

When Men Become Fathers: Men Doing Identity Transition.

Claudia Höfner, Cornelia Schadler, Rudolf Richter

Since 1990 in Austria men have the option to take parental leave. In 2007 4% of all men with children took this opportunity. Usually higher wages for males and better chances for a career are quoted as reasons that men cannot use this possibility (Doerfler 2004). As research in other European countries show regardless of the woman's profession, educational status and distribution of housework or attitude to gender roles before giving birth, after the transition to parenthood women are much more likely to take up the caring responsibilities as well as men create an identity as a provider of the family (Lammi- Taskula 2008, Bernhardt/Goldscheider 2001). Even women with higher wages than their partners highly tend to take up the caring responsibilities and also lowering their career opportunities. Simultaneously transition to first time parenthood is the time where men start to work more and get involved more into their own careers (Höfner 2003). At the same time they seem to be not satisfied with being responsible for the financial stability of the family. Men are unhappy with being less involved with their children and carrying the burden of work life alone. On the other hand, if men take parental leave and assume caring responsibilities they often feel they are less masculine and develop low self esteem (Merla 2008, Hoefner 2003, Doucet 2004).

Another contemporary in Austria and other European countries is the problem of declining birth rates. Children have high value, bring a lot of financial and individual costs with them and demand a great deal of time from their parents. Women attend longer years of education and have stronger attitudes to work life and career. Especially high educated women postpone their transition to parenthood to the late thirties or stay childless.

New strategies to raise birth rates and to disburden women from their caring responsibilities are extending the availability of day care facilities and engage men into higher engagement in caring activities. Offers for fathers like a month of stay home after birth with full substitution of his wage shall get fathers into more involved fatherhoods. Involvement attitudes of fathers are important for fertility decisions; especially the decision for a second child is related to the amount of the involvement of the father with the first child (Pinelli/Fiori 2008). An equal share of caring duties may raise the attractiveness of having children again (Seward/Richter 2008). Fathers involvement is strongly related to his identity as a father (Rane and McBride 2000). In this paper we introduce a theoretical framework to address this issue through identity theory as well as we show some outcomes of Claudia Hoefners dissertation on fathers' identity transitions.

Fatherhood within male life courses

Woman in Austria have their first child in a average age of 28. We expect mens transition to parenthood in a average age of 30 to 33¹. There is less research in the timing of transition to parenthood for men than for woman. Because of a contemporary steadily ongoing redefinition of male life courses (LaRossa 1997), different forms of hegemonic values and pictures are existing how to lead male life (Connell/Messerschmidt 2005) and how to time transitions. Men as breadwinners are still a standard image within western countries (Merla 2008). Beside to this a new image of men that share care giving and breadwinning responsibilities equally emerged (Merla 2008, Seward/Richter 2008, Wall/Arnold 2007). Increasing divorce rates² additionally lead to an increase in non-residential fatherhood as well as in an increase of patch work families. Reorganization of family also require new abilities from fathers and mothers to integrate new children as well as new partners into families (Zartler 2004). The social constructions of pathways and trajectories for men become more vague what creates the possibility for men to create new strategies of agency (Holstein/Gubrium 2007) or, as life courses are linked, to choose and negotiate with the environment different ways of timing and living transition. With these new possibilities also new requirements to fathers behaviour and involvement are part of these negotiation processes. Therefore the transition to parenthood gained high importance in

¹ There are no concrete data for men in Austria.

² In Austria the divorce rates are 49% (Statistik Austira 2007).

Mideuropean countries. Additionally marriage or transition to adulthood seems to become rather a side-effect of becoming a parent (Nave-Herz 2002). Therefore also fathers believe during transition to parenthood that they are witnessing the most important phase in their lives (LaRossa/Sinha 2007), which is accompanied by a crucial redefinition of their way of living as well as their identity. This redefinition of fathers behaviour and identity, which is done in interaction with several people, discourses, structures and objects surrounding the father is the key area of our research. In this phase the decision over fathers involvement and the amount and form of this involvement usually is done and will influence fathers behaviour for the rest of his children's lives.

