving their lives in a new direction. After this pivotal moment, they enter their post-exit phase when they cast off their old roles and then assume new ones. Although there are debates around the linearity of this process (Altier, Thoroughgood, and Horgan 2014), it is a useful model in understanding the dynamics propelling familial transitions. For any person experiencing divorce, role exit can be mapped directly onto these stages (Duran-Aydintug 1995; Gregson and Ceynar 2009). More

specifically, as they move through the divorce process, former couples begin to question their married roles and then seek out alternative roles. Later, at a specific turning point, they disidentify with their old marital status and then look to assume new roles with respect to their future family affiliations.

However, role transitions and ultimately role exit both within and outside of the family context do not always proceed smoothly (DeGarmo and Kitson 1996; Babcock 1998). Significant research has demonstrated that processes internal to the individuals in question can either help or hinder the role exit process. On the supportive side, individual motivations to move away from a particular way of life can help promote role exit. This, for example, can not only be seen in research on relationship break-ups (Doering 2010), but also in the deviance literature on sex workers, gang members, and addicts who seek more stable daily lives (Brown 1991; Mansson and Hedin 1999; Decker, Pyrooz, and Moule 2014). Of course, pulling in the opposite direction for these individuals are feelings that include both a strong sense of self-definition with their own histories as well as familiarity with past routines. Similarly, social networks can also serve to either support or stymie role exit processes. In this case, friends, family, and other professionals can assist with role exit, but they can also thwart role exit if they have opposing interests (Dobrof and Ebenstein 2003/2004; Keene and Prokos 2008).

Underacknowledged in the sociological literature is the influence of governmental policies in either helping or hindering the role exit process. Through public policy, various governmental entities organize and shape a wide range of human behavior. For example, the structure of Social Security payments in the United States encourages individuals to move out of their worker roles and into their retiree roles while they are in their sixties (Clarke et al. 2011). As another example, public defenders and parole officers may provide information for sex

workers to leave their past lives behind and help them move back into mainstream society by encouraging them to participate in rehabilitation programs (Oselin 2010). Alternatively, governmental policy may inhibit role exit. For example, police surveillance over former gang members might induce them to return to their former lives of crime in order to insure their own protection (Decker, Pyrooz, and Moule 2014). Within the context of the family and in the case studied here, governmental policy in the form of long-term ordered alimony payments may serve as a barrier to some men wanting to exit completely from their old husband roles. For these men, even if they have minor children who will keep them somewhat connected to their old family structures, the entire, holistic process of role exit is incomplete because long-term alimony in their view keeps them tied in a much stronger way than necessary to their former wives.

Men do have, however, the power to influence the government's positions on alimony through the tool of social mobilization and they benefit in many ways from their gender in doing so (Turner 1990). More generally, central to almost all mobilization efforts is Taylor's (1999) observation that gender operates at multiple levels in ways that rank men above women in everyday social life; this hierarchy is then reproduced in multiple aspects of movement activism. More specifically, Taylor (1999) argues that gender can influence three central features of collective mobilization. First, gender differentiation and stratification, with men situated above women in terms of importance, define the political and cultural contexts under which protests are designed and executed. Second, gender shapes the mobilizing opportunity structures and strategies that are available to men and women in social movements, with many more powerful and highly visible options for male participants. Third, gender is key in defining identities and most importantly for this analysis, collective action frames, or the messages social movement activists want to send to targeted audiences (McCammon, Hewitt, and Smith 2004; McCammon

2012). In this case, the masculine and highly valued principle of autonomy, versus the feminine, devalued principle of connectedness, drives the collective movement frames that the mostly male activists want to highlight as they aim for alimony reform.

To contextualize and unpack these collective frames even further, it is first important to understand the main characteristics of the groups that make up this reform movement. The movement itself is composed of primarily male alimony payers in multiple states who are organized to promote a variety of policy changes in this area. Only a small number of women have joined as well, mostly in their roles as current wives/girlfriends of men paying alimony to previous wives, but in a few cases as payers themselves. By far, the most egregious form of alimony abuse according to these groups is long-term or what effectively constitutes permanent alimony, and abolishing these categories of payments has become one of the most central goals of these reformers. In forming this burgeoning social movement, leaders have focused on their desire for release from their ordered alimony responsibilities in order to complete their role exit from being married individuals (husbands) to being divorced individuals.

Notably, leaders in the involved states have mounted their alimony campaigns in very similar ways. Each state's organizing team has developed a website articulating the purpose of alimony reform activism. Common website features include sign-up options for those who wish to affiliate, donation opportunities that support the groups' media and legislative outreach efforts, and instructions as to how individuals can identify their state house and senate legislative representatives and lobby for reform. Some websites also present contact information for legislative judiciary committee members who might be overseeing alimony reform. Other website components include regularly updated news postings, attorney recommendations, and links to other state alimony reform websites.

Most importantly for the analysis of collective action frames that is conducted here, each of these reform efforts encourages individuals to submit their personal narratives regarding the injustices of their particular alimony cases. In many instances, activists highlight these narratives on their websites as a way to point out to their state legislators as well as to the general public what they view as the unfair durational features of current alimony policy. In other words, these narratives serve a crucial role in framing or defining how these activists want a particular social problem perceived (Benford and Snow 2000; Drakulich 2015). Best (1995) has argued that social problems are not objective issues to be solved, but rather issues subject to many, potentially competing debates regarding their resolution. In Best's framework, typification involves naming and providing examples of a certain issue in a very specific way that advances the agenda of an interested group. It points to particular aspects of a problem, delineates its causes, and offers recommended solutions.

