

Construction of Gender Equity in Various Family Settings: some philosophical reflections

Juan-Guillermo Figueroa-Perea

El Colegio de México

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Introduction: the public policy setting

In this text, I propose a number of philosophical reflections on gender equity in spheres of everyday coexistence, sometimes called family although I prefer to call them domestic arrangements for everyday living. My approach is based on the experience of interacting mainly with disciplinary interpretations from the point of view of demography, sociology and medicine, as well as several discussions from an ethical and human rights perspective. I have engaged in continuous discussions with public policy analysts and designers on the needs and conditions that could be influenced in the quest to reduce poverty, inequality and inequity in social relations.

In this context, I am interested in problematizing what one could demand from policies and individuals in the process of helping them improve the conditions in which everyday coexistence takes place in shared households (whether directly or indirectly), by reducing poverty, enriching the quality of living together and reinventing gender agreements that could promote more supportive and beneficial relations for each person involved in them.

In this respect, I will begin by recalling two alternative aspects of work from the perspective of public policies. On the one hand, the satisfaction of previously identified or defined needs and on the other, accompanying the construction or creation of the conditions of possibility for individuals to attempt to satisfy their own needs. At the same time, one could think of interventions that foster discussion and reflection on individual, group and collective needs as well as the identification of those responsible for meeting them.

It is therefore necessary to explore and clarify possible criteria for defining the needs of a family nucleus and its members while problematizing what one could expect from the family and what should be tracked at other micro-and macro-social levels. However, there is a type of public policy known as social policy that targets marginalized persons or groups within social arrangements, in order to subsidize them or implement affirmative actions that will make it possible to reduce exclusions, offset discrimination and ideally, advance towards the quest for equality. It is therefore feasible to identify persons who do not assume that they have these rights or needs, due to their position in social relations, experience difficulty in exercising their human rights, either because they have deliberately been marginalized from this possibility, or even because cultural or disciplinary interpretations do not identify them as being entitled to these guarantees. The literature in various disciplines, such as political science, refers to various social actors and new stake holders, obliging one to review the previous definitions of these attributions, since they could require additional adjustments or else have to be re-positing from their origin.

It is precisely in the definition and review of human rights that one speaks of various generations of rights, in each of which it is possible to identify a different role by the state and rights holders, which in turn determines the different degrees of solidarity and responsibility between social actors and institutions. This leads to a new interpretation of the task of policies while at the same time enabling the construction of a relational view of "otherness," since we are not isolated subjects but historical individuals who are permanently linked. I would like, however, to discuss the three basic aspects of human beings, beginning with their process of health/illness and their reproductive behavior, since both refer to self-care and the care of other persons. At the same time, they refer to stereotypes socially constructed on the basis of exclusive, hierarchical power relations. This calls for the rethinking of learning and privileged situations if

one is working to achieve equity, since it could be attractive if men and women identified advantages in it or alternatively, if we found disadvantages to continuing with the current situation. The third aspect that will be commented on is work, regarded as the possibility of transforming everyday life and of constructing “the material conditions” for survival. It is interesting to regard this from the point of view of gender and to comment on the meaning of the fact that it is associated with male identity, both because it discriminates against women regarding a right and because it makes men over-responsible.

I would like to propose a relational interpretation to highlight the reductionism of disciplinary interpretations and everyday language, which legitimizes and reproduces limited identitary views that impoverish human beings’ capacities, quite apart from the arrangements within which their everyday existence takes place yet which may, in some cases, be exacerbated by the limited practices and norms on the basis of which “family” and “couple” are interpreted. Hence the importance of an ethical analysis that will help identify the assumptions and prejudices used to determine the rules for social co-existence, some of which exclude specific subjects and other options of relating to others and oneself.

The first part is more theoretical, analytical and reflexive, and includes questions to dialogue. In the second, I share the results of a recent study in Mexico on gender equity and public policies, as well as a documental analysis of fatherhood and employment contexts. In the third and fourth parts I move onto a set of reflections on gender and public policies, as well as some philosophical questions that will encourage debate within the working group in which this text will be presented.

Part I. Theory, concepts and other initial considerations

I.1. Gender Equity and Public Policies: a reinterpretation of Weber and Bourdieu¹

Gender relations reflect socially constructed stereotypes of femininity and masculinity. Masculinity is represented by symbols of strength, bravery, intelligence, capacity, power and manliness, among other things. Conversely, femininity is associated with reproduction, child-raising, domestic work and serving men. It is on the basis of these roles -and the representations that contain the value of femininity and masculinity- that social relations between men and women develop within the private space of the family and the sphere of public life.

Social relations, framed by sexual differences, have delimited gender relations and the sexual division of labor. This division between men and women’s roles corresponds to rational action arranged for a specific purpose. Historically, the sexual division of labor corresponded to the needs of biological and social reproduction, but it is not an inherent part of being a man or a woman. Instead, social relations between men and women are regulated by the value system, norms and social culture, which at the same time respond to society’s need for social cohesion, political stability and economic growth.

According to Weber, social action is guided by the action of others, in other words, social action is equivalent to the social relations established between social sectors, persons of different sexes, power and/or interest groups. “Not all actions are social; in order to be social, they must be guided by the action of others. They are not identical to either the homogeneous action of many or the social action of someone who is influenced by the behavior of others; in order for them to be social actions, they must have a significant link to the action of others.” (Weber 2000, 19)

¹ See Figueroa and Franzoni (2008) for an extended discussion and dialogue with some experiences of public policies in Mexico.

Therefore, when one speaks of men and women, one is not referring to isolated, independent groups. Any analysis of the social problems affecting men and women must be undertaken from the perspective of the social relations established. To date, the need to recognize women's different position in modern society has led to the formulation of laws designed to achieve an improvement of the exercise of women's rights, an effort that has often overlooked the fact that they are not a group that is isolated from men but rather one whose action corresponds to their action.

"The participants in this action do not always give the same meaning to their action or there is a degree of reciprocity in this meaning, as a result of which they give their behavior various meanings. The relationship on either side is unilateral, but it does not stop being referred to, since each of those that participate assumes a specific attitude or response from the person opposite and on the basis of this expectation, orients his (or her) behavior, which suffices for there to be consequences as there tend to be, in relation to the development of actions and forms of relationship." (Weber 2000, 209)

According to Bourdieu (1994), habitus is a socialized subjectivity in terms of information that produces converging, shared practices, without the intervention of intention or collective awareness. Habitus is lasting but not unchanging. It is a product of history, in that it is an open system of arrangements that constantly confronts new experiences. "All the stimuli and conditioning experiences are perceived through categories that have already been constructed by previous experiences. It is essential to conceive of it as a sort of spring waiting to be released and according to the stimuli and the structure of the field, it can generate different and even opposite practices..." (Bourdieu 1994, 93)

With this frame of reference, it is worth asking about the male's and female's position: is he or she dominated or the dominator? We can guarantee that men remain in the position of dominators by virtue of the fact that they have maintained their leadership in the public sphere. However, this appreciation is relative, since when women shift from their position of being dominated, there is also a change in men's traditional position as dominators. It is necessary to reflect on this aspect, since discussions of public policies and public programs sometimes continue to be conceived of as if there had been no changes in the labor market, such as the massive incorporation of women, their increased educational attainment and the legal protection they now enjoy. We must begin, then, by acknowledging the fact that traditional gender relations are being transformed and therefore, men's and women's positions.

