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# **Pathways to fatherhood:**

## Exploring men's communal intentions and engagement through the lens of parental leave

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## Summary

This dissertation contributes to the emerging research field on men's underrepresentation in communal domains such as health care, elementary education, and the domestic sphere (HEED). Since these areas are traditionally associated with women and therefore counter-stereotypic for men, various barriers can hinder men's higher participation. We explored these relations using the example of how men's interest in parental leave – as a form of communal engagement – is shaped across different stages of the transition to fatherhood. Specifically, we focused on how gendered beliefs regarding masculinity and fatherhood, the possible selves men can imagine for their future, and the social support men receive from their normative environment relate to their intentions to take parental leave and their engagement in care more broadly. In Chapter 2, using experimental designs, we examined how different representations of a prototypical man, varying in stereotypic agentic and counter-stereotypic communal content, affect men's hypothetical intentions to take leave and their communal possible selves. Findings suggested that a combined description of a prototypical man as agentic and communal tended to increase men's parental leave-taking intentions as compared to a control condition. In line with contrast effects, also an exclusively agentic male prototype tended to push men towards more communal outcomes. In Chapter 3, in a cross-sectional examination of the parental leave-taking intentions of expectant fathers, we found first evidence for a link between male prototypes and men's behavioral preferences to take parental leave after birth. Yet, the support that expectant fathers received from their partners for taking parental leave emerged as the strongest predictor of men's leave-taking desire, intention, and expected duration. In Chapter 4, using longitudinal data collected during men's transition to fatherhood, we studied discrepancies between men's prenatal caregiver and breadwinner possible selves and their actual postnatal engagement in each domain. Results suggested that fathers, on average, expected and desired to share childcare and breadwinning rather equally with their partners but had difficulties translating their intentions into behavior. The extent to which fathers experienced discrepancies was related to their attitudes towards the father role and the social support they received for taking parental leave and engaging in childcare. Moreover, experiencing a mismatch between their expected, desired, and actual division of labor had consequences for fathers' intentions to take parental leave in the future. Across the empirical chapters, we found that men generally had high communal intentions and did not consider care engagement as non-normative for their gender. However, men continue to face barriers that prevent them from translating their communal intentions into behavior. We outline strengths and limitations of the present research given the emerging nature of the research field. Moreover, we discuss implications for future research on men's orientation towards care as well as implications for how to foster the realization of communal intentions into actual behavior.

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# **1 Chapter: Introduction**

## **1.1 Men's underrepresentation in communal roles and its opportunity costs**

During the past decades, women's gender roles have shifted significantly, with more and more women entering the workforce, receiving degrees in higher education, and taking up traditionally male-dominated roles and occupations. Despite considerable progress towards gender equality, a slowing or halt in women's advancement has been observed, depending on the examined domain and country (England, 2010; England et al., 2020; Sullivan et al., 2018). What is more, men have been even slower to embrace traditionally female roles – roles that have been summarized under the acronym HEED (Health care, Elementary Education, and the Domestic sphere; Croft et al., 2015). Communal roles are another related term used throughout this thesis and are derived from the basic content dimensions of agency and communion (Abele & Wojciszke, 2014; Bakan, 1966). Communion implies an orientation towards others and subsumes traits and behaviors stereotypically associated with women, such as being caring or helpful (whereas agency is stereotypically associated with men and includes an orientation towards the self as well as content related to assertiveness and competence; Abele et al., 2008, 2016; Abele & Wojciszke, 2014). Careers in nursing or elementary education can, thus, be described as communal and counter-stereotypic for men. In fact, men account for only 10-20% of registered nurses and elementary or middle school teachers in the United States, Belgium, and Germany (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2020; Healthy Belgium, 2019; Statistisches Bundesamt, 2018; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). In the domestic domain, fathers have increased their involvement in childcare over the years, but women still bear most of the responsibility and time investment (e.g., Sayer, 2016; Steinbach & Schulz, 2022; Sullivan, 2013; Wei, 2020). Time use studies found that mothers spend roughly one hour per day or almost eight hours per week more on childcare than fathers (Samtleben, 2019; Yavorsky et al., 2015). Regarding housework, women's and men's involvement became more even cross-nationally, with women reducing and men increasing their hours. Still, progress has slowed down during the past decades, and men's relative contribution remains limited (Altintas & Sullivan, 2016). Similarly, men's parental leave<sup>1</sup> uptake continues to rise, and some countries,

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this dissertation, we define parental leave as the time parents take off work to care for their young child. Depending on the respective policy, this can be an individual right or family right, may entail income replacement or job protection (or not), and can also apply to non-employed or self-employed parents. In contrast to parental leave, paternity leave is an individual entitlement for fathers that is often taken shortly after birth for short periods of time (Koslowski et al., 2022). The findings presented in this doctoral thesis generally pertain to (paid) parental leave. Thus, the term parental leave instead of paternity leave or paternal leave is used

such as Sweden or Finland, are approaching almost equal shares between women and men (Eurofound, 2019). At the same time, fathers make up less than 10% of leave takers in many European countries such as Hungary or Spain, and the leave duration for fathers falls significantly below that of mothers (e.g., mothers take ten times longer leave than fathers in Denmark; Eurofound, 2019).

The lack of male representation in communal roles is a significant issue, as studies have shown that not only men who take on such roles can benefit themselves but also their families and society as a whole. In general, communally oriented people who care for the welfare of others tend to have higher well-being themselves but also in their relationships (Le et al., 2013, 2018). Well-being is also increased (and distress lowered) through the attainment of communal goals (e.g., improving patience in parenting or making compromises in relationships; Sheldon & Cooper, 2008). On a societal level, higher gender equality in a country (e.g., in terms of men's higher involvement in unpaid care work) has been linked to men's increased well-being, lower chances of committing suicide relative to women, suffering from depression or violent deaths, and experiencing divorce (Holter, 2014). Being a father relates to a healthier lifestyle by providing men with increased feelings of purpose in life (Mahalik et al., 2020). Moreover, higher involvement with their children correlates with fathers' higher well-being (Knoester et al., 2007) and lower depression scores (Bamishigbin et al., 2020). If men share domestic labor more equally with their partners, this supports women in pursuing their careers and being financially independent (Croft et al., 2019; Dunn et al., 2013; Juncke et al., 2018; Meeussen et al., 2019). Yet, not only men's partners are supported in pursuing non-traditional roles such as breadwinning but also their children can benefit from non-traditional role modeling through their parents' gendered beliefs and division of labor. Evidence exists that girls have less stereotypical occupational goals depending on their fathers' beliefs about and share in domestic labor (Croft et al., 2014). Also, children's broader development is positively affected by having an involved father, for example, in terms of their cognitive development and their behavioral and psychological adjustment (net of other factors that may explain such associations; Jia et al., 2012; Lamb, 2010; Sarkadi et al., 2008). Lastly, when considering men's communal engagement in the workforce, the high demands for health and care workers can be met more easily if men consider these occupations more for themselves (see Lacey et al., 2018).

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predominantly (for more details on the leave policies in the countries of data collection, see Subchapter 1.3 on the current context).

An example of the wide-ranging effects of men taking on communal roles can be seen in parental leave. Taking parental leave can increase fathers' satisfaction with their current job and, by that, their general life satisfaction (Kramer et al., 2019). Moreover, fathers' leave uptake benefits parental relationships, for example, in terms of relationship stability, relationship quality, and co-parenting quality (Lappegård et al., 2020; Petts, Carlson, et al., 2020; Petts & Knoester, 2019). Recent experimental evidence also showed that expected male access to parental leave positively impacts well-being – especially for women – and men's and women's expectations for increasing their involvement in gender-nontypical domains (Moss-Racusin et al., 2021). In addition to women's well-being, granting fathers flexible leave can also be beneficial for mothers' perinatal health outcomes (Persson & Rossin-Slater, 2019). From children's perspective, fathers' time off work has been linked to children perceiving their fathers as more involved, feeling more closeness to their fathers, and experiencing better communication (Petts, Knoester, et al., 2020). In addition to these parties, positive consequences of communal engagement via men taking up parental leave have also been shown in grandparents' increased progressive attitudes towards gender equality (Unterhofer & Wrohlich, 2017) and in colleagues' willingness to take parental leave (Bygren & Duvander, 2006). On a societal level, the provision of parental leave for fathers has been linked to more egalitarian gender attitudes in women and men, for example, concerning female employment (Omidakhsh et al., 2020; Tavits et al., 2023; for a review, see Schober & Büchau, 2022). Thus, men's parental leave-taking can provide multi-layered leverage towards gender equality. In the present doctoral work, we look at parental leave-taking as an instance of communal, counter-stereotypic engagement for men. While we consider parental leave to be a particularly effective tool due to its multilevel effects, we, nevertheless, assume that the present findings can be applied to other communal roles and behaviors and discuss the implications for men's broader engagement in care.

Given men's underrepresentation in parental leave uptake and care work more generally, the overarching goal of this doctoral research was to develop a clearer understanding of what influences men's intentions to take parental leave and to be involved in care. For this, we first examined internal factors related to the internalization of communion and care into men's perceptions of their gender group, their social role as a father, and their future self. Second, we considered external factors in the form of social support and the extent to which support from men's environment may relate to their parental leave-taking intentions and engagement in care. In the following sections, I give a brief overview of current knowledge on barriers to men's parental leave-taking and describe the contexts in which we collected data,

focusing on respective leave policies. Next, I present the broader theoretical basis of how gender roles and gender stereotypes develop and why men remain underrepresented in traditionally female care domains. I then focus on the key constructs that have been studied in relation to men's parental leave-taking in the present research: male prototypes, father role attitudes, possible selves, and social support. Lastly, I provide an overview of the rationale and methodology used in the three empirical chapters and how they are linked to the objectives of this dissertation.

## **1.2 Barriers to men's parental leave-taking**

Parental leave represents a promising starting point for men's increased participation in communal roles. As parenthood is considered a period of transition within the life course (Elder & Shanahan, 2007), attitudinal and behavioral changes are especially likely to occur at this time (Brooks & Bolzendahl, 2004). However, attitudes towards gender roles and the division of labor often become more traditional for first-time mothers and fathers (Baxter et al., 2015; Endendijk et al., 2018; Katz-Wise et al., 2010). Reasons for this are seen in the adaptation to societal expectations, identity changes, and institutional conditions such as the (restricted) availability of childcare facilities (Baxter et al., 2015). Parental leave constitutes a possible way to counteract the movement towards more traditional gender roles during the transition to parenthood. Evidence exists that men's leave-taking enables them to act more as equal co-parents than helpers to mothers carrying the main responsibility (Rehel, 2014). When looking at concrete behaviors such as changing diapers, feeding their baby, and getting up at night with the baby, men who took parental leave were more likely to fulfill those tasks 8 to 12 months after birth (Tanaka & Waldfogel, 2007). In fact, men's parental leave-taking has been linked consistently to higher father involvement during and after leave (especially for longer leave lengths; Almqvist & Duvander, 2014; Bünning, 2015; Haas & Hwang, 2008; Meil, 2013; Nepomnyaschy & Waldfogel, 2007; Petts & Knoester, 2018; Schober & Zoch, 2019).

Although parental leave can add communal aspects to men's lives and can result in the mentioned benefits, several barriers keep men from taking this opportunity. Prior research uncovered a variety of demographic, legal, organizational, and psychological causes (see Beglaubter, 2017). For example, couples often state financial reasons for why men as the main providers can take only short, if any, periods of parental leave (Almqvist, 2008; European Commission, 2018; Marynissen et al., 2019; Samtleben, Bringmann, et al., 2019). Relevant demographics of men and their partners that affect these choices are also age, educational level,

## CHAPTER 1

socioeconomic status, employment status, parenthood status, relationship status, and urban or rural living (Almqvist, 2008; Berrigan et al., 2021; Brandt, 2017; Geisler & Kreyenfeld, 2011, 2019; Marynissen et al., 2019; Trappe, 2013a, 2013b; Vogt & Pull, 2010). Furthermore, the specific form that the policy takes influences the decision. Non-transferable leave policies prescribing that a specific amount of time can only be taken by fathers increase the likelihood of men taking parental leave in comparison to gender-neutral policies that can be taken up by women or men. Moreover, job protection and the level of wage replacement are central aspects of policies that influence men's decision (Brandth & Kvande, 2009; Castro-García & Pazos-Moran, 2016; Karu & Tremblay, 2018; McKay & Doucet, 2010; Ray et al., 2010). Among the additional explanations are furthermore organizational norms at the father's job regarding parenthood and active fathering, but also ideal worker norms and coworker support (Borgh et al., 2018; Haas et al., 2002; Haas & Hwang, 2009, 2019a, 2019b; Kaufman & Almqvist, 2017; Samtleben, Bringmann, et al., 2019). More technically, the employees' status at the company (e.g., length of employment), the general type of company or occupation, and the extent to which flexible work arrangements are offered affect the feasibility of taking leave (Bygren & Duvander, 2006; Geisler & Kreyenfeld, 2011; Miyajima & Yamaguchi, 2017). From a psychological perspective, the fathers' wish to take parental leave to, for example, foster a close relationship with their child is crucial for their leave-taking decisions (Beglaubter, 2017). However, gendered norms regarding masculinity and parenting and the related backlash (i.e., social and economic sanctions), if norms are violated, can create a barrier for men's leave-taking (Almqvist, 2008; Brandth & Kvande, 1998; Duvander, 2014; Hyde et al., 1993; T. Johansson, 2011; Rudman & Mescher, 2013; Schmidt et al., 2015; Steffens et al., 2019; Vogt & Pull, 2010). Often, men also have false, overly negative perceptions of peer norms regarding communal engagement and parental leave-taking (i.e., pluralistic ignorance; Miyajima & Yamaguchi, 2017; Van Grootel et al., 2018). Furthermore, essentialist beliefs about parenthood and cultural norms can hinder men's leave-taking, such as a strong emphasis on "breast is best" (Moss-Racusin et al., 2020). Such norms pressure mothers to breastfeed and prioritize female instead of male caregiving (Beglaubter, 2017; Bueno & Grau-Grau, 2021; Faircloth, 2021; also see Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018). Generally, how parental leave is shared is a decision usually made as a couple. Therefore, the (female) partners' career or family orientation, their gatekeeping, and trust in fathers' competencies, but also potential feelings of entitlement to take larger shares of the available leave length (in the case of transferable leave) contribute to the leave that is allocated to fathers (Beglaubter, 2017; Brandt, 2017; Cannito, 2020; McKay & Doucet, 2010).

### 1.3 The current context

Due to differing policy schemes, men's parental leave-taking depends on the national context. Thus, a brief overview of the regulations in Belgium and Germany, where we collected data, follows. In Belgium, job-protected parental leave ("*ouderschapsverlof*") is available to each parent for a total leave of up to four months. Recipients must have been employed (not self-employed) with their current employer for at least 12 months during the past 15 months. Employees working full-time can also take various forms of part-time leave (i.e., 50%, 20%, 10%). The available leave is an individual entitlement for each parent and can be taken up to the child's twelfth birthday. The income replacement is comparatively low at roughly 800€ per month (or respective portions of this amount if leave is taken part-time) and paid via federal health insurance (Koslowski et al., 2022; Rijksdienst voor Arbeidsvoorziening [RVA], 2022). In 2021, 34% of leave-takers in Belgium were fathers (vs. mothers) who predominantly used it as a flexibility measure to combine work and family. Sixty-three percent of fathers took one day of leave per week, and 20% took half a day per week or one day every two weeks (Koslowski et al., 2022).

Additionally, a paternity leave ("*geboorteverlof/vaderschapsverlof*") of 20 days (15 days until 2022) is available for employed fathers. This short-term leave must be taken during the first four months of the child's life and can also be taken in half days. For the first three days of leave, employees receive their full daily gross salary, paid by their employer. For the additional days, they receive 82% of their daily gross salary, which is paid via health insurance funds (Federale Overheidsdienst Werkgelegenheid, Arbeid en Sociaal Overleg [FOD], 2023). Roughly 50,000 fathers took paternity leave in 2020 for an average of seven days (Koslowski et al., 2022; with roughly 114,000 births that year; Statbel, 2023; yet, we are not aware of data stating how many fathers were eligible to take paternity leave).

In Germany, job-protected paid parental leave ("*Elterngeld*") is available for up to twelve months; yet, parents can receive an additional two months if both parents take leave for at least two months. Thus, parents are entitled to a total amount of 14 months of parental leave. Regulations for part-time leave also exist ("*ElterngeldPlus*"), and combining work and childcare is encouraged by the opportunity to work part-time during leave and by the provision of an additional four months of part-time leave if both parents work part-time ("*Partnerschaftsbonus*"). However, recipients do not need to have been employed before the leave period; thus, unemployed or self-employed parents are also eligible. If taken full-time, parents can receive parental leave within the first 14 months of their child's life, whereas they

can claim part-time leave until the 32<sup>nd</sup> month of life. Benefits are higher than in Belgium, with parents receiving 65 percent (or up to 100 percent for low earners) of the average net income of the last 12 months before the birth (capped at 1800€) or a minimum of 300€ (all paid through government funding/taxation; Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend [BMFSFJ], 2022; Koslowski et al., 2022). In Germany, the proportion of fathers taking parental leave has increased over the recent years, following a policy change in 2007 that introduced the two non-transferable ‘daddy months’ (Bünning, 2015; Geisler & Kreyenfeld, 2019). In 2016, 36% of fathers took parental leave compared to 21% in 2008 (Samtleben, Schäper, et al., 2019; Statistisches Bundesamt, 2017). However, in 2018, 72% of those took parental leave at most for the duration of the non-transferable period (i.e., up to two months in Germany; Samtleben, Schäper, et al., 2019).

Scholars have described both Belgium’s and Germany’s leave policies as viewing men as “incidental collaborators” in childcare (Castro-García & Pazos-Moran, 2016) due to either short amount of highly paid leave that is reserved for fathers or the longer but insufficiently paid leave. Advantages for fathers in Belgium’s policy are the individual entitlements for fathers to short but highly paid paternity leave as well as four months of parental leave with, however, low income replacement. In contrast, Germany offers less non-transferable leave for fathers. While fathers could technically take up to 12 months of leave, this period is shared with mothers, and only two months are non-transferable between partners. Nevertheless, benefits in Germany can reach up to 1800€ (compared to ca. 800€ for parental leave in Belgium), and a broader population than employees is eligible to receive benefits.

### **1.4 Theoretical background**

#### **Development of gender roles and gender stereotypes**

After setting the stage regarding the national contexts in which we collected data, I now outline the theoretical rationale for examining men’s take-up of parental leave. To understand why parental leave and communal roles more generally conflict with traditional male prescriptions, I describe how gender roles and gender stereotypes develop and are perpetuated. Social role theory (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Wood, 2012) provides a suitable framework for understanding why communal engagement is counter-stereotypic and, therefore, less pursued by men. To understand gender differences and similarities in behavior, Eagly and colleagues draw on the concept of social roles (i.e., gender roles in the case of gender): shared expectations about the appropriate behavior and attributes of members in a society (Biddle, 1979; Sarbin &



Allen, 1968; as cited by Eagly & Karau, 2002). For women and men, gender roles have emerged that ascribe breadwinning and high-status positions, such as leadership, to men. In contrast, women are expected to be engaged in childcare and domestic labor and to be employed in care-oriented occupations. The authors trace these role beliefs back to the gendered division of labor that was originally based on physiological differences between women and men and the environment they found themselves in. Due to men's average larger size and higher strength, they were more suited for physical labor in societies focused on hunting, collecting, and cultivating. In contrast, women took on caregiving activities due to predispositions in childbearing and breastfeeding. As women and men were observed in these gender-specific roles, beliefs formed that attributes and skills connected with these roles were also gendered (for empirical evidence on how observations of behavior shape stereotypes, see Koenig & Eagly, 2014).

Such shared beliefs about the innate attributes of women and men are called gender stereotypes. Most of the content of these stereotypes can be categorized into two fundamental dimensions. These dimensions have received different names, such as masculinity and femininity, competence and warmth, or agency and communion (Abele et al., 2021; Abele & Wojciszke, 2014; Bakan, 1966; Bem, 1974; Fiske et al., 2002; Spence et al., 1975). I use the terms agency and communion throughout my thesis when referring to these dimensions. Following Abele and Wojciszke (2014), we chose these terms as they are a) established terms in the research field, b) can comprise the subdimensions *warmth* and *morality* for communion and *competence* and *assertiveness* for agency (Abele et al., 2016), and c) are less charged with lay interpretations contrary to, for example, masculinity and femininity.

Agency subsumes attributes and behaviors that are oriented towards the self and refer to the attainment of goals and tasks, such as being intelligent or self-reliant. Communion means an orientation towards others, social interactions, and relationships, but also ethics and social values, and is exemplified by attributes and behaviors, such as being sensitive or loyal (Abele et al., 2008, 2016; Abele & Wojciszke, 2014). As men's labor was predominantly associated with strength and status, agentic traits were inferred and continue to be assigned more to men than women. Women's labor, meanwhile, was characterized by the care for others, which is why communion is traditionally more strongly associated with women (Wood & Eagly, 2012). Nevertheless, following women's advancement in the workforce and non-traditional fields and positions, competence is increasingly ascribed to their gender group. Although men tend to ascribe communion more to themselves, change in gender stereotypes is less clear cut and

lacking behind, similar to men's engagement in non-traditional domains (Eagly et al., 2020; Hentschel et al., 2019).

Thus, gender stereotypes and beliefs about appropriate gender roles are formed by observing how labor is divided between women and men. Thereupon, different processes ensure their preservation. First, social role theory accounts for the influence of biological processes. The role of hormones is described as being activated by interpreting social situations (i.e., a perceived competitive context releasing testosterone or a perceived interpersonally connecting context releasing oxytocin) and as reciprocally making certain behaviors more likely (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Wood & Eagly, 2012; also see Bakermans-Kranenburg et al., 2019). How situations are interpreted depends on personal expectations and gendered identities, which emerge as people internalize gender stereotypes to a certain extent into their sense of self. Gender identities are then used as a standard against which personal behavior is evaluated and possibly adapted in a self-regulatory process. Lastly, social regulation exerts influence as people expect to be and often are rewarded for role-congruent behavior and sanctioned for role-incongruent behavior (e.g., through positive or negative evaluations). Thus, social role theory neither takes on a fully social nor fully biological perspective but explains the emergence of gender roles and stereotypes through the interplay of both (Eagly & Wood, 2012; consistent also with recent accounts of the literature on brain/hormone – environment interaction; for a review see, Fine, 2017). Gender stereotypes that have formed through observing the gendered division of labor and are maintained through biosocial processes, in turn, contribute to women and men selecting stereotypical roles for themselves, creating a vicious cycle between stereotypes and role engagement (Eagly & Koenig, 2021).

### **Men's underrepresentation in communal roles**

Croft and colleagues go one step further than social role theory in their theoretical model on barriers to men's engagement in communal roles by theorizing why men's gender roles show more inertia than women's (Croft et al., 2015). A major reason they indicate is the higher status commonly ascribed to men (see Adams et al., 2007) and the agentic traits and behaviors associated with them (Conway et al., 1996). Consequently, it is more desirable and more endorsed for women to adopt counter-stereotypic, agentic roles to enjoy the related higher status (Schmader et al., 2001), whereas for men, participating in communal roles represents an activity that is counter-stereotypic *and* of lower status. Hence, men face a double barrier while women either engage in counter-stereotypic but high-status behavior or in lower-status but role-congruent behavior. Thus, the lower status of communal roles magnifies the effects of gender

stereotypes on men's interest in communal roles. The model further includes two pathways through which gender stereotypes relate to men's communal orientation (Croft et al., 2015). According to the first, internal route, men's internalization of communion is impeded because they a) lack male role models who demonstrate communal engagement, b) learn from an early age that agentic traits and behaviors are more strongly associated with their gender and rewarded than communal ones, and c) because their environment actively fosters gender-typical qualities through socialization efforts. Through these mechanisms, men integrate communion less into the traits they ascribe to themselves, their personal values, and their possible selves (i.e., their future-oriented self-concepts; Croft et al., 2015. For more details, see later section on possible selves.). As people generally aim to bring their life pursuits in line with their personal values and identities, men tend to show lower interest in communal careers and behaviors (Diekmann et al., 2010, 2017).

However, men's interest in communal roles is further influenced by external barriers in addition to these internal barriers. A first external barrier, which is often mentioned with regard to men's parental leave-taking, is financial costs. Communal occupations often entail lower salaries than non-communal ones, and communal engagement can also cause a loss of earnings, for example, due to low income replacement during parental leave or subsequent lower earnings (England et al., 2002; E.-A. Johansson, 2010; Ray et al., 2010). Psychological barriers are identity threats that men can face when pursuing communal roles. Research on precarious manhood claims that men's gender identity is "harder won and more easily lost" compared to women's (Vandello & Bosson, 2012). Thus, whereas women's gender identity is more essentialized, men must gain and reaffirm their status more than women through stereotypically gendered behaviors such as aggressiveness. Another strategy besides aggressiveness is to assure masculinity by avoiding femininity. Therefore, engaging in traditionally female communal engagement can elicit threats to the masculine identity and consequently lower men's interest in such roles (Bosson & Vandello, 2013; Vandello et al., 2008; Vandello & Bosson, 2012). Related to these threats is the third external barrier proposed by Croft and colleagues (2015): social sanctions and discrimination. Such sanctions, which are also called backlash, can result from counter-stereotypic orientation (Chaney et al., 2019; Moss-Racusin & Rudman, 2010; Rudman et al., 2012; Steffens et al., 2019). For example, seeking flexible work arrangements resulted in more considerable penalties for male employees than female employees because flexibility seekers were evaluated as less masculine and more feminine (e.g., as warmer but less career-oriented; Vandello et al., 2013). Also, when specifically requesting a family leave, such

as parental leave, men faced a femininity stigma which put them at risk of receiving work-related penalties such as a demotion (Rudman & Mescher, 2013).

Taken together, the outlined processes form a number of internal and external barriers to men's interest in and pursuit of communal roles. In the following sections, I build on Croft's model but also extend it by a) considering male prototypes as a proxy of what it means to be a man and differentiating prototypes from stereotypes as well as norms, b) further considering the father identity in addition to the male identity, and the relevance of attitudes towards the father role, c) examining men's possible selves in relation to their communal engagement, and d) going beyond barriers to men's orientation towards care by also considering facilitators in the form of social support.

### **Male prototypes as representations of what it means to be a man**

Throughout my thesis, I studied prototypes – a construct that has received relatively little attention so far in social psychological research on gender (for exceptions, see, e.g., Danbold & Bendersky, 2020; Derks et al., 2018; Ehrlinger et al., 2018; Goh et al., 2022; Peters et al., 2012; Redford et al., 2016; Sesko & Biernat, 2010). Even when prototypes were considered, as in the given examples, research was focused on women's issues and traditionally male-dominated fields such as computer science or firefighting instead of men's engagement in communal roles. I, thus, aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the role of prototypes for men's communal orientation and define the term in the following as well as differentiate it from related terms such as stereotypes or norms. Furthermore, I relate the construct of prototypes to previous examinations of masculinity conceptions and men's parental leave-taking.

Prototypes have been defined as “the ideal-type member of a category that best represents its identity in a given context and frame of reference” (Wenzel et al., 2007, p. 335; Oakes et al., 1998). Prototypes were introduced in the context of categorization and self-categorization theory (Rosch, 1978; J. C. Turner et al., 1987). Both sources, however, stress that thinking of different degrees of prototypicality is more appropriate than the idea of one fixed prototype. This relative rather than absolute understanding is also evident from the definition given in self-categorization theory. Here, prototypicality is defined through the meta-contrast ratio, the ratio of differences to outgroup members and similarities with ingroup members (J. C. Turner et al., 1987). The more an individual embodies both what a group represents and what differentiates the group from others, the more prototypical of the group the individual is perceived (Oakes et al., 1998). However, speaking of a group prototype can be more accessible than speaking of relative prototypicality, which is evident from the frequent

use of the term in social psychological research (e.g., Danbold & Bendersky, 2020; Derks et al., 2018; Goh et al., 2022; Kim & Wiesenfeld, 2017; Peters et al., 2012). In that case, a prototype can be understood as the best example of a category, and the degree of similarity to the prototype determines whether individuals are categorized as group members (Oakes et al., 1998). Accordingly, group members do not all share the same attributes, and rather than fixed entities, prototypes represent fuzzy sets of characteristics, attributes, and behaviors that best describe similarities within a group as well as distinctions from other groups (Hogg et al., 2004, 2012; Oakes et al., 1998). Hence, a notable feature of prototypes and how they are defined is the emphasis on their flexibility and the context in which categorization takes place. As the degree of prototypicality depends on comparisons with the ingroup and the outgroup, prototypicality – and with it prototypes as a highly prototypical position – can vary according to the intergroup context. This context dependency also differentiates prototypes from stereotypes. Whereas both contain information about characteristics, attributes, and behaviors of group members (Hilton & Von Hippel, 1996; Hogg et al., 2012), stereotypes can be considered broader generalizations of typical features of group members, while prototypes leave room for variability and adjustment by accounting for the intergroup context. Nevertheless, prototypes and stereotypes are often used interchangeably (e.g., McPherson et al., 2018), and their differentiation becomes more difficult when operationalizing the constructs in empirical research (see Chapter 5: General Discussion).

Another construct that is sometimes used interchangeably with prototypes is norms (see Hogg et al., 2012). Social norms are differentiated into descriptive norms (i.e., what group members typically do) and injunctive norms (i.e., what group members should do; Cialdini et al., 1990). A different term for injunctive norms, which is often used in the gender context, is prescriptive norms. Prescriptive norms prescribe which traits and behaviors are appropriate for women and men, whereas proscriptive norms contain gendered proscriptions. Men are prescribed to be and act in agentic ways but are proscribed communal traits and behaviors, and vice versa for women (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Prentice & Carranza, 2002). Importantly, such norms are consensual, socially shared standards for expected behavior (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). In contrast, Hogg et al. (2012, p. 262) describe prototypes as “an individual’s cognitive representation of what he or she believes to be the normative properties of the group”. According to the authors, this differentiates norms and prototypes since individual group members could theoretically disagree about the most prototypical position. However, such a divergence is unlikely, given ongoing social interaction and social comparison between group members (Hogg et al., 2012). Another distinguishing feature of prototypes in contrast to

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stereotypes or norms is their potential to draw group members towards them. According to Turner et al. (1987), group members are evaluated positively depending on their degree of prototypicality, and relative prototypicality can influence access to resources and privileges associated with group membership. In intergroup contexts, relative prototypicality for a superordinate category can legitimize high intergroup status (Wenzel, 2004; Wenzel et al., 2007). These processes suggest that prototypes represent an ideal and that group members strive for high degrees of prototypicality to reap the benefits associated with this position.

Taken together, although prototypes have conceptual overlap with stereotypes or norms, they stand out in their properties of being variable and context-dependent and representing individualized – although often shared – perceptions of group features in ideal-type form. In the context of men's gender roles, we, therefore, considered prototypes as the most suitable construct to capture an individual's understanding of what it means to be a man and how men's personal and variable convictions about masculinity shape their intentions to take on communal roles such as parental leave.

This notion aligns with first evidence on the role of masculinities in men's parental leave-taking. As most prior research was conducted from a sociological perspective, researchers drew heavily on the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In Western and many other societies, hegemonic masculinity represents the predominant form of masculinity and is characterized by the dominance of men over women. While it is highly present in societal discourses and practices, it does not mean that most men are characterized by and behave in line with hegemonic masculinity. Rather, it represents an "ideal" due to its benefits for men, such as societal power. As becomes apparent from this conceptualization, hegemonic masculinity is one form of masculinity, but other forms can coexist. Also, the hierarchy of masculinities can change according to time and context. Moreover, Connell and colleagues emphasize the relational character of gender and the fact that hegemonic masculinity is defined in relation to other masculinities as well as femininity (Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). As such, parallels to the concept of prototypes are evident, such as the understanding that not one but numerous forms of masculinities and ideas of a prototypical man can exist, that these represent ideals that men strive to fulfill, which can, however, change according to context, and are constructed in relation to outgroups such as women.

In fact, a variation of masculinities, which developed against the backdrop of hegemonic masculinity, are caring masculinities. Elliott (2016) defines caring masculinities through the rejection of men's dominance over women and the embracing of care for masculine identities.

Such an understanding of masculinities contributes to increasing gender equality as domination is rejected, whereas emotionality, interdependence, and relationality are emphasized. Although the ideal of caring masculinities is becoming more popular, it has not replaced hegemonic masculinity. Instead, men need to negotiate different expectations of themselves and others based on these masculinity “ideals” (Hunter et al., 2017).

This renegotiation of what it means to be a man in light of varying masculinity ideals is evident in research on men’s parental leave-taking. For example, although parents valued men’s parental leave-taking highly in a study by Schmidt et al. (2015), caretaking continued to be primarily associated with women, and men’s leave was considered a bonus that was only enacted when adequate and beneficial for men. Moreover, the difficulty in embracing caring masculinities becomes visible by the apparent need to reframe men’s leave-taking as a courageous and, therefore, traditionally masculine act or as hard work (Beglaubter, 2021; Brandth & Kvande, 2018; Schmidt et al., 2015). Thus, in existing research, first insights have been gained as to how contesting forms of masculinity may influence men and fathers during and after their parental leave-taking decisions. We aimed to complement these findings gained from sociological, qualitative studies by examining masculinity and men’s parental leave-taking through the lens of male prototypes. In addition to this consideration of men’s gender group, we were interested in the role of men’s gender role as a father for their orientation towards care.

### **From gender group to gender role: Men becoming fathers**

During the transition to parenthood, a new identity is added to men’s lives: that of being a father. Although the father identity is nested within the male identity, recent examinations of the transition to fatherhood suggest that notions of being a man and of being a father may conflict (Lewington et al., 2021; also see Crespi & Ruspini, 2015; Habib, 2012). Fatherhood can make aspects of caring and emotionality more prominent in men’s lives which may feel incompatible with men’s idea of masculinity (Lewington et al., 2021). Thus, we aimed to examine the roles of masculinity and fatherhood beliefs simultaneously in understanding men’s parental leave-taking and communal involvement more broadly. On the one hand, we focused on men’s beliefs about their gender group and what a man should be like by examining prototypes of men. On the other hand, we studied men’s beliefs about their gender role as a father and to what extent they saw their responsibility as a father in breadwinning and childcare.

Research on differences between male and father stereotypes suggests that the father role may provide more flexibility for men to engage in caretaking. Findings from 20 years ago

indicate that female stereotypes were expected to change more in the future than male stereotypes due to related role change (Diekmann & Eagly, 2000). Yet, more recent research suggests that at least one male identity – that of being a father – is perceived as dynamic and expected to change in the future (Banchefsky & Park, 2016). Even currently, stereotypes regarding fathers are less restrictive than those towards men in terms of stereotype content: Fathers are stereotypically seen as possessing more positive communal traits (e.g., cheerful, friendly, and sensitive) and less negative agentic traits (e.g., arrogant, controlling, and stubborn) than men who chose not to have children (Ciaccio et al., 2021). Moreover, stereotypes concerning fathers and those of men do not overlap considerably, with men again being perceived more negatively and less communal than fathers. These differences between gender and parenting stereotypes are also larger for men than for women (Park & Banchefsky, 2018).

Given these gaps in ascriptions to men versus fathers, we were interested in how men's perception of fatherhood matters for their parental leave decisions, in addition to their ideas of a prototypical man. Men themselves could have integrated care more into their emerging fatherhood identity than their male identity, facilitating communal engagement. In terms of fatherhood, we were especially interested in men's *role* beliefs concerning their responsibility as a father for breadwinning and childcare. Especially in the case of gender, prototypes and stereotypes often contain information about appropriate behaviors and even social roles (Rudman & Glick, 2021). However, we chose the terminology of father role attitudes as it arguably captures such role beliefs best. The more often used terms in research are gender role attitudes or related constructs such as gender ideology, attitudes about gender, gender-related attitudes, or gender egalitarianism (Davis & Greenstein, 2009). In their review of gender ideology, Davis and Greenstein (2009) suggest that using a specific term depends on the researchers' conceptualization and understanding of the constructs or journal preferences (likely in addition to standards of the respective research field). However, all these terms have in common that they usually refer to beliefs about the division of paid work and family spheres and how women and men should ideally share these (Davis & Greenstein, 2009).

Prior studies on men's engagement in care differed in their focus on attitudes towards women's roles or men's roles. Consequently, evidence tended to be mixed, especially for whether gender attitudes are predictive of men's parental leave-taking. Although less traditional gender role attitudes were indeed found to be positively related to fathers' leave-taking in some studies (Duvander, 2014; Hyde et al., 1993; Vogt & Pull, 2010), others failed to find significant relations (Berrigan et al., 2021; Stertz et al., 2017). We identified a limitation here in the lack of differentiating between attitudes towards gender roles generally and the father role more



specifically (also see McDonnell, 2018). In past research, items mainly were focused on attitudes towards women's and mothers' gender roles (e.g., "Ultimately a woman should submit to her husband's decision."; Hyde et al., 1993; "Women who are strongly committed to their jobs cannot be good mothers at the same time."; Stertz et al., 2017). Yet, when looking at men's communal engagement, how men see their own role as a man and father does not have to mirror their attitudes towards women's roles and could be more closely related to their interest in caregiving. Moreover, many measures of gender role attitudes were developed when a traditional division of labor was endorsed and do not tap into men's involvement in caretaking (for similar discussions, see Buchler et al., 2017; Walter, 2018a, 2018b). Thus, a goal of the present research was to specifically examine how men's beliefs about their own role as a father relate to their interest in parental leave and caregiving. Moreover, examining father role attitudes as an instance of men's gender role beliefs complemented our analysis of representations of men's gender group in the form of male prototypes.

### **Possible selves: Seeing a communal future**

Men's gender beliefs can affect not only concrete intentions such as taking parental leave but also men's general views about their future and whether they can imagine engaging in care then. Individuals' visions of themselves in the future are also called their possible selves, the future-oriented aspects of the self-concept (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Oyserman & Horowitz, 2022; Oyserman & James, 2009, 2011). Through their focus on the future, possible selves allow for an exploration of identity content and can be more malleable than the current self (Dunkel, 2000; Markus & Nurius, 1986), possibly making consideration of counter-stereotypic communal content more likely for men. Thus, we examined men's possible selves across the transition to parenthood as indicators and drivers of men's orientation towards care: First, we tested whether different representations of a prototypical man can affect the degree to which men integrate communal content into their possible selves. Second, we studied discrepancies between expectant fathers' possible selves and their actual experiences regarding the division of childcare and breadwinning after birth.

