

**SAME OR DIFFERENT: THE PARENTING
EXPERIENCE OF WOMEN AND MEN IN
CONTEMPORARY SLOVAKIA**

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to explore the meaning and experience of parenthood among 20 middle-class urban parents with children under three in Slovakia. In particular, it focuses on the comparison between mothers and fathers regarding their involvement in the childrearing and family, their construction of the parental role, their expectations from parenthood, their decisions about having a child and their experience of personal change induced by parenthood. This paper draws on the research by Martha McMahon (1995) and it applies two methods: the interviewing method and the method of symbolic interactionism.

The results of this paper are in compliance with the findings of previous studies. This research illustrates that mothers and fathers in Slovakia differ in the quality and quantity they devote to childcare and domestic tasks (e.g. Coltrane, 1998), in the process of carrying out the decision to become parents (e.g. Gerson, 1995), in their expectations and realities of parenthood and in their construction of the parental role (e.g. Šalingová, 2003). Yet, there are some areas where the experience of mothers and fathers converges namely in their rejection of the childcaring practices of the previous generation, in their perception of childfree people or in the experience of personal change caused by parenting.

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Introduction

The realities of parenthood in Slovakia are changing. The change of the political regime in 1989 removed the restrictions on the length of maternal leave and fathers, together with mothers, are now equally eligible to spend the time with their child on the parental leave. Additionally, because of the market economy, parents in Slovakia now face pressures that were uncommon in the socialist regime like the withdrawal of the state from the social services or higher economic demands. These changes inevitably influence the way women and men parent and the division of childcare. Some of the alternations in the parental conduct are already visible as the emergence of stay-at-home wives and breadwinner husbands.

Motherhood has been extensively studied for the last few decades (see for example Oakley, 1979, Davies, Welch, 1986; McMahon, 1995; Choi et.al., 2005). Motherhood, together with fatherhood, can be defines as a role and as a relationship. (McMahon, 1995). Further, mothering encompasses “providing physical maintenance and psychological nurturance to young children” (Risman, 1987, p.11). Some authors argue that one should speak only about maternal care and not parental. (e.g.Ruddick, 1989) However, I will use this definition also for parenting in general because I believe that both mothers and fathers have the potential to engage in parenting according to Risman’s definition.

Regarding research, fatherhood does not stay behind motherhood. As Lewis and O’Brien claim “there has been a stream of papers on fatherhood in last fifty years” (Lewis, O’Brien, 1988, p.3). Scholars have investigated the involvement of fathers (e.g. La Rossa, 1998; Gerson, 1993), the experience of fatherhood (Lupton, Barclay, 1997; Doucet, 2004) or the different activities that mothers and fathers perform (e.g. Coltrane, 1998). Yet, the meaning of fatherhood for men who are parents still remains underresearched. (see for example Eggebeen, Knoester, 2001 or Fox, Bruce, 2001)

The above-mentioned studies have mostly investigated motherhood and fatherhood separately, which may be caused by different research objectives for each area such as the question of the involvement level in the case of fathers and the possible negative experience from motherhood in the case of mothers. However, despite these different aims of research, motherhood and fatherhood converge in the contradictory demands and experience that both mothers and fathers face.

Moreover, except the separate focus on motherhood and fatherhood, the research concerning the experience of fathers often used only the narratives of mothers. (Lewis, O'Brien, 1987; Chorvát, 1999) Further, the research has tended to concentrate more on the shift in fathers' role and the change in the division of household tasks than on the actual experiences of fathers. The prevalent focus on the division of household labour is characteristic also for the research in Slovakia. (e.g. Butorová, 1996; Bausová, 2004) So far, there has been carried out very little qualitative research in the field of fatherhood as well as research that would use the narratives of the contemporary parents from Slovakia. (e.g. Didičová, Vendelová, 2001)

Therefore, the aim of this research is to study the experience and the meaning of parenthood through interviewing women and men who are parents of pre-school children. In particular, I will focus on the differences and similarities among mothers and fathers regarding their expectations from parenthood, their decisions to become parents, their construction of the parental role including parents' usage of the psychoanalytic discourse (attachment theory and maternal deprivation) and their involvement in the childrearing and family. The sample of this study consists of middle-class couples with university degree mainly from humanities (psychology, pedagogy) and with children under the age of three.

The relevance of this study rests on the fact that, to my knowledge, there are no data revealing the experience of contemporary parents in Slovakia through using their own

narratives. Moreover, this study can illustrate the experience and meaning of parenthood among middle-class parents under new economic and social circumstances. Yet, I am aware of the fact that the composition of my sample represents one of the greatest limitations of this study since it cannot serve as representative for the whole population. Another limitation is the focus on middle-class men, which was already criticized before. (e.g. LaRossa, 1988)

I will explore the meaning of parenthood through the method of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969), because this method will enable me to get to the meaning of parenthood through parents' narratives. Further, in my research, I will draw on the study by McMahon (1995) who studied the impact of motherhood on women's identity, how women came to have children, how they developed self-conceptions as mothers and the cost and rewards of motherhood among working-class and middle-class women. Partly, I will use McMahon's research and interview questions, however, I will enlarge the research sample with fathers.

I will demonstrate that despite the growing involvement of fathers the traditional notion of the family with the breadwinner role is still persistent and I will demonstrate that the involvement of fathers does not exclude the perception of the mothers as primary caregivers. (see for example Moss, Brannen, 1987; Gerson, 1993) The purpose of my research is to apply this argument in the Slovakian context.

Since parenting in general cannot be separated from household labour, because activities such as cleaning, washing and cooking are connected with childcare, I will explore the participation of Slovakian mothers and fathers in these chores too. In particular, I will illustrate that the greater involvement with children does not necessarily initiate higher involvement in the domestic tasks and that "housework remains the last frontier that men want to settle" (Gerson, 1993, p.141). Consequently, the involvement of fathers in the CEE region although greater than that of the previous decades (Pascall, Kwak, 2005) remains

essentially different from that of mothers, because fathers are involved only in certain tasks while mothers perform all the rest. (Didičová, Vendelová, 2001)

In Chapter One I will elaborate on the contradicting demands that are placed both on mothers and fathers. While women have to deal with the alleged naturalness and happiness of the mothering experience that often counter their actual feelings, men are still regarded to be the main providers for the family which conflicts with the changing “culture of fatherhood” (LaRossa, 1988) that demands from them greater family involvement.

In Chapter Two I will look at the specificities of parenting in the CEE context including some aspects of the socialist past (e.g. equal participation of women and men in the labour market) and the emergence of the breadwinner husband and stay-at-home wife. Further, I will elaborate on the societal and economical factors that support this emergence like the traditional attitudes towards gender roles or the situation of women on the labour market. Finally, I will address the experience of mothers and fathers as presented in the few qualitative studies from Slovakia and Czech republic.

In Chapter Three I will provide a short description and a critique of the psychological theories that are most prevalent in the parenthood field. Especially, I will concentrate on the attachment theory (1967) and the theory of maternal deprivation (1950) by John Bowlby. Bowlby’s theories have been very influential in the field of psychology and even today they determine the perception of a proper parental conduct. Additionally, I will elaborate also on the psychoanalytical theory of mothering by Nancy Chodorow (1978). Finally, I will contrast and consequently merge the above-mentioned theories with later theoretical approaches to parenthood such as the microstructural approach by Barbara Risman (1987) and the developmental approach by Kathleen Gerson (1985).

In Chapter Four I will specify the method of symbolic interactionism, provide a closer look at the study that influenced my methodology in particular *Engendering motherhood* by McMahon (1995), describe the interview method and the research sample.

In Chapter Five I will present the results from the interviews with parents, most importantly, the greater share of responsibility for the child and spending time with the child in the case of mothers and the perception of paternal role as providing financially for the family in the case of fathers.

1. CONTRADICTIONS OF PARENTHOOD

Motherhood, as well as fatherhood, offers a great enriching personal experience that provides the opportunity for creating a unique bond with another human being. (McMahon, 1995) However, both women and men parent under certain conditions that can produce negative feelings. In particular, women as mothers are often isolated and confined to their home while encountering the myth that this should be the happiest time of their lives. (Davies, Welch, 1986) Fathers are confronted by the demand to be breadwinners while also to become more involved. (Lupton, Barclay, 1997) An involved father is a father who does not perceive his role as economically defined but as filled with childcare and domesticity share. (Chen as cited in Kubičková, 2003) Consequently, parenthood is filled with ambivalence and contradictory feelings that mark the parenting experience. These contradictions between demands and experience as in case of mothers and between conflicting demands as in the case of fathers will be the topic of this chapter.

Motherhood is often perceived as a natural part of womanhood. It is not unusual to equate women with mothers. (Glenn, 1994) Moreover, the connotations of motherhood are only positive as „a supreme calling, a happy achievement, a heavenly blessing, a womanly profession, the consummate feminine achievement”. (Barnett, 2006, p.411) The alleged naturalness of motherhood causes that only women are regarded as having the right skills for raising a child: for example to be gentle, or to know how to feed and care for a baby, etc. Further, these skills are regarded as innate parts of womanhood, i.e. they are not something to be learned but something one is born with. (Harberged et. al. as cited in Barnett, 2006) But what is the situation of mothers who do not fulfill these expectations and who do not experience feelings of happiness after becoming mothers? How do new mothers cope with the fact that they should know everything regarding childcare and if they do not they have few

opportunities where to look for help? And how do they experience the stereotypical activities connected to childcare knowing that this should be the “happiest moment of their life”?

According to the research by Choi et al (2005) the above-mentioned expectations make it very difficult for women to express their negative feelings about motherhood, because they feel they may be perceived as bad mothers. Furthermore, the ideal of motherhood affects women’s expectations and when they see that they cannot reach this ideal in reality, it leads to conflict inside them. (Choi et.al.2005) Also Shelton and Johnson’s study shows that mothers constantly compare themselves with the unachievable ideal of a “good mother”, which can in turn produce feelings of guilt and failure. Further, as these authors point out, the discrepancy between the ideal of motherhood and the lived experience can lead to stress and anxieties. (Shelton, Johnson, 2006)

As I already mentioned, motherhood is often viewed as essential for women and consequently, it is assumed that women should “naturally” devote themselves completely solely to childcare. Yet, as Davies and Welch (1986, p.420) demonstrate this demand results in guilty feelings among women when they want some space of their own. Furthermore, women in their research perceive “self-negation” as belonging to motherhood, which can negatively affect mothers’ psychological well-being.

