

## “DADDY HAS NO MILK!” NOTES ON PATERNAL HOLDING DURING ABSOLUTE DEPENDENCE<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT.** Considering the emergent claim towards father involvement in daily care during the absolute dependence, this paper aimed to analyze the possibility of paternal *holding* in the immediate care offered to a baby. Therefore, a case study, based on observations of father-baby interactions during the child's first three months of life and two interviews with the father before and after the child birth, was developed and is presented. The content analysis provided support for a psychoanalytic and psychosocial discussion on the potentiality of paternal *holding* to introduce in the baby's subjectivity Elements of Diversity: sensory and perceptual, psycho-affective and spatio-temporal. Results show that: it is possible an amplification of the constitutive aspects on *holding* regarding the immediate care offered to a baby by its father; Winnicott's theory on *holding* must be adapted and made more flexible regarding the relational dynamics of contemporary families and the father must be legitimized as a caregiver during pregnancy and puerperium.

**Keywords:** Father-child relations; psychoanalytic theory; Winnicott.

## “PAPAI NÃO TEM LEITE!” CONSIDERAÇÕES SOBRE O HOLDING PATERNO NA DEPENDÊNCIA ABSOLUTA

**RESUMO.** Considerando a emergência de uma postura paterna afetivamente implicada nos cuidados diários demandados no período da dependência absoluta, este artigo tem o objetivo de analisar a possibilidade de constituição do *holding* paterno nos cuidados diretos oferecidos ao bebê. Dessa forma, apresenta-se um estudo de caso construído a partir das observações das interações de uma díade pai-bebê, realizadas no primeiro trimestre de idade da criança, e de duas entrevistas (pré e pós-nascimento) realizadas com o pai. Empreendeu-se uma análise de conteúdo do material que fomentou uma discussão psicanalítica e psicossocial sobre a possibilidade de constituição do *holding* paterno capaz de introduzir, na subjetividade do bebê, elementos de diversidade: sensoriais e perceptivos; psicoafetivos; e espaço-temporais. As elaborações apontam a possibilidade de ampliação de aspectos constitutivos do *holding* a partir da inserção dos cuidados diretos oferecidos ao bebê pelo pai; a necessidade de adaptação e flexibilização da teoria winnicottiana frente às dinâmicas relacionais apresentadas nas famílias contemporâneas; e a necessidade de legitimação do pai como um cuidador durante o ciclo gravídico-puerperal.

**Palavras-chave:** Relações pai-criança; teoria psicanalítica; Winnicott.

## “PAPÁ NO TIENE LECHE!” CONSIDERACIONES SOBRE HOLDING PATERNO EN LA DEPENDENCIA ABSOLUTA

**RESUMEN.** Considerando la postura paterna afectivamente implicada en los cuidados infantiles en la dependencia absoluta, el objetivo de este trabajo fue analizar la posibilidad de constitución del *holding* paterno en los cuidados directos ofrecidos al bebé. Se presenta un estudio de caso construido a partir de las observaciones de las interacciones de la díada padre-bebé, realizada en el primer trimestre de la edad de crianza, y de dos entrevistas (pre y postnatal) realizadas con el padre. Se realizó un análisis de contenido que fomentó una discusión psicoanalítica y psicosocial sobre la posibilidad de constitución del *holding* paterno capaz de introducir en la subjetividad del bebé Elementos de Diversidad: sensoriales y perceptivos; psico-afectivos; espacio-temporales. Los análisis apuntan: la posibilidad de ampliación de

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aspectos constitutivos del *holding* a partir de la inserción de los cuidados directos ofrecidos al bebé por su padre; la necesidad de adaptación y flexibilización de la teoría winnicottiana, frente a las dinámicas relacionales presentadas en las familias contemporáneas; y la necesidad de legitimación del padre como un cuidador durante el ciclo embarazo - puerperio.