Men's Identity as Fathers

In the last decade identity theory has been applicated to studies about involvement of fathers (Marsiglio/Cohan 1990, Rane and McBride 2000). These studies usually use concepts of hierarchical orders of identities within an individual. Stryker (1968, 1994) and McCall and Simons (1978) are the inventors of the used concepts. Fathers behaviour is shaped by the aspects he internalized as necessary for being a father (Maurer 2003). These can be providing aspects or nurturing or whatever the father thinks is expected from him. Research usually investigates the influence of these certain identity aspects like to involvement of fathers (Rane and McBride 2000). Of course fathers who describe nurturer as a central aspect of their identity are more involved in caring activities with their children. Burke and Reitzes (1991) showed the importance of the father's environment to develop a identity as involved father. Fathers negotiate central aspects with the social groups they belong to. Role expectations therefore are developed situational within the context the father lives and can be divided in rather holistic expectations to a person, like just accepting oneself as father and in special expectations like being responsible for financial stability of the family or being a caring father (Ihinger-Thallman et. al. 1993).

These studies are important because they show that a caring identity is necessary for fathers to be involved in early childhood and father involvement increase childrens wellbeing and outcomes. But they also lack to describe how men create their identities as nurturer or provider as well as how gender-identity influences these aspects of identity. The identity concept of these studies lies within a functionalist theory which does not consider positions as constructed within societal

structures and individual contexts. It takes certain positions for granted and does not question the ambivalence of identities and identity categories of being fluid and fixed in the same way and in the same time. The categories seem universal and ahistorical and lack a complex discussion. It is important to include identity in the measurement of fathers involvement, but it needs the inclusion of new concepts of identity that has been developed within the last decade.

Identity Theory

Identity became a core category in different theoretical paradigms like interpretative sociology, postmodern theories, feminist theory and cultural studies. While gender role theories in sociology bound identity to a strict role and role-identity it became common sense that identity is something fluid and changeable through time and space, while in the same time it appears as unchangeable and natural (Hettlage/Vogt 2000, Hall 1994, 1998, Rorty 1989, Butler 1991, 1997, West/Zimmerman 1991).

The term identity is inseparable from individuality and both are an invention of modern society (Heinrichs 2001: 24). Modernity created the self we know and the possibility to see ourselves as an individual within a certain structure. Also the possibility to step back and reflect our identity and choose other forms (within a certain range) is bind to modern individuality (Hettlage/Vogt 2000). But it is not only freedom it is also suppression to identity. We need identity to count as a autonomous subject that is able to act within the world (Foucault, Butler). Identity can be summarized as a contingent, constructed and situational concept we need to feel it as natural as possible within our daily practice (Lacan 1995, Butler 1991). The essence of having identity is that it is a historically contingent societal construction we need to believe it's natural. Modern Identity therefore is the ability to have a somewhat coherent notion of the self, to act through this self and create a linear biography we call life course (Hettlage/Vogt 2000). This construction goes always with central categories of a certain society: within modern worlds these are gender, age, class and nationality/ethnicity and is performed and apparent in individual practices (Hall 1999, Connell 1995, Kimmel 2000, 2004).

If we attach this approach of identity to transition to parenthood for fathers, first there is the need to address categories like men, woman, class or age as constructed categories that appear natural and need to appear as natural. Beside this the redefinition of fathers practices is steadily ongoing

within modern societies which transforms the descriptions and pictures fathers and men (Butler 1991, Kimmel 2002). This opens the gap for discourses of new and caring fatherhood (Lammi-Taskula 2008). But despite this the structures of the gendered society (Kimmel 2000) are strong and keep up the division between core categories of the society. To address mens identity transition during transition to parenthood we need to consider our society still as patriarchal, highly bound to breadwinning practices and structures, especially within middle class families.

