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Man's engagement in family life – changes and contexts

Introduction

Much has been said and written about the role of man in the life of contemporary family and broader social groups, analyzing the problem from various viewpoints (e.g. procreation and sexuality, economy, socialization, emotions, education and upbringing). Even though the knowledge of contemporary man is constantly expanding, research fails to keep pace with social transformations of male roles – partly because of dynamic reconfigurations of the life context. Analyses of men's roles typically focus on the functioning of man in the family – in relation to selected individuals: wife, mother of his child(ren), and his child(ren) (a), in the professional environment (b), in the local community, in the neighbourhood (c), in the social group (d) and, finally, in relation to the society as a whole (e).

However, there is growing interest in man and man's place in family life not only among psychologists but also representatives of other scientific disciplines including sociologists, pedagogists, medical practitioners – and many institutions (Church, local government bodies, etc.). Men's transition into the role of husband and father changes their social standing and triggers the process of restructuring of their previously dominant life patterns. Their

embedding in the social network is thus radically transformed. Growing interest in problems relating to man's social role is a consequence of its special impact on all social structures, from microsystems (marriage, family) to macrosystems. The interest is further fuelled by change in the dominant ideology and its accompanying transformations of state structures and institutions brought about by civilization development. The concern of researchers, theologians, national and international organizations, denominational associations and volunteers with man's involvement in sociocultural transformations and, primarily, their concern with the future of the father's role is seen by many as a social and moral dictate. It is accompanied by the relatively common belief that contemporary men have undergone a change of mentality. The claim is supported by results of scientific explorations which, however, are mostly fragmentary in nature. Despite that, on the basis of results of our research, a thesis is put forward that the contemporary man is beginning to perceive his own role in the life of the woman and his child(ren) as a major life task which can only be accomplished on condition of active attitude and unwavering commitment (Liberska, Freudenreich 2011).

Man in the role of father in the context of family changes

The basic theme of the discussion below concerns the roles of contemporary man in the family unit, with a special emphasis on the role of father.

In spite of major transformations which are affecting the family nowadays, the family unit remains the basic social system exerting a powerful educational influence on its youngest members, i.e. children. Contemporary research into the family invariably demonstrates the key importance of the family unit for the child's physical and mental development – despite the occasionally voiced concern about the family's diminishing functions in the sphere of education and upbringing (cf. Harwas-Napierała 2008). The family system is especially vital for catering to the child's fundamental needs including the basic need of security and the best possible conditions for development. Parents continue to be role models for their offspring. Children usually identify with their parents, picking up certain behaviour patterns from them and developing a concept of their own adult life based on their example. It also needs to be stressed that the father's attitude is of enormous significance for the harmonious development of the child's personality, their successes and failures at later development stages and the ability to cope with various life challenges. Recent studies confirm that

support given by the father is extremely beneficial for children's adaptation at school, their academic success and behaviour. This observation applies both to children of average ability and those exceptionally gifted (intellectually, musically, artistically, etc.) (Gluska, Ossowski 2011). Pupils with the best results at school are those whose parents demonstrate an attitude of acceptance, take their children as they are, with all their physical and intellectual abilities and limitations. By accepting their children, the parents (the father especially) give them a feeling of security and deepen their sense of *satisfaction with existence*. Not all fathers, however, share the same attitude towards their children and their approach may have either positive or negative effects on the children's personality development and behaviour (Pospiszyl 1980, 2007, Rembowski 1972, Plopa 2005, 2006).

Presentation of the father's contribution to the child's general development was a prelude leading to a discussion of the man's function in the contemporary family. The father's influence over his own (or adopted) children is inextricably connected to transformations undergone by the family unit in historical time. Attention should be paid to the importance of the father-child relation for unleashing the full development potential – and development resources – of both parties to the relationship.

Another aspect worth noting is men's special role in the process of intergenerational transmission within the family, including the generation of the oldest men (Tyszkowa 1990, 1996, Farnicka 2009). The nature of relations between the grandfather and the grandson depends on the line of kinship (maternal grandfather – paternal grandfather), relations between grandparents and parents as well as the age of the grandfather and grandson. Results of studies into functions performed by grandparents towards their grandchildren prove that they are usually involved in education and upbringing as well as economic/material, socializing and cultural aspects.

Some men never positively resolve their own development dilemma of *generativity vs stagnation* until they become grandfathers, and the new role makes them find the sense of life. A special benefit of the grandparents/grandchildren relationship is that it is based on dialogue, which fosters mutual understanding and teaches cooperation with other people. Literature on the subject distinguishes several “grandparenting styles” based on various forms of dialogue: material, personal and existential (Małeczka 1997). The overall improvement in life conditions, combined with propagation of the idea of “severing the umbilical cord” and self-fulfilment, may underlie the process of gradual limitation of the scope of functions performed by grandparents in the contemporary family – mostly to playing games and recreational activities.