Of course, activist narratives likely possess more extreme views than *all* alimony payers, including non-activists.⁹ However, it is important to understand how these groups frame and define this social problem because collective action framing is key to any successful social movement. Activists shape the public perception of a problem and can also serve to motivate others into joining a movement for change (Benford and Snow 2000; McCaffrey and Keys 2000). Activists, then, by their very nature are the key drivers of public policy transformations, as they are always looking for political opportunities to put their best possible case forward and tailor their messages to a wide variety of audiences accordingly (Kubal 1998; McCammon 2012). As noted by Taylor (1999), gendered collective action frames play a key role in many social movements and thus the alimony reform movement as well. Alimony reform activists deploy gender by constructing and then attaching particular messages to a highly valued, masculine concept, in this case autonomy, rather than a feminine and devalued concept, such as interconnectedness (Philaretou and Allen 2001; Connell 2005). More specifically, they argue that alimony, in a variety of ways, impairs their freedom to be autonomous human beings in their new, divorced lives. In sum, alimony rights activists come together to collectively frame their narratives around the prized notion of autonomy with the hope that they will have smoother, more equitable, and more complete transitions out of their husband roles.

Methods

This study began by examining the websites of alimony reform groups in the eight states where grassroots activism has emerged in the form of collecting alimony narratives from payers: Arkansas, Connecticut, Florida, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Oregon, and South Carolina.¹⁰ The starting year of analysis was 2011, when activists in the first state, Massachusetts, were successful in pressing for legislative reform in limiting long-term alimony settlements. Arkansas, Connecticut, Florida, and Maryland have had ongoing reform campaigns. New Jersey's campaign resulted in the New Jersey Alimony Reform Act of 2014; the most significant part of this law empowered judges to utilize guidelines for the length of awards based on each couple's marital duration. Oregon and South Carolina conducted reform campaigns in 2012-2013. All of the data in the form of these narratives were collected in June 2014. By including only states that mobilized individuals at the grassroots level through the collection of narratives, this study excluded states with underdeveloped websites maintained by a small number of sole activists attempting to bring wider attention to the goal of alimony reform.¹¹ As Table 1 indicates, there were a total of 182 narratives included in this analysis.

[Table 1 about here]

To qualify for inclusion in this study, a narrative was defined as a single document submitted and posted to these states' websites. A single document could be a letter or blog entry sent to the reform organization describing a personal situation; it could also be a "case summary" that involved the organization's leader himself telling the story of an individual seeking the group's assistance but written from that person's perspective. In the majority of cases, these narratives did not have names attached to them or were presented with pseudonyms. If actual full names were used, they were omitted in this study.

The theoretical framework of role exit along with the relevant literature on the role of gender in social movements suggested that three sensitizing concepts in particular would be important in guiding the analysis of the data related to the creation of collective action frames (Blumer 1954; Blumer 1986). These included concerns over the following threats to activists' freedom and thus the masculine value of autonomy: finances, psychological effects, and contact with their ex-wives. In examining these data, I first read through each narrative multiple times. I then used open coding techniques based in grounded theory with the assistance of the software program Atlas.ti to analyze the data (Strauss and Corbin 1990). The central themes and subthemes that represented these collective action frames developed through close interaction with the data. I also remained open to new ideas emerging more organically from the data. In this analysis, I present actual quotations from these narratives as embodied by the concept of "thick description;" this allows alimony payers' (or otherwise affected parties') own words to define the importance of this issue in their daily lives (Geertz 1973). In the results that follow, each quotation is followed by the narrative writer's residential state and assigned document number from that state's sample.

Each state's alimony reform group was different in terms of its success in gathering narratives from its affected citizens. They ranged from the New Jersey reform group collecting 62 stories, to the Maryland reform group only collecting 5. As described earlier, the majority of alimony narratives did not provide a name of the author nor many other identifying characteristics. However, the context of each document enabled me to produce a broad overview of narrative writers. Overall, there were 182 narratives, of whom 139 of the narrative writers were men. The overwhelming majority of these—133—were describing their own particular case; the other male writers were a son-in-law, a son, and 4 brothers of men currently paying

alimony. In addition, there were 39 female narrative writers, the majority of whom, 25, were current wives of the alimony payers. The remainder were paying alimony themselves (10) or current girlfriends of alimony payers (4). Finally, 4 narrative writers had an unclear gender: 1 was writing as a child of an alimony payer, and 3 had unclear relationships with the alimony payer.

In order to qualify as a substantive theme representing a collective action frame in this analysis, I determined that it had to appear in at least 10% of the total number of narratives (18 out of 182 narratives).¹² This left frames meeting this 10% threshold in six out of eight states, leaving out Arkansas and Oregon. This selection criterion thus ended up generating alimony payers' (or those affected) most important frames.

Results

Throughout their narratives, activists placed primacy on the highly valued and masculine concept of autonomy in their desire to exit from their roles as husbands. More specifically, they maintained that alimony, in a variety of ways, infringes upon their freedom to be autonomous human beings. The three major themes or collective action frames that developed from this powerful autonomy construct were all defined as *losses* in the following areas: financial freedom in retirement, psychological freedom in building their new lives, and freedom from interpersonal contact with their ex-spouses. Subthemes in each category also emerged, as discussed in the sections to follow.

The Loss of Financial Freedom in Retirement

The most common claim activists articulated in their desire to exit completely from their husband roles related to the conflict between their desire for financial freedom in their retirement years and their alimony obligations. This collective action frame emerged in 41/182 narratives

and typically revolved around perceived financial inequities experienced in later life. Financial issues between former spouses have long been thought of as stressors for each partner (Madden-Derdich and Arditti 1999; Coontz 2007). In some of these cases analyzed here, activists were ordered to pay lifetime alimony that prevented them from retiring, and others had accumulated so many expenses due to their ordered long-term alimony obligations that retirement simply was an impossibility. Activists described the ramifications of these financial losses in many ways, including referencing their ex-partners' abilities to flourish upon their retirement but their own lack of a similar option. One man in Connecticut indicated that recipients of alimony are basically receiving unfair entitlement payments that should not have a place in the United States' economy.

