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INTERGENERATIONAL CARING PRACTICES SONS' PERSPECTIVES ON CARING RELATIONSHIPS WITH FATHERS¹

Abstract. This article aims to present and discuss the author's research, individual in-depth interviews conducted with 10 young college-aged men on the understanding and practice of caring in their relationships with their fathers. The article refers to the notion of caring (Kitwood 1997, Philips 2007), theories of masculinity (Connell 1995, Anderson 2009, Elliott 2016) and fatherhood (Kluczyńska 2009, Suwada 2015, 2017) and describes the relationship between these concepts. Based on the literature review and research findings, the author attempts to problematise the forms of caring between sons and fathers, the reasons that shape this caring, and to capture what a son can learn about caring from his father and how this knowledge is commented on and used in a practical sense.

Keywords: men, fathers, sons, care, masculinities studies.

MIEDZYPOKOLENIOWE PRAKTYKI TROSKI PERSPEKTYWA SYNÓW NA RELACJE TROSKI Z OJCAMI

Abstrakt. Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie i omówienie autorskich badań – indywidualnych wywiadów pogłębionych, przeprowadzonych z 10 młodymi mężczyznami w wieku studenckim, dotyczących rozumienia i praktykowania troski w relacjach z ich ojcami. Artykuł odnosi się do pojęcia troski (Kitwood 1997, Philips 2007), teorii męskości (Connell 1995, Anderson 2009, Elliott 2015) i ojcostwa (Kluczyńska 2009, Suwada 2015, 2017) oraz opisuje relacje zachodzące między tymi pojęciami. Autorka na bazie przeglądu literatury oraz wyników badań próbuje sproblematyzować

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formy troski między synami i ojcami, powody wpływające na kształt tej troski oraz uchwycić, co o trosce syn może dowiedzieć się od ojca i jak tę wiedzę komentuje oraz wykorzystuje w praktycznym sensie.

Słowa kluczowe: mężczyźni, ojcowie, synowie, troska, studia nad męskością.

1. Introduction

Family relationships and interactions between family members have long been the subject of research by sociologists and other social scientists. The characteristics of the roles and positions one can occupy within the family, the power relations within the family, the impact of family relations on other areas of individual life, or simply the function and role of the family in society are among the many topics we look at in social science research. I was interested in the emotional relationship – based on care – between the male members of the family, those most closely related to each other, i.e. between father and son.

Caring, as an analytical category in sociology, is primarily associated with femininity and the traditional roles attributed to women in the family. Women customarily perform caregiving (CBOS 2018) and emotional labour in households. Meanwhile, caring relationships within the family, which are extremely important for family and social dynamics, should also come from fathers. With changing patterns of masculinity and the redefinition of parental roles, it is becoming increasingly necessary to study the care offered by fathers and practised between male family members.

This article aims to describe how sons perceive their fathers' care, what reasons they find for their fathers' caring ways, and what and how sons have learned about caring from their fathers. To do this, first, the concept of caring is defined based on the available literature and dictionary resources. Next, the relationship of caring in the context of selected theories of masculinity and the theory of involved fatherhood, which posits a father's caring as an important practice in family functioning is described, followed by a presentation and discussion of the author's own research results. As the article reveals, further research on masculine caring, that highlights its contribution to the characteristics of father-son relationships and emphasises the importance of relationships based on empathy and mutual responsibility is needed.

2. What is care?

In the social science literature, the topic of caring is addressed in multiple ways. It is assumed that care is a social construct, often defined subjectively based on one's individual view of reality (Phillips 2009: 22–41). The English

term 'care' translates into two nouns in Polish: "*troska*" and "*opieka*" which may cause inaccuracies in interpretation or differences in interpretation by different researchers (Gitkiewicz 2023: 146). This article will reflect on the category of care (*troska*), rather than caring understood as guardianship (*opieka*) – a more hierarchical relationship in which the subject to whom care is directed is more dependent on the person offering that care. The difference between these concepts is captured in the following definitions: care (*troska*) means 'taking care of something or someone in such a way that you devote a lot of time and attention to it or surround it with guardianship' and caring understood as guardianship (*opieka*) means 'taking care of a person or thing in such a way that they are well or in good condition'. It is curious that Polish language, the etymology of the concept of care (*troska*) refers back to the Proto-Slavic explanation that it represents 'that which is the result of slamming, splashing',² thus capturing care as a consequence of a specific action. Nowadays, care is defined as 'a feeling of uneasiness caused by a difficult situation or anticipation of such a situation', 'a situation in which one experiences such a feeling, and being concerned for someone, for something or striving for something'.³