While for women the contradictions of motherhood consist of the incompatibility between the ideal and the experience, for men the contradictions encompass the conflict between the breadwinner role and the involved father role. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) argue that the breadwinner concept does not exist anymore and that the roles of caregiver and provider are shared between women and men interchangeably. Yet, I am more willing to incline towards the argument by Moss and Brannen. These authors claim that the underinvolvement of fathers is influenced by the ideology according to which “the father should be the main breadwinner, and that breadwinning is the most important role for the father”. Further, this

ideology fully justifies the full-time participation of fathers in paid labour (Moss, Brannen, 1987, p.41) and results in a reality where fathers are involved only partly in childcare and do not participate equally in domestic tasks. Also, participating in parenting only in “small doses” allows men to enjoy fatherhood without creating an obstacle of it for their career. Uninvolved fatherhood is completely compatible with the breadwinning role. Being a father, unlike being a mother, allows men to both work and spend time with their children. (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, p.11)

The breadwinner role may be one of the reasons why the greater involvement of fathers is being challenged. Several authors have argued against the changes in fatherhood. Lewis claims that there is no evidence for a significant change in the involvement of fathers. (as cited in Richardson, 1987) According to Lamb, Pleck and Levine by assessing how many men are staying on parental leave it is obvious that the group of men giving preference to the involvement with their children instead of their career remains too small for defending increased paternal involvement. (Lamb, Pleck, Levine, 1987)

LaRossa is also among the authors that reason against the notion of changing fatherhood. He differentiates between the culture of fatherhood and the conduct of fatherhood stating that the latter has changed far slower than the former. Through reviewing several studies dealing with parental involvement he demonstrates how little the conduct of fatherhood has changed over time. Further, he emphasizes different tasks that dominate fathering and mothering, namely, women engage mainly in caretaking while fathers in playing with the child. This author also draws our attention to one important fact that while we see still more and more fathers pushing baby carriages the time that fathers spend alone with their child remains very little. (LaRossa, 1988)

The difference between pushing the stroller or playing and more involved activities is that the former is “cleaner” and requires much less attention than other types of childcare. For

example, changing a diaper demands full concentration while pushing the strollers does not. Further, satisfying the child's physical needs is more demanding since it cannot be delayed but has to be performed immediately. (LaRossa, LaRossa, 1989) Since mothers are the ones mainly engaged in the second type of activities, i.e. those requiring higher attention, they remain the primary caretakers. Finally, LaRossa points out that the fathers not only engage in different tasks but they are also often "technically present" but "functionally absent". (LaRossa, 1988, p.454) LaRossa's observations can still prove useful today. His argument that the norms guiding parenthood are more about theory than about the actual practice can make us realize that only because fathers know that they should be more involved, it does not necessarily mean they will be so.

The difference in the activities in which mothers and fathers engage in is pointed out also by Beckett (1987). According to this author, the rhetoric of equality has created a "smokescreen" that hides continuing inequalities (p.76). She identifies several differences between mothers and fathers, for example, the demand for a higher availability of the former than the latter. In her conclusion Beckett highlights the claim by Barrett and McIntosh that the division of the household labour is not a division between equals, "but an unequal exchange in which the man's interests predominate" (as cited in Beckett, 1987, p.86).

Lewis and O'Brien, in their introduction to the book *Reassessing fatherhood*, are also more cautious in making a claim about change. Instead, they state "involved fatherhood may have always existed, but only have become a fashionable research topic in recent years" (Lewis, O'Brien, 1987, p.4). In their overview on the scholarship on fatherhood they present findings that illustrate the possibility of fathers to choose what they will do and what they will not or the role of the mother as an authority in childcare with the subsequent higher responsibility for it. Yet, despite the lower involvement of fathers in childcare Lewis and O'Brien recognize

the heterogeneity among fathers and absence of one similar pattern of paternal behaviour. (Lewis, O'Brien, 1987)

It seems that the rather sceptic attitude towards the change in fatherhood predominates the western scholarship. Yet, there are some who are more optimistic in this regard. Gerson (1993) shares LaRossa's (1988) opinion that knowing that men should be more involved in childcare will not necessarily increase their involvement. However, she argues that compared to previous generations fatherhood in America has changed. She carried out a comprehensive study on the involvement of fathers in the USA in which she differentiates between three types of fathers: the breadwinner, the autonomous father and the involved father. Since the question of fathers' involvement is the one that interests me the most, I will closely look only at this type of the father. Involved fathers in Gerson's research want to have a deep emotional relationship with their children as well as participating largely in their care. Nevertheless, despite that, they do not become primary caregivers but rather "mothers' helpers" with mothers as primary caregivers. (Gerson, 1993) Thus, the changes in fatherhood do not lead to an equal share of care taking since fathers maintain different position in the family than mothers. And while one could claim that this inequality is compensated by women's bigger power over childrearing, as Backett points out the compensation is not as straightforward as it may seem since it only reinforces women's greater responsibility in the household. (Backett, 1987)

Just as women's power and higher responsibility in the household are mutually reinforcing, so is the men's practical experience with fathering and their involvement. Through the uninvolvement of fathers, mothers gain childcaring skills that strengthen the perception of them as more competent. Consequently, this stronger competence dampens fathers' involvement and thus fathers do not gain experience that is needed for their self-confidence as qualified parents. (Lamb, Pleck, Levine, 1987) This leads into a vicious circle

where fathers' uninvolvedness is reinforced by itself and it is hard for the fathers to break it since they do not feel skilled enough to care for children.

But why do fathers not get involved in childcare immediately after the birth to gain necessary skills? As I already stated, one possible explanation could be the breadwinner role. But would reduction of their working activities mean greater participation in the family? According to Gerson's (1993) study, not necessarily. She claims that the (non)involvement of fathers is not the result of their participation in the labour market but rather of their psychological motivation to become involved. The acknowledgment that women and men's different involvement in the domestic tasks is not only the result of the employment of men is recognized also by Moss and Brannen (1987). Also Russell points out that flexible work does not inevitably produce higher family involvement of fathers. (Russell, 1987) So what is the reason that even if fathers have jobs that provide them with more time for the family they do not use this opportunity?

Among the possible explanations can be that for men parenthood simply means something different than for women. To be a mother embraces different activities than to be a father, which is connected to the stereotypical perception of womanhood and manhood. The different content of motherhood and fatherhood can be supported by the fact that while parenting, women and men are occupied with different tasks in different settings. As Coltrane demonstrates, mothers take care of children at home while simultaneously performing household tasks. Fathers, on the other hand, engage in childrearing in the public and their activities consist of playing, taking children to school or teaching them skills. For women parenting is something that they have to reconcile with other obligations. For men spending time with their child means to do something refreshing and enjoyable. (Coltrane, 1998) Thereby, fathers are involved but in a rather limited way participating only in certain tasks.

Further, the positioning of parents in the family is different. The mother becomes the primary caregiver and the father simply helps, which is influenced by a traditionalization process that emerges as a consequence of the presence of a female caregiver. (Baber, Allen, 1992). The positioning of the father as a helper has some negative consequences as avoiding the dirty work connected to childcare while enjoying the more pleasurable activities. Further, the post of a helper enables leaving all the responsibility on the shoulders of mothers. (Gerson, 1993) Thus, the fact that fathers occupy only a secondary position in childrearing involves multiple meanings such as who can avoid the dirty work and who cannot. Moreover, deciding who is the primary caregiver means deciding whose career is more important and it therefore determines “who in the future will be economically dependent on whom, with all the consequences involved” (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, p.25). Thus, it seems that the traditional division of parenthood with the breadwinner husband and stay-at-home wife has more negative consequences for women than for men, namely, greater responsibility and greater share of childcare together with the economic dependence on the husband. However, we should not forget that fathers also have their own barriers to overcome towards being more caring including the idea that women are the most suitable for childcare and men should provide for the family only financially.

In this chapter, I have addressed the contradictions of parenthood. For women these contradictions embrace inconsistent discourses and experience, for men they consist of the conflict between the breadwinner and involved father role. Further, I have demonstrated that even fathers who take greater share in childcare leave women with higher responsibility and in a less advantageous situation compared to men. Overall, it seems that even with the changes in fatherhood towards fathers’ greater involvement the inequality between genders in the family continues.

2. FATHERHOOD AND MOTHERHOOD AFTER SOCIALISM

Until now I have elaborated mainly on parenthood as presented in the Western literature. However, I am aware of the specificities of parenting in Central and Eastern European (CEE) context. The composition of my research sample with all women staying on the parental leave points out to the importance of addressing the societal or economical factors that are influencing the decisions of these women to become stay-at-home wives. Yet, the emergence of stay-at-home wives coincides with the increased involvement of fathers, which I will also assess in this chapter.

In this part I will address parenthood and its context using mainly Slovakian empirical scholarship (e.g. Bútorová, 1996; Didičová, Vendelová, 2001; Šalingová, 2003; Bausova, 2004) together with few Czech (e.g. Bartlová, 2007) and Polish (Pascall, Kwak, 2005) studies. Shared socialist past and the transition period after the change of regime support the applicability of other researches from post-socialist countries to Slovakian context.

I will argue that fatherhood in post-socialist countries is changing (e.g. Pascall, Kwak, 2005) despite the persistence of traditional attitudes towards gender roles (e.g. Butorova, 1996). I will address the possible societal circumstances that affect this persistence and contribute to the emergence of stay-at-home wives. Finally, I will provide a brief overview on the qualitative research carried out among mothers and fathers in this region.

The change of the political regime in 1989 introduced massive changes in economy, the labour market, legal system and social services. Inevitably, this was followed by changes in family and gender relations (Gal, Kligman, 2000a) and by the rise of the stay-at-home wives and the breadwinner ideology (Gal, Kligman, 2000b). However, despite the equal participation of sexes in paid labour during socialism their status in different spheres of life e.g. in family was not necessarily equal as well.

