
Consumer Ethics and Family Relations: The Economic Side of Fathering

Ética del consumo y familia. La dimensión económica de la paternidad

RECIBIDO: 6 DE FEBRERO DE 2018/ ACEPTADO: 16 DE OCTUBRE DE 2018

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Abstract : Among contexts in which consumer ethics unfold, the family is a very relevant one because it holds a sizeable share of consumption decisions, and is intimately connected to the search and sustaining of a common life project. Based on interviews with 20 fathers cohabiting with their partners and children, we examine the role of the father in family consumption, including the progressive weakening of the breadwinner model in favor of more involved ways of male presence in the family. We explore whether fathers show any kind of ethical concern in their family consumption decisions and, if that is the case, whether those concerns are better understood through the lens of an ethics of care –as usually done in the case of mothers– or through the lens of virtue ethics –which is connected to consumers’ projects and their search for the good life.

Key Words: Care; Character, Children, Consumer Ethics; Family; Identity, Gendered Roles.

Resumen: Entre los contextos en los que se desarrolla la ética del consumidor, la familia es muy relevante, porque posee una parte considerable de las decisiones de consumo y está íntimamente conectada con la búsqueda y el mantenimiento de un proyecto de vida común. Basándonos en entrevistas con 20 padres que conviven con sus parejas e hijos, examinamos el papel del padre en el consumo familiar, incluido el debilitamiento progresivo del modelo del sostén de la familia a favor de formas más involucradas de la presencia masculina en la familia. Exploramos si los padres muestran algún tipo de preocupación ética en sus decisiones de consumo familiar y, en caso de que sea así, si esas preocupaciones se entienden mejor a través de la lente de una ética de la atención, como suele hacerse en el caso de las madres, o a través de la lente de la ética de la virtud, que está conectada con los proyectos de los consumidores y su búsqueda de la buena vida.

Palabras clave: Cuidado, Carácter; Hijos; Ética del Consumo, Familia, Identidad, Roles de Género.

I. INTRODUCTION

Consumption features increasingly as an area of moral concern. Current advertisement-fuelled consumption society receives acute criticism for promoting craving, self-indulgence, and even personality disorders. In contrast, scholars have also argued that consumption, beyond serving its primary purpose of catering to essential needs, may also fulfill such positive functions as social involvement, political awareness and identity formation. Research on ethical consumption has explored special-interest groups such as fair trade networks, dwellers of ecological cities and anti-pollution boycotters¹.

Dominant theories in consumption ethics have considered commitment to public and social issues and values to be phenomena worthy of attention². While effective and intellectually warranted, however, this focus has tended to sideline understanding of the fact that everyday consumption practices are inherently ethical, as they are part and parcel of the consumer's search for an ethically good life and contribute to the good of the community³.

A sizeable share of private consumption decisions is made within the family. While some of them may prove trivial, others may be intimately connected to the process of searching for and sustaining a morally good life for family members and for their family as a whole⁴. However, focusing almost exclusively on ethical responsibilities in the public sphere, scholars have tended to consider influence within the family a hindrance to ethically positive decision making⁵, as one of the factors that induces the attitude-behavior gap⁶ with respect to 'ethical' products such as eco-friendly cleaners⁷, recyclable diapers⁸, organic food⁹ or gender-neutral toys¹⁰. Nonetheless, other scholars have argued that caring for one's family constitutes an ethical motive, even the main one in agents' ethical development¹¹.

1 Harrison, R.; Newholm, T. and Shaw, D. (2005); Lewis, T. and Potter, E. (2011).

2 Tronto, J. C. (2013); Vitell, S. J. (2015).

3 Adams, M. and Raisborough, J. (2010); Hall, S. M. (2011).

4 Epp, A. M. and Price, L. (2008); Hall, S. M. (2011); Lindsay, J. and Maher, J. (2013).

5 Szmigin, I.; Carrigan, M. and McEachern, M. (2009).

6 Carrigan, M. and Attalla, A. (2001).

7 Black, I. R. and Cherrier, H. (2010).

8 Heath, T.; O'Malley, L.; Heath, M. and Story, V. (2016).

9 Cox, R. (2013).

10 Pugh, A. (2005).

11 Hall, S. M. (2011); Heath, T.; O'Malley, L.; Heath, M. and Story, V. (2016).

Research on the ethical dimension of family consumption has mainly focused on dilemmas that mothers face when confronted with conflicting principles, such as sustainable consumption and caring for their children¹². However, extant consumer ethics literature has devoted scant attention to the role of fathers¹³. This omission is inconsistent with the progressive weakening of the breadwinner father model in favor of more male involvement in the family, especially in child rearing but also in routine chores such as cleaning, cooking and shopping¹⁴.

In this article, we examine the role of the father in family consumption ethics. We wish to explore whether fathers show any kind of ethical concerns within their consumption decisions and, if so, whether such concerns are better understood through an ethics of care lens –as usually done in the case of mothers¹⁵– or through another theoretical lens.

To answer our research question, we conducted in-depth interviews with 20 Spanish fathers cohabiting with female partners and children to ascertain the extent to which their consumption decisions took into account moral considerations. We focused on not only the moral dilemmas they faced but also their everyday practices, as they form part of their ordinary family life.

This paper aims to extend the literature on consumer ethics by focusing on a specific type of consumer, i.e. fathers. This topic is particularly relevant to academics interested in elucidating the ethical motives behind everyday consumption practices in the family, especially the father's role in them. It may also be of interest to firms and activists interested in “new fathers” as consumers, as they constitute a new and specific target for their influencing efforts.

II. FATHERS' INVOLVEMENT IN FAMILY CONSUMPTION

The place of the father in the home has traditionally been assigned on the basis of the “earning as caring” ideology¹⁶. In the past, fathers' participa-

12 Black, I. R. and Cherrier, H. (2010); Cappellini, B. and Parsons, E. (2013); Cross, S. N. and Gilly, M. (2014); De Vault, M. (1994); Hall, S. M. (2011); Heath, T.; O'Malley, L.; Heath, M. and Story, V. (2016); Tanner, C.; Petersen, A. and Fraser, S. (2014).

13 Bettany, S. M.; Kerrane, B. and Hogg, M. (2014); Coskuner-Balli, G. and Thompson, C.J. (2013).

14 Adamsons, K. and Pasley, K. (2016); Bianchi, S. M.; Kerrane, B. and Hogg, M. (2012).

15 Heath, T.; O'Malley, L.; Heath, M. and Story, V. (2016).

16 O'Brien, M.; Brandt, B. and Kvande, E. (2007), p. 376.

tion in the domestic sphere was defined normatively by their economic responsibilities, duty to maintain discipline and the initiation of their children into adulthood. In the past few decades, however, gender roles have grown increasingly undifferentiated. The ‘good father’ is no longer the benevolent and absent provider. The idea of paternity has widened to include the aim of establishing and sustaining an emotional connection to children, becoming involved in their games and optimizing the couple’s division of time between paid work and care for the family¹⁷.

The current concept of the ‘ideal father’ includes working to sustain one’s family but also being committed to care for children, participate in household chores, and privilege the family’s needs over one’s own¹⁸. Nevertheless, fathers seem to tend to think of themselves as mere cooperators around the home and to take responsibility only or almost exclusively for stereotypically masculine tasks, such as mowing the lawn, making home improvements and playing with the children¹⁹.

