



## In the Name of the Father: Father's Day and its Importance

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***"I know you're no worse than most men but I thought you were better. I never saw you as a man. I saw you as my father"*** 'All my sons' - Arthur Miller (1947)

This year, on Sunday, 19<sup>th</sup> June, Father's Day, paternal bonds, fatherly figures, and fatherhood are honoured and celebrated in many places around world. I've always been interested in the long-term effects of parents on their children, and particularly the relationship between fathers and children, the impact of this relationship on children's psycho-social development and their transition into adulthood. The importance of reflecting on fatherhood centres on the fact that the *role* of fathers is sometimes secondary with more emphasis placed on mothering/motherhood. If you quickly overview the history of fatherhood through the years in research, media, literature, popular culture, etc., you can see that fathers' presence (or not) is often inextricably linked to mothers or in some sort of antithesis to motherhood. Fathers appear to have pre-determined functions mostly dictated by socio-economic (patriarchal) models of governance and production underpinning contemporary societies: fathers as carers, providers, leaders, citizens, brothers, husbands, sons, men. And it is this last role, fathers as men, that it's worth exploring and think about in an era where we experience significant shifts in attitudes, perceptions and beliefs regarding gender roles and equality, relationships, manhood and as a consequence fatherhood. Hence, fathering, fatherhood and being a father should be revisited, reframed and reconsidered through the lenses of (hegemonic) masculinities and dominant socio-cultural scripts regarding what it means to be a man and therefore a father.

Being a father is an identity defined, conceptualised, built up within the context of specific socio-cultural and legal rights and obligations. These rights and obligations have been reviewed, and significantly shifted, modified and expanded (see, for instance father/parental leave) during the last decades in tight connection to socio-economic shifts and changes in the labour market. Some potentially pertinent questions to consider here are: are fathers a key component of family systems? Is contribution to child care a key component of fatherhood's identity? Or is it more about engagement and sharing (see e.g. the equal contribution thesis, the 'economy of gratitude' as suggested by Hochschild, 1989)? Does the latter depend on different fatherhood statutes, for example, unemployed, widowed or divorced fathers? Briefly looking back at women's position in society and the labour market through the years you can mostly identify two key models of fatherhood: the breadwinner model that is often deemed as sabotaging women's rights and the autonomy model promoting an independence-orientated model at the expense though of interpersonal commitment. Either way these models appear to me as a double-edged sword (or else Scylla



and Harybdis of heavy individualism on the one hand and male hegemony on the other) and provide a rather outdated, short-sighted conceptualisation (authoritarian vs. vulnerable) of the multi-layered concept of fatherhood.

Ultimately my question is simpler than it sounds: what makes someone a (good) father? Are fathers born or made along the way? Does good fatherhood depend on the quality of the mother and their relationship? Does being a good man translate into being a good father? I keep wondering if there are different approaches of practicing good fatherhood and what's the importance of being a father nowadays. Perhaps the best way to garner useful insights about fatherhood and its complexities is to do more research focused on fathers and their needs asking them about the ways they make sense and navigate challenges of fathering. Or maybe take a further step back and ask them how they perceive their identities as men within current socio-economic climate and then their roles as caregivers, partners, husbands, sons or fathers.

To my mind, fathers are like old trees. Standing there and waiting to hear, to guide, to support, to argue and debate, to mentor, to reprimand, to joke, to forgive, to stop something bad happening to you. Always there, watching and protecting, but not always seen, praised, or acknowledged. In Ancient Greek tragedy 'Antigone' by Sophocles the key heroine stands her ground about burying her brother Creon and she is described '*like father, like daughter, passionate, wild...she hasn't learnt to bend before adversity*'. Let this be my homage on Father's Day: fathers (or father figures) been seen as those who we cherish, love and care about because they don't stop being this constant voice in our heads urging us to never stop, give in or give up, no matter what. Fathers matter, after all, don't you think? Happy Father's Day.

#### References:

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