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MALE IDENTITY AND THE MODERN MODEL OF FATHERHOOD

A b s t r a c t. On the one hand, the man is supposed to show greater interest in the childcare, spend much more time with his offspring and put more effort in its education and upbringing. On the other, the very same man is simultaneously obliged to be the head of the family and take care of its safety, especially as far as money is concerned. Therefore, the man is expected to spend more time at home with his wife and children, participate in all housework, and be still responsible for the family's financial security. Would the new father be able to manage these new expectations, which seem a little bit to excess? Would these changes reflect identity and fulfill expectations of the new father? Of course we still have to wait for the answers, but it seems feasible to ask, following Melosik, whether, in the face of so many encroachments on the male personality and psyche, as well as feminization of his body, "[...] a man is still a man?"¹.

Key words: fatherhood, new fatherhood, masculine identity.

INTRODUCTION

It seems that over the last three decades every aspect of human activity has undergone huge transformations. The extremely fast pace of life, higher standards of living, a great range of opportunities and growing needs have contributed significantly to re-defining human life, personal identity, and social roles as well. These transformations are closely intertwined with the

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¹ Z. M e l o s i k, *Kryzys męskości w kulturze współczesnej*, Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls 2006, p. 22.

change in the very model of parenthood itself. Although neglected in the past, it is now the problem of fatherhood that is gaining the same recognition in the scholarly discourse as the experience of motherhood has always had. A multitude of contemporary transformations affecting the role of the father seems to allow for designating this emerging phenomenon as a “revolution” which results in establishing a form of the “new fatherhood”². The shaping of late twentieth-century male identity is unquestionably influenced by the aforementioned changes and it thus seems feasible to claim that this completely new model of male identity might be considered the final effect these transformations.

Józef Augustyn states that it is the man who has been most surprised by the development of civilization as he was not previously prepared, neither psychically, nor spiritually, for finding his own place in the changing world. The man’s activity has been suddenly moved from the position of dominance at home, to a post in the workplace³. The most tangible effect of this situation is loosening the family ties and, unawares as it were, the loss of male identity’s basic element, that is, its inclination to dominance.

The present article aims at attempting to determine the influence of the model of the “new fatherhood” on shaping male identity. It is without any doubt that this new means of realizing the role of the father is correlated with the way a contemporary man perceives and creates his own identity. That is why it is possible to claim that a current definition of masculinity, not to mention other features contributing to the concept of male identity, is not always in accordance with the premises of the “new fatherhood.” The very dealing with the issue gains more importance when one realizes that nowadays even the very core of male identity, that is, its masculinity, is also being challenged⁴.

1. MALE IDENTITY: DIRECTIONS OF CHANGE

The precursors of the concept of “identity” initiated in the scholarly discourse a discussion about such notions as “self” (William James), “loo-

² Cf. K. Z i e l i ń s k a - K r ó ł, *Ojcostwo na początku XXI wieku – kryzys ojcostwa i nowe ojcostwo*, „Roczniki Nauk o Rodzinie” 5(60) 2013, pp. 83-94.

³ Cf. J. A u g u s t y n, *Ojcostwo. Aspekty pedagogiczne i duchowe*, Kraków: WAM 2011.

⁴ Cf. L. S e g a l, *Slow Motion. Changing Masculinities. Changing Men*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press 1990.

king-glass self” (Charles H. Cooley), “consciousness” (George H. Mead), “social role” (Robert E. Park) and “social agent” (Florian Zaniecki), which, in the course of time, were used for building the concept of “identity.” On the basis of the those ideas, Talcott Parsons introduced into his theory a category of personal identity. The sociologist claimed that an agent acted in accordance with the expectations of others because in the process of socialization one acquired specific norms and models of behavior, which oriented him towards action. That issue is therefore synonymous with the problem of role distribution because the most important function of identity is its so-called “role obligation”⁵. Thus presented approaches to the concept of identity share a general characteristic, that is, the impossibility of exerting an influence by an individual on the shape of his/her identity as its foundation lies in the socio-cultural reality. Thus, the model of masculinity should be accepted as the one that is internalized by an individual in the process of socialization. It might mean that the man is able to fulfill only those social roles and models that are considered strictly “male”⁶. Moreover, it should be also emphasized that it is the body that has always been perceived as the source of the primordial identity. The body, as it were, contains identity⁷. However, the postmodern perspective provides a different way of interpreting and defining the category of identity, focusing on its processual character that is more creative and relational⁸. Anthony Giddens describes “identity” in a similar manner. He maintains that identity is not provided as such but has to be generated and supported by a reflexively acting individual⁹. Another thesis, which is a controversial one, is advanced by Kristen Hastrup who claims that “we do not have identity, we have to invent it”¹⁰. Therefore, it might be suggested that the modern understanding of identity endows an individual with openness and freedom to create it, thus giving rise to an entirely original creation. Hence, in order to feel like the man, each and every man has