According to the literature, men tend to develop masculine ways of taking care of the household, which frequently include the use of technology²⁰ and a certain degree of outsourcing for everyday tasks such as cleaning and cooking²¹. Through such activities, men try to distance themselves from culturally based, gender-related connotations associated with household chores²². For example, in many places, cooking everyday has a feminine connotation, but barbequing on the weekends is typically a masculine task, which belongs in the public sphere and is socially defined as a leisure activity, in contrast to the motherly task of cooking²³. For decades, fathers have seen this kind of extraordinary tasks as their contribution to family life. Their accounts tend to emphasize that the aim of their work at home (be it using the barbeque or building a dollhouse for the children to play) is to offer fun and educational experiences for their children²⁴. The aim is not merely to improve the home improvement or save money, as these activities resist categorization as ‘every-

17 Doucet, A. (2006); González-López, M. J. and Jurado-Guerrero, M. T. (2015); Miller, D. (2011).

18 Agirre, A. (2016); Wada, M.; Backman, C. and Forwell, S. (2015).

19 Coltrane, S. (2000); Bianchi, S. M.; Kerrane, B. and Hogg, M. (2012).

20 Bettany, S. M.; Kerrane, B. and Hogg, M. (2014).

21 Coskuner-Balli, G. and Thompson, C.J. (2013).

22 DeVault, M. (1994).

23 Coskuner-Balli, G. and Sandikci, O. (2014).

24 Gelber, S. (2000).

day home making.’ These activities afford men a way to build an identity in the domestic sphere coherent with their gender model.

A particular case of fatherly implication in domestic chores is that of “stay-at-home fathers.” Such fathers are men who have forfeited their professional career to take care of their family and household, to support their wife’s career. In current gender ideologies, at-home fathers find the ethical authority to become completely involved in the more emotional and social aspects of being a father and of family life²⁵. This circumstance, however, does not prevent them from experiencing a cultural conflict between masculinity and dedication to the home, as well as feelings of distance from domestic chores. This distancing becomes apparent, on the one hand, in the tendency to outsource the most repetitive chores, such as cleaning, and, on the other hand, in the way in which chores are taken up, such as going with the children to the park but without becoming involved in conversations with the mothers present there²⁶. In performing their role as at-home fathers, they try to reveal a (probably legitimizing) masculine dimension that is different from culturally prevailing conceptions of motherly care.

Involved fatherhood is ever more frequent²⁷. The decrease in importance of the male breadwinner model has given way to the increased participation of fathers in everyday consumption decisions. Although the masculine discourse tends to emphasize gender differences in family care, in practice, males –specially young ones– devote an increasing amount of time to caring for their families²⁸. Involved fathers include care-giving in their construction of masculinity and their ideal of what it means to be a good father²⁹.

Consumption practices often reveal themselves as a means towards asserting, sustaining and communicating personal, social and moral identities³⁰. Therefore, consumption practices constitute a privileged way to examine the construction of fathers’ identities. In the following sections, we argue that family consumption is an appropriate context for the formation of such identities.

25 Coltrane, S. and Adams, M. (2008).

26 Coskuner-Balli, G. and Sandikci, O. (2014).

27 Adamsons, K. and Pasley, K. (2016); Ajenjo, M. and Garcia Roman, J. (2011); Domínguez-Folgueras, M. (2015).

28 Ajenjo, M. and Garcia Roman, J. (2014); Bianchi, S. M.; Kerrane, B. and Hogg, M. (2012); Domínguez-Folgueras, M. (2012); Tanner, C.; Petersen, A. and Fraser, S. (2014).

III. FAMILY CONSUMPTION AND IDENTITY FORMATION

“Being a family” is a collective enterprise that looms large for many consumption experiences³¹. Some family decisions are collective because members negotiate based on both their individual interests and their commitment to their family’s well-being.

Consumption objects and practices constitute tools and resources for the expression of identities as family members and as a family³². Sharing reinforces and perpetuates affiliation and belonging to a group, as well as one’s role within the group³³. Families perform collective practices that express and reinforce their character and that are transferred from one generation to the next³⁴. Objects, brands and services are frequently included in idiosyncratic ways of communication, where they aid in building and managing fluctuating relational identities.

Families sustain their identities over time and space through everyday interaction. The literature on family consumption has frequently emphasized important or extraordinary purchases, but there are reasons to believe that ordinary consumption activities such as having breakfast or watching TV together put into relief most fundamental family dynamics³⁵. Watching TV together, for example, may jumpstart new forms of dialogue and make visible latent impulses of family identity; for example, a family may find its collective sense of humor through exchanges related to a TV program.

Some communication forms, such as rituals, narratives, social dramas and intergenerational transfers³⁶, stand out among everyday interactions in that they are especially conducive to realizing the family’s identity. A ritual is a voluntary exercise of symbolic behavior organized according to pre-established patterns³⁷ that help sustain a sense of continuity in the family’s identity over time. Family narratives are coherent, temporally structured and context-sen-

29 O’Brien, M.; Brandt, B. and Kvande, E. (2007); Tobío, C. (2012); Wada, M.; Backman, C. and Forwell, S. J. (2015).

30 Belk, R. W. (1988); Miller, D. (2001); Schroeder, J. E. (2015).

31 Cross, S. N. and Gilly, M. (2014); Price, L. (2008); Lindsay, J. and Maher, J. (2013).

32 Hall, S. M. (2011).

33 Belk, R. W. (2010).

34 Black, I. R. and Cherrier, H. (2010).

35 Cross, S. N. and Gilly, M. (2014)

36 Epp, A. M. and Price, L. (2008).

37 Braithwaite, D.; Baxter, L. and Harper, A. M. (1998).

sitive accounts of particular experiences³⁸. Families resort to these stories to remember shared experiences and to question and revise them as a way to express and contrast their collective identity with those of its members or sub-groups. Social dramas are collective responses to norm violations that prompt discussions and subsequent redressive action, such as public admonishing or correction³⁹. They constitute amenable contexts for the reinforcement or weakening of identities, depending on how the challenge is tackled⁴⁰. Typical dramas may concern two generations discussing about hairstyles, musical taste, or the use of the family's car⁴¹. The introduction of new products and technologies –e.g., mobile phones and games– may constitute also an occasion for the generation of social dramas and their attending negotiations. Intergenerational transfers within families consist of shared experiences, such as viewing photo albums together, telling family stories or handing down objects that come to have inalienable wealth⁴².

Family consumption practices include these communication channels to different extents. Each family bestows different degrees of importance on each of them and may sustain and relay them in different ways and to different extents. Family meals, for example, constitute an excellent medium to reinforce family belonging, as well as to perpetuate and reconfigure family relations⁴³. Meals allow family members to converse and share everyday stories, rituals and customs. Some families may seek strategies to overcome difficulties or barriers such as geographical dispersion or scarce time and economic resources.