As Šalingová points out in her research among Slovakian parents from 1970's, despite the fact that most of the women were working, their maternal role was still perceived as the most dominant and taking care of the household as solely their responsibility. (Šalingová, 2003) It seems that the employment of women did not have any impact on the traditional division of domestic tasks, which might be influenced by the fact that women's employment was perceived as ideologically enforced and as the result of the economic situation of the socialist family. (Chorvat, 2004) Thus, women's work was perceived as necessity and consequently did not have any impact on the division of gender roles.

Yet, according to Šalingová, there were fathers who became more involved in childcare and family, but they did so because of the situational demands rather than because of their attitudes. And even though the economic situation in 70's required an intensive engagement of both parents in childcare, the traditional opinions about mothers being biologically more suitable for parenthood remained unchanged. However, through the involvement in certain tasks (e.g. hanging nappies) these fathers opened a path towards the "new father" and were on the borderline between the traditional and involved father (Salingova, 2003). Thereby, it is obvious that the division of childcare and household labour during the socialist era does not mimic the situation as described in the previous chapter by western scholars regarding the challenged existence of the involved father.

It is credible to claim that because of the societal, political and economic changes as pointed out by Gal and Kligman (2000a) that occurred in the post-socialist countries fatherhood and motherhood in Slovakia was and is changing (e.g. Pascall, Kwak, 2005). Unfortunately, it seems that with the arrival of market economy and subsequent financial changes in family budgets this change is happening rather towards more traditional model than egalitarian. In particular, the change appears in the form of the breadwinner husband and

stay-at-home wife roles. What are the reasons for this turn towards the traditional path in the family?

The emergence of the breadwinner husband and stay-at-home wife concepts after the collapse of communism can be explained by the harsh conditions that mothers faced before 1989 not only in the form of the double (childcare and work) or triple (childcare, household labour and work) burden. The participation in the labour market was supposed to be achieved even at the possible costs of the mother-child relationship. As Šiklová indicates, the maternal leave was only four months long. After that working mothers had two fifteen minutes break for breastfeeding. (Šiklová, 1996) Compared to the fact that the parental roles and having a child are of highest importance for both sexes (Bútorová, 1996; Piscová, 2002) the market economy can be perceived as a way to put this attitude towards family into practice. Yet, this means something different for women than for men. The representative study about attitudes to gender roles and appropriate gender behaviour by Bútorová shows that the idea of male breadwinner is strongly rooted in Slovakian society and perceived as the most important aspect of masculinity. (Bútorová, 1996) The traditional perception of gender roles emerges also in other studies from Slovakia. (e.g. Didičová, Vendelová, 2001; Bausová, 2004)

However, the fact that the breadwinner role is perceived as the strongest aspect of masculinity does not necessarily mean that fatherhood is not changing. There are certain signs, unlike in the western literature that fatherhood in CEE countries is aiming towards greater involvement of fathers. Some studies indicate that fathers, while maintaining their breadwinner role, are engaging in the parenting tasks much more than fathers of previous generation. (Pascall, Kwak, 2005)

Yet, despite the indications of changing fatherhood it seems that the traditional perception of masculinity and femininity remains intact and with that the unequal division of household labour. As Bútorová's study shows the participation of men in the household labour is

minimal, women are performing much more labour in this regard. (see also Bausová, 2004) It is evident that while for men the role of the father means to provide for the family financially, helping children with homework and taking them to kindergarten/school, for women it is taking care of all the rest, i.e. cleaning, cooking, doing laundry or shopping. Yet, in some activities like cooking women do not even expect greater assistance from men. And while according to this last result of the study it could seem that women are satisfied with the unequal division of household labor, reality is different. When this study compares the actual and ideal of this division it finds out that men are satisfied with the fact that women are taking responsibility for almost all domestic tasks, i.e. men's ideal state of household division is close to their actual state. It can be concluded that in Slovakia men are greater supporters of the patriarchal form of the family including childcare and women express greater willingness to share parenthood than men. (Bútorová, 1996)

That women are more in favour of the equal division of household labour and childcare is advocated for also by more recent study. That men should participate more than they do now, both in the sphere of household work and of childcare, is expressed more strongly by women than by men. (Bahna, Kvapilová, 2007) So what are the reasons that despite women's openness to shared childcare and household tasks the situation does not change towards greater equality?

Among possible causes could be that, according to an international comparative study, 70% of people in Slovakia think that women are more suited to care for a child than men (Bausová, 2004) and the prevalence of previously mentioned traditional stance towards gender roles. However, what also can have a strong impact on women's greater share in childcare is the availability of childcare facilities. According to the report by Debrecéniová and Očenášová, in 1991 the state withdrew from the responsibility for childcare facilities. Currently, there is a deficiency of these facilities in Slovakia, in majority of towns and

municipalities only one kindergarten is available, which results in waiting lists for these facilities as well as in the establishment of private ones. (Debrecéniová, Očenášová, 2005)

Another reason can be women's situation in the labour market. Women work mainly in the secondary labor market that is characteristic with lower prestige and promotion opportunities. (Vodáková, Vodáková, 2003) Moreover, the feminised professions belong to those with lowest average salary. (Bútorová et.al., 2003). Women encounter the glass ceiling (Filadelfiová, 2002, s. 40), discrimination (Debrecéniová, Očenášová, 2005) and sexual harassment at workplace (Holubová, 2006). Concerning all these difficulties and barriers that women have to overcome at the workplace their decision to stay at home and devote themselves only to the family and household seems quite reasonable.

So far I have mainly presented statistical data connected to household and family sphere, since these are the kind of data mainly available in this concern. But what is the experience of women and men as parents living in these families? Let us now look at the narratives of mothers and fathers as presented in the empirical research from Slovakia and Czech republic.

One of the researches that addresses motherhood in this region is a qualitative study drawing on interviews with eight mothers from various social backgrounds. According to the accounts given in the interviews, women experience motherhood differently. While some women identify with mothering and childcare, others express the need for their autonomy regardless of motherhood. Additionally, motherhood is perceived as a special relationship between the mother and the child but also as source of dissatisfaction rising from stereotypical activities or the underinvolvement of fathers. (Bartlová, 2007) Thus, motherhood can be experienced as an enriching relationship as well as a source of frustration.

The diversity of the motherhood experience emerges as well in the study by Didičová and Vendelová (2001). However, these authors also emphasize the discrepancy between the myth of motherhood and the reality. Women in their study describe negative experience from

giving birth, feelings of unbearable fear and insuperable societal barriers. Despite these difficulties that they have to overcome all of them identify with the maternal role without any doubts and they perceive motherhood and childcare as natural. Additionally, notwithstanding this perception of motherhood, women experience being on the parental leave rather negatively. According to the authors, this is because the parental leave is characteristic with lack of stimulus, lack of social contacts, lack of freedom, lack of possibility to change everyday activities and duties and slowing down of a woman's career. (Didičová, Vendelová, 2001)

The previously mentioned results demonstrate that the experience of motherhood is clearly influenced by the societal conditions in which women or men are parents. Using the work by Davies and Welch (1986), it is not mothering as such that creates the negative experience but rather mothering under certain conditions. Thus in a situation when it is required that mothers have to spend all their time with the child to secure her/his development, when there are few possibilities for women with small children to travel from one place to another, when the society is not used to see women breastfeeding children in the public so they are tied up to their homes, then it is very likely that women on parental leave will experience the damaging feelings as depicted above.

The availability of original empirical data on fatherhood that would rest on fathers' narratives in Slovakia is rather scarce. One of the few studies that deals with fatherhood through interviews is Šalingová's work on motherhood and fatherhood in the 1970's Czechoslovakia. Her interviews, conducted with parents who raised children at that time, illustrate the experience of fathers and mothers of the socialist era. If I can infer from these fathers' narratives, being a father for them meant to provide help and assistance in the child rearing only when needed. Assistance is the key word here, because that is how men described their parental role. Further, they did not express any interest for the child during the

pregnancy, were not present at the delivery and left the newborn child solely to the care of the mother. The parental role of these men included providing material care and technical tasks connected to childcare (e.g. preparing the cradle). However, as Šalingová claims, even these activities demonstrate a shift in the paternal role compared to the previous generation of fathers. (Šalingová, 2003) Šalingová's work demonstrates that fatherhood in Slovakia is changing and the results of my research compared to her will only support that.

In this part I have addressed the emergence of the breadwinner husband and stay-at-home wife concepts together with factors like the economic situation, perception of gender roles and inequality at the labour market that shape this process. Moreover, I have also assessed the concept of changing father in the CEE region and in particular, in Slovakia. I will now turn to theories that guide the conduct of parenthood including the attachment theory by Bowlby and the psychoanalytical approach by Chodorow. Psychoanalytical or psychological theories influenced parents also in 1970's (Šalingová, 2003) and they appeared also in the narratives of parents in my research.

3. THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO PARENTING

In this part I will elaborate on some of the theoretical approaches to parenthood starting with John Bowlby who emphasized the importance of maternal care and the attachment between mother and child and who, in a great way, influenced the way we think about the proper conduct of parenthood even today. I will then proceed to Nancy Chodorow who refused Bowlby's approach to exclusive mothering but still maintained that mothers are more inclined towards maternal/parental care than men. I chose these two approaches because of the educations of my interviewees who had mainly university degree from humanities (psychology, pedagogy) and who sometimes openly referred to these theories. Finally, I will address the theory of parenthood by Kathleen Gerson (1985) and Barbara Risman (1987) who

instead of focusing on individual pulls towards parenthood concentrate on wider social forces that influence who ends up as a primary caretaker.

Bowlby's theory of maternal deprivation was first introduced at the beginning of 1950s¹. It builds on Freud's theory of deprivation according to which the dissatisfaction of a child's need may have extensive negative psychological effects. The novelty of Bowlby's approach consists of substituting maternal deprivation for oral deprivation. The main assumption of his maternal deprivation theory is that maternal care is essential for the healthy development of children and if not provided it can lead to serious mental health problems. (Flanagan, 1999) This produces immense demands for mothers and can even result into feelings of guilt and failure if anything goes wrong with the child.

