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Being a Father: A Broken Masculinity or a Better One? An Autoethnography from a First-time Father Perspective

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Being a Father: A Broken Masculinity or a Better One? An Autoethnography from a First-time Father Perspective

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Abstract

The current neoliberal society is built upon a patriarchal system in which new types of masculinities have a difficult time thriving. In this paper, I draw upon my own experiences as a Spanish neophyte father and how it shifts away from models of hegemonic masculinity. In doing so, I am forming a new model of masculinity to explore neoliberal discourses and how these determine my emotions, feelings and personal identity. Methodologically, I make use of a critical lens and an autoethnographic approach, interlinking personal and social aspects. In the results, I reflect upon a normal day in my life as a father and my relationship with my son, and the way in which it is affected by the hegemonic masculinity. The text is presented as an opportunity to rethink the importance of changing patriarchal prejudices and to deepen the knowledge of the role that masculinity plays in the paternal experience

Keywords: corporal identity, neoliberalism, masculinities, gender, autoethnography, patriarchy.

Ser Padre: ¿Una Masculinidad Rota, o una Mejor? Perspectiva Autobiográfica de un Padre Primerizo

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Resumen

La actual sociedad neoliberal se cimenta sobre un sistema patriarcal en el que los nuevos modelos de masculinidad tienen complicado abrirse paso. En este artículo, narro mis propias experiencias como padre primerizo y cómo mi modo de ser padre se aleja de los modelos de masculinidad hegemónicos. Así, es la paternidad la que me ayuda a forjar un nuevo modelo de masculinidad que pone en entredicho los discursos neoliberales y cómo esto condiciona mis emociones, sentimientos y mi identidad personal. Metodológicamente, empleo unas lentes críticas y una aproximación autoetnográfica, teniendo en cuenta aspectos personales y sociales. En los resultados, reflexiono sobre un día normal en mi vida como padre, las relaciones que establezco con mi hijo y el modo en que éstas se ven afectadas por la masculinidad hegemónica. El texto es presentado como oportunidad para (re)pensar la importancia del cambio en los prejuicios patriarcales y como modo de profundizar en la manera en que los modelos de masculinidad tradicionales condicionan la paternidad

Palabras clave: identidad corporal; neoliberalismo; masculinidades; género; autoetnografía; patriarcado.

If you can fill the unforgiving minute with sixty seconds' worth of distance run, yours is the Earth and everything that's in it. And— which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!

R. Kipling

The fable "The frog and the scorpion" illustrates how behaviour is marked or genetically determined. The scorpion convinced the frog to carry him to the other side of the river. The scorpion cannot avoid his instincts and stings the frog, causing both of them to die before reaching the shore. When the frog asks him the reason behind his actions, the scorpion responds: "I could not help it, it's my nature".

It is evident that, like the scorpion, men are also genetically conditioned. But being a man is not just a genetic issue, it is also a product of social, cultural, political, economic and historical issues. These conditioning factors are those have led to the legitimization and perpetuation of attributes and characteristics that define identity and behaviour based on gender. Nevertheless, after years of living a limited and limiting reality, it seems that Western(ized) societies are experiencing an awakening to a wider existence. Men, freed more than years before from dominant scripts, have the opportunity to identify and value the model of masculinity in which they were educated.

This article deals with the way in which being a father has caused a transcendental transformation within me: I will never be the same as before. This reflects the way in which my body identity and my concept of masculinity, such as neophyte father, are developed as I perform my parenting's functions. This identity, here understood as a multifactorial, complex and diverse construct (Baddeley & Singer, 2007), adopts a triple dimension: personal, corporal and professional. And it is the interaction between personal experiences and the social, cultural and institutional context, which leads me to a reconstruction of my body identity and understanding of my way of being, albeit conflicting at times.