IV. CARE AND THE ETHICS OF FAMILY CONSUMPTION

Opposing Kohlberg's⁴⁴ conception of moral maturity as the capacity to judge on the grounds of abstract justice principles, Gilligan⁴⁵ hold that the ethical substance of life is expressed as residing in care relationships. Care ethics differs from principle-based approaches –mainly deontology and utili-

38 Bolea, P. S. (2000).

39 Turner, V. (1980).

40 Chatzidakis, A.; Hibbert, S.; Mittusis, D. and Smith, A. (2004).

41 Epp, A. M. and Price, L. (2008).

42 Curasi, C.; Price, L. and Arnould, E. J. (2004).

43 Cappellini, B. and Parsons, E. (2012); DeVault, M. (1994).

44 Kohlberg, L. (1981, 1982).

45 Gilligan, C. (1982).

tarianism— in clear and relevant ways⁴⁶. First, care ethics is essentially context dependent, as it does not abstract from particulars to ascertain which principles should take precedence in the situation at hand, apart from the mandate to care. Agents should provide situation-based responses based on a “cognizance of interdependence”⁴⁷. Second, unlike deontological systems⁴⁸, the ethics of care does not see autonomy as an ideal to which to aspire. On the contrary, ethical agents need to realize that their lives imbricate with those of others. An ethics of care is a relational ethics. Third, an ethics of care calls for an integration of emotion, cognition and action, in which emotion seems to be preferred, in line with Hume’s dictum on reason being a slave to the passions⁴⁹. Therefore, an ethics of care stands as “a way on living one’s life and resolving personal conflicts that is driven by feelings of responsibility for enhancing the well-being of others and a sensitivity to the interpersonal consequences of one’s actions and choices”⁵⁰.

In consonance with the characteristics just mentioned, care ethics finds that the family is the primary context in which an attitude of care may develop and find expression⁵¹. In the first place, the attitude of care is inspired largely from memories of having received care, which predominantly derives from the experience of having received parental care for most agents. In the second place, families encapsulate relationships of dependency, which engender both occasions and reasons to care.

Caring for others implies a moral motive carried out through practices such as consumption⁵². Provisioning, for example, tends to target other people, usually others for whom the purchasing agent cares⁵³. Selecting goods becomes an avenue to care for the other; hence, in most cases, “love is not only normative but easily dominant as the context and motivation for the bulk of actual shopping practice”⁵⁴. As illustrated by Miller’s research, shopping for others is widespread, the purpose being not only to please them but also to

46 Blum, L. A. (1988); Blustein, J. (1991); Held, V. (2006); Tronto, J. C. (2013).

47 Gilligan, C. (1982), p. 14.

48 Kohlberg, L. (1981, 1982).

49 Noddings, N. (2013).

50 Thompson, C. J. (1996), p. 401.

51 Held, V. (2006).

52 Hall, S. M. (2011); Shaw, D.; Shiu, E. and Clarke, I. (2016).

53 Miller, D. (1998).

54 Miller, D. (1998), p. 22.

show them that one cares in practice. Understanding and credibly describing an ethics of consumption thus imply understanding that care⁵⁵.

Extant literature attributes to mothers an ethics of care, which allegedly becomes evident in family consumption practices as distinct from and, if necessary, as opposed to ecological, social or political considerations⁵⁶. Surprisingly, and despite the abovementioned changes in the role of fathers in family life, we still lack studies on involved fathers' ethical attitudes toward family consumption practices and, therefore, probably entertain an outdated idea of their potential contribution. More specifically, we ignore whether an ethics of care lens is the best approach to understanding their implication in the family through consumption. In this study, we address this gap and inquire whether fathers hold an ethics of care or, rather, feel driven by a different set of attitudes, values and principles.

The purpose of our research is to understand fathers' experience of ordinary consumption practices as part of their role as members of their families. We aim to unveil their concerns, problem sets, cognitive schemata and orientations of action. We want to explore to what extent fathers perceive and manage everyday consumption practices as part of what it means to be an "ideal father", i.e. the extent to which their consumption decisions took into account identity and moral considerations.

V. METHODS

We used an interpretive approach to explore informants' point of view. Such an approach provides insights into the experiences and feelings of consumers and the motives for their behavior.

We interviewed 20 fathers living with their spouse/partner and children. We decided to make the interviews semi-structured in order to gain an emic point of view of the informants' account of consumption and fathering practices, as well as of their interrelation and reference to their envisaged model of an 'ideal father.' We approached our interviews as phenomenological dialogues⁵⁷.

55 Heath, T.; O'Malley, L.; Heath, M. and Story, V. (2016).

56 Heath, T.; O'Malley, L.; Heath, M. and Story, V. (2016); Shaw, D.; McMaster, R. and Newholm, T. (2016).

57 Thompson, C. J.; Locander, W. B. and Pollio, H. (1989); Lareau, A. (2000).

We started our interviews with an overview of our informants' backgrounds and lifestyles, normally stimulated by a grand-tour question: "Could you tell me what you think being a father is about in your case?" We then followed this question with floating prompts⁵⁸. Subsequent questions in our discussion guide revolved around four topics: a) the activities in which they engage around the house; b) the extent to which those activities help in maintaining and furthering family relations; c) the activities that fathers do that mothers do not; and d) the ethical implications of their involvement in the family's everyday consumption. To avoid socially desirable responses, we instructed each informant to describe his family's consumption practices, communication channels (rituals, narratives, social dramas and intergenerational transfers) and motivations. As purported by our choice of method, informants spoke for the vast majority of the time, with interspersed prompts, requests for clarification or reformulations, and open questions on our part, as needed for the continuing flow of the procedure. Interviews lasted an average of 50 minutes, with a range from 35 to 90 minutes.

We set a diverse sample in terms of age, education, income and number of children. Several scholars⁵⁹ have pointed to these factors as the most influential in fathers' involvement in the house. Informants were recruited in Madrid and Zaragoza (Spain) through a snowball recruitment technique⁶⁰. Table 1 contains a summary of informants' profiles. We used fictitious names and modified personal details slightly in order to preserve anonymity without changing the essential meaning of data. Interviews were conducted between September and December 2016. We audiotaped and transcribed the face-to-face interviews verbatim.

58 McCracken, G. (1988).

59 Alberdi, I. and Escario, P. (2007); Doucet, A. (2006); Coltrane, S. and Adams, M. (2008); Bianchi, S. M.; Sayer, L. C.; Milkie, M. A. and Robinson, J. P. (2012); Adamsons, K. and Pasley, K. (2016).