Possible selves can be divided into what an individual would like to become (desired self), is afraid to become (feared self), and expects to become (expected self; Markus & Nurius, 1986). Possible selves can, therefore, be positive or negative in valence and provide a standard against which current actions are evaluated (i.e., whether they contribute to achieving a desired self or preventing a feared self). In providing such an evaluative framework, they also inform the current self, even though they are future-oriented. In addition, they represent standards

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against which future actions are considered. The desire to achieve positive selves or avoid negative ones can, thus, be an incentive and motivator of behavior. From this also follows that possible selves are relevant for forming goals and the motivation to pursue them (Cross & Markus, 1991; Markus & Nurius, 1986). For example, if an expectant father has a desired self of being highly involved in the daily caregiving of his child, he could be more motivated to take parental leave to bring him closer to his desired self.

Possible selves do not emerge in a vacuum but are shaped by, for example, the cultural context and relevant social identities (Cross & Markus, 1991; Frazier & Hooker, 2006; Oyserman & James, 2011). A man who believes being a man means to be highly agentic but not communal may consider communal engagement less for himself in the future (also see Croft et al., 2015). Similarly, attitudes towards the father role likely shape men's breadwinner and caregiver possible selves and to what extent men expect to be engaged in these social roles. However, although possible selves are socially embedded, they are not universal for group members but represent individual self-knowledge based on personal experiences (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

In general, possible selves are characterized by their variable and malleable nature. Markus and Nurius (1986) link possible selves to the working self-concept, which represents those parts of the self-concept that are currently cognitively present. This means that different possible selves can be activated based on situational factors. Moreover, possible selves are not fixed over time: Whereas people strive for consistency in their current selves, possible selves are more malleable for new identity content. One facilitator of this malleability is that possible selves are seldomly shared with others but rather negotiated privately by the individual (Cross & Markus, 1991). However, Croft et al. (2019) updated this isolated understanding by providing evidence for how women's possible selves are shaped by their expectations for men's role engagement. When heterosexual women were primed with men's higher involvement in caregiving, either through family-oriented exemplars or change in gender roles, the women's possible selves became less traditional. Thus, women expected more to become their families' primary breadwinners and less to become the primary caregivers, depending on the state of men's gender roles and role engagement. While first evidence exists then for how women's counter-stereotypic possible selves can be activated through male gender roles, we were interested in whether men's own possible selves would also prove more malleable for counter-stereotypic content than the current self-concept. Because possible selves are partly informed by social identities and seem receptive to primes of counter-stereotypic content, an objective of

the present thesis was to examine how different representations of a prototypical man can affect the degree to which men integrate communal content into their possible selves.

Another objective was to better understand men's possible selves during the transition to parenthood. Possible selves have often been examined from a developmental perspective, focusing on which possible selves are salient during different life phases and how they relate to adjustment during these phases (Frazier & Hooker, 2006; Oyserman & James, 2011). Transitions between life phases, such as the transition to parenthood, represent disruptive periods in which possible identity content can be re-evaluated. In fact, evidence has been gained on parents' development and change of parenting possible selves and how possible selves relate to father involvement. For example, Hooker et al. (1996) showed that possible selves related to parenting are indeed highly salient for young parents besides their job-related possible selves. Whereas for parents of infants, desired selves in the realm of being a good parent dominated, feared selves became more prevalent for parents of older children, likely because of the higher autonomy that goes along with children aging. Moreover, parenting seemed equally central to mothers' and fathers' future-oriented self-concepts. However, mothers named feared selves more frequently than fathers, which the authors explain via gender role expectations and mothers' traditionally higher responsibility for childcare (Hooker et al., 1996; also see Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018).

In an examination of men's possible selves during the transition to fatherhood, Strauss et al. (1999) found that the importance that men put on their parenting selves was linked to their childcare engagement, but also to what extent ideal and actual selves overlapped after birth. More recent research on parents' identity structures across the transition to parenthood found that parents rather accurately predicted prenatally which content would be more central to their possible selves after birth (Manzi et al., 2010). However, parents approached expected and desired possible selves more than they avoided feared selves. Nevertheless, both desired and feared selves had consequences for parents' postnatal well-being in that achieving desired selves was related to increased positive affect, whereas the fulfillment of feared selves was linked to more negative affect (Manzi et al., 2010).

A reoccurring pattern in these examinations of possible selves during the transition to parenthood was the importance of whether future-oriented possible selves matched actual experiences after birth. Reaching ideal selves and avoiding feared ones contributed to higher father involvement and well-being (Manzi et al., 2010; Strauss & Goldberg, 1999). When examining men's interest in non-traditional communal roles, it is, therefore, interesting to study their possible selves regarding the social roles of breadwinning and caregiving. Prior research

gained insights into parents' expectations and realities for the division of labor during the transition to parenthood (e.g., Ascigil et al., 2021; Biehle & Mickelson, 2012; Mitnick et al., 2022). However, research specifically addressing men's visions for their future as fathers is lacking. In addition, we know little about predictors of the extent to which fathers experience discrepancies between their expectations, desires, and actual experiences or about the consequences of experiencing discrepancies. In the present research, we, therefore, aimed to link men's beliefs about their gender group and their social role as a father to the experience of discrepancies regarding the division of labor and how such discrepancies relate to men's interest in taking parental leave.

### **Social support as a facilitator of men's communal engagement**

Following the distinction of internal and external factors for men's communal engagement (Croft et al., 2015), the outlined objectives of this dissertation focused on the internalization of communion and care into men's idea of a prototypical man, their father role attitudes, and possible selves and respective relations to men's parental leave-taking intentions. As an external factor, we additionally considered the role of men's normative environment for their parental leave-taking and how much social support men perceive from important others to engage in care. In their model of contributors to men's interest in communal roles, Croft and colleagues mainly focused on external *barriers* such as financial costs, identity threats, or social sanctions (Croft et al., 2015). We extend this notion by considering social support as a *facilitator* of men's engagement in care, in addition to barriers.

Social support is defined as "psychological or material resources that are provided to a focal individual by partners in some form of social relationship" (Jolly et al., 2021). Different forms of social support have been distinguished for dealing with stressful situations: informational support (i.e., providing information to better understand an issue and advice on how to solve it), instrumental support (i.e., providing concrete actions and assistance), and emotional support (i.e., providing nurturance, warmth, and empathy; Taylor, 2012). Yet, some definitions of social support include not only the provision of support but also the perception that forms of support would be provided if needed (Taylor, 2012). Moreover, Feeney and Collins (2015) proposed social support as a tool not only for dealing with adverse situations but also with ones that provide opportunities for growth and development. Dealing with adverse as well as challenging situations, such as parenthood, with the help of social support can, thus, contribute to individuals' thriving in the long term (Feeney & Collins, 2015).

Social support can also stem from different sources of support. In the work domain, the organizational context can be perceived as supportive, but individuals such as supervisors or coworkers can also function as support sources. Also in the family context, a generally supportive family environment can be present, but the partner often represents an essential source of support in the private sphere, especially for men (French et al., 2018; Taylor, 2012). Although both women and men benefit from social support, women are generally more likely to seek support and provide it (Taylor, 2012). Besides work and family spheres, social support can also be received via friendships, larger personal networks, and even from strangers (Taylor, 2012).

Generally, receiving social support or knowing that support is available can have positive effects, for example, in terms of health and well-being (Cohen & Wills, 1985; House et al., 1988; Taylor, 2012; R. J. Turner, 1981) or for combining work and family responsibilities (French et al., 2018; French & Shockley, 2020). Evidence also exists for the supportive effects of social relationships for engaging in non-traditional gender roles and domains. Important others can signal via their support that they encourage counter-stereotypic behavior, such as women entering STEM fields or men engaging in HEED domains. By that, potential identity threats and discrimination can be reduced or dealing with backlash can be facilitated (see Croft et al., 2015; Meeussen et al., 2020). In fact, perceived support from close others such as friends or family was positively related to women's sense of belonging in counter-stereotypic STEM majors at university (Rosenthal et al., 2011) and feelings of self-efficacy to pursue mathematics-related careers (Zeldin & Pajares, 2000). Moreover, getting prepared from other minority members for potential adversities and stereotyping helped women's and Blacks' feelings of fit in engineering (Campbell-Montalvo et al., 2022).

Whereas the role of social support for women's counter-stereotypic engagement has been studied, research on men in communal roles is scarce. In one of the few studies, Schreiber et al. (2023) examined how social support can buffer men's identity threats. They found that receiving social support from their personal environment was related to men identifying more with their father role, expecting to receive more respect for taking care of their children, and hiding their childcare engagement less. Moreover, social support moderated the relation between men having a lower social status than their partners (i.e., a potential masculinity threat) and their intentions to hide their engagement in childcare (Schreiber et al., 2023). Additionally, receiving social support seems to help men deal with the negative consequences of traditional masculinity ideals. For example, the relations between gender role conflict regarding restricted

emotionality that men experienced and the accompanying psychological distress were mediated by social support in a study by Wester et al. (2007).

Although research on social support and men's non-traditional role engagement more broadly is scarce, the role of social support for fathers has received greater attention. Broadly speaking, fathers experience more social support than childless men due to the increased purpose in life that goes along with parenthood (Mahalik et al., 2020). Still, during the transition to fatherhood, men often report feeling left out and marginalized from formal sources of support and thereby feeling unsupported in preparing for fatherhood (Baldwin et al., 2018; Rominov et al., 2018; Venning et al., 2021). Due to persisting masculinity norms, they also experience stigma associated with seeking support for their own well-being (Rominov et al., 2018; Venning et al., 2021). Thus, fathers often turn to informal sources of social support, such as friends who already became fathers, but also their partners and family (Rominov et al., 2018; Venning et al., 2021).

Partner support can especially help lower the distress that often accompanies the transition to parenthood (Gillis et al., 2019). Moreover, being supported by their partners can also increase fathers' involvement in parenting (Murphy et al., 2017) and their adjustment to the role of being the primary caregiver in the form of being a stay-at-home father (Rochlen et al., 2008). In addition to partner support, organizational support can be beneficial for reducing men's work-family conflict (Aycan & Eskin, 2005; French et al., 2018; French & Shockley, 2020) and has been linked to men's use of flexible work arrangements (Moran & Koslowski, 2019). In sum, social support can help to cope with adverse and challenging life events. Due to the barriers and potential costs associated with counter-stereotypic engagement in general and men's specifically, social support can be an effective tool to facilitate men's communal engagement. Therefore, we aimed to gain deeper insights into how social support from relevant others, such as partners or the workplace, can foster men's interest in communal roles and taking parental leave.

### **1.5 Overview of empirical chapters**

This dissertation outlines in three empirical chapters how men's interest in taking parental leave is shaped across different phases of men's lives: when men have an abstract desire to have children in the future, when they are approaching parenthood, and once they became fathers. We examined how men's beliefs about a prototypical man (Chapters 2 and 3) and their attitudes towards the father role (Chapters 3 and 4) relate to their parental leave-taking

intentions and engagement in childcare after birth. Moreover, we studied how such gendered beliefs affect men's possible selves and the extent to which possible selves regarding breadwinning and caregiving match men's actual postnatal experiences (Chapters 2 and 4). Lastly, we considered social support as a facilitator of men's intentions to take parental leave and their engagement in childcare (Chapters 3 and 4). The rationale and methodological approach of each chapter is described in the following.

## **Chapter 2: Which representations of their gender group affect men's orientation towards care? The case of parental leave-taking intentions**

Different ideas of what it means to be a man can influence which roles and behaviors men consider for themselves. Qualitative research suggests that conceptions of masculinity may also play a role in men's parental leave-taking decisions. Yet, we know little about which masculinity ideals specifically relate positively to men's interest in communal engagement, such as taking parental leave. Against the backdrop of the role prioritization model and assimilation and contrast effects, we examined how different representations of a prototypical man, varying in agentic and communal content, affect men's communal intentions. Two experiments were conducted in Germany with male students with a desire to have children in the future ( $N = 132$ ) and a more representative male sample ( $N = 233$ ). In these experiments, male prototypes were manipulated via contrived newspaper articles which either described the ideal man as entirely agentic, entirely communal, or a combination of both (with different control conditions per experiment describing another ingroup prototype besides men). We were interested in how these different representations of a prototypical man would relate to the extent that young men would see themselves as communal in the future, expect to engage in communal behavior, and intend to take parental leave. Thus, we included two operationalizations of possible selves as outcomes: men's possible self-concept, focusing on the extent to which they expected agentic and communal attributes to describe them in the future, and their possible task engagement, focusing on the extent to which they expected to engage in agentic and communal behaviors in the future (i.e., breadwinning and caregiving). For men's intended parental leave-taking, we examined their intention to take leave in the future and how long they expected to do so. We hypothesized that especially a description of a prototypical man as agentic *and* communal would increase men's communal orientation. We further expected exclusively agentic prototypes to lead to more communal outcomes due to contrast effects away from this extreme and one-sided perception of masculinity.

### **Chapter 3: Predictors of expectant fathers' parental leave-taking intentions before birth: Masculinity, fatherhood beliefs, and social support**

When examining men's interest in taking parental leave, studying participants who face this decision is of vital interest. Therefore, we conducted a longitudinal study with men expecting their first child in Belgium and Germany. Chapter 3 focuses on data collected before birth ( $N = 143$ ) and investigates predictors of expectant fathers' parental leave-taking intentions. Specifically, we examined as predictors agentic and communal male prototypes (i.e., to what extent expectant fathers saw an ideal man as agentic or communal), father role attitudes regarding breadwinning and childcare (i.e., to what extent expectant fathers saw their responsibility as a father in each domain), and perceived social support from partners and people at work for taking parental leave (i.e., to what extent expectant fathers felt encouraged or discouraged to take leave from their personal environment). We included different operationalizations of intended parental leave-taking, which fell on a continuum from behavioral preferences to behavioral intentions: expectant fathers' desire to take parental leave, their intentions to do so, and their expected length of parental leave.

We expected communal prototypes of men to be positively related to expectant fathers' intended leave-taking. In contrast, we postulated a negative relation between agentic prototypes of men and intended leave-taking. Likewise, we expected a positive relation between father role attitudes regarding childcare and intended leave-taking and a negative one for father role attitudes regarding breadwinning and intended leave-taking. Lastly, we hypothesized that receiving more support from their partner and people at work for taking leave would be positively related to expectant fathers' intended parental leave-taking. Besides these hypothesized relations, we explored further predictors that have been discussed as influential for men's leave-taking decisions. Zooming in on men's normative environment, we included as predictors the proportion of other men in their surroundings who took leave before them and how much these fathers were engaged in childcare as compared to their partners. Moreover, we studied how expected backlash effects for taking leave and men's expected self-efficacy for childcare relate to their intended parental leave-taking. Thus, after examining causal relations between male prototypes, possible selves, and intended leave-taking in convenience samples, we increased ecological validity by examining actual leave-taking intentions of soon-to-be fathers. Moreover, we considered father role attitudes and social support besides prototypes of men in this study. Nevertheless, the cross-sectional design limited the explanatory power of the findings. Hence, Chapter 4 contains a longitudinal examination of men's care engagement.



#### **Chapter 4: Dashed expectations and unmet desires of first-time fathers regarding their engagement in breadwinning and childcare**

For Chapter 4, we used data collected before and after birth ( $N = 85$ ) as part of the longitudinal study on first-time fatherhood, which Chapter 3 was also based on. Because only a small proportion of participants had taken leave four months after birth and variance in the data in this regard was limited, I do not present insights into men's actual leave-taking, although this was an initial goal of my thesis. Instead, in Chapter 4, we focused on fathers' expected and desired caregiver and breadwinner possible selves and how their lived reality after birth differed from prenatal expectations and desires. Thus, we examined how men expected and desired to share childcare and breadwinning with their partners before birth and what their actual division of labor was after birth.

Past research suggests that even if an egalitarian division of labor was desired before birth, parents struggle to share childcare and breadwinning equally after birth (e.g., Ascigil et al., 2021; Biehle & Mickelson, 2012; Hackel & Ruble, 1992; Milkie et al., 2002). However, to our knowledge, no previous study focused specifically on fathers. We replicated past research by showing that fathers, too, experience dashed expectations and unmet desires regarding the division of labor. Moreover, we calculated difference scores between prenatal and postnatal scores for the division of labor and used father role attitudes and social support to predict these discrepancies. We expected, for example, more egalitarian father role attitudes to be related to fathers exceeding their expectations and desires regarding breadwinning but failing to reach expectations and desires regarding childcare. Moreover, we expected that workplace and partner support could help fathers meet their expectations and desires regarding childcare. In contrast, a lack of support could mean that fathers engage more in breadwinning than expected and desired. In addition, we were interested in whether parental leave was perceived as a tool to counterbalance potential discrepancies regarding the division of labor. We hypothesized that the more fathers exceeded their expectations and desires regarding their engagement in breadwinning, the more they would wish and intend to take parental leave in the future. Conversely, not reaching expectations and desires regarding childcare could also foster men's intended leave-taking. In this study, we again examined contributors to men's communal engagement in a naturalistic setting but with the added strength of a longitudinal approach. Furthermore, we gained new insights into men's ability to translate their prenatal possible selves regarding breadwinning and caregiving into actual behavior after birth, accompanied by a deeper understanding of what relates to the emergence of discrepancies and whether fathers'

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intended leave-taking is affected by the experience of discrepancies regarding the division of labor.

In sum, this dissertation examines male parental leave as an example of communal engagement in which men's representation remains limited. Using experimental, cross-sectional, and longitudinal designs, we expanded current knowledge on how men's parental leave-taking intentions and orientation towards care are shaped across different stages in men's lives. Such a better understanding can help leverage the benefits that men's increased communal engagement can bring to themselves, their partners, their children, and society. Since the following chapters each represent stand-alone papers that either have been published or have been or will be submitted for publication, overlap with this general introduction and amongst each other can occur.

## **2 Chapter: Which representations of their gender group affect men's orientation towards care? The case of parental leave-taking intentions**

This chapter is based on:

Scheifele, C., Steffens, M. C., & Van Laar, C. (2021). Which representations of their gender group affect men's orientation towards care? The case of parental leave-taking intentions. *PLoS ONE*, 16(12), Article e0260950. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0260950>

### 2.1 Abstract

Men are currently underrepresented in traditionally female care-oriented (communal) engagement, such as taking parental leave, whereas they are overrepresented in traditionally male (agentic) engagement, such as breadwinning or leadership. We examined to what extent different prototypical representations of men affect men's self-reported parental leave-taking intentions and more generally the future they can imagine for themselves with regard to work and care roles (i.e., their possible selves). We expected prototypes of men that combine the two basic stereotype dimensions of agency and communion to increase men's communal intentions. In two experiments ( $N_1 = 132$ ,  $N_2 = 233$ ), we presented male participants with contrived newspaper articles that described the ideal man of today with varying degrees of agency and communion (between-subjects design with four conditions; combined agentic and communal vs. agentic vs. communal vs. control condition). Results of Experiment 1 were in line with the main hypothesis that especially presenting a combination of agency and communion increases men's expectations for communal engagement: As compared to a control condition, men expected more to engage in caretaking in the future, reported higher parental leave-taking intentions, and tended to expect taking longer parental leave. Experiment 2 only partially replicated these findings, namely for parental leave-taking intentions. Both experiments additionally provided initial evidence for a contrast effect in that an exclusive focus on agency also increased men's self-reported parental leave-taking intentions compared to the control condition. Yet, exclusively emphasizing communion in prototypes of men did not affect men's communal intentions, which were high to begin with. We further did not find evidence for preregistered mechanisms. We discuss conditions and explanations for the emergence of these mixed effects as well as implications for the communication of gendered norms and barriers to men's communal engagement more broadly.

### 2.2 Introduction

In the last 50 or so years, men's traditional gender roles have shown fewer changes than women's. Women have increasingly entered the labor market and attached greater importance to the work domain in their lives. Men's gender roles have shown much more inertia: Men are not taking on care roles (also named communal roles) to the same degree as women have claimed traditionally male-dominated work roles and leadership positions for themselves (Croft et al., 2015; Meeussen et al., 2020). Men's underrepresentation in communal roles manifests not only in the domestic domain but also in the work sphere. For example, only one-tenth to

one-fifth of registered nurses and elementary and middle school teachers are male in the USA and in Germany, where the current studies were conducted (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2020; Statistisches Bundesamt, 2018; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). In the domestic sphere, men spend about half as much time as women on daily household tasks and childcare (Eurofound, 2017; Samtleben, 2019). Men's uptake of parental leave has increased, and 37% of fathers took leave in 2016 in Germany; yet, often for only short periods of up to two months (as compared to the 10 to 12 months that mothers take; Samtleben, Schäper, et al., 2019).

Because of this underrepresentation, men themselves, their partners, their children, and society miss out on various benefits associated with men's increased engagement in communal roles (Croft et al., 2015; Meeussen et al., 2020). From a societal and labor market perspective, motivating such a large group as men to engage in communal roles can help to meet the high demands for professionals in health, child, and geriatric care (Lacey et al., 2018). On an individual level, communal orientation has been linked to positive psychological outcomes such as increased well-being and relationship satisfaction (Bamishigbin et al., 2020; Eggebeen et al., 2013; Le et al., 2018; Petts & Knoester, 2019). In dual-earner couples, men's communal engagement can leave room for their partner's career pursuits. Therefore, in heterosexual relationships, which the current paper focuses on, men's communal engagement can improve women's financial security and pension provision (Juncke et al., 2018). Regarding parenting, men's involvement beyond resource provision has been found to be beneficial for their children's developmental, psychosocial, and educational outcomes (Marsiglio et al., 2000) and to motivate daughters to consider less female gender-stereotypical occupations (Croft et al., 2014). To reap these benefits for men themselves and their proximal family environment, parental leave can represent an effective tool. Even more, men's parental leave-taking has been associated with their continuing engagement in childcare (Haas & Hwang, 2008; Nepomnyaschy & Waldfogel, 2007; Tanaka & Waldfogel, 2007), changes in grandparents' attitudes towards gender equality (Unterhofer & Wrohlich, 2017), and in colleagues' willingness to take parental leave themselves (Bygren & Duvander, 2006).

Prior research has found evidence for a variety of factors that may keep men from taking up more parental leave, such as specific leave policies, financial considerations, organizational norms, or couples' negotiations of paid and unpaid work (Almqvist, 2008; Brandth & Kvande, 2009; Haas et al., 2002; Kaufman & Almqvist, 2017; McKay & Doucet, 2010; O'Brien, 2009; Samtleben, Bringmann, et al., 2019). From a psychological perspective, possible external barriers such as facing stigmatization and job disadvantages have been studied (Fleischmann & Sieverding, 2015; Rudman & Mescher, 2013; Vandello et al., 2013). Less attention has been

paid to the role of masculinity norms and the extent to which communal traits are integrated in such for men's leave-taking intentions. Thus, in the present studies we examine how different prototypical representations of men varying in communal (e.g., emotional, empathetic, trustworthy) and agentic (e.g., ambitious, assertive, competent) content affect men's communal orientation in general and their parental leave-taking intentions more specifically.

### **Masculinity norms, fathering norms, and parental leave**

When examining how ascribing communal traits to men themselves and their gender group relates to their parental leave-taking intentions, it is important to consider recent changes in masculinities and fathering norms. A theoretical basis for such examinations are discussions about a shift from hegemonic to caring masculinities with regard to caregiving fathers (Hunter et al., 2017). According to its original formulation, hegemonic masculinity represents the most honored form of masculinity and perpetuates the dominance of men over women (Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). On the contrary, caring masculinities reject this dominance and reconcile masculinity with traditionally feminine characteristics such as nurturance, emotionality, and connection (Elliott, 2016; Hunter et al., 2017). Many men likely neither enact hegemonic nor caring masculinities in pure form or identify exclusively with such; however, both represent normative standards for men regarding what it means to be a man (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Hunter et al., 2017).

In empirical studies, similar shifts from traditional to so-called new, caring norms for men and fathers can be observed. Recent examinations of panel data in the US and Europe show that traditional gender ideologies, associating men with breadwinning and women with caretaking, are declining and that egalitarianism, although in various forms, is on the rise (Grunow et al., 2018; Knight & Brinton, 2017; Scarborough et al., 2019). In terms of gender stereotypes, a recent study showed that men perceive other men and especially themselves as actually rather communal (although women still rated themselves as more communal; Hentschel et al., 2019). Similarly, now more than in the past the "new father" is associated with more maternal (i.e., communal) traits and behaviors, and people expect a further alignment of motherhood and fatherhood for the future (Banchevsky & Park, 2016; also see Churchill & Craig, 2022). In a German study, two thirds of respondents considered breadwinning and nurturing as equally important for an ideal father, while one third even prioritized nurturing over breadwinning (Hofmeister & Baur, 2015).

Although men and fathers are increasingly associated with care, these new ideals for manhood and fatherhood have not fully replaced traditional norms and stereotypes. Communion

is still firmly associated with women, and stereotypes of men appear more resistant to change than those of women (Donnelly & Twenge, 2017; Eagly et al., 2020; Sendén et al., 2019). In terms of role engagement, implicit tests showed that parenthood is more strongly associated with women than men (Devos et al., 2008), and only given role change, stereotype change can eventually be expected (Eagly & Koenig, 2021). Even though a trend towards neutrality within gender stereotypes can be observed, it is estimated to take at least 134 years for implicit male-career/female-family associations to dissolve (Charlesworth & Banaji, 2022). These findings emerged in representative as well as student samples and in different national contexts.

Thus, new forms of masculinity and fatherhood, although popular in societal debates, do not seem to have replaced traditional forms (Aumann et al., 2011). Men, and especially fathers, still need to negotiate with some difficulty their role between being the main provider for their families and being an involved, primary caregiving father. Similar to when women increasingly entered the labor force, men are now facing the pressures of “having it all” (Aumann et al., 2011). This balancing of modern and traditional masculinities and fathering norms is evident in recent research on parental leave across cultural contexts. On the one hand, case studies and interviews with Swedish families support the emergence of child and family-oriented masculinity norms which affect men’s parental leave-taking (T. Johansson, 2011; Lammi-Taskula, 2008). On the other hand, French couples, contrary to Swedish ones, adhered more strongly to traditional forms of masculinity and did not see men’s leave-taking as an option (Almqvist, 2008). In Austria, parental leave was perceived to be in line with masculinity norms; but only if men personally wanted to take leave and external circumstances allowed for it (Schmidt et al., 2015). In cases when men do take leave, especially independently from their partners, they often have to find ways to integrate caretaking into male gender roles, for example, by defining childcare as “hard work” (Beglaubter, 2021; Brandth & Kvande, 2018).

### **Agency and communion in male gender norms and prototypes**

As outlined, the relevance of masculinities and fathering norms and the degree to which caretaking and communion have been integrated with traditional norms focusing on breadwinning and agency has been considered by past research. Yet, it remains unclear which norms specifically motivate men to increase their engagement in care roles and how varying descriptions of a prototypical man can affect men’s parental leave-taking intentions. The central hypothesis of the current experiments is that norms describing prototypical men as both agentic and communal are most likely to increase men’s communal intentions, for example, regarding parental leave.

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Masculinity norms as a subset of gender norms describe what men typically do and what is thus “normal” (descriptive norms) as well as what men should or should not do (injunctive or prescriptive norms; Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Cialdini et al., 1990; Prentice & Carranza, 2002). Within the social identity approach (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; J. C. Turner et al., 1987), the representation of what an individual perceives as normative for a group is called the group prototype (Hogg et al., 2012). Prototypes have been defined as “the ideal-type member of a category that best represents its identity in a given context and frame of reference” (Wenzel et al., 2007, p. 335; following Oakes et al., 1998). As such, prototypes do not necessarily represent average group members but rather capture the essence of a group, often in ideal or hypothetical form (thus, similar to prescriptive norms; Hogg et al., 2004).

When individuals are perceived through the lens of a prototype (i.e., viewed as group members with similar attributes rather than individuals), we speak of stereotyping (Hogg et al., 2004). Stereotypes of men are traditionally characterized by agency (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). Agency, along with communion, represent the two fundamental content dimensions for perceiving the self, others, and social groups (Abele & Wojciszke, 2014; Bakan, 1966; Cuddy et al., 2008; Fiske et al., 2007; Judd et al., 2005). These “Big Two” also emerged when examining gender stereotypes and typically male and female attributes (Spence et al., 1975, 1979), and recent theorizing even sees gender as the source of the formation of these fundamental dimensions (Martin & Slepian, 2021). Agentic traits and behaviors which are traditionally associated with men include being assertive, independent, competitive, and dominant and taking on respective roles (e.g., leadership). In contrast, women are associated more, and men less, with the second dimension, communion, which includes being friendly, caring, understanding, and emotional, and taking on respective roles such as caretaking (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Prentice & Carranza, 2002). Although these strong associations are blurring to some extent (as described above), parental leave and care-oriented, communal engagement in general is traditionally considered counter-stereotypic for men. When men nevertheless engage in such roles and behaviors, they may encounter backlash (i.e., social and economic sanctions, such as being perceived as less masculine and more feminine and receiving worse job evaluations; for a review, see Steffens et al., 2019).

The role prioritization model (Haines & Stroessner, 2019) suggests a possible solution for avoiding backlash for engaging in counter-stereotypic behavior. According to the model, men (and women) can receive leeway to engage in counter-stereotypic behavior if they are perceived as prioritizing traditionally stereotypic roles and only augmenting, instead of replacing them, with counter-stereotypic behavior. Thus, men who are perceived as prioritizing



breadwinning and agentic roles in general should receive fewer sanctions for engaging in communal, caretaking roles (Haines & Stroessner, 2019). Possibly, such “licensing” is not only beneficial when being evaluated by others but could also give individuals themselves the assurance to act in counter-stereotypic ways when being confronted with masculinity norms. Thus, we argue that not only being perceived as balancing traditionally stereotypic agentic and counter-stereotypic communal aspects could be beneficial for men. In addition, learning that others value both aspects in men could enable men to increase their communal engagement.

First empirical evidence related to these assumptions for masculinity norms has been gained in a study on the effect of different peer norms for young men’s communal outcomes (Van Grootel et al., 2018; also see Danbold & Bendersky, 2020). When male participants learned that peers valued agency as well as communion in an ideal man, they showed more communal outcomes compared to a control condition (i.e., had more communal self-concepts, intended to hide communal task engagement less, and had more progressive gender-related attitudes). In addition to being confronted with a combination of agency and communion, male participants also indicated more progressive attitudes towards gender-related social change, when their peers supposedly described the ideal man as entirely agentic (Van Grootel et al., 2018). In light of shifting masculinity norms, this strictly traditional notion of what it means to be a man could have motivated some men to indicate holding contrasting beliefs. As masculinity norms are broadening, an exclusive focus on agency could be perceived as extreme, unambiguous, and one-sided. When points of reference are characterized by such attributes, contrast effects can be the result (i.e., being pushed away from the point of reference; Biernat, 2005; Bless & Burger, 2016). In the study by van Grootel and colleagues (2018), we interpret another finding as a contrast effect: When male peers were said to perceive communal traits as most desirable for men, participants intended to hide communal task engagement the most. Thus, ideal-type representations of men seem to either encourage or discourage men to show communal intentions and progressive attitudes depending on presented degrees of agency and communion. Still, past research showed that male gender roles and stereotypes are rather resistant to change (Donnelly & Twenge, 2017; Eagly et al., 2020; Haines et al., 2016; Sendén et al., 2019) and that it could be especially difficult for men to consider counter-stereotypic engagement (Croft et al., 2015; Sendén et al., 2019). Therefore, we additionally examine an outcome variable that could be more open to counter-stereotypic content and represents a broader indicator of men’s communal intentions than parental leave-taking intentions: men’s possible selves.

### **Men's possible selves and caretaking**

Past research has often tried to foster counter-stereotypic content in the current self-concept (Asgari et al., 2012; Van Grootel et al., 2018). Yet, the results were mixed, and effects were, for example, mainly found on implicit measures (Asgari et al., 2012; also see Dasgupta & Asgari, 2004; Stout et al., 2011). In contrast to the (implicit or explicit) present self-concept, future-oriented self-conceptions, so-called possible selves, are less bound by current social feedback and by a need for consistency in self-descriptions (Markus & Nurius, 1986). As a result, possible selves are more malleable and can serve as means of identity exploration (Dunkel, 2000). For men, it could, thus, be easier to consider counter-stereotypic communal roles for themselves in the future than in the present.

Markus and Nurius (1986) proposed that possible selves can differ in valence by reflecting what an individual would like to become (desired self), is afraid to become (feared self), or expects to become (expected self). Consequently, possible selves can function as incentives and provide a framework against which behaviors and outcomes are evaluated (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Moreover, possible selves have been described as social products and are embedded in social identities (Frazier & Hooker, 2006; Oyserman & James, 2011). They not only provide a framework for personal identities but take into account category membership and what is possible for oneself as a group member (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Oyserman & James, 2011). Hence, prototypes, representing the essence of a group, can be an important source for socially contextualized possible selves.

In addition to prototypes, the content of possible selves is likely also affected by salient life tasks and periods of transition such as parenthood (Hooker et al., 1996; Manzi et al., 2010; Oyserman & James, 2011). Next to job-related possible selves, parenting constitutes an essential part of young parents' conceptions of themselves in the future (Hooker et al., 1996). Also for men, parenting roles become increasingly important when transitioning to fatherhood. Yet, actual involvement in childcare also depends on the extent to which actual and possible selves overlap (Strauss & Goldberg, 1999). Even before becoming parents, women and men hope for rather role-congruent and fear rather role-incongruent possible selves in their distant future based on traditional social roles associating women more with caretaking and men more with breadwinning (Brown & Diekmann, 2010; also see Knox, 2006). However, research has shown that changing such gendered norms can facilitate the consideration of role-incongruent possible selves. In a previous study, priming women with male exemplars and men's changing gender roles affected their possible selves: When women perceived men to increasingly participate in

childcare, they expected more to engage in breadwinning (and vice versa; Croft et al., 2019). Yet, we are unaware of a study that tested the effect of changing masculinity norms on men's possible selves and counter-stereotypic outcomes such as parental leave-taking.

### **The present research**

The aim of the present research was to examine different prototypical representations of men, so-called prototypes, as indicators of what it means to be a man, and their effect on men's expectations and intentions regarding engagement in caretaking in the future. To that end, we focused on men's possible selves and parental leave-taking expectations as communal outcomes in two experiments. We manipulated whether prototypical descriptions of men were characterized exclusively by agency, exclusively by communion, or by a combination of both to understand which compositions of agentic and communal content are most likely to increase men's communal intentions. To test our predictions, we presented fictitious newspaper articles about the ideal man of today (control condition: student or millennial of today, Exp. 1 vs. 2, respectively) to male students (Experiment 1) and to a broader male sample of participants (Experiment 2) who did not have children yet but planned to become parents in the future. We assessed possible selves via their possible self-concept (i.e., to what extent participants expected agentic and communal attributes to describe them in the future) and their possible task engagement (i.e., to what extent participants expected to engage in agentic and communal tasks and behaviors in the future) followed by an assessment of parental leave-taking intentions and additional variables.

In addition to these main goals of the research, we aimed to learn more about the mechanisms that affect men's communal outcomes depending on different agentic and communal representations of their gender group. More specifically, we examined assimilation and contrast effects and affirmation and threat responses. However, we did not find substantial support for these assumptions (for results and discussion, see A2.2 Supplementary analyses and Section 2.5: General discussion). To make these initial goals transparent, in Table 2.1 we present the original hypotheses described in the preregistrations (Exp. 1: <https://aspredicted.org/tv34k.pdf>; Exp. 2: <https://aspredicted.org/2f69s.pdf>) juxtaposed with the hypotheses described in the manuscript. Moreover, we report which analyses we had planned to conduct and where they are reported (in this chapter or in A2.2 Supplementary analyses).