I could, as many of us, probably write a very gritty cheap novel of our divorce experience in the state of Connecticut. My goal in supporting the efforts of the Alimony Reform Group is to help change the outdated and family-destroying judgments that are currently being handed down by the Connecticut judicial system. Alimony should be a temporary financial award to help individuals get back on their feet, get training [that] will allow them to obtain or regain [the] means to provide for themselves, and not, what has become popular in the American culture, a lifetime of entitlements...Alimony awards [that] carry into retirement can result in extreme hardship to the paying spouse, and actually result in a much better quality of life for the receiving party. (Connecticut Alimony Activist-#4)

This Connecticut activist reported that he had caught his wife having an affair, and then within two days, was served with divorce papers. He was married for over twenty years, but from the moment that he discovered his wife was cheating on him, he described experiencing huge financial losses, including equity in the home and attorney fees. His divorce ended up going to trial, and the judge awarded long-term economic support to his wife. In his view, alimony recipients are like welfare recipients who unjustly live off of hard labor such as his, only to have a much better lifestyle than what he could afford.

Other narrative writers, while not invoking unfair entitlement language, also repudiated the different standards of living that alimony imposes upon former couples when they retire. In many states, marriages of a long duration can trigger permanent alimony obligations, even through the payers' expected period of retirement (Green 2010). A man from Massachusetts had been married to his wife for close to ten years. He was a truck driver who, in his view, had been very generous to his wife before they got married. More specifically, while they were dating, she was about to lose her house due to foreclosure, so he asked her to live with him. Since she lacked health coverage and then developed a serious illness, they decided to get married so that she could be placed on his health plan. Yet, in his view, she was less than grateful. Unbeknownst to him, she had sought out an attorney's advice about a possible divorce, and was advised to stay in the marriage through the tenth year for a better alimony settlement. He described his inability to exit fully from his husband role financially in the following way.

I was served with papers one week after that tenth anniversary. In our divorce trial, the marital assets were divided "equitably." She got to keep the house and I got to keep my own pension, along with our hefty five-figure credit card debt. The court then ordered me to make weekly alimony payments that are approximately 25% of my take-home pay. I must work 1.25 days a week, every week, to meet that obligation to a person to whom I am not related, a person to whom I owe no debt, a person to whom I no longer even speak, for the rest of my natural life. Three years after the divorce, my ex-spouse continues to enjoy a single-family house and a weekly support check from me and I can only afford a small apartment while struggling to keep up with the alimony and making the minimum monthly payments on the old credit card debt. Within two years, I will qualify for retirement but will not be able to afford retirement at that time due to these lingering burdens. (Massachusetts Alimony Activist-#37)

The small set of female payers of alimony were no different in their complaints about how their inability to retire was unjust and prevented them from living a better lifestyle like their former partners. A New Jersey woman wrote about her ex-husband's constant state of unemployment that damaged their marriage over time. According to her, because he was an alcoholic and unstable, he would frequently steal from his employers, resulting in his having 27 jobs over 31

years. This New Jersey payer also argued that her alimony payments were enabling her ex-husband's addiction. Yet, in her view, while he is able to relax and enjoy a leisurely life now, she is unable to exit completely from her spousal role given her low-paying occupation.

He gets part of my pension when I retire, which is ironic because after 37 years of dedicating my life to teaching the children of Voorhees Township, because of him, retirement is not an option for me any time in the foreseeable future. Besides the fact that I am a woman who is required to pay alimony and has lost half of everything I've saved, I am also a teacher. This is not a complaint about my job or my salary; however, [the] reality is that with a master's degree and 37 years of experience, I do not make a six figure salary. (New Jersey Alimony Activist-#15)

While she clearly enjoyed her job, this narrative writer had at one time hoped to retire. With her permanent alimony obligations, she could not, as she asserted, even imagine doing so.

This perception of their inability to exit fully from their spousal roles regarding finances led payers not only to express concerns about differences in standards of living between them and their former partners, but also to develop fear about their physical and mental well-being in their older years. For these payers, they had to stay healthy into old age or face the consequences of alimony nonpayment, one of which could be jail. A man from South Carolina described himself as a loving father who supplied his children with all of the material necessities of a middle class lifestyle. When he divorced his wife in 1985, he viewed his monthly alimony payments of \$3,250 as fair. He regularly met his obligations, but as an insurance agent whose income depended on commissions, at times, he was several days late in transferring the money to her by the 10th of each month. In his narrative, he described how he felt unfairly chastised by the judge who was hearing the case his ex-wife had brought forth related to his infrequent tardy payments.

I left that courtroom made to feel like a deadbeat spouse which I considered very unjust. I will be 71 in May. I have several herniated disks in my back and in the last three years, have limited myself from most physical activities. I must still drive to and from work and to church, but no more driving than that. I have been married to my present wife for 15 years.

I am well past the age when many retire, but this is not possible for me as long as I am saddled with [permanent] alimony. (South Carolina Alimony Activist-#3)

Illness also emerged as a topic of concern from another New Jersey man. As an emergency medicine doctor, he was in the past able to provide a comfortable life for his wife and three children. However, once his wife decided that she wanted a divorce, he recounted that she made his life extremely difficult. He maintained that she filed a false claim of domestic violence against him that resulted in his being led away in handcuffs in front of his children. During the divorce process, he lost most of the marital assets and was ordered to pay \$5,000 per month in permanent alimony. This necessitated that he work three jobs in order to cover all of his expenses.

Despite significant health problems—including blood pressure, heart disease, herniated discs, depression, and kidney disease—I have no prayer of retirement. I have no money. The Court has already refused to even consider my medical ailments as a “change in circumstances” to permit a reduction in these overwhelming expenses. My ex-wife doesn’t care; the Court [also] requires me to insure my life for \$2,000,000 - so she can be even richer if I die. The premiums on this policy are expensive and not tax deductible. A change in the alimony laws is my only hope of escaping a continuation of my horrid “responsibilities” and even though it is likely too late for me to ever be able to retire, at least I could keep some of the money for which I work very hard, and perhaps cut down to two jobs. (New Jersey Alimony Activist-#18)

In multiple state interpretations of alimony law, modifications or a “change in circumstances” can reduce payers’ obligations. However, typically these changes have to be dramatic and even illness can be disregarded as a valid basis for a new order (Shehan et al. 2002). This means that sometimes very ill payers cannot fully exit from their spousal roles with respect to finances.