60 Tepper, K. (1994).

Table 1. Informants' profiles

	Age	Education	Income ⁶¹	Children	Children's age	Occupation
CHARLES	31	High School	50	1	1	Ombudsman
SEAN	33	Secondary	30	1	3	Maintenance technician
OLIVER	34	Vocational	50	2	5 - 6	Software developer
THOMAS	34	Secondary	30	1	2	Janitor
NATHAN	36	BA	60	2	1 - 4	Journalist
MARK	37	Vocational	35	1	3	A/V technician
ALBERT	39	Masters	120	3	2 - 8	Lawyer
EARL	41	Masters	70	5	1 - 8	Event manager
BILL	42	Vocational	90	4	2 - 11	Accountant
PETER	42	Vocational	45	3	2 - 12	Network administrator
FREDDY	43	BA	120	4	4 - 12	Consultant
LEO	43	BA	30	2	2 - 5	Teacher
HENRY	44	Ph.D	70	2	3 - 5	Professor
GORDON	45	Vocational	55	4	2 - 9	Hospitality manager
DANNY	46	BA	100	3	11 - 13	Civil servant
KEITH	48	BA	80	2	17 - 19	HR executive
JAMES	50	Masters	120	4	8 - 18	Sales executive
IAN	51	Ph.D	110	3	9 - 17	Staff scientist
VINCENT	51	Vocational	30	2	11 - 15	Electrician
ZACH	54	High School	24	2	10 - 14	Bus driver

Both authors coded and discussed the transcribed interviews. No major discrepancies within the research team arose, and minor ones were discussed and resolved. Main codes used were named “consumer practices” (which include as sub-codes *meals, provisioning, transportation, holidays, celebrations, leisure, whims*, etc.); “communication channels” (which includes as sub-codes *stories, rituals, dramas*, etc.); “fatherhood” (which includes those activities carried out by fathers but not mothers; “ethics” (which includes *values, duties, feelings, moral reasonings*, etc.). Data analysis proceeded as an iterative comparison between the data, field notes, interpretations, existing theory and research ex-

61 Gross household income in Thousands of Euros.

pectations⁶². Using analytic software, we started by open coding each transcript, where we used as many in vivo codes as possible. In doing so, we intended to allow themes to emerge from the data in order to keep our codes as close to informants' vocabulary and experience as possible. Later, we focused on more experience-distant ones⁶³. After coding our field notes, codes were aggregated and set in relation to one another (axial coding). As a final analytical step, we reviewed the transcripts in search of data that might fit specific code categories (selective coding) until a saturation point on key categories was reached. We also compared the empirical data with assertions about informants' data (pattern matching) and systematically tested and revised numerous assertions as data were introduced (explanation building) in order to test for internal validity⁶⁴. To ensure the reliability of our interpretations, we invited a colleague researcher of the second author to act as external auditor of the text⁶⁵.

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Ethical concerns in ordinary family consumption

There's no room for wasting money at home because we live on one salary only. The girls know they cannot fancy stuff. Well, the elder one... we were at a mall once one rainy day, and she was looking at a tiara, one of those metallic-looking plastic ones – trash, basically. The price tag was 2. Then, she turned and picked it up, turned to me – she was nine or ten at that time – and said, “Look, look, what a beautiful tiara.” I gave her that look and told her, “Come on, that's trash, don't even think of that.” She put it back. We browsed some more and then took the lift down to the parking level to ride back to the camping area. At some point, I looked in the rearview mirror and saw two big tears running down her cheeks. She hadn't said a word. I went like, “what's wrong?” and she replied, “The tiara was really beautiful” [our respondent imitates his daughter's pitiful tone]. I felt this shiver down my spine... because, you know, those two euros you could spend on a beer [our informant gets slightly emo-

62 Glaser, B. G. and Strauss, A. (1967); Spiggle, S. (1994).

63 Geertz, C. (1983).

64 Erickson, F. (1986); Katz, J. (1988).

65 Erlandson, D. A.; Harris, E. L.; Skipper, B. L. and Allen, S. D. (1993).

tional, as evidenced by a small but noticeable break in his voice]... you sometimes indulge in small things, and she loved that tiara much more than I may love a beer. I just made a U-turn, drove back to the mall and got her the tiara. It may last two days, but she will enjoy it so much.... Actually, she lost it in a couple of days. Anyway, that gives you an idea of how she is. Maybe we have raised them well, because they don't beg for stuff and settle easily. (Vincent).

This story depicts a common, ordinary situation for many families but not a trivial one, as it contains ethically dense and complex meaning in terms of care ethics. The plot revolves around a tiara that a father and daughter value differently. For Vincent, at first, the tiara lacks any value whatsoever (“one of those metallic-looking plastic ones – trash, basically”). For this reason, he did not grant his daughter's request at first, even though she found it “beautiful.” Vincent believes that he should not grant anything his girls demand, so as not to spoil them. This moral principle, however, clashed with the experience of his sad, crying daughter, which triggered a different kind of moral reasoning, closer to an ethics of care⁶⁶. First, he worried about the sadness of his daughter and began to “care about” a problem (“care about”). Second, he understood that he had to act to “care for” his daughter and take up the responsibility of addressing her need (“care for”). Third, he drove back and purchased the tiara (“care giving”) as the material meeting of her need. In this short vignette, Vincent's moral reasoning and conflict resolution were fundamentally “driven by feelings of responsibility for enhancing the well-being of others and a sensitivity to the interpersonal consequences of one's actions and choices”⁶⁷.

There is an evident emotional side to Vincent's account. On the one hand, he feels saddened for not having realized that the tiara meant so much to his daughter. Emotions reveal to Vincent what he cares about, what it really matters to him in a situation and how he ought to respond to it. On the other hand, Vincent does not repudiate the general moral principle: even though one should sometimes grant one's children little whims, “they don't beg for stuff and settle easily.” Emotions do not pit, but blend, feelings and judgment against each other⁶⁸. In fact, Vincent understands that his responsibility as a father includes helping his children build their character. For this reason, he

66 Tronto, J. C. (2013); Shaw, D.; McMaster, R. and Newholm, T. (2016).

67 Thompson, C. J. (1996), p. 401.

68 Shotter, J. and Tsoukas, H. (2014).

proudly asserts that “[m]aybe we have raised them well.” For fathers like Vincent, ordinary consumption is one means through which they can assert, define and communicate their identity as “fathers”⁶⁹. The ethical challenge lies in balancing their responsibility toward what they deem good for their families and the need to heed the feelings and needs of each of their family members in different contexts and situations. Sometimes, both elements agree, but other times, they do not.

The surveyed fathers articulated their ethical considerations on the ethical side of family consumption around three interrelated factors: emotional connection with members of their families, a sense of responsibility toward their families’ well-being, and an ideal of paternity to which they strived to attain. We now turn to the exploration of each of these three factors.

2. Care as emotional connection

“Due to job-related reasons, we spend little time together as a family (...). My wife and I love to watch movies on the couch and eat sunflower seeds. It’s a small ritual. Being together, chilling out, and eating seeds. That’s a little communion. It creates a sense of complicity – that we are one. We hug each other. It’s a special activity. In fact, “we’ve bought sunflower seeds” means more than that. It means we’re going to be together, share a moment for us. Seeds are an excuse, if you will, to create that moment, that atmosphere, normally at night, when the lights are off and everyone is sleeping. That’s our moment. The fact that the sunflower seeds packet leaves the kitchen means something more” (Leo).

In Leo’s account, “eating sunflower seeds” constitutes a ritual – a voluntary exercise of symbolic behavior organized according to pre-established patterns⁷⁰ – that helps a couple devote time to each other at the end of the day despite being tired and having the appealing option of going to sleep. In this family’s life, an object of ordinary consumption (“sunflower seeds”) takes on relevance as an instrument and as a symbol. As an instrument, it affords a shared resting window of time after the children have gone to bed. As a symbol, a packet of seeds “means something more” than just a food, as it creates “a sense of complicity” between Leo and his wife. Eating sunflower seeds and watching a movie together become a communication channel to show mutual

69 Belk, R. W. (1988); Shaw, D.; Shiu, E. and Clarke, I. (2000).

70 Braithwaite, D.; Baxter, L. and Harper, A. M. (1998).

affection⁷¹. For this reason, “purchasing sunflower seeds” is an important way of taking care of one’s family, of being a good father.

