Introduction

Discourse of parenthood after marital separation tends either to idealize the traditional nuclear family and call for strengthening of fathers’ commitment, emphasizing along with that difficult situation of divorced mothers left alone with their children, or, alternatively, to denounce the “injustice” experienced by the fathers who have lost their essential parental “rights”. In most of the studies of fatherhood, fathers are perceived more as mere influences on their children (positive or negative), rather than persons. The image of father is polarized: on one side, the vision of “new” father emerges, on the other side, the “absent” father, irresponsible and abandoning firmly remains in view. Such absent father seems to be, at least for the conservatives, the crucial cause of many social problems. Nevertheless, it needs to be kept in mind that the call for fathers’ commitment, and arguments that go along with that, in fact implicitly or explicitly criticizes and blames mothers who take care of their children alone. The nostalgia for the family with both parents is one of the sources of conservative social policies refusing taking-over of responsibility over the provision of one-parent families by the welfare state and ascribing this responsibility to deficient fathers. Factually, this attitude implies women’s subordination to patriarchal order and imposes women’s dependency on the fathers of their children, from whom they splitted, often for some important reason.

But the crucial question surfaces - how fatherhood is affected and alternated for men not getting custody of their children after a separation and not sharing any longer common residence with them; not living with the family they previously founded and not having everyday ritualized contacts with their children any longer.

The project draws on questions how father’s identity after the split-up of the couple is affected, changing representation of father’s role and how fathers themselves perceive the changes in their father’s practices. The primary questions is how these fathers manage in the new situation – which acting strategies they choose, how they rationalize their behavior, in which ways they reconstruct and maintain their men’s and fathers’ identity and which discourses they engage to describe and recognize their situation.

Divorce in the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic has comparatively high divorce rate; in 2001 31 586 couples were divorced. This number has remained essentially steady for the last twenty years, but in the course of the last decade this has been accompanied by a radically declining marriage rate which means that in the last year the divorce/marriage ratio was standing at 54 divorces to every 100 new marriages. 65% of these divorces involved underage children. In view of the fact that steadily 90% of the children stay with their mothers, 3 years after divorce, almost 60% of the fathers have no, hardly any or just rare and irregular contacts with children (Matějiček 1992: 144-147). In the absence of applicable cultural models and scenarios, fatherhood after the separation of the couple becomes an extraordinarily problematic relationship and essentially depends on the willingness and ability of the parents to arrange an agreement regarding further functioning and maintenance of family relations.

In the course of the 90’s, legislation introducing equal opportunities for men and women in view of care-taking and upbringing of children was passed – ”further maternity leave” and maternity benefit
has been changed into parental leave and parental benefit, the right to return to the original position in
the workplace after parental leave has been unified. This, however, has not changed the fact that
everyday care about children and household remains in the absolute majority of the Czech families to
be the responsibility of women, and the view that women tend to go for parental leave or take care of
ill children. The unwritten gender contract still presupposes that the private sphere - taking care of
children and household - is the matter of responsibility of women while men focus their activities in
the public sphere. The prevailing arrangement of child care and upbringing after divorce is one of the
consequences of this contract: in the Czech Republic, children in more then 90% of the cases, either
due to the court decision or after mutual agreement, stay in the sole custody of mother. Fathers after
divorce frequently start new families, their contacts with children are for various reasons restrained or
interrupted completely. One parent families, in most instances single mothers with children, then
happen to encounter economic problems, and along with that, the numerous problems that come with
the actual upbringing and care of children; more often then in the full families, care and upbringing
goes beyond the limits of the family and involves public services tackling the failures of family care.
Their high representation (compared to other European countries) among the families close to the
subsistence living cost line - even after including their social security benefits, and other
supplementary forms of social support draws attention to the fact that the Czech system of social
security is set up to assist two-incomes families while for single breadwinners it provides only a
subsistence safety net. Due to the set up of social security and owing to the discriminatory practices at
the job market it is difficult for single parents to reach socio-economic independence.
When compared with the EU countries it comes out that Czech fathers fall among those who are
institutionally given only a minimal share in the upbringing of their children and tend to show few
years after the separation with the partner only limited interest in children. Provided that a father after
divorce a priori does not resign on his father’s role, it may be expected, that the more he is allowed to
keep in touch and have information about the child, the more he will be willing to support the child.
Fathers perceive themselves as "those who pay" and once they are not capable or it is not possible for
them to maintain parental relations with their children they stop any contacts with their children. The
father’s role, in spite of an increasing engagement of men in the primary care of their children and
undoubtedly extensive activity of women on the job market, is though still perceived by the public
consciousness (surveys in the 90’s) primarily in the terms of financial obligation to provide for the
family. The father is more a "breadwinner" and the mother a "provider of care", eventually a "co-
breadwinner". This division of gender roles is reflected in disadvantaging women in the job sphere and
men in the private sphere. While women, under the influence of prevailing stereotypes, tend to be
perceived as second-class employees, men, both in complete and incomplete families, are viewed as
"inferior" parents whose parenthood is limited to providing financial needs of the family and does not
truly involve taking care and satisfying the emotional and communication needs of their children.
Such arrangement is possibly functional in a complete family, although, the principle is unequal from
the gender point of view. After the separation of the partners, however, this arrangement becomes
contra-productive. Stereotypically, it is assumed that it is in the interest of children to be put into the
sole custody of mother, while father is put into the role of visitor bringing financial means. This
perception of the situation is shared by social workers, attorneys, judges, but also by the parents
themselves. Consequently, the father loses everyday contact with his children and finds himself in the
situation for which there is not a cultural model or scenario available. This way the father is forced to
change and adjust his parenthood practices, reform his representation of the father’s role and
reconstruct his fatherhood identity. If he is incapable of that, it may be expected that step by step his
relation to his children happens to be severely restrained to such a degree that at a certain moment his
contact with the biological children ceases to exist. A father capable of such adjustment has to build a
new life strategy carrying with it an active involvement in the life of children, which is often
accompanied by the frustration and the feelings of impatience and discontent and inadequacy.
The majority of social sciences output involving the theme of parenthood after divorce is focused on
the impact of divorce on children, eventually, analyzing the situation of mothers having children in
sole custody and fathers are viewed most frequently as one of the interacting factors. Only
exceptionally, the questions of how men after the divorce or separation deal with the loss of everyday
contact with their children, how they redefine their fatherhood and which way their role and identity
changes are raised up and answers sought.
**Theoretical background**