According to Bourdieu, the interrelationship between the position in the field, the habitus of class and the available economic, social and cultural capital, shapes people's mental schemes and symbolic representations. In this respect, gender identity, understood as individuals' representation of their sexual and socio-cultural being, corresponds to the position and actions they have to perform in front of others. Insofar as women's rights are thought of in relation to men's, rather than in opposition to men's rights, the conditions will be established to create fairer relations between different people.

The habitus learned in the socialization of gender roles from childhood and arranged in sociocultural codes is recreated in adult life at the same time as the values, norms and representations of present-day society are incorporated. Within this new framework, economic and social conditions place men in less unequal positions. Men's participation in different fields enables them to perceive, appreciate and respond to an action. In their social relations, they recreate the meaning of their sexual identity and seek forms of expression as social actors. In this order of ideas, if the rights of men and women, social norms and the set of values contained in them are clearly established, they can serve as a vector for consolidating fairer relationships.

The differences and specificities that exist within the habitus of the feminine and the masculine can be blurred insofar as men and women's rights are delimited with an integral sense of interdependent rights and obligations, where access to women's rights opens up channels of expression for men's rights, as an example.

I.2 Some theoretical, conceptual and analytical considerations

I.2.1 Poverty in the family setting

The first interpretation of the phrase to which this section refers includes a delimitation of poverty, together with a reflection on those potentially responsible for alleviating it. We could list family needs or minimal standards of well-being on the basis of certain alternative definitions of thresholds but we also need to incorporate the type of economic model we are imagining as a context as a reference, since this permeates the identification of the persons or entities whom one would expect to undertake some form of contribution or action for reducing or eradicating this condition of poverty. In various social arrangements, the previous definition does not prevent one from continuing to think of persons of the male sex as key actors in provision (within the framework of their respective social stratum) which permits the full or partial satisfaction of the needs of a domestic nucleus, whether it is referred to as “family” or some other term. In other words, the sexual division of labor must be taken into account, together with the economic model at the macro level. As for social strata, there are situations in which, despite the fact that attempts are made to maintain a certain rigidity in the assignment of responsibilities depending on persons’ sex, this is hampered by the precarious conditions in the households, the absence of a “traditional provider” or else by the latter's unemployment.

In certain social contexts, this is more frequent among men, either because of the type of jobs they require or even because of the perception of their participation in the labor market or their lower productivity compared with women’s. Whatever the reason, this unemployment may be accompanied by self-destructive behaviors by certain men or else by bouts of depression. In other cases, the greater presence of unemployed men at home is associated with an increase in alcohol consumption or more episodes of violence. Women even perceive an increase in housework, since it is not uncommon for men to demand to be attended by them rather than becoming involved in a fairer distribution of domestic responsibilities. What is a constant is that due to the symbolic and concrete weight of providing in many men’s models of gender identity, unemployment is accompanied by personal questioning and different experiences of crisis. Despite this, many men choose to hide their unemployment for some time or else complain about the setting that prevents them from working even before considering the possibility of sharing the role of providers with other persons in the family nucleus. This would apparently involve a radical rethinking of their gender learning, which they do not really agree with.

It is therefore essential to explore the relationship between employment and male identity, making a relational type of interpretation quite clear, since, without arriving at the extreme of unemployment, there are situations in which women refuse to share the work of being a provider. Alternatively, they feel that their jobs are unfairly paid, since they are assumed to be a form of support for the main breadwinner, regardless of the specific situation they are experiencing, and even despite the fact that this reproduces stereotyped assignments between persons of both sexes. Another important factor to consider is the “fear of losing one's job,” since some studies have shown that this can create more stress than unemployment itself. It also contributes to a feeling of job precariousness, since the person feels unsure about how long his job will continue, which in turn leads many people to spend more time at the workplace (“in case someone needs them,”)

regardless of the fact that this reduces the time spent with other members of the domestic nucleus. One should not ignore the fact that the original demand for a 40-hour work week was accompanied by a logic whereby a person could devote 8 hours a day to work (five days a week), and at the same time, dedicate an equivalent amount of time to rest and a similar amount to spending time with the family and other forms of recreation.

Quite aside from reflecting on the conditions of possibility for ensuring this symmetry between certain needs for development, rest and spending time with the family, as well as the possibility of acknowledging free time as a social right to be guaranteed and attended, if we reflect on these issues using a relational gender approach, we need a more systematic and rigorous discussion of the consequences of unemployment on male identity, particularly when there are conceptual frameworks that do not contemplate work as a basic need to be dealt with by public policies, whereas there are others that acknowledge them as being at the same level as basic rights. It is also necessary to deal with the consequences of the obstacles faced by women in satisfying this need to work (as Marx would say) or else the right to do so, proving that the difficulties of doing so may be created by the opposition of their partners or of certain men with whom they share the domestic sphere. Another obstacle comes from the social arrangements for carrying out family activities or the rigidity of the gender models learnt by men and women, regarding which social and institutional rules are legitimized. In some cases, it is even argued that the sexual division of work and its effects on the organization of everyday coexistence is natural.

I.2.2 Poverty and Identity and Disciplinary Reductionism

It is necessary to take an additional step to mention the influence of certain fragmented or reductionist interpretations of what is understood by family, reproductive behavior, the process of health and illness and providing, on the identification of possible work issues to achieve equity and gender solidarity in the various family settings. This would make it possible to rethink responsibilities and rights from the logic of equity and equality for the various members of a space of co-existence, even beyond calling it a family.

Some authors speak of a tendency towards “familyism,” since the sociological category of family is mythicized, yet sometimes turned into an adjective, due to the fact of being able to refer to a favorable state to satisfy the material and affective needs of the persons comprising them. It is said that, “Not all brothers are friends but all friends are like brothers.” However, there is a tendency to lapse into heterosexist interpretations, which require the condition of conjugality and kinship to legitimize this structure, ignoring many other arrangements, despite the fact that they offer the closeness and company required to satisfy the aforementioned needs or else to create the conditions of possibility for dealing with them. I therefore propose systematically reflecting on some of its components.

◦ The first is the *concept of family* as the nucleus permitting individuals’ material and emotional development. If this were the case, conjugality would not be either a necessary or a sufficient condition for accompanying their needs, nor would heterosexuality or biological kinship or being in-laws. This is borne out by homosexuals who have been expelled by their biological parents (more by fathers than mothers) and those that live on the street (often because they were fleeing domestic violence). In both cases, they admit that their families constitute those that receive them and acknowledge them for what they are. Their “families” are also those that support their attempts to deal with their basic survival needs, once again interpreted from a material and affective point of view.

◦ When we take the step towards *reproductive behavior*, we find that they have been interpreted by academic disciplines and culturally legitimized with a feminized view of

reproduction, which even makes it difficult to name the reproductive experiences of the male population. I will now comment on two examples that have taken place in Mexico.