2.1. *Sharing time*

In line with the “ideal father” ideology⁷², our informants reported that being a good father meant “spending time with your children” (Ian), “being available so that they can tell you about their stuff and ask for help” (Mark), and “keeping your door open when you’re home so that they may interrupt you” (Henry). Consider the following excerpt:

What I’m doing with my elder one these days is watching soccer [on TV]. The Champions League, that kind of stuff. He knows more about it than we do. Then he asks you, “who do you think is going to win today?”, or “which player should our team get?” These kind of questions help you open up a dialogue with the kid (Albert).

For Albert, sharing a hobby allows him to spend time with his 8-year old, listen to him and learn about his concerns, tastes and interests. Sharing time is not an end in itself but an occasion to take care of his children in a closer, more individualized way. Here, the caregiver may be caring about the recipient’s needs, in being attentive, responsive and respectful⁷³.

The families surveyed saw trips and vacations as important times to “do family.” Most of the fathers reported that what they valued the most on holidays was the chance to spend time together as a family, where they are able to share activities and experiences. It is not mostly about the destination but about “the opportunity to enjoy each other by being together” (Keith). Ian reports that although he does not enjoy skiing, he has spent several days during the winter at a ski resort with his wife (who does enjoy skiing) and their three kids, aged 17, 14 and 9. They all love skiing, and Ian does not mind waiting for them to arrive in the apartment they have rented. They have dinner together, watch a movie or play cards. He knows there are not many occasions left to share moments like these with his elder children, and he is willing to keep going in this way even though mornings may turn out to be “plain boring.”

71 Epp, A. M. and Price, L. (2008); Belk, R. W. (2010).

72 Wada, M.; Backman, C. and Forwell, S. J. (2015).

73 Shaw, D.; McMaster, R. and Newholm, T. (2016).

Some parents tried to “make their vacations memorable, so that the children could take those memories with them into adulthood” (Henry). Henry, for example, had taken his children (aged 3 and 5) to Disney World Paris. “They hadn’t asked for it,” said Henry, “but they got enthused when we told them. We have recently been to the castle of Loarre, and they can’t wait to go back.” In this way, Henry intends to transfer to his children some family memories⁷⁴, which, in the future, may strengthen a personal relationship of affect and care.

2.2. *Sharing tastes*

“I now travel to Africa quite a lot and do it for African food, but my wife and children don’t do so. I’d be excited for my children to get to like the African ways I enjoy. I usually bring sugar cane from the fields, coconuts, mango, avocados, dates... stuff from there, you know. For now, they sample it, kind of fake a little..., but they don’t really like it for now.” (Gordon)

Gordon would like his kids to get used to Guinean food, the African country where he was borne. He often travels there for business reasons and tries to bring back local products. He is adamant about getting them to like Guinean food because he is excited about the possibility of his children liking the products so close to his heart. He would like food from both Spain and Guinea to play a significant role as a shared aspect of the collective family identity⁷⁵, but it does not seem to be working so far.

As fathers, our informants tried to connect emotionally with their children by transferring their own preferences and hobbies to them through *ad hoc* rituals⁷⁶, such as taking day trips or watching TV together. Peter sometimes puts soccer on TV to watch it together with his children, but they do not enjoy it that much. He once took them to their grandparents’ to watch the Champions’ League final on pay-per-view, but they left to watch cartoons in another room instead. Peter was heartbroken. In contrast, Freddy has turned going to movies he loves into what he calls a “father-son” event.

Whenever any good Sci-Fi movie (e.g., Iron Man 3) comes up, I go with one of the elder ones on their birthdays or some other important occa-

74 Epp, A. M. and Price, L. (2008).

75 Cross, S. N. and Gilly, M. (2014).

76 Epp, A. M. and Price, L. (2008).

sion. Alternatively, we go out for lunch together. But it's only once or twice per year." (Freddy)

In some sense, the fathers know that they sometimes "project [their interests] onto their children" (Henry) and that they feel this way when they purchase objects or brands that they like, when they visit destinations or when they watch movies (e.g., Star Wars or Star Trek) that they enjoyed as children. Sometimes, these intended transfers succeed, but most of the time, they do not.

Making the most of celebrations

Holidays and birthdays are also occasions for care within the family. Albert and his family celebrate every Sunday so that his children will distinguish it from the other days of the week. As he puts it, "it's important to do it—even if it's only with chips—because that leaves a mark and helps us be happy." For this reason, he asks his children to accompany him when shopping for gifts for his wife so that they can share in the joy.

Some fathers noted how their small children ask for theme celebrations. Peter's elder one recently asked for a "pirates" birthday, and "here you have me shopping for a pirate costume, a pirate-themed plastic tablecloth, pirate glasses, pirate napkins and a pirate cake...." Peter ignores whether all this is an exaggeration stemming from a consumerist environment or an opportunity for his five-year old to develop personal inclinations, especially given that they have had 'Star Wars,' 'Hello Kitty' and 'Dora the Explorer' birthdays in past years. These "thematic" celebrations often generate narratives that families remember over the years⁷⁷, especially when a child actually develops an inclination, a hobby or a particular taste toward such a specific "theme."

These special occasions are not without risk. Some parents complain that some birthday celebrations have gone over the edge. For instance, Gordon reports that at his children's school, all children invite every other child to their birthday parties. Each invitee is expected to make a gift worth 10. "We don't go," complains Gordon. "Imagine that; I have four kids, and each of them has 25 schoolmates. I would need another salary to pay for those gifts." It is nevertheless difficult to resist, as children can be very insistent.

77 Bolea, P. S. (2000).

3. Care as responsibility

“For me, responsible consumption means consuming proximity products – those purchased not at chain superstores but at local shops or farmers’ fairs.... There may not be as many broad choices, but there is a lot of food, local stuff. To give you an example, I check whether canned food comes from China or from Peru.... I always buy national and preferably regional, stuff. That, I’m a stickler about. The same goes for fruit and groceries, which we purchase from a cooperative in our parents’ town. We usually bring stuff from there. In addition, if we don’t purchase it there, we go to the central market instead of the superstore. We try to give Mateo, our 2-year-old, healthy food – only occasionally candy. We shop this way without giving it much thought. We sometimes think about it and say, “it’s better this way.” We don’t talk about it much because we both think this way (Mark).

Mark values sustainable consumption as part of his duties as a citizen. He cares about the environment and purchases local produce. For Mark, this ethical consumption does not pose a conflict with what he owes his family, as occurs in some other households⁷⁸. On the contrary, acting in this way reassures Mark that there is always “healthy food” at home for his 2-year-old. In fact, Mark goes to such lengths as to go to the central market, which is not only much further from his home than his local superstore but also more expensive. His ordinary consumption decisions help him integrate his adherence to ecological values and his family responsibilities. For Mark, care may be defined in terms of activities, consumption among them, that “enhance or maintain our world in order for us to live in it as well as possible”⁷⁹.

