

MEN AND FATHERHOOD

New Forms
of Masculinity
in Europe

Artūras Tereškinas
and Jolanta Reingardienė,
editors



Social Research Center of Vytautas Magnus University
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Center for Equality Advancement

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Contents

Introduction: Subverting Hegemonic Masculinity	5
1. Men on Paternity Leave in Lithuania: Between Hegemonic and Hybrid Masculinities	11
<i>Artūras Tereðkinas</i>	
2. Fatherhood in Question: Attitudes of Lithuanian Politicians and State Officers Towards Paternity Leave	38
<i>Jolanta Reingardienė</i>	
3. Fathers on Parental Leave in Denmark	59
<i>Kenneth Reinicke, Franz Cybulski, Lea Vedel Drews and Bo Wagner S,rensen</i>	
4. Atypical Choice: Perceptions of Paternity Leave Amongst Maltese Public Sector Male Employees and Department Heads	92
<i>Celia Callus</i>	
5. Can Men Do It? On Men, Caring and Gender Equality in an East/West European Perspective	114
<i>Þystein Gullvåg Holter</i>	
Contributors	147

Introduction: Subverting Hegemonic Masculinity

Currently, the European Union institutions pay an increasing attention to men and masculinity problems, particularly in the new EU states. Within the framework of the European Commission project “Modern Men in Enlarged Europe: Developing Innovative Gender Equality Strategies,” largely financed by the European Commission, Danish, Icelandic, Lithuanian and Maltese scholars have completed a comprehensive research on masculinity and fatherhood. Focusing on paternity leave, they have examined the changes in traditional fatherhood in these countries. Most articles except one in this collection have been written in the context of this project.

The relations between men and women have been historically characterized by the doctrine of separate spheres (public and private) as an ideologically and socially constructed form of gender existence. In this form, masculinity is associated with the public sphere and its rewards, and women are naturally connected to the private space and family life. For almost a half of the 20th century, feminists severely criticized the separation and opposition of the public and private spheres, and the meanings and values associated with them. They thought that only by deconstructing this dichotomy and normative meanings of hegemonic masculinity and femininity it is possible to

liberate society from prejudices and ideas about the dominant gender order, the women's situation in the public sphere and the men's role in a family life.

The project "Modern Men in Enlarged Europe: Developing Innovative Gender Equality Strategies" has also attempted to achieve similar objectives: to create a sustainable change in gender identities by encouraging men to embrace new and modern gender roles and to overcome gender stereotypes. We used parental leave as a means to challenge hegemonic gender identities and create new images of men as caregivers in different European countries.

As our research demonstrates, some care-giving men both perpetuate or resist hegemonic masculinity in their interactions with women, children, friends and strangers. Childcare enables men to construct a new attitude towards gender dichotomies and at least partially to reconstruct them. It can be argued that fathers who participated in this project represent the model of generative parenting characterized by the equal sharing of housework, child care and family responsibilities among both partners.

In his article "Men on Paternity Leave in Lithuania: Between Hegemonic and Hybrid Masculinities," Artūras Tereškinas examines how Lithuanian fathers construct their masculinity in relation to fathering practices. Focusing on a group of fathers on paternity leave, he analyzes the meanings and experiences of fatherhood as a part of the sociology of masculinity. The article is based on 11 semi-structured and 1 focus-group interviews with Lithuanian men who have used or were using their right to paternity leave.

Do men on paternity leave integrate their gender conceptions into the hegemonic form of masculinity or do they construct a new type of masculinity based on their own child-caring experiences? How do paternity practices express masculinity and how are they related to hegemonic masculinity? Tereškinas argues that the examined men describe a "hybrid" model of fatherhood that combines the idea of a man as a breadwinner and the notion of a father actively participating in family life and child care. However, these ideals of a breadwinner man and a caring father create significant tensions for men as they seek to perform their masculinities.

In her article entitled “Fatherhood in Question: Attitudes of Lithuanian Politicians and State Officers Towards Paternity Leave,” Jolanta Reingardienė analyzes the opinions of Lithuanian politicians and state officers about a more active participation of men in family life and a means for the improvement of legal regulation of childcare in Lithuania. Her analysis is based on the survey data collected in 2004. According to Reingardienė, Lithuanian politicians and state officers cautiously yet more openly indicate that the state should be responsible for gender equality in a family. Almost half of the parliamentarians agree that the legalized participation of men in child care could help to achieve real gender equality in Lithuania. The politicians in the sample also tend to acknowledge that not an individual right of fathers to paternity leave (the experience of Scandinavian countries) or the increase of a financial compensation but the promotion of a family-friendly work environment and stronger support and obligation of employers to parents on leave could return men to their families.

Kenneth Reinicke, Franz Cybulski, Lea Vedel Drews and Bo Wagner Sørensen argue that contemporary fatherhood and masculinity differ increasingly from traditional hegemonic masculinity according to which men are primarily responsible for ensuring the financial basis of the family. Their article “Fathers on Parental Leave in Denmark,” based on the interviews with 15 Danish men and 8 employers, shows that many men’s ideas about fatherhood and family responsibility tend to revolve around such aspects as close contact and involvement with children. However, it seems that men do not acknowledge fully the significance of gender for their decisions concerning the child, parental leave and domestic affairs. The article also demonstrates that the issue of parental leave may cause a conflict of interest between an employer and an employee although the majority of employers in this study emphasize that parental leave is unproblematic for them.

In her article “Atypical Choice: Perceptions of Paternity Leave Amongst Maltese Public Sector Male Employees and Department Heads,” Celia Callus states that the decision to take paternity leave in

Malta is very infrequent. This may be due to strong traditional family gender roles and to the fact that men are generally the highest income earners in the household. The fathers interviewed during this study commented that while communicating their decision to take paternity leave to their family and friends they were met with surprised but not wholly negative reactions. They themselves had very positive experiences of paternity leave and viewed it as a special period that enabled them to enjoy their children and home and to appreciate other life priorities than work. According to Callus, the interviewed department heads felt that paternity leave was very disruptive to their organisations' operations. However, both male and female employees who took a parental leave option were thought to mature as a result of this experience.

Øystein Gullvåg Holter's article "Can Men Do It? On Men, Caring and Gender Equality in an East/West European Perspective" concludes our collection. It focuses on broader issues of gender and masculinity in a sociological and historical perspective. Arguing that the role of gender equality has been underestimated in social development theory, Holter discusses men's gender change and their increasing participation in parental leave reforms. Using socioeconomic and demographic material, the article offers an original perspective on the contemporary East-West dimension in gender equality advances in Europe. According to Holter, the misuse of 'gender equality' terminology in the Soviet period combined with extra burdens on women has hindered the development of real gender equality. It also can explain the current state of relative family/gender conservatism in Eastern Europe. The Norwegian sociologist argues that an active parental leave and reform policy to enlarge men's gender-equal options as part of a gender equality strategy are necessary for post-Soviet and post-Communist countries.

Policy frameworks shape the choices men make as fathers and foster certain kinds of identities and interests. Public discourses create hegemonic ideologies around fatherhood which can enable or constrain fathers. Therefore, the dissemination of the discourse of nurturing fatherhood can provide fathers with discursive resources

to make claims upon their employers, colleagues and relatives (Hobson 2002). To transform the notion of fatherhood in Europe, it is necessary to concentrate on the benefits of nurturing fathers for children, fathers themselves and gender equality. The emphasis on male nurture is important in changing gender relations and men's attitude towards women and their role in society.

It is obvious that meaningful subversion of dominant forms of masculinity associated with breadwinning, economic autonomy, heterosexuality, aggression and toughness remains difficult, given their privileging within current social arrangements. However, fissures within hegemonic masculinity do permit acts and discourses that introduce oppositional knowledge and may reconfigure public and private spaces, and open new possibilities for challenging traditional patterns of gender performances (Brickell 2000: 39-40).

A. TEREDKINAS, J. REINGARDIENĒ

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1

Men on Paternity Leave in Lithuania: Between Hegemonic and Hybrid Masculinities

ARTŪRAS TEREDKINAS

Introduction

This article examines the Lithuanian fathers on paternity leave as a part of the sociology of masculinity and attempts both to grasp the complexity of fathers' experience and to draw trajectories for the social politics of fatherhood. The article is based on 11 semi-structured and 1 focus-group interviews with Lithuanian men who have used or were using their right to paternity leave. The interviews were conducted within an international project "Modern Men in Enlarged Europe: Developing Innovative Gender Equality Strategies" financed by the EU Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality and the Government of the Republic of Lithuania.

During the interviews, we focused on the following thematic guidelines: 1) Fathers' decision to take paternity leave, obstacles and reactions from the environment; 2) paternity leave versus a paid job; 3) relationship to a partner and a child/children during paternity leave; and 4) relationship between paternity and masculinity. The conducted interviews revealed the motives of the men who have chosen paternity leave, their attitude to the reactions of employers, co-workers, friends and acquaintances. They also enabled us to grasp the ways in which the fathers articulated their masculinities.

Paternity Leave: Legal Situation and Statistical Data

In the laws of the Republic of Lithuania regulating paternity/maternity leave, the term 'parental leave' does not exist. Instead maternity/paternity benefit and childcare leave are used. The Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania provides for childcare leave which can be used, depending on a family decision, by the mother (or foster mother), the father (or foster father), the grandmother, grandfather or other relatives who take care of the child until he/she reaches the age of three. The Lithuanian legislation on Sickness and Maternity Social Insurance grants the mother between 126 and 140 calendar days before and after the birth on 100% salary compensation. After this period, any of the above mentioned family members is granted a maternity/paternity benefit until the child reaches the first year of age. As of March 1, 2004, parental benefit amounts to 70% of the caretaker's salary.

According to the data of the State Social Insurance Fund of the Republic of Lithuania (*Sodra*) from the first quarter of 2005, 98.8% of women and 1.2% of men received maternity/paternity benefits, or, in other words, took a parental leave. In previous years, the percentage of fathers on parental leave was even lower (see Table 2). In 2003 the average length of fathers' parental leave in Lithuania was 354.5 days (approx. 50 weeks) and the average of mothers' maternity leave – 411 days (59 weeks).

TABLE 1. The Distribution of Maternity/Paternity Benefits in Lithuania According to Gender (2000-2005) (Fathers on Parental Leave 2005: 11)

Year	Men		Women	
	N	%	N	%
2000	457	1.16	39051	98.84
2001	465	1.3	34887	98.7
2002	377	1.17	31731	98.83
2003	344	1.08	31320	98.92
2004	400	1.2	32837	98.8
2005	376	1.36	27337	98.64

Socio-Demographic Profiles of the Interviewed Fathers

Besides 15 interviews conducted, additional information related to the informants' social-demographic situation and their labour participation was collected by using a quantitative method (questionnaire survey). After each interview, informants had to fill out a questionnaire. During this quantitative research, the information about the informants and their partners' age, education, labour participation, the number of their children, the duration of paternity leave and their social guarantees was collected.

The average age of the interviewed fathers was 30 years. The youngest respondent was 23 years old, the oldest, 38 years old. More than half of the informants indicated that they had an unfinished high school education (2), high school education (4) or special high school education (3), the rest 6 had university education. All fathers were married. The average age of their partners was 29 years (the youngest was 20, the oldest, 38 years old). Their education was similar to the respondents'. Almost half of the women had university education (7), the rest, high school education (4) or special high school education (4).

The spectrum of the respondents' professional occupations were very broad: from an electrical technician to a driver, an assembler of ship electricity, a technologist of environment protection, an economist, an organizer of youth events, an university lecturer, a philologist, a doctor, a woodworker, an engineer-mechanic, a machinist, a carpenter and a welder-metalworker.

TABLE 2: Use of Parental Leave among the Interviewed Lithuanian Fathers (Fathers on Parental Leave 2005: 12)

Age	Level of Education	Position	Parental Leave Period	Children
30	Tertiary	Financier	59 weeks	2
28	Secondary	Machinist	24 weeks	2
29	Tertiary	Engineer-mechanic	36 weeks	1
30	Vocational	Manager	52 weeks	3

TABLE 2 CONTINUED

Age	Level of Education	Position	Parental Leave Period	Children
35	Vocational	Driver	46 weeks	2
34	Tertiary	Lecturer	28 weeks	2
30	Tertiary	Manager	32 weeks	2
38	Tertiary	Manager	26 weeks	3
24	Tertiary	Medical doctor	52 weeks	1
26	Secondary	Driver	32 weeks	1
33	Vocational	Electrician	26 weeks	3
25	Tertiary incomplete	Student	30 weeks	1
23	Vocational	Woodworker	52 weeks	1
34	Secondary	Machine operator	52 weeks	3
29	Vocational	Welder	52 weeks	2

All interviewed men indicated that they have been raising children of their own and their spouse (5 couples had one child, 5 couples, two, and other 5 couples, three children). Apart from their own children, one couple has been raising one foster child whose biological mother was a spouse. The average age of the youngest children was 12 months. There were 8 boys and 6 girls (one respondent did not indicate his child's gender). All fathers took paternity leave to care for their youngest child (only one father took paternity leave twice, i. e. he also took care of his older child for 3 months). In all cases, the men took paternity leave after the end of their spouses' maternity leave that on average lasted for 6 months. The average length of parental leave among the interviewed Lithuanian fathers was 40 weeks.

The interviewed men lived in the different regions of Lithuania: Vilnius (5), Kaunas (2), Klaipėda (2), Āiauliai (2), Panevėpys (2), Tauragė (1), and Pakruojis (1). The interviews were conducted during the period of December, 2004 – March, 2005. The State Social Insurance Fund Board of the Republic of Lithuania supplied us with information about the fathers with their own consent.

Fatherhood and Masculinity: Some Theoretical Notes

Fatherhood is a process related to the formulation of fatherhood practices determined by social traditions, values and norms. Analyzing the cultural coding of men as fathers, we must take into consideration not only the fathers' rights, duties, responsibilities and statuses but also the broad discursive terrain around fatherhood and fathers (Hobson and Morgan 2002: 10-11).

Fatherhood is formed by a variety of social institutions and discourses including the government, the legal system, medicine and public health, the mass media and the educational system (Lupton, Barclay 1997). These institutions and discourses reflect deeply engrained values, influence public policy and affect the private lives of many men.

During the last five decades, Western academic research paid a considerable attention to men, family and fatherhood (Marsiglio 1995; Connell 1987; Adams and Savran 2002; Dienhart 1998). Feminist studies and the sociology of family have documented a rise in theoretical and empirical work on motherhood and fatherhood (Adams 1995; Marsiglio 1993). Contemporary scholarship on parenthood focuses on how women and men express and practice their femininity and masculinity through their participation in parenting and family work (Gerson 1993).

Although masculinity studies is gaining an increasing popularity in the world, men and masculinity still remain a rather new research subject in Lithuania. First of all, very little attention has been paid to the relationship between masculinity and fatherhood. On the other hand, in Lithuania, as elsewhere, considerably more attention has been paid to the social construction of motherhood and femininity than to fatherhood and masculinity. While motherhood practices continue to be extensively documented in scholarly literature, relatively little light is thrown upon the experiences of being a father, particularly in the context of post-Soviet developing countries.

Before analyzing the experiences of the Lithuanian fathers, it is necessary to define several categories useful to our analysis. First of all, the term “masculinity” is regarded here as a cultural construction and not a biological trait. Masculinity is not only socially constructed but also performative: we not only perform a constructed role but we also play with and within it, and this means that masculine role is fluid, contingent and not fixed (Berger, Wallis, Watson 1995). Secondly, there exist several forms of masculinity in each society of which one is predominant. It is hegemonic/normative masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is “a culturally dominant construction of masculinity, a hegemonic discourse” (Connell 1993: 597). In contemporary Western societies including Lithuania, hegemonic masculinity is seen as based on heterosexuality, economic autonomy, being able to provide for one’s family, being successful, keeping one’s emotions in check, and not doing anything considered feminine. Hegemonic masculinity norms emphasize values such as courage, aggression, autonomy, mastery, technological skill, adventure, and toughness in mind and body (Connell 1995). On the other hand, emotions such as nurturing, receptivity, empathy, and compassion are experienced as inconsistent with the power of manhood and are ascribed to femininity (Connell 1987).

Work and “breadwinner’s” role are regarded as a major basis of hegemonic masculinity and masculine identity in general. Child care is usually assumed to be a gendered occupation, a ‘woman’s work.’ Hence, the hegemonic ideology of fatherhood reflects the ‘traditional’ notion of the breadwinning role that defines a good father as a good provider whose wife does not have to work (Griswold 1993). A good provider has a separate role in the family and may not engage in activities associated with child care or motherhood (Wilkie 1993).

Relation to a Child/Being a Good Father

Since the 1980s and 1990s, “new fatherhood” has been widely discussed in the U.S. and Western Europe: new expectations related to the role

of men in families, their active participation in a family life and more equal sharing of family responsibilities with women interested scholars, policy makers and fathers themselves. They contrasted it with the model of “absent fatherhood” and “absent father” emphasizing that a new participating father brought a lot of rewards for families, children and society. These discussions aimed at establishing new fatherhood practices and at demonstrating that men as fathers could be warm, sensitive and enthusiastic about child care.

However, not everyone accepted the above ideas about new fatherhood. Almost at the same time when the discussions about a new father proliferated, there arose, in the West, particularly in the U.S., a strong opposition to the advocacy of new fatherhood. Anti-feminist movement that attempted to return the traditional role of a father to men argued that men would feel better in both family and society if they retained the traditional role of a family-head and leader in their families (Blankenhorn 1996).

Despite the intensive discussions and disagreements about the role of a father and fatherhood, both sides of this discussion noticed that the so-called fatherhood culture had been changing quicker than the behavior of fathers. The ideology of fatherhood has changed not only because of fathers’ behavior but also because of the practices of motherhood. Western women became increasingly involved in labor market, consequently men had to share more family responsibilities. But, according to family sociologists, a real participation of men in a family life, increased very insignificantly. Perhaps a “new father” does not exist at all?

The discussed opposite attitudes towards fatherhood and very slowly changing fatherhood practices reveal the gap between attitudes and behavior, representations and reality, ideology and action. One of the main problems encountered by fatherhood scholars has been the dominant reductive model of bad (traditional) and good (new) fatherhood. As an alternative to this model, some researchers suggested to draw a sociological division between the identity (what fathers are) and behavior (what they do) (Haywood and Mac an Ghail 2003: 52).

In this article, we will discuss both fathers' identity (good fathers) and their behavior (fathering practices), therefore, it will be impossible to avoid this division between a good and bad father dominant in social sciences.

What is a good father in Lithuania? What fathering norms are acceptable and unacceptable in the country?

The interviewed fathers very rarely had a clearer model of what it meant to be a good father. They usually did not think of it. Some argued that each man understood fatherhood differently:

I think that every father wants to be good, although everyone understands it in his own way. One wants to earn more money, to provide for his family, another wants to communicate with his child more. I don't know...
(Titas)¹

In the responses of most men, closeness, care and contact with children were emphasized as the most important aspects of a good father:

A good father is one who takes care of his child and loves her very much.
(Tomas)

Perhaps a good father pays more attention to his child... Well, it is difficult to say what good father is. [Perhaps] a good father is one who feels connected to his child. (Andrius)

To play with a child, to teach her various games, well, to be busy with a child. It is not that you bought and gave something to her and you're already a good father; as if I bought a chocolate and left it to her... No.
(Rimas)

Well, I think that the most important thing is to spare some time to your child; you must find time for him. It isn't the way that you come home tired and say to your child "Go away!" No. You must spend time with him. (Titas)

¹ The respondents' language has not been corrected.

[A good father] should pay a lot of attention to his child, to spend much time with him and be good. (Aurimas)

In their responses, the fathers emphasized that it is very healthy when a father spends a lot of time with children even if he is not on paternity leave. After experiencing paternity leave, the interviewed fathers realized the importance of being with a child: they felt that they had lost something if they failed to spend most of the day with their children (Dainius). Although in most cases the fathers did not problematise their relationship with children, friendship and constant communication with children were regarded as very pleasant things:

A communication with a child is the most pleasant time. (Paulius)

While being on paternity leave, fathers enjoyed pleasures, privileges and rewards of establishing a close relationship with children. Their relationship with children has transformed their attitude towards their family and children who became the main things in the fathers' lives.

In talking about their communication with children, some fathers emphasized patience as a feature of a good father:

A good father... one who has patience is a good father. (Jurgis)

Others thought that from the children's point of view a better father was lenient one:

If you look from a child's point of view, a better father is one who scolds a child less and lets him run free... These are attitudes towards the raising of a child... (Paulius)

Still others argued that a good father was one who provided for his family, fed and took care of his children in any possible way (Matas). Thus, besides a constant contact and communication with children, the breadwinner role was also touched upon in the fathers' responses. In most interviews, the ideas of a participating and nurturing father and a breadwinner man were inseparably related.

A good father actively participates in family life, shares responsibilities and cooperates with his partner in housework. However, it

is necessary to emphasize that in discussing a good father, the respondents concentrated more on children (taking a good care of them, playing with them etc.) and less on housework. Food preparation, doing laundry and cleaning closely related to child care seemed secondary to them. Most fathers defined their normal day with a child as passive during which not too much happened. Their day would pass as usual with such activities as a child's sleep, feeding, bathing etc. It seemed that everything happened spontaneously. Some fathers said that they missed more difficult "manly" work or more intensive activity.

For a part of the fathers, paternity leave presented some kind of respite from their professional careers but for most it was very difficult work. The latter emphasized that to look after a child was much harder than to keep a job because of immense responsibility for a child.

It is possible to argue, on the basis of the interviews, that child care and responsibility for a child positively affected fathers, helped them discover the emotional and nurturing sides of their personalities. Child care also raised men's awareness of children's needs. Paternity leave forced men to slow down a bit and realize who and what they were (the focus interview).

Did the respondents think of themselves as good fathers? Most men regarded themselves good fathers, some doubted arguing that they were neither good nor bad. Responding to the question about the relation of paternity leave to being a good father, the respondents divided up in half. The first part of the fathers indicated that paternity leave could help men to become good fathers; the second half stated that paternity leave was merely a natural expression of being a good father.

Masculinity

What norms of masculinity dominate in the Lithuanian society? The 2002 representative survey "The Crisis of Male Roles in Lithuania" commissioned by the Men's Crisis and Information Center demon-

strated that traditional gender attitudes prevailed in the Lithuanian society. According to this survey, the main features of a “normal” or “real” man emphasized by both men and women were (in order of importance): 1) his ability to earn money for his family (72% of respondents); 2) a man’s capability to do male housework like home-improvement and technical jobs (67% of respondents); 3) care and upbringing of his children (67%); and 4) his taking care of his woman (66%). Among most important features of a “normal” man (in order of importance), men themselves distinguished the ability to earn money, the care of a woman and children and the capability to do male housework. For women, the most important things were the man’s earning power, his sensitivity and understanding, his housework abilities and child care. It is obvious that both men and women’s responses were very similar except one feature that women mentioned, i. e. men’s sensitivity and understanding. In the male respondents’ view, the latter trait was not essential to a man. This survey demonstrates that both the Lithuanian women and men consider the breadwinning role as the most important feature of a “real” man. (Tereškinas 2004: 17-18). It is not surprising since, according to Barbara Hobson, “men’s authority in the family and male breadwinning are at the core of masculinity politics” (Hobson 2002: 5).

The identity of men as fathers is closely related to their male identities. In Jeff Hearn’s words, fathers and fatherhood are “intimately connected with the social production and reproduction of men, masculinities and men’s practices” (Hearn 2002: 245). The social politics of fatherhood is inseparable from masculinity politics.

The logical connection between the topics of masculinity and fatherhood allows us to ask how men define their masculinities when they take on the role of primary caregiver for their children. What changes do men and their masculinity experience when they temporarily leave the work and enter the home to assume child-caring responsibilities? Do they integrate their gender conceptions into the hegemonic form of masculinity or do they construct a new type of masculinity based on their own child-caring experiences? How does the concept of care conform to masculine ideals? Do men consider

paternity leave a threat to their masculinity? Focusing on these questions, we will examine how fathers define their masculine care-giving identities and how they create their masculine form of nurturing and caring.