In recent years, research about the cultural meanings of fatherhood in relation to the experiences of men within the Social Sciences has increased (Kaufman, 2013; Locke & Yarwood, 2017; McGill, 2014). These investigations show how the meanings and cultural attributions of

fatherhood entail a change in relationships, while family organization, albeit slowly, seem to be evolving and favouring the implication of men in the care of their children (Locke & Yarwood, 2017; McGill, 2014). However, these studies have tended to rely upon realistic forms of representation that produce a disembodied account of the wonderful and bodily experiences of being a father. To my knowledge, no autoethnographic research has been undertaken about the experiences, attitudes and masculinities of a first-time father regarding embodied and bodily identity. Therefore, this autoethnography is presented with the aim of deepening the understanding of the identity of a neophyte father within an eminently patriarchal and hyper-masculinized Western(ized) society.

This paper is an invitation to rethink the concept of masculinity, taking into account certain social conceptions that legitimize and perpetuate social discourses around fatherhood and masculinity, capturing that, although most of men's behaviours are defined and conditioned by neoliberal and consumerist patterns (Locke & Yarwood, 2017; McGannon, McMahon, & Price, 2017), it is possible to open paths to find better ways of being and full enjoy our embodiment.

Understanding Fatherhood and Masculinities in the Neoliberal Society

Neoliberalism is understood as a complex and contradictory system of practices and discourses shaped by global economies (Chiapello, 2017), including capital accumulation, subcontracting and privatization, among others (Macdonald, 2014). In this sense, neoliberalism promotes a hyper-responsible self and a denial of imposed constraints and limitations (Rose, 1999) that affect fatherhood and the role of being a father and being a man (Henwood, Shirani, & Coltart, 2010). Under the influence of neoliberal discourses, individuals may be convinced that they are shaping their own life conditions. However, this is the result of a covert technique used to govern individuals by persuading them to make meaning of their lives as if it were the result of their own choices, making difficult to distinguish if people change their own being as a result of their own beliefs or due to the social discourses. Neoliberalism has also changed the concept of social relations, as it is a system based on market, competition and efficiency (De Lissovoy, 2013), leading to a "fragility of belonging" (Bauman, 2013)

where the links become casual, precipitate, fast, superficial, even between parents and children (Beyens & Beullens, 2017). In addition, neoliberalism breaks down the feeling of identity, hindering the establishment of stable and strong bonds, both emotional and ideological (Herman & Chomsky, 2002). In this regard, in neoliberal societies there is a growing concern related to what is a partial perception of *the human being*, where masculinity – whose characteristics are related to the analytical, the successful, the academic, the important- not only prevails but also endangers the feminine -represented by sweetness, submission, weakness, the trivial (Connell, 2005). These neoliberal discourses also permeate into the labour market and, focusing on the field of education, condition the pedagogical practice and the way in which teachers relate to students (Öhman, 2017) through policies and techniques closely linked to the methods of control and supervision that lead the teacher to be restrictive in his or her contact with students (Papaefstathiou, 2014).

Spain is immersed in this neoliberal dynamic, as it has been undergoing strong pressure to fit in the dynamic and interests of the markets (González-Calvo & Arias-Carballal, 2018). It is a country that has experienced a period of almost 40 years of fascist dictatorship. Beginning in 1975, feminist groups began to emerge demanding the inclusion of women in the new Constitution (Kaplan, 1992). Although policies for wage equity protection against gender-based discrimination and the emergence of new models of masculinity have proliferated in the last few years, it remains an androcentric-patriarchal country in which these policies have not had a real impact, the roles assigned to men and women are still evident (Charles, Wadia, Ferrer-Fons, & Allaste, 2018).

In an androcentric system like the Spanish, the universal is masculine, leaving the feminine and everything that moves away from the traditional models of masculinity relegated to a second plane. Therefore, this article aims to address the male issue of paternity and the roles assigned to it, taking into account the rigidity of the generic identity assigned to males (as a consequence of the androcentric-patriarchal system). The article aims to answer the following questions: (1) how does the experience of being a father affect my personal identity?; and, (2) how do I give meaning to my personal and corporal experiences of being a father in the Spanish society that is characterized by hypermasculinity?