The first concerns the paternity leave provided by a university union from the mid-1990s onwards, since a significant proportion of the unionized men remarked that they did not know of its existence while another group said that they had never used it. An examination of the way it had been created as one of the union's guarantees showed that women had demanded it so that men would take part in childcare. Since it did not grow out of a need or demand expressed by men, they regarded it as something remote from them, perhaps because it suited them but also they were not named a reproductive subjects either in everyday or academic language or in public policies themselves.

The second example has to do with this last point, since in Mexico, despite the fact that health institutions state that they have incorporated a gender perspective into their everyday work, men are still not allowed to be present during childbirth, even those this takes place at government health institutions. This maintains the representation and social practice that reproductive events and their respective care are a women's affair. It is therefore hardly surprising that in a survey conducted in 2009 on men and women in three cities in Mexico, the former were more in favor of paternity leave than women. When asked why they did not support a form of leave that would potentially make men more present, they argued that they feared it would be used to increase the demand for services they provide men rather than to enable men to take part in looking after and spending time with their children. Recalling the statement by philosophers of language that, "What is not named ends up being assumed not to exist," one can infer that the jointly responsible presence of male subjects may be rather artificial if linguistic references are not constructed, despite public policy actions in this respect.

° This refers to another dimension to be considered that entails the *process of health and illness*, which directly involves the dimension of self-care and the care of others. The literature and everyday experience have shown that this care has also been feminized and that conversely, models of male socialization pressure men to engage in rash, risk-seeking behavior as criteria for legitimizing "manliness," which reduces the value of self-care among members of the male population. This makes it difficult for many men to play a more active role not only in looking after others but even in looking after themselves, which delegitimizes self-care as part of models of masculinity, making it impossible to generalize.

What is mentioned in this paragraph is associated with statistical data that reflect a very different panorama of morbi-mortality in men and women, together with the identification of contrasting criteria and categories when one realizes what the two populations experience in these spheres. Whereas for men, one talks of "suicidal negligence" (Bonino 1989) or "masculinity as a risk factor" (de Keijzer 1995) or the fact that "being a man is dangerous or risky for health" (Barker 2005), in the case of women, one talks of the fact that, "being a woman is a health risk" (Sayavedra and Flores 1997), because of her disempowerment or the fact that, "Being a woman consists of learning to live for others" (Basaglia 1984), meaning that they do not have the time or legitimacy to look after themselves. In both cases, this creates a deterioration of their respective choices for exercising the human right to health, a guarantee which they have both acknowledged.

However, the reductionism referred to in the title of this section not only refers to the gender models that are culturally learnt and reproduced but also to the way in which the various disciplines document this scenario. It is striking that in various contexts of academia and political intervention, the feminization of health care is assumed as a daily part of social arrangements and that emphasis is placed on the need to reduce the conditions of vulnerability of the female

population. This is obviously valid, particularly in a patriarchal society, for example in the issue of access to tests to detect cervicouterine or breast cancer or in the need to reduce maternal mortality. There does not, however, appear to be an analogous, not necessarily similar emphasis on warning about male over-mortality and the way it is associated with the same models for learning about masculinity.

In other words, there is a similar lack of discussion about the lack of health programs for men. Instead, many studies simply focus on understanding the reason why the male population does not see a doctor or seek health services. Although this issue is important, it is worth asking about men's specific health issues such as prostate cancer or the point of acquiring the right to health in a population trained to engage in rash, risk-seeking behavior. In fact, why not reflect on the meaning of the possible association between health, mortality and fatherhood as a resource for achieving balance and well-being in males' experience regarding their reproductive spaces and context?

° Another element to consider in these reflections is the *role of employment* in people's lives, particularly when it is analyzed as a result of their gender learning. In other words, the type of specializations that are socially constructed for men and women delimit different expectations of the activities to be carried out in everyday life and incidentally, the different form of access to opportunities for development in educational, work and other fields. This permeates the differing value of employment in the lives of men and women, particularly when different models of gender socialization include, as one of the central attributes of the male population, the fact of being the economic providers for domestic nuclei, families or living arrangements or whatever they are called (Jiménez and Tena 2007a).

A survey conducted on women from three regions in Mexico explored certain expected models of behavior in men and women, one of which included how they expected a man and woman to stop working, but forcing the question from the assumption that there was a specific moment for stopping this work experience. Women declared that they should stop working when they married or had their first child or when their partners asked them to and some even stated, "When the woman wants."

When asked about the moment when men should stop working, even using the word "should," the most frequent answers referred to "never" or "when they were disabled" and on other occasions, "When they retired." However, the answer, "When the man wants," was never given. On the contrary, women admitted that this was an advantage they had over men. Although this was not made explicit in the interview, one has the impression that they were talking about paid extra domestic work, since they themselves acknowledged that in their own case, they should stop engaging in this activity because of housework or childcare, the limits of which are never very precise.

At a level of analysis related to this, it is worth recalling evidence of the crisis of identity produced in many men by losing their jobs, retiring or being unable to fulfill their role as providers. Studies have documented the malaise and tension associated with experiencing the risk of losing their jobs, both because of the learned attributes of masculinity and because of the loss of recognition, power and authority this may entail. In this respect, it is worth reflecting on how much of this crisis can be offset by a policy that ensures full employment and how much it should undergo a critical review of learning what it means to be a man or a woman, without ignoring the right to reconstruct the setting of which one is both a part and a consequence. An analogous reflection could be made to modify the setting of reproductive behavior and the processes of health and illness.

I.2.3 Reproduction, Health and Employment Redefined in Relational Terms

An additional step in this reflexive exercise seeks to share some proposals with the aim of participating in the process of resignifying the three dimensions referred to in the previous section, since I think that this could make it easier to identify strategies to advance towards the construction of gender equity and solidarity in various family spheres insofar as their various participants mutually acknowledge and rediscover themselves, on the basis of resignifying “otherness.”

In other words, if we systematically recover an interpretation of these dynamics on the basis of a human rights approach and a gender approach, we would need to ask about the meaning of equality and equity for the persons and individuals imagined as social subjects in constant interaction in both the domestic and the extra-domestic sphere. This would make it possible to enrich both the interpretation of the processes in question and to identify potential conflicts and dilemmas derived from living together. This would enable us to determine the scope of certain actions through public policies and other means, such as, for example, the media.

From the logic of human rights, we can refer to the protection from possible discrimination or the revindication of guarantees, once certain exclusions in each of the spheres referred to have been identified. At the same time, we could outline the responsibilities of specific institutions (as passive rights holders) regarding the active rights holders in each sphere or else problematize what it means that the persons acknowledged to have rights choose ways of exercising them in each sphere considered but also what happens at every level of policies and programs when what is chosen does not exist and needs to be constructed. However, a central axis of human rights, from a philosophical point of view, is that they acknowledge the moral authority of human beings, which implies establishing relations with them by assuming their dignity and capacity to participate in the construction of their everyday lives without adopting paternalistic or protectionist attitudes.