**Table 2.1. Juxtaposition of hypotheses and analyses as presented in the preregistration in comparison to the manuscript for Experiments 1 and 2 (*r* = rephrased, *b* = broadened).**

Preregistration		Manuscript	
Experiment 1			
<i>Hypotheses</i>			
1	Inclusive <sup>1</sup> male prototypes should lead to more communal possible selves <sup>2</sup> than in in the control condition (assimilation effect).	1	Presenting men with prototypes combining agency and communion leads to more communal outcomes compared to a control condition. ( <i>r</i> , <i>b</i> )
2	Exclusively agentic male prototypes should lead to more communal possible selves than in the control condition.	2	Exclusively agentic prototypes of men should lead to more communal outcomes as compared to the control condition. ( <i>b</i> )
3	Exclusively communal male prototypes should lead to more agentic possible selves than in the control condition.	3.1	Exclusively communal prototypes of men [should] lead to more agentic outcomes than in the control condition. ( <i>b</i> )
4	Inclusive male prototypes should lead to more communal possible selves than exclusively communal male prototypes.	4	In any case, we expected prototypes of men combining agency and communion to lead to more communal outcomes than the exclusively communal prototype. ( <i>r</i> , <i>b</i> )
4	However, the exclusively communal male prototype could also lead to assimilation effects if it is rather perceived as moderate than extreme.	3.2	However, given increasing integration of care into masculinity and fathering norms (Banchefsky & Park, 2016; Hofmeister & Baur, 2015; Hunter et al., 2017), prototypical representations of men focusing on communal attributes could not be perceived as extreme and thus rather be pulling men towards communal outcomes instead of pushing them away. ( <i>r</i> )
<i>Analyses</i>			
<i>Main analyses:</i> ANOVAs with planned contrasts as described in hypotheses		Reported in Chapter 2	
<i>Secondary analyses:</i> Mediation analyses examining whether possible selves mediate the relation between prototypes of men and parental leave-taking intentions		Reported in A2.2 Supplementary analyses	

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**Experiment 2**


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*Hypotheses*


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<p><b>1</b> Male prototypes combining agency and communion lead to more communal outcomes than in the control condition.</p>	<p><b>1</b> Describing prototypical men as agentic and communal [should] increase men's self-reported communal intentions as compared to the control condition. (<i>r</i>)</p>
<p><b>2.1</b> Male prototypes combining agency and communion lead to more communal outcomes than exclusively communal male prototypes.</p>	<p><b>4</b> We expected the combined agentic and communal prototype of men to lead to more communal outcomes than the exclusively communal prototype. (<i>r</i>)</p>
<p><b>2.2</b> Agentic male prototypes lead to more communal outcomes than the control condition.</p>	<p><b>2</b> For the prototypical representation of men focusing exclusively on agency, we again expected contrast effects in the form of more communal outcomes than in the control condition. (<i>r</i>)</p>
<p><b>2.3</b> Communal male prototypes do not lead to more communal outcomes than the control condition.</p>	<p><b>3</b> We did not expect any differences between the communal condition and the control condition on the dependent variables. (<i>r</i>)</p>
<p><b>2.4</b> We expect men to be more affirmed in their masculinity in the combined agentic and communal condition compared to the communal condition (and thus allowing for more communal outcomes). We expect men to be more threatened in the communal condition compared to the control condition and compared to the combined agentic and communal condition.</p>	<p>Hypothesis not included in Chapter 2 (but see A2.2 Supplementary analyses)</p>
<p><b>2.5</b> We expect the combined agentic and communal prototype to be perceived as more moderate, ambiguous, and diverse than the exclusively agentic or communal prototypes and thus lead to assimilation (see 1.). On the contrary, we expect the exclusively agentic and the exclusively communal prototype to be perceived as more extreme, unambiguous, and one-sided than the combined agentic and communal prototype and thus lead to contrast (see 2.2., 2.3)<sup>3</sup>.</p>	<p>Hypothesis not included in Chapter 2 (but see A2.2 Supplementary analyses)</p>

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<i>Analyses</i>	
<i>Main analyses:</i> ANOVAs and planned contrasts as described in hypotheses	Reported in Chapter 2 for hypotheses 1 to 2.3 and in A2.2 Supplementary analyses for hypotheses 2.4 and 2.5
<i>Secondary analyses:</i> Mediation analyses to examine whether possible selves, threat, and affirmation mediate the relation between male prototypes and paternal leave-taking outcomes	Reported in A2.2 Supplementary analyses
Moderation analyses to examine whether self-typicality and perceived extremity, ambiguity, and diversity moderate the relation between male prototypes and communal outcomes	Reported in A2.2 Supplementary analyses

<sup>1</sup>: In the preregistration of Experiment 1, we had used the more ambiguous term inclusive prototypes to describe prototypes combining agentic and communal content in contrast to prototypes exclusively containing agentic *or* communal content. <sup>2</sup>: As we expected communal possible selves to mediate the relation between prototypes of men and men's parental leave-taking outcomes, we only specified hypotheses for effects of prototypes of men on the mediator (possible selves) and failed to preregister hypotheses for direct effects on men's parental leave-taking intentions and expected length of leave. <sup>3</sup>: In hindsight, the hypothesis that the communal prototype of men should be perceived in line with and lead to contrast effects contradicts H2.3 in the preregistration and H3 in the manuscript, which is why we dropped it.

### 2.3 Experiment 1

In Experiment 1, we first tested the central hypothesis that presenting men with prototypes combining agency and communion leads to more communal outcomes compared to a control condition (H1). For all hypotheses, we define as more communal outcomes more communal possible selves (i.e., possible self-concept and possible task engagement), higher parental leave-taking intentions, and longer expected length of parental leave.

As prototypical representations of men focusing on only one dimension (agency or communion) could be interpreted as rather extreme, unambiguous, and one-sided, we expect contrast effects for these conditions. Accordingly, the second hypothesis was that exclusively agentic prototypes of men should lead to more communal outcomes as compared to the control condition (H2). For the communal condition, we had two possible hypotheses. In line with contrast effects and H2, exclusively communal prototypes of men could lead to more agentic outcomes than in the control condition (H3.1). However, given increasing integration of care into masculinity and fathering norms (Banchefsky & Park, 2016; Hofmeister & Baur, 2015; Hunter et al., 2017), prototypical representations of men focusing on communal attributes could not be perceived as extreme and, thus, rather be pulling men towards communal outcomes

instead of pushing them away (H3.2). In any case, we expected prototypes of men combining agency and communion to lead to more communal outcomes than the exclusively communal prototype (H4).

## **Method**

The research plan was approved by the Ethics Commission of the Faculty of Psychology of the University of Koblenz-Landau (approval number 2019\_200). We obtained informed consent by informing participants that by clicking the “next” button they agree to the study details as described in the consent form. We report how we determined sample size, all data exclusions, details on all conditions and all measures in this chapter or in A2.4 Additionally measured variables.

### ***Participants***

The final sample size amounted to  $N = 132$  participants and was, thus, sufficient to detect large-sized effects of  $f = 0.40$  ( $\eta^2 = 0.14$ ) in a one-way ANOVA with four conditions according to the a-priori power analysis (based on previous results for the central contrast [combined agentic and communal vs. control condition]; Van Grootel et al., 2018). This power analysis was conducted with G\*Power 3 (Faul et al., 2007), an  $\alpha$  of .05 and a statistical power of  $1 - \beta = .95$ , which resulted in a necessary sample size of  $N = 112$ .

In total, we reached 334 men but screened out cases with more than 25% of missing values. Of the resulting 163 participants, we excluded several in advance based on our preregistered criteria. At the beginning of the survey, we screened out ten participants because they did not self-identify as heterosexual and could, therefore, be subject to different norms. We administered additional preregistered exclusion criteria after data collection: We excluded the data of nine participants who failed an attention check (i.e., choosing “2” to show that they are reading carefully, interspersed in a measure of gender identification) and one person because he withdrew his approval for using his data for scientific purposes. No further participants were excluded based on the criteria that they already had children, did not want children in the future, were not students, or failed quality or suspicion checks. Outlier analyses based on Cook’s distance led to the exclusion of eleven cases (also see A2.3 Changes in results based on inclusions).

The final sample had an average age of 26 years ( $M = 25.53$ ,  $SD = 4.52$ ), ranging between 19 and 47 years. Regarding their highest level of education, 55% had graduated from high school, 38% had a university degree, and 6% had completed an apprenticeship. Most participants indicated being single (48%) or in a committed relationship (48%). Fields of study

included psychology (13%), educational sciences and teaching (9%), computer science (9%), business (8%), and sciences (8%).

### ***Procedure and experimental manipulation***

We recruited participants online via university mailing lists, social media, and a commercial panel. They were invited to take part in a study on the evaluation of newspaper articles and had the chance to win 200€ in total in a lottery. After agreeing to the informed consent, the exclusion criteria specified above were queried. Then, we assigned the remaining participants randomly to one of the four conditions presenting different prototypical representations of men: combined agentic and communal prototype ( $n = 30$ ) vs. agentic prototype ( $n = 35$ ) vs. communal prototype ( $n = 37$ ) vs. control condition ( $n = 30$ ). In each condition, the participants read a contrived newspaper article (for full materials, see <https://osf.io/ah9v4/>). In all conditions, the article was framed by describing current debates and insecurities regarding what constitutes the ideal man of today (control condition: ideal student of today) as well as the results of an investigation to gain insight into this question. In the experimental conditions, masculinity was – according to the results of the journalists’ research – defined nowadays by varying degrees of agency and communion depending on the condition and affirmed accordingly. The agentic and communal attributes mainly indicated the presence of the respective content, not their absence (i.e., “assertive” indicating the presence of agency instead of attributes indicating its absence such as “aimless”; Abele et al., 2008). Moreover, we included attributes from different subdimensions of agency (assertiveness and competence) and communion (warmth and morality; Abele et al., 2016). For the combined agentic and communal condition, we included two versions with reversed order of agentic and communal attributes. In the communal condition, we included a few negative attributes (i.e., gullible, subordinates self; Runge et al., 1981; Spence et al., 1979) to counterbalance the more positive rating of this condition compared to the other conditions as indicated by a pre-test. The control condition included the same parts as the experimental conditions. However, as our sample consisted only of students, the student of today, as an ingroup prototype, was described in the control condition, and the description included as neutral content as possible. This implies that we did not use any gendered pronouns (however, we also refrained from using the gender-sensitive form of the German word “Student”, instead using what is called the generic masculine form). As agency and communion are so universal, some of the content could be matched to these fundamental content dimensions (e.g., students spending time on their hobbies or working as student assistants). Nevertheless, the experimental conditions all mentioned aspects of work and family or social life but with regard to agentic or communal content (i.e., men being caretakers in their



family in the communal condition vs. being breadwinners in the agentic condition). In the control condition, this relation to agentic or communal content was omitted. Following the manipulation, the participants completed the dependent variables, manipulation checks, and further variables that are not the subject of the present research (desired and feared possible selves, current self-concept, desired (length of) parental leave-taking, perceived self-efficacy for parental leave-taking, feeling comfortable communicating parental leave-taking plans, perceived compatibility of agency and communion, distinctiveness threat, perceived diversity of men, gender identification, gender role attitudes, perceived pressure to fulfill agentic and communal roles; for details, see A2.4 Additionally measured variables). At the end of the survey, we assessed demographic information, informed the participants about the design and purpose of the study, and gave them the chance to withdraw their approval for using their data for scientific purposes.

### **Measures**

After the manipulation, we first checked the general *perception of the prototypes* presented in the newspaper articles. Specifically, we asked participants to indicate their spontaneous impression of the given description of men (students) as negative versus positive on a scale from 0 to 100.

Next, we assessed the dependent variables pertaining to possible selves. First, we assessed the *possible self-concept* via close-ended measures (following Oyserman & Markus, 1990); yet, using agentic and communal traits. Participants rated the extent to which five agentic (e.g., independent, competitive;  $\alpha = .61$ ) and five communal traits (e.g., emotional, understanding;  $\alpha = .74$ ; based on the GEPAQ; Runge et al., 1981; Spence et al., 1975) were likely to describe them in 15 years or around the time when they want to have children on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*).

To include a more task- and behavior-oriented operationalization, we measured *possible task engagement* via three work-related behaviors (e.g., going to work; not aggregated to form a scale as  $\alpha = .41$ ) and three family-related behaviors (e.g., taking care of children;  $\alpha = .73$ ; based on the Gender Role Behavior Scale and previously used tasks to assess possible selves; Athenstaedt, 2003; Croft et al., 2019). Participants indicated on a 5-point scale to what extent they expect that these behaviors will be typical for them in 15 years or when they expect to have children.

We then measured outcome variables related to parental leave. To ensure that all participants had the same background knowledge, the participants first read a short text on parental leave policies in Germany. Afterwards they imagined that they would have children

and had to decide on whether to take parental leave. The participants indicated their *parental leave-taking intentions* on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*) (“I plan to take parental leave”; adapted from Miyajima & Yamaguchi, 2017). In addition, they indicated *how long they expected to take parental leave* (0 to 12 months).

As the *manipulation check*, we lastly assessed to what extent four agentic (e.g., assertive, competent;  $\alpha = .72$ ) and four communal (e.g., caring, trustworthy;  $\alpha = .71$ ) attributes described the man of today (control condition: student of today) according to the article they read in the beginning (Abele et al., 2008).

## Results

After checking assumptions and screening the data, we conducted one-way ANOVAs to examine the main effect of condition followed up by planned contrasts. In cases of variance heterogeneity, we conducted Welch tests and pairwise *t*-tests as post-hoc analyses. Because we only included hypotheses for agentic outcomes for the communal prototype of men (vs. the control condition; H3.1), we conducted *t*-tests for this comparison. For ANOVAs and *t*-tests, we used the Benjamini-Hochberg method (Benjamini & Hochberg, 1995) to control the false discovery rate and report cases in which *p*-values equal or exceed .05 after corrections. As effect sizes, we report eta-squared for ANOVAs and Cohen’s *d* for planned contrasts including 90% and 95% confidence intervals respectively. When *p*-values fall above .05 and the confidence intervals of effect sizes include zero, we interpret the results as non-significant. All analyses were conducted with and without participants who failed attention, suspicion, or quality checks, and with and without cases with a Cook’s distance larger than  $4/n$ . We report results in the manuscript with these cases excluded and report when results differ with inclusions in A2.3 Changes in results based on inclusions.

### *Manipulation check*

The manipulation check showed that the manipulation was perceived as intended (see Table 2.2 for descriptive statistics). First, participants perceived different degrees of *agency* in the presented prototypes of men,  $F(3, 128) = 19.27, p < .001, \eta^2 = .31, [.20; .40]$ . As planned, the agentic condition,  $p < .001, d = 0.87, [0.51; 1.24]$ , and the combined agentic and communal condition,  $p < .001, d = 0.62, [0.27; 0.98]$ , were perceived as more agentic than the control condition. The communal condition was perceived similarly as the control condition on agency,  $p = .149, d = -0.26, [-0.60; 0.09]$ .

Second, participants also perceived different degrees of *communion* in the presented prototypes of men,  $F(3, 128) = 39.16, p < .001, \eta^2 = .48, [.37; .56]$ . As planned, the communal condition,  $p < .001, d = 0.84, [0.48; 1.20]$ , and the combined agentic and communal condition,  $p < .001, d = 0.69, [0.34; 1.05]$ , were perceived as more communal than the control condition. The agentic condition was perceived as less communal than the control condition,  $p < .001, d = -0.80, [-1.16; -0.44]$ .

In addition, we examined how negative versus positive the experimental conditions were perceived and indeed found substantial differences,  $F(3, 128) = 6.63, p < .001, \eta^2 = .13, [.04; .22]$ . According to the participants, the description of the man of today in the agentic condition was more negative than in the combined agentic and communal condition,  $p = .009, d = -0.72, [-1.22; -0.22]$ , than in the communal condition,  $p < .001, d = -0.99, [-1.48; -0.50]$ , and than in the control condition,  $p = .006, d = -0.80, [-1.31; -0.30]$ . The other conditions were not perceived substantially differently from each other, all  $ps > .633$ . We also found substantial differences as to how pleasant, extreme, and desirable the prototypical representations of men were perceived (for results, see A2.2 Supplementary analyses).

**Table 2.2. Means and standard deviations for manipulation check and perception of prototypes in experimental conditions (Experiment 1).**

	<i>Experimental Condition</i>			
	Control	Communion	Agency	Agency & Communion
Agency <sup>1</sup>	4.80 (0.99)	4.42 (1.14)	6.11 (1.00)	5.78 (1.12)
Communion <sup>1</sup>	4.78 (0.77)	5.95 (0.96)	3.66 (1.05)	5.79 (1.15)
Negative – positive <sup>2</sup>	65.13 (24.54)	69.05 (22.86)	44.09 (27.50)	63.97 (27.87)

*Notes.* Means with standard deviations in parentheses. <sup>1</sup>: Scale from 1 to 7, <sup>2</sup>: Scale from 0 to 100.

### ***Dependent variables***

Descriptive statistics for all dependent variables can be found in Table 2.3. In general, the sample showed high communal expectations: Across all conditions, possible selves measures ranked around 4 on a 5-point scale and average parental leave-taking intentions varied between 4.77 and 5.93 on a 7-point scale. Also, the expected length of parental leave was consistently above the average leave-taking period of fathers in Germany of roughly three months (Reimer et al., 2019; which had not been made explicit to participants). In the combined

agentic and communal condition, participants even expected to take nearly eight months of parental leave. As parents can divide 14 months between themselves if each partner takes at least two months, more than seven months would represent a longer leave for fathers than mothers.

**Table 2.3. Means and standard deviations for possible selves and parental leave outcomes in experimental conditions (Experiment 1).**

	<i>Experimental Condition</i>			
	Control	Communion	Agency	Agency & Communion
Communal possible self-concept <sup>1</sup>	3.75 (0.60)	3.76 (0.71)	3.80 (0.47)	3.97 (0.63)
Agentic possible self-concept <sup>1</sup>	3.67 (0.54)	3.67 (0.67)	3.78 (0.70)	3.67 (0.53)
Communal PTE <sup>1</sup>	3.74 (0.68)	3.96 (0.70)	4.13 (0.62)	4.26 (0.67)
Agentic PTE (going to work) <sup>1</sup>	4.37 (0.76)	4.27 (0.80)	4.49 (0.70)	4.17 (0.91)
Agentic PTE (other household tasks) <sup>1</sup>	3.87 (0.94)	3.65 (1.16)	3.46 (1.09)	4.07 (0.87)
Agentic PTE (working overtime) <sup>1</sup>	3.27 (1.17)	3.11 (1.02)	3.20 (1.02)	3.37 (1.00)
Parental leave-taking intentions <sup>2</sup>	4.77 (1.77)	4.84 (1.72)	5.71 (1.58)	5.93 (1.14)
Expected length of parental leave <sup>3</sup>	5.20 (3.67)	5.83 (3.55)	6.09 (3.76)	7.77 (3.13)

*Notes.* PTE = Possible task engagement. Means with standard deviations in parentheses. <sup>1</sup>: Scale from 1 to 5, <sup>2</sup>: Scale from 1 to 7, <sup>3</sup>: Scale from 0 to 12 (months).

Regarding hypothesis tests, we found general support for the hypotheses for parental leave-taking variables but less so for possible selves. For the first operationalization of possible selves, the *possible self-concept*, we did not find substantial differences between the experimental conditions. Specifically, whether the presented prototypes of men were described as agentic, communal, or both did not substantially affect men's self-reported communal possible self-concept,  $F(3, 128) = 0.88, p = .455, \eta^2 = .02, [.00; .06]$ , or agentic possible self-concept,  $F(3, 128) = 0.29, p = .830, \eta^2 < .01, [.00; .02]$ .

However, how prototypes of men were described affected the second operationalization of possible selves, *possible task engagement*,  $F(3, 128) = 3.41, p = .020, \eta^2 = .07, [.01; .14]$ ; yet the adjusted empirical  $p$ -value was .050. When the man of today was described via a combination of agency and communion, men expected communal tasks to be more typical for themselves in the future than in the control condition,  $p = .004, d = 0.52, [0.17; 0.88]$ , but not substantially more than in the communal condition,  $p = .069, d = 0.44, [-0.05; 0.92]$ . These

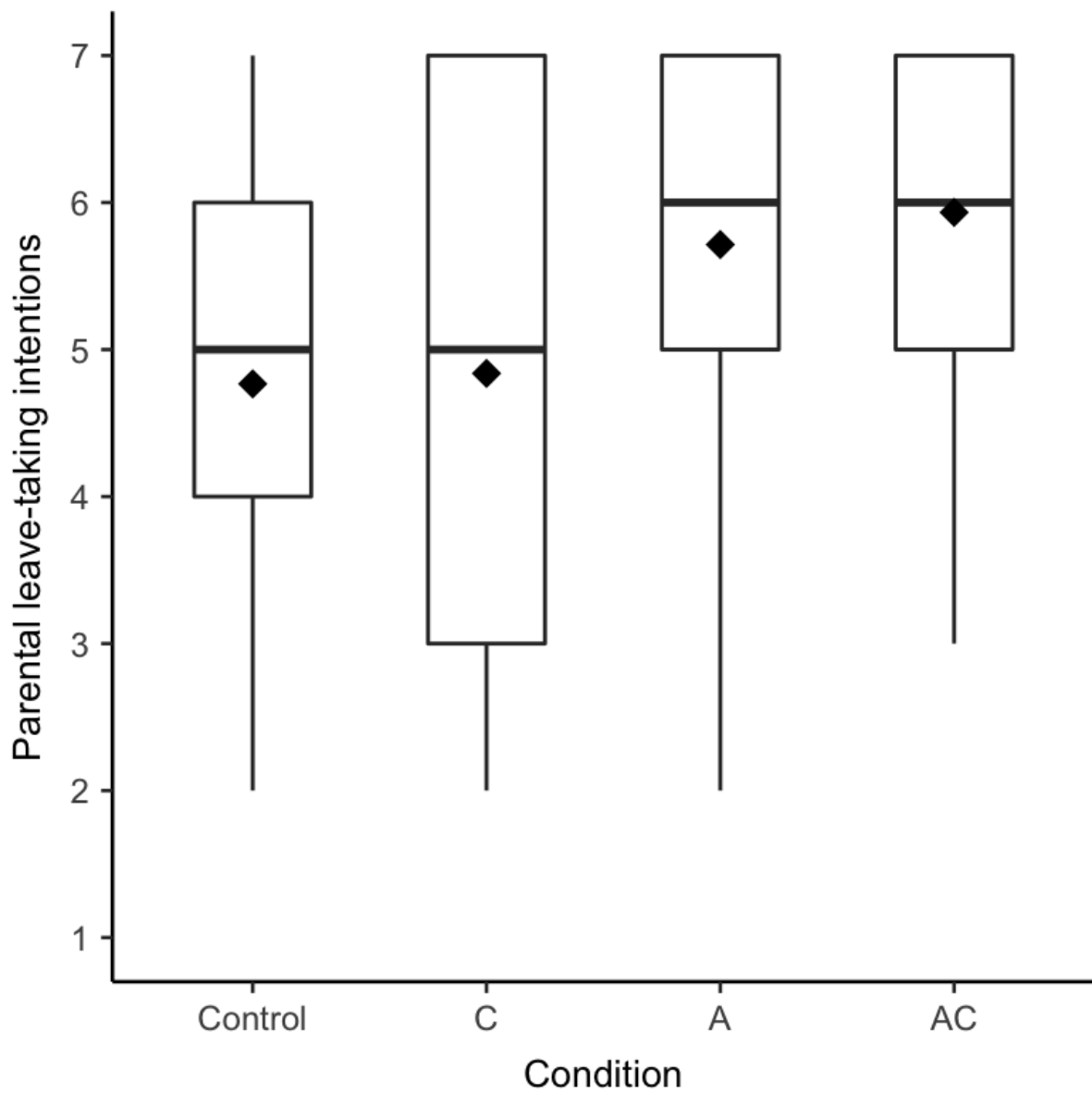
findings support H1 that combined agentic and communal prototypes of men should lead to more communal self-reported intentions than in the control condition, but contradict H4 as the comparison to the communal condition was not significant. Regarding H2 that a contrast effect for the agentic condition should also increase communal intentions, men expected communal tasks to be more typical for themselves in the future in the agentic condition as compared to the control condition,  $p = .020$ ,  $d = 0.41$ ,  $[0.06; 0.76]$ , but this comparison was not significant when outliers were included. Contrary to H3.1 and H3.2, presenting solely communal prototypes of men neither substantially affected men's self-reported communal nor agentic possible selves regarding task engagement,  $ps > .495$ ,  $ds < 0.23$ . These results held when controlling for age, educational level, and relationship status in a hierarchical regression. The model including the experimental conditions (dummy-coded with the control condition as the reference group) explained significantly more variance in the dependent variable than the base model,  $F(3, 119) = 5.04$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .09$ .

Boxplots for *parental leave-taking intentions* are presented in Figure 2.1. As expected, presenting different prototypes of men affected men's self-reported parental leave-taking intentions,  $F(3, 128) = 4.58$ ,  $p = .004$ ,  $\eta^2 = .10$ ,  $[\.02; .17]$ . In line with H1 and H4, when the man of today was described via a combination of agency and communion, men reported planning more to take parental leave than in the control condition,  $p = .005$ ,  $d = 0.50$ ,  $[0.15; 0.85]$ , and than in the communal condition,  $p = .006$ ,  $d = 0.73$ ,  $[0.24; 1.23]$ . A solely agentic prototypical representation of men was linked to higher parental leave-taking intentions as compared to the control condition,  $p = .018$ ,  $d = 0.42$ ,  $[0.07; 0.77]$ , supporting H2. When the man of today was only defined via communion, men's parental leave-taking intentions did not substantially differ from those in the control condition,  $p = .855$ ,  $d = 0.03$ ,  $[-0.31; 0.38]$ , thus not supporting H3.2. Again, the results held when including controls in a first step, and the second step's model including the experimental conditions explained significantly more variance in parental leave-taking intentions,  $F(3, 119) = 3.74$ ,  $p = .013$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .06$ .

Men's self-reported *expected length of parental leave* also tended to be affected by the experimental conditions,  $F(3, 128) = 2.89$ ,  $p = .038$ ,  $\eta^2 = .06$ ,  $[\.00; .13]$  (see Figure 2.2);  $p_{\text{adjusted}} = .063$ . When the man of today was described via a combination of agency and communion, men reported to expect taking longer leave than in the control condition,  $p = .006$ ,  $d = 0.50$ ,  $[0.14; 0.85]$ , and the communal condition,  $p = .029$ ,  $d = 0.58$ ,  $[0.09; 1.07]$ . Men's expected length of parental leave did not substantially differ from the control condition when the man of today was solely defined via agency *or* via communion,  $ps > .317$ ,  $ds < 0.18$ . The model

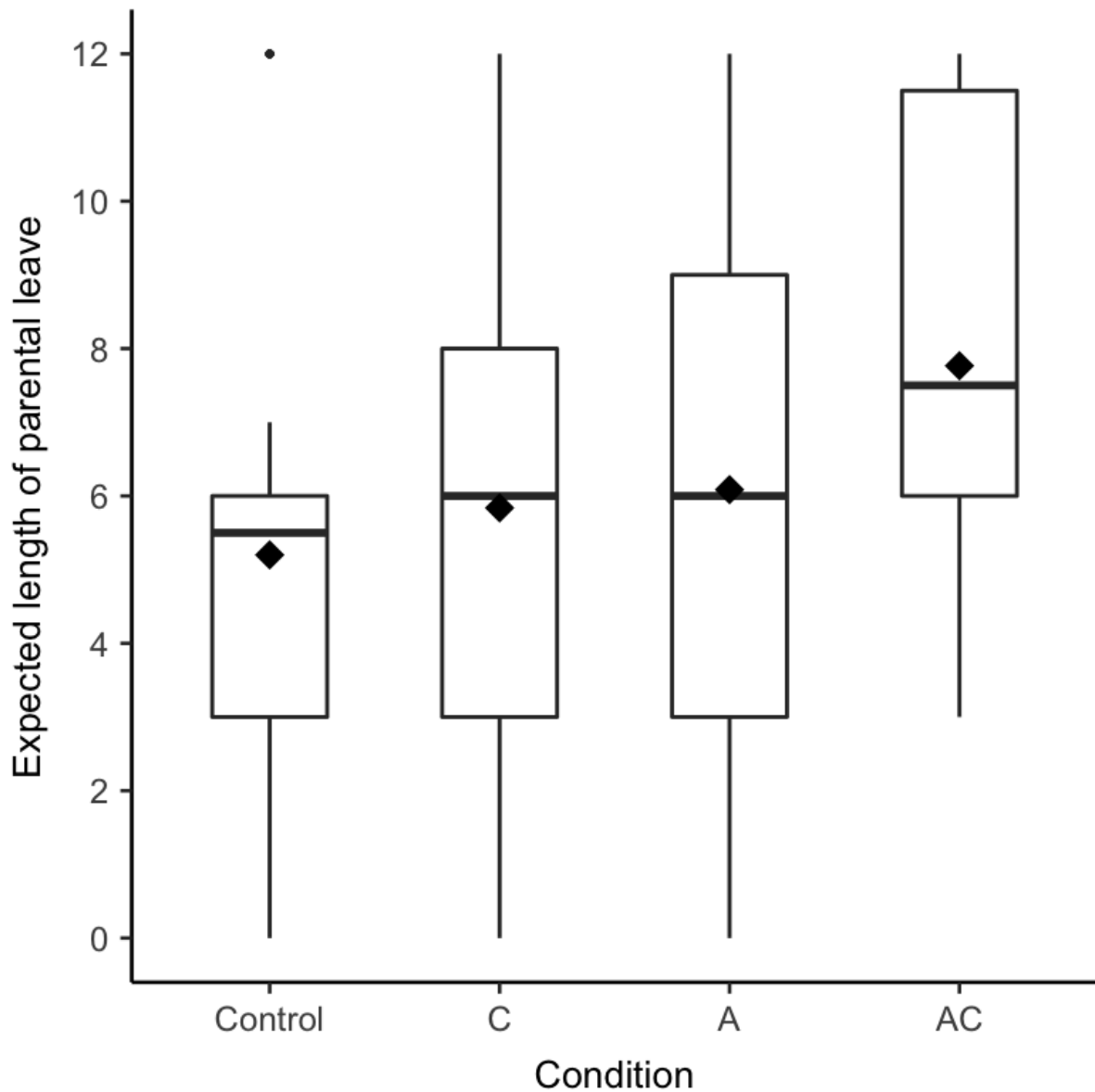
including the experimental conditions descriptively explained more variance in the dependent variable than the base model but this difference was not statistically significant,  $F(3, 119) = 2.48, p = .064, \Delta R^2 = .04$ . Moreover, the confidence interval of the omnibus  $F$ -test's effect size included 0 and the adjusted  $p$ -value was .063. As we, therefore, cannot conclude that an effect is present, we tested for the absence of a meaningful effect by examining whether the observed effect is smaller than a smallest effect size of interest (SESOI; Campbell & Lakens, 2021; Lakens, 2017; Lakens et al., 2018). We determined the SESOI based on the study we used for the power analysis in Experiment 1 (Van Grootel et al., 2018) following Simonsohn's (2015) approach (Lakens et al., 2018). Based on the results of the equivalence test,  $p = .850$ , we cannot reject the  $H_0$  that there are meaningful differences between the experimental conditions, meaning that the obtained effect size ( $\eta^2 = .063$ ) appears to be larger than the SESOI ( $\eta^2 = .014$ ). Thus, the differences are neither clearly statistically different nor statistically equivalent and thereby inconclusive, likely due to a lack of power (Campbell & Lakens, 2021; Lakens et al., 2018). In sum, presenting combined agentic and communal prototypes of men only tended to lead to a longer expected length of parental leave compared to the control condition, providing tentative support for H1. In addition, we only found tentative support for H4 and no support for H2 and H3.2.

**Figure 2.1. Boxplots for parental leave-taking intentions separated by condition (Experiment 1).**



*Notes.* Diamonds represent means, horizontal lines represent medians.

**Figure 2.2. Boxplots for expected length of parental leave separated by condition (Experiment 1).**



*Notes.* Diamonds represent means, horizontal lines represent medians.

### Discussion

The aim of Experiment 1 was to gain insight into which kinds of prototypical representations of men can draw men towards communal outcomes such as more communal self-reported possible selves and parental leave-taking intentions. Specifically, we tested the central hypothesis (H1) that presenting a description of the man of today as agentic *and* communal would be effective in fostering communal intentions in men. We found (partial) support for this hypothesis on all dependent variables except for the possible self-concept. When the man of today was described as agentic and communal, men expected communal tasks



to be more typical for themselves in the future (possible task engagement), had higher parental leave-taking intentions, and tended to expect taking longer parental leave than in the control condition. We also found partial support for the supplementary Hypothesis 2: In line with contrast effects, describing the man of today as solely agentic led to men's higher self-reported parental leave-taking intentions and more communal possible task engagement (when outliers were excluded). Presenting exclusively communal prototypes of men neither affected men's agentic (H3.1) nor communal outcomes (H3.2). Lastly, presenting a combination of agency and communion in prototypes of men resulted in higher self-reported parental leave-taking intentions (when outliers were excluded) and longer expected leave not only as compared to the control condition but also as compared to the communal condition (H4).

As we found initial support for the main hypothesis on all other dependent variables, the question remains why prototypical representations of men did not affect the possible self-concept. It is possible that being understanding and warm to others in the future is a positive outlook that participants are motivated to claim for themselves (regardless of experimental conditions). This assumption is in line with research on self-enhancement that shows that people have generally optimistic views about themselves and their futures (Dufner et al., 2019; Taylor & Brown, 1988). Moreover, we asked participants to rate their possible self-concepts around the time when they want to have children. Parenthood implies caretaking which makes it likely that participants expect themselves to be communal in the future, when they are parents. In other words, our measure for the possible self-concept may not have allowed for much variance and was, thus, adapted in Experiment 2. We did find differences for possible task engagement between the experimental conditions for which we chose a more relational approach by asking what behaviors participants expect to be more typical for themselves in the future. These differences in the assessment of both operationalizations of possible selves may explain our different findings.

Besides the main hypothesis, the expected contrast effects were mainly found for the exclusively agentic and not the exclusively communal prototype of men. Based on the assessed perceptions of the prototypes (also see A2.2 Supplementary analyses), the prototypical description of men focusing on communal attributes was not perceived very differently than the control condition and was perceived much more positively than the prototypical description of men focusing on agentic attributes (even though we tried to counteract this positivity bias). These perceptions and the generally high communal intentions suggest that for our sample, men's communal engagement was not perceived as highly non-normative. A possible explanation is the student sample (including many education and psychology majors) who could

differ from the general population in their attitudes and actual experience with leave-taking considerations (Henrich et al., 2010; Peterson, 2001). Further limitations of Experiment 1 can be found in the measurement of the central variables. For example, the possible task engagement only included few tasks which did not always form reliable scales. The ceiling effects we obtained for possible task engagement could be related to the phrasing of the items: Asking how typical tasks will be in the future, leaves room for interpretation regarding what “typical” means, and men could overestimate their engagement (as compared to other men, rather than women, i.e., shifting standards; Biernat, 2012; Biernat & Manis, 1994) with ceiling effects as a result. We addressed these issues in a second experiment.

### 2.4 Experiment 2

The goal of Experiment 2 was to reexamine the predictions in a larger and more diverse sample and improve several of the measures used. Recruiting from the general population and not only students meant that we had to adapt the control condition, previously describing the student of today. To address another ingroup prototype, we created a new control condition on the millennial of today (for full materials, see <https://osf.io/ah9v4/>). We again aimed to recruit men who did not yet have children but wanted to become parents in the future, and especially targeted employees for whom taking parental leave may be more relevant soon. Thus, we targeted participants who would be part of the generation of millennials (being born in the 1980s or 1990s).

We changed several aspects of the possible selves measures. To reduce ceiling effects and allow for more variance, we used 7-point scales for all possible selves measures, which previously used 5-point scales. Moreover, based on recent insights into gender stereotypes (Hentschel et al., 2019), we only used sub-dimensions of communion for the possible self-concept on which in previous research women and men differed in self-ratings to further prevent ceiling effects. For the possible task engagement, we adapted the instructions so that participants were asked to indicate *how often* they expected to engage in certain tasks in the future. We assumed that asking about frequencies rather than typicality of tasks would represent a more objective response format (Biernat, 2012; Biernat & Manis, 1994). In addition, we did not ask participants to imagine their future 15 years from now but more generally around the time when they wanted to have children (as this could be sooner for many). Before the parental leave variables, we again included a text on current policies in Germany but made some adaptations to not communicate current norms and potentially push participants into a certain

direction. Furthermore, we added three items to our previously single item measure of parental leave-taking intentions to ensure a more valid and sensitive assessment.

The main hypothesis was again that describing prototypical men as agentic and communal would increase men's self-reported communal intentions as compared to the control condition (H1). We defined communal outcomes in the preregistration as more communal possible selves, higher parental leave-taking intentions, and longer expected length of parental leave. For the prototypical representation of men focusing exclusively on agency, we again expected contrast effects in the form of more communal outcomes than in the control condition (H2). For the prototypical representation of men focusing exclusively on communion, the lack of substantial findings in Experiment 1 suggests, as expected, that an exclusive focus on communion could simultaneously draw men towards communal outcomes and push them away, with effects cancelling each other out. Thus, we did not expect any differences between the communal condition and the control condition on the dependent variables (H3) and only included the communal prototypical description of men to replicate the findings from Experiment 1. Moreover, we only examined communal outcomes (instead of both agentic and communal ones for this condition as in Experiment 1). Yet, as in Experiment 1, we expected the combined agentic and communal prototype of men to lead to more communal outcomes than the exclusively communal prototype (H4).

## **Method**

The research plan was again approved by the Ethics Commission of the Faculty of Psychology of the University of Koblenz-Landau (approval number 2019\_200), and informed consent was obtained as in Experiment 1 within the online survey. We again report how we determined sample size, all data exclusions, details on all conditions and all measures in this chapter or A2.4 Additionally measured variables.

### ***Participants***

Based on the medium-sized effects found in Experiment 1, we conducted an a-priori power analysis for obtaining medium-sized effects of  $f = 0.25$  ( $\eta^2 = .06$ ) in a one-way ANOVA. With  $\alpha = .05$  and a statistical power of  $1 - \beta = .95$ , a sample size of  $N = 280$  was required. We recruited 322 male participants of which we excluded upfront – as preregistered – three participants who were already parents and seven participants who did not want to have children. For sexual orientation, we softened our preregistered exclusion criteria to also include participants who mainly feel attracted to women or who feel attracted to women and men equally. Sixteen participants did not meet the sexual orientation criterion. Another 44

participants withdrew their approval for using their data for scientific purposes and were, thus, excluded. This relatively high number of withdrawals likely occurred because, initially, participants could not reverse clicking the item for withdrawing the approval to use their data (e.g., when clicking first and then reading the instruction). After participants informed us about this and we enabled unclicking the item, the number of subsequent withdrawals decreased. Lastly, we excluded three participants who failed an attention check (interspersed in the measure of parental leave-taking intentions), one participant who failed a quality check, and 15 outliers based on Cook's distances larger than  $4/n$  (results including outliers are again presented in A2.3 Changes in results based on inclusions). The final sample size comprised  $N = 233$  participants which corresponds to a statistical power of .90 to detect medium-sized effects given our design.

The final sample was on average 26 years old ( $M = 25.55$ ,  $SD = 4.87$ ) with a range from 18 to 48 years. Most participants were highly educated: 42% held a university degree, 40% had graduated from high school, and 11% had completed an apprenticeship. Fifty-one percent of participants were students, 39% were employees, and 4% were apprentices or pupils. Regarding their relationship status, 52% indicated being in a committed relationship, 42% were single, and 4% married or in a registered civil partnership.

### ***Procedure and experimental manipulation***

The procedure was similar to Experiment 1 with the following exceptions. The recruitment took place via mailing lists, social media, face-to-face recruitment in a city center of a small town in South-West Germany, and through personal contacts of student assistants. We aimed for a more diverse sample beyond students and especially targeted employed participants who were more likely to take parental leave soon.

We invited participants to a study regarding plans for their future and raffled 120€ in prizes in total. After informed consent and exclusion criteria, the participants were again randomly assigned to one of the four conditions including different prototypical representations of men varying in agentic and communal content (combined agentic and communal,  $n = 62$ , vs. agentic,  $n = 54$ , vs. communal,  $n = 56$ , vs. control condition,  $n = 61$ ). As we were aiming for a more diverse sample, we adapted the control condition, previously describing a student prototype, to represent an ingroup prototype for the majority of participants: the millennial of today. As for the control condition in Experiment 1, we mostly refrained from using gendered pronouns by using plural forms and again mentioned aspects of the work and family or social life but without complementing them with agentic or communal content. Again, the article

claimed to describe an ideal image of the millennial of today (yet the term “ideal” was mentioned once instead of twice as in the other conditions).