Being able to retire by having the financial freedom to exit completely from their past roles was important to payers in one last way. As might be expected, payers often would wish to start their lives again with new spouses. In addition, they might hope to one day retire in comfort with their new families. However, like many others, the current wife of a Florida alimony payer reported fearing that this would never be a possibility for her family. Her husband was required

to pay a permanent alimony amount based on the fact that at the time the award was determined, he earned a yearly bonus. With the downturn in the economy, he lost this income as well as his economic security. In addition, she stated that he had to maintain a \$100,000 life insurance policy for his ex-wife. According to this new wife, under this burdensome legal framework, her husband could never fully exit financially from his past spousal role.

[His ex-wife] now lives in the home of her wealthy parents, a home she will inherit free and clear, and where she lives now cost-free. Her only bills right now are for a cell phone and car insurance. She chooses how many hours she works and all [of] her income is disposable. Meanwhile, my husband had to file bankruptcy due to the huge attorney bills. We live in an apartment and we have no disposable income. We can never afford to take her back to court...My husband is 50 and he will never be able to retire. (Florida Alimony Activist-#19)

Although the couple considered going back to court for a modification, in some states, a judge may consider other factors, such as the second wife's income, as a basis for making a new alimony determination (Green 2010). As a result, they reported that they were not going to risk this possibility and thus decided to simply keep on working.

The Loss of Psychological Freedom in Building their New Lives

The second most common claim activists articulated in their pursuit to fully complete their role exit process related to the conflict that they experienced between their desire for psychological freedom and their alimony responsibilities. This collective action frame emerged in 28/182 narratives and revolved around their feeling of being “mentally imprisoned” in some way by their alimony obligations. In the case of divorce, many individuals simply want out of the marital institution, of which mental disengagement is a fundamental part of the process (Duran-Aydintug 1995). However, in multiple cases, men reported that they could not psychologically “escape” as they argued that they were treated even worse than common criminals by the alimony system. One New Jersey man maintained that he had been a dedicated

husband and father while he was married. During the course of this union, however, there were times when the family struggled financially, and yet, according to him, his wife refused to work for pay. Over time, he discovered that his wife had amassed enormous credit card bills. In his account, once he realized that she was unlikely to stop spending indiscriminately, he decided to seek a divorce. He soon learned that this would be a difficult path as well since the judge ordered that he pay permanent alimony.

It's extremely unsettling. We have many people in this state that commit heinous crimes such as murder, child abuse, armed robbery etc. and all we hear about is how we need as a society to rehabilitate these people and give them a second chance. I did not even commit a crime. (New Jersey Alimony Activist-#38)

Only with a dramatic change in the laws would this man no longer feel like he was worse than a common criminal. This was important to him, especially since he viewed himself as one of the many outstanding citizens who “actually get out of bed every day and go to work, pay taxes and take responsibility for themselves and their families.”

In addition to describing how the law made them feel worse than common criminals, many individuals focused on their lack of psychological freedom to exit fully from their former spousal roles using other types of incarceration language. A child of a man who used to pay permanent alimony employed language invoking one particular form of imprisonment—in this case a “lifetime sentence”—when discussing his/her father’s life.

[My father] was truly tortured his entire life, [with] threats, warrants, [and] contempt of court [charges]. Growing up, this is all I knew, up until December 2009 when I was 35. In December 2009, he finally won a stop in alimony payments to my mother. He died from cancer in April 2010. He was granted his final wish. I have questioned the fairness in this for many years but never really understood it; it never made sense to me. Their lives never went on, subsequently tearing other lives apart in this lifetime sentence. I truly feel for any man in this situation. There needs to be change. (New Jersey Alimony Activist-#4)

As a result of this perception, this child vowed to become involved in the alimony reform movement. The lack of psychological freedom resulting from long-term and permanent alimony obligations affected payers in other, but related ways; in numerous cases, they described their obligations as pushing them into a lifetime of “involuntary servitude.” One current wife of an alimony payer in Maryland indicated her disdain for the system of alimony that makes her husband pay permanently for an ex-wife who, as a result of these payments, does not need to get up in the morning and go to work.

Marriage is a contract between two people. Divorce ends that contract. No crime was committed, but [there is still] a sentencing of lifetime alimony? [My husband’s ex-spouse] will never remarry and lose [her] entitlement. Paying alimony until death interferes with our constitutional right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, not to mention a violation of the 13th Amendment to abolish involuntary servitude! (Maryland Alimony Activist-#4)

For other payers, long-term and permanent alimony payments represented something worse than a lifetime sentence or involuntary servitude; to them, alimony was an ultimate role exit blockade: nothing more than a “death sentence.” On this point, one man from New Jersey maintained that current alimony awards have no financial basis since typically both men and women work for pay in a modern marriage.

[Alimony] has no economic justification. How could a judge possibly know what two people’s financial situations will look like years from now? Being a judge doesn’t give you a crystal ball. How can anybody justify paying alimony to someone when you’ve been divorced from them twice as long as you were married? You can’t. And that’s why judges and lawyers don’t want alimony reform. Their gravy train is my personal hell. And I’m not the only one living in it--until I die...I pay permanent alimony--THE DEATH PENALTY (his capitalization). (New Jersey Alimony Activist-#45)

Prior to his divorce, this man reported that he and his wife made approximately the same amount of money in their careers. Upon divorcing, however, the judge ordered him to pay her permanent alimony, which he described as her “winning the lottery.” He did ultimately remarry, but because of these alimony obligations, indicated that his new wife had to work three jobs to

support him and his new stepdaughter. In his mind, psychologically, there was only one way to exit fully from his past spousal role as he described his present marital relationship: “[My current] marriage is a wreck because of the unjust liabilities I carry with me every day [from my ex-wife], with no end in sight except death!”