Hannah Arendt referred to the right to have rights as a requirement of citizenship. It is therefore no small matter to attempt strategies to determine how empowered subjects are regarding their civic experience in the three spheres referred to, on the basis of the various conditioners that may permeate it, such as institutional regulations and legal resources, as well as the symbolic references and practical experiences regarding citizenship in each issue, from the context in which their everyday lives take place.

In this respect, the gender perspective dimension is important, since in addition to influencing the re-interpretation of each issue, on the basis of eliminating or reducing essentialist visions of the differences we have socially constructed, it enables the identification of various experiences of civic awareness within a patriarchal society. This is not synonymous with the fact that only women (as a supposedly homogenous group) have difficulty gaining access to conditions for the exercise of their rights. One should also consider elements of belonging to social, sexual orientation and ethnic strata, but also problematize whether persons of the male sex are really aware of rights when they have been the subject of reference of many social arrangements and the construction of language. In other words, a patriarchal system assumes a model of man as a reference. It constructs a language from the point of view of this reference and partly legitimizes the fact that members of the male population do not experience themselves as “others,” while the rest of the population becomes otherness, with the hierarchical disadvantage that this produces. However, since the male population immersed in this model does not need to be specifically named (as is the case with women, homosexuals, children and members of certain ethnic groups), they may end up being strangers to themselves and not being aware of themselves as rights holders but at most, as enjoying privileges (Núñez 2004).

That is why the combination of human rights with the gender perspective invites us to engage in a dynamic interpretation of rights holding and the discursive, theoretical and political empowerment that lies behind numerous processes of social claims in general and these issues in particular. One of the most useful approaches I know problematizes whether the universality of rights is a starting point for being accepted in an obvious fashion, on the basis of declarations of human rights and various international conventions or whether this universality should be considered as an aspiration and a potential goal, once various processes of discrimination and exclusion of specific persons or groups in concrete spheres of everyday life are reduced or ideally eliminated. This interpretation brings us increasingly close to the universality of rights insofar as an increasing number of persons are recognized—and assumed as such—in the exercise of these rights. Thus a set of policies, together with investigation processes that would document and monitor this scenario, would potentially be the best possible companions of an inclusive civic exercise in reproduction, health and employment as an object of rights. Before outlining possibilities of reflection and work, let us look at the results of a study on men, gender equity and public policies in Mexico, as well as to a documental analysis on the interaction among fatherhood and employment.

II Two components of a project on Men, Gender Equity, and Public Policies

II.1 A Description of the Case of Three Mexican Cities²

Within the context of a multinational research project on public policies, gender equity and male population, during the first half of 2009, we conducted structured interviews with men and women in three Mexican cities. The age range selected was 18 to 59 and in the case of women, the condition of having been in a conjugal union at some time in their lives was included. The population under study resides in urban zones, half of which live in one of the country's largest metropolitan zones, Monterrey. The other two are intermediate cities, Querétaro and Jalapa.

The fieldwork experience was more complex than we imagined, since the high levels of violence in the country appear to be associated with the increased rate of non-responses encountered during the interviews. The country's recent context (with a high incidence of drug trafficking) explains why many people referred to the fear of kidnapping, fraud and extortion. They also protected their intimacy in a way that could be classified as “extreme” since unlike in other demographic surveys, they refused to say how many people lived in their household or even to give the names of those they admitted lived there.

Some of the interviewers remarked that they perceived a need among the women to “look after *their men*” given the aggressive, violent, uncertain environment. Added to this was the perception that “too many surveys” are carried out, with very few results. There was also an initial reaction of rejection towards the word “politics” because of the disappointment of a large section of the population with both government and political parties. One last element was related to the questionnaire in which they sometimes felt “they were being evaluated,” regardless of the fact that they acknowledged the importance of the issues and were glad to “be listened to” at last.

Although it is not the purpose of this paper to provide a theoretical reflection, it is worth listing the issues that warrant subsequent reflection once the results of this research have been contextualized, such as the interpretation of the role of public policies in possible changes

² See Barker et al (2011), and Figueroa (2011), for a presentation of the project, as well as a discussion of some results. In Figueroa and Franzoni (Forthcoming) we include a first analysis of some in depth interviews with men who work on jobs quiet related with women's experiences.

towards gender equity. This includes a discussion of the way these policies help or hinder the conditions of possibility for re-inventing gender identities and the significance assumed by “decision-makers” since it is not the same to imagine the administrators of government programs and public policies as it is to think about citizens themselves, rights holders and those to whom research results can (and should!) be returned. An additional aspect to be considered in the transformation of gender identities and relations concerns structural changes as a condition that socially and institutionally permeates the exercise of “being a man” and “being a woman,” as well as the contrasts that exist in men’s and women’s perception of “gender equity” from the perspective of their respective histories, contexts and world views.

General Characteristics

A total of 1001 men and 383 women were interviewed. The men were mostly younger than the women, which is linked to the fact that the latter were women who had been married or lived with their partners at some time in their lives. Twenty per cent of the men were single, and 55% were married or living with their partners at the time of the interview, which was true in the case of 82% of the women.

Men had higher levels of educational attainment and employment. Whereas 87% of men had completed high school or more, 33% of the women had not achieved this level and only 3 out of 10 women had university degrees, as opposed to just over half the male population. Among the men, only 4% admitted never having had a job, as opposed to 25% of the women.

Attitudes regarding gender equity

When persons of either sex were asked about the progress in “gender equity,” without specifying what this meant in detail, more men declared that this was being achieved, although their answers were not that different from women’s. This was confirmed by asking them whether sufficient progress had been achieved in gender equity or whether it had been achieved. However, when the questions referred to affirmative actions undertaken in various spheres to offset traditional discrimination against women and homosexuals, the differences between men’s and women’s views began to increase. Just over half the men were opposed to a fixed percentage of positions for women in the sphere of political representation, academia and managerial positions. Conversely, approximately 60% of women agreed with this in the three cases. When asked about equal income for men and women engaged in similar activities, twice the number of men said they were against this, even though the percentages were low, 7.9% and 3.4% respectively.

Distribution of Activities in the Domestic Sphere

An additional feature of this aspect of the research involved asking about the perception they both have of the distribution of domestic work. Before discussing the results, it is worth pointing out that the samples of men and women are independent. In other words, we did not interview couples, which might have facilitated the comparison of statements by persons sharing the same household and apparently the same everyday life. This does not invalidate the richness of what was observed in their answers, since, when asked to describe the division of labor in their homes, 35% of the men said that their partners did far more whereas only 1.3% of the women gave this answer. Nevertheless, it is interesting to find certain coincidences in the answer to the category describing a similarity in the activities they share: 33% of the men and 30% of the women admit that they share the housework. However, more men state that they are satisfied with the distribution of housework (93%) than women (86%) although the difference is not significant, bearing in mind that very few women admit that their husbands do more. This may reflect what men and women assume as “normal” in the distribution of activities in the domestic spheres they share.