⁵ U. K l u c z y ń s k a, *Metamorfozy tożsamości mężczyzn w kulturze współczesnej*, Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek 2009, pp. 26-30.

⁶ Ibid. p. 31.

⁷ A. G i d d e n s, *Nowoczesność i tożsamość*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN 2012, p. 83.

⁸ L. K o ł a k o w s k i, *O tożsamości zbiorowej. Tożsamość w czasach zmiany. Rozmowy w Castel Gandolfo*, Kraków: Znak 1995, p. 48.

⁹ G i d d e n s, *Nowoczesność i tożsamość*, p. 79.

¹⁰ K. H a s t r u p, *Poza antropologią. Antropolog jako przedmiot przedstawienia dramatycznego*, „Konteksty” 2(1998), p. 27.

to create his own masculinity. It seems that nowadays neither sex, nor society or culture, can or are able to impose the foundation of one's identity on a human being. However, since a human being has a creative and free will to build his/her identity, it seems feasible to ponder why nowadays the notion of the "identity crisis" is so widespread in a scholarly or journalistic discourse. Interestingly, more and more publications deal with the "masculinity crisis" in the same context. It seems that in the modern society the attributes that used to be acknowledged as typically male and thus considered a point of departure for the man's care of the woman, are now used as the basis for an attack on him¹¹. While analyzing the origins of masculinity, it is easy to notice that there has occurred a serious collapse in a uniform manner of its presentation. Now, there are many equal, though frequently mutually exclusive, versions of masculinity. Consequently, a growing number of boys have difficulties, as Zbyszko Melosik claims, with integrating their own male identities¹². The loss or instability of one's values induces inability to define one's identity, especially when a person has difficulties with recognizing his/her personal value¹³. It is hard to propose now the one and only definition of masculinity as it depends on a particular theoretical perspective, dominant ideology and even individual preferences of a particular scholar. The cultural unrest over masculinity and its very definition is growing. The aforementioned "masculinity crisis" seems to be confirmed by the process of women's emancipation, which has induced the obliteration of differences in fulfilling particular social roles by the representatives of both sexes. That obliteration can be, in turn, noticed on every level of social and personal existence. That is why a contemporary debate over the man focuses predominantly on "pathologies," "complexes" and "problems" with establishing his identity. Hence, the man is prone to seek for his weaknesses only¹⁴. Discourses over the construction of masculinity seem to be still in progress. The models, which have been functioning so far, are undergoing significant changes, and its very presentation emphasizes that temporality and changeability.

To conclude, it might be assumed that the present-day world does not propose a single model of masculinity and the man creates his identity with no help, reference, or history whatsoever. The previous definitions of masculinity

¹¹ J. M a c I n e s s, *Manly Virtues and Masculine*, "Living Marxism" 115(1998), pp. 32-33.

¹² M e l o s i k, *Kryzys męskości*, pp. 8-9.

¹³ G i d d e n s, *Nowoczesność i tożsamość*, p. 81.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

and male identity are no longer topical but there are still no alternative propositions. That ambivalence contributes to the necessity for redefining one's self and, in consequence, leads to the sense of loss and inability of understanding and situating oneself in the world.

