

Answering my colleagues' comments

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The comments made by my colleagues Buffagni, Deriu and Durante regarding my article are a further opportunity for discussion, re-elaboration and for giving significance to a subject which, as is evident from their words, is currently the focus of many people's attention and requires collective, but also specialist, rethinking. The way in which we propose preventative and educational projects in different community contexts, but also the training we offer to those who will have to deal with mental health clinically, in individual and couples therapy, parenting support and psychotherapy in childhood and adolescence must now take into account all the aspects concerning gender, roles, stereotypes and discomfort that may arise from something that demands to be experienced and processed at both an individual and collective level.

It is precisely these two levels of analysis, elaboration and proposal that come into play in the many different reflections of the three colleagues, and I believe that they represent the best possible complement to my original work. And I am very grateful to them for this.

In Buffagni's commentary, I find the common objective of reaffirming the importance that is given to the new reality and educational experience that lies ahead for fathers, no longer considered transmitters of rules (as tradition used to require from the figure of the *pater familias*), but parents who help a child to consider how limit and defeat are tolerable. And that does not mean 'disembodying' from the father's role but making it something that accompanies and supports a child in adversity. This is a non-judgmental method, which takes the father away from the role that, for generations, has belonged to him as guarantor of the norm, emptying him of the affective code, which is so present today in the social representation of paternity. Finding a new balance between the code of the norm and the code of affection in the construction that men make of their paternal dimension, integrating both into their own parenting experience is what psychological literature (especially the psycho-analytical kind) in recent decades has highlighted more in the analysis of

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changes in the role of the male gender. Think of the contribution made by Pietropoli Charnet (1999), who theorized in detail about the transformation and evolution of the paternal role, by introducing the definition of an ‘affective father’, who must be confronted with the question of not neglecting what Buffagni highlights when he points out that fathers involved only in the search for an affective code can be transformed into ‘fathers who find it difficult to embody their role, because they risk not supporting their children enough in adopting the male role, leaving them in a stalemate, isolated from their peers, or within transgressive and violent group conduct that attests to the birth of the virile identity.’ In this case, we see the risk that Recalcati (2017) theorized in the description of what he calls ‘the evaporation of the father’, a condition that leaves the growth of a dimension of support and containment ungarrisoned, yet it is fundamental at both a personal/individual and a social/collective level. This aspect was also identified by Buffagni, who raises the question of the need to bring back ‘adults, specifically, fathers who know how to be ‘competent and credible’ and who are able to convey that ‘the adolescent moratorium is over’ by signaling creative and constructive ways to channel aggressive drives and tolerate the frustration of the limit. The challenge is therefore being able to reach a fatherly identity that knows how to deal with its ‘masculine’ with a fluidity that ‘when put at the service of growth is configured as a language that helps to find a way to separate and individuate from typical reference models of patriarchal society’.

Deriu, in his writing, calls for a proper balance between the narration of the male who does not have access – within the gender role made available to him – to a complete and complex emotional awareness (a pre-requisite for living consciously in one’s own identity and gender role) and the awareness that the ‘masculine’ has been able to assert itself in dynamics of power and control over the ‘feminine’ ones that still exist. The narrative of a new ‘masculine’ cannot fail to consider what decisive role the patriarchy played in determining how men staged, in their lives, their gender role. Deriu reminds us that while it is true that men have often found themselves trapped in identifying with the model of the ‘real man’, losing access to the experience of ‘really being a man’ present in each of them, it is also true that this model has proved beneficial on several fronts and this has led to an imbalance of power and possibility that has had repercussions in both private and public life. Deriu is right when he reminds us of all this, which also represents what is narrated in Paola Cortellesi’s film *‘C’è ancora domani’* (‘There’s Still Tomorrow’), a film that sees the character of Ivano, Delia’s husband and Marcella’s father, embody the patriarchal model and depicts him as the bearer of toxic masculinity, representing him as a figure ‘sitting’ on his male privilege and totally indifferent to building an equal, sincerely intimate and affective relationship with his life partner. The film perfectly demonstrates where we come from, us men, and why reflecting on transformations and changes in gender roles today is fun-

damental and cannot be pushed into the background. In fact, it is precisely this male prototype who acts as Ivano does in life, who has within himself the compulsion to keep control and power in a couple of relationships and, as happens in several instances of the film, does so also by exercising physical, emotional and verbal violence. The superficiality with which Ivano makes himself be served and revered by a woman whom he considers inferior by 'status' and which instead the narrative shows to be infinitely superior to him in terms of emotional, socio-relational and cognitive functions, perfectly represents what Deriu defines as the 'living off interest' that men have enjoyed, entering into couple relations and sitting on a throne that made them 'king' with no merit other than being male. It is women like Delia, subdued in appearance, but revolutionary in soul, which led to the epochal change proposed by feminist movements since the 1960s, which in the Western world have led to what Deriu calls 'a significant weakening of the control and power devices that established and guaranteed acquired roles and predominant positions in the relationship between the sexes: in work, in affection, in family and in sexuality.' In this, Deriu calls for the focus to be placed on the old problem of 'social self-regulation', which sees men in transformation, committed to learning how to live in a changed environment, with new expectations, with different resources, with capabilities other than what was previously considered appropriate and functional. From here, currently, therefore, a necessary path is generated that Deriu identifies with a two-pronged approach: countering the pressure that 'social expectation still produces on men in order to conform to the male cultural norm' and at the same time 'working to counter the cultural gender models rooted in our tradition that continue to exert a negative influence on generations of men'.

For this to happen, it is necessary to intervene at an educational and preventative level, to act throughout society and to promote *ad hoc* projects in the educational community, while avoiding 'turning affective, emotional and sexual education into a 'discipline' with its dogmas, notions, norms and grades, with the danger of anesthetizing and freezing what instead represents one of the most vital areas of the experience of human maturation'. Instead, what is really needed is 'an active and at the same time reflective educational work' that sees all social bodies committed to achieving shared goals.

It is a challenge that is fully and completely taken up even by Durante, who in her commentary reminds us that in 'families, schools or social, cultural or religious groups, all human communities suggest or sometimes dictate the most effective ways of embodying femininity or masculinity to continue to be part of the target group and who often obtain identity benefits rather than material ones', thus, he reiterates that the work of evolution and transformation must permeate every place and every educational process that concerns the community as a whole. Not an easy task, especially in a life and society defined as liquid by Baumann (2008). It is precisely gender roles and identities

that are at the heart of a process that, at a time when it should define and renew them, cannot stabilize their perception and expression within our existence. Now more than ever, where we would all like to equip ourselves with an existence that includes the gender dimension in a functional way to the demands of individual and collective well-being, what is happening is the affirmation of a fluid culture in which sex can be gender-free and gender can be detached from biological sex, something that is also appearing more and more often in therapy when confronted with patients who have gender dysphoria. It is clear that this new way of addressing the issue of gender roles, making them fluid and interchangeable, perhaps bears metaphorical witness to the best representation of a socio-cultural context that has not yet been resolved around the major issues we are all discussing in the educational and clinical spheres, but also political and socio-cultural ones. Durante is right when she says that one cannot 'imagine suggesting to boys and girls how to become a certain type of man or woman, nor merely providing theoretical references without triggering processes of appropriation, subjective change and reformulation of the gender image'. This is perhaps the challenge that concerns us all now, in all our private, public, personal and professional roles. It is a journey that is taking place not in the abstract, but in reality: within our lives and our professions.

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