**Palabras-clave:** Relaciones padre-niño; teoría psicoanalítica; Winnicott.

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## Introduction

The present article aimed to analyze the possibility of paternal holding in the immediate care offered to a baby. To begin this discussion, the following situation is described: at the reception of a prenatal clinic, a father is seated holding a newborn while the child's mother is at the reception desk filling in forms. At a certain moment, the child begins to cry and the father, to calm her down, lifts her very close to his face. From this minimum distance between the faces he kisses his daughter smiling, while saying to her: "Daddy has no milk! Daddy has no milk!" (field diary – outpatient clinic). The child stops crying and looks attentively at the face of the father who continues to interact in a tender and intimate way. This situation has been described as having become emblematic for the following discussion: if daddy has no milk, what does he have to offer at this time?

In order to establish a correlation between Winnicott's theory of primitive emotional development and the possibility of constructing a new model of paternity, we circumscribe the moment that served as the basis for the observation of the father-baby relationship, denominated absolute dependence and comprised approximately between the baby's first and fourth month of age (Winnicott, 1965/1983).

This period is characterized by a total dependence of the child on the care provided by the surrounding environment, represented by the adult caregivers, predominantly the baby's mother. At this point, according to Winnicott (1975), from the point of view of the child, all perception is apperception, which is a process of capturing the environmental stimuli assimilated as objects subjectively conceived. The externality is not perceived objectively and the environment is gradually inserted from the constancy and repetition of fragments gathered in the subjective rhythm of the baby. This process of accumulation of sensory and perceptive memories has been called the imaginative elaboration of body functioning and it is from this that the baby makes psychic connections between the present, previous experiences and expectations for the future (Winnicott, 1958/2000).

In this period, the mother would have the function of providing a constitutive base called holding. In Winnicott's theory, holding, which includes handling, is defined by everything a mother is and does at a time when the child is still psychically undifferentiated from the environment. Thus, the mother in a state identified with the baby's needs, termed the primary maternal preoccupation, would work as an auxiliary ego capable to perceive, supply and protect the child's psyche (Winnicott, 1987/2006). A good environmental provision must therefore meet the physical and psychological needs that are present. In the care provided in the holding, handling refers to the care that involves the manipulation of the baby's body (Winnicott, 1965/1983, 1987/2006).

The sense of absolute in this context concerns the active adaptation of the mother to these needs, since tolerance for the expectation of satisfaction must be gradually constituted, which demands an almost immediate suppression of necessity. Thus, a good enough mother would be one who, from a place identified with her baby, would be able to sustain primary omnipotence and provide a secure basis for the development of creativity and the constitution of a true self (Winnicott 1965/1983; 1957/2008).

Winnicott also understands that this fusional state of identification, in which mother and baby would be one, albeit under asymmetric conditions of environmental perception, would be grounded by the pure female element, present in men and women, constitutive of the primordial experiences of being. The mother-baby unit would give the necessary apparatus so that the experiences accumulated in a continuity of being could progressively constitute the self of a baby-individual (Winnicott 1975).

If holding enables the continuity of the individual's being through sustainability of predictability and environmental stability (Winnicott, 1987/2006), the father could be part of environmental provision in two complementary ways to maternal functions (Winnicott, 1958/2000, 1957/2008). On the one hand, it would

be possible for an indirect participation in which the father would function as a holding of the mother-baby dyad, protecting against elements of external reality that could be intrusive to the ongoing constitutive processes. Therefore, the father would be at the service of protection of the infantile and maternal vulnerabilities, since the mother is also in a state of fragility due to the primary maternal preoccupation. In addition, he could act directly as a substitute mother, that is, a provisional extension of maternal care (Rosa, 2009; Winnicott, 1957/2008).

It is noteworthy that changes in family dynamics have enabled the emergence of new interactions in the father-mother-baby triad (Covre-Sussai, 2014; Frizzo & Piccinini, 2007; Rodriguez & Gomes, 2012; Santos, 2014). Regarding the nuclear and heterosexual families, in some population segments, a distancing from the family model governed by patriarchal ideology was observed, whose paternal and maternal functions were rigid and gender hierarchies were intrinsic (Bilac, 2014; Fiorin, Oliveira & Dias, 2014; Lopes, Dellazzana-Zanon & Boeckel, 2014). And, although different family arrangements existed at different historical periods, in contemporary times the construction of a more flexible division of parental roles and functions stands out.