2. MODERN FATHERHOOD

As a role, "fatherhood" is a relatively new idea explored within the field of social studies. The interest in this issue is closely connected with transformations in the contemporary world, which affect significantly nearly all spheres of human existence. A crucial issue in the whole process seems to lie in a person's individualization that leads to breaking traditional bonds, models and forms of social life. It is especially visible when it comes to defining and realizing social roles connected with sex. However, cultural models of fatherhood have not experienced rapid transformations. The first significant change occurred in the West at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s. It was connected especially with the transfer of women's professional work from the household. As an inevitable result, parents had to start sharing family responsibilities, what also contributed to the change in the husband-wife and father-child relations. Fulfilling the role of both the father and the husband thirty or forty years ago was not a very complicated task, and women did not even dare to question the family model they were exposed to at their homes. The aforementioned changes have led to the situation when nowadays women expect more for their children and themselves from men who, in turn, also want to be more active. After a period of the "absent father," a debate arose over the influence of the father's absence on the child deprived of the male role model¹⁵. A multitude of research allows to draw a conclusion that the absence of the father at home has various irreversible consequences not only for the child, but also for the wife/mother, husband/father and the whole family as well. In that context it is easy to notice that a new model of fatherhood is being created. The changes are rapid and, as a result, modern fathers are burdened with responsibilities which were completely unknown to their own fathers and grandfathers¹⁶. Therefore, a new phenomenon occurs, that

¹⁵ S. Arnold, *How Involved is Involved Fathering? An Exploration of the Contemporary Culture of Fatherhood*, "Gender & Society" 21(2007), pp. 508-527.

¹⁶ D. Majka - Rosteck, *Zaangażowane ojcostwo – specyfika współczesnego wzorca*

is, the “new fatherhood.” It consists in men’s more caring behavior, by means of which they discover and develop emotional bonds with their children and share with the mothers joys and sorrows of parenthood. A model young father treats an infant with great tenderness and is not ashamed of such a behavior. What is new here is not an affection itself, but the very fact of showing it¹⁷. According to the new model, fatherhood begins not the moment a baby arrives, but already when the offspring is planned and through its whole foetal life. A father-to-be is to accompany the woman in all preparations for and even during the very act of labor¹⁸. The “new fatherhood” makes the father’s presence during the labor almost a standard or even an unwritten duty. The modern father is involved in the whole process of pregnancy and often knows about it no less than his wife does¹⁹. Being fully prepared, the “new” father actively participates in looking after a baby since the very first moments of its life. What is more, the “new” father can also exercise his legal right to “paternity leave.” Although incomparably shorter, “paternity leave” signifies both a mental and organizational transformation. Returning from the workplace, the “new father” no longer spends his time watching TV but, just like his wife, begins a second-time job at home²⁰. Krzysztof Arcimowicz claims that the new masculinity paradigm emphasizes equality and partnership between men and women, and considers these values as the fundamental ones in creating a new social order. ‘Cooperation’ replaces dominance,’ and thus becomes for a man a new life’s philosophy to follow. ... The new masculinity paradigm allows a man to emphasize those traits that are characteristic for both men and women, and thus enables him to reach his full potential as a human being (translation mine)²¹.

That model has become a foundation for creating the new fatherhood paradigm. The man/father is a partner to the woman/mother and they are both

kulturowego, <http://www.kulturaihistoria.umcs.lublin.pl/archives/2786> (accessed 20.06.2012).

¹⁷ Cf. Z i e l i ń s k a - K r ó l, *Ojcostwo na początku XXI wieku*, as well as Delu-
menau’s and Roche’s *Historia ojców i ojcostwa*, Warszawa: WSiP 1995.

¹⁸ A. K r a j e w s k a, *Konteksty ojcostwa. Nowi mężczyźni?*, in: M. F u s z e r a (Ed.),
Zmieniające się modele męskości we współczesnej Polsce, Warszawa: Trio 2008, p. 78.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 78-80.

²⁰ T. S z l e n d a k, *Socjologia rodziny. Ewolucja, historia, zróżnicowanie*, Warszawa:
Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN 2010, pp. 449-450.

²¹ K. A r c i m o w i c z, *Obraz ojca w polskich mediach*, „Niebieska Linia” 1(2004),
p. 9.

responsible for maintaining the household. The man does not administer but cooperates equally with all members of the family.

