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“Assessing family policies:

Confronting family poverty and social exclusion & Ensuring work-family balance”



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

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Session V:

The context of a kind invitation

- Philosopher skeptic on the category of ‘policy makers’
- Researcher on human rights, gender and *the political power of naming* but not on family and public policies
- Researcher on reproductive behavior and health
- Teaching on male identity and the value of work (MGEPP)
- Empowerment of research subjects through research projects
- Ethical compromises of researchers vs social exclusion



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 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.
- Promote 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.



Introduction (continue)

- Discuss three basic aspects of human beings,
 - their process of health/illness
 - their reproductive behavior
 - the exercise of work, as the possibility of transforming everyday life and of constructing “the material conditions” for survival.

- I propose an ethical analysis that will help identify the assumptions used to determine the rules for social co-existence, some of which exclude specific subjects and ways of leaving.



I.1. Gender Equity and Public Policies

- According to Weber, social action is equivalent to the social relations established between social sectors, persons of different sexes, power and/or interest groups.
- Therefore, when one speaks of men and women, one is not referring to isolated, independent groups.
- 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*.



I.2.1 Poverty in the family setting

- The sexual division of labor must be taken into account, together with the economic model at the macro level.
- Due to the weight of providing in many men's models of gender identity, unemployment is accompanied by personal questioning and different experiences of crisis.
- Another important factor to consider is the “fear of losing one's job,” since this can create more stress than unemployment itself. It also contributes to a feeling of *job precariousness*.



I.2.2 Identitary and Disciplinary Reductionisms

- 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, in order to rethink responsibilities and rights from the logic of equity and equality.
- *If family* is the nucleus permitting individuals' material and emotional development, conjugality would not be either a condition for accompanying their needs, nor would heterosexuality or biological kinship or being in-laws.



I.2.2 Identitary and Disciplinary Reductionisms (continue)

- 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.
- It is difficult for many men to play a more active role not only in looking after others but even in looking after themselves, since *self-care* is not legitimized as part of models of masculinity.
- Why not reflect on the meaning of the *association between health, mortality and fatherhood* as a resource for achieving well-being in males' reproductive experiences?



Relationship between employment and male and female identities

- To consider the *role of employment* in people's lives, particularly when it is analyzed as a result of their gender learning.
- It is necessary to deal with the consequences of the obstacles faced by women in satisfying this need and right to work
- 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?



I.2.3. Reproduction, Health and Employment: Relational definition

- We need to re-signify “otherness”, by recovering an interpretation of these dynamics on the basis of a human rights approach and a gender approach.
- The gender perspective dimension enables the identification of different experiences of civic awareness within a patriarchal society, both for men and women.
- Since men immersed does not need to be specifically named, they may end up being *strangers to themselves*.



I.2.3. Reproduction, Health and Employment: Relational definition (continue)

- We must problematize whether the *universality of rights* is a starting point in an obvious fashion, or whether it should be considered as an aspiration and a potential goal, once various processes of exclusion of specific persons in spheres of everyday life are reduced or ideally eliminated.
- A set of policies, together with investigation processes, would potentially be the best possible companions of an *inclusive civic exercise* in reproduction, health and employment as an object of rights.



II. A project on Men, Gender Equity, and Public Policies

- The fieldwork experience was quite complex since the high levels of violence in Mexico appear to be associated with the increased rate of non-responses encountered during the interviews.
- Some of the women interviewees perceived a need to “*look after their men*” given the aggressive, violent, uncertain environment
- Men feel increasingly observed and critically accompanied by other social actors



Exercise of Fatherhood and Workplaces

- 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
- This might help to reconstruct male identity on the basis of parameters that prevent the tension of being a good 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.



Exercise of Fatherhood and Workplaces (continue)

- 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.
- From the “*loneliness of fatherhood*” to “*the safe fatherhood*”
- 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

- “What is not named ends up being assumed not to exist”.
- 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.
- This could contribute to a collective discussion and reflection of the scope and horizons of certain public policy actions.



• *Reproductive spheres*

- The imposition of a heterosexual model of coexistence, ends up creating a restriction of the conditions for exercising them among many people, although they are acknowledged as guarantees in various international and national documents.
- To advance towards the *universality of rights*, we need to 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*.



- *Reproductive spheres (continue)*

- Could we think about *Safe Fatherhood* by proving the link between health and mortality and the paternal experience, reconstructing the attributes associated with this experience, which could mean a state of equilibrium and well-being in the sphere of paternity?
- Could we think about the aspects that prevent men from having a more gratifying, balanced experience of fatherhood, without seeing it in opposition to motherhood, yet at the same time without diluting it by conceiving of them relationally?



• *Processes of health and illness*

- Whereas for men some authors talk of “suicidal negligence” or “masculinity as a risk factor”, in the case of women, they talk of “being a woman is a health risk”, because of social disempowerment
- 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?
- We could work for the right to have "*a dignified death,*" which would imply constructing more dignified ways of living, both for men and women.



Getting and having a job

- Some philosophers recognize work as a founding aspect of human beings, since it allows to make history.
- A system of public policies that encourages the reconciliation of work life with spending time with the family, would accompany a review of gender learning, revealing what is lost 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 *rediscovering solitude as time for being with oneself*, something that has not been examined politically.



IV. Some provisional conclusions

- 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.
- Discuss **methodological questions**, 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?



Ethical and political implications

- 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 social relations of power.



Men's rights and privileges...!!!

- A key analytical axis in the discussion is the semantic difference between males' privileges and rights.
- 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.



Men's rights and privileges...!!! (continue)

- 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.



Philosophical epilogue...

- People are not responsible for what they learn as gender models but it is feasible to become aware of this and help identify possibilities of transformation, despite the difficulty of reconsidering cultural inertias, legitimized by institutional and social norms.
- 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.
- Sartre stated that “we are what we do with what others made of us”, since we have the capacity of **looking to ourselves**.