Structures of Masculine Identity

Contemporary modern societies are still dichotomous structured cultures. Dichotomy therefore can be seen as the most constitutive structure within modern world (Butler 1991, Kimmel 2000). Masculinity is one part of a binary category which is created by and also creator of structures within society. Other structures are division of power and labour, division of desire (Connell 1995) institutions and identity (Kimmel 2000). These structures are intermingled with binary constructs in which one part is set as more valuable and those who do not have this feature have to refer to (Connell 1989, Beauvoir 1977). Categories therefore can be described as masculine/non-masculine, white/non-white ec.. Every part of these categories comes with a set of again binary attributes. The higher valued parts of dichotomies stick together to a hegemonic picture of humanity: male, white, and heterosexual joined by the attributes of culture, public world, rationality ect.. Therefore masculinity is linked to a model of a male breadwinner and men in contemporary societies have to refer to these attributes, because of their masculinity, as well as women have to refer to the “other” sides of the attributes (Beauvoir 1977). Men do not fit in all categories to the more valued side are considered as “marginal masculinities” (Connell 1995, 2000, 2002). These are homosexual men, non whites, workless men, as well as men fulfilling caring activities. Of course this is also an ideal construct and within late modern societies a range of hegemonic masculinities exists. Also the possibilities for individuals in positions and with life courses that do not fit into the hegemonic picture. But in the same time the structure of dichotomy is still a core category of western societies and individuals are divided through this structure.

Individual Identities are a part and an outcome of these structures and the power underlies these structures (Butler 1997, Kimmel 2000). Identity gives the possibility to create a biography or life course round these structures and iterate and perform them (Butler 1991, West/Zimmerman

1991). Through our identities as individuals we are engaged in relationships. This all becomes "real" through our practices that create reality by practice. Therefore "Masculinity must be viewed as structured action – what men do under specific constraints and varying degrees of power" (Messerschmidt 1993: 81).

In our daily lives this does not mean, that every man has power, especially not if men do not fit into the hegemonic picture (Kimmel 2000). And there are also a growing number of women in power positions. As we mentioned above these categories are fluid and fixed in the same way. For fathers these structures in late modernity offer the possibility to cross these dichotomies in certain attributes as well as locally different forms of leading pictures of fatherhood can emerge. Identity is the way fathers integrate these new pictures in their practices.

But positions within societies are still engaged with a certain dichotomous gender behavior (relatively independent from the person who owns the position). Male caregivers therefore have to do work marked as female. But this doesn't mean that a man will have to give up his male identity generally, to do a job like that. Late modern societies open now new discourses that create male caring practices and the possibility to male care giving identities.

Following the empirical research in fathers identity, men have to have a caring identity to which they also relate in a positive way to be engaged in caring activities equally to mothers or even more than mothers if the family situation requires this (Doucet 2004, Rane and McBride 2000). Therefore we must ask: Can mens identities be transformed to caring identities?³ These questions will lead our further research. But to address these questions we first had to know:

What are **men's practices** concerning identity during transition to fatherhood?

- Who is involved?
- Which "ideas" of fatherhood and masculinity are involved?
- Which institutions are involved?
- Which values are involved?

Method

³ Of course this is a question that is related to a change of the behavior of a group of society to fit within a set of certain values, in our case the value of an equal share of duties and possibilities between man and women.

In order to take into consideration all those issues of fatherhood, we based the study upon a multi-method approach. Methodological triangulation involves a complex process of playing each method off against the other so as to maximize in-depth understanding and to get a broader picture of the phenomenon in question (Flick 2004).

We raised qualitative and quantitative data from surveys, interviews, and group discussions to deepen our understanding of the process of transition to fatherhood with all its influencing factors. This approach also helps to adopt different perspectives on our topic. The methodological triangulation consists of (1) quantitative questionnaires, (2) biographical interviews with men, (3) focused interviews with their partners and (4) group discussions among male friends.