3. "NEW FATHERHOOD" AND THE MODERN IDEA OF MASCULINITY

As has been already mentioned, the transformations of the idea of "fatherhood" constitute a significant part of our changing reality. Therefore, a way of defining the man/father is also changing as the previous definitions seem no longer valid. Elizabeth Badinter points out that a well-known command "be a man" is most often presented in the imperative rather than affirmative mood – quite in contrast with how the statement "be a woman" is understood. Hence, Badinter continues, the "be a man" command implies that masculinity is not such a natural phenomenon as it has been believed²². Notwithstanding a heated debate over the very basic meaning of male identity that Badinter's argument has inspired, the present article will rather focus on the correlation between fatherhood and the concept of identity itself.

Following Arcimowicz's claim, there are two opposing masculinity paradigms in the contemporary Western culture. The first model presents masculinity as dominance and specialization in specific domains, and is based on the duality of sex roles in the society, as well as the asymmetry in masculine and feminine traits. As a result, the man is required to subordinate other people and, simultaneously, not to show any emotions or feelings. That model of masculinity is a consequence of centuries of social demands, as well as historical and religious determinants. On the other hand, the second model of masculinity emphasizes the equality and partnership between men and women, and designates these values as the essential ones in establishing the social order. In that context, the man does not fight femininity that accompanies him. As has been aforementioned, the new paradigm allows to bring out those attributes, which enable the man to reach his full potential as a human being, in the sphere of intellect, social skills, and emotions as well²³. Badinter also maintains that the generation of the new fathers and the new sons will appear when "the man starts to question the inherited and repressive idea of masculinity and patriarchy, notice the wrongs caused by a lack of

²² E. B a d i n t e r, *XY tożsamość mężczyzny*, Warszawa: W.A.B. 1993, p. 23.

²³ A r c i m o w i c z, p. 9.

contact with his children due to a specific type of work he has, accept his feminine side, and, finally, begins to seek for a different model of masculinity and fatherhood”²⁴. Although the statement might meet with objections, the changes have been already initiated the entire model of fatherhood is being transformed and adjusted to the contemporary image of both the man and the very idea of masculinity itself.

It seems that nowadays cultural definitions of femininity and masculinity lose relevance. The elements such as affection, protectiveness, sensitivity, empathy and emotionality, which have traditionally constituted the idea of femininity, are no longer its sole representatives. Similarly, no longer can the notions like strength, determination, harshness, distance, or autonomy be considered the elements of male identity. Therefore, both the scholarly and colloquial discourses question a belief that it is the woman who is predestined to fulfill responsibilities of the mother, whereas masculinity is absolutely not in accordance with full time care of a child. The idea of the “new fatherhood” is almost the opposite of the previous family models. An attempt at assessing that situation seems to suggest that the contemporary position of men is deteriorating because they are deprived of their former privileges and are, as it were, forced to engage themselves in parenthood. Firstly, this specific attitude is demanded from men by women themselves who most often work outside the home. Secondly, the changes at the labor market undermine the man’s role as the sole breadwinner, whose only duty is to provide the family with consumer goods. Therefore, as Steve Biddulph points out, the role of the father in the twenty-first century is very difficult. The man wants to enrich his parenthood with those attributes (such as tenderness, consistency, or commitment), which most probably he himself never experienced. Thus, he tries to create his fatherhood from scratch, without any previous models²⁵. However, the idea of the “new fatherhood” seems to focus on a different aspect of the man’s engagement in parenthood – and with that men do not lose, but gain. Equally to women, men make the most of the contemporary emancipation from the established sex roles. Moreover, the “new fathers” seem to stop following the requirements of traditionally understood masculinity. Fatherhood becomes for men a chance of development and self-fulfillment. The cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity clearly

²⁴ Cf. B a d i n t e r, *XY tożsamość mężczyzny*.