The narratives I present in the following section are based on events and situations that resonate within me, in everyday situations.

Methodology

Something about Me

In a few months, I will be 41 years old. My professional career has been developed mainly in the field of teaching, both in Primary and Secondary Education and, also, at the university level.

Once I completed my degree in Physical Education, in 2009, I started preparing for the Public Service exams in Primary Education (obtaining a vacancy as a supply teacher for the school year 2009/2010) while simultaneously starting my doctoral studies, getting my PhD in 2013. In 2010, I entered the competition exams for Public Service in Secondary Education, working as a supply Secondary teacher during the year 2010/2011. In 2011, I finally passed the selection process, obtaining a permanent post as a civil servant in Primary Education, a job I have been carrying out since then. Moreover, since 2011, I have combined my job as a Primary Education teacher with my activities as a partial time lecturer at university.

In addition to what I have commented, for the past three years, I have been the father of a child, Marcos. My recent paternity, along with the corporal and professional ideals that I had been forming over the years, has led to a reconstruction of my identity, making me rethink who I am and who I want to be.

An Autoethnographic Approach

Ellis and Bochner (2000) define autoethnography as “an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Autoethnographers use their personal experiences as primary data, and the richness of their narratives is valued and incorporated into the research process (Chang, 2013). According to Chang (2008), ‘autoethnography is not about focusing on self alone, but about searching for understanding of others (culture/society)

through self' (p. 48). In this sense, this paper is not 'just about me', is about thinking the social through the self (Varea, 2019), trying to establish a reflexive and critical position within the culture, aiming that dialogue and reflection would lead to action (Freire, 1996).

In this study I have opted for a narrative methodology in the form of an autoethnographic narrative for different reasons. In the first place, because the essence of narratives is not only that they are based on the historical events that are told through them, but of the role they play in the process of construction and transformation of identity, the exploration of beliefs, professional goals and the ways to achieve them (Chan, 2012), elements of special interest in this study. Secondly, because here the ethnographic narrative allows a deeper understanding of the options that I chose as a father and how I live them (Wellington, Bathmaker, Hunt, McCulloch, & Sikes, 2005). Thirdly, because it allows me to use my personal experience to describe and criticize sociocultural experiences (Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis, 2015), the central approach in this investigation.

All of the above characterizes the autoethnography as a method that combines the rigor of research with the creativity of a less rigid and expressionistic style than those usually found in academia; it is also defined by its balance between a reflection on the self and a reflection on the social and cultural environment where it develops. With this, in this work, I present different moments and experiences, using memories and personal experiences, bodily and professional in an attempt to lead the reader to empathize with my world and my history. I hope to be in a position to stimulate people to reflect on their own lives in relation to mine. To make it possible, I have followed the standards of *autobiographical truth* (Denzin, 2014). In this sense, my autoethnography intertwines facts (events that are believed to have occurred to me), facticities (how I lived and experienced these facts), and fiction (a story which deals with or imaginary facts and facticities) (Denzin, 2014), being faithful to ficticities and facts. To that end, all the daily perceptions, experiences and dilemmas experienced by me throughout the past three years, were registered in handwriting¹ in a logbook that reflects my life after and before becoming a father.

Finally, the criteria I have followed to judge the quality and relevance of autoethnography are the following: Does this work make a significant contribution to our understanding of masculinity, fatherhood and corporal

identity?; is there something to be learned from this autoethnography?; does it invite dialogue as a space of debate and negotiation?; and, does it provide an embodied sense of the lived experience with regard to masculinity, fatherhood, personal/corporal identity and neoliberalism?

Results

In this section, I reflect upon a normal day in my life as a father, my relationship with my son in spaces traditionally attributed to women as mothers and the way in which paternity conditions my personal identity; also, I reflect on my role as a father and the way in which it is affected by the hegemonic masculinity that surrounds the Western societies.

