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**Masculinities offside?**  
**Critical Studies**  
**on Men And Masculinities**  
**– a Sociological Analysis**

**Habilitation thesis**

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# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

### **Masculinities offside?**

The text analyses the relevance and appropriateness of the idea that men and masculinities can get or be “offside”. The topic is inspired by the recurring public and academic debates on discrimination against men and the underrepresentation of men as a category of analysis in sociological research.

The study introduces the theme of research on men and masculinities from a very specific perspective. It gives credit to the assessments of relevance of this theme for sociological enquiry and adopts the lack of sufficient research coverage of the issue by Czech social science research as a point of departure. Masculinities are presented here both as a concept of gender analysis and a structural element in the actors’ practice. It looks through the lens of sociological gender studies and the specific stream of Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities (CSMM) to analyse several selected areas linked to establishing and maintaining the normative powerful masculine identity – hegemonic masculinity – as the antithesis of the crisis in masculinity, which has found its permanent coverage in the Czech media and in the activities of particular civic initiatives.

The main objective of this text is to demonstrate how men maintain their key position, what mechanisms put them “offside”, or how and where they can challenge the mainstream dominant masculinity. The metaphor and the title of this paper was inspired by Karel Poláček’s novel *Men Offside*; his insights which are relevant for this text will be illustrated in due course. The theme of the work is thus a conceptual analysis of the forms, transformations and continuity of hegemonic masculinities in the Czech context, and an analysis of several social fields, covered by the

author's empirical research evidence on the men's practices where masculinity is under negotiation.

The high-profile theme of men at risk, or in crisis, which is supported by statistics, comes out as an antithesis to the feminist emphasis on the social discrimination of women. In the Czech context, where I have long been monitoring any incidence of publicly-addressed issues related to masculine practice, status and problems, more and more common sense warnings have been appearing with the message that it is actually men who are disadvantaged. These incidents are often framed by a corresponding declaration that women - through their emancipation - have already reached an equal position with men in the public sphere, at least formally, while still dominating the private sphere in their families. As a result, men find themselves in the undesirable situation of the frequently contradictory expectations they have to shoulder: they have to maintain a sufficiency of the conventional masculine status as breadwinners who are publicly engaged and successful, but they are also expected to show maturity by providing committed care to their children and in their relationships. Moreover, all that should be managed in the atmosphere of the dominant symbolic gender order, where at the same time, practices that are "properly" masculine are defined against anything labelled as "feminine" (Harding 1986, Connell 1995, Kimmel 1987, etc.).

This text thematises gender inequalities with particular attention directed to men and masculinities. It presents concepts useful for the detailed analysis of which mechanisms (social, cultural, historical) maintain a social order that - in a very specific and typical way - favours and penalizes actors in specific social institutions and contexts. At the same time, this work conceptualizes what mechanisms work in setting down who becomes or remains the hero, who is the culprit of turbulences in gender relations, and which of them are interpreted by the key actors as desirable and undesirable. Gender relations, it seems, are to a large extent related to the opportunity of choice, to the freedom to choose among the socially required and accepted gender identity or to the ability

to step outside these expectations. In this respect, the amount of room for manoeuvre also tends to have strong gender connotations; institutionally and symbolically set up rules of the social structure interplay with individual actions. Last but not least, this text wants to contribute to the study of an incredible and remarkable question: what mechanisms maintain the importance of gender in social interactions? What stands behind the practice that when dealing with one another the actors highlight gender, gender differences in particular, above any other?

Few researchers have analysed issues particularly focusing on men and masculinities from the critical sociological perspective in the Czech context. Some research suggests (Havelková 1997, Šiklová 1996, Vodochodský 2008) that the structural situation of men under the Communist regime was weaker in comparison to the capitalist contexts. Thus an issue of masculinities offside would be relevant to that epoch as well as to its impact on the current practices. Nevertheless, this analysis is placed differently.

The theme under focus is structured in this text as follows. Selected key contemporary theories of hegemonic masculinity, hegemonic men and their relevance to men and masculinities offside is introduced and discussed in Chapter 2 that follows this Introduction.

Chapter 3, "Men offside: powerless, helpless, homeless and with illness" introduces several selected themes that resonate with the framing of men as both sources and targets of social problems. It also lists themes encompassed by social research in this field and describes in more detail certain practices associated with the reproduction of both hegemonic and non-hegemonic men's practices. This includes humour as a practice that sometimes helps overcoming difficult and tense interactions. Yet in other contexts it serves as a tool for downgrading others – either men (especially homosexual men) or women in sexist remarks and jokes. The themes of work, home, health, violence and social exclusion more

generally form the remaining by no means exhaustive list that has deservedly gained the attention of research.

From Chapter 4 the manuscript presents research studies that the author has been engaged in. There are four topical chapters included here. Chapter 4, "Boys at Risk", questions the framing of the debate on underachieving boys in the educational system and analyses the arguments used in this debate. Undereducated young men definitely form a specific area of social exclusion. It is inspiring to look at the ways this theme enters public and academic debates, along with its relationship with hegemonic masculinity - the gender order of masculine domination.

Chapter 5, "Key domestic players and guests: masculinities and the family", deals with the transformations of Czech fatherhood. It covers the men who have taken over the status of nurturers of children in the family, while concentrating on how this change in practices has affected the dominant image of masculinity. The following chapter continues in the fatherhood issue from its very practical starting point.

Chapter 6, "Childbirth, men and hegemony", introduces the presence of men at childbirth as one of the events identified in media debates, peer pressure and state policy as a key experience, which should trigger changes in the men's paternal practices towards a greater gender balance. The question elaborated in this chapter is whether such a radical new practice in the experience of giving birth in the Czech Republic in the last quarter of the century preserves or changes hegemonic masculinity.

Chapter 7, "Condemned to Rule: Doctors in Czech Maternity Wards", approaches the theme of birth, opened in the previous chapter, from the perspective of medical professionals. The practices of men head doctors are analysed, while illustrating the hegemonic and off-putting contexts of their work, which reinforces their hegemonic, dominant position as something that condemns them personally.

In the Conclusion, the findings from the empirical chapters are summarised with the emphasis on the ways in which the existing hegemonic definitions of masculinity are maintained, modified or

challenged. It systematises the relevant answers to the question whether men and masculinity (especially) in the Czech social context are offside. It is obvious that the answer is at least twofold. The text also formulates themes and approaches that can be helpful to further sociological analyses targeted on men and masculinities.

## **Acknowledgements**

This text is based on the author's previous research and some of her earlier published texts appear in their revised form in this manuscript. The sections on the home, work, health and violence in Chapter 3 were inspired by the structure of original national research reports for an international project (Šmídová 2005a and 2005b), which were revised and updated for publishing here, and an earlier review of issues targeted by Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities has been utilised here (Šmídová 2006a). Textual inspiration for Chapter 4 comes from a text published as a Czech journal article (Šmídová 2008b) "Men on the margins? Marginalized uneducated young men". The theme presented in Chapter 5 has been published in several of the author's texts. The version included here is predominantly based on the author's revised chapters from the edited volume of "*Nurturing fatherhood*" (Šmídová 2008a). The chapter on men at birth is an updated and revised version of a journal article originally published in 2008 (Šmídová 2008c) as "Fatherhood at birth: reconstructions of gender relations in the family". Chapter 7 is an edited and revised version of a chapter "Condemned to Rule: Masculine Domination and Hegemonic Masculinities of Doctors in Maternity Wards" from the book *Feminism from the Margins: Issues in Czech Women's and Gender Studies Discourse and Practice* that is currently in print with the Indiana University Press. It was used here with the permission of its American editor Iveta Jusova. Some shorter sections in the theoretical Chapter 2 and the concluding Chapter 8 also draw from this text, as well as from an earlier book chapter of mine "Changing Czech Masculinities? Beyond

“Environment And Children-Friendly” Men” published in 2009 with Routledge (Šmídová 2009).

Putting this piece together was a long, thrilling as well as exhausting process. Its original version was already finished and submitted once (in Czech), in 2009, but the whole procedure has never proceeded to the phase of having this manuscript reviewed and assessed. The piece I am submitting now, five years later, is a thoroughly revised, reassembled, edited as well as extended text. Chapter 7 is a totally new addition in it.

I would like to thank all those who have supported and encouraged me throughout the whole process and repeatedly offered their assistance and sympathy, Lenka Slepíčková and as ever Eva Šlesingerová. Especially in the final, intense phase, this support was highly appreciated, and I gladly received encouragement also from Czaba Szaló, Ladislav Rabušic and Břetislav Dančák. I want to thank especially Petr Antonín for his joy in the language and translation, Steve Chalk for swift proofreading and hearty encouragements, Kristýna Kozlovská for crosschecking references and Kateřina Nedbálková for apt comments on segments of this text. All faults left in the text are mine.

A final disclaimer notice belongs to sports. Sport associated with speed, distance or difficulty and competitiveness is one of the practices symbolically associated with men and masculinities par excellence. Despite that, this text contains nothing about sports or games. The title of this text is inspired in Poláček’s “Men offside” - contrary to expectations, the book is in many respects not about football either.

Just few days before submitting this manuscript, I attended a lecture by professor James W. Messerschmidt (Olomouc, October 9, 2014), a name abundantly cited in Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities and a recognized expert in researching men and masculinities and criminology, sexuality and boyhood. When speaking over a glass of wine in the reception following his speech, the issue of

men and sport, particularly football, came out. "I do not even know what an offside is" noted the professor, thus bringing my conclusion to the Introduction full circle, relevant to men, sports and humour. A celebrity can make a fool of himself, even in front of a broader audience, without the anxiety of losing respect. Not knowing offside did not put this man offside.

## Chapter 2

# **Masculinities offside, masculine domination and hegemonic masculinities**

An older man knocked on my door a couple of years ago, looking for someone “who does that gender thing”, as he put it, in order to point out something alarming. He showed me statistics on the ratio of men and women studying at the Veterinary and Pharmaceutical University in Brno. He himself was a doctor, a retired professor who was bothered, among other things, by the fact that some fields of study were so predominantly filled with young women that the few remaining young men would be, in his words, “condemned to become high-ranking administrators and professors”, without necessarily aspiring to do so.<sup>1</sup> They would have little choice but to serve in these positions and the selection would be narrowed down, which in his eyes was a desperate situation and a major injustice.

In a way I understood the concerns of this long-time university teacher and researcher; it was not the first time I had encountered them. We had a nice conversation over the possible causes and future prospects of this student ratio. It also turned out that my visitor (of many years’ experience) was concerned that women making a career in veterinary (and human) medicine in the future would be unable to fulfil their maternal status. He was worried about the biological reproduction of humankind, and the care and raising of children, which, in his eyes and as far back as human memory reaches, was the primary responsibility of women.

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1 A parallel to the opposite end of the social ladder is offered, in a way, by Tomáš Katrňák in the title of his book "Destined for Manual Work: Educational Reproduction in a Working Class Family" (in Czech „Odsouzení k manuální práci: Vzdělanostní reprodukce v dělnické rodině“, Katrňák 2004), which analyses the social reproduction of the actors’ professional status. However, his presentation was concerned with a lack of education in the reproduction of working class families, without any explicit gender axis. The men at the bottom of the social hierarchy will be discussed in chapter in the following chapter.

This experience made me re-think the ambivalent relationship between the crisis and the dominance of today's men, as well as the current forms of masculinity. How come that I myself tend to interpret leading professional positions as a privilege and success, and not – like the above-mentioned office visitor – as a condemnation? What role is played here by the gender setting of society? Why does this distinguished professor and doctor interpret this situation, which lifts men into highly-placed decision-making positions, as a manipulation by the social structure?

In my doctoral research study, I have touched upon a similar situation. Then, I followed the live careers of men in professions associated with ecological education and environmental protection (it must be pointed out that they were men in leading professional and otherwise influential posts). I also encountered a tendency to report on their status partly as a "service to their country", and a responsibility they must not shirk in spite of not having chosen it: it just fell on their shoulders (Šmídová 2004b). However, a study by the British researcher Gatrell (Gatrell 2005) indicated that women (mothers) professionals also take their professions partly as a "service to society". She writes that these mothers of small children want to hold onto their jobs because they like them, or because they worked hard to achieve their professional positions. At the same time they confessed to feeling a moral responsibility to a society that had allowed them to attain such a high level of skills. They felt it was their duty, and sometimes even a calling, to continue in their paid work despite becoming parents (2005: 152– 3). Still, I felt no hint in Gatrell's text that these women regarded their "service" as their inevitable doom. Perhaps it is this very difference (among others) in which I see the borders of a symbolic gender order that directs our feminine and masculine life paths.

There is actually nothing surprising about the man who knocked on my door looking for future bosses only amongst the shrinking group of men studying these fields. He was looking for a solution to this problem

defined as a high risk within the limits of a system he understood and knew.

And his mindset can be applied to a similar situation from my personal experience, which occurred a few years ago. A professor stopped me and my colleague in the corridor and asked me (with genuine interest), when was I going to have a third child, while my colleague on the same level and with the same amount of academic practice was asked about his habilitation study plans.

What leads to such standpoints? The mindsets of such senior professionals were positioned to look for answers available and comprehensible to them based on their understanding of the conventional gender division of society. It searches for men in order to overcome obstacles in the public (professional) realm and addresses structural failure in "providing" them, while targeting women when issues symbolically labelled as private (associated with care) are at stake.

## **Men`s privilege and burden from the perspective of Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities**

The concept, which makes it easier to understand the conflict between the individual and the structural understanding of men's domination, is that of hegemonic masculinity. It may help us analytically to distinguish the contrast between the two men`s positions of crisis and domination. It presents clues to the paradox that men actors are like puppets in a system that pushes most of them upwards into the public sphere, but they often do not actually feel powerful. The structural profile, where statistics demonstrate a significant prevalence of men in positions of public power and top economic positions, sometimes sharply contrasts with the individual feelings of (dis)empowerment and mastering ones lives.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity is a key analytical tool for Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities (CSMM), which I draw upon in my texts and which are based on feminist theories. The notion of

hegemonic masculinity represents a contribution of CSMM to interpretations uncovering gender relations and the gender-symbolic order. It is a rather fluid and continuously-evolving tool, as several major re-conceptualizations and redefinitions have occurred recently. A thorough understanding of hegemonic masculinity will make it easier to explain and understand just how it is possible that men, who statistically hold dominant positions in society in several key respects, can at the same time confess to feeling endangered, saying that it is not them who sets the rules and that they find themselves in an offside position. Being out of the game, outside the rules, offside - to use the terminology of Karel Poláček's book borrowed for the title of this text - forms a significant axis in the analytical perspective provided by this text.

The systematic approach to studies on men and masculinities in social sciences originated in the 1980s. Pioneering research drew attention to pathological phenomena such as violence, myths or limits associated with the performance of the masculine role (Pleck, 1981, Tolson 1977), and finally outlined the subject of a crisis for men or contemporary forms of masculinity. In popularizing publications, the subject of a men's crisis has since been established and has often become a profitable business for pseudo-psychotherapists and organizers of various courses in the spirit of the new-age movement. These were supposed to help men rediscover their almost lost wild men within themselves (Bly 1990, Kimmel 1995, Clatterbaugh 1995)<sup>2</sup>. In contrast to this trend, the research in the field of critical (gender) analyses soon began to take a different course. This was not because the problems that men faced were not serious, but mainly because in order to understand them it was necessary to grasp the complex nature of gender relations and conduct. The changes that

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<sup>2</sup> The birth of men's studies has already received detailed attention in one of my earlier works (Šmídová 2006a), while the typology of men's movements, which also include the aforementioned "mytho-poetic groups" seeking genuine, wild masculinity (especially when drumming around campfires in the remnants of the North American wilderness), is introduced to Czech readers in Jana Valdrová's book "Gender and Society" in the chapter titled Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities (Šmídová 2006a). In Chapter 3 of this text, I take a closer look into specific social problems that CSMM deal with.

masculinity was going through (Kimmel 1987, Segal 1990) began to be analysed especially in relation to changes in femininity, but also together with changes in masculinity over history, with differences in the forms of masculinity in various social classes, ethnic groups, with reference to sexual orientation, religion and a number of other factors. Soon it became clear that the uncontested uniform polarity of men and women in the social space, as we know it from a simplified reference to Parsons (1951, 1955, Šmídová 2004b), is not sustainable.<sup>3</sup> One of the results of these efforts was the establishment of an approach that, in sociology and feminist theories, is a respected form of analysis of men and masculinity: CSMM.<sup>4</sup> Their key characteristic is a reflexive, critical approach to the study of men and their conduct and to the representations of masculinity and masculine types of social identities, within the framework of the social order, whose gender profile is characterised by unequal power positions described as a patriarchy or domination (Hearn 2004, Bourdieu 2000).

The term "critical" in critical studies on men and masculinities refers in particular to issues of power, i.e. gendered power (Hearn 2004:51). Jeff Hearn, one of the representatives of CSMM, summarized the characteristics of gendered power as well as the advantages and difficulties of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, in an article "From Hegemonic Masculinity to the Hegemony of Men". Hearn describes the relation of power and men as follows: "While power functions, flows and re-forms in multiple ways, it is difficult to avoid the fact that in most societies, and certainly those of western, 'advanced' capitalism, men are structurally and interpersonally dominant in most spheres of life" (2004:51). The critical approach of Critical Studies on Men and

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<sup>3</sup> Structural functionalism works with five binary patterns for the roles of actors: affectivity - affective neutrality; diffuseness - specificity; particularism - universalism; ascription - achievement; self-orientation - collectivity orientation. The first characteristics in each pair are assigned to the feminine role and the second one to the masculine. In the context of the family, Parsons added a maternal expressive role and a paternal instrumental role. However, I have already pointed out in my earlier work (Šmídová, 2004b: 14-16) that Parsons himself did not actually think so simplistically.

<sup>4</sup> CSMM are not a disciplinarily framed approach, see more also in the aforementioned chapter Šmídová (2004b, 2006a) or Hearn (2004).

Masculinities does not belittle differences within the category of men, such as age, class, ethnicity and other differences, including their relationship to women. It rather emphasizes the complex interplay of diversity and unity among men within the patriarchates (ibid.).

Hearn's approach draws attention to the fact that power relations form the decisive and predominant aspect of men's social relationships, conduct and experience and that these matters remain overlooked by the mainstream social sciences (2004: 51). Despite Hearn's advocating for studying predominantly men's practices to grasp the reproduction of inequalities in gender relations, prevailing research within CSMM took a slightly different turn. Most of the research studies use the concept of hegemonic masculinity and its relations to other masculinities. Nevertheless, the key perspective in CSMM still sticks to the analyses of power relations and the reproduction of gender inequalities, to hegemony/ies issues.

## **Hegemony and hegemonic masculinity**

Authors working with hegemony, mostly those who use it in connection with masculinity – as hegemonic men and/or masculinity, refer to its consensual or non-coercive character (Hearn 2004, Carrigan et al. 1995, Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, etc.). The hegemony acts on the level of everyday, unquestioned ideas and actions. The difference between dominating (forms of) and hegemonic masculinity is the explicit relationship of the hegemonic forms to the reproduction of gender inequality.

As Hearn and others observed, the vast majority of men take masculine domination in society for granted and, with the consent of some women, they help maintain patriarchal power relations (Hearn 2004:52). The concept of hegemony, originally developed by Antonio Gramsci (1971), relates to the ruling group's ability to impose their definitions and determine the rules by which others interpret events, discuss issues, formulate ideals and define morality. Bourdieu writes, in this respect,

about symbolic harm, when the only available interpretative framework for the dominated is the one of the dominating (Bourdieu 2000).

The concept of hegemonic masculinity, which is based on the gendered concept of power, has evolved. It has developed so much that it would seem to be quite unclear, although it is widely used and accepted in the broader field of feminist research (Lorber 2010). In the original definition, the Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell described hegemonic masculinity as a form of masculinity, or a particular set of gender practices, that stands in contrast to other, less dominant or subordinate forms of masculinity (Connell 1995: 77 - 81). It is characteristic of hegemonic masculinity that other men are subordinate to a certain status in gender practice (Hearn 2004, 57; Carrigan, Connell, and Lee 1985: 586). Some groups of men thus occupy a structural position to various degrees similar to the main group subordinated by the patriarchal gender order - women.

Among types of non-hegemonic masculinity Connell lists complicit masculinity, subordinated masculinity, and marginalized masculinity (Connell 1995: 77 - 81). Complicit masculinity is particularly useful in the context of this present text. It is founded in the advantage that men acquire through a "patriarchal dividend," a share of power received by helping to maintain the hegemonic model, even though they may not exercise the practices or embody the model of hegemonic masculinity themselves (Connell 1995: 79 - 80).

It is important to realize that the strongest defenders of the cultural ideal of hegemonic masculinity may not be the most powerful individual actors. Some bearers of power may in fact depart significantly from the image of hegemonic masculinity as a cultural ideal. Between hegemonic and complicit masculinity there exists tension and differentiation. In contrast, subordinate and marginalized masculinities are in direct opposition to hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995: 76 - 81; 242), although they still work in overall harmony with other key social

characteristics, such as class or ethnicity, to “authorize” the hegemonic masculinity of the ruling group (ibid).

There is a certain status in gender practice among the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity to which other men are subordinate (Hearn 2004, 57; Carrigan, Connell, and Lee 1985, 586), as I have noted above. Put more exactly, Carrigan’s team of authors say that it is precisely certain groups of men, not all men in general, who are oppressed by patriarchal gender relations and whose positions are to various degrees similar to the prevailing logic of the gender order: women subordinated to men. These groups of men deserve a similar research attention of social sciences as other subordinated groups do.

The hegemony has been contextualised, now more needs to be clarified as for the (hegemonic) masculinity itself. CSMM authors describe masculinity as a dynamic concept that works through constant monitoring and reinforcement. Such a structure of social relations presents the currently accepted form or strategy of legitimizing masculine domination (Carrigan et al. 1985). In order to succeed in the world of masculine domination, men must constantly demonstrate their masculinity, before the eyes of other men, in the form of public self-control and in their relationships with women, and they must distance themselves from everything viewed as feminine (Bourdieu 2000). At the same time, hegemonic masculinity needs not adhere to the most common pattern of the everyday life of boys and men. Instead, it operates by positing authoritative symbols to which men are to aspire.

Although hegemonic masculinity is a widely-used framework, different authors use it differently. Furthermore, it is difficult to identify hegemonic masculinity in everyday practice, because it is not always clear what constitutes anti- or non-hegemony. For example, Donaldson asks whether the growing participation of men in parenting signals a strengthening of hegemonic masculinity or the opposite; and similar

questions have been raised by other authors (Donaldson 1993; Howson 2006; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Šmídová 2009).

Perceived by some as too broad and ambiguous, the concept of hegemonic masculinity has been repeatedly questioned (Hearn 2004; Beasley 2008; Howson 2006; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, Messerschmidt 2012). Authors wishing for a clearer and narrower definition of the term have asked whether it refers to cultural representation, everyday practice, or institutional structure. How are the individual dominant and dominating ways of being a man interrelated and reinforced, weakened, or applied in various contexts? When do we perceive the firm hand of a man – as a head doctor, or a father – as a legitimate and respected (professional) method, and when as an aggressive, violent practice?

When Jeff Hearn proposed to abandon the use of hegemonic masculinity, opting instead for the more specific "men's practices", he suggests that scholars should focus on deconstructing the social category of "men" (Hearn 2004). By doing so, Hearn argues, we could "begin to face the possibility of the abolition of 'men' as a significant social category of power" (Hearn 2004: 66).

Other scholars have defended the continued usefulness of the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Connell and Messerschmidt, for instance, suggest to conscientiously stick to the key aspects of hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), which is the dynamics, contextual and structural dependence of gender relations (as opposed to sets of stereotyped psychological traits) and on the plurality of masculinities and their hierarchies. One aspect of this definition is the ambiguity inherent in any easy attribution of hegemonic masculinity to specific actors; i.e., the definition of gender processes, and therefore the mechanisms for the reproduction of hegemony. According to Connell and Messerschmidt, this means that the concepts of hegemonic

masculinity can be constructed even if they do not correspond to the lives of any particular men. In their definition the models of hegemonic masculinities can express in various ways the culturally widespread ideals, fantasies and yearnings that exist, and offer a relational framework towards women and solutions for problems in gender relations (ibid.). It encompasses cultural representation and everyday activity, as well as institutional structures. The shifts in the concepts of Connell and Messerschmidt as well as Hearn seem to be more complementary than contradictory to one another.

At the same time research needs to be done on the structural contexts of the practices and representation of hegemonic masculinity, as well as its embodiment (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 846 – 853) and the rooting of social structures in men's bodies (somatization). This is a topic that is taken up by a number of other authors, including Bourdieu (Bourdieu 2000). The male body surely plays a role in the symbols of the approved masculinity, acknowledged prestige, and in the establishment of men's reputations within their peer groups (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 851). The body, and its attributed and proven capacities, plays a structuring role in the performance of professionally-demanding activities and in adrenaline situations, such as medical operations for doctors, in the work regime at or near the boundaries of the physical capability of the human body, when working on the edges of life and death. Bodies are the participants and initiators of social action, so it is important to analyse gender patterns in the areas of health as Connell and Messerschmidt in this context explicitly point out (ibid.).

The privileges of dominant men, constantly being reconstituted according to lifestyle, or in relation to expensive modern technologies, are being invented specifically with the intention of serving and contributing to the enhancement of the physical sources of strength belonging to the bodies of elite men (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 851– 2). In this sense, the patterns for negotiation or expressions of recognition of

masculine domination take place without major differences in the cultural context of the Czech environment or elsewhere.

## **Satisfactory and offside masculinities**

The core approach to understanding men and masculinities is through practices and interactions. The dynamics of masculinities also reflects the notion that masculinities do not only exist in their mutual relations, spaces and bodies, but that they also have their intrinsic complexity and lack of integrity. With a reminder of this long-known fact, Connell and Messerschmidt point out the need to research and recognize the "layering, the potential internal contradiction, within all practices that construct masculinities" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 852). Another dynamic of masculinity can be the "time project" of the life cycle and the changes in men's practices associated with it. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005: 852) claim that hegemonic masculinities include inner contradictions and emotional conflicts, most likely due to their very link to gendered power.

They believe that a given pattern of hegemonic masculinity is hegemonic to the extent that it provides a solution to these tensions, tending to stabilize patriarchal power or reconstitute it into new conditions (2005: 853). The one that worked for the old conditions may not necessarily withstand a challenge from the new conditions - this everyday conflict takes place on a number of fronts, but the results cannot be anticipated, and this is where Connell and Messerschmidt put their hope, no matter how unpredictable, associated with the democratization of gender relations, abolition of power differentials and gender hierarchy (2005: 853).

The research of masculinities and men has shown that the tool of hegemonic masculinity has taken hold. Similarly to Hearn in 2004, also the duo of authors Connell and Messerschmidt emphasized a year later that the usefulness of the concept of hegemonic masculinity may ultimately depend on how it is used. It turns out that when used

appropriately, it is essential to unveiling the hierarchy of gender relations and helping to explain and understand the social order of masculine dominance. There is hardly any point trying to prevent the diffusion of this concept to many colourful corners of the social sciences and humanities, or cling to a single formulation without being able to modify it (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 853). However, the interpretive shifts which are not permitted include "those usages that imply a fixed character type, or an assemblage of toxic traits" (2005:854). This opinion is shared by Hearn (Hearn 2004) or Beasley (Beasley 2008), who also criticized the concept of hegemonic masculinity for its monolithic, narrow use for the professional elite group of socially dominant men, which is very problematic in the age of globalization.<sup>5</sup>

## **Progressive and aspiring hegemonies**

Another important author who influences the debate on hegemony and its variant in hegemonic masculinity is an Australian sociologist Richard Howson. His book "Challenging Hegemonic Masculinity" (2006) and some other texts on the same topic (Howson 2008, 2009) confronts the use of hegemonic masculinity by social-science researchers with the original concept of political hegemony. He opens several relevant sets of problems and criticism on account of hegemonic masculinity. Here, I will pay more detailed attention to two aspects of his reconceptualization that find its relevance for my own research. Howson resists the notion of

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<sup>5</sup> Beasley moreover believes that Connell and Messerschmidt consider the (partially) dominant masculinity and hegemonic masculinity as one. This argument, however, was refuted by Messerschmidt (2008) in response to her article in the same thematic issue of *Men and Masculinities*. He clarifies that the mechanisms of achieving hegemony - the political process and changes - are always analytically above the specific forms, which the dominant masculinities acquire.

understanding hegemonic masculinity only in its regressive, problematic form as a "dominant", subordinating hegemony in relation to gender. He also promotes its progressive, "aspiring" version. Howson assumes that hegemony is also a concept which may bring a positive change to the existing patriarchal domination. The author consistently holds on to this perspective also in his later texts (2009). Howson proposes to achieve a "progressive hegemony". For it, it is still important to name a man as a man, but it is quite uncertain whether the man's identity (being) will remain also a necessity in the future (Hearn 2008: 127). On this point, the authors Hearn and Howson agree - it is a fundamental question for them whether the category of gender, which we use to describe and understand the world in everyday life, will still have any bearing in the future.