In addition to dictionary definitions or colloquial understanding, the concept of caring also appears in academic literature. Judith Phillips, in her book *Caring* (2007), points out that it is necessary to draw on the category of caring to create an ideal of a civic approach that meets the needs of society now and in the future, referring to it as a model of action and responsibility. What is important, what is found in its definitions and what is common to them, is that the concept of caring is linked to an object or subject, so an important feature of it is that it is anchored in the relations between social actors. When reviewing the definitions, one can also see the affective, emotional nature of this relationship. The Institute of the Polish Language of the Polish Academy of Sciences (IJP PAN)⁴ associates the notion of care with the role of parent, sibling, neighbour, loved ones, that is, relations that are, by definition, fundamental for expressing, receiving and learning about feelings, a space of 'affective atmosphere' (Krajewski 2022). The IJP PAN article also links the term care with concepts denoting values such as nation, family, ecology, culture, homeland, which entail spectacular acts of expressing this action and sentiment. The emotion that caring for these values entails can be seen, for example, during political demonstrations by conservative circles or during Independence Day celebrations. Phillips (2009: 25), referring to Tom

² The Great Dictionary of the Polish Language, *Troska* [origin] (<https://wsjp.pl/haslo/podglad/857/troska/4028520/dbalosc> [accessed 14.01.2023]).

³ Polish language dictionary PWN, *Troska* (<https://sjp.pwn.pl/sjp/troska;2530726.html> [accessed 14.01.2023]).

⁴ Great Dictionary of the Polish Language, *Troska* (<https://wsjp.pl/haslo/podglad/857/troska/4028520/dbalosc> [accessed 14.01.2023]).

Kitwood (1997), points out that ‘caring unites feelings of love, solidarity, reciprocity, altruism and spirituality’.

Given that Philips’s (2007) book was published in English, it is worth leaning into the corresponding English-language term *care*, meaning ‘the process of protecting someone or something and providing what that person needs’⁵ (Cambridge Dictionary 2023). In this definition, care is also framed as a kind of relationship between beings, but, importantly, it emphasises the fact that this relationship creates a dependency between the caring subject and the one to whom the care is directed, and that the act of caring can entail responsibility. This aspect is also highlighted in Milton Mayeroff’s theory (1987, after Matusch 2022: 3–15), in which caring is defined as ‘a central anthropological category, a concept primary to responsibility and justice’. This feature is linked to its expansiveness, which can be expressed in words or gestures: *to show care*, *to surround someone with care*, *to speak with care*, which would further allow it to be considered a social practice in the sense of Andreas Reckwitz’s (2002, after: Sikorska 2018: 31–47) theory of practices. That is, caring involves verbal and non-verbal actions, manifests itself in bodily and mental activity, and is realised using material objects associated with caring (for example, a warm drink, a meal, a blanket), which acquire a strong association with this action by mediating it.

The given explanations of the term *care* refer back to connotations, to synonymous words such as dependence, responsibility, which differ from the actual concept in nuances, but together with their definitions clearly direct attention to the multidimensionality of care and its presence in many areas of social and individual life. Philips’ (2009: 28) definition corresponds with this: ‘caring is best defined by its complexity, which results from the fact that it permeates all aspects of life’.

The theoretical sources cited allow us to create a map of concepts related to caring. From this, a definition emerges that caring means a multidimensional practice of an emotional nature, strongly anchored in interpersonal relations and binding social actors together. Thus problematised, the definition appears to be sufficiently broad and capacious to befit the conditions of contemporary reality and to be measured by the sociological sciences.

3. Masculinities and care

Of the many theories of masculinity and its construction, for the study of caring in the context of men, this article focuses on Raewyn W. Connell’s theory of hegemonic, complicit and subordinate masculinity, Eric Anderson’s theory of

⁵ Cambridge Dictionary, Care (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/care> [accessed: 14.01.2023]).

inclusive masculinity, and Karla Elliott's theory of caring masculinity as key for the arguments herein.