Paternity aspects

Depending on the family, the word “father”¹ evokes various memories, associations and expectations. Members of the oldest generation remember their father as a stern figure whose only contact with children was through the mother. For the middle generation that survived the Second World War the father is seen, first and foremost, as the breadwinner. In today’s social and economic environment, however, the father’s earnings are no longer the primary source of support for the family. The limitation of the breadwinning role is thus accompanied by a growing involvement in the children’s upbringing and education. For an increasing number of young people the father is perceived as a friend and companion.

Regardless of the father’s image (“strict authority figure”, “breadwinner” or “friend and companion”), contemporary familiologists unanimously stress that the father should be a role model for the child and a partner to the child’s mother, both in daily chores and in the upbringing of offspring. The idea of partnership is one of the distinctive traits of our times, particularly of the 21st century (Renzetti, Curran, 2008). It must be added, though, that certain indicators suggesting its limited permanence were already noted in the previous century (cf. Matuszewska, 1990). It cannot be ruled out that the partnership-based relation between the husband and wife in young families, preserving the specific character and mutual complementariness of roles, has been reinforced throughout the past twenty years.

Paternalism is a very specific role performed by men, involving certain rights, obligations and behaviours which demonstrate cultural variation. Stepping into the role of the father, men must take their proper place in marriage and family including conception of child(ren), giving love to the children and their mother, financial maintenance of the family and children’s upbringing. Man’s paternity is usually closely related to the function of giving life to his children. It is, at the same time, underlain by a broad set of interpersonal references. In his teachings, Pope John Paul II stresses that “within the conjugal and family communion-community, the man is called upon to live his *gift and role* as husband and father”. The process of preparation for the father’s role is socially determined,

¹ The concept of “father” is one of the fundamental categories and defines the male parent of (a) child(ren) – in relation to the child(ren); paternity is defined as the quality of being a father. There are also many secondary meanings of the word, such as ancestor (forefather), progenitor, founder, author, initiator, creator, etc. In the group of religious meanings of “father”, the word is often used for referring to God (God the Father), Pope (Holy Father), as well as ordained monk who has taken priestly orders (or – broadly understood – priest).

while the way the role is performed (similarly to the mother's role) is tied into intergenerational transmission.

Capturing the essence of paternity requires an analysis of various aspects: biological, psychological, spiritual and legal. The multitude of aspects is clearly visible in theoretical concepts of paternity proposed by various areas of human knowledge and in the everyday realization of paternity, i.e. how paternity is perceived and put into practice by a concrete man called "father". The basic, though simplified, division is into biological (also referred to as physical or natural) paternity and spiritual paternity (which should not be confused with the concept of spiritual paternity existing in theology of inner life). Psychoanalytic research underscores the importance of the symbolic aspect of paternity. Ethnological, anthropological, sociological and demographic aspects are also brought up in literature.

An aspect that is most immediately associated with paternity, though admittedly not the most important one is **biology**. Biology is the foundation of "blood ties" and the quintessence of kinship. A man who, together with a woman, brings a new person (their child) to the world, "begets" new life and is thus a "begetter" (i.e. *genitor* to his progeniture). The natural way to bring about biological paternity is to engage in an intimate relationship. Another precondition for parenthood for many women and men in our cultural sphere is the act of marriage.

In humans, the mere biological act of conceiving a new life is absolutely exceptional because its consequences transgress the biological dimension of life. The Church argues that the act of biological conception should be seen as *actus humanus*, a conscious human act, because it gives rise to a new multidimensional person endowed with spirituality and psyche. In the consciousness of the man and the woman it should be an act of creating a new human being. The biological fact of paternity also influences the psyche of the three individuals concerned: the man, the woman and the child. It is, therefore, reflected in their consciousness and determines their further life course.

In addition to the biological aspect, paternity also has a **legal dimension**. The parents' marriage gives the child legitimacy and ensures a proper status within the social fabric. From this point of view legal paternity is more important than biological paternity. In some countries biological paternity does not grant the father any parental rights towards the child and *vice versa*, while the full scope of powers and obligations is given by the society to the legal father. In contemporary times, legal paternity recognized by the social group is gaining importance over biological paternity. This tendency suggests that in social consciousness there is a clear distinction between the "father" (*pater*) and the "begetter" (*genitor*). The father is endowed with a social and legal status without necessarily being responsible for siring the child. This approach views "father" as the man who is

bound by a set of rights and obligations to the child's mother, while "begetter" is equivalent to the notion of "gene donor".