Howson therefore brings two new key insights into the debate on hegemonic masculinity. Hegemony may not only be reactionary; a desired shape of dominant forms of masculinity can be pushed through by a political change and its key feature can be of interest to gender justice. Hegemony as a concept in gender analysis is not only tied up with masculinity. This is not a revolutionary discovery or any innovation, but it was only Howson who developed this aspect in greater detail. He was also interested in practices, which include various forms of femininity, such as protest or ambivalent femininity, or the "emphasized femininity", which Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) had discussed earlier. More authors have later started employing the ideas of subversive and protest forms of hegemonic masculinities.

Howson has further developed his approach to the forms of hegemony as regressive and aspirational in the article *Deconstructing Hegemonic Masculinity: Contradiction, Hegemony and Dislocation* (2009). In this text he is also concerned with the paradox of how hegemony can represent at the same time both the consensual as well as the dominating category, which manifests itself in the everyday conduct of men as

complicity, and simultaneously break free from the obligations of hegemonic masculinity (Howson 2009: 8-11). Howson again approaches hegemony from a broader context and claims that hegemony is never total; it includes antagonisms, and therefore "dislocations", that limit any "real" universality of identity.

Therefore he argues, that there is only ever an image of complete hegemony, and this image becomes dominant when it is constructed with coercion and exclusion in response to a crisis of authority. Or conversely it becomes aspirational when it is a way out from the crisis through moral and intellectual leadership by recognizing the inclusion by means of constant change and renewal. Howson then argues that "hegemonic masculinity achieves an appearance of homogeneity and stability by producing at best complicity and at worst ambivalence of its hegemonic principles (...) The primary task of hegemonic masculinity," he writes, "is to act as the representation of the hegemonic principles of the people thereby enabling them to focus their desire and aspiration and in so doing produce certain hegemonic bodies, configurations of practice and identifications. (...) Thus hegemonic masculinity (...) does not set out the practices that men or women achieve but rather, what men and women aspire towards within hegemony"(Howson 2009: 21).

## **Researching masculinities offside in the Czech context**

I would now like to return to one particular aspect of hegemonic masculinities that Connell and Messerschmidt have pointed out. It is important to recognize that "without treating privileged men as objects of pity, we should recognize that hegemonic masculinity does not necessarily translate into a satisfying experience of life" (2005: 852). This momentum in their approach to analysing men's practices and gender relations in respect to hegemonic masculinities forms an axis of my own approach to studying men in various contexts of their social lives.

The studies that will be presented in the following chapters all elaborate on the idea of layering and balancing the contradictions.

Moreover, Howson's inspiration concerning the aspirational and subversive hegemony for men will be repeatedly employed in this study. Some statistical and research evidence is provided to shed light on men and masculinities offside. The next chapters will move us on to masculinities aspiring to subvert the current hegemonic form. The final analytical chapter then will apply the concepts of hegemonic and complicit masculinities in detail by exploring the contexts of powerful head doctors who frame their everyday experience in terms far from satisfactory.

## Chapter 3

# **Men offside: powerless, helpless, homeless and with illness**

*"And suddenly, the key didn't fit in the lock. That's all it takes, just the miserable key to the door. One day it doesn't fit and you're out. And you are offside, out of the game. And now you just look for something and you don't find it."*

An utterance of a homeless man in a TV documentary "A Man's Odyssey"<sup>6</sup>

This chapter thematises the issues and areas where and how men can get disempowered. This is a rather lengthy chapter providing mostly introductory, descriptive, survey type of information. Its logic is to prepare and open the space for more detailed analyses based on author's own empirical research studies that follow in the next chapters. Here, core areas of research coverage embraced by Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities (CSMM) are introduced as well.

In sociology, a number of studies have followed the original initiatives in targeting men as a relevant object of analyses (Pleck 1981, Tolson 1977). Feminist researchers have brought into focus serious problems associated with men and masculinity in the 1980's; later on, these issues have also been established in CSMM. The studies covering this field focus both on the problems that men face, trying to highlight the situations that lead to them, and on the problems that men themselves inflict on other actors. The research includes relatively exotic or marginal issues and phenomena as well as an explanation and understanding of common everyday life situations and the impacts of a socially-structured world on men and on forms of masculinity. Researchers focus on the

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<sup>6</sup> The caption said: Jiří Příbyl /53/, homeless, divorced, 1 child; theme and script of this documentary film „A Man's Odyssey“ is by Lída Rakušanová, directed by Jiří Krejčík jr. (Česká televize 2002).

relatively high suicide rate among men (about 4 times higher than in women), a risky way of life (from adrenaline driving to maximum stress at work, including neglecting their own health) and problems resulting from the imperatives of male heterosexuality (a need to be “a man about town”, to prove one’s sexual prowess and fertility, to profess the power of the heteronormative approach to sexuality, whose downside is homophobia). The list of problems includes the failure or absence of men in paternal roles, discrimination in the allocating the custody of children after a divorce to the father, but also a general tendency to underestimate the possibility that men can also appear in the situation of victims (of violence, child abuse), while stereotypically assigning them the role of the guilty offenders. This random list, which I drew up a few years ago based on bibliographic research (Šmídová, 2006a: 61), can fortunately be expanded today to incorporate more systematic overviews of what is offered by CSMM for a broader sociological reflection.

Today I can frame the dimensions of research and theoretical exploration in the field of academic Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities by looking into two encyclopaedic publications introducing this field of science. The five-hundred-page manual of CSMM, a *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities*, edited by much-respected sociologists in the field (Kimmel, Hearn, Connell 2004), offers five levels of topics that are the focus of their attention. In the theoretical realm, they deal with the hierarchical relationship between gender and structural inequalities, working on feminist theories. They are looking for ways of applying them also on the study of masculinities and men. A great impact on the theoretical level is exerted by queer theories and gay studies. Academic research also includes efforts to cover global and regional patterns of masculinity (imperialism, the Third World and post-colonialism, ethnicity and Europeanism); it presents and analyses social structures, institutions and processes (classes, men’s sexuality, crime, education, equality in the private sphere, fatherhood, popular media, and the labour market). The relationship of men with their bodies and with their

personalities indispensably remains one of the key issues for CSMM (with categories including sports, health, interpersonal violence, degrees of physical normality and transgender - crossing the dual categories of gender). Due to the association of masculinities, men and the public sphere (power), global implications are also offered as well as aspects of masculinity (the nation, terrorism, war, militarism, myths about Islam or Muslim masculinities, and last but not least, men's movements against violence; Šmídová, 2006: 68 - 69).

Another thematic cross-section is offered by a seven-hundred-page *International Encyclopaedia of Men and Masculinities* (Flood, Kegan Gardiner, Pease and Pringle eds. 2007). Due to the composition of the editors' team, the book is focused more on social work practice with men, and on problems where masculinities and men appear as significant actors. Although both summary publications partly overlap in a number of aspects, the latter covers in a greater detail a "dictionary" range of topics, which are worthy of attention in studies on men and masculinities. In twelve sections divided into sub-thematic modules, the book offers the following headings covering individual rather detailed dictionary entries: 1. Life's path, with the modules of Boyhood, Aging and Adulthood (midlife crisis, initiation, ageism); 2. Intimate relationships (such as brotherhood, custody, father's relationship with children, the relationship of men to women as well as men, friendship, etc.); 3. Practices, with modules on Sexualities (including topics such as bachelorhood, homoeroticism or virility - among many others), Fatherhood (in relation to nurturing, work, violence, or as gay or lonely), Violence and Crime (with topics such as bullying, child pornography, hunting, but also terrorism and entries on men as victims and working with them), Health (including risky lifestyles, self-destructiveness or depression, occupational diseases and addictions), Work, Class and Economic Relations (the entries cover domestic work, leisure and violence in the workplace); 4. Institutions (in which masculinity plays a significant role, such as the educational system and family, and also the police, academy, religion or social work); 5. The body

(with entries from castration and circumcision through sports such as body-building and football to testosterone); 6. Representation in Art (including musicals), in Literature (the genres include Westerns, comics and gay texts), and in "Miscellaneous" (such as advertising, humour, cyberspace, elite culture and also journalism). Section 7 on theories includes Theoretical and Disciplinary Perspectives applied in studies on men and masculinities, supplemented by a list of Key concepts in this area. Yet the forms of masculinity (including not only hegemonic and complicit but also playboy lifestyle, metro sexuality and protest masculinity) form a separate (8.) theme of the encyclopaedic entries. Another section (9.) covers Cultural Formations, such as Regions, types of Formations (such as postcolonial, diasporic, global or imperial manhood) and additional research and categories (successfully avoiding the term "race", although they deal with African-American masculinities or white men, they also list here machismo, codes of honour or "redneck" masculinity); chapter 10. on Histories and the historical formation is divided into Epochs and Regions relevant for constructing men's identities and their representative forms; 11. Masculine Policies (such as antifeminism, individual forms of men's movements, men's campaigns against violence to women and children / e.g. White Ribbon /, the gun lobby, fascism and nationalism). Section 12 concludes the thematic list of dictionary entries with the Work with Men and Boys (therapy, recovery, self-help and ways of working with different types of men that need it - whether they are inmates, aggressors or victims and patients, but also teenage boys, aging men, gay men, oppressed men, etc.) (Flood, Kegan Gardiner, Pease and Pringle eds., 2007: xxiii - xxvii).

Before this chapter focuses mainly on the relevant areas of the analysis concerning men and masculinities, particularly on problem men and masculinities, let us briefly pay tribute to Karel Poláček and his book that inspired me in many ways, and briefly stop at humour. Along with sport, which was offered in the first plan as Poláček's theme of men

offside<sup>7</sup>, it is also humour. Humour is encoded in the Czech context predominantly as a masculine phenomenon and it is involved in the formation of an ordinary man's social identity. This chapter also deals with humour because of the subject, which – in spite of being a significant building block of masculine (also hegemonic) identity – has not yet been, to my best knowledge, thematised as such in the Czech context.

Further on, the chapter will introduce several areas that are fundamentally associated with masculine identities. Within those areas, sources of insecurity for men and/or by which (some) men threaten other actors will be identified. There will be insights from the thematic sphere of home and work, and from the field of violence and health. We will then move to the more general issues of men and masculinities framed as social exclusion, where homelessness will be covered as a typically masculine attribute of poverty. This chapter will be followed by the next topical one (Chapter 4), devoted to a detailed analysis of another socially excluding phenomenon, which has been identified as threatening: it is a substandard level of education in a serious segment of young Czech men. This issue has entered the Czech public debate as an issue of underachieving boys, and thus legitimately belongs among targets of an analysis of masculinities offside.

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<sup>7</sup> Researchers in CSMM have paid persistent attention to sports. They research its relation to masculine identity (e.g. Michael Messner 2002, 2009), especially to building masculine social identity in childhood, and specifically to "boyhood". Sports, men and masculinities are being researched, including some extreme manifestations of masculinities within sports (e.g. Robinson, 2008, writes about rock climbing and mountaineering) or outside of them; mostly cases of violent practices are discussed (typically it is football hooliganism). Research has also responded to topical political issues, such as honour-based violence (in Islamic communities), and there seems to be a theme anchoring more and more firmly in the framework of studies on men and masculinities, which is an early stage of men's life paths: the boyhood. In the last two years several publications covering this issue have appeared in academic bookshops (Kimmell 2008, Corbett 2009, Cross 2008, Mikel Brown, Lamb and Tappan 2009, Messner 2009 on sports, Skelton and Francis 2009a, 2009b on the system of education).

## Humour

Studies on masculinities should clearly cover good humour. At the first glance, nevertheless, such inclusion should be only marginal, due to the rather low severity of social problems attached to this subject. At the second glance, however, there also stands humour that hurts. In relation to gender issues, it includes mainly sexist or misogynist "cracks", and also homophobic, racist or otherwise antisocial humour, all the way to harassment, which is also not funny or amusing. Researchers find it inspirational to examine how and where the actors define the boundaries of "good" and "bad" humour.

In my opinion, especially in the Czech environment, overstatement, a sense of self-irony or satire are not only seen as generally positive human attributes (or even as a part of the "national character"), but men are somehow normatively required to fit in with these traits. Humorists, entertainers and aphorists are predominantly expected to be men. This can be either simply due to an interplay of historical constellations associated with gender order, or perhaps there are certain "Good Soldier Schweik" traits which generally form a part of the national character, as others see it. However, "Czech masculinity" simply includes expectations that men have to be funny, solve problems with the help of overstatement and handle difficult situations with humour. What is especially prized is the ability of self-irony, which is what inspired me to borrow the title of this text about men and masculinities from the humorist Karel Poláček. His *Men Offside* is not only entertaining, but also surprising and enlightening. I was intrigued by the information in the epilogue that Poláček had not really liked football himself! (This is actually why he unequivocally won me over.) In spite of that, the author used the game as the main theme of his book. Although the content of *Men Offside* is actually only marginally about football, the central role is symbolically played by FC Victoria Žižkov

and "supporting"<sup>8</sup> this club. The key figures are men from various walks of life, and a prominent role is also played by Jewishness - Poláček offers countless Jewish jokes, thus also making fun of himself. At the same time, however, his book presents a very good insight into the lives of the residents of this poor district of Prague, reporting on intergenerational, partnership and family relationships in those days. Poláček is definitely a very inspiring author thanks to his light style of writing; such readable descriptions of relatively complex social problems are rare. Poláček writes with exaggeration about the relationship of (Czech) men not only to sports, but also to alcohol and health.<sup>9</sup>

Humour also plays a role in everyday family life. As Hochschild and Machung (1990) pointed out, sometimes this very approach, precisely the men's detachment and overstatement, together with expressing emotional support to their partners, is enough for maintaining a harmonious family routine in double career families. Fathers' letting off steam by playing with children after work, or perhaps only a snappy detachment of men in dealing with the domestic troubles of everyday life is largely the result of the gender-stereotyped division of labour in families with children and mothers at home, or with a woman between her two shifts (at the labour market and at home). We can come across this also in the Czech environment (Šmídová 2008a). Similarly, Hochschild and Machung (1990) earlier noticed the "space" that men (unlike women) still have for this detachment in two-career families in the USA. There was no need in their research to resort to explanations arguing with a "natural"

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<sup>8</sup> Being called a „fan“, however, is an insult, according to Žižkov residents, as it is evidence of the person's inability to impartially follow and evaluate the match. All passages of the book dedicated to the game (there are not as many as one might expect, based on the title of the book), naturally rest on the passionate support of a particular football club and on descriptions of heated disputes amongst the spectators in the stadium.

<sup>9</sup> Just two short samples: "I can't sit in a café all the time, can I? The doctor recommended me to do some sports, so I go to football matches," says the businessman character in the book, Mr. Načeradec (1956: 30). "There's a rumour going around that in Harantová street there was a butcher who was so badly hit by the sad news (about the FC Victoria Žižkov losing a match) that he was cut down by a stroke. But some said that the schnaps in him caught fire." (p. 39).

masculine talent for logic. The relation between humour and masculinity reaches beyond family life.

Humour, despite its lightness and absence of seriousness, plays a very important role in social life, Kehily notes (2006: 320- 1). Men's attitude to humour plays a significant role in their mutual practices and the purpose of its use for the establishment of a peer group is much stronger than just sharing a joke, says the author (2006: 320). An exchange of banter resembling verbal tennis with escalating verbal statements expresses a part of the masculine identity and works as a manifestation of friendship, support and a shared view of the world. In studies on men and masculinities it plays an important role, especially for younger age cohorts - adolescents and young men. A strong role is also played by a class-specific sense of men's humour, the author continues. It acts as a relief, a kind of escape or strategy to cope with the rules of educational institutions perceived as controlling, and as a feature of shop-floor culture and a bond between blue-collar workers. Humour is not so much the result or the outcome of these situations, but a constituent element of masculinity in these environments, says Kehily (2006: 320).

Humour often has a heteronormative character. It works well as glue for gender conformity in the form of games and allusions, and such like (unlike some kind of subversion against the standards required in the school environment). The target of student jokes, as Kehily writes, is usually girls or boys who do not fit into the conventional image of normative masculinity and femininity. This regulatory effect of humour works especially strongly in relation to homosexuality, when homophobic allusions only highlight the fragility and uncertainty of those concerned and their repetitive battle for mastering the "right" masculinity. Humour also serves as a tool for maintaining the dominant forms of masculinities. There is only a very fine line between humour and verbal attacks leading to humiliation. Sexist jokes help maintain ties within the group of insiders and strengthen hatred for those who do not belong to the group (for

example the organized clusters of boys and girls in American universities – “fraternities” and “sororities”). Anyone who can handle a rough joke or can withstand an attack has a chance to rise in the group hierarchy (Kehily 2006).

The use of humour is sometimes conceptualized as the denial of adulthood and maturity (Patman, 2006: 358), especially in the context of "white" working-class masculinities in Britain. It is also a form of defiance to respected middle-class values and a "backlash" to feminism. Historically, this is not a new pattern, as Elisabeth Badinter (1999) has pointed out earlier in her historical sociological analysis of crises of masculinities in French history, for example. Elites are sometimes portrayed in these comparisons as effeminate, their masculinity bound by specific refined practices including for example clothing. The working-class men then construct their statutory pride on denial of these attributes (no “pink shirt” and genteel conduct). Patman then shows how blue-collar workers use this humour to feminize the meaning of "seriousness" and "maturity", and supplemented by a sexist diction they present it as ridiculous (2006). Thus, humour taken as a constituent trait of masculinities works both ways. It works as an element relieving stressful situations resulting from power games and situations that men face when (getting or being) offside, such are the contexts of class inequality, and by effeminizing men in higher levels of social hierarchy blue collar men keep their own class pride and dignity. At the same time, humour is a practice fortifying the dual gender order when it is used to downgrade other actors (by sexist and homophobic jokes). There is definitely more to humour to be studied in the Czech context.

## **Key topics: home and work, health, violence and social exclusion**

This chapter will further introduce several institutions significantly forming men’s life paths and influencing their status and perception of

positions of power and/or offside. Let us start on a rather descriptive basis. Statistics and existing research data used here point to areas where men have problems and where the contemporary concept of normative masculinity finds itself offside. The selection of topics presented here was not completely random; it was inspired by an analysis conducted by a team of researchers in the CROME network and database – Critical Research on Men in Europe (<http://www.cromenet.org/>). With myself as a part of the research team, we searched for information and data in four areas defined as crucial for clarifying where there are problems that men suffer in society, and at the same time that they often face from a position of power, and thus have a share in the reproduction of the status quo in gender relations. At the time there were four social institutions, in which gender constellations were negotiated on daily basis: men's practices in relation to home and work, social exclusion, masculine violence and men's health.<sup>10</sup>

There are some very practical issues at stake when attempting to get an overall picture from the available statistical data. My experience from previous research was that although the Czech Republic seems to be a paradise for categorized data, it is not the case when one is seeking answers to questions such as: "In what percentage of households are women in the lead?"<sup>11</sup> or "What is the relatively highest level of education reached by the population of the Czech Republic by gender and age?"

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<sup>10</sup> The National Reports for the Czech Republic (Šmídová 2005a and 2005b) explored the available statistical data and the existing social science research on men and masculinities in the context of the Czech Republic in the four thematic areas outlined above.

<sup>11</sup> The section on the Population and Families and Households in the Czech Statistical Office publication called Focus on Women and Men (2009) contains a few tables that promise such information (based on the title). Absolute numbers of men as heads of households can be found (Table 1-19; there are 3,195 thousand), but for women there is only an aggregated category there "Woman in the head of household, wife or common-life woman" (3,726 thousand). Even with the knowledge of the total number of households (4,275.9 thousand), the relative representation of women at the head cannot be obtained. The tables with data for households by the number of members (Table 1-25) do not offer (even in this specialized publication) information about the variable saturation according to the sex category (but it quite unambiguously shows the age and education of the person in the "head of the household", and the same information for the "wife").

Such a classification of higher degree is not offered by common statistics. Some clues can be found to obtain the answers in the latest available thematic publications of the Czech Statistical Office, *Women and Men in Data 2008 (2009)* and *Focus on Women and Men (2008, 2009 and 2013)*, but what is missing is, for example, information on the changes in the relative ratios in the level of education reached over time in women and men in the entire population. It is also important to know how the statistics are read and interpreted and which data is selected to represent specific phenomena. For that matter, it applies both to reading the statistics, and also to using theoretical concepts, as I have already indicated in the second chapter when discussing the appropriate use of the concept of hegemonic masculinity and a critique of cases of its expedient or distorting application.

Some trends in the problems faced by Czech men can be, nevertheless, found in the available statistical data. However, there is no point in interpreting the standard collected data on households, families or paid work separately for men. It is especially when comparing the prevalence of certain phenomena in women or men that one can more easily identify similarities or differences in the problems that lurk for the actors in these institutions. Yet, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that the statistical category of "sex", i.e. what is written in the actors' birth certificates and identity cards, or what they declaratively profess, may have little to do with the category of "gender". At the same time, the sex category, a term coined by West and Zimmerman (2008) for the statistical dual variable of sex, is not identical with (biological) sex. We can only assume that beneath the underwear of men and women, we would find the expected biological evidence for their categorization into the male or female sex category (ibid.). So what relevant information do the statistics offer about households, families and work for the sociological perspective on social reality, that would cater for gender optics focused on men and masculinities?

The field of the family and harmonizing work with family and personal life represents in the Czech Republic the most researched category of the four introduced. However, this is true especially for the perspective focusing on the social status of women. What is missing is a gender sensitive sociological research on the topic of professional masculinities. Research studies dealing more generally with gender relations and representations are also less frequent than analyses focused on one of the dually-conceived gender analytical categories. Gender specific research is lacking on institutions in the public sphere associated with dominant masculinity. There are exceptions, such as the work by Hana Červinková on manhood in the Czech Army (Červinková 2003 and 2006), or Alena Křížková, who writes about men (and women) in managerial positions (Křížková 2007). Although there are some sociological research studies of the (new) elites, they do not include the gender aspect of their structure (such as Vlášil 1995). I myself carried out research on Czech hospital practice for giving birth, where much of the research was focussed on men head doctors, the medical profession representing one of the most prestigious occupations, while also being significantly gendered. Relevant aspects of that research study for analyses of masculinities offside are presented in Chapter 7 of this text. Yet another thematic research sought the "different men" in professions related to environment protection (Šmídová 2004b), it also touches the spheres of rather powerful men, despite the original intent to consistently uncover the life courses of non-careerists. A relevant view on constructing masculinities in the period before 1989 is offered by Ivan Vodochodský in his PhD research. He used biographical interviews to grasp the experiences of men and their family relationships during the 1970s (Vodochodský 2008). He does so explicitly using the knowledge of CSMM.

### ***Home: household and the family***

The existing Czech research on the family and private sphere that specifically thematises men covers rather fringe than mainstream family

arrangements. Czech sociology has focused research activities more (and earlier) on nurturing fathers (Maříková, Radimská 2003, Maříková 2004, Maříková Vohlídalová 2007, Šmídová 1999, 2004, 2008, Doválelová 2004) than fathers defined as "normal." A representative survey on a fathers' approach to active forms of fatherhood was conducted in 2011, commissioned by the Czech Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (<http://www.mpsv.cz/cs/12713>). Reliable research efforts have been dedicated to fatherhood after divorce (Radimská 2002, Dudová 2007, Dudová and Hastrmanová 2007). Nevertheless, Czech research on men and masculinities in the private sphere still rather conventionally focuses on the so-called "normal family". Only marginal research attention in Czech sociology has been paid to examining the phenomenon of "singles" (Tomášek 2006), but there has been no explicit focus in relation to (hegemonic or marginalized) masculinities. Little research attention has been given to the phenomena and the problems of intimacy and men's sexuality, whether it concerns the mechanisms of maintaining heteronormative patterns, or homophobia, or marginalized expressions of their sexuality. From this area, a recent research study of gay fatherhood by Věra Sokolová (Sokolova 2009) should not be ignored.

The role of breadwinners in the family and in the household is symbolically attributed to men (which makes them the heads of their households, as the text has already pointed out in a note referring to gendered statistics). However, fathers are not sole breadwinners in the traditional sense (they do not provide the only source of income), which has actually been the case in the Czech lands for a long time. Statistics and sociological studies on the family proved this long ago, yet men are still symbolically looked upon as family breadwinners and women-mothers are attributed the status of the other as wives, caretakers of the household and nurturers of the children.

According to opinion polls, the trend in childcare changed some time ago and it is understood now that it should be a matter for both parents, while the housework should still be done by women (CVVM, Public Opinion

Research Center, 2003). This has also been confirmed by later research data (Vohlídalová 2007) showing the Czech family everyday practice. The melting pot of family relations is the environment where even the most significant gender stereotypes either break down or are maintained. It is then reflected in the arrangement of positions in paid employment and elsewhere in the public sphere (Holter 2003, Harding 1986).

Therefore, men have received research and media attention predominantly in connection with nurturing parental status as an exceptional or new and desired practice. Since the formal introduction of parental leave (next to the maternity leave) in 1990, systematic attention has been given to the statistics recording the numbers of men receiving parental benefits - allowances (though inaccurate, this is the only readily available indicator of how much care men are taking of small children). In 2012, the share of men was 1.7%<sup>12</sup>, in 2007, there were about 1.5% men in the total number of people nurturing a child, which - according to a commentary in the publication *Women and Men in Data* (*Women and Men in Data 2008: 62*) - was an increase of 50% compared to 2004. On the other hand, this represented only a little over 4,500 men (5,249 in 2012), compared to 327,500 women (301,163 in 2012) in the same year (*ibid.*). According to the data available (only) for the year 2001, it is also true that most fathers take over childcare from mothers when the children are a bit older (*Women and Men in Data 2003, 2003*). Similarly infrequent for men are single-parent households. 2% of all children aged 0-17 lived with their fathers in 2001, while 3% of all children aged from 18 to 24 did.

These figures bring us to the second area in the context of fatherhood, which has also appeared in the spotlight of both Czech media and sociological research. It is the issue of custody after the separation or

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<sup>12</sup> Focus on Women and Men 2013 (ČSÚ 2014), Table 5.7:  
[http://www.czso.cz/csu/2013edicniplan.nsf/engkapitola/1413-13-eng\\_r\\_2013-15](http://www.czso.cz/csu/2013edicniplan.nsf/engkapitola/1413-13-eng_r_2013-15)

divorce of parents. A research study by Dudová and Hastrmanová (2007) concludes that in the last 15 years, approximately 90% of children have been put in the sole custody of the mother after the divorce. "This fact attracts attention and may lead to the question whether indeed there is discrimination against fathers in the decision-making about upbringing. However, the statistics regarding the allocation of children for custody offer only this final balance, but no numbers that would answer the question of what percentage of mothers and fathers during the divorce actually applied to get the child for sole custody "(ibid.). In 2004, 7.1% of the children were entrusted to the father's sole custody and 2.4% of the children ended up in joint or shared custody of both parents (however, this number is growing - in 2000 it was only 1.3%) and a tiny 0.4% fraction of the children were taken care of by different persons than the parents after the divorce (Women and Men in data 2005, 2005).

The picture of a kind of displacement of men from families, whether it happens after divorce or by a reduction of their status into a stereotypical role of "wallets" - a source of finance, even in families with two parents, highlights the dark side of gender relations for men. In the symbolic (gender) order, men are on the top in the public sphere, and even in the private one they are often those who can choose to join in household chores and enjoy the privilege of being perceived as precious items in the daily family routine, when they come home from their jobs (Šmídová 2011; Šmídová 2008c). On the other hand, the guardian of the hearth and home also has some power.

The legitimate power that women apply, reinforce and guard in the private sector falls on men with the greatest force when their access to childcare is at stake after their partnership has failed. On the level of individual relationships, it is inspiring in this sense to mention the proposition by the feminist psychoanalyst Dinnerstein (1999), introduced in more detail in the concluding parts of Chapter 6 when wrapping up the issues devoted to the family (analysed in Chapters 5 and 6). In Dinnerstein's text originating in the 1970's, women are portrayed as

"monsters" in the private sphere, where they have a monopoly on the upbringing of children, but they have no (or very limited) power in the public sphere to vent their possible dissatisfaction or suggestions for changes in any other way than through their partners - men. Men in turn dominate in an "inhuman" manner in the public sphere and do not really want to get involved in the so-called women's and family issues, even though they could address them in their realm. As stated by the author, until we get rid of this opposing dual concept of femininity and masculinity, we will all pay the price (Dinnerstein 1999). In the words of other authors, such as Harding (1986) and Bourdieu (2000), the dual world of the division of labour and unequal meanings and evaluations associated with the family and paid work represent a symbolic order of masculine domination. It is not difficult to find individual practices which are exceptions to these rules, but they rather confirm those rules than offer alternative routes.