All fathers that participated in the project represented traditional hegemonic masculinity since they were closely connected to the labor market and their identities were based on their work and earning power.

For most fathers, paternity leave did not present any threat to their masculinity because, according to them, it was neither masculine nor feminine. Some respondents thought that this leave did not have any impact on their masculinity at all. According to one father, paternity leave seemed masculine since it was a normal thing. Furthermore, in his view, his and his wife's rights were equal (Tomas). Another man argued that when he took care of his child, "he did not think that he was feminine" (Paulius). As the interviews demonstrated, all fathers did not doubt their masculine identity in spite of skeptical and sometimes negative responses of surrounding people. According to Rokas,

I don't think that a child could harm a man, a father; I don't really think... To look after a child is a masculine activity since not each man can do it. It is some kind of challenge...

Hence, paternity leave did not harm the image of a real man. Men could express their masculinity by taking care of children. Comparing a child care to a real job, one of the respondents remarked that

...spending a day with your child and activities related to his care are similar to a job in a firm because you have to plan everything anyway, to act and to perform well. [Child care] is the same work, only the work environment and results are different. But it does not harm masculinity. (Paulius)

However, surrounding people, mostly relatives and colleagues, thought of paternity leave differently. According to one of the respondents, some people considered a father on paternity leave as feminine (one who "became a woman"):

Somehow they ascribe you more to women. In their eyes, you don't seem like a man... well, to tell colloquially, you become a milksop. (Rimas)

Those people could not imagine that men could take care of children because there were very few men who did it. In this regard, as one father argued, the Lithuanian society was rather traditional:

I don't think that anything will change soon. If a man is with a pram, he doesn't belong to the company of those men who only look for drink-buddies... If you can't drink with them, you cease to be their friend... (Juras)

Another respondent stated that some outsiders regarded a father on paternity leave as a not real man or a gay (he referred to “the year of the cock;” the “cock” in the Lithuanian prison jargon is a derogative term for a passive gay). However, all fathers attempted not to pay attention to negative reactions from the environment arguing that they were the problem of the surrounding people.

In some fathers' opinion, one could not divide problems related to children into female or male. Men could take care of children the same way women could:

Well, I don't think that it is a female work and that there is any difference... A man can do many things but he simply doesn't want to do them. (Titas)

I think we also can do it [to take care of children] well but, in most people's view, it is a mother's work. (Rokas)

However, analyzing the men's answers in this regard we encounter a paradox: although the respondents did not think of child care as an exclusively female activity, some of them compared fatherhood to being a mother. Thus, they gendered child care as feminine:

When a mother feels some responsibilities, a father on paternity leave also feels them... It doesn't change anything, it's just a formality. And you feel yourself like a mother anyway and you have to spend a lot of time with your child and to do much... A good father should correspond

to a mother as much as it is possible, and he should be as responsible and attentive and feel the same obligation to a child as a mother.
(Paulius)

It is obvious that the interviewed fathers live in a culture which traditionally associates child care with women and in which traditional images of motherhood are idealized. In most fathers' view, women were better at taking care of children since child care was inborn to them while men had to learn it. Although the respondents did not regard child care as a threat to their masculinity and as a solely female activity, they still operated within the framework of gender dichotomies in which fatherhood was described as being a mother. This paradox is also confirmed by the Lithuanian opinion polls. The 2001 research entitled "The Evaluation of the Population Policy" in which 1400 respondents took part demonstrated that most Lithuanian people (80% of men and 82% of women) thought that "nobody could take care of a child better than his mother." On the other hand, slightly more respondents thought that men could also successfully fulfill this duty traditionally assigned to women. 86% of men and 92% women agreed with the statement that "both a father and a mother can take care of their children very well." There was no clear age differentiation although younger respondents were more inclined to think that both parents could take care of their children equally well (Stankūnienė 2003: 117).

Asked whether they conformed to the image of a traditional man, most fathers said that they did not or did very little:

[I don't conform] to the image of a traditional Lithuanian man. But, I think, with regard to other countries... I am traditional. There is the quite different social environment, financial situation and employers' attitude towards women [in Lithuania]: they constantly ask whether she is pregnant or not and whether she will take a maternity leave. They expect from a woman to take a leave but they don't expect it from a man.
(Paulius)

... I don't conform. When I was working, I didn't notice that there were a lot of men, in our village, that didn't have time for children. My wife

has a girlfriend and they're in a very good relationship, she and her husband has a two-year old child; there is only one-day difference in age between our child and theirs. But I didn't notice that her husband would play with his child; he's interested only in work, work, work... (Rimas)

In answering the question about a traditional man, some men hesitated for a while and even contradicted themselves. At the beginning of the interview they would argue that they did not differ from “normal” or traditional men because they had been on paternity leave, in the end they would argue that only modern, bold men participating actively in a family life would dare to take paternity leave. Non-modern or traditional men would never do it (the focus interview).

Asked whether they conformed to the image of a traditional man, most fathers said that they did not or did very little. In most cases, the complex problem of masculinity remained poorly articulated. But the strongest tension related to their masculinity, i. e. the tension between a breadwinner and a nurturer, emerged in most interviews.

Decision to Take Paternity Leave

As the Lithuanian public opinion polls demonstrate, in Lithuanian men are associated with the role of breadwinner and women, with the role of house keeper. The identity of women is related to nurture and care, and the identity of men, with being in the public sphere. The researches “Woman in the Lithuanian Society” conducted in 1994 and 2000 show that Lithuanian women still carry out most child-care chores (Stankūnienė 2003: 117-18). According to the 2004 research “Public Opinion about Gender Policies of the EU and Lithuania,” 62% of Lithuanians thought that women had to take care of pre-school children. The similar percentage of men and women expressed this opinion (55% of men and 49% of women). On the other hand, even 32% of Lithuanians could not decide who, men or women, had to take care of children during the first years of their lives. In Auðra

Maslauskaitė's view, these numbers witness the change in public opinion in Lithuania (Maslauskaitė 2004: 44-45).²

Why did, in this context, the interviewed fathers decide to take paternity leave? What were the main factors determining their decision?

According to most interviewed fathers, one of the most important factors to take paternity leave was financial. For most fathers, paternity leave was more profitable than for their spouses. Hence, paternity leave was a pragmatic decision:

We took the longer leave just for bigger money and for an easier life. All for our little one. (Tomas)

First of all, this leave was more profitable for me since my salary was larger, since now [paternity] benefit is calculated according to your salary... (Juras)

I had many opportunities to take this leave: my salary allowed me to do it since I get very good money. If you compare my salary with my wife's, she would have received nothing. Neither could she have finished her studies, nothing. (Tadas)

According to the respondents, a child required additional income; therefore, the financial situation of a family after the birth of a child became particularly important. The interviews demonstrate that financial reasons are particularly significant in Lithuania in which a part of population receives an unofficial salary ("salary in an envelope"). Hence, those who earn less officially do not have powerful incentives to take paternity leave.

Three respondents mentioned different reasons for their decision. One said that he took paternity leave only to have a personal experience of what it meant to take care of a child full time (Andrius).

² In her article, Auðra Maslauskaitė quotes the data from the research "Public Opinion about Gender Policies of the EU and Lithuania" conducted in July, 2004. The TNS Gallup conducted the field research: 500 respondents of 15-74 years of age were questioned. For the results of this research, see <http://www.gap.lt/vnaes>

Another took the leave because of the critical situation in his study at a university. And the third respondent took paternity leave because of an inborn defect of his child.

Although in most cases the financial factor influenced the men's decision most, it could be argued that another reason for paternity leave was their caring attitude towards their partners. Several men said that in taking paternity leave they considered their partners' needs and wishes. They simply wanted them to take a well-deserved rest:

...the wife spends the first year with a child, right? Say, she gets tired; simply, she gets bored, she feels that she wants something else; thus, it is even good that she will return to work... Say, perhaps it was time for her to go back to society, right?... And it turned out that we shared these responsibilities in half: first time she took a leave, second time I did. And now it is difficult to say whether it was a financial motive to take a leave or just to let her get some rest...(the focus interview)

...this father's attitude towards paternity leave can't be separated from his general attitude to a person with whom he lives, I mean, his wife. You always think how busy she is, how she feels, how tired she is, and you make a very obvious decision. That a man would want to take paternity leave is a nonsense, but, I think, everything should be negotiated with a child's mother... You must see whether she's busy or not, tired or not, whether she has a possibility to be with a child... (Paulius)

Whose initiative influenced the decision to take paternity leave most? Several men thought of paternity leave first, and their partners approved of this idea. Others were persuaded by their wives who knew about this legal opportunity. According to most respondents, however, both partners decided that men had to take paternity leave.

Reactions from the Environment

Reactions from the environment can be divided into four groups: 1) employers; 2) the State Social Insurance Fund Board of the Republic of Lithuania (*Sodra*); 3) colleagues; and 4) relatives and strangers.

According to the informants, for most Lithuanian people, paternity leave was an unfamiliar thing. Some of people did not understand what it was and thought of it as nonsense.

Because work is an essential part of masculine identity, the employers' reactions are particularly important for men. Although some fathers defined their reactions as "normal," some employers did not know about the law on child care leave and were very surprised:

Well, I went to the executive director and said that I would take a paternity leave. "What?" he asked and was very surprised. He said: "How could a man take a childcare leave?" He has never encountered such a thing. (Titas)

[My boss] said: "I hear of such a thing for the first time, but if it is necessary, then it is ok." (Tomas)

...there were a number of employers who would shout: "Oh!" "No!" "What?!" But others reacted ok, normally, they understood. (Aurimas)

It is necessary to emphasize here that the respondents' decision to take a paternity leave enabled the employers to find out about the existing law on childcare leave.

More than half of the respondents did not encounter any problems with regard to their employers. Most employers did not resist the men's decision to take paternity leave. Only very few employers were unhappy and wanted to stop the men from leaving their jobs. However, they did not have a choice:

Only I'd say ... my bosses didn't want to let me go. ... They summoned me to the office [and tore down my request for a paternity leave]. An administrator registered me ... my request... but the vice-director called me and said: "Tadas, come to work!" And I said: "Why? I have already written everything." And he responded: "Today is a work-day..." (Tadas)

One of the respondents noted that he had encountered an indirect resistance of his employer against his decision because it was so difficult, in a small team, to replace him with someone else.

How did their colleagues react to the men's decision to take paternity leave? According to the respondents, in spite of the fact that

their colleagues were surprised by their decision, the positive reactions among them prevailed for several reasons: first of all, the fathers had a high esteem at their workplace; and, secondly, females comprised the majority of their colleagues:

Well, some didn't even believe that I was leaving; they asked for how many months I would be on leave; I told them that I would be with my child for half a year; then they responded in such an interesting way: "Oh, you would be on maternity leave!" Well, some reacted normally but some don't believe to this day, they think that I took a leave to go abroad, that [my paternity leave] was some kind of cover-up. Well, I'd say that perhaps most didn't believe me... (Rokas)

There was a wonder among [my colleagues] but one colleague of mine had already been on paternity leave, so I didn't have big problems with it. He was with his child until the age of three, and now his child is six years old. (Titas)

One of the fathers was supported by his colleagues although his employers did not want him to take a leave. Some respondents remarked that they had not heard of any reactions from their co-workers. Some fathers mentioned that at first colleagues and co-workers would ridicule them and call them "mothers":

Well, at first it was so funny to them.... They would make fun of me at first. I would go to work for some time, I had some matters to settle, so my co-workers would ask me: "How is our young mommy doing?" But after that they got used to it, they calmed down somehow... (Juras)

Well, how should I say it? At work my co-workers are laughing, they say: "He left for maternity leave." They laughed in a friendly way and that was it. Now, for instance, when I go to work, they say ridiculing me: "How is your maternity leave?" But I can see that they envy me... (Titas)

Only at the State Social Insurance Fund Board of the Republic of Lithuania (*Sodra*) fathers encountered most problems. Although the 2002 Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania provides both mothers and fathers with the right to parental leave, officers of the *Sodra* were completely uninformed and ignorant of this law:

It would happen that you would go to the Sodra and would say that you wanted documents... for paternity leave... [they would say]: "I would ask another officer; I know nothing about it. The lack of information. (the focus interview)

When I was, for instance, at the Sodra, I had to take care of my documents at Šiauliai Sodra, [I could see] those big eyes of female officers. They would say: "What? What paternities do you want? We hear about it for the first time!" I was sent to a different floor in which the head of the office was located. (Rimas)

Officers' negative attitude towards fathers was prevalent. According to Rimas, at one of the departments of the *Sodra*, the chief scolded him that he wanted to take paternity leave only because of money and that he "wanted to make profit, to exploit the state." At a different department of *Sodra*, the same man felt like a criminal: "You sit in front of her and she looks at you ... like you were some kind of a criminal."

It is important to emphasize that most relatives and even strangers approved of the fathers on paternity leave:

Especially my friends' mothers supported me very much ... because they would say, briefly speaking: "If a father spends time with a child, then he will understand what it means for a mother to give birth to a child..." (Matas)

Their initial astonishment has eventually been replaced by their respect for these fathers (Tadas). For instance, women meeting a man with a child every day would call him an "exemplary father" (Paulius). As it is obvious from the respondents' answers, women supported them most.

Relations to Partners

The relationships between partners or spouses are one of the most important aspects in the life of an adult person: they not only help to express an individual identity but also guarantee the sense of social relations with other people. These relationships also reproduce

the cultural meanings of gender and confirm the models of femininity and masculinity (Stankūnienė 2003: 123). According to sociological research, the Lithuanian people emphasize quality in interrelations. Successful partnership is considered to be important for the Lithuanian people of different age groups (Stankūnienė 2003: 127-29). However, according to Auðra Maslauskaitė, traditional gender models in which men are associated with the public sphere and women, with the private space, and in which emotional work is women's prerogative contradict the ideal of positive partnership. These models hinder relationships based on equal emotional investment among partners (Stankūnienė 2003: 135-37).

How did the respondents describe their relationships with their wives and partners? Did paternity leave change them? How did the family relationships change in general?

Men articulated changes in their relationships with great difficulty. Most fathers stated that their relationships did not change at all. Everything remained the same because everything was almost perfect. One of the respondents remarked that, during his paternity leave, his wife had more free time and could go to sew and knit at the village community. Another man thought that although his relationship with his wife had not change, his wife was very happy with his paternity leave.

Only very few men explained more clearly what changed in their family relationship. According to Andrius, their relationships strengthened because now they shared the common problem – child care. In his words, “only later you realize that you're so rich and you live in concord with your wife when you raise a child. Personal relationships strengthen.” In Darius's opinion, during his paternity leave, he became calmer, less nervous and his better mood influenced his relationship with his spouse positively. Only one respondent indicated that paternity leave was a real test for his relationship with his wife. He did not explain what he meant by it but it can be inferred, from his speech, that he had in mind his difficult work of child care which sometimes remained undervalued by his wife.

In discussing the respondents' relationships with their partners, it is necessary to pay attention to housework. The research on time spending conducted by the Department of Statistics to the Government of the Republic of Lithuania demonstrate that daily women spend two hours more than men doing housework and family chores (Šemeta 2004). According to the 2004 sociological research "Public Opinion about Gender Policies of the EU and Lithuania," the absolute majority of women living with their partners most frequently prepared food, did dishwashing, bought products and tidied up rooms (Maslauskaitė 2004: 44).

Analyzing the fathers' responses it is possible to notice that the sharing of housework tasks affected, at least partially, the men's relationships with their partners and their fathering experiences on paternity leave in general. Was housework necessarily included into the fathers' conceptions of parental leave and into their child-caring activities? Did they share housework equally with their partners? Was housework considered as more important for women or men?

In this regard, the conducted interviews present a very contradictory view. Although there was no gain for masculinity in doing housework, a part of the respondents shared housework chores with their partners:

Essentially I do housework until the mother comes home. When she returns, I pass her the torch, I turn on the TV, now I need quiet. So, this is the way it is... I change the child's diapers ... and we leave laundry for the weekends; and I manage to tidy up rooms myself when I have time... (Rokas)

Now after the birth of our child, housework became neglected... Usually when the mother comes back from work and takes over the child I do housework since, as I said, she also has to work and has much less time than I do...(Paulius)

The latter respondents thought that housework was not gendered and that a man at home had to do everything. However, these fathers comprised the minority. Most men stuck to the traditional atti-

tude towards housework. They tended to do some household jobs but ascribed most responsibility for the whole household to their partners. Although men could help their wives to do laundry, dishwashing and tidy up rooms, men and women had their own housework spheres; for instance, men would do technical jobs and women would do laundry etc.:

Well, we got used to it, and now everything moves naturally. Housework belongs to my wife. For instance, shopping is mine...(Andrius)

In a word, my wife returns, I give her a couple of hours to herself but she will usually say: "Go, get rest!" And it means that I can go to a garage and do my own work [note: he does handicraft, takes care of a backyard, garage and arbor] (Matas)

Hence, most fathers on paternity leave thought of a child as a central matter around which housework had to be organized. The fathers were rather nurses and not masters of the house. They could not escape some household jobs but left others to their wives.

Although most respondents argued that their relationships with their partners had not changed, it can be inferred from the interviews that all of them were very sensitive to their partners. According to one father, men usually didn't want to take care of children but they knew that they had to take into account their partners' wishes, moods and needs. All decisions had to be coordinated with their spouses. It can be argued that the above mentioned contradiction between the ideal of successful partnership and the traditional cultural models of gender is not as strong in the respondents' lives as it is in the lives of most Lithuanian population.

It is necessary to emphasize that even if their relationship with their partners had not changed significantly, after the paternity leave, most fathers realized the importance of family in their lives. Their families became the most important thing to them:

Now somehow I notice things about which I didn't care before. I understood that there's nothing more important than my family... Before I didn't think so... I even didn't think of it at all... (Juras)

Conclusion: Masculinities in Tension

What conclusions can be drawn from the analysed interviews? How do paternity practices express masculinity and how are they related to hegemonic masculinity? Is active fatherhood a part of hegemonic masculinity? Can the respondents actively involved in child care be called “new men”? Or do they exhibit a form of subordinated/alternative masculinity?

In their responses, the interviewed fathers described pleasures related to paternity and child care. Several men emphasized that their attitude towards the importance of the family changed dramatically. Almost everyone of the interviewed fathers spoke of a significant change in their consciousness about the centrality of fatherhood and family in their lives. For some, paternity leave meant the acquisition of privileges and rights that had before belonged only to women.

As the interviews demonstrated, no father doubted his identity as a man despite skeptical and sometimes outright negative reactions from the environment. Being at home and taking care of a child, in the fathers' view, did not threaten their masculinity.

Describing the experiences of their paternity leave, the respondents expressed their relation to the whole gender order. Child care enabled men to construct a new attitude towards the gender dichotomies and at least partially to reconstruct them. The experience of these fathers allows us to re-evaluate the models of fatherhood and masculinity influencing the practices and behavior of Lithuanian men. Analyzing the experience of the fathers on paternity leave, it is possible to see that they describe a “hybrid” model of fatherhood that combines the idea of a man as a breadwinner and the notion of a father actively participating in family life and child care.

As the interviews demonstrate, the economic aspect of fatherhood is important for the welfare of families and children. The majority of the interviewed fathers have taken paternity leave only for economic reasons. In order to increase the economic benefits of paternity leave, it is necessary not only to raise a financial compensation for fathers on paternity leave but also to encourage a family-friendly

work environment and employers' sensitivity to men's involvement in family life and child care. It is also necessary to guarantee that fathers on paternity leave would suffer the least material and professional damages.

It can be argued that a both breadwinner man and a caring father come to strongly influence contemporary cultural ideology surrounding fatherhood in the world and Lithuania. Yet these fatherhood ideals do not easily co-exist in men's lives. As our research demonstrates, they create significant tensions for men as they seek to enact their masculine ideals. The fathers are faced with a difficult task of meeting the demands of being both the traditional hegemonic family provider and the more contemporary "caring father." However, the experience of the 15 interviewed fathers shows that men are able to effectively negotiate the tension between fathers' providing role and those aspects of the father's role that entail creating close bonds with children and caring for them.

Although, in all interviews, the breadwinning role is strongly emphasized and integrated into the perception of a good father, new features of a nurturing father allow the respondents to understand themselves as non-traditional or non-stereotypical men. The nurturing father and man are not an opposite of hegemonic conservative masculinity; it is rather a hybrid form of masculinity comprised of both a working and earning and a nurturing man. It can be argued that the interviewed fathers also represent the model of generative parenting described by scholars. This type of parenting includes the equal sharing of housework, child care and family responsibilities among both partners.

The conducted interviews also revealed tensions and difficulties related to paternity leave and to the model of a nurturing father chosen by the respondents. First, the respondents described child care during their paternity leave as a hard work that some of them would not want to repeat. Second, most men indicated that they encountered very negative reactions from the officers of the State Social Insurance Fund Board of the Republic of Lithuania (*Sodra*), the institution that had, in fact, to help them. And, third, without feeling any

threat to their masculinity, the respondents very frequently defined child care as a female activity. In talking of fatherhood, they usually emphasized an “inborn” connection of a child to a mother. It appears that, on the discursive level, the traditional attitude towards child care predominates. According to scholars, until nurture and child care are associated with femininity, male socialization will work against men and not on their behalf (Dowd 2000: 181).

To sum up, it is possible to argue that the discussed Lithuanian men both accept the dominant norms of masculinity and resist them. Participating actively in the reproduction of patriarchal norms, they deconstruct them by their nurturing behavior and child care. Although they gender child care as feminine, the respondents include it into hegemonic masculinity.

In his book *The Men and the Boys* Robert Connell writes that “Masculinities are often in tension, within and without. It seems likely that such tensions are important sources of change” (2000: 13). It is obvious that the tensions apparent in the masculinity of the fathers’ on paternity leave signify slow but important changes in the ideology of masculinity in Lithuania.

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2

Fatherhood in Question: Attitudes of Lithuanian Politicians and State Officers Towards Paternity Leave

JOLANTA REINGARDIENĖ

Introduction

Currently experts of gender studies and family sociologists pay a considerable attention to masculinity studies and the phenomenon of fatherhood. The improvement of women's situation in society is inevitably related not only to social visibility of their problems and strategies of empowerment in the public sphere but also to the transformation of the meanings of hegemonic masculinity and the more equal share of power among genders in society.

The findings of masculinity studies demonstrate that in contemporary societies the role of men in family life and particularly in child care becomes a more significant part of masculine self-realization than ever before. In the countries of advanced democracy, an increasing number of men actively participate in child care, use their right to paternity leave and easier accept career ambitions of their female partners. Men's participation in family life strengthens their intimate partnerships, creates a closer emotional bond with children and opens up new possibilities for women to contribute to the general social and economic welfare.¹ Without rejecting the basic idea of gender difference, masculine

¹ In its report on the 1999-2000 European labour market participation, the European Commission emphasized the fact that equal opportunities for men and

care can not be assessed by the standards of female care giving. The fathers shape their own masculine form of care differently from the mothers' interaction with a child. If accepted without prejudices and complexes, male care may gradually transform the norms of hegemonic masculinity and open new spaces for masculine self-expression.

It is likely that the advantages of male participation in child care are not yet fully realized and male ability to be a good caretaker is still much doubted in Lithuania. The current legal basis of Lithuania defines citizens' rights to childcare leave on the basis of family decision. Consequently, in almost 99% of cases, the right to parental leave has been used by Lithuanian women. As the experience of other countries demonstrates, individualized rights to childcare impact men's real participation in childcare and subsequently transform fatherhood towards the more inclusive behaviour model. Different researchers have pointed out (Brandth, Kvande 1998; Dienhart 1998; Hobson 2002; Fagan, Barnett 2003) that the participatory fatherhood has a potential to advance the welfare of not only an individual but also a family and a whole society. The positive impact of such a regulation has been most evident in Scandinavian countries famous for their achievements in the sphere of gender equality.

This article analyzes the opinions of Lithuanian politicians and state officers about a more active participation of men in family life and a means for the improvement of legal regulation of childcare in Lithuania. The analysis is based on the survey data collected in 2004.