Connell (1995) describes masculinity as a multiplicity of attitudes, a spectrum in which, narrowing the perspective to Western societies of the so-called Global North, she distinguishes four basic types of masculinity, patterns manifested in men's behaviour. The first – hegemonic – is the normative pattern of masculinity, is concerned with power, wealth, strength, authority, physical prowess, competition, and aggression and is associated with a heterosexual orientation. Hegemonic men are those who reproduce with their behaviour and attitudes to the world via the patriarchal constructs according to which the male dominates women. In the context of caring, they will be those least engaged in caring practices, performing them with a hierarchy in relationships.

Complicit masculinity, on the other hand, is an attitude characteristic of men who recognise hegemonic masculinity but do not practice it fully; it is 'consenting to the dominance of hegemonic masculinity and constructing one's masculinity while acknowledging the patriarchal divide *without risking being on the front line*' (Kluczyńska 2017: 15). Those manifesting this type of masculinity will be those who adhere to traditional values of male dominance, but make time to care for loved ones, engage in local communities, and partner relationships. This is a masculinity of compromise (Kluczyńska 2017: 15).

Subordinate masculinity is associated with a group that does not follow heterosexual, hegemonic patterns. It, therefore, includes people of non-heterosexual orientations, ethnic groups where cultural patterns of masculinity are different from Western – patriarchal – ones, and heterosexual people who oppose an ideology that requires men to be at the top of the social hierarchy. Representatives of subordinate masculinity will primarily be excluded or marginalised in the male community because of their symbolic similarity to femininity, but they will practice caring similarly to those we might categorise as part of the pattern of co-participatory masculinity.

As proposed by Eric Anderson (2009), the notion of inclusive masculinity functions in opposition to orthodox masculinity, i.e. that which is highly violent, hierarchical, dominant, resorts to misogyny, homophobia, and sexism, similar to hegemonic masculinity. Anderson's theory assumes that Connell's hegemonic masculinity is not a model of traditional masculinity, but a masculinity that is traditional in societies where homophobia is fundamental to the construction of *real* men's identities. Inclusive masculinity, as the name suggests, transforms the social order horizontally and recognises equally all those who escape the schemas of hegemonic masculinity as equally valid. Inclusivity is characterised by emotional accessibility, the practice of physical proximity and the breaking down of gendered norms. Caring, understood as an emotional relationship, is a value recognised and supported by inclusive masculinity.

In the publication cited above, *Men in Nursing. Towards a Caring Masculinity*, Kluczyńska (2017) describes caring masculinity based on the theories of Karla Elliott (2016). It points out that caregiving is culturally understood as the domain of women, so, dominant, hegemonic men distance themselves from this practice, and the duty of caregiving is carried out by women and other members of the community who are closer to masculinities which are? lower in the social hierarchy. Caring masculinity is, therefore, is an approach whereby men are not afraid to value feelings and express emotions in a positive way, it encourages men's fulfilment in feminised professions, and strives for the integration of gender roles; it is a 'recognition of the value and satisfaction of caring not only on a theoretical level, but also on a practical level' (Kluczyńska 2017: 32). The concept of caring masculinity thus redefines traditional gender roles by introducing values such as caring, emotionality and relationality into male identities that were previously attributed exclusively to women (Elliott 2016). This idea, based on critical studies of masculinity and a feminist ethics of care, proposes a model of masculinity that rejects domination, violence and aggression in favour of equality and cooperation. Caring masculinity introduces a paradigm that can serve as a tool for social transformation.

As noted by Michael Kimmel (2011), the modernisation of gender relations in the family and public sphere is becoming one of the key challenges of contemporary societies, and men, by engaging in caring for children and the home, can play an important role in these transformations. These practices can contribute to reducing the negative effects of hegemonic masculinity on both men and women and set a positive example for future generations by demonstrating that caring and concern are universal values that can be realised regardless of gender. His considerations are relevant to the topic of caring relationships on the part of fathers.

4. Caring father

The reference of caring to the relationship between parent and child seems to be the most natural association, a reference to the first gestures in a man's life, the activities that surround him when he appears in the world and is unable to function without the support of others. On the issue of fatherhood and caring, Katarzyna Suwada's (2017: 40) text highlights that 'The experience of caring is not entirely new in men's lives, especially when it comes to fathering'. There is no denying that raising a child is part of the father's role, which should involve care and concern, but we know that the involvement in the work of caring for the family is sometimes distributed differently between parents, which is why research into contemporary fathering behaviour has identified different attitudes that operate in

society and depend on how much the man, the father, is involved in the private, emotional sphere of the family.