These dynamics typical of a more contemporary functioning have been observed, mainly: in middle-class families, couples with high schooling and dual-career couples (term referring to the division of roles and functions in which the two members of the couple pursue a professional career and contribute equally to family expenses) (Bilac, 2014; Fiorin et al., 2014; Langaro & Pretto, 2015).

From a patriarchal fatherhood - responsible for the imposition of moral limits, family protection, financial provision and affectively distanced from the domestic environment - progressively turns to the participation of the father as an affective caregiver and the more egalitarian division of parental responsibilities (Arruda & Lima, 2013; Cúnico & Arpini, 2013; Vieira & Nascimento, 2014).

Scientific research on new fatherhood - or participative fatherhood - is growing. It is mainly the entry of man into an affective territory sometimes relegated, sometimes monopolized by women: the pregnancy-puerperal cycle. Pregnancy and prematurity of the child are periods associated with the "natural instinct" for the care present in women. However, observations and reports about the current reality of this period show that men are actively participating in this period as well (Carneiro et al., 2013; Silva, Bueno & Ribeiro, 2014).

We also note the interest in the study on the father-mother-baby triad and the phenomena identified as representative in the transformations of the father role, such as the extension of father leave or the creation of parental leave (divided between the couple) in some countries; the *couvade syndrome*, a psychosomatic process of identification of the father with the pregnancy, not necessarily psychopathological; the *stay-at-home-fathers* phenomenon, the choice of some fathers to be a primary caregiver, while the woman becomes the financial provider; and the discourses on the pregnant couple and a fatherhood that is actively involved in the practical aspects of childcare (Carneiro et al., 2013; Rehel, 2014; Schulz & Rost, 2012; Stevens, 2015; Zutin, 2012; Zvara, Schoppe-Sullivan & Dush, 2013).

Contemporary fathers have taken on the challenge of inserting themselves in care practices previously supervised by mothers. Discourses that defend maternal love as a psychosocial construction, and not something given a priori, imprint on the daily lives of contemporary families the possibility of democratic conjugality and parenthood in which women, although still the main child caregiver, can count on a more participative man and that has built a new way of being a father (Fiorin et al., 2014; Magalhães, 2010).

Focusing on the changes brought about by a more direct relationship between the father and the baby during the pregnancy-puerperal cycle, the discussion is developed around the following question: How has the father inserted himself in the environmental provision to the point to be ever more present, caring and affectively participating in his baby's life?

## **Method**

The material derives from an exploratory research conducted from case studies guided by the Clinical-Qualitative Method developed by Turato (2011). The method allows the follow-up of intersubjective processes based on the psychoanalytical framework and recommends the following

foundations: phenomenological apprehension of the senses and meanings of the phenomenon in essential aspects; valuation of the naturalistic environment in research; welcoming anxieties and anguishes of the subjects in relation to the investigated phenomenon; and the imbrication of Psychoanalysis in the various stages of research.

## Participants

Two fathers and their infants participated in the study, however, only in one of the dyads we observed a greater implication of the father with the care directly offered to the baby, that is, not necessarily mediated by the mother, which delimited the material presented here to only one dyad. The inclusion profile of the father encompassed the criteria: first parental experience, which allowed us to observe the novelty of the fatherly experience; living with the partner, which could interfere with the quality of the presence with the baby; being the biological father, the circumscription of the sample to the biological linkage; and reside in the city of São Paulo, delimitation justified by the institutional affiliation of the researcher. The following exclusion criteria were considered: fathers with more than one child, as the objective was to follow the first experiences of child care; non-biological fathers and not living with the partners, since we decided to limit the sample to the nuclear and heterosexual family, with consanguineous ties and cohabitation.

## Instruments

The sources used in the analysis of the phenomenon were: the field diary with the observations made in the prenatal outpatient clinic of the hospital where the participants were selected; the transcripts, carried out by the researcher (1st author), semi-directed interviews pre-birth (one month before delivery) and post-birth (three months after delivery); and the field diary with observations made in the family home during the first three months of the child. The information contained in each instrument is as follows:

*Thematic script of pre-birth interview:* socio-economic-demographic data, information about the family of paternal origin, marital history and preparations for the arrival of the baby.