Quantitative methods

The quantitative portion of this study is based upon questionnaires on "fatherhood" filled out by both expectant parents and parents of an infant. 182 couples (before delivery) and 109 couples (2-36 months after delivery) participated in the inquiry. The polled couples were recruited from preparation courses for pregnant women and their partners, from hospitals and other institutions, as well as from parks, breast feeding groups. The questionnaires contained following topics: Plans and experiences concerning delivery and parental leave, Prenatal activities and involvement, Antenatal activities and involvement, Attitudes towards the different roles of fathering such as, Experiences and perceptions of their own childhood. The data will be analyzed with a focus on correspondences and disagreements between the polled couples (comparison of gender aspects) and the course of development concerning the transition to fatherhood before and after delivery (comparison along a timeline). To compare the correspondences and disagreements of the couples we will construct cross-tabs, compare means (paired samples T-tests), and run correlations.

Qualitative methods and data

The interviewed couples and male peer groups were found by using word-of-mouth and "snowballing" techniques. All interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed for analysis.

First, we carried out biographical interviews with nine expectant fathers from the middle-class⁴. It was crucial for the interview that they were expecting their first child and cohabiting with their pregnant partner. The initial question was: "Tell me your story starting with the day you first met your actual partner."

Some months after the birth of the child we carried out biographical follow-up interviews with the same nine men. The purpose was to find out how the men felt being fathers and what had changed in the meantime. We had them start their story with the birth of the child.

The partners of the nine polled men were also interviewed after delivery. We conducted problem centred interviews. The women should express what they generally expect of fathers and if their partners fulfil these expectations and wishes. This includes both problems or different views and successful solutions in daily family life. Furthermore they were to describe how they thought fatherhood had influenced their partner's personality, behaviour and understanding of their masculinity.

One focus group was done with a mix of men to investigate men in same gender groups.

The interpretation of the interview data followed a theme analysis. The analysis of the first set of interviews with expectant fathers concentrates on different aspects that influence men's ways of thinking and dealing with fatherhood (i.e. experiences during and perception of their own childhood, relationships with their own parents, changes in the relationship with partners and friends, hopes and fears, everyday family practices and division of work, work-life-balance, changes of social life and leisure time, etc.). The analysis of the second set of interviews with parents of an infant deals mainly with the actual experiences, feelings and problems of the polled fathers (i.e. how they make sense of their experience of fathering, if their behaviour is consistent with their prenatal expectations, what fatherhood means to their self-image and self-perception as men, etc.).

First Findings – Identity Transitions

The statistical analysis of the 582 questionnaires revealed a big difference between the ideals of fathers prenatal and antenatal identity among fathers from all age groups (see some results in

⁴ The interviewees were divided into three age groups: (1) men in their twenties, (2) men in their thirties and (3) men in their forties. This selection was made to get a broad view of men's experiences and perceptions of fathering in conjunction with their stage of life.

figure 1). Before child birth, only some men express opinions that disagree with the ideologies of involved fatherhood. After birth, the many fathers do not behave in accordance with the involved father discourse. Various couples slide into traditional gender roles and a classical division of labour with a male breadwinner and a female caregiver even if they originally planned to share childcare and household tasks equally.

		parental attitudes before delivery		parental attitudes after delivery	
		mothers	fathers	mothers	fathers
Mother shall take all parental leave.	% of Total	75,6%	74,4%	93,7%	94,7%
The financial maintenance of the family is the duty of both parents.	% of Total	30,2%	24,6%	17,3%	22,1%
The father is totally responsible for the financial maintenance of the family.	% of Total	10,5%	18,4%	14,4%	25%
I am afraid of professional difficulties due to the child.	% of Total	44,2%	27,1%	55,6%	37%
The mother is mainly responsible for parenting and child education.	% of Total	21,9%	4,9%	38,5%	20,1%
Our division of labour at home is very fair.	% of Total	80,3%	71,9%	58,7%	41,3%
I consider myself as a rather emancipated and liberated woman. (questionnaire for women) I consider my partner as a rather emancipated and liberated woman. (questionnaire for men)	% of Total	52,8%	46,6%	39,6%	30,7%
I consider myself as a rather traditional woman. (questionnaire for women) I consider my partner as a rather traditional woman. (questionnaire for men)	% of Total	33,5%	42,6%	45,5%	60,4%
The father should spend a lot of time with the child.	% of Total	80,6%	65,7%	72,1%	44,2%

Figure 1: Parental attitudes before and after delivery⁵

⁵ We tried to translate the questions and scales as correctly as possible.

