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## **On Fatherhood, Masculinities, and Family Policies in Poland and Sweden—a Comparative Study**

*Abstract:* This article seeks to identify the relationships between fatherhood, masculinities, and the welfare state. The paper is based on fifty-two interviews conducted with Polish and Swedish fathers living with their biological children and their partners. A comparison of Polish and Swedish fathers enables us to comprehend how everyday practices and men's thinking about parenthood and gender roles are connected to hegemonic masculinities models and family policy systems. The study shows how definitions of parental roles adopted in family policy influence men's engagement in caring activities and the domestic sphere, as well as how they can help in the reconstruction of hegemonic masculinity and traditional gender order within family life.

*Keywords:* fatherhood; masculinity; family policy; gender roles; Poland; Sweden.

### **Introduction**

This article's aim is to show possible links between everyday fathering, masculinity models, and family policy systems. The way men perceive parenthood is linked to hegemonic masculinity prevailing in a particular society. Yet analyses of fatherhood and masculinities also have to take into consideration institutional contexts and the approach to motherhood and fatherhood adopted within the social policy system. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century parenting stopped being regarded as merely a private issue of men and women, but became a political issue within European welfare states (Hearn & Pringle 2006; O'Brien & Moss 2010). We take into consideration two family policy systems, the Polish and the Swedish ones, and we analyse their impact on men's parenting and on dominating masculinities archetypes. A comparison of Polish and Swedish fathering provides an opportunity to examine the influence that social policies have on men's thinking about their parental roles and in what parenting practices they engage. Besides, it shows how this influence is related to hegemonic masculinities and why those three elements should not be analysed separately. In the existing literature there are many attempts at explaining the links between fatherhood and family policy, fatherhood, and masculinities; yet there is still a lack of analysis regarding the links between all those elements. Our aim is to fill this gap. Intentionally, we decided to conduct a comparative inquiry of two distinctively different welfare states in order to

grasp the issue in a broader perspective. It should also be noted that, even though there is plenty of research on Swedish fathering in the context of family policy or masculinities, there is still not enough research in Poland.

Our main questions in this article are: how Polish and Swedish family policy contexts affect fathers and their fathering; what similarities and differences emerge regarding men's parenting in a comparative perspective; and, finally, what the links are between family policy, fatherhood and masculinities. This is also a broader issue of how the mechanisms of social policy can reinforce or reconstruct traditional gender order and organisation of family life, as well as under what circumstances individuals change their attitudes to dominating models of masculinity.

### Methods

The research study is based on fifty-two interviews with fathers. Conducted between July 2012 and April 2013, the study compares fathers in Poland and Sweden.<sup>1</sup> In-depth interviews based on a semi-structured guide were conducted with middle-class<sup>2</sup> fathers living in big cities. All interviewees were heterosexual, lived with their children, and were in relationships with the mothers of their children. Choosing such a homogenous group was intentional; the goal was to compare two different institutional and social contexts. Middle-class heterosexual families are still seen, especially in conservative societies, as a desirable 'norm' and are usually regarded as those who are mostly affected by the social policy system. Lars Plantin (2007) shows that Swedish men in middle-class households more often than other men profit from the family policy system and are more eager to participate in domestic work. The middle-class might also be seen as the class most aware of gender equality issues (Gottzen & Kremer-Sadlik 2012, see also: Burghes, Clarke, & Cronin 1997; Fujimura 2000; Griswold 1993).

There were thirty-two interviews conducted with Polish fathers and twenty with Swedish fathers. Ages of the men ranged from 21 to 49—generally Swedish parents were slightly older, which can be explained by the fact the average age of having the first child for women is higher in Sweden than in Poland; in 2011 28.5 versus 25.5 years (Główny Urząd Statystyczny 2012, Socialstyrelsen 2013). All the men and their partners varied in their occupation and type of employment (self-employment, public or private sectors, unemployment), level of education, number of children, and also the way they divided up parental leave. Interviews with fathers concentrated on how men perceive their parental role and the role of the mother, how they care for

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<sup>2</sup> We define middle class within socio-economical framework. It is a broad category of people holding professional qualifications (secondary or higher education) who usually are white-collar workers. They tend to earn above the average salary and seek higher rank status (Bergh 2007; Clegg, Boreham, & Dow 1986; Domański 2002).

