

# MOTHERING FATHERS: CHANGES IN SIGHT? HOMBRES MATERNALES: ¿CAMBIOS A VISTA?

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Recibido: 02 de abril de 2012

Aceptado: 20 de agosto de 2012

## ABSTRACT

Today men interact more with their children and with their home environments compared with past decades. Men are redefining their identity and their roles, questioning societal constraints. Based on some studies of anthropology, sociology and psychology carried out in recent decades especially in Latin America, the relationship between father and son is focused in this article. In order to reflect on the possible effects of mothering fathers into the next generation this study tries to highlight the importance of parent-child relationship in the construction of male gender identity and to discuss asymmetries in the sharing of parental care, to identify the elements that contribute for different assumptions on fatherhood, and assessing the gender gap between men and women concerning child care.

**Key words:** Fatherhood, Gender Identity, Masculinities, Mothering Fathers

## RESUMEN

Hoy los hombres interactúan más con sus hijos y con su entorno familiar en comparación con décadas pasadas. Los hombres están redefiniendo su identidad y sus funciones, cuestionando las restricciones sociales. Sobre la base de algunos estudios de la antropología, la sociología y la psicología llevados a cabo en las últimas décadas, especialmente en América Latina, la relación entre padre e hijo es enfocada en este artículo. Con el fin de reflexionar sobre los posibles efectos de los padres maternales a la siguiente generación este estudio trata de poner de relieve la importancia en la relación padre-hijo, en la construcción de la identidad de género masculino y para discutir las asimetrías en la distribución de la atención de los padres, para identificar los elementos que contribuyen para diferentes supuestos sobre la paternidad, la evaluación de la brecha de género entre hombres y mujeres en el cuidado de los niños.

**Palabras clave:** Identidad de género, hombres maternantes, masculinidades, paternidad.

## Introduction

Today men interact more with their family members, especially with their children and they enjoy their home environments more compared with past decades. Men are redefining their identity and their roles, questioning and refuting absolutist societal constraints and outdated models, and also are seeking to recover positive values associated with masculinity. The myth of masculinity is full of beliefs such as: men don't cry; they must be

competitive and strong; they must be rational; they are not supposed to get involved emotionally; they must be the best. Some studies of anthropology, sociology and social psychology (Vigoya, 2001) carried out in recent decades in Latin America men indicate changes in the traditional model of «macho men». Since then, several studies on male subjects have pointed out that the main aspect that most distinguished men from his predecessors is the paternal role.

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In this article the relationship between father and son, now with a greater emotional involvement is focused. What will the effects of this kind of relationship be in their children's lives into the next generation? Will maternal fathers produce children with psychological profiles that incorporate this aspect more smoothly? Will they also turn themselves into maternal adults? At what stage of development do men begin to incorporate the feeling of becoming a father? Is this path constructed parallel to that of becoming a man? Is the mothering not encouraged in men's childhood? Instead of male gender is it possible to start thinking of unified human gender? What happens at the beginning of the construction of male gender identity that contributes to most men being poorly prepared for caring? What is the role of the generational transmission? How close is the male identity from the fatherhood role? What is the level of compliance with the masculine identity of fatherhood?

To answer all these questions is not the aim of this study. The main goals are to highlight the importance on parent-child relationships in the construction of male gender identity and to discuss asymmetries in the sharing of parental care. This study will also focus on the analysis of the male gender construction in its childhood to identify the elements that contribute for different assumptions on fatherhood, assessing this way the gender gap between men and women concerning child care. Through the concept of generational transmission, it will be analyzed which elements characterize the constitution of a man and a father and what contributes to differences in active fatherhood that lead to asymmetric relations with women mothers.

The theory of individualization says that negotiations in society happen on many levels. Negotiations through interactions occur between intimate partners on a micro level and during interactions between friends and colleagues. These aspects are involved during the transition of men becoming fathers. On a macro level, the negotiations take place between competing agencies and institutions dealing with both formal and informal family related policies, especially as they relate to the challenges of combining work and family care (Seward & Richter, 2008).

