A fatherhood is social constructed and the way of being a father is defined in various cultures and times in a different way. Patterns of fatherhood usually coexist, but one of them is defined as the dominant one. A fatherhood is closely linked with the masculinity concept, and changes among masculinities cause changes among fatherhood concepts.

Social research shows that ‘there is no one pattern of masculinity that can be found everywhere’ [1]. What is more we need to speak of ‘masculinities’, not masculinity. The initial premise of the analysis of masculinity is a rejection of an approach stating that there is only one right and essential form of true masculinity and the conviction that we deal with masculinities which are socially constructed and rendered within the discourse because ‘masculinities are neither programmed in our genes, nor fixed by social structure, prior to social interaction. They come into existence as people act. They are actively produced, using the resources and strategies available in a given social setting’ [1]. What is more ‘there is abundant evidence that masculinities do change. Masculinities are created in specific historical circumstances and, as those circumstances change, the gender practices can be contested and reconstructed’ [1]. Different cultures, and different periods of history, construct gender differently. Following those assumption we cannot define masculinity or fatherhood in one way, because it is easily changeable category.

Changes of culture of fatherhood

In the past the answer to the question: what it means ‘to be a father’? – was clear, standards of defining fatherhood were strictly defined with reference to masculinity. It helped men to fulfill their social role. Nowadays the answer is not as simple, it is more complicated, we cannot answer this question without any doubt because there are various patterns of masculinities and fatherhood.
Although it is a dizzying array of possibilities of forming an individual way of being the father of the man, we can observe some crucial patterns. J. Pleck presents the proposed periodization of the fatherhood portraits which are dominant at the moment: ‘moral overseer’, ‘distant breadwinner’, ‘sex role model’, and ‘new father’.

Eighteenth century and the beginning of nineteenth century was a period of ‘moral overseer’. A father used to be a moral educator who taught his children what God and the world expected from them [2]. According to J. Demos emerged ‘picture, above all, of active, encompassing fatherhood, woven into the whole fabric of domestic and productive life. Fathers were a visible presence, year after year, day after day. Fathering was thus an extension, if not a part, of much routine activity’ [3].

The next model was called ‘distant breadwinner’ (XIX/XX). It was a time of growing importance of the role of the mother, who was responsible for every domain of children’s life. In psychological theories the mother played a crucial role in children’s development. At that time the home and the father’s workplace became separated, causing a growing physical and emotional distance among the family. As J. Demos describes: ‘for the first time, the central activity of fatherhood was sited outside one’s immediate household. Now being fully father meant being separated from one’s children for a considerable part of each working day’ [3].

‘Sex role model’ (1940–1965) appeared as an effect of the criticism of excessive influence of the mother. After the wars the father was often defined by absence, which was considered dangerous for the identity of the son [2].

As a critique of former models ‘new father’ appeared, called by E. A. Rotundo the ‘androgynous father’ [4]. New father is present during childbirth, and engaged in everyday care not only older children, but also infants. New father is involved in the lives of his children, spends time with them, feeds them, helps them with homework; he is also responsible for children and takes part in everyday decisions like buying clothes or going to the doctor [2].

‘New fatherhood’ in the context of cultural transformations of masculinity

It seems important to wonder how we can describe contemporary fatherhood. Researchers very often highlights that new father can be defined by involvement. According M. E. Lamb parental involvement consists of three components: engagement – time spent in one-on-one interaction with the child (feeding, playing with the child); accessibility – less intensive level of interaction, parent doing one thing (e.g. cooking, cleaning) but is available when the child needs them; and responsibility – which can be described by things like making sure that the child has clothes or shoes or like going to pediatrician [5].

New father, as a critique of former models, is described by J. Pleck as a father who ‘is present at the birth; he is involved with his children as infants, not just when they are older; he participates in the actual day-to-day work of child care, and not just the play; he is involved with his daughters as much as his sons’ [2] According to Rotundo androgynous father ‘involves himself in a more expressive and intimate way with his children, and he plays a larger part in the socialization process that his male forebears had long since abandoned to their wives’ [4].

Appearing of the new fatherhood was an effect of few coexisting occurrences. The most important seems to be the critic of mother’s center role in the child development but also mothers expectation directed to fathers. Women expected from men commitment in parenthood. In this situation a crucial role played feminity and masculinity changes, and gender order changes. J. Pleck points up that ‘this image, like the dominant images of earlier periods, is ultimately rooted in structural forces and structural change. Wives are more often employed, and do less in the family when they are; men are spending more time in the family, both absolutely and relative to women’ [2].