In this context, Kluczyńska (2009), who cites theories attempting to define the concept of the modern father, the so-called new father, is noteworthy. Kluczyńska (2009) cites M.E. Lamb's division, according to which fathers' involvement can be defined by three components: (1) involvement, i.e. spending time alone with the child in various forms (feeding, playing, helping with housework), (2) availability (less involved level of parental activity and takes place while the father is simultaneously doing other activities such as watching television, cooking), and (3) responsibility for the child's well-being, i.e. caring for the child, taking care of the child's health and basic needs such as clothing appropriate to the weather.

Kluczyńska (2009) goes on to describe other theoretical approaches, of which – with respect to the topic at hand – two, in particular, should be mentioned: the typology of fatherhood defined according to the relationship the father has with the child and how much time men spend with their children (Hatten, Vinter, Williams 2002) and the concept of a good father by Karen Henwood and James Procter (2003). In the first one, Hatten et al. (2002) problematises fatherhood into four types: (1) enforcer dads, who are responsible for discipline and are accompanied in their upbringing by the mother, who is responsible for daily chores; (2) entertainer dads, who focus on the children's leisure time, providing activities, trips and involvement in leisure activities external to the home; (3) useful dads, who are the mothers' 'helpers'; and (4) fully involved dads, fathers who are equally involved in household chores and various aspects of the child's upbringing as the mother. The concept of a good father, nowadays valued as appropriate, defines a father 'as present in the home and involved in the life of his children, maintaining contact with the children and sensitive to their needs, treating the family as a value' and understanding, friendly, supportive, cooperating with his partner (Kluczyńska 2009: 134). Definitions of the involved father thus speak of a caring, dedicated family father who performs household duties on an equal footing with the mother and sensitively nurtures the child.

Suwada (2017) states that it is Elliott's (2016) concept of caring masculinity that is particularly useful when talking about contemporary fatherhood, as both of these attitudes focus on practical activities. It is therefore important to research men's actual involvement in caring tasks and to value the caring attitude of fathers, as this can lead to modifications in the way men's identities and models of masculinity are formed. This, in turn, results in the emergence of an identity of a caring father, an emotionally involved father and an equitably functioning distribution of parenting responsibilities. A father's emotional involvement in father-son caregiving relationships may be crucial to how sons care for their fathers: as Stoller (1990) points out, men's caregiving is shaped by specific family relationships and distinct care needs and also sons' emotional closeness

with their fathers is a stronger predictor of later contact frequency than in father-daughter relationships (Hwang et al. 2021). This may suggest that when sons develop close bonds with their fathers based on care and emotional involvement, they are more likely to maintain regular contact later in life.

5. Methodology

The purpose of the conducted research was to provide insight into whether young men had learned anything about caring from their fathers and how they handled this skill and knowledge. The research questions were about how the young men understand and practice caring in relation to the social reality around them, what they think about the concept of ‘male caring’, what – in the context of caring – the relationship with their fathers looked like during their childhood, and why it was shaped in that way, and what this relationship of father-son caring looks like today and what are the caring gestures, behaviours that sons have learned from their fathers.

This study is based on 10 individual in-depth interviews, which were conducted in the autumn of 2024 with Polish college-aged men. The choice of this method was motivated by the need to explore the subjective perspective of looking at an abstract concept such as care. The aim of the research was not to create a universal model, but only to identify the phenomenon, so the qualitative method seemed the most appropriate. Furthermore, the study assumed that the interviewees would be describing personal family stories, the individual interview and direct contact with the researcher, therefore provided a sense of empathy towards the stories quoted (Juszczak 2013: 9). The interviews were based on a pre-prepared semi-structured script that included specific problems, research questions and suggested follow-up questions to deepen the topic of conversation. The problems discussed during the interviews with young men were: 1) their understanding of care (definition, association with practices, people), 2) their understanding of men’s care, 3) care towards them during their childhood, 4) their fathers’ care (methods, practices), 5) learning about care from their fathers, and 6) care between them and their fathers currently.