their children, how their lives have changed after having a baby, what the division of domestic work in their households is, and what they think about family policies in their countries. Interviews took place in different settings, most often in the interviewees' households, but also in work offices, coffee shops, and lunch places. Interviews with Poles were conducted in Polish, whereas interviews with Swedes were conducted in English. Our interpretation of the interviews followed the standard procedures of qualitative analysis (see: [Benaquisto, 2008](#); [Strauss & Corbin, 1998](#)). This means that we have, above all, searched for patterns and thematic features in the interviewees' experiences and feelings around parenthood and family life. In our treatment of the interviewees' subjective accounts, we analytically brought out and organised meaningful relationships and characteristics. This selection process followed an inductive analysis model, in which a continuous interplay between the theoretical perspective and the grouping and categorising of the data is stressed. The analysis presented in this paper is based on the social constructionist perspective proposed by Scott R. Harris (see: [2006a](#), [2006b](#), [2010](#)) in which researchers study how people use and define particular terms and interpret social reality.

### Fathers within Swedish and Polish Welfare States

Plenty of research shows that different social policies determine the gender division of domestic work and the organisation of family life ([Fuwa & Cohen 2007](#); [Stier, Lewin-Epstein, & Braun 2012](#)). Steven Saxonberg (2013), critically referring to Gøsta Esping Andersen's concept of the familialisation/defamilialisation ([Esping-Andersen, Gallie, Hemerijk, & Myers 2002](#); [Esping-Andersen 1990](#)), proposes to look upon welfare state regimes rather in the framework of genderisation and degenderisation. "We use the term 'genderising' to describe *policies that promote different gender roles for men and women*. 'Degenderising' policies, then, would denote *'policies that promote the elimination of gender roles'* ([Saxonberg 2013, p. 33](#)). Saxonberg distinguishes two main mechanisms that have the greatest influence on gender roles: the level of paid parental leave, and state support for childcare. In our opinion, Saxonberg's theory is useful in introducing and presenting, in a comparative perspective, the Polish and Swedish family policy systems.

Poland has an *implicitly genderising* family policy. In the Polish Labour Code, there are five types of parental leave: (1) twenty weeks of paid maternity leave; (2) six weeks of additional paid maternity leave; (3) two weeks of paid paternity leave; (4) twenty-six weeks of paid parental leave; and (5) three years of 'child-raising' leave, which is basically unpaid (the low-level benefit was available only to the poorest families). Although in this parental-leave system fathers are included, mothers are still in a privileged position. Only at the beginning of the 2000s did men as fathers were recognised as individuals who can use maternity and parental leave. In 2002, fathers gained the right to use part of maternity leave. After having used an obligatory for women fourteen weeks, the mother can transfer the remaining six weeks to the father. Since 2009, fathers also have the right to use additional maternity leave.

In 2010, a new type of benefit was introduced—a paternity leave reserved only for fathers. Then, in the middle of 2013, a new parental-leave policy was introduced. This parental leave (twenty-six weeks) can be taken by either parent, after having used up firstly maternity and then additional maternity leave. These changes are intended to allow parents to be on leave for one year (fifty-two weeks). Since thirty-eight weeks can, at least theoretically, be used by the father, the new regulations might be seen as a step towards greater involvement of fathers in family life. There is still, however, a lack of gender-neutral discourse within Polish family policies. In fact, most of the parental leave options are described as mother's privileges that may only be transferred to fathers if the mother decides so. Taking into account the poor access to public childcare, it becomes obvious that at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the state regards the responsibility for childcare as the woman's obligation. Childcare institutions are available mainly for children over three years old (in 2010, only 49.8% of three-year children were enrolled in childcare) and, in fact, during the 1990s a decline was observed in the numbers enrolled in public and private childcare, mostly because of the disappearance of workplace daycare institutions organised by enterprises privatised during this time (Kłos & Szymańczak 2006; Suwada 2013).