The Loss of Freedom from Interpersonal Contact with their Ex-Spouses

The third most common claim activists made in their desire to exit fully from their past spousal roles related to the conflict that they experienced between their desire to choose their own interpersonal relationships and their forced alimony obligations. This collective action frame emerged in 20/182 narratives and was based upon payers’ feelings that they could never eliminate unwanted contact with their former spouses due to their alimony payments. Indeed, previous research has indicated that relationship management is a process that can be difficult with an alimony order in place as money and emotions can interact in volatile ways (Masheter 1991; Shehan et al. 2002; Fischer, De Graaf, and Kalmijn 2005).

The existence of an alimony obligation may actually force the two former partners in a couple to interact face-to-face, or via phone, text, or email, but more often than not, simply represents the fear that future interaction might be unavoidable. A current wife of an alimony payer in Connecticut described long-term and permanent alimony as an interpersonal trap in which neither half of the couple can ever escape.

The payers accept their financial destruction and emotionally detach from the marriage—something the recipients never do. Eventually, the payers begin to heal from the inside. Sooner [rather] than later they begin picking up the pieces and re-building a life worth living. These individuals go on to re-marry, re-build, and live productive, meaningful lives. Then awareness sets in and due to an archaic system [of alimony], they start living in fear... Of course, the recipients want to feel victorious again; they haven’t felt accomplishment since the initial divorce (they are given no incentive to become independent) and pursue [the payers] in retaliation because they are unable to control their own lives. The entire situation is very sad. These laws must change. (Connecticut Alimony Activist-#12)

According to this narrative writer, the permanent payment of alimony becomes a cycle of turmoil because the recipient never heals from the divorce. More specifically, because the recipient becomes dependent on alimony, he/she never becomes fully self-sufficient. Instead, the promise of the monthly alimony check and further retaliation keeps the recipient looking for constant engagement with the ex-spouse. A man in Massachusetts echoed these sentiments of never being able to exit completely from a dysfunctional interpersonal relationship with his ex-wife. He was a doctor who divorced in 1997 and had three daughters. His experiences were described as follows:

Although she [his ex-wife] received more than half the marital assets, abundant child support and alimony, and although she worked as a real estate broker, the extremely vindictive ex-wife has systematically ruined his life, filing lawsuits against him for more than 10 years. Family courts have complied with her ever-increasing demands, even while he supported her and their children, even sending them to Ivy League colleges. He is now 60, suffering from cancer, unemployed, and living on transitional public assistance of \$177 a month. (Massachusetts Alimony Activist-#3)

This narrative also indicated that one of this man's children had to pay for a room for him to rent in Tewksbury, Massachusetts, which is all that he could afford. With all of these problems, his narrative clearly stated that in his view, his ex-wife was continuing to bring him to court to maintain or increase his permanent alimony payments. Whenever this would happen, he would have to represent himself as he could not afford an attorney. This, in his perspective, always put him at a severe disadvantage in front of the judge and gave more power to his ex-wife to continue contacting him for more money.

Even couples who hope the issue of alimony will never surface during the divorce and is thus behind them know that they will be bound forever by a fear of their ex-partners confronting them with a new alimony claim; here again, they can never completely exit from their roles as former spouses. As this New Jersey wife of a current alimony payer detailed, a

stressful relationship between her husband and his ex-partner has continued to haunt her family for years. In her narrative, she described her husband as a very good provider to his ex-wife, even helping to support her three children from previous marriages. According to this new wife, he also worked hard and paid over \$250,000 in medical bills when his ex-spouse developed breast cancer. At first, he believed that their split would be amicable and fair to him. Unfortunately, in the view of this new wife, this was not the case. As his current wife detailed,

[My husband and his ex-wife] sold the home and split the profit. When they filed [for a divorce], he got a lawyer and she did not, claiming [that] she had no money. She represented herself. She agreed to the divorce. She did not want alimony. She was asked over and over and over again and she said she understood and continued to reject the alimony. She even wrote a letter to the judge, stating [that] she understood and still refused the alimony. The final divorce decree stated [that] she waived it and this waiver was PERMANENT. My husband with [the] final decree in hand left NJ and went to Florida. He had quit his job of \$75,000 and got a job for \$36,000. A month later, the ex-wife files for permanent alimony, this time with an attorney (her capitalization). (New Jersey Alimony Activist-#7)

This narrative demonstrates that even couples who believe that their past marital interactions are over can never be fully secure in that knowledge. They are never truly free from these interpersonal relationships as their ex-partners can continue to make alimony demands—even completely new ones—going forward.

In addition, children can be exposed to toxic environments when payers cannot acquire freedom from contact by their ex-spouses. According to one Connecticut current wife of an alimony payer, one of the most damaging consequences of long-term and permanent alimony is that it exposes children unnecessarily to adult conflict. In order to prevent permanent alimony payments from ending (which, by law, happens frequently with remarriage), it is not uncommon for recipients to have co-habiting relationships rather than marry (Green 2010). But often when

cohabitation begins, tensions can flare between former partners. Watching these flare-ups is not in the best interest of the children in her view, as she described here.

Yet the most disturbing aspect of all of this legal fighting is the lifetime impact it has had and will continue to have on the children involved. To witness the emotional toll and embarrassment the children have had to handle being forced to live in a home with a live-in lover who is not a step-parent and sadly, the crushing fact that the two parents they love the most, are at war...and probably will be for life...all thanks to the "good folks" at the Connecticut Family Court! It is imperative to get involved in your state's reform movement! Change the laws now to stop this destruction of families!
(Connecticut Alimony Activist-#14)

By compelling ex-spouses to interact with one another, the alimony system can also poison relationships between children and their parents by forcing them to take sides. A man from New Jersey articulated this view when he outlined how devastating long-term alimony was in imposing contact with his ex-wife that ultimately created agony for his two children. Both he and his ex-wife had doctoral degrees during the time in which they were married. While he was able to secure a job in higher education, she decided to use her Ph.D. in psychology to build up a private practice. Unfortunately, according to him, she was not successful in launching such a business and he started to question what she was really doing during the days when she was supposedly "working." Once when he began to ask her about her days in more detail, he stated that she falsely accused him of yelling that he was going to "cut her throat." On that particular day, the police were called and he was arrested, creating part of the fallout that along with his "alimony-driven divorce," served to continue to divide his family even through today.