This thesis draws on symbolic interactionist paradigm (Mead, Blumer), social constructivism (Berger, Luckmann, Kellner), French individualist theory of family (F. de Singly, J.-C. Kaufmann). The social constructivist position implies that the world of everyday’s life is socially constructed; every society in a certain way perceives and defines the social world through language, symbols and a system of representations, and this way creates it’s own reality. This reality appears as taken for granted and essentially unperturbed but only until a problem violating this reality appears (Berger, Kellner 1964). The break-up of the marriage exemplifies such a problem that pushes an actor to redefine and reconstruct his/her social world. According to F. de Singly, it is precisely the sphere of family and private life - "one’s closest relations" that are continuously validating our reality and who contribute to the establishment of our personal identity through revealing our “self” in continual dialog. The father is for the child such "significant close relation", however, only in the case when he is sufficiently present in a child's life. The father’s role after a separation remains more readily upheld if men distinguish between their role of husband and father so that their relation to child is not all the time mediated by their spouse and carries "personal father’s identity”(Singly 2000).

Research project is then building on the feminist theoretical position suggesting the existence of the gender divide in the social world and human experience (Chodorow 1978, Ruddick 1989, Badinter 1980, Héritier 1996), and particularly – theoretical and empirical concepts of critical studies of men (Kimmel 1987, Mac an Ghaill 1997, Connel 1993), bringing into the open the relation between menhood and fatherhood, and men’s and father’s identities. The men’s reaction to divorce is to substantial degree influenced by their own image of ”manhood” since fatherhood is essential part of men’s identity.

The research project further connects to the empirical account of identity theory school and T. Arendell (1995). In overall the project draws on the theoretical presumption that fatherhood after the separation of the couple is shaped by two - partly interwoven factors. The first one is connected to the respondents representation of the parental roles, in particular those regarding the gender division of labor and gender differences in view of the strict distinction of mothers’ and fathers’ roles. The way fathers construct their parental identity develops from those representations; either in opposition to the female and mothers’ values or in a more indifferent way. Secondly and crucially, is the relation they have to their child - which may be direct, child-centered or mediated by the child’s mother and in that way dependent on the unity of the couple. In the first case, we deal with the personal type of the fathers’ identity, in the second with the marital type of fathers’ identity. In view of fatherhood this way these three categories of fathers’ reactions to the partners’ separation are established: traditionalist, neotraditionalist and innovative post-separation fatherhood (Arendell 1995). The traditionalist fathers share the conviction about the principal difference between men’s and women’s role; their relation to children is mediated by their marriage partner and they understand themselves and own role as breadwinner. As they, at the same time, share the traditionalist image of masculinity, their frustration and disappointment is transgressed into envy towards the ex-spouse which may be manifested by not paying the alimony. Their fatherhood activities are limited to the provisions as given by the court or are close to zero. The neotraditionalist fathers partially share this conviction but at the same time are substantially involved in the life of their children and make an effort not to be pushed out. Fathers sticking to innovative strategies refuse the difference between men’s and women’s parental role, and fatherhood is an essential part of their personal identity and they subordinate the other spheres of their life to their fatherhood obligations.