The men were recruited through a recruitment advertisement made available on social media and posted in the area surrounding Poznan universities. The age of the respondents ranged from 21 to 25, all interviewees studied at Polish universities, resided in large cities, and their fathers were alive. Information regarding the earnings, the interviewee’s field of study, relationship status or sexual orientation of the interviewees was not collected, as it was not considered to be relevant variables in the context of the study. Due to the size of the sample, the most important recruitment criterion – apart from age and the student’s status – was the willingness to talk about the relationship of care between the interviewees and their living father,

which did not turn out to be easy at all. When recruiting, a large number of men who were willing to talk about caring, but not necessarily about the relationship with their father. Initially, the project assumed that interviews would be conducted with both sons and their fathers in order to gain insight into the studied subject from both perspectives. However, the fathers were not interested in participating in the study – only three fathers of respondents agreed to be interviewed. Therefore, this analysis is based on only 10 interviews with young men.

The interviews lasted about an hour on average and were conducted and recorded with the consent of the interviewees. The interviewees were offered to conduct the interview in their home spaces, but none of them chose this option, and by virtue of the fact that the conversation touched on emotional issues that could be a sensitive topic for some, public places were not a suitable space for the interview, so most of the interviews took place in the author's residence. Two of the interviews were conducted via Zoom, as the interviewees were in a different city. The analysis of the collected research material was based on the identification of recurring patterns and themes in the interviewees' statements that related to their experiences of caring between them and their fathers, and the reasons influencing the characteristics of fathers' caring. The aim was to uncover significant features of this particular caregiving practice. The analysis was conducted using a constructivist methodological approach, proposed by Scott R. Harris, which involves interpreting social reality from the point of view of the individuals interviewed, rather than relying on a pre-imposed theoretical framework (see Harris 2006a, 2006b, 2010). Quotes that best illustrated key aspects of the phenomenon were selected from the interviews. Any data that would allow for the interviewees' identification have been anonymised and pseudonymised – the name visible next to the quote does not belong to the quoted person or any other person who took part in the study.

6. Sons on their father's care

The interviews provided information about sons' perceptions of their fathers' caring. In the responses about paternal care in childhood, three ways in which fathers care in their relationship with their sons were identified: (1) episodic care (focused on external activities such as work or arranging entertainment), (2) emotionally withdrawn fathers' care (avoiding active involvement), and (3) tender fathers' care – in the case of the interviewees, this father figure is or was more caring than their mothers. None of the interviewees talked about a family relationship in which their parents are similarly involved in emotional labour for the family.

In most cases, a style of caring was described that was mainly based on providing for the family's well-being by supporting the family or simply working

more than the mother, including staying overtime at work to earn for his family or taking on jobs away from home. Thus, the father was associated with being much less present than the mother in the family's life, being physically involved through work or small gestures made out of the blue, such as occasionally making tea, but not emotionally involved. The father's care in these descriptions was often limited and practical, manifested in the family environment in undertaking joint but episodic activities with his son, such as buying presents, going for a bike ride, or playing football. Practising caring in this way is similar to the pattern of entertainer dads, according to H a t t e n et al. (2002), i.e. fathers who fulfil their duty to raise and care for their child by providing entertainment. Among others, Marcin recounted his dad's caring practices in this way:

[...] I have the impression that our interactions were also a bit more practical on the basis that, well, dad was, I don't know, the person who went with me to play football or something like that or there was just, I don't know, going out to go-karts with friends or something like that and it was there, dad was sort of there with me or something like that, so just sort of, things like that, if we're talking about some sort of care there [...]. (Son 5 – Marcin)

The sons most often cited the financial situation of the family as the reason for this type of caring, but above all, the parenting experiences of their fathers. The sons suspected that their fathers had likely received this from their fathers; the belief that instead of emotional care, it was the man's responsibility for the family's material existence, to be a breadwinner. Although the interviewees appreciated the dedication of their fathers, who in some cases were willing to pay for a whole range of extra-curricular activities and holiday trips for their children, even without themselves, they did not allow themselves to indulge in small pleasures. The sons shied away from this way of caring, in which earning rather than the emotional relationship is the priority, and declared that they themselves were trying to practice more attentive and affectionate caring, to fight the stereotype of the self-sufficient male.