Unlike Mark, other surveyed fathers do not see “caring for their world” as including sustainable consumption practices. Some of them find this task relatively uninteresting and exhausting. Others reckon that “it could prove more or less interesting”; however, they “do not have time for that,” they “do not trust the information on the labels, given the generally low level of truthfulness in society” (Ian). Like Mark, these fathers make evident their sense of responsibility toward their families, but they do so according to different values and behavioral norms.

78 Szmigin, I.; Carrigan, M. and McEachern, M. (2009); Heath, T.; O’Malley, L.; Heath, M. and Story, V. (2016).

79 Tronto, J. C. (2013), p. 19.

3.1. *Setting values and norms*

“I think that we’ve succeeded in persuading them progressively of the fact that there can’t be an ongoing tug of war about what they fancy when they check out the shelves at the supermarket because we’d go mad then. They need to consume responsibly, as we instruct them to do. We share our reasons for buying specific products with the kids. ‘Why do I choose this or that? Well, check out the price tag’ or something like that. Some of them understand it easily, but others may reply, ‘I want the custard with the sticker.’ And I’ll say, ‘yeah, right, but it’s more expensive. Listen, are we buying custard or stickers? If it’s stickers you want, well, then let’s get stickers.’ It’s a little bit... what we call ‘responsible consumption.’ (...) yes, I know that we’d all want to purchase more expensive things, but...” (Freddy).

Freddy understands that the responsible consumer is the one who makes decisions based on sensible, reasoned arguments, not on impulse. He tries to instill that criterion in his children. Most fathers interviewed, such as Freddy, worried about consumerism in today’s society. “Consumerism dries the brain and leads nowhere – only to stupidity or the belief that everyone is going to look at you because you’re wearing in a certain product” (Ian). Our informants also agree with those in other studies⁸⁰ that the current consumerist climate may induce vices in their children. Concurrently, and for this very reason, they consider consumption activities to be an occasion to foster positive values in them. In line with other consumers⁸¹, our informants view consumption practices as a relevant context for instilling values such as generosity, responsibility, solidarity and abnegation in their children.

For some informants, a taste for austerity runs in their families. For others, it has been a recent discovery, spurred by the financial crisis. Many surveyed families reported having learned to keep their spending below their earnings. Most of the surveyed fathers, however, noted that austerity did not constitute a non-intended consequence forced upon the family because of resource scarcity. In contrast, they saw it as a moral value that fathers try to inculcate in their children. Keith, for example, highly values their children not submitting to caprice. To that end, he indulges them with as few requests as possible and has struggled to develop – as other fathers have⁸² – a shared cri-

80 Barber, B. (2008); Schor, J. B. (2014).

81 See Hall, S. M. (2011); Capellini, B. and Parsons, E. (2013); Cross, S. N. and Gilly, M. (2014).

82 Lindsay, J. and Maher, J. (2013).

terion at home, namely, that each gift or extraordinary purchase has to be commensurate with its motive (e.g., a birthday). Resisting, however, tends to be difficult. Henry shares with Keith the “commensuration criterion,” but he finds it more difficult to resist the requests of his 5- and 3-year-olds when they shop together on Saturday morning. For this reason, he is trying to lay down some red lines, which he fears will be more difficult to uphold once his kids reach their teen years.

Perseverance and patience are other values that parents associate with consumption experiences. Freddy defines one of his sons as “a pest” because “he says, ‘I want an iPhone 6 now!’ Well, so do I! But I tell him that I have been waiting for a long time to purchase it and that I have worked a lot to earn the money it costs.” Freddy does not know whether his son will forget about the iPhone soon, but he at least takes the advantage to educate him. Bill took advantage of his daughter’s effort to collect yoghurt lids in the hope of winning a prize. To reward her perseverance, Bill bought her a tablet and told her that she had gotten it from the yoghurt company and that she had to share it with her little brother. Entangled with these decisions is the idea of passing these morals of consumption down to your children, as a responsibility of fatherhood.

Some fathers understand that consumption decisions are good inasmuch as they help their families achieve a higher good. James wants his children to realize that consumption will take you only that far – that one is no happier for “having a lot of stuff.” They need to know that they have to renounce to things because one cannot have everything. James believes that beyond a certain threshold, consumption constitutes a threat to children’s education. He would like his children to be austere because they will then be able to learn other values, such as being sensitive and solidary with people in need.

A large proportion of the surveyed fathers thought they were caring for their children by educating them in austerity and frugality, where they deny them material gratifications on a regular basis. This educational task frequently required intense and protracted negotiations. Some fathers singled out the management of electronic TVs and gadgets as the most controversial arenas.

3.2. *Managing TV and gadgets*

The surveyed fathers had mixed feelings concerning the role of TV in the upbringing of their children and their family lives. On the one hand, they try to curb TV consumption in order to leave more time for the family to talk

and for small children “to play among themselves” (Oliver). Other families, however, have discovered that they enjoy watching together some TV series that have “sucked them in” (Danny) to a similar extent, especially with grown-up children. Danny, for example, likes “The Simpsons”: “We all like it. I like it very much and think it’s the most regular family on TV.”

Fathers regard norms regulating the use of TV, mobile devices and computers as very important. “Otherwise, they [children] will eat us whole. They’re always negotiating” (Bill). They are also aware of the fact, however, that it is not easy to enforce them and that they progressively relax them as their children grow older. Some fathers forbid the use of videogames on weekdays because they “suck them in; they isolate the kids” (Danny). To ensure that they children do not become individualists and self-centered, the TV, tablets and mobile phones are off during meals. James, however, reckons that this rule does not always hold, at which moment “we tell them, hey, are we together or not?” In Gordon’s home, tablets are allowed to aid homework during weekdays, but gaming is only possible during weekends.

Consumption decisions on tech devices involve regular and complex negotiations that take into account not only affordability but also the ways in which a product might be used and valued⁸³. In these negotiations, identities and relevant relations emerge and change (e.g., the minimum age to own a cell phone, whether they may be used at the table or in the afternoon or at night)⁸⁴. The outcomes of such negotiations may prove demanding to not only sons and daughters but also fathers themselves.

When the night comes, I tell them [his sons and daughters] to leave their cell phones on my nightstand. During the day, they should leave them in the hall upon their return from school. I leave mine there, too. We manage to survive that way. Sometimes, my elder one tries to wiggle away. He’ll say, ‘I gotta check something out,’ or ‘I need to set the alarm.’ Then, I tell him, ‘I’ll wake you up.’ Some Saturdays, he says, ‘I have a soccer match tomorrow, so I’m going to keep my cell,’ but I reply with something like, ‘get your watch instead, buddy.’ So, we get into this swas-hbuckling. Sometimes, I catch him red handed, such as at 1 am on his *Whatsapp*, but what can you expect from a 17-year old? That’s normal.” (Danny).

83 Hall, S. M. (2011).

84 Epp, A. M. and Price, L. (2008).

Danny tries to prevent his children from becoming addicted to their cell phones, to which end he is ready to submit himself to the same norms he establishes for them. However, he understands that, despite his efforts, the battle will be difficult, and negotiations, ongoing.