Before Marcos was born, my feelings were mixed. I remember experiencing a lot of enthusiasm, anxiety and, also, many fears. It could be that these intermixed emotions were an intrinsic part of a full emotional approach to parenting. Paradoxically, these emotions hindered a full emotional approach to my new role as a father. Maybe, in part, it was because I was not the one who had had a new life growing inside them. My experiences prior to fatherhood were mediated by the body of my wife, who told me every day what she was experiencing. My experiences were also mediated, punctually, by medical technology. Thanks to this technology, I had moments where I could "feel" my son's body, listen to his heartbeat, see his movements. These were moments in which I felt completely happy and, at the same time, underestimated by the medical staff: I seemed invisible, someone who had simply placed the seed of life, ending his role at that moment. Nonetheless, I wondered whether that act was going to be the culmination of fatherhood for me. Or, would my responsibility only be to guarantee economic stability for my family? The affectivity, the emotional, the passion, the feelings, were they going to play a secondary role my relationship with my son, perhaps outside my realm of responsibility?

“Boys don't cry”, whispers the voice of Robert Smith in my ear. Boys don't cry. That's why I did not cry when my son was born. I was worried, but eager for the day to come, for everything to go well. But I did not cry, at

least not in public. This is something I have yet to accomplish in my almost 41 years on this planet. Maybe that makes me a “normal father”. A father who, subjected to a heteropatriarchal culture, is a bystander in many situations where it is the mother who is responsible for all things related to offspring rearing and affection. In addition, I live in a society where the ideal of eternal happiness is idolized (Bauman, 2013), rejecting uncomfortable emotions and vulnerability. It is not well seen to be sad, angry or afraid; for all that, as a man, I have been taught to deny, ignore and hide my most hidden emotions, those that make me feel vulnerable. "Do not show vulnerability" could be the motto of the traditional demands of masculinity. In addition, the androcentric society does not make it easy to develop a new model of paternity. There are spaces that seem reserved exclusively to the mother (mainly those related to the care and welfare of the child), my identity being a hinge between my willingness to be a father involved in the care of my son and cultural restrictions. It is a *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990) difficult to break, in which my new identity as a father emerges conditioned to the ways of acting, thinking and feeling associated with the way I perceive the world and the way it supposes that I have to act. Moreover, there is another limiting factor to fatherhood, namely, the current paternity policy in Spain: while the mother can enjoy a maternity leave of up to 16 months, in the case of the father it is reduced to two weeks, a far cry from other European countries where the permits of paternity are greater, this influences the existence of a more egalitarian society.

I wake up slowly, little by little. Sometimes I like to wake up and know that I have time to go back to sleep. That's not the case today; but, I still try to catch a few more seconds of sleep, enjoying the soft touch of the sheets on my skin and the warmth of the blanket over my body. When I overcome the abnormal weight of my eyelids, I remember that today is Friday. A day that, in general, I love, because I anticipate a restful weekend, with more time to enjoy Marcos and do different family activities. However, today is a different Friday. Marcos has to get a vaccination, and it's something that has been tormenting me for days. Although I know it is an essential procedure, I can't help but feel short of breath, suffering from a knot in my stomach when I think about the pain the cold metal of the needle will produce in his tender muscles. And, what hurts the most is anticipating his look of

incomprehension and feelings of betrayal when someone he trusts, someone whom he believes will not hurt him, is causing that pain. I enter his room. I embrace him, his body is also mine. I enjoy this moment with my senses: his sweet smell, his velvety skin, his rosy colour, his placid breathing. Every time I look at him my heart beats harder, I would almost say that it races, and my eyes tear with joy. So I experienced a new bodily expression of emotion: the ability to weep in public. I wake him gently, with kisses, with caresses. These gestures seem more associated with the mother. However, I do not miss the opportunity to be affectionate with my son. If I do not pay attention to my feelings, complementing them with embodied responses, I feel emotionally empty. In addition, I hope that Marcos will see and learn, through my behavior, that another type of masculinity is possible: one in which being a man does not have to be synonymous with aggressiveness, violence or strength.