Changes in fatherhood models were the effect of the social, cultural and economical transformation. Men and their roles same as women, changed because of the modification of the social reality. New situation required redefinition of roles, duties, identity from women and men. But the important thing is that it gave men the opportunity to participate in the private sphere without fear of their masculinity. The appearance of a new model do not mean that the older models does not exist any more, it is rather – according to R. LaRossa – change in ‘the culture of fatherhood’ [6]. According to LaRossa ‘the institution of fatherhood includes two related but still distinct elements. There is the culture of fatherhood (specifically the shared norms, values, and beliefs surrounding men’s parenting) and there is the conduct of fatherhood (what fathers do, their parental behaviors)’ [6]. As researcher stated we can observe the asynchrony between the culture and conduct of fatherhood; the culture of fatherhood has hanged more rapidly than the conduct of fatherhood [6]. Probably in various periods of time different models of fatherhood coexisted, and depending on dominant version of masculinity or redefinition of masculinity, some of them predominate over others. Those models of fatherhood which were established as dominant were describing culture of fatherhood of a particular period.

Portrayals of fatherhood in magazines for parents

Description of self-help books and magazines for parents – who is a receiver?

It is important that titles of magazines and self-help books are addresses to both parents. Whereas titles of self-help books do not highlight gender of receiver, except situations when a book is directed to fathers (e.g. ‘You can be super father’, ‘I am a father’), title of magazines are never addressed directly to fathers (e.g. ‘I have a child’, ‘Your child’, ‘Parents’, ‘Child’, ‘My family’, ‘Your baby’, ‘M for mother’, ‘Mummy it’s me’). Subtitles of magazines intensify the message, that both parents are the targets of the product.
It is worth to supplement this message with analysis of covers of self-help books and magazines for parents. The aim of covers is to inform readers of the theme of a magazine or a book, and encourage people to buy a magazine or a book. On covers of publications are presented a child or a mother with child. Pictures of fathers are only on covers of self-help books directed to men. On the basis of covers we can conclude that ‘a parent’ should be read as ‘a mother’.

In magazines and self-help books for parents feminine grammatical form is used (sometimes plural form); only books directed to fathers use masculine grammatical forms.

This construction of transmission in magazines and self-help books indicate that a child affects women identity rather than men identity. A father is defined as a second parent, who is responsible just for some aspects of parenting. A father who wants to know more has to read information in feminine grammatical form, so he has to put himself into a mother’s place. It is more possible that a man who wants to feel more secure will read just information directed to fathers.

A distinctive feature of magazines for parents are letters to the editor. Letters published in magazines for parents contain information or advice, usually connected with everyday baby nurture, products for child or health problems. But there are no letters from fathers, that allows you to present some hypotheses. First, it is possible that fathers do not read magazines for parents, which is why they do not send letters to the editor. Or perhaps fathers, who usually do not participate in day-long care or just participate partly, do not have enough experience to share it. Finally men might read letters to the editor, but do not perceive them as an area for men, who often treat asking for help as a sign of weakness.

Mother’s and father’s duties and behaviors presented in magazines and self-help-books for parents

The main aim of the analysis is the description of ways how fathers are presented and defying their parenting duties in contexts of masculinity. As I demonstrated earlier, the main receiver of magazines for parents are women, whereas to fathers are directed short fragments, which usually are separated from the main part of a magazine. Good example is the magazine ‘Mummy it’s me’, which contains some parts: a main part, ‘mother zone’ and ‘father zone’. ‘Mother zone’ contains information about beauty, spending free time without children, fitness, diets, and relaxing. ‘Father zone’ shows fathers who are engaged in children’s lives. When we compare those zones, we get a clear message – mothers sometimes have a break from taking care of their babies, whereas men sometimes take up this role. What kind of subjects are bring up in ‘father zone’ and self-help books directed to fathers?

Analysis shows that fathers are perceived as a playmate, especially during out door activities [7]. According to researchers spending free time with children and playing with them are ways to maintain the bond between them, to communicate and to inculcate values in children. It is also important that this way of closeness does not undermine cultural masculinity standards, because being active is a male practice [8]. In articles the father is described not only as a everyday playmate, but also as a person who organizes free time during weekends or holidays. To fathers are directed instructions about arranging holidays, planning car journey or preparing first aid kid. But array of ‘men’s thing’ is limited to those tasks. There is nothing about packing child’s clothes or toys.

Magazines for parents define carrying of child and home duties as a natural women activity. Taking over duties by father is an unusual situation:

Every day you take care of baby like every mother does. But you need time to take care of yourself: go to a hairdresser’s or beautician. So on Saturday let the father take care of your kid [9].

The article directed to fathers ‘A day without mum’ determines caring of baby as a woman’s task, whereas a father day long care is a special event. Men are perceived as a helpless and unaware of ways of protecting and carrying baby. Those special situation are define not as a duty, but great fun: You can have a lot of fun [10]. There is no suggestion that fathers take over domestic duties during such a day. What is more there is no suggestion that fathers take over household duties and carrying for child, while a mother goes to work.

Daylong care is define as a mother task. A good example of this statement is the article ‘20 gadgets, which make young mother life easier’ (not a mother and a father!). Magazines which determine receiver as a mother show traditional way of sharing private and public sphere among women and men. Man is perceived as a person who sometimes helps a mother in parenthood and take part just in some duties. What is more those duties are voluntary only for men.