However, there are a couple of data that reflect a mutual awareness of questioning the experience described by both men and women: when asked whether they consider that their respective partners are satisfied with the distribution of labor, there is a decrease in the number of men who state that the women are satisfied. Conversely, when both are asked about their overall evaluation of the relationship, there is a decrease in the percentage of women who rate it as good, although this is not restricted to housework and includes other spheres of interaction, negotiation and possible distancing.

The experience of violence

An example of this is found in the sphere of the violence exercised and experienced regarding their partners, which was not restricted to their current partner. In one section of the questionnaire, both populations were asked whether they had exercised violence against their partner (in the case of men) and whether they had experienced violence at the hands of their partner (in the case of women). It is striking that 80% to 85% of men stated that they had not hurt or pushed their partners, a percentage that drops to approximately 70% for women who denied having had this experience. Likewise, other types of more serious domestic violence such as kicking, hitting with an object or trying to strangle one's partner are denied by virtually all men yet admitted by 7% to 13% of women. Other sources of information in Mexico provide a different panorama, since a larger proportion of women admit to having been attacked by their respective partners. However, the fact that the interviews were conducted by women probably influenced men's tendency to deny this practice. Beyond the fact that this is a methodological constraint, it is important to note that the experience of the various questions shows that men feel increasingly observed and critically accompanied by other social actors. Although this has not sufficed to eliminate violence, the passage of laws against violence may be helping to create an awareness of less impunity for something associated with certain forms of gender learning.

Laws protecting women from violence

When men and women were asked whether they were aware of the existence of laws against violence towards women, they both answered affirmatively in the same, mostly high proportion (86.7%). However, when asked whether they thought these laws were too harsh on men, over half the men agreed as opposed to only a third of the women. Conversely, when asked whether they thought that the law did not provide sufficient protection for victims, two thirds of the men agreed whereas three quarters of the women said that victims of this type of violence were not sufficiently protected. In fact, 83% of the female population think that these laws expose women to greater stigmatization, which is supported by a lower proportion of men. Gender experiences obviously permeate the different approaches to this issue.

Laws Protecting Homosexual Persons

Another way of tracing men and women's perceptions of their respective gender identities and the significance of some of their differences involves examining their position regarding homosexuals' rights and the laws designed to protect and acknowledge them. Some authors posit that part of male identity is constructed by denying any feature associated with femininity, which includes the denial, rejection and even aggression towards homosexuality, apparently to a larger extent than what women learn and socialize.

When both populations were asked whether they were aware of the existence of laws to protect homosexual persons from the risk of being discriminated against, the percentages that had heard of them and of those that agree with them are not that different between men and women. Asked about the laws guaranteeing the right to marry persons of the same sex, a slightly higher proportion of men are familiar with them yet a very similar percentage of men and women accept this possibility. However, it is striking that when asked whether these homosexuals should be

able to adopt children, both populations show a reduction in the proportion of those that agree, from half to a third. An even lower proportion agree that homosexual persons should be able to work with children although it is striking that women accept this less than men. A slightly higher proportion of these same women than men agree that aggression against a homosexual person (for kissing another man in public or acting in an “effeminate way”) is justified, which proves that homophobic practices and attitudes persist in persons of either sex.

Self-care and Health

One of the consequences of gender learning for men is to engage in self-destructive practices, partly because of the assumption that it is part of a compulsory process for becoming and being legitimized as men. Some authors describe this as suicidal negligence regarding themselves while others describe this “masculinity as a risk factor” for both men and any other person who becomes involved (whether intentionally or accidentally) with them. Seventeen per cent of the men interviewed admitted drinking too much, as opposed to only 0.3% of women. Added to this is the fact that 14% of men admit having become violent after consuming alcohol; 7.5% have had work, family or health problems associated with alcohol consumption and nearly 30% have driven under the influence of alcohol. These practices are less common among women, fluctuating between 1% and 2.4%.

Paternity Leave and Presence of Men in Reproductive Spaces

One last issue I would like to comment on in this presentation that will be discussed by men and women concerns the presence of men in spaces linked to paternity. Thirty-two per cent of men and 42% of women are aware of the existence of paternity leave, although women support this less than men. When asked informally about the reason for this rejection or limited support, some women argued that they are not sure whether men will use this leave to take part in child care. They fear they may demand more attention from women and therefore prefer them to remain in their respective workplaces. Nevertheless, high percentages of women said that their partners were attentive in the time leading up to childbirth (although in lower proportions than those stated by men) and agreed about the percentage of men who had wanted to be present in the delivery room yet were not allowed to be. It should be pointed out that in Mexico, although at least half of all births take place in government hospitals, men’s presence is not authorized.

It is worth concluding this description of preliminary result by suggesting the problematization of the meaning of men's reproductive rights, since failure to name their reproductive experiences not only makes their experience invisible but may hamper the integral exercise of women’s reproductive rights, since the context in which they are implemented is fragmented. It is therefore worth discussing these results and what men and women say they share in their daily lives, beyond agreements and disagreements. It is difficult to provide a single interpretation but one should avoid a Manichean interpretation of their answers or hierarchizing some of them as being more reliable. This can be seen when dealing with fatherhood and employment within a critical approach.

II.2 Exercise of Fatherhood and Workplaces³

According to the study entitled *Productive and Reproductive Economy in Mexico*, conducted by the Economic Commission for Latin America, Mexico is one of the countries with the greatest lag in reconciling productive activities with those involved in biological reproduction. This result is striking, because Mexico signed the agreement to promote gender equity at the Convention on

³ See Figueroa and Franzoni (2008) for a documental analysis of public policies related to: Sexual Health: The case of HIV-AIDS, Intrafamilial Violence, Men's Health, and Sexual Diversity.

the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, a commitment reflected in the passage of laws on equality between men and women regarding reproduction and child-raising.

Frías recalls the fact that "The UN Commission on the Legal Status of Women (established on March 2 2004) urged UN member countries to introduce or expand the work policies that will enable men to spend more time with their families through paternity leave, while pointing out that a specific, positive social change is needed that will give more power to women and children, reinforce the legal protection of their rights and urge men to assume their responsibilities". (Frías 2008, 2) On April 28 1997, in the Mexican Chamber of Deputies, a bill was submitted to reformulate Article 123 of the Constitution in order to include paternity leave as a work right and benefit for men employed in the formal market, by granting them leave to be absent from work for ten days, with full pay, in order to be able to meet the needs of their wives, newborn babies and other children, in the event they existed. In 1998, the Democratic Revolution Party proposed raising this men's right to a constitutional level. However, the bill was not approved.

From 1998 to 2008, various political parties have promoted bills to transform the Federal Labor Law, the Social Security Law and the Federal Law of State Workers in order to guarantee men the right to a set number of days of paternity leave, with full pay. Some states in the country have also promoted similar initiatives with various arguments ranging from gender equity, family union and children's right to and need for affection.

Although paternity leave could be seen as a resource favoring gender equity, this bill has not achieved the rank of public policy. A number of isolated institutions have incorporated this into their internal regulations, with minor differences. Tena (2008) points out that the National University of Mexico's Workers' Union considers that when both parents are employed at this institution, they should be given alternate paternity leave-if the parents so wish- with the right to 12 days a year with full pay to look after their children under the age of 12. For its part, the collective labor contract at the Autonomous Metropolitan University states that in the event of the illness of children under the 12, workers (whether mothers or fathers) will have up to a fortnight's leave a year with full pay.