²⁵ S. B i d d u l p h, *Męskość. Nowe spojrzenie*, Poznań: Rebis 2012, p. 153.

show that the man's perception of the role of the parent differs from the woman's. Women treat motherhood as their most important role and their true life mission. It seems possible to call it the central and dominant element of femininity. Notwithstanding opinions that undermine the role of the maternal instinct (feminism, gender), it is still attributed to women. Moreover, the maternal instinct does not mean solely a general wish for having a child, but also an inborn and thus natural ability to take care of it. As far as men are concerned, the role of the parent comes low down in the rankings of the "proper" masculine attributes and roles. Masculinity and fatherhood are associated with performing a role of the head of the family and being responsible for its' members material safety. Hence, it all comes down to fulfilling responsibilities in the public sphere, outside the home. Thus defined femininity and masculinity, as well as differing meanings of parenthood for women and for men, can also influence the very way of experiencing motherhood and fatherhood. Kazimierz Pospiszył aptly states that "fatherhood is definitely less significant a fact in the man's life than it is in the woman's. However, it should be also pointed out that various scientific research as well as mere observations reveal that fatherhood exerts a great influence on life and psychical development of a man" (translation mine)²⁶.

It was career that was believed to contribute to men's psychic well-being because they used to define themselves precisely in relation to the professional roles only. Nevertheless, it has been discovered that a sense of happiness and general satisfaction are more connected with their roles at home than at the workplace. Good relations with children protect men from the occupational stress. What is more, it has been also proved that fathers are less inclined to risky undertakings than the childless men because fathers seem to be more responsible and far-sighted²⁷. It seems that the aforementioned transformations take place especially at the behavioral level, but men still have difficulties in verbalizing them, although it is also a fact that the contemporary man speaks about himself more often in the context of being the father. To be the "new father" seems fashionable nowadays and men often boast about the knowledge of the childcare. Many men are discovering now that career, hobbies or erotic and sexual love with women are not the

²⁶ Cf. K. P o s p i s z y ł, *Ojciec a rozwój dziecka*, Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna 1980.

²⁷ Ibid.

sole constituents of the meaningful life. That meaning is also provided by the fact of being the father and having a paternal relation with his child.

In the research conducted for a study *Nieodpłatna praca kobiet. Mity, realia, perspektywy* (2004), Anna Titkow addressed an issue of the contemporary place of motherhood and fatherhood as perceived by men and women respectively. Represented by both sexes, the respondents were to answer the question "Who am I?" and they could choose one out of three possibilities. The results revealed that women perceived themselves predominantly as mothers (25.9%) and wives (23.6%). They also identified themselves as human beings and females (both possibilities were chosen by 22.3% of the female respondents). Men identified themselves generally as human beings (34.3%), then husbands and, finally, males. Only 7.9% of the male respondents considered the role of the father as the most important one in their lives²⁸. The results clearly show differences in men's and women's approach to parenthood. On the one hand, that new situation has deprived men of the privileges over women, and revealed many of their weaknesses. On the other, however, they start to seek for more profound sources of their male and paternal identity. What is more, since fatherhood is no longer supported by religious or social structures, it demands from the man greater personal engagement and work. The contemporary fatherhood also needs a closer cooperation between the man and the woman during the preparations for the wedding, as well as their future marital and family life.

However, in the context of the "new fatherhood," one question still remains: are these changes good for both the father and the child? Tomasz Szlendak claims that the contemporary world is creating a situation when women seek for a sense of humor and protectiveness from men, not allowing them simultaneously to resign from the role of the breadwinners²⁹. The research conducted by Małgorzata Sikorska on the "new fatherhood" and "new motherhood" show that now many men really derive great pleasure from taking care of their children, and sometimes even complain that they work too much and do not have enough time for their families. Men seem to realize that their wives demand from them the impossible, that is, both

²⁸ Cf. B. Budrowska, D. Duch-Krzyszoszek, & A. Titkow, *Nieodpłatna praca kobiet – mity, realia, perspektywy*, Warszawa: IFiS PAN 2004.

²⁹ A. Kublik, *Szklana pułapka płci, czyli jak kobiety i mężczyźni za wiele od siebie wymagają*, „Gazeta Wyborcza” 120(2012), p. 13.

a high financial status (the man as the head of the family) and active engagement in housework (the man as the husband and parent)³⁰.