Some thinkers seek the essence of paternity in the "creative desire", i.e. man's ambition to be the creator of a new life. A question thus arises on whether contemporary men indeed want to create a new life, shape a new human being, instil in their children values which they consider to be crucial and which they follow in life. A positive answer to the question means that creation is a priority to men, while "being a father" is the most fundamental way towards self-fulfilment, in exactly the same way as "being a mother" is for women.

There is a unanimous consent that the basic responsibility of the father is taking care about the proper and complete development of the child he co-created. In one sense, as already mentioned above, this is a creative process which gives fatherhood a **spiritual aspect**. It is the spiritual dimension of paternity that makes the man form deep and permanent ties to his family. Without a family, his sole role would be that of "biological father". The man constantly revises his paternity and gives it a new dimension thanks to the lasting bond which exists between him and the woman who is his wife, and – most importantly – the mother of his children. An important point for a man stepping into the role of the father seems to be the preliminary act of acknowledgement of his child and gaining awareness of that act's future implications.

The status of father is thus attained:

- a) in the legal sense – when a child is born, either in matrimony or out of it, or when a child is formally adopted,
- b) in the psychological and pedagogical sense – when the man enters into the father-child relationship, which entails the fulfilment of the social role of the father. The development of that relationship demonstrates that the man identifies with his paternal role and undertakes the long-term task of shaping a new person. In this light, forming the relationship is of vital importance for the child (though not only),
- c) in the biological sense – by begetting a child.

It needs to be stressed, though, that the division presented above is, to a certain extent, artificial since there is typically no disjunction between biological and social fatherhood. One exception is adoption, which – however – can be accommodated within the social criterion of the problem under study. Capturing the essence of fatherhood thus requires a holistic rather than analytical approach.

² This belief suggests that the child is perceived, jointly with the mother, as a single inseparable unit, while the man only has obligations towards the child through his relationship with the child's mother.

Transformations of male roles against the background of sociohistorical transitions

The democratization of social life which has been dynamically affecting our society is underpinned by the belief in equality of all people including men and women, superiors and subordinates, caregivers and care-seekers, parents and children. The tendency has had a powerful impact on family life: in terms of relations between parents but also between parents and children. The profound transformations which shook the 20th century have had an impact on all family members, men included.

The centuries-old model of man as a patriarch of an extended family of several generations, with unquestioned authority over all family members, has been undergoing a transition in the majority of industrialized societies. It is being replaced by a model which has not, as yet, been fully investigated. The old model of man is being phased out, while the new one has not yet taken its final shape, which makes any definition difficult. The difficulty involved in exploring the emerging new model of man in the family is also a consequence of its processual nature because both the concept of man and the socially pervasive idea of what the contemporary husband/partners and father should be like are constantly evolving in parallel to the ecological context. Transformations of the family microsystem are related to changes occurring in superior systems. In this process men are assigned a leading role – as a liaison between the family system and broader systems (Parsons 1969). In the contemporary age, however, the woman (wife, mother) also has a major share in the development of a network of connections between the family and higher-level external systems. This represents yet another change making the social role of men within the family unit more complex and triggers transformations of the model of contemporary man.

In public discourse there is no consensus on that topic, either. It is in fact much easier to specify what the new model of man (as husband and father) should *not* be like than find an answer to the question of what the man's important role in the contemporary family should be – not to mention the family of the future.

Family seen as a system is the basic social microsystem entering into interactions with other social systems at the *micro*, *mezo*, *exo* and *macro* levels.³ Consequently, the family should not be regarded as a tightly closed unit, cut off from the process of evolution of social life. Quite the opposite: it is very closely linked to social structures and affected by various influences and pressures coming “from outside”. As a result, all the social, cultural, political, economic

³ By giving the man a status of a subsystem, we assume constant transformations of his roles performed in systems of which he is a member.

and historical processes and phenomena exert their impact on the family and its individual members, contributing to changes in the family's function. A new model is thus emerging and its structure reflects the new **position of man**.

The family is influenced by a broad range of external processes which concern the family life either directly or indirectly. The former group includes:

- **industrialization** – replacement of human labour with machines, resulting in technical changes which have an effect on the quality of life. People thus become superfluous and their labour is not as indispensable as it used to be. The multiplication of professions and specializations causes a demise of social and professional traditions. Professions are no longer passed on from father to son.
- **urbanization** – depletion of village populations and widespread migration to cities which become more and more congested. The process brings about a new way of social life. Families tend to “shrink” as a consequence of geographic mobility of family members. The hectic urban lifestyle reduces the frequency of contacts and intimacy of family life.