The next theme related to family is home. Home does not necessarily only mean a family household, which I have discussed in this section so far. The Czech Republic has gone through a significant shift in several ways since 1989. The statistics relating to the home and family testify to an extended phase of dependence on the family of origin and at the same time increasing years spent in non-family households. The statistics indicate that in 1995 men left home at the age of twenty-six (median), when they were often already married (the average age<sup>13</sup> of their first marriage was 25.5). In 2005 they left at twenty seven, but they still had more than two years before their first marriage (29.2). As for women in 1995, they left home essentially with the first marriage at the age of twenty-three (the first marriage on the average at 23.1 years); in 2005 the leaving age was twenty-five, and the first marriage usually took place after a year and a half of independent living (all data is from Table 1

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<sup>13</sup> I know that comparing medians with averages is clumsy, but statistics do not offer the average age of leaving home or the median age of the first marriage (Focus... 2009).

- 6 and 1 - 17 in Focus ... 2009)<sup>14</sup> and then almost immediately the first child was born<sup>15</sup> (in the same year, the average age of mothers at the first birth was 26.6 years, Tables 1-15 in Focus ... 2009). The average difference in the father's and mother's ages at the birth of their first child is estimated by the demographers as 4 years (Štyglerová 2009: 163), so it can be assessed that men had their first child at the average age of 31 in the year 2009. This leads to lengthening the childless phase of life - if I consider in this case only the standard biographies of men and women which include children. The numbers of those who remain childless throughout their whole lives are still smaller in the Czech population than of those who have children, though the number of childless people is increasing and the estimates mention 15-19% lifetime childless (women) born in the 1970s (Sobotka 2006).<sup>16</sup>

In any case, the period after men (and women) leave the household in which they have grown up, would deserve detailed research attention in the Czech Republic. What is going on there? This stage of life has become the research focus of some foreign authors in the sphere of CSMM. Kimmel (2008) conceptualized the so-called "Guyland", the men's world of early adulthood, the period of transition between childhood and adolescence into adulthood, a fascinating land of messing about, parties, games with modern technology and watching sports. In his book *Guyland - The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men. Understanding the Critical Years Between 16 and 26* he points out that at this stage of life in the USA it is not just about an extension of the childhood – the boyhood, but a more dangerous social world has evolved in which men are "moulded" today. It is very remote from the traditional indicators of the way to

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<sup>14</sup> No comparative data on these issues was found for later years. The age of the first marriage has increased, it was 31 years for men in 2010 and 28.2 for women (Focus...2013).

<sup>15</sup> This simple and smooth narrative over large numbers gets complicated by the fact that, say, in 2008, 46.2% of the first children were born outside of marriage, and that in the same year there was 28.1% of pre-marital conceptions (Štyglerová 2009).

<sup>16</sup> This estimate by Sobotka, confirmed by retrospective projections, implies an increasing probability of the birth of the first baby at an advanced stage of the reproductive age (Sobotka 2006).

men's adulthood, characterized mainly by responsibility. It also takes a lot of courage to step out of it and enter the true adulthood, remain honest with oneself and draw one's own path in life, says Kimmell (2008).

A similar theme is discussed in another analytical work by another American researcher, who is not a sociologist like Kimmell, but a historian. Gary Cross, in his book *Men to Boys. The Making of Modern Immaturity* (Cross 2008), discusses aspects of immaturity in today's adult men and describes their evolution from the 20th century to the present. Similarly to Kimmell, he is concerned with the representations of idols in magazines (typical boyish appearance), with boys-men addicted to video games, comic books, extreme sports or apt to "give someone a roasting" rather than to plan one's own next career move. Neither author idealizes the past nor calls for its return, but they both note the unsustainability of the status quo. It kills individual desires and ethical maturity in the case of masculinity which, in Cross's words, have to be dusted and cultivated. Kimmell also offers a set of advice in the last chapter about how to leave the enchanted land of Guyland with honour. Kimmell's hints include integrity and respect, breaking the silence by ethical approach and solving conflicts with honour. "That the culture of protection become a culture of genuine (...) support and care", Kimmell writes; the best way out from the endless contesting culture of manhood is to leave the world of Guyland far behind once and for all (Kimmell 2008: 289).

The homes and households of young adult men and the way they live in them (or mostly outside of them) are still unknown to Czech social scientists. Tomášek (2006), who has dedicated his research to Czech singles, offers a gender-sensitive perspective on what the households of the "young bachelors" look like, how they operate and how they are maintained. In parallel to studying the households of young adults, we could also look at the households at other stages of life. What do the households of single or divorced seniors look like? Surely we could find similarities and differences from the gender perspective. However, should this text focus on identifying spaces and topics that are somehow new,

specific or "threatening" in the context of masculinities and the home, it must include homelessness. The phenomenon will be dealt with, at least briefly, in the section devoted to social exclusion.

### ***Work: employment, professions and occupations***

Paid work in the public sphere is symbolically rather than factually a men's domain. Again some descriptive statistics may help us get an overall picture on what grounds does work acquire a symbolically-gendered character. The rate of economic activity for men aged 15-64 in 2007 according to LFSS (Labour Force Social Survey in Focus... 2009) was 78.1% (61.5% for women). About four times less men than women work part-time (though the rate of full-time work in the whole country is very high: only 2.3% of men and 8.6% of women were working part-time in 2007). Men working full-time work on average five hours a week more than women (40.5 compared to 35.1), in part-time contracts they work half an hour less (19.9 compared to 20.4 hours, in both cases the data are for 2007, taken from Focus... 2009). About 20% of men are engaged in their own business (the number of self-employed women is 50% smaller; the data is for 2007, taken from Women and Men in the data 2008) and men also make up two thirds of people with a second job (ibid.). Due to the form of work and the employment sector, it is less frequent for men to have employment contracts for an indefinite period than for women (Focus ... 2009).

Men earn more, work a higher number of years, and on average run a smaller risk of unemployment than women - hence they are less threatened by poverty. In 2007, women earned an average  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the men's wages (the median wage was about 80%), so men earned 133% of the average women's wage (Focus... 2009). Regarding earnings by educational attainment, the largest gap between the sexes is in the category of university graduates (the difference is 31.2%) and those with vocational education (28.4%, ibid.). The greatest differences between men and women in average monthly wages (over 30%) can be found in

the following segments of the labour market. In reference to the standard categorisation into employment classes, the greatest gender gap is in I and VII., i.e. legislators, senior officials and managers, skilled crafts-persons, manufacturers and processors (minimum differences are in the army). In terms of sectors, the greatest differences are in the most lucrative professions and the smallest in those where earnings are below the average. So in the sector with by far the highest average salaries, in financial services, women earn half the men's income (52%, which in 2007 represented an average wage of CZK 65,000 or, in the case of women less than CZK 34,000). A similar situation is in the sector of trade and repair (G sector, 64.9%) and in the industries in general (69.8%). Similarly small earnings apply to both men and women in the sector of services (public, social and personal, 93.1%; men's salary is CZK 22,000, women's CZK 20,500) or in hotels and restaurants (87.5%, CZK 18,000 compared to CZK 15,700).<sup>17</sup>

In the Czech context, the issue of another category "at risk", young men with low education, has made its way into the public discussion and has gained the attention of research as well. This topic is also gaining more attention internationally, probably mainly because the conventional gender expectations still include the assumption that the household (or future family) financial security is predominantly provided by men; a paid job is one of the cornerstones of masculine social identity, while women are identified, or remain to be identified, with maternity status and nursing. This issue has become a common focus of sociological analyses, and for this very reason I devote the Chapter 4 of this habilitation thesis to the threat that the low level of education represents for men.

If we look again at the Czech statistics of men's and women's employment, it is clear that those expectations are attached more to the

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<sup>17</sup> However, it is significant that, according to a very rough breakdown of the work sectors (agriculture, industry and services), we find 48.8% of all working men in relatively lucrative industries (and 24.5% of women), while 72% of women (and 48% of men) are employed in the generally lower-paid services (Focus... 2009). In sectors where we find more women (e.g. retail shops and repairs, except for cars), the differences in wages between men and women are very high (ibid.).

symbolic level of dividing the world into masculine and feminine and to legitimizing the practice of the private sector. As for the practices of the actors in the labour market, gender stereotypes and the gendered character of labour market institutions have an impact on the statistics mainly in the segmentation of the work sectors and in the hierarchy of jobs. One cannot say (since long ago) that paid work is the domain of men. This information can be a source of concern or even a threat for traditionally-minded men and it keeps its legitimacy only in defence of the existing gender order.

When focusing on men offside with regard to work, it is unemployment that stands at the basis of the problem there. Unemployment is often used, and legitimately so, as a key threatening factor in arguments referring to reasons behind the publicized crisis of masculinity or men. It is precisely due to gendered expectations associated with conventional men life trajectory. Czech statistics offer the following figures that distort the easy imagery: long-term unemployment is higher among women than among men, and it applies to all age groups (except 60 +; Focus... 2009). The men's unemployment rate is, similarly to the women's, concentrated mainly in young age groups (recent graduates 15-19 and 20-24 years), with 30% of the youngest women and 25% of the youngest men unemployed (for the age 20-24 the figures are 8.9 and 8.7%).<sup>18</sup> In 2012, the ratio of age and education specific unemployed rate was also higher for young men (aged 15 – 29 with basic as well as lower secondary education) than for women (Focus... Table 4 – 25, % share by age). By default, the worst is the situation of the people with the lowest level of education (primary or no education).<sup>19</sup> The long-term unemployment rate in the Czech Republic, presents a bigger threat to women than men. Between 1993 and 2012 the long-term

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<sup>18</sup> There is a significantly higher unemployment rate among younger women (30-40 years) than among men, when women as mothers take care of smaller children.

<sup>19</sup> In this text I leave aside the impact that the recent financial crisis has had on the statistics. An analysis of recent data would need a longer lapse of time. I am also leaving aside the so-called hidden unemployment, which is not reflected in statistically measured indicators of unemployment.

unemployment rate was always at least a third higher for women, in 2012, the percentage of long-term unemployed was 2.8% of men and 3.9 % of women (Table 4-29 Focus ... 2013). The severity of unemployment also has a regional character. Long-term unemployment affects most regions with a high overall unemployment rate, which means the Ústí nad Labem region, Moravian-Silesian region, but also the Karlovy Vary region. These are all fringe regions - most of them had had heavy industry which had been significantly reduced in the transformation process after 1989. Young people constitute the most threatened group, in which men are unemployed mainly in the Karlovy Vary region (Unemployment, 2007).

Thus, as far as the genderedness of work (labour market) is concerned, as well as the lack of work in the case of unemployment, the data indicates that it is women who are the more endangered segment of Czech population. Nevertheless, the dominant symbolic interpretation lies in stressing the negative effects for men and their social identities. Within the conventional concept of gender relations and expectations associated with feminine and masculine social identity, we tend to overlook the women's unemployment, or comment that the situation is not so bad for them, as they can still find their self-fulfilment in the family, where their gender-specific domain consists of nurturing and interpersonal relations.<sup>20</sup> In this context, men's unemployment in today's gender setting is understood as a more fundamental problem.

In a way, this view is justified, unless we cross the boundaries delineating the existing gender order. As we have shown in the conceptual Chapter 2, devoted to hegemonic masculinities, the public sphere and self-fulfilment in paid employment is symbolically strongly linked to "achieving masculinity". Its accomplishment forms the basis for deriving more characteristics such as individual life satisfaction, but also the legitimacy of the practices reproducing the status quo. We live in a world

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<sup>20</sup> For example Dudová and Hastrmanová draw attention to the economically untenable situation of single parent families, which in the current practice of division of gender roles again means almost invariably women (2007).

where it is endlessly stressed that it is the anticipated differences between masculine and feminine abilities that predispose men to activities in the public sphere and women in the private sphere. Although developments in a number of recent decades suggest that such a division in its simplest form ceases to be sustainable - a man's failure in the public sphere is still interpreted as a greater tragedy. Unemployed men end up "offside" particularly because the labour market and organizations offering jobs are set up and have actually been constructed to accommodate those actors who are independent of other commitments, i.e. family care and the work associated with the running of the household, which again men traditionally fulfil more easily than women. Thus, unemployed men have failed in the men's world, as labour market and employment organisations are not gender neutral, despite formally being framed as such (Acker 1990). Men have a better paved path ahead there, easier career growth, better salaries, men's bonding forms exclusive clubs (for example in the form of patriarchal dividends mentioned by Connell, 1995) and all that helps to keep this men's world symbolically separated from that of women. In the case of positions in the labour market, men with their problems still remain conventionally more visible actors.

An unemployed man loses the key benefits of affiliation or aspiration for hegemonic masculinity, even if only temporarily. The stigma of an unemployed man puts him offside in the game, where most actors share the idea that a paid job is more a part of masculinity than anything else. Unemployment and its impact on the evaluation of men's careers is a standard example of the gender system (the way we know it works in practice), which restricts all actors, both women and men.

Let me repeat what is typical of the existing gender order, without downplaying the problems of men's unemployment: the fact that unemployment systematically threatens mainly women is somehow being rendered invisible. The gender universe described by Sandra Harding (1986), i.e. looking at the world through the dual categories of feminine

and masculine, which are moreover in clearly hierarchical mutual positions, works here in the sense that men are the breadwinners (in fact, they are co-breadwinners) who should protect women and children, defined as weak and fragile (this man's function has been partly substituted by the state). The actors are aware of these expectations and act on them. However, generally neither women nor men reflect the restrictions that are the reverse side of the coin. Bourdieu (1998, 2000) writes in this sense of symbolic violence, where the ones who are controlled are only able to see their world through the perspective defined by the ones who control them. Bourdieu had primarily women in mind as those controlled by the system of masculine dominance. If we take a closer look at hegemonic masculinity, it becomes clear that a number of men also take advantage of the mechanisms of reproducing hegemony in order to maintain their share of power. This complicit side of masculinity then provides men with the patriarchal dividend, benefits flowing to men just on the basis of belonging to the category of men (Connell 1995). It is therefore in their best interest to maintain the sphere of paid employment as the key to man's social identity, although it is not an enterprise without risk; at the same time it is also in the best "interest" of women to preserve the security of the present status quo when guarding their nurturing work in the family. It is precisely these two pigeon-holes (for men and women) that are offered by the existing gender order.

### ***Health: risk, adrenaline and helplessness***

The theme of health is significantly understudied in the Czech context from the social-science perspective. The same applies for the involvement of gender-focused analytical perspective in the existing research. Health statistics in this country offer rich comparative material, nevertheless sociological analyses of health (sociology of medicine or medical sociology) remain only marginal in international comparison. Of the handful of existing sociological research studies, more attention has been paid to issues related to women and health – specifically with

concerns on decreasing fertility rates (Rabušic 2001, Zamykalová 2003, Rabušic, Chromková Manea 2011), infertility (Slepičková 2009) and other aspects of reproductive health (Hrešanová 2008, Hrešanová, Hasmanová Marhánková 2008, Slepičková, Šlesingerová a Šmídová 2012). In the context of the demographic aging of society, gender-relevant research studies have appeared dedicated to this process and to its embodiment by individual actors (not only in their working careers, but also in the ways and opportunities of spending their leisure, continuing education, etc.)

There is no question that issues of health are significantly gendered, too. The conventional understanding of the relationship between men and health disassociates these two with reference to the cliché that “men do not have any problem”. Here again, the symbolic gendered framework of all-omnipotent men clashes with the evidence.

What does a rough picture of the Czech population show and how can we relate these data to men and health? In the Czech Republic over the last 15 years the men to women ratio had been consistently decreasing (Table 1 - 1 in Focus ... 2013). Life expectancy at birth has been consistently shorter for men (in 2006 it was 73.2 years; 79.7 for women, in 2011 74,8 and 81,1). However, it has an increasing trend for both sex categories and the gap between them is decreasing, too (Table 2 – 22 in Focus ... 2013). We can start our exploration of the relationship between health and masculinities and men's life experience right from the analysis of this data on life expectancy.

The state of men's health, and socially pathological behaviour reflected in it, comes as a relevant focus of analytical attention in the context of addictions, especially the culturally-tolerated abuse of alcohol. After 1989, the phenomenon of work-related stress and workaholism appeared with unusually high intensity, both coded and experienced rather as masculine-gendered experiences. On the opposite side of the spectrum, extensive media coverage has focused on the health issues of erectile dysfunction and impotence, where – among other aspects - men get commodified, similarly to other target populations, by the

pharmaceutical industry. In the early nineties, an interesting study appeared on poor eating habits and obesity (Krch 2002). The psychiatrist Krch argued that men tend to self-confidently overestimate their physical appearance. The study has also pointed out to the growing trend of the male body as catching up with the female one in becoming a centre for consumerism and marketing strategies. Krch adds that in men we are more likely to come across the "psychiatric comorbidity", i.e. the occurrence of more than one problem at a time, and he mentioned alcohol, obsessive traits, insecurity or depression as examples.

Men's health has been, until very recently, one of the least publicized "men's issues" in the Czech context. Research-wise this still remains so. Occasionally it received research attention from social scientists in connection with fertility patterns, paternity (legal) issues, equal opportunities in the family or in the labour market, or even within some popular psychology approaches, which offer sets of characteristic masculine and feminine traits and sometimes even hereditary characteristics (the kind of Parson's opposites). But what rather holds is the stereotype that "men do not (should not) have a problem," or that they can manage it without any outside help.<sup>21</sup>

Contrary to the reflection of the phenomena that is missing, there are a number of health topics that are very serious specifically in terms of men's lives. Little sociological attention has been paid to the social explanation of the shorter life expectancy of men or to the higher rate of suicide. The health effects that result from the standard men's biographies include health risks associated with work-related stress, the type of work performed and workaholism.

In the Czech context, I believe that the issues related to men's health come into public awareness predominantly when pharmaceutical

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<sup>21</sup> Another popular saying refers to the fact that when men get sick, it must be at least a deadly disease. There is a riddle with a pertinent overstatement: "What is a serious disease for a man, the lord of creation, in five letters?" "A cold."

companies orchestrate the medicalization of particular segments of the human life experience (such as for example ageing). The pharmaceutical business involved in launching men's health as a public issue is geared by presentations of their products by well-known public figures; e.g. in the case of sex-life problems, the marketing has the faces of popular Czech sexologists. Media bring research reports revealing the decreasing number of viable sperms in the male ejaculate, or accounts of the 'first artificial sperm' (Respekt 2009/29). Themes slashed about in this way touch upon a very sensitive chord that was already conceptualized by Geoff Dench, and introduced to Czech audiences by Hana Havelková (Havelková 1995b) in the review of his book. They thematise the seeming uselessness of men for the reproduction of populations, or rather the stronger perception of women as bound to the biological reproduction of humanity in comparison to the somewhat uncertain status of men in this endeavour.

This whole nature-culture debate cannot be embraced here. Nevertheless the dual approach again helps us understand interpretations pointing to the "social redundancy" of men with reference to their absence in the upbringing of children and often perceived clumsiness or unsuitability for matters related to relationships, with the next step, which is to overcome the male indispensability to biological reproduction. In Dench's scenario, it is only a matter of time, till women will be able to entirely do without men. Only fifteen years after his scenario of "men at risk" was formulated, media coverage presents it as much more realistic.<sup>22</sup>

Yet another gender-specific approach to health is suggested by the information from the table on assessing one's own state of health. On average, men more frequently than women assessed their health as good or very good, and they are somewhat more likely to state that they have no permanent health problem that would limit them (only in the case of

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<sup>22</sup> The fact that this topic is tempting, inspiring and highly marketable (in the genre of science fiction) is shown by the long-standing popularity of the Polish comedy "Sexmission" (1983) directed by Juliusz Machulski in the Czech Republic.

women and men with a university education, the order is slightly reversed). A very interesting picture is offered by assessments categorised by the level of educational attainment. It seems that men with primary education are subjectively the healthiest, although they also have the most health problems that somehow limit them in comparison to men with higher levels of education. This paradox only highlights the conventional imperative for men as publicly admitting no problems, and the conformity with such masculinity representation structured along the educational axis.

In women with low education, it is the other way round. Yet both men and women hold the increasing tendency to rate one's own health as good depending on the level of educational attainment, starting with lower secondary education. So the people, and men especially, with the lowest level of formal education form a specific group.

**Assessment of health condition (persons aged 16+, in %)**

Indicator	Highest completed education			
	basic incl. non-completed	lower secondary, apprenticeship	complete secondary with GCSE	University
<b>Women</b>				
Health condition				
very good	10,7	9,5	19,9	31,0
Good	26,6	40,8	47,3	47,3
Acceptable	32,3	33,2	24,7	18,4
Bad	24,1	13,7	6,7	2,6
very bad	6,2	2,9	1,4	0,8
Health problem				
no permanent health problem	49,8	65,0	75,5	80,6
problem causing no difficulties	7,6	8,8	7,5	7,6
problem with restrictive consequences	28,8	18,6	13,1	10,0
problem with strong restrictive consequences	13,8	7,6	3,9	1,8
<b>Men</b>				
Health condition				
very good	30,6	14,8	26,0	29,1
Good	29,0	39,9	44,6	43,0
Acceptable	23,2	29,8	21,4	23,0
Bad	12,0	12,5	6,6	4,0
very bad	5,3	3,0	1,4	0,9
Health problem				
no permanent health problem	66,9	67,4	76,5	77,0
problem causing no difficulties	5,5	6,9	8,3	9,5
problem with restrictive consequences	18,3	18,6	11,0	11,0
problem with strong restrictive consequences	9,3	7,1	4,2	2,5

Source: Focus on Men and Women 2013, original source: Living conditions 2012

Men`s self-assessment as being healthier is also interesting because their life expectancy at birth is shorter than that of women. However, according to the statistics of healthy life expectancy, it is higher for men than for women (59.9 and 57.9 in 2005, Women and Men in the Data 2008), which can be interpreted (with the life expectancy in mind) that men suffer less from chronic diseases.

With regard to disease prevention and vice versa - health-threatening risky behaviour with gender-specific incidence, the health statistics in the Czech Republic monitor how women and men are actively engaged in sports and what the situation is with smoking and alcohol consumption. According to statistical data available for rather more distant periods of time, in 2003 men were three times more likely to be active in sports than women, and more often than women were engaged in sports in their spare time (43% men and 29% women, Women and Men in Data 2003, 2003). The statistics on smoking and alcohol consumption are offered by the World Health Survey on the website of the Institute of Health Information and Statistics (ÚZIS) for the year 2004 (Hrkal 2004). According to these statistics, about one fifth of adult women and one third of adult men smoke; the proportion of daily smokers is the highest in the age group 40–49, where one third of women and one half of men smoke; in the category up to 30, the proportion of women and men smokers is about the same. It means that men smoke more and longer than women, and this ratio grows with age. Regarding alcohol consumption, according to ÚZIS data (Hrkal 2004) there are about 5% of lifetime abstainers among men (and 21% among women). About three quarters of women and men consume alcohol "moderately". 18% of men and 4% of women fall into the category of irregular excessive drinkers, as classified by ÚZIS (occasional 5 standard glasses of alcohol within one to two days); and 7% of men and less than 1% of women are regular alcohol consumers (at least 5 glasses in three days). A comparative analysis concludes that in the Czech Republic, 24.8% of men and 3.9% of women consume alcohol excessively (Hrkal 2004).

Another view of the similarities and differences in health between men and women is offered when we look at mortality tables. They suggest that men die somewhat more frequently than women from cancer (in 2007 neoplasm-caused deaths accounted for 29% in all men's deaths, and almost 24% in women's deaths, which represents a more or less stable long-term trend, see Table 2 to 22, in Focus ... 2009). The most common causes of death are diseases of the circulatory system, which accounted for about 37% of deaths in both women and men in 2007. A more frequent cause of death in men is myocardial infarction (16%, compared to 10% in women in 2007); statistics show a significant decline in this cause of death from 26% for men in 1995 and 16.5% for women in the same year.

Another specific cause of death in men, although in terms of proportions it is rather marginal, is suicide (in 2007 it was 2.2% compared to 0.4% in women; the men's share has been stable for a long time and it is around 1,100 to 1,200 men per year; the figures are falling slightly for women - in 1995 it was about 450 women, i.e. 0.8% of all causes of death among women, and in 2007 there were 230 suicides among women, *ibid.*). Women then die more frequently than men of cerebrovascular diseases: in 2007 it was about 24% of the causes of women's deaths and almost 20% of men's deaths; there is a declining trend compared to previous years (in 1995 it was about 30% in women and 24.5% in men, *ibid.*).

It is questionable to what extent it is significant from the point of view of sociological gender analysis of the structure of society to search for similarities and differences in the causes of death of men and women. In any case, it is still true that we do not have sufficient evidence to explain why men feel healthier and why their practices are more risky than women's in terms of health. Czech sociology has so far failed to analyse which mechanisms link normative masculinity (including masculinities complicit and aspiring to hegemonic masculinity) to different

practices of the actors (men) in relation to various aspects of their health. There is room for topical research initiatives there.

### ***Violence: the far side of masculinities and men***

The theme of violence in the context of Czech men is virtually untouched by research, similarly to health. I have not found any extensive research that has conceptualized men either as perpetrators or as victims or in a complexity of both. There is an apparent tendency to sometimes understand the topic of gender violence only narrowly as domestic violence, which applies both to the public debate, and to the few existing research studies. Empirical data is sometimes generated by organizations that work directly with the victims of (domestic) violence, and their perspective can offer a biased picture, despite their creditable efforts to map the field. There are some results of the research on "domestic violence against men and the elderly" (Buriánek and Kovařík eds. 2006), but the research is rather problematic from the methodological point of view (it was carried out by students through questionnaires, the report does not indicate the number of respondents that declined to participate, etc..), and several internal studies by non-profit organizations or the Czech Police that focused on the perpetrators of domestic violence.

Similarly to some foreign research studies, in this country we also come across the situation that men are included in the research of domestic violence against women only as perpetrators and women only as victims, as pointed out by Linková (2002). The available data and their interpretation suggest that 90% of domestic violence victims are women and children, the remainder are seniors and "exceptionally, but also", as the authors put it, men in productive age (Voňková, Lienau, 2002). However, similar data presentation may be misleading and in terms of the gendered nature of social structure they represent a stereotypical, simplistic view. By saying this, I do not question the clearly prevailing trend and detected incidence of domestic violence or crime statistics indicating that women are overwhelmingly the victims and men the

perpetrators of domestic violence. However, the picture described above also fits into the gender-stereotyped images of what kind of action is expected from men and from women in this set-up of relations, and is also interpreted with greater understanding.<sup>23</sup>

It may be worth looking at how social scientists and professionals in this field treat the information about women as perpetrators and men as victims. For example in the case of violence against children, such generalization of women-victims is all the more problematic, as boys and girls are not often portrayed as gendered actors, and neither their dependent position in the social hierarchy, mainly on mothers and fathers, has received any distinct conceptualization. Similarly, it may also be the case with seniors. At the same time, however, we can encounter reversed, biased interpretations of the attackers and victims, which in turn inappropriately exaggerate the threat that men are exposed to and push aside and discredit the main feature of domestic violence as a gendered act in the social order of men's dominance. Domestic violence is still an issue only recently articulated in the public debate and thus its taboo has been broken.

A typical feature of presenting domestic violence in the Czech media space is the attention given to men as victims of abusive women. In the spirit of an unfortunately-twisted thesis of Tomas Garrigue Masaryk, that there is no women's issue without a men's issue, such men-mirroring in recently untabooed violence issues is overrepresented. A detailed article in the magazine WEEK (Týden; Kyša 2008) could be labelled as a case of cataclysmic journalism, which in my opinion blocked for a long time any serious debate on the factors linked to the taboo of men as victims. By seriously marking men as victims of so-called food terror, the article mocked years of work of specialists and experts in the field of domestic violence, which was defined mainly as a situation of long lasting,

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<sup>23</sup> A growing aggressiveness of girls' gangs in France is described for example by Badinter (2004), while Sokolová (2004) writes about violence committed by women in Nazi Germany.

intensifying and very unequal positions of the partners in the couple. This food terror meant that men's partners deliberately cooked either what men did not like or what made them fatter, or plainly refused to cook for them. In such a downgrading of a serious theme, a number of women's organizations found the legitimacy of their opinion confirmed that the victims of the patriarchal yoke are in the end always women. Moreover, it is hard then to propose less marketable complex analyses written in complicated, terminologically-dense language to indicate that women are also the perpetrators and they can abuse, and do abuse their power when they have legitimate access to it (which may indeed be mainly in the family and household); men can just as well become victims of women in situations where they do not have a dominating status. The key factor is who ends up with the option to choose; and with what consequences, whether s/he will remain in the relationship or leave. In any case, it can be concluded that Czech empirical sociology has no extensive research available so far that would conceptualize in a gender-sensitive and non-partial way interpersonal violence in its complexity. This topic is highly complex methodologically, ethically and theoretically.