Many fathers try to put off or limit access to mobile phones and games but claim that it is a very difficult task because of their children's insistence, fueled by peer pressure and advertisements. As in the case of Danny, this typically constitutes an occasion for social dramas that prompt discussions and corrections⁸⁵, the reinforcement of values and norms or, ever more frequently, their actual weakening⁸⁶. Elder fathers reported that their children had a much better command of all these gadgets. At Zach's home, all family members gather to watch a TV series. In fact, his two children are watching a different series on their own mobile phones, but he has given up on scolding them, as he believes that being together in the same sitting room is enough. In many homes, small children decide which programs the family watches: Disney movies or cartoons. The fathers wish to share these moments with their kids, even though they tend to reckon, as Earl does, that "once you've watched the same movie for the tenth time... well... their mother and I move to the sitting room and have some quiet time together."

At Earl's, and many other informants' homes, TV plays an "interesting role of baby-sitter" (Nathan), as cartoons allow breakfasts to be quiet and help relax the atmosphere before children go to bed. In addition, as Nathan adds, "if you're at a café with friends and don't want them to bother you but don't want them to fall asleep either, then you loan them the tablet so that they can play a game. You need to administer the dose..." as one would do with a drug. These cases show that the fathers try to balance caring for their children, their wives and themselves through the strategic use of resources, in a very similar way as caring mothers⁸⁷.

3.3. Negotiating with grandparents and relatives

For the surveyed fathers, dealing with grandparents also usually proves arduous. Grandparents educate their grandchildren in their particular way by allowing them to act in a way that fathers normally forbid, such as watching TV lying on the couch, eating supersized portions of ice cream or having

85 Turner, V. (1980).

86 Chatzidakis, A.; Hibbert, S.; Mittusis, D. and Smith, A. (2004).

87 Noddings, N. (2013).

lunch in special places. Some fathers prefer to uphold their “red austerity lines” and allow grandparents to transgress them as a means of reward or exception, which they also consider educational and which the “kids remember very fondly” (Keith).

However, most surveyed fathers found it difficult to manage gifts by grandparents and relatives, as they often go against the grain of what they want to inculcate in their children. Charles is a recent dad; his elder daughter just turned one. He has spoken extensively with his wife about how best to raise their child from the very beginning. They agree about trying not to let her be capricious by avoiding providing her whatever she may request. Against this desire, however, stand their own parents, who have vowed to purchase tons of things for the baby.

“If you talk to them (*grandparents*) clearly and consistently, they’ll reckon you’re right. But, in the moment of truth, they all do what they want, and that starts a tendency. The house ends up full of stuff. You don’t know what to do with it. We’ve gotten two bathtubs and more clothes than she’ll ever be able to use. Stuffed animals, we have tons of them. I don’t know what we’re going do with them!” (Charles).

Negotiations with grandparents extend into areas such as feast days. Earl reported being distressed upon seeing gifts pile up on Christmas day.

“I don’t like at all going to my parents’ to pick up the gifts, to my siblings’ to pick up some more, to my in-laws’.... Going from house to house is a pain in the neck; I’d rather stay home and let kids play with what they have. At the end of the day, they spend the day going back and forth and don’t play at all. But, it’s a lost battle. I don’t know why I take offense, because there’s no use in it. It’s a lot of gifts, but the grandparents say, ‘let me buy them whatever I want’.” (Earl)

Celebrations, such as Christmas or Thanksgiving, become climatic moments because “it is during extraordinary meals that collective family identity is reinforced and perpetuated”⁸⁸. They constitute occasions on which to give and receive affection, which makes managing them tricky.

“We tend to celebrate Christmas with my wife’s family and New Year’s Day with my folks. I try to change it and limit it. I’d like to go places with my wife and a family we know on New Year’s Day. They have a house in

88 Capellini, B. and Parsons, E. (2013), p. 130.

the Sierra where we could go. But, grandpas still hold the baton; they organize our holidays to some extent. They try to arrange things. It's a constant tug of war. Both our families blackmail us emotionally, like 'why don't you come... we're very sad if you don't,' and that kind of stuff. I guess all grandpas do it, but it's a hard situation for us." (Peter).

Care is often fraught with conflict, as there are usually more needs than caring capabilities⁸⁹. For fathers like Charles, Earl and Peter, "consumption becomes both a context and a tool for negotiation within the family"⁹⁰, a negotiation that extends to their own character development.

4. *Fathers' character development*

"Before getting married, I was a little more whimsical. Maybe I had a different take on life. I used to care for particular clothes, brands, and gadgets..., but when we got married, we said, 'we need to have a bigger car' because we wanted to have kids. We bought the biggest there was, a station wagon, a pretty neat one. It was loaded with technology...; it had all these extra features. Once we had our third one, we couldn't fit three car seats in the back. We then purchased a no-frills seven-seater (bare bones, really). Well, it had A/C, but that was about it. We wanted to spend as little as possible. And most of the extras are superfluous. We used the DVD player in the first car, but then you find out it's not as useful as you thought. We stopped using it because kids get sucked in. Don't take me wrong, it gives you a quiet ride, but you can also teach them to behave without the aid of those gadgets. You play their [children's] music..., and sometimes you play it for your own fun in the morning, sing along and think, 'man, this is too much' (*laughs*).' So, that's basically it; you play their music and talk to them about what we're going to do, about their cousins we'll meet when we arrive" (Earl).

Earl's narrative and practices act a means of reflecting and constructing his personal ethics⁹¹. Earl realized that his family life had changed his worldview. He used to be "whimsical" and loved the possessions that he now ignores. After purchasing his first car, he thought the DVD player would pay off by helping his children avoid boredom. Now, he considers that those gadgets

89 Shaw, D.; McMaster, R. and Newholm, T. (2016).

90 Cross, S. N. and Gilly, M. (2014), p. 455.

91 Hall, S. M. (2011).

are useless because experience has taught him that talking to them seems preferable. He uses his children's music to connect to them and talk about their interests. To his surprise and joy, Earl finds that –even when riding alone– he now listens and sings pleasurably to his sons' music, which he "sometimes" even enjoys. Caring has become part of his character as a father and taken precedent over a taste for particular brands, clothes or gadgets.

Most of the fathers in our study reported holding the responsibility to meet their children's needs, even if that meant going against their spontaneous inclinations (e.g., "acting as a chauffeur during weekends") (Freddy). Freddy would like to go more often to the gym, play tennis with his friends and generally have more time for himself instead of bringing his children to play school sports on the weekends. However, he claims, "it's not the end of the world," in line with Miller's (1998) claim that most consumers will subordinate their personal desires to a concern for others and that this choice will be legitimated as love.

The fathers are aware that consumption may be a powerful occasion for family members to develop their ethical character, see consumption as a powerful way to inculcate values – both negative and positive – and understand that they play an important role in these processes. They also realize that relaying such values requires that they live by them themselves. As the literature on consumption and virtues suggests⁹², consumption activities offer fathers an occasion not only to educate their children but to improve themselves. "We want them to be austere and try to be an example. Otherwise, we'd be doing them a disservice" (Bill). In doing so, they emphasize the pivotal role of commitment in care and caring⁹³. Owing to this commitment to making and sustaining family life, they get involved in a practice in which they acquire and develop specific virtues⁹⁴.