The latter group of processes, which have a direct impact on family life, structure and functions, comprises:

- **democratization** – manifested as a change in intra-family relations, a shift in the status of women in the society (increasing professional activity of women and their financial independence). The process induces transformations of the traditional family model in which the place of the woman was in the home, looking after the family, while the husband and father to her child(ren) was responsible for the material well-being of the family unit.
- **individualization** – manifested as isolation of the family from other families and social groups (e.g. school) as well as autonomization of life displayed as the precedence of personal interests over those of the family (Tyszka, 2003).

Industrialization, urbanization and, above all, democratization and individualization, embraced by many contemporaries, form a basis for the metamorphosis of roles traditionally performed by men and result in a change of their status, also as husbands and fathers. Changes in the family model and function are strictly correlated with transformations of the model of man. The far-reaching consequences of individualization are difficult to predict. Excessive individualization may, however, jeopardize not only the family but even close interpersonal ties which are crucial for family formation (Bauman 2006, 2007, Giddens 2007). One of the threats to the creation of powerful positive emotional bonds constituting marriage is the autonomization of sex. Others include chaos

and turmoil in the sphere of values such as prioritization of self-interest *over the welfare of others, even close people, and last but not least, the drive towards absolute autonomy.*

Transformations of the role of man in the family

The family used to be dominated by the patriarchal model for a long time. In the patriarchal system the man, i.e. head of the family (*pater familias*), enjoyed a very powerful position. He represented the family outside, in social and public life, while his power (*patria potestas*) within the family unit was based on authority and gave him the function of judge in family matters. The man also had an influence on the future of family members. His fundamental task, however, was provision for the family's material well-being. The bond existing between the man and his children was instrumental in nature. As opposed to the mother, who was responsible for the warmth and comfort of home and whose relations with the children were based on mutual affection, the father preferred an autocratic upbringing style involving a system of prohibitions and penalties. Any deeper expressive relations with his children were out of the question. The relations between the father and his children were thus purely material in nature, similarly to the bond linking him to his wife (Adamski 2002, Tyszka 2003).

The downfall of the traditional patriarchal family model was precipitated by a number of diverse historical transformations, however the turning point was the end of the Second World War. Historically significant events including not only the War but also the overturn of the sociopolitical system, set off a very rapid process of changes in all aspects of family life, paternity included. The man was suddenly faced with new challenges. He was expected to change his image from the "head of the family" to a partner in family life on the same par as his wife. Post-war difficulties with employment and adjustment to new life circumstances made the process even more demanding. Consequently, the weakening of the traditional masculine authority became more and more prominent. The man lost, as contemporaries presume, the status of *pater familias* and it became necessary to elaborate a completely new concept of man in the family and a new model of paternity.

Faced with the loss of his high status, the contemporary man is in a difficult position. He must cope with the situation and redefine his role in the family. His success depends both on his individual resources and on the broadly understood life context which also undergoes dynamic transformations. The process in many cases increases the man's perceived degree of difficulty of his current station in

life and the developmental challenge to define himself in the family system. Addressing the phenomena underpinning the process, attention should be paid to the rapid and radical transformations of interpersonal relations manifested, for example, by the growing prevalence of cohabitation arrangements which are gradually winning acceptance in many social circles.

As a result, our sociocultural reality embodies not only traditional families composed of multi-aspect subsystems created by the woman and the man (functioning in two roles: wife and mother for the former and husband and father for the latter)⁴, but also – increasingly – monoparental families, i.e. those in which only one parent has responsibility for bringing up the child. Usually, the role is entrusted to the woman whose social role in the family thus becomes reduced to that of the mother. Consequently, the man's involvement in the life of the family is completely eliminated. The long-term risk of this process is depreciation of the status of man as a member of the family system: both as husband and as father. In reconstructed families the risk can be associated predominantly with the role of the father. In this situation, the cultural backgrounds of the parents who have split, combined with appropriate legal regulations, may act as buffering factors. The last of the mentioned tendencies of changes in marriage and family contribute to a further decline of the importance of biological paternity on a macro scale. On the individual scale, however, biological fatherhood is retaining its important status. Evidence for that claim is the fact that a considerable proportion of children who do not know their biological parents undertake endeavours to find their biological families at some point. Being able to identify one's position in the kinship network seems to be instrumental to the individual's construction of identity, both on a personal and social level. Under Erikson's theory, biologically programmed pressures play an increasingly important role for the development of the child's identity – particularly during puberty. Physiological and anatomical changes, as well as changes in outer appearance noticed by adolescents by self-observation spawn their interest in biological parents, suggesting that knowledge of one's biological parentage is significant for the development of their psyche and behaviour.