**Stating the problem**

The major goal of the study of fatherhood after partners’ separation in the Czech Republic is to show the changes that undergoes fatherhood for men who do not have their child or children in sole custody and are not sharing the household and consequently are loosing daily contact with child or children. The focus is on the personal identity of fathers - the aim is to reveal how their identity is constructed
and re-constructed, how father’s identity is interlined with men’s identity and what forms their father’s identity takes after separation. The study is to find out the ways in which men see their fatherhood practices and to compare the impact of these practices on their identities. We are interested in how men perceive their situation and which discourses they use in order to deal with it. Men are to be regarded as actors who found themselves in the situation which is not offering a clear-cut cultural scenario and who are to choose certain acting strategies and apply particular ways of interpretation enabling them to reconstruct their personal identity.

Fatherhood after the separation of the couple is to be studied at the number of levels:

1. Objective - given situation (divorce rate, the demographic transition in the Czech Republic, gender contract in the Czech Republic, material conditions), institutional conditions (legal conditions and court divorcing procedures) and ways of arranging after-divorce upbringing and the father-child relation in the Czech practice
2. Subjective changes of fatherhood (in the case of fathers who do not have children in sole custody and are not sharing households with them)
   a) changes in practices (as seen by fathers themselves) attached to upbringing children, particularly in view of the non-residential character of fathers’ parenting and consequently direct father-child relations not any more mediated by children’s mothers.
   b) change in men’s perceptions of father’s role - the question which dimensions of father’s role remain and in what way and capacity
   c) change in father’s identity, the marital type of father’s identity and personal type of father’s identity, interconnectedness of father’s identity with comprehensive men’s identity

The Set of Major Hypotheses (as emerging from hitherto family research in the Czech Republic and foreigner academic publications):

1. The break-up of marital or partnership relation in most instances creates a highly conflictfull situation and this ongoing conflict renders impossible the preservation of the parents’ relationship, which is necessary for the communication and cooperation between the two parents after the separation.
2. Marriage and parenthood are in male understanding belonging into one ”package” (Townsend 2002) and with ending one goes the threat of termination of the other. Father-child relationship is frequently indirect and is mediated by child’s mother and negative feelings towards former partner affect the relationship with the child.
3. After the divorce, both parents have to ”fuss” the relationship with their child. The father finds himself in a situation, which does not offer any established cultural scenario or behavioral model; when he attempts to maintain his parenthood relationship, he is forced to look for new strategies. The situation of separation solicits a reformulation of the relation to the child, which must be constructed in function of the absence of everyday contacts, of the visits limited in time and without the presence of the mother of the child.
4. Personal identity of the father must also be reformulated. Traditionalist male identity as founded in values like domination, control, rationality, confidence, self-reliance and action is put in doubt; there is necessity to leave the marital type of father’s identity and switch to the personal type of father’s identity.
5. Finally, the form of the fatherhood after the split depends on many ”structural” or objective factors: the man’s material conditions, the gender contract of the given society, the cultural images of the ”good mother” and ”good father”, the judicial practices…

Methodology
The suggested project requires focused qualitative approach. For comprehensive understanding of the situation the qualitative research is to be preceded by the secondary analysis of already existing databases from quantitative surveys on family and social structure conducted in the course of the 90’s
and at the beginning of this decade. Analyzing them to identify the social climate in view of divorces and divorce rate, the opinions of the Czech population on parenthood, in particular, the parenthood in incomplete families and assist in describing the beliefs of the Czech citizens about men’s and women’s roles. The quantitative section is to be completed with the statistical analysis describing the demographic development of the Czech population.