Likewise, since 2008, the Federal District Human Rights Commission has granted ten days' paternity leave to male workers when their children are born. We now know that several firms and institutions grant their workers paternity leave, even though this is not established by the Federal Labor Law. At the federal level, when the National Women's Institute provided 10 days' paternity leave in 2008, it was the first federal government institution that promoted this initiative for the purpose of extending it to other federal government institutions.

A review of all the terms under which paternity leave is granted, however, shows that advances are still limited. While it is not possible to speak of a public or government policy regarding paternity, one should not underestimate the bills proposed by various parties, since they express a different perspective on paternity of certain political actors.

The work of various civil society organizations has played a key role in this change, because since the mid-1990s, they have organized "Fatherhood Fairs" as well as local and national competitions for children to express "How I See my Dad." At the same time, for a number of years, they designed calendars with images and reflections on "For Better Fatherhood," which refers to the playful part of fatherhood while asking whether the positive aspect is achieved in everyday life.

For example, the results of the "How I See My Father Campaign," devised and implemented by non-governmental organizations working with males (CORIAC and Health and Gender) used drawings to show how children saw or wished they could see their dads. They

found affectionate fathers together with authoritarian figure that elicit fear and distrust. At the same time, these drawings expressed the expectations and desires of children regarding how they would like to see their fathers. The drawings show how the children identify problems of addiction, intrafamilial violence, aggressive attitudes, indifference, loneliness and ignorance (Frias 2008). As part of a process of awareness raising, it has been very interesting to comment on some of the drawings with groups of adult men, whether or not they have children.

Public discussion, coupled with the initiatives of certain institutions in favor of paternity leave, have served as a means of identifying and reflecting on what Tena (2008) calls men's "work-related discomforts", such as, for example, health problems associated with unemployment. For men, the loss of work implies no longer earning the income they should contribute to the household. This event damages their masculine identity, because the inability to continue serving as the financial provider for their families creates depression and illness. Research results have shown that the discomfort produced by unemployment is a cause of men's physical and mental illnesses in Mexico (Jiménez and Tena 2007b).

Tena (2008) points out that negotiating times in the familial, work and political sphere could help blur the borders between men's excess time at work and women's excess domestic time, in order to reconstruct male identity on the basis of new parameters that will prevent the tension of being a successful provider in order to satisfy the social mandates of the male's social role. Time negotiation could become a resource to increase gender equity and modify the traditional male role.

Because of the discomforts caused by male mandates in the work and public sphere, it is essential to continue promoting bills, public policies and government programs that will transform the role of provider, householder and person responsible for the household attributed to the male to the detriment of his well-being and health. However, the business sector did not support the changes to the Federal Labor Law to grant paternity leave due to their financial implications. That is why it is useful to link the paternity leave proposal to economic aspects such as productivity and efficiency in men and women's work.

Despite the limitations of this initiative, which barely combines the isolated efforts of certain institutions, it should not be regarded as a minor achievement, since it introduces a new representation of paternity into social institutions and thereby helps reframe the meaning of child raising in male and female identity. It is not difficult to imagine that affective fatherhood is linked to time spent together, attention, and the father's knowledge of his children. Conversely, authoritarianism, fear and indifference are feelings constructed on the basis of distance, disregard and absence. When people discuss paternity leave as public policy, the reference is workers' work right to share and help their partners during the first few days of child raising but it also involves children's right to receive attention, care and protection from their fathers. It is necessary, then, to reinforce the demand for paternity leave from the perspective of children's rights supported by Mexico in international agreements.

III Options for renaming reproductive, productive and self-care spheres

"What is not named ends up being assumed not to exist," as various philosophers of language have said. This section will attempt a play on words but without remaining at the level of playfulness and instead engaging in a critical review of the semantics behind what could begin to be seen when categories, concepts and terminology are diversified in order to describe the reproductive, health and work settings referred to in other parts of this document. I believe that this could contribute to a collective discussion and reflection of the scope and horizons of certain public policy actions related to gender equity work in various family spheres or others in which

people live together. I use this double form of naming them since a hegemonic definition of family has been assumed which restricts work horizons in the process of dealing with the needs of members of different forms of everyday coexistence.

◦ *Reproductive spheres* are one of the areas where the imposition of a heterosexual model of coexistence, only legitimized by a marriage contract (and in some cases, with the requirement of a religious endorsement) ends up creating an exclusion of rights or else a restriction of the conditions for exercising them among many people, although they are acknowledged as guarantees in various international and national documents. Some authors mention the need to distinguish between having and exercising a right since they say that if the latter (exercising them) cannot be done, it is pointless or even a joke in poor taste to say that the former occurs (being a rights holder) (Cervantes 2001). It is therefore necessary to recall the ways in which human rights are potentially violated, since in addition to abuse and discrimination, there is also omission. This occurs when the organizations responsible do not ensure the necessary conditions for the exercise of rights. It is therefore a compulsory requirement to advance towards the universality of rights, determine who has difficulty constructing his or her reproductive spheres and where possible, the reasons for this.

We can begin by saying that many women have not achieved sufficient power to be able to determine themselves reproductively. At the same time, marital status and age restrict some of the options of this population, as do belonging to certain social strata, ethnic groups and having a particular level of educational attainment. At the same time, we could mention persons with a different sexual orientation from heterosexuality (assumed as the norm) as well as persons who have difficulty conceiving, but one should also refer to the male population. This is partly because they are not named as reproductive subjects either in everyday language or in specialized language by the disciplines interested in reproductive events but also because of the invisibilization of certain guarantees, malaise and negative consequences for men of reproductive experiences in which they are more distant actors both in practice and as a result of discursive interpretation.

Let us think for example of what certain rights might mean in reproductive spheres for the male population, from access to information on their capacity to reproduce, gain access to options for regulating this capacity, gaining access or otherwise to the possibility of being actors (rather than merely observers) in the process of pregnancy and childbirth, as well as sharing the right to having time to accompany their children intensely during the first months of their lives, among other moments. In other words, they are often regarded merely as a help or a hindrance regarding what their partners do regarding their reproduction, thereby minimizing the fact of being an important part of a process they are relationally experiencing with the person with whom they are reproducing (Figueroa 2003). We have already proposed the possibility of speaking of human rights in reproduction as a means of preventing reproductive rights from continuing to be thought of as focusing on fertility but also in order to continue feminist warnings in terms of the fact that reproductive rights are a very significant part of the demands in women's movements (Figueroa 2005). They are therefore skeptical about using the same category for the male population, since it seems that their possible guarantees or claims in this area have different characteristics, because as a result of biological differences and because of differences in the ways of obtaining access to decisions in general and those concerning reproductive spaces in particular. That is why one aspect of discussion for politics, research and activism would be to discuss the category of human rights in reproduction (Figueroa 2010).