Bowlby's theory of attachment was presented at the end of 1960's and it draws on ethological studies that see attachment behaviour as innate and adaptive. According to the theory of attachment "*both* infant and caregiver are innately programmed to form attachments: the infant has innate behaviours which elicit caregiving and the caregiver is innately programmed to respond". (Flanagan, 1999, p.100, emphasis original) The behaviour that elicits caregiving includes sucking, clinging, smiling, crying and following with clinging and following being the most important of all. (Bretherton, 1993) What can be concluded from the previous quotation is that both the child and the mother (even though it does not mention explicitly that it is the mother) have some natural instincts that push them towards forming the attachment with one another. According to Hays (1998), it is precisely the theory of attachment that serves as the base for the idea of maternal instinct.

Another issue that is emphasized in the attachment theory is the importance of one primary caregiver to whom the child can attach. Moreover, the attachment has to happen before the child reaches the age of two and a half. After that stage the child is no longer able to form an

¹ When elaborating on Bowlby's theories I will be using only secondary sources because of the unavailability of original sources.

attachment with another person. The proposed negative outcomes of the absence of attachment, based on the empirical research by Mary D. Ainsworth, are various from feelings of insecurity and higher dependency on others to effects on cognitive development. (Flanagan, 1999)

Bowlby's theory, supported by Ainsworth's research, has been criticized for his exclusive focus on mothers in his studies (e.g. Eyre, 1992) as well as for his idea that childcare with one primary caregiver is the best (e.g. Chodorow, 1978). Further, his theory was accused of resting "on a set of essentialist, biologically determinist, and fundamentally gendered assumptions". (Hays, 1998, p.783) Finally, the main weak point of the attachment theory is that from all the possible causes that can affect negatively child's development it concentrates only on maternal deprivation. (Hays, 1998) Thus, it creates a cause-effect relationship between maternal behaviour and future well-being of the child and through that imposes a huge amount of responsibility upon mothers.

Flanagan states, in Bowlby's defence, that Bowlby never claimed that the person providing maternal care has to be the mother. (Flanagan, 1999) In this regard, Bowlby's theories are significant because they emphasize the quality of maternal care regardless of parent's gender. As such they are supportive of my stance that both of the parents are suitable to become primary caregivers.

However, one could ask why Bowlby used the word maternal instead of general parental. And by the look on some of Bowlby's earlier work it is obvious he was explicitly speaking solely about mothers.

Having once been helped to recognize and recapture the feelings which she herself had as a child and to find that they are accepted tolerantly and understandingly, a *mother* will become increasingly sympathetic and tolerant toward the same things in her child." (as cited in Beherton. 1993, p.10-11, emphasis added)

Further, to support his findings regarding attachment theory, he used his observations only of the interaction between children and mothers and not also between children and fathers. (see e.g. Bretherton, 1993) According to Eyre 90% of all the attachment research has been done only on mothers. (as cited in Hays, 1998) Maybe, Bowlby did not intend to accent only the relationship between mother and child but since this was the sole relationship he focused on in his studies it produced an idea, that this was the relationship that stood above all others. Yet, despite this criticism, Bowlby's theories represent significant contribution for the conduct of parenthood because of their emphasis on nurturing and caring parental behaviour for the well-being of a child.

To reflect the criticism on Bowlby some scholars developed their own approaches to parenthood. Chodorow belongs to those scholars who condemn the idea of exclusive mothering while stating that it is women who are mostly the primary caregivers. Using psychoanalytical theory, she looks at ways women socially reproduce and are reproduced by mothering. Women become the primary caretakers because they have been cared for by women and because the maturing process among girls involves the identification with their mother. Boys have been also cared for by women, but they, in order to become men, have to refuse the identification with the mother. Moreover, since boys lack a masculine figure because the father is engaging in outside activities they do not have a role model to identify with. Instead of that they learn how to be "men" from images of masculinity they see around them. Thus while women identify through relationships with others, men do so through separation from others. (Chodorow, 1978)

This approach represents a new insight on the reasons why women engage so intensively in mothering. Yet, because Chodorow addresses only nuclear families with both parents she omits situations where single fathers raise girls. According to the logic of her approach, this would lead to a situation in which boys raised by single fathers would engage more

intensively in fathering because they would have a nurturing paternal figure to identify with. I do not believe this is the case. Who becomes the primary caregiver and under which conditions is influenced by wider social factors than just the gender of the previous parent. Nevertheless, Chodorow repeatedly points out the importance of equal sharing of childcare as well as that the primary caretaker does not have to be a woman, which is one of the reasons why her book still remains of great significance.

Among theories that concentrate more on wider social factors that influence parenting is the developmental approach by Gerson (1985). While acknowledging the importance of the childhood experience, i.e. the socialization theory, Gerson looks at why in a situation of competing expectations women choose one norm or goal over another. According to her theory the reason is that “people’s motives, goals and capacities develop” as people move through various social stages and situation in which they have to make biding decisions. (p.37) Further, to understand the reasons for women’s behaviour we have to look as how they develop over their life course. Gerson uses this approach as a theoretical basis for her research on how women decide to stay at home or to pursue a career. (Gerson, 1985)

While Gerson applies the developmental approach to her own research, the findings of her study seem also to support the microstructural theory by Risman (1987). Risman criticizes the individualist perspective of gender relations including Chodorow’s theory and the socialization theory. According to Risman the weak point of these theories is the focus on internalised behaviour traits, rather than social relations as the explanation for gendered behaviour. She proposes new “microstructural theory” according to which “most differences between women and men arise from differential experiences, opportunities, and access to social networks”. (Risman, 1987, p.9) In this approach, behaviour is not established by childhood socialization but it is rather the result of social interaction. Through her study about single fathers she supports her hypothesis that “situational demands and embeddedness” are

“better predictors of the mothering behaviour²” than the socialization theory. Risman demonstrates that fathers, once put in a situation where they have to become primary caretakers, are capable of childrearing in the same way as mothers. She concludes that our expectation of men to do as much childcare as women is a prerequisite for a significant change in parenting. (Risman, 1987)

The parallel between Risman’s theory and Gerson’s research results is that Gerson finds out that what pulls women out of domesticity towards pursuing a carrier is the “instability in male-female relationship, perceived pressures on the family economy, dissatisfaction with domesticity and expanded work-place opportunities (p.70). Additionally, among the reasons why women decide to stay at home are also blocked work opportunities. (Gerson, 1985) I believe these motives clearly fall among women and men’s different opportunities and social networks as mentioned by Risman (1987).

Other scholars further support the stance of Risman and Gerson. For example Coltrane too stresses that parenting is determined by wider social conditions. If women and men had the same recourses and met the same sort of demands and concerns they would act the same way. But they do not share the same resources and demands especially when they have children. (Coltrane, 1998) Thus, in a society that provides men and women with different opportunities, the decisions about family and work together with parenting conduct are bound to be gender differentiated

Yet, despite the importance of addressing wider societal circumstances as emphasized by Risman and Gerson, or the weak points of Bowlby’s and Chodorow’s theories, it cannot be claimed that one stance is more appropriate or better than the other. Rather, it can be concluded that the combination of all theories as presented in this chapter constitutes the actual behavioural pattern of parents.

² The word mothering behaviour stands here for the nurturing and caring behaviour mostly conducted by mothers.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. *Symbolic interactionism*

There are two main methods I will be using in my study. First is the method of symbolic interactionism as presented by Blumer (1969). This method was already extensively used in researches concerning parenthood. (e.g. Backett, 1987; McMahon, 1995; Doucet, 2004) The main premises of this method are: “human beings act towards things on the basis of the meaning that the things have for them”; “the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interactions”; “these things are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters” (Blumer, 1969, p.2).

Of particular importance for my research are the first two premises since they specifically concern meaning. Additionally, according to Blumer, the meaning of an object influences how a person sees the object, how she/he acts toward it and how she/he talks about it. (Blumer, 1969) Thus, since interviewing embraces talking it allows the researcher to get to the meaning of children and parenthood through capturing parents’ narratives. Further, because meaning of an object is expressed through one’s behaviour the meaning of a child for a person can be deduced from how one acts towards this child. Consequently, I apply the method of symbolic interactionism in constructing the results’ categories that encompass behaviour, namely spending time with the child and taking responsibility for the child.

4.2 *Interviewing*

In my research I collected the data through semi-structured open-ended interviews. I chose the interview as a method because it allows the researcher to get to the meanings and understanding as constructed by the subject. The aim of my research is not give voice to a particular group of people, because as Riesmann states “we cannot give voice since we do not

have direct access to another's experience" (as cited in Hollway, Jefferson, 2001). The inner worlds of the research subjects "cannot be understood without knowledge of their experience in the world" and "subjects experiences of the world cannot be understood without knowledge of the way in which their inner worlds allow them to experience the outer world". Thus the research subject can be known only through another subject – the researcher. (Hollway, Jefferson, 2001, p.4)

However, I am aware of the fact, that "interview cannot be divorced from the circumstances of its creation" and that interview is a result of the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. (Grele, 1998 p.44) This leads to one of the possible influences to result of my research. Since I separately interviewed mothers and fathers, to prevent the possible impact that the presence of one's partner could have on the answer of another, the different outcomes of these interviews may be also a result from the different interaction between me and the interviewee rather than from the difference in experience. As Denzin puts it "gender filters knowledge" (as cited in Fontana, Frey, 2003, p.64). Thus, the differences in parents' narratives may be produced by the different level of willingness between women and men to share their experience with a female researcher.

The research by Kane and Macaulay (1993) shows that the gender of the interviewer can influence interviewee's response. For example, in questions regarding gender-attitude respondents expressed more critical view to the female interviewer than to the male interviewer. Or the responses of the male interviewee varied according to the interviewers' gender when discussing a more common topic. However, when comparing their study with previous ones, Kane and Macaulay point out that the gender-effect may differ according to the questions analysed. Moreover, the above-mentioned results should not be viewed as errors of the survey process, but rather as "reflections of the nature of social interaction and as suggestive evidence regarding how gender shapes such interaction" (Kane, Macaulay. 1993,

p.24). For example, most of my interviews with fathers were much longer, in some cases even three times longer, than the ones conducted with mothers. This different outcome of the interviews may be shaped by several factors including my own greater interest in fathers' narratives, fathers' greater willingness to share their experience in a field that is not traditionally regarded as men's domain or the fact that they are interviewed by a female researcher.