The thesis about the loss of importance of biological paternity in the family may, however, be supported by those systems in which the role of the parent is realized by the partner of the child's mother who, at the same time, undertakes the function of the father that is *present in the child's life* by supporting the child and participating in the child's upbringing. Such cases corroborate the claim of growing supersession of biological paternity, or rather replacement of the role

⁴ Therefore, there are justified reasons for analyzing transformations of the family system occurring in three subsystems: husband-wife, father-mother and parent-child.

of biological father by the role of father who is actively involved in rearing the child.⁵ Advancements in medical sciences also contribute to the change in the concept of paternity, facilitating the distinction between the role of father as caretaker from the role of father as begetter. Transformations in the educational system, coupled with changes in the economic situation of families and the wide variety of consumer goods available (following the Solidarity Revolution and the “Round Table” events) contributed to the intensification of women's interest in professional activity. The trend, in turn, either limited or completely displaced the man-father from his traditional economic function as the main provider of the family's income. The superimposition of limitations of basic functions performed by men in the family in our culture (i.e. parent and provider) can be a source of stress. This may, to a certain extent, explain the view expressed by some contemporary men that they experience a low level of well-being not only in the private sphere but also in the public domain (compare Miluska 1996, Śmidowa 2008, Kołodziej 2010).

Changes affecting the social status of women are clearly felt in the family because, in line with the systemic approach, women's relations built in external systems impacting the family are the transposed onto the family system. The woman's perceived higher status in the workplace or in the local environment may give rise to expectations of similar changes in the family unit and hence influence the relationship with their life partner.

A man positively evaluating changes in the status of women in extra-familial settings may expect similar changes in the immediate environment, i.e. in his own family. Some men, however, respond to the changing situation differently, particularly if stereotypical thinking and gender stereotypes enter into play. Negative attitudes towards changes in the couple's relations (intimate, marital, familial etc.) are further reinforced by a range of factors such as the growing size, complexity and variability of the human environment, and the fluidity of reality increasingly experienced by people (Giddens 2008), i.e. all the features that typify our times. The phenomena result in difficulties with correct identification of the life context, while a lack of resources (including skills necessary to cope with the situation) leads to the construction of a simplified model of reality, including one's own family environment (cf. Miluska 2008). Classification of objects and people using the criteria of appearance and basic functions supports the process of adaptation, making it possible to reduce the complexity of the world and protecting the individual against information overload (Allport 1954). Therefore, social stereotypes (including those related to gender roles) perform

⁵ Even in such families the importance of biological father may develop during adolescence – in the child, though not necessarily in the man (father), if he is not interested in any involvement in the life of his offspring.

a protective role. They may be invoked in complex or ambiguous situations, affecting decisions regarding behaviour.

However, backward stereotypes, i.e. conceptions still heavily embedded in conditions that no longer exist, prove inadequate and ineffective at a certain stage of social and cultural transformations, failing to aid the process of handling – or even analyzing – the tasks at hand. Whether a man chooses to refer to a stereotypical belief or not depends largely on his internal resources such as individual experience, personality traits, level of education, health, material standing, professional status etc. (Rostowska 2009). Of all the factors enumerated above, emphasis should be placed on the maturity of the man's personality. The basic attributes of mature personality include ability to adequately assess one's behaviour, autonomy and own will (Rostowska 2001, 2009, Obuchowski 2000). These qualities determine the man's ability to cope with multiple social roles and tasks culturally assigned to the man and the woman. However, contemporary men and women must address not only the issue of balancing their roles in marriage, family and job but, predominantly, resolve the task of self-determination in the changing world.

The traditional authority of man as the head of the family is shaking not only because of growing intellectual independence of their female partners, their emancipatory ambitions (either real or alleged) or extra-household activities performed for remuneration, which in many cases form a basis for women's economic independence, but also because of rising demands in the sphere of women's professional activity – the domain of men belonging to retiring generations – which not all are able to satisfy. Consequently, threats to traditional male roles exist both within and outside the family. Failures outside the family home experienced by some men undermine, in their belief, their status as the husband and father, making it more difficult to establish themselves as authorities and role models for the child; other important consequences are changes in relations with their partners.

In view of their diminishing protective role in the family – as husband and father – and considerable specialization of jobs, contrary to previous times, fathers are no longer able to bring their children into their profession, at the same time fulfilling their educational duties. The father's roles of protector and educator are growing apart, which often results in clashes. One of the functions tends to be performed at the expense of the other, especially in the light of ever-increasing requirements of the job market and employers expecting greater commitment to professional career.