Fatherhood Reconsidered

Men have traditionally expected to construct their identities as fathers through the hegemonic norms of masculinity and its connection to paid work (Townsend 2002). A "good father" has been de-

women are of economic necessity and that the gross national product of the European Union countries has been increasing by one fifth yearly (2,3%) because of the increasing women's participation in the labour market (Burneikienė et al, 2002).

defined as one who is a successful breadwinner and who complements his partner's responsibility for childcare. He is always distant, "helps out" occasionally and is not expected to take any direct responsibility for children's care, spend as much time with children, or develop the same type of close ties with children that mothers do (Brandth, Kvande 1998).

Following the constructionist standpoint on gender, a father is not something one *is*, but something one *becomes* through training and involvement (Lupton, Barclay 1997; Dienhart 1998; Haas, Hwang 2005). Gender differences in parenting behaviour may be attributed to social policies and practices that lead to a lack of opportunity for men to get involved in nurturing activities early in children's lives, as well as to cultural discourses that emphasize the importance of maternal care.

The current gender researchers argue that if women's role is redefined to include paid employment and access to other power resources, definitions of masculinity will be redefined as well. As Brandth and Kvande (1998: 295) have pointed out, "femininity and masculinity are not fixed and static roles that persons have, but dynamic relational processes." Women in contemporary societies share greater responsibility for breadwinning and work more outside the home; this allows them to relinquish primary responsibility for care giving, making it possible for men to share this area. However, research suggests that it is not always easy for women to relinquish this responsibility (Fagan, Barnett 2003). Rather than assume that some type of maternal instinct is creating this pattern, a social constructionist perspective would examine what alternatives for self-fulfilment women have outside the home. According to Risman who has studied single fathers (1998: 21), "if women and men were to experience identical structural conditions and roles expectations, empirically observable gender differences would dissipate."

In the Lithuanian context the essentialist attitudes towards gender roles, based on natural divisions of labour, are still very widespread in the population and enforced in the national welfare regime. Lithuanian social policy encourages families to follow a dual

breadwinner model but at the same time no legal measures are provided to advance an equal share of childcare. As Scandinavian experience demonstrates, social policy can be an important instrument for changing the traditional division of labour for childcare (Haas, Hwang 2005).

Research Methodology

The mailing survey of politicians and state officers (hereafter respondents) was carried out in March-April, 2005. The sample consists of 77 representatives² of different institutions (Lithuanian Parliament, Ministry of Social Security and Labour, Social Policy Group of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, Interdepartmental Commission of Equal Opportunities for Women and Men) directly related to both social policy and equal opportunities policy, decision making and monitoring of the State Program of Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in Lithuania, 2003-2004.

The sampled politicians represented almost all parliamentary groups. The groups of Liberals and Center (37%), of the Homeland Union (35%) and of the Social Democratic Party (33%) were best represented in the survey. The groups of National Farmers' (17%) and New Union (20%) were least active in the survey. Gender distribution of the respondents reflects the real proportions of women and men in the sampled institutions. Most male respondents represented the Parliament (31), the rest 8 – the Ministries. Most women in the survey were affiliated with the Ministries (20), 13 were members of the Parliament and 3 – experts at the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Lithuania. Women comprised 48% of all respondents.

² From 141 members of the Parliament, 45 (32%) participated in the survey. From 51 representative of the Ministries, 29 (57%) completed the questionnaire. 3 of 4 representatives of a social policy group at the Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania took part in the survey as well.

The Role of the State in Promoting Gender Equality

At the end of the 20th century, the new attitude towards the policy of EU with regard to equality between women and men, in other words, *gender mainstreaming*, became dominant. In Europe, gender equality was considered, for a long time, as equal treatment of genders, equal opportunities and rights. However, it was noticed eventually that this perception only strengthened the *status quo* of the traditional gender order but did not transform it. To guarantee gender equality, women's "problems" have been solved by providing legal basis for their integration into traditionally masculine structures and social organizations without questioning them. Therefore, the legal establishment of the principles of equal opportunities did not ensure real gender equality even in the countries of the advanced democracy.

Since the middle of the last decade gender mainstreaming policy has attempted to destroy the roots of structural gender inequality and integrate the equal opportunities thinking into various levels of political processes. It challenged the symbolic order of patriarchal relations and consistently attempted to reveal institutional mechanisms of the traditional gender contract and to undermine the structures of domination and oppression (Woodward 2003). A new gender contract has been offered based on individualism, independence and equal value of gender differences, according to which, both men and women are supposed to share not only the possibilities and rewards of the public sphere but also the responsibilities of housework.

Gender equality in the Lithuanian Law on Equal Opportunities (adopted in 1999) and the State Program on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, 2003-2004, is based declaratively on the principle of equal rights, responsibilities and possibilities for both genders in public spheres of life. The policy of gender equality strives for the equal sharing of power and influence among genders in economy, social life and decision-making processes. It declares publicly that the physiological differences cannot be the basis for discrimination of different genders and cannot have any negative influence for the living conditions of men and women. The above resolutions

conform to the international obligations of Lithuania and the legal norms of the EU. However, different obstacles impede the more radical transformation of institutional gendered order. Gender experts treat the implementation of the State program on gender equality ambiguously and often very critically.³ Although the formal side of the policy has not received much critical attention, the measures of its implementation and outcomes have been assessed with a great number of critical remarks. Experts point out that the program is very fragmentary and lacks a consistent strategy, stable financing and inter-institutional cooperation; the monitors are rather incompetent, insensitive to gender problems and to the social-structural reasons of gender inequality. Even if we have a necessary judicial base conforming to the EU standards and directives, in the current context, gender equality *de facto* still remains a very distant vision (Reingardienė 2004).

In the context of legal regulation of child care, the politicians and state officers were asked about the role of the state in securing equal opportunities in the private sphere at first. More than a half of the Parliament members agreed that the state should take the responsibility for providing gender equality in a family and society. Respectively fewer parliamentarians than the state servants agreed the state should regulate the sharing of gender roles among family partners. More traditional attitudes towards gender roles were evaluated unanimously: the majority in the sample agreed that men should not only support their families financially but also take care of children since the latter strengthened the family and reduced negative social phenomena. An active participation of men in both public and private life and child care was regarded as an expression of contemporary masculinity. Respectively, the respondents denied the attitude that the participation of men in the caregiving did not conform to the male nature and his responsibilities in society.

³ During the 2004 research “The EU Enlargement and its Commitment to Women in Lithuania,” 12 experts of gender policy in Lithuania (representatives of the Lithuanian Parliament, the Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsman, international organizations, women’s NGOs and scholars) were asked to evaluate the implementation of the policy of equal opportunities for women and men in Lithuania.

TABLE 1. Respondents' attitudes towards gender roles in family life and the role of the state in securing gender equality (gender distribution,%).

	Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Do not agree	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Increased participation of men incorporated into laws could push the Lithuanian society closer to real gender equality	35	35	31	32	34	33
When men not only support families financially but also take care of children, families strengthen and a number of negative social phenomena decreases	93	85	–	15	7	–
Priority in child care should be left to women	21	40	9	24	70	36
The state should be responsible for providing gender equality in family and society	38	44	34	31	28	25
In order for families to function normally, men should support them financially and women should take of children and household	3	18	19	29	78	53
Men's participation in the care of juvenile children does not conform to the male nature and men's responsibilities in society	–	3	8	13	92	84
Contemporary man not only participates actively in the public life but also shares child care and housework responsibilities with his partner/wife	64	83	23	14	13	3
The state should regulate the division of gender roles among family partners/spouses as little as possible	37	49	23	31	40	20
Traditional division between female and male roles in family does not influence the processes of gender equality in society	26	42	18	33	56	25

Analyzing the gender distribution of responses, several significant differences should be noticed. For instance, twice as many men than women traditionally thought that women should be given a priority in child care. On the other hand, the similar percentage of men did not agree with this statement, and one in four men was undecided about it. This distribution demonstrates that the primary role of women in child care is no longer taken for granted. A similar distribution can be noticed in men's responses about the influence of gender roles in a family on the processes of gender equality in society. A larger part of the respondents tended to think that the traditional division of gender roles in a family did not have any influence on men's and women's possibilities in the public sphere. It appears that twice as many women understood the significance of this gender conflict and its consequences.

Almost half of the Parliament members (45%) to only 25% of the state officers think that the greater participation of men in family life incorporated into laws could push the Lithuanian society closer to real gender equality. Also, every second parliamentarian thinks that the state is responsible for the implementation of gender equality not only in public sphere, but in family life as well.

Nowadays the European Union countries pay a considerable attention to the effective reconciliation policy of family and work roles seen as the main measure in decreasing gender inequality in contemporary societies. The EU member states declared in their employment strategies to increase institutional care for children and other wards, encourage men and women to share family and work roles, support the integration of women into labour market, and develop flexible and more effective work forms and benefit measures. The political decisions of separate countries depend on the ways the problem of reconciliation and its reasons are defined in national contexts. Some countries, including Lithuania, regard the reconciliation of work and family roles as the women's issue. Thus, it is not surprising that measures for reducing women's dual role strains are discussed in these countries. Other countries have already acknowledged the need to reconsider caregiving and to strengthen the role of a man/father in the private sphere (most frequently by revising the legal basis of childcare

and encouraging more men to use their right to paternity leave). The increasing participation of women in labour market does not mean that men's responsibilities for child care and housework increases at the same rate. The reports of the European Commission state that every year the EU labour market underuses the human resources of qualified women because of the roles' conflict and its consequences. Instead of leaving this conflict for families to solve, the Lithuanian state should not only declare gender equality in all spheres of social life but also attempt to reform the private sphere, the most traditional institution resistant to changes.

The Evaluation of the Current Legal Basis of Child Care in Lithuania

The legal regulation of paternity/maternity leave is a part of the general EU and Lithuanian policy of social welfare, employment and gender equality. Laws of the Republic of Lithuania and other legal acts correspond to the regulations established in the Directive of the EU Council of Ministers, which was adopted on June 3, 1996, and signed by the EU-level social partners on the general agreement about paternity leave. Parental leave has been a long-standing item on the European Union's social policy agenda and features in the 1989 Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers, which states that measures should be developed to help men and women reconcile their professional and family responsibilities, to secure equal opportunities for men and women and the same attitude towards them, and to establish the resolution of the EC that encourages men to share family responsibilities equally with women, for instance, to take paternity leave.

In the laws of the Republic of Lithuania that regulate paternity/maternity leave, the notion "paternity leave" is not used (maternity/paternity benefit and child care leave are used instead). The Law on Vacation, Sickness and Maternity Social Insurance and the Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania provide for child care leave which

can be taken, according to a family decision, by mother (foster-mother), father (foster-father), grandmother, grandfather or other relatives who raise a child until he/she reaches the age of three. A child care leave can be taken whole or in parts. Although in the above mentioned EU Directive there is a clause stating that the right to paternity leave cannot be transferred to another person, the Lithuanian legal basis does not provide for an individualized and non-transferable right to childcare. The surveyed politicians and state officers were not critical to the current legal basis of child care in Lithuania. The parliamentary groups of the Labour Party, Liberals and Centre, and National Farmers' were most unanimous in this regard: they think of this law either positively or very positively.

Why Don't Men Want to Take up Paternity Leave?

Lithuanian laws guarantee *de jure* equal opportunities for women and men and provide modern legal provisions to secure them. However, in reality, particularly in the private sphere, gender roles are still understood and practiced according to the traditional gender contract. The politicians and state officers were asked about the reasons for men's reluctance to take paternity leave (see table 2). The respondents could give multiple answers. The most frequently cited reasons included professional risks (almost a half of the respondents thought that men do not want to take breaks in their careers or even risk their careers) or support of the traditional "natural" gender order (more than 1/3 thought that, in our society, child care leave was attributed to women since they could take care of children better than men who could not be easily separated from the social/public life).

The answers reveal some contradictions. For instance, the politicians and state officers did not acknowledge that men's reluctance to take up paternity leave might have been related to the unacceptable legal regulation of childcare in the country. However, one in four respondents (23%) thought that an insufficient financial compensation during paternity leave might have been the reason.

The opinions of men and women are not unanimous too. Women tended to think more frequently than men that the men's choices are usually influenced by their reluctance to leave labour market and their aversion to household tasks.

TABLE 2. Reasons for men's reluctance to take up paternity leave in the politicians' opinions (gender distribution, %).

Today only around 1% of Lithuanian men take paternity leave until a child reaches the age of one. In your opinion, what are the reasons for this phenomenon?	Women, %	Men, %
There is not enough information about a possibility for men to take paternity leave	17	33
Insufficient financial compensation during paternity leave	17	28
Men cannot accept being separated from the social/public life	36	21
Men don't want to do housework	14	3
Men don't want to do breaks in their careers or even risk their careers	61	36
It is thought that maternity (paternity) leave belongs to women more than to men	39	28
It is thought that women can take care of children better than men	28	39
Men don't think that they would be able to take care of children	8	10
The procedures of maternity (paternity) leave established in the laws of the Republic of Lithuanian are unacceptable for men	-	3

Male politicians also acknowledged that men's reluctance to risk their careers and insufficient financial compensation were important reasons for not taking up parental leave. However, they also felt that the widespread perception that parental leave is more for women

than men also has a significant impact of men's choices. Politicians think that the accessibility of information could encourage more men to use their right to paternity leave.

Paternal Leave as a Positive Action: Can it be Justified?

The models of gender inequality are determined not only by ideological and cultural reasons but also by the state structure and social insurance system. The state intervention is one of the means to relieve social inequality. To facilitate women's integration into the labour market and to help them reconcile their work and family responsibilities, the EU countries have been undertaking various institutional reforms including the measures of positive actions. The sexist patriarchal environment and gendered order organized around the dichotomy of the public/private that ascribes women to the private and men, to the public, make such reforms necessary. The ideological premises and structures of labour participation, tax and social insurance systems also reflect the above dichotomy and division. In this context, the establishment of a child care leave for men and women based on individualized social rights is one of the positive actions that becomes increasingly popular in the EU countries.

Sweden was the first nation to grant employed fathers and mothers equal access to paid family leave in 1974. Fathers' participation in parental leave has risen steadily since the beginning of the program. Over three quarters (77%) of fathers with a child born in 1996 took parental leave during their children's first four years (Haas, Hwang 2005). From the beginning, parental leave has been presented as an important policy designed to promote gender equality, defined as women and men having equal opportunities, rights, and responsibilities to become economically independent and to care for children. Swedish social policy encourages families to follow a dual breadwinner model; paid parental leave is designed to encourage both parents to have a continuous connection to the labour market, while compensating them for time off work.

Lithuanian politicians and state officers were asked what they think about the possible legal provision for more active participation of men in child care. The respondents could give multiple answers.

TABLE 3. **Politicians' and state servants' opinion about the need to change laws on child care, %** (absolute numbers of respondents are indicated in the brackets).

In your opinion, is it necessary to establish by law a more active participation of men in child care in Lithuania?	Parliament % (N)	President's Office % (N)	Ministries % (N)
Yes, it would help men integrate into families and understand better their concerns	36 (16)	–	41 (12)
Yes, it would help men create closer emotional bonds with their children	33 (15)	–	31 (9)
Yes, it would facilitate women's integration into professional life	42 (19)	–	21 (6)
No, the current legal provisions are sufficient	16 (7)	–	41 (12)
No, because if men don't want to participate in child care, laws won't help them	16 (7)	67 (2)	14 (4)
No, since men's responsibility is to earn money and support their families financially, and women's obligation is to take care of children and housework	–	–	–
Do not know	2 (1)	3 (1)	–

Almost 2/3 of the respondents approved of a proposal to legalize the greater participation of men in child care in Lithuania and acknowledged many positive outcomes of it. Politicians were more positive towards this proposal than the representatives of the Minis-

tries. For instance, twice as many parliamentarians than the state servants agreed that a more active participation of men in child care would facilitate women's integration into professional life. Moreover, women more than men tended to believe that legal norms can change the traditional division of labour for childcare and establish more actively involved and nurturing fatherhood. On the other hand, almost one in four respondents thought that the current legal provisions were sufficient (widespread answer among state servants) or they did not believe that laws can enforce men to get involved in child care if they themselves do not want it.

The opinion of the 2000-2004 Lithuanian Parliament members, surveyed in 2003, about a more active participation of men in child care was rather sceptical.⁴ Almost a half of the sampled parliamentarians (49%, most of them were men) did not believe that laws would be effective if men themselves did not want to participate in a family life. The more positive attitudes of the current members of the Parliament may have been influenced by the EU integration processes, the younger age of Parliament members, the higher representation of women in the Parliament and gradually changing traditional gender norms.

The measures offered by the respondents that might increase the number of men taking paternity leave were more often attributed to the reforms of labour market and the raise of paternity benefits than to the assumptions of positive actions (for instance, validation of individual right to paternity leave). Almost half of the respondents think that it is necessary to regulate legally the establishments of a family-friendly work environment and increase the employers' obligations to support fathers on paternity leave at first. A little more than 1/3 of the respondents thought that the raise of the amount of a maternity (paternity) benefit could influence men's decision to take paternity leave.

Women twice as often as men tended to approve of measures for the advancement of a family-friendly work environment and for the

⁴ This survey of parliamentarians was carried out in 2003 by the Men's Crisis and Information Centre in Vilnius.

strengthening of the employers' support for fathers on paternity leave. However, one in four male politicians' tended to think that paternity leave was a matter of tradition and doubted whether any measures could be effective.

TABLE 4. Respondents' opinion about the factors that would encourage fathers to take paternity leave (gender distribution, %).

In your opinion, what measures could increase the number of Lithuanian men taking paternity leave?	Women, %	Men, %
Establishment of an individual right to maternity/paternity leave	19	15
Increase of maternity (paternity) benefit	36	36
Creation of a family-friendly work environment regulated by law	56	36
Employers' obligations and support for fathers on paternity leave	44	36
Educational and information campaigns on gender and paternity in schools and mass media	28	23
It depends on a tradition, therefore, it is doubtful whether any measures could be effective	11	26
It is a normal situation, no measures are necessary	6	5
I have no opinion	3	–

The institutional distribution of the responses demonstrates that one in four state servants believed unconditionally in the power of tradition and doubted the effectiveness of any measures. Most politicians thought that employers' support and a family-friendly work environment would encourage men to take paternity leave.

The EU public opinion survey carried out in 2004⁵ revealed similar conditions in which men would use their right to paternity leave

⁵ Survey data is available at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/news/2004/sep/parental_leave_en.htm

more frequently. These conditions included bigger financial compensations (38%), better work and career guarantees during paternity leave and after it (30%), better information (27%), more favourable reactions of employers and colleagues (23%), and the possibility to share this leave with a mother or take paternity leave only for a part of the day (18%). Essentially the main conditions were related to the amount of a financial compensation and career guarantees.

Evaluation of the “Icelandic Model” of Paternity Leave

Politicians and state officers were asked to say their opinion on the “Icelandic model” of paternity leave based on an individual right that was becoming more widespread in Europe. According to this model, every family with a new baby is given a right to nine months of paid parental leave – 3 months for a mother, 3 months for a father, and the rest 3 months can be used by either parent. The 3 months given exclusively for the father or mother are granted on a non-transferable basis. The parent on leave is granted a compensation of 80% of his/her wage.

Although only 17% of the surveyed representatives approved of the establishment of an individual right to maternity/paternity leave as one of the factors that would encourage fathers to take paternity leave (see table 4), twice as many respondents evaluated the Icelandic model of paternity leave favourably.

TABLE 5. Evaluation of the “Icelandic Model” of Paternity Leave, %.

Do you think that the Icelandic model of paternity leave could be adopted in Lithuania?	Agree, %
Yes, it is a good way at least partially to equalize the contribution of men and women to child care	34
I doubt whether this kind of a law would encourage men to use their individual right to paternity leave (this law would only shorten a paid part of child care leave for mothers)	40

TABLE 5 CONTINUED

Do you think that the Icelandic model of paternity leave could be adopted in Lithuania?	Agree, %
No, since it is an unnecessary interference into a private family life; it would create additional problems for men	12
No, since Lithuanian lawmakers will oppose the adoption of this law	1
I have no opinion	3

A little more respondents (40%) doubted whether this law would encourage men to use their individual right to paternity leave. The gender distribution of the responses is not statistically significant: although a little more men than women believed that such a legal regulation in Lithuania could at least partially equalize the contribution of men and women to child care, there were more men who doubted the power of this law to enforce men to use their individual right to paternity leave. According to the 2003 survey of politicians, the distribution of respondents who doubted this legal model and who approved of it (respectively 40% and 37%) cannot be interpreted in a single way. Female parliamentarians of the former Parliament almost unanimously (71%) agreed that the transformation of the current model of paternity leave could at least partially equalize the contribution of men and women to child care.

The positive opinion of the Parliament members in this regard was more progressive than the doubts of the state officers (45% among them doubted the effectiveness of the "Icelandic model" to gender equality). Their doubts seem unfounded if we keep in mind the high numbers of men taking paternity leave in the countries in which paternity leave is established on non-transferable or partially non-transferable basis (for instance, since 2000, after the adoption of the mentioned law in Iceland, almost 95% of Icelandic men used their right to paternity leave).

The ambiguous evaluation of the Icelandic legal model implies no less ambiguous attitude towards the adoption of a similar law in

Lithuania. Only two Parliament members indicated that they themselves would undertake to initiate the law on individualized rights to paternity leave. Regardless that a little more than 1/3 of the respondents would not approve of the adoption of such law, almost a half of the respondents (42%) would not undertake to initiate this law. However, if someone else showed the initiative, they would support it. Some Parliament members could not evaluate this law in a single manner because their opinion would be influenced by some very concrete provisions of the law; for instance, they would support the law if the duration of paternity/maternity law was extended from one to two or even three years or if the amount of a maternity/paternity benefit was increased to 90-100% of compensated salary. However, deeper studies and recommendations could facilitate decisions of some respondents.

For conclusion of the analysis it is important to mention that the results presented above have to be interpreted with caution. It is possible to generalize the received results but only after the reliability of data is taken into account. The probability that in the current situation a half of the Parliament will support the initiative "to return fathers to families" is more theoretical than real. First of all, a more active participation of women in this survey may have influenced the general results. Second, an individual opinion of the parliamentarians might never turn into confirmative votes, especially if the official position of their parties is different. Third, legal reforms on paternity/maternity leave are related not only to family welfare and gender equality but also to the state budgetary issues and business' interests. Therefore, the solution of this issue may incite protracted discussions and interest struggles. Fourth, it is necessary to take into consideration that more than 2/3 of the parliamentarians refused to participate in this survey. If it is possible to infer from the above data that they have a negative opinion of the discussed issues or do not regard family, child and gender issues as serious, then we will have a rather long time to wait for this kind of initiative to reach the Lithuanian Parliament.

Conclusions

It becomes customary that the issues of gender equality come to be related declaratively to the participation of both genders in the public life disregarding the private sphere and the “natural” gender order. Family problems are considered important as much as they are connected to the processes of deinstitutionalization and their influence to state welfare and the primary socialization of children. The phenomenon of parenthood is usually discussed in the context of the decreasing birth-rate and the social and economic problems of families. In is not an accident that in the programs of the ruling Lithuanian parties, their obligation to raise paternity/maternity benefits is emphasized as if a financial support was the main guarantee for a stable family. The sharing of “private” male and female roles in family and a number of other issues of intimacy, privacy and caring remain beyond the dominant gender discourse. Hence, it is not surprising that currently only 1% of Lithuanian men take paternity leave and the majority of women do not have a “right” not to take it.

Politicians and state officers cautiously yet more openly indicate that the state should be responsible for gender equality in a family. Almost half of the parliamentarians agree that the legalized participation of men in child care could help to achieve real gender equality in Lithuania. This “non-traditional” politicians’ attitude towards contemporary masculinity and femininity demonstrates that women’s primary role in child care is no longer accepted as a matter of course and that men’s participation in family life can strengthen family and social welfare.