In contrast, Sweden should be regarded as a welfare state with a *degenderising* family policy. Åsa Lundqvist and Christine Roman argue that Swedish family policy development is based on an interplay of scientific knowledge production, with particular reference to the feminist approach, and also being closely linked to the process of modernisation (2010: 65–66). Consequently, since the 1930s, all reforms have been introduced with a common acceptance of values of gender equality and strong state intervention in family life. This family policy is based on a generous parental leave-scheme and an extensive public day-care model. Today, in 2013, Swedish parents can have up to 480 days (about 68.5 weeks) of paid parental leave. The parental leave system is gender-neutral; either parent can take parental-leave days. Additionally, sixty days (about 6.5 weeks) are reserved for either parent; and, if parents share the rest of the parental leave equally they get the “equality bonus.” In addition, every child—that is of at least one year old—has a place in daycare guaranteed by the municipality. The introduction of extensive public daycare was one of the reforms that allowed mothers to work fulltime. The gender-neutral parental leave was introduced in 1974, and has been systematically prolonged since then. During the last decades in Sweden, there were several reforms aimed at engaging men in family life—‘daddy month’ reforms in 1995 and 2002, and the introduction of gender equality bonus in 2008. These changes were supposed to equalise the gender order prevailing in the society. The need was not only to change the law, but also to change people's behaviours and ways of thinking (Duvander & Johansson 2012; Lunqvist & Roman 2010). Therefore, together with introducing new reforms, several national and local campaigns were launched to promote the image of the ‘new father’ and the joint responsibility of both parents to take care of their children (Klinth 2008).

To sketch the differences between Poland and Sweden, we should at least shortly underline their cultural dimensions. The influence of the Catholic Church is very strong in Poland. The increasing number of divorces, low fertility rates, growing

acceptance of unmarried couples having children and of homosexual relationships, are seen as signs of the a crisis of the ‘traditional family’. Also, the image of fatherhood presented in the public media is based on traditional patterns and refers to the ‘crisis of masculinity’, which is seen as caused by the negative influence of the feminist approach (Wojnicka 2011). Even in academic and political discourses, there is not enough gender research and there is basically no interest in men and masculinities (see: Wojnicka & Ciaputa 2011; Wojnicka 2011). In contrast, contemporary Sweden is a highly secularized<sup>3</sup> and individualised society, which has adopted a feminist perspective in social policy and has been trying to redefine traditional gender roles, through the redefinition of fatherhood and masculinities models, for the last few decades (Lunqvist & Roman 2010).

### Theoretical Framework

One of the most influential theories of today’s discussions on men and masculinity was formulated by Raewyn Connell (1987). Her concept of hegemonic masculinity, formulated initially in 1987, is intended to help understand the power relations of a patriarchal society. It attracted, and still attracts, fierce criticism, which has consequently led to its reformulation (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005), but it is the starting point for most theoretical consideration on men and masculinities. Eric Anderson (2009, 2011) argues that Connell’s theory was effective throughout the late 1980s and the 1990s, but not in the times of declining homophobia and anti-femininity. Based on this argument, he formulates a theory of *inclusive masculinity*. He distinguishes an archetype of orthodox masculinity that may, but does not have to, include hegemonic values. On the other hand, there are opposing archetypes: inclusive masculinities rejecting values constituting orthodox masculinities such as homophobia, sexism, stoicism, or compulsory heterosexuality. Anderson uses the constructivist approach and treats masculinities as configurations of social practices that are subject to changes within a historical perspective. The focal variables in Anderson’s theory are homophobia and masculine capital. In times of high homophobia, men are forced to raise their masculine capital by showing homophobia and femphobia, and by constantly proving their heterosexuality. When homophobia is declining, softer types of masculinities can appear and coexist with orthodox masculinities without being exposed to social stigma or exclusion. In such conditions, the boundaries between femininity and masculinity start to blur, and different types of masculinities are no longer stratified in a hierarchical order. In societies with a very low level of homophobia, homophobia is not acceptable and men tend to be more willing to engage in ‘feminine’ practices.