While interviewing, I used the approach to interviewing proposed by Oakley (1981). I tried to avoid using interview as "pseudo-conversation" (Oakley, 1981, p.32), to engage in a non-hierarchical relation with the interviewee through putting my own identity in the relationship, which also embraces answering interviewees' questions. This attitude is helpful when establishing rapport. (Oakley, 1981) Thus, I always gave the interviewees space to ask their own questions which sometimes resulted in fruitful discussion.

Before conducting the interviews in April, I carried out two test interviews to assure the understandability of the interview questions. Consequently, on the basis of these two interviews I slightly modified some of my interview questions. During the month of April and at the beginning of May, I obtained twenty semi-structured interviews with parents (10 mothers and 10 fathers) who have a child under the age of three and live in the capital of Slovakia, Bratislava. All but two parents have only one child. I recorded and transcribed all interviews. Both parents were asked the same questions starting with an introductory warm-up question about their average day, then proceeding to their parental role and the personal change caused by parenthood and ending with their approach to childrearing. (see Appendix)

In designing the research questions I was influenced by several studies (e.g. Lupton, Barclay, 1997) but mostly by the research on motherhood by McMahon (1995), who investigated the experience of motherhood among middle-class mothers. I used three of her research questions namely: What were parents' expectations of parenthood compared to their

actual experiences? How do parents decide about having children? How do parents perceive their parental role? However, because McMahon does not list her research questions in her book, her research questions as presented in this paper are just deduced.

I also applied one of her interview questions, however, it did not prove very useful for me since many of the participants had problems answering it so I had to rephrase it. Thus, instead of asking parents how would they feel if they never had children I asked them what do they associate with childfree people.

The average age of both mothers and fathers is 29 years. All but two of the interviewees have a university degree predominantly from humanities (psychology, pedagogy) and they are all middle class professionals. In all cases the mother is staying on parental leave. I limited the research sample according to the above-mentioned characteristics because of various reasons. I decided to interview predominantly parents with a child under three, because this age offers the most intensive parenting experience since the child is constantly under the parents' care. I restricted the number of children to one because the parental experience changes after the arrival of second child. (see e.g. Lupton, Barclay, 1997) Further, I focused on university-educated people to achieve the homogeneity of the sample and control variables that can determine parenting practices and experience. Another reason for choosing only middle-class couples was that fathers from this group are more often involved in childcare in a greater way than working-class fathers. (see e.g. Chorvat, 1999)

To find the needed amount of parents I used the snowballing sampling technique starting with parents from my own environment. However, this method did not prove very useful so I contacted mothers' centers, which proved bit more effective. I also posted advertisements on several Internet forums. Unfortunately, I did not find any parents through this channel.

Regarding the ethics of my research all participants were familiarised with the purpose and basic information about the research. All were provided with informed consent that specified their rights during the interview together with the contact address of the researcher. This consent was signed by both parties.

For the analysis of the data I used the cluster method. According to this method the statements and claims from the interviews are put into groups on the basis of shared characteristic for example, a theme or a space. (Miovsky, 2006) First, I extracted from the transcripts constituent elements. Then I divided them into categories namely spending time with the child, taking responsibility for the child, the decision to have a child, expectations from parenthood, the experience of parental role and experiencing personal change. These categories were consequently integrated into two main domains: meaning as defined by Blumer (1969) and parental experience.

I do not intend to present the interview findings as “objective facts”. I am conscious of the fact that the interviews and their results are not only shaped by how the interviewee perceives me, but also how I, as the interviewer, enter this process with pre-constructed ideas about what the interviewee will tell me. As Denzin points out “value-free interpretive research is impossible, (...), every researcher brings his or her own preconceptions and interpretations to the problem being studied” (Denzin, 2001, p.43). Therefore, through collecting as well as interpreting data I used self-reflexivity to avoid the trap of “self-fulfilling prophecy”.

5. MOTHERS AND FATHERS OR JUST PARENTS?

In this chapter I will assess the meaning and experience of parenthood. By analysing interviews with mothers and fathers I will address the meaning of parenthood for women and men, what role models their use in childrearing, their expectations from parenthood, how do

they decide about having children and how do they develop parental identities. (see Appendix for interview questions)

This chapter is divided into two parts, first of them examines the meaning of parenthood through two categories namely “Spending time with the child” and “Taking responsibility for the child”. The second part represents the experience of parenting by looking at the process of making the decision to have a child, expectations from parenthood, the experience of parental role and personal change. In the analysis of each category I focus on the similarities and difference between women and men. Originally, I had expected to find more of the former than latter. However, the results of the interviews made me change my initial expectations. Thus, on the basis of interviews’ excerpts, I will demonstrate that the alleged importance of being a parent in women and men’s narratives is quite similar for both genders. Yet, despite that, the way mothers and fathers enact this importance in their paternal behaviour is characteristic with greater involvement of the former, which leads to different meaning and experience of parenthood for women and men.

5.1 What does it mean to be a parent?

According to the method of symbolic interactionism the way people act towards certain things expresses the meaning these things have for them. (Blumer, 1969) I will use this method as a tool for accessing the meaning of parenthood and of children for parents through these parents’ behaviour as described in their narratives. Consequently, the results’ categories that express the meaning of parenthood will focus on the parental behaviour, in particular spending time with the child and feeling responsibility for the child.

In this part I will answer one of my research questions namely: What does it mean to be a parent for women and men in terms of their parental behaviour? On the basis of previous

research (see e.g. Coltrane, 1998) I expect that the meaning of parenthood for women and men as deduced from their parental behaviour will be more different than similar.

5.1.1 Spending time with the child

Since all mothers in my research are on the parental leave, their day always starts when the child wakes up. Mostly, the first thing these mothers do is to nurse/feed the child. After that they start to take care of the child simultaneously engaging in domestic tasks like cleaning and cooking. While the child is asleep mothers devote themselves either to household labour or they try to relax and do leisure activities chiefly reading.

She sleeps on the balcony (...), I mostly eat, rest, have a coffee, I sit for a while, I read, mostly for 15-30 minutes and then my activity begins. I clean up the whole flat: mostly I tidy up, iron or do whatever is needed. (Michaela, 26 years)³

That women have to combine several tasks to make use of the little time they have available and to manage all their responsibilities is illustrated already by Didičová and Vendelová (2001). Moreover, it is obvious that caring for the child is connected to a greater share of domestic labour for women. The fact that the birth of the first child produces a traditional division of household labour was already demonstrated by previous researchers. (see e.g. Sanchez, Thomson, 1997; Coltrane, 1998) Yet, it is questionable if one can claim that women themselves perceive this division as unequal or unfair. Previous studies have shown that whether women perceive the household division as fair or unfair is independent of how much time they devote to the chores or childcare compared to their partners. (Baxter, 2000, Thompson, 1991 as cited in Chorvat, 2006) Also McMahon demonstrates that it is much more important if women perceive the division legitimate rather than equal. (McMahon, 1995) That most women in my study do not voice feelings of unfairness with the current

³ The translation of the interview excerpts was done by myself.

division of household labour, despite the seemingly obvious inequity, indicates that the statements of Baxter (2000) or McMahon (1995) may be plausible.

Unlike mothers, only few fathers begin their day with the child. Most of them leave work before the child wakes up. One of these early leaving fathers hardly mentions his child at all while giving account of his average working day. Yet, three fathers take the child away from the mother in the morning either on a regular basis or during the weekends.

He [the child] starts to make noises in the early morning so I take him to a different room and let her [the wife] to get a bit more sleep. (Juraj, 25 years)

The level of involvement in childcare changes for some fathers when they return home. They take strolls with baby carriages or change nappies. In one case, as soon as he gets home, the father takes over childcare so that the mother has some time for her paid work activities. Yet, there is not one pattern among fathers and their involvement after work ranges from almost none to an intensive engagement in childcare.

Interestingly enough, as a tool for demonstrating that their involvement is satisfactory, some fathers compare themselves with others.

I also watch other fathers, my acquaintances. ... I hope that it is not just my ego, but it seems to me that I invest much more into it [fatherhood]. (Karol, 26)

This comparison to other men and not to their wives enables these men to view their involvement as praiseworthy and significant (Gerson, 1993) and thus it creates a cover-up for the inequality in the household. (e.g. Beckett, 1987)

What all fathers in this study have in common concerning childcare is that they all give bath to their child. Even fathers, that are otherwise involved on a very little basis give bath to their child although not regularly and in cases when giving the bath is described as unusual (e.g. in a big bathtub or connected to activities like diving).

Another aspect that fathers share in their accounts when speaking about being with the child is that they often talk only about playing with the child. Only one father elaborates on

the care of his child in detail mentioning acts like cleaning the nose or ears. When left alone with the child, several fathers mention activities like child minding or just being there while the child plays. The important aspect of activities like playing or childminding is, as LaRossa and LaRossa (1989) point out that they do not require as much attention as activities falling under carework like feeding or changing the diaper. Moreover, these activities enable fathers to devote time to their own hobbies simultaneously for example to reading.

Except the difference in how, when and for how long women and men engage in childcare there are two more dissimilarities regarding the amount of time for one's free time activities and the option to refuse participation in certain tasks.

Most women have time for themselves only when the child is asleep. Only two women attend outside activities while the child stays at home. Just one of the women keeps partly her job commitments, working either at home or taking the child with her. Fathers, on the other hand, more often find enough time to devote themselves to free time activities such as windsurfing, going to mountains, playing football or skiing. The difference between doing one's free time activities at home and outside, is as LaRossa states, that the person staying at home, in this case the woman, is constantly accessible for the child. (LaRossa, 1988) Thus, reading or relaxing at home while the child sleeps is not qualitatively equal with being able to do the same without the child nearby.

Women's reasoning for not attending activities outside the home without the child is that they are breastfeeding hence they cannot leave the child with somebody else. Behind the reluctance to leave the child with another person can also lie the assumption that the child constantly needs her/his mother, especially in early childhood. This assumption appears also in the narratives of men when they differentiate between motherhood and fatherhood. I address this factor later on. Yet, I believe that the different amount of time that parents have for their hobbies can be influenced by their life priorities. If fathers are able and willing to

keep these activities even after the birth of their child it is clear that to find the time to relax is among the highest priorities of these men, even if they claim otherwise. Moreover, they have the choice to do so while mothers do not. What I mean by this is, in the words of LaRossa and LaRossa, that the difference between women and men in their parental behaviour towards their children is influenced by their difference in power, commitment and ideology. (LaRossa, LaRossa, 1989) Women may experience less power in the relationship stemming from their economic dependence on the husband. (see e.g. Gerson, 1985) Further, the ideology guiding the parental conduct is different for women and men, i.e., while it is acceptable for the father to give preference to his own free time activities for the mother it is not.