Nowadays the European Union countries pay a considerable attention to the reconciliation policy. This political strategy has for a long time been devised to encourage women’s participation in the labour market and to reduce their role conflict. However, these measures have not improved women’s situation in the labour market; on the contrary, they have stimulated various forms of hidden discrimination. Using the experience of Scandinavian countries, an increasing number of countries have been carrying out parallel reforms in the sphere of work organization and fatherhood: a family-friendly work environment has

been promoted and more active involvement of men in child care has been secured by law. The Lithuanian politicians do not oppose the latter possibility: according to them, this measure not only could help men understand family matters better but also facilitate the integration of women into professional life. The politicians tend to acknowledge, however, that not an individual right of fathers to paternity leave or the increase of a financial compensation but the promotion of a family-friendly work environment (forms of part time employment, flexible work schedule etc.) and stronger support and obligation of employers to parents on leave could return men to their families.

The implementation of the concrete "Icelandic model" of paternity leave is also evaluated ambiguously. Almost half of the Parliament members agree that such initiative is a good way to equalize, at least partially, the women and men's contribution to the family. However, the rest doubt whether men would use this right. Despite these doubts, half of the Parliament members would approve of this kind of law in Lithuania if someone introduced it. The doubts seem unreasonable if we keep in mind the high numbers of men taking paternity leave in the Nordic countries. However, the functioning of such law will depend directly not only on its own benefits, but also on the parallel family-friendly reforms of the labour market and other measures, directed towards more active participation of women in public life.

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3

Fathers on Parental Leave in Denmark

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Introduction

This article focuses on the experiences of Danish men who have chosen to take more parental leave than the average Danish man. The material presented is based on an EU project “Modern Men in Enlarged Europe: Developing Innovative Gender Strategies” and carried out from October 2004 until November 2005. It was initiated by the Lithuanian Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman through the Fifth Community Action Programme on Equal Opportunities.

The interview material consists of 15 fathers who have taken a relatively long period of parental leave, and 8 employers. The research purpose was to investigate the fathers’ experiences with parental leave, their considerations prior to their decision to take the leave, and what they identified as barriers and how they dealt with them. Regarding the employers we were interested in their personal experiences of parental leave, their dealings with male employees on paternity leave, and how they handled specific cases, that is, the level of formalisation and temporary replacement plans.¹

¹ Six of the interviewed employers work in private companies and can be characterized as having a middle-rank position, responsible for approximately 25-30 employees. Six of the employers were men; two were women.

Masculinity and Fatherhood

Traditional masculinity and male identities are primarily established within the public realm of work and men learn to evaluate themselves according to external standards provided by the dominant masculinities. Men are expected to give priority to career before family and to a certain extent they are also expected to leave the main responsibility for housework and childcare to women (Connell 1995; Kimmel 1996; Bourdieu 1999; Badinter 1992).

Why do men in general not take a long period of parental leave? Is it the employers in the companies who will not, or cannot, do without their male employees, therefore keeping them away from staying at home and taking part in the parental leave? Is it the women who will not let the men in on their share? Or can the problem simply be explained as the fathers' unwillingness to take parental leave, hence leaving most of it to the mothers? It is also an open question within the research about men and fatherhood, whether fathers on paternity leave do it for their own sake, for the child or to improve the situation for the female partner on the labour market. Gender equality is not necessarily an underlying motive for parental leave. The Swedish researcher Lisbeth Bekkengen (2002) uses the expression "*child orientated masculinity*" to describe that some men want a close relationship with the child, but do not necessarily want to change the traditional gender pattern between men and women.

The Present Situation in Denmark

A dominant theme in the masculinity debate in the Danish media for several years has been "men as fathers." But in comparison with the other Nordic countries the debate in Denmark about men and parental leave has had many references to coercion (Borchorst 2003). Parental leave touches upon some deeply rooted cultural perceptions namely men as breadwinners and women as caretakers. There are many contradictory feelings and issues at stake in the construction

of fatherhood; engagement and presence in the family versus the traditional breadwinner role and responsibility for the family economy (Brandth et al. 2003; Reinicke 2004).

In the spring of 2002 the Danish Parliament passed a number of changes to the legislation on parental leave. The aim was partly to lengthen the period of parental leave, partly to make it more flexible. One of the noticeable aspects of the new flexibility is that it is now possible to take a part-time parental leave. Furthermore, parents can take parental leave together, but they can also choose to expand their period of parental leave or postpone parts of it.

Taken as a whole, the Danish parental leave consists of fourteen weeks of maternity leave, two weeks of paternity leave, and thirty-two weeks of shared parental leave. Thus, during the parental leave, parents are entitled to fifty-two weeks on parental allowance (including four weeks of antenatal leave for the mother). Parents can choose to take leave together or following each other; they can take part time parental leave, extending the thirty-two weeks up until forty weeks, though without extra parental allowance.

Since the changes were made, men's paternity leave increased with almost a quarter in 2003, fathers on average taking paternity leave for 2.7 weeks or nineteen days. In the same period the mothers' maternity leave on average increased 14 % lasting on average forty weeks or 278 days in 2004. This clearly shows that even though, in principle, it is possible for fathers to take thirty two weeks of parental leave, they actually only take five days of parental leave. That amounts to men in 2004 taking 7 % of the total parental leave taken in Denmark in 2003. Thus, most men's paternity leave is relatively short. However, most men do make use of the two weeks paternity leave. In families with children born in 2003, in which at least one of the parents took parental leave, 71 % of the fathers chose to take paternity leave, while 92 % of the mothers chose to take maternity leave (www.bm.dk/barselsorlov/default.asp).²

² Had parents outside of the labour market, and therefore not entitled to allowance, e.g. students, been disregarded, the percentage would have been a little higher for both men and women.

Fathers on Paternity Leave - Experiences and Strategies

In the research project, fifteen interviews were conducted with fathers, all having taken a paternity leave longer than the three weeks taken on average by Danish men.³ At the time of the interviews the fathers were still on paternity leave or had only recently returned to work.

TABLE 1: Background of the interviewed fathers

Age	Job	Education	Child's Sex	Children	Period of paternity leave	Period with full payment	Public or private
32	Senior consultant	Long (MA)	Male	1	6.4 weeks	8 weeks (75% pay)	Private
32	Copy-writer	Long (dramatist)	Female	1	8 weeks	0 weeks	Independent
34	Doctor	Long (doctor)	Male	3	12 weeks	12 weeks	Public
38	Social worker	Medium-length (social worker)	Female	3	12 weeks	?	Public
46	Factotum	9. grade	Female	2	13 weeks	4 weeks	Public
31	Programmer	Long (physicist)	Male	1	14 weeks	10 weeks	Private
43	Theatre technician	9. grade	Female	1	14 weeks	14 weeks	Public
40	Teacher	Medium length (care taker for mentally disabled)	Female	1	16 weeks	12 weeks	Public

³ Depending on how one measures it, the average paternity leave taken by fathers amounts to either 2.7 or 3.6 weeks. In comparison, Danish women on average took forty-one weeks of maternity leave in 2003.

TABLE 1 CONTINUED

Age	Job	Education	Child's Sex	Children	Period of paternity leave	Period with full payment	Public or private
29	Engineer	Long (engineer)	Female	1	17 weeks	2 weeks	Private
44	Postman	9. grade	Female	3	17 weeks	0 weeks	Public
37	Engineer	Long (engineer)	Male	2	17 weeks	12 weeks	Public
41	Section leader	Long (communication)	Male	2	21 weeks	10 weeks	Public
32	Teacher	Medium length (kindergarden teacher)	Male	1	28 weeks	14 weeks	Public
27	Actor	Medium length (actor)	Female	1	32 weeks	0 weeks	Private
28	Student	Long, though not completed	Female	1	52 weeks	(Student)	Student)

On average these fathers have taken paternity leave for about twenty weeks: from 6.4 weeks of leave over eight weeks, with a weekly workday as the shortest, until one year as the longest. Except for two, all fathers took a longer paternity leave than was possible with full pay, thus for a shorter or longer period they only received parental leave allowance.⁴

⁴ One exception was the father still a student, as students are not entitled to an allowance. Instead, a male student is entitled to an extra half year of state educational grant when becoming a father (if the mother is also a student she is entitled to an extra year of state educational grant of which half can be transferred to the father).

Compared to the rest of the population the majority of fathers in the research project are employed within the public sector, just as they – as well as their partners – are relatively well educated.⁵

Decision to Take a Leave

The Danish sociologist Bente Marianne Olsen (2002) has stated that parents rarely are having extended discussions concerning the division of parental leave. We saw the same tendency in the project. None of the interviewed fathers talked about actual conflicts with regards to dividing the parental leave. Taken as a whole it is rather noteworthy how little the fathers talked about the negotiation on which the division of parental leave was based.

Most of the fathers related that already before their wife/partner became pregnant, they knew they would take more paternity leave than the two weeks reserved for the fathers:

I knew that I would take more from the beginning of [my wife's] pregnancy. I had no doubts about that (...) I certainly wouldn't want to have children if I didn't have time to be at home. So that was quite clear! I knew from the beginning that it was how it should be.

For three of the fathers, however, it was their partner who encouraged them to take more paternity leave and in one case the wife's work situation was the determinant:

Well, it was rather easy. My wife was offered a job [when our daughter was four or five months old] and in order for that to be possible at all, I had to take paternity leave. So it was like the same day as she was offered the job that we took the decision as to how it should be.

Though the majority of fathers talked of paternity leave as 'a matter of course' and/or 'natural', most of them spoke of it with pride. The fathers conveyed that they sent out positive signals by taking

⁵ The men in the research project earn between DKK 17,000 more and 13,000 less than their partners on a monthly basis.

paternity leave. By taking paternity leave a man signals that he is able to take responsibility, is on top of things, modern and perhaps somewhat of a pioneer, as one of the fathers puts it. You have “*to be the type that actively partakes in your own life and choose what you want to do with it*”. Thus, choosing paternity leave is considered an independent choice:

As long as it isn't so common [men taking paternity leave], it is probably more conceived as: 'Well, here is one, who is on top of things'. Then it seems like a luxury thing to do and not a duty. (...) Like, no one thinks of this as a duty. It's a free choice.

The reactions related by the fathers indicate that the surroundings in general do not think of the fathers' paternity leave as such a matter of course as they themselves do.

Reactions from the Surroundings

Reactions to the fathers' choice of paternity leave are mixed and contradictory. Some fathers spoke only of positive reactions, while others mentioned sceptical or even negative reactions. The positive reactions vary from “*Cool!*” and “*Good on you*” to admiring remarks from friends and colleagues, saying they too would like to share parental leave. Furthermore, some spoke of older men or women who seemed somewhat envious, as the opportunity was not there when they had children:

I think many men in principle believe it's a really good thing to take. (...) I haven't really thought about it before, but I actually don't think I know anyone who is taking it – or has taken it.

Apparently, one of the things conducive to positive comments is that these fathers, by taking more than two weeks of paternity leave, in practice are doing what most in principle believe to be right.

The two fathers, who have children from previous marriages, also talked of a change from fifteen or twenty years ago until now in how one is perceived as a man:

Must be the times that have changed. Twenty years ago I don't think I would have arsed about with my pram and thought it to be particularly cool.

Even though some things suggest a change in the way men can exercise their masculinity, the far majority of fathers still talked of various negative reactions from their surroundings, yet not all of them expressed directly. However, there is no doubt that most fathers have encountered astonishment that *they* took leave. The astonished reactions from the surroundings are directed at the father: “*You want to do that? Will you not get bored?*” But several also conveyed that the mother was met with surprise that she “*was willing to give up*” some of the parental leave to the father. In short, an expectation in the surroundings that parental leave is for women and not so much for men – at times flavoured with a poorly hidden perception that it should be the mother, who took the full parental leave:

There's a group of people who think it's an odd thing. I mean: why should I take it? Who almost find it wrong (...) Nobody would ask questions if I was at work, would they?

Though it is not expected of men to take paternity leave, a couple of the fathers clearly expressed their surprise at the negative reactions they have encountered:

*There have been both positive and negative reactions, but the negative has been given to me indirectly. Maybe I'm a bit touchy now, in such a way that I am **very** alert, when receiving negative signal (...) But it surprised me that there **were** negative reactions. (...) I think it seems old fashioned that it's a problem to take paternity leave, or that it is different, though it is different.*

Mostly the fathers conveyed that their colleagues – in particular the younger ones – were supportive of their decision to take paternity leave:

It's a little as if this thing with men on parental leave is a bit funny. It's a bit funny even though we don't think so, and it's certainly easy to make fun of.

Among the executives most reactions were either positive or neutral. Some of the fathers' closest bosses reacted with comments such as "Well, I guess it is your *right*," end of discussion.

Problems at Work

In general it can be controversial for men to start to doubt the hegemonic forms of masculinities. The imagination of "men at work" is deeply incorporated in the dispositions of the majority of men and is inscribed in their behaviour and attitudes (Connell 1995). Though most of the interviewed fathers were more or less worried how the director or nearest boss would react to the request to take paternity leave, it is far from all who experienced actual problems at the work place.

One interviewee started in his new department by taking 16 weeks of paternity leave without difficulty. At the other end of the spectrum is the father who gave in his notice due to disagreements.⁶

In the beginning we were sure that we could get the paternity leave paid, so I put forward that I was simply allowed [to take leave for more than 14 days] and then just be on allowance. Then it turned out that I could document that I was in fact entitled to full payment for two and a half months, and then it was like they almost became angry, as they thought I was misusing their time.

On top of having problems with his employer it was only on chance that this man actually discovered he was entitled to full payment during his leave. Also a great deal of the other fathers in the research project (regardless of educational background) explained that they had difficulties with the rules on paternity leave, as they seemed complicated and bureaucratic.

⁶ According to the agreement, the father in question was entitled to twelve weeks of paid paternity leave, but the employer did not believe so. Not until both union and the local municipality interfered did he get his paternity leave with pay, as he was entitled to.

The Problem of Being Indispensable

Another problem can be when the father applying for paternity leave is considered a specialist, and therefore indispensable:

On the part of the executives, the reaction was that I was indispensable, and that it was unthinkable that it could run at all without me being present. That was their reaction to begin with! I wanted three months and that was totally unlikely. It just couldn't be done! (...) I was also interested in finding a solution to suit all parties. But from there – from his suggestion in contrast to mine – was hell of a way!

This father chose a solution, which did not leave it up to the mother to take the majority of the parental leave, but rather for him to take part-time parental leave. In more detail, he took leave four days a week. The fifth day the mother stayed at home with the child. To him, it was part of a compromise with his employer. Though choosing the same solution it was not quite the same for another father, as his arrangement was established in order for him to stay in touch with his pet project:

I take four days a week and my wife takes one. It's because I helped win a project in an area I'm a specialist. It's something I've been working on starting up in Denmark for 6 or 7 years. That's longer than I've 'worked' on [my daughter], and that I just had to, so one day a week is probably the least. (...) But I also think my wife is pleased about sharing.

In a similar study regarding men and parental leave conducted by the Danish Research Centre on Gender Equality the reasons for not taking paternity leave were primarily explained as a matter of the mothers' wish to reserve the parental leave for themselves (Reinicke 2005).

Barriers to Taking Paternity Leave

The participating fathers were asked if there was anything that could have prevented them from taking paternity leave or making them take

a shorter period of paternity leave. A couple of the fathers completely denied this. Others mentioned very drastic consequences such as getting fired or having severe financial troubles. Interesting projects or career opportunities were also mentioned, but often described as something hypothetical. Others mentioned that their paternity leave probably would have been shorter had they not received full payment during the paternity leave. Finally, some said that the mothers' wish to take all of it would have influenced their choice of parental leave:

I would probably say that it should be that we couldn't pay off on our debts, or that we had to move, or something like that, because we could easily sell the car and live for less money and such. I mean it was a matter of priority.

Understanding Others' Choice not to Take Paternity Leave

When a father takes paternity leave he has to be in a situation when it is a real possibility for him. Several of the fathers did describe themselves as being lucky or privileged in comparison to other men, who were not so lucky to have the "option" of taking paternity leave. Favourable conditions are not mentioned in regard to the mothers' maternity leave, but rather considered obligatory:

I think those 14 days you take in the beginning, that's too little. I wanted some more. I wanted to take part. And I had the opportunity. Of course it's rather privileged that one has that.

When the fathers contemplated why other men settle for fourteen days of paternity leave, the argument was usually not unwillingness to take parental leave. Other explanations were proposed. Perhaps the one in question has just got a new job; perhaps it will damage his reputation, and thereby career; or maybe the family is in too tight a financial situation. The explanations proposed for not choosing parental leave is thus understood as relating to pure structural problems, whereas the arguments in favour of taking parental leave are

described as relating to individual preferences. Thus, the men not taking parental leave are excused. That is in spite of the fact that it is not immediately apparent how the interviewed men's life conditions are more fortunate than those of most other Danish men.

By using conceptions of luck or privilege, the men not taking paternity leave are excused or given absolution as in most cases it is not perceived of as an active avoidance. When asked, all the fathers said that they would *recommend* paternity leave to other men and that they think other men ought to give it a try. But at the same time, most of them said that it is not something they would meddle in; they would not try to *convince* anyone.

It is also noteworthy that the choice and length of the men's paternity leave do not play a significant role in how the fathers conceive of themselves or other men as modern or not. The important thing is whether the parents have agreed on the division of parental leave on the grounds of an explicit negotiation. Even if the outcome is a division, where the mother takes all the parental leave, the modern way of organising the division of the parental leave is thus legitimised through a negotiating process. Hence, it is less significant whether the outcome is very traditional, as long as the parties in common have reached an agreement:

There could very well be men who don't take paternity leave. I think it's modern that you're equal and that you agree on things in a relationship. That you discuss things and reach consensus – that one party isn't dominating. But it might be so that you decide that the wife really does want to take it all. My wife also thinks her maternity leave was a bit short. She wouldn't have minded particularly if I had dodged the ball and let her take some more.

During Paternity Leave

The majority of fathers agreed that it is tough and challenging to take paternity leave. Asked about the difference between career work and domestic work, the fathers explained that being on paternity leave is

more relaxing as the tempo is different. On the other hand, the domestic work and child caring are in many ways more demanding or difficult than career work. The logic in this reasoning is that at the work place one knows how things function, what reactions to expect, e.g. from bosses and clients, in contrast to life on paternity leave, where one with a small child cannot in the same way predict or plan the day.

Though the fathers experience their paternity leave as hard work, it does not mean that the responsibilities of child caring and domestic work are not experienced as meaningful. On the contrary, the fathers talked of being in a rather unique position, which they found very meaningful (cf. being privileged/lucky). There seems to be an implicit premise that even though it is tough, one (the father) is able to cope. Furthermore, many of the fathers explained their surprise as to how quickly a day on paternity leave passes and how difficult it is to 'get things done' in the course of a day:

Even though I was well prepared, you can still be surprised how fast the day goes by. I mean, just going down to the post office can be completely overwhelming. It can take a whole day. Then it's time for eating, caring and sleeping and all that. (...) I mean, when people ask 'So, what did you do today?' then I can say 'a dance on the floor' and that was what we managed today.

Hence, a day on paternity leave largely goes by with duties related to child caring. It is noteworthy that the traditional notion of 'getting things done' is difficult to combine with child caring duties. According to the logic one has 'got something done' when one has been to the post office or danced with the child on the floor. The other things, such as eating, caring and playing with the child, are not consistent with getting things done in a traditional sense.

The Best Part of Paternity Leave

In spite of the fathers' account of having significantly more to attend to than imagined when on paternity leave, therefore also having had to give up most of their planned projects, there is no doubt: the fa-

thers are thrilled to be on paternity leave. When you take paternity leave you become a part of the child's life. The majority of the fathers emphasize that they get to know the child and that the child gets to know them:

I think the most important thing is about getting to know your child. I mean you get a closer relationship than you would otherwise.

Apart from the fathers getting to know their child better, they are also able to follow the child's development close-up. Some expressed surprise as to how fascinating it is to follow the child's development. Others conveyed with dread how it would be not having this opportunity. Common for the fathers is that they are very interested in and pleased to be able to follow their children.

Apart from the joy, the fathers also explain that it goes to the very essence of life and is basically meaningful to be with their children:

The best is that it is so incredibly meaningful. It's so basically meaningful to walk with your children. It's really very banal. Watching a small child develop from day to day, growing bigger and saying new stuff. It's the essence of life!

In their accounts, some of the fathers put a certain literal distance to their overwhelming enthusiasm; perhaps in an effort to defuse the otherwise rather awe-striking sentiments, they claimed that it is extremely "self centred," "completely ridiculous" or "very banal." Thereby they did not disappear into a blind parenting fervour, but could relate their experiences with a certain emotional distance. However, there is no doubt that the 'but' following their reservation is really important.

The best part of paternity leave is thus the relationship to the child; to be with the child, getting to know it, seeing it develop. With or without their slightly distancing reservations, the fathers relay their unconditional love for the small child and the happiness it brings them:

No matter how insanely tired you are (...) You've felt like throwing her out of the window, flush her down the toilet and all kinds of things. And then you wake in the morning, and she's crawling all over you, being happy, and biting your nose or something. Then you get like (...). It's

quite ridiculous. But you get like completely warmed up in the heart and touched beyond tears some times (...) I mean, it's actually really that big! And she's happy to see you.

Another important aspect of paternity leave is the fathers' opportunity to take it step by step, thereby learning to take care of the child. During this process they find their own ways of dealing with problems. There are indications that this strategy is effective when it comes to breaking the mothers' monopoly on child caring. In some families it seems like the father's commitment to child caring can create some friction. That also goes for those cases where the father stays at home with the child during the day:

Usually it is the mother and child who have a close relationship and then the father bit comes along the way, but instead [my daughter] has learnt from the beginning that we are equally good. It might as well be me, who comforts her, as her mother, or feed her or change her.

It appears that most fathers attempt to establish a relationship with the child, which in many ways is just as important as the one existing between a mother and a child:

There'll always be a difference in the way he feels towards his mother and what he feels towards me. That's how it is of course. She's obviously the primary person, but just that month [when we were both at home] we've completely ... it's hard to get, really ... I mean. I thought I had a good relationship with him before, and I really did. But now it's just becoming ... no, there's really no comparison to having been a part of his day just for a month, and then how it was before! There's a completely different sense of trust, and it just kind of functions on more equal terms.

It seems evident that the bond with the child strengthens when the father takes paternity leave. Yet, some fathers hesitated to conclude that one became a better father by taking paternity leave. However, this does not alter the fact that the fathers throughout claimed that the more time they spent with their child the better the relationship. Also, in relation to this, it was made clear that fourteen days of paternity leave were not sufficient.

Learned through Paternity Leave

The interviews show that apart from the fathers enjoying their paternity leave, they also believed they have learned something. Some conveyed that they were surprised that their paternity leave has taught them something they could use in their jobs. None of the fathers have expressed that they took paternity leave for any other reason than getting to know their child and becoming better at taking care of it. The time spent with their child has trained them in qualities such as patience, planning, keeping an overview, tolerance and responsibility. As they explained themselves, these things were vital when on paternity leave. In short, it seems like the qualities men and women gain from being on parental leave can also be useful on the work market:

[I don't think I should miss out on the next pay raise] because I've actually learned something from being on paternity leave, and I'll be returning with something that makes me better at what I do in my job (...) [My employer will probably say]: 'Well, you didn't get smarter during those 4 months'. But I sure as hell think I did (...) I've really learned something here, which I wouldn't have learned through my normal engineering projects.

In addition to the already mentioned qualifications, several of the fathers also claimed that they have learned to “gather energy” in order to get those things done that were absolutely necessary. Their empathy was developed, and they became better at interpreting other people. Also, the fathers learned about themselves and their limits; some even learned there was more to them, than they had imagined:

You get good at producing extra energy. When you're there, and really just want to put your fist through the wall, then just take a deep breath and say 'Oh, you are so cute'. (...) I'm not really the one who's really good at finding extra energy (...) I easily get annoyed, and so it's good exercise for me.

It was also indicated that the experiences and qualifications the fathers gained on paternity leave assisted in changing their masculinity. Work simply becomes less important; the family in general and

the child in particular become more important. With regards to the job it can result in the fathers putting in fewer hours; however, they also become more efficient while at work:

Your spare time becomes more important in different ways than before. Then work and spare time had a tendency to melt together a little. Therefore I also work a lot more efficiently and focused, while I'm there, but then I also throw it aside when I come home. So I believe that if you learn anything from being on paternity leave it is to prioritise right, to get things done in time in order to have time for other things than work.