Moreover, we refrained from adjusting the positivity bias in the communal condition. Lastly, we did not include two versions of the combined agentic and communal condition with reversed order of agentic and communal attributes anymore for the sake of simplicity but mixed the order throughout the manipulation.

After the manipulation, the participants again completed the dependent variables, manipulation checks, and further variables (closeness between the self, men, and millennials, current self-concept, agentic possible self-concept and possible task engagement, second operationalization of possible selves, affirmation of masculine identity, prototypicality threat, threat-related emotions, self-typicality, perceived care-giving competence, ambivalent sexism; for details, see A2.4 Additionally measured variables). At the end of the survey, we assessed demographic information, debriefed participants, and offered a chance to withdraw their approval for using their data for scientific purposes.

### **Measures**

Unless otherwise indicated, we used 7-point scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) in a German-language survey. After the manipulation, we again checked the *perception of the presented prototypes* as negative versus positive on a scale from 1 to 10.

Next, we assessed the *possible self-concept* again via close-ended measures (following Oyserman & Markus, 1990). We included seven communal attributes for the subdimensions concern for others (e.g., compassionate) and emotional sensitivity (e.g., emotional) respectively, which we combined to form an overall scale ( $\alpha = .79$ ; Hentschel et al., 2019).

For *possible task engagement*, we asked participants additionally to rate how often they expected to engage in gender role relevant tasks around the time when they wanted to have children (7-point scale ranging from 1 = *never* to 7 = *very often*). We focused the analyses on communal tasks which we especially defined as childcare tasks (e.g., physical care of child;  $\alpha = .67$ ). Routine housework tasks were analyzed secondarily (e.g., preparing food;  $\alpha = .59$ ; Craig & Powell, 2018; Croft et al., 2019; Endendijk et al., 2018; Yavorsky et al., 2015).

After participants read a short information text on parental leave policies in Germany, we assessed *parental leave-taking intentions* now with four items (e.g., “I will probably take parental leave.”;  $\alpha = .93$ ; Miyajima & Yamaguchi, 2017; Yzer, 2012). *Expected length of parental leave* was assessed as in Experiment 1 (open-answering format with possible answers

between 0 and 12 months). The *manipulation check* was also identical to Experiment 1 ( $\alpha_{\text{agency}} = .84$ ,  $\alpha_{\text{communion}} = .86$ ).

## Results

We followed the same analysis strategy as in Experiment 1.

### *Manipulation check*

As in Experiment 1, the manipulation was perceived as intended (see Table 2.4 for descriptive statistics). First, participants perceived different degrees of *agency* in the presented prototypes of men,  $F(3, 229) = 18.80$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .20$ , [.12; .27]. The prototype in the agentic condition,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.19$ , [0.79; 1.59], and in the combined agentic and communal condition,  $p = .003$ ,  $d = 0.58$ , [0.22; 0.94], was perceived as more agentic than in the control condition. The prototype of men in the communal condition,  $p = .567$ ,  $d = 0.12$ , [-0.24; 0.48], was perceived similarly as in the control condition on agency.

Second, the presented prototypes of men also differed by condition regarding *communion* according to the participants, Welch's  $F(3, 124.76) = 47.07$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .53$ , [.43; .61]. The prototype in the communal condition,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.68$ , [1.26; 2.10], and in the combined agentic and communal condition,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.12$ , [0.74; 1.50], was perceived as more communal than in the control condition. The prototype of men in the agentic condition was perceived as lower on communion than in the control condition,  $p = .014$ ,  $d = -0.48$ , [-0.85; -0.11].

We again examined how negatively versus positively the presented prototypes were perceived and found substantial differences,  $F(3, 108.32) = 13.12$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .27$ , [.14; .37]. Participants perceived the description of the man of today in the agentic condition as more negative than in the combined agentic and communal condition,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -1.03$ , [-1.44; -0.62], than in the communal condition,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -1.14$ , [-1.56; -0.71], and than in the control condition,  $p = .008$ ,  $d = -0.49$ , [-0.90; -0.09]. They further perceived the description of the man of today in the combined agentic and communal condition as more positive than in the control condition,  $p = .005$ ,  $d = 0.62$ , [0.24; 1.01], but not substantially differently from the communal condition,  $p = .621$ ,  $d = -0.11$ , [-0.48; 0.26]. Lastly, the description in the communal condition was perceived as more positive than in the control condition,  $p = .002$ ,  $d = 0.75$ , [0.35; 1.15]. We also found substantial differences as to how extreme, unambiguous, and one-sided the prototypical representations of men were perceived (for results, see A2.2 Supplementary analyses).

**Table 2.4. Means and standard deviations for manipulation check and perception of prototypes in experimental conditions (Experiment 2).**

	<i>Experimental Condition</i>			
	Control	Communion	Agency	Agency & Communion
Agency <sup>1</sup>	4.53 (1.04)	4.65 (0.97)	5.91 (1.28)	5.13 (1.03)
Communion <sup>1</sup>	4.44 (0.95)	5.96 (0.85)	3.89 (1.33)	5.53 (0.99)
Negative – positive <sup>2</sup>	6.62 (1.82)	7.89 (1.55)	5.54 (2.54)	7.71 (1.69)

*Notes.* Means with standard deviations in parentheses. <sup>1</sup>: Scale from 1 to 7, <sup>2</sup>: Scale from 1 to 10.

### ***Dependent variable***

Descriptive statistics for all possible selves and parental leave-taking variables can be found in Table 2.5. Although we tried to prevent ceiling effects, participants expected to be highly engaged in caretaking and parental leave in the future in all conditions (all mean ratings between 5 and 6 on a 7-point scale). Regarding the expected length of parental leave, ratings fluctuated around six months. Thus, on average, participants indicated expecting an almost equal division of parental leave-taking between their partners and themselves (given that in Germany, 14 months of paid leave are available to share between partners if each takes at least two months).

**Table 2.5. Means and standard deviations for possible selves and parental leave outcomes in experimental conditions (Experiment 2).**

	<i>Experimental Condition</i>			
	Control	Communion	Agency	Agency & Communion
Possible self-concept <sup>1</sup>	5.49 (0.84)	5.48 (0.79)	5.51 (0.84)	5.46 (0.86)
PTE – childcare <sup>1</sup>	5.60 (0.88)	5.70 (0.74)	5.84 (0.77)	5.68 (0.88)
PTE – housework <sup>1</sup>	5.11 (0.90)	5.20 (1.10)	5.22 (0.96)	5.26 (1.00)
Parental leave-taking intentions <sup>1</sup>	5.25 (1.41)	5.59 (1.34)	5.99 (1.01)	5.78 (1.28)
Expected length of parental leave <sup>2</sup>	5.87 (3.92)	5.96 (3.76)	6.59 (3.67)	6.23 (3.83)

*Notes.* PTE = Possible task engagement. Means with standard deviations in parentheses. <sup>1</sup>: Scale from 1 to 7, <sup>2</sup>: Scale from 0 to 12 (months).

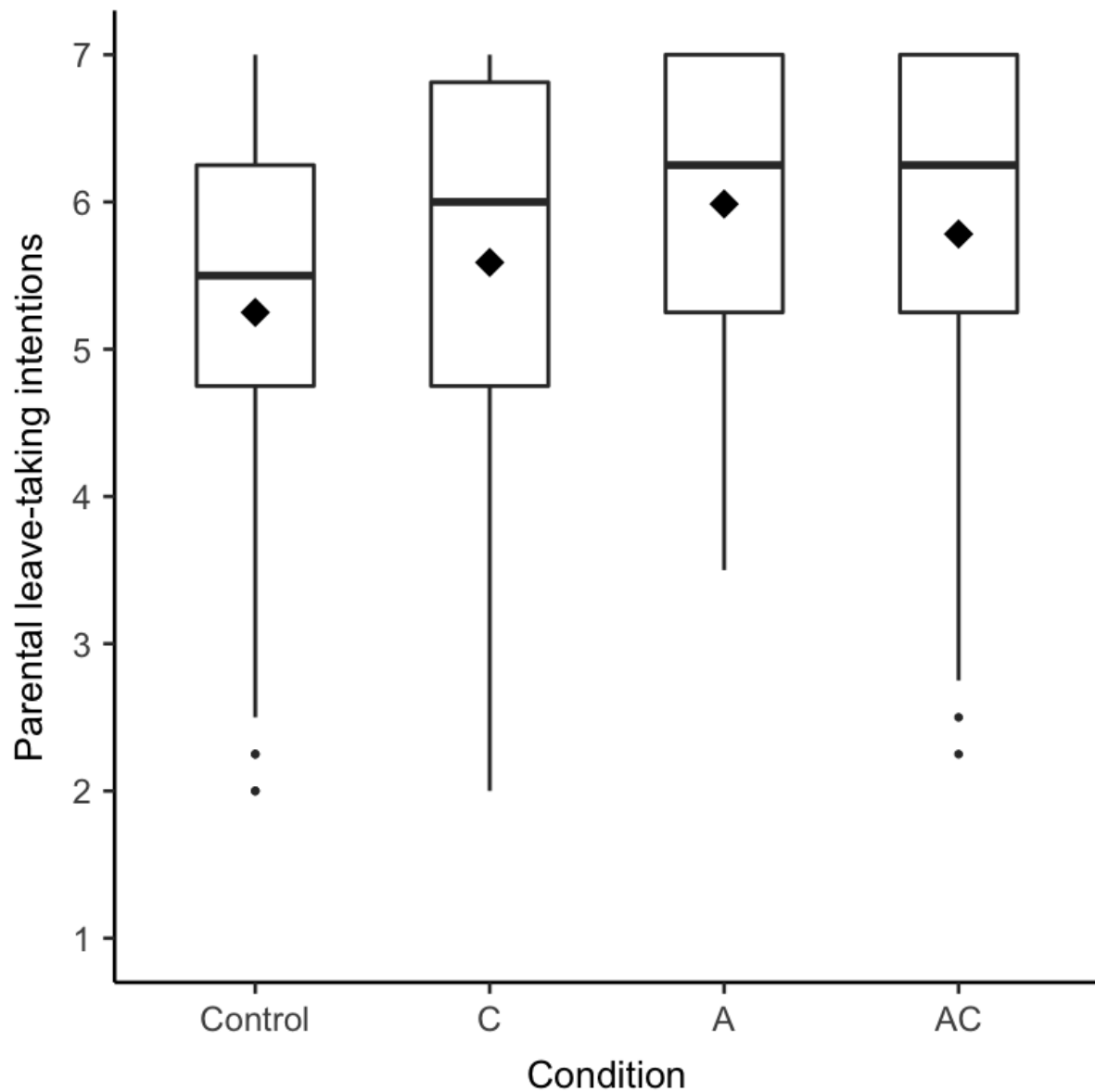
To anticipate, the results again tended to be stronger for parental leave-taking outcomes than possible selves. For possible selves, neither presenting the combined agentic and communal nor the exclusively agentic prototypes of men led to more self-reported communal *possible self-concepts*,  $F(3, 229) = 0.03$ ,  $p = .995$ ,  $\eta^2 < .01$ , [.00; .00], or more communal *possible task engagement*,  $F_s < 0.86$ ,  $\eta^2_s < .02$ . Varying degrees of agency and communion in presented prototypes of men did not substantially affect how men saw themselves in the future or their expectations for engaging in different roles around the time when they wanted to have children. Thus, the results do not support the hypotheses that a combined agentic and communal prototypical representation of men (H1) or an agentic prototypical representation of men (H2) lead to more communal intentions (i.e., communal possible selves here) as compared to the control condition (or as compared to the communal condition for the combined agentic and communal prototype; H4). These findings are consistent with H3, that presenting communal prototypes of men would not lead to more communal possible self-concepts,  $p = .974$ ,  $d = -0.01$ , [-0.38; 0.35], or possible task engagement,  $p_s > .485$ ,  $d_s < 0.14$ , than the control condition.

Regarding men's parental leave-taking, somewhat more support for the hypotheses was found – especially for leave-taking intentions. Participants differed in their reported *parental leave-taking intentions* depending on experimental condition,  $F(3, 229) = 3.51$ ,  $p = .016$ ,  $\eta^2 = .04$ , [.00; .09]; yet the adjusted  $p$ -value was .080 (see Figure 2.3 for boxplots). In line with the main hypothesis (H1), participants reported higher parental leave-taking intentions when the man of today was described as agentic and communal compared to the control condition,  $p = .022$ ,  $d = 0.39$ , [0.04; 0.75]. Yet, contrary to H4, the comparison to the communal condition was not significant,  $p = .402$ ,  $d = 0.15$ , [-0.22; 0.51]. We found support for contrast effects in the agentic condition (H2): Presenting exclusively agentic prototypes of men also led to higher parental leave-taking intentions than the control condition,  $p = .002$ ,  $d = 0.60$ , [0.22; 0.97]. In line with H3, exclusively communal prototypes did not substantially affect men's parental leave-taking intentions compared to the control condition,  $p = .152$ ,  $d = 0.25$ , [-0.12; 0.61]. We again tested whether a model including the experimental conditions explained more variance in parental leave-taking intentions than a base model including age, employment status, and relationship status as controls. This was indeed the case,  $F(3, 211) = 3.27$ ,  $p = .022$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .03$ . Given the adjusted  $p$ -value of the omnibus  $F$ -test and the effect size's confidence interval including zero, we also conducted an equivalence test which revealed that we cannot rule out that meaningful effects are present,  $p = .837$ .



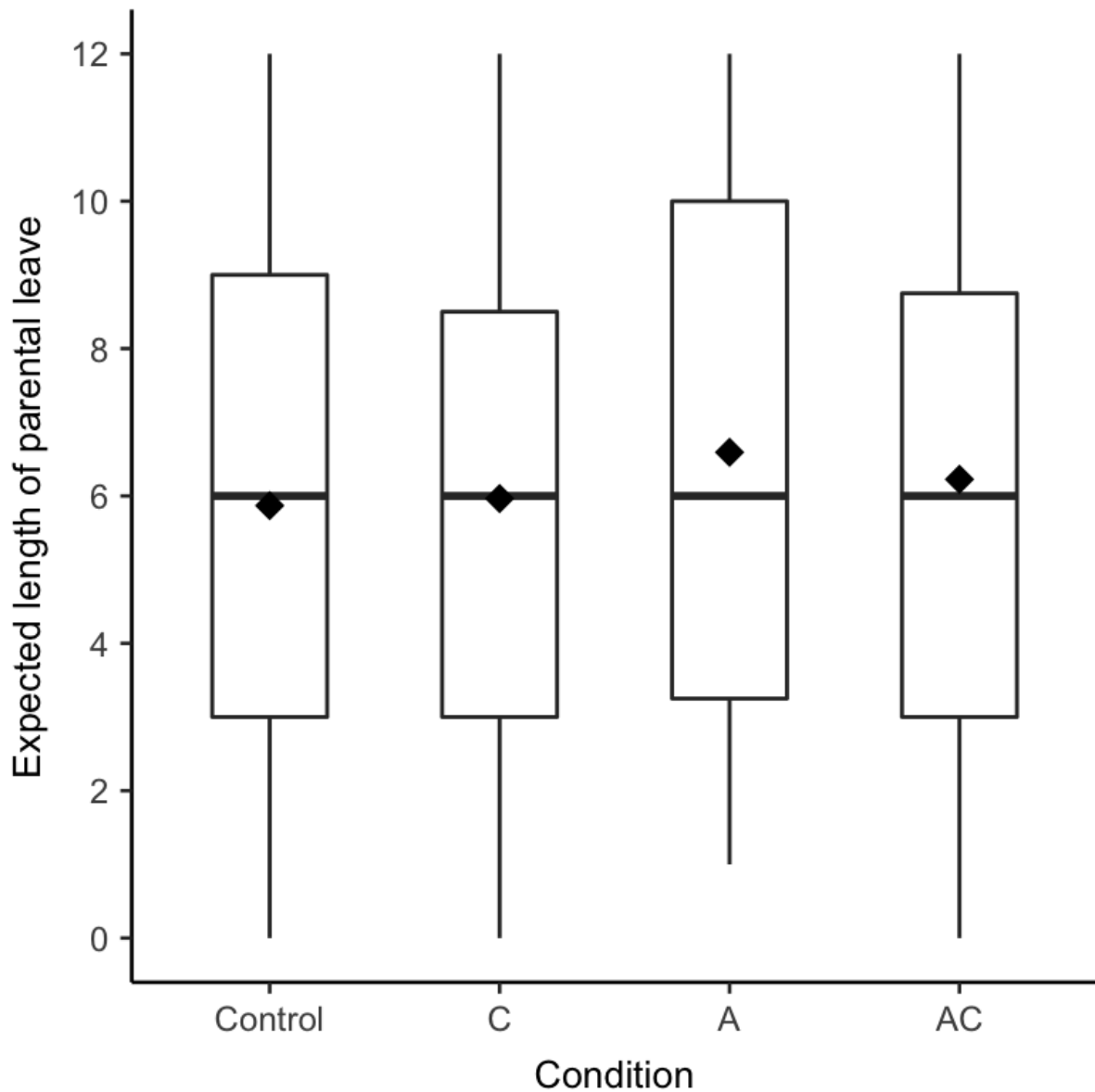
Contrary to expectations, the presented prototypes of men did not substantially affect men's *expected length of parental leave-taking*,  $F(3, 229) = 0.41, p = .747, \eta^2 < .01, [.00; .02]$  (see Figure 2.4).

**Figure 2.3. Boxplots for parental leave-taking intentions separated by condition (Experiment 2).**



*Notes.* Diamonds represent means, horizontal lines represent medians.

**Figure 2.4. Boxplots for expected length of parental leave separated by condition (Experiment 2).**



*Notes.* Diamonds represent means, horizontal lines represent medians.

### ***Exploratory analyses***

The above results showed – in line with the central hypothesis (H1) and results from Experiment 1 – that men tended to report higher parental leave-taking intentions in the combined agentic and communal condition than in the control condition. Yet, in Experiment 2, men’s parental leave-taking intentions were even higher when the man of today was described as solely agentic. To better understand these findings, we ran exploratory analyses to see whether individual differences such as employment status or gender identification could help

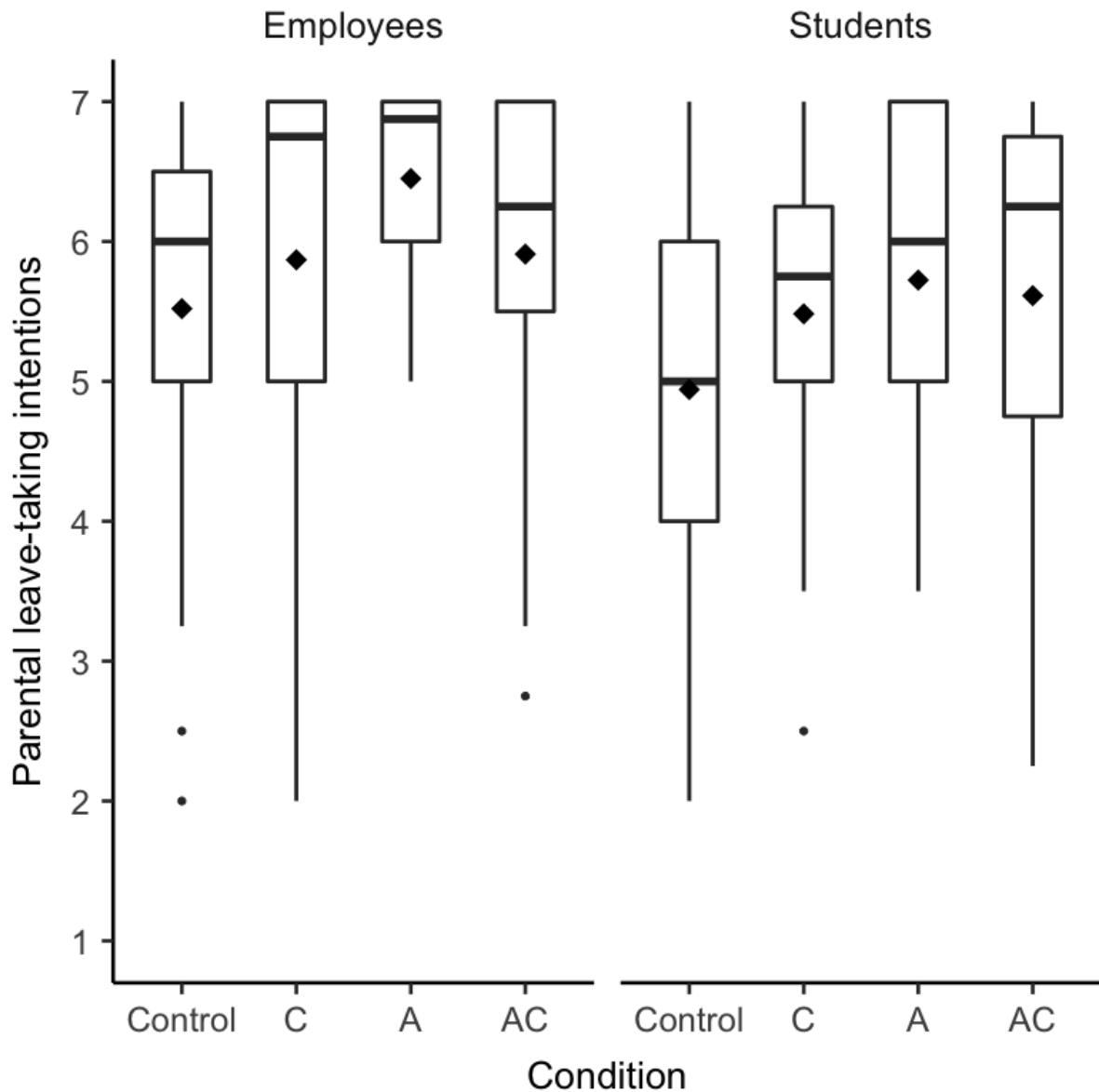
explain which condition is linked to more communal outcomes for whom. First, we compared the two biggest subsamples of Experiment 2: students and employees. As the sample in Experiment 1 and the samples in past research that we based our hypotheses on (Van Grootel et al., 2018) only consisted of students, including employees was a unique feature of Experiment 2. We conducted an ANOVA with the factors condition (control vs. communion vs. agency vs. combination agency and communion) and employment status (employees vs. students; omitting the data of 23 participants with other employment status) and parental leave-taking intentions as the dependent variable (for boxplots, see Figure 2.5 and for details on statistical analyses, see A2.5 Exploratory analyses for Experiment 2). In addition to the main effect of condition, we found that in general employees had higher parental leave-taking intentions than students. Students, replicating Experiment 1, reported higher parental leave-taking intentions in the combined agentic and communal condition and now also in the agentic condition as compared to the control condition. In contrast, employees only reported higher parental leave-taking intentions in the agentic condition but not in any other condition as compared to the control condition.

Thus, although presenting an agentic prototype of men seems to have had stronger effects on men's parental leave-taking intentions in Experiment 2 as compared to Experiment 1, students' leave-taking intentions were in addition higher in the combined agentic and communal condition than in the control condition. Only for employees, contrast effects in the agentic condition prevailed. Hence, employment status (or being engaged in the agentic domain of work and breadwinning) seems to play a role for which composition of agency and communion in prototypes of men increases men's intentions for communal engagement.

Besides employment status, we examined whether different degrees of gender identification, operationalized via a pictorial assessment of closeness between the self and the group of men (Schubert & Otten, 2002; Tropp & Wright, 2001), played a role for which presented prototypes of men elicited self-reported communal outcomes in men. Thus, we conducted a moderation analysis including prototypes of men as the independent variable, gender identification as the moderator, and parental leave-taking intentions as the dependent variable (for details on statistical analyses, see A2.5 Exploratory analyses for Experiment 2). Degree of closeness between the self and the group of men significantly interacted with the combined agentic and communal condition. Probing the interaction revealed that the combined agentic and communal condition especially led to higher parental leave-taking intentions for men who did not feel very close or only moderately close to other men. These results suggest that the combined agentic and communal prototype of men may be particularly effective for

men with little ties to the group of men, whereas the agentic prototype may be particularly effective for men who are already experienced in the male, agentic domain of work and breadwinning (provoking a contrast effect).

**Figure 2.5. Boxplots for parental leave-taking intentions separated by condition and employment status (Experiment 2).**



*Notes.* (A) Employees. (B) Students. Diamonds represent means, horizontal lines represent medians.

### Discussion

Experiment 2 showed only some support for the main hypothesis (H1) for parental leave-taking intentions. More specifically, being confronted with a prototypical representation

of men that combined agency and communion tended to result in higher self-reported parental leave-taking intentions for men compared to the control condition. Moreover, the results for parental leave-taking intentions provided tentative support for H2: Presenting exclusively agentic prototypes of men also increased parental leave-taking intentions by trend. In line with H3, the communal prototype of men did not affect men's communal outcomes. Yet, we also did not find substantial differences between the combined agentic and communal and the exclusively communal prototypes of men on any dependent variable, contradicting H4. In sum, the results of Experiment 2 were less clear than those of Experiment 1. Although we adapted the possible selves measures, these adaptations did not always yield stronger findings: Specifically, neither men's communal possible self-concept nor communal possible task engagement were affected by degrees of agency and communion in prototypes of men (and neither was their expected length of parental leave). We discuss possible explanations for the mixed findings in the following.

## **2.5 General discussion**

Even though various benefits can result from men's increased participation in communal roles, men remain underrepresented in traditionally female care-oriented engagement such as parental leave. Past research suggested that notions of what constitutes an ideal man or ideal father and the degree to which agentic and communal traits are integrated in these can play a crucial role for men's orientation towards care. We, thus, examined to what extent suggesting different representations of their gender group affects men's self-reported parental leave-taking intentions and possible selves with regard to work and care roles. We presented male participants with contrived newspaper articles on the man of today (control group: student or millennial of today) varying in agentic and communal content. Derived from the role prioritization model, we expected a prototypical representation of men that combines agentic and communal aspects to increase men's communal intentions. The results of both experiments provided initial support for this main hypothesis for self-reported parental leave-taking intentions. Moreover, we found first evidence for contrast effects: As predicted, exclusively agentic prototypes of men were linked to higher parental leave-taking intentions. While the current results tend to support the main hypothesis that a combination of agency and communion in prototypical representations of men is likely to increase men's parental leave-taking intentions, we found less support for effects on men's possible selves and their expected length of parental leave. In addition to these mixed findings, two clear conclusions can be drawn

from our research: First, both experiments showed that men expect to be highly engaged in communal roles in general. Second, consistent with our predictions and in contrast to what lay theories may expect, simply presenting communal prototypes of men to further promote men's communal engagement clearly does not suffice.

### **Assimilation and contrast effects and further mechanisms**

In contrast to communal prototypes of men, we found that presentations of agentic prototypes were more likely to increase men's parental leave-taking intentions. Whereas such a contrast effect is in line with hypotheses, we expected the combined agentic and communal condition to lead to participants reporting higher parental leave-taking intentions. Yet, this dominance of contrast effects is in line with findings from a meta-analysis of social comparison theory including assimilation and contrast effects. Especially in comparisons with actual persons, contrast effects seem to be the dominant response, and evidence for assimilation effects (i.e., being pulled towards a point of reference) is weak (Gerber et al., 2018). Still, we could argue that the increased communal intentions after being exposed to a more moderate and diverse prototype focusing on agency *and* communion could be interpreted as an assimilation effect: being pulled towards the newly added communal aspects of a prototype that combines traditional and emerging norms. Moreover, exploratory analyses of Experiment 2 showed that contrast effects were mainly driven by a specific subsample, employees, who were already engaged in the agentic domain of work and breadwinning. At the same time, parental leave represents a more realistic option for their immediate future because of their possibly higher age and career advancement, which is reflected in their overall higher parental leave-taking intentions as compared to students. Accordingly, being presented with a group prototype that only prescribes agentic engagement could lead to reactance (for reactance effects in a similar study, see Danbold & Bendersky, 2020).

Alternatively, the agentic prototype of men could have functioned as a paradoxical intervention (Bar-Tal et al., 2021; Swann et al., 1988). Presenting participants with messages that are in line with their views but exaggerated can unfreeze their beliefs and lead to attitude change. In this case, the agentic prototypical representation of men could especially foster communal orientation in men with initially traditional gender-role attitudes. In contrast, communal intentions tended to be higher after being exposed to the combined agentic and communal prototype of men for other samples such as students, supporting findings from past research (Van Grootel et al., 2018). Moreover, in our Experiment 2, men who felt little to moderately close to their gender group reported higher parental leave-taking intentions

following exposure to the combined agentic and communal prototype, suggesting that such prototypical descriptions of men could be especially effective for non-traditional men. In sum, whether a combination of agency and communion or an exclusive focus on agency in descriptions of what constitutes a man leads to more communal outcomes appears to depend on individual characteristics such as employment status and gender identification, and no clear conclusions can be drawn from our findings.

### **Which prototypes should be effective for fostering men’s communal outcomes?**

A further open question is why other communal outcomes such as men’s possible selves and the expected length of parental leave were less affected than parental leave-taking intentions. Results of a recent study that examined the role of professional prototypes for the underrepresentation of groups in professional contexts, such as women in firefighting, suggest that our manipulation could have lacked crucial aspects (Danbold & Bendersky, 2020). The authors propose that *balanced* category prototypes (the category being firefighting in this case), which emphasize both traits traditionally associated with the dominant group in this context as well as the non-dominant group, can reduce group-based biases and the underrepresentation of the non-dominant group, similar to our central hypothesis. However, their results (Danbold & Bendersky, 2020) further showed that for participants to truly consider both groups of traits as equally important, it is necessary to especially emphasize the traits associated with the non-dominant group by presenting them first when ranked in order of importance (so-called prototype inversion). When looking at the category prototype of caretaking, this would mean that agency, which is traditionally associated with the non-dominant group of men in this context, should be emphasized. However, when considering group prototypes, as we did in the present research with prototypes of *men*, we could conclude that communion – traditionally associated with the female group – should be emphasized. In Experiment 1, we in fact included different orders of agency and communion. Yet, a reversed order in which communal attributes were mentioned first did not increase communal outcomes descriptively. However, an explanation for this could be that we did not stress that attributes mentioned first are more important for characterizing the group of men, which is what Danbold and Bendersky’s results would suggest. In addition to applying this prototype inversion, future research could consider other prototypes than prototypes of men such as, in the context of parental leave, the more specific group prototype of fathers. Moreover and as discussed, the results by Danbold and Bendersky pertain to category prototypes instead of group prototypes. As changing group prototypes has proven difficult in past research (for a discussion, see Danbold & Bendersky,

2020), focusing on caretaking prototypes could be fruitful for motivating men to engage in such roles. In fact, men are already applying the strategy of redefining caretaking instead of redefining masculinity, for example, by defining childcare as “hard work” (i.e., as an agentic task; Brandth & Kvande, 2018; Schmidt et al., 2015). Such an approach could especially lower barriers for highly identified men by reducing threats to their masculine identity. In addition, agency is associated with higher status and could, thus, contribute to increasing the appreciation of care work – a shift women could also benefit from. However, fully replacing or negating the traditional communal aspects of caretaking could have negative consequences for women who strongly identify with communion as well as for non-traditional communal men. These considerations are also outlined by Danbold and Bendersky (2020) who, therefore, suggest focusing on balanced prototypes.

The idea of considering both aspects traditionally associated with gender groups, as well as those that have not, is also central to the role prioritization model on which we based the main hypothesis (Haines & Stroessner, 2019). In the case of the present experiments, prototypical representations of men in which communal traits and behaviors complement agentic ones could reassure men and give them leeway to engage more in communal roles, as illustrated by their high parental leave-taking intentions in this condition (in addition to the agentic condition). Still, it remains unclear what is more effective for fostering counter-stereotypic outcomes: only adding communal aspects as an extra (augmentation) as Haines and Stroessner (2019) suggest or specifically highlighting communal aspects as Danbold and Bendersky (2020) suggest (yet, it is additionally unclear to what extent the findings for category prototypes can be applied to group prototypes). Nevertheless, both, in addition to our work, stress the importance of integrating agency *and* communion to motivate counter-stereotypic engagement. This stands in contrast to what lay theories may assume: that focusing on the neglected aspects (communion in the case of men) will help to increase men’s communal orientation, for example, regarding parental leave. One of the clearest findings of the present research is that presenting a communal prototype of men does not increase men’s self-reported intentions regarding parental leave and caretaking in general.

### **Practice implications**

The insight that communal prototypes are inefficient could, for example, be applied to gender portrayals in media and advertising. Past research showed that gender stereotyping is still prevalent in media and advertising cross-nationally (Eisend, 2010; Gentry & Harrison, 2010; Matthes et al., 2016; Ward & Grower, 2020). For example, men are less often portrayed



as engaging in domestic tasks and childcare than women, and if they are, these depictions are often characterized by lower competence and involvement as compared to women (Prieler, 2016; Scharrer, 2012; Tsai & Shumow, 2011). The ways in which men and male gender roles are portrayed in media and advertising is important, as media consumption has been linked to supporting and adhering to masculinity norms (Garst & Bodenhausen, 1997; Giaccardi et al., 2016). Even though more non-traditional male portrayals focusing on caretaking and involved fatherhood are emerging, these often put a strong focus on communal, caretaking aspects while neglecting traditional male roles (e.g., the Dove Men+Care advertising line; Grau & Zotos, 2016). The present research can be viewed as first evidence that communion-focused communication of masculinity norms could be ineffective in increasing men's orientation towards care in contrast to communication including both communal and agentic aspects. Whereas increasing gender equality is not the (primary) goal of media content and advertising, this can be an important implication for societal and governmental communication that aims to reduce barriers to men's engagement in communal roles.

Although some of our experimental conditions were more effective than others in fostering communal intentions, men reported generally high communal expectations. This finding is mirrored by representative population surveys in which 83% of young childless men think that fathers should spend as much time as possible with their children (Juncke et al., 2018). Similarly, many fathers think that sharing childcare equally would be ideal. Yet only a minority actually does so (Juncke et al., 2018), which indicates that men could be too optimistic about their involvement. In their model of cultural and psychological barriers to men's engagement in communal roles, Croft et al. (2015) propose that besides the internalization of communal traits, values, and possible selves, external barriers play a crucial role for men's orientation towards care. Thus, even though men might be motivated, their engagement in childcare and parental leave further depends on, for example, financial costs and workplace or partner support (e.g., Almqvist, 2008; Kaufman & Almqvist, 2017; Samtleben, Bringmann, et al., 2019). Future research could, thus, examine the (longitudinal) processes that seem to interfere with men's initially high motivation, creating a gap between their intentions and behavior. Nevertheless, internal motivation is a necessary prerequisite for men to even consider increased communal engagement (except for cases in which policies create high incentives; Kotsadam & Finseraas, 2011; Yerkes & Javornik, 2019). Even for men who are not confronted with childcare and leave-taking decisions themselves, valuing communion in men can lead them to support respective policies in organizations and societies. Such an increased support can, in turn, contribute to lowering external barriers which enable men to act on their internal motivations. In sum,

findings of the present research imply that a communication of masculinity norms that is exclusively focused on communion is unlikely to foster men's communal intentions. In fact, these communal intentions were high to begin with in the current samples, stressing the role of simultaneously lowering external barriers to men's communal engagement and parental leave-taking by, for example, increasing social and financial support.

### **Limitations**

The findings of the present experiments should be viewed in light of several limitations. First, the samples of both experiments were skewed towards students who differ from general populations on fundamental psychological dimensions as shown by meta-analyses and reviews (Henrich et al., 2010; Peterson, 2001). Second, both experiments were conducted in Germany, and materials were partly tailored to the national policy context (i.e., the short information on parental leave policies in Germany presented to participants). As policies are an important driver of leave-taking decisions and vary considerably across countries (Castro-García & Pazos-Moran, 2016; Feldman & Gran, 2016; Yerkes & Javornik, 2019), this constraint on the generality of the present results should be taken into account.

In addition, we recruited male participants who indicated a desire to have children but were neither yet fathers nor expected to be so in the close future. Thus, it is possible that they had not yet fully developed attitudes towards parental leave-taking and, therefore, especially in the case of their expected length of parental leave, gravitated towards a more or less egalitarian division of leave between themselves and their (future) partners (see also Meeussen et al., 2016, 2019). Nevertheless, we targeted these samples of highly educated childless men deliberately: Because of their own and their (future) partners' possibly high education, financial considerations – otherwise an important external determinant of men's leave-taking – could be less essential (and increasingly available financial compensation for paternal leave also makes this less key). For this group, it is, therefore, particularly important to understand how factors such as masculinity norms and ideas of what constitutes a man contribute to their behavioral intentions for communal engagement. At the same time, parental leave pay is capped at 1800€ in Germany. Although we informed participants about the national leave policy, information on the financial compensation that parents receive during parental leave was not included. Therefore, for the targeted sample and considering gender norms continuously associating men with breadwinning, including this information could have affected men's parental leave-taking intentions and reduced the observed ceiling effects.

Another limitation pertains to our chosen manipulation of prototypes. Theoretically, prototypes are context-dependent and can change according to the point of reference (Oakes et al., 1998; Wenzel et al., 2007). However, the intergroup nature of prototypes was not directly reflected in the manipulation; hence, it can be argued whether we indeed manipulated prototypes. Still, we assume that the intergroup context of gender was activated in the present experiments due to the materials. As gender is traditionally viewed as binary (and this perception is only slowly changing; Morgenroth & Ryan, 2021), it is likely that the group of women implicitly functioned as the point of reference. It is also an open question in which ways the prototypes' category width or perceived distance to individuals affects men's communal outcomes (e.g., Schwarz & Bless, 1992; Zell & Alicke, 2010). In the present research, we focused on prototypes of men in general; yet, prototypes within men's immediate environment (e.g., men in their profession or organization) could be more effective in drawing men towards communal engagement. However, men could also find it more difficult to distance themselves from an agentic male ideal if prototypes of men that are more closely related to their reality were described, possibly leading to lower communal intentions.