In this patriarchal society, is a commonplace that men have difficulty in expressing their emotions; having certain feelings - fear, sweetness, affection, love - is yet mainly feminine (Charles et al., 2018). It seems that my body, under the hegemony of the masculine, has been confined to an environment where the emotional has no place, where it is necessary to educate it so as to not feel or experience those feelings. But I want to consider myself a father distanced from traditional attitudes associated with masculinity. So my body, as a biological entity, is incapable of not feeling fear, tenderness and love; my body, as a social entity, may seem strange in certain contexts and situations. Being emotional is, for me, a fundamental mode of being (Buytendijk, 1974).

When I reflect upon the gender identities that Western(ized) societies impose on young people from very early ages, I am convinced that we are physically conditioned: we teach little ones how to dress, talk, play and act (Morgan, 2005) according to whether they are boys or girls long before their bodies are able to engage in actions based on gender differences such as reproduction (Shilling, 2016). And, although my son's pacifier is a simple object and of any colour, the truth is that it has social connotations and on occasion we have been warned that "that colour is for girls".

Sitting on a bench waiting for our turn at the doctor's, I look around and I am the only man among several women. As if that were not enough, the posters that adorn the room show women accompanying and taking care of their children. There is not a single man, neither in flesh nor in the images, a situation that does not help to create a new identity of a father focused on the care and attention of his children. Marcos is impatient and, in an attempt to reassure him, I offer him his pacifier. It is pink, a colour associated, too, with the feminine. I have already been warned about the "danger" that a child can be effeminate using that colour. Who decides which masculinities are exclusive and inclusive?, why is this heteromale capital still so strong? With these questions hanging over my head, it's our turn; upon entering the doctor's office, I smell an antiseptic, clean, penetrating odour. A smell of medicine that takes me back years to when, due to a strong allergy, I had to go to the medical centre to get vaccinated every week. I wonder what Marcos will associate that smell with. I know he does not mind odours that, in general, adults dislike, which leads me to question whether our senses are shaped by our personal history - evocative colours that lead to an episodic memory - but also, social and cultural conditions. On the other hand, I don't mind certain smells from Marcos, that in other people, I know I do not like. Do my feelings toward my child affect my senses? Marcos breaks down into tears and, in an attempt not to reaffirm in him patterns of masculinity associated with ignoring his emotions, I let him express all the fear, anger and sadness he must be feeling at the moment. I think it's healthy for him to cry, to accept and face his emotions. After all, you cannot learn to manage what you repress.

My new status as a father gives me the opportunity to experience an emotional life and an emotional body. Empathy and compassion are linked, embodied by recognizing my son's needs by actively listening to nonverbal cues (e.g., facial expressions, body language). And, also, by identifying and reflecting how my body feels in the places I work and I live, and how emotions are interlinked into bodily practices.

I do not need to see Marcos' look of incomprehension to understand his feelings. Learning requires knowing and listening to your own body; being a father implies, also, learning to listen to the

body of the child. I wonder at what point adults stop paying attention and we go from listening to simply hearing; from observing to simply seeing; from being surprised to expecting and doubting certain outcomes. My throat is dry, my fingers tremble, my eyes fix on my sons', and I hunch my back so as to be closer to him. Since I still cannot communicate with Marcos by word, I try to do it through my body language and my facial expressions, which are trying to evoke a smile from him. My body develops empathy as an embodied practice. The time has come, the nurse grabs the syringe while an invisible hand strangles me from within. I am not the same person I was before: I am more empathetic, vulnerable, and sensitive. My body has undergone these changes as well.