*Thematic script of post-birth interview:* birth experience, father leave and care routine during the first three months of the child.

*Field diary – outpatient clinic:* frequency and presence of the father to prenatal examinations, general aspects of the process of selection of the participants and first contacts with the father.

*Field diary - family house:* interactions between father and baby, routine, environment and schedules.

The choice of instruments aimed to analyze the relationship between the father and the baby, to understand how the father was built as a caregiver and to analyze how paternal care was included in the environmental provision.

## Data collection procedures

Contact with the participant occurred initially through his partner in a consultation at the prenatal outpatient clinic in the last month of gestation. Considering the adequacy to the inclusion criteria, the first telephone contact with Bernardo was arranged in which we scheduled a visit at his house. In this meeting, we presented the T.C.L.E. and the information regarding the form of participation in the research.

Once the consent was obtained, the first interview was conducted. After the child's birth, observations on father-baby interactions were made in the participant's home. Five forty-minute visits were made during the baby's first three months. It is noteworthy that the child's mother was also present during the observations, however, in the material analysis the interactions in the father-baby dyad were emphasized. At the end of the observation period, the second interview was conducted.

## Data analysis procedures

Following the assumptions of data analysis defined in the Clinical-Qualitative Method (Turato, 2011), a particularization of the content analysis technique was applied, characterized by the suspended reading of the material and attention to contents that emerged as standards, traditional content analysis, and to the latent contents of statements, indicative of the unconscious dynamics and established transference relations.

The analysis, therefore, discusses the process of insertion of a father in the care with his baby and reflects on the possibility of paternal holding in the environmental provision offered to the child. Data presented were constructed from the research material of the dyad Bernardo and Benjamim.

## Ethical procedures

The research from which this article derives was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University Hospital of the University of São Paulo and the Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology of the Faculty of Medicine of the University of São Paulo (CAAE: 02928013.0.0000.0076). In addition, participants' consent was also obtained, described with fictitious names to preserve the secrecy of information. The following is a presentation of the case selected and the analysis undertaken to discuss the possibility of constitution of paternal holding.

## Results

### Bernardo and Benjamim

Bernardo grew up in a family that adopted him when he was a child, the couple who welcomed him were separated at the time he entered this family. The participant and his two siblings, biological children of the former couple, grew up amid the alternation between the homes of the father and the mother. At the age of 22, Bernardo, and his companion, Bianca, 19, became parents of Benjamin. The participant had completed higher education and began working in a supermarket after the news of pregnancy, his partner was finishing high school and did not engage in paid work. The average family income was in the lower middle class. The members of the couple were declared by the participant as to ethnicity as grayish-brown. Bernardo also reported not following any religion and specified that Bianca was Catholic.

The news of the pregnancy mobilized the civil marriage and the change of Bernardo to the house of the family of Bianca. In addition, the participant also got a job to provide financially wife and baby. During the prenatal care, he reports that he was able to accompany Bianca in the consultations in the first months, but his working hours made it impossible to follow up more assiduously.

This father conveyed in his reports significant aspects about his interaction and emotional involvement with the baby during the gestation period, such as: mental formulations of physical and psychological characteristics of the child "*we were thinking, because my hair is curled and hers also, then I said that if it comes, it will come with curly hair, brown skin*" (pre-birth interview); contacts with the baby in the belly through touches and conversations "*It excites us, the moment I arrived, I lay down, I was nudging her belly, he was punching. Oh, I keep doing some little ticks, poking at her belly, he kicks, punches. Yesterday we stayed this way for the whole day*" (pre-birth interview); search for knowledge related to baby care before birth in different sources (wife, father, internet, etc.) "*she (Bianca) is already teaching me how to change diapers, how to hold him ...*" (pre-birth interview); the choice for the name of the child "*I chose, is a different name that I like*" (pre-birth interview); and the preparation of the family environment for the arrival of the baby through the purchase of clothes and objects necessary for the care "*we painted the house, we bought a double bed, we bought a crib*" (pre-birth interview).