The change in the child's status and prominence given to the child's rights in the family have resulted in considerable destabilization of the father's traditional position as the most important person and “judge” in family affairs. On the one

hand, the child has become a value in itself. On the other, children tend to be perceived as objects fulfilling emotional needs of their parents. The process carries the risk of the following sequence of events: (1) the child is viewed as an object fulfilling the adult's needs – (2) the child, being an object fulfilling the parent's needs, represents a value – (3) an increase in the child's value enables the parent to fulfil their needs to an even greater extent – (4) consequently, to fulfil their needs more, the parent strives to increase the value of the child – (5) increasing the child's value can be achieved by increasing investment in the child's needs, while the perceived multitude of goods that can be acquired to satisfy various needs of the child (either actual or assumed) requires greater commitment to professional work – (6) greater devotion to work is a factor limiting engagement in family life, including the child's upbringing, etc. Paradoxically, a man experiencing social pressure to increase his contribution to his child's and his partner's everyday life, and to empower them, and seeking to fulfil these expectations enters a path of exclusion from the family's life. Mental discomfort caused by the situation does not make it easier for the man to find his place in the family or work out a new model of husband/partner and father.

The factors listed above prompt the man to take up the challenging endeavour towards self-determination as a partner in intimate relations with his female partner (who is not always the child's mother) and in relations with the child, and to construct a concept of himself and his own family.⁶ Some studies, however, indicate that the transformations of male roles are limited in scope (Šmidowa 2008, Liberska, Freudenreich 2011). A question is thus raised whether the man's role in the family is acquiring a new dimension in response to transitions occurring in the broader life context.

If the task formulated in the question is addressed successfully, the man's further harmonious development is ensured.

Contemporary man

The nature of concepts of contemporary man, including the role of the father, is affected among other factors by social expectations and privately held beliefs about the functioning in the social environment, both immediate (family) and more distant (in one's profession, neighbourhood, etc.), determined by a variety of contemporary phenomena, primarily transitions engulfing marriage forms

⁶ Heterosexual relationships are discussed here.

and family types, filiation rights and progress in biomedical sciences, as well as the image of man promoted in the media.

The above factors that constitute a specific “network of connections” and influence one another on the feedback principle have radically changed the status of contemporary man as husband/partner and father. It is sometimes claimed that contemporary men are like mascots who have lost their high social status to women, partners, mothers of their children, female co-workers or superiors in the workplace (cf. Mandal 2003, Szlendak 2005, 2010).

What are the features of the contemporary **father model**, then? The crisis of the traditional patriarchal model has not definitely devalued the role of man in the family unit but rather forced men to assume a new position in the family circle and modify the scope of their functions. Since the instrumental bonds traditionally connecting the father with his children have decreased in importance and are no longer suitable for the family context because of phenomena occurring in the contemporary reality, they have to be reflected in relations of other types. The relations have thus acquired a more expressive and emotional dimension. The contemporary father is no longer assigned the authoritative role. Instead, he is a guardian of the family’s internal stability. His presence in the family life and the role of guide of the child’s steps from birth until independence seems to run against the established order. A switch from the instrumental fatherly role to a more emotional one might corroborate the above claim. This conclusion, however, would not be fully justified because the relations between the father and child are based on a unique and qualitatively different bond. Consequently, they cannot be compared to the type of bond existing between the mother and the child.

The outcome of the process of transformations of the father model is easy to notice. In the past, the sight of a father pushing a pram, walking with the child, cuddling or feeding his baby formula from a bottle used to attract surprised looks. Today, it fails to surprise any more (Matuszewska 1994). The contemporary father more readily engages in household chores formerly undertaken by women and is more eager to take care of the child (Plopa 2005). What is more, he is less and less inclined to act as a stern judge of the child and more likely to use democratic control methods, support the child in resolving difficulties and developing skills, and prepare the child for future social functions (Liberska, Freudenreich 2011). There is also a growing tendency for fathers to be present at birth and to have direct contact with the child afterwards, similarly to the mother (Bielawska-Batorowicz et al. 2002). Looking back, the changes appear to be revolutionary.

Do the yearning to be close to the child from the first days of his or her life and fatherly sensitivity represents new phenomena?

From the psychological viewpoint, the father's parenting sensitivity towards the child emerges very early, at the time of conscious realization of the fact of becoming a father. The realization sets off a number of psychological mechanisms in the father. First, it captures the man's imagination, provoking memories and dreams for the future. Following the child's birth, the dreams are filtered through the prism of the child's gender. The first manifestations of the father-child bond are an important element in the process of development of paternal awareness. They find expression in the father's involvement in basic care tasks or, even before birth, in attempts to establish contact with the unborn child the help of the pregnant partner (wife). The activities can give rise to a unique and inimitable bond between the man-father and the child (cf. Schaffer 1981, Bowlby 2007, Pospiszyl 1980, 2007) which offers an opportunity for a full expression of his generativity. Therefore, it seems justified to claim that the paternal sensitivity, formerly concealed by the man's attempts to provide his wife and child with physical and material security, has now been unleashed. The involvement of the woman (wife, child's mother) in activities contributing to the family's well-being create a certain space for the man offering him a chance to realize his fatherhood differently, without being limited to the basic instrumental functions.