As seen in the previous vignette, a reoccurring situation makes me feel fragile, vulnerable, and defenceless, adjectives difficult to find in male narratives (Sparkes, 2015). Something has sparked within me that want to put aside the cultural ideals of masculinity (self-control, less emotion, authority, and strength), incompatible with my new ideals that are centred on the care of my son. My new ideals are also often incompatible with neoliberal ideals. For example, in these times of neoliberal educational policies, in which close contact with students is at risk because it is considered unethical and unnecessary within the school setting (Öhman, 2017; Papaefstathiou, 2014), being a parent makes me more aware of the need to offer physical contact as part of an ethical and just system, an approach under the precepts of good teaching and good parenting practices.

The current conventions around the figure of man (as father) seem to legitimize the idea that a father is there to educate his son to be strong, courageous, without fear. An idea that avoids physical contact between men in order to reaffirm their masculinity, a masculinity woven from the rejection of everything that seems feminine. That which is mistakenly thought to be vulnerable, delicate, fragile, sensitive. But I am convinced and I want, for my son, a society in which people can come together, show affection, hold hands when they walk, kiss. In this sense, when I get to Marcos' school, the educator received him with kisses and hugs, I'm not surprised at anything like that. I like my son's teacher to be

loving and affectionate with him. But it's probably influenced by the fact that Marcos' teacher is a woman. I have normalized that women should be the ones who take care of the little ones and do it with tenderness and affection. If the teacher were a man, I might have been more surprised, it is as if I had assumed that the most loving, closest men are also more "potentially dangerous". There are still many aspects of my orthodox masculinity that I have to change. One of them, for instance, is related to the climate of moral panic around us, that has led to the production of practices concerned with protecting children from abuse, but where children's needs are lost. While I am clearly concerned about this issue, I don't want to be panicked as a parent. I don't think that "no touch at all" is the best option for children. I am convinced that love is at the base of a child's learning to think, to communicate, to feel and to act in a climate that allows everyone to be what they are, breaking with the very harmful ideals of orthodox masculinity.

My paternity has lead me, too, to develop an attitude of concern for the physical care, play and enjoyment of time with my son, which in part defines me as a non-traditional father (McGill, 2014). However, there is no doubt that socially constructed gender-based differences in fatherhood, motherhood, and the workplace ideals are constructed by the ways social institutions are structured by gendered practices and ideologies (Kushner et al., 2017). The gender determinants of paternity are often explicit and implicit in the hegemonic norms of the sociocultural context. Thus, the woman (whether active in the labour market or not) is responsible for managing her work time with child care tasks in a way that is not expected of men, mainly focused on their role as the "breadwinning father" (Locke & Yarwood, 2017).

After dropping Marcos off at daycare with his caregivers, I get in the car to go to work. I listen to Jeremy from Pearl Jam. The song is trying to transmit a message. I turn up the volume and open my ears: "Jeremy spoke in class today, clearly I remember". My hair stands on end, sadness moistens my eyes, and anger overtakes me as my emotions surface. I feel as if someone has stomped on my chest, just to fathom the idea: the suicide of a young man who suffered bullying. Once again the paradox of fear: is being a parent a continuous life of fear? I pray to myself that Marcos will never

find himself in such a situation, neither as a stalker nor as a harasser. I arrive at job and I turn in the doctor's note in the office in order to justify my absence. The female colleagues present in the room at that moment ask me about my wife. Is she okay? And, if so, why hadn't she gone? It seems that the father can only take responsibility in the absence and / or illness of the mother. But she's fine. She just went to work like every morning. We simply share responsibilities. And, among my various responsibilities, I want to include caring for, loving and attending to my son.

The end of the day is approaching and I am aware of how physically demanding the work of a father is. Marcos is in bed, and I feel really tired. On the one hand, I believe it is my responsibility to be physically fit and in a healthy state in order to be able to respond to the demands I place on myself as a parent. On the other hand, I know that thinness, athletic, healthy bodies, and the cult of youth, exert strict control upon my personal identity, which conditions me as a father.