With regards to the family and in particular to the mother, several of the fathers revealed that the paternity leave also made them understand each other better, which was considered very valuable by the fathers. It was an understanding they only achieved by trying to stay at home with the child for a period of time:

It's become somewhat easier to understand each other. (...) And I think that it has been quite healthy to experience myself that this is how my wife has had it both those periods she's been on maternity leave. (...) With my firstborn my wife spent two years at home with her. So it was a lot like those daily routines, they were built in, in such a way that she did it, (...) and then when I came home at five thirty, it was just done.

About Parents - Fathers and Mothers

Not all fathers get the feeling of being a dad from the moment of birth. Some fathers conveyed real surprise that the birth did not result in the expected feeling of being a dad. Rather, the first feeling, recognised by the fathers as a 'dad-feeling', was the need to protect the small child. In cases where the child was born by caesarean or the mother was unable, for other reasons, to take care of the child immediately after birth, there seemed to be a clear tendency towards the fathers getting an immediate experience of being a dad. From the fathers' accounts, however, it also seems that the fathers only experience this real involvement in cases where the mother is in the periphery:

It's damned important that the father's there the first 48 hours. I was so lucky – so to speak – that my wife was busted after the operation, and (...) as she couldn't move because she had been sewn, I then got the opportunity to change and dress him, and got all sorts of roles.

During the first period of the child's life it was the experience of being recognised by the child that really made the fathers get the feeling, and not least the joy, of having become a dad:

...when I come home from a night out, perhaps a little tipsy, I think that Marie [my girlfriend] will find it hellish, but I only wish that [my daughter] awakens so I can establish contact with her and feel her recognizing me. Sending that smile, so you just think 'shut up!' It just goes straight in! That's about being a dad, there's a strange ...

A Good Dad

The way in which men are constructing their fatherhood is changing. Many men no longer want a threshold position in the family. They want to *be* a family, not just *have* a family (Holter 2003; Madsen et al. 2002). When asked, there are many things the interviewed fathers relate to being 'a good dad.' However, there is no doubt that the most mentioned element is *presence*; to be a good dad entails being there for the child, spending time with it. Furthermore, it is important to be attentive and involved, providing the child with comfort and love, showing understanding and being positive, rather than becoming upset. It is also important to respect the child and envisage his or her needs. It is a prerequisite for being a good dad that one has high regards for one's children and realise that one is no longer in the centre of things.

Only one of the interviewees relayed the possibility of using his father as a role model. The other fathers claimed they could not use their fathers as models. Thus, the role of the good dad was something the individual father invented himself. Often, the grandparents were used as decidedly negative role models and thereby became a symbol of all that the fathers wished to do differently. Mostly it was

the absent father who was contested, when the fathers explained their attitudes:

No, definitely not. No. Okay, it might sound too harsh, and some things I have been able to use. But I wouldn't say I could take him as a usable role model. I couldn't.

Father or Parent?

Several fathers mentioned that a good dad did 'dad-stuff' with his child. He challenged the child and played rough games. They imagined – especially when the child got a little older – that they would do man-stuff, such as playing football and carpentry. This was mostly the case for fathers of boys, but some fathers of girls also mentioned doing “man-stuff”:

Then I believe that a typical thing men add, and which I therefore also try to do, is a little more rough playing, throw her about a bit and that stuff. It's not for sure that you just make that up on your own, but I've heard that it's what men are good at, so I do it as well. (...) Being a good dad probably implies some of what being a good mum implies. Mothers also really ought to do the rough playing. (...) I would say that it is important as a parent. Actually, I think it is a bit peculiar that you ask what it is to be a good dad, as said; I don't really think there's that much of a difference.

However, none of the fathers believed that the role of being a father solely consisted of doing “man-stuff.” Some were rather ironic when contemplating the expectations towards the “man-stuff” fathers and children did together. Other fathers told that they did not really find any differences between being a good mother and good father. To them it was about being good parents, and that was the same thing whether you were a man or a woman:

So now, you are father, I mean, now I am a grown-up and a dad and I have to take responsibility. Do all the stuff a dad does. Saw, drill, build something or other, what do I know (laughing)? The things fathers do ... they build a nursery!

Though the qualities that mark a good father and a good mother are the same for some of the fathers, most of the fathers still have an immediate perception that the relationship between mother and child is unique.

The Mother's 'Natural' Advantage

The mother has a head start from the beginning. Mostly the fathers explained this by the fact that:

She has a child inside of her, so all things considered she is many steps ahead of the father as she has biological changes and feels life inside, which the man obviously does not. He might be able to see something kicking by watching the stomach.

As mentioned earlier, the father is not really a part of it until after the birth and in cases in which the mother, for different reasons, is unable to take care of the child. Most commonly it is the mother who increases her lead after the birth, as she is the first to have contact with the child. This establishes the grounds for the time ahead spent by the mother and child. These factors make the relationship between mother and child project as something that, by nature, makes for a closer relationship than the one the father and child have:

We don't possess the last bastion. Such [breasts] we just don't have. We don't have that weapon. And we don't have the closeness provided by that weapon that the mother has.

In this way the fathers easily perceive of the relationship between mother and child as something practically unachievable, while at the same time increasing the hope of establishing the same kind of close relationship. The point is that a perception evolves of the mother having something to start with, which the father does not. In the father's situation, he has to build everything from the ground.

The interviews clearly show that paternity leave is a chance for the father to become more involved. In particular it seems that something happens in the cases in which the mother is not at home, leaving the

father with the primary responsibility for the child and domestic chores. The fathers happily conveyed how they gained in on the mothers' head start when they were alone at home with the child:

There was a change from when my wife was at home, and when I was. I mean, when she was home, and Emma cried, it was mum she wanted. All in all it was mum she sought out, as that was the safe haven at that time, far more than I was, right? And that just turned around when my wife had returned to work for a while.

Mum Has the First Choice

As it was mentioned above, several fathers consider the mother as the primary person in the child's life, and it easily follows from this that it is the mother's maternity leave which is most important. All in all, the father's paternity leave becomes less important. Hence, with regard to the options of taking parental leave, the mother's needs and wishes are taken into consideration first. Secondly, when the parental leave (the thirty-two weeks) is to be divided, it is possible to take the father's wishes into consideration. However, as it was discussed previously, it is rarely considered as vital or obligatory as the mother's maternity leave.

In some way or other it is given that she somehow had the first pick. I mean in choosing how much she wanted. Of course I could object. But it's not so often that men do that.

But there are still some gender roles, which from the women's side means that they, not just because of financial reasons, but also social or other things, feel pressured or more easily can live out the dream of the good family by taking all the leave. (...) Well yes, we too have a dream – like all these magazines about the perfect wedding – and an idea about what the perfect family is, and that where mother takes care of it by doing everything possible for her child.

There are a few problems that the division of the parental leave creates between the mother and the father. In most cases, the fathers

talked of the division of parental leave as a formality. Often it was referred to as a common project. In other words, it was implied in the fathers' stories that both parties had an equal say in the matter. Asked more directly about the circumstances regarding the division of parental leave, several fathers implied that, to some extent, they have taken the special mother/child relationship into consideration. That the mother was given, and in many cases actively acted as the one having first choice was often explained by the fact that a father earned the most on a monthly basis. In some cases, the argument was that he was indispensable at the workplace.

Being a Man on Paternity Leave

All fathers in the research project were asked what significance paternity leave had to their being *men*. A couple of the fathers strongly denied any problems in that respect and one felt that the question was a sensitive one and that perhaps *others* might consider it problematic. One father asked the interviewer what he meant by the question: "*You mean, whether it's humiliating?*" Another father explained that he was certainly not *ashamed* of it.

The fathers' perception of whether they themselves are masculine varies from one end of the spectrum to the other:

If I was more masculine and did some more masculine stuff with my boy, then I wouldn't be me!

When the fathers described paternity leave, it was often done in terms of paternity leave signalling responsibility and standing by your decisions – in this case the decision to have a child:

I mean, fathers on paternity leave, I think it is enormously masculine. But it's all about standing by the decisions one makes.

Several fathers explained how they considered it "old fashioned" or an expression of "primitive masculinity" if one had trouble taking a leave as a man. The opposite of this antiquated masculinity was that you did not feel "misplaced" at home and that you were able

to show the surroundings that there were more sides to you than the one expressed through work:

I think it's nice to show both the surroundings and myself that you can do more than one thing. (...) Like, showing that there are more aspects of you, rather than just having that depth.

Another masculine aspect of taking paternity leave was the very thing of having a child, or perhaps rather having 'produced' a child. Likewise the fathers conceived of their pride in the child and their protectiveness as something masculine.

At the same time I think it's outrageously masculine to have a small baby on your arm. I think so. That's really something. I've been very proud of that child. And that too I see as something masculine.

Thus, on the one hand, paternity leave is something that the surroundings do not altogether conceive as masculine. On the other hand, the fathers relayed in the interviews that paternity leave was in fact masculine, solely because it was tough. Furthermore, it took responsibility and courage, and it signalled standing by one's decisions. In this way the fathers redefined their choice of paternity leave towards being masculine, rather than redefining masculinity towards being something docile and tender. However, the fathers also conveyed that it was a sign of an old fashioned and even a bit ridiculous form of masculinity if it did not entail the tender aspects like playing with dolls together with one's son or daughter.

Hence, the classical perception of masculinity has already changed at least in parts of society, and paternity leave was also defined in terms of masculinity, something which in the long term could become significant for men's wish to take paternity leave.

Employers' Experiences of Fathers on Paternity Leave

The interview data show that the eight employers have different experiences with employees on paternity leave. One did not have

any men on paternity leave within the last three years, three had one employee on paternity leave, one had two, another one, three, still another one, three to four employees, and the final one, five or more employees on paternity leave.

The interviewed employers or department managers typically state that employees can take paternity leave with no problem. As one of them says:

It is not something which is frowned upon ... I mean, it's quite normal.

Even though it is prohibited to fire an employee who is claiming his right for paternity leave, the data also show evidence of employees sometimes being afraid of losing their job or otherwise being pushed back in line. For instance, one employer explains that male employees always do a period of 10 weeks, and that it *is* not possible to split up the paternity leave though most of the male employees convey that they would prefer to have the paternity leave spread out. This employer states:

It would be more popular. No doubt about that. They have all, practically all of them, had some built-in fear of not returning to work. Or been afraid that the workplace had developed so they would feel that they weren't coming back to the same jobs, or in some way had missed out on one or another thing.

Another employer refers to the newspapers in which:

Some men relay that they feel that if they take paternity leave, well ... then there is a cut back, so they might be the first to go. The fear of this might have something to do with it. It is not my case, as I am a civil servant, I am thinking more of the private sector, which is a bit different.

One employer also says that the company almost expects the men to take paternity leave:

But in general most have, as I have mentioned, taken these six weeks. So we actually expect them to do so. Not that it is like 'you have to do it, or else (...)' but, nevertheless, most do. And I think it is going well. It is a very quiet and relaxed environment in which we say 'remember to enjoy it.'

This employer stood out specifically from the other employers. He had been on ten weeks of paternity leave himself. Furthermore, he had an eye for the human gains related to taking parental leave.

Just a Practical Issue?

The employers typically talk of the employees' paternity leave as a practical problem. Blunt expressions are used such as notification, planning, solution and implementation. One employer says:

If the request comes in proper time for planning and you have a policy in the company that makes this possible, then it is a question of getting it into system and planning it.

Another says:

Well, if the department can take it, I would grant it. And if the department could not take it, I would try to find solutions. He would get it [the paternity leave], some way or other.

A third employer talks about how the work functions can be coordinated so that the individual *can* be replaced or dispensed with for a while, for instance, with regards to paternity leave. In the organisation, he claims, they have:

Very specialised jobs and are very dependent on the individual employee. But we do strive to set up teams, as it provides a kind of durability when people need to have a leave of absence, whether it is due to paternity leave, ailments or other types of reasons for absence. So, we are conscious of the fact that it can be necessary to do without the employees, and thus we prefer to organise ourselves so the functions are not completely dependent on one person, and people can come forward with a good conscience when they need to.

One employer attempted to be humorous in response to the question as to whether it was problematic to have men on paternity leave, and laughingly said:

Well, I would find it ideal if they all took ten weeks in July and August as we are on holiday then anyway, but that's not how it is. I have not tried to persuade any of them.

One employer conveyed that it has not been very problematic to find out when the employees scheduled their paternity leave as they all took paternity leave simultaneously with the mother:

For everyone but me it has been the mother or the wife who chose to be at home the whole period. So it has not mattered too much as she has been around all the time. They have not been alone and had the full responsibility during the parental leave as one could put it.

It is undoubtedly easier for the companies to manage the paternity leave for employees if they take it simultaneously with the mother, as it provides for more flexibility with regards to determining the beginning and end of the paternity leave. However, as the experience demonstrates, the man's parenting ability and the close relationship with the child are best developed during the time when the man has the sole responsibility for the child. Furthermore, the actual circumstances and the size of the company/organisation cannot be underestimated when it comes to the level of prospective problems due to the timing of men's paternity leave. As one of the employers put it:

We have a big organisation, I mean, it is not a small flower shop where one has to be trained from the ground in the period.

Undoubtedly it is easier for large and not small companies and organisations to manage when men take paternity leave.

Temporary Replacement Plans

The employers confirm that it is possible to replace the employee on paternity leave with a stand-in, but this option is not always used. One said:

No, up till now we have managed by either postponing or redistributing the job functions between the existing [employees]. So far, we have not brought in temps for the shorter periods (...) when we have an employee,

male or female, who wants a longer period, like three months, then we will bring in a temp. But for the men who have wanted 4-6 coherent weeks it has not been necessary to bring in a temp. We have been able to plan our way out of it.

Another one mentioned that:

Ten weeks is a time period that can be dealt with.

A third employer commented on the trouble and costs that both a parental leave and a temp would inflict. She said:

The whole mess of getting one hired, with advertisements and interviews and so forth ... it is really time consuming. So from our point of view, the company's view, I would say that there are great expenses attached to having this opportunity [ten weeks of paternity leave with full pay].

One employer emphasized the problem of bringing in stand-ins for specialists:

The dilemma is, as you say so yourself, that when you are a specialist then it is a problem to be a 100% isolated.

Another employer pointed out that all employees are provided with net access, a computer and a mobile at home, and that these are kept during the paternity leave:

Therefore you do have contact with the company and your colleagues. And you are still invited to staff meetings and group activities. Though, of course it is voluntary whether you want to show, but many do take the offer precisely in order to keep in contact.

The above indicates the problem that often exists for men in specialised positions and for those who have a dominant career-oriented lifestyle in which work plays a central role for their identity as a whole.

Level of Formalisation

In order to *take* paternity leave the employee has to *ask* for it beforehand. However, there are variations as to the level of formalisation

within the companies. Some places require an *application*, while at other places an oral notification or a talk with the boss is sufficient. The data do not indicate anything as to when the notification should take place, so perhaps there is a grey area between the rules and the so-called etiquette, which can contribute to the perception that the employees are asking for a personal favour.

A difference can also be detected as to how many links are involved in the process. One of our informants mentioned that the employees:

Go to a local administrator (...) as it is policy. And then the local administrator comes to us in the HR-department and kind of asks 'what should we do' (...) and then we take it from there.

Merely asking for paternity leave sometimes seems to be a barrier in itself. One employer said:

It is a barrier to have to tell your colleagues and your boss, and then I think it is a relief once it has been said, and what remains is the planning to make it actually happen.

Furthermore, this employer held the attitude that:

The barrier to using this [paternity leave] more lies with the individual man, for sure.

As it was described earlier, sometimes men feel that a paternity leave for a longer period of time can be regarded as their attempt to de-prioritise their work. It is most likely that most men feel that they also risk getting fired in the event of a cutback if they take a longer paternity leave.

Complicated Rules of Policies on Parental Leave

The possibility of asking for paternity leave is to a large extent a question of having access to information regarding the existing rules. It appears that some work places have an actual policy for parental leave, while others do not. Some employers are not quite sure how to respond to the question. One employer responded:

I do not know whether there is a decided policy, but the rules for parental leave are clear.

Whether or not the company had its own policy on parental leave, or it just followed legislation, none of the employers were able to account for the rules during the interview.

Sending Signals

Whereas some companies take a neutral stand towards paternity leave, others actually endorse it. One mentioned that:

It is accepted within the organisation. It is quite normal.

Another informed that the HR-department “*directly advertise that we have good terms.*” To that effect the employer gave examples of male employees who thought that they had the right only to two weeks of paternity leave, but were told that they were entitled to twelve weeks in total. A third pointed out that they circulated folders within the company with guidelines for parental leave.

Thus, the level of information and the acceptance and endorsement of parental leave by different companies are different. The same company that advertises good terms for employees also said that:

Good employees are an investment.

Employers’ Experiences with Parental Leave

There is a great variation in the employers’ personal attitudes towards and experiences of taking parental leave. On one hand, there was an employer who told that he was the only man in the company who has taken ten weeks of paternity leave. He explained that he had found his ten weeks of paternity leave to be too limited and that it was his priority to be alone with his child during paternity leave:

Both of you being at home does not count, it is not a paternity leave.

He also indicated that it had been difficult to be away from the company:

Of course I have had dialogue. I have not been 100 % cut off from the company during those ten weeks.

However, it does not change the fact that he is the employer who most clearly expresses a wish to be close to his child. Other male employers have not taken paternity leave to such a large extent.⁷ When asked whether there have been any special challenges when taking parental leave, one of the female employers, who had three children in a row, responded:

When I said that I was having the third then I did feel that they did not find it particularly cool. It was a bit like 'oh, again!'

Another female employer responded:

No, I don't think so, actually. I mean (...) I think, there is a reasonable understanding – for women anyway – that they should have their maternity leave.

She elaborated that she personally did not have any hesitations about taking maternity leave and argued that there were two years between the children, so she had been back at work for fourteen months before taking maternity leave again. In addition, she said:

I mean I was not nervous whether I was sitting on a ledge or what reactions would be. I think the reactions are very positive when people are expecting them.

It is noteworthy that she pointed out that she did *not* worry about whether she could maintain her job when considering that she only made use of the existing rules. Apparently there is a perception that asking for parental leave is tantamount to asking for a personal favour. If women's maternity leave raises hesitations among female employers it is logical to conclude that when men want paternity leave they encounter some problems.

⁷ One employer made use of the two weeks.

Conclusion

As we described in the article, fatherhood has been changing in Denmark. Today many men's ideas about responsibility for the family tend to revolve around such aspects as close contact with a child and involvement in a family. This is a distinctive shift with regards to the traditional hegemonic masculinity, which primarily associates responsibility with ensuring the financial basis for the family. However, the Swedish researcher Lars Plantin (2001) has emphasized that the cultural expectations about men and fatherhood are changing faster than the actual practices of men.

There seems to be relatively little attention given, in the interviews, to the significance of gender for *all* the decisions concerning the child, parental leave and domestic affairs in general. In other words, the implicit privileges of the parties are not being contemplated in particularly critical way. Consequently, the privileges remain implicit and function as invisible barriers, thereby hindering the development of alternate gendered identity constructions and possibilities of enactment. It also indicates that gender is more often "performed than talked about."

These implicit gendered barriers impede the development of fathers' identity more highly integrated into the sphere of the family. The fathers themselves indicate it, among other things, when they clearly say that their decision to take parental leave is a *choice*, unlike the wife/partner who is not given this option. Furthermore, the paradox exists in the fathers' explanation that they find it a matter of course to take parental leave, on the one hand, and their surprise when the surroundings express wonder about their choice, on the other hand. This might explain why one father chooses to describe his choice of parental leave as pioneering.

To a large extent, men relate notions of presence and involvement to the idea of what it means to take care of the family today. The fathers emphasize that it is worth all the trouble to be on parental leave. They particularly stress that one of the best things during parental leave is when they get to know their child and their child gets to know them.

Furthermore, the fathers explain that it is very inspiring to follow the child's development. The life enriching and meaningful elements are persistently put forward as a central motivational factor. It seems that having an opportunity to take on child caring and domestic affairs, the fathers not only get to know their children and themselves better but also their partners. The fathers' involvement in child caring and the family provides them with an opportunity to break the more or less implicit monopoly the mother holds in these areas.

It is difficult to point to some clear general tendencies with regard to employers' attitudes and experiences of employees taking paternity leave. Still, there are some indications that point to a positive direction. Employers often stress that employees on paternity leave do not constitute a problem. Some even convey that the work place can gain from it. Furthermore, they argue that when men take paternity leave it sharpens the company's awareness of the necessity of sharing knowledge between employees.

However, it cannot be ruled out that the question of paternity leave can raise conflicts between employer and employees. To enhance legitimacy, and thereby reduce the potential career dilemmas for men who choose to take paternity leave, it is important to challenge the rhetorical referrals to coercion with regard to paternity leave. Making use of a discourse of rights rather than the idea of forcing more men to take paternity leave sends the signal that paternity leave is a benefit and not a burden. If more men really are to think of paternity leave as a personal right, it is important to develop a parental culture in which taking parental leave becomes a right and a matter of course and not a thing with damaging career consequences.

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4

Atypical Choice: Perceptions of Paternity Leave Amongst Maltese Public Sector Male Employees and Department Heads

CELIA CALLUS

Introduction and Objectives

In Malta, the paternity leave option was only legally extended to the private sector in October 2003. To a great extent direct experience with paternity leave as of the date of the research could only be found within the public sector.

The umbrella objective of the “Modern Men in Enlarged Europe” project was “to identify, develop and sustain innovative gender equality strategies regarding men and paternity leave.”¹ With the aim of identifying possible strategies and courses of action, the Malta project had as its objectives the investigation of perceptions of, and attitudes towards, paternity leave amongst two categories which, to date, have been directly involved in the application of paternity leave. These are male public sector employees who have availed themselves of the leave option and public sector heads of departments who have approved paternity leave applications for male employees under their responsibility.

The generic research objectives of this project were to gain an understanding of how:

1. fathers deal with paternity leave
2. masculine identity relates to the concept of paternity leave

¹ <http://www.dadcomehome.org/en/>

3. employers' view paternity leave legislation and its impact on the workplace.

Methodology

First Category of Interest: Employees

Public domain data was consulted to obtain the details of all the male employees within the public sector who had availed themselves of paternity leave in the eight-year period since paternity leave regulations were implemented. A total of 11 male employees had availed themselves of paternity leave during this period. All were invited to attend an interview. 10 accepted to participate in the study.

All the one-hour in-depth interviews were carried out between January 14th and February 14th 2005.

Second Category of Interest: Department Heads

Eligible informants were contacted using public domain public service records. In all a total of six heads of department were contacted and four accepted to participate in the study. 45-minute interviews were carried out with each informant between 14th January and 14th February 2005.

Participant Profiles

Breakdowns of father and employer informant profiles are given in Tables 1 and 2.

TABLE 1: Informant Profiles for the Fathers' Category

Age	Level of education	Paternity leave period	Number of children	Spouse's age	Spouse's level of education
31	Tertiary	28 wks	3	40	Postgraduate
42	Tertiary	30 wks	1	46	Postgraduate

TABLE 1 CONTINUED

Age	Level of education	Paternity leave period	Number of children	Spouse's age	Spouse's level of education
46	Tertiary	2yrs 5mts	2	32	Tertiary
44	Tertiary	1yr 24 wks	2	47	Post-Secondary
38	Vocational	20 wks	2	31	Vocational
35	Tertiary	1 yr	3	33	Tertiary
35	Tertiary	3yrs	2	33	Tertiary
33	Tertiary	1yr	2	33	Post-Secondary
46	Tertiary	2 yrs	2	34	Tertiary
34	Tertiary	1 yr	2	34	Tertiary

TABLE 2: Informant Profiles for the Employers' Category

Age	Sex	Position held for	Sector	Number of employees	Typical level of education	% of Men in organisation
45	M	8 yrs	Health	750	Secondary	51 – 75
58	F	1 yr	Education	Ca. 7,000	Post-Secondary	< 25
58	M	5 yrs	Aviation	48	Vocational/Tertiary	51 – 75
50	F	25 yrs	Health	114	Tertiary	25 – 49

Results Fathers

Motivations and the Decision-Taking Process

The top motivation for applying for paternity leave which was given by informants was that of being able to spend time with the child. They wanted to be “*more involved*” and to have more time to enjoy the children “*before time ran out.*” One respondent said that it had been his “*dream*” to take time off to devote to his children and that before doing so he found himself feeling jealous of his wife and of the “*special relationship*” she had with the children. In one case, the

informant said that he expected it to be a “*rewarding experience*” and had embarked on it in this spirit.