During the labor of Bianca, which lasted about 28 hours, Bernardo remained in the waiting room and could not attend the delivery of his son, about what he felt at that moment the participant reports:

*I was in the waiting room. Alone. I could not come in, they said I could not enter. I waited as it was going to be, I thought they were going to let me in, but they did not, so I stayed outside just wondering if everything was going to be okay with her, with the baby. (post-birth interview).*

After the birth of the child, Bernardo, in addition to using the paternity leave (5 days), he also asked his employer for a change in his work schedule (from afternoon/evening to morning /afternoon) so that he could spend more time with his son during his first months. Below, there is a detailed description of the family routine during the first three months, made by the participant:

*We wake up in the morning, then bathe him, I preferably do this, we leave him clean, then she breastfeeds him, then I take a shower to go to work, then later when I get home from work I just play a little with him, we stay up until 2 o'clock in the morning, feed him, I prepare a bottle and I give him the bottle down here, I go up again, I play with him up there, then he goes to sleep. (post-birth interview)*

During the observation visits made by the researcher (1st author), it was possible to notice that Bernardo established frequent physical contacts with the child and that this was something accepted by Bianca, although some rivalry for the privileged attention of the baby could not be dismissed as latent to the interactions. This mother has not shown any discomfort or recriminatory prohibitions against the contacts established in the father-baby dyad. Here is an excerpt from the field diary containing the observations at the family home:

*Bernardo is lying on the bed holding the son on his chest, at certain point, Benjamim moves on Bernardo towards his nipple. Bernardo points out that the son was trying to suck. Bianca catches Benjamim on the arm and lays him on her lap to breastfeed him, he suckles for about 5 minutes and then is delivered to Bernardo. Then Bianca jokingly says, "Oh he just comes to me to suck, the rest of the time is all with him (Bernardo)." Benjamin moves in the body of the father and alternates between states of stillness where he is fixedly observing the environment and states of excitation in which there is movement of the limbs and the facial expressions. (Field Diary – Family house)*

It should be noted, therefore, that from the visits to the family home it was possible to observe several types of interaction. Below, we present those that have recurred and are extremely relevant to the discussion proposed in this article:

*Speech addressed to the baby:* changes in the tone of the voice (acute and lower). Conversations addressed to the baby in order to stimulate playful interactions. Attribution of psychological states, needs, discomforts or satisfactions perceived in the baby, not necessarily based on observable elements.

*Visual contact:* constant observation of the movements and looks of the baby, reciprocity in the visual contact between father and son.

*Body contacts:* hold the baby facing him at the height of his own face and talk to him. Manipulation of the baby's body in playful interactions. Hold the baby lying on his body in the thoracic region. Agility in changing diapers. Hold the baby with the body and, consequently, also look at the environment.

Considering the approach of the material presented here, about some aspects of the relational dynamics established in the dyad Bernardo and Benjamim, next the discussion of the case will be carried out in view of the psychoanalytic assumptions of Winnicottian theory and psychosocial studies on the references that characterize the assumption of a new model of fatherhood.

It is important to highlight that, because it is an exploratory study, this discussion raises the hypothesis of a theoretical extension in view of new interactive dynamics. The argumentation is not intended to be generalizing and is a starting point for further studies that may corroborate and/or refute the propositions defended.

## Discussion

The family background of Bernardo was characterized by him as what is being conventionally called as a reconstituted family, situated as a specific configuration resulting from rearrangements in family dynamics as a consequence of the divorce of the parental couple. According to Gomes (2009), in reconstituted families, the possibilities of interaction - with the partners of the parental figures, besides

the possible new siblings or half-siblings, coming from the new unions - magnify the constitution of these families and produce a kind of configuration in which both the roles and functions of the family members are redefined, as the affective link becomes as significant as the biological linkage.

In the family context of Bernardo, who had to grow in the midst of paternal and maternal homes, the participant mentioned receiving punishments of both parents when necessary. Relationships are also described with positive adjectives such as "quiet, relaxed and good" (pre-birth interview). Stereotyped attributions were not identified in the participant's discourse regarding the care received by the father and the mother. Bernardo also states that he received a good education and that this will be transmitted in his own fatherhood exercise. Therefore, it is possible to reflect on the hypothesis that for Bernardo the parental figures have played flexible functions and roles in different environments, such as the accomplishment of a position of authority or of a welcoming attitude performed by both the father and the mother.