The simple picture of "men and women offenders" and "women and men victims" gets complicated by a set of other key factors that structure social relationships and interactions, like the category of gender. The gender order sets very specific possibilities for the actors and the result is restrictive both for women and men, especially in its stereotypical interpretation of "women = victims" and "perpetrators = men".

I have already pointed out that age (children and seniors) plays an important role, and in a specific situation may or may not sometimes outweigh the importance of gender categories. Other structuring factors are understandably the social class or status (education, socio-economic position) or belonging/not belonging to the majority nationality, ethnicity or religion. Gender is also a very specific factor as regards health and disease - as is violence tied to infirmity and dependence. Another important aspect of gendered structure applies in relation to (expected)

care, which is required by (gendered) players when they are in a state of helplessness and powerlessness. The resulting set-up of relationships between the actors and their symbolic representation and interpretation relates to the mechanisms of retaining power in social structures, thus to negotiating the legitimacy of certain types of practice expected of women and men in specific situations.

Hegemonic masculinity and complicit masculinity in their present form make it easier for the individual men to act violently, because it is largely a cultural pattern for the exercise of legitimate masculinity. It would be a mistake, however, to consider violence as the pronounced dual practice of actors from two sex categories, women and men. Masculine and feminine identities are found in situations of power superiority and inferiority, in conjunction with the other above-mentioned structuring factors. The gender universe of power inequality in which our actions take place may thus be in a particular context overshadowed by a more dominant role of another stratifying element. However, at the same time it holds true that not only the individual practices of the actors, but also social institutions and the whole social order are structured along the gender axis in such a way that the symbolic value of the feminine is attributed a more passive, weaker and closer to nature (and reproduction) evaluation, which stands hierarchically below the masculine active, competitive - in the case of violence, aggressive and more powerful position (Harding 1986).

The general understanding of sexually-motivated and domestic violence has an impact on framing and interpreting interpersonal violence as such. The symbolic order, the gender universe, offers and legitimizes stereotypical interpretations that men are the perpetrators and women the victims, which also applies in the approach to the prosecution of criminal

offences related to violence. Criminology statistics confirm this bias.<sup>24</sup> We will now have a closer look at violence beyond the private sphere.

Although men are statistically more frequently the perpetrators, they are also more frequent victims of violence, with the exception of sexual assault (see the table Victims of Selected Crimes). Men become victims of robberies significantly more frequently than women and it already starts in adolescence (in 2006, 664 men under 18 years of age and 2009 adults were mugged - in the same year 130 juvenile women were mugged as well as 1,663 adult women) and also more men who had been attacked ended up with an injury (Table 6-2 ... in Focus 2009). Women as murder victims are 50% less frequent than men (the ratio of minors to the rest of the population is the same in women and men).

**Victims of selected crimes in 2006**

Violent crime		Murders		Thefts		Sexual assault	
women	men	women	men	women	men	women	men
3 608	6 191	73	146	1 800	2 864	1 104	207

Source: Table 6 – 17 in Focus ... 2009; Original source: <http://w3.unece.org/pxweb/Dialog/> – 10/06/2008

Now let's look at the situation with the perpetrators of crime. Men account for nearly 95% of prison inmates (in 2007 there were 999 women compared with 17,902 men, Table 6-5 in Focus ... 2009). What also plays a role in criminological statistics is which of the prosecuted persons have charges brought against them, and which are sentenced and penalized. While men in the same year accounted for 85.6% of all persons prosecuted, charges were brought against 86.3% of them. Proposals for punishment are made and summary proceedings are held in 91.7 and 91.5 percent of the cases involving men. They were convicted in 87.6% of cases. This suggests that there are situations where the cases of women prosecuted end differently than by a sentence and punishment; although

<sup>24</sup> Criminological topics through the lens of gender were introduced to Czech sociology above all by Kateřina Nedbálková (2006).

there are not many cases, these are more frequent than in men. Obviously this bias can be interpreted from the gendered notion that women have to be protected, as they are often mothers, who may have committed a crime only out of individual despair in order to provide for their families. This consideration may not be immediately applied in cases involving men's criminal acts - and apparently it is not; it is more the case that the crime is followed by a punishment. Such moral opinions help maintain the status quo in gender relations, where women are automatically connected with the role of victims and men with the role of the perpetrators, just because they belong to a statistical category "women" or "men".

As to the structure of criminal offences for which women and men are prosecuted, the following table offers a basic overview. However, it is important to note that the number of people in these categories varies rather wildly year on year depending on the applied methods and valid legislation. So, for example in 2007, the total number of men persecuted for Other offences of violence was 8,614 (and 750 women respectively), in 2012, the total figures were 5, and zero. With no regard to potential year-on-year comparison, the women:men ratio is telling enough.

**Prosecuted persons: by sex and kind of offence 2012 and 2007**

<i>Criminality</i>	<i>2012</i>		<i>2007</i>	
	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>
<i>Murders, total</i>	20	154	59	92
<i>Other offences of violence, total</i>	-	5	750	8 614
<i>Offences against morality, total</i>	91	1 079	436	5 527
<i>Burglaries, total</i>	585	8 630	378	1 183
<i>Thefts, total</i>	2 922	16 493	1 890	12 651
<i>Offences against property, total</i>	4 442	29 199	2 789	15 866
<i>Other criminal acts, total</i>	2 122	15 566	3 987	15 664
<i>Remaining criminality, total</i>	3 462	25 078	1 753	15 896
<i>Economic crimes, total</i>	3 502	8 720	7 531	19 523
<i>Military acts and acts against constitutional system, total</i>	-	9	.	.

Source: Focus... 2013

Original source: The Police Presidium of the Czech Republic

It is apparent that typical men's crimes - in my definition those of a higher order - include basically all prosecuted types of crimes in the observed years 2012 and 2007. Men are not only accused but also prosecuted for all types of crimes distinctly more frequently than women (the assumption is that they have also committed them). The smallest difference in the ratio was in homicides, where women are prosecuted in roughly 39% of all cases, and in economic crimes where they are accountable for 27% and it is 24% in burglaries (as in 2007). In the figures from 2012, only economic crimes remain with a comparable scope.

The great disparity between men and women in recorded crime reflects in particular the fact that men are more frequently taking the risk and engage in such types of behaviour, which transgress the socially accepted norms. It seems that crossing these borders, or generally less discipline, is the attribute of masculine rather than feminine practice.<sup>25</sup> Without getting into analysing the stages of moral development of the actors and solving moral dilemmas in their motives, which lead to violating the legal boundaries, as these issues are more often the subject of studies in psychology (Gilligan 1982, Kohlberg, 1981), I can state that men often go beyond the rules of social order in which they live, which results in punishment and the consequent risk (and common practice) of social exclusion. The gender universe also functions in this case by strengthening the legitimacy of looking at men as abusers and women as victims or the weak ones who need to be protected and who are not even able to properly commit most crimes. So this is yet another area of social institutions functioning in such a way that it somehow pushes men out of the regular game, despite their dominant social position. The mechanisms that maintain the powerful image of masculinity include the proverb that

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<sup>25</sup> The role of discipline in gender socialization, particularly in the choice of further education, is the topic of a co-authored monograph "S genderem na trh" (With the Gender to the Market, Jarkovská, Lišková, Šmídová, SLON Praha 2010). In chapter four, *Secretaries and Mechanics of CNC Machines As a Free Choice: The Gendered Chances in Labour Market and Family Decision-Making*, I conceptualize the differences between adhering to the rules and keeping an eye on the daughters and the sons.

the end justifies the means, although it is also more likely to turn against men.

### ***Other types of social exclusion***

One of the other topics, which has put certain masculinities and men's practices under the threat of social exclusion, is certainly homelessness, poverty or the poor education of some percentage of the men's population. The visible homelessness, associated with poverty, disease, and/or addictions is predominantly a masculine phenomenon. Homeless women are more exceptional in proportion to the number of men. Their status is also less visible or obvious as women in precarious situations do not hesitate to share homes and are more likely to keep to the rules of bodily hygiene as they are more likely to be disciplined in them as a result of the gendered socialization process. An extreme form of masculine poverty is characterized by evident homelessness (Štěchová, Luptáková and Kopoldová 2008).<sup>26</sup> Men without a home are also the most common dwellers in asylum homes and emergency hostels. Although there are no proportional statistics of men's and women's representation among the homeless people, the number of beds in these facilities reserved for men substantially exceeds the number of beds for women.

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<sup>26</sup> Homelessness has been addressed by Czech social scientists only rather recently. A trio of authors defined this topic in 2008 (Štěchová, Luptáková and Kopoldová 2008); they say a homeless person, "in the ordinary usage of the term, i.e. does not own a home, or does not rent it, does not live in a dwelling with an intimately close person, or cannot use such a home, or does not want to for serious reasons, or uses such a home unlawfully. Home in this definition is generally understood as the place where the user can of his own free will deny entry to another person or allow them access. Czech law regards such a person as being without citizenship" (Štěchová, Luptáková and Kopoldová 2008: 4). The authors of the book on homelessness characterize three types of this phenomenon: overt, covert and potential. They write: "we rank among the overt homeless people, those who live ostentatiously outside the standard boundaries of social norms and habits, they are "people from the stations and parks". The category of covert homeless people includes those who live without a home, but we are not able to distinguish this "at first sight", which is the vast majority of homeless people. Potentially homeless people then are those who are threatened with homelessness." (ibid, 2008: 21).

Homelessness as a masculine phenomenon can be more easily understood when we look at the complexity of gender settings in society. First of all, women are more often associated with relationships and family, which represents their fundamental base. As was already noted, the effect of such a connection in practice means that women in an emergency, for example, will find it easier to find refuge in their children's or their parents' families. Women have their own "women-friends", with whom they do not need to be too reluctant to start sharing a household, unlike men, who are again expected to be independent (literally) and autonomous. Secondly, if men share a household with someone who is not a part of the family, they become, more easily than women, a target of homophobic comments; the lack of tolerance for homosexuality is stronger in men than in women, also because it doesn't reflect the appropriate features of hegemonic masculinity.<sup>27</sup> This is what makes the majority of society define itself against such life situations even more strongly. And thirdly, various institutions in this country provide long-term asylums (homes) for women and mothers with children in distress, as part of a legitimate "entitlement of the weak for protection". These characteristics, however, apply only to women and children (girls and boys), but not to (adult) men.

Homelessness is thus an extreme consequence of being endangered by poverty, and this aspect of poverty is heavily men-gendered. Poverty as such, however, is rather women-gendered. In 2007, almost ten percent of the population were at risk of poverty due to a low-income living in the Czech Republic (9.8%, Table 1 to 29 in Focus ... 2009). The ratio was 44% of men and 56% of women. Statistics indicate that the most threatened group are the unemployed. In terms of age, men are slightly

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<sup>27</sup> Sexual orientation is another general area in which social exclusion occurs. The topic of homophobia and men's homosexual subculture in the Czech environment has already become a subject of research (Nedbálková 2003), but it is still waiting for a more thorough investigation.

more at risk from poverty than women in the youngest age groups (under 24 years old; in contrast, there are significantly more poor women in the category 25-49 and 65 +). However, the households most at risk from poverty are those with children, or single-person households of retired women (ibid.). If we consider the boundaries of the existing gender order, then life in poverty is still much less compatible with expectations related to men's biography rather than women's. When it comes to men, life in poverty can be more clearly interpreted in the context of the current gender order as a sign of failure, while with women it is rather a sign of fate.

In this chapter I have offered so far only a brief outline of selected relevant research topics and an incomplete list of problems relating to men and masculinities in the Czech Republic that lead or may lead them off-track (offside) and thus complicate the complex debate on power relations and gender here. Besides homelessness as an extreme and gendered form of poverty - there is educational underachievement that tends to receive gender specific attention in Czech society. We will pay a closer attention to in the following chapter. The majority of social problems outlined is still waiting for a thorough sociological analysis.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Boys at risk?**

*"Rascal, he is ripe for the gallows.  
He shall go to craftsmanship! There will be no studies! I'll show him!  
The scoundrel is starting to grow over my head!!!"*  
(Poláček 1956: 216 )

The quote of Šefelín, a father from Poláček's *Men Offside* is a typical illustration of some of today's family decision-making processes about what kind of future to prepare for their growing sons. The issue is reappearing in recent debates on educational mobility, and has been permanently anchored in the Czech sociological analysis of social stratification. In this context, the topic of overrepresentation of men among those with low educational attainment (a vocational certificate without "maturita" - the Czech completion of secondary education exam - or just with primary education) in comparison with completed secondary education, which is more common for women, and gender segregation of the fields of study (Matějů and Straková 2006, Čermáková 2002, Hájek 1997) are repeatedly thematised. The scissors of vertical educational inequalities are actually more open in the case of men's education, so that their educational pathway has a dual trajectory: either it is very short, or on the other hand very long. Its short course understandably anticipates the possibility of social exclusion, and the long trajectory promises a chance to get a professional career.

The reason why poverty and unemployment among young men is seen as alarming is related to the life, which in this case goes well beyond conventional expectations of "the role of men in society" and which falls far from stereotypical masculine attributes such as ambition or performance and career. Those men who end up at the bottom of the social hierarchy too early are likely to become easy prey for other social pathologies, such as addictions, crime and also health problems. Therefore a more thorough analysis of the relationship between the gendered

structure of society and the threat to poorly-educated men is offered now. This topic of "men at risk", as I have already stated, is repeatedly addressed even by the mainstream Czech sociology. Therefore, I will now offer a comparison of how the poor education of men is characterized in sociological analyses (and in public discussions or political documents) in the Anglo-American context and in this country. This issue will be highlighted in the context of analyses of social stratification and mobility, and complemented by the approaches applied in CSMM to interpreting inequalities in education.

Statistics for the educational paths of Czech boys are more divided than in the case of girls. It holds true for a certain percentage of the population that young men really end up only with a certificate of apprenticeship. The following text is a reflection on the research of boys' failures at school in the light of wider debates about gender un/equal opportunities in the educational process and system. It offers an opportunity to reflect on some of the findings of recent international research projects (of an Anglo-Saxon sociological production) in the field, which either confirm or, on the contrary, dispute the process of educational marginalization of boys or young men. On the background of Czech statistics in the field of education, it contributes to the Czech sociological debate over gendered educational pathways. I assume here that the structural disadvantage of the young men with no "maturita" is somewhat taken out of a broader context of the gendered structure of society in which men as a group still dominate in all segments of public life. I am especially interested in the way that the hallmark of "young men at risk" appears even in the Czech mainstream sociological research, because in other areas it hasn't paid nearly as much attention to distinguishing the impacts of gender inequality reproduction.

## Men's educational handicap

Boys are disadvantaged. This allegation appears more and more frequently in media debates on the situation in Czech education and it is strongly echoed from abroad as well. A similar proposition is proclaimed by an authoritative and comprehensive professional publication on the topic, *(Un)equal Access to Education* (Matějů, Straková 2006, for example p. 143), but it has also been voiced in a number of international research papers in scholarly journals (Buchmann and DiPrete 2006; Entwisle et al 2007; DiPrete and Buchmann 2006; Van de Gaer et al 2006). The following text will look at this rather controversial - from a feminist viewpoint - phenomenon through the lenses of both of the mentioned research studies, which substantiate the discrimination against boys, and also from the angle of other sociological literature, which somewhat takes the edge off the initial generalizing statement.

It is useful, at the start of academic and political debates in the Czech context on the topic of underachieving boys, to highlight the main arguments that have recently been voiced in professional discussions beyond our borders, especially in the British and American context. This chapter attempts to shed light on one major issue of marginalized men in the educational system from the sociological perspective of gender (see Smetáčková et al., 2005 for a similar perspective). The authors of the chapters in the mentioned Czech publication *(Un)equal Access to Education* thematise the educational inequalities between girls and boys in a very specific way<sup>28</sup>. They point to consistent differences in aspirations and the levels of education attained by girls and boys, where boys more often than girls end up without a "maturita", and according to the authors

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<sup>28</sup> It should be noted, however, that in a number of chapters the gender analytical perspective is not present even on the minimum level of classification of the analyses according to the sex category of the child. It is interesting that at the same time the parent category is split fairly consistently into father and mother. So it also happened that throughout the chapter "Who ends in vocational training specializations and why?" (Veselý in Matějů and Straková et. al. 2006) the fact that "being a boy" increases the probability of being included in apprenticeship and not in the "maturita" branch - received only this part of the sentence in the whole analysis (ibid. p. 271).

find themselves more easily on the path leading to social exclusion. Straková et. al. then draw a conclusion that there is a need to focus national educational policies and activities of the teaching staff on boys, because the target of setting equal opportunities for girls in terms of access to education has already been achieved (2006: 143).<sup>29</sup> It is this particular conclusion that I find very problematic.

In the eighties, research attention in the field of equal opportunities in education focused on the educational paths of young women, while since the nineties the research has focused on the increasing educational handicap of young men. One book summarized the first stage and it is already a classic - *Failing at Fairness. How Our Schools Cheat Girls* by Myra and David Sadker (Sadker and Sadker 1994); then the team of authors of the book *Failing Boys? Issues in Gender and Achievement* by Debbie Epstein, Jannette Elwood, Valerie Hey and Janet Maw (1998) set in stone the second issue of gender in a sociological debate. An acknowledged feature of a later series of publications was either a focus on practical teaching techniques for motivating boys, or on conceptualizations of masculinities and the total lack of connection with reality, as noted by Christine Skelton in another key publication: *Schooling the Boys. Masculinities and Primary Education* (2001).<sup>30</sup> Before we look at the features of the analyses supporting how boys are disadvantaged, or girls advantaged in education, we'll remain for a while in the Czech context to see how we are doing (see table on Completed education).

Even the first look at the educational statistics in the Czech Republic shows that the youngest group of Czech boys end up more frequently only

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<sup>29</sup> For example, a survey of reading literacy ranks the Czech Republic in a rather lower place in an international comparison; there are big differences between types of schools. In all countries and in all types of schools, girls achieved better scores. But when it comes to the differences between boys and girls in the Czech Republic, the differences are among the smallest: the average difference was 20 points, the smallest in Italy was 8, in the CR it was 12, in Kuwait 48 (Kramplová and Potužníková 2005). The legitimacy of any measure aimed at boys must be supported more comprehensively.

<sup>30</sup> There are more excellent academic texts dealing with education and masculinities, including books by Máirtín Mac an Ghail, such as *The Making of Men. Masculinities, Sexualities and Schooling* (Mac an Ghail 1994).

with a vocational certificate, while girls pass their "maturita". The sample survey of fifteen-year-olds, coming from the PISA-L study, shows this fact even more sharply (35% of boys and 13% girls in apprenticeship; see table The types of studies...).

**Completed education by women and men in selected age cohorts, a comparison between 2003 and 2007 (in %)**

Age group	Level of education	1993		2007	
		Women	Men	Women	Men
25 - 34	Primary and no education	11.7	6.8	6.3	5.4
	Secondary with no "maturita"	6.9	50.2	31.6	44.2
	Secondary with "maturita"	40.5	28.9	45.1	36.4
	University	10.9	14.1	17.0	14.0
45 - 54	Primary and no education	29.4	11.5	16.3	6.6
	Secondary with no "maturita"	31.3	52.3	35.3	52.1
	Secondary with "maturita"	31.9	25.0	36.2	25.0
	University	7.3	11.2	12.2	16.2
65+	Primary and no education	62.5	30.2	45.3	14.8
	Secondary with no "maturita"	24.3	39.4	29.6	45.5
	Secondary with "maturita"	10.9	19.7	20.6	25.7
	University	2.2	10.7	4.3	13.9

Source: ČSÚ/CZSO; selection from Table 1 – 2. The structure of inhabitants according to sex, age and education (VŠPS)

**The types of studies of fifteen-year-old adolescents in the Czech Republic in 2003 (in %)**

The studies of 15-year-olds in CZ (%)	Boys	Girls
without "maturita"	34.5	13.1
with "maturita"	65.5	86.9

Source: PISA-L 2003 according to Šmídová et al (2008)

A general social impact of lower education is obvious - there is a higher risk of unemployment and the resulting potential poverty; there is also an increased risk of crime connected to the conventional form of masculinity, as well as homelessness, alcoholism and the hustle and

bustle of life at the very bottom of society. In addition to that, the conventional life pathway offers very low opportunities on the marriage market and thus a limited chance to father a son/offspring and hand over to the next generation the lessons learned in life.

Czech young men also have - perhaps surprisingly - lower educational aspirations than women in the same category, which strikes at least sociologists. Why is it that boys are not willing to climb up the social ladder with the help of higher education? What puts them offside, on the wrong side of the conventional imperative of men as breadwinners and career-seeking competitive people? One of the following sections of this chapter looks at this peculiarity.

**Aspirations of pupils of 9th forms  
in the Czech Republic in 2003**

Aspirations of 9th formers in the CZ (%)	Boys	Girls
Without "maturita"	10.9	5.7
With "maturita"	51.4	49.5
University	37.7	44.8

*Source: PISA-L 2003 according to Šmídová et al (2008)*

**Barriers to higher education for young men**

The data from the Czech context can get illuminated in a wider international contextualization. A number of recent international surveys offer evidence that a) women on average perform better in schools and achieve higher levels of education; b) the return on investment in women's education remains higher and grows faster compared to men; c) men's performance is "bimodal" - unlike the pattern applicable to women, men are either academic stars, or drop-outs (Mickelson 2003; DiPrete and Buchmann, 2006; Buchmann and DiPrete 2006). The factors stated by international studies that may contribute to the image of underachieving, disadvantaged boys include, for example, biased teachers (women) who punish boys with marks; they also choose girls more often as teachers' helpers, which puts boys at a disadvantage, because they do not get the chance to cooperate more closely. Proof of this is said to be boys' worse

academic performance (Entwise, Alexander and Olson 2007; Kramplová a Potužníková 2005). What is interesting in this sense, however, is that research documenting the disadvantage of girls in the education system interprets precisely this "teacher`s helper" service as a disadvantage, as it brings an extra burden for the girls, purely in the spirit of the stereotype of the obedient, responsible, and helpful conduct of socialized women. (For the Czech context, see for example Jarkovská 2007, Smetáčková 2005).

Or is it all different? Do both theories apply? I offer three thoughts that can be inspiring in the debate on marginalizing men, which results from the low educational standard.

### **Bimodal status**

The scissors effect applies more evidently to boys than to girls: the good ones rise straight up and the worse ones do not make it. Young men, unlike young women, rise to the very top of the social ladder (measured both by the cultural and the material status, Tuček, 2000). Still, the young men with low education levels constitute a large part of the unemployed and they also get stuck in other socially problematic situations. It appears that a major role is played by the social status - the socio-economic status of the original family - and the traditional gender line of "father's education and the role-model" for the sons, which does not apply to daughters (Šmídová 2008a).

There are not only boys who are worse than girls, but also those who are better. The frequently stereotyped setting of the formal and informal curriculum (in CZ it is addressed by Smetáčková 2005) does not take into account the image of "clever, obedient" and therefore successful boys: boys in education are seen across the board as problematic (Jones and Myhill 2004). However, there is also another group, which is not included in the conventional generalizing pair of clever girls and naughty boys: it is the category of problematic girls. Both of these "additional types" - clever boys and naughty girls, have so far been played down by

researchers (as well as teachers), but they should be included in our research, more than ever before. The stereotypical gender setting applied by a number of teachers, with their "common sense" and often gendered prejudices, as well as the setting of a number of sociological surveys<sup>31</sup> in this area, does little or no service to successful boys and unsuccessful girls, another pair of authors (Jones and Myhill 2004) write. That means we do not know much about troubled girls and obedient (easily conforming) boys. A conventional interpretation offered by teachers in the research by Jones and Myhill (2004) took the group of girls with good results and the group of boys with poor results as symbolically representing their teaching experience, and thus fulfil the gender expectations. The boys with good results were perceived by the research as those who positively break down the gender patterns and the girls with poor results were overlooked (Jones and Myhill 2004).<sup>32</sup>

### **"Pro-women" social atmosphere**

The research documenting a lower performance of boys thematises a sort of "pro -women " trend (Buchmann and DiPrete 2006), which according to these authors essentially favours women at the expense of boys. In another study, these authors point directly to the "gender gap reversal" (DiPrete and Buchmann, 2006). They point to the scissor-effect

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<sup>31</sup> For example the thesis on the loss of motivation in smarter boys in the lower ability groups confirmed by research (a specific approach in the educational system in Flanders, northern Belgium) resulting in a loss of talented boys (Van de Gaer 2006), or the ascriptive status "being poor and male" (Entwise, Alexander and Olson 2007) serves as proof of the inevitability of the reproduction of class status from father to son, thus along traditional gender lines.

<sup>32</sup> I will again point out similar evidence to the status of excellence and heroism in men associated with the parallel invisibility of women in Chapter 5. It documents the raising of the profile of nurturing fathers on parental leave, hiding or not assigning similar heroism to their women partners, who, like their spouses, transcended the conventional status (Šmídová 2008a). However, one can't help thinking that in terms of the concept of building a masculine identity, a boy who doesn't like to fight, who is obedient and "clever" (effeminate?) has problems at the same time meeting the criteria of conventional masculinity both among their peers, and in some other environments. It was demonstrated in an example of a dictate and negotiation of obligatory heterosexuality (its normativity) by Pascoe (2007) in her study from the US environment recorded in the book "Dude, You are a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School".

that marginalizes the children from families without a father or with a poorly educated father. The same does not apply to daughters from the same environment. The authors ask: Is it a sign of ignorance of the value of higher education and its transfer value to the labour market? Or is it a lower priority attributed to education in comparison with other short-term goals? Or are some other mechanisms at work (Buchmann and DiPrete 2006)?

The atmosphere favouring women, backed up by the emancipation of women and engaged feminist studies, which provide the lacking self-confidence to girls, is also thematised in social psychological research and popular developmental psychology. The more or less explicit conclusion, also common for such types of research, is the notion that this is happening at the expense of boys.

It is remarkable at the same time that similar studies do not thematise the structural privileged position from which the dominant groups of men, complicit or aspiring to hegemonic masculinity, have been taking advantage of for a historically long time. They have certainly had a long-term influence on women's and men's attitudes (as well as access) to education, and even today the gender order affects at least the horizontal, i.e. the specialist, segmentation of education. The fact that "masculine domination" (Bourdieu 2000) is being overlooked, although the influence of the feminist movement in the form of the "pro-feminine atmosphere" is being stressed, should point out the problematic nature of this only partial reflection of changes in gender relations on the social scale.

### **The paradox of the correlation hypothesis: men do not need higher education**

The low boys' aspirations and low educational attainment of a significant group of men forces us to think about the effect of the correlation hypothesis. It contends that the higher the level of completed formal education, the higher the position in the subsequent standardized

job functions, as the vertically and horizontally segmented education system is to provide each new group with such knowledge, skills and attitudes that correlate to the features in the vertical and horizontal structure of the labour market. So far, this causality has been questioned or modified more for women: the higher the educational level women attain, the higher the difference in the material status compared to men on the same level of education; but women do not reach the same material status.

Nevertheless, some research studies results demonstrate that the return on education grows faster for women than for men (DiPrete and Buchmann, 2006; Buchmann and DiPrete 2006; Bobbitt-Zeher 2007; Mickelson 2003). A brief analytical text by Roslyn A. Mickelson (2003) suggests a paradox: the resulting women's social status is lower, in spite of better study results. A question arises, why do women (still) aspire to higher education and achieve their goals, even if it does not pay off either professionally or financially? Implicitly they also offer the answer to the question, why do men not actually need (higher) education?