This reason was often accompanied by a second motivation which generally fell under one of the following:

1. *to provide the child with a caregiver while minimising the negative impact on domestic finances.* In many cases, the spouse was the higher income earner and/or could not afford to be away from her job at the time. In one case, the couple had no relatives who were able to care for the child while the couple were at work. In the other cases, however, the informants explained that they did not want their child to be raised by the grandparents or a babysitter and had decided to take time off work so that they would take personal responsibility for their child’s upbringing – at least for the duration of the paternity leave period.
2. *to benefit from a career break.* In quite a few cases, the informant described how he had not been finding his job fulfilling enough at the time and therefore saw the paternity leave option as a good opportunity to remove himself from the work environment as he considered future career options.²

The fact that many fathers had a ‘secondary motivation’ distinct from their expressed wish to spend time with the child is in a way testimony to the ‘extraordinary’ nature of their decision as it is not, as the informants themselves often mentioned, the accepted norm in Malta for fathers to take time off work to spend time with their children. It was made quite clear during the course of the interviews that, while the problem of having a caregiver for the child and/or needing a career break was ‘secondary’ to the desire to spend time with the child, it was by no means a negligible consideration and often had significant weight in the father’s final decision.

² As one employer aptly put it, “One is always a bit surprised to see a man’s name (*on the paternity leave application form*) but then one finds out that there is another reason for the father’s decision and that it will benefit both spouses in the long-term.” (See Section 5.2.3)

In most cases, informants took the decision with their spouses and only in a couple of cases did the informant claim that the decision was theirs alone. In one case, the informant's spouse had doubted how genuine he was about wanting to spend time with the children. Whilst this may be considered an extreme example within the group of fathers participating in the study, it illustrates the culturally-determined 'surprise' and, in cases such as this one, 'disbelief' in the face of a highly uncommon decision. In the researcher's experience, this may often extend to resistance (stated or covert) to the idea. However, this facet of gender-determined parenting roles was not covered by this study and it is reasonable to assume that the informants were, by virtue of their actions, more positively inclined than most towards this infrequent choice.

Not all informants faced this type of reaction from their spouses. A different reaction was described by an informant who said that his wife had always encouraged him to take paternity leave. He also said that she had been "*pushing him*" to take time off to stay with the children for some time and was very happy when he finally agreed to do so.

The main sources of information used by informants were: the media, in-house circulars and colleagues. In a few cases informants had been guided by the department's HR department while one informant in particular had gotten to know about the option through his union newsletter.

Reactions from Family, Friends and Colleagues

Informants said that they were met with generally positive, albeit not overly enthusiastic reactions. The third-party opinions which appeared to carry most weight with informants were those of spouses, parents and in-laws. As described by the informants themselves, there was some element of surprise but in most cases the decision was easily accepted and did not attract a strong reaction.

In a few cases, informants did receive some negative reactions, especially from parents who expressed concern about the informant jeopardising his work position. A couple of others were worried that

the informant would not cope and/or expected that he would not do any of the domestic chores leaving the bulk of the work to the wife.

Reactions from colleagues varied from incredulous surprise to indifference. A few colleagues did react quite strongly (sometimes offensively) to what they saw as an unorthodox choice. *"They thought I was a bit bizarre."* Some colleagues passed comments about him doing a *"woman's job"*: *"It's shameful – he's the housewife!"*, *"Why (are you taking paternity leave)? Are you pregnant?!"* *"So will we see you again or will you be staying at home now?"*

A couple of informants did mention that the strongest criticism came from their older male colleagues. Female colleagues were said to be generally in favour of the decision and were generally much more understanding. In a couple of cases some younger male colleagues showed an interest in the option and said that they might consider taking paternity leave themselves in the future if they could afford it.

The financial problem was also mentioned by the informants' colleagues. A few asked the informants how they could afford to do without a full-time salary and expressed some regret that they would never be able to avail themselves of this option as they did not have the financial capability to do so.

When asked to describe how their superiors had reacted to their communicating their decision to go on paternity leave, a couple of informants said that their bosses had initially reacted quite negatively and had insisted that they be given a replacement for the duration of the paternity leave period. Some colleagues were also clearly aggravated by the fact that they would have to do his share of the work. However, after informants insisted with their department head or human resources manager that the necessary arrangements be made and, in a couple of cases, stated that they would accept being transferred to a new department on re-entry should it be necessary, the application was approved.

As discussed above, the range of reactions from surprise to disdain is not surprising to an observer of local Maltese culture. The novelty of the decision (most third parties mentioned here would not have had direct experience of male relatives or acquaintances taking

paternity leave); may be partly what instigated this reaction. However, one must keep in mind that Maltese society, whilst strongly matriarchal in the private sphere, is relatively unacquainted with the role of the father extending into that of a main caregiver – or even with extending much beyond the role of main breadwinner.

Experience and Evaluation of Paternity Leave

Informants' perceptions of the daily chores varied quite significantly. Around half the respondents said that they felt very relaxed and that they found housework and caring for the children not at all stressful when compared to their jobs; *"housework is not stressful," "I felt quite laid back."* Another few informants, however, said that they always found themselves being kept very busy: *"hectic," "much more busy than work," "a jam-packed day!"*

When asked to evaluate the experience, many informants had positive comments. Their paternity leave appeared to be generally viewed as a special period where they had time to enjoy their children and their home: *"I have many nice memories."* *"At the end of it I wished I could have extended the leave period."* *"I really made the most of my time with the children. I used to take them everywhere."*

The Challenge of Creating a New Routine

A few fathers found the experience challenging: *"I couldn't get used to not having a routine."* *"I found it very difficult to spend so much time at home."* *"I felt a bit tied down as I could do nothing unless the children were asleep."* The major challenges mentioned by almost all informants were a) getting used to a different routine, b) doing without adult company and c) some aspects of child caring which they needed guidance on, such as, weaning.

Informants were also surprised by other aspects of paternity leave which they had not envisaged finding difficulty with: namely, the amount of energy and commitment that domestic work requires, the challenge of sticking to a routine and the effort required on re-entering full-time employment after a period of absence.

In spite of the challenges, the informants' evaluation of paternity leave was described in very positive terms: "*It makes life more fulfilling.*" "*It makes you see work, and life, from a different perspective.*" "*It allowed me to be more involved with the child's upbringing – we have a special bond now.*" "*It shows you the beauty of parenting.*"

Also significant was the fact that, for around half the fathers in the study the leave period served as a career break. In some cases their job was no longer satisfying and they welcomed the leave period as a time to revisit priorities and make a fresh start career-wise.

A Financial Burden

The paternity leave option was also praised for being a means by which to give the spouse a chance to re-enter the job market or consolidate her position at work. In a few cases, the spouse was the higher income earner and the paternity leave option allowed the couple to choose to give up the lower salary for the duration of the leave

As per National Statistics Office data³, the percentage of gainfully employed females aged 16 – 64 in the population is 32. This low figure indicates that the number of dual income earners in Malta may be very low – especially when compared with other European countries. The fact that so many households rely on a single income can go a long way towards explaining the low take-up of paternity leave.

Although almost all the informants said that they would be prepared to repeat the experience if they had another child, many said that were not planning to because of the financial setback it entailed. Indeed, for almost all the informants this was the worst thing about the paternity leave option, and giving financial support – even if limited – was mentioned as something that the fathers felt should be considered by the relevant authorities.

Paternity Leave: An Evaluation

The best things about paternity leave as mentioned by informants were that it:

³ Labour Force Survey dated 2nd November 2005 (No 237/2005)

1. gives you time to appreciate the family and other things in life (besides work);
2. gives you a direct experience of the children and is a learning experience in child-rearing;
3. allows you time off work and to enjoy a less hectic pace of life;
4. allows the spouse to re-enter the job market/devote more time to her work.

The worst things about paternity leave mentioned were that it:

1. involves a considerable financial setback which requires one to alter ones lifestyle;
2. exposes one to some negative/judgemental attitudes from acquaintances and colleagues;
3. involves spending a lot of time alone and losing contact with adults;
4. can have a negative effect on career prospects; such as setting you back in terms of promotions;
5. is a lot of work!

Informants were asked what they would do differently if they were to repeat the experience. There were few contributions at this point but some respondents did say that they would plan the leave period better so as to make the most of it, "*because time flies!*" A couple of others said that they would try to be less isolated during this time and be more open to social activities. A couple of informants would also appreciate keeping in touch with their workplace through reduced working hours rather than losing contact completely. A few respondents mentioned that they would, with hindsight, know how to take better care of their children and would make sure that they made the most of their time together.

Suggestions for Improvement

The most frequently mentioned suggestion for improvement was that the family be given some financial support for the duration of the

paternity leave period. This was very greatly stressed by the majority of informants who said that they would have extended the leave period if they could afford to and that worrying about how to make ends meet can at time be very stressful.

Other suggestions for improvement made were to:

1. give paternity leave takers guidelines on how to replace the work routine and spend time in the home more efficiently;
2. increase the maximum age of the child when paternity leave can be availed of;
3. allow a "reduced hours" clause for when children are older;
4. allow the paternity leave period to count as time in service safeguarding the employee's seniority and promotion prospects;
5. modify legislation so that the leave option can be broken down into a number of leave periods and/or used with more than one child.

When asked for the optimum duration of the leave period, four informants said that they would expect it to be between two and three years, three informants said that four years would be more adequate while three said that there should not be any limit on the duration of the paternity leave period and that parents should be allowed to go on paternity leave for as long as the couple could afford it.

Comparison to Paid Employment

When asked to compare being on paternity leave to being in paid employment, most of the informants interviewed said that they found the two experiences to be very different.

The two main advantages of being on paternity leave were, of course, that one had more time to spend with the children and that one had an opportunity to learn about and "*garner enthusiasm*" for the home which one was generally more detached from while on a full-time working schedule.

Less Stressful/More Flexible

Paternity leave was said to be generally more relaxing because one's schedule was more flexible and during paternity leave "*you're your own boss.*" Although both activities required time, energy and, to some informants' surprise, commitment, the tasks that they had to attend to during paternity leave were seen to be generally less taxing and time seemed to "*pass quicker*" than when at work.

Isolation/Lack of Contact with Colleagues

A number of informants also commented on the fact that they felt detached from the social structure. Being away from the work environment, many of them found that they had very little contact with the outside world and with adult company. This, they felt, was the great drawback of being on paternity leave. The other major point mentioned was that the financial situation of the household was dramatically different without their monthly income.

In order to gather a better understanding of the informants' experience of paternity leave they were asked to mention what they missed whilst away from work. The responses given, in decreasing order of frequency were:

1. interaction with others: daily conversations with colleagues, the maintenance of friendships within the working environment and the daily contact with people – clients, students etc – which one had on a regular workday;
2. the interest factor and satisfaction that working in one's chosen field allowed;
3. having an established work routine: This was viewed positively by some informants who had initially found the unstructured nature of domestic work a bit difficult to get used to.

Relationship with Partner

Practically all the informants in the study said that their opting to go on paternity leave for a shorter or longer period of time benefited the relationship with their partner. Their being on paternity leave

allowed them to spend more time with their partners. It also improved communication because they were both calmer and less stressed and because the situation at home became “healthier” – less hassled and time-constrained.

Most of the informants said that it helped them understand their partner’s role within the family – “*Now I know what it is like!*” It allowed them to learn how to contribute more to the housework and care of the children. The spouses were said to be “*very happy*” that the fathers had opted to go on paternity leave and in most cases appreciated their decision. In fact, some fathers commented that during the period that they were on paternity leave, their spouse appeared to be happier and in a better mood. This they attributed to the fact that she was less stressed from coping with work and domestic demands during the time the father was handling a good part of the child caring responsibilities. In one case, an informant said that he knew his wife was “*proud of him*” for taking such a decision.

During the time that this study was carried out, all informants except for one had returned to full-time employment (only one father was on reduced hours during the time the study was carried out). Now that all the informants except one are back to full-time employment, care for the child is being split equally between the spouses in five cases. Three informants take over caring for the child during the time when both he and his spouse are at home.

Relationship with Child

The question on how paternity leave had impacted their relationship with their child elicited enthusiastic responses amongst the interviewed fathers. Practically all the informants said that their relationship with their child improved because of the extra time spent together. It affected the way their child saw them and this effect was still noticeable at the time of the study when the great majority (all except one) of the fathers had returned to their full-time working schedule.

Some of the fathers were happy to describe how they had now become their child’s “*point of reference*.” The paternity leave period had strengthened the bond with the child and enabled them to “*put down roots*” on which to build the relationship with the child in the future.

Positive Comparison to Mother/Child Relationship

Interestingly, many informants compared their relationship with their child to the one their partner had. In some cases, the mother was still seen to have the better relationship with the child. A “*better relationship*” was generally said to belong to the parent the child referred to when in trouble and/or more willingly obeyed and accepted as an authority figure. In quite a few cases, however, the father said (with some evident pride) that their relationship with the child was as good as or even better than that enjoyed by the mother: “*I feel as important as the mother now! Not one little bit less!*” The relationship was said to be much better (“*much, much better*”) and they were now a lot closer than they had been before.

This contributed to some very positive feelings about paternity leave amongst fathers and elicited some superlative comments from the informants at this point: “[It was] *an experience I will never forget.*” “*We became very close. I am still her (the daughter’s) point of reference today.*” “*She still remembers what I did for her (informant had been on paternity leave four years earlier) and occasionally someone will remind her about it. We still have a very good relationship.*”

Communication with the child was generally seen to have improved as they had time to get to know and understand each other. In a couple of cases the informant said that the child “*grew more like me*” while one father said that they understand each other so well now that “*sometimes words are unnecessary*” and “*a look or a gesture is enough.*”

When asked whether paternity leave allowed them to learn anything new about their child and about what caring for them entailed, quite a few said that it did not. The reasons given for this were that, a) they had older children, b) worked with and/or had extensive prior experience with children, c) it was largely the way they expected and d) because the child was too young at the time and therefore did not allow for the type of communication which would have allowed them to get to know the child better.

Those who answered in the affirmative said that they were surprised to find that it was so demanding. As one respondent said, “*Things did not happen automatically!*” and required a lot of time and

energy to get done. A couple of informants commented on how surprised they were to see how quick the child was to learn new things and by how time-consuming it was to make sure that the child was safe and sound.

Being a Good Father

Informants offered some differing definitions of a good father but most revolved round three key factors:

1. being responsible for the child: both financially and emotionally. This includes being “*someone (the child) can rely on*”, “*being a supportive shoulder*” and “*a friend when s/he grows older*.” “*A good father always puts his child first – both financially and psychologically.*”
2. actively instilling values, a sense of discipline and desirable qualities in the child: A good father was defined by some as being a “*good role model*.” He puts great store by setting a good example and takes responsibility for the child’s education – both moral and academic;
3. investing time in his child: by “being present” in his/her life. This includes striving to achieve a healthy work-life balance and finding time to care for the child. A good father also finds time to play, listen and pay attention to the child. “*A good father always finds time for his child.*”

Being a good father was described as being “*very involving*.” Whilst most of the informants mentioned all three characteristics listed above in some way, the most striking difference was in how they thought fit to rear their child. Some fathers insisted on the importance of discipline and actively guiding the child’s choices when young while others described how they took pains to “*discuss*” issues with their child and how discipline encompassed both mutual respect and friendship.

When asked whether they considered themselves to be good fathers, about half the respondents said they thought they were whilst the other half said they tried to be good fathers. (“*Struggled*” was the term used by one informant.)

An Improved Self-Image

Most of the informants explained how paternity leave period had helped them become better fathers. It gave them enough time to understand their child and be involved in his/her upbringing. Some said that paternity leave taught them what being a good father was all about. They are now more involved in the physical care of the child and are also more careful about their behaviour around the child when at home.

The feeling of being a better father made informants feel “*more complete*.” This was described as a fantastic feeling (“*Täl-genn!*”) and as something which gave a great feeling of fulfilment and satisfaction. For a couple of informants, the feeling of being a good father was also that of knowing that when you die, you will be alive in your children.

Informants were asked to give an example of when they acted like a good father. The examples given were the following:

1. Spending three weeks attending to son in hospital.
2. Preparing a meal for the family while on a family outing.
3. Staying up with the child when she couldn't sleep.
4. Punishing child for not getting good exam grades.
5. Going on paternity leave.
6. Reading to daughter regularly when she was young.
7. Consoling children after someone broke into their home.
8. Being available for the children every day – at any time they need him.
9. Coming to realise that the children were fulfilling duties and managing well in life.

Perceptions of Masculinity and Parenting

Informants were asked to comment on the statement that childcare was primarily a woman's job. Most of the informants disagreed with this statement.

All informants but one said that childcare was equally the responsibility of the mother and the father. Some informants said that times had changed and that the local mentality with regard to this issue had to be challenged. The idea was said to be “*old-fashioned*” and

“*sexist*.” It was said to be an idea which was applicable a while ago but was now no longer so given that women want to be involved in productive, paid employment. It is no longer an accurate picture of the reality at home.

A few exceptions were pointed out during the course of the discussion, Childcare was still deemed to be primarily the woman’s job if:

- a) the father is the sole breadwinner,
- b) the father is more involved in his job/career than the mother;
- c) the child is physiologically dependant on the mother; such as during the initial “breast-feeding period.”

The one informant who agreed with the statement said that it was true because women were naturally “*more caring*” than men and were therefore more suited to caring for young children.

When informants were asked for their views on why it is generally the mother who takes time off work for the children, most said that it was because the father was usually the higher earner in the household. Other motivations given were that it is traditionally and culturally considered more “*acceptable*” but also because, after child birth, the mother would need some time off work to get her strength back. At this time the man could feel “*useless*” around the house and might prefer to spend his time at work.

As mentioned earlier, couple of informants said that the first few months of the baby’s life were particularly important and that at this time the mother is possibly more important to its well being than the father. However, in the opinion of all informants, following this initial period, both the mother and the father should have an equal opportunity to spend time with the child.

The “Traditional Man”

Informants were asked whether they would call themselves ‘traditional men.’ Most informants disagreed with this.

All the informants commented that ‘traditional Men’ would not consider going on paternity leave “*or even changing nappies!*” They wouldn’t be very involved in running the family and caring for the

children. One informant described himself as “*rather unorthodox*” while another said that he always saw his role as being more than that of just the main breadwinner. There appeared to be rather strong views on this topic and some of the informants expressed themselves rather emphatically on this issue.

A few insisted that they were not traditional (“*Not one bit!*”) and while they enjoyed “*traditional activities*” with the family (such as family dinners and outings), they did not consider themselves the kind of man who worked all day and returned to the home in the evening “*expecting to be waited on by the wife.*”

One informant in particular said that he used to be a ‘traditional man’ but that his perception of himself and the way he related to his family changed during his paternity leave period (“*I was that way – not anymore*”). Spending time with the child made him realise how much a father’s input meant to the child and made him realise that a father’s role was distinct from that of breadwinner and very important to the child and the family as a whole.

Self-Perceptions and Perceptions of Others

The informants’ perceptions of themselves had improved following their experience. Some said they felt “*more complete.*” That they had found a better balance between the male and female roles within the family and that they were proud of themselves and more confident that they could manage any situation following this experience. One respondent said that he is very happy that he got the chance to care for his children himself (rather than having the grandparents or a baby sitter take care of them) and it gave him a sense of his own importance within the family. Overall, the interviewed fathers felt they had grown and learnt a lot about parenting through their decision to take time off work to be with the children.

Paternity leave was said to have both positive and negative effects on others’ perceptions of the informants. Around half of the informants said that friends and acquaintances had generally appreciated, and in some cases admired what he had done for his child. In their experience, the local mentality about parenting is changing

and other people he had come across had acknowledged that it was natural for the father to want to “*do his share*.” The informants said that they had received some positive comments and a couple said that they still do when they describe what they did to outsiders.

Three informants, however, had rather negative experiences with feedback from other people. They felt that a lot of people judged them negatively because they were “*doing a woman’s job*” and one informant said he was still teased when he took a day off work by some colleagues who would say, “*Off work today? Again?*”

Another informant who teaches at a girls’ secondary school said that his students had made fun of his decision at the time and had not understood his need to be with his children during the early years.

Employers

All the informants had very limited experience with male employees availing themselves of unpaid paternity leave. Awareness of public service paternity leave policy was low.

As mentioned above, all the informants came from the Public Sector and they all referred to Public Service regulations when asked about paternity leave policy. Only one informant was able to describe the service regulations on paternity leave mentioning the 13 weeks paid and 1 week optional unpaid maternity leave as well as the 5-year career break which may be availed of up to the time when the child is six years old. This informant also mentioned the reduced-hours option.

The other informants said that their department complied with Public Service regulations and that they would refer to their HR department for information on terms and conditions whenever necessary.

How Paternity Leave Impacts the Organisation

Informants were asked to explain how they felt about the paternity leave option. All four interviewees said that they felt that having an employee on paternity leave was very disruptive to day-to-day op-

erations: *"It's bound to be disruptive, isn't it?"* This was particularly the case when the employee held a senior position or was heading a working team of some sort: *"very inconvenient"* and *"a nightmare."*

Although a replacement could be asked for, and colleagues would generally take on the employee's workload, most of the informants felt that the paternity leave option interfered greatly with the smooth running of their department. One informant said that she had a running joke with women who applied for paternity leave – *"I tell them that they should have submitted an application before getting pregnant!"*

In a couple of cases the informants encouraged the employee to go on a reduced hours schedule rather than to absent themselves from work completely. However, for two respondents, having employees on reduced hours was even more tiresome and difficult to manage as they would generally have to *"negotiate hours"* with the employee and adjust other employee's schedules to fit in with the schedule of the person on reduced hours. In some cases the employee was also seen to be too involved with the child to be fully committed to his work responsibilities. As one head of department put it, *"Their thoughts would still be full of the child and it's difficult to get them to think about work and only work."*

The main problems with reduced hours as identified by informants are:

1. negotiating working duties around family commitments;
2. frequent handovers;
3. employees generally missing out on the first (planning) part of the day;
4. negative reactions and resistance from the other members of staff.

One informant who headed a department in the health sector said: *"We must make it very clear that even if you are working on a reduced hours schedule you have responsibilities. The department needs continuity and regularity."*

For one informant, paternity leave is good for women as it was a means to keep them in employment and on the department's staff list. However, for other informants, it was said to be a necessity – one in-

formant termed it “*social progress*.” As one informant pointed out, *all* long-leave options created disruption and inconvenienced the running of the department and paternity leave was one of these options.

How Paternity Leave Impacts the Employee

Apart from the inconvenience it caused the organisation, informants had generally positive comments about how the experience of paternity leave affected the employee. Both mothers and fathers who availed themselves of parental leave options were seen to mature as a result of this experience.

A negative side to paternity leave was mentioned by a couple of informants with regards to senior or professional staff. As one informant pointed out, the paternity leave period generally occurred during a time when the employee would be reaching a peak in career development. The leave period is often used to make a career change so that the department often loses some of its best-trained and most experience employees through this leave option.

Another point mentioned was that “*paternity leave can be abused of*” and that this was very de-motivating for the other employees. One informant especially stressed the potential for abuse – especially with male employees, who, he felt, would use the long leave option for other purpose: “*There is always another reason with the men* (who apply for paternity leave).”

However, paternity leave was said to be fundamentally a praiseworthy option by all informants and very motivating for the employees who do avail themselves of it. As one informant put it, “*We’re not over the moon (when an employee goes on unpaid leave) as we can barely cope as it is but in this case he was a senior and trusted employee and I was sure that he did not have ulterior motives.*”

As mentioned by practically all informants, the major problem apart from having to find a replacement for the duration of the leave period was the possibility of losing the employee who would have looked for, and found, alternative employment during the paternity leave period.