[Did you feel cared for in such a model?] Then? I don't bloody know. Now I think there was a lot of it missing there, because I struggle with that invariably, that style that I grew up in and doing everything myself and taking care of my own needs because nobody took care of them. But at the time I don't know if I felt that. At the time it seemed natural to me. In the sense of just having to cope with life. And now you also have to cope in life, but it turns out that you don't have to by yourself. (Son 6 – Janek)

It is worth noting, however, that although the sons of fathers practising caring episodically judged their fathers' care as insufficiently satisfactory, they themselves replicated elements of such caring. This was manifested in the adoption by sons, for example, of behaviours such as discreetly meeting the needs of loved ones without expectation of reward:

Well, I think what I might have after my father is that I can do something, I can consciously let go of something or do something in such a way that this person doesn't know that I did it. For example, to make her think that she did it herself, to make her feel better, that kind of implicit concern I would say, let that person not know that I did it, but let her feel good about the idea that she did it. (Son 1 – Maciej)

Men speaking about their fathers' care similarly to Maciej pointed out that the way they took on elements of their fathers' practice of caring was not fully conscious, it was not verbalised; they recounted that they did not recall a situation in which their father had directly and specifically communicated to them what caring was. This may indicate that the knowledge of care produced in the relationships between fathers and sons rather is transmitted bodily and that patterns of care drawn from these relationships are incorporated into emotional behaviour subconsciously. It is worth adding that in the discussed mechanism of sons taking care of information from their parents, gendered tensions in the perception of care are also perceptible on the basis of the interviews conducted. Although the majority of respondents declared an easier identification with maternal patterns of emotional closeness, at the same time, they pointed to the unique character of male care, manifested in rituals (for example, the aforementioned brewing of tea as an act of care) or a specific relationship with the public sphere (the organisation of joint outings) as easier to replicate than the care practices performed, offered by the mother.

However, not all of the interviewees experienced even episodic acts of caring on the part of their fathers. In the interviews, there were accounts of fathers being uncaring, displaying harmful or even violent behaviour when it came to dealing with the child:

And you can also have the example of my father, who just doesn't give a shit about you. And he'll take you out on some drunken whim with his friends. And he'll define that as an element of tenderness, caring, and closeness. (Son 2 – Adam)

Here, as in the cases of fathers caring episodically, Adam saw the reason for his father's way of caring in the value system he professed. This was described as *right-wing*, that is, according to Adam, characterised by emotional distancing from other people and disdain for men's displays of tenderness and closeness. This can be attributed to Connell's (1995) hegemonic model of masculinity. Adam's unconcerned father was not involved in housework or child-rearing and was additionally absent due to work and alcohol dependency. Adam declared that he did not learn anything about caring from his father related to good emotional practice, and indeed learned what caring is not:

As I was, I don't know, working on this therapy somewhere, well my father was a counter-example of how to care and look after another person, how I should function in interpersonal relationships [...]. (Son 2 – Adam)

Adam mentioned several times during the interview that he had worked with the patterns, experiences and knowledge of caring and emotionality he had acquired from his father in therapy. He was not an isolated case – some interview participants recounted that they had reproduced the strategy of maintaining moderate involvement from their fathers, but functioning in this way, they realised that building emotional frigidity did not serve them and the relationships they formed with others, so they sought to abandon paternal practices.

This was different in the cases of the sons who valued their fathers' care positively. It is worth noting, however, that in these relationships (two of ten), the interviewees' parents divorced during the respondents' childhood, and they perceived their mother and father in contrasting ways. In one case, both parents were involved in providing for a family whose financial situation was very good, but it was the mother, not the father as in most of the accounts discussed, who sometimes worked outside her son's place of residence or even in another country, focusing on developing her professional path, so-called *career-making*. Her son, Alex, talked about his mother as fulfilling, according to H a t t e n et al. (2002), the type of parent called enforcer dads, in this case, enforcer mum, i.e. the relentless mother responsible for the child's discipline. It was on the father's side that Alex encountered more tenderness, understanding and forbearance:

It seems to me that [in my father's case] maybe it's also about some of that empathy and wanting to nurture the child more and not program the child. (Son 4 – Alex)

As a reason for his father's involved concern, Alex cited, like interviewees experiencing a different concern, the upbringing his dad had experienced. Alex's father, like him, had a more emotional relationship with his own father. In addition, the presence of Alex's father and the absence of his mother due to the necessity of the family's economic well-being was an important issue here; again, the need to guarantee physical accessibility to the child becomes apparent if the parent is to be considered a good person, properly fulfilling their nurturing, caring role.