This tendency also appears in the arrangement of parental leave: Before delivery 25% of the expectant fathers intended to take at least some months of leave, whereas 12 months after delivery only 6% of the fathers still stick to their intentions to stay at home with their child (see figure 3). The financial compensation for taking leave ranges between 14,53 €⁶, 20,80 €⁷, and 26,60 €⁸ per day - no matter how high the former income was, but depending on the length of the parental leave (<http://www.bmgfj.gv.at>, 07-20-2008). Usually, the highest earner keeps on working. These are mostly men who earn 20% more on average than Austrian women (Statistik Austria 2007). If the men stayed at home the financial losses would be far too great for many families. But economic rationality is not the only decisive component to influence a couple's organisation of everyday life. As we will see later identity aspects have a considerable impact.

The analysis of the interview material shows a similar discrepancy between the intentions of fathers during pregnancy and the real fathering half a year after delivery. Most expectant fathers have prenatal involved father identities. This is apparent when one considers that almost all male interviewees want to spend everyday life with their child and are willing to do the tasks of childcare like feeding, bringing it to bed, changing the diapers, and so on. Often, the men declare that they refuse to spend only leisure time with their kids and be a "playing dad". In addition they do not see their main responsibility as a provider but also as a nurturer. At the same time, they seem to be very conscious of the fact that they would break with traditional forms of masculinity and the way their own fathers behaved.

What I definitely want to do - to do differently - is simply spend more everyday life with my child. I don't mean more quantity of time, I simply mean sharing everyday life. I mean really being there even if it is exhausting. Thus really meet the challenge, because going to the park and playing with the carousel, I mean, for me this is definitely not intrinsically fatherhood. And maybe this is also the reason, why my own father reproaches me. For him it was simply too annoying, too stupid, too tedious, just simply to be really there for

⁶ This alternative is valid for 30 + 6 months: You get the financial compensation up to 30 months, if only one parent is taking parental leave, and up to 36 months if both parents share the leave (in this case the minimal time for one parent is 6 months).

⁷ This alternative is valid for 20 + 4 months (explanation see above).

⁸ This alternative is valid for 15 + 3 months (explanation see above).

us. And thus cleaning and doing and all those things he left to my mother. (Daniel, 42, expectant first-time father)

Being asked half a year after delivery the majority of fathers is astonished how little time they really spend with their child and how imbalanced the main responsibility is allocated between themselves and their partners.

Well it becomes obvious, that the responsibility or the last responsibility respectively for the child still is up to the mother. That's where the buck stops although we planned it completely different. (Daniel, 43, first-time father)

Most of the men did a transition to a male breadwinning Identity. Even those, who are not able to take up the financial responsibility yet. For example young fathers, who are still studying and have scarcely traditional attitudes concerning gender roles and parenting, admit that the main responsibility and competence for childcare rests upon the shoulders of their partners. Although they are still at university and practically not able to provide financially for their new family, they see their schooling as their main duty. They justify this by trying to finish their studies quickly in order to be able to earn a living for their family. Conversely their partners stopped their trainings and stay at home. Here, the traditionalisation of gender relationships a child causes becomes very obvious.