Another possibility that brings us closer to the second issue of health and illness is to seek analogies with the categories of maternal health and mortality, precisely when the gender category and certain more integral disciplinary approaches warn of not being restricted to physical dimensions and instead, of recovering the social and emotional environments where women's reproductive behavior takes place. Could we think about *Safe Fatherhood* by proving the link between health and mortality and the paternal experience, without restricting it to physiological aspects, since men obviously do not get pregnant, yet reconstructing the attributes associated with this experience, which could mean a state of equilibrium and well-being in the sphere of paternity, as cited in the definition of health proposed by the World Health Organization?

A few years ago, we proposed the category of "loneliness in fatherhood" (Figueroa 2001), in order to refer to the possibilities of the reproductive processes which men do not experience (whether consciously or not) due to the fact of not questioning the models of masculinity. Why can't we now think about the aspects that prevent men from having a more gratifying, balanced experience of fatherhood, without seeing it in opposition to or isolated from motherhood, yet at the same time without diluting it by conceiving of them relationally? It is important to point this out, since it is not a competition about frailty or need since there would be reasons for affirmative actions focusing on populations perceived as being more vulnerable without reflecting on them theoretically beforehand.

° *Processes of health and illness* are another key element in everyday individual and family life, understood in its broadest sense, which could therefore be the object of attention in the search for greater equity. As in the case of reproductive spaces, analyzing them from a relational point of view makes it possible to enrich their everyday environment and exercise. At the same time, it involves a review of exclusive, hierarchical gender learning in which men and women specialize in order to be different, despite the fact that this fragments and impoverishes their possibilities of personal development. This does not mean ignoring the responsibilities of the state or individuals' rights to gain access to a setting that will facilitate care of themselves and the persons with whom they interact on an everyday basis.

Young men's health processes show a number of differences throughout the stages of their lives as well as a number of patterns. These include learning what we could call certain demands for rash behavior which expose them more to the risk of accidents and death itself, on the grounds that they need to legitimize "being a man." Although certain self-destructive practices are exacerbated at younger ages, there continues to be a lack of legitimacy of self-care, leading men only to consult doctors in extreme circumstances, which in turn makes it more difficult to deal with the health problem that brings them to health services in the first place.

In the case of women, the causes of morbidity and mortality are different, which cannot simply be explained by their physiology but by behavior learnt socially on the basis of gender specializations, since many women are socialized by being taught to look after others, even when these others do not look after themselves, while placing less importance on self-care. However, this is not due to negligence, as explained by certain authors in the case of men, but to social disempowerment. In both cases, we could work for the right to have "a dignified death," which would imply constructing more dignified ways of living. From a relational point of view, this would benefit both men and women. Why not question why a self-referential being does not look after himself, while a "person who lives for others" ends up forgetting about herself?

° Although the possibility of *getting a job* has been regarded as a need or a basic human right, some philosophers recognize it as a founding aspect of human beings, insofar as it gives them their connotation as a subject who can transform reality by making history in order to legitimize himself in his (or her) “humanity.” In other words, it is not a secondary factor or accidental accessory but a basic part of himself (or herself) as a subject. In this respect, the masculinization of the labor sphere disqualifies women from constructing themselves as persons, yet at the same time, encourages the male population to place excessively high expectations on work, which prevents them from achieving integral development on the basis of the possibilities that can be constructed in other everyday spaces, particularly when human beings are interpreted in their multiple dimensions. In this respect, a system of public policies that legitimizes free time at the same time as employment and encourages the reconciliation of work life with spending time with the family, would accompany a review of gender learning, making it easier to reveal what is lost in each case by gender specializations.

Since the current economic model does not permit full employment, even for reasons of collective survival, there are countries that prefer to provide unemployment benefits rather than subsidize basic services, both to prevent inflation levels that would threaten collective development and to ensure that individuals take part in achieving their satisfiers on the basis of achieving their right to unemployment insurance. The question is whether employment could be rotated, since there is not enough for everyone as the sum of individuals although there is as a strategy for collective development. I am not an economist, but I wonder whether there is not a need for a collective debate on the meaning of employment instead of leaving it as a privilege for those that manage to obtain it. Moreover, some psychoanalysts speak of mourning the loss of a job. Given that this is a significant probability, should one prepare for those moments of loss with the idea of reducing the emotional impact, by providing information ahead of time, as a group, on what will happen when one loses one's job, but not as a catastrophic interpretation of the experience but as a highly likely event that can be handled?

A review of the gender models that assign men the role of providers would obviously help them to be less isolated from the experience of unemployment and with coping strategies, accompanied by persons that are close to them but also by state organizations designed for this purpose. However, there would also seem to be a need to provide symbolic referents that dignify and revalue rest and time spent with the family. In other words, in a neoliberal society, there is a perception that free time is not productive, since the person “is not doing anything,” which creates the sensation in many people that it has less value than that of spaces devoted to work or, in the best of cases, that at least looking after others is useful. However, the possibility of revindicating solitude as time for being with oneself is also something that has not been examined politically. From the times of ancient Greek philosophy, it was necessary to cultivate leisure in order to be able to philosophize, in other words, to take distance from ourselves and what we are doing. Why not attempt to do this again by reinventing a new moral and ethic agreement for coexistence?

IV Some provisional conclusions

The experience we have accumulated leads us to engage in a critical dialogue on what it means to analyze men and women by thinking of them as the targets of public policies but also about the way in which male and female subjects perceive themselves as being in need or otherwise of these interventions. Our research shows the need to review the linguistic categories used and the populations that benefit when one attempts to reconstruct the context of gender equity, as well as the contributions one might expect from public policies. In other words, men and women

construct different social representations of gender relations from their position in social organization and obviously, from the point of view of their respective experiences, from which they name their needs and evaluate their role in the context. Emphasis has been placed on redistributive public policies that support the persons perceived as being the “most vulnerable,” thinking constantly of women and homosexuals. Nevertheless, in order to lend an integral meaning to the studies on men, we need to review the questions that orient what we are trying to see in their everyday lives within gender exchanges, since “the condition of men” is sometimes assumed and its numerous nuances scarcely verbalized, as one can see in the spheres of health, employment and paternity, among other dimensions dealt with in this text.

However, there is a methodological question which it is still necessary to work on, when research is linked to public policy issues and gender equity. Do we need to monitor changes or reconstruct the conditions of possibility to boost gender equity processes? If the former, where should this be done and what informants shall we consider for this? If the latter, how can we recover men’s experiences of their needs and malaise (as has been documented with women) and how can we use a relational approach to explore what men and women declare about their expectations, disagreements and needs? If work on both aspects is required, what theoretical, methodological, epistemological and political resources should we use?

Another dimension worth commenting on to round off the text concerns the ethical and political context of the study in particular and all research in general. Beyond attempting to solve social situations through public policies, based, in the best-case scenario, on research results, there is the possibility of giving back the information to those that made the study possible. This is a basic resource for accompanying citizens, in the process of taking distance from shared everyday life.

It is also necessary to encourage a critical dialogue with academics and activists interested in gender equity as a means of rethinking the expression “policy-makers,” since it is often assumed that program and public policy administrators are those that should compile the results, even though this might legitimate relations of power that reproduce other gender prejudices.