Marcos and I have many moments together throughout the day, to connect emotionally and corporally. These moments include bathing him, holding him, playing with him in the park, putting him to bed, tickling him, giving him a ride on my back, hugging him, running, dancing, jumping... all of these activities are physically demanding. They require a strong, healthy and moderately fit body. But I am aware of how fragile the idea of a father's appropriate body is. Again, I feel vulnerable. The familiar that, suddenly, becomes strange, is now my body. I am being aware that I am getting older. Every time I look at my son I see the aging in my own body. I know that being fit, slim and healthy is highly valued as a core aspect of subjectivities in the Western neoliberal societies. But, also, what I do know, is that since I'm a father, exercising regularly to be healthy is my responsibility if I want to be able to care for my child, take care of him, play his games...

I understand that the healthism discourse (Crawford, 1980) links with consumer culture and individualised responsibilities, including aspects of the health assemblage and being key forces affecting the body (González-Calvo, Varea, & Martínez Álvarez, 2019). And, although I try to resist that

discourse, it appears that not fulfilling that self-imposed responsibility of being healthy leads me to feel as though I am someone who is not fulfilling the expectations of fatherhood or, in relation to my fatherhood, as someone who does not comply with their new fatherhood ideals (Kaufman, 2013). That's how I realize that I still have some sexist biases, probably the result of all the previous years of male socialization. If not, how can I explain why I demand of myself, as a man, that I can respond to the bodily demands of fatherhood, and not be so sure that they can also correspond to the mother? This situation convinces me that, since becoming a father, I am trying to understand my role as a man, doubting gender differences between men and women and social convictions that can easily be translated into a clear case of physical machismo (Love, 2016) and that, before I became a father, I either underestimated it or I wasn't as aware of it as I am of it now.

Despite my fatigue, I go to the gym. As soon as the doors of the gym open, I realize that these centres are spaces that legitimize and perpetuate ethno-cultural ideas related to sexism and masculinity. That occurs, for example, within the choice of music. In the gym, I always feel surrounded by strident music that I don't like. I look around and, although many of those present carry their own audio players, this is not true in all cases. It seems as though someone has thought that it is a good idea to train to rap and / or reggaeton music, forgetting that in many cases they have sexist and inappropriate lyrics. Between the monotonous rhythms of the music tum-tam-tum-tam, I catch a couple loose words. In almost every song, the words “nasty”, “whore”, “slut”, “bitch”, are present. I want my son to be brave enough to face the "costume talk" when he hears stories that denigrate women, stories of abuse, stories that perpetuate the idea of women as sexual objects. I want to be able to educate my son in a space where I can promote healthy masculinity and real gender equality. I understand my paternity as a social and symbolic space that configures my identity and the identity of my son as well. I want to be able to teach him to use his heart, because that will make him really a man.

I understand that all these ideas that I have, as a parent, are going to condition my child. However, I am honest when I say that I would not mind if Marcos had different ideas from mine. It is evident that I try to introduce

a critical look into his education that can lead him, as a citizen, to question and fight to change some aspects of our society (consumerism, wars, hunger, care for the environment, to name but a few examples), but always helping him to find his own way. After all, parenting is living with an eternal sense of uncertainty and being haunted by thousands of questions every day: Can I be a parent without living with a sense of permanent fear?; how can I educate Marcos so that he doesn't feel rejected by the games traditionally associated with girls?; how can I teach him that he doesn't have to give kisses to people he doesn't want, even if it's the most polite thing to do?; why doesn't he have to throw papers on the floor, even if everyone else does?; how am I going to explain to him that the main aim of Christmas is to encourage consumerism; when are we going to talk about inequalities according to the country in which you born and live? I know there are too many questions, too many uncertainties. But that's my day-to-day life as the father of a three-year-old.