Although Anderson formulates his theory based on sports research, masculinities, and sexualities, his approach might be a useful tool to use in analysing relations between masculinities and fatherhood. Lukas Gottzén and Tamara Kremer-Sadlik argue that ‘the duality of orthodox and inclusive masculinities seems to be at the heart

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<sup>3</sup> Accordingly to the World Value Survey 49,3% Swedes consider themselves as “not a religious person” and 17,2% as “a convinced atheist.” For 33,3% people God is not important at all in their life.

of contemporary middle-class fatherhood' (2012: 644), and they show how American fathers try to find an equilibrium between different masculinities as they become involved in their children's sports activities. Our article concentrates on the Polish and Swedish middle class, heterosexual fathers, in a general perspective, fathering in everyday life. Anderson's theory provides us with a useful analytical tool to understand the relations between institutional context, dominating archetypes of masculinities, and fatherhood.

Since models of orthodox masculinity and inclusive masculinities might be seen as two opposite ends of one continuum, we propose an analogical continuum of fatherhood which would refer to Anderson's approach. Fathers who acquire values from the model of orthodox masculinity would be characterised by a higher level of conservatism and would consequently stick to strict boundaries between the perceived female and male spheres. Consequently, their main role as a father would be as breadwinner. Their relationship with children would be more distant and based on authority. Such fathers would prefer their partners to stay home and take care of the children and do housework. Fathers with inclusive masculinities-values would be located on the other side of the continuum. Their relationships with their partners would be based on partnership; this relationship would be characterised by blurred boundaries between female and male roles. They would not be afraid of participating in domestic work and would demonstrate a higher eagerness to resign from a successful career for the sake of their children. As fathers, these men would be very eager to establish strong relationships with their children. They would also participate more often in nurturing activities.

These two ideal types of fatherhood fit into an analytical division between so-called 'traditional' and 'new' fatherhoods. The advantage of using Anderson's concepts in analysing contemporary fatherhood is that it takes into consideration the dynamic and historical concept of masculinities and helps to indicate how fatherhood and masculinities are linked. Additionally, since the inclusive masculinity-theory assumes that orthodox masculinity values decline along with homophobia, anti-femininity, and heteronormativity, the role of the state and its family policy system plays a crucial role in reconstructing masculinities and fatherhood in contemporary societies. In this context, degenderising policy should be perceived as a policy that aims to reconstruct the model of orthodox masculinity and promote inclusive masculinity values, whereas, the genderising policy is based on traditional and patriarchal values. These two completely opposite approaches should differently affect men's parenting behaviours.

### **Paternal Obligations: Breadwinning and Emotional Involvement**

In the traditional model of male breadwinner, being a father usually means being the sole provider for the family. To some extent the mother's role would be defined, in contrast, as being the main caretaker of children and the one responsible for domestic work. This model supports the orthodox masculinity values and clear boundaries between men and women, between paternal and maternal roles. Even though, today,

this model is being replaced with the dual breadwinner model, the Polish fathers still concentrate on their role as the main provider for the family. This is what is usually mentioned at the very beginning of interviews:

I need to provide some kind of security. Luckily, there was no situation in which I needed to provide security in a physical sense, but I started to see my role in the perspective of having a family, I am financially responsible and this is my responsibility, not Basia's [my wife's]. (Poland, Piotr, 35 years old, 12-month-old son)

For men, whose financial situation is not good, this role of provider might be the cause of worries and problems:

All in all... the father is still expected, I guess usually, to provide for his family. And this was a little bit problematic for me when I was supposed to find myself in a father's role, because at that time my financial situation, let's say my professional life was not bad, but for the first two years after Kasia's birth it was unstable. Only after a while my position became more stable and I felt more comfortable. That is why... that is why this working life is so... is so important for me and for other fathers. (Poland, Janusz, 27 years old, 4-year-old daughter)

Being the main breadwinner means that men are less eager to engage in domestic work and in taking care of their children. They do not always feel responsible for this area, since their obligations are concentrated on financial provision. Such a traditional division of work is even clearer in families in which the woman is unemployed or does not work by choice—then the man's work becomes a convenient excuse for why the father cannot be more involved in the household.