The cultural landscape of family life today is one that continues to be strongly shaped by gendered beliefs – that is, ideas about the ways in which men and women ought to

behave and their expectations of how they should feel within families. The contemporary setting may serve as a basis for consolidating more democratic relations between men and women in a few generations. Although there are social changes set in motion, not all aspects of male parental responsibility are yet consolidated. Yes, men are emotionally closer to their children, but not yet advanced enough. There are numerous pressures, barriers, social prescriptions faced. As Giffin (1998) points, as well as being required to provide full dedication to work, and they were not prepared to take child-rearing, men still face gender definitions that put the domestic sphere as not only worthless, but as «woman things». The home environment and their tasks end up being disqualified twice in this way toward making it unattractive for men.

To enhance fathers' involvement with their children, governments and employers worldwide give leave of some kind for fathers, or part of the leave provided to mothers. Additionally in many countries, providing fathers employment leave is considered one way to challenge the traditional gendered division of work. Mothers' responsibilities for domestic duties, like child care, and fathers' responsibility for providing, have been strongly fixed beliefs in society and family structures for a long time. And if both parents are eligible for leaves, mothers still take most of what is available. Primarily, few fathers take leave and participation rates have increased slowly (Seward & Richter, 2008).

In accordance to Minella (2006) the analytical intersections between gender and childhood are still rare. There are more, according to the author, empirical studies and less theoretical reflections. In order to fill in gaps and contribute to scientific research, fatherhood in adult age was chosen to be discussed here (Souza & Benetti, 2009).

## Method

A literature review on the subject of fatherhood was conducted in databases such as Web of Science, PsycINFO and SCIELO, using the following descriptions: father, fatherhood, paternal involvements, parental role, family relationships and boys' identity. This review also was supported by some works of researches that focus in this area for some time: Araújo and Scalón (2005), Badinter (1986, 1992, 2005), Jablonski (2010), and Wagner and Mosmann

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(2009). Empirical studies conducted in Brazil also were consulted, like Vianna and Finco (2009), as well some American studies, like Bianchi, Robinson and Milkie (2006) Fuwa (2004), and a Mexican study (García, Sarmiento & Martínez, 2011).

### **The decline of the patriarch**

With the progressive decline of patriarchy, mainly driven by the contemporary feminist movement and the labor market, human gender, male and female, previously defined as tight dichotomously, are now more subtle with its boundaries, roles and multiple identities unstable. Women have changed and therefore men as well, but not necessarily at the same pace. Badinter (2005) states that although women consider progress too slow, and men too quick to share their spoils, both mostly have the will to live and coexist better with each other. Women and men have appropriated new ways of expanding this, the scope of their identity configurations. These movements have produced effects not only on marital, interpersonal relationships, but also on parenting.

Several studies about domestic tasks and sharing family responsibilities, in Brazil (Araújo & Scalón, 2005; Jablonski, 2010; Rocha-Coutinho, 2007; 2009; Soares & Saboia, 2007) as well as abroad (Badinter, 1986; Bianchi, Robinson & Milkie, 2006; Fuwa, 1994), point to gender inequalities which burden women. Less robust than in the past, the patriarchy is still present in the hierarchy of the sexes, where men still enjoy privileges and are less accountable for the care of children.

Researches on fatherhood (Badinter, 1992; Devreux, 2006; Hennigen & Guareschi, 2002; Passos, 2007) helps to recognize the decline of the hegemonic patriarchal father figure and to see other models that contrast or blend (new fathers), and they come in several contemporary family configurations. According to Fonseca (2004), in the case of heterosexual men, there seems to be a strong dose of ambivalence experienced by them about their place in the family that they wish to constitute, and that is part of the so-called crisis of masculinity. The author points out that some men, who have no income, can't meet the satisfaction of the old provider role; those who have not coped with the egalitarian model of behavior assume that relates to independent women. There are a lot of dilemmas, conflicts,

failures and difficulties of the most diverse kind for its protagonists to face. Parenthood, one of men's possible roles to exercise, suffers the same impacts of this crisis. Simultaneously, a greater breadth of choices that allow a more authentic, and autonomous, life can be glimpsed by men of this new time. Thus, we have a multifaceted reality that is reflected in various models of men, fathers and families.