The worst damage resulting from our lifetime, alimony-driven divorce was to our children. My son hasn't spoken with me or any of my side of his family since the divorce almost 5 years ago. My daughter doesn't speak with her mother or any of her maternal family. Neither of my children speaks with the other. Our family was completely destroyed by the divorce. They were young adults and they understood the events as they unfolded. They saw me being led out of the house in handcuffs by [the] police. They saw the intense pain of the legal battle afterwards. Now they each have half a family and much psychological damage. While expressing concern for our

children, my ex and her lawyer pursued me for permanent alimony like vicious dogs.
(New Jersey Alimony Activist-#3)

As far as this New Jersey man reported, his ex-wife was still earning very little income in her private psychology practice. He stated that by the time he retires, “I will have paid her nearly half a million dollars (\$500,000). If I live to 80 years old, I will have paid her nearly one million dollars (\$1,000,000).” Yet, most distressing to him overall was that his children became victims in the alimony system that forced him to continue to have a long period of hostile contact with his ex-wife.

Conclusion

The period surrounding divorce is typically a tumultuous time in the lives of American families. Much of the recent scholarly focus on these transitions has related to the predictors of divorce as well as the adjustment of children in post-divorce contexts (Amato 2010). While these issues are clearly important, there are also unanswered questions regarding how each adult family member will redefine himself/herself in the future. On this point, both partners must reshape themselves in new areas such as household management and communication with others on their own rather than as a unified couple (Walzer 2008). In this way, each spouse attempts to complete the role exit process—disengagement and disidentification with his/her former married self—in order to eventually move on to begin a new stage in life as a divorced person. In many cases, this is an instance where role exit out of a married status does not automatically equate to a loss, but rather to a new season in each adult’s life that has the potential of being very positive (Wheaton 1990; Reitzes and Mutran 2006).

Nonetheless, this study demonstrates that simply because some individuals desire to completely exit from their former roles to pursue other life goals, there might be other actors or entities that push back on these demands. While other research has focused primarily on the

supportive or obstructive efforts of either the role-exiting individuals themselves, or those of their immediate social networks, this analysis more deeply explores the impact of governmental policy on the role exit process. Indeed, governmental policy can serve either as a sturdy foundation for role exit or be a deterrent. In the view of the activists described here, current alimony policy prevents them from fully exiting their former husband roles. They name a social problem in a specific way—that is, that alimony prevents them from jettisoning a no longer desired role: husband.

It is critical to note that as these mostly men seek to exit from their past roles, they have joined with other similarly situated men in an emerging social movement. This analysis detailed the ways in which gender defined a critical part of their strategy: the creation of effective collective action frames. More specifically, they assert that alimony as it operates in the financial, psychological, and interpersonal arenas impairs their freedom to be autonomous human beings—a highly valued, masculine condition. Through their collective action frames, they attempt to evoke sympathy when they identify themselves as victims of unfair circumstances that deny them their right to independence (Clark 1987; Leisenring 2006; Clark 2007). Overall, these qualitative data are trustworthy as outlined by Denzin and Lincoln (2011) in the following ways: (1) they are credible in representing the participants' accounts in their own words, (2) transferable in that their experiences are thoroughly contextualized within a larger political movement, (3) dependable in that the setting of the research was within a limited number of states and narrative collection took place over a short period of time (overall stability), and (4) confirmable in that multiple readings of these narratives have produced similar conclusions about the data.

Of course, this study is not without its limitations. The analysis only has general data and not complete sociodemographic information about these alimony movement participants. Knowing more about the characteristics of those who are involved would be important in more clearly mapping out who is involved in shaping collective action frames and all of their potential motivations. In addition, there is no record about debates among individuals within a single alimony reform group, nor across the state groups, as to how these collective action frames were generated in a generally consistent fashion. Looking inside these black boxes would undoubtedly prove useful in understanding how these particular frames have emerged and survived among potentially competing frames.

Going forward, it is important to note that several other social movements currently in operation in the United States use collective action frames that are also dependent on the masculine value of autonomy. For example, men's rights activists assert that women have subjugated them in terms of power and therefore reduced their autonomy in many aspects of their lives. As a result, they argue that they are the real victims of a variety of contemporary injustices such as bogus sexual harassment claims, false rape accusations, and fraudulent domestic violence allegations (Messner 1998; Author 2009; Dragiewicz 2011; Heinrich 2014). In addition, the fathers' rights movement in the United States advocates on behalf of reducing child support obligations and promoting equity in determining child custody as its members make their demands to their state legislators. They draw upon the masculine value of autonomy when they assert that current child support laws prevent them from living in financial security and that being labelled as "noncustodial parents" diminishes the critical, paternal contributions that they make to their children's lives (Author 2006a; Author 2008). While it is unclear how much overlap there is in terms of membership among those in alimony reform groups, men's

rights activist groups, and fathers' rights groups, they all use frames dependent on the masculine value of autonomy in claiming that they are the aggrieved sex in American society that is in need of massive policy redress.