But even though Polish system is *genderising* and makes clear divisions regarding male and female parenting, external conditions force men to engage not only in breadwinning. Polish men are perfectly aware of changing gender roles and women's participation in the labour market. Therefore in many families parents try to share responsibilities equally:

In fact we had no choice, we wanted to adopt this model, but also having two kids at once, twins..., and no relatives around, means that we actually have to share everything. And we try to make this proudly called partnership happen in our life, we just cannot do it differently. (Poland, Igor, 33 years old, 31-month-old twins: a girl and a boy)

A different picture of paternal obligations emerges from the Swedish interviews. Even though men still earn more money than women do in Sweden, fathers seem not to see financial providing as their main obligation. The issue of breadwinning appears only as men complain about unequal wages that do not allow them to use longer parental leave.

The thing is that we're kind of stuck in a society with men usually earning more than women. So, for us, if I stayed at home, we'd lose so much money on that and we cannot adjust to this budget, you know [...]. We discussed it several times, with my wife; the only reason it is like that it is because I earn more money, which is fucking sad, because I would love to stay home more. (Sweden, Fredrik, 34 years old, 5-year-old daughter and 8-year-old son)

Instead of concentrating on breadwinning, Swedish fathers directly start talking about (a lack of) differences between female and male parental roles:

I am a parent together with my wife, she's a parent as well and the... I think our job is to share the things we need to do because of our baby, and for the most part we share it equally, so there are no special things that it is my job to do as a father or her job as a mother, but we do it together as parents. (Sweden, Daniel, 38 years old, 13-month-old son)

Since for the Swedish middle-class parents the situation in the labour market is much better than for the Polish parents, men feel quite relaxed about taking long parental leaves or working part-time until the child grows up a bit. Such decisions usually do not threaten their position in the company (especially if they work in the public sector), although it might have a negative impact on careers and therefore not everyone is eager to make such a decision. In contrast to the Polish fathers, a mother's lack of employment is not seen as an excuse for not participating in domestic sphere, but it is a chance to use more parental leave days by men. Anders is an excellent example—his girlfriend is unemployed and therefore he uses all parental days working part-time, two weeks a month, to maximise time spent with his sons:

I have a great set-up that I currently do: being here for one week and working from home for one week, and still I have half of my time dedicated to doing stuff at home, and I think that being with your kids is really important and having them at daycare all days... I think the worst part with that is... that you end up not seeing them when they are awake, so you end up not being the most important person in their lives and I think that's dangerous, actually. (Sweden, Anders, 31 years old, 3-year-old and 2-year-old sons)

Anders decided to work part-time in order to establish a strong relationship with his sons. Swedish fathers tend to use the discourse of a strong bond between the parent and the child. But they experience lots of difficulties, especially when they compare themselves to their female partners; they are convinced that men need to put more effort into creating a bond as strong as the one mothers have naturally thanks to pregnancy and breastfeeding.

I think it is important for the father to be home as long as he can at the beginning [...]. Because the mother and the child connect through the breastfeeding in a much different way than father and child do. So I am trying to be around as much as I can when he's awake, so he can recognise me and everything like that. (Sweden, Oskar, 35-years old, 2-month-old son)

Three potential indicators that a society is adopting values characteristic of inclusive masculinities include: underlining the lack of differences between mothers and fathers, less emphasis on only fathers pursuing careers, and a greater focus on the need for fathers to establish close relationships with their children. Concentrating on relationships is stereotypically regarded as a female task; orthodox masculine fathers would rather put emphasis on being an authority figure for their children as they are growing up. Furthermore, Swedish men talk about the need to start the process of establishing a bond from the first days of a child's life, which is especially interesting in comparison to Polish fathers, even those really engaged in parenting. Polish men tend to think that the mother is more important in the first period of a child's life, and they do not really see a space for the father during this period:

It is a completely different situation whether the father is on parental leave to be with the mother and the child, or having to choose—mother or father. In such a choice the decision is easy, because the father of

course can feed from a bottle or be with a child for a while, but... a child needs the mother. And the father can take leave only to be with the mother, to cook for her and take care of her. (Poland, Robert, 35 years old, 5-year-old son and 8-year-old daughter).

The interviewee refers here to an idea of changing the maternity leave into a gender-neutral parental leave in Poland. In Sweden, where such leave was introduced in 1974, opinions are much different—people generally support the idea of gender-neutral parental leave.