### **Father model redesigned**

There is a failure to conform about male behavior; there is no consensus among experts, which are divided in many ways about what we might call the «new fathers». To Devreux, (2006) in terms of concrete practices, the notion of «new fathers» emerges as pure ideological construction, disconnected from the realities of family life and the division of labor between the sexes. The most precise and coherent term, to be used here, would be «transitional fathers», closely linked to consistent patterns of relationship of the new transitional conjugality's. The traditional and egalitarian ideologies that permeate attitudes and gender relations are merged producing transitional ideologies. The new models of fathers are still not in a general standards pattern. Parents in transition have their contradictions and ambiguities in dealing with the inherited patriarchal values and by adopting post-modern attitudes.

According to Saldanha (2010) the contemporary role of the father more involved with his family, seems not to be felt as a threat to his masculinity, since the formation of male identity is going to depend on both, his performance at work as his performance in the family. Their role as fathers not only involves the care of young children but also a closer relationship, a more frequent interaction with the older children in a myriad of situations. How to deal with the fact that some fathers are divorced and live in another city or country far from his children? How to deal with children from previous marriages of the spouse? A phrase that translates well this iconic family time is given by Vera, interviewed for a survey made by Datafolha SP newspaper about Brazilian families (2007): «Here are mine, yours, ours and those of others». She refers to children from her first marriage, the ones of her husband, the children in common with him and their adopted children. In one example it can be seen reflected the various changes of an era: the permanence of the marriage, despite the possibility of

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separation, remarriage brings in tow the inclusion of children from previous marriages added to the current marriage and also the adoptive family. It is in this context, with all these variables, that the contemporary father participates with their sons and daughters development throughout a life cycle and complicates any attempt to classify models.

Mothering is an ability that men and women can develop and that according to Badinter (1992) is very dependent on how the childhood of those adults was and it is facilitated when parents had mothering parents themselves and differs from the few minutes that a traditional father dedicates to children. The concept of paternity (Silva, 2005) involves a process of social experience of fatherhood through the construction of affective ties and overcomes the naturalistic and biological vision that justifies the bond established between father and son/daughter. It also entails the effective participation of men in family life, particularly in the care of children, and may be able to streamline gender relations more equitable, in that it allows an expansion of the repertoire of the tasks male and female. From this explanation we can say that mothering and fathering are nearly synonymous, because from the point of view of the activities they are no different, what changes is the sex and gender of those who exercise it. Caring is a more neutral word and its derivative caregiver is less imbued with the idea of motherhood / fatherhood / male / female / mother / father. Just as the English word nurture, which presents and promotes a detached desexualized linguistic gender issue on the role of child care. Perhaps the terms of care / caregiver substitutes could be more consistent with the assumptions that predict vanguard detachments of gender roles as a solution to the imbalances of power. The male identity configuration forms are long and steep until the development process (or not) of his father's career starting with the birth of sons and daughters according to Badinter (1992). Gender differences are engendered in this process as discussed below.

### Constructions of Gender Identities

Even before the birth, a baby is already a fantasy source for the future parents. Often both already have desires, even unconscious, about the preferably sex of their children. The moment of ultrasound, or discovering the sex of the baby, is usually one of the most expected. And from that

moment different forms of waiting for the birth of boys and girls are being experienced. A «life script» is elaborated by parents, which will take different directions depending on sex, based on the roles that these children should adopt towards the society in which they live. These directions, among other expressions, consist on ways to gift, dress, tell stories, and more subtly, in bodily attitudes and mannerisms that most of the time is different for boys and girls (Cruz & Palmeira, 2009). Thus the construction of gender identity will be giving, as in the baby's layette, which most of the time is blue for boys and pink for girls. Thus, these differences propagated by many and questioned by few will leave brands of femininity and masculinity, in most cases, permanent in boys and girls (Gomes, 2008).