Being a mother is described as natural, but being a father is not. Mothers have to teach men how to be a father:

Engage the future dad! You will be a mum because you will give birth to your child. A future father has to learn how to be a father, and you can help him do it [10].

It means that woman in a ‘natural’ way become parent, and she is responsible for engage man and support him in discovering a new role. This conclusion support once again that most of magazine and self-help books form parents are directed to mothers, who are obligated to educate their partners.

Articles in magazines highlight very often gender differences with reference to parenthood: One thing is obvious, mum love in different way than dad [11]. Further part of article contain statement about different way of communication depended on gender. In the article the
author describes a stereotypical way of communication, and gives an example:

What mum says: Please put on your wellies. If your feet get wet, you will stay in bed and take medicine. What dad says: If you don’t put on your wellingtons, you will not go outside [11].

A father is described as a less emotional, distant, using orders and more consistent person than a mother.

Authors of the article [14], refer to American psychologist, persuade fathers to the importance of intimacy and touch, and present a stereotypical picture of an irresponsible father and an over-protective mother:

The father tosses the infant up to the ceiling, catches it then tosses it again. Do you know such games? Don’t allow them. Be firm [12].

Redefinition parental duties as a masculine

In ‘father zone’ we can observe attempts of redefinition parental duties as masculine. Some behaviors are described as masculine to encourage men to take them up. On the other hand a lot of subjects in magazines and self-help books are the reflection of stereotypical way of thinking and abilities of men and women.

First activity of men is he baby nurture. Some tasks are redefined by emphasis different aspects than those linked with mother’s task. Baby’s bathing and personal hygiene become a way of confirming men’s strength and domination:

Bathing an infant is a job for men. A baby will feel safe in the big and strong hands of its father [13].

Next area, which is refined in magazines as a masculine is touch, closeness, and sensitivity. A model of distance father is described as improper and destructive. Authors of the article [14], refer to American psychologist, persuade fathers to the importance of intimacy and touch. Touch is described as a kind of cure or therapy, which supports child development. Touching and closeness are regarded as beneficial for a child and treat as a kind of a masculine behavior:

It is time to get rid of men’s insensitivity [14].

Fatherhood is very often stereotypically described as the end of freedom and irresponsibility. But in ‘father zone’ we can find attempts to redefine this way of thinking:

Is it end of freedom? No, it’s not! Childbirth is just a begging of new, different life [15].

In magazines men get information about ways of supporting pregnant women. Most of magazines and self-help books for parents try to redefine the moment of turning into a father. Authors of articles convince men that they are fathers since the moment of conception and supporting pregnant women is a part of the father’s role and something what real men do. Fathers are described as active during pregnancy and a childbirth. In magazines and self-help books we can find instructions like:

do shopping, support your women emotionally, and let her take a rest [11].

Some of the tasks are interchangeably defined as masculine, for example punishment. A fatherhood is linked with domination, exercising power, and controlling a situation.

You’re a man. A rational guy, who is aware that in relation with his biggest treasure – child – will need to punish his or her. As same as your father punished you, and your grandfather punished your father [13].

The way of naturalization of fathers’ involvement is presentation famous fathers (e.g. Marcin Baszczyński, Marcin Prokop, or Bartosz Obuchowicz). Famous sportsmen, actors, newscasters declare that fatherhood is an important part of their identity. One of the footballer said that his son was for him more important than football.

Conclusions

Magazines and self-help books for parents confirm a traditional model of fatherhood in terms of conducts. In the analyzed material we can find signs of involved fatherhood, or even suggestions like: ‘you should be an active father’ or ‘you should engage in your child’s life’, but there are limited examples of father’s ways of involvement in every day baby care. We can find more specific activities described or redefined as fatherly in ‘father zone’, but those tasks are often traditional, clearly linked with the stereotypical masculine role.

Magazines for parents define carrying of child and home duties as a natural women activity. Daylong care is define as a mother task, whereas taking over duties by fathers is an unusual situation. Being a mother is described as natural, but being a father is not. Mothers are obligated to teach men how to be fathers. In terms of conducts fathers are mainly perceived as a playmate. Articles in magazines very often highlight gender differences with reference to parenthood, and a father is described as less emotional, distant, using orders and more consistent than a mother.

Some of duties in child care are redefined as masculine. The most often baby’s bathing is described as a father’s duty. This activity is perceived as a way of confirming men’s strength and domination. Another redefined task is touch. Touching and closeness are regarded as a beneficial for a child and treated as a kind of masculine behavior. Most of magazines and self-help books for parents try to redefine the time of turning into a father as
a moment of conception. Some of the tasks are interchan-
geably defined as masculine, for example punishment, as
a result fatherhood is linked with domination, exercising
power, and controlling a situation.

LaRossa assumes that culture of the fatherhood fol-
lows conduct seems to be justified. Beliefs surround-
ing men’s parenting, and idea of ‘new fatherhood’ is
just a part of culture, whereas particular conduct do not
change so rapidly. We can read in magazines and self
help books for parents about engaged fathers, but most
of behaviors and tasks connected with child care are still
described as a part of the feminine role.

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