The major - qualitative part of the study is to capture particular experiences of the Czech fathers, who have divorced or separated from the mother of their child or children and who do not have child or children in sole custody and consequently lost daily contact with the child or children. For this purpose the qualitative empirical method of “understanding interview” (Kaufmann 2001) combining ethnological techniques of work with informants and technique of semi-directive interview which is suitable for a deeper incursion into the accounts of respondents and comprehending their own meaning categories and on the base of this comprehension to built a theory - based on the facts and their sociological interpretation. This approach takes up the method of ”grounded theory” (Strauss, Corbin 1999), commonly and with success used in the most qualitative research, and further deepens this common method. "Understanding interview” is a method allowing for a flexible reaction to the particular course of questioning and, at the same time, leading it to the core of the research issue. The target group are men who have broken up with the mother of their child or children in the period from 1990, and their children were not older then 13 at the time of separation. This way, the condition of preserving the continuity of the single global socio-economic experience in the sample is to be fulfilled and, at the same time, the men interviewed at least for a period of time happened to be divorced fathers of pre-puberty children. The number of interviews is to be around 40 and is to be determined by saturation of the sample. The interviews with divorced fathers is to be complemented by a smaller number of shorter control interviews with divorced mothers having children in sole custody in order to be able to compare discourses of divorced fathers and mothers. Besides this qualitative study the suggested research will also involve participatory observation at court proceedings to grant custody for children, the analysis of the proceedings and their results and informal interviews with judges, attorneys and social workers.

Until now I have carried out nine interviews with men that I recruited by the snowball method. The snowball method results in a very specific sample – fathers who agree or even want to speak about their situation. They are mostly very committed fathers with strong interest in their children. On the other hand, it is very difficult to interview “absent fathers” - men who do not maintain any contact with their children. In the future I plan a more systematic recruitment of respondents.

The first interviews - analysis results

The separation creates a situation marked by extensive conflict

As P. Berger and H. Kellner (1964) stated and F. de Singly (2000a) further developed, marriage is one of the central institutions where social reality and personal identity are constructed. J. Hopper (2001: 431-443) showed that paradoxically for this reason separations are characterized by high levels of conflict – because the actors must redefine and reinterpret the new reality. In this process of reinterpretation, the ex-partner is often denigrated, criticized and devaluated. This leads to a certain degree of mistrust and rejection of the ex-partner, which influences the relationship to the children. Consequently, it is very difficult to preserve the relationship between parents, which is needed for the consensus about the education. The reactions that I observed are either of defeatism – the men consider their fatherhood and all they devoted to upbringing of child as lost, or of offensive – the men try to get the most possible influence and control over the child, in as much as the mother is unable to provide conditions for good education

The separation means the loss of family
The marital break-up is, for divorced men, also the break-up of family life—separation from their wife, children, and the home. Almost all interviewed men had to leave the family home they shared with their wife and children, while their ex-wives stayed there with their children. This fact was very difficult to bear, especially, when the initiator of divorce was the woman. In five cases of nine, men considered their ex-wife to be initiator of the split as she left because of an extra-marital relationship. In the remaining four cases, men stated that they had to leave because marriage was no longer bearable for them. With only one exception, they all left their previous homes. In consequence, they have felt as being explicitly or implicitly expelled and thrown out, especially, when it was the woman who initiated the separation.

P. Novak, a painter 47 years old, with two daughters (5 years), used the most picturesque metaphors: Maybe I’m a little bit too much dramatizing, but you feel as if a train had came and taken it all away to a concentration camp... It’s loss of the home, of the house, of everything you have built during long years. (...) I felt as a wolf hounded by hunters.

They have impression that their life was broken and that they have to start again from the very beginning. First, they have to find a new place to live, the thing which is highly problematic in the Czech republic. Their first preoccupations after the separation concern their housing. It seems that their father’s identity is closely related to material basis, to the space where they lived with their family and which they participated in arranging for. Without this particular basis, their relationship to their children becomes rather unclear. They redirect their energy and activities to the practical organization of their new life: All my preoccupations in those times, it was to find a flat and to furnish it... (J. Subrt). And than, out of the blue, all the existential troubles start again, it is not easy to find a flat. (P. Novak). They blame for it their ex-wives who “decided to get rid of them”.

Most of them have significant problems in contacts with their children, the mothers often render contact complicated or even impossible. In two cases, fathers cannot see their children at all, even if they want to. In the other cases, mothers have hampered the children’s contacts with father in the period following the separation. This behavior can have two reasons: according to the fathers, it is a continuation of conflict: rejection of the ex-partner, way how to punish him or complicate his life. Though, alternatively, it may be rather women’s desire to restart their own life and to forget the past—most of women happen to live with a new partner and they consider their previous relationship as a mistake.