There have always been designated differences in male and female roles representations; the masculine was represented by strength and the feminine by beauty (Baggio, Carvalho, Backes, Backes, Meirelles & Erdmann, 2009). The culture built early in children differences between boys and girls, between masculine and feminine. Thus, the children's process of building the gender identity is deeply connected to experiences with people who will play the role of caregiver, whom are inserted into a particular culture. Therefore, alongside the feminists' studies, in addition to gender, the critique of biologization of sexuality and subsequent naturalization of ways of being masculine and feminine is reinforced (Silva & Luz, 2010).

Talking about a critique of biologization does not mean to deny biology, but emphasizes the socio-cultural aspect of gender construction (Gomes, 2006). The family and the school's socio-cultural institutions will play a significant role in perpetuating the gender order. However is at a familiar environment that stereotypes are being inculcated through more indirect ways, as with the child's perception of the existence of a sexual division of work. Since kindergartens and schools contribute to the reproduction of these stereotypes, they foster the inclusion of a standard male and female behaviors considered culturally correct. Thus, events related to children's gender roles will appear, triggering moralists' reactions by anyone who cares, showing that this is a topic not yet covered (Gomes, 2008).

Despite the history of attempts to grant equal access and educational methods for boys and girls that can be

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seen in theory since the emergence of mixed schools for children in 1920 (Cruz & Palmeira, 2009), there are contradictions, because, according to Louro (2008) since its inception the school institution exerts a distinctive action, undertaking to separate boys and girls (Freire, Sabarense & Branco, 2009). Studies claiming a policy of gender equality for children have increased (Kishimoto & Ono, 2008). After all a childhood with gender equality is less likely to become an adulthood with a gender inequality, avoiding a repetition of alienated gender models to the next generation.

### Society and Culture

The construction of gender in childhood takes place through various learning and practices that take place in very diverse situations and can be undertaken either explicitly or across veiled through social and cultural experiences lived by children scoring child development (Silva & Luz, 2010). Louro (2007) says that from feminist aspects, the body would only become intelligible in the field of culture and language.

Messages transmitted from father to son, whether verbal or not, are also issued by society about what is expected of «being a girl» or «being a boy». As each society is embedded in a different culture, which creates specific meanings for those who live in it, that is, the concept of gender in each culture is a product of social representations created by men and women. To overcome gender inequality is necessary to understand how society ranks and naturalizes the differences between masculine and feminine, reducing these differences to physical characteristics taken as natural (Vianna & Finco, 2009).

Social institutions such as school and family can be considered as the principal advocates of construction and reproduction of stereotyped concepts and values about gender issues. For many children, day care or school is the first public institution they attend, having the opportunity to experience different cultural experiences from those prevailing in the family, introducing boys and girls to social and gender categories - as well as colleagues, educators, teachers, parents and mothers of colleagues among others. School offers the opportunity of being in contact with children of different social classes, religions and ethnicities, with different values and behaviors. Children are confronted with a diversity of races, ethnic groups, children with special

needs, poor, rich, middle class, Catholic, Jewish, atheists, and many others (Cruz & Palmeira, 2009).

But also in that space of cultural diversity of society, boys and girls live among the most diverse power relations. Female and male representations with which boys and girls relate are mostly representations of their educators. Thus, children, besides reproducing the representations and practices of adults, can also break the rules imposed, surpassing standard models of masculinity and femininity, suggesting new possibilities for the construction of gender relations (Silva & Luz, 2010). However, many educators still insist on enhancing feminine skills for girls and masculine skills to boys, when, for example, a boy is considered of having feminine characteristics, or when girls who are considered brutish clash with other girls who are considered more delicate are oppressed (Vianna & Finco, 2009). So, teachers provide boys and girls different experiences based on models of masculinity and femininity standardized in relation to a questionable naturalization from what is considered «more appropriate» for each sex and reprimanded for what they consider inappropriate (Silva & Luz, 2010).