According to Mickelson (2003), it appears to be likely that women perceive the connection between their education and the traditional payback opportunities as weak, but also that they evaluate the return on their education differently compared to men. This is empirically also suggested by other studies, although they are otherwise constructed along gender-stereotyped lines (Buchmann and DiPrete 2006; DiPrete and Buchmann 2006). In addition to a standard payback in the form of the salary, status and career opportunities, women tend to include the potential that education provides for them to enhance the quality of their personal, family and social life.<sup>33</sup> It is the task of further research studies

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<sup>33</sup> One of her hypotheses based on the feminist theory builds on the concept of the fluidity of boundaries between public and private spheres for women. According to Mickelson (2003), women see economics and politics alongside their families and communities as a continuum rather than a dichotomy. Women are socialized from an early age to blend the private and public roles "into a single tapestry". So it is more women than men who seek balance in both spheres, between the resources invested in education and what they received in return. This process also leads to the choice of

to prove whether this is a paradox, as Mickelson believes, or a legitimate strategy.

The findings of other research can serve us as a supplement (Bobbit-Zaher 2007); it enquired into the reasons for this wage gap between women and men, which is not explainable by the level of education attained. The author suggests that the key is not the level of educational attainment, but the specialization. And according to her research in the USA, a significant role is played here by the devaluation of the feminized segments of the labour market and the related specializations and their resulting under-evaluation on the labour market. The horizontal segregation has continued to resist after the vertical breakthrough in education.

Therefore, it still applies that men with vocational certificates have higher incomes, both in the legal and the complementary grey economy, than women in the frequently feminized fields.<sup>34</sup> The question is, why should men in the Czech environment aspire for higher education, if in terms of return in the form of the salary they do not really require the "maturita"? It seems that the current aspirations of young men do not reflect the recent changes in the labour market, where the traditionally masculine and lucrative professions and trades are being pushed out by services and digitized machines operators (NC and CNC). It still pays for them to rely on the traditional gender breadwinning status of the provider, which guarantees them stable profits in the labour market, simply because they are men.

## **Education and its return on investment**

A series of topical analyses claim that the return on investment in women's education remains higher and is growing faster than that in

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careers such as teaching or nursing, which complement their family role while excluding them from employment positions with higher status and salary, but which require a huge time commitment (Mickelson 2003).

<sup>34</sup> More detailed illustration of this state of affairs can be found in another text (Šmídová in Jarkovská, Lišková and Šmídová 2010).

men's (theirs is also growing, but more slowly). What may seem surprising (when approached without a gender bias) is the set of indicators such studies have used to measure the return. According to DiPrete and Buchmann (2006), the areas where the value of education for women (and men) primarily increase include: a) a higher probability of marriage, b) a higher living standard (the quality of personal, family and community life, which is also confirmed by Mickelson, 2003) and c) an insurance against poverty. In all these areas the added value of education grows faster for women than for men. Except for one: the personal income of women in relation to education grows more slowly (DiPrete and Buchmann, 2006).

So the recipe is easy: to divert the research attention from the measurable key success in the public sphere, just "enhance" the indicators with some criteria from the women's world - and bingo! It indicates the overall men's disadvantage. Even if we accept the previous statement without (not only methodological) cynicism, it is important not to stop perceiving the fact that the introduction of the so-called holistic approaches to measuring return on education is double-edged. Men undoubtedly pay a high price in the private sector for their achievements in the public realm. The bimodal nature of masculine status clearly indicates that the unsuccessful are twice as badly off (worse than some women), and in many cases it threatens the men's personal integrity, as well as their social status. Nevertheless, it is still true that the system is androcentric for the whole "group of men", which benefits from the patriarchal dividend (Connell, 1995) of potential affiliation with hegemonic masculinity. In terms of these concepts, along with the level of the structural masculine domination and symbolic order (Bourdieu 1998a, 2000), and with the hierarchy of levels of the gendered structure of society (Harding, 1986), it is appropriate to analyse the advantages and disadvantages of both groups of pupils in the education system according to sex categories and consider the complex features of the existing gender social order. It is not enough for a useful insight into the issue to simply

include criteria from the private sector on the benchmarks of career success, and then be surprised that "we have ended up" with the discovery of a "pro-women" atmosphere, or even a "reversed-gender disadvantage."

Likewise, it is tricky to transpose research arguments from the structural settings of factors that affect access to education and the training process, towards the level of the actors' satisfaction: even if - according to these research studies (and according to the interpretation of the research teams) - women themselves tend to include in their education return on investment more than just the salary, the status and career opportunities. It should be noted that in this case the incorporation of a wider range of indicators of return on investment on education means certain enrichment of the criteria in a seemingly surprising<sup>35</sup> direction for the late modern market society, which normally focuses on the measurable performance in the form of wages and career advancement (predominantly in the public sphere). Although the turn to the personal (Beck 2004, Lasch 1979) is a part of the social trends in Western society, the inclusion of the most gendered standard of all the selected ones - increasing the likelihood of getting married, refers to the traditional rather than the progressive vocabulary.

Should the return on investment in education include only men's criteria, it is still true that theirs grows faster. We tend to associate men more in terms of salary, status and career opportunity - in accordance with the conventional dual gender expectations. It's just a matter of time when it comes to how long it will pay off for them to rely on this order, as the labour market institutions have already changed the rules in many respects.

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<sup>35</sup> From another perspective, however, this may represent some kind of an effort of taking into account the principles of harmonization or reconciliation of work and private life, as well as equal opportunities, as the benchmark includes both public (masculine) sphere oriented parameters, and also the criteria relevant to personal life (conventionally interpreted as a family, hence more feminine).

## **Offside men on the edge in research practice**

The contemporary Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities highlight the little-researched groups of men and masculinities on the margins of society (Hearn et al., 2006). Hegemonic men can be found on the top, but the non-integrated, marginalized men end up deep down at the opposite end of the social status ladder. There is still a long way ahead for us in devising a comprehensive strategy for researching this phenomenon.

For possible inspiration, let me conclude by summarizing three perspectives with some impact on the Anglo-American research into educational inequality, which has constituted the core of this section. Debbie Epstein and her team (1998, as well as Skelton 2001: 6-7) defined three areas in the context of discussions about the low performance of boys in education ("boys' underachievement"), which to various extents influence the ways in which the issue is approached, as well as the implications that such approaches bring to girls. The first area consists of discussions with the label "poor boys", who are perceived as victims of single-parent families (mostly without fathers), feminized primary schooling and "feminism", which has enabled girls' successes. One of the recommended strategies to overcome this disadvantage was to send more men-teachers to offer boys some men role-models. The second area is described by the authors as "failing schools, failing boys". Here, the more systematic and structured argument is the notion that if the school fails to ensure a sufficient quality of education for its pupils, guaranteed by success in literacy tests (literacy and numeracy), it is responsible for the failure of boys (and probably of girls, too) who have attended it. Unlike the perspective of the "poor boys", the advocates of the latter approach rarely excessively or directly attack the feminist interpretation of "boys at risk." The third group is centred around the idea of "boys will be boys", which interprets boys through a very conventional and stereotyped approach and attributes these traditional characteristics to 'natural differences' as a result of biology and psychology. This group is very

similar to the first one, as it accuses feminism of victimizing young men by promoting the feminine principle over the masculine, thus challenging traditional ways of being a man. What authors, such as Epstein or Skelton, find particularly interesting is the way that this third approach manages, at one and the same time, to posit an unchanging and unchangeable “natural boyness”, which involves aggression, fighting and delayed maturity and yet uses a different than a naturalizing set of factors for explanation of poor achievement at school (Epstein et al. 1998: 9; also Skelton 2001: 6-7).

In this light, we can do better in classifying more clearly the existing case studies of educational inequality, which take into account the gender perspective, and we can avoid making the same mistakes as those committed by some research teams on all sides of the research spectrum dealing with educational inequalities. And similarly to finding inspiration in the analyses on the topic of boys at risk by a low level of education attainment, we are still waiting for a more thorough analysis of other described social problems associated with masculinity and its normative character. The contemporary hegemonic masculinity has actually had a massive share in creating an image of the men-actors as persons without problems whose destiny is desirable and normal. As I have tried to show in this chapter, such an androcentric view excludes the marginalized and subordinated masculinities, along with other gendered social identities, both in practice in the public and private spheres, and also from sociological research.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Key domestic players and guests: masculinities and the family**

Hegemonic types of masculinity presented in the previous chapter refer in particular to the public sector. The social structure ranks men symbolically higher in the public sphere as actors of material production and ideological leaders of the world, while women are being associated with the private sphere, the sphere of biological reproduction. However, in everyday practice the actors violate the boundaries of this simplified dual symbolic division, which is also due to the fact that the clear assignment of certain activities to one realm or the other has become somewhat unclear in the last few decades. Moreover, there is also apparent confusion in the question of who enters which realm with the status of "breadwinner" or "caregiver".<sup>36</sup>

In the following two chapters (Chapter 5 and 6) I focus on the key institution of the private sector, i.e. the family. I introduce two issues that are, in my opinion, closely related to men's identities and a redefinition of gender relations. The first one (analysed in this chapter) is based on my research on men on parental leave and relevant concerns about possible views on masculinity from the perspective of families where the full-time nurturing status was adopted by men. The second issue, presented in the following Chapter 6, reflects a new normative experience for heterosexual couples, i.e. the participation of men at the birth of their first child. This is sometimes presented by social policy makers as well as by some popular psychology studies and in the media as an essential step to changing the fathers' attitude to childcare. There, I draw from another empirical study, this time on families where the father attended the birth. In both cases, both for men on parental leave and men as participants at childbirth, I ask

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<sup>36</sup>As Dudová (2007) last pointed out, divorced parents (in practical life they are predominantly mothers) with children are anchored firmly in both spheres, because they have no choice but to fulfill both the nurturing and breadwinning status.

myself this question: Do shifts in masculine identity (and gender relations) caused by these types of experience, which – due to a historical stereotype – are not a part of the masculine social identity, put them among the key players or exclude them from the game? Who in the family represents the home team and who is the away or “guest” team, to use Poláček’s terminology in his football-inspired *Men Offside*?

Men in the private sphere, in the family, are still conventionally understood as key breadwinners. Nevertheless the expectations targeted at them to get more involved in the routine family life get stronger. These are the results of several trends; the changing nature of the labour market and its reflection upon arranging the harmonization of working with personal lives, the emancipation of women, and perhaps some more personal changes in the concept of individual men’s lives motivating them not to miss this part of their life experience. All these three aspects get significant attention in media coverage, too, which only strengthens the imperative of such changes in the strategies and negotiation of forms of fatherhood and relevant family arrangements.

### **Nurturing masculinities, gender relations and the family**

The family and the home are symbolically the domain of women as it is framed by activities such as care, nurturing and reproduction. Nevertheless, in the Czech context and far beyond, the private sphere has ceased to be the only environment for women, and even care does not take place solely within the home. Children are being cared for in institutionalized settings provided by the state or private subjects, too. The symbolical coding of home and family as the woman’s domain still strongly persists. In this chapter I thematise this dominance, and open several issues related to the key players or “helpers” as well as a reversal in the symbolic evaluation of the nurturing status quo in families where their joint strategy followed the path of settling men into the nurturing position.

Arrangements of daily routine and their legitimisations in families with nurturing men (and masculinities) thus form the base for an analysis of a potential transformation in gender relations. Several moments are highlighted in the chapter to point out a certain naiveté in the uncritical approach to these new practices as paths to equal opportunities for men and women in the family and beyond.

The everyday life of each particular family comes about by the more or less constant comparing and negotiating of individual partners' ideas of adequate gender roles, the ways of fulfilling the desirable standard of parenting based on ideas they have acquired both in their families of origin and through other socializing agents (school, peers, friends, colleagues at work, church, media, legal standards, etc.). Finding a compromise between the initial concepts, enhanced by the subsequent practice of having to take care of a baby, has been described in a long line of research studies on family arrangements and their gender aspects (Hochschild and Machung 1990, Statham 1986, Gatrell 2005, Perkins and DeMeis 1996).

It is especially the men's attitude to their status in the private sphere which is sometimes labelled in feminist sociological literature as inadequate and slow to respond to the social changes in the position of women (Hochschild and Machung 1990, Segal 1990, Badinter 1999) and the changing forms of the family (Holter 2003). Titles of books arising from these analyses refer to *The Second Shift* (as performed by women in the household or as a long awaited stalled move by men towards the private sphere, Hochschild and Machung 1990), to the *Slow Motion* (Segal 1990) or a question *Can Men Do it?* (Holter 2003).

On the other hand, in academic research we sometimes encounter a focus on the "bright exceptions"– the men who have broken with the traditional gender family arrangement (Hobson 2002, Madsen 2004); a number of authors put their hope in this model as one of the feasible ways of "preserving" the family (the so-called "normal" family, a heterosexual multigenerational bond, in whose realm the biological reproduction of

society takes place). Here, some feminist as well as mainstream social science researchers often plead for men's involvement and praise the heroes who have overcome the "biological obstacles" referred to as indispositions.

The key test for setting up partners' gender relations is the moment when the first baby is born. Several studies indicate that this experience seriously alters everyday life, even for couples who have deliberately opted for gender-equal household arrangements at the beginning of their cohabitation as couples (Perkins and DeMeis 1996, Statham 1986). According to the Norwegian sociologist Holter (2003), family arrangements and the division of labour between partners develops along several lines: either they share the childcare, the domestic work and the career equally, or – which is more frequent – they practice the model of "one and a half", where the woman works part time and the man full time. The third model is the traditional "breadwinner" arrangement, where the man is responsible for the financial income of the family and the woman for the unpaid work at home and taking care of the children. This model is already on the decline in Scandinavia or it is practiced only for a very short period after the birth of the baby. Holter (2003) in this context both describes the typology of relationships, and also focuses on the analysis of social systems and structures which put obstacles in the way of some models, while favouring others. In comparison with the nurturing approach, he points out the "sprinkle system" which works to enhance the existing patriarchal barriers. The author primarily highlights the way in which the dominant model of masculinity, characterised by an absence of nurturing, is being rewarded within the "sprinkle" system; society basically supports – by means of economic stimuli - the breadwinning model, rather than the nurturing one. This system keeps men out of care-related activities, including professional nursing, as well as outside the nurturing status in private life (Holter, 2003: 25). However, this practice does not only apply in the economic sphere; it has social, cultural and psychological dimensions. It is associated with social sanctions for displays

of “loss of masculinity”, with contempt for weakness and with an effort to maintain the “power model”. The result is that men are expendable in the family, and by being expendable, they don’t pay particular attention to family care. It turns out that this system of economic discrimination equally affects the caregivers of both genders. The sprinkle system connects masculinity with success, gender and class in a very specific way: men with the greatest influence among other men are those, who are the least interested in the development of a more nurturing masculinity. And as a cultural counterpart: what finally receives the status of the most important men’s issues are activities which are the most remote from nurturing (Holter 2003). The consequence of this model is a disproportion between a greater formal and even factual equality between women and men in the institutions oriented towards individuals (e.g. the labour market), and lingering lower equality in family-oriented institutions, where the family is still accounted for as based on the men breadwinner model (McDonald 2004). Even in the labour market, a woman employee is at a disadvantage not because she is a woman, but because she is a (potential) caregiver (Gatrell 2005). Men are not even looked upon as fathers, nor is this possibility taken into account. Thus, reproduction of masculinity patterns in the family represent an important field that is reflected in the institutional arrangements of state policies related to work as well as care. Formal institutions tend to be inertial and only slowly adopt changes required for normal everyday lives. That is the very reason why in this chapter I am looking into arrangements and partnership practices in the private sphere as such.

A thorough description of the social structures of masculine domination and the dividends that a number of people obtain for maintaining it (Connell, 1995) clearly indicates that even in the Czech environment, the men-fathers on parental leave and the men actively involved in ante-natal preparation are products of this system. Life strategies of individual fathers and their partners can therefore subvert the existing structures, but they can also reproduce them, only in a

version providing men with an enrichment of a still somewhat exotic experience from the so-called "feminine" world. The blurring of realms, which traditionally used to be interpreted as separate, however much they mingled in the practice of social actors, is a process that has the potential to redefine the gender relations in the family. In this sense, it is essential that the activities or even traits associated with either the private or the public sphere are not necessarily automatically attributed to women or men. During the socialization process in differently gendered environments, individual actors acquire competencies they can apply according to their needs, regardless of whether these are labelled as masculine or feminine tasks. The problem is in the stereotypical association of men with a career and women with nurturing and household chores. If men are (also) marked as nurturers taking care of their children, then the perpetual labelling of certain activities as "women's work" will come to an end (May and Strikwerda, 1996: 208). Although it is a politically provocative claim, it grasps the true picture of a problem that has been repeatedly described. According to a number of studies (Holter 2003, Hobson 2002), it is the private sector and the gender relations within it, which is the key to understanding social trends.

## **Men as nurturers**

*„Eman has been promoted to a nanny.”*  
Karel Poláček, *Men Offside*, 1931, p. 101

The main character in Poláček's *Men Offside*, Emanuel Habásko jr. was hired as a part-time babysitter by Mrs. Načeradec, the wife of a businessman who employed Habásko in his shop. After the first good experience, Mrs. Načeradec started to invite him regularly to help with the children when the boisterous offspring did not want to eat, but then fell silent and eventually did eat when listening to Eman's stories (about football). The author of the humorous book made no comments about this engagement of the young man and he doesn't even question it. Emanuel

Habásko's role could yet be taken as educational rather than nurturing, and therefore perfectly legitimate for a man in the conventional sense. Otherwise, men in the nursing status generally raise public attention.

The connection of men with family care is among the topics that raise eyebrows in media reports also from yet another specific perspective; not a single year passes without scandalizing partners' disputes concerning the custody for children after divorce, or discussing men accused of child abuse. Alongside such reports, commentaries about fathers on parental leave found its parallel position. In these reports the certain inappropriateness of such an "exchange of roles" is often commented, but generally the latter are presented as bright exceptions with an explicit hope that their particular case represents a growing trend. Nurturing men have also earned significant attention even in gender sociological research; I myself have repeatedly focused on this phenomenon in my own research and I have found a number of inspiring findings from these previously-carried-out analyses for my subject of masculinity offside.

The phenomenon of fathers on parental leave, that is fathers with a nurturing status, raises the legitimate question as to whether they represent a fundamental change in the organization of gender relations or not (Donaldson 1993 by Hearn, 2004: 58, Howson 2009, Hearn 2008). Have they really swapped roles with their partners, or how can such a family arrangement actually work? In fact it undermines unchallenged historical beliefs concerning proper family arrangements and convictions concerning the (biological) predispositions of individual men and women. Can this be a subsequent response of men to the associated infiltration of women into the labour market and elsewhere in the public sphere? As mentioned by McDonald (2004), Gatrell (2005), Holter (2003), or even earlier by Hochschild and Machung (1989), it is the asynchronism of changes in men's and women's conduct in the public and private spheres, which form the stumbling block for a more balanced adjustment

of gender relations. Or is it perhaps a backlash from hegemonic men with an ambition to dominate yet another sphere of life?

Taking care of children and their upbringing, taking care of the household, being employed and taking part in other self-realization activities form lines and stages in the life-paths of many people. In the last few decades, even in the Czech context both motherhood and fatherhood have been going through a period of redefinition, reflection and criticism both from the academic community and on the social level. Nurturing fatherhood is further presented from the perspective of a declared partnership family strategy, attempting to capture the opportunities and barriers to implement a committed, caring model of fatherhood in the structures of contemporary Czech society, naturally with the ambition of answering whether Czech masculinities get through these processes offside, or in the centre of the game. As already pointed out in the opening chapter of this text, the academic debate surrounding caring masculinities then poses the question whether such arrangements can alter the hegemonic masculinity, or at least form its counter hegemonic counterpart.

The main objectives of the research of the masculine and feminine status in the family include monitoring the (gendered) expectations and stereotypes associated with the context of a particular society, legitimizing the stages of life's careers outside the mainstream (in the Czech environment e.g. Možný 1983, 1990, Maříková 2002-4, Maříková and Radimská 2003, Šmídová 2004a, c); this includes an analysis of the relationships and individual changes in family gender patterns, the partner strategies of how to "manage" the family (Holter, 2003) and on the sociological level attention is also devoted to the gendered social structure: the private and the public spheres (Bourdieu 2000, Havelková 1995a), or three dimensions of the gender structure in society according to Harding (1986), which does not mean only individual gender roles, but also the division of labour and the symbolic order or the gender universe.

## **Nurturing fathers in the Czech Republic**

It is not easy to define what paternal care or fatherhood means. Several texts from the Czech context do not use the term fatherhood, but the "man's role in the family", and they point out that the time spent at work can be seen by men as the time devoted to the family in the form of providing financial benefits (e.g. Maříková and Radimská 2003, Chorvát 1999). In this context, some foreign theoretical studies on the forms and the evolution of fatherhood point out that fathers have literally been "written out" from books dealing with the family. In my opinion, this only proves the orientation of research focus on families rather than an actual presence or absence of fathers in families; the research exaggerates the separation of the public and the private spheres (Laqueur 1996, May and Strikwerda 1996). Fathers have not only been "written out" in the studies on family for a certain period of time; or fatherhood was not regarded as a constitutional part of the masculine identity – it gets no space in books dealing with forms of masculinity, such as Brod and Kaufman (1994) or Adams and Savran (2002), but also Connell (1995), who refers to fatherhood in only one sentence. Another theme in their works, however, is "paternalism" in relation to masculinities.

A qualitative empirical probe into the Czech environment, where the forms of nurturing fatherhood were present, provides a useful challenge to discuss the family strategies of couples and forms that nurturing fatherhood may acquire to reconcile work and the family in the parents' lives. The original research (Šmídová 2008a)<sup>37</sup> is used here as background to illustrate perhaps more general trends in the changes of gender relations associated with masculinity.

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<sup>37</sup> These were conversations with five families, supplemented with telephone updates, and separate focus-group discussions at a meeting in Brno, where the women and men from the couples under research separately met with the research team. In all these families, the man was the nurturer at the time of the research. The author was the principal researcher in this project and an editor of the final volume presenting various angles and outputs from the analysis written also by the members of the research team.

The parental couples were trying to overcome the traditional duality of being either a breadwinner, or a full-time housekeeper, by a series of strategies that they applied in their specific situations and the development of their family relationships - starting with the complexity of reasons for the fathers' choice to take on parental leave and their legitimisation. In their argumentation, not only rationalizing arguments were provided, such as economic reasons, military service deferment, university studies, health reasons (limiting the caring capacities of the spouse), but also those particular legitimizations understandable and relevant for their unique families. Their considerations included even the option to take alternative life-paths (e.g. childlessness, one child), long-term plans and preparing for the father's nurturing role (adjusting the father's careers to their future family commitments) and also ways of combining household activities with their personal hobbies. In a number of statements from interviews with the parents there were situations that clearly demonstrated gender as an insignificant category of the nurturers. This was rather the specific activity, like the 24/7 duty childcare is, than the person's gender that affected the conduct of the actors (fathers or mothers, men or women) in such a way, that prompted tendencies to evaluate the executors of these activities in the private realm as feminine or masculine.

The birth of the first child necessarily leads to a significant rearrangement of the existing relationship of every couple. A fundamental change, such as the arrival of a child into the family, may to some extent obscure the changes caused by the fact of partners' swapping the primary nurturing role. The "irreversibility" of having a baby, as the situation was described with a bit of an overstatement by the research participants, a test of responsibility or curiosity and a test of the reflected role exchange could have an impact on the degree of idealization of the upcoming paternal care as a chance for greater freedom for fathers, compared with the time when they had to go to paid employment. They do not have to get up early for work now, they have time for themselves

and for their hobbies; one of the fathers described his original idea of taking on the parental leave as "a couple of beers and rocking the pram". The fact is that these men, who were in their time pioneers, are only defining a new space, unoccupied by normative expectations bound to men yet, while the period of maternity care is associated on the one hand with the cult of the good mother and on the other hand with routine, drudgery and possibly boredom (and paid work is in the interpretation of women in our research couples sometimes seen as a pleasant refreshment and freedom).

This discrepancy in the assessment of work and domestic activities in the testimonies of mothers and fathers is only intensified by the difficulty in communicating these new experiences, both in terms of parenthood and in relation to a particular gender arrangement in the family. This can be a problem of intimacy, taboos or lack of adequate language to grasp and deal symbolically with the family practice and give it meaning in the interpretation for the research team. This means the usual clichés about the stereotypes of fatherhood and motherhood, fathers' and mothers' skills, mingled with the proud joy (of fathers and their partners) resulting from overcoming all of the "lack of biological adaptation" of men to nurture new-born babies, which was obvious to all. The new field - "the father on parental leave" - was thus described as a space for success and self-satisfaction, as overcoming anxiety, envy, admiration, but also reconciliation with an uncomprehending environment, which is expected to have slip-ups.

In order to cope with their nurturing task, fathers had to overcome in their everyday life these very beliefs about men's incompetence or inadequacy. From the moment of entering into the nurturing career, men had to overcome their fear that the baby would "break"; they gradually built a relationship with the baby through everyday little things and reinforced it by small shared secrets.<sup>38</sup> All this was happening in the

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<sup>38</sup> Lukáš Sedláček looked more closely into this aspect (in Šmídová 2008a).

atmosphere of a forthcoming, but sometimes also less welcoming attitude of the partner. The role of the primary nurturer, stereotypically attributed to mothers, was sometimes defended by them in an effort to maintain a monopoly on at least some of the "know-how" concerning their children. The mothers at this point expected understanding that baby care, as common sense prompts to us all, represents the fate and purpose in women's lives.

The partners of the men with nurturing status go through a similarly difficult phase, which is sometimes overlooked. Working mothers can perceive their return to work as liberating. On the other hand, the space of the "breadwinning mother" has not been clearly defined in the Czech context, where women remain considered as the primary nurturers. The employed partners of nurturing men are yet to be defined - and this process involves fears, uncertainty and feelings of endangered identity, which mingle with an effort to find security and safety in the new gender arrangement.<sup>39</sup>

Pride and joy over the more or less expected father's / partner's mastering of their nurturing role can be mixed up with women feeling that they do not fulfil their expected role, and a lack of positive public feedback on them voluntarily leaving the space defined as a woman's domain to their men counterparts. They also found themselves in uncharted territory: women in the public sphere without connection to the primary nourishing role.

Nurturing fatherhood has not been defined in these families only in relation to women - as working mothers and as the symbolic guardians of care. In its fulfilment, a role was also played by the needs of the baby being cared for. The original ideas of some men (as mentioned before - "a couple of beers and rocking the pram") underwent a series of corrections.

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<sup>39</sup> The theme of women-mothers' power and it being at risk by the entry of men-fathers in the care-giving status was also dealt with in detail on the basis of this research in the texts of Šmídová and Sedláček (in Šmídová 2008a), Janoušková and Sedláček (Janoušková and Sedláček 2005) and Šmídová (2004). There is a certain complicity in such an approach.

We came across both a reduction in children's needs, i.e. a passive minimalistic approach (father's body lies against the door to prevent children from entering the working mother's territory, while he is reading), or involving children in the men's world, where they participate in what dad wants or needs to do (hammering nails during the construction of a new floor or gluing complex kites); there were also cases of meticulous preparing educational games by fathers trying to implement responsible fatherhood (the father invents activities for kids according to instructions from professional guides to suit the designated stage of their psychomotoric development). Some fathers returned to their boyish pastimes (watching a working excavator with their sons for an hour), but their daughters did not seem to cause any more care or educational disconcertment than their sons. What was more important than the gender of the children was the fact what "the children allowed them to do" by their nature and behaviour within the framework of the parenting experiment. The children were presented by their parents as the active movers of events. Either as children characterized as the good and easy-going ones or those requiring complex care, the prevailing parental (paternal) imperative was: "I have to manage."

What follows from these hints of strategies or more or less conscious conduct of the parental couples for the analyses of the gendered structure of society and for the identification of resources, mechanisms and barriers to change and for social reproduction? Is there anything that keeps men offside from the nurturing family status and where have they become key players? How does the masculine nurturer status challenge and attack the safeguarded base still systematically defended by the home team, namely mothers?

What is remarkable in these parental couples' strategies from the sociological perspective is the moment of inclusion, reinterpretation and modification of the existing normative ideas on parenting. It is the challenge made to seemingly unmanageable activities, the characteristics

and the opportunities of men as fathers, as well as the limits and possibilities for defining contexts and activities created for the women whose primary activity is not motherhood. Although these characteristics are concerned with people with so-called normal biographies (Šmausová 2002), or rather precisely for that very reason, their choice of parental practice, which still has, in the Czech context, the appearance of an experiment, offers an insight into the changes of the habitus (Bourdieu 1998b). It thus makes it possible to capture changes in acquired as well as spontaneous expressions of conduct, which then form a unique lifestyle for the actors.