Sometimes, they even offer to their ex-husbands the possibility to retire from their father’s obligations, including from paying the child support, in exchange for their agreement with the change of surname of their child to the surname of the mother’s new husband. For instance, P. Krouzek heard his daughter of 8 years say: Daddy doesn’t want me to change my name, so he must pay.

It is evident that fatherhood after split is for no-coresident fathers an unclear institution and their place in the post-divorce family is uncertain. They feel being and often they really are replaced by another man and the family is recomposed.

The break-up and masculine identity

The break-up brings to most men serious doubts about their Self as a man, it is a threat to their masculine identity. Father’s identity is closely linked to men’s identity, the fatherhood and relationship with their children depends on their identity of grown man. To be a ”man” means, for most of men, to perceive their Self as efficient, dominant and autonomous, but separation brings a loss of control over their situation. To be a man is a ”master status” (Hughues 1945) – men feel entitled to a superior position in family, and the separation results often in a loss of this status. Most of the respondents see themselves as victims, and think that their rights have been violated by the divorce. It puts them in the position of defense in their actions and in their interpretations of events (Arendel 1995: 77-102).

In many cases, divorce was perceived as a war between two sexes in general and between them and their ex-wives in particular. Along with that the men blame public institutions (judges, social workers, psychologists) for taking the part of women in this war.

... Man is contented with him self, while woman is always labile and unhappy with her life, and I think that it works this way, that the lawyers and judges, all the system creates big expectations in women concerning the divorce... (R. Dergam)
But this is normal! In 99 per cent of cases, man has got problems. Man always looses. (P. Krouzek)

The loss of power

The interviewed men feel as if they have lost everything in divorce – the children as well as material base. According to their subjective perception, women have won in their divorce. In general, man leaves with a plastic bag, In all cases that I know, you leave there everything and someone else comes and moves in (P. Novak).

However, behind these problems lies the fear of the loss of control and power - over the ex-wife, the children, the family, and their earnings. "Lost in divorce, they claimed, were their rights to fatherhood, discretionary control of their earnings, exercise of familial authority, and autonomy to plan and handle their futures", writes T. Arendell (1995: 46). The break-up implies for non-custodial fathers a loss of control over the situation, over their ex-wife and offspring, a loss of authority and social status. The concern with the loss of control is marked in the discourses of interviewed men: they have a feeling of powerlessness in the face of the will of their ex-wives.

I didn’t have any choice. Me, I didn’t have any choice. I can’t do anything. (P. Krouzek)

But what can I do. If she says that she (his daughter) doesn’t want to see me, so what can I do? (T. Krouzek)

The studies of F. Furstenberg and C. Winquist Nord (1985) show that custodial parents credit the non-custodial parents with only few authority and possibility of decision of their children’s education. Discussions between the two parents are rare or don’t take place at all. The narratives of men prove the same thing: man who sees his child only once in two weeks looses almost all influence over decisions concerning his child and his education.

Me, from my position, I can’t force her to learn English. (T. Krouzek)

I don’t decide anything, I just get the announcement. (P. Kana)

According to the American authors (Arendell 1995; Furstenberg, Winquist Nord 1985; Cherlin 1981), the divorced fathers react often to this imbalance of control by fighting for joint custody (which gives the same custodial rights to both parents). They ask for it even if they are not really interested in active fatherhood – their interest in joint custody is not a real search for new alternative forms of parenthood, but rather a search for the status of legal custodial parent. But it seems that this is not the case in the Czech Republic, where it is much more complicated to obtain joint custody, so that fathers attempt this option only if they are genuinely interested. On the other side, mothers are more than fathers afraid of loosing the legal status of custodial parent and they refuse the joint or alternated custody, because if they don’t have the sole custody of their children, they are perceived and stigmatized as "bad mothers". This is one of the consequences of the situation in which women are not attributed sole custody only in cases of their complete incompetence to take care of their children.

As we have seen, men consider their family after separation as a broken family, they see themselves as thrown away from their home and their place in their children’s lives is rather unclear. Their reactions vary – from acceptance of the situation – "it happens, I can’t help it, I will be a week-end father” – to defeatism – "my life is broken, I have lost my child and my family”. Most of fathers finds some compensation strategy: they put aside their father’s role and they focus on other roles; they base their identity on some other elements. For some, it is work, for others a new romantic relationship or relationships, for others, it is legal struggle with ex-wife, and, for some, it can be religion.