There is hegemony in representations of masculinity and around the power of man, although there are different positions taken by boys and girls in social relations. There is also a reproduction of hegemonic models, where man is seen as 'individualistic' and the woman as 'collectivist' (Freire, Sabarense & Branco, 2009). And it can be seen from childhood where in times of rich interaction between teachers and girls, to the organization of environments, most often boys are excluded (Silva & Luz, 2010).

The same context can be seen in different ways for boys and girls. So the experiences of socialization experienced by girls and boys are social exercises that go on outlining the possibilities and limits of their trajectories in social space (Ribeiro, 2006). Boys are pressured by family and society to control their emotions and to be rational and not cry. This can be considered a major drawback in the sense of being prevented from living their feelings freely and spontaneously.

There is an image of males and composition of the male subject lacking of basic care needs, or smoothed, compared to girls. This is a misconception in relation to the needs of

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boys, because like girls, boys also need support and protection (Meira, 2008). As an example, the girls for having long hair often, «need» to be combed by the educator, and receiving the touch as affection. However, the need for affection is beyond the size of hair that needs to be arranged or not. That is, there is a dimension of exclusion in respect of the possibilities of emotional exchanges of men and to lesser extent women with the boys, involving cultural practices and marked by the masculine conceptions present in various layers of society (Silva & Luz, 2010).

About the affection and care, Pierre Bourdieu uses the notion of *habitus*, which means a trend that guides action, which is the product of social relations, tending to ensure the reproduction of objective relations that generate it. From this notion, differences in the way of caring and being cared for constitute the care structures in the formation of *habitus*, showing that it is one of the most active conservation factors in society, because it gives the appearance of legitimacy to social inequalities, confirming and treating the cultural and social heritage as a habitual state. Thereby, children naturally learn values, stigmas, precursors and prejudices such as gender that will permeate their socialization (Gomes, 2008). However every time someone says it is *natural*, there is a manipulation discourse that naturalizes things (Gomes, 2006).

The stereotypes that are played by society are perpetuated by the culture industry and the media (Kishimoto & Ono, 2008). In every society, depending on the cultural specificities there is a cultural construction of gender practiced, having recovery of certain behaviors over others (Cruz & Palmeira, 2009). What is valued for boys is probably not for girls and vice versa. A redefinition of the stereotypes involved in masculine and feminine gender identity should be included in the perspective of human development as a whole considered in power relations (Freire et al., 2009). However, in school in most cases there is no room for a re-signification of signs inherent in stereotypes (Silva & Luz, 2010).

According to Ribeiro (2006), despite the feminine and masculine childish behavior being trained from early ages by social institutions, it is enhanced from 7 to 14 years due to changes in the bodies of boys and girls. And this happens in any generation, but in ever more explicit and questioned

ways. And these are the gender languages that organize social relations, structuring differences that characterize behaviors socially considered «of girls» or «of boys».

### Generational Transmission

The mechanisms through which parents, mothers and society transmit their values, knowledge, attitudes and behaviors are widely varied (Tomizaki, 2010). However, it is the family rather than society, which plays a key role in the transmission of culture (Teixeira, Parente & Boris, 2009). Therefore, she chairs the fundamental processes of psychic development, and here it is possible to include the question of the construction of gender identities from paternity performed, in other words, what the father transmits to his son or daughter. The most important in this generational transmission of gender roles are the practices carried out by parents every day and that are seen by children, and not the recommendation of what should be done (Bozon, 1995). That is, what is learned through teaching is different from content and attitudes that are transmitted and inherited in an unconscious way, which are considered the most crucial for the phenomenon of generational transmission (Tomizaki, 2010). As parents convey these ideas children incorporate gender representations (Ribeiro, 2006).