In the existing organization of family life in Czech society, a niche has been opened (and formally legalized), which contains a clearly observable paradox of dually-conceived parental practice. This includes the expected modes of conduct, which do not fulfil these symbolically-maintained stereotypes, but which can only be described with the means available in the language. Moreover, they offer dual, polar or alternative definitions of feminine and masculine, or maternal and paternal space. At the same time the family strategies that demonstrate the ability to combine the family and work (with some uncertainties and inventiveness), also suggest the presence of blurring gender roles (gender blending), the androgynuity of a number of activities and the ability of the parents to implement collage identities (Šmausová 2002, 2004) and play or use the gender according to the context. This is evident from the following example:

*Father (F): That's what I had to learn. That now I just go, and sometimes I think it is, maybe, embarrassing, you know, that Dana finishes her coffee and I actually take the cup and wash it, you see?*

*Mother (M): But not –*

*F: Or that I say every evening that the dishes will be washed for the morning. And I actually wash it every evening, you know, because I don't want...*

*M: That's what I used to do.*

*F: Well, because I don't want to get up and see the mess in the kitchen. And sometimes I say to myself that what I do, that I have learned it.*

The partners verbally clearly distinguished the paternal and the maternal role in the family, "as is right and proper", despite their particular individual family arrangement, which often had no links with the presented social stereotypes associated with these roles: the father is the strict one and children run to mum to "scratch an itch"; this does not only apply in their home. It is clear from the example that the emphasis on cleaning and a tidy household may be the result of self-identification with one's dominant status as a competent person in the private sphere. The person with the status of a nurturer who spends a long time in the household, may adopt the activities pertaining to this position, although they do not conventionally belong to their gender. However, this does not happen automatically, or always. Distinct conformity with the normative stereotype of the parental roles can be identified by the level of concern presented by the couples over the different expectations and different evaluations of nurturing fathers. Nurturing fathers are honoured as the "heroes of the day" and their spouses are framed as "heartless mothers" in their position of family team players.

I would be happy to simply state that "nurturing fatherhood" poses a clear challenge to the limitations of dual gender and presents an emerging type of hegemonic masculinity, which is socially desirable to aspire to (Howson 2009, Hearn 2008). However, much more than an exchange of roles on a symbolic level was at stake: it was a redefinition of the flexibility of human practice, of the ability to adapt to a new environment and responsibilities. Nurturing fatherhood is as yet defined as a masculine "field for success", mainly thanks to the partners – mothers – who have not taken over the stereotypical model of the breadwinner in a skirt, nor have their men partners become housewives in trousers. Therefore, maybe they are together helping to transform the space for a "caregiver/parent", where the care is shared by both partners wherever and whenever possible, so they both then have the time, energy, and space for self-realization. What presents a greater challenge than the idea of a nurturing father (the hero, who eventually made it) as part of the

masculinity patterns, are the efforts to cope with domestic masculinity - to take over the normal daily housekeeping by men; and cope with the emancipated motherhood (Janoušková 2004) of women in the public sphere. The role of "non-iconic" motherhood and the transformation of the image of "supermum" who brilliantly handles her job and the family and the household, a phenomenon which is well-known both to the west of our borders and in the Czech context, more sharply collides with the historical and social context, as well as with the tradition of the Christian-patriarchal social order. It forms a counterpart to the similarly problematic image of "men in the household".

However, the question remains, how such parental couples will manage in the future to manoeuvre between the existing structures and expectations associated with paternal and maternal activities in the symbolic gender universe (Harding 1986), based on polar characteristics and the duality of roles. The individual practice is often quite different, but the inertia of this structure has great power (Bourdieu 2000). This research study documented a practical appearance of individual active attempts to redefine structures that have a strong tendency to reproduce themselves unchanged. In addition, individual fathers - "heroes" - who have mastered childcare, clearly demonstrate the fact that some strategies of families in which the fathers take care of children, may not significantly affect and change gender relations and partners' (im)balance in the family's coexistence and in the context of other lines and stages of the actors' careers. Therefore, although the research captured the fading of residual gender differences in collage identities, there have also been strategies, where men still kept "the best of the two worlds" (Hochschild and Machung 1990, Holter 2003, for this research in greater detail Šmídová 2004b), because they were in the position to choose. They have achieved public success and recognition, media (and research teams') attention is focused on them, they retain time for their own hobbies, and mainly - they can play on the temporary status of nurturing, and after they return to their paid jobs, their status will return to more gender-

stereotypical tracks. This evidence thus suggests that when men enter the home ground, in many respects the rules of the public sphere remain in force, the rules of the symbolic order of masculine domination; childcare and household get separated and the interaction in the private sphere is judged in competitive terms: "Who can beat me?" and "Do I have the balls to do it?" These men "knew how to arrange it better" than women on parental leave, because they had partners who participated in this change, shared activities in the private realm with them or took turns with them. They also arranged it better because social structures allow them to (mostly) set the rules of the game. Normative expectations tied to nurturing fathers do not yet have a clear shape or content, so almost everything they do meets with admiration and praise.

Although the nurturing masculinity is in many respects close to my heart, and I met men on parental leave who in my opinion fulfil the expectations of loosening the dual gender relations, it doesn't seem to me to put men offside in a similar isolation, which is described by women in connection with their domestic status (and feminist research, Gatrell 2005, Dinnerstein 1999). Nurturing masculinity has become a key player and it definitely represents a desirable segment of men's social practice. However, it is still questionable whether it necessarily subverts the hegemonic masculinity as we know it. Does nurturing masculinity represented by caring fathers aspire to disintegrate the dual gender order, or does it only redefine its dominating non-progressive aspects (Howson 2006, 2009, Hearn 2008)? In my opinion it has the potential, but it is clear that when two people do the same thing, it is not the same.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Childbirth, men and hegemony**

The second area of involved men's practice that falls within the private sphere is the presence of fathers at the birth of their and their partners' children. Regarding the participation of fathers at birth, it is a relatively new phenomenon for the Czech context. This event is considered a very intimate and private experience which has been considered until recently to be distinguishably and symbolically "feminine". Despite being framed as private and intimate, in the Czech Republic births take place in the institutional setting of a hospital and therefore outside the family household located in the private sphere. Nevertheless, birth represents a profound experience for each couple. This is a key rite of passage, an entry into the adult world, as procreation is defined in society.

Childbirth represents a topic that was and largely remains symbolically a very private, intimate experience, despite the Czech practices in the field of reproductive medicine, often praised for biomedical excellency, but at the same time criticized for neglect of the birthing women's wellbeing. In any case, men are confronted with childbirth especially as professionals, doctors – specialists, or as private persons accompanying women in labour. This chapter is dedicated to the latter category. The former is dealt with in the following one.<sup>40</sup>

#### **Fatherhood at birth**

Only twenty five years ago (1990) it was almost unthinkable in the Czech Republic for a woman in labour to be accompanied in the delivery

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<sup>40</sup> Unlike the humorously depicted uproar over an unplanned pregnancy, Poláček's book *Men Offside* does not refer to childbirth and doesn't even offer any equivalent parable.

room. Fifteen years ago this "fashion" was already publicly debated, and ten years back it had already become a common practice in a number of Czech maternity hospitals. Fathers at childbirth also appear in the wider context of the debate about the potential transformation of gender relations in the private sphere, along with current political topics of so-called "active fatherhood". The following analysis offers a reflection on the phenomenon of fatherhood at childbirth in the Czech context based on an empirical research study conducted in 2006. Interviews covered a much broader array of research themes targeting mostly the life arrangements of young heterosexual families. For this chapter, I selected the passages describing the event of birth, and analysed them in the context of reproducing gender relations in the family setting and in relation to hegemonic masculinity and men's practices (re)producing or subverting it.

There were additional theoretical concepts that directed this particular segment of analysis, apart from the theories framing the critical approach to men and masculinities introduced in Chapter 2 of this volume. These were inspired by approaches to partnership strategies to "manage" the family (Holter, 2003), finding compromises between the stereotypes and the practice in gender relations in a particular family as presented in selected feminist research (Hochschild and Machung 1990, Segal 1990, Badinter 1999, Statham 1986). These were supplemented by a more general approach to the mechanisms limiting individual choices in the (re)production of gender and the gendered structure of society (Laqueur 1996, Bourdieu 2000, Havelková 1995a, Harding 1986, Acker 1990). These sources are also subjected to critical reflection trends that are presented in the public debate as desirable and promising; they include the involvement of men in the family. The question to what extent - if at all - the presence of fathers at childbirth affects the performance of individual parental roles or stereotype changes in gender relations, however, is a subject for a number of systematic research studies. At this point, I can offer one such possible approach.

The aim of the research, which will be introduced later, was also to search for and describe the mechanisms that are involved in the constitution of the normative trends of Czech fatherhood, and more broadly to understandings of men's practices and relevant forms of masculinities. The mechanisms for the re-production of fatherhood, and the gender relevance of their relationship to forms of motherhood remains necessarily related to other categories of sociological inquiry (the status, ethnicity and age), and to social institutions beyond the family (media, state health and social policies, medicalized care etc.). Yet the primary objective was to capture the dynamics of gender relations.

A specific situation in the "state of the fatherhood" has only a temporary and locally-restricted character, while the strategies of the partners in negotiation or intuitive "doing gender" (West and Zimmermann, 1991, Connell 2002) help to reveal the norms and niches for their redefinition as part of the symbolic systems of today's Czech society. The gender universe (Harding 1986), which on a symbolic level represents the expectations associated with the gendered division of labour and is inherent to the individual life trajectories of the actors, can be partly uncovered simply by entering the stage of the life cycle in which the partners are experiencing - due to the birth of the first baby - a radical change in the existing settings of their relationship. How will social structures of masculine domination work (Bourdieu 2000) in a redefinition of the partner/parent family setting? What legitimisations will be employed to justify the selected arrangements?

The period of transition to parenthood, and specifically the turning point in the form of the birth of the first child, were not selected accidentally for this analysis. The phenomenon of the father's direct presence at this event - the experience of childbirth - is sometimes regarded as crucial in establishing a relationship with the baby. It is highlighted in media coverage and popular psychology handbooks, it also finds its way into the rhetoric of social policy makers and equal-opportunities advocates.

The father's presence at childbirth is put into a causal parallel with their active involvement in parental care. It can certainly be stated that the father's presence at childbirth has become an everyday issue and sometimes even a normative requirement: an indicator of a "good father". Today, the already standard question "Were you at the childbirth?" asked to new fathers has become an item on the scale of his "paternal identification" with the baby and with his parental roles. This is so regardless of the fact that the mere presence of a partner during childbirth may have no influence on the form of his parental involvement. Accompanying the partner at birth can be the result of a long-term preparation for parenthood, but also a matter of curiosity, coercion by the partner or the surrounding actors, or just the accidental outcome of circumstances.

Medical doctors engaged in initiatives advocating "natural childbirth", such as the Frenchman Michele Odent (1995), suggest that the development of the "fashionable trend" of fathers at birth is not yet closed, and point to the fact that the presence of the father at birth may sometimes not play a positive role, although he is the most frequent companion of the mother in labour, and the effect of his presence is often beneficial (1995: 67-68).<sup>41</sup> May and Strikwerda (1996) also point to the covertly sexist terminology which sometimes occurs in the context of the increasing presence and activities of fathers at birth. In the USA, a nationwide initiative for fathers at birth used the term "coach", which shifted the role of the labouring mother to a mere "team player". Despite these symbolic (but significant from the gender point of view) difficulties, fathers at birth are described primarily as helpers and those who remind the woman of the agreed procedure, the birth plan.

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<sup>41</sup> Odent points out that the presence of another person, including the father, may be subconsciously perceived by the mother in labour as undesirable and may slow down, or even stop the birth (1995). This argument partly refers, among other things, to the essentializing dual world of "female secrets", in which "the male element" does not belong at the time of birth.

## **Childbirth and parental practices**

Childbirth is a strongly gendered institution in which the tasks, it seems, are clearly pre-determined. It is a feminine space, but it is also a space for expert medical approach and rules. The new dimension which this event acquires in the presence of the partner of the mother in labour (in our case fathers), reveals a set of stereotypically gendered expectations that are linked to it, but also represents the opening up of the space for perceiving childbirth by its participants as a jointly-shared, partnership and parent-family event. Common stereotyped conceptions about women and men at childbirth and in the relationship are sometimes redefined owing to this new common experience, without clinging to conventional ideas defining childbirth as a purely feminine experience. So again, I ask whether the experience of fatherhood at childbirth represents a challenge to the dominating hegemonic masculinity, or what makes the progressiveness of this "aspirational" hegemony problematic (Howson 2006, 2009, Hearn 2008)?

The opinions of new parents on their own experience of the father's presence at childbirth included several arguments. Let me sum up four of them, which directly relate to the birth and have an interpretative potential for analysing men's practices and masculinities there. The themes are: 1. Fathers at childbirth as a new norm. 2. Linking up normative expectations with personal experience. 3. Support for a lonely woman, or a new field of power domination. 4. Gendered expectations related to men at childbirth.

Despite evidence supporting the "appropriateness" of the fathers' company at childbirth, both the past practice (in their father's generation and even before that) and the essentialised understanding of birth as symbolically a-women-only experience also lead to legitimisations to help overcome this particular anxiety. It is the mixture of their required presence with, at the same time, feelings of "inappropriateness" of men's presence there as men that can be traced there.

### ***Fathers at childbirth as a new norm***

The expected presence of the man/father at birth as well as advertising it as a worthy experience by its "graduates", today represents a normative requirement. The interviewed couples framed it by unambiguous statements of the woman's wish for his presence accompanied with praise for fulfilling it; recommendations to "all others" were added, as well as their (now) expert reassessment of initial enthusiasm, in cases when the birth did not proceed as expected. For a typical example of such positive appraisal, recommendations and normative expectations, see the citations:

*Mother A: And I definitely have to say that from the very beginning I wanted my husband to be there and in the end I was really so happy he was there; that actually helped me so much just to know that he was simply there. Yeah, definitely, definitely there's something in it, and I want to recommend it to all mothers. If daddy takes a stand that he would like to do it; if he doesn't want to, then it's worse, of course.*

*Mother B: Well, I was happy because if he had said he wasn't coming, I might not have respected him, there'd be a kind of barrier that would have been created between us, such as- he made me pregnant, so why shouldn't he be there...but I was happy that he was there with me [...] that is one of those positive things and that's why I am with him.*

In addition to repeated recommendations to other fathers or wavering mothers, there also appeared an assessment of the father's presence at birth as a normative standard. Negative sanctions and down-looking were reserved for those who act differently.

*Father: Well, I sort of can't understand someone when his girlfriend is giving birth that he would just go home (...) I'd probably be there all the time, I would not leave her alone, I don't think I would, not at all, in an unfamiliar environment with strangers, just knowing that somebody would pop in, that really reminds me of the diagnosis as an illness, that pregnancy is simply a disease, that you are simply in a room where the clock is ticking and you are waiting for it to come. I did not want her to ... I wanted her to be relaxed when the child came.*

The repertoire of normative requirements - "it's normal", "only freaks don't do it" – reassures individual actors themselves of a right

choice and works as a value message addressed to other actors. It also provides some evidence of the more general acceptance of the current trend of progressive redefinitions of fatherhood and parenthood related to the event of childbirth. The normative aspect prompting a fulfilment of this family experience is clearly reflected in other analysed topics as well. Compliance with the perceived social expectations, directly articulated in strong peer group pressure, celebrity-publicized stories or popular parental handbooks, is demanding and perceived as not optional.

### ***Linking up normative expectations with personal experience***

Whether the request for the father's presence at childbirth was the result of the couple's agreement, the wish of one of the partners or simply conforming to the "norm", the specific experience of birth itself influences the reflection of it in the research interviews. The couples communicated the largely taboo or at least non-public aspects of their experience, such as fear and anxiety.

In connection with masculinity, fathers recalled a distorting feeling of helplessness and inability to act (take the initiative). The experience is clearly inconsistent with the stereotype of the man expected to have everything under control or who is able to benefit from it. They were overwhelmed by the intensity of the very private experience of intimacy and fear at the same time. Fathers referred to an unspeakably emotional experience (strong and positive), often reinforced by the moment when they physically took responsibility for the baby. They referred to unique individual situations distinguishing their experience from that of the mothers'.

These were when they were holding the baby in their arms, when they were asked to cut the umbilical cord, when they were left alone in the room with the newborn, while their spouse was being treated in another room, or when the father was watching the first examination of the child while the spouse was left out of sight lying in the delivery bed. Other times they described their experience as a shared, mystical or very

personal, internal event that is impossible to communicate. At the same time, the research communication partners expressed their confusion, anxiety, haste or fear brought about by unexpected complications or impersonal, formal rules of the maternity hospital often presenting the father's presence there as providing "support" for the birthing woman.

The verbalization of their experience was presented as difficult. The fathers often stated that they did not know how to describe the situation, or just briefly shared the information that the experience and emotions were strong, and used the standard clichés: *a great experience, terrific, good, normal, I'm very happy/thrilled/overjoyed/delighted that I was there, I evaluate it positively, interesting, a little disappointing*. One of the fathers was able to convey the immediate atmosphere of that experience in a detailed description, quite aptly, as he was an artist by profession himself, which might have helped him in articulating the experience referred to as transcendental and liminal.

The aspect of an intimate, perhaps even secret shared experience was described as bordering with the world of miracles. Such expressions challenge the "rational" reactions expected from men, and challenges some aspects of the institution of childbirth as a traditionally gendered social field. It blurs the dual categories: public - private, rational – emotive, etc. It also provides a new platform for the communication of men's emotions, whether in relation to the newly-born baby, the partner or other actors nearby.

### ***Support for a lonely woman or a new field of power domination***

"The main thing for me (her) is not to be there alone," was the theme presented by both mothers and fathers. Some mentioned an effort to provide a sense of security and a reasonable degree of certainty that nothing can go wrong. Fathers were perceived as a moral support and a safeguard against the unpleasant conduct of hospital staff towards the woman, who was presented as being defenceless. The father's presence

was to guarantee an impartial element, a liaison officer between the personal, private and institutional and formal environment.

The father acts as a mediator, a liaison between the described dichotomized worlds: the home/familiar/personal/secure world versus the strange/impersonal hospital institution with a formal performance and a uniform environment. All this is further enhanced by the expectations of the unknown for both the key actors, players in this game - the birth of the first child. By emphasizing the alien versus the homely, personal environment (the father's presence means security and contact with the familiar world, an opportunity to stay in touch with home being it the father playing favourite music, etc.), the participants point to the need to adapt quickly to the unfamiliar environment and staff.

This motif of a mediator, however, had a more complex structure. It also included reflected changes in the interaction of the woman in the presence of her spouse. This is where the issue of power enters the stage. The role of a mediator may be played as a coach or a control freak; the motive of the man's control of the conduct of both the staff and also the mother-to-be. Such incidents were also cautiously communicated in the research interviews. At the same time, the fathers' support was confused with a feeling of uncertainty in relation to their usefulness in childbirth. They had doubts in the effects of their performance, although the doubts did not concern the emotional level. Both the control over the situation and the anxiety connected with the lack of it and with periods of inevitable passivity (in waiting through the woman's labour) pose challenges to the fathers' identities as masculine and adopting a manly attitude.

Disjunction of the individual experience with its appropriate gender conduct, and open questioning of the stereotypically-delineated expected practice forms one aspect of the reflection in the research interviews. On the other hand, strict adherence to the appropriate gender conduct found its moments of advocacy as well. Some interviewed women deliberately portrayed their partners' involvement within the limits of the clearly-predefined framework of the dual gender world, where both women and

men have their own separate, impenetrable domains. Childbirth symbolically represents the world of feminine power here, or a field where men are stereotypically not useful or they can't understand it. This gendered dynamics could be applied, despite the overall approval and appraisal of the positive aspects of the father's presence.

*Mother: So he was there for me as a sort of psychological support ... it was really important, when... How can a guy really help? Well, he wiped my legs after I got out of the shower, and turned up the music or turned it down, or I said put it forward, I don't want to hear it now, I want something else, and so on ... but essentially those practical things, zero, zero, nothing, but the fact he was there with me - it was quite amazing that I wasn't alone in it all. Of course then, practically at the birth, what can the guy accomplish, you know? But the moral support, it was something amazing.*

In a sharp contrast to such a conventionally clear division of who is "useful" at birth and how, I also registered a trend describing a (lay) man's presence at childbirth as an act that demonstrated coping with the situation, controlling the events and a factor affecting the women's conduct towards greater self-control (for the sake of the partner ). As May and Strikwerda (1996) point out, almost paradoxical situations can occur where it is the father, and not the mother, who in recounting the event becomes the key and indispensable player at childbirth.

*Father A: I was surprised that the doctors integrated me into the whole process. I'd thought that I would only stand somewhere near her head and that the only thing I'd do would be to watch and shake my head and try to be supportive for my wife. But I actually held her legs and more or less pushed together with my wife, because the doctor was saying, come here, hold this ... yeah, the only thing I didn't do was to pull the baby out.*

*Father B: I still make fun of it to my wife that it was me who delivered the boys that she only carried them and I gave birth to them, yeah. She slept through the whole childbirth (an acute caesarean section) and me -*

Although it is an overstatement or a humorous comment to lighten up recollections of the life-threatening experience – I came across other hits as well framing the fathers as those who "gave birth". Some caution is appropriate in my opinion, as these accounts may indicate the

reproduction of the hierarchical gender inequality by spreading into this new arena and thus broadening the dominance or superiority of men's action to women's labour even here. Similar to the cases of men on parental leave described in the preceding chapter, fathers at childbirth start occupying an area where they had no assigned place in the past, and moreover, they are often welcomed there. It would be absurd to create a case for conspiracy based on few examples, and thus guard the "insurmountable" boundaries of the men's and women's worlds.

What remains thought-provoking is to pay attention to what (gender-typical) attributes are assigned to the presence of men at birth: they managed everything OK, were rewarded and remain active (though in other places they also carefully formulate their concerns, fear and helplessness). Can it be true, that by entering the formerly exclusively feminine domain, men actually appropriate childbirth? And thus are they threatening to take over yet another remaining arena of feminine power? Such interpretations would only strengthen the gender duality and potentially intensify the gender imbalance rather than frame fathers at childbirth as a positive trend in challenging established gender relations.

### ***Gendered expectations and men at childbirth***

How does the personal experience of childbirth and the strong motive men have to support their partners fit in with the available knowledge about childbirth? What did the interview participants compare their unique experience with, when they offered their stories to serve as an experience to be followed and they recommended it to all expectant parents? By doing so, do they in fact indicate that it has not yet become commonplace and thus not an issue to be raised and discussed in the interview? How do they themselves reflect upon the imperative for fathers to be present at childbirth?

The rite of passage to fatherhood is changing significantly from generation to generation. The collective celebration of the birth of the baby is preceded by a very personal experience and men often need a

long time to process it (on their own or in a familiar intimate environment), before the typical drinking celebrations with friends and the extended family takes place. What is also a novelty for the man is to stand the partnership test at the birth - to pass as a man, which again is tied up with a number of stereotypical expectations. These may surface especially in unfamiliar surroundings and in an unknown sequence of events. In the testimonies of interview partners on this subject, expectations are articulated associated with men and women, especially the father's fears of being useless or helpless, which is incompatible with their implicit normative definitions of masculinity. Men's personal evaluation of the childbirth was then partially unravelled from this thread. And as described in the former section, fathers tended to interpret their experience and contribution to the whole process in a rhetoric conforming to the conventional masculine expectation: they did it all, managed, "gave birth", and the anxiety remained more latent in their stories.

Such a performance positions the new social experience of the parents in the rank of the dominant language discourse, which is heavily gendered, although its intensity is not reflected, nor is it often perceived as problematic. These categories of gender relations presented in such a way did not include the previously-mentioned "protection and support of the woman" or the "helplessness and uselessness of the man." Fathers communicated their feelings using words of joy about themselves and the baby (they were often the first ones of the family to see the baby or cradle it even before the mother) and the fact that the "baby looks just like me". They showed pride that they had managed it, and that they had eventually gone to the childbirth (in spite of the previous uncertainty or hesitation), mixed with fear resulting from the sudden responsibility (to cope well in taking care of the family) and an additional feeling of relief when everything had gone well.

So the initial approach of the liminal life experience that childbirth is, was accompanied with expectations full of uncertainty, anxiety and fear. These are cultivated by the dominant rhetoric of late modern medicine

framing childbirth as a life-threatening event, medicalizing it, forming sets of preventive interventions, and seasoning it with stories of blood and horror. Such fears attack actors regardless of their gender or physical embodiment. The particular anxiety of men then was mixed with a fear of failure in their conventionally-expected role as a protector and saviour. Once the childbirth was over and these foundational uncertainties passed away, the couple returned to the dual rhetoric of men as action heroes (and women absent). The relief in the reversion and restoration of the original safe (gendered) world was readable in their recalls.

Even the mothers spared no praise for the fathers. Similarly to the research of families where fathers had the nurturing status, also fathers at birth are the new heroes of the event. The merits of having the partner at birth is unequivocally appreciated and their legitimate paternity ("the baby looks like him") is explicitly formulated and supported also by the physical contact with the baby. But the evaluation has not always been unequivocally positive.

Some striking points can occur in the partnership negotiations, when - however good the intentions may be - the men's interest in attending the childbirth can come up against the will of the woman to decide whether she actually wants her partner there or not. A childbirth, traditionally framed as a women's matter, hereby enters another dimension of the bargaining relationships, which have a hierarchical gender axis. (At a totally different angle, childbirth as a medicalized event has long ago fallen into the powers of experts in the field of medicine - often men). Men's entry into the private realm (into nurturing parenthood, to the experience of childbirth - i.e. biological reproduction) traditionally perceived as a woman's domain, necessarily implies new bargaining and concessions. Both actors have a part in the reproduction of the status quo or its challenge. The effect of the father's presence at the childbirth on a shift in gender relations in the family definitely does not come out as unambiguous.

There are multiple examples indicating that the practice perpetuates the status quo in a hierarchically-split experience rather than bringing more balance to gender relations in the beginnings of family life. Among these there are men's approach to childbirth with curiosity, bordering on an adventure of discovery, or descriptions implying that it was actually him who gave birth to the child and actually played the central role in the childbirth, or who, except for a few essentially negligible interventions by the medical personnel, played a role as active as his partner. Personal heroism and the evaluation that "I'm good", often supported by the declarations of their women partners, is accompanied by measuring their own personal performance against other men, thus pointing to their own masculinity in the context of existing normative patterns. These presentations only reinforce the image of the father at birth as the hero of the day: "It's not for the faint-hearted"; "I don't know... someone else wouldn't manage it, it was hard." Fathers describe their joy, a powerful experience, satisfaction from a joint experience, while, at the same time, declaring their own usefulness and active role.

There are also moments of strategic negotiations and redefining the relationship between the woman and the man at childbirth. The dynamics of the interviews brought up, for example, the subject of helplessness. In the expectations linked to the women's or men's "roles" in the story of childbirth, the presence of helplessness was either confirmed, or on the other hand, downplayed by the other partner. So feelings of despair, for example, presented by fathers were followed by the partners' assurances that the man had done well. In the words of one of the women, her husband "is not the kind of guy who is revolted by the sight of blood, which would have been something else, and that's why she's glad he was there and helped her," and so became a part of the childbirth. He is therefore a hero and a real man, who is a real support to her. Thus, at least in the verbalised form, the presence of fathers at birth fits in the traditional perception of protective masculinity rather than its nurturing forms (Šmídová 2004c).

## **Nurturing and birth: gender relations in a new arrangement?**

The analysis of the stories from childbirth shows quite clearly that the presence of a father at birth is the new normative requirement. In their reconstructions of the experience, the individual actors frame it by expectations (acquired and presented in the media and by peer pressure), compare these with personal attitudes and adapt it to specific situations. The interpretation of the father's presence at birth can be seen as a reflection of conventional gender expectations relating to men-fathers: support for a lonely woman and a new space for masculine assurance of control of the situation. However, in the light of the parents' attitudes, the range of experiences at childbirth and afterwards can also acquire less conventional forms.

The analysis indicated that the theme of childbirth and the period immediately afterwards is a stage of the family cycle which involves both a re-constitution and consolidation of separate worlds along the lines of stereotyped, conventional gender definitions. In these moments, the parents fulfilled and transcended their everyday life concepts of the man's incompetence and women's maternal intuition. A confrontation between previously-collected information and the knowledge acquired by applying common sense with the conduct required by the families with a newborn has refuted the biological conditionality of this dualism. Fathers actively took care of the partners, the household and the baby – and the mothers insecurely adapted to their new identity, with some searching intensely for the proverbial maternal instinct.