The difference in power, ideology and commitment between mothers and fathers as demonstrated by LaRossa and LaRossa (1989) may also influence the fact that men can refuse performing certain childcare tasks. While all women in my research carry out everything that is needed concerning childcare a few fathers claim that some childcare activities they just do not perform.

I change nappies only when she [the partner] is not there, only when it is urgent. Otherwise, she is quite the professional in that department. (Juraj, 25 years)

Similar situation is also in the case of household tasks. Although here some women openly declare that they do not do some tasks, their reasoning for that differs from men's.

He [the husband] does the dusting, I don't dust, I just hate dusting. (Eva, 30)
I would Hoover but she [the wife] always hoovers at such weird times. (Karol, 26)

These differences between women and men, especially in the case of childcare, may indicate that women have less power to choose what they will or will not do and higher commitment to do everything that is required.

Also in Gerson's study emerge fathers who avoid responsibility for domestic tasks and develop similar justifications as those mentioned-above for their selective involvement. Through these justifications, or rationales as Gerson names them, fathers are able to manage

the costs of involved fatherhood and not feel guilty about shifting such costs to their wives. (Gerson, 1993) I align with Gerson's stance, however, I believe that these justifications could be described also as rationalizations instead of Gerson's rationales, to capture the dynamic character of this process.

Yet, one should be cautious in blaming solely men for their selective involvement because it is also influenced by wider social circumstances. Among these circumstances are the missing expectations from men to engage on a greater level as pointed out by Risman (1987), the breadwinner ideology, the ostracism that men can experience when taking on greater share of childcare (see e.g. Šmídová, 2004) and also the fact that new models of fatherhood are not encouraged in the public sphere (Radimská, 2002). To conclude, there are not enough factors that would increase men's willingness to give up their privileges at home, which is also influenced by the lack of social and structural support for male parenting. (Gerson, 1985)

5.1.2 Taking responsibility

In this part I will provide interview excerpts that offer answers to my first research question: What does it mean to be a parent for women and men in terms of their parental behaviour? Additionally, I will also address my second research questions: Do mothers and fathers differ in the role models that they apply in the rearing practices? I decided to include this question because of the findings from previous research on fatherhood (e.g. Gerson, 1993; Lupton, Barclay, 1997) that demonstrate the influence of men's own fathers on their later paternal behaviour. In particular, several men in both of these studies indicate willingness to resemble or to be different from their own fathers and I expect that the same instance will appear also in my study.

Responsibility, as LaRossa claims, means "who is accountable for the child's welfare and care". (LaRossa, 1988, p.452) As Oakley points out responsibility is the key issue in

childcare. Even in families with an equal division of household labour and childcare mothers and not fathers are the ones who are judged for the appearance (e.g. clothes, behaviour) of their children. (as cited in Lewis, O'Brien, 1987) When something goes wrong with the child “mothers are blamed, or blame themselves, for not caring enough” (McMahon, 1995, p.209). Thus, mothers are the ones responsible for the child's well-being and development, which may be also the result of Bowlby's theories about attachment and maternal deprivation.

Women in my research start to take on more responsibility right after they find out they are pregnant. They read books about childrearing, magazines and go to preparation courses. Men, unlike women, do not prepare for the child's arrival. Only one of the fathers read books and materials about a child before the childbirth. Mostly, fathers take part in one antenatal class since it is the prerequisite for their involvement at the delivery. Consequently, all of the fathers in my study are present at the delivery, except those whose wives deliver through caesarean section. Their presence suggests that the conduct of fatherhood is changing since in the 70's men's presence at the delivery was rather a rarity. (Šalingová, 2003) Men's justification for not reading books for parents is as following.

My wife bought me the book “Father at the delivery” but I did not read it. Strictly speaking, I did not even open it. I am not that much into reading. (Andrej, 26 years)

Further, men's reasoning includes pleading the higher expertise of their wife, wife's previous education or men's own previous psychological education. I am not proposing that psychological education is an insufficient base for parenting, however, it is interesting that also women who had similar educational background, i.e. psychology or pedagogy searched for supplementary information about parenthood.

Also LaRossa and LaRossa (1989) discover the lower preparation of some fathers-to-be during the wife's pregnancy. According to these authors, this is the first sign of the later lower involvement of fathers' and their positioning as helpers. Many fathers will read parents manual only because of the wife's persuasion. Finally, the greater preparation of the mother

will result in a situation, where she will be perceived as greater expert on the childcare and “in charge of the baby”. (LaRossa, LaRossa, 1989, p.144) Thus, the preparing or not preparing for the child’s arrival influences the division of childcare after the baby is born. And although I did not find such a clear-cut cause-effect relationship between preparation for the baby’s arrival and the actual involvement of fathers as LaRossa and LaRossa (1989), it seems that it can be one of the factors that affect fathers’ later engagement.

Once women become mothers another issue that arises as a part of responsibility is the already mentioned breastfeeding. All women view breastfeeding as essential for the well-being of the child as well as for the relationship between mother and child and some of them support their claims with reference to the psychological literature they read regarding parenting. Using the psychoanalytic or psychological discourse as an argument for greater involvement of mothers is nothing new in Slovakia and was already demonstrated by previous research. (e.g. Šalingová, 2003) Further, for my respondents breastfeeding serves also as an argument for the decision why the mother stays at home and not the father.

Breastfeeding is the most important thing to me. If I have enough milk I will breastfeed for at least year and a half, because that’s the way attachment is formed and I could not give the child to my husband, saying “here you are, I am going to earn money” - no way. (Maria, 30 years)

The significance of breastfeeding appears in all mothers’ narratives, which can be the relic of the Slovakian past. As Šalingová states, during socialism the willingness to nurse one’s child was regarded as a sign of motherhood and maternal love. A mother, who was willing to sacrifice her self, supposed to nurse the child under any circumstance and breastfeeding was one of the factors on the basis of which the maternity was judged. (Šalingová, 2003) As already Šalingová’s quote indicates the importance of breastfeeding is culturally bounded. (see also Badinter, 1998) Further, the seeming significance of nursing can have implicit social meanings, i.e. it may arise as a result of economic demands for women to stay at home.

The importance of creating an attachment in the early childhood mentioned by mothers appears also in the refusal of giving the child to a third person to take care of, either to nursery or to a paid baby sitter.

I am definitely not the kind of parent who would put the child into nursery - that is out of question; into kindergarten yes, because the first two years are the most important for the mother and child regarding development. (Maria, 30 years)

What comes up in these narratives is that mothers, if their relatives do not live in the same city, have very few opportunities where to leave the child, in the words of one of the participants *there is no place to leave the child*. When there is lack of state nurseries as in the case of Slovakia, private services are too expensive and relatives are far away mothers find themselves in a very isolated state. This unavailability of childcare facilities may be also one reason why these women speak so reluctantly about giving the child to somebody's else care. Another reason can be, as Didičová and Vendelová (2001) state, the mentality and social norms that do not approve of leaving the child with a "stranger" before reaching certain age. Thus, the importance of breastfeeding as well as the reluctance to consign the child into the care of an unrelated person is created culturally and supported by "scientific" literature as well as by the inaccessibility of childcare services.

Feelings of responsibility for the well-being of child manifest themselves also in the regular cleaning of the house:

I Hoover every day, because she is starting to crawl so I Hoover. (Zuzana, 26 years)

Or in the activities that mothers do with their children. They do not merely play with children but they stimulate their development and growth.

A have one book, ..., and it is really great, there are various games and activities for motoric development in it, so I use that. (Zuzana, 26 years)

Through using guidebooks how to stimulate child's growth and how to secure her/his proper development women rely heavily on the advice of experts. This practice is also

pointed out by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) who claim that contemporary mothers rely on the expert advice in a far greater way than their parents did.

Additionally, the reliance of mothers on experts' books is present also in the field of childrearing. Fathers mostly keep their previous approach meaning not reading any materials. Importantly, several men claim that instead of reading help manuals they deal with rearing rather on an intuitive base. In this way they completely lean on themselves and on their judgement what is good for the child. The reasons for this can be that they are under less pressure to rear the child without making any mistakes, because they are not the ones who will be blamed for the possible faults. However, what brings women and men together regarding childrearing practices is the predominant refusal of the approach to childrearing as practiced by the previous generation. Only one woman claims that in the first place she would ask for help her own mother. Further, no men in this study perceive their fathers as role models in the conduct of fatherhood as did men in the research by Gerson (1993) or Lupton and Barclay (1997).

Finally, some women do not only adopt greater responsibility for the child but also for the amount of time the child spend with her/his father.

I mostly try to clean during the week so that on Saturday we will have time for a trip, for the family. (Henrieta, 34)

By arranging their daily plan to have enough time for cleaning, so that the partner does not have to participate in it during the weekend, these women take on them the responsibility for how much time the father will actually spend with the child. I find this rather problematic, because that way women enable men to engage in more pleasurable activities and skip the work that is included in childcare and household.

Overall, these mothers are responsible for all aspects of childcare, they develop children's skills, put children's well-being at the first place and are also the ones who take the child to the doctor and keep tracks of things that are needed to buy for the child. These findings

correspond with Coltrane's claim that women assume major responsibility for all children's needs. They spend much more time than fathers "feeding, dressing, cleaning and keeping infants and toddlers safe" and they engage in these activities twice or three times more than fathers. (Coltrane, 1998, p.98) A strong feeling of responsibility for everything emerges also in study by Didičová and Vendelová (2001). Women in this study feel responsible even while being away from children e.g. on a trip and they cannot get free from the psychical attachment to children. Didičová and Vendelová see this as a result of the fact that it is mainly women, who bear responsibility for making decision inside the family. (Didičová, Venedelová, 2001)

That all women in my study become the primary caretakers can be influenced by several things, one of them is, according to Gerson (1985), the income inequality which the participants in my study often give as the reason for deciding that the mother should stay at home and not the father. At the same time caring for children and providing them assistance in development brings with it rewards. As Coltrane points out childcare provides a feeling that one is needed together with fulfilment that one cannot gain from different activity. (Coltrane, 1998) And while this last statement by Coltrane may be rather the expression of maternal ideology's presence in the academia, women and men in my study often refer to motherhood as the "time of my life" or as "the best thing that ever happen to me".