Extent of Personal Experience with Paternity Leave Applications

As mentioned earlier, the informants had very limited experience with employees availing themselves of paternity leave. When asked to describe their reaction they all said that they had been surprised initially.

One informant who had such applications from four professional-grade employees was afraid that it would interrupt operations and had tried to persuade the employees to opt for working on a reduced-hours scheme. Another informant said that he had made it a point to discuss the decision with the employee and "*make sure that he know what he was doing* (and of the financial drawback it involved.)"

Would the Informants Avail Themselves of Paternity Leave?

None of the informants from the employers' category had ever availed themselves of paternity leave. Only one informant said that he would *not* consider the option if he were to have a child at this time. The reason this was that his spouse does not work and therefore "*there is no reason (for me) to be at home with the child.*" The same informant also admitted to being "*rather traditional on these issues.*"

Recommendations

Attitudes towards Paternity Leave and Gender Equality

All informants said that they agreed with the concept of equal rights and responsibilities for both sexes. However, while two informants said that it was right that paternity leave be extended to fathers saying that things "*have changed*" and that this egalitarian view of childcare was gaining ground, another two qualified their statements.

For one informant, "*females are better at bringing up children.*" "*Women should have longer parental leave periods. It was always that way.*"

For another, "*it is good that fathers take time off work to be with the child, but the child will always gravitate towards the mother. Men don't know how to care for children. Women do.*"

One female informant said, "*It is always a risk to have a woman in your staff but you shouldn't be biased by this. This option and others will help more women gain senior positions because there are more concessions being made enabling them to cope with both work and family life.*" She also pointed out that she has lost more staff through emigration leave than through employees opting to go on paternity leave.

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5

Can Men Do It? On Men, Caring and Gender Equality in an East/West European Perspective

ØYSTEIN GULLVÅG HOLTER

Introduction

This paper outlines main issues of men, masculinities and gender equality today, using a comparative European perspective. Starting with the historically uneven ‘gender geography’ of Europe and a comparison of two countries (Lithuania and Norway), I discuss gender as an element in economic and social development. The paper gives evidence on links between gender inequality and stagnated development, why gender equality is important, and how gender equality, welfare and democratization are connected. I also analyse how the current approaches to gender equality differ from those of the past, and what Eastern Europe can learn from ‘Nordic’ models.

The paper also contains discussions of gender theory and analysis. Bringing in men requires a change of perspective, but does it mean to leave a feminist analysis behind? Or, on the contrary, a more developed feminist views? It describes a “gender power” model of discrimination which is often problematic, and the ways in which more structural and societal models of gender equality and discrimination can be applied.

Background

Some of the main concerns in studies of men and masculinities today include the appropriateness of men as a gender category, the character of gender-related power, and issues of caring, transforming norms into practices, and creating gender-equal developments among men. These are described in my book “Can Men Do It” (Holter 2003b) that was recently translated to Lithuanian (*Ar vyrai sugebės*). The book proposes a gender equality change method that will be discussed in this paper.

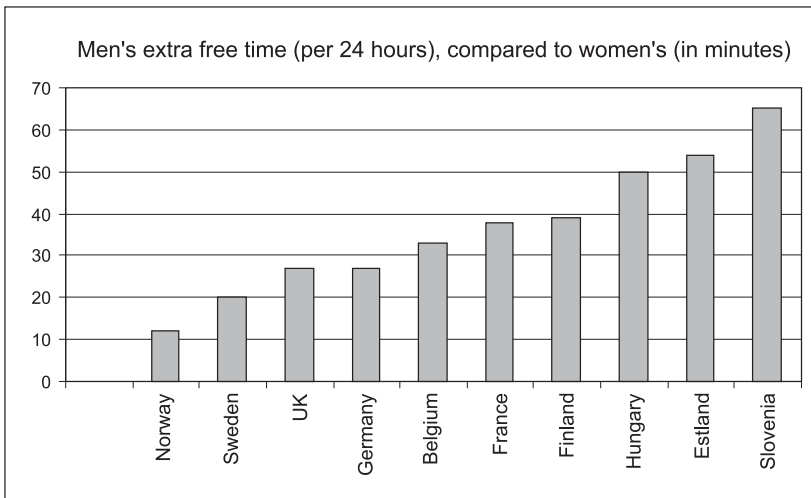
On a theory level, the method requires some reconceptualisation of gender and power. Men’s position in the gender hierarchy is seen as mixed rather than purely dominant. Gender-related power is more complex than one category (men) against another (women). Gender discrimination includes ranking within each gender (Waller 1938). Discrimination relates to social and cultural structures that operate on both sides of the gender line. The end result of the processes of discrimination, in society as a whole, is the subordination of women. However, this result does not imply that women are the ‘second sex’ within each arena or sphere in society. In practice, the ‘patriarchal dividend’ of men (Connell 1995) varies, and costs can vary too (Seidler 2004; Ekenstam et al. 1998; Payne 2002).

Direct gender hierarchy or the gender system should be interpreted as part of wider indirect gender hierarchies (Holter 2004a). The relevance of the ‘narrow’ gender power model in which men have the power and women don’t depends on these wider structures. This is sometimes discussed in terms of ‘male dominance’ and the wider structures of ‘patriarchy’. Patriarchal structures and gender systems are two quite different things, although these structures influence the gender system strongly, and in a sense, create its framework. Yet gender cannot be reduced to power. In practice, gender system relations also contain democratic and oppositional traits. In fact, in a wider historical perspective, modern and more horizontal gender systems have gradually replaced parts of patriarchy in many regions of the world (Therborn 2004; Holter 1997e).

This process is very uneven, however, giving rise to ambivalence and conflict. Within Europe, certain 'gender geography' can be seen (Puchert et al. 2005). Traditionally, the main European gender equality variation has been between the north and the south – with northern Europe ranking higher on measures of gender equality (like many women in leadership, low pay gap, and high domestic work sharing), the south, lower, and the middle, in the middle. This has been shown by economic research, time use statistics, opinion polls etc. Today, however, an east-west dimension is also very visible, with the west ranking higher than the east.

Here is an example, showing men's extra free time per 24 hours, in minutes, for men compared to women, in a recent EU 10-nation study (based on Vaage 2005b table 1, see further EC 2004).

DIAGRAM 1 **Men's extra free time, 2000**

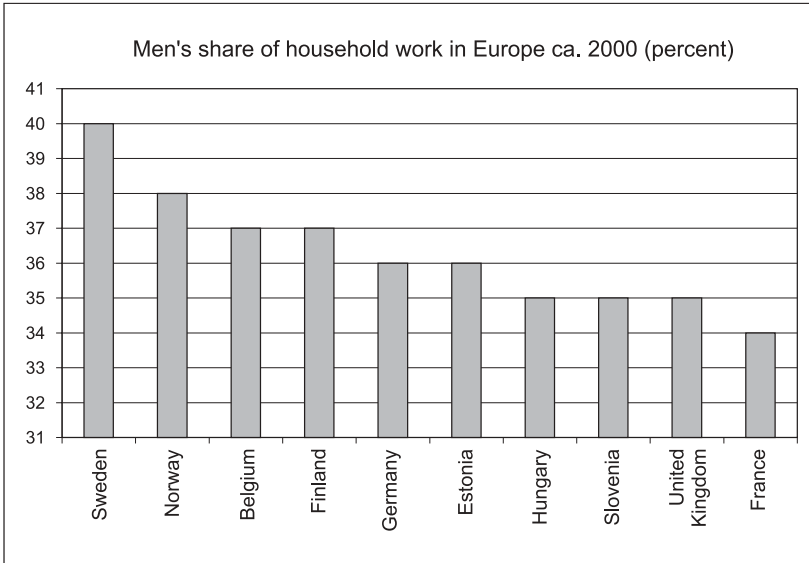


The geographical pattern in diagram 1 is quite typical. Both the north/south and the west/east dimensions appear here. The most northern countries are at the top of the list with the most gender-equal free time, except Finland in the north-east. In all countries,

gender equality is “partial” if the free time variable is used as an indicator. At the same time, we have large variation in Europe.

A similar pattern appears in terms of household work, as it can be seen in Diagram 2 (based on Vaage 2005 table 3).

DIAGRAM 2 **Men's share of household work, 2000**



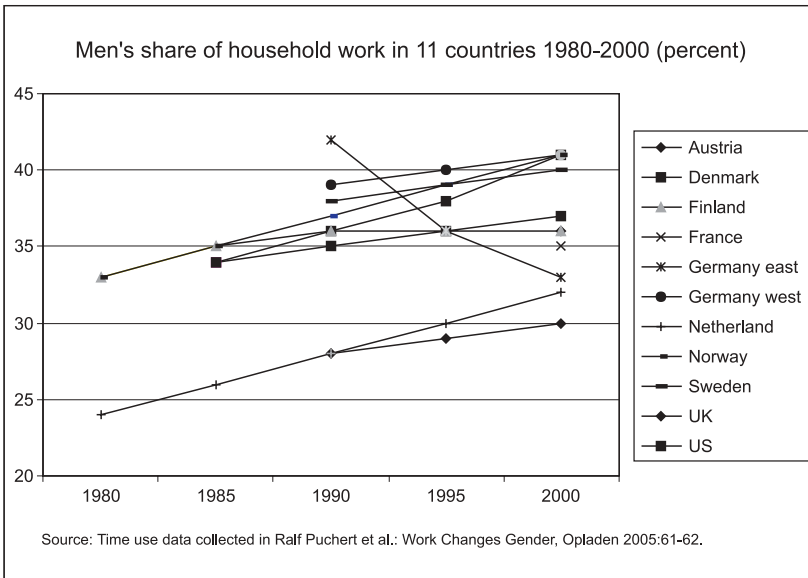
The geographical variation in household work division between men and women is quite clear. European countries vary.

This variation can also be found in opinion surveys. In a 2002 survey on attitudes towards equality in a number of countries, people were asked whether they agreed with the following statement: “A man’s job is to earn money; a woman’s job is to look after the home and family.” In Sweden, roughly every tenth respondent agreed with this statement. Similar results came from the other Nordic countries and the Netherlands. However, in Slovakia, Latvia, Czech Republic and Poland, almost half of the population agreed with the statement (Nordh 2005:79).

Europe has nevertheless been characterised by very important common trends over the last decades. Gender equal norms have gained support, women’s position has been strengthened, and the sharing of household work has become more common.

The diagram 3 shows that men in most European countries have increased their share of household work, a trend that can also be observed in the US.

DIAGRAM 3 **Men’s share of household work, 1980-2000**



The time use studies summarised in diagram 3 are not always fully comparable but the trend information is usually consistent (see Puchert et al 2005:61-62). East Germany was a possible exception to the trend, but the data from the region seem to be somewhat conflicting. The common trend is that men have increased their share of household work (housework and domestic caregiving) two decades. Although the yearly change rate is low, the change in men’s participation becomes more visible in the wider time perspective. Household and caregiving

work is undergoing a gradual historical change, increasing 3-10 percent in most countries over the twenty years period. This confirms the trend towards gender convergence in time use found by time use analysts (Gershuny 2003) although the development in Eastern Europe is still unclear. In Western Europe, the north/south gap has been reduced, the south taking up 'northern' norms and measures.

The rules of this gender geography have many variations, and they should not be 'overused.' (The west is not always the 'best' – etc.). For example, although women's participation in working life mainly follows the rules, the degree of gender segregation in working life seems to follow a different pattern (Nermo 2004). The rules are often counteracted in more concrete circumstances, creating important exceptions, even established contra-distinctions.

In some contexts, official passivity can lead to gender change and social innovation. For example, institutions, organisations and networks can take up supportive measures that are not yet implemented by the state. Voluntary and informal networks can play a role. Such developments can occur in organizations and companies, as shown by the *Work Changes Gender* research, in which northern Spain (Catalonia) was a particularly clear example (Puchert et al. 2005). The social partners of the labour market and community forces can work together to 'engender' change and improvements. Results can include more gender-equal, flexible and extended parental leave regulations, used by many men as well as women. This finding was a surprise to the researchers since Spain (even in the Spanish interview material) was often described as a country of sexist segregation. Yet things are changing, and when little happens from the top, change may come from below or from the middle instead.

A centrality dimension should also be added to the gender geography. Central Europe (especially, Germany, and also France and the UK) is more gender-conservative than a compass directions model of European gender geography can explain. For example, German family policy is mentioned as a barrier to European development by Nordic welfare researchers (Kautto 2001) and its family-oriented welfare models are criticised as inflexible and non-innovative (God, 2005).

Historically, European gender inequality variation has been strongly influenced by centralisation of power. Gender discrimination structures tend to be stronger in the centre, along with other power variables (sources are summarized in Holter 1989:35-45). On the other hand, peripheral societies or groups tend to be somewhat more gender-equal than the centres. This centre/periphery scheme is not always true, however, especially if the peripheral country or people are threatened by a larger system that increases social stratification. In the centre, several rules run the other way. "Problems shifted downwards" is a frequent pattern of persistent power. The downshifting is one of several possible power saving rules. It includes attempts to transfer the costs of power downwards in the ranks and outwards to the periphery. Such mechanisms can become institutionalised as parts of patriarchal strategy (Holter 1997e: 383-428).

A Method of Gender Equality Change

Here I will describe the method outlined in my book "Can Men Do It" and further developed in later research. The method is broadly action-oriented and solution-focused, starting with positive needs and elements, and working from there (Thorsrud 1973; de Shazer 1994). This kind of position does not imply any denial of problems like gender-related exploitation, alienation and violence. Rather, gender discrimination analysis is used to clarify potentials for change and latent or hidden solution-generative processes. As Connell argues, "There is already a broad cultural shift toward a historical consciousness about gender" (2005:1818). The method suggested in "Can Men Do It" is historical and non-fundamentalist and it attempts to ally gender equality with other processes.

In the beginning, there is often a situation in which some men favour gender equality, but these are only a small minority. In order to get further, we need to look for wider processes that involve most participants. These processes do not walk around with a banner saying "this is really about gender equality," so we have to analyse things

a bit more. Family change and working life change are matters that should be examined.

I will use the family field as an example. Here we can see a trend among men moving away from “having” a family towards “being” in a family (Holter & Aarseth 1993). Such changes in family life (or working life) involve much more people than just gender equality-oriented pioneers. These changes appear among quite different sorts of men – especially, men in certain situations (Puchert et al. 2005). The new findings encourage “situationist” interpretations, however, the norms and ideologies that lie in the background should not be overlooked (Nordh 2005).

These processes are a part of family change, not only gender change. Yet changing gender-related structures lie in the background. There is a broader historical change beyond the traditional masculine breadwinner or main provider role. The ‘nucleus’ of the nuclear family is being redefined. Family theorists use terms like a “companionate marriage” (Scanzoni) and the “fall of patriarchy” (Therborn 2004:310).

Some processes of the family sphere are associated with increased gender equality, others with inequality. At the same time, many things are happening in the family sphere having no direct connection to gender in/equality. They may be related to other in/equalities instead and may not be linked to any form of power to a significant degree. Although it is true that the family sphere is often patterned by gender (this is also true of wage work), it cannot be reduced to gender. It has its own dynamic. This idea appears in recent Nordic studies in many ways, for example, in studies of violence which demonstrate that partner violence is caused by many partnership-related factors like an insecure relationship with jealousy and ambivalence, a marginal or insecure labour market positions and ethnic discrimination. These factors interact with gender factors (Haaland, Clausen & Schei 2005; Pape & Stefansen 2004; Sogn, Lorentzen & Holter 2005). At the same time, opinion studies in Norway and elsewhere demonstrate that children, caring and quality of life (and reproduction) as processes that cross gender lines have become more central in normative formations.

In the present situation, therefore, many forces like increasing individualization, education and globalization, along with gender change, are contributing to new standards of family life. Some new norms, for example, the norm that families should be more individually created, allowing more diversity, and the norm that men should be more active and caring as parents and in other family roles, gain more ground. In turn, if reasonably supported and not discriminated against, people's practices tend to follow the new goals; however, the split between ideals and realities is also often very noticeable. Among men, especially, this split was evident in the 1980s research (Jalmer 1984) although later studies indicated that consistency had increased.

Historically, developments of a new family sphere have often been controversial and subversive (Mount 1982). Like the workplace, the family can be both a catalyst and barrier in societal development, since it involves organized practices that put their demands on others and often tend to dominate the agenda.

States and authorities can respond in different ways to new demands of a family sphere. The family and the state can be more or less 'in synch'. Today, the low and sinking fertility in parts of Europe can be seen as an indicator that they are not aligned. I will discuss it below.

It is clear that family norms and processes can be connected to gender equality. But they can also be set up as its contrast or related to inequality. This connection seems to be a major predictor of the success of gender equality in society at large. For example, if many men and women feel a need for men to become more participative and active as fathers, the state can reject, avoid or support this tendency. On the contrary, it can also create reforms reducing the actual hindrances that active fathering meets.

In the Nordic region, this approach has increasingly been chosen. Paternal leave reforms created in the last fifteen years have been taken up by the majority of fathers. The result of such reforms has been a widening of the social and cultural basis for gender equality. The reforms of paternity leave have received more support from men than was predicted, and they have been seen increasingly as right (Brandth & Kvande 2003; Holter & Aarseth 1993).

The men's extensive use of the new reforms casts doubts on narrow gender-power models where men do not change unless they are forced to do it. Of course, using the parental leave does not, by itself, involve a farewell to male dominance but it does actualize processes that run counter to the wage winner model of dominance.

In comparative analysis of different "gender contracts" (or work/family adaptations) in the labour market, the profitability of two-job marriages seems to have been gradually increasing in the last century, compared to breadwinner or one-job-plus-something marriages or partnerships (Hagemann & Åmark 1999, see also Pateman 1988; Holter 1983i). The shifting and partially competing gender contracts seem to be a key element for understanding a wider social change although the evidence about it has not been fully systematized. Women's labour power commercialized in northwest Europe influenced by social democracy especially in the 1970s and 80s, together with a rise of women's pre-eminence at home (Bengtsson 1990), could be described as a "love power" (Jonasdóttir 1991). The extensive use of part-time work in some countries (like Norway) and the persistent gender segregation of large parts of the labour market show problems of the Nordic approaches (Ellingsæter & Solheim 2003). At the same time, love and caring have become more gender-neutral in norms and conceptions.

Such analyses of family sphere democratization and shifting gender contracts in society point to the fact that familistic norms and processes may support rather than oppose gender equality. When reforms and policies meet these new needs, they are more successful.

The Nordic model has been relatively successful because it has kept a central link between family welfare and gender equality. The discourse is not split, compared to the US, for example, where family values are often opposed to gender equality and sometimes even seen as the exclusive domain of right-wing politics. Isolating family values from actual practices and from social equality and democracy, is not sensible according to the Nordic perspective. The link has been kept open through the efforts of social research and a democratically minded public with considerable political support, leading, for ex-

ample, to less gender-stereotyping media (where the Nordic content is today quite different from the US content). The social and moral cost of saying “I am different” from gender stereotypes has gone down, with a lower anxiety level than twenty years ago.

Thereby, some theorists think that a more playful gender order has been established (Bech 2000; Nielsen 2005); pluralistic family values have also become more visible. Family values are not confined to heterosexual couples or to partners with a written marriage contract. A main point is to democratize family values, and in this sphere the Nordic approach has been successful.

Development Through Gender Equality

Following this “allied” method, I turn to what seems to be the overriding issue for Eastern Europe, e. g. Lithuania: *attaining social and economic development*.

Since I write from a country with perhaps six times the average wage level of Lithuania, my gender equality concern may seem a luxury but this is misleading. My argument concerns gender equality as a method that is important whatever the economic level, based on studies of gender discrimination from many periods (e. g. early antiquity, see Holter 1997e: 305-42). Based on this research, my hypothesis is that if the Eastern European countries want to become more prosperous and democratic like the western and northern countries, gender equality is a main key. The gender equality methods, however, are not uniform or unilinear but quite diverse and varying, depending on circumstances. Their success rate varies with different economic levels of development, family structures, culture, religion, politics etc., as outlined below.

Eastern Europe has a large background of economic and social problems, compared to the west, and it is not surprising that opinion polls show a strong wish among east Europeans today to be able, at last, to take one’s rightful place in democratic European prosperity and community. But what is the role of gender equality in such

a development? Here, eastern opinion is more divided than western and northern opinion. A tendency towards 'conservative familism' and setbacks for women and feminism has been noted by researchers (e.g. Novikova 2000). Could it be that men and women are better off going back to segregated roles? At this point we should consider a rather ironical result of recent opinion polls. Men and women's opinions today often differ very little within each country. A recent world-wide opinion survey concludes that with regard to gender equality norms, "the only surprising finding is the fact that the overall gender gap amounts to only 6 percent points" and that other divisions seemed more important, for example, "postmaterialists are more gender-egalitarian than materialists" (Inglehart et al. 2004: 10-11). On a normative level, gender may seem to count for little, even as countries and regions vary a lot regarding gender equality support. Yet gender is still strongly connected to practices, and European and global patterns differ greatly.

Three eastern European development scenarios can be outlined here.

- The first (A) is a *gender-conservative development scenario* in which the economy and social life keep in line with the most reactive gender features that emerge in historical and sociological analyses of the region.
- The second (B) is a *mid-way scenario* in which the East improves its efforts but continues to be second rank compared to the west and north.
- The third (C) is a *more advanced scenario* in which Eastern Europe (through innovative individuals, groups, networks, regions and countries) takes on the challenge of getting up to date and going ahead in terms of gender equality.

If gender equality is strongly linked to economic development (as argued below), we would expect that scenario (A) would impede the eastern development, making the region develop only as a secondary, underpaid work and capital region. Model (B) would do better since there would be a halfway development, while model (C) would

do best. I call them “models” since they are actual options that states, groups and individuals may choose or not choose. In my view, the gender equality struggle will take place regardless any factors but it can be made more proactive and less costly.

My personal judgement is optimistic. I think that positive economic development can happen quite quickly, given the right policies and social and democratic developments. Perhaps Eastern European and transition countries can choose between a 100-year model in which gender equality is only a low priority issue, or a 20 and 30-year model in which it is a very high priority issue. Although over-eager western ‘optimization ideas’ have been seen many times before in this discussion and should be avoided. The present evidence points exactly this way. A better development path is possible although I can only present some of the evidence here.

The gender equality method does not deal with gender equality that is only a distant goal and a luxury, as mentioned above. Instead it places *gender equality first*, identifying and analysing the actual situation, the on-going gender-equal processes and barriers, using gender discrimination analysis that combines many areas of research. Furthermore, it asks how to help the processes and reduce barriers. In this approach, gender analysis is a way to make development work.

East and West

Historical conditions are very important for understanding east-west gender differences in Europe. Historical conflicts related to war and violence can be a force that persists for a long time among men, as demonstrated by recent men and masculinities studies that reveal the transfer of problems across generations (Jungnitz 2004; Kuosmanen 2001). In my view, the background of Eastern European countries in the history of trauma and oppression in the 20th century comprises a large part of current developmental issues, along with the later transition period problems of unemployment, poverty and poorly regulated economies. Democratization is a central underlying dimension, and gender equality is a key aspect.

Lithuania, like other countries, was occupied for fifty years by an imperially oriented state claiming to be in favour of “gender equality”. For this reason many Lithuanians like other Eastern Europeans are hostile to the term. The gender-discriminatory or patriarchal structure of the Soviet Union is therefore relevant here.¹

The gender-discriminatory structures of the Soviet system from 1918 onwards consisted partly of patriarchal institutions and traditions taken over from Czarist Russia, including labour relations created through authoritarian industrialization, and a conspiratory, ‘fraternal’ and ‘masculinistic’ cadre party structure developing into a big-leader worship in the 1930s under Stalin. There was, in some ways, a superstructure of communist macho, expressed, for instance, in art, Stakhanovite worker posters, far-seeing Lenin statues, and so on.