On other occasions, the traditional spheres of family gender roles were strictly guarded in the participants' testimonies. Let me provide some examples with reference to other topics of the research interviews and from the study of families with men on nurturing status. These include highlighting references to the polarity of the men's and women's tasks and traits and the benefits that such duality brings to all

participants. Fathers in families with a conventional gender arrangement of care for small children would not change their lot, as paid work sometimes represents a breather for them, and thus they have at home, "the hallmark of scarcity." Mothers would not change their lot either, as they do not want to "be deprived of motherhood" and they would be "jealous" of their spouses, if it was their men who went on parental leave.

Inspiration from the analysed studies leads to valuable attention directed to the so far non-reflected discrepancies between the symbolic order and the specific interaction of the actors. That means the newly-experienced intimacy, emotions, but also fear and helplessness as well as joy and shared experience form a basis for challenging and redefining the understanding of "contemporary Czech fatherhood." The parents partly reflect the absence of terms to communicate their new parental experience, if they do not want to fall into the trap of using clichés such as joy, happiness and love. They indicated that the price they had to pay for their parental joy was often a number of problems, a lot of drudgery and a lack of sleep. Although some issues have been made invisible, fathers also gave praise to the mothers/spouses for handling the demanding care of the baby and the household. This praise is based on their own, though sometimes very short, personal experience, and in a number of cases it is no more than a rather negligible contribution to the division of housework.

For some women, the emotional support from their partners was enough and they considered it a sufficient expression of the partners' "responsibility towards the family". Similarly, the mothers heaped praise on the paternal engagement of their partners. The fathers are praised for any shift in this direction, because nothing of what they do is taken for granted. They are still more in the position of those who can choose (Hearn in Hobson 2002). On the other hand, even if the fathers are intensely involved in the domestic sphere, they are described by women as "helpers".

The two presented research studies, Chapters 5 and 6, have shown individual active efforts to redefine structures that have a strong tendency to reproduce themselves unchanged. On the other hand, individual heroines (mothers) and heroes (fathers) clearly demonstrate that some strategies may not significantly change gender relations and the partners' (im)balance in the family and in the context of other lines and stages in the actors' life careers. Both are each other's supports, the man protects the woman by virtue of manhood and the woman protects her maternal power. She is guarding the area where today she already wants to admit the man, but she is not sure yet whether completely.

The dilemma faced (unreflectively or latently) by the research participants partners has been elaborated many times, and applies both to families with nurturing fathers and to couples where they lived through the birth of their baby together. Can a mature partnership relationship unburdened by hierarchizing gender prejudices work? How can you get rid of the gender stereotypes that bind women and men so much that they described and framed their relatively varied experiences by the very conventional dual image of the expected male and female world?

In the 1970s, the American psychoanalyst Dorothy Dinnerstein (Dinnerstein 1999) offered an original and in my opinion symbolically apt radical interpretation of this stalemate in gender relations. She points out in her book "*The Mermaid and the Minotaur*"<sup>42</sup> the unsustainable condition of gender relations and stresses the need to start working on moving from the separate female-male world of "monsters" (not humans or animals) into the world of communicating partners, people, women and men, unburdened by dogmatic ideas of relevant dual-life spheres and the resulting personality traits. The Dinnerstein's monsters are, on the one hand, women as the sole donors of life and guardians of the hearth and

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<sup>42</sup> The book was first published in New York in 1976, in Europe it appeared with the title *The Rocking of the Cradle and the Ruling of the World*.

home, and, on the other hand, men as rulers of the world, who force out everything that can be associated with the ancient power of their mothers over their lives. What members of each gender can do best has been disrupted by the neurotically-motivated trimming away and isolation from what the others can manage best (Dinnerstein, 1999: 272).

The influence of female monsters from early childhood (in the form of mermaids) on future men and women is mythicized and at the same time it also blocks a change and maintains the status quo, which is also the women's field of power. Today's women, stylized in Dinnerstein's narrative as mermaids, drive men to destruction. And at the same time the icon of the mother remains half as a human being and half belonging to nature (Dinnerstein, 1999: 100). Dinnerstein stresses that only after we reach the conclusion that today's state is untenable both for women, as the women's movement has always been pointing out, and also for men (which is the case today), things can move forward towards a less dichotomous world, which will cease to cling to gender as a category fundamentally structuring everyday life. Dinnerstein believes that the key is buried in a necessary reorganisation of early childcare to make it both a feminine and a masculine domain. Dinnerstein concludes that if this succeeds, men will be less worried about being pulled under water by women, and at the same time, (and Dinnerstein sees it as a very painful confession that we must face), men will also need women in a different way than up until now. They will not represent the motherly person from their childhood who spoon-feeds them and helps them find and re-define the boundaries of their "self" and their autonomy. At the same time, when the earliest care ceases to be an eminently feminine domain, the strangely obvious expectation will disappear that women will be their guides throughout their childhood (Dinnerstein, 1999: 112-113).

From this perspective, the critically-described changes in fatherhood and motherhood represent an unquestionable challenge to the existing gender regime, although significant traces can still be found of certain privileges being reproduced, which the involved women and men find hard

to give up. The nurturing experience as well as the shared childbirth thus make gender relations less monstrous, in Dinnerstein 's terms. Nevertheless, it needs caution and critical attention paid to the new clones of the former monsters, too.

In regards to the men and masculinities offside, the two analyses in the private, family realm indicated that when men and women swap their status, the result does not bring a plain replica. We tend to interpret our world using the gender lenses of men having choice, playing the key role and being action heroes. Experiences that do not follow these lines tend to be overlooked or reframed to fit the hierarchical dual grid.

## **Chapter 7**

# **Condemned to rule: doctors in Czech maternity wards**

*I just had to call doctor Krauskopf, because Brod is an ignoramus, and I told him everything; well, why shouldn't I? There's no point being shy, you've only got one health. Krauskopf has gifted hands (...) he asked for thirty crowns, but I was happy to pay that, at least I don't have to worry.*  
Mrs. Načeradec in *Men Offside*, p. 45-6

This text has so far concentrated on analyses of non-hegemonic or aspiring-to-be-hegemonic men's practices. The main focus of the whole text is directed towards masculinities (and men) offside, and on analyzing the paradox of even powerful men feeling powerless. With this final chapter, I would like to supplement the previous topics of underachieving boys, nurturing fatherhood and men at childbirth with an empirical example from the top ranks of the social ladder. Here I will take representatives not only of a prestigious profession, but also in the upper echelons of their professional hierarchy and explore the mechanisms reproducing as well as complicating their hegemony in relation to gender relations. I will again be looking for evidence and a better understanding of the key ambiguity I (and researchers in CSMM, such as Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005) have encountered in my research: that men as a group continue to hold a dominant position in Czech society, but at the same time membership in this group does not necessarily assure a satisfying life experience.

The hegemonic masculinity of men head doctors of maternity wards is challenged by several structural elements that influence their perception of the powerful position they possess. The complexity of the organization of healthcare in the Czech context and elsewhere sets certain limits to their performance. As the analysis shows, surprisingly the limits provided by the formalized long-established profession performed in the

professionalized highly-hierarchical organizations of hospitals do not prevent very subjective and individualized constructions of the medical care provided and practices based on the authority and personal attitudes of the head doctors.

There is a certain legitimate logic to this. Medicine is a hands-on profession, with a brilliant physician being the person who can master the skills and excellence in everyday routine. So it is understandable and practical to pass the skills of individual head doctors on to younger generations of medical doctors. Unfortunately, such mechanisms of reproducing the professional routine and art are accompanied by reproducing a broader spectrum of personal attitudes maintained by the persons in the head positions. Thus the reproduction of various stereotypes and sets of prejudices can be passed on from generation to generation unless the person in charge brings about change. However, such change does not come from the subjects taught at medical faculties. It is again very personalized.

The medical profession is a very demanding occupation, even more so in the Czech context where the system of health care provision is undergoing a long and intense transformation process. Old, pre-1989 rules have their momentum in later changes, while the financing of the state provision of healthcare is problematic – again with symptoms perhaps escalated by the complex transformation of Czech society (such as a phenomenon of corruption). Despite the unquestionable demand on time and expertise in their profession itself, Czech physicians are well-known for their active engagement in political affairs in the Czech Republic and for high voter support, suggesting the good level of trust which the profession has historically enjoyed among the Czech public. With the Czech Republic ranking high in the field of modern (bio)medicine, despite the totalitarian past, this field, and specifically obstetrics, offers an opportunity to study a context that is influential, prestigious, as well as heavily gender-loaded. All of these factors make it even more pertinent to

analyze the circumstances in the obstetrics wards through the lens of hegemonic masculinity.

The empirical data from these Czech obstetrics hospitals have inspired me to consider the ambivalence of the position of the powerful men heading the obstetrics departments. How does structural dominance (the prestige of the profession and their position in the work hierarchy) relate to a life experience that can even be interpreted as hindering? I believe the dynamics of the relationship between masculine structural dominance (the power role of the state and ruling elites) and the action of individual actors deserves closer analytical attention.

### **Helpless head doctors and powerful masculinity**

In the research study I draw on here<sup>43</sup>, I have conducted interviews with male and female Czech obstetricians predominantly working in maternity wards in hospitals. The reference to a particular difficult situation in the medical practice has already been used to open the theoretical chapter of this text. The following analysis provides supplementary evidence to the situation and explores other relevant aspects to everyday routine practice in Czech maternity wards.

Men in positions heading hospital departments complained about men leaving the field of obstetrics. Explanations for this trend included the fear of litigation, which is a growing phenomenon. Another reason is that although obstetrics may even be a branch of emergency medicine, it is hardly a progressive biomedical specialization. It mainly requires a conservative, patient, wait-and-see approach. It thus fails to offer opportunities, presumably sought by men entering the medical profession, for the kind of technological innovation and intervention expected from those who wish professional visibility and fast career advancement. The child will pass through the birth canal in the same old way, while the

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<sup>43</sup> The whole research study was funded by the Czech Science Foundation as the project "Childbirth, assisted reproduction, and embryo manipulation. A sociological analysis of current reproductive medicine in the Czech Republic" (GAP404/11/0621).

methods for assisting a child in difficulty were found and verified long ago. Moreover, in the Czech context of mostly state hospitals, and where medical professionals are prohibited from delivering children outside certified medical facilities,<sup>44</sup> obstetrics does not pay as well as other, more lucrative private employments while requiring a significant commitment of physical effort and time. Aging department heads (especially in regional hospitals) thus lack successors who would meet their stereotypical gendered expectations.

Women obstetricians in hospital teams were portrayed by their bosses as conscientious and competent (except in the area of operations, for which men are almost always chosen by the head of the department), but also as facing the insurmountable handicap of motherhood, automatically associated with a Czech woman's life trajectory. Citing examples from their own practice, head doctors argue that when women return from parental leave they prefer to take an assistant position to that of a "senior" doctor. In this way, gender inequality is reinforced or maintained, symbolically as well as in practice, with reference to women's presumably inescapable biological role as mothers, which places them at an automatic professional disadvantage to men (and with the moralizing clause that this is right and natural when women take on their irreplaceable role as mothers).

This mechanism brings fewer and fewer advantages to the head doctors as well, as young men doctors especially tend to leave for private practice or other specializations that either pay better with less of a time

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<sup>44</sup> The State-Communist era has distorted the division of work tasks between medical doctors and midwives; the latter profession was almost eliminated and downgraded only to nurses (with secondary school education and thus limited qualification and responsibilities). The lack of qualified midwives together with the centralized approach to health processes has also influenced arrangements for childbirth. In addition to this, the status quo has been strongly resistant to any changes despite significant changes in the educational professionalization of midwives since then. Moreover, not only does childbirth have to happen in a hospital setting, medical personnel can be taken to court for assisting at a home-birth.

commitment, or are perceived as more progressive in biomedical standards (thus fulfilling the stereotype of a career suitable for men). Therefore there are ever fewer men doctors in the profession compared to women. Department heads (especially in the regional hospitals) may thus find themselves isolated in their profession, with no successors who would meet their gendered expectations.

The hospital - as a strongly hierarchical organization with strict rules in which the specialized department heads play a strong role (head of clinic, head doctor) - tends to socialize the young medical graduates into the routine of hospital practice. Its regime is often compared (especially by women doctors in the interviews) to life in the military. It is a setting in which (gendered) power hierarchy is constantly reinforced, whether between the senior and younger doctors or between them and the other hospital personnel (midwives, nurses, etc.). Young women doctors are often told about having to work much harder to achieve recognition in the eyes of middle-level staff (often skilled women) than their male counterparts, who tend to be the centre of attention and enjoy various advantages. In contrast, women doctors later in their careers are systematically relied on by the middle medical staff – because of their perceived conscientiousness and willingness – to carry out bureaucratic tasks or communication with patients, even on behalf of their men colleagues. Combined with the above-mentioned preference by head doctors for men assistants in surgery and as successors in head positions, the world of obstetric and gynaecological departments in hospitals seem to be strongly gendered.

The privileges of (men only) department heads, however, are being weakened today by various phenomena that relate to general trends in current medicine and the organization of medical practice. Physicians in general today also find themselves in a difficult position because their previously unquestioned medical authority over lay opinion is no longer automatically recognized and acknowledged in public debates on medicine. This understandably has a greater impact on people – men – in

positions of formal responsibility for the given workplace. With a few exceptions, head doctors today complain about the Internet as a source of disinformation for women patients (in the case of obstetrics). Armed with knowledge from the Internet, women patients increasingly seek to become partners in their own care instead of remaining its passive recipients. Doctors thus find themselves having to explain and defend their actions to the "object" of their work, a role many of them refuse to accept. This is a situation in many ways symptomatic of post-Soviet national health care systems, characterized by a tradition of paternalistic and authoritative approach to patients and recipients of care. Therefore, the practice of exercising (men's) power and authority increasingly clashes with a more democratic, participatory approach to providing health care.

Yet from another perspective, the decision-making responsibility especially of head doctors at smaller hospitals is regulated by patients today. The situation for doctors and head doctors is further complicated by their choices and decisions being to a great extent circumscribed by the so-called recommendations coming from professional associations (evidence-based medicine). This formal guidance is usually put together by teams from large research clinics or adopted from abroad. The failure to observe the recommendations can place doctors in legal jeopardy or can result in the loss of collegial backing. These set rules and standards are sometimes at odds with the capabilities of practice at the smaller facilities; alternatively, in view of the dominant trend towards safety and the elimination and prevention of risks in biomedicine, it may be in conflict with the conservative approach to birth (minimizing intervention in the birth process; with fewer cesarean sections or breach births). Many experienced doctors of the "old school" still practice and know how to do the minimum interventionist approach to childbirth/delivery<sup>45</sup> which

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<sup>45</sup> In many respects these physicians, sometimes with professional experience from abroad, are unacknowledged allies of the "birth-assisting" model of birth asserted by

contrasts with the biomedical operating theatre. Thus the autonomy of individual department heads is bound by strong guild hierarchies.

Furthermore, the doctor's aura of glory, enhanced in the case of obstetricians through their role as "bearers of joyful news," can be experienced in everyday practice by doctors as exhausting. Meanwhile, many women doctors feel that this professional glory is achieved by men much more easily. How are we to understand this paradox on a more general level?

The situation reflects the still highly-accepted expectation among the general Czech public, so clearly expressed by the retired professor who knocked on my door at the beginning of this essay. The expected future heads of department are to come naturally and exclusively from among the diminishing ranks of men students in the profession. He sought assurance in the rules of a system that he understood and which was familiar to him; with reference to the dual concept, still strongly-rooted in the public discourse, of women's and men's life trajectories organized along sharply-polarized gender lines. Such persistence with these conventional and stereotypical expectations might be to some extent surprising, especially in the context of the Czech Republic. After all, similar to other countries from the former Soviet bloc, the Czech Republic is characterized by high rates of employment and education among women, as well as by a (still relatively high) state subsidy for maternity, parenthood, and institutional care for children.

### **Masculinity in the delivery room scrubs**

In the Czech Republic, the field of medicalized, hospital childbirth, currently the focus of heated public debates, constitutes one of the fields in which masculinity is contested, unravelled and, for the most part,

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midwives (woman centred, minimum interventions, responsibility shared by mother, midwife and physicians called only in emergency).

reinforced. The high-tech interventionist technology of modern biomedicine stands in sharp contrast to the conservative approach of some old-school doctors in smaller hospitals, as well as to the assisting approach to childbirth represented by the midwifery ideology and by a segment of Czech women. The former, interventionist style aligns with hegemonic masculinity, while the latter, wait-and-see, meticulous approach rooted in patience is perceived and represented as feminine (and thus inferior), whether actually carried out by men or women. Action, qualified intervention, and physical robustness, linked with skill in using modern technological equipment, are the elements of the way births are dealt with. These are regarded as progressive, and associated with a more masculine approach to medicine. The concept of hegemonic masculinity can help us understand the processes through which alternative (non-interventionist) approaches to childbirth continue to be delegitimized in the Czech context. Such delegitimization is in line with Connell and Messerschmidt's argument that hegemonic masculinity tends to insist on a central discursive position and operates by marginalizing the alternatives (2005: 486).

It would therefore be useful to carry out a multicultural comparison of established routines, compare practices in the big clinics and small hospitals, and analyse gender relations and specifically relationships between men in senior and starting positions, and possibly between the professions involved. Such analysis would be especially beneficial for a better understanding of the specific sub-contexts of decision-making and the application of the privilege of leading positions, and the relative disadvantages presented in view of the imperatives of biomedical practice and the need to adhere to the so-called recommended approaches ("lege artis"), etc.

What constitutes hegemonic masculinity changes over time. It need not adhere to the most common pattern of the everyday life of boys and men; instead it functions by shaping the prime examples of masculinity (an excellent surgeon, or a media-popular expert physician) using

authoritative symbols regardless of the fact that the majority of men or boys do not fulfill them in their everyday lives. The historical context of hegemonic masculinity, its change and development over time, reflect broader social processes, while also finding their way into gender relations.

The phenomenon of feminization in health care can, in specific contexts, alter the rigid professional rivalry and gender establishment of the hospital's medical hierarchy, as well as any consideration of alternative approaches to obstetrics; and this can potentially enhance the position of the bearers of alternative masculinity. However, considering that the majority of Czech doctors today are women but this has brought little if any change in the existing rules and gender relations in the hospital environment, we need to proceed carefully here and avoid oversimplification. Obviously, achieving lasting change, i.e. changes that would make a mark on the social structure, is a complex matter.

In today's environment, women doctors tend to appropriate the characteristics of hegemonic men in their professional career, thus becoming "complicit women." This inertia of the professional hierarchy and organization of hospital departments should lead to a renewed scholarly focus on femininity, and on the role played by women in the shaping of particular forms of masculinity. Connell and Messerschmidt bring up the concept of "emphasized femininity" in this context, which replaced the original technical term "hegemonic femininity" in tandem with hegemonic masculinity. Emphasized femininity, alongside the patriarchal model of gender relations, expresses the clearly asymmetrical and polarized positions of masculinity and femininity.

I need not go far for illustration; here I will present examples of the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity from maternity wards. In the following quotation, a woman doctor with two certificates and more than ten years of hospital practice describes and legitimizes the asymmetrical gender symbiosis in the operation room of her district hospital:

*In my opinion they (men) are able to decide better and faster. (...) I think that both the woman, and the man simply have a certain role. For instance, I was most satisfied in the role of assistant at the operating room of my head doctor. He was an excellent surgeon (...) He knew exactly what to do; in a crisis situation he knew how to deal with it. And then I was capable, with my female element, to make it comfortable for him there. How to set it up well for him, sometimes say something so he would feel better. I think this made a kind of a good team and that in the end we were all happy. I did not have the ambition to be as good as he was. But then I knew that I could do things he couldn't. Well, he'd have made a terrible assistant, wouldn't he? So if you know what I mean, everyone has a bit of a different role.*

Under different circumstances, particularly in larger hospitals, this kind of complementarity is not considered desirable. The hospital rules grant strong authority and executive powers to the head doctor, while junior men and women colleagues are expected to behave in accordance with stereotypical gender expectations presumed to predetermine their professional competencies. In the words of one woman doctor:

*When I came on as a graduate, (...) two thirds were men doctors and a third of us were women doctors, and the men really made it into the operating room while we stood in the corner when indications were made for surgery, where it is decided which treatment the patient is to undergo and what procedure is to be carried out. There is always like the head of the clinic and several men doctors who decide what to do. We (women doctors) just stood there and we really wanted to make at least assistant or stand there and hold something. And it was (...) hard, and I think that men really, really had a privilege, that they really started to put us women more in the out-patient office and we'd do these other things, or we are in the small (out-patient) operation room (...) But we, not that we wanted to operate all of the time, but all the same for the certification we needed some procedures. (...) We do enjoy doing something manually, sew something up; we needn't do some kind of heroic surgeries, but since we've gone into the profession, to do something, and it was a little harder to get anywhere. (...) Well, it's a little bit, that 'these girls'- most of the women doctors, are whooshed to the ambulance, because they are like more meticulous, hardworking, they can withstand the routine of seeing one patient after another and type it up (...) These guys don't have much patience, and they just try more to get into surgery. Well, (...) I think they have an easier time of it.*

This research participant illustrates the practice by which routine bureaucratic tasks and "red tape," presumably unsuitable for "impatient,

active men," end up being done by women. The more attractive, adrenaline jobs in the delivery room are offered to women only when there are "no men available," a phenomenon repeatedly observed by gender studies scholars and described in other contexts as a temporary solution at best.

In my research I have also encountered examples of explicit discrimination against capable women doctors, as illustrated through the following citation. Here again the conventional perspective is maintained, despite clear evidence to the contrary, that the best doctors/surgeons are men:

*She is extremely talented and . . . really an excellent surgeon - if she got her space, which she did not, because she got it at the beginning and then went on maternity leave. Now she's come back but it's already like the end. She would have shown all those men that she's simply much better. She is really very good, precise, super-talented, and now she's returned after maternity leave (...) Well, she, she's just a much better surgeon than he (the head doctor) is, and he sees that, you know. So, he found that out a couple of times. Then he completely stopped writing her down for the operating room, and she basically told me that he doesn't let her at anything since then. What's more she's attractive; it's just like, it's, it's simply a disaster, see?*

The reproduction of masculine domination through a (likely conscious) use of power by the supervisor above is here backed up by the overall social structure with its accepted gender stereotypes (expressed through the comment about the woman doctor's looks). Unfortunately, similar situations are in the Czech context rarely perceived by powerful men actors as an abuse, and they are rarely even perceived by them in terms of an exercise of power. Men like the supervisor above are supported in their practices by their perception that the stereotypes concerning gender they hold are not "just" their attitudes as they see them articulated and reproduced everywhere in Czech society at large.

The author of the following quote, the head of the obstetrics department of a smaller hospital, acknowledges the gendered division of labour at the hospital, and presents it as resulting from the way broader

society is structured. However, even this physician has no ambition or power to modify it:

*In out-patient service I think these women have a number of advantages and privileges; on the other hand in the whole field, hospitals and surgery, there I think it's more complicated for them to get ahead (...) There is also a certain limitation by the family, that's clear, because a guy can just say: I'm on duty, I'm going. And the woman takes care of the kids and it's just that I think in the Czech Republic it won't work that a guy would be as involved in family life as the woman. The woman is always saddled with that. I know what I'm talking about- my mother was a doctor, my wife is a doctor, my sister is a doctor, my daughter is a doctor - so I know how it is for every generation and we have gone through a lot, and it's always the guy who says first: I'm going. When there are two doctors, it's the woman who has to be more with the family. If you ask me, maybe it will change now, but I don't believe many guys would say: Hey, sorry, I can't take the shift, because my wife already has something. (...) Yep, it's harder for them to get ahead. In regard to knowledge, skill, attention to detail, the women may have a lot of advantages. But society is set up so that a guy is a guy. It's the way it still is.*

The above statement by the head of the obstetrics ward concerning the maternal role of women is by no means isolated, even among women doctors in the profession (the need to be available both for work and duty in the family). The gendered personal characteristics that they use to describe how they conduct their profession (quick decision-making in the operating room vs. conscientious daily routine), can be interpreted as the accepting or at least pragmatic statement of a person who is "powerless", under the influence of external circumstances, to do otherwise. In such a division of labour between women and men, the head doctors are seconded by the opinions of many women doctors that conform to "emphasized femininity". These women doctors welcome the fact that they do not have to be on duty at weekends, and, as they seek to harmonize work with personal and family life, they volunteer to fill the role of assistant doctor. It must be added that in view of the selective careers of men and women doctors directed by the heads of department, it is actually not much of a surprise that women accept the long-term assigned and reinforced position of assistants, and not decision-making actors. Moreover, at a number of facilities part-time employment is not possible.

There was no available role in the profession, at the time of my research that would allow doctor-mothers to work part-time, a problem faced by Czech women in many other professions as well.

Returning to the framework of hegemonic masculinity, the attributes of dominant masculinity in the profession of obstetrics are at work not only in the hierarchical environment of the individual hospital workplace. The dynamic hierarchy of masculinity can also be observed in relationships in the professional forums. The demonstration of power by representatives of the professional community at the annual conference of the Czech Association of Gynecologists and Obstetricians serves as a prime example.

The power is demonstrated in the way in which discussions are conducted, the arguments the actors use to support their assertions, whom they cite, as well as the "school" of child-delivery they align themselves to. Decisions are reached not necessarily on the basis of the strength of an argument and with sensitivity to local conditions, but on the basis of (power) alliances. One example: There has been a big debate recently on shutting down maternity wards in smaller Czech hospitals. The decision-making process on the selection of which wards to close was criticized at the conference forum by the head doctor of a local obstetrics unit. An influential participant, one of the big guns, rejected such criticism of actions taken by the professional council, referring to the democratic principles of voting by representatives on any new mandatory procedures in councils, committees, and commissions of physicians. He did not question openly, however, that such a council (on which he himself represented a big clinic) recommended the closing of obstetrics departments with less than an arbitrarily set number of births each year. Meanwhile the majority of representatives on that decision-making organ came from larger clinics. In this way they wanted to wipe out the "weaker players", and not just those from the small hospitals, but also the department head (a man) who spoke in the discussion in defence of the small hospitals (including the one which he headed).

The high degree of professional discipline and loyalty – and the desire to be among those who make the rules and decisions – partly explain why only isolated criticism of this measure was heard from the ranks of senior obstetrics doctors: the professional debate in this country is based on this code of silence. Therefore, in certain contexts, the department heads at small hospitals can be representatives of hegemonic masculinity, at other times - pawns in a larger game.

As the first part of this text indicated, in order to analytically track and identify the layers of masculinity and potential internal conflict in situations that set the rules for masculinity, it helps to understand the contexts in which men in influential positions cling to their privileges and thus maintain the rules of the gender order. And why and how they do so despite finding themselves in the situation of the powerless. The resulting forms of their masculinity represent a compromise between opposing commitments, desires, and emotions, probably precisely because of their dependence on gendered power.

This notion expressed and reflected in the research interviews analysed here demonstrates what Connell and Messerschmidt say and what has already been illuminated in the theoretical chapter of this text and in the introductory lines of this chapter: without feeling sorry for the privileged men, it is necessary to take into account that hegemonic masculinity may not necessarily transfer into practical life as a satisfying life experience (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 852). The practiced, tolerated and demanded hegemonic masculinity thus remains hegemonic to the degree it is able to resolve these tensions, to the extent it stabilizes patriarchal dominance, or establishes it under new conditions (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 853). Howson analyses the paradox of how the hegemonic can represent both the consensual and dominating categories which are manifested in the everyday actions of men as complicity and at the same time liberation from the obligations of hegemonic masculinity (Howson 2009: 8– 11). He says also that hegemonic masculinity imposes

the appearance of homogeneity and stability by offering at best complicity and at worst ambivalence about its hegemonic principles (Howson 2009).

### **Maternity ward head doctors condemned to rule?**

Are Czech maternity ward head doctors condemned to rule and their women colleagues left to assist them? In the Conclusion of this whole manuscript the question will be opened in a more generalized and open form to bring some insight into the broader structures of gender relations.

As for the particular topic of Czech heads of maternity wards, the men in powerful positions feel undermined by a number of circumstances. Consequently, the inertia of the current hegemonic masculinity in obstetrics is a form of public control (by men in the same position) and a form of loyalty in the defence of members of the profession and its functionaries and their time-honoured practices that maintain and legitimize the professional dominance of men. At the same time, it has become an evermore uncertain game of going around the recommended rules of obstetrics, balancing on the edge of driving the capable obstetricians from the hospitals, and needing to deal with both interdisciplinary disputes on the way to delivering babies, as well as the growing number of judicial consequences of professional mistakes or the absence of the mandated care.