Bernardo demonstrated in some lines the appropriation of gender stereotypes understood from a more egalitarian point of view, in which there was no presumption of maternal care as predetermined. When asked before the birth about who would take more care of Benjamin, the participant answered that it would be his wife, however, justified his answer clarifying that this predominance was based on the greater availability of time of Bianca with the child. About this division, he complements: "*I will be alone in the morning. In this case, she goes to school and I will take care of the baby in the morning*" (pre-birth interview).

Thus, when referring to Bianca's return to the classroom routine, the justification for the division between maternal and paternal care was not based on a preconceived notion of care that should invariably be exercised by the child's mother. In this case, the organization of the availability of time in function of other attributions determined the division of responsibilities of the couple.

We consider in this context the assumption of a generational psychic transmission of parental models and specificities in the transmission of maternal and paternal functions in a given family. From this perspective, it is possible to reflect on Bernardo's assimilation of a generational legacy that may have fostered the bases for an update of the father's role in a more affective way and implied in the direct care offered to the baby (Gomes, 2009).

Another point to be highlighted in the last part of speech is that the participant already anticipated periods in which he would have to take care of the child alone and did not show to be uncomfortable with this possibility, something confirmed by the experience after the birth and emphasized in the following speech: "*sometimes she comes out, when she has to and I change his diaper if it is dirty, clean him, I go up there, I give him a bottle*" (post-birth interview). Feeding also through the bottle gave this father the possibility of feeding the baby daily, care, which together with the diaper change was declared as one of this father's favorite affective contacts (Zutin, 2012).

Regarding the mobilizations generated before the arrival of the baby, Bernardo's parental exercise was part of the formalization of the affective link with Bianca through civil marriage and the immediate accountability for the financial provision of his newly constituted family. It is possible to reflect on these changes undertaken in the life of the participant as a form of implication of Bernardo in the new demands of the couple and the care to be provided in relation to the baby. However, this initial implication was still concerned with traditional family references ruled by patriarchal ideology, namely: the social legitimation of the marital link from legal recognition, something that at present has lost its forces as a prerequisite for the formalization of the link, and the naturalized father appropriation of the place of family's financial provider (Magalhães, 2010).

In a counterpoint to the traditional references, with regard to the father place within the family, it is possible to infer that Bernardo demonstrated a process of affective link implied and more characteristic of a participative fatherhood, since he was able to exercise practical care and develop a linkage with the child (Arruda & Lima, 2013). The growing interaction between Bernardo and Benjamin throughout the gestation could be considered a stage of paternal psychic preparation and was essential for the identificatory processes between father and baby after birth (Frizzo & Piccinini, 2007).

Within this context of paternal insertion in the pregnancy-puerperal cycle, Bernardo's desire to participate in the delivery of his son and to accompany Bianca during this time was also observed. This

was not fulfilled because the hospital did not authorize the paternal presence. It is necessary to emphasize that, even though this is a practice that has been changing in the different health sectors aimed at family care, the exclusion of the father at the moment disregards him as a caregiver and an essential element for maternal and child health (Rehel, 2014).

Both the nonparticipation of the father during childbirth and the paternity leave of only 5 days function as perpetrators of a socio-political logic that favors the mother-baby dyad, to the detriment of the father-mother-baby triad. In this way, public policies and health teams are still slowly moving towards legitimizing the paternal place in response to the demands raised during this family event (Marques, 2015).

Although Bernardo did not witness the birth of Benjamin, in the puerperal period, the participant demonstrated and reported the routine of care adapted to the needs demanded by the baby. The characterization of some aspects of the interaction and the relationship in the dyad Bernardo and Benjamin is again related to the importance, in the period of absolute dependence, of the corporal care given to the newborn. The basis of the entire integrative and maturational process, which may culminate in the constitution of an integrated self and in relation to the environment as external and separate, is in the affective and dedicated support of the environment due to the unorganized state of the baby in this first stage (Winnicott, 1958/2000).

It can be thought that this father throughout the whole process of gestation, childbirth and puerperium was able to construct an affective availability that made possible an active insertion in the direct care demanded. Added to this is the possibility of family transmission from the paternal family of more flexible references to gender stereotypes, which may have influenced the greater exchange of roles and attributions between Bernardo and Bianca.