Finally, we are merely able to draw cautious conclusions based on the present findings. Only on some dependent variables (especially in Experiment 2), we found support for the main hypothesis that exposing male participants to a description of the man of today that includes agentic and communal content would increase men's self-reported communal intentions. Even in Experiment 1 effects were smaller than initially expected, and the study may not have had enough power to clearly detect some effects. The results were further mixed across experiments and across dependent variables for the exclusively agentic prototypical representation of men that increased men's self-reported communal intentions only sometimes. What is more, effects partly depended on outlier treatment and adjustment of error probabilities. We also did not find evidence for preregistered mechanisms behind these effects (e.g., assimilation and contrast effects or affirmation and threat responses, see Table 2.1 and A2.2 Supplementary analyses). Nevertheless, two clear findings emerged: We consistently found that men had generally high communal intentions and that a representation of men exclusively focused on communion does not further increase men's orientation towards care.

## **Conclusion**

The current experiments offer first insight into how descriptions of what constitutes a man varying in agentic and communal content can generally affect men's self-reported orientation towards care and their parental leave-taking intentions more specifically. We found

## CHAPTER 2

initial evidence that a combination of agency and communion in presented prototypes of men can increase men's parental leave-taking intentions, whereas an exclusive focus on agency additionally tends to foster leave-taking intentions in men via contrast or reactance effects. However, men's possible selves and their broader orientation towards care were less affected. Except for the consistent finding that exclusively emphasizing communion in prototypical representations of men does not suffice to foster men's communal intentions, we cannot draw clear conclusions based on the present findings. Further research is needed to clarify how men's orientation towards care is affected by prototypical representations of their gender group and what the underlying mechanisms for these effects are. Generally, though, men's communal orientation was high to begin with, emphasizing the difficulty men have translating their communal orientation into actual communal behavior. An increased understanding of how men's intentions for communal engagement are shaped by gendered norms enables us to develop ways to encourage their actual involvement and can ultimately contribute to gender-related social change.

### **Acknowledgements**

We thank our student assistant and students of the empirical seminar for their help in data collection.

## 2.6 Appendix

### A2.1 Deviations from preregistration

In addition to the deviations outlined in Table 2.1, we preregistered to exclude participants who failed the manipulation check. Yet, this procedure is more advisable when the manipulation check is administered in the form of an attention check (e.g., whether participants remembered an important part of the manipulation correctly). In our case, it is not as clear what qualifies as a failed manipulation check, and excluding participants could invalidate the random assignment of participants to experimental conditions. Thus, we refrained from excluding cases based on this criterion.

### A2.2 Supplementary analyses

#### *Experiment 1*

*Perception of prototypes.* We examined how the prototypical representations of men were perceived over and above agentic and communal attributions (for descriptive statistics see Table A2.1). The prototypes differed as to how pleasant,  $F(3, 128) = 6.70, p < .001, \eta^2 = .14, [.05; .22]$ , extreme,  $F(3, 128) = 10.69, p < .001, \eta^2 = .20, [.10; .29]$ , and desirable,  $F(3, 128) = 3.30, p = .023, \eta^2 = .07, [.01; .14]$ , they were perceived. We found no substantial differences in how surprising they were perceived,  $F(3, 128) = 1.86, p = .139, \eta^2 = .04, [.00; .10]$ . Especially perceptions of the prototypical representation of men focusing on agency differed from those of other prototypes. According to the participants, the description of the man of today in the agentic condition was more unpleasant than in the combined agentic and communal condition,  $p = .003, d = -0.84, [-1.34; -0.33]$ , than in the communal condition,  $p = .001, d = -0.92, [-1.41; -0.44]$ , and than in the control condition,  $p = .003, d = -0.90, [-1.41; -0.39]$ . The description of the man of today in the agentic condition was also perceived as more extreme than the description of the man of today in the combined agentic and communal condition,  $p < .001, d = 0.93, [0.42; 1.45]$ , than that in the communal condition,  $p < .001, d = 1.07, [0.57; 1.56]$ , and than that in the control condition,  $p < .001, d = 1.26, [0.73; 1.80]$ . Lastly, it was perceived as less desirable than the description of the man of today in the communal condition,  $p = .033, d = -0.69, [-1.16; -0.21]$ . The other conditions were not perceived substantially differently from each other, all  $ps > .055$ .

**Table A2.1. Means and standard deviations for perceptions of prototypes in experimental conditions (Experiment 1).**

	<i>Experimental Condition</i>			
	Control	Communion	Agency	Agency & Communion
Unpleasant – pleasant	64.37 (24.75)	64.51 (23.86)	42.00 (24.90)	63.83 (27.47)
Unsurprising – surprising	30.63 (22.76)	43.68 (23.82)	40.34 (26.56)	34.77 (23.99)
Moderate – extreme	37.80 (21.66)	42.92 (20.44)	66.31 (23.37)	43.90 (24.84)
Undesirable – desirable	56.97 (26.99)	62.19 (23.71)	45.20 (25.91)	61.60 (25.68)

*Notes.* Means with standard deviations in parentheses. Scales ranging from 0 to 100.

*Additional facets of possible selves and parental leave-taking.* We conducted the same analyses of variance as reported for other facets of possible selves (i.e., desired and feared agentic and communal possible self-concept and possible task engagement) and other facets of parental leave-taking (i.e., desired [length of] leave-taking, perceived self-efficacy regarding leave-taking). We did not find any substantial differences between conditions on these variables,  $F_s < 2.12$ ,  $p_s > .101$ ,  $\eta^2_s < .05$ .

*Mediation analyses.* As preregistered, we conducted mediation analyses to examine whether possible selves mediate the relation between prototypes of men and parental leave-taking variables. We did not find any significant indirect effects across operationalizations of possible selves and parental leave-taking, all  $b_s < 0.45$ ,  $\beta_s < .07$ , all 95% Boot CIs included zero.

## **Experiment 2**

*Perception of prototypes.* We again examined how the prototypical representations of men were perceived over and above agentic and communal attributions (for descriptive statistics see Table A2.2). We expected the exclusively agentic prototype to be perceived as more extreme, unambiguous, and one-sided than the combined agentic and communal prototype (and vice versa; H2.5 in preregistration). In fact, the presented prototypes differed substantially regarding how extreme,  $F(3, 185) = 17.93$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .23$ , [.14; .30], unambiguous,  $F(3, 210) = 8.15$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .10$ , [.04; .17], and diverse they were perceived,  $F(3, 208) = 18.91$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .21$ , [.13; .29]. The agency-based prototypical description of men was perceived as more extreme than the combined agentic and communal prototype of

men,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.28$ , [0.88; 1.68], than the communal prototype,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.36$ , [0.95; 1.78], and than that in the control condition,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.23$ , [0.83; 1.63]. The other conditions did not differ substantially from each other regarding perceptions of extremity, all  $ps > .750$ . Both the agentic and the communal prototypes of men were perceived as more unambiguous than the combined agentic and communal prototype ( $p_{\text{Avs.AC}} < .001$ ,  $d = 0.77$ , [0.40; 1.15],  $p_{\text{Cvs.AC}} = .004$ ,  $d = 0.67$ , [0.30; 1.04]) and than the control condition ( $p_{\text{Avs.Control}} < .001$ ,  $d = 0.68$ , [0.30; 1.05],  $p_{\text{Cvs.Control}} = .004$ ,  $d = 0.58$ , [0.21; 0.95]; all other  $ps > .584$ ). In terms of diversity, the agentic prototype of men was perceived as less diverse (i.e., more one-sided) than the combined agentic and communal prototype,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -1.53$ , [-1.94; -1.11], than the communal prototype,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -1.05$ , [-1.45; -0.65], and than the control condition,  $p = .002$ ,  $d = -0.63$ , [-1.00; -0.25]. Furthermore, the combined agentic and communal prototype of men was perceived as more diverse than the control condition,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.76$ , [0.39; 1.13]. The communal prototype did not differ substantially from any other condition, all  $ps > .053$ . In sum, especially the agentic prototype of men was perceived as extreme, unambiguous, and one-sided and more so than the combined agentic and communal prototype, supporting H2.5. However, these different perceptions generally did not moderate the relation between prototypes of men differing in agentic and communal content and men's communal outcomes (see below). Thus, we cannot conclude that assimilation and contrast are the mechanisms behind the obtained main effects of prototypes on, for example, parental leave-taking intentions.

**Table A2.2. Means and standard deviations for perceptions of prototypes in experimental conditions (Experiment 2).**

	<i>Experimental Condition</i>			
	Control	Communion	Agency	Agency & Communion
Moderate – extreme	4.61 (2.20)	4.55 (1.95)	7.11 (1.81)	4.80 (1.81)
Ambiguous – unambiguous	6.04 (2.58)	7.37 (1.98)	7.68 (2.24)	6.02 (2.06)
One-sided – diverse	5.16 (2.46)	6.04 (2.30)	3.71 (2.13)	6.86 (2.00)

*Notes.* Means with standard deviations in parentheses. Scales ranging from 1 to 10.

*Additional facets of possible selves and suggested mechanisms.* We conducted the same analyses of variance as reported for agentic possible selves and the second operationalization of possible task engagement. We did not find any substantial differences between presented prototypes of men on these variables,  $F_s < 1.52$ ,  $ps > .209$ ,  $\eta^2_s < .02$ , except for the agentic

possible self-concept,  $F(3, 229) = 3.99$ ,  $p = .008$ ,  $\eta^2 = .05$ . Men tended to expect to be more agentic in the future in the communal as compared to the control condition, a contrast effect,  $p = .083$ ,  $d = 0.35$ ,  $[-0.01; 0.72]$ .

We also examined whether the different prototypes of men affected whether men felt threatened or affirmed in their masculinity. We expected men to be more affirmed in their masculinity in the combined agentic and communal condition compared to the communal condition (and, thus, allowing for more communal outcomes). Moreover, we expected men to be more threatened in the communal condition compared to the control condition and compared to the combined agentic and communal condition. Contradicting these hypotheses (H2.4 in preregistration), we did not find any substantial differences between conditions, all  $F_s < 1.08$ ,  $p_s > .358$ ,  $\eta^2 < .03$ . A possible explanation for these null results is the difficulty to measure threat (and possibly also affirmation) via self-report. Using self-report measures assumes that participants are aware of being threatened or affirmed in their masculine identity, although this cannot be taken as a given (Blascovich & Mendes, 2000). What is more, explicitly measuring threat responses has been linked to reactance and defensive behavior such as intentionally indicating low feelings of threat (see Branscombe et al., 1999; Scheepers & Ellemers, 2005). In fact, we obtained floor effects for threat measures; however, the data do not allow to distinguish whether these reflect reactivity or participants' actual threat levels. Moreover, the masculine identity has been described as a precarious one, and, thus, self-presentation concerns could keep men from reporting that they feel threatened or affirmed in their masculinity (Vandello et al., 2008; Vandello & Bosson, 2012). Future research should, therefore, use physiological indices to assess affirmation and threat responses more comprehensively (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1996; Scheepers & Ellemers, 2005).

*Mediation and moderation analyses.* As preregistered, we conducted mediation analyses to examine whether possible selves as well as perceptions of threat and affirmation mediate the relation between prototypes of men and parental leave-taking variables. We did not find any significant indirect effects, all  $b_s < 0.26$ ,  $\beta_s < .03$ , all 95% Boot CIs included zero.

We also examined whether self-typicality and the perceived extremity, ambiguity, and diversity of prototypes moderated the relations between prototypes of men and communal outcomes (i.e., communal possible selves and parental leave-taking variables). Self-typicality was operationalized via the self-stereotyping subscale of gender identification as well as Euclidean distances calculated separately for agency and communion between the perception of the presented prototype (as indicated on the manipulation check) and agentic and communal



self-concepts. For the first operationalization of self-typicality, we found a significant interaction between the agentic and communal prototype of men and self-typicality, including parental leave-taking intentions as the dependent variable,  $b = -0.33$ ,  $SE = 0.16$ ,  $t = -2.06$ ,  $p = .041$  (overall  $F$ -Test:  $F(7, 225) = 2.63$ ,  $p = .012$ ,  $R^2_{adj} = .05$ ). Probing the interaction revealed that the combined agentic and communal condition especially led to higher parental leave-taking intentions for men who felt little like typical men ( $-1$   $SD$ ),  $b = 0.99$ ,  $SE = 0.32$ ,  $t = 3.07$ ,  $p = .002$ , and also for men who felt moderately like typical men ( $M$ ),  $b = 0.49$ ,  $SE = 0.23$ ,  $t = 2.15$ ,  $p = .033$ .

Next, we conducted moderation analyses for the second operationalization of self-typicality. For self-typicality regarding communion, we found a significant interaction with the combined agentic and communal prototype of men,  $b = -0.59$ ,  $SE = 0.15$ ,  $t = -3.84$ ,  $p < .001$ , and the communal prototype of men,  $b = -0.80$ ,  $SE = 0.17$ ,  $t = -4.76$ ,  $p < .001$ , including the communal possible self-concept as the dependent variable (overall  $F$ -Test:  $F(7, 225) = 5.30$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2_{adj} = .11$ ). Probing the interactions indicated that the combined agentic and communal prototype of men led to more communal possible self-concepts for men who felt little like typical men regarding communion,  $b = 0.53$ ,  $SE = 0.20$ ,  $t = 2.61$ ,  $p = .010$ . The same applies to the communal prototype of men,  $b = 0.62$ ,  $SE = 0.20$ ,  $t = 3.08$ ,  $p = .002$ . Moreover, the combined agentic and communal,  $b = -0.67$ ,  $SE = 0.22$ ,  $t = -3.06$ ,  $p = .002$ , as well as the communal prototype,  $b = -1.01$ ,  $SE = 0.25$ ,  $t = -3.98$ ,  $p < .001$ , led to less communal possible self-concepts for men who felt much like typical men regarding communion.

When looking at the perceived diversity of prototypes as a moderator, we found a significant interaction with the combined agentic and communal prototype of men,  $b = -0.15$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $t = -2.03$ ,  $p = .043$ , and the agentic prototype of men,  $b = -0.15$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $t = -2.06$ ,  $p = .041$ , including the item “I will spend time looking after my children's needs” as the dependent variable (overall  $F$ -Test:  $F(7, 204) = 2.13$ ,  $p = .042$ ,  $R^2_{adj} = .04$ ). This item was part of the second operationalization of possible task engagement regarding childcare which did not form a reliable scale ( $\alpha = .23$ ). However, none of the conditional effects at levels of the moderator were significant (all  $ts < -1.86$ ,  $ps > .064$ ). For all other analyses, either the overall  $F$ -Test or the interactions were not significant. Thus, we did not find evidence for assimilation and contrast effects based on perceptions of prototypes as, for example, extreme, unambiguous, or one-sided (versus diverse).

### A2.3 Changes in results based on inclusions

#### *Experiment 1*

As preregistered, we conducted all analyses again with cases that failed attention, suspicion, and quality checks. With these cases included, the overall  $F$ -test for communal possible task engagement was not significant,  $F(3, 140) = 2.36, p = .075, \eta^2 = .05$ . Men now did not substantially expect communal tasks to be more typical for themselves in the future in the agentic condition as compared to the control condition,  $p = .064, d = 0.45, [-0.02; 0.92]$ . Similarly, the overall  $F$ -test for the expected length of parental leave-taking was not significant anymore,  $F(3, 140) = 1.99, p = .118, \eta^2 = .04$ ; yet, the results for the comparisons between conditions did not change.

When outliers were included, participants did not substantially expect communal tasks to be more typical for themselves in the future in the agentic condition as compared to the control condition,  $p = .060, d = 0.40, [-0.06; 0.86]$ . Also, the overall  $F$ -test for the expected length of parental leave-taking was not significant anymore,  $F(3, 139) = 2.66, p = .051, \eta^2 = .05$ . Although other findings did not change, men now only tended to expect to take longer leave in the combined agentic and communal condition as compared to the communal condition,  $p = .073, d = 0.53, [0.04; 1.01]$ .

#### *Experiment 2*

When we included cases that failed attention, suspicion, or quality checks, parental leave-taking intentions now only tended to differ between conditions,  $F(3, 235) = 2.57, p = .055, \eta^2 = .03$ . In the exploratory 2x2 ANOVA including prototypes of men and employment status as factors, students tended to have higher parental leave-taking intentions in the combined agentic and communal condition as compared to the control condition,  $p = .053, d = 0.47, [-0.04; 0.98]$ , and in the agentic condition as compared to the control condition,  $p = .097, d = 0.42, [-0.09; 0.93]$  (all other  $ps > .110$ ; both were significant when cases were excluded).

Including outliers did not affect our conclusions regarding hypotheses. Yet, again, students only tended to have higher parental leave-taking intentions in the combined agentic and communal condition as compared to the control condition,  $p = .072, d = 0.47, [-0.04; 0.98]$  (all other  $ps > .150$ ).

## **A2.4 Additionally measured variables**

### ***Experiment 1***

Regarding possible selves, we report results for expected possible selves in the manuscript but also assessed desired and feared possible selves as well as the current self-concept together in a matrix. Similarly, we assessed desired parental leave-taking and desired length of parental leave in addition to perceived self-efficacy for parental leave with one item each. Moreover, participants were asked to indicate how comfortable they would feel telling their boss, their colleagues, and strangers that they take parental leave (/ of more than two months / more than their female partners; adapted from Van Grootel et al., 2018). We also assessed the general perception of the prototypes presented in the newspaper articles. Specifically, we asked participants to indicate their spontaneous impression of the given description of men (students) via five bipolar items: negative – positive (see Table 2.2), unpleasant – pleasant, unsurprising – surprising, not desirable – very desirable, moderate – extreme (all scales from 0 to 100). To measure how compatible participants consider agency and communion to be, we included the compatibility of communion, achievement and power scales (6 items; Block & Schmader, 2016). Moreover, we measured distinctiveness threat between men and women via three items adapted from Schmid, Hewstone, Tausch, Cairns, and Hughes (2009). We assessed the perceived complexity or diversity of men via six items adapted from Waldzus, Mummendey, Wenzel, and Weber (2003) and Ehrke and Steffens (2023). Gender identification was measured by the centrality and self-stereotyping subscales from Roth and Mazziotta (2015). For the assessment of gender role attitudes, we used a measure from the German General Social Survey (Walter, 2018a), consisting of ten items. Lastly, we created three items to measure the pressure to fulfill both agentic and communal roles (e.g., “The thought of having to be assertive and friendly at the same time stresses me”).

### ***Experiment 2***

In addition to gender identification, operationalized via a pictorial assessment of closeness between the self and the group of men (see exploratory analyses in main text), we further assessed closeness between the self and the group of millennials as this was the prototype described in the control condition. After the manipulation, we again checked the perception of the presented prototypes as negative versus positive (see Table 2.4), moderate versus extreme, ambiguous versus unambiguous, and one-sided versus diverse (all scales from 1 to 10). As in Experiment 1, we assessed the current agentic and communal self-concept as well as agentic expected possible selves in addition to communal ones. For the agentic possible

self-concept, one item from each of the four agentic subscales as described by Hentschel and colleagues (2019) was used (e.g., effective, dominant). For the possible task engagement, we included items regarding non-routine household tasks and paid labor besides the ones reported in the manuscript (adapted from Craig & Powell, 2018; Croft et al., 2019; Endendijk et al., 2018; Yavorsky et al., 2015). As a second operationalization, we asked participants to what extent six generated care-, housework-, and career-related statements will apply to them around the time when they want to have children (two items each, e.g., “I will spend time looking after all the needs of my children”).

To assess affirmation of masculine identity, we included the private subscale of the Collective Self-Esteem Scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992) to measure state collective self-esteem (four items, e.g., “At this moment I feel good about being a man”; Derks et al., 2009). We assessed threat regarding the prototypicality of traditional men via nine generated items (e.g., “A modern image of masculinity threatens the status of men”). Furthermore, we assessed five threat-related emotions (e.g., nervous; adapted from Derks et al., 2009). We also measured perceived self-typicality as a man via the self-stereotyping subscale of gender identification (three items; C. W. Leach et al., 2008; Roth & Mazziotta, 2015). Lastly, we measured participants’ self-perceived care-giving competence at the time when they want to have children regarding a range of tasks, such as supervising a morning routine (adapted from Barnett & Baruch, 1987) and included the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Eckes & Six-Materna, 1999; Glick & Fiske, 1996) in a shortened version (following Sibley & Becker, 2012).

### **A2.5 Exploratory analyses for Experiment 2**

To better understand the findings of Experiment 2, we ran exploratory analyses to see whether individual differences such as employment status or gender identification could help explain which condition leads to more communal outcomes for whom. First, we compared the two biggest subsamples of Experiment 2: students and employees. We conducted an ANOVA with the factors condition (control vs. communion vs. agency vs. combination agency and communion) and employment status (employees vs. students, omitting the data of 23 participants with other employment status) and parental leave-taking intentions as the dependent variable. Specifically, we found – in addition to the main effect of condition,  $F(3, 202) = 3.89, p = .010, \eta_p^2 = .05$  – a significant main effect of employment status,  $F(1, 202) = 7.62, p = .006, \eta_p^2 = .04$ . Employees had higher parental leave-taking intentions than students in general. Students, replicating Experiment 1, had higher parental leave-taking intentions in the combined agentic and communal condition,  $p = .045, d = 0.47, [-0.04; 0.98]$ . In addition,

students also had higher parental leave-taking intention in the agentic condition,  $p = .022$ ,  $d = 0.61$ , [0.09; 1.13], as compared to the control condition (all other  $ps > .111$ ). In contrast, employees only had higher parental leave-taking intentions in the agentic condition but not in any other condition as compared to the control condition,  $p = .015$ ,  $d = 0.80$ , [0.19; 1.41],

Besides employment status, we examined whether different degrees of gender identification ( $M = 4.63$ ,  $SD = 1.68$ ), operationalized via a pictorial assessment of closeness between the self and the group of men (Schubert & Otten, 2002; Tropp & Wright, 2001), played a role for which degrees of agency and communion in prototypes of men elicited communal outcomes in men. Thus, we conducted a moderation analysis including prototypes of men as the independent variable, gender identification as the moderator, and parental leave-taking intentions as the dependent variable,  $F(7, 225) = 2.44$ ,  $p = .020$ ,  $R^2_{\text{adj}} = .04$ . Degree of closeness between the self and the group of men significantly interacted with the combined agentic and communal condition,  $b = -0.36$ ,  $SE = 0.14$ ,  $t = -2.51$ ,  $p = .013$ . Probing the interaction revealed that the combined agentic and communal condition especially led to higher parental leave-taking intentions for men who did not feel very close to other men ( $-1 SD$ ),  $b = 1.09$ ,  $SE = 0.32$ ,  $t = 3.41$ ,  $p = .001$ , and also for men who felt moderately close to other men ( $M$ ),  $b = 0.49$ ,  $SE = 0.23$ ,  $t = 2.13$ ,  $p = .034$ .



### **3 Chapter: Predictors of expectant fathers' parental leave-taking intentions before birth: Masculinity, fatherhood beliefs, and social support**

This chapter is based on:

Scheifele, C., Van Laar, C., & Steffens, M. C. (2023). *Predictors of expectant fathers' parental leave-taking intentions before birth: Masculinity, fatherhood beliefs, and social support* [Manuscript submitted for publication].

### 3.1 Abstract

Despite continuing progress, men remain underrepresented in childcare, domestic labor, and other care work. Because parental leave is discussed as a gateway to increase men's childcare engagement, we aimed to gain insights into predictors of men's parental leave-taking intentions during the transition to parenthood. Using outcomes on a continuum from behavioral preferences to more behavior-oriented measures, we examine how masculinity and fatherhood beliefs as well as social support become relevant during men's formation of their leave-taking intentions. Planned analyses of data collected from 143 expectant fathers in Belgium and Germany revealed that the support men perceive from their partners for taking leave predicts their parental leave-taking desire, intention, and planned length of leave. Against expectations, workplace support did not emerge as a relevant predictor of men's intended leave-taking. Men's conception of a prototypical man was especially linked to their desire to take leave, whereas father role attitudes were only partially related to men's intended leave-taking. Results of exploratory analyses suggest that care engagement of peers, expected backlash, and self-efficacy beliefs further play a role for men's intended leave-taking. We discuss parental leave as a negotiation process within couples and review the role of men's normative environment for their intended leave-taking.

### 3.2 Introduction

Involved, caring, and new – these are some of the terms that are frequently used when talking about fatherhood today. In fact, the shift towards a fatherhood ideal that expects fathers to be more involved in childcare and to develop closer emotional bonds with their children is not exactly new anymore but was already observed in Western cultures since the 1980s (Dermott & Miller, 2015; Wall & Arnold, 2007). Indeed, fathers have increased their engagement in childcare and household labor and continue to do so (Altintas & Sullivan, 2016, 2017). For example, more and more fathers across Europe are making use of their parental leave entitlement (Eurofound, 2019), and roughly a third of fathers in Belgium and Germany takes parental leave (Koslowski et al., 2022; Samtleben, Schäper, et al., 2019). Nevertheless, women continue to be more affected by the transition to parenthood and, after becoming a parent, often reduce their work hours while increasing time spent on childcare and household tasks (Abele & Spurk, 2011; Baxter et al., 2015). Women across cultural contexts also at a young age already have higher intentions than men to take parental leave (Olsson et al., 2023) and continue to be overrepresented relative to men in actual leave uptake (Koslowski et al.,



2022). A more equal share of parental leave among women and men has been discussed as a way to promote gender equality (Castro-García & Pazos-Moran, 2016; Meeussen et al., 2020), especially during the transition to parenthood when gender-role attitudes and the gendered division of labor tend to become more traditional (Baxter et al., 2015). In addition, men's increased care engagement can have benefits on various levels, for example, for their own well-being, their partners' career advancement, and their children's developmental outcomes (for an overview, see Croft et al., 2015). Men's parental leave-taking specifically can lead to fathers being more involved in childcare later on (Almqvist & Duvander, 2014; Bünning, 2015; Meil, 2013; Petts & Knoester, 2018).

Various reasons for men's comparatively low interest in and uptake of parental leave have been discussed. Whereas external barriers such as the lack of sufficient income replacement during leave are often emphasized (e.g., Castro-García & Pazos-Moran, 2016; Karu & Tremblay, 2018; Kaufman, 2018), a recent examination of young men's (and women's) intentions to take parental leave across 37 nations suggests that individual-level factors such as men's gender role attitudes trump country-level factors such as specific leave policies (Olsson et al., 2023). The goal of the current study is to have a closer look at such psychological contributors to men's parental leave-taking intentions before birth. By examining leave-taking *intentions*, we learn more about precursors of men's leave-taking and possible pathways for interventions. Moreover, we examine the different layers of men's intended leave-taking, namely whether they desire to take leave, whether they intend and plan to do so, and if so, for how long. We assume that these dependent variables form a continuum from behavioral preferences to behavioral intentions (Bagozzi, 1992; Perugini & Bagozzi, 2001) and, thus, provide more insights into predictors of men's intended leave-taking at various stages in their decision-making process. In addition, examining the hypothesized relations cross-sectionally will provide suggestive evidence as to whether the relations can also be expected longitudinally. We further contribute to the current literature by considering simultaneously men's gender beliefs regarding what constitutes a prototypical, ideal man, and gender *role* beliefs regarding men's role as a father for their intended leave-taking. Accounting for the normative environment men find themselves in, we additionally focus on how active support or discouragement from relevant others is related to men's intended leave-taking.

### **Gendered beliefs and men's interest in communal roles and parental leave**

A starting point for understanding men's interest in care roles generally and parental leave specifically are gender norms and stereotypes (see Croft et al., 2015; Meeussen et al.,

2020). Gender stereotypes can be divided into two fundamental content dimensions: agency and communion (Abele & Wojciszke, 2014; Bakan, 1966). Traditionally, gender stereotypes ascribe agentic traits and behaviors to men (e.g., being independent, assertive, or competent) and communal traits and behaviors to women (e.g., being warm, caring, or helpful; Bakan, 1966; Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Prentice & Carranza, 2002). However, recent examinations of change in gender stereotypes found that men's self-descriptions are becoming less stereotypic and that men do associate themselves with communion (Hentschel et al., 2019). Other findings suggest that women and men do not ascribe communion more to men now than in the past and that women's higher scores on communion persist or have even increased (Eagly et al., 2020; Hentschel et al., 2019). Given the ambiguity in change of gender stereotypes, an important source of men's interest in communal, care-oriented engagement is what *they* perceive as desirable and normative for their gender group. We, therefore, examine men's conception of a prototypical man, the ideal-type member of their gender group (Oakes et al., 1998; Wenzel et al., 2007). Prototypes have conceptual similarity to constructs such as stereotypes or norms but better capture an *individual's* perception of a prototypical member of their gender group (see Hogg et al., 2012).

Such notions of what it means to be a man have already been examined from a sociological and qualitative perspective with regard to men's parental leave-taking (Almqvist, 2008; Brandth & Kvande, 1998; T. Johansson, 2011; Schmidt et al., 2015). For example, in a study conducted in Austria, fathers' parental leave-taking decisions were made within work-focused masculinity ideals and depended on fathers' personal wishes and whether external circumstances allowed for it (Schmidt et al., 2015). Moreover, Norwegian fathers who felt like they did not have to prove their masculinity were more content during leave but also kept strong ties to their breadwinning role (Brandth & Kvande, 1998). Thus, first evidence on how masculinity is constructed in relation to men's parental leave-taking exists, but we know less about how male gender stereotypes and gender norms contribute to whether men intend to take leave. From research on father involvement more generally, we know that less traditional masculinity norms are related to more care-oriented father involvement, such as showing more warmth and using less harsh discipline (Petts et al., 2018; Shafer et al., 2020). In the present research, we aim to shed light on whether less traditional (i.e., more communal and less agentic) notions of masculinity are also related to an important precursor of father involvement, namely men's intended leave-taking. Therefore, we examine the link between intended leave-taking and the degree to which men associate a prototypical man with the stereotypic dimensions of agency and communion (Abele & Wojciszke, 2014; Bakan, 1966).

When men become fathers, they not only face masculinity ideals but also ideals regarding fatherhood. In fact, the father role could provide leeway for men to engage in caretaking as stereotypes of fathers are less restrictive in terms of communal aspects than those of men (Ciaccio et al., 2021; Park & Banchevsky, 2018). These differing perceptions of men and fathers are likely based on the added social role of being a parent – a role that implies some degree of communion and caretaking. Thus, in addition to examining men’s conception of their gender group and which attributes constitute a prototypical man, we examine men’s gender *role* of being a father and their attitudes towards this role. First evidence for the relevance of gender role attitudes for men’s leave-taking exists across national contexts such as Sweden, the US, and Germany. Generally, less traditional gender role attitudes were related to higher intentions to take leave, higher chances to do so, and longer leave length (Duvander, 2014; Hyde et al., 1993; Olsson et al., 2023; Vogt & Pull, 2010). However, in more recent research, men’s leave length was neither predicted by their own nor by their partners’ gender role attitudes (in a US context; Berrigan et al., 2021; and German-speaking countries; Stertz et al., 2017). An explanation could be the ambiguous measurement of gender role attitudes in some of these studies, which mostly included attitudes towards women’s gender roles (Hyde et al., 1993; Stertz et al., 2017; for an exception see Vogt & Pull, 2010). Yet, how men see their own role as a father could be more closely related to their parental leave-taking intentions. In addition, fatherhood does not have to be defined on a continuum from breadwinning to caregiving, but men could see their responsibility in and identify with both. Thus, in the current study we examine father role attitudes towards breadwinning and childcare separately (as suggested by Hyde et al., 1993).

### **Social support for men’s communal engagement and parental leave-taking**

Men’s parental leave-taking decision is shaped within a normative environment in which social support (or lack thereof) can signal whether others approve or disapprove of their communal engagement. As communal engagement is traditionally counter-stereotypic for men, men can fear backlash and negative consequences such as experiencing stigma or career disadvantages for wanting to take leave (Miyajima & Yamaguchi, 2017; Rudman & Mescher, 2013). However, when others signal that they support men’s leave-taking, this challenges what is perceived as normative and can alleviate such threat (for first evidence on social support and men’s communal orientation, see Schreiber et al., 2023).

For parental leave-taking decisions, especially the interactions and support between partners plays a crucial role. In fact, negotiations are often focused on the partner’s wishes

(Beglaubter, 2017; Kaufman & Almqvist, 2017; McKay & Doucet, 2010; for an exception see Schmidt et al., 2015), especially when there is no earmarked leave available for fathers (Castro-García & Pazos-Moran, 2016; McKay & Doucet, 2010). Nevertheless, mothers have been found to encourage fathers to take longer leaves to achieve a more equal division of childcare and foster the bonding between father and child (Kaufman & Almqvist, 2017). More generally, when mothers encouraged childcare efforts, fathers' relative involvement as reported by both parents was higher, and fathers perceived that they had a greater say in decisions regarding the child's health (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2008; Zvara et al., 2013).

Besides their partners and others around them, men's normative environment and leave-taking decision is further shaped by their workplace. As a general trend, organizations are becoming more supportive of men's leave-taking (Brandth & Kvande, 2019; Haas & Hwang, 2009). Moreover, colleagues can be a facilitator of men's leave-taking as men are more likely to take longer leave if colleagues have done so before them (Bygren & Duvander, 2006). However, in organizations that emphasize ideal worker norms (i.e., prioritizing work over family and aiming for high workload and output), men are less likely to take (longer) leave and report more negative career consequences if they still do so (Haas et al., 2002; Haas & Hwang, 2019a; Samtleben, Bringmann, et al., 2019).

### **The present research**

In the current paper, we investigate predictors of men's intended parental leave-taking before birth. Specifically, we focus on men's conception of a prototypical man, father role attitudes, and social support as predictors of men's intended leave-taking. As outcomes, we look at expecting fathers' general intentions to take leave, their desire to do so, as well as for how long they expect to take leave (summarized as *intended parental leave-taking* in the following). Looking at men's conception of a prototypical man, we expect communal prototypes of men to be positively related to men's intended parental leave-taking (H1.1), whereas agentic prototypes of men should be negatively related to men's intended parental leave-taking (H1.2). Likewise, we expect father role attitudes regarding childcare to be positively related to men's intended parental leave-taking (H2.1), whereas father role attitudes regarding breadwinning should be negatively related to men's intended parental leave-taking (H2.2). Lastly, we investigate the role of men's personal environment for their intended leave-taking. We expect partner support (H3.1) and workplace support (H3.2) for leave-taking to be positively related to men's intended parental leave-taking.

We analyzed data from 143 men in Belgium and Germany who were expecting their first child. Participants were asked to complete an online survey around three months before birth. Importantly, different national policies for protected paid leave apply in Belgium and Germany. In Belgium, men can take parental leave (“*ouderschapsverlof*”) for four months, and this leave cannot be transferred between partners. Part-time leave regulations are available, but income replacement (provided through government funding) is comparatively low with roughly 800€ per month for full-time leave (Koslowski et al., 2022; RVA, 2022).<sup>2</sup> In Germany, parents can divide paid parental leave (“*Elterngeld*”) of up to twelve months between each other, with an additional period of two months not transferrable to the other parent. Regulations for part-time leave also exist, and combining work and childcare is encouraged by an additional four months of part-time leave if both parents work part-time. Income replacement is higher than in Belgium, with parents receiving 65% of the average net income of the last 12 months before the birth (capped at 1800€, provided through government funding; BMFSFJ, 2022; Koslowski et al., 2022).

### 3.3 Method

The study was preregistered on Aspredicted ([https://aspredicted.org/3HY\\_17Q](https://aspredicted.org/3HY_17Q)) and received ethical approval by the Social and Societal Ethics Committee of the University of Leuven.

#### Sample and sensitivity analysis

In total, 171 participants completed the survey who met the preregistered criteria of identifying as male, being at least 18 years old, expecting their first child, and being eligible to receive parental or paternity leave. We excluded the data of eight participants from the analyses because they failed attention or quality checks. We further excluded 20 multivariate outliers based on the MCD75 (Minimum Covariance Determinant with a breakpoint of 0.25), with a chi-square at  $p = .001$  (Leys et al., 2019; see Section A3.1 for results including outliers). Among the final 143 participants, 115 resided in Belgium and 28 in Germany. Participants were on average 31 years old ( $SD = 3.60$ ; range: 25 – 42). Most were married (69%) or in a committed relationship (26%) and identified as heterosexual (98%; 2% identifying as bisexual).

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<sup>2</sup> A paternity leave of an additional 20 days (15 days until 2022) is available for fathers only (FOD, 2023). As no equivalent exists for Germany and because of ceiling effects in our data for the intended uptake (almost all fathers intend to take the full amount), we do not present results for paternity leave.

## CHAPTER 3

Participants were, on average, highly educated, with 43% having a university degree, 27% higher professional education, and 17% secondary education. In terms of relative income, 18% had a much higher income than their partner, 35% a higher income, 23% more or less equal income, and 15% a lower income than their partner. They worked, on average, 41 hours per week ( $SD = 7.32$ ), and most did not have any leadership responsibility (66%). Their political orientation was moderate to slightly left ( $M = 4.56$  on a 9-point scale,  $SD = 1.65$ ), and they were not religious on average ( $M = 2.48$  on a 9-point scale,  $SD = 2.07$ ).

We conducted a sensitivity analysis with G\*Power 3 (Faul et al., 2007) to learn which effect sizes we were able to detect given a sample size of  $N = 143$  ( $\alpha = .05$ ,  $1 - \beta = .95$ ). In analyses with up to 11 predictors, we were able to detect effect sizes for regression coefficients of  $f^2 = .09$  (i.e., small- to medium-sized effects).

### Measures

If not indicated otherwise, we used 7-point scales ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 7 = “strongly agree”.

#### *Prototypes of men*

We assessed participants’ idea of a prototypical man by asking what it means to them to be a man and to what extent four agentic (e.g., assertive,  $\alpha = .64$ ) and six communal (e.g., compassionate,  $\alpha = .77$ ) traits describe an ideal man in their opinion (adapted from Hentschel et al., 2019; Van Grootel et al., 2018). We used a 7-point scale from 1 = “not at all” to 7 = “very much”.

#### *Father role attitudes*

We asked participants what it means to them to be a father and how they see the responsibility of a father for his child, adapted from the Caregiving and Breadwinning Identity and Reflected-Appraisal Inventory (CBIRAI; Maurer et al., 2001; using a 9-point scale from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 9 = “strongly agree”). Five items focused on physical and social caregiving, with only two items sufficiently correlated to form a scale ( $r = .66$ ; e.g., “A father should NOT be very involved in the day-to-day matters of caring for his child.”; recoded). Four items formed a scale focusing on breadwinning ( $\alpha = .65$ ; e.g., “A father has a strong responsibility as a parent to be the financial provider for his family.”).