Well we slipped somehow in a very rational view of the world. We absolutely did not expect this before. Well we are talking much more about money than before and we are talking more about the future than before and we try however to built up something together. Something that will be a stable basis for my daughter's life. I knew before, that we want to build up something together, but I was not aware of the fact, that this will affect many many areas, where we used to be full of ideals. Maybe we repressed those changes before delivery. (...) I expected somehow, that I will spend much more time at home. I did not expect, that I, well, I thought, that I will be more eagerly involved in my fatherhood. This doesn't mean that I am an uneager father now. But in my imagination it was much more balanced than it is the bottom line. Thus more fifty-fifty. But is definitely not the case. Well it is far away from fifty-fifty. (George, 24, first-time father)

Influences lead to the transition to male breadwinning Identity

As explained above, identities have to be considered as fluid and transitional within time and in the same time as influenced by a rather stable structure of dichotomy. One part of this dichotomy is the gendered body (Butler 1994, West Zimmerman 1991). The gendered body provides a male identity, that is unable for caring. For example not having the option of breastfeeding also leads to the conclusion not being responsible for other caring duties. Some fathers use this as a biological argument that unavoidably justifies the higher responsibility of mothering.

This appears solely in the fact that my girl friend is breast feeding, uhm, that's why the peewee sleeps next to her during the night. This means, that she is breast feeding all the time and sometimes I don't even notice that and sleep through the night. (...) But also when my daughter wakes up during the night and is crying, because she dreamt something bad or so and is not hungry at all, my girl friend takes care of her, because she just simply has to turn around in bed. All of this has it's reason. But it effects totally the main responsibility, so that I for example don't know where the baby's leggings are and stuff like that. And then I have to ask what I shall put on her. With things like these you can see that the main responsibility is not up to me. (Bernd, 43, first-time father)

Many men get involved with numerous problems when they try to create a new identity as a father. If they fulfil caring practices they are confronted with mocking comments from workmates, when they change the time they spend at work after the child was born. Some even get taunted by male relatives when they express their wish to attend the birth or their desire for involved fatherhood.

It was funny when I told my father that I want to take parental leave. "Are you crazy? Being away from your job?", he said. I answered: "Yes, this is much more important than my job!" He could not understand that at all. He also cannot understand that I want to be present at delivery. "Do you want to breast feed him [sic!]" "No I just want to be there!" That was weird. (...) Neither my brother nor my father can be appreciative of the fact that a man can put the job or something professionally important last. That was somehow funny. (Max, 41, expectant first-time father)

It can be difficult on an individual level in such ambiguous situations, when first-time fathers are well aware of how they should act as fathers, but simultaneously are challenged in their efforts to

modify their behaviour. They find it rather difficult to connect the ideals of involved fatherhood with their male self image. Sometimes they describe pride in their way of fathering while at the same time they feel their behaviour is clashing with the dominant male self-image. For example when an involved father is the only men in a group of mothers the fact that he is the only male caregiver makes him feel uncomfortable and proud at the same time. It is stressful to be “the exception” and to have to defend one’s identity as a man who cares for his child.

One thing that is annoying me a lot at the moment is that the gender roles or role models are so inverted in our case. I am not content with this fact. And I find it should be different again. Well if you are out with your child and you go to nurseries and you go in there, you are rather exotic as father. That is something which is rather ambivalent for me. On one hand it is annoying me and on the other hand you are the one with the very special position. You have your own status there. (Christopher, 31, first-time father)

This “*exotic position*”⁹ is ambiguously beautiful and stressful at the same time. On the one hand, men come into conflict with societal stereotypes, with which they are breaking consciously. Consistently having to break with rules and traditions also has negative and exhausting consequences. It can be very annoying to be always perceived as special when doing the day-to-day tasks of childcare. On the other hand some men find pleasure in breaking conventions. Besides pride, some fathers also report positive feedback from women who appraise involved fathers as “*cool*” and “*sexy*” “*superheroes*” (quotations of Alfred, 37, Christopher, 31, and Tom, 33, during a group discussion).

Another crucial problem facing child caring fathers is that they cannot compare (and compete) with other men, because they hardly ever meet other child caring fathers. As the only men among women they miss their same sex (comparison) group and are afraid they might become feminised. This has a negative influence on the male self-esteem which can be intensified if their partner is the breadwinner.