Finally, my first hypothesis that being a parent means something fundamentally different for women and men can be confirmed. The difference is acted out through the quantity and quality of childcare and household tasks that mothers and fathers engage in. Further, this difference reveals itself in the level of responsibility that parents take for the well-being of the child. And while for women being a mother means being responsible for everything from the cleanliness of the house to the development of the child, for men being a father in most cases means engaging in enjoyable childcare activities and providing financially for the family. Yet, it is important to point out that these different meanings of parenthood for women and men

may be also determined by my own pre-conception about the division of childcare and household tasks. I expected that women would do more than men in childcare or household and while reflecting on the interview process I realized that these pre-conceptions might have oriented the focus of my analysis in a particular direction.

My second hypothesis regarding the role models that parents use in childrearing cannot be confirmed since only one woman refers to her own mother as a role model in this regard. Consequently, the answer to my second research question is that women, together with men, do not apply their own parents as role models in childrearing. However, women rely more on the advice of experts while men approach childrearing rather intuitively.

5.2 How does it feel to be a parent?

This part of my analysis assesses the experience of parenthood. This experience is captured in following categories: the decision to have a child, expectations of parenthood, how women and men develop self-conceptions as parents and experiencing personal change. Each of these categories stands for one research question.

5.2.1 The decision to have a child

In this part I will answer the following research question: How do parents decide about having children? This question is from McMahon's study. By this question, McMahon explores what are the factors that influence the decision to have a child (e.g. age, financial security, stable relationship). (McMahon, 1995)

Similarly to McMahon's research also in my study appear women that are hesitant to become mothers and to the question why they decide to do so some of them reply:

I never was such a motherly type that I would long to have children before reaching twenty. But when I got married, then I started to want having kids, I perceived is as natural; I thought that it was part of the package. (Beata, 30 years)

Not only these women hesitate to make the decision about having a child but also the impulse to do so came from their husbands. Interestingly, the acknowledgment that he is the one who pushed for the child is reflected only in the narrative of one father. Further, corresponding to Gerson's research (1985), what can also influence women's decision to bear a child is their experience on the labour market. Working in an unsatisfactory job or being fired after going on maternal leave can reinforce women's decision of staying at home and for how long.

There are of course also women, who claim that they always wanted to be mothers. As McMahon point out to say that they always wanted to have a child "represents a particular kind of identity claim. Women who had 'always wanted' a child were emphasizing the noncontingent nature of their maternal desire and locating it in something unchanging in themselves" (McMahon, 1995, p.54) Thus, to state that the maternal desire was always there allows women to create a maternal identity, to recognize themselves as mothers.

Significantly, there are almost no fathers who express hesitancy or willingness to postpone having a child and two fathers claim that they always wanted to have a child. One reason for this could be that the actual costs of parenthood are higher for men than for women in the form of putting of carrier.

What is interesting here is that even fathers who declare a strong desire for having a child are very little involved after the child arrives. This can be caused by the perceptions of the paternal role among fathers, i.e. what they perceive as paternal role does not include every day intensive care for the infant. Moreover, this discrepancy between the alleged strong desire for a child and the actual involvement can be explained by Chorvat's claim, according to which the changes regarding fatherhood happen more in the sphere of attitudes than behaviour. (Chorvat, 1999)

Yet, for women who always knew they would become mothers as well as for women less determined to do so, the decision of having a child is inextricably connected to the marriage. Also McMahon recognizes that marriage serves as the reason for having children and many middle-class women in her research present having the right partner as a decisive factor in having a child. (McMahon, 1995) McMahon's outcomes are similar to mine, since only one woman states that she would be willing to have a child even without a stable partner.

Similarly, for fathers the decision to have a child is in most cases connected to the decision to get married. For several men in this research to become a husband means to become a father as well.

At first I decided to become a husband, (...) the role of a husband was for me always related to the role of a father. (Juraj, 25 years)

Further, the decision to have a child is for both women and men also connected to the material stability, financial stability and age.

Finally, what appears to have impact on the decision about having a child equally for both genders is the negative image of childfree people in the Slovakian society. (see also Zamykalová, Hašková, 2006) Majority of respondents associate childfree people with selfishness, loneliness and sadness.

I think that people, who really do not want to have a child, are selfish. (Henrieta, 34)
[The people who don't want to have children] are selfish, they think only about themselves and they want to live large, they want to be free. [People who can't have children] feel sad and empty. (Andrej, 26)

It is interesting that when asked about childfree people several respondents divide them in two categories, namely, voluntarily childfree people associated mainly with negative characteristic like egoism and involuntarily childfree people associated with unhappiness. Thus, the character of a childfree person is judged according to the reasons that shape her/his decision, in particular, career is perceived as an illegitimate reason while infertility as a legitimate one. Here proves useful McMahon's observation that parenthood "is not simply

about having children; it is about engaging identities and their attendant cultural meanings” (McMahon, 1995, p.89). Consequently, it seems just reasonable that when the childfree identity is connected mainly with negative characteristics or experience most of the people will decide to have a child.

To conclude, the strongest factor that determines women and men’s decision to have a child is the marriage or stable relationship. Moreover, what also shapes this decision is the rather negative perception of childfree people among the participants. Yet, despite these similarities, the decision to become a parent is executed more smoothly among men than among women

5.2.2 Expectations from parenthood

This category concerns the following research question: What were the expectations of parenthood compared to actual experiences? (McMahon, 1995) When asked to compare the expectation and the experience of motherhood the women in McMahon’s study voice surprise on how strong the maternal love is and that they did not know they could feel this way about their child. I was curious if women, or man for that matter, experience parenthood the same way.

Unlike women in McMahon’s study who claim that motherhood was an “overwhelming experience” (1995,p.131) several mothers in my study voice rather negative feelings when comparing their expectations and the motherhood reality.

Maybe I had the notion,... that I would be [a great mother]. Some mothers give birth to a child and they are immediately very happy and have these great feelings that they are mothers. I did not experience this with the first child ... I was not on cloud nine, feeling what a great child he is and how happy and fulfilled I am by this role. (...) I did not expect to miss my job. (Beata, 30 years)

Further, several women when asked about their expectations claim that their picture of motherhood was idealistic and naïve.

One does not count on the fact that the child has to be permanently cared for, that there are months and weeks without having time to draw breath. In the first three months one does not know anything; it is the first child and one has to learn everything ... I knew I had to perform twenty-four hours a day being sick or not, being tired or not, I did not imagine it like that. (Adriana, 29)

Interestingly, unlike mothers, fathers in their accounts about expectations speak more of distant future than about presence, in this sense they are still waiting for their expectations to be fulfilled.

I am waiting for my son to grow up so that we will be able to go hiking, that we will be able to hike to Male Karpaty. (Juraj, 25 years)

These findings are consistent with the study by Dorothy Burlingham who discovered that fathers are more likely to look at children not as children but as potentially grown-ups. Their perception of children is more focused on the future concerning what the child will be like once grown-up and the things they will be able to do together. (as cited in Chodorow, 1978)

Finally, what proves very important both for mothers and fathers is the previous personal experience with childrearing.

I was prepared for it really being a job (...), so I was ready for the fact that when you breastfeed, you have to get up in the night, that you will be tired, that it will cut you off from social life. (Eva, 30 years)

The previous experience with childcare shapes whether women feel ready for parenthood and self-confident about their parenting skills. Further, only experienced women declare that they are surprised because mothering turned out to be better than they expected. These accounts indicate that woman's expectation from motherhood can determine her actual experience. It seems that having the possibility of gaining caring skills before having one's own child heightens the probability of positive mothering experience.

Overall, the comparison between expectations and experience regarding parenthood seems to bring more negative outcomes for women. The discrepancy between women's imagination of mothering and reality often engenders negative feelings. Yet, this result could also be determined by my expectations to discover more negative experience among mothers than

among fathers, which could lead to my overlooking positive motherhood experience. However, fathers encounter the discrepancy between expectations and experience on a much lower level. Further, their expectations are often not fulfilled by the birth of their child and they are waiting until she/he grows up. Despite these dissimilarities between women and men what unites them is the impact of the previous opportunity to gain childcare skills on their later parental experience.

5.2.3 The parental role

In her study on motherhood, McMahon (1995) explores how women develop self-conceptions as mothers. This concern will be also the topic of the current category. McMahon demonstrates that the idea of remaining childfree arouses feelings of incompleteness or loss among women in her study. On the basis of these findings she argues that being a mother is a profound component of the feminine identity. I was interested if the importance of being a mother or a father would emerge as central to participants' identities also in my study. However, I encountered problems when using McMahon's interview question about not having a child. Most people in my study were not able to answer it. Thus, instead of this question, I focus on the importance of parental role for women and men.

For most women, their maternal role becomes the most important even though they openly express that they miss their professional work very much. Despite that they do not want to return to the labour market before the child is three and even intend having more children and stay at home in the long term.

[After having the first child] I did not go to work and I really missed it (the school). I am a teacher, so I missed it quite a lot. [But I do not] plan on going back to work, I would like to have more children. (Beata, 30 years)

Unlike for women, the importance of the paternal role for men varied. Some of them stated that being a father is the most important role in their life. For these fathers work was just a

mean for providing for the family. Interestingly, few fathers claim that they do not differentiate between the various roles they have (e.g. employment role, parental role), but rather they try to combine them according to the circumstances.

Further, when one looks on the last excerpt it is evident that there is a sort of ambivalence. Why do women, who enjoy their profession, decide to stay at home caring for children instead of returning to work as soon as possible? Piscova calls this “positive schizophrenia”. It depicts a situation in which women, although they do not have to have a child to feel fulfilled, start to engage immensely in childcare after the child is born, “even at the expense of their self-abnegation and self-denial” (Piscova, 2002, p.264).