Fathers and mothers early on transmit values that have implicit gender issues, often without thinking or questioning what they are teaching, treating their children as if they were characteristics of each gender defined genetically, natural and immutable, because these are implicit and rooted questions in their culture (Cruz & Palmeira, 2009). The act of asking a girl for help cleaning the house and the boy to help carry something shows how different attitudes are expected from boys and girls. As well as the idea that the house is a space of female dominance and the streets are a place of male dominance, so men should spend less time at home (Ribeiro, 2006).

From the elements that structure the generations as a specific social situation, it is possible to relate the different educational exercises to specific intergenerational dynamics, that is, to relate them to the social requirements (limits and possibilities) that delineate «how» and «what» should be passed from one generation to another (Tomizaki, 2010). Here we enter into the question of the male-female binary model that is presented to the children and passed down

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from generation to generation. The maintenance of this model occurs when there is silence about the possibility of masculine and feminine alternatives (Vianna & Finco, 2009). Many parents convey as natural the gender standards supposedly linked to biological sex, e.g., what is identified in girls' acts, regarding school skills, as an organization is seen as a sign of femininity and places masculinity as opposed. From a perception of gender binary, is understood that something feminine is non-masculine (Freire et al., 2009).

In this sense, socially constructed differences between male and female end up being considered natural and thus entered in the biological and legitimate relationship of domination (Gomes, 2008). Like the process of parental education, which is still the most common transmission for boys to charge them to be always virile, strong, brave, conquerors of many women. Society charges aggressive, violent activities, and also a position of having many girlfriends. On the other hand, unevenly, are the girls who still get values linked to male dominance, such as being fragile, sensitive, and prepared to take care of home, husband and children (Costa et al., 2008). This can be seen reflected in children's toys. The girl gets a doll to take care of, a toy kitchen for cooking, and the boy gets a sword to fight, hero dolls to fight and toy cars to drive.

Social changes in respect to gender conceptions are handed down from generation to generation as determinants of the formation of each generation that can be taken as «novelty» in relation to previous generations, even if they're small, rather than being repeated and unquestioned. And so social changes occur in the various concepts and possibilities of what is being a boy or a girl. These transmissions when rethought can produce significant changes in the behavior and attitude of society. Thus, new generations could bring a new meaning about gender, through appropriation and transformation (Tomizaki, 2010).

### **Playing in the construction of gender identities**

Playing is important for the constructions of gender. In the process of socialization and the formation of children's identity, the toys are chosen by gender and sex, and so, stereotypes are created. However a boy who plays with dolls or a girl who plays with cars should not carry prejudices, nor create stereotypes. That is, it's the family

context in which the child lives that drives his/her first choices (Kishimoto & Ono, 2008).

Boys are encouraged to practice more dynamic games that require strength, speed, and at the same time involving hazard situations, more aggressive and more free, like playing ball at a street, flying kites, riding bikes, climbing walls and performing various other activities that involve risks and challenges. Girls, on the contrary, are discouraged from committing such activities and games have been proposed, games that have a relation with the functions of woman's in social context, such as being a mother, wife and housewife, placing the girl as a miniature adult (Cruz & Palmeira, 2009).

In a study performed by Gomes (2006, cited by Silva & Luz, 2010), it was observed that even in play times there are educators who pay attention to ensure compliance with social rules that pertain to desirable behaviors for boys and girls. Boys are allowed to play anything that involve risks, but girls are charged to behave in a more contained way, to be within the norms established by society, even in a children's game. Denoting social strategies used to register children in the early meanings of gender.

Gradually spaces are being created for the deconstruction of gender stereotypes, promoting gender equality. The football played by the girls or the dance by the boys can give new meaning to gender relations (Silva & Luz, 2010). Girls may have their gender identity questioned if they play soccer. But if boys do not like to play soccer they are also questioned about their gender identity. There is almost a requirement in boys to like soccer. Boys and girls also develop skills and behaviors in order to fulfill expectations of what is considered accepted by stereotypical models of male and female (Vianna & Finco, 2009). These stereotypes can be seen in the study from García, Sarmiento and Martínez (2011) that showed that men are usually seen as stronger, more athletic, and more able to exercise and practice sport activities than women.