Therefore, it is argued from the material observed that, although the father did not go through the physiological process of gestation, it is considered possible for man to enter a process of psychically gestating a child. In this process, the interactions of several orders, performed between the father and the baby before birth, would also constitute acting factors in the greater predisposition to a father identification with the baby's needs after birth (Frizzo & Piccinini, 2007).

To corroborate this argument, the notion of affect attunement developed by Stern (1992) is used as a state of intersubjective and affective exchanges that facilitate the father understanding of the behavioral manifestations of the child. In this way, there would be a reading and an interpretation in the interactions that would be influenced by the fantasies and expectations about the subjective states attributed to the baby. Therefore, it is reflected on the possibility of Bernardo, from a more direct relation with his son, to have been able to deal with the daily demands of the child of an identified and affective position.

It is necessary to distinguish between a parent who exercises efficient handling (physical care) and a father who could go beyond and also enter the holding. Performing a practical care and establishing a direct contact with the baby's body does not necessarily imply a subjective identification with the baby's psychic position. The father could be a good performer of tasks without, however, being able to identify the immediate demands of care, which would always demand the presence of the mother as a mediator/translator on behalf of the baby.

It can be seen from the material presented how much Bernardo has adapted to the routine of care of Benjamin, exercising the same types of care as Bianca (giving the bottle, changing diapers, bathing, putting to sleep, playing, talking, etc.), even without the presence of the mother. The word routine here does not refer to automatic repetition of care, but to the elements essential for the constitution of the environmental holding, namely, the constancy and predictability necessary to establish reliability in the child's life (Winnicott, 1987/2006).

Nevertheless, to say that Bernardo exercised the same types of care as Bianca from an identified position does not mean that the care was felt identically by the baby. From the observation and reports on the dyad Bernardo and Benjamin, it was conjectured on the possibility of a father insertion in the holding offered to the child not as a substitute mother (or extension of maternal care), but as a holding with specificities that would include, according to Belo (2012) and Santos (2014), the diversity in the subjective perception of the child in relation to the environment.

Thus, the care offered (paternal and maternal) would constitute a same holding with different qualities. Differentiation would not yet be perceived by the child at this time, for it is in a state of

undifferentiation. However, qualities inserted in the holding by the direct care exercised by the father could also add elements conducive to diversity in the subjective world of the child (Santos, 2014). These elements would add to the diversity already inserted by the mother from her care.

It is essential to emphasize that the possibility of insertion of the father in the holding would only become beneficial for the psychic development of the child when a posture affectively implicated on the part of the father mobilized identificatory processes with the baby. This identification and the care derived from it would be essential because they would respect the child's primary omnipotence and would not constitute as intrusions or interruptions to the continuity of being and the subjective perception of the baby. On the possibility of a paternal holding and the understanding that this, as well as the maternal holding, adds diversity to the subjective life of the child, Belo (2012) states:

By postulating the existence of a "paternal holding" I am considering everything that concerns the touch, care and support of the baby on the part of the father. But I am not assuming that it will be beneficial to have two central techniques to be dispensed to the baby in the phase of "absolute dependence". As I have already mentioned, and I say again, at this early stage the baby needs monotony and someone to simplify its existence (so that, gradually, it can be complicated). I propose, therefore, that the participation of the father and other relatives be, in this first phase, mediated by the mother. If this participation is healthy, the mother will know to what extent she is welcome. I refer both to "taking the baby in the lap" and to participating in the care given to the baby. These should not hurt the harmony between the baby and the mother. (Belo, 2012, p.145)

In the meantime, it is important to emphasize that Bianca adopted, with Bernardo, an attitude of trust regarding the care exercised by this father. This mother did not show during the observations to feel threatened in her maternal place by the active participation of her companion in the care given to Benjamin, acting to encourage the contact between father and son. This factor was therefore considered as an element of consolidation of this father as an essential representative of environmental provision.