Most of our informants acknowledge noticeable differences between fathers' and mothers' way of caring through ordinary consumption. Shopping is a fertile ground for these differences to become evident. Bill claims that his wife goes shopping for clothes with the children because he lacks the requisite patience. Last time he went shopping, he purchased ten shirts and a jacket in half an hour, but she spent three hours and ended up purchasing nothing. When shopping, she sees things that he does not. She excels in originality,

92 García-Ruiz, P. and Rodríguez-Lluesma, C. (2014); Gentina, E.; Tang, T. and Gu, Q. (2016).

93 Blustein, J. (1991).

94 MacIntyre, A. (2009).

while he tends to excel in execution. Earl also believes that he lacks the patience of his wife with respect to shopping. Maybe for this reason, when the children are getting ready for school, she chooses what they will wear, and he “encourages them to get dressed quickly.” Patience is also important when putting the little ones to sleep. It is supposed to be a pleasant moment because this is when they speak the most about what happened during the day; however, Albert reported that they mostly talk to their mother, perhaps because he tries to get them to sleep as soon as possible.

Concerning house chores, our informants’ reports seem to confirm the literature⁹⁵ in that a noticeable difference is observed between older and younger fathers. Ian (51), James (50) and Keith (48) do not go shopping or engage in bricolage or any other activity. In contrast, younger fathers are more heavily involved in household chores. Most of them regularly cook at home. Some do so only on weekends, but others do on a daily basis, especially when kids take their lunch boxes to school. For some of them, this is their main contribution. For others, such as Nathan, Charles, and Mark, cooking is part of their habitual chores: readying breakfast, taking the kids to school, picking them up at 5:00 pm, helping them with their homework, bathing the children and putting them to sleep at about 9:00 pm, right before his wife comes home from a grueling job.

Even so, most of the surveyed fathers declared that mothers took better care of, or connected better with, their children. At Henry’s, every afternoon is patterned by the same ‘protocol’: bath, dinner, teeth brushing, five minutes of reading and prayers. It is Henry who takes care of everything when his wife is away, which frequently occurs because of her habitual late arrival from work. Henry, however, claims that “even though, because of our schedules, our kids spend more time with me than with my wife, I think that they have more fun with her.” Similar claims come from other fathers.

From these accounts, virtues such as patience, attention to detail and originality seem difficult for fathers. Fathers, however, recognize themselves as having qualities such as efficacy and swiftness. The development of these sets of different virtues is probably a way of including care giving in their construction of masculinity⁹⁶. At any rate, the assertion that mothers always act as “default parents”⁹⁷ seems less warranted than usually assumed.

95 O’Brien, M.; Brandt, B. and Kvande, E. (2007); Bianchi, S. M.; Sayer, L. C.; Milkie, M. A. and Robinson, J. P. (2012); Adamsons, K. and Pasley, K. (2016).

96 O’Brien, M.; Brandt, B. and Kvande, E. (2007).

97 Tanner, C.; Petersen, A. and Fraser, S. (2014).

VII. CONCLUSION

Our informants see everyday family consumption activities as an ethical arena in which to be “good fathers.” For some of them, this means something close to “organizing and paying for, my children’s leisure,” as the “earning as caring” paradigm⁹⁸ would predict. For most of them, however, being a “good father” rests on the principles espoused by care ethics.

Our data strongly indicate that men also care, confirming what some literature on care suggests⁹⁹. Our informants try to embody a version of pater- nity that includes, as Timmons¹⁰⁰ suggests, an intellectual component (being aware of family members’ needs and knowing how to attend to them), an af- fective component (emotionally sharing in their successes and failures in mee- ting those needs), and a motivational-behavioral component (desiring, wi- thout self-interest, to help them meet their needs).

Many fathers – especially younger ones – perform ordinary domestic chores such as shopping or cooking. They also consider these tasks to be an occasion to spend more time with their families and share activities with their children. These activities sometimes become family rituals, such as the cele- bration of children’s birthdays, the collective trip to the supermarket on wee- kends or the choice of movie on Saturday nights. In doing so, fathers practice family consumption as a privileged means to care for their family’s well-being. They use communication channels such as rituals, narratives, intergenerati- onal transfers and social dramas to ascertain and meet their family’s needs, to connect with them emotionally, and to help them in appropriate ways.

Further, fathers consider family consumption practices to be a way to instill important ethical values, such as generosity, responsibility, patience, soli- darity, abnegation and, above all, austerity, in their children. Our informants evaluated consumption goods and activities according to their contribution to the moral development of children and the non-market practice of making and sustaining their family life.

Consumption decisions occasionally place moral dilemmas on fathers, such as ‘should I yield to my child’s insistent requests, or should I abide by my initial criterion?’ and ‘should I allow grandparents to give children the gifts

98 O’Brien, M.; Brandt, B. and Kvande, E. (2007).

99 Tronto, J. C. (1987); Held, V. (2006); Noddings, N. (2013).

100 Timmons, M. (2002).

they wish, or should I prevent them from doing so by appealing to my responsibility as a father?’ Many fathers face these dilemmas from a contextual perspective of a narrative nature¹⁰¹. They need to exercise good judgment to solve or, at least, determine how they may handle problems ‘best’ on an on-going basis¹⁰².

Both care and virtue are present in the nature and structure of fathers’ rationales and justifications for their role in their family’s consumption choices. For these fathers, taking care of their family means not only identifying its members’ needs, sharing their emotions or helping them in projects but also fostering a moral character in them. Moreover, the fathers in our study – though to differing degrees– acknowledge that they too have to live the proper virtues for making and sustaining a family if they are really to care. In this respect, they agree with Noddings¹⁰³: virtue ethics is a necessary complement to care ethics.

These fathers’ experiences help us understand that care is not self-directing. It requires good judgment to care for the right object, in the right measure, and for the right reasons. Fathers know this too well because family consumption requires continuous negotiations with spouses, children, grandparents and other relatives. Furthermore, the virtues of, for example, generosity or courage seem necessary to move from deliberation into action: to have the guts to move from ‘caring about’ to ‘care-giving’ despite internal and external difficulties and against the odds of exhaustion, conflict and their own personal defects. Virtue ethics, in turn, cannot ignore care ethics because the latter emphasizes the importance of an emotional connection with others. In helping perceive the relevant aspects of a situation and, consequently, helping adapt behavior to the particulars of the case, emotions play a key part in character development.

This study also offers a vivid image of an emerging model of fatherhood that has to be understood in the context of the blurring of gendered distinctions¹⁰⁴. The figure of the new father allows the expression of newer discourses of caring masculinity and nurturance to be appropriate¹⁰⁵.

101 MacIntyre, A. (2009).

102 Shotter, J. and Tsoukas, H. (2014).

103 Noddings, N. (2002).

104 Del Bucchia, C. and Penaloza, L. (2016).

105 Bettany, S. M.; Kerrane, B. and Hogg, M. (2012).

Our study shares the typical limitations of other empirical, exploratory studies regarding sample size and informants' sociocultural contexts. However, the close link between virtue ethics and care ethics exposed in our study may shed light on further research. In addition, considering the relationships between care and character may help us more profoundly understand the motives behind the acquisition and use of 'ethical' or sustainable products within consumers' search for a good life.

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