One possible interpretation of this ambivalence or ‘schizophrenia’ can be that these women are influenced by “a traditional child-rearing ideology that argues that full time mothering is the only ‘good mothering’ ”. (Gerson, 1985, p.137) Another reason for this ambivalence is that parenting causes simultaneously feelings of frustrations and meaningfulness. (Coltrane, 1998) Moreover, children have a “psychological utility” and taking care of them can give life “new meaning and significance” and “become the very core of one’s private existence” (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, p.9-10)

Another plausible explanation can be that even though to stay at home on parental leave is connected with feelings of tiredness, isolation and with stereotypical activities, these women still find enough gains in it that pull them to home. Further, as Lewis and O’Brien assert “often the attraction of motherhood and the home is much stronger than the pull of the market-place for women”. (1987, p.5) Additionally, what shapes women’s decision to stay at home is the existence of a stable relationship. As Gerson points out pursuing a carrier is a “risky possibility” while the relationship is an “accomplished fact”. Consequently, the choice of family instead of work is much more attractive. (Gerson, 1985, p.94)

Of course there are women who are at home because they consciously decide to do so, however these women belong to the category for whom becoming a mother was always a desired goal. And while some women express negative feelings, others are surprised from how good they actually feel as mothers.

I am surprised that I am very happy, I thought that it would be much harder. (Eva, 30 years)

Another aspect that is strongly present in women and men's accounts on parental role is the biological discourse towards motherhood.

A mother is something different than a father on maternal leave: a mother is a mother. (...) A woman feels motherhood inside; it is typical for a woman to have maternal feelings with pregnancy, and that they [the mother and the child] experience the pregnancy together. (Henrieta, 34)

The ability to carry a child and consequently to nurse him/her is seen as essential difference between women and men. As McMahon asserts reference to biology provides women with the basis for claiming "distinct maternal identities" (McMahon, 1995, p.249). Further, the reference to biology creates an illusion that women are just better suited for parenting and as such it provides an argument for the ongoing unequal share of childcare responsibilities.

The construction of these "distinct maternal identities" can be found also in fathers' narratives, who view the relationship between the child and the mother as more special, unique. Moreover, this special relationship serves also as the cause for why fathers cannot accept the idea of changing the traditional division of roles and become the primary caregivers.

I think that mother has the closest relationship to the child, (...), the mother belongs to the child. (Andrej, 26 years)

The difference in the child's relationship towards the mother and towards the father emerges also when fathers mention their inability to put the child into sleep or calm her/him

down, which is in one case explained with “mom is mom”. Even though fathers recognize the effect that the amount of time spend with the child has on the father-child relationship, they do not see their inability to perform certain tasks (e.g. calm the child down) as the result of lack of time devoted to the child or childcare.

The emphasis on the allegedly unique mother-child relationship functions as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it provides woman with greater power in childrearing because she is perceived, by both women and men, as the most competent for that. On the other hand, this perception leads to women’s greater responsibility for childcare and as such it creates a huge barrier for women to step out from the sphere of domesticity.

Finally, McMahon’s findings that being a mother is “an essence making process” that provides women with the affirmation of their womanhood (McMahon, 1995, p.158) can be partly supported by the current study in which majority of women claim the highest importance of the maternal role for them. However, there are also men who claim the same. Thus, it seems that motherhood, together with fatherhood, has been incorporated into the gender identity of women and men.

5.2.4 Experiencing personal change

This category answers the last research question: How did the experience of parenthood influence women and men’s personalities? (McMahon, 1995) In her research among middle-class women McMahon finds out that motherhood initiates changes in three spheres of women’s life: changes in their use of time, personal growth and transcendent change (i.e. change in their relationship to the world). Addressing the second category – personal growth – McMahon proposes that by becoming more patient and more tolerant women experience a moral transformation. (McMahon, 1995) Do also women and men in my research feel that parenthood transforms them in anyway?

When asked if the experience of motherhood have changed them in some way women speak about greater patience, greater tolerance, vulnerability, sensitivity, less selfishness, being more cheerful and calm. They also state that their life priorities have shifted with the child being the first priority in their lives and that they start to perceive the world in a different way as well as their relationship to their own parents. Nevertheless, the change does not happen only in the positive direction. Some women feel that they become more anxious, more isolated, that they loose their freedom and become economically dependant on their husband. The fact that they openly speak about their negative experience advocate for ongoing changes in motherhood, because as Šalingová (2003) demonstrates in the generation of socialist parents it was not common for women to express the dubious aspects of motherhood.

In one way the transformation to fatherhood brings the same changes as the one to motherhood. Feelings of higher sensitivity, responsibility, greater happiness and calm, as well as of less freedom appear regularly in fathers' narratives. However, when speaking about the changes initiated by parenthood several fathers, unlike mothers, mention also the economic responsibility.

My relationship towards work and money has maybe got a bit stricter, (...), sometimes I feel pressure to have some money left on the account, so that we will not get into a financial crisis. (Peter, 37 years)

Fathers, who express these concerns, obviously identify themselves with the breadwinner position. By this they are caught up in a contradictory situation where they want to fulfil their parental obligation, which is to provide for the family, but at the same time they would like to spend or know they should spend more time with the child.

To conclude, the experience of personal change of the middle-class women and men in my research is quite similar to women's in McMahon's (1995) study. In my paper, women,

together with men, undergo a “moral transformation” in their personalities through parenthood.

Summary

The results of my research illustrate that, at least for the women and men in this study, both meaning and experience of parenthood are different. Women and men differ in the quality and quantity they devote to childcare and domestic tasks, in the process of carrying out the decision to become parents, in their expectations and realities of parenthood and in their construction of parental role. Yet, there are some areas where the experience of mothers and fathers converges namely in the rejection of the childcaring practices of the previous generation, in their perception of childfree people or in the experience of personal change caused by parenting.

Overall, the areas of divergence predominate the ones of convergence. Yet, I am not claiming that the ideal is an identical experience of mothers and fathers, which is not possible since we live in a society that is organized according to gender. Rather, I see the way to change the current situation in supporting and expecting greater involvement of fathers as well as in preventing the negative experience of parenting for mothers. In particular, to create a state where fathers will not be reluctant to engage more both in childcare and domesticity and where women will be supported in keeping their own space and autonomy.

Discussion

I started this paper by thinking that women and men have the same potential to experience parenthood similarly: as a tiring but still rewarding experience. I still think the same, however, after reading previous studies on motherhood and fatherhood and after conducting my own interviews, I realized that this potential is only very rarely used in the case of fathers while exhausted in the case mothers.

I was also at first reluctant to include in this research the division of household labour. Yet, after I interviewed women and men, I recognized that this division cannot be obscured, not only because it is inextricably connected to childcare but since women are the ones doing the greater share of chores, these encompass a significant part of women's experience.

If we accept that women and men indeed have the same potential what are the reasons for the different outcome in their parental conduct? Does this mean that women are the victims of the unequal division of labour for which men are to be blamed? Certainly not. Women and men decide how they fulfil their parental role according to the conditions they currently live in. I have elaborated on these conditions in this paper by looking at the work of previous scholars. I have addressed the breadwinner ideology as pointed out by Western scholars (e.g. Moss, Brannen, 1987) or the ideal of the good mother, which emerged in previous studies on motherhood (e.g. Choi et al, 2005). I have also assessed the societal and economic factors in the post-socialist countries by looking at the research conducted in this region. Finally, I have dilated on the theoretical approaches to parenting. All the above-mentioned aspects shape the conduct of parenthood. I do not claim that this list of conditions influencing parenting as provided in this study is exhaustive, still it offers a reasonable view on what can be "in play" regarding the different parenting outcome for women and men.

Several findings in my study correspond with the ones from previous researches including the different meaning of parenthood for women and men as deduced from their behaviour

(e.g. Backett, 1987) or the hesitancy among several women to become mothers (e.g. Gerson, 1985). Interestingly, what enlarges the findings as presented in the study about motherhood by McMahon (1995) is that women and men experience personal change initiated by parenthood in a similar way, i.e. for both women and men being a parent initiates higher feeling of responsibility, greater patience or less selfishness. Further, being a parent is a significant part of the gender identity for both women and men, meaning that the parental role is of highest importance for several women as well as men. My research introduces the experience and meaning of parenthood among men, which is not present in McMahon's study. Finally, this paper offers an illustration of the parental experience and meaning in the Slovakian context.

Yet, I am aware of the limitations of my research. The small compositions of the research sample regarding the number of participants together with the exclusive focus on the middle-class urban couples constitute the main weak points of this study. Nevertheless, although in a very restricted way, this paper still offers an illustration of the meaning and experience of parenthood. This topic may be elaborated in subsequent research that would embrace larger group of parents from various social and economic backgrounds, explore more deeply men's motivation for involved fatherhood or the factors that could lower the negative experience of motherhood.

The results of my interviews are in accord with previous works that point out the emergence of the breadwinner husband and stay-at-home wives in the post-socialist countries (e.g. Gal, Kligman, 2000b), the persistence of the perception of mothers as primary caregivers (e.g. Gerson, 1993) and the usage of the psychological discourse among parents (e.g. Šalingová, 2003). Further, this paper demonstrates the importance of wider social circumstances that influence parental conduct like the unavailability of childcare facilities or

the unequal status of women and men on the labour market, and through that my study confirms the legitimacy of Risman's or Gerson's theories.

Finally, my original expectation that the experience and meaning of parenthood for women and men will more converge than diverge seems rather naïve and idealistic. The narratives of parents point out the complexity of parenting and as such they mirror the importance of merging all the theories about parenthood as presented in this paper. And while it may seem that being a parent is the most natural and straightforward thing in the world, the results of this research illustrate that it can be anything but that.

Appendix

Interview questions

- Describe to me to your average day? Is there any difference between the weekdays and weekend day? In which childcare activities are you involved? Which household tasks do you perform?
- When did you decide to become a parent? How do you feel in your parental role? What is the relationship between your parental role and your other life roles? Did you ever think about exchanging your family role with your partner?
- Did parenthood change you in any way (e.g. personality, priorities, values)? Did you feel ready for parenting? Did you prepare somehow for parenthood (e.g. by reading parenthood manuals)?
- What were your expectations of parenthood? What did you think that parenting would be like? Is there any difference between your expectations and the reality? Is there any difference between how your child relates to you and to your partner?
- How would you feel if you had never had a child? (McMahon, 1995) How did you feel after becoming a parent?
- How did you find out how to approach childrearing? Do you have childrearing role model? Where did you look for information?

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