With this, it is understood that the possibility of insertion of paternal care as constitutive of holding offered to the newborn broadens the experiences of contact and could bring subjective implications for the infant psychic constitution. The father's lap at that moment would not be perceived as the lap of a different person or an integrality but could add some elements to the comprehension of holding established in the Winnicottian theory (Santos, 2014). In a complement to the diversity aspect elaborated by Belo (2012), below we present a discrimination and a characterization, constructed by the authors of this article, of what was chosen to denominate of Elements of Diversity. These could be part of a holding that considers the contribution of the father's presence also as a representative of the immediate care offered to the baby:

*Sensory and perceptual elements:* relative to the corporal distinctions in the holding offered by the mother or the father (different textures, temperatures, tonicities, smells, tastes, touches, heart beats, etc.). In these elements it also could be included the feeding offered by the father through the bottle, when this is a practice established by the triad.

*Psycho-affective elements:* modulated by the intersubjective and affective attunement in the father-baby dyad, considering the specificities of this link. The father could identify himself without necessarily taking the place of the mother and without abandoning his masculine characteristics. Corroborating an argument defended by Belo (2012), in his elaborations from data from his clinical practice, it is possible to think that this identification of the father with the baby would facilitate access to the relationship with the masculine and the pure female element from the father, access stemming from the fusion with the environment that supports the primary identity (being). At this early stage in which primary omnipotence is sustained, the infant and the environment are one, what is suggested from this discussion is that the father could also be part of the constitution of this primary identity acting through its pure female element.

*Spatio-temporal elements:* referring to the ways of holding the baby, considering the muscular tone different from the father and the mother and the positions in which they hold the child. It is also possible to consider in these elements the rhythm of the interaction between father and baby, including aspects of intonation, duration and volume intensity of the vocalizations addressed to the baby (nuances of environmental acoustics).

These Elements of Diversity were thought of as constitutive aspects that could have their qualities expanded by the paternal insertion in the holding from the direct care carried out by the father in a position identified with the needs of the child. It is important to rethink some Winnicottian theorization, widely examined and inserted in several studies, in order to adapt and flexibilize assumptions regarding the new contexts that have been presented in the contemporary family dynamics.

## Final considerations

This article, therefore, aimed at highlighting elements present in a father-baby dyadic interaction and mobilizing new studies that will expand the Winnicottian elaborations concerning the functions of the father in the period of absolute dependence. The problematization of this theme offers a path of possible articulations around the new places occupied by the father in the family and the implications of these changes for child development, for the family arrangement and for the construction of new gender references around fatherhood.

The family, located in the lower middle class, differently from the scientific literature, shows that a new model of fatherhood is also being built in lower-income groups. Nevertheless, traditional and patriarchal references still play a role in the constitution of the nuclear family, regardless of the populational segment, a fact corroborated by the still predominant place of the mother as the main caregiver.

Institutions focused on prenatal, childbirth and puerperium care and the various legal maintenance devices that perpetuate parental places still based on gender stereotypes of patriarchal logic, such as the short paternity leave and the non-guarantee of father participation in the childbirth also go through a process of change and moves, albeit slowly, to the direction of considering the father-mother-baby triad.

The discussion presented here was based on the in-depth exploration of a single case, which establishes limitations to the inferences and defended arguments. However, it is necessary to consider and investigate this new insertion of the father in the pregnancy-puerperal cycle in order to legitimize the father's place as a caregiver and to think about the contributions of this possible place for the infantile psychic development. This discussion, far from formulating generalizations or exhaustions, has tried to generate new questions and to mobilize future investigations around a new family dynamic that still needs to be explored.

To conclude, even if provisionally, the emblematic situation described in the introduction is retroactively resumed to reflect on two different paternal positions regarding the crying of the child in the prenatal environment. The first of these could have occurred in a way in which, given the child's crying, the father who necessarily associates the baby's demands with maternal care could face a communication (crying) that is never addressed to him, since the daddy has no milk, he has nothing else to offer right at this moment.

Another possible position, which was actually observed, is that of the father who, in the face of the crying of the child, puts himself in a position of the one who has no milk, but has something to offer through his affective implication engaged with the immediate demands of the child. This father, who does not panic or vanish, constructs other possibilities of subjective perception from the specificities of the experience lived between father and baby.

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