Finally, while this analysis focused on the impact of gender in shaping the collective action frames of the alimony reform movement, gender also structures other features of this mobilization effort that are likely to be predictive in determining future public policy in this area. On this point, a gender-informed analysis suggests that additional attention needs to be paid to questions regarding *which sex* is waging these political battles and *where* they are being waged in order to begin assessing probable outcomes. More specifically, the alimony reform movement is made up of predominantly men, who benefit from their own gender privilege in the current social structure. They, in turn, present collective action frames that highlight the masculine value of autonomy to state legislative bodies, which are overwhelmingly male-dominated and therefore receptive institutions (Acker 1990; Arendell 1995; Taylor 1999). In contrast, women, who are mainly alimony recipients, do not benefit from gender privilege in the current social structure. They also have to articulate their perspective—which stresses the need for continued interconnectedness, a devalued feminine concept—before the same, and thus unreceptive, overwhelmingly male legislative bodies in order to prevent the complete role exit desired by their former husbands. Both examining the advantages of the key actors involved as well as understanding the relative inclusivity versus exclusivity of the spaces where these collective action frames are being presented are thus also critical in mapping out how contentious public policy issues like alimony reform will likely be resolved going forward.

REFERENCES

- Abrams, Laura S. 2012. "Envisioning Life 'On the Outs': Exit Narratives of Incarcerated Male Youth." *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 56: 877-896.
- Acker, Joan. 1990. "Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations." *Gender & Society* 4: 139-158.
- Altier, Mary Beth, Christian N. Thoroughgood, and John G. Horgan. 2014. "Turning Away from Terrorism: Lessons from Psychology, Sociology, and Criminology." *Journal of Peace Research* 51: 647-661.
- Amato, Paul R. 2010. "Research on Divorce: Continuing Trends and New Developments." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 72: 650-666.
- Antonovsky, Aaron. 1987. *Unraveling the Mystery of Health: How People Manage Stress and Stay Well*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Arendell, Terry. 1995. *Fathers and Divorce*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Author. 2006a.
- Author. 2008.
- Author. 2009.
- Babcock, Ginna M. 1998. "Stigma, Identity Dissonance, and the Nonresidential Mother." *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage* 28: 139-156.
- Benford, Robert D. and David A. Snow. 2000. "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26: 611-639.
- Best, Joel. 1995. *Images of Issues: Typifying Contemporary Social Problems*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Blumer, Herbert. 1954. "What Is Wrong with Social Theory?" *American Sociological Review* 19: 3-10.

Blumer, Herbert. 1986. *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Brown, J. David. 1991. "The Professional Ex-: An Alternative for Exiting the Deviant Career." *The Sociological Quarterly* 3: 219-230.

Cherlin, Andrew J. 2010. "Demographic Trends in the United States: A Review of Research in the 2000s." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 72: 403-419.

Clark, Candace. 1987. "Sympathy Biography and Sympathy Margin." *American Journal of Sociology* 93: 290-321.

Clark, Candace. 2007. *Misery and Company: Sympathy in Everyday Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Clarke, Philippa, Victor Marshall, James House, and Paula Lantz. 2011. "The Social Structuring of Mental Health over the Adult Life Course: Advancing Theory in the Sociology of Aging." *Social Forces* 89: 1287-1313.

Connell, R.W. 2005. *Masculinities*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Coontz, Stephanie. 2007. "The Origins of Modern Divorce." *Family Process* 46: 7-16.

Decker, Scott H., David C. Pyrooz, and Richard K. Moule. 2014. "Disengaging from Gangs as Role Transitions." *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 24: 268-283.

DeGarmo, David S. and Gay C. Kitson. 1996. "Identity Relevance and Disruption as Predictors of Psychological Distress for Widowed and Divorced Women." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 58: 983-997.

Denzin, Norman K. and Yvonna S. Lincoln. 2011. *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dobrof, Judith and Helene Ebenstein. 2003/2004. "Family Caregiver Self-Identification: Implications for Healthcare and Social Service Professionals." *Generations* 27: 33-38.

Doering, Jan. 2010. "Face, Accounts, and Schemes in the Context of Relationship Breakups." *Symbolic Interaction* 33: 71-95.

Dragiewicz, Molly. 2011. *Equality with a Vengeance: Men's Rights Groups, Battered Women, and Antifeminist Backlash*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Drakulich, Kevin M. 2015. "Explicit and Hidden Racial Bias in the Framing of Social Problems." *Social Problems* 62: 391-418.

Duran-Aydintug, Candan. 1995. "Former Spouses Exiting Role-Identities." *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage* 24: 23-40.

Ebaugh, Helen Rose Fuchs. 1988. *Becoming an Ex: The Process of Role Exit*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ellman, Ira Mark. 1989. "The Theory of Alimony." *California Law Review* 77: 3-81.

Fischer, Tamar F. C., Paul M. De Graaf, and Matthijs Kalmijn. 2005. "Friendly and Antagonistic Contact between Former Spouses after Divorce: Patterns and Determinants." *Journal of Family Issues* 26: 1131-1163.

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Glaser, Barney G. and Anselm L. Strauss. 1971. *Status Passage*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.

Goffman, Erving. 1961. *Asylums*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday.

Green, Janice. 2010. *Divorce after 50*. Berkeley, CA: Nolo.

Gregson, Joanna and Michelle L. Ceynar. 2009. "Finding 'Me' Again: Women's Postdivorce Identity Shifts." *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage* 50: 564-582.

Heinrich, Jill. 2014. "Searching for a Masculine Model: Missteps Made During Three Decades of the Men's Movement and Why Moderation Is the Key." *The Journal of Men's Studies* 22: 238-252.

Keene, Jennifer Reid and Anastasia H. Prokos. 2008. "Widowhood and the End of Spousal Care-Giving: Relief or Wear and Tear?" *Ageing & Society* 28: 551-570.

Kennedy, Sheela and Steven Ruggles. 2014. "Breaking up Is Hard to Count: The Rise in Divorce in the United States, 1980-2010." *Demography* 51: 587-598.

Kitson, Gay C. and Leslie A Morgan. 1990. "The Multiple Consequences of Divorce: A Decade Review." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 52: 913-924.

Kitson, Gay C. and Helen J. Raschke. 1981. "Divorce Research: What We Know; What We Need to Know." *Journal of Divorce* 4: 1-37.

Kubal, Timothy J. 1998. "The Presentation of Political Self: Cultural Resonance and the Construction of Collective Action Frames." *The Sociological Quarterly* 39: 539-554.