It is often discussed in literature whether the contemporary father can still be termed "the father of the family". The discussion above gives grounds to assume that the old meaning of the term has now changed, increasing its scope and encompassing new aspects. However, its basic functions remain unchanged, e.g. providing the family with a sense of security and bringing up offspring. The family's sense of security does not depend exclusively on the material resources co-created by the contemporary man but also, or perhaps primarily, on good home atmosphere created by the man together with his female partner. Thanks to involvement in all challenging situations of daily life, the man knows all the problems facing the family and has his share in their resolution. Being aware of engagement in the family's affairs is, for a number of men, a source of satisfaction and compensation for the lost position of the dominant family member. The father is also a guardian and caretaker of his child (either natural or adopted), while his influence on the child's development becomes more prominent as the child grows (Danielewicz-Mucha 1990). Even though the father's creative input into the development of the child's psyche is crucial to his own developmental, few men seem to have adequate awareness of that (Liberska, Freudenreich 2011). Some men realize that there are special profits associated with involvement in the family's life – in the form of respect they earn outside the family circle, in the so-called public sphere (Hochschild, Machung 1990, Śmidowa 2008). A number of contemporary men feel sorry about the lack of sufficient interest in the affairs of their own family, especially inadequate involvement in the child's life. It must

be added, though, that in many cases the realization only dawns on them after the child has left the nest or in times of crisis.

Men are more likely to admit to having difficulties in communication with their children and more inclined to give them appropriate support and fulfil expectations relating to the role of the father during the midlife crisis (cf. Tyszkowa 1996). Men experiencing midlife crisis usually assess their past achievements and failures, and reflect on their success in the role of husband and father. Some of them feel they have failed both to meet the expectations of their nearest and dearest and achieve their own goals in this field. In order to fulfil expectations connected with the man's social role in the family, men need to be very sensitive and open with other people, i.e. possess appropriate social and emotional competences (Sęk 1990). Not all men, though, go through midlife crisis. The phase affects men who are capable of self-reflection and able to withdraw, at least temporarily, from active involvement in everyday family life. (The attribute seems to apply to the man-subject). This foundation of midlife crisis is highlighted by results of some studies (cf. Sęk 1990). Referring to Jung's ideas on human development, midlife crisis can be viewed as a phase that is critical for the process of man's individualization. From the perspective of the family (wife, child), however, the man affected by midlife crisis distances himself, even if only temporarily, from family problems, which results in deterioration of family relations.

Is the midlife crisis experienced by contemporary men essentially the same phenomenon as it was a quarter of a century ago? It is not possible to give a definite answer to the question due to the absence of studies investigating that problem.

Under the normative approach, the phase of midlife crisis in a sense inspires the man's further individual development, but also has significance for the development of his closest relatives. By struggling with the crisis, the man modifies the structure of his life over again, sets new goals for the future and, consequently, is able to alter his life course (cf. Oleś 2011, Pietrasiniski, 1990). The man's family members, however, may perceive such actions as destabilizing for the family and respond to them in a negative manner. These reactions, in turn, may disturb the man's future individual development. This partially pessimistic vision regarding changes of the man's bonds with his wife/partner and child does need to come true, though. Men who use the period of crisis for making an effort to improve their communication with family members may, in effect, create new, more positive and stronger family bonds. Consequently, men are given the opportunity to restructure their family system and adjust intra-family relations, turning them into a source of satisfaction for all members of the family system and a foundation for further developmental changes. The reconstruction and/or