Children understand that they have different gender roles, especially in group play, when representations of what is masculine and feminine flourish. In children's games it is also implied the ways children cope with their bodies and those of others through playful actions, reproducing their sexuality through gender specific perception that each

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one builds. According to Ribeiro (2006), boys who accept to play a suggested game by girls may be stigmatized as not being «a man». Also girls considered adept at positions taken by boys in games are censored. Girls who behave well are those who do not «swear», don't fight, and avoid talking about unwanted behaviors of others boys.

Interesting that until four years old, there is no evidence regarding gender differences in play, but after, the boys tend to avoid those considered «girl games» (Kishimoto & Ono, 2008), that is not because they have no desires, but for not being socially accepted. And this happens even if the man shares the domestic duties such as childcare, even in the new contemporary family structures. To reduce the dualism of male and female in a world so gendered a deconstruction is needed, offering unrestricted access to toys for children, regardless of age, contributing to the formation of gender identities free of regulations and social prescriptions of gender (Kishimoto & Ono, 2008). Hence parents should reorganize themselves around the child, exercising parenting less tied to gender roles (Meira, 2008).

#### **A new father and a new son?**

How the social bases of gender identities are built and how they set their differences were described above. Certainly, if men take on the care of young children with the same degree of involvement that women do, it would have other grounds of gender identities. To Giffin (1998) male and female identity would be more alike and a more positive identification with one's own gender if men, for example, wash dishes or vacuum without fear of jeopardizing their masculinity.

Some men still don't seem to have the appropriate amount of importance in their children's lives, and show themselves ambiguous as to adopt a position that requires a larger share of participation. For Burdon (1998) men need to be willing to learn the «fathering». However the same society that defines that women have the responsibility to care for children, exempt men away from this role as well, sustains Giffin (1998) and it is exactly this attitude that encourages parental irresponsibility in many situations. Top Part of the formulary.

Saldanha (2010) presents several studies that confirm the fact that there is an increase in specialization for

traditional roles as heterosexual couples make the transition to parenthood. Women are more dedicated to housework and men are more dedicated to paid work. In addition, there is a drop in marital satisfaction, triggered by the return of the spouses to a traditional pattern of relationship. Conjugality's less satisfactory compromise, negatively affects children's education because parents are less available to engage in parenting (Wagner & Mosmann, 2009).

#### **Final Thoughts**

The idea that men are equal to women, mothers to fathers and the role of motherhood can be exercised by both sexes is particularly interesting. It can be understood as a result coming from a greater democratization and flexibility of intimacy at homes (Giddens, 1993). Gender inequalities in private life are very evident, but sexual diversity and multiple family configurations and dilemmas arising from this are pushing men and women to review their marital and parental placements.

Gomes and Resende (2004) state that in a few generations, movements that are observed in times of change and transition of parenthood, shall beckon a future that will return to fathers with the baby and the child, the intricate and ambivalent relationship hitherto reserved to the mother. This could happen by the mutual interest of men and women to give in their traditional areas of operation and redistribute more equally their historically conquered powers of each. These changes depend on a broader scale, on a deep denaturalization of the place of masculine and feminine in culture, which terminate specifically in the de-sexualization of domestic, professional or parental skills. Contributions of feminist scholars have long helped to denaturalize the differences between the sexes and encourage the studies that enable the understanding of such differences as a result of social construction (Gomes, 2006).