The gender perspective underlined the social inequity towards women, now expressed in public policies and government programs to benefit them. It is extremely useful to highlight an unjust reality that requires the intervention of governments, organized civil society, international organizations for defending human rights and the general population. The defense of women’s rights has advanced considerably, but it is now necessary to show that from the perspective of certain persons and institutions, men that have enjoyed recognition and power and therefore should not be entitled to any more rights than they already have. However, this perspective prevents modifying the social representation of their position and advancing towards gender equity, since insofar as there are no public policies, programs or cultural and symbolic changes offering men, for example, the right and obligation to participate in reproduction and the raising of their children from birth, there will be fewer results in gender equity in the domestic sphere. Insofar as their right to express their fears and emotions and to consider their physical and emotional vulnerability as persons is recognized, it will be possible to break away from the conventional gender schemes affecting men and women.

It is important to point out that referring to a gender perspective is not redundant, since there are those who are interested in working with men or women for common sense reasons, due to their knowledge of certain issues or else because of a political conjuncture, but are not necessarily questioning the sex-gender system to which Gayle Rubin (1996) refers, whereby biological differences are the cause of unequal access to the possibility of developing as persons.

Another key analytical axis in the discussion is the semantic difference between males' privileges and rights. In a patriarchal society, one runs the risk of assuming that patriarchal dividends, which tend to be called privileges, are synonymous with rights that have already been achieved by men, meaning that there is therefore no need to undertake specific actions or interventions to deal with their needs, since they can be satisfied on the basis of their access to the exercise of power.

However, when one thinks of rights from a relational perspective, which assumes that possessing a right implies the recognition of the rights of persons with whom one interacts socially, thinking of the rights of the male population acquires a different meaning. In fact, it forces one to identify their unmet needs more accurately, both in the way to which they are referred by women when they interact with them and in the way in which they themselves reconstruct them.

Epilogue People are not responsible for what they learn as gender models but if this was part of a socially constructed process, it is feasible that proving and clarifying it would make it easier to become aware of this and help identify possibilities of transformation, despite the difficulty of reconsidering cultural inertias, legitimized by institutional and social norms. Paulo Freire remarked that taking one's distance from oneself is an excellent resource for acquiring power over the capacity to create one's own history, rather than simply following the scripts defined by other persons and institutions. Jean-Paul Sartre stated that "we are what we do with what others made of us," referring to the fact that despite the fact that we did not choose ourselves and are not responsible for our first socialization, we do have the capacity to take our distance from this and define ourselves regarding it, whether to remain there (by adapting and adjusting) or to move away (through resistance and the possibility of transforming settings) (Petchesky and Judd 1998).

I hope that a series of reflections such as those included in this text will make it possible to identify social strategies at the level of public policies, research needs, the definition of media contents and other parallel resources in the process of taking our distance from what we are and reinventing ourselves in fairer, more supportive exchanges.

Construction of Gender Equity in Various Family Settings: some philosophical reflections

Juan-Guillermo Figueroa-Perea, El Colegio de México

May 30, 2011 *SOME PROPOSALS FOR DISCUSSION*

Introduction: the public policy setting

° Problematize what one could demand from policies and individuals in the process of helping them improve the conditions in which everyday coexistence takes place.

° Explore different criteria for defining the needs of a family nucleus and its members while problematizing what one could expect from the family and what should be tracked at other micro- and macro-social levels.

I. Theory, concepts and other initial considerations

° If the rights of men and women, social norms and the set of values contained in them are clearly established, they can serve as a vector for consolidating fairer relationships.

- It is necessary to take into consideration the influence of certain reductionist interpretations of what is understood by family, reproductive behavior, the process of health and illness, since this would make it possible to rethink responsibilities and rights from the logic of equity and equality for the various members of a space of co-existence, even beyond calling it a family.
- If family is the nucleus permitting individuals' material and emotional development this were the case, conjugality would not be either a necessary or a sufficient condition for accompanying their needs, nor would heterosexuality or biological kinship or being in-laws.
- The jointly responsible presence of male subjects within reproductive context may be rather artificial if linguistic references are not constructed, despite public policy actions in this respect.
- Why not reflect on the meaning of the association between health, mortality and fatherhood as a resource for achieving well-being in males' experience regarding their reproductive context?
- It is worth reflecting on how much of men's crisis can be offset by a policy that ensures full employment and how much it should undergo a critical review of learning what it means to be a man or a woman.
- We must problematize whether the universality of rights is a starting point for being accepted in an obvious fashion, or whether this universality should be considered as an aspiration and a potential goal, once various processes of discrimination and exclusion of specific persons or groups in concrete spheres of everyday life are reduced or ideally eliminated.
- A set of policies, together with investigation processes that would document and monitor this scenario, would potentially be the best possible companions of an inclusive civic exercise in reproduction, health and employment as an object of rights.

II Two components of a project on Men, Gender Equity, and Public Policies

- We need to consider structural changes as a condition that socially and institutionally permeates the exercise of "being a man" and "being a woman".
- It is worth suggesting the problematization of the meaning of men's reproductive rights, since failure to name their reproductive experiences may hamper the integral exercise of women's reproductive rights, since the context in which they are implemented is fragmented.
- It is essential to continue promoting bills, public policies and government programs that will transform the role of provider, householder and person responsible for the household attributed to the male to the detriment of his well-being and health.
- It is useful to link the paternity leave proposal to economic aspects such as productivity and efficiency in men and women's work.

III Options for renaming reproductive, productive and self-care spheres

- It is necessary to engage in a critical review of the semantics behind what could begin to be seen when categories, concepts and terminology are diversified in order to describe the reproductive, health and work settings.

Reproductive spheres. ° To advance towards the universality of rights, determine who has difficulty constructing his or her reproductive spheres and where possible, the reasons for this.

° One aspect of discussion for politics, research and activism would be to discuss the category of *human rights in reproduction*, as well as *Safe Fatherhood*, which could mean a state of equilibrium and well-being in the sphere of paternity.

Processes of health and illness. On the basis of gender specializations, we could work for the right to have "a dignified death," which would imply constructing more dignified ways of living.

Getting a job. A system of public policies that legitimizes free time and employment, as well as the reconciliation of work life with spending time with the family, would accompany a review of gender learning, making it easier to reveal what is lost in each case by gender specializations.

° We need to create and share symbolic referents that dignify and revalue rest and time spent with the family. It is the possibility of revindicating solitude as time for being with oneself, something that has not been examined politically.

IV Some provisional conclusions

° There is a methodological question which it is still necessary to work on, when research is linked to public policy issues and gender equity. Do we need to monitor changes or reconstruct the conditions of possibility to boost gender equity processes?

° The ethical and political context of the study in particular and all research in general, implies giving back the information to those that made the study possible. This is a basic resource for accompanying citizens, in the process of taking distance from shared everyday life.

° It is necessary to rethink the expression "policy-makers," since it is often assumed that program and public policy administrators are those that should compile the results, even though this might legitimate relations of power that reproduce other gender prejudices.

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