In a 1984 analysis of the main existing socioeconomic and feminist works on the Soviet Union, I found that many patriarchal arrangements were taken over from the pre-Soviet period, some of them in modernized forms (‘reorganized patriarchy’, cf. Holter et al. 1984). Statistics from the 1950s to 1980s and a number of supportive sources prove that women were systematically superexploited compared to men, and it provides us with a coherent picture of double burdens in economic form. The political machinery continued to

¹ In my research including “Can Men Do It,” I have used the term ‘patriarchal structure’ that is close to the term ‘gender discrimination structure.’ I think that the term of patriarchy is useful, for example, in historical-sociological analysis but the term of gender discrimination is more precise. The term “patriarchy” has the unwanted side effect of giving the father a main role – while gender discrimination systems can be found in societies in which men’s fathering roles seem fairly low on the list of male power positions. Whatever the terminology used, research demonstrates that these gender discrimination structures *vary* significantly, both sociologically and historically. This variation and associated variation of the gender system are main points in my gender theory approach (Holter 1997e). This approach is focused on *discrimination* – how gender difference is bound up empirically with social stratification in structures that persist but also change over time. For example, when the EU Amsterdam treaty mentions “passive” gender discrimination these structures become of obvious importance in order not to inherit or pass on gender discrimination from one sphere or sector of society to another.

emphasise the heavy industry, although the profits were made mainly from the light industry in which women worked. This was a society of heavy production sphere dominance, and applying feminist analysis of gender systems and production/reproduction structures created important research and theory results (Holter 1984d).

Later several works have appeared confirming the main conclusions. New historical research has shown how contempt for weakness and misogyny became major components of the top leadership (Montefiore 2004). As a particularly brutal form of “gender-equal” and fanatically production-oriented oppression, the Gulag system, as described by Applebaum (2004), was mainly economic: its core was forced labour rather than prisoners; it was not mainly punitive like the Nazi system although it killed more people over the years. Prisoners were recruited by quotas; their guilt often was quite irrelevant. The forced labour system played a central role in the economy. Applebaum’s work clarifies some of the mysteries of the great terror and constant persecution under Stalin. The camps were tolerable in the beginning, with political prisoners receiving quite good treatment even in the early 1930s but later norms became harder, with food rationed thinly according to work, and the treatment became more punitive. “From the late 1930s, Stalin also began publicly to refer to ‘enemies of the people’ as ‘vermin’, ‘pollution’ and ‘filth’....they were no longer to be considered full citizens of the Soviet Union. (..) After 1937, no guard used the word ‘tovarishch’ or ‘comrade’ to address a prisoner, and prisoners could be beaten for using it to address guards, who they had to call ‘grazhdanin’ or ‘citizen.’ Photographs of Stalin and other leaders never appeared within the camps or prisons” (Applebaum 2004: 112).

This is what Connell (1995) calls *authorisation* (see Holter 1997e: 425-7) – the specific framing of the gender system in terms of power. Contempt for weakness and misogyny had become inbuilt in a structure of social persecution (Holter 2006b). Recent men’s studies have demonstrated how security and safety regimes can be bound to extreme ‘binary’ gender exclusion and gender terror (Folkesson 2005).

When the long period of traumatic wars and extreme authoritarianism was over, after Stalin’s death, Soviet working life was unable

to develop into a more democratic mode and instead became increasingly unproductive. This happened together with renewed gender segregation, horizontally and vertically. The light industry, with the majority of women, was the main value creator in the GNP, yet the masculine-associated heavy industry continued to dominate the agenda. If we look at the Soviet economic life in the 1970s and 80s we see overworked women and not so much working men plagued by corruption, alcoholism etc. (Holter 1984d).

The Soviet economy stagnated, and the preservation of patriarchal prerogatives and male dominance was the main reason. It is true that inequality was counteracted in some ways; there were ideological campaigns to foster equality (women should be treated with respect, educated, used as experts, and so on) but the major economic map was heavily gender-segregated, not to speak of the total exclusion of women from the top political power (the Norwegian feminist researcher Berit Ås used the term “geriatric patriarchy” for this arrangement). Male dominance and female subservience continued as major factors in social and economic life.

In the west and north of Europe, in the meanwhile, gender equality development emerged as a *popular* struggle, mainly as part of a democratisation process. I believe that this is an overlooked key point in European comparative analysis. In the west, women’s liberation was not a state measure, although eventually it also created state measures and perhaps even a “*women-friendly state*” in the north (Hernes 1988; 1987).

During the 1950-2000 period, the increasingly social-democratized economies of Western Europe shifted towards reduced and more horizontal forms of gender discrimination, along with less class oppression and better welfare systems. Women took jobs and educated themselves as part of a developing democratic orientation related to women’s further emancipation and liberation. In the east, comparatively speaking, the two-job family had always been the main reality and breadwinner ideals and associated nuclear family norms and gender polarization had not fully replaced older patriarchal masculine/feminine formations. Most family arrangements and jobs contin-

ued to lay extra burdens on women, more slanted than in the west. In the 1970 and 1980s, however, the south-north differences of the European map attracted most attention of researchers, and it was only recently that scholars started looking into this gender dimension more clearly.

In the west, the massive increase in women's education and labour market participation from the 1960s onwards was not due to the need of a state although policy shifts and labour market "pull" effects should not be overlooked. I discussed this in "Can Men Do It." Women were more welcome to working life than before but they were not dragged into it. It was not an automatic effect of a growing welfare state. Men's selection of more equal partners was part of the wider social process, as described in my 'gender market' study of partner selection changes in the 20th century (Holter 1983i). The thesis that modernism by itself brings about gender equality overlooks not only the role of the women's struggle, but also, generally, the importance of people as actors in order to bring about social change and reform.

Beyond this theory debate, there are two clear empirical patterns. In the east, gender, social and family structures remained in place partly suppressed by the system, while in the west, they were changed from within. The evidence supports the hypothesis that gender equality plays a key role in socioeconomic development. Gender-related democratization meant a comprehensive development of social standards and concepts of human rights in the west that eventually brought rewards in business and working life terms.

Eastern Conceptions

When women and men in Eastern Europe often (more often than in the west) support traditional gender norms and values, does it mean a return to patriarchy or a wish to improve the situation in families? Should it be taken as a sign of opposition to gender equality or more as a historical consequence of how words have been used and how

ideas have been formed? The historical background described above helps us understand this trend towards family conservatism in Eastern Europe.

In Eastern Europe more than in the west, women's right to work has been associated with burdens and extra exploitation. Regarding the more recent 'Westernization' and transition problems, two tendencies can be postulated: women's "*flight from exploitation*" tendency and men's "*now be a real man*" tendency. The first could help to explain renewed familism (with little interest in active fathering and a much more traditionalist familism than in the west). The second tendency may explain the reorganized gender discrimination/patriarchal structures, expressed, for instance, through hostility towards gender equality. "After the end of 'socialist affirmative action,' the struggle for recognition of women's issues became extremely unpopular" (Jalusic & Antic 2001:27). "Now be a real man" may help explain other patterns also, e. g. why the 'hard talk' of some US administrations has attracted cheering in the east but worry in the west of Europe. In general, Eastern Europe has been several steps behind the west in economic development over the last hundred years, through very different political regimes that nevertheless had a common core of keeping gender equality low on the priority list.

Gender and Economic Development

What is the evidence regarding gender equality as a key to economic development?

In one view, "gender equality has a lot to do with sustainable economic growth and developing the welfare society – so much, in fact, that sustainable economic growth in developed industrial countries will largely be determined by their success in making it easier for women to combine a professional career with family life" (Nordh 2005: 75). Similarly, researchers argue that "raising the number of women in the labour market is one key to securing the higher labour supply needed because of the ageing population in Europe. Economic growth

is not possible without an increased level of employment among both women and men; therefore economic growth and gender equality are closely linked” (Schubert & Martens 2005; cf. Neramo 2004).

Nordic studies demonstrate that *gender-equal workplaces function better* in many social conditions today and that they may also increase profits (NUTEK 1999). However, we also know that study results from Sweden or Norway cannot be applied directly to Lithuania, Bulgaria, Moldova or Ukraine. Although norms and time uses tend to become more similar, traditions, work and family cultures still differ considerably.

The “*does gender equality pay*” (gender equality and profit) discussion has been continuing for a long time. The answer seems to be a modest “yes” – it pays, but everything depends on a society. In the 1970s and 80s, this issue was part of the so-called international domestic labour debate. The emergence of time use studies showing much unpaid work was very important. Researchers began to understand “working life” in a new and more comprehensive way, as a totality of several work spheres (domestic, voluntary and wage), and not only wage work.

Currently, three decades of research let us to conclude that:

- (a) family systems, household organisation and culture etc. play a large role in economic life and in the understanding of the profitable and productive;
- (b) some gender equality measures pay off more broadly than others, being more robust in terms of type (a) extra economic filtering and barriers.

So, filtering and robustness are key terms. Some gender equality items can be marketed more immediately others are more ‘futuristic.’ Some appeal to civil life concerns and family values more than others.

The moral and economic value of gender equality varies with the societal and cultural conditions; it also involves a ‘core’ of more robust issues that give direct access to improved human resources (Holter 1997a). For example, the argument for the use of both women and men’s resources to attain optimal leadership (*more women as lead-*

ers) has crossed many division lines over the last decades and is now well known also in even gender-equality-reluctant institutions, organisations and segments of the population. On the other hand, the “*more men as caregivers*” argument is less known and often harder to ‘sell’ since a wider society and not only company or organization profits from it. At the same time, the idea of *active fathers* meets broad approval. The moral support may sometimes be stronger when the market demand is low (Holter 1983i).

One element of the ‘subversive’ development of a family sphere found in most research is a tendency towards conflict or mismatch between domestic considerations and practices in daily life, on the one hand, and existing normative and authority-supported roles and identities, on the other hand. For example, the norms of fatherhood and the practice of fathering can turn out to be very different things; and fathering can be a feminist issue (Silverstein 1996).

The household as a work organisation is often somewhat ahead of the established normative rules (like the wage work organisation), or at least it attempts to be since this is its main *raison d’être* in a modern world. The ‘professional’ type of social organisation including modern marriage with divorce rights was a project beyond the existing patterns and rules of pre-modern society. The learning capacity of the modern organisation depends on its ability to bend and transform existing rules, for example, gender rules (Holter 1997a; Holter 2000e).

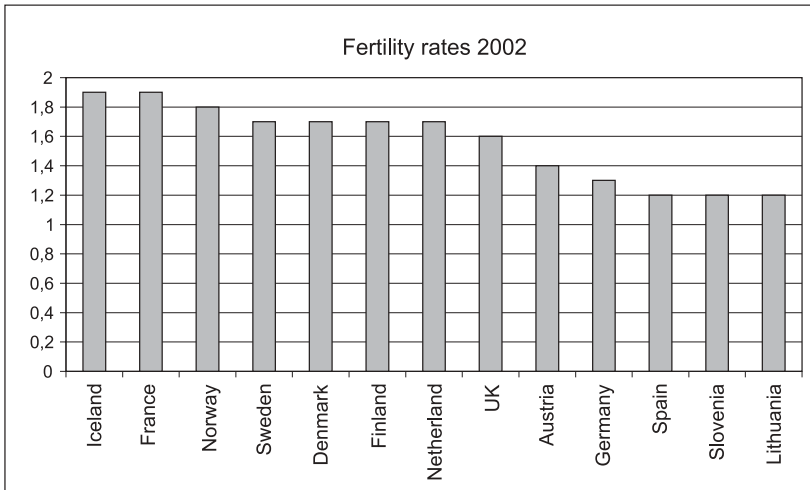
Work life democratization and economic development are closely linked in this action research view. Yet modern organisations can also reorganize patriarchal structures (Holter 1984). The modern organisation by itself does not guarantee post-patriarchal development (for a contrary view see Jackson 1998). Democratization is the main dimension. In Norway, for example, the GNP per work hour is among the world’s highest, and the reasons for this include a democratic communal understanding (*felleskapsforståelse*) of the labour market, centralized wage negotiations, and expectations that the social partners should help to increase welfare and socioeconomic development (Cappelen & Rød Larsen 2005).

According to a US analyst, social development is most important, and an equivalent to the New Deal policy is necessary today (Florida 2005: 243). Socially adaptive capability means success, and US “cowboy capitalism” with its “high anxiety levels” is a minus (Florida 2005: 244). Reproduction and early socialisation are more important than before but they receive less of the values created (Florida 2005: 256-257).

Economy, Fertility and Welfare

New developments in welfare and economic research and theory are important at this point. Recent European research has underlined the role of welfare in creating an acceptable level of fertility. Fertility is now treated mainly as a social variable. Need makes the man.

DIAGRAM 4. **Fertility rates (source: Statistics Norway Yearbook 2005).**



It has become clearer that gender equality is associated with higher fertility, between 1.9 and 1.7 on the European map (e. g. Iceland, Norway and Denmark), while low fertility and especially very low (1.2-1.1) zones in the south and east are associated with socio-economic problems and traditional gender regimes.

Welfare, economy and fertility can no longer be isolated from each other in research. In order to improve and broaden perspectives, socio-economic analysis should be more consciously applied by social researchers, and studies should avoid the “technology fix” (Burns et al. 2005).

Main points of paradigm change can be described as following: “In short, Gary Becker [in a 1985 paper, compared to the classic 1965 paper] had discovered that raising children is work, and that jobs are structured to advantage those who perform no childcare, an argument that fits the newer motherhood wage gap literature discussed below” (Drago 2003: 6; cf. Kuhn 1996). According to a recent analysis, this gap becomes increasingly visible as a parenthood gap or a caregiving gap across the gender line (Halrynjo & Holter 2005; cf. Acker 1990) even if it does not affect men’s wages as visibly as the women’s. At this point, Nordic evidence is mixed, some studies showing parenting as a career benefit, especially in the longer term (see e. g. Hardoy & Schjone 2004:19).

Recently, work/family flexibility and time squeeze emerged as main issues in public debate. Men are becoming more vocal as caregivers. Increased information as a long-term tendency means more reasons for changing the traditional devaluation of caregiving and socialization work in the labour market (Holter 1997a). Work/family or production/reproduction issues have become more important in working life surveys; they receive more attention among employees at large (Torvatn & Molden 2001). Many trends are international. A Canadian study found, in line with the recent EU research, that “many organizations may still have a way to go in fostering climates that promote the integration of work and family” (Comfort, Johnson & Wallace 2003). Similarly, a US survey of work problems found an emphasis on caring possibilities. “US work life scored low on many forms of family flexibility (...) among men as well as women” (FHCS 2002).

Better child care and combating the pay gap between the sexes are among the measures proposed by researchers in order to improve European fertility (Schubert & Martens 2005). Better family support is a main item in new quality of life surveys (Krieger 2004).

Judging from recent research, fertility can be improved by a combination of gender equal welfare and caregiving rights. It is perhaps mainly the lack of good childcare arrangements, more than family culture or gender norms, that creates the current “Lysistrata strike situation” (Ingolfur Gislason) especially in the south and east of Europe. In the Nordic region, studies demonstrate that more egalitarian couples with men in more active parental and domestic roles increase the chance of children (Olåh 2003, 2001). Women whose men contribute to the household labour are more satisfied than the rest (Kitterød 2000). However, there also exist surveys indicating that many women, for instance, in Norway are reluctant to give their men a wider family or household responsibility.

“Women-friendly” welfare problems should be noted at this point. There is no need for others to repeat mistakes of the Nordic model, including its areas of persistent gender segregation (Nermo 2004). The region has sometimes been more conservative in terms of women’s role change than in terms of men’s. The protection of mothering as part of a feminist project can also become a protection of traditionally segregated motherhood. Women’s organizations of the Nordic region gained influence in the 1975-85 period especially, helping to create a more “women-friendly” welfare state in the late 1980s and 1990s. It was a reaction against earlier, more pro-male patriarchal welfare arrangements, yet it also cemented a new gender division that was no less pervasive and influential than the sex roles of yesterday.

Thus, for example, even if men’s share of domestic work in general and caregiving for young children in particular was gradually rising among the population in Norway in 1980-2000, the proportion of post-divorce fathers in main care roles was decreasing in this period, mainly due to the Norwegian child custody legislation which became more “women-friendly” in the sense of reinvigorating traditional mother-focused parental norms. This development created popular reactions. In a 1994 representative survey, 65 percent of men and 51 percent of women said that the children should live equally with the parents after divorce (Holter 1994c: 307), a view that contrasted with the official practice according to which about 90 percent

of children after divorce were assigned to their mothers. A 2005 survey shows that as much as 82 percent of men now want shared custody after divorce (MMI Univero 2005).

As we can see, the Nordic “partial” equality is not a rosy state. Yet it is still much better than “little or no gender equality” state, according to opinion measures and life quality studies. It is the habitual barriers and taking for granted of gender discrimination that should form the main subject of investigation. Gender policies are also generation/age policies, locality/centrality politics, time/work politics and economic policies. Using gender equality as a method we move towards innovation. The force of habit is very much what gender is about.

Conclusion

Men’s positions and roles are mixed in gender-discriminatory (‘patriarchal’) society. Some processes and tendencies make men (and women) aligned with more gender equality, others with less. Different social options exist, and tensions between these are important for European development today not only ideologically but also in ‘harder’ terms such as economic development and acceptable fertility. The wider connections of gender equality are gradually becoming clearer through research in different European regions.

On one level, it seems obvious that gender-equal capitalism should be able to outperform patriarchal capitalism. Fewer resources are wasted and less time is used on non-productive disciplinary actions and control. Yet this textbook rule is not necessarily true in actual social life and societal development. The questions of how patriarchy and capitalism relate are still often unresolved and answers are tentative (Holter 1997e). Historical experiences should not be overlooked. Gender-equal capitalism was a subject of debate already in the 19th century, yet it has not been realised so far. For several hundred years, capitalism has recreated (if not favoured) male dominance. It has indeed combated old-style, political, open patriarchy, yet it has not abol-

ished systematic gender discrimination as such. Perhaps capitalism as a textbook model is gender-equal but as a social reality and an established economic system it has evolved in patriarchal society and it has at least been “open” to continuous recreation of extraeconomic domination and exploitation of women. It remains to be seen if the whole structure can be deconstructed and replaced with a gender-equal structure. However, comparing east and west after WW2 we can see that democratic capitalism shows a different and more gender-equal profile and that advances over the last thirty years are larger than before even if discrimination persists. Currently, more promising developments can be found in many areas, also in the ‘male/mainstream’ (see Connell 2005; Connell & Wood 2005).

In this varied ‘partial equality’ situation, I have outlined how gender equality methods can be used to improve innovation and development.

Currently, only a marginal part of Lithuanian fathers take parental leave. The situation resembles Norway in the 1970s. In Norway, since then this portion has climbed slowly, and currently around 16 percent of the total parental leave time (not including the specific father’s leave period) is taken by men, 84 percent by women. The participation rate is still modest if we compare it to Iceland in which men now stand for around 30 percent of the total caregiving during the child’s first year. Regardless, it is perhaps ten times higher than Lithuania, even more disproportionate than the wage levels.

My hypothesis would be: by raising the active fathering and fathers’ leave proportion you will improve socioeconomic development. If you create a good, gender-balanced social safety and welfare system based on the knowledge that men are necessary for caring and reproduction along with women for leadership and production, development will improve in many areas. The alternative is to remain with low fertility and low productivity.

Basically, active fathering and gender balance in upbringing and caring concern *human rights and democracy*, including children’s rights to develop close contact with both fathers and mothers. It is a democracy and welfare issue. And, of course, a gender equality issue.

When I emphasize the economic development perspective, I do it not only because of the Eastern European economic situation but also because of the Nordic experience that confirms the rule that parental leave and similar reforms are easily pushed down on the priority list unless they are articulated very clearly in economic terms. They are investments, not costs, and at least this possibility should be tried out in a fair way. It is necessary to create a civil and economic commitment to invest, reconcile and innovate. One cannot get gender-equal workplaces and leadership in business, unless both men and women's roles are changed not only at the workplace but at home too. And since this is a main matter of economic development today, engaging men in home tasks and caring is an important issue for economic reasons too.

In Norway in the 1990s, the fathers' leave had a noticeable effect on gender norms. A young Norwegian top leader, in a recent interview, told me that he and his friends – mainly other male leaders – all regarded changing diapers as acceptable to men; furthermore, they were “proud of it,” even if they did not like doing housework chores. “What is most important about being a man?” – a recent Swedish study asked men (Nordberg 2006). Many men distanced themselves from the traditional male role. They said things like “Well, at least I am not the old stupid type.” They focused on caring and fathering as signals of a new role. Asked for what they would like to be remembered after their death, most answered in the following way: “Having been a good caring person and father.” The ideas and practices of active fathering are getting stronger in most of Europe.

How can positive developments be strengthened through reforms? One way to move forward is to create a father's period in addition to or as a part of the parental leave. The “addition method” works best in terms of political support, according to the Nordic experience, although it is more costly than setting off a month or more of the existing parental leave time. This is an investment that would pay off and a clear signal to men and women working in family reconciliation terms, especially when it is followed up by a shift in cultural emphasis on manliness (regarding caring as manly).

Good reforms say “here is a step to go.” Given economic support, creating a father quota reform is not very difficult if the total leave period is extended.

However, if we look at Nordic experiences as a whole, there are reasons to be weary of “a little bit to the fathers” models and “a little bit to the other gender” measures that are first steps only. Is it better, instead, to introduce new gender balanced systems right from the start? At least the connection between means and ends (fathers’ period and equal division) and first steps that follow them should be made clear. At this point, the recent Iceland parental leave model is especially relevant, since it overcomes the problems of renewed gender segregation in the Swedish/Norwegian models. The latter says “one month and then some more – but rather long time to wait.” However, these are practical issues that I leave to further debate.

In all respects, the need to see paternal leave in combination with other measures is very clear. Health is another important issue. For example, in Lithuania today, on the average men live ten years shorter than women, a very large gender gap indeed. And it seems to be mainly created by adult lifestyles and exposures to risks, not by different infantile or young age mortality. Death rates are balanced until adult age sets in. Lithuanian men die, on the average, eight years before Norwegian men. There are many challenges for further reform. Currently, men’s ability to balance caregiving needs and job needs seems to be best “test case” for the real situation of gender equality.

I started my article with socioeconomic development and also discussed authoritarian models and Soviet gender discrimination because recent gender studies demonstrate the underreported traumas in men’s backgrounds and family traditions. “One of the most striking – and in this form also most surprising – findings of the study was the frequency, and in some cases the intensity, with which the Second World War had made its mark on respondents” (Jungnitz 2004). Understanding caring and its possibilities and the ways in which caring has been blocked in the past and how this blockage exists in men’s backgrounds are closely connected issues.

There are many reasons to learn from the Nordic model. Productivity is high, and so is welfare and fertility. Society is relatively peaceful, violence relatively low, and prosperity more fairly shared than in many other societies. I have emphasised the need to avoid stereotypes, however, and also described “stress problems” in areas like divorces, custody, violence, health, and quality of life. Addressing men’s problems and men’s health is an important issue.

All over Europe research shows that being a gender equality pioneer has its costs. The costs include not being favourably seen by dominant men and traditional employers. “If you work part-time, you are dead careerwise in our company,” a man said in the *Work changes gender* study. Combining care and career, the main ‘Nordic’ position, is not easy (Halrynjo & Holter 2005).

Many problems can be understood by looking at the partial and often inconsistent ways that gender equality has been introduced and realised over the last decades. Some of these problems related to the ‘women-friendly’ state rather than the current ambition of a more consistently gender-equal state and a society in which gender equality is the rule both in the public and private sector. When gender equality methods are more consistently applied, results improve.

In a recent interview, a top leader in Norway told me about the problems of realizing a balanced dual career family in the still quite gender-conservative context of top business leadership jobs. His wife and he had planned a balanced job/home situation for both, yet it became imbalanced after he took the top job. As a consequence, there were conflicts and troubles at home. He felt unjustly accused. “It was not my plan to become a leader, it just happened that way, my career ladder was steeper than hers,” he said defensively. “How would you notice,” I asked him – if you woke one morning, and your problems were solved?” The question made him think. “Good question,” he said after a while, smiling. “I would know by waking up with a happy wife beside me.”

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