Representations of gender difference between motherhood and fatherhood

Fatherhood cannot be apprehended separately from motherhood, forasmuch as social construction of one inevitably influences the other. For a longtime, maternal and paternal role were considered as complementary – father was mainly breadwinner and authoritarian pedagogue, while mother was the caretaker and housekeeper. A number of researches had proved that these representations are social constructions and that at the same time they present one of the foundations of gender inequality in both domestic and public settings.
In the family before separation, mother is often most of her time at the children’s disposal, at least indirectly, while father’s presence is concentrated in demarcated periods of time. On the other hand, father understands his work time as an indirect parental time (Singly 2000: 170-171). The disposability and presence of mother and the accent put on the professional activity of father creates a situation in which mother acts as mediator of the relationship between father and his children. This way, fatherhood becomes intrinsically intertwined with conjugality, and once the relationship between mother and father disappears, fatherhood must be reformulated or the father-child relationship disappears also (Singly 2000: 196-202; Townsend 2002).

The way in which men construct their relationship to their children and their father’s identity depends on their representation of these gender differences – differences between man and woman and between motherhood and fatherhood. The traditional masculine identity is defined in terms contradictory to care and sacrifice for others, and men who base their identity on this traditional definition of masculinity may experience important problems in preserving the relationship with children after divorce.

The interviewed men were in general persuaded that gender differences between fatherhood and motherhood exist. Often, they tried to explain “how men are and how women are”. They considered men, including themselves, as more rational, logical, calm etc. than women. The gender differences are according to them biological and natural. Women are supposed to have more aptitude to care after the children. This conviction permits them to rationalize the fact that their wives spent much more time taking care of the child and the household than they did: for women, this work is naturally easier, men are not “strong enough to do that” (P. Novak). But, at the same time, they are in general persuaded that men can learn and develop the same skills if they need or want to. This was a common contradiction in the men’s narratives: women are naturally more able, so it is logical that they care more of their children and family – but men can learn it too, so it is logical that they should have the same possibility of contact with children after marital separation. The rationalization that worked well before turns against them with the break-up of the family, so they invent a new one, which permits them to conserve the dominant position.

**Fatherhood after separation**

As a family reorganizes after marital separation, a man must choose new patterns of involvement with his children. When he looses the daily, routine, familiar opportunities to parent, his relationship to the children and his identity is expected to be affected. It may be assumed that his acting as a father will not change only in case of extremely low or extremely high importance of fatherhood for him (Ihinger-Tallman 1995: 68).

**Father-child relationship**

All interviewed men are relatively strongly committed to their children. Only two of them don’t have any contact with their child and both are suing their ex-wives for obstructions of father-child contacts. Others see their children during one weekend in every two weeks and spend with them a part of holidays. It seems that a strong continuity of the father-child relationship exists - men who had a close relation to the child before the separation and they participated in the care and education since the child was born generally remain strongly involved in the education of their children after the separation. Two of the respondents were primary caretakers of their children for a certain period of time, another looked after his daughter during her mother’s afternoon shifts, others used to work at home and spend a lot of time with their children.

Besides of this continuity, in few cases, I observed a strengthening of relationship, a kind of discovering of the child after the divorce, due to time that father spends alone with the child. It is mostly the case of fathers who did not have any specific common activity with their children before the separation, but due to spending weekends together they found a new kind of closeness.
Father practices

When approaching the actual practices of fathers, the limitations of above described research approach should be considered carefully. For the purpose of more inclusive account of the situation of fathers all actors engaged in family break-up should be questioned. In this stage of research - conducting interviews with fathers - the focus has been on the fathers’ identity, their perception of changes in fatherhood and the discourses they use to explain their situation. In this phase, study is not paying attention primarily to the factual practices, but rather to the ways fathers see their practices and changes in them.

The fact of not sharing the same residence means a lot of changes in parent’s practices, even in those families where father was not often present in times preceding the marital separation. After the separation, the father becomes a sort of visitor of his child. He spends with him/her a limited amount of time without the presence of the mother. The common activities have mostly the form of distraction and entertainment, which corresponds to results of other researches of parenting after divorce (Furstenberg, Winquist Nord 1985: 897). Father’s participation in school activities of his child depends on the educational background of the father.

Even if the father-child relationship is no more mediated by the mother of the child, most of the men don’t accept all the responsibility of childcare. Instead they delegate it to other women (grandmother, new partner). Only those who were used before the separation to take care alone of their children do not need any new mediator or a ”female expert” when they spend time with their children.