What I want to avoid is to become feminised. It is stupid that some roles are gendered and seem to fit better for men or for women. Until now I couldn’t find a good solution for me, but I know that I definitely want to stay a man. I cannot tell you where I attach my male identity. But basically I want to be a man, I want to be a father somehow. And I

⁹ Quotation of Christopher, 31, father of a 2 year old son

don't want to become a feminised man because I do things with my child and I am mostly within groups where 90% are women. (Christopher, 31, involved father of a 2 year old son)

Child caring fathers also don't have the feeling of being a pioneer due to the fact, that they are "invisible" for other men.

Simon: But if you are doing things with your son, do you feel like a pioneer?

John: I would be a pioneer if anyone could see this, if other men saw this. But at the moment I am rather in groups of women. (Simon, 32, and John, 31, during a group discussion)

In many interviews, expectant fathers asked how other men coped with their fatherhood. This is another prominent sign of the lack of exchange between men and the longing for a "group membership" to stabilise male identity during the difficult transition to fatherhood. Most men know that they want to act different from their fathers, but they are unaware of how other fathers act. Additionally, they tend to get the feeling that mothers always do better. Here, the importance of same sex groups again becomes evident. Men who practice involved fatherhood are well aware of the fact that their behaviour and their convictions are not representative of and not shared throughout society. If a man breaks with the ideals and claims of hegemonic masculinity (cf. Connell 1995, 2003) and performs his gender role in a new way (cf. West & Zimmerman 2002), it can cause him to feel uncertain and insecure. The few male interviewees on parental leave all had to argue immediately (especially in group discussions) that this is only temporary and they intend to provide their family as soon as possible.

If men take on domestic responsibilities, it effects the way they think and act in relation to gender roles (cf. Coltrane 1996). The more men involve themselves with the child and participate in domestic labours, the more their picture of themselves as men and their ideas on masculinity and fatherhood change. In our interviews, it was easier for both men and women to allow a modern view of the gender role for their partner than for themselves; when it came to describing their own gender role, both men and women generally took a more conservative position. Men don't have any problems to have a partner who is working, but they still feel responsible to provide for the family.

Conclusions

As we tried to reveal, that fathers identity during transition to parenthood is both fluid and bound to dichotomous societal structures.

First findings illustrate and affirm that the ways in which the contemporary discourse of involved fatherhood affect men's practices are dependent on a wide range of factors such as the relationship to the partner, to workmates and the male peer group, a couple's economic circumstances, social policies, and the organisation of a family's work-life-balance. Like all gender relations, parenthood is embedded in a dichotomous system of relations of power, production and institutions that create dichotomous identities and practices (Kimmel 2003, Connell 2002).

For most men in our study, being a committed parent is a central characteristic of being a man, but a masculine identity is still bound to being a provider and fathers struggle with these structures or try to fit in these concepts. Often explained and justified with biological arguments like breast feeding, traditional identities of fathering and mothering became persistent in daily family life.

The majority of men in our survey is prenatally participating in the discourse of involved fatherhood in a positive manner no matter how their actual behaviour with their child is. Some men speak positively about gender equality and argue for shared responsibilities in family work, although they neither attended their child's birth nor want to take parental leave. One possible explanation for this is that it is that fatherhood is intimately linked to the processes of male identity construction. All paternal meanings and practices are defined by particular forms of being and feeling masculine, of adopting some tasks and rejecting others (Connell 2002). The public discourse of involved fathering has produced such an attention to men's behaviour that it is more difficult for the current generation of fathers to act like their own fathers did. Even if they do so, they have to justify this with financial or biological arguments.

Men tend to have great difficulties in making sense of the paradoxical relationship between their ideals of involved fathering (i.e. caring) and their traditional masculine identities (i.e. providing). As long as those gendered expectations about homemaking and breadwinning continue to be part of a person's identity, this model will be perpetuated. It will shape opportunities for professional

advancement and individual decisions to have children and arrange family life. Therefore we want to emphasise that it is important to create conditions which allow men (and women) to develop all facets of their personality, no matter how those traits are regarded in a gendered way throughout society.

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