reinforcement of positive bonds will also contribute to further developmental changes of the system. This male role in the contemporary family seems to be growing in importance, not least so because the man's female partner is more liable to feel helpless in critical situations (the repertoire of which grows along with the growth of the woman's involvement in outside systems) and is less effective in the identification of pro-developmental solutions than the husband/partner (Sęk 1990, Tyszkowa 1996). The support given by the man to the woman can make it substantially easier for them to restructure their mutual attachment when the child leaves home. The phase of midlife crisis running concurrently in the man and his partner increases the symmetry and openness of their interactions, as well as boosting acceptance for one's own and the partner's subjectivity. However, an undesirable outcome of that consistency is worse performance as a parent of an adolescent child. The majority of events which are evaluated negatively by men who go through the crisis phase are related to family life (ca. 60%), while increasingly complicated or "blurred" external systems may, for some men, be a source of many additional negative attitudes, thus escalating the crisis. Prior commitment to family matters, including child rearing, gives the man an opportunity to receive support from his nearest and dearest during crisis periods. This is a special benefit to be achieved by the contemporary man. On the one hand, it can reduce the degree of perceived difficulty involved in the individualization process. On the other hand, it can result in further reinforcement of the family system. In critical cases, i.e. when the family system is too cohesive, the man's relation with external systems may deteriorate, making it more difficult to achieve pro-development changes in the life structure and function in social roles beyond the level of the family. It cannot be ruled out that some men decide to postpone the decision to start a family and have children precisely for that reason (Liberska, Matuszewska 2006).

The above discussion demonstrates two separate development paths culminating in two different models of contemporary man in the family. According to the first model, the man views his own development as occurring in connection with the development of people who are bound to him by intimate relations and derives satisfaction from co-creating the bonds.

Under the second model, the man focuses on personal development in social systems other than the family microsystem, which however does not mean that he cannot achieve the sense of generativeness. The generativeness, however, is often more anonymous and impersonal, and there is no certainty that the man, looking back, will positively evaluate his endeavours leading to it.

By creating the family and engaging in the family's affairs, the man achieves the status of a recognized and respected creator whose creation is embodied in the biological and psychosocial dimension. Ultimately, he creates a microsystem

which is a source of support in his relations with external systems. Men who have a major share in the family life may face the opposition from some of their female partners, resulting from intergenerational transmission. The woman's perception of some of the benefits derived from family roles as assigned to her gender may, to a certain extent, explain women's greater interest in establishing monoparental roles which have no place for men.

What is the model of the contemporary man and his expected model of family?

One of the models is that of a hard-working man focused on his professional career, even if his main motive is the welfare of his family members. He is either absent from family life or so tired after a day's work that he is no longer capable of taking care of his wife and the child. Consequently, he faces the risk of alienation from his family – even though the family unit still functions in compliance with currently valid cultural standards. He fulfils the basic function of the person securing the family's financial well-being, social welfare and even socioeconomic advancement. He thus represents the model of father devoting his full effort to the family. Despite the fact that his partner/wife and child are of supreme importance to him, he is essentially an *absent father*.

The model of father as a *patriarch* is still alive and well – though it may be masked. The patriarchal man is focused on addressing other people's problems, sensitive to their needs and willing to devote a lot of time to them. At the same time, however, he lacks the time to be occupied with the affairs of his own family. As a consequence, the majority of family problems and duties fall on his partner's shoulders. The man may support the idea of gender equality in marriage and family, however his beliefs are only limited to the public sphere (Šmidova 2008, Renzetti, Curran 2008).

Another model of contemporary man is associated with the new family status. The man is transformed from the austere "instrumental leader" to a sensitive, loving friend and caretaker performing the expressive function previously reserved for the mother. In addition to being active in the professional field, the man participates in many household chores and is keenly involved in the child's upbringing. The man breaks away with the traditional stereotype of a patriarch rooted in the conventional division of functions depending on biological gender. In its more limited form, the model assumes that the man restricts himself to caring for and bringing up the child. This represents the model of *man-caretaker* or nurturing father. The model is thus close to the Scandinavian practice where

family and professional activities are treated on a par, while the relationship between the man and the woman is based on partnership. The partnership, however, concerns the relation between parents and children, not running the household (cf. Kwak 2005).

The model of father also incorporates relations with the child's mother (wife), and hence relations between the man (husband) with the woman (wife), the mother of his child. Their mutual arrangements can vary. In a broader perspective, they will define the future relations of the adult child with his/her male/female partner. Many young adult men and women declare that after entering into marriage they will strive to achieve partnership in child rearing, at the same time maintaining the division into "male" household duties (minor repairs, dog walking, organization of the family's leisure time) and "female" tasks (cooking, washing up, doing the laundry, cleaning) (Liberska, Matuszewska 2001, Plopa 2005). A thorough analysis, however, shows that the planned partnership between the man and the woman only slightly deviates from the traditional model of marriage. Studies show, however, that the birth of a child sets off the process of transformation of the partnership into a traditional marriage relationship with a division of roles based on gender differences (Matuszewska 1994). There is also evidence from other societies confirming their importance for shaping social roles (Hearn et al. 2006).

Does the emerging model of man as the *co-guardian of the home* stand a chance of becoming ingrained into our cultural standards and transforming future generations? The solution would protect us against multiple threats caused by the contemporary fluid reality and, to a certain degree, stabilize the current path of social development.

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