It has been observed that the place where the contacts take place is very important: the men’s housing condition influences strongly the father-child relationship. Because of the critical housing situation in the Czech Republic, a lot of men have difficulties to find independent housing, so they don’t have at their disposal any space where they can receive their child.

The interviewed fathers accept the obligation to contribute financially to their children and they consent with the level of child support they are supposed to pay. Forasmuch as most of the respondents have regular contacts with their children, this confirms the hypothesis that the compliance with child support is linked with the frequency of father-child contacts (Setyer, Schaeffer, Charng 1989). In spite of that, money remains the biggest source of conflicts between the ex-spouses. Men see the money they pay as an investment, which should be counter-balanced with a possibility of control and decision. If this possibility doesn’t exist, it is acceptable and logical for them not to pay the child support. In fact, they do not oppose to the duty to contribute financially to the education of their children, but they prefer to do it directly, buying things that the children need, in order to keep control over their finances.

I don’t want to pay more, because I feel that if I have to pay, it’s better to pay directly to my daughter, to buy her something. (…) I prefer to spend my money for something particular that to contribute to the budget of another family, because I don’t know how this money is divided. (J. Subrt)

Father’s role

The father’s role is a whole of all that others expect of somebody who holds the status of father, it is a complex of norms. The father’s role is in competition with other roles that a man can have and it is itself composed of a number of sub-roles. Father’s involvement after a separation depends on the hierarchy of all these dimensions. Men after separation find themselves in a situation without appropriated scenarios and modes of acting. Even in two-parent families, the norms associated with fatherhood became fuzzy nowadays, fatherhood became pluralistic (Castelain Meunier 2002). It can be “understood as an entrepreneurial activity”, influenced, at the same time, by expert discourses and by strong emotional states (Lupton, Barclay 1997: 16-18). In times of “new families”, the roles are even more confused by the unusual situations and new norms of father’s behavior in these situations do not emerge.

In order to understand the father’s involvement of divorced or separated men, it is useful to see how they perceive the father’s role – how they perceive the expectations of significant others and what they consider to be the father’s obligations; what is their representation of a ”good father”, and than to
explore how they see themselves in relation to these perceived norms. The men realize that they are expected to provide for their family and to ensure its good material conditions. Some accept this configuration and they share the idea of traditional gender division of labor inside the family. In spite of that, all of them stated that their wives had a paid work even when their children were small, and that their income was as important as the men’s income for the family budget. Even though women in the Czech republic are highly active in the labor market, the cultural representation of ”father” – provider of money and ”mother” – provider of care still persists in people’s minds. This traditional representation plays the role of justification of the unequal division of labor inside the family, but it is no more based on facts. On the other side, some interviewed men refuse this traditional arrangement, because they feel that it makes them loose their children.

In general, father’s role and the ideal of ”good father” is for the interviewed fathers highly unclear. They think that there is not any model of fatherhood for them and that the best what they can do is to react ad hoc to the situation and to the needs of the child.

*It is very individual... I really can’t say what it should be, a good father... It is too dificult to find out what it is. (...) It is not possible to construct a model and then to follow it. It must be spontaneous.* (P. Novak)

*I don’t dare to say what is best...* (J. Subrt)

*I think that every father is a good father. Every father is a man, and if he doesn’t exceed some limits, some norm, which is quite large, he wants only the good for his child.* (L. Patera)

**Personal and father’s identity**

As it has been said, parenthood in our societies is strongly gendered. Father’s identity cannot be considered separately from masculine identity, as well as maternal identity from feminine identity. But while feminine identities used to be for a longtime synonymous with maternal and familial activities, definitions of masculinity issue from non-familial roles of men (Chodorow 1978; Arendell 1995: 31). Men are still expected to fully participate in economic sphere and to construct their identities as men through their professional roles. In consequence, the strongest dimension of paternal identity is the one of income provider for the family, because it permits to conciliate the traditional definition of masculinity with the commitment to the family (Singly 2000: 176). In addition to it, the traditional definition of masculinity contains attributes contrary to values of care and sacrifice, so it renders problematic the involved and caring fatherhood. In the face of the model of ”new father” fatherhood and even masculinities themselves become fussy and contradictory.

First, father’s identity of a separated man depends on the way in which he perceives himself, the expectations of others and his ability to respond to these expectations. Most of interviewed fathers realize that they do not correspond to their representation of ”good father” – they do not spend enough time with their child, they don’t have enough authority etc. But, although, they know that they do not really correspond to the ideal, they keep a rather positive image of themselves in the role of father even after the divorce.