Another respondent, Szymon, spoke positively about what he had learned about caring from his dad. In his relationship with his parents, it is difficult to see deep practices of closeness and care, but it was interesting to see what Szymon replicates, what he has in common with his father when it comes to care, and what we are talking about with respect to care towards non-human actors. He related the paternal pattern of care through his experiences to an ethic of care for animals, treating this sphere as a space for exercising responsibility.

I don't know if it's in relation to humans, but we certainly have some kind of innate, probably passed down concern for animals. Because we can really do a lot. My dad, me and my brother do a lot to make sure that the cats and dogs are well, nice and warm. (Son 7 – Szymon)

This phenomenon suggests that masculine caring finds expression in concrete, measurable, task-oriented activities, which may be due to culturally determined constraints on emotional expression but seems to be adequately realised in interspecies relationships.

In one other interview, the respondent provided a description of the ideal, exemplary and desired paternal care, where the father is open and emotionally generous:

[...] such paternal care, such maybe even an ideal vision of it, just the fact that there is this father who just somehow, in a kind of positive way, breaks down these emotional barriers. And then it's like, well, the two of you just have some kind of bond, a chance to experience these things. And so, well, then, as a son, you also get some kind of reassurance that suddenly you're not alone with these things. (Son 5 – Marcin)

The father described by Marcin provides care and space to value the emotions experienced in a positive way, so it can be suggested that the son experiences a similar relationship with their father to the researcher in question needs is the caring masculinity described by Elliott (2016) and a good, involved, unashamed father with emotions, similar to Henwood and Procter's (2003) father model.

7. Conclusion

From the interviews, sons who had not experienced emotional care from fathers representing hegemonic or complicit masculinity (Connell 1995) interpreted masculine, paternal care as something limited, contrasting with maternal care and in need of change. Transforming the image of male caring and the models of masculinity that are associated with the stereotype of the self-sufficient, absent from the emotional life of the family male-father, was an important issue raised by respondents in the interviews. Respondents signalled a generational shift, a rejection of the hegemonic model of masculinity in favour of affectionate caring, although this process faced difficulties due to a lack of role models. This was also evident when talking about the reasons for fathers' caring. In addition to values, the fathers' upbringing played an important role. Negative instances of uncaring fathers (e.g., those marked with alcohol or violence) acted as a warning, perpetuating in sons the need for emotional availability. The positive care of affectionate fathers, on the other hand, was unique in that it was present in unique family contexts, where gendered roles and the sharing of family responsibilities were perceived to be fluid.

The findings of this study highlight significant connections between patterns of fatherhood and the concepts of masculinity and care. The experiences of sons who perceived their fathers as embodying hegemonic or complicit masculinity

(Connell 1995) support the notion that traditional fatherhood models tend to limit the expression of care. The ‘breadwinner father’ model (Kluczyńska 2009) aligns with fathers who practise care in an episodic manner, reinforcing patterns of male emotional restraint. In contrast, fathers demonstrating a more engaged form of care, in line with the concept of ‘caring masculinity’ (Elliott 2016), correspond to the model of an active and emotionally available father, consistent with the idea of the ‘good father’ (Henwood & Procter 2003). The sons’ narratives reveal a generational shift in attitudes towards male care – young men in this study increasingly aspire to a model of fatherhood based on emotional involvement and sensitivity, although this transformation still faces structural and cultural barriers. Therefore, this study highlights the need for further reflection on the social redefinition of fatherhood and the mechanisms through which patterns of care are transmitted across generations of men. It would be worthwhile to expand the study to saturate the full range of potential care patterns and typologies, based on for example on three axes: the level of emotional involvement (strong, medium, weak), the form of care (practical / emotional / symbolic) and the father’s physical availability (present / absent / irregular).

The research carried out highlights two issues: the need to explore the topic of patterns of paternal care passed on to sons through the study of father-son relationships, and the need to talk about the possibility of fatherhood evolving from the traditional breadwinner model towards more sensitive forms of involvement. It seems that filial caring practices are entangled in inherited patterns and structural barriers shaping masculine emotionality, but that young men, through practices such as therapy or simply self-reflection, can perceive their caring needs better than their fathers and realise caring on a more emotional level, regardless of the fact that the hegemonic masculinity patterns present around them do not allow this.

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