Notwithstanding any doubts concerning the “new fatherhood,” it seems that the phenomenon should be positively assessed. The research shows that the time the father spends with his child is simply invaluable as far as establishing proper emotional bonds and passing behavior models are concerned. The father who is present at home not only creates a proper model of the family, but also prevents many educational problems of his child. The arrival of a child is for many men a great personal challenge. Having, for instance, no enormous material goods to pass on, the contemporary man seems to realize that what he can, in fact, really provide his child with is his time, tenderness, kindness, concern, support, commitment and generosity, what in a word is the fatherly love. It is possible to notice that a new approach to true manhood has finally appeared; a true man is someone whose attitude is protective. Some of the fathers and husbands decide to develop these features in their lives. That transformation is a sign of hope for many growing-up children. However, it should be also noted that the whole process of creating this new model of both fatherhood and masculinity is lengthy. The contemporary generation of men is only initiating the transformation connected with “questioning the masculinity inherited from the ancestors”³¹. The contemporary fatherhood might be, as it were, more real than the one from the past as it is based on personal values acquired consciously in the process of improving oneself and co-operating with the woman and children. A greater self-confidence, spontaneity, and freedom of expressing one’s feelings make men more sensitive and constant in their relations with wives and the offspring. The excess of authority, punishing, emotional estrangement from the family and distance from children are now judged negatively. Now, the paternal authority seems to be labile, although it should be consonant with the maternal one as well. However, it is should be the woman who helps the man to re-create his fatherly position and new functions in the family. Motherhood has to support and, as a result, show appreciation of fatherhood in its present shape.

³⁰ Cf. M. S i k o r s k a, *Nowa matka, nowy ojciec, nowe dziecko*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie i Profesjonalne 2009.

³¹ K. P i ą t e k, *Nowy wymiar ojcostwa jako nowy wymiar męskości. Kryzys czy redefinicja pojęć?*, in I d e m, *Męskość (nie)męska. Współczesny mężczyzna w zmieniającej się rzeczywistości społecznej*, Bielsko-Biała: Wydawnictwo Akademii Techniczno-Humanistycznej 2007, p. 106.

Krzysztof Arcimowicz claims that never was there a single model of the father, and in every historical period a dominant type was accompanied by its less popular variant. Nevertheless, it seems that nowadays there is the greatest conceptual variety as far as both sex and father roles are concerned. The scholar concludes that the evolution of the model of the father has not ended yet and, in fact, has just started its new stage³².

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³² K. A r c i m o w i c z, *Przemiany wzorów ojca w kulturze zachodniej*, in B. P ł o n - k a - S y r o k a (Ed.), *Stereotypy i wzory męskości w różnych kulturach świata*, Warszawa: DiG 2008, p. 74.

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TOŻSAMOŚĆ MĘŻCZYZNY A NOWY MODEL OJCOSTWA

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Dzisiaj wymaga się od mężczyzn większego zainteresowania dzieckiem, większego wkładu czasowego i zadaniowego w jego rozwój i wychowanie, ale jednocześnie oczekuje się, że mężczyzna nadal będzie głową rodziny i przede wszystkim zadba o bezpieczeństwo swojej rodziny – zwłaszcza w zakresie finansowym. Zatem z jednej strony oczekuje się, że będzie on więcej czasu spędzał w domu, z żoną, z dzieckiem, będzie partycypował w domowych obowiązkach, jednak nie zdejmuje to z niego odpowiedzialności za utrzymanie rodziny. Czy nowym oczekiwaniom, wydającym się trochę ponad miarę i możliwości, nowy ojciec podoła? Czy zmiany i współczesna figura ojca jest tą, w której określana na nowo tożsamość mężczyzny znajdzie odbicie i możliwość realizacji? Z pewnością na odpowiedź należy jeszcze poczekać, jednak uzasadnione wydaje się pytanie, jakie stawia Z. Melosik: Czy w obliczu wszystkich zmian w osobie, psychice, medykalizacji oraz feminizacji ciała męskiego „[...] mężczyzna to jest jeszcze mężczyzna?”.

Słowa kluczowe: tożsamość mężczyzny, nowe ojcostwo, ojcostwo.