These changes can start from men and women, since these actors are directly experiencing the problem that arises from the stiffness that is still present in the adherence to gender roles. However, it would be an impoverished mistake, limiting the daily reality of these people to the private sphere. It should also be remembered the support that public policy can make to help in the transformation process. Badinter

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claims (2005) that the additional day care and better opportunities to care for their children may contribute more to household gender equality than all the speeches on parity, including paternity leave. And, from kindergartens and schools with early childhood education, make it possible to inculcate in children primary *habitus* precursors of gender equity. Possibly a more fair society can be formed by questioning about the enormity of circumstances so commonplace and «natural», that culturally embedded, and unnoticed, affect the individual and collective health (Gomes, 2006). Thus avoiding a continuous process of transmission of sexual prejudices in experiences to boys and girls can positively interfere directly in their social lives.

The traditional, modern or postmodern family is responsible for forming the child, who will set it for all his life, thus the importance of values that will be transmitted (Meira, 2008). Since the family child-friendly space of inclusion in which the child should receive affection and protection, is also a socializing function for the son and daughter by the father and mother and therefore the introduction of the meaning of gender. From Ribeiro (2006) the construction of gender is through the concepts learned in the various social systems in which children live. Being a boy or a girl involves the acquisition of social and symbolic attributes about what can or can't be done.

The deconstruction of gender stereotypes is necessary. Even though there are opportunities to reflect on the meanings of everyday practices that imprint on gender identity –whether at school, at home or in other social spaces– it must be acknowledged that most societies are immersed in a culture which resists changing. There is a strong alienation from the recognition that boys and girls are products of a culture, where through the social relations in which they socialize, building references to male and female, make it difficult to deconstruct stereotypes of what is or is not allowed for boys and girls (Silva & Luz, 2010). Madureira (2007, cited by Freire et al., 2009) states that discourses of ambiguity can be seen as constructive, because the ambiguity marks the transition gap and provides for emergency changes with regard to female and male conceptions, either in the roles of mothers and fathers, who have assumed new configurations within the family, whether in boys and girls behavior who, through a more equitable education, can grow healthier.

With these new family configurations, gender roles between parents and children are no longer defined. The division of housework, child care and financial collaboration of women in the child's support, led to a change of the traditional family authority, from mothers and fathers to sons and daughters. This generates a conflict between the necessary authority of the parents and permissiveness that affect the children's welfare (Meira, 2008). On the other hand, this lack of limits does not include gender issues, where many children still suffer repression. Boys are gradually developing skills which are considered feminine, like playing kitchen by watching his father cooking, and experimenting and trying to be able to create their own generic identity. This reminds adults that the way these kids are being educated instead of limiting their initiatives and aspirations may help them to become more humane, free of prejudice and contributing to a more peaceful coexistence within societies (Vianna & Finco, 2009).

Therein lies the importance of playful games as a possible space of cultural transformation, as it provides a space for children to create, recreate and transform, a fact that could possibly lead them to be producers of adult culture, not passive consumers (Cruz & Palmeira, 2009).

The issue of paternity presents a plurality of experiences of being a father, as well as the representation of masculinity, crossed by the socio-economic aspects, gender, ethnic, generational, primary experiences, life cycles, besides the children gender and ages. The focus here has remained, however, in seeking the understanding of the paternal role in relation to contemporary requirements and locates the barriers to greater involvement of fathers with sons and daughters. So, thinking about education in a generational perspective means to root it in its social belonging, giving it the broadest sense, strongly based on the movement of social interactions (Tomizaki, 2010).

In this chapter to incite reflection and awareness by parents increasingly active in parenting, mothers and educators who care about children and even society as a whole, and the need to avoid gender differences which trigger inequality of rights. By this way the promotion of biopsychosocial health can be aimed. And by living with the child, ranging from moments of basic needs to recreational activities, mothers, fathers and other caregivers,

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promote an excellent opportunity for children to internalize the principles of equity. In addition, children can learn to respect and live with differences of gender, race, creed, culture, along with the construction of notions with tolerance and desire for peace (Gomes, 2008). Only then can education serve as a basis for freedom, where children may be able to experience masculinity and femininity with less oppositional dualism.

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