Reflections on the Story

The autoethnography that has been presented here is clearly marked by the social and cultural conditioning factors in relation to gender, sexuality, masculinity, fatherhood and the consumer society, among others. While it is true that some of these aspects have been reflected upon more intensely than others, my condition as a man and a father has been present at all times, a condition inevitably linked to the idea of masculinity. This form of masculinity, as a social construct that reflects and represents a range of masculine performances, ideologies and experiences within the family and society in general (Doucet, 2004), has shown how my decisions and experiences as a man and as a father are influenced not only by my personal ideals, but also by the existing dominant social ideologies (Kushner et al., 2017). Thus, before my son was born, my dominant masculinity accepted, for the most part, the dominant social discourses about what role man should play and the gender ideals surrounding fatherhood. Given that hegemonic masculinity is not a static and invariable construct, but a dynamic and permanent reconstruction (Locke & Yarwood, 2017), my paternity helps me to build a new masculinity closer to the role of a *nurturant father* (Henwood & Procter, 2003).

In this sense, it is important that men are able to develop a new identity, a new way of being parents and of being men. As Henwood and Procter (2003) claim, "the new man who is devoted and nurturing at home, with a successful and successful female partner, should be interpreted as the antithesis of conservative masculinity, but as a hybridized form of masculinity enjoying the best of both worlds " (p. 340).

I have also reflected on how neoliberal societies, replete with messages that infiltrate my life and my beliefs (Varea, 2016), lead me to understand my body as a *site of anxiety* (Evans & Davies, 2004). These current societies are contexts full of images and bodily representations through which cultural messages about the body are constantly reproduced (Azzarito, 2009). As Connell (2005) explains, "bodily experiences are often central to memories of our lives, and so are our understanding of who and what we are." (p. 53). In this way, having an athletic and healthy body exercises a strict control over my body identity, something that shapes me as a father. My lifestyle and my way of being are within a particular health discourse, in large part because I feel an obligation to act as a role model (Eaton, Marx, & Bowie, 2007) to my son, destined to produce a healthy and active citizen. In this sense, I, as a father, should be the embodiment and custodian of the symbolic qualities of the "healthy body" (McCuaig, Öhman, & Wright, 2013). However, paternity has made me more resistant to dominant discourses and aware of the fragility and vulnerability of my body and, with it the capability of questioning its "ultimate truth" (McDonald & Birrell, 1999). Being a father has been a turning point. Now, I try to understand and move away from ideologies that assume the body as a vehicle of control and as a source of value for society (Shilling, 2012, 2016).

Critically recalling, narrating, and examining my experiences on fatherhood, both from the twofold perspective of a novice parent and a man have enabled me not only to "challenge" prevailing social norms and ideals around masculinity and fatherhood in a neoliberal society, but also to realize that "masculinity", as a social construction, can be deconstructed and reconstructed according to many different viewpoints and for multiple purposes. In my own case, I have realized how feelings and emotions can be embodied differently from the traditional paradigm of toughness and relative distance from the child. This, in turn, both represents and generates

a whole new way of seeing, feeling and enacting "fatherhood" in terms of tenderness toward, empathy with, and, yes, suffering for, one's own child. Furthermore, I can conclude that, in so doing, new pedagogical and parental avenues open up from which women and children, as well as men, can greatly benefit. On the other hand, however, I would be too bold to assume that my way is free of pitfalls. In this sense, I am conscious of the fact that I will need to keep on studying myself on this subject as my son and I continue to learn and grow, while our lives (his and mine) continue to unfold. As such, many lessons are yet to be learned by both of us in this joined venture. Hence, I will need to be watchful so as to avoid passing on to him my own fears and shortcomings. In order to do so, I will continue to question my own masculinity (embodied and ideological) to be a proper and decent model for him. Finally, I see masculinity and fatherhood as areas worth reflecting on and researching in tandem, especially considering that, in addition to my son, I have a role model to fulfill as a man for my own students, regardless of their gender.

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Notes

- ¹ According to Ellington (2017), there is evidence that our brains process language and information differently when we use handwriting than when we type, evoking emotion, affect, and bodily attunement.

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