This ambivalence also lies in the balance between individual (personal and professional) responsibility and privilege as part of the system. In the Czech Republic the public debate over childbirth is conducted as a seemingly professional dispute over alternative approaches to childbirth. Often, however, it degenerates into a strongly-gendered rant about irresponsible mothers who are unable to comprehend the consequences of their actions or to make decisions about their own bodies, about risk-taking (independent women midwives on the one hand and the rational, reasoned, benevolent "masculine" experts who promise the maximum safety for child delivery in their terminology) in fully-equipped maternity wards. There, needless interventions in the process of

giving birth are routine; there, the men remain the “bearers of good news” (while much of the work is done by others). With the post-1989 re-imposition of the conventional, essentialising concept of gender relations, the men in expert medical positions are encouraged in their feelings of carrying out their “masculine mission.”

The above analysis of interviews concerning practices and gender dynamics in Czech maternity wards reveals mechanisms which both rely on and perpetuate the glorification of polarized feminine or masculine conduct that falls into the patriarchal pattern. At the same time, there is the marginalization of those who target the wrongdoing inherent in such systematic structures. The legitimacy of the existing approach to childbirth is thus open to question.

This is so especially in the light of the awakening of (some) hegemonic men doctors in obstetrics, who appear to be becoming more open to the arguments for non-interventionist delivery and are beginning to question the future. They question the sustainability of the given system, including its gender order. Returning to the statistics presented to me with some alarm by the retired medical professor, it is likely that the continued feminization of the profession will force structural changes on the profession that might even lead in directions where “the few men left” will no longer be “condemned to rule”.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Conclusions**

# **Professors, well-paid mechanics, appraised nurturing fathers, condemned head doctors and mothers: are they offside?**

How are we to summarize the conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity in relation to the question of why Czech men are still “condemned to rule” while women are still expected to either produce children or “assist men” in their career? This question reappears in all the analysed themes of this volume.

It was the notion motivating the old medical professor to search for explanations by randomly knocking on the doors at the gender end of the corridor of the sociology floor at our Faculty. It is an issue at stake when comparing the underachieving boys in the Czech educational system with the consequent hierarchies on the labour market and the levels of poverty (that is feminized), which renders those men who have really failed rather invisible and stigmatized. The skilled mechanics with apprenticeship certificates are still much better off in the still-transforming Czech context than women secondary school leavers situated in the feminized sectors of the labour market. In the realm of the private sphere, nurturing fathers are the heroes of the day and they are even attributed a key role in the birthing room, thus pushing mothers out of sight, especially in public (and publicized) recalls of these experiences. The exhausted head doctors, yet “bearers of the good news” for “newborn” parents, struggle between sticking to their prestige and rigid guidelines of the professional status, dwelling in the aureole of late modern medicine and being caught as “cogs in the machinery” of the systems of organizing Czech healthcare and hospital routine. Some of them do advocate for systemic change, shifting the power imbalance towards a more engaged partnership with birthing women, while guided by essentialising assumptions about the career paths

of their women colleagues. Much too often women play the same game following these gendered rules. Some others, women and men, do not give up fighting with the system putting them offside.

What can we make of the fact that such gendered status privilege begins to be represented by many Czech men as a disadvantage, an unwanted bonus? The dilemma of whether men find themselves in a disadvantageous situation, or whether they have actually been in it for a long time, especially resonates with long-standing questions. The fact that we still primarily see men in leading work positions, while women caring for children and the household, only demonstrates that the dominant gender ideology which we have never abandoned continues to predominate. And it is only as part of this hegemony that we attribute adequate aspirations to specific men and women actors. The state policy before 1989 mandated women's emancipation and encouraged the blurring of gender differences in the workplace. However, the fact that we today continue to assign men to leading work positions while women are to care for children and the household, suggests that the patriarchal gender ideology was never completely disassembled and that it has a strong momentum.

It is tempting to keep reproducing such gender duality even in a sociological research targeting men offside. The polar matrix of providing evidence that men are not offside while women are, only simplifies the complexity of social relations and structures. While all the presented research studies have addressed certain aspects of men's hegemony, the mechanisms contributing to the reproduction of gender inequality, segments of the far side of men's structural disadvantage have been only touched upon. The chapter on statistical and research evidence can serve as an initiation point for a more thorough reflection on the segments of social strata where men prevail and are left offside. Such reflections will include highlighting the fact that it is very much a class or socio-economic status issue that is closely related to the (re)production of inequalities and mechanisms pushing even men offside. Besides health issues that are also

connected to age and family (or household) status, there are other incentives that easily lead men offside.

This manuscript has taken only a particular segment of the whole issue into focus. Most of the research participants of all the elaborated research studies were highly educated and financially well-off. In spite of such limitations, such homogeneity has enabled an intense application of the concept of hegemonic masculinity. This is because it is bound to men in power and with power and thus to a certain status privilege.

### **Bosses and mothers: reproducing the status quo**

The dual matrix of gender relations is not reproduced without problems, however. The second wave of feminism pointed out the dissatisfaction of women with being assigned to the private sphere, while in recent years some men have also spoken out that they find their rule a painful and limiting experience. What is interesting about this process is the durability of that dominant, symbolically very powerful edifice of “bosses and mothers”, despite its many cracks. It even seems that this neo-conservative emphasis on the “natural” division of labour is becoming stronger in the current debate on gender relevant issues. What was being critically discussed to the west of the Czech borders in the 1970s in the context of neoliberalism is only now – against a different backdrop – taking place in the Czech Republic today.

As opposed to the former state policy of emancipating women and blurring gender differences, the “natural” dual role of women and men is being emphasized and strongly enforced. The stress is placed on the biological nature of motherhood and the presumably instinctive female care. With this conceptualization, women’s sexuality and (in the language of medical authorities) women’s hormonal imbalance turns women into irrational beings who are in no condition to be making decisions, not even about their own bodies (for example when the life of a child is at stake at birth). Calls by Czech women to transform this practice are twisted to hysterical expressions of irresponsible and uninformed, risk-taking actors.

It is quite easy to slip into the system of praising the very expressions of human practices that fit into the dual masculine or feminine patriarchal patterns, while ignoring those that defy them. However, our life paths have gone through such changes in the last decades that the question of the legitimacy of the current practice has become more urgent. This time it also applies to men, as many of them express the feelings of being threatened or betrayed.

## **Masculinities and men offside?**

Which similarities can be found between the changing forms of masculinity in the Czech family, whether they concern nurturing fathers' status, or the normative expectations of accompanying the partners during the childbirth? What unites and at the same time distinguishes men protecting nature (in my doctoral research) from men with little education? And what links these experiences and practices with those of men head doctors in maternity wards?

Here is an overall summary of the similarities and differences of these men's social identities, their momentum and changes. The summarising covers the specific sections of social practice, on which I myself focused in detail earlier in my research. Towards the end of this section, I would like to compare these very areas more thoroughly.

In order to enrich the analysis of the similarities and differences between masculinities that remain in the game, and the types of masculinities offside, I'll compare the key findings of the studies presented in this manuscript with an even older research study on men with alternative careers in environmental protection (the Different men as I refer to them in my doctoral research). These men are also in a way offside due to their specialization in a segment of the labour market far offside the mainstream understanding of cutting-edge career orientation. At least, this is how it was at the time of the research at the turn of the 2000s.

Firstly, let us return to the opening chapters. The chapter providing a prevalence of statistical and research evidence indicated that even in the case of clear candidates for being offside, men without education, there is no unambiguous explanation and understanding of their status from the gender perspective. It has actually turned out that social mobility is not guided only by the individual performance of the actors or the family "inheritance" of the social status. It also has a strong gender accent, as the investment in education has significantly higher returns for men in the form of material status. It would be misleading to ignore the visible signs of poverty and social pathologies that the (young) men without education are prone to. To really fail in a system that favours men in the public sphere is doubly stigmatizing. It is perhaps only out of habit, or now already partly out of naivety, that men have internalized this symbolic order, which still partly pays off. Alternatively, they choose another legitimate gendered strategy: breaking the rules of the game. In terms of the gendered world, this practice is more acceptable for men than for women.<sup>46</sup>

A dangerous new world is being outlined for men. Guyland, as described by Kimmel (2008) and others (Corbett 2009, Cross 2008), rejects adulthood linked to the acceptance of responsibility and with the conventional, normal biographies of men and women. This social phenomenon certainly also needs thorough research attention in the Czech environment. However, in my opinion it is important not to lose sight of the fact that the final evaluation of who is offside and who is considered to be a key player still reflects the symbolic universe of gender relations. Men with low education attainment represent a potential social problem. Certain signs of panic invoked by this phenomenon should not exceed the level of concern resulting from other social phenomena

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<sup>46</sup> Affirming this practice can be traced even in Kohlberg's stages of moral development of the individual; in his opinion, men can get away with solving moral dilemmas by violating social norms, while women seek conventional solutions within the system (Kohlberg 1981 in Šmídová 2004b).

influenced by the existing gender order, such as the impoverished households of single-parent families and seniors, or similar social phenomena. It is rather typical, i.e. gender stereotyped, that uncritical attention (of media, research and politics) in this case has been again directed at men, who are presented as endangered more than anyone else by the changes in social institutions, such as the labour market, the education system or the family.

### **The boundaries of difference: power and assistance in nurturing, protection and hegemonic masculinities<sup>47</sup>**

On a retrospective glance, my research has been predominantly focused on the men and masculinities that in some ways step out of the conventional expectations of masculine biographies. At the same time, as the analysis showed, these remain in many respects close to the notion of hegemonic men. Alternatively, these actors' manifestations of masculinity belong in the category named by Connell as "complicit masculinity", in which these actors take advantage of their affiliation to the "serial collective men" (Young 2008) to benefit from a number of taken-for-granted benefits, the so-called patriarchal dividend. They get them purely thanks to belonging to a culturally and historically privileged gender category (Connell 2002, 1995).

The research studies that I have introduced in this text are intended to provide an insight into the process of maintaining and changing the hegemonic masculine identities in the Czech Republic. When I connect them with my dissertation research, I can outline more colourfully what it looks like with the endangered masculinities, with the changing men or the masculinities that continue to retain the central point of the game. What do they have in common? What permeates the life stories of the doctoral study *Different men with the rest?* The *Different men* at first

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<sup>47</sup> The subchapter also draws, in some details, on the older versions of the author's texts (Šmídová 2004c and 2008a).

glance clearly don't seem to be career oriented, competitive masculinities by acting "in the interest of protecting the weaker nature". Neither do men engaged in nurturing family work, which is symbolically called the "feminine" realm. What will the insight into these practiced masculinities bring in terms of gender relations and gender order analyses?

In the doctoral research (Šmídová 2004b), I interpreted interviews on the life courses of men employed in conservation and environmental education, who were also identified by my informant recruiters as active fathers. The analyses focused on their sensitivity and responsiveness to the problems of the "weaker", taken as representatives of practices deviating from the conventional notions of mainstream masculinity.

I originally approached this serial collective men (Young 2008) with the concept of "new masculinity" (Segal, 1990, Hochschild and Machung 1990), but finally I selected the term the Different men, with the reference to their conduct and life stories being "new" only in appearance. I pondered upon whether these men represent a "new" socially-desirable form of masculine identity, focusing on the care and protection of the "defenceless" nature, which also in other cultural contexts metaphorically involves disrupting the patriarchal model of masculine domination in human interactions (Šmídová 2004, Connell 1999). However, I had to conclude the analysis with a discussion of the patterns enhancing the reproduction of the gender order, asking whether the presented professional orientation and careers of the communication partners have brought any shift in gender relations. I finally inclined to the notion that those men were a new/old version of patriarchs rather than men newly defining power balanced relations between men and women. In the case of their careers, the Different men stayed stuck with the hierarchical relation between the "lords of creation" and conservation (Šmídová 2004b).

As my doctoral research stated:

*Should the protective and protecting Different men, engaged in refuting the dominance of man over nature, become the New men, they would*

*have to include in their considerations, attitudes and opinions on how to "insist on their truth" and how to "harmonize everything in their lives" the criterion of hierarchy in human relationships as well. However, this does not only concern the First World hegemony over the Third, which is already being discussed along with environmental issues, but they would also have to consider and reconsider the relations between masculinities and femininities, and include them in their "fight for the good thing." (...) Connell (1999) shows in the research of men in the environmental movement that a redefinition of masculinity in this area takes place only if the men reflect the nature of the power and superiority of men as a group over women (and a certain group of men over all the others), in addition to dominance over the weaker nature. (...) There remains the question on how to make such life-changing decisions occur? How to stimulate decisions that would change the opinion of the men already striving for a change, and make them include another dimension in the areas understood as a "useful service to others"? In addition, it would be a dimension calling into question the legitimacy of the universally human practice (but in practice a symbolically masculine practice) of a "meritable act" and a "service to your country". This dimension would force them to rethink their own (masculine) concept of public protection of the weaker and the (feminine) private care" (2004b Šmídová: 149- 150).*

Not even as teachers of environmental education or fathers have the Different men stepped out of the conventional gender arrangements in these social fields. They epitomized the active and universalistic masculinity (taking their children to the countryside, showing them the world), exactly in the spirit of Parsons' (Parsons 1951) definition of the paired dilemmas of the actors' social identities. By doing so, they reproduced and maintained the status quo of polar conservative expectations related to women's and men's social identities.

Despite this critical evaluation, the Different men have violated the rules of conventional masculinity in several respects. They themselves were caught in their narratives in the traps of the symbolic order, the gender universe (Harding 1986), by using inappropriate language and lacking words to describe their experience presented. For example they found it hard to overcome the pervasive gendered biological essentialism, when they wanted to define their experience as acquired thanks to their sensitivity to certain phenomena. As already signalled at the beginning of

this text, it can't be clearly concluded that the Different men merely reproduce the status quo in gender relations, and that they represent hegemonic masculinities (and not the outsiders offside). They were quite outspoken about the inequalities and admitted their share of responsibility for them, but also a certain degree of indolence in respect to changes in their own practice. Thus they realized the benefits of the status quo, which they regarded as problematic in a number of respects, but while they fought for their beliefs in the protection of nature, they mostly failed to take an active role in challenging unequal gender relations.

If we interpret the Different men as eccentrics with the features of old-new patriarchs, how can we see the pro-family men - the fathers with the status of nurturers? Do they substantiate the notion of "masculinities offside?" or do they cast doubt upon it? The men on parental leave clearly disrupt the traditional idea of the gendered division of labour (Pateman, 1988, Harding 1983). They do not meet the masculine stereotype oriented predominantly on the public sphere, and they also challenge the absence of essentialising the "gender assignment" of men to nurture small children. Even in the case of men-fathers in the nurturing status, I was looking for a positive deviation from the hegemonic masculinities traces in biography.

The specific everyday routine practices of the family couples that disrupt the common and symbolically clearly-established notion of the family obligations attributed to women (nursing) and men (breadwinning), are sometimes in conflict with their own overall comprehension of gender relations in the family. However, the way the housework and childcare in the families researched was arranged does not indicate a simple exchange of parental social identities, where the father takes over everything that women on parental leave "normally" do. The family strategies of these couples offer several significant changes, including a list of specific improvements that are made available to families with conventional gender arrangements for inspiration. Their family arrangements did not

simply result in the exchange of roles. It may be noteworthy for the status of mothers on parental leave that the father in the same situation takes care of the children, but does not automatically assume the care of the household. It is also interesting for the status of breadwinning fathers how the exclusive motherly power over the nurturing know-how is negotiated, or how come that in a Czech two-career family the men are still labelled as "helpers". Yet one more analytical inspiration informs on how little it takes to cross the gender boundaries for the man-father to be praised as the hero of the day and for the woman-breadwinner to the contrary to disappear from the picture.

Men on parental leave are usually valued as the new heroes, who represent a desirable trend in the state policies of equal opportunities. Media and peer pressure work to illuminate the portraits of families with men taking care of children. However, no public attention and appraisal is paid for their women partners, who at least equally contributed to this family arrangement. These mothers redefine the stereotype "heartless mothers" by saying that a good mother is not only the one who is on a 24/7 shift, who is available for her family and whenever necessary gives up any other activities. These families offer at least two models of parenting, and both are stimulating for gender relations constellations. They redefine both fatherhood towards nurturing, pointing out that it is also possible, and also motherhood, which in the same spirit overcomes the burden of the double "women's" shift. Moreover, they also offer for consideration the model of "exchanging" the conventional parental responsibilities and point out to symbolically significantly different meanings, which the same activities assume depending on whether they are performed by a person who is adequate from the gender point of view, or "inappropriate".

It seems that the trend towards higher fathers' parental involvement is growing and this change is presented as socially and politically welcome and desirable. In this sense, it is very important to observe whether a deflection of the gender relations axis doesn't occur,

paradoxically towards a stronger masculine hegemony. As expressed by Hearn (2008) and Howson (2009), active fatherhood may represent a progressive hegemony, aspiring to harmonize gender relations, and therefore it symbolically downplays the role of gender inequalities and differences between women and men. However, these authors also presented their concerns that it may just amount to men's conquering another gender-specific sphere, without a parallel shift in gender practices in the public sphere. It also seems (in the spirit of Dinnerstein, 1999) that gender practice changes in the private sector are perceived with the hope of progressive change rather than a regression or maintaining the status quo in gender relations.

The tendency to raise the profile of the men actors already at the first sign of their good will to participate more actively in the family life is apparently more general. It was also shown in the study focused on the interpretation of the partner's experience of the childbirth. It seems that women require and appreciate the shift in their partners' engagement in the private sector, although they sometimes also reflect a loss of their own personal experience. However, these families look with great expectations at this newly emerging, and so far rather uncertain "togetherness" at birth. The analysis has revealed some signs of protest against perpetuating the conventional gender relations in the maternity wards and beyond them. A requirement has appeared to change the organization of the period after birth for working fathers (they take a holiday, which the employers are sometimes not very happy to see) and mutual partners' support, which should strengthen the position of the lay players in the institutionalized hospital environment, where rules are set by the medical staff as to what the mother and the father have to do.

Time-wise, the childbirth - unlike the parental leave - is a much shorter experience. The fact that the father's presence in the birthing room has become a standard in the Czech context, for which men are praised, could mean that here too men have become the key players. And those (both male and female partners) who have not conformed to this

new norm are offside. In this sense, men's presence at childbirth as a normative expectation is a manifestation of the hegemony of heroism in our cultural context. Both women and men who have departed (for various reasons) from the mainstream path are rated as outsiders. Therefore, the question remains, how come that heroism in the new practice of childbirth is attributed to fathers, but in the case of mothers it is understood as either an unsaid assumption (something obvious, "by nature"), or perhaps as an inappropriate gender appraisal.

### **Beyond the hegemonic men and men offside**

The final empirical evidence presented in this volume has documented the ambivalences of the lived hegemony of men head doctors. The core issue elaborated there was efforts to turn around the structural dominance, which was perceived by individual actors as limiting and unsatisfactory. Two parallel trends have been indicated: firstly, that power is structured and centralized in a few decision-making bodies in the medical profession and advantages gained according to the proximity and compliance with the top-down hierarchy of the decision-making authorities (university clinics, political decision-making centres in the capital versus regional small-scale hospitals). Second, the system reproducing gender inequality rests also with complicit femininities – the compliance of women doctors and predominantly middle-level hospital personnel with the practices required in particular hospital departments. There is a lot at stake, so such a defence of the well-established patriarchal gender order in the hospital setting brings advantages to the most engaged actors. It reproduces gender injustice, though, and thus reproduces the hegemony of men in this setting.

The complex organization of hospital routine and the Czech national health service renders head doctors disempowered. The commonplace organization of coping with professional and family lives is highly gendered here, with women doctors expected to pursue their family careers rather than at cutting-edge surgeries. Moreover, the fading

prestige of obstetrics practiced at childbirth, fueled by lawsuits for fatalities, prompts men to leave for a more lucrative private sector. Men head doctors of maternity wards in the position of experts in managerial positions are often in hopeless situations. As the study has documented, there are no formal regulations to make them incorporate women into their leading department teams. They routinely tend to pass their art to men successors. In respect to reproducing gender equality, head doctors remain in powerful positions, often enhancing rather than combating gender stereotypes directing (even professional) women to the private sphere of family care. The overall compliance of these women with such arrangements may be as a result of long-term discouragement at work and a lack of other institutionalized options to manage both shifts as well as their personal choice. The latter option nevertheless was, I would say, considered thoroughly even before their choice of profession, so it is a rather unlikely preference.

Gender relations and their negotiations either in a private or professional setting represent a very complex topic. The practices of men and the repertoire of masculinities reflected in the analyses here are by no means complete. Moreover, there is no ambition in this text to resolve the complexity or provide any easy answers. Gender relations' settings and challenges are linked to the broader social processes of individualization, globalization and the dissolution of traditional social identities, as described in contemporary sociology (Beck 1992, Giddens 1998, Bauman 2002). I argue, along with Acker (1992), Harding (1986), West and Zimmermann (2008), Connell (1995) and others that they operate on several levels. Personal practice and interaction is (becoming) accommodated to institutionalized structures. And these rules and organizational arrangements are gendered in a very specific way. This principle, whether it is called patriarchy or masculine domination, is characterized by the dominance of the hegemonic patterns of men's conduct and the subordination of all others. The everyday interactions of

actors with the structure, the resulting "habitus" of the actors (Bourdieu 1998b), is confronted with the adequate and expected symbolic representations of masculine and feminine practice. With reference to Bourdieu's concept of inverting the causes and the consequences (1998a), such studies of masculinity illustrate these processes of the "naturalization" of the gender order. It consists of funnelling phenomena that do not fit in the dominant gender order into invisibility and striving for their interpretation within the intentions of it, and with the use of means provided by the system itself.

Therefore, the protective Different men have declared their openness to debate on gender equality and with one breath they hailed women for their indispensable childcare. They contended that "women do not belong in the kitchen", but they stick to the image of mothers always available to their families. In addition to these statements they admitted leaving the housework rather to their partners, with a completely legitimate explanation for them (and in accordance with the symbolic universe) – since they themselves are the ones who change the world, who do the service to the country. They reflect their absence in the family after the children have grown with certain degree of self-criticism, but that is all. The pro-family men have breached the barrier of the "women's sphere". In this sense, the change in their practiced masculinities extends further than in Different men regarding gender equal relationships. But even in these families, the couples insist on having a clear idea of which tasks are feminine and which are masculine. They work hard to keep the researcher aware that they know what is "normal", regardless of their everyday practice, in which they break down this normality. And the practices of men in the prestigious professional setting, temptingly associated with omnipotence and the exercise of power, have only pointed to the complexity of social structures restraining individual initiative in certain respects, yet allowing for of a reproduction of the status quo in the everyday routine of "bosses and mothers" arrangement in the work place.

Yet, we can keep the idea that on the level of the individual practices of the actors, there are settings where the dual gender division of labour and competencies is quite often violated. At the same time, these deviations are not transformed on a symbolic level to parallel or even alternative patterns of gender relations without a hitch. It seems, therefore, as stated in the theory by Harding (1986) and others, that the persistence of masculine domination is maintained precisely on the level of the symbolic order, in the ways we think and talk about the practices. The safe haven offered by our faith in the known gender arrangement, has not been challenged yet by the "different" biographies.

A similar note relates, quite understandably, both to the men departing from the beaten path as well as to women. The stereotype of mothers-caregivers in the families where the children were looked after by men was sometimes guarded and confirmed by the legitimacy of the mothers' "power" in the private sphere. Such legitimate women's dominance could draw on a notion of her better qualification for certain activities, which she is not carrying out only temporarily, or on her "patent for the know-how" with the resulting privilege to decide in some situations and make the "correct" decision. A typical example was breast-feeding or setting limits to what was dangerous and safe for the baby. Highlighting these unambiguously gender-assigned practices legitimized the status quo and emphasised the validity of conventional gender relations, despite variations in their individual practices. This activity was difficult, but vital for the research participants' concept of their gender identities. The identification of what becomes heroic and what is withheld only points to the powerful persistence of the existing gender order.

The data from the chapter on men head doctors nevertheless indicated that the everyday practice in a highly formalized and professionalized setting does not provide or guarantee a gender neutral treatment either. Gender challenge is brought about in this setting rather by sheer despair in the recruitment of available physicians or by the individual gender-enlightened or open-mindedness of a particular

personality in the head position. The masculinities and episodes from masculine biographies which I have introduced in this text call for a dual interpretation. They challenge the exploitative and misogynist patterns in masculinity, but they also maintain, reproduce and support the conventional, mainstream approaches to gender (the protective function of masculinity or a limited form of equality in the family, where the care of the children is shared, but not the housework).

The mechanisms which maintain and disrupt the contemporary gender order often co-occur. It is problematic to evaluate the environment protective men and the active fathers as positive deviations in terms of re-definitions of the hegemonic masculinities, as the issue is more complex. Similarly, it is not clear whether it applies in the Czech context that the serial collective "men" with low education automatically get marginalized. Neither is it clear whether their failure, particularly in the public sector, has to be necessarily interpreted as a more fundamental life loss compared to women in a similar situation. And from the opposing edge of the social ladder, the men doctors condemned to rule do not demonstrate an easy to dismiss form of masculinity either. As in their case, the hegemonic patterns of masculinity (reproducing gender inequality) are interwoven with strict (hierarchically set) professional guidelines, vital judgements and responsibility, the current state of the national organization of health care, and the everyday routine in which complicit masculinities mingle with complicit femininities.

This volume has bracketed certain crucial issues relevant for analyses of hegemonic masculinities and masculinities offside. Most of the research studies dealt with educated professional men - the issue of sexuality (queering the heteronormative mainstream) has not been raised either. There are more incentives now to move in this direction. And to cover a broader spectrum of the social practice relevant to reproducing the patterns of hegemonic as well as subordinate masculinities, to study public violence on/of men, to provide a better understanding of radical and military masculinities etc.

However, this text has hopefully provided hints and some answers to help understand the complexity of masculine power better, and its hegemonic forms. It has problematized easy answers to issues of men being discriminated against as framed without reference to the broader structures of gender relations. Moreover, it has provided a conceptual framework for analysing men and masculinities offside in a sociologically productive and useful way. There is more to be done. There are still many relevant social phenomena out there yearning for a reflection from the perspective of Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities, a sociological approach informed in feminist debates.

## **The offside rule**

This text has considered masculinities offside from at least two opposite perspectives. Firstly, men threatened by various aspects of social exclusion were presented as one potential parallel of the offside position, being totally out of the game. Secondly, powerful masculinities in their changing patterns and contexts were analysed suggesting a complexity in the hegemonic as well as the relatively powerless position of individual men. This led to a presentation and an assessment of the offside position of rather privileged men. In fact, it was such a manifold interpretation of the offside rule and offside position applied in the game of football itself that it has inspired me for the metaphor of masculinities offside.

In football (soccer), the offside rule is both very old and, as I have learnt, also highly discussed. The offside rule in football or in ice hockey “supposedly prevents the style of game that would violate the spectator sport and ruin the impression of the game” as the Czech version of Wikipedia claims. An offside is a standard part of the game (of its founding rules), and although a player cannot score when offside, players get offside frequently during the game. The offside position itself does not automatically disqualify a player. It is the broader composition of the game situation, the position of the ball vis-a-vis other players, even the players from the opposite team, that makes the referee decide whether

the offence of an offside has been committed and should be punished. During the game, even the best players can get offside and still play a key role in the rest of the game. The referee`s (and assistant referees`) decision over an offside offence can be disapproved of by the player(s), coach or decried by the fans, yet the referee has the final word over the situation.

I believe masculinities offside is also a topic worthy of discussion. I have offered several interpretations to a number of aspects of offside positions and offside rule violations by men for sociological reflection. I hope that, just like in sports, such discussions will continue.

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## **Abstract**

# **Masculinities offside? Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities – a Sociological Analysis**

Studies on men and masculinities are slowly finding their way into Czech sociological reflection. This text analyses several topical research studies using a critical approach to researching men and masculinities. The argument revolves around the background question of the relevance and appropriateness of the idea that men and masculinities can get or be “offside”. The topic is inspired by the recurring public and academic debates on discrimination against men and the underrepresentation of men as a category of analysis in sociological research.

The main objective of this text is to demonstrate how men maintain their key position, what mechanisms put them “offside”, or how they can challenge the mainstream dominant masculinity. The chapters analyse several selected areas linked to this hegemonic masculinity (reproducing gender inequality) as the antithesis of the crisis in masculinity. The topics covered in this text by no means exhaust all the possible directions for researching men and masculinities. “*Masculinities offside?*” lists several of them in the opening chapters and four areas are elaborated in closer detail. These include the issues of masculinities related to underachieving boys in the educational system, nurturing fathers, fathers at birth and head doctors in maternity wards. The text also formulates themes and approaches that can be helpful to further sociological analyses targeted on men and masculinities.

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