This substantial difference in approaches to men's primary parental obligations might be explained by social factors. In the case of Polish and Swedish societies it becomes clear what role the family policy plays in organising family life. The genderising policy that underlines differences between women and men provokes fathers to build their identity on a distinctively different base than that of their female partners, whereas men operating in the degenderising system tend to reject the clear division of female and male obligations and based on this rejection, reconstruct traditional male identities.

### **Expectations and Models of Fathering**

The attitudes toward the parental leave system mentioned above fit into a broader picture of (1) how external social conditions affect fathering in everyday life; and (2) what beliefs men share regarding fatherhood. A long tradition of gender-neutral parental leave policy in Sweden undoubtedly has had an impact on the shared belief that every parent, regardless of gender, has a right to choose whether he or she wants to use parental leave. The Polish system is much more genderising, and this influences men's opinions that the mother should be the main recipient of the family policy benefits. This is especially evident when fathers talk about the Polish family policy and the expectations they have of the state. They are not convinced that, as fathers, they should be included in the parental leave system; rather they expect the state to extend maternity leave. The picture, though, is more complex; and some of my respondents feel that their parental role is ignored in the public discourse, especially in the media, which concentrates mostly on mothers:

It is paradoxical, because only women are present in the media and therefore the parental role is only imposed on women. On the one hand it is bad, because only women are expected to be parents, not men, but on the other hand men don't have any support... so you feel that maybe you'd like to do something, but the media don't say anything about that, so maybe this is stupid, you know. All in all, it is not nice to both sides; I mean it's not good for women either. (Poland, Bartek, 35 years old, 3-year-old son)

A very important issue is touched upon here—the problem of what is expected from men and women as parents. Because of the prevailing gender order in Poland mothers and fathers might find themselves in a trap. On the other hand in the Swedish society, gender equality is an important issue, fathers tend to reject stereotypical parental roles more easily and are aware that parenthood is to some extent socially constructed:

— Are there any differences between motherhood and fatherhood?

— Yeah, probably. Ehmm..., but I am not sure if that is... it is probably mostly a cultural thing. Not that much a gender thing really. (Sweden, Olof, 36 years old, 30-month-old daughter)

Therefore, Swedish men do not have problems with being more engaged in their parental role and family life. Crossing boundaries between gender roles is even something expected of them. For Polish fathers the situation is more complicated. They find themselves in many awkward situations if they do not behave according to traditional gender roles. The story of Marcin, father of a 2.5 year old daughter, Pola, is an excellent example:

I think that now when our daughter is this age, her mother is more important for her and it was proved a few times in such difficult situations, for example when we went to a swimming pool for the first time. I got into the water with my daughter and Kaja [the wife] didn't, she stayed outside the pool and Pola was very stressed and she started to cry. I was trying to calm her down and at some point one woman came to me and told me: 'With all due respect, the mother is needed here'. And she was right. Pola was eight months old then; the point is that she was a baby then and in stressful situations a child's instinct leads her to her mother. Whereas the father somehow helps. (Poland, Marcin, 30 years old)

The tension between biological and cultural explanations of differences between mother and father is particularly evident here. Since Marcin operates in a society that defines fatherhood within the framework of orthodox masculinity values, it is natural for him to explain the difficult situation he encountered in terms of gender differences. In fact, Marcin's daughter might have reacted similarly if she had been with her mother. The reaction in a difficult situation might show how easily men accept or reject traditional parental roles. A good example is Marcus, a Swedish father, whose whole interview is basically a story about the struggle with gendered expectations:

It was also at the beginning when we [Marcus and his partner] were together and he [the son] was with me and screamed for some reason... Half a second later! She was there and basically tore him out my arms and was taking him. And I said: *What are you doing?* I mean, babies cry and do it for different kinds of reasons, so I wasn't abusing him or anything, just... I don't know, I wouldn't say it's... maybe not a mistrust, it was just—she could not really let go. (Sweden, Marcus, 29 years old, 5-year-old son)

Marcus was perfectly aware of the fact that different expectations of mothers and fathers are culturally grounded and are not necessarily linked to biological differences between sexes. Therefore, he tried to face them and indicate how they work to other people, even to his partner, who at the beginning had problems fully trusting Marcus as he was taking care of their son. It might be assumed that it is easier for him than for Polish fathers, since he functions within a system that aims to degenderise parental roles.