#### *Social support for leave-taking*

We measured the social support men perceived with one item pertaining to the support from their partner, and one from people at work (e.g., their boss or colleagues). Participants indicated how much support or discouragement they experienced from their partner [people at

work] to take up parental leave (adapted from Schreiber et al., 2023) on a 9-point scale (1 = “lots of discouragement”, 5 = “neither much discouragement nor support”, 9 = “lots of support”).

***Others’ leave-taking, others’ childcare engagement, expected backlash for leave-taking, and expected parental self-efficacy***

We included additional predictors in the analyses that have been linked to men’s parental leave-taking before. Focusing on men’s personal environment, we asked participants how many men in their surroundings who became fathers during the past years took parental leave (9-point scale from 1 = “very few” to 9 = “almost all”) and how much these fathers engage in childcare (9-point scale, 1 = “very little as compared to their partner”, 5 = “as much as their partner”, 9 = “much more than their partner”). For expected backlash effects, participants answered the item “I worry about being labeled negatively for putting my career on hold to care for my young child.” (adapted from Rudman & Fairchild, 2004), omitting a second item due to low correlation (for links to men’s leave-taking, see Samtleben, Bringmann, et al., 2019; Vogt & Pull, 2010). Lastly, we measured expected self-efficacy for childcare with two items ( $r = .82$ ; e.g., “I feel like I will be capable of taking care of my child.”; adapted from Črnčec et al., 2008). Although general self-efficacy beliefs were not related to men’s leave-taking (Horvath et al., 2018), evidence exists for the relation between *parental* self-efficacy and father involvement as well as parental competence (Jones & Prinz, 2005; Trahan, 2018).

***Intended parental leave-taking***

We measured men’s intended leave-taking via three operationalizations: desired parental leave-taking, parental leave-taking intentions, and expected length of parental leave. We assessed desired parental leave-taking with one item (“I would like to take leave.”), adding two items on parental leave-taking intentions ( $r = .88$ ; e.g., “I intend to take leave.”; adapted from Miyajima & Yamaguchi, 2017; Yzer, 2012). For the expected length of parental leave, participants indicated how long they expected to take parental leave in full-time weeks (Belgium) or months (Germany). Those planning to take leave part-time, thus, recalculated their intended length into full-time weeks or months. We then calculated a percentage measure, indicating how much of the available leave participants expected to take.

**Procedure**

We recruited participants through people and places that we expected to be in touch with expectant parents (e.g., prenatal classes, hospitals, gynecology practices, midwives, shops for baby equipment, parenting and baby fairs, professional organizations for midwives or

gynecologists, companies in male-dominated industries etc.). We further used social media (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) and encouraged snowball sampling. We invited participants to take part in a study on how the birth of the first child affects the work and family situation of men (and their partners). At the beginning of the online survey, participants received a detailed information letter on the procedure of the study and gave informed consent online. Afterwards, we assessed and implemented the exclusion criteria specified above. Eligible participants then read a short summary of the current leave policies in their respective country before completing the main survey measures, suspicion and quality checks, and demographic information. At the end, participants could indicate special circumstances of, for example, their work or family situation. Lastly, we thanked participants and asked them for help with recruiting additional participants. For each referred participant who filled in the first survey, participants (and others) could receive a 10€ gift card. Moreover, participants themselves received a 10€ gift card for each completed survey and had the chance to win a family weekend trip at the end of the study.

### 3.4 Results

#### Descriptive statistics

Table 3.1 shows means, standard deviations, and correlations for all predictors and dependent variables. Notable here are the high means for father role attitudes regarding childcare and support from the partner for taking leave, suggesting a comparatively egalitarian sample. Moreover, participants had a relatively strong wish to take parental leave, whereas average leave-taking intentions were slightly lower. On average, participants expected to take roughly 58% of the available leave length.

#### Analytical approach

We first screened the data and checked the statistical assumptions. We used the R package *lavaan* (Rosseel, 2012) for the regression analyses because robust estimation methods are available given assumption violations as well as full information maximum likelihood estimation for treating missing data. We conducted hierarchical regression analyses separately for the three dependent variables *desired parental leave-taking* (Table 3.2), *parental leave-taking intentions* (Table 3.3), and *expected length of parental leave* (Table 3.4). First, we included the covariates age, country of residence (dummy-coded with 1 = Germany and 0 = Belgium), educational level (dummy-coded with 1 = university education or higher and



**Table 3.1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations of study variables.**

	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>Correlations (N = 124 – 143)</i>											
		2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.
1. Prototypes – Communion <sup>a</sup>	5.10 (0.79)	.22**	.13	.07	.10	.17*	.11	.07	-.09	.20*	.26**	.15 <sup>†</sup>	.10
2. Prototypes – Agency <sup>a</sup>	5.21 (0.82)		-.03	.22**	.11	.05	-.05	.05	.10	.07	-.04	-.03	-.16 <sup>†</sup>
3. Father role attitudes – Childcare <sup>b</sup>	8.22 (0.95)			-.10	.29***	.08	-.03	-.05	-.09	.13	.15 <sup>†</sup>	.15 <sup>†</sup>	.08
4. Father role attitudes – Breadwinning <sup>b</sup>	4.46 (1.53)				-.31***	-.01	-.19*	.23**	.05	-.17*	-.15 <sup>†</sup>	-.22*	-.27**
5. Partner support <sup>b</sup>	7.89 (1.50)					.35***	.23**	-.10	-.08	.17 <sup>†</sup>	.48***	.45***	.25**
6. Workplace support <sup>b</sup>	6.36 (1.76)						.36***	-.04	-.37***	.12	.24**	.31***	.08
7. Others' leave- taking <sup>b</sup>	5.44 (3.01)							.02	-.10	-.05	.26**	.32***	.07
8. Others' childcare engagement <sup>b</sup>	4.56 (1.24)								.11	.02	-.10	-.20*	-.17 <sup>†</sup>
9. Exp. backlash <sup>a</sup>	2.57 (1.82)									-.13	-.20*	-.42***	-.20*
10. Exp. parental self-efficacy <sup>a</sup>	5.81 (0.90)										.25**	.31***	.18*
11. PL desire <sup>a</sup>	6.14 (1.56)											.76***	.40***
12. PL intentions <sup>a</sup>	5.58 (1.92)												.49***
13. PL length (%)	57.67 (41.77)												

Notes. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ , <sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$  (all two-tailed). <sup>a</sup> 7-point scale, <sup>b</sup> 9-point scale. Exp. = Expected, PL desire = Desired parental leave-taking, PL intentions = Parental leave-taking intentions, PL length = Expected length of parental leave.

0 = below university education to reduce number of predictors), relative income, and weekly work hours. We decided on these covariates before data analyses due to prior evidence for relations to men's parental leave-taking (e.g., Geisler & Kreyenfeld, 2019; Marynissen et al., 2019; Stertz et al., 2017; Trappe, 2013a, 2013b).

In a second step, we added beliefs regarding masculinity and fatherhood, namely communal and agentic prototypes of men and father role attitudes regarding childcare and breadwinning. In a third step, we added the social support men received from their partners and their workplace for taking parental leave, and in a fourth step, additional predictors related to men's intended leave-taking for which we did not generate hypotheses (others' leave-taking, others' childcare engagement, expected backlash for leave-taking, expected parental self-efficacy). Lastly, we present parsimonious models with only those predictors included that were significant (or tended to be) in Models 4.

### **Covariates**

The covariates explained 12% of variance in desired parental leave-taking, 14% in parental leave-taking intentions, and 13% in the expected length of parental leave (Models 1). Age only emerged as a significant predictor of intended leave-taking in some models, but if so, older age was associated with higher intended leave-taking. Residing in Germany was associated with a higher desire and intention to take leave (but relations did not hold in the final models). In contrast, Belgian residence was related to planning to take a higher percentage of available leave, possibly because the available leave is shorter than in Germany (average expected absolute leave lengths were ten out of 16 weeks in Belgium,  $M = 10.09$ ,  $SD = 6.63$ , and four and a half out of 12 months in Germany,  $M = 4.48$ ,  $SD = 4.45$ ). A higher educational level was negatively related to men's desired parental leave-taking and parental leave-taking intentions. Men's income relative to their partners was not significantly related to their intended leave-taking. Lastly, longer weekly work hours were related to men expecting to take shorter percentages of parental leave (and in Models 1 and 2 also to lower intentions to take leave).

### **Hypothesis tests**

We found partial support for H1.1, that men's beliefs that an ideal man has communal attributes would be related to higher intended leave-taking (operationalized in the present research as desired parental leave-taking, parental leave-taking intentions, and expected length of parental leave). Communal prototypes of men were positively related to men's desired parental leave-taking but not to any other dependent variable. Also, relations were weaker with

increasing numbers of predictors, possibly due to correlations amongst predictors (see Table 3.1). H1.2 postulated that men's beliefs that an ideal man should have agentic attributes would be related to lower intended leave-taking. We again found support for desired parental leave-taking but none of the other operationalizations of intended leave-taking. Thus, the degree to which men think an ideal man should have agentic attributes was negatively related to their wish to take parental leave. In contrast to communal prototypes of men, relations were stronger in later models.

We found trends for H2.1, that father role attitudes regarding childcare would be positively related to men's intended leave-taking, in Models 2. The more men thought it is their job as a father to take care of their children, the more they tended to want and intend to take leave. When social support variables were added to the models, these relations were weakened. A similar pattern occurred for father role attitudes regarding breadwinning (H2.2). We found a significant negative relation between father role attitudes regarding breadwinning on the one side and parental leave-taking intentions as well as the expected length of parental leave on the other, indicating that the more men think it is a father's role to be involved in breadwinning, the lower their intentions and expected length of parental leave. These relations did not hold when additional, partly correlated (see Table 3.1) predictors such as social support were added. Yet, only *perceived* support was measured, and men could perceive more or less support from their partner or people at work depending on their father role attitudes. Hence, we possibly did not find support for H2.1 and H2.2 in later models due to correlated measures or even mediation effects.

Lastly, we examined whether the support men perceive to receive from their partners and people at work for taking parental leave was related to their intended leave-taking (H3.1 and H3.2). Across dependent variables and models, support from the partner was a significant predictor, supporting H3.1. The more support for their leave-taking men perceived receiving from their partners, the more they liked to take leave, the more they intended to take leave, and the longer they expected to take leave. In contrast and contradicting H3.2, the support men perceived from people at work was not significantly related to their intended leave-taking. Yet, examining bivariate correlations revealed that partner support and workplace support were significantly correlated (see Table 3.1). Apparently, perceiving much support from the partner was positively related to perceiving much support from people at work for the expectant fathers in our sample. This could, on the one hand, suggest a selection effect (i.e., one also selects the places where one works and continues to work as fitting) or, on the other hand, wishful thinking of the care-oriented fathers to receive support, generalized to the social environment.

**Robustness checks and exploratory analyses**

As a robustness check for the partner support findings, we ran additional analyses in which we controlled for men's perception of their partner's prototypes of men and father role attitudes. Including these measures did not affect the results for partner support on men's intended leave-taking ( $\beta$ s = .26 - .40), suggesting that active support or discouragement from partners plays a role in men's intended leave-taking beyond the partner's general gender egalitarianism. Moreover, we repeated the analyses, now also controlling for whether participants intended to take leave part-time or full-time. For that, we excluded participants from the analyses who did not intend to take any leave and added a dummy variable for part-time versus full-time leave-takers. This exclusion reduced the sample size to 107, but the results of hypothesis tests were not affected. Still, the support men perceived from their partners for taking leave was the main robust predictor of their expected length of parental leave ( $\beta = .29$ ,  $p = .007$ ).

As exploratory analyses, we examined further predictors that could be related to men's intended leave-taking based on past research: other men's leave-taking in their personal environment, other men's childcare engagement, expected backlash for leave-taking, and expected parental self-efficacy. For all dependent variables, we found small positive relations with men's expected parental self-efficacy: The more men expected to be capable of taking care of their child in the future, the more they wished and intended to take leave and the longer they expected to take leave. Counterintuitively, how much other men engaged in childcare was negatively related to men's parental leave-taking intentions and expected length of parental leave. Thus, the less men perceived other men to be engaged in childcare, the more and the longer they intended to take leave (or perhaps: the more and the longer the participants intended to take leave, the less they perceived other men to be engaged in childcare – suggesting a contrast effect). Others' leave-taking and expected backlash for leave-taking were additionally related to men's parental leave-taking intentions: The more other men took leave before them and the less they expected backlash for leave-taking, the higher were men's intentions to take parental leave. Moreover, others' leave-taking tended to be related to men's desired parental leave-taking.

**Final models**

To check whether the predictors that appeared relevant for intended leave-taking in the larger models also hold when dropping non-significant coefficients, we analyzed the models

including only predictors that were significant ( $p < .10$ ) in Models 4. For desired parental leave-taking, especially the support men perceive from their partners for leave-taking seemed to be related to their wish to take leave. In addition, we found small relations between communal and agentic prototypes of men and desired parental leave-taking, suggesting that the more men saw an ideal man as communal ( $p < .10$ ) and the less as agentic, the more they wished to take parental leave. Similarly, the additional predictors others' leave-taking and expected parental self-efficacy tended to be related to desired parental leave-taking in the final model. Overall, these predictors, including covariates, explained 35% of variance in desired parental leave-taking. For parental leave-taking intentions, again, partner support emerged as an important predictor with a medium-sized relation, besides small relations for others' leave-taking, others' childcare engagement, expected backlash for leave-taking, and expected parental self-efficacy beliefs. We were able to explain the largest amount of variance in parental leave-taking intentions (47% of variance explained). Lastly, the support men perceived receiving from their partners for taking leave, how much other men in their personal environment engaged in childcare, and their expected parental self-efficacy were also predictive of the percentage of parental leave men expected to take. For this more behavior-oriented dependent variable, we were able to explain 25% of variance in the final model.

**Table 3.2. Hierarchical regression models (with standardized regression coefficients) for desired parental leave-taking.**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Final model
<b>Step 1: Covariates</b>					
Age	.07	.02	-.00	-.05	
Country of residence	.23*	.26**	.21**	.13 <sup>†</sup>	<b>.13</b>
Education level	-.27**	-.26**	-.26**	-.22**	<b>-.26**</b>
Relative income	.07	.04	.08	.08	
Work hours	-.22 <sup>†</sup>	-.15	-.13	-.10	
<b>Step 2: Masculinity and fatherhood beliefs</b>					
Communal prototypes of men		.26**	.21*	.17 <sup>†</sup>	<b>.19<sup>†</sup></b>
Agentic prototypes of men		-.08	-.15 <sup>†</sup>	-.16*	<b>-.19*</b>
Father role attitudes – Childcare		.11 <sup>†</sup>	-.01	-.02	
Father role attitudes – Breadwinning		-.13	.01	.08	
<b>Step 3: Social support</b>					
Partner support			.41**	.42***	<b>.38**</b>
Workplace support			.02	-.06	
<b>Step 4: Additional predictors</b>					
Others' leave-taking				.14 <sup>†</sup>	<b>.13<sup>†</sup></b>
Others' childcare engagement				-.09	
Expected backlash				-.13	
Expected parental self-efficacy				.15*	<b>.13<sup>†</sup></b>
Adjusted $R^2$	.12	.19	.30	.35	<b>.35</b>
$R^2$ change		.07	.11	.05	

Notes. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ , <sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ .

**Table 3.3. Hierarchical regression models (with standardized regression coefficients) for parental leave-taking intentions.**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Final model
<b>Step 1: Covariates</b>					
Age	.17*	.13 <sup>†</sup>	.10 <sup>†</sup>	.05	
Country of residence	.26**	.27**	.21**	.08	
Educational level	-.26**	-.26**	-.24**	-.16*	<b>-.14*</b>
Relative income	.09	.05	.10	.10	
Work hours	-.19*	-.16*	-.13	-.08	
<b>Step 2: Masculinity and fatherhood beliefs</b>					
Communal prototypes of men		.14	.09	.02	
Agentic prototypes of men		-.01	-.06	-.06	
Father role attitudes – Childcare		.14 <sup>†</sup>	.05	.03	
Father role attitudes – Breadwinning		-.23*	-.11	.03	
<b>Step 3: Social support</b>					
Partner support			.32**	.31**	<b>.30***</b>
Workplace support			.11	-.03	
<b>Step 4: Additional predictors</b>					
Others' leave-taking				.24**	<b>.27***</b>
Others' childcare engagement				-.21**	<b>-.20**</b>
Expected backlash				-.25**	<b>-.28***</b>
Expected parental self-efficacy				.21**	<b>.22**</b>
Adjusted $R^2$	.14	.21	.30	.46	<b>.47</b>
$R^2$ change		.07	.09	.16	

Notes. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ , <sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ .

**Table 3.4. Hierarchical regression models (with standardized regression coefficients) for expected length of parental leave in percent of available leave.**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Final model
<b>Step 1: Covariates</b>					
Age	.18*	.13	.13	.09	
Country of residence	-.23**	-.23**	-.28**	-.37***	<b>-.33***</b>
Educational level	-.09	-.10	-.09	-.06	
Relative income	.09	.04	.07	.08	
Work hours	-.21**	-.17*	-.15*	-.14 <sup>†</sup>	<b>-.22**</b>
<b>Step 2: Masculinity and fatherhood beliefs</b>					
Communal prototypes of men		.06	.03	-.00	
Agentic prototypes of men		-.07	-.10	-.12	
Father role attitudes – Childcare		.09	.02	.01	
Father role attitudes – Breadwinning		-.24**	-.15	-.05	
<b>Step 4: Social support</b>					
Partner support			.25**	.25**	<b>.28***</b>
Workplace support			.02	-.03	
<b>Step 5: Additional predictors</b>					
Others' leave-taking				.14	
Others' childcare engagement				-.18*	<b>-.22**</b>
Expected backlash				-.07	
Expected parental self-efficacy				.14 <sup>†</sup>	<b>.14*</b>
Adjusted $R^2$	.13	.18	.22	.27	<b>.25</b>
$R^2$ change		.05	.04	.05	

Notes. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ , <sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ .



### 3.5 Discussion

Parental leave has been discussed as a tool to foster men's engagement in communal roles with benefits for men themselves as well as their personal environment. However, men continue to take less parental leave than their partners, raising the question of what contributes to their intentions to take parental leave. In the current paper, we investigated predictors of men's intended parental leave-taking before birth, using data from soon-to-be fathers in Belgium and Germany. To gain a deeper understanding of men's intended leave-taking, we examined different operationalizations on a continuum of behavioral preferences to more concrete behavioral intentions.

The findings provide support for the hypothesized positive relation between partner support and men's intended leave-taking (H3.1). The more support men perceived from their partners to take parental leave, the more they wished to take leave, intended to do so, and aimed to take a higher percentage of available leave. We additionally found partial support for the expected negative relation of agentic prototypes of men and men's intended leave-taking (H1.2) and, to a lesser degree, for the expected positive relation of communal prototypes of men and men's intended leave-taking (H1.1). That is, the more men thought an ideal man has agentic attributes (e.g., being independent or assertive) the less they wished to take parental leave. Seeing an ideal man as communal (e.g., communicative or emotional) tended to be related to a stronger wish to take parental leave. Yet, we did not find any significant relations between prototypes and other operationalizations of men's intended leave-taking besides their wish to take leave. Moreover, the results provided partial support for the hypothesized relations between father role attitudes and intended leave-taking (H2.1, H2.2). In Models 2, men with more childcare-oriented father role attitudes tended to wish and intend more to take leave, whereas men with more breadwinning-oriented father role attitudes intended less to take leave and a lower percentage of the available leave. Perceived workplace support for leave-taking was not related to men's intended leave-taking, providing no support for H3.2.

However, exploratory analyses suggested that men's parental leave-taking intentions were also predicted by other men's engagement in childcare and their uptake of parental leave, the backlash participants expected to receive for taking parental leave, and participants' expected self-efficacy as a parent and caregiver. Moreover, how much other men engaged in childcare was also negatively related to how long men expected to take leave. Lastly, the more capable men felt of taking care of their child in the future (i.e., their expected parental self-efficacy), the longer they expected to take leave.

Hence, the perceived support men receive from their partners for taking parental leave played a crucial role in their intended leave-taking in the current study. This finding suggests that parental leave decisions are shaped through negotiations in partnerships. As the transition to parenthood is often experienced as a couple, the new life tasks have to be negotiated and distributed interpersonally. Prior qualitative research on men's leave-taking has focused on the decision-making process of couples who shared parental leave, concluding that often only limited negotiations were taking place (Beglaubter, 2017). Even when men desired to take leave, decisions were often based on a strong sense of mothers' entitlement for leave-taking, which placed fathers' leave-taking as a "bonus" to the mothers' share. Nevertheless, within these boundaries, the female partners' point of view remained an important driver for determining parental leave shares, for example, when partners wanted to return to work soon or were not eligible to take leave. Brandt (2017) also discussed men's leave-taking as a matter of negotiation in partnerships. However, the negotiation process was examined implicitly by looking at distributions of economic resources in partnerships, working conditions of partners, and gendered values, suggesting, for example, that partners' family orientation hinders, whereas fathers' family orientation helps their uptake of leave.

While the roles of economic considerations or gender ideologies have, thus, been discussed before, the current paper goes one step further in showing that partners' active support or discouragement can contribute to men's intended leave-taking beyond relative income shares or gender role attitudes. Even though this provides a tangible parameter for influencing men's leave-taking (i.e., partners' active encouragement), the conclusion of the current findings should not solely be that the responsibility for men's leave-taking lies with their partners. This would make women responsible for yet another aspect and add to the pressures on women when combining family and career and facing intensive motherhood norms (e.g., Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018). Nevertheless, mothers can play a key role, functioning as gatekeepers for men's leave-taking, especially in the case of transferable leave periods between partners (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Cannito, 2020). Therefore, the perceived role of partners for men's leave-taking is crucial given specific policy designs, but decision-making processes remain a joint task for couples in which women *and* men carry responsibility.

Besides partner support for leave-taking, no other variable was consistently related to all operationalizations of men's intended leave-taking. This suggests that different predictors may be relevant for men's leave-taking the more concrete their intentions become. Men's conception of an ideal, prototypical man was related to their wish to take parental leave but not to the more behavior-oriented operationalizations of intended leave-taking, such as their

expected length of leave. It is intuitive that prototypes of men as more abstract masculinity ideals are relevant for shaping behavioral preferences because they prescribe what is desirable for group members (Hogg et al., 2012; Oakes et al., 1998; Wenzel et al., 2007). Yet, when looking at more behavior-oriented outcomes, reality constraints are introduced, which require going beyond behavioral preferences based on ideal circumstances. As found in the current paper, outside influences and men's broader normative environment (e.g., how much other men before them engaged in leave-taking and childcare or the negative consequences men expect to face for wanting to take leave) additionally contribute to their concrete intentions for taking parental leave. Also, men's expected parental self-efficacy, as the degree to which they perceived themselves as *able* to take care of their child independently, provides a reality check and was found to be related to how long men planned to take leave in the current study. Still, explaining correlates of more concrete leave-taking plans remained more difficult, and we were able to explain the lowest amount of variance in men's expected length of parental leave ( $R^2_{\text{adj}} = .25$  compared to .35 for desired leave-taking and .47 for leave-taking intentions), in line with general models of attitudes, behavioral intentions, and behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Likely, the specific length of the planned leave depends more strongly on individual circumstances within the relationship and external reality constraints than behavioral preferences or intentions do.

Besides masculinity ideals, we also included father role attitudes, but results were mixed and only in some models in line with hypotheses. An explanation for that could be a self-selection process within our sample: Highly identified expectant fathers, who may relate to current norms of involved fatherhood, could have been more motivated to participate in the study than traditional, work-focused expectant fathers. The general high orientation towards care (i.e., high ratings on childcare-related father role attitudes and intended leave-taking) underline this assumption, making it more difficult to find significant relations due to restricted variance. In a more diverse sample, internal contributors such as attitudes towards fatherhood likely are more relevant next to external influences like social support.

Moreover, in a similar study on predictors of men's leave-taking in the US, only maternal essentialism emerged as a correlate of men's leave-taking in contrast to parenting role beliefs (a similar measure to our father role attitudes; Berrigan et al., 2021). Thus, whether men think women are *naturally* better caregivers could be more closely related to childcare decisions regarding newborns than more general parenting beliefs. This is in line with evidence on the relevance of breastfeeding for parental leave-taking decisions (Beglaubter, 2017; Bueno & Grau-Grau, 2021). A strong endorsement of breastfeeding puts mothers in the role of primary caregivers and reduces men's claim for taking parental leave because of biological differences.

Hence, future research should examine more closely how essentialist, compared to general beliefs toward parenting roles, are related to men's leave-taking, using more representative samples.

Furthermore, we did not find evidence for the relation between workplace support and men's intended leave-taking. This contrasts with past research that stresses the importance of the workplace for men's leave-taking decisions (Brandth & Kvande, 2019; Bygren & Duvander, 2006; Haas & Hwang, 2019a; Kaufman & Almqvist, 2017). However, other studies also failed to find consistent relations for men's higher workplace support as compared to their partner (Brandt, 2017) or for supervisor support with men's leave-taking (whereas workgroup support and workplace norms were related to men's leave-taking; Haas et al., 2002; Samtleben, Bringmann, et al., 2019). The latter finding suggests that, in future research, workplace support should be measured separately for colleagues and supervisors instead of using a combined measure like in the current study. Moreover, participants could have selected their workplace partly based on correspondence with their personal values, such as family orientation, reducing the relevance of workplace support for predicting men's intended leave-taking. In addition, workplace support was correlated with other predictors in the models, namely others' leave-taking and expected backlash effects. When asking expecting fathers how much other men in their personal environment took leave, colleagues are likely an important reference group. Moreover, being encouraged or discouraged by people at work signals whether men could expect negative consequences and backlash for taking leave. Future longitudinal research could, therefore, shed light on the interplay and temporal order of these constructs and how they contribute to men's leave-taking decisions. In addition, some participants commented that they filled in the survey earlier than three months before birth and had not made concrete plans regarding parental leave yet. Possibly, conversations with people at work take place at later stages in men's decision-making process, and there had not been much room for receiving support from the workplace yet.

In addition to hypothesis tests, we explored further predictors of men's intended leave-taking. Results confirmed the relevance of fearing backlash (e.g., Horvath et al., 2018; Vogt & Pull, 2010): The more men expected negative consequences when taking leave, the less they intended to take leave. Furthermore, these explorations yielded additional evidence for how men's leave-taking decision appears to be shaped within a normative environment and how others' behavior is related to their own intentions. Here, other men can function as role models who show the feasibility of taking leave as a man, for example, by reducing the perception of external barriers (Morgenroth et al., 2015). In fact, backlash effects and career consequences

following men's leave-taking are often less negative than expected (Fleischmann & Sieverding, 2015; Samtleben, Bringmann, et al., 2019; see also mixed evidence in the review by Steffens et al., 2019). Moreover, seeing other men take leave can reduce self-stereotyping and facilitate the consideration of counter-stereotypic engagement – which parental leave-taking traditionally is for men (Morgenroth et al., 2015; also see Asgari et al., 2010). Lastly, role modeling is especially effective in the case of similarity and shared group membership, speaking again to the inspirational role of male colleagues' leave-taking (Bygren & Duvander, 2006).

Whereas we found this motivational relation of other men's leave-taking with participants' leave-taking intentions, other men's childcare engagement was negatively related to participants' leave-taking intentions and expected length of parental leave. It is possible that other men who engage less in childcare than their partners function as negative role models (see Lockwood et al., 2002), showing men what they would miss out on. Alternatively, given the correlational data and unclear causal order, men with stronger leave-taking intentions could perceive other men as engaging comparatively little in childcare. Lastly, the negative relation could also be interpreted inversely as perceiving other men to be highly engaged in childcare being related to lower leave-taking intentions. In fact, men who do more childcare than their partners, like in the case of stay-at-home dads, often experience backlash (Steffens et al., 2019), which could deflate men's leave-taking intentions.

### **Strengths and limitations**

The following limitations should be considered when interpreting the current results. Most importantly, we report on cross-sectional correlational data and are, therefore, not able to draw causal conclusions about precursors of men's intended leave-taking. Although experimental designs allow for such conclusions, they are ethically questionable and difficult to implement for life decisions such as parenthood and parental leave-taking (for experimental evidence for hypothetical leave-taking, see Rudman & Mescher, 2013; Scheifele et al., 2021). The current study adds to existing research by examining intentions of men who are actually becoming parents and are facing parental leave-taking decisions. Naturally, an interesting avenue for future research is to gain more insight into predictors of men's actual leave-taking instead of mere intentions. Still, by zooming in on men's intended leave-taking and different nuances from preferences to more concrete plans, we gain a deeper understanding of which factors are related to men's leave-taking decisions before birth. In addition, analyzing cross-

sectional data on men's leave-taking intentions enables us to make better predictions for a longitudinal assessment of men's leave-taking decisions across the transition to parenthood.

Although the current study goes beyond student samples, we still rely on a convenience sample with limited representativeness in terms of socio-economic status or gender and parenting attitudes. Therefore, the current findings cannot easily be generalized to the population of expectant fathers in Belgium and Germany. Nevertheless, one could argue that it is particularly interesting and a more conservative test to look at how, for this sample, leave-taking intentions are shaped through attitudes and normative environments because external factors, such as whether parents can financially afford men's leave-taking, play a minor role here. Also, if there is limited variance in our sample, the correlations we found likely are lower boundaries of true correlations in more diverse samples, including more traditional fathers.

Another limitation can be found in the start of the data collection at the end of 2021 when the global COVID-19 pandemic was ongoing. However, only few participants completed the surveys when measures such as mandatory teleworking were still implemented. In addition, although the pandemic had consequences for parents' division of labor, with men increasing their time spent at home, mothers continued to shoulder the majority of childcare and housework (Hipp & Bünning, 2021; Kreyenfeld & Zinn, 2021; Petts et al., 2023; Van Tienoven et al., 2023; Yerkes et al., 2020; research conducted in Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, the UK, Canada, and the US). Researchers in Belgium concluded that changes in the division of household labor were rather temporal and that the inertia of gender roles is still evident (Van Tienoven et al., 2023). Thus, while the unique period in which parts of the data were collected should be considered, we do not think that the current findings are caused by it but likely generalize to other periods as well.

Methodologically, we used several non-validated measures due to a lack of validated alternatives, resulting in issues with internal consistencies and ceiling effects. Lastly, we did not reach the required sample size based on an a-priori power analysis. As a result, we were not able to detect small effects and, at times, only found trends in the data. We, therefore, encourage future longitudinal studies on the relations between men's parental leave-taking intentions and actual leave-taking, including larger, more representative samples and validated measures.

### **Conclusion**

We see the contribution of the present research in gaining first insight into the parental leave-taking intentions of expectant fathers while addressing different facets of the studied

constructs and carving out the role that men's social setting plays in their orientation towards care. Across analyses, higher levels of partner support were accompanied by a higher desire and intention of expectant fathers to take (longer) leave, illustrating the role of partners as gatekeepers for men's leave-taking. Other predictors were more relevant for different facets of intended leave-taking, speaking to the need for a nuanced assessment of such. Notions of what it means to be a man tended to be linked to whether expectant fathers wished to take parental leave, whereas men's broader normative environment was especially predictive of their behavioral intentions to take leave. Taken together, these findings advance current knowledge on predictors of men's intended parental leave uptake but also of men's involvement in childcare more generally, as parental leave can represent a gateway for continuous father involvement.

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### 3.6 Appendix

#### A3.1 Further robustness checks

##### *Including outliers*

We ran the models including all predictors again with outliers included. This led to some changes regarding the results for desired parental leave-taking. Instead of a trend for communal prototypes of men, we now found a significant relation to men's desired parental leave-taking ( $\beta = .18, p = .043$ ), whereas agentic prototypes of men were not significantly related anymore ( $\beta = -.10, p = .208$ ). In terms of the additional predictors, others' leave-taking was not a significant predictor of men's desired leave-taking anymore ( $\beta = .10, p = .133$ ) but, instead, expected backlash was ( $\beta = -.17, p = .034$ ). The results for parental leave-taking intentions did not change substantially when outliers were included. For the expected length of parental leave, perceived self-efficacy was not significantly related anymore ( $\beta = .10, p = .106$ ). Taken together, some relations were weakened and, thus, power could be too low to detect these smaller relations. However, none of the coefficients changed direction, and the results including outliers would not substantially affect the conclusions drawn.

##### *Absolute parental leave length*

As we did not preregister using a percentage measure for the expected parental leave length, we checked how using absolute expected leave lengths would affect the results in the fourth and the final model. Agentic prototypes were significantly related to men's expected length of parental leave, suggesting that seeing an ideal man as agentic was related to a lower expected length of leave, in line with H1.2 (Model 4:  $\beta = -.26, p = .028$ , final model:  $\beta = -.25, p = .019$ ). However, parental self-efficacy did not emerge as a significant predictor of expected leave length anymore (Model 4:  $\beta = .09, p = .264$ , final model:  $\beta = .06, p = .485$ ). Moreover, we only found a trend for others' childcare engagement in the final model ( $\beta = -.17, p = .074$ ).

##### *Excluding sociability items from measure for communal prototypes of men*

As preregistered, we excluded the items *communicative* and *likeable* from the communion subscale used to measure prototypes of men. In past research, no differences between men and women were found in terms of sociability (Hentschel et al., 2019), which could result in ceiling effects. However, the mean was only slightly lower when these items were excluded,  $M = 4.98, SD = 0.83$  (with items included:  $M = 5.10, SD = 0.79$ ). Using this alternative scale led to a weaker trend for communal prototypes of men and men's desired parental leave-taking (Model 4:  $\beta = .12, p = .148$ , final model:  $\beta = .15, p = .099$ ). Also, the



relation of agentic prototypes of men and men's desired parental leave-taking was weaker (Model 4:  $\beta = -.15$ ,  $p = .068$ , final model:  $\beta = -.18$ ,  $p = .040$ ). Results for parental leave-taking intentions or the expected length of leave were not affected.

### **A3.2 Deviations from preregistration and additional measures**

We conducted an a-priori power analysis before collecting data but were not able to recruit the required sample size of  $N = 188$  ( $N = 200$  including a buffer) despite continuous long term recruitment efforts. In Chapter 3, we present a sensitivity analysis to indicate which effect sizes we were able to detect given the final sample size of  $N = 143$ .

We preregistered that, for the T1 data, we would conduct regression analyses to examine the relations between male prototypes, possible selves, and parental leave-taking intentions (see preregistration for details on measures, [https://aspredicted.org/3HY\\_17Q](https://aspredicted.org/3HY_17Q)). As not included in the main text, we present findings for the relations of male prototypes (named prototypes of men in the following), possible selves, and intended parental leave-taking here. Possible task engagement was assessed on a scale from 1 = "I will do this exclusively" to 7 = "My partner will do this exclusively", but the scale was reverse coded during data analysis to facilitate interpretation. We hypothesized that more communal prototypes of men and more communal possible selves before birth are positively related to men's parental leave-taking intentions. Results of regression analyses are presented in Table A3.1. In fact, communal prototypes of men were positively related to men's desired parental leave-taking and tended to be positively related to men's parental leave-taking intentions. We did not find significant relations for men's communal possible self-concept or possible task engagement regarding childcare. However, possible task engagement regarding work emerged as a predictor of men's expected absolute length of leave. The more men thought they will spend time on their paid job in the future as compared to their partners, the shorter they planned to take leave. For the percentage measure, we also found a trend in this direction. Moreover, men's agentic possible self-concept tended to be negatively related to men's parental leave-taking intentions. The more men thought that agentic attributes will describe them in the future, the lower their parental leave-taking intentions tended to be.

**Table A3.1. Regression models (with standardized regression coefficients) for prototypes of men and possible selves predicting intended parental leave-taking.**

	Desired parental leave-taking	Parental leave-taking intentions	Expected length (absolute)	Expected length (%)
Age	.05	.14*	.04	.15 <sup>†</sup>
Country of residence	.28**	.31***	.43**	-.15
Educational level	-.30**	-.33***	-.08	-.15
Relative income	.07	.12	.02	.08
Work hours	-.14	-.12	-.07	-.13
Communal prototypes of men	.21*	.18 <sup>†</sup>	-.01	.09
Agentic prototypes of men	-.08	-.00	-.19 <sup>†</sup>	-.10
Communal possible self- concept	.01	-.07	-.02	-.09
Agentic possible self-concept	-.03	-.14 <sup>†</sup>	-.02	-.05
Possible task engagement – Childcare	-.16	-.13	-.17	-.14
Possible task engagement – Work	-.12	-.01	-.34**	-.14 <sup>†</sup>
Possible task engagement – Routine household tasks	.06	.07	-.02	-.09
Possible task engagement – Non-routine household tasks	-.06	-.11	-.06	-.15
Adjusted $R^2$	.14	.18	.20	.17

Notes. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ , <sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ .

We further planned to conduct analyses for men's intended *paternal* leave-taking besides their parental leave-taking. As paternal leave is only offered in Belgium (before 2023: 15 days, since 2023: 20 days), we conducted the analyses with Belgian participants ( $N = 106$ ) and did not include country of origin as a covariate (see Table A3.2). Descriptively, participants had a strong desire ( $M = 6.73$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ , assessed on 7-point scale) and intention ( $M = 6.67$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ , assessed on 7-point scale) to take paternal leave. They planned to take, on average, 14.47 days of paternal leave ( $SD = 2.29$ ). In line with the preregistered hypothesis, communal prototypes of men were positively related to men's expected length of paternal leave,

suggesting that the more men saw an ideal man as communal, the longer they intended to take paternal leave. In addition, we found a positive relation between men's communal possible self-concept and their desire to take paternal leave: The more men expected communal attributes to describe them in the future, the more they wished to take paternal leave. Exploratory analyses suggest a positive relation for men's possible task engagement regarding routine household tasks and their expected length of paternal leave. The more men expected to engage in routine household tasks as compared to their partners, the longer they expected to take paternal leave. Moreover, we found trends for negative relations between men's agentic possible self-concept and their paternal leave-taking intentions as well as men's possible task engagement regarding non-routine household tasks and their desired paternal leave-taking. Lastly, a positive trend emerged for men's possible task engagement regarding work and their desired paternal leave-taking. Contrary to expectations, men who expected to work more as compared to their partners had a stronger desire to take paternal leave.