Leisenring, Amy. 2006. "Confronting "Victim" Discourses: The Identity Work of Battered Women." *Symbolic Interaction* 29: 307-330.

Leverentz, Andrea. 2010. "People, Places, and Things: How Female Ex-Prisoners Negotiate Their Neighborhood Context." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 39: 646-681.

Madden-Derdich, Debra and Joyce Arditti. 1999. "The Ties That Bind: Attachment between Former Spouses." *Family Relations* 48: 243-249.

Mansson, Sven-Axel and Ulla-Carin Hedin. 1999. "Breaking the Matthew Effect: On Women Leaving Prostitution." *Journal of International Social Work* 8: 67-77.

Masheter, Carol. 1991. "Postdivorce Relationships between Ex-Spouses: The Roles of Attachment and Interpersonal Conflict." *Journal of Marriage & Family* 53: 103-110.

McCaffrey, Dawn and Jennifer Keys. 2000. "Competitive Framing Processes in the Abortion Debate: Polarization-Vilification, Frame Saving, and Frame Debunking." *The Sociological Quarterly* 41: 41-61.

McCammon, Holly J. 2012. "Explaining Frame Variation: More Moderate and Radical Demands for Women's Citizenship in the U.S. Women's Jury Movements." *Social Problems* 59: 43-69.

McCammon, Holly J., Lyndi Hewitt, and Sandy Smith. 2004. "'No Weapon Save Argument': Strategic Frame Amplification in the U.S. Woman Suffrage Movements." *The Sociological Quarterly* 45: 529-556.

Merton, Robert K. 1957. Continuities in the Theory of Reference Groups and Social Structure. Pp. 368-384 in *Social Theory and Social Structure*, edited by Robert K. Merton. New York: Free Press.

Messner, Michael A. 1998. "The Limits of the "Male Sex Role": An Analysis of the Men's Liberation and Men's Rights Movements' Discourse." *Gender & Society* 12: 255-276.

Oselin, Sharon S. 2010. "Weighing the Consequences of a Deviant Career: Factors Leading to an Exit from Prostitution." *Sociological Perspectives* 53: 527-550.

Philaretou, Andreas G and Katherine R Allen. 2001. "Reconstructing Masculinity and Sexuality." *The Journal of Men's Studies* 9: 301-321.

Proquest. 2015. *The Statistical Abstract of the United States, Table 558*. Blue Ridge Summit, PA: Bernan.

Reitzes, Donald C. and Elizabeth J. Mutran. 2006. "Lingering Identities in Retirement." *The Sociological Quarterly* 47: 333-359.

Shehan, Constance L., Felix M. Berardo, Erica Owens, and Donna H. Berardo. 2002. "Alimony: An Anomaly in Family Social Science." *Family Relations* 51: 308-316.

Simon, Robin W. 2002. "Revisiting the Relationship among Gender, Marital Status, and Mental Health." *American Journal of Sociology* 107: 1065-1096.

Singer, Jana B. 1988. "Divorce Reform and Gender Justice." *North Carolina Law Review* 67: 1103.

Smock, Pamela J., Wendy D. Manning, and Sanjib Gupta. 1999. "The Effect of Marriage and Divorce on Women's Economic Well-Being." *American Sociological Review* 64: 794-812.

Starnes, Cynthia Lee. 2011. "Alimony Theory." *Family Law Quarterly* 45: 271-291.

Strauss, Anselm and Juliet Corbin. 1990. *Basics of Grounded Theory: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Taylor, Verta. 1999. "Gender and Social Movements: Gender Processes in Women's Self Help Movements." *Gender & Society* 13: 8-33.

Turner, Ralph H. 1990. "Role Change." *Annual Review of Sociology* 16: 87-110.

- Urdansky, Margaret L. 2008. "The Emergence of a Social Problem: Single-Parent Families in US Popular Magazines and Social Science Journals, 1900–1998." *Sociological Inquiry* 78: 74-96.
- Walzer, Susan. 2008. "Redoing Gender through Divorce." *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 25: 5-21.
- West, Candace and Don H Zimmerman. 1987. "Doing Gender." *Gender & Society* 1: 125-151.
- Wheaton, Blair. 1990. "Life Transitions, Role Histories, and Mental Health." *American Sociological Review* 55: 209-223.
- Williams, Joan. 1993. "Is Coverture Dead-Beyond a New Theory of Alimony." *Georgetown Law Journal* 82: 2227-2290.

Endnotes

- 1 Other common names for alimony are spousal maintenance and spousal support.
- 2 Of course, it may be the case that the wife pays her former partner alimony if circumstances so dictate. Same sex marriages may also involve the exchange of alimony.
- 3 Table 2: BLS. *Women in the Labor Force: A Databook*. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015.
- 4 Table 7: BLS. *Women in the Labor Force: A Databook*. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015.
- 5 Table 25: BLS. *Women in the Labor Force: A Databook*. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015.
- 6 Table 16: BLS. *Women in the Labor Force: A Databook*. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015.
- 7 Data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, Various Years.
- 8 In a parallel literature, research focusing on individuals seeking out new identities for themselves also stresses the importance of private decision-making in the areas of self-definition, group interactional choices, and cultural supports for new selves. In this overall framework, individuals also make orderly sets of personal decisions regarding roles that they want to cast off and roles they want to assume.
- 9 No scholarly work exists related to the views of non-activist alimony payers.
- 10 All website addresses can be obtained from the author.
- 11 These states included Alabama, Georgia, and Tennessee.
- 12 This is a very conservative threshold because themes about the duration of alimony only appeared in 83 of the 182 documents. Some documents contained multiple themes regarding the duration of alimony.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Narrative Writers
Gender of Narrative Writer

Totals

Breakdown of Narrative Writers by Relationship to Alimony Payer

Male

1 Son-in-law	
1 Son	
4 Brothers	
Female	
	39
25 Current Wife	
10 Self	
4 Girlfriend	
Unclear	
	4
3 Unclear	
1 Child	
Totals	
	182
182	