For Polish fathers, adopting such a demeanour would be more difficult. In Polish interviews the tensions between being a nurturing father and at the same being a 'real man' is evident. Men can have difficulties in doing things traditionally regarded as female tasks; they might think that it somehow affects their male identity and that they have to compensate for it with something else:

You know, at the very beginning after Filip was born, I had a problem with my male image to go out with a pram. A single father? You know, it doesn't look good, definitely. That is why I bought the coolest pram, which... that was natural. (Poland, Mateusz, 34 years old, 4-year-old son)

These traditional expectations of fathers in Polish society are so strong that men tend not to question them, even though, as mentioned above, fathers are aware of the fact that the gender order is under the process of reconstruction and women are not only caregivers, but usually work to the same extent as do men.

### **Homophobia, Feminity, and Fatherhood**

Anderson claims that his “inclusive masculinity theory helps to explain what happens to the behaviour of straight men when homophobia no longer works as stigmatizing weapon and boundary policing tool” (2009: 154). Accordingly, in a society with declining homophobia, anti-femininity, and heteronormativity orthodox masculinity values are diminishing; thus, in such a society the model of new fatherhood should also be more common. The level of homophobia is definitely higher in Poland than in Sweden. This is evident on the institutional level—Sweden was the first country in the world that stopped regarding homosexuality as an illness. Since 1995, homosexual couples have been allowed to register their partnerships, and since 2003 they have had the right to adopt children, and in 2009 same-sex marriages were legalised with the support of more than 70% of Swedes (the Eurobarometer poll). In 2012, the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association claimed that Sweden is one of the gay-friendliest countries in Europe, getting twelve points on the Rainbow Europe Country Index (highest possible score: 17; highest obtained score: 12.5, lowest score: -7; see: [ILGA-Europe 2013](#)). In contrast, Poland received only one point. Polish gay people do not have rights—they cannot register their partnerships, have no adoption rights, and experience discrimination in everyday life. The high level of homophobia is also confirmed by some men, who happen to make homophobic remarks during conversation:

A child should see a difference between the father and the mother. We are against homosexual couples with children—this is a tragedy. (Poland, Filip, 44 years old, 4-year-old son)

Such comments are not characteristic of all interviewees, but the fact they appear shows that they are not necessarily regarded as something ‘politically incorrect’. They also show that it is an acceptable belief that the traditional family, based on a heterosexual relationship, is important to proper child development, because children ‘should’ grow up in a family that teaches them sex-roles. What is also interesting, since heterosexual families are regarded as the norm, is that, for many people, becoming a father serves as proof of heterosexuality:

I have a few friends who just became dads for the first or the second time. Some of them, especially those who used to be a little bit faggy, suddenly they became real men and they are starting to... they are full of energy, because they have a son, for example (Poland, Rafal, 26 years old, 6-month-old daughter)

Similar statements could not be found in the interviews with Swedish fathers. Obviously, the lack of homophobic remarks in Swedish interviews does not indicate that there is no homophobia in Sweden. Rather, it shows that fatherhood is not

generally seen as proof of heterosexuality and therefore is not strictly connected to the model of orthodox masculinity.

But the inclusive masculinity theory is not only about declining homophobia—but also the greater presence of inclusive masculinities values, the greater acceptance of feminine behaviours, and ‘feminine’ features among men. Parenting as an area traditionally reserved for women is an excellent research field for examining what men think about becoming more ‘feminine’. The birth of the first child is usually connected with a huge shift in a new parent’s life, not only on the level of everyday practices, but also on an identity level. Discovering emotionality is one of the most common shifts that men experience after becoming parents. Stories about how men start to cry while watching a movie about sick children or reading an article about starving children are very characteristic for the conducted interviews, especially in the Swedish ones. Furthermore, men regard discovering their emotional part as very positive and sometimes could not understand why they used to be so insensitive. Accepting the emotional part might be an indicator of adopting more inclusive masculinities values, especially when it is not followed by the previously mentioned assumption that the father’s role, in contrast to that of the mother, is to be tough. Becoming a parent might, then, be regarded as an important step in helping men to cross boundaries between gender roles.