Additional measures that are not part of this manuscript were others' support for leave-taking (e.g., friends, family), others' prototypes of men, others' father role attitudes, desired possible selves (attributes and tasks), timepoint of leave-taking, expected job consequences of leave-taking, reasons for or against leave-taking, partner's leave-taking plans, gender identification, father identification, career vs. family orientation, and gender role attitudes. We explored whether some of these measures were predictive of men's intended leave-taking but arrived at the set of additional predictors that is currently presented in the analyses as the most parsimonious selection. Moreover, only partial data were available for some measures (e.g., others' support for leave-taking or partner's leave-taking plans), which would have reduced the sample size substantially.

**Table A3.2. Regression models (with standardized regression coefficients) for prototypes of men and possible selves predicting intended paternal leave-taking.**

	Desired paternal leave- taking	Paternal leave- taking intentions	Expected length (absolute)
Age	.14	.08	.15*
Educational level	-.05	.05	.08
Relative income	.01	-.12	-.15
Work hours	-.11	.12	-.04
Communal prototypes of men	-.15	.15	.24*
Agentic prototypes of men	.06	.03	-.07
Communal possible self-concept	.32*	-.02	-.02
Agentic possible self-concept	-.15	-.19 <sup>†</sup>	-.14
Possible task engagement – Childcare	.06	.06	-.05
Possible task engagement – Work	.15 <sup>†</sup>	-.05	-.12
Possible task engagement – Routine household tasks	-.05	.12	.29*
Possible task engagement – Non-routine household tasks	-.14 <sup>†</sup>	-.08	-.05
Adjusted $R^2$	.04	.06	.21

Notes. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ , <sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ .

**Table A3.3. Descriptive statistics separated by country.**

	$M_{BE}$ ( <i>SD</i> )	$M_{DE}$ ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>Correlations</i> ( $N_{BE} = 89 - 115$ , above diagonal, $N_{DE} = 26 - 28$ , below diagonal)												
			1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.
Prototypes – Communion <sup>a</sup>	5.15 (0.80)	4.89 (0.69)		.27**	.15	.00	.16	.13	.18 <sup>†</sup>	.04	-.04	.23*	.35***	.23*	.10
Prototypes – Agency <sup>a</sup>	5.22 (0.79)	5.16 (0.96)	.03		-.01	.19*	.15	.11	-.05	-.03	.06	.04	-.05	-.06	-.10
Father role attitudes – Childcare <sup>b</sup>	8.18 (0.99)	8.39 (0.72)	.08	-.13		-.10	.33***	.02	-.06	-.03	-.07	.12	.15	.13	.09
Father role attitudes – Breadwinning <sup>b</sup>	4.49 (1.46)	4.32 (1.79)	.33 <sup>†</sup>	.31	-.09		-.27**	-.05	-.18 <sup>†</sup>	.18 <sup>†</sup>	.12	-.20*	-.06	-.22*	-.29**
Partner support <sup>b</sup>	7.75 (1.45)	8.43 (1.57)	.06	.00	.12	-.42*		.36***	.19 <sup>†</sup>	-.02	-.07	.18 <sup>†</sup>	.36***	.39***	.33***
Workplace support <sup>b</sup>	6.18 (1.72)	7.04 (1.77)	.54***	-.13	.29	.11	.21		.38***	-.08	-.34***	.13	.24*	.31**	.17 <sup>†</sup>
Others' leave- taking <sup>b</sup>	4.96 (3.03)	7.21 (2.18)	.02	-.03	-.06	-.22	.19	.02		.03	-.13	-.04	.27**	.35***	.24*
Others' childcare engagement <sup>b</sup>	4.66 (1.14)	4.18 (1.52)	.10	.23	-.08	.34 <sup>†</sup>	-.20	.19	.23		.23*	.07	.00	-.24*	-.22*
Expected backlash <sup>a</sup>	2.60 (1.81)	2.43 (1.89)	-.36 <sup>†</sup>	.25	-.17	-.20	-.09	-.50**	.04	-.20		-.15	-.23*	-.44***	-.29**
Self-efficacy <sup>a</sup>	5.78 (0.89)	5.93 (0.93)	.12	.21	.18	-.09	.11	.07	-.24	-.12	.01		.27**	.28**	.23*
Parental leave – Desire <sup>a</sup>	6.03 (1.60)	6.54 (1.35)	-.04	-.01	.12	-.45*	.92***	.16	.02	-.37*	-.09	.15		.77***	.48***
Parental leave – Intentions <sup>a</sup>	5.44 (1.94)	6.12 (1.79)	-.10	.05	.22	-.23	.65***	.20	-.02	-.01	-.36 <sup>†</sup>	.41*	.68***		.59***
Parental leave length (%)	63.05 (41.45)	37.35 (37.08)	-.08	-.40*	.14	-.26	.27	-.03	-.24	-.21	.10	.06	.31	.36 <sup>†</sup>	

Notes. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ , <sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$  (all two-tailed). <sup>a</sup> 7-point scale, <sup>b</sup> 9-point scale. Parental leave – Desire = Desired parental leave-taking, Parental leave – Intentions = Parental leave-taking intentions, Parental leave length (%) = Expected length of parental leave in percent.



# **4 Chapter: Dashed expectations and unmet desires of first-time fathers regarding their engagement in breadwinning and childcare**

This chapter is based on:

Scheifele, C., Steffens, M. C., & Van Laar, C. (2023). *Dashed expectations and unmet desires of first-time fathers regarding their engagement in breadwinning and childcare* [Manuscript in preparation].

### 4.1 Abstract

Norms for the division of labor are increasingly shifting towards expectant parents aiming and expecting to share breadwinning and childcare more equally. Evidence exists, though, that after birth, parents often face violations of their expectations and desires regarding the division of labor. We extend past research by focusing on a) first-time fathers' dashed expectations and unmet desires for the division of labor, b) how attitudes towards the father role and perceived social support relate to such discrepancies, and c) how experiencing discrepancies relates to fathers' intended parental leave-taking. In line with hypotheses, the postnatal division of breadwinning and childcare was generally more traditional than fathers had expected and desired before birth. Fathers were more likely to work more but engage less in physical childcare than expected and wished for, the less traditional their attitudes were towards the father role. The support fathers perceived from their partners for taking parental leave and engaging in childcare was related to experiencing less discrepancies regarding breadwinning and physical childcare. However, prenatal support from partners and workplaces also tended to increase expectations for sharing breadwinning and childcare more equally, which were difficult to fulfill after birth. Moreover, the more fathers exceeded their expectations and desires regarding work engagement, the more they wished to take parental leave in the future, while falling short of intended childcare engagement partially predicted longer intended leave lengths. These findings suggest that fathers' dashed expectations and unmet desires can become catalysts for change, motivating action such as taking parental leave to increasingly align their expected, desired, and experienced division of labor. Yet, findings varied for different operationalizations, which speaks to the need for a nuanced assessment of fathers' dashed expectations and unmet desires during the transition to parenthood.

### 4.2 Introduction

“Young men embrace gender equality, but they still don't vacuum”, the New York Times noted in 2020 (Miller Cain, 2020). This headline suggests that although men's attitudes about gender roles have become more egalitarian, the division of labor between men and women remains unequal. While fathers indeed increased their time spent on childcare and housework in the last decades, their relative contribution as compared to mothers remains limited (e.g., Altintas & Sullivan, 2016; Samtleben, 2019; Sayer, 2016; Steinbach & Schulz, 2022; Sullivan, 2013; Wei, 2020). Generally, the transition to parenthood is said to affect women more strongly than men, for example, regarding their career advancement or their work



hours (with women reducing the time they spend on their paid job, while generally working more hours per day; Abele & Spurk, 2011; Sanchez & Thomson, 1997; Yavorsky et al., 2015).

Despite the pronounced effects of parenthood for women, becoming a father naturally has consequences for men's lives, too. For example, fatherhood goes along with changes in men's identities, relationships, health, and well-being (Eggebeen et al., 2013; Genesoni & Tallandini, 2009; Kotelchuck, 2022). Moreover, expectations towards fathers have shifted from a strong prioritization of work to emerging norms of involved fatherhood that prescribe fathers to be highly involved in their children's daily lives (Bataille & Hyland, 2023; Dermott & Miller, 2015; Wall & Arnold, 2007). In line with these normative changes, fathers often have a strong wish to spend time with their children and expect and wish to divide breadwinning and childcare tasks more equally with their partners (Juncke et al., 2018; Machin, 2015; Milkie et al., 2002). However, institutional support for modern work and family arrangements is still limited, and parenthood can, thus, lead to a re-traditionalization of attitudes and task division, especially for initially progressive individuals (Baxter et al., 2015; Grinza et al., 2017; Katz-Wise et al., 2010; Machin, 2015). In turn, parents often experience a violation of their initial expectations and desires regarding the division of labor. Examining such discrepancies between expectations, desires, and experiences is relevant as past research has documented various, often negative, consequences related to relationship satisfaction, co-parenting, well-being, and depression (e.g., Ascigil et al., 2021; Biehle & Mickelson, 2012; Khazan et al., 2008; Lawrence et al., 2007; Milkie et al., 2002; Mitnick et al., 2022; Shockley & Allen, 2018). Men's dissatisfaction with the division of parental leave was further related to having fewer children later on and a higher risk of separation (Brandén et al., 2018).

However, when considering the gendered division of labor, most studies examine mothers' or couples' dashed expectations and unmet desires but do not specifically address fathers' experiences. In addition, past research focused on a specific set of contributors to and implications of dashed expectations and unmet desires during the transition to parenthood, such as how the birth experience or infant behavior is related to experienced discrepancies (e.g., Flykt et al., 2014) and how discrepancies affect postnatal adaptation (e.g., Powell & Karraker, 2019). We aim to extend the current state of knowledge by addressing the following goals: learning more about a) possible discrepancies regarding the expected, desired, and experienced division of labor that fathers face during the transition to parenthood, b) whether the extent to which fathers experience such discrepancies is related to gendered beliefs regarding fatherhood and the social support fathers perceive from their personal environment, and c) what

implications experienced discrepancies have for fathers' intended parental leave-taking (see Figure 4.1).

### **Parents' dashed expectations and unmet desires**

During pregnancy, expectant parents develop an idea of what their lives could look like after the birth of their child. Such expectations can concern the division of labor as a couple and the extent to which each partner will engage in childcare, breadwinning, and household tasks (Nazarinia Roy et al., 2014). Today, couples often strive for a more equal division of labor instead of a traditional division in which women specialize in domestic labor and men in breadwinning (Juncke et al., 2018; Machin, 2015; Milkie et al., 2002). However, past research has shown that a traditional task division emerges more often than couples expected and wished for before birth. In terms of domestic labor, mothers and fathers often have unrealistic expectations and experience violations of these expectations, with mothers doing more and fathers less of the childcare and housekeeping after birth than expected prenatally. In an early study with 50 couples, mothers indeed took on more of the childcare and housework than they expected and fathers less, despite the fact that couples already expected an unequal division before birth (Hackel & Ruble, 1992). Dashed expectations regarding one's *partner's* involvement in childcare can also occur in that mothers see fathers as less engaged in childcare than mothers had expected, and fathers see mothers as more engaged than fathers had expected (Biehle & Mickelson, 2012). Contrary to mothers, fathers tend to profit from mothers' higher adoption of childcare tasks. However, mothers' unexpectedly frequent playtime with their children can contribute to fathers' lower marital satisfaction (Biehle & Mickelson, 2012). When comparing heterosexual and lesbian couples, past research suggests that expectation violations are more prevalent among heterosexual couples, with mothers again doing more childcare than expected in the first months after birth and fathers less (Ascigil et al., 2021).

Notably, most studies examined dashed *expectations* regarding *domestic labor*. In contrast, Milkie and colleagues (2002) additionally focused on a) discrepancies between parents' actual and ideal (instead of expected) division of childcare and b) measured the desired and actual division of financially supporting the family besides domestic labor. While most parents agreed that disciplining, playing, emotionally supporting, and monitoring should be shared equally, opinions varied concerning daily care, such as feeding, and breadwinning. Moreover, if parents experienced discrepancies between their actual and ideal division of labor, these pertained to mothers judging fathers' involvement in childcare tasks as too low (Milkie

et al., 2002). In addition, parents often report discontent with fathers doing the majority of breadwinning after birth (Cappuccini & Cochrane, 2000; Milkie et al., 2002).

As in much of the research around parenthood, few studies focused on fathers' dashed expectations and unmet desires regarding the division of labor. Nevertheless, from research on father involvement more generally, we know that expectant fathers today often expect and wish to be more highly involved in childcare and to share breadwinning more equally (e.g., Fox et al., 2000; Juncke et al., 2018; Machin, 2015). Still, fathers feel pressure to confirm stereotypes of a protective and providing father and struggle to feel an equal co-parent (Fox et al., 2000; Machin, 2015). Thus, although fathers often have a strong wish to be highly engaged in childcare, ideals regarding involved fatherhood seem to progress more quickly than actual involvement, and fathers continue to feel attached to and responsible for the breadwinning and provider role. In line with prior evidence, we, therefore, expect fathers to be more involved in breadwinning after birth but less involved in childcare than initially expected and desired. Yet, few studies explicitly examined why fathers may experience such discrepancies and how discrepancies can be alleviated. Hence, we aimed to examine whether the extent to which fathers experience such discrepancies is related to their attitudes towards the father role and their perception of being socially supported to engage in childcare.

### **Father role attitudes and social support**

Fathers can have differing beliefs about whether their responsibility as a father lies more in breadwinning, caring for their child (other than financially), or both (Maurer et al., 2001). As attitudes have often been linked to the formation of intentions and behavior (e.g., Ajzen, 1991; Armitage & Conner, 2001), men's attitudes towards the father role likely contribute to their expectations for the postnatal period. In fact, gender attitudes have more generally been linked to couples' division of labor, suggesting that more traditional attitudes go along with a more traditional task division (Gaunt, 2006; Pinho & Gaunt, 2020; also see Poortman & Van der Lippe, 2009). In addition, expectant fathers with less traditional attitudes (here in the form of lower biological gender essentialism) had higher intentions for father involvement (Ross-Plourde et al., 2022).

Thus, attitudes likely not only play a role in the actual division of labor but also early on in shaping how men envision their engagement in childcare and breadwinning. Fathers with more egalitarian attitudes towards the father role likely expect to be more engaged in childcare and less in breadwinning than fathers with more traditional father role attitudes. We know from past research that the division of labor often turns out more traditionally than parents initially

expected. Hence, we propose that less traditional expectant fathers who strive for an egalitarian division of labor more easily exceed their expectations and desires regarding breadwinning but may be more likely to fall short regarding their expected and desired childcare engagement. Conversely, more traditional expectant fathers are less likely to exceed their expectations regarding breadwinning because they have higher expectations for their involvement to begin with. Moreover, more traditional fathers may more easily reach their expected and desired involvement in childcare due to their lower expectations compared to less traditional fathers.

Some existing evidence indeed speaks to the relevance of gendered beliefs for experiencing dashed expectations and unmet desires across the transition to parenthood: Exceeding their expectations regarding childcare involvement affected the marital satisfaction of gender non-traditional women more negatively than traditional women. For gender traditional women, spending more time on childcare than expected even had positive effects as this violation was in line with their gender role orientation (Hackel & Ruble, 1992). However, we are not aware of a study that tested how gendered beliefs relate to fathers' experience of dashed expectations and unmet desires regarding the division of labor. In the current study, we, therefore, aim to learn more about how fathers experience discrepancies between the expected, desired, and actual task division with their partners, depending on their father role attitudes.

Besides fathers' own gendered beliefs, their personal environment and the extent to which important others support their engagement in childcare can contribute to whether pre-birth expectations and desires match post-birth experiences. Fathers generally value social support at the time around birth, for example, to prepare for the parenting role or discuss parenting experiences (Rominov et al., 2018; Venning et al., 2021). Because the transition to parenthood is often experienced as a couple, partners are a crucial source of social support. During the often-stressful transition to parenthood, the support fathers receive from their partners can have positive effects, such as lowering distress (Gillis et al., 2019). Moreover, being supported and encouraged by their partners to engage in childcare can increase father involvement and reduce competitive co-parenting (i.e., undermining each other's parenting efforts; Bouchard & Lee, 2000; Murphy et al., 2017; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2008). Partner support is crucial not only for father involvement in general but also for fathers deciding to become primary caregivers and stay-at-home dads (Fischer & Anderson, 2012; Merla, 2008). Also for men's parental leave-taking decisions, the mothers' wishes and whether they encourage fathers to take (longer) leaves are major contributors (Beglaubter, 2017; Kaufman & Almqvist, 2017; McKay & Doucet, 2010).

Besides partners, we examine the workplace as a source of social support for men's engagement in childcare and breadwinning. A recent review of work-family management highlighted the role of informal organizational support (i.e., through social relationships instead of policies) for juggling work and family responsibilities (French & Shockley, 2020). Furthermore, employer support and organizational norms have been linked to whether men take parental leave to care for their young children (Haas et al., 2002; Haas & Hwang, 2019b; Kaufman & Almqvist, 2017; Samtleben, Bringmann, et al., 2019). An organizational culture that is unsupportive of father involvement can lead to fathers fearing career disadvantages and feeling indispensable at work if few measures are taken to enable flexible work arrangements and leave-taking (Horvath et al., 2018; Kaufman & Almqvist, 2017; Samtleben, Bringmann, et al., 2019). Thus, the workplace can signal via organizational norms, working arrangements, and supervisors' and colleagues' behavior whether fathers are expected to prioritize work (e.g., through long work hours) or whether they are encouraged to follow emerging norms of involved fatherhood (also see Minnotte & Minnotte, 2021; Reimer, 2015). Such support (or lack thereof) can enable (or hinder) men to meet their expectations and desires regarding their involvement in breadwinning and childcare.

### **Intended parental leave-taking**

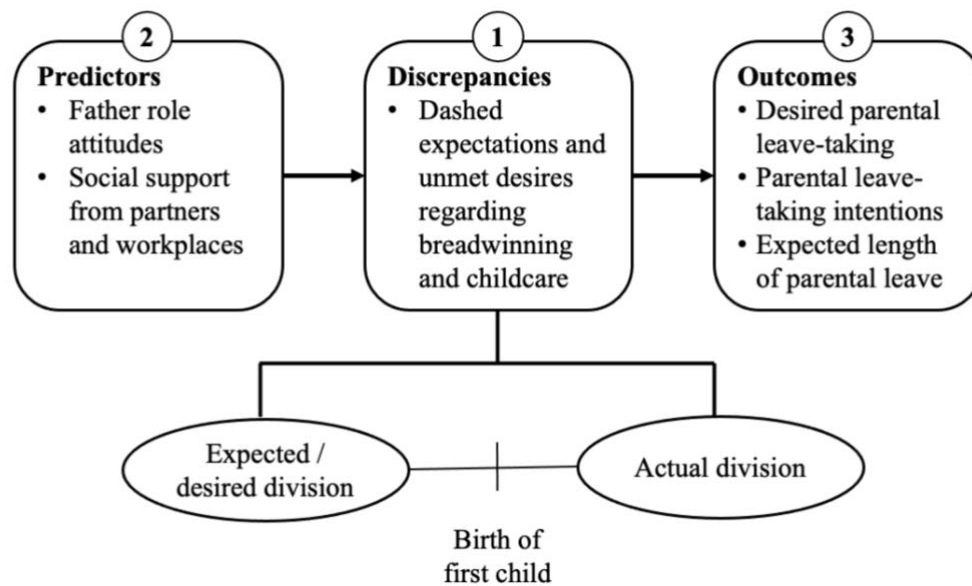
When people experience discrepancies between their expectations and actual experiences, this can elicit psychological responses, such as aversive arousal or heightened attention (Pinquart et al., 2021). Hence, individuals develop different strategies for coping with the experienced violations (for an overview, see Pinquart et al., 2021). For example, individuals may aim to change the reality to match expectations and create situations that make expectation violations less likely (Gollwitzer et al., 2018; Pinquart et al., 2021). Parental leave has been discussed as a tool to increase men's involvement in childcare and to achieve a more egalitarian division of labor (Castro-García & Pazos-Moran, 2016; Meeussen et al., 2020). Hence, when fathers experience an unsatisfactory division of labor in their partnership, one way to establish a division more in line with expectations and desires is to take parental leave. In the current study, we are interested in whether experiencing discrepancies between the expected, desired, and actual division of labor across the transition to parenthood is related to how much fathers desire and intend to take leave in the future (and for how long) to bring their experiences more in line with their expectations and desires. Conversely, fathers who do not aim to increase their childcare engagement or to decrease their time at work could have a lower desire and intention to take parental leave in the future.

In fact, evidence exists that whether and for how long men take parental leave does not only increase father involvement during leave but also later on (Almqvist & Duvander, 2014; Bünning, 2015; Haas & Hwang, 2008; Meil, 2013; Nepomnyaschy & Waldfogel, 2007; Petts & Knoester, 2018; Schober & Zoch, 2019; Tanaka & Waldfogel, 2007). Longer leave length was also related to fathers reporting higher satisfaction with their relationship with their child, for example, concerning the amount of time spent together (Haas & Hwang, 2008). Lastly, after taking leave, fathers may not only engage more in childcare but also reduce their work hours (Bünning, 2015). These findings suggest that men's parental leave-taking can indeed be helpful for sharing childcare and breadwinning more equally amongst partners.

### **The present research**

Past research on dashed expectations and unmet desires of expectant parents put a strong focus on mothers or couples and on how childcare is shared postnatally (e.g., Ascigil et al., 2021; Hackel & Ruble, 1992; Lawrence et al., 2007; Mitnick et al., 2022; Powell & Karraker, 2019). Moreover, many studies examined the consequences of dashed expectations and unmet desires for parents' postnatal adaptation and relationship satisfaction (e.g., Biehle & Mickelson, 2012; Khazan et al., 2008; Mitnick et al., 2022; Powell & Karraker, 2019). However, little is known about fathers' unique experiences, discrepancies regarding the division of breadwinning between partners besides childcare, and other correlates of disconfirmed expectations and desires after birth besides, for example, relationship satisfaction. In the current study, we aim to gain insight into the expectations and desires of first-time fathers for the division of childcare and breadwinning with their partners. We compare these prenatal expectations and desires with the actual division of labor established after birth. Moreover, we aim to learn more about predictors of discrepancies and how these discrepancies, in turn, relate to fathers' future behavioral intentions, namely their intended parental leave-taking. Thus, our objectives in the current study are threefold (see Figure 4.1): To shed light on a) possible discrepancies regarding the expected, desired, and experienced division of labor that fathers face during the transition to parenthood, b) whether the extent to which fathers experience such discrepancies is related to gendered beliefs regarding fatherhood and the social support fathers receive from their personal environment, and c) how experienced discrepancies relate to fathers' intended parental leave-taking.

Figure 4.1. Overview of research objectives.



### 4.3 Method

#### Design and procedure

Data were collected between 2021 and 2023 in Belgium and Germany as part of a longitudinal study on how becoming a parent for the first time affects men's (and their partners') work and family situation. Expectant fathers were eligible to participate if they were at least 18 years old, identified as male, were expecting their first child, and were working in Belgium or Germany. Recruitment channels included prenatal classes, hospitals, gynecology and midwife practices, shops for baby equipment, parenting and baby fairs, professional organizations for midwives or gynecologists, and companies in male-dominated industries. Additionally, we spread the call on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. We asked participants to complete online surveys administered via Qualtrics around three months before birth (T1) and four months after birth (T2).<sup>3</sup> We chose four months after birth as the second measurement point similar to other studies on the transition to parenthood (see Mitnick et al., 2022), and since fathers in Belgium can take paternity leave (a short-term leave of 20 days reserved for fathers) until four months after birth (FOD, 2023). Participants

<sup>3</sup> As the recruitment of expectant fathers was rather difficult, we loosened the criterion of completing the first survey around three months before birth and allowed participation any time before birth. Data collection for the second and a third measurement point at twelve months after birth is still ongoing.

who indicated their contact details and their expected due date received the second survey four months after the estimated due date via email and were reminded twice to complete the survey. Participants received gift cards worth 10€ per completed survey and were offered entry in a lottery for a family weekend trip at the end of the study. Moreover, we encouraged snowball sampling by offering gift cards worth 10€ per referred participant who completed the first survey. The study received ethical approval from the Social and Societal Ethics Committee of the University of Leuven.<sup>4</sup>

### **Participants and sensitivity analyses**

We were able to match the data of 87 male heterosexual participants who filled in the first and the second survey. The data of two participants were excluded from analyses because they did not pass one of the attention checks (e.g., “Please choose ‘strongly agree’ here to show that you are reading carefully.”). Of the remaining 85 participants, 73 were living in Belgium and 12 in Germany. We report additional demographic characteristics in Table 4.1. In terms of demographics, participants did not differ substantially from those who failed to complete T2 surveys ( $N = 58$ , all  $t_s < 1.60$ ,  $p_s > .112$ ).

We checked which effect sizes we could detect in the planned analyses via sensitivity analyses in G\*Power 3 (Faul et al., 2007), given an  $\alpha$  of .05 and a statistical power of  $1 - \beta = .95$ . In paired  $t$ -tests (Objective 1), with a minimum sample size of  $N = 76$ , we were able to detect small to medium-sized effects of  $d = .42$ . In a regression analysis for predicting discrepancies via father role attitudes and social support (Objective 2) with a sample size of  $N = 65$  and 11 predictors, we were able to detect medium to large-sized effects for regression coefficients of  $f^2 = .21$ . Similarly, in a regression analysis for predicting intended parental leave-taking via discrepancies in breadwinning and childcare (Objective 3) with a sample size of  $N = 69$  and 10 predictors, we were able to detect medium to large-sized effects for regression coefficients of  $f^2 = .19$ .

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<sup>4</sup> The overarching project was preregistered on Aspredicted.org ([https://aspredicted.org/3HY\\_17Q](https://aspredicted.org/3HY_17Q)) but not the specific hypotheses or analyses.



**Table 4.1. Sociodemographic characteristics of participants at T1.**

Age ( <i>M, SD</i> )	31.44 (3.43); range: 25 – 39
Relationship status	21% Committed non-marital relationship 76% Married or legally cohabiting
Educational level	15% Secondary education 29% University of Applied Sciences or higher professional education 42% University education 11% Doctorate
Relative income <sup>a</sup>	24% Much higher income than partner 32% Higher income than partner 25% About the same income as partner 14% Partner has higher income
Weekly work hours ( <i>M, SD</i> )	41.44 (5.50); range: 20 – 60
Leadership responsibility	61% no 38% yes
Political orientation <sup>b</sup> ( <i>M, SD</i> )	4.73 (1.42)
Religiosity <sup>c</sup> ( <i>M, SD</i> )	2.48 (2.00)

*Notes.* <sup>a</sup> 7-point scale from 1 = “My partner has no income” to 7 = “I have no income”. <sup>b</sup> 9-point scale from 1 = “strongly left” to 9 = “strongly right”. <sup>c</sup> 9-point scale from 1 = “not at all religious” to 9 = “very religious”.

## Measures

### ***Expected (T1), desired (T1), and actual (T2) division of breadwinning and childcare***

Before birth, we assessed men’s expected and desired division of breadwinning and childcare by asking how often they *expected* to engage in several behaviors in the future as compared to their partner (expected division of labor) and how often they would *ideally* engage in several behaviors in the future as compared to their partner (desired division of labor). After birth, we asked participants how often they *currently* engaged in these behaviors (actual division of labor). We used one item for engagement in breadwinning (“spend time on paid job”) and four items for engagement in childcare: “engaging with our child (e.g., reading aloud, calming down, talking to our child)”, “playing with our child”, “family management (e.g., bringing to or picking up our child from appointments, planning or organizing for our child)”, and “physical care of our child (e.g., feeding, changing diapers, bathing, putting to bed, putting

on clothes)” (adapted from Craig & Powell, 2018; Croft et al., 2020; Endendijk et al., 2018; Meil, 2013; Yavorsky et al., 2015). Items pertaining to childcare did not form reliable scales suggesting they assessed related but not the same constructs (all Cronbach’s  $\alpha$ s < .50), which is why we included the items separately in the analyses. We used answer scales from 1 = “My partner will/does exclusively do this”; midpoint 4 = “Me and my partner (will) share this equally”; to 7 = “I (will) exclusively do this”.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Discrepancy scores***

We calculated difference scores to include in the regression models for indicators of men’s dashed expectations and unmet desires regarding breadwinning and childcare (following Mitnick et al., 2022). This way, positive difference scores indicate that men are doing more than expected or wished for, whereas negative difference scores indicate that men are doing less than expected or wished for. Specifically, for dashed expectation scores we subtracted men’s expected division of breadwinning or childcare respectively from their actual division. For unmet desire scores, we subtracted men’s desired division of breadwinning or childcare from their actual division. This procedure left us with ten difference scores: five difference scores pertaining to dashed expectations regarding breadwinning, engaging with their child, playing with their child, family management, and physically taking care of their child, and five difference scores pertaining to unmet desires regarding these behaviors.

### ***Father role attitudes (T1)***

We measured pre-birth father role attitudes by asking participants what it means to them to be a father and how they see the responsibility of a father for his child (adapted from the Caregiving and Breadwinning Identity and Reflected-Appraisal Inventory [CBIRAI]; Maurer et al., 2001). We included five items on physical and social caregiving in the survey which together did not form a reliable scale ( $\alpha = .48$ ). Thus, we only aggregated the two items correlating highest to form a scale ( $r = .58$ ; e.g., “A father should NOT be very involved in the day-to-day matters of caring for his child.”; recoded). Of the four items pertaining to breadwinning, we aggregated three to a scale, as Cronbach’s alpha increased by .11 when dropping one item (final  $\alpha = .64$ ; e.g., “A father has a strong responsibility as a parent to be the financial provider for his family.”). All items were answered on a 9-point scale from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 9 = “strongly agree”.

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<sup>5</sup> The original answering scale was inversely coded (i.e., lower values indicating that men are or will be doing this more and higher values indicating that partners are or will be doing this more). We recoded all to make the interpretation of results more intuitive.

### ***Social support for leave-taking (T1) and childcare engagement (T2)***

We used two items to measure social support for leave-taking before birth – one related to support from participants’ partner and the other related to support from people at work, such as their boss or colleagues. Participants rated the amount of support or discouragement they experienced from their partner or people at work regarding taking parental leave (adapted from Schreiber et al., 2023). Within the question text, support or discouragement were explained as whether their partner or people at work encouraged or discouraged them to take leave, showed appreciation or disapproval when participants planned to take leave, and whether participants felt like they could talk to them when they had questions or rather not. After birth, we additionally asked how much support fathers were experiencing for taking care of their child from their partner and people at work with one item each. All items were rated on a 9-point scale ranging from "lots of discouragement" to "lots of support."

### ***Intended parental leave-taking (T2)***

We operationalized men’s intended leave-taking after birth as their desired parental leave-taking, parental leave-taking intentions, and expected length of leave. We used a single item for men’s desired parental leave-taking ("I would like to take leave.") and two items for men’s parental leave-taking intentions ( $r = .81$ , e.g., "I intend to take parental leave."), using a 7-point scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" (adapted from Miyajima & Yamaguchi, 2017; Yzer, 2012). As the parental leave policies differ between Belgium and Germany<sup>6</sup>, we calculated a percentage measure, indicating how much percent of the available leave men expected to take. This measure was based on the absolute length participants indicated in full-time weeks (Belgium) or months (Germany). Thus, participants who planned to take part-time leave needed to recalculate their expected duration to full-time weeks or months.

## **4.4 Results**

### **Objective 1: Dashed expectations and unmet desires**

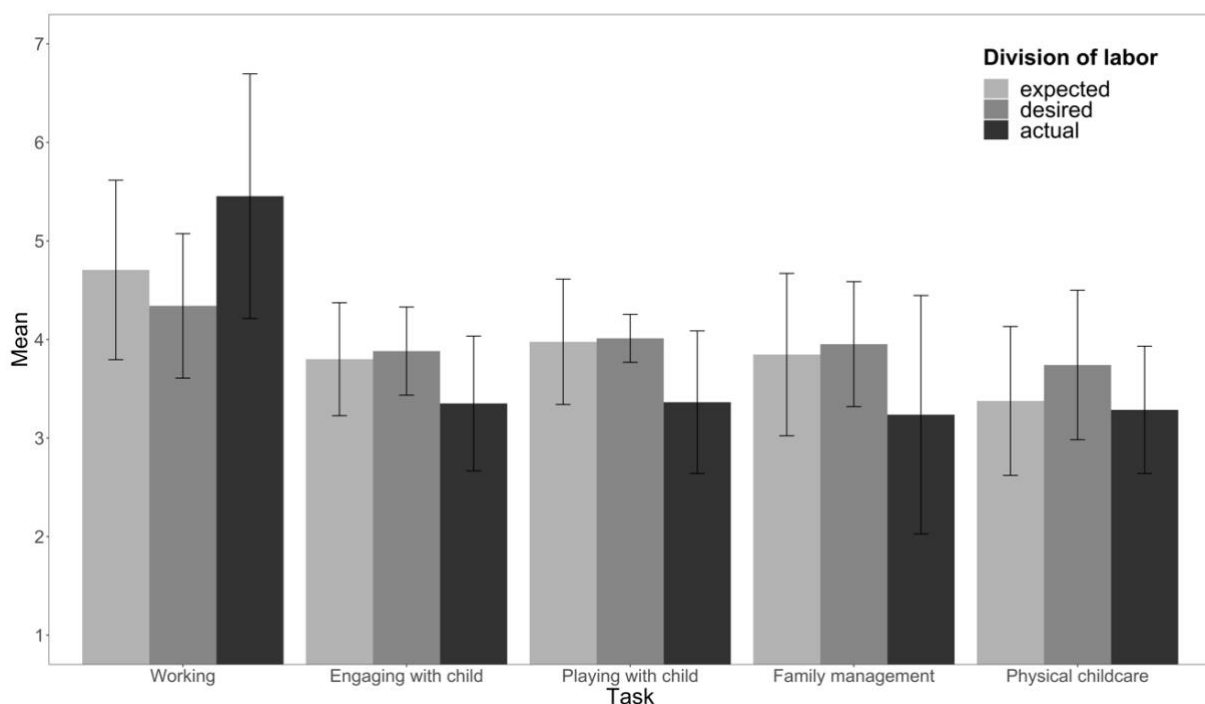
Table 4.2 includes means and standard deviations for expected and desired (T1) and actual division (T2) of breadwinning and childcare tasks. Descriptively, fathers expected and

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<sup>6</sup> In Belgium, mothers and fathers can take up to four months of ear-marked paid parental leave ("*ouderschapsverlof*"), whereas mothers and fathers in Germany can share up to 14 months of paid parental leave ("*Elterngeld*"). Regulations for part-time leave-taking exist in both countries, but income replacement is more generous in Germany (65% of income, up to 1800€ per month of full-time leave) than Belgium (ca. 800€ per month for full-time leave; BMFSFJ, 2022; Koslowski et al., 2022; RVA, 2022).

desired to engage more than their partners in breadwinning in the future and did so (more strongly) after birth. In contrast, answers on childcare tasks were slightly tilted towards the female partner's side, with fathers expecting and wanting their female partners to do more childcare as compared to themselves. Yet, this was not the case for playing with their child as fathers expected and desired an equal division. Actual division of childcare tasks was also more strongly shifted towards the female partner's side than expectations and desires. Across all behaviors, participants' desired division of labor was more egalitarian than their expected division, indicating that fathers in the current sample were striving for a more equal division of labor than they felt was realistic – which seems to prove true considering their even more traditional actual division (also see Figure 4.2).

**Figure 4.2. Means including error bars for expected, desired, and actual division of breadwinning and childcare tasks.**



We conducted paired *t*-tests to analyze whether fathers' expected and desired division of labor before birth differed significantly from their actual division after birth (see Table 4.2). Moreover, we used the Benjamini-Hochberg procedure (Benjamini & Hochberg, 1995) to control the false discovery rate given multiple testing and report Cohen's *d* as effect sizes. After birth, we expected fathers to indicate working more relative to their partners than they expected and desired before birth, while engaging less in childcare relative to their partners than they

expected and desired before birth (operationalized via engaging with their child, playing with their child, family management, and physical childcare).

**Table 4.2. Means, standard deviations, and paired *t*-tests for dashed expectations and unmet desires.**

	Expected / desired division (T1)	Actual division (T2)			
	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Dashed expectations – Breadwinning	4.71 (0.94)	5.46 (1.25)	-5.27	< .001	0.60
Unmet desires – Breadwinning	4.32 (0.72)	5.46 (1.25)	-6.92	< .001	0.79
Dashed expectations – Engaging with child	3.80 (0.59)	3.34 (0.68)	4.60	< .001	0.52
Unmet desires – Engaging with child	3.89 (0.45)	3.34 (0.68)	5.96	< .001	0.68
Dashed expectations – Playing with child	4.01 (0.64)	3.36 (0.72)	5.87	< .001	0.67
Unmet desires – Playing with child	4.00 (0.23)	3.36 (0.72)	7.71	< .001	0.88
Dashed expectations – Family management	3.87 (0.85)	3.24 (1.21)	4.64	< .001	0.53
Unmet desires – Family management	3.93 (0.66)	3.24 (1.21)	4.45	< .001	0.51
Met expectations – Physical childcare	3.39 (0.75)	3.29 (0.65)	0.85	.396	0.10
Unmet desires – Physical childcare	3.78 (0.76)	3.29 (0.65)	4.55	< .001	0.52

*Notes.* Means and standard deviations do not pertain to discrepancy scores but represent values for the expected, desired, and actual division of labor. Thus, dashed expectations and unmet desires result from comparing the two respective means. Degrees of freedom = 76, except for dashed expectations and unmet desires regarding family management ( $df = 75$ ).

In line with hypotheses, fathers worked more and engaged less in childcare after birth than they expected and desired before birth. In terms of childcare, support for hypotheses pertained to fathers' general engagement with their child, playing with their child, family management, and unmet desires regarding physical childcare. However, fathers' expectations regarding physically taking care of their child did not substantially differ from their experiences after birth. This finding suggests that fathers had a more realistic expectation regarding physically taking care of their child than for other tasks. In sum, fathers seemed to have expected and were striving for a more equal division of labor in their relationship than they achieved four months after birth.