Father’s identity as crucially based on the way fathers perceive their relationship with children. For those men who keep regular contact with their children, the children are significant others, they contribute to construction and validation of the men’s identity. In order to conserve certain coherence of their image of Self, men need to believe that their child loves and respect them, and also that their child is not suffering because of the separation. They believe in this even in situations marked by extensive conflicts, and even in spite of their own convictions that other children of divorced parents are perturbed by divorce. For instance, two fathers who are neighbors claimed that their children are doing very well, while the child of the neighbor is doing badly – and vice versa.

The interviewed men construct their personal and paternal identities through oppositions, mainly in opposition to their ex-partners. In general, they attribute the positive pole of the opposition to themselves and the negative one to their ex-wife. We can find such oppositions as: rationality / irrationality, create conflicts / avoid conflicts, consumption / love, introversion / extraversion. These oppositions are based on the fundamental opposition of masculine and feminine. Their personal identity is in fact founded on a representation of gender differences: men see and evaluate themselves mostly as more valid, logical, reliable and objective than women.
Their masculine identity, based on control of Self and others, has been put in doubt through the separation or divorce. Since they share the prevailing model of masculinity, they have difficulties with expressing and accepting their emotions and feelings. Feelings inverse to self-confidence, like pain, fragility and confusion were transformed into anger against public institutions or against their ex-wives. Exactly as Arendell research showed, those feelings “were redefined or reconstructed by being positioned within the context of experienced injustices” (Arendell 1995: 134). Some of interviewed men pretend not to have feelings at all, others, when interviewed, claim that they prefer to forget and not talk about it.

The common reaction to the loss of control and power is for most of respondents affirmation of their superiority and conviction that they are victims of great injustices caused by their ex-wives and by women in general.

Men don’t do that. They don’t try to set children against the other parent. Only women do that, because they have children all the time, they don’t loose them, they don’t have to fight for them and are not proud enough to have them. (P. Novak).

In reaction to the loss of power, they feel victimized by the system that favors mothers. Their vision of situation is often very subjective – according to them, all divorced or separated fathers have been kicked out by their wives and all of them have lost involuntarily their children. Taking into account the objective situation regarding child custody in the Czech republic, this conviction is partly true, but it is exaggerated and stems from the men’s’ need of affirmation of their superiority over women.

**Conclusion**

The question of fatherhood after separation of marriage is largely connected to the question of gender power relations in society. For thousands of years, the control of reproduction as well as the power over child education lied in hands of men. But this distribution changed in the course of 20th century. Now men claim (or at least some of them) that they have lost the control over their offspring – they don’t decide of contraception, abortion, they usually don’t get custody of their children after a divorce. The question to be asked is if this control and power has any real impact on the power relations between the two genders: "if the social system today lets women control their reproduction, it means that it is advantageous for this system – it is the best way how to persuade women to take care of children that they wanted to bring to life" (Ferrand 2001: 192).

Still it must be acknowledged that separated or divorced fathers in the Czech Republic find themselves in an uneasy situation. They tend to have limited contact with their children, only rarely they are given custody of child as they are exposed to stereotypical treatment by public institutions. The self-perception of fathers and ways they deal with this situation is the central theme of the paper; the qualitative inquiry exposed common reactions to the loss of everyday contact with children after family split - pain and anger: pain as feeling accompanying the loss of family, home, close relationship with one’s child; anger as reaction to the feeling of powerlessness and weakness in view of preferential treatment of men’s ex-wives and undertakings of public institutions enacting this treatment. Following the marriage break-up, fathers try to reconstruct their identity in order to save a coherent image of themselves as men. They stick to other than parental roles and they attempt to construct new representations of relationship to their children to permit themselves to believe that they keep control over the situation. Their construction of fatherhood and father’s and personal identity is founded on a strong representation of natural gender differences (masculine attributes versus feminine). They all feel powerless towards prevailing stereotypes of motherhood and fatherhood as they are anchored in practices of public institutions and all society; on the other hand, however, they tend to share them too.

In view of quantitative research, fatherhood emerges as one of the most important dimensions of identity and self-esteem for men. It seems that more uncertainty in the outside world brings a retreat into the private sphere and, consequently, an increase in importance of family. During the communist period there were only few options of self-fulfillment in the Czech Republic; family together with parenthood were one of them. Today individuals can build new life strategies and search for variety of areas of self-realization, still, it is not so easy to blame for a failure someone else then oneself.
Consequently, a failure of family and parenthood appears therefore more dramatic, or at least, as dramatic as it was before.

References
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