### Conclusions

Looking at fathering more carefully, and particularly at models of masculinities within the context of social policies in Poland and Sweden, a complex picture emerges. The Polish family system is *genderising*, in that it is mostly concentrated on women. Only recently did it include men, but their role is still defined more as a helper rather than as a primary carer. Furthermore, in the Polish public discourse, only traditional couples, i.e. heterosexual ones in legalised marriages, are regarded as ‘proper’ families. Thus, it is not surprising that Polish fathers define their roles in typically ‘mannish’ terms as being the main breadwinner. At the same time, the Polish system does not provide sufficient public childcare, and there is no work-home reconciliation policy, although most women do participate in the labour market.<sup>4</sup> Poles are also aware of changing gender roles and new expectations of fathers. Consequently, men need to engage in caring and in the domestic sphere, and to take over some of the traditional female obligations. The Polish system seems to, on the theoretical level, adopt values characteristic of the orthodox masculinity model, yet on the level of practice, men cross traditional gender roles and accept the inclusive masculinities values. This is particularly difficult without institutional support that questions traditional expectations of fathers and mothers. In comparison, the Swedish system is much more coherent in its approach to the father’s role. Gender equality is regarded as a crucial issue for the whole of society. It cannot be

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<sup>4</sup> In 2012 62,3% of Polish women having children participate in the labour market (Eurostat data).

achieved without engaging men in the domestic sphere, so the shared parenting discourse has to be adopted. Men are seen as equal to women recipients of the family system benefits. Fathers are expected to be involved in taking care of children to the same extent as mothers. Lars Plantin, Sven-Axel Månsson, and Jeremy Kearney claim that “the discourse of the involved father is now hegemonic in Sweden” (2003: 23). The welfare state’s aims are coherent with the generally changing gender order. Therefore, men would rather explore their relationships with children than solely concentrate on the breadwinner role. This process of adopting inclusive masculinities-values in Sweden has been ongoing for almost four decades; and this time dimension is crucial to properly understanding contemporary fathering in Sweden. Although the situation is not yet perfectly equal, men are gradually becoming more involved parents. This greater involvement can be observed in statistics of the usage of parental leave; e.g. the percentage of parental leave days used by fathers increased from 6% in 1989 to 11% in 1999, and to 24% in 2013 (SCB Statistics Sweden).

To a different extent gender inequality is still observable in both societies. Women in general do the lion’s share of domestic work and are more willing to resign from their careers because of parenting demands. Tina Miller (2011) underlines that, despite the fact that the fathers she interviewed generally think there is no difference between mothers’ and fathers’ caring responsibilities (except breastfeeding), men can choose to what extent they want to be involved fathers. Mothers usually do not have such a choice.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the significance of men’s paid work is unquestioned. The father’s role is redefined, but to some extent it still refers to the traditional fatherhood model based on orthodox masculine values. Plantin (2001) claims that, even if fathers are engaged in nurturing, they still tend to transfer parts of their caregiving in order to give fatherhood a more masculine expression. So, overtaking traditionally female tasks might be connected with giving them a new, more masculine, character (as in the case of Mateusz from Poland and his ‘cool pram’). But there is a need to reformulate the role of the main, male breadwinner in contemporary society. As Derrick M. Bryan (2013) argues, expectations for fathers to be main providers can do more harm than actually help in fulfilling the parental role, especially for low-income fathers. This shows that the concept of masculinity is crucial in the process of redefining the father’s role. The declining model of orthodox masculinity allows for widening the range of fathers’ behaviours without undermining male identity. Thus, the system of inclusive masculinities-values adopted by the welfare state might actually help men in fulfilling their parental roles according to new expectations and the new gender order. As our analysis shows, a degenderising family policy can help men adapt to a changing gender order in that they are more eager to engage in traditionally ‘female’ activities. It seems that the institutional context might be crucial for the reconstruction of orthodox masculinity model.

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<sup>5</sup> Polish readers can find similar conclusions in the work of Anna Titkow, Danuta Duch-Krzystoszek, Bogumiła Budrowska or Małgorzata Fuszara (Budrowska 2008; Duch-Krzystoszek 2007; Fuszara 2008; Titkow 2004).

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