### ***Descriptive statistics for relations to discrepancy scores***

Given the similar patterns shown in Table 4.2, the relatively small sample size, and results of a factor analysis, we averaged each person's dashed expectations and unmet desire scores to one discrepancy score per behavior to reduce the number of predictors in the regression analyses (for correlations, see A4.2 Additional analyses). In Table 4.3, we present means, standard deviations, and correlations for aggregated discrepancy scores, men's pre-birth father role attitudes regarding breadwinning and childcare, pre-birth partner and workplace support for taking parental leave, post-birth partner and workplace support for engaging in childcare, and post-birth desired parental leave-taking, parental leave-taking intentions, and expected length of parental leave.

### **Objective 2: Predicting discrepancies via father role attitudes and social support**

We screened the data and checked the statistical assumptions before conducting regression analyses. Due to partial violations of homoscedasticity and multivariate normality, we used the R package *lavaan* (Rosseel, 2012) to implement robust estimation methods and treatment of missing data via full information maximum likelihood estimation. We conducted a regression analysis separately for each discrepancy score as the dependent variable. For these analyses, we excluded 15 multivariate outliers based on the MCD75 (Minimum Covariance Determinant with a breakpoint of 0.25), with a chi-square at  $p = .001$  (Leys et al., 2019; see Section A4.1 for results including outliers). As covariates, we included participants' country of origin (dummy-coded with 1 = Germany and 0 = Belgium), age, relative income, educational level (dummy-coded to reduce number of predictors, with 1 = university education or higher and 0 = below university education), and pre-birth weekly work hours. As predictors, we included pre-birth father role attitudes regarding breadwinning and childcare, pre-birth support

**Table 4.3. Means, standard deviations, and correlations for discrepancies, father role attitudes, social support, and intended parental leave-taking.**

	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>Correlations (N = 69 – 85)</i>												
		2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.
1. D: Breadwinning	0.94 (1.24)	.07	-.10	-.18	-.30**	.06	-.10	.08	-.19	-.30*	-.07	.26*	.21 <sup>†</sup>	.04
2. D: Engaging with child	-0.50 (0.80)		.33**	-.14	.29**	.16	.05	.08	-.15	.05	.08	.08	.01	-.02
3. D: Playing with child	-0.65 (0.79)			-.04	.30**	.10	.06	-.18	-.06	-.04	.05	.14	.12	.08
4. D: Family management	-0.66 (1.21)				.06	-.21 <sup>†</sup>	.17	.08	.20 <sup>†</sup>	.00	.01	-.07	-.10	-.21 <sup>†</sup>
5. D: Physical childcare	-0.29 (0.81)					-.09	.06	.12	.02	.30**	.17	.06	-.06	-.21 <sup>†</sup>
6. Father attitudes Childcare <sup>b</sup>	8.36 (0.70)						-.16	.31**	.03	.16	.14	.28*	.17	.19
7. Father attitudes Breadwinning <sup>b</sup>	3.62 (1.54)							-.33**	-.05	-.06	.13	-.21 <sup>†</sup>	-.26*	-.41**
8. Partner support Leave-taking (T1) <sup>b</sup>	7.89 (1.51)								.34**	.15	.12	.37**	.44***	.17
9. Work support Leave-taking (T1) <sup>b</sup>	6.22 (1.83)									.25*	.24*	-.11	.14	-.08
10. Partner support Childcare (T2) <sup>b</sup>	8.29 (1.01)										.26*	-.13	-.11	.01
11. Work support Childcare (T2) <sup>b</sup>	6.36 (1.60)											-.02	.04	-.13
12. PL desire <sup>a</sup>	5.83 (1.53)												.71***	.46***
13. PL intentions <sup>a</sup>	5.85 (1.40)													.49***
14. PL length (%)	62.44 (39.48)													

*Notes.* \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ , <sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$  (all two-tailed). <sup>a</sup> 7-point scale, <sup>b</sup> 9-point scale. D = Discrepancy, PL desire = Desired parental leave-taking, PL intentions = Parental leave-taking intentions, PL length = Expected length of parental leave.

from partners and workplaces for leave-taking, and post-birth support from partners and workplaces for childcare engagement. We present regression models including standardized regression coefficients and adjusted  $R^2$  in Table 4.4. Of the covariates, fathers' educational level was negatively related to discrepancies regarding childcare: A higher educational level was associated with fathers being more likely to not reach their expectations and desires regarding playing with and physically taking care of their child. Residing in Germany was positively associated with fathers exceeding their expectations and desires regarding breadwinning and playing with their child. Adding the predictors in the models in the next step increased explained variance for discrepancies regarding breadwinning, playing with one's child, and physical childcare. However, adjusted  $R^2$  decreased for discrepancies regarding childcare engagement and family management, suggesting a worse model fit given the number of predictors than when only covariates were included.

### *Hypothesis tests*

We expected that the less traditional fathers' attitudes were before birth, the more easily they would exceed their expectations and desires regarding breadwinning after birth but would fall short of their expected and desired engagement in childcare. Hence, we hypothesized that the less fathers saw their responsibility as a father in breadwinning but the more in childcare, the more likely they were to exceed their expectations and desires regarding work after birth. In turn, we hypothesized that the more fathers saw their responsibility as a father in childcare but the less in breadwinning, the less likely they were to fulfill their expectations and desires regarding childcare.

We found support for these hypotheses within domains: Father role attitudes regarding breadwinning were negatively related to discrepancies regarding breadwinning, and father role attitudes regarding childcare were negatively related to discrepancies regarding childcare. However, the latter finding only pertained to physical childcare but not any other childcare task. Moreover, we did not find significant relations across domains (i.e., father role attitudes regarding breadwinning being related to discrepancies regarding childcare and vice versa).

Besides father role attitudes, we expected perceived social support to be relevant for fathers translating their expectations and desires for the postnatal division of labor into behavior. We expected that the more support fathers perceived from their partners and people at work for taking leave and engaging in childcare, the more likely they were to reach their expected and desired engagement in childcare after birth. In turn, we expected higher perceived support to be related to fathers being less likely to exceed their expectations and desires regarding breadwinning. We found support for the hypotheses for the relation between social



support from the partner and discrepancies regarding physical childcare (but not any other childcare task): The more support men perceived from their partners to take parental leave and engage in childcare, the more likely they were to reach their expectations and desires regarding their participation in physical childcare (e.g., feeding or changing diapers). In addition, perceived partner support for engaging in childcare, but not for leave-taking, was related to fathers being less likely to exceed their expected and desired involvement in breadwinning.

Contrary to hypotheses, also negative relations between prenatal social support for leave-taking and discrepancies regarding childcare emerged. First, we found a negative relation between partner support for leave-taking and discrepancies regarding playtime: The more leave-taking support men perceived receiving from their partner before birth, the more they failed to reach their expectations and desires in terms of playing with their child after birth. Second, for workplace support for leave-taking, we found a similar negative relation with discrepancies regarding physical childcare: Higher prenatal workplace support for leave-taking was again related to fathers being less engaged in physical childcare than they had expected and wished for. Lastly, the findings suggested a negative trend for workplace support for leave-taking and childcare engagement (e.g., reading aloud, calming down): The more support men perceived from their workplace before birth to take parental leave, the more they tended to not reach their expectations and desires regarding engaging with their child after birth.

Taken together, social support may have positive as well as negative consequences for fathers' experienced discrepancies between their expected, desired, and actual postnatal division of labor. The social support fathers perceived before birth from their partners and workplaces seems to have partially led to heightened expectations for childcare engagement, which are more difficult to fulfill after birth. In contrast, the social support fathers receive after birth can affect fathers' actual involvement and, thus, can facilitate translating expectations and desires for how to share breadwinning and childcare into behavior. Findings supported this notion especially for partner support, instead of workplace support, and for discrepancies regarding breadwinning and physical childcare. For the latter finding, a possible explanation can be found in fathers' lower pre-birth expectations for physical childcare than for other childcare tasks, so chances for unfulfilled expectations were lower. Moreover, physical childcare is an essential part of the early postnatal caregiving, whereas tasks such as family management and playing may become more important once the child is older. Thus, perceived partner support may have been especially relevant for fathers' engagement in physical childcare.

**Table 4.4. Regression models with standardized regression coefficients for father role attitudes and social support variables predicting discrepancy scores.**

	D – Breadwinning	D – Engaging with child	D – Playing with child	D – Family management	D – Physical childcare
Country of residence	.32**	.24	.37**	-.14	.15
Age	.00	-.27 <sup>†</sup>	-.14	.06	.03
Relative income	.13	-.22	-.17	-.24 <sup>†</sup>	-.15
Educational level	.16	-.23	-.43**	-.05	-.26*
Work hours	-.02	.06	-.17 <sup>†</sup>	-.01	-.05
Father role attitudes – Childcare (T1)	.12	-.02	.15	-.14	-.24*
Father role attitudes – Breadwinning (T1)	-.28*	-.16	-.14	.22	.05
Partner support – Leave-taking (T1)	-.08	.02	-.27*	.16	.28**
Workplace support – Leave-taking (T1)	-.14	-.24 <sup>†</sup>	-.13	.20	-.33**
Partner support – Childcare (T2)	-.33*	-.00	-.08	.04	.45***
Workplace support – Childcare (T2)	.07	.07	.05	-.05	.10
Adjusted $R^2$ – Covariate model	.05	.07	.15	.03	-.04
Adjusted $R^2$ – Full model	.16	.04	.20	.02	.13
$\Delta$ Adjusted $R^2$	.11	-.03	.05	-.01	.17

Notes.  $N = 65$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ , <sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ . D = Discrepancy.

### **Robustness checks**

Results also held when controlling for child gender, complications during pregnancy or childbirth, and infant behavior (e.g., irritability or sleep problems). For discrepancies regarding physical childcare, we also controlled for whether mothers breastfed, which did not change conclusions regarding hypothesis tests. Furthermore, since we also collected data from the

female partners of participants, we examined to what extent fathers' perception of social support matched their partners' answers. Given attrition, we matched T1 data, instead of T2 data, to receive the highest possible sample size. The support fathers perceived before birth from their partners for taking leave descriptively had a moderate correlation with the support their partners indicated providing,  $r_{SB}(33) = .41$ . Hence, fathers' perception of partner support seems to be somewhat grounded in reality and not just represent wishful thinking. For further robustness checks and analyses, see A4.1 Robustness checks and A4.2 Additional analyses.

Importantly, we measured social support prenatally regarding *parental leave-taking*. Consequently, the extent to which fathers experience dashed expectations also depends on whether they already took parental leave, suggesting moderation effects. However, we did not conduct moderation analyses at this point due to restrictions within the data basis (i.e., the relatively small overall sample size, the low number of twelve participants who already took leave, and the resulting lack of power and variance to detect interaction effects).

### **Objective 3: Predicting intended parental leave-taking via discrepancies**

We conducted regression analyses separately for each operationalization of fathers' intended leave-taking after birth as the dependent variable (i.e., desired parental leave-taking, parental leave-taking intentions, and expected length of parental leave). We excluded six multivariate outliers for these analyses based on the MCD75 (Minimum Covariance Determinant with a breakpoint of 0.25), with a chi-square at  $p = .001$  (Leys et al., 2019; see Section A4.1 for results including outliers). We added the same covariates as in the previous regression analyses. As predictors, we added discrepancy scores between fathers' pre-birth expectations and desires and post-birth experiences regarding breadwinning and childcare (i.e., engaging with child, playing with child, family management, and physical childcare). We hypothesized that the more fathers exceeded their expectations regarding breadwinning, the more likely they were to desire to take leave, intend to take leave, and plan longer leave. In turn, we expected that the less fathers fulfilled their expectations regarding childcare tasks, the more likely they were to desire to take leave, intend to take leave, and plan longer leave.

#### ***Hypothesis tests***

We present regression models including standardized regression coefficients and adjusted  $R^2$  in Table 4.5. Of the included covariates, participants' country of origin, their educational level, and weekly work hours emerged as significant predictors of intended leave-taking, in contrast to age and relative income. German residency was associated with higher parental leave-taking intentions after birth but also intending to take a lower percentage of the

available leave, possibly because the available leave in Germany is longer than in Belgium (absolute lengths of intended leave were similar on average with two and a half months out of 12 months in Germany,  $M = 2.55$ ,  $SD = 1.64$ , and eleven out of 16 weeks in Belgium,  $M = 11.07$ ,  $SD = 6.17$ ). Having a university degree or higher was negatively related to fathers' desired parental leave-taking and parental leave-taking intentions. We also found negative relations between fathers' reported weekly work hours and their parental leave-taking intentions and expected length of parental leave.

Adding discrepancy scores to the models explained an additional 2 to 8% of variance in intended leave-taking. In line with hypotheses, discrepancies regarding breadwinning were positively related to fathers' desired parental leave-taking and parental leave-taking intentions: When fathers worked more relative to their partners after birth than they had expected and wished for, they had a stronger desire and intention after birth to take parental leave in the future. However, no childcare-related discrepancy scores were significantly related to desired parental leave-taking or parental leave-taking intentions. Results differed for the expected length of parental leave. In this model, discrepancies regarding family management and physical childcare emerged as significant negative predictors, supporting hypotheses. When fathers did a smaller share of the family management and physical childcare after birth than they had expected and wished for, they intended to take a higher percentage of available leave in the future.

### ***Robustness checks***

Results also held when controlling for child gender, complications during pregnancy or childbirth, and infant behavior (e.g., irritability or sleep problems). Moreover, we examined whether we would still find significant relations between experienced discrepancies and future intended leave-taking when controlling for prenatal expectations regarding the division of breadwinning and childcare (see A4.2 Additional analyses). While prenatal breadwinning expectations were negatively related to fathers' postnatal desired parental leave-taking, larger discrepancies regarding breadwinning were still related to a stronger wish to take parental leave. A similar pattern emerged for parental leave-taking intentions; however, the relation between breadwinning discrepancies and parental leave-taking intentions was only significant at  $p < .10$  (possibly due to the increased number of predictors). For the expected length of parental leave, having been less engaged in physical childcare than expected and wished for continued to be related to intending to take longer leave in the future. The relation between discrepancies regarding family management and the expected length of parental leave decreased in strength and was not significant anymore.

Nevertheless, these findings suggest that not only intentions for sharing breadwinning and childcare are related to fathers' intended parental leave-taking but also the experience of discrepancies between expectations, desires, and experiences. Especially exceeding one's expectations and desires regarding breadwinning seems relevant for fathers' desire to take parental leave postnatally. In addition, having been less involved in physical childcare than expected and wished for was related to expecting taking longer leave in the future (or vice versa, having been more involved being related to shorter expected leave).

**Table 4.5. Regression models with standardized regression coefficients for discrepancy scores predicting intended parental leave-taking after birth.**

	Desired parental leave-taking (T2)	Parental leave- taking intentions (T2)	Expected length of parental leave (%; T2)
Country of residence	.00	.28**	-.38***
Age	-.16	-.04	.01
Relative income	-.05	-.05	.11
Educational level	-.28**	-.42**	-.16
Work hours	-.14	-.24*	-.22*
Discrepancy – Breadwinning	.38**	.25*	.17
Discrepancy – Engaging with child	-.02	-.06	-.04
Discrepancy – Playing with child	-.02	-.02	.14
Discrepancy – Family management	.00	-.11	-.17*
Discrepancy – Physical childcare	.09	-.05	-.19*
Adjusted $R^2$ – Covariate model	.06	.19	.29
Adjusted $R^2$ – Full model	.11	.21	.37
$\Delta$ Adjusted $R^2$	.05	.02	.08

Notes.  $N = 69$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ , †  $p < .10$ .

## 4.5 Discussion

The transition to parenthood is accompanied by a multitude of expectations and desires for this life phase (Nazarinia Roy et al., 2014). Past research has shown that expectations and desires regarding the division of labor between partners are not always fulfilled (e.g., Ascigil

et al., 2021; Biehle & Mickelson, 2012; Milkie et al., 2002; Mitnick et al., 2022). We aimed to gain deeper insight into whether expectant fathers experience discrepancies regarding their expected, desired, and actual division of breadwinning and childcare tasks, whether such discrepancies can be predicted by their pre-birth attitudes towards the father role and the social support they perceived, and whether experienced discrepancies are related to fathers' intended parental leave-taking.

Generally, fathers had more egalitarian expectations and desires for the division of labor than they achieved after birth. As hypothesized, fathers indicated working more after birth relative to their partners than they expected and desired before birth. Moreover, fathers had lower relative involvement in childcare after birth than initially expected and wished for. However, for physical childcare, experiences differed significantly from desires but not expectations, suggesting that fathers had more realistic expectations for how they would share the physical childcare with their partners, such as feeding or changing diapers.

Experiencing discrepancies was partially predicted by individual attitudes: Fathers with less traditional attitudes towards the father role were more likely to exceed their expected and desired engagement in breadwinning, while falling short of their expected and desired involvement in physical childcare. Yet, we did not find support for the hypotheses across domains, meaning that father role attitudes regarding breadwinning were not related to childcare discrepancies and vice versa. Perceived social support both mitigated and fostered to what extent fathers' experienced discrepancies between their aspired and actual division of labor. Prenatal support from their partners and workplaces seemed to have partially heightened expectations for a more egalitarian division of breadwinning and childcare, which had a higher probability to be dashed when facing reality constraints. In contrast, being supported by their partners to engage in childcare postnatally helped fathers to meet their expected and desired shares in breadwinning and physical childcare.

Lastly, we found partial support for the hypotheses regarding whether experiencing discrepancies between the expected, desired, and actual division of labor was related to men's intended leave-taking. As hypothesized, the more fathers exceeded their expectations and desires regarding breadwinning, the more they desired and intended to take leave (but not longer leave). In turn, falling short of expectations and desires regarding family management and physical childcare was related to planning to take a longer leave length.

The findings for fathers' dashed expectations and unmet desires across the transition to parenthood provide support for the assumption that norms for involved fatherhood have progressed faster than actual egalitarian divisions of childcare (Milkie et al., 2002; Offer &

Kaplan, 2021; Petts, 2022; Thébaud & Halcomb, 2019). Contrary to the current findings, research conducted during the past few decades partially suggested that fathers were satisfied with being less involved in childcare than their partners. For example, past research showed that if fathers' expectations regarding their partners involvement in childcare were exceeded (except for playtime), they had higher relationship satisfaction (Biehle & Mickelson, 2012). Moreover, more fathers felt overly involved – rather than under-involved – in disciplining and playing with their child in a study by Milkie and colleagues (2002). Ten to twenty years later, the current findings suggest that fathers are rather unsatisfied with their lower-than-expected engagement in childcare. As we assessed ideal divisions of labor in addition to expected ones, we also found that fathers wished to be more engaged but did not achieve this.

Part of why fathers did not achieve their expected and desired division of labor yet could be the timing of data collection at four months after birth. Many fathers had not taken parental leave yet, although they had plans to do so before birth. As each partner can take up to four months of parental leave in Belgium (i.e., the country of origin of the larger part of the sample; Koslowski et al., 2022; RVA, 2022), it is possible that couples reserved the first four months for mothers and that fathers will start their leave later. Also, a strong focus is given to breastfeeding (Beglaubter, 2017; Bueno & Grau-Grau, 2021) which could have delayed fathers' leave-taking. The fact that fathers' expectations and experiences regarding physical childcare did not differ considerably also supports this assumption. Fathers correctly expected that their partners will do more of these tasks, which included daily activities such as feeding, changing diapers, and putting the child to bed. Past research suggested that divisions of labor change depending on the child's age, and that expectations and reality can converge more once the child is older (see Khazan et al., 2008; Powell & Karraker, 2019; Van Egeren, 2004). For example, moving from breastfeeding to solid food has been discussed as a chance for stronger father involvement (Machin, 2015). However, the essentialist argumentation around breastfeeding and mothers' primary caregiving has less weight considering the possibilities of formula feeding and pumping breastmilk (also see Moss-Racusin et al., 2020).

Although it is possible that data collected at later time points would paint a different picture, the current results are still valuable because we were able to capture an early postnatal period in which parents make large adjustments (following standards of related research, see Mitnick et al., 2022). These early decisions that parents make regarding the division of childcare and breadwinning set standards and create routines that can be difficult to break later (McHale et al., 2004; Powell & Karraker, 2019). From research on the intention-behavior gap, we know that habits and for how long they have existed can stand in the way of realizing

intended behavior, such as moving to a more egalitarian division of labor after having prioritized mothers' caregiving (Sheeran & Webb, 2016; Webb & Sheeran, 2006). In turn, early adoption of childcare by fathers, for example, through taking parental leave, has been linked to sustained father involvement (Almqvist & Duvander, 2014; Bünning, 2015; Haas & Hwang, 2008; Meil, 2013; Nepomnyaschy & Waldfogel, 2007; Petts & Knoester, 2018; Schober & Zoch, 2019; Tanaka & Waldfogel, 2007). These findings underline the relevance of early decisions regarding the division of labor – as captured in the current research – for fathers' future involvement in childcare and breadwinning.

The present results also provide preliminary evidence of different mechanisms through which social support may unfold its effect on the division of labor. On the one hand, being supported by their partners to take leave and participate in childcare reduced the chances of fathers engaging more in breadwinning than intended or falling short of their expectations regarding physical childcare. Thus, social support may increase the likelihood of turning intentions and desires into behavior and facilitate a more egalitarian division of labor between parents. Similar to related research (see Chapter 3), partners represented a more crucial source of social support than the workplace. Especially in terms of daily time-intensive tasks such as physical childcare, a supportive partner can, thus, enable father involvement, even if men were the main breadwinners and did not take leave yet. In addition, partner support prevented fathers more from exceeding their expectations and desires regarding breadwinning. Hence, partners can help fathers to loosen the still prevalent ties to the breadwinning role (Fox et al., 2000; Machin, 2015) by supporting their engagement in childcare and sharing breadwinning more equally.

On the other hand, partner and workplace support before birth was related to fathers being *less* likely to fulfill their expectations regarding playtime and physical childcare. Thus, it seems as though having a supportive personal environment before birth tended to increase fathers' expectations for childcare involvement. In light of the persistent difficulties parents face for establishing their desired division of labor after birth (e.g., Ascigil et al., 2021; Biehle & Mickelson, 2012; Milkie et al., 2002; Mitnick et al., 2022), such heightened expectations may more easily be disappointed after birth. In fact, fathers' expectations and desires were highest (i.e., most egalitarian) for playtime and, therefore, provided most leeway for unfulfilled expectations and desires. Fathers' high expectations for playing with their child also stood out in past research (e.g., Biehle & Mickelson, 2012; Delmore-Ko et al., 2000). Biehle and colleagues (2012) found that fathers were less satisfied with their relationship if their partners played more with their child than expected and suggested that maternal gatekeeping could play



a role here. Even regardless of maternal gatekeeping, fathers seem to see play as an important part of their father involvement which can prove difficult to fulfill in the early postnatal periods (e.g., because forms of play are limited during the first few months of life and those typically preferred by fathers, such as physical play, become more important once children are older; Amodia-Bidakowska et al., 2020).

However, experiencing discrepancies between prenatal expectations and postnatal realities may not only have drawbacks but could also provide impetus for change. When expectations and desires for the division of labor are not fulfilled, this can result in negative consequences, such as negative affect and the described lower relationship satisfaction (Ascigil et al., 2021; Biehle & Mickelson, 2012; Khazan et al., 2008; Lawrence et al., 2007; Milkie et al., 2002; Mitnick et al., 2022; Shockley & Allen, 2018). Individuals then usually seek ways to mitigate these aversive affective states, for example, through actions that bring their realities more in line with expectations (Gollwitzer et al., 2018; Inzlicht & Legault, 2014; Pinguart et al., 2021).

In line with this assumption, we found relations between experienced discrepancies and future intended parental leave-taking. Fathers who exceeded their expected and desired engagement in breadwinning had a stronger desire to take parental leave in the future, while those who did not fulfill expectations and desires regarding (physical) childcare intended to take longer leave. These results could be interpreted as fathers wishing to counterbalance their unsatisfactory engagement in childcare by taking more parental leave in the future. Hence, the current findings suggest that discrepancies between expectations, desires, and experiences can act as catalysts for social change by motivating fathers to take parental leave and, thereby, increasingly aligning their intended and actual division of labor. In addition, social support may provide leverage here by increasing expectations to balance breadwinning and childcare more. When these heightened expectations are dashed, this may especially lead to dissatisfaction with the division of labor and motivate parents to take action towards more gender equality.

### **Strengths, limitations, and future directions**

The present research is characterized by strengths in its scope and methodology. Even though past research considered men's dashed expectations during the transition to parenthood to some extent by looking at dyadic data, this is, to our knowledge, the first examination that specifically addresses fathers' experienced discrepancies regarding the division of breadwinning and childcare with their partners. In doing so, we answer calls by earlier research to focus more on fathers' unique experiences (e.g., Harwood et al., 2007; Powell & Karraker,

2019; Schoppe-Sullivan & Fagan, 2020). Moreover, we address understudied precursors of experienced discrepancies, such as father role attitudes and social support. We also take a broader perspective on potential implications of experienced discrepancies by examining fathers' intended parental leave-taking. With our measurement of the division of labor, we took a more fine-grained approach by looking at different childcare tasks separately. This is important as fathers can have different expectations and desires for different domains, which was confirmed by the current as well as previous findings (e.g., Biehle & Mickelson, 2012; Milkie et al., 2002). Furthermore, the current findings speak to the relevance of assessing father role attitudes separately regarding breadwinning and childcare: Attitudes in one domain (e.g., childcare) were not related to discrepancies in the other domain (e.g., breadwinning), suggesting that fathers do not perceive these as zero-sum (Hyde et al., 1993; also see Peeters et al., 2013). In addition, we did not focus on fathers' expected *or* desired division of labor but addressed both, which again allows for more comprehensive insights into men's experiences during the transition to parenthood (also see Ascigil et al., 2021). Lastly, we gained first evidence on the double-edged effects of social support in that social support can both directly facilitate a more egalitarian division of labor and can increase expectations which – when dashed – could potentially motivate action and more progressive attitudes towards social change.

Nevertheless, the following limitations should be considered when interpreting the current findings. First, the sample is limited in size and representativeness. Due to the relatively small sample size, we did not have the statistical power to detect smaller effects which are, however, common in psychological research (Götz et al., 2022). Moreover, the adjusted  $R^2$ , which takes sample size into account, was negative for some models, indicating insufficient model fit. However, our conclusions for the present research were not based on these models. Still, a larger sample size would have enabled us to use more advanced statistical procedures, such as latent instead of manifest difference scores, which take measurement error and invariance into account (Gollwitzer et al., 2014), or to examine boundary conditions, such as how fathers' actual leave-taking affects the relations.

The sample further consisted of highly educated first-time fathers with relatively egalitarian attitudes as evident from their father role attitudes and intended leave-taking. More conservative men could experience less expectation violations when becoming fathers as the often-occurring rather traditional division of labor after birth better matches their expectations and desires. At the same time, the general trend sees fathers increasingly aiming for a higher involvement in childcare but struggling to share breadwinning and childcare more equally with

their partners (Juncke et al., 2018; Machin, 2015; Milkie et al., 2002). Current knowledge is still limited as to why the gendered division of labor seems to be so sticky despite policy changes (Noonan, 2013). Thus, examining barriers and facilitators in more progressive samples is important to better understand leverages for change. An additional constraint to the representativeness of the sample pertains to sexual orientation: Although non-heterosexual men could theoretically also participate in the study, the current sample only included heterosexual men. Thus, we cannot generalize the findings to gay fathers' experiences as we know from past research that sexual orientation plays a role in expectation violations across the transition to parenthood (Ascigil et al., 2021).

Limitations also concern the measures used in the current research. Often, the measures were not validated due to the lack of validated alternatives and did not always form reliable scales. However, the measures were based on related research and overlap with more comprehensive established measures, such as our assessment of task division with the "Who Does What" questionnaire (Cowan et al., 1978; Cowan & Cowan, 1988). Furthermore, the assessment of the actual division of labor is limited to fathers' self-reports. We do not know whether partners would agree and whether examining time diaries would yield similar results (see Yavorsky et al., 2015). Still, the *perceived* violation of expectations and desires are likely to be more impactful for the current objectives (for a similar discussion, see Ascigil et al., 2021). Moreover, by matching partner data, we were able to find evidence of some overlap between fathers' assessment of partner support and their partners' reported provision of support.

The current findings call for more research in this area. As discussed, we examined discrepancies between fathers' expected, desired, and actual division of labor at an early postnatal phase. Future research should, thus, examine for first-time fathers how the experience of discrepancies changes and affects behaviors over longer periods of time. An interesting avenue would be, for example, to examine to what extent dashed expectations can become catalysts for change in that fathers support policy changes or seek out more family-friendly work contexts (see Gollwitzer et al., 2018; Inzlicht & Legault, 2014; Pinquart et al., 2021). Furthermore, we were not able to address the impact of men's actual parental leave-taking on the division of labor due to limitations of the dataset. Evidence exists, however, that men's parental leave-taking can increase father involvement during and after the leave (e.g., Bünning, 2015; Machin, 2015; Schober & Zoch, 2019). Lastly, although we focused on the most obvious sources of social support by examining partner and workplace support, fathers can receive support from other important groups, for example, in the health care system, their personal

networks, or through the broader societal norms and expectations (Meeussen et al., 2020). Some fathers do not feel very supported in transitioning to their new parent role by health care institutions and practitioners because of a lack of offers specifically addressed to fathers or because of being treated as their partner's supporter instead of an equal co-parent (Machin, 2015; Rominov et al., 2018). Moreover, other fathers amongst friends and family have been cited as important sources of social support (Rominov et al., 2018), and their engagement in childcare and parental leave has been found to relate to men's own intentions for leave-taking (see Chapter 3). In addition, we included a rather general measurement of social support in the current study, but social support can be provided in different forms (i.e., informational, instrumental, or emotional support; Taylor, 2012). Thus, a more comprehensive assessment of social support in future research could complement the current findings.

### **Conclusion**

With the current study, we aimed to advance research on fathers' experiences during the transition to parenthood and possible violations of their expectations and desires for sharing breadwinning and childcare with their partners. Even though societal norms increasingly call for higher father involvement, parents seem to have difficulties arriving at a more egalitarian division of labor shortly after birth. Not only do fathers, on average, engage less in childcare than expected and desired, but they continue to be tied to their traditional role of breadwinning. Still, the experience of an unsatisfactory division of labor depends partially on attitudes towards the father role and whether fathers see their responsibility more in breadwinning or childcare. The current paper also identified avenues for change that could be leveraged, such as the support from partners and work that may lead to higher actual care behaviors and higher expectations for a more egalitarian division of labor. While these expectations may often not be fully met, they can thereby become catalysts for change. In turn, men's parental leave-taking can represent a tangible tool to align expectations, desires, and experiences regarding the division of labor and move closer to gender equality.

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## 4.6 Appendix

### A4.1 Robustness checks

#### *Including outliers*

As a robustness check, we examined whether including outliers would affect the conclusions we draw from the regression analyses. When predicting discrepancies regarding breadwinning and childcare tasks, some relations were smaller and now only significant at  $p < .10$ . This was the case for the negative relation between partner support for childcare engagement and discrepancies regarding breadwinning ( $\beta = -.25, p = .063$ ), the negative relation between partner support for leave-taking and discrepancies regarding playing with their child ( $\beta = -.27, p = .071$ ), and the negative relation between father role attitudes regarding childcare and discrepancies regarding physical childcare ( $\beta = -.23, p = .051$ ). Moreover, we did not find a significant positive relation anymore between partner support for leave-taking and discrepancies regarding physical childcare ( $\beta = .15, p = .220$ ). We also found some stronger relations with discrepancies. The negative relation between partner support for leave-taking and discrepancies regarding engaging with their child was now stronger and significant ( $\beta = -.27, p = .031$ ). In addition, we detected significant predictors of discrepancies regarding family management. Father role attitudes regarding childcare were negatively related to discrepancies regarding family management, indicating that more orientation towards care was associated with fathers doing less family management than expected and wished for ( $\beta = -.23, p = .037$ ). At the same time, partner support for leave-taking was positively related to discrepancies regarding family management ( $\beta = .23, p = .038$ ).

When predicting intended parental leave-taking, the positive relation between discrepancies regarding breadwinning and parental leave-taking intentions was now weaker and significant at  $p < .10$  ( $\beta = .22, p = .072$ ). Moreover, discrepancies regarding family management were not significantly related to the expected length of parental leave anymore ( $\beta = -.13, p = .138$ ), but the relation between discrepancies regarding physical childcare increased in strength ( $\beta = -.26, p = .003$ ).

#### *Absolute parental leave length*

We further examined how using a measure of absolute leave length instead of a percentage measure affects the results. Similarly, only discrepancies regarding physical childcare ( $\beta = -.24, p = .017$ ) but not discrepancies regarding family management ( $\beta = -.11, p = .258$ ) were significantly related to the expected length of parental leave.

## A4.2 Additional analyses

### *Discrepancies regarding household tasks*

In addition to the division of breadwinning and childcare tasks, we also assessed expected, desired, and actual division of routine and non-routine household tasks with one item each. Routine household tasks were summarized as housekeeping (e.g., cleaning, laundry, cooking, shopping for groceries), whereas non-routine household tasks were described as home repairs and outdoor work (e.g., small repairs, renovations, bike or car care, gardening). We tested whether fathers also had dashed expectations and unmet desires regarding routine and non-routine household tasks (see Table A4.1). For routine household tasks, we did not find dashed expectations or unmet desires. For non-routine household tasks, fathers did not have dashed expectations but unmet desires. They were, on average, doing more non-routine household tasks after birth as compared to their partners than they wished for before birth.

**Table A4.1 Means, standard deviations, and paired *t*-tests for dashed expectations and unmet desires regarding household tasks.**

	Expected / desired division (T1)	Actual division (T2)	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Met expectations – Routine household tasks	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> ) 3.73 (0.82)	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> ) 3.69 (1.23)	0.37	.715	.04
Met desires – Routine household tasks	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> ) 3.87 (0.87)	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> ) 3.69 (1.23)	1.22	.299	.14
Met expectations – Non-routine household tasks	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> ) 5.78 (0.88)	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> ) 5.94 (1.02)	-1.98	.103	.23
Unmet desires – Non-routine household tasks	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> ) 5.58 (1.07)	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> ) 5.94 (1.02)	-3.28	.006	.38

*Notes.* Degrees of freedom = 74, except for dashed expectations regarding routine household tasks (*df* = 76).

We conducted regression analyses for father role attitudes and social support variables predicting discrepancies regarding household tasks. These predictors including covariates

resulted in an adjusted  $R^2$  of .06 for discrepancies regarding routine household tasks and an adjusted  $R^2$  of .00 for discrepancies regarding non-routine household tasks. For routine household tasks, we found a significant positive relation between workplace support for leave-taking, indicating that fathers did more housekeeping than expected and desired the more support they received from their workplace for taking leave before birth ( $\beta = .35, p = .009$ ). In addition, two trends emerged: Stronger father role attitudes regarding breadwinning tended to be related to fathers exceeding expectations and desires regarding routine household tasks ( $\beta = .26, p = .075$ ). Workplace support for childcare engagement after birth tended to be related to fathers not reaching their expectations and desires regarding routine household tasks ( $\beta = -.23, p = .050$ ). For non-routine household tasks, receiving less support from their partners for taking parental leave before birth was related to fathers exceeding their expectations and desires regarding non-routine household tasks ( $\beta = -.30, p = .040$ ). When including discrepancy scores regarding routine and nonroutine household tasks to predict intended parental leave-taking, we did not find any significant relations ( $\beta s < .14, p s > .235$ ).

#### ***Change in expectations and desires from T1 to T2***

As we assessed the expected and desired division of labor again at T2, we examined whether significant changes occurred for expectations and desires over time. We measured the expected and desired division of labor as before birth but asked about participants' more distant future (i.e., their expectations and desires for their division of labor five years from now) instead of asking about their future in general. Means, standard deviations, and the results for paired  $t$ -tests are presented in Table A4.2. We found decreases in fathers' expected engagement in breadwinning as compared to their partners: After birth, fathers expected a more equal division of breadwinning with their partners five years from now than they expected before birth. Moreover, fathers tended to have a lower post-birth desire to do family management five years from now than they desired before birth. Lastly, after birth, fathers expected to be more engaged in physical childcare five years from now than they expected before birth. Taken together, fathers were optimistic to share breadwinning and physical childcare more equally with their partners in the more distant future (i.e., when their child will be around five years old).

**Table A4.2. Means, standard deviations, and paired *t*-tests for expectations and desires before and after birth.**

	T1	T2			
	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Expectations – Breadwinning	4.73 (0.94)	4.39 (0.73)	2.98	.028	0.34
Desires – Breadwinning	4.31 (0.71)	4.29 (0.79)	0.23	1.00	0.03
Expectations – Engaging with child	3.81 (0.59)	3.82 (0.42)	-0.16	1.00	0.02
Desires – Engaging with child	3.90 (0.45)	3.91 (0.37)	-0.20	1.00	0.02
Expectations – Playing with child	4.01 (0.64)	3.90 (0.48)	1.38	0.343	0.16
Desires – Playing with child	4.01 (0.27)	4.01 (0.34)	0.00	1.00	0.00
Expectations – Family management	3.87 (0.85)	3.66 (0.66)	1.98	.145	0.23
Desires – Family management	3.95 (0.67)	3.71 (0.72)	2.44	.080	0.28
Expectations – Physical childcare	3.38 (0.76)	3.70 (0.56)	-3.35	.018	0.38
Desires – Physical childcare	3.77 (0.76)	3.84 (0.59)	-0.90	.646	0.10
Expectations – Routine household tasks	3.73 (0.82)	3.74 (0.82)	0.00	1.00	0.00
Desires – Routine household tasks	3.87 (0.87)	3.73 (0.81)	1.75	.198	0.20
Expectations – Non-routine household tasks	5.78 (0.88)	5.71 (1.09)	0.12	1.00	0.01
Desires – Non-routine household tasks	5.58 (1.07)	5.27 (1.08)	2.00	.145	0.23

*Notes.* Degrees of freedom = 76, except for changes in expectations for nonroutine household tasks and changes in desires for routine and nonroutine household tasks (*df* = 74).

### ***Male prototypes***

In addition to father role attitudes, we included a masculinity-focused measure in the form of agentic and communal male prototypes measured before birth. We asked participants to what extent they believed four agentic (e.g., assertive,  $\alpha = .61$ ) and six communal (e.g., compassionate,  $\alpha = .81$ ) attributes described an ideal man (adapted from Hentschel et al., 2019; Van Grootel et al., 2018). We added male prototypes as predictors of discrepancies regarding



breadwinning and childcare. However, we did not find any significant relations (all  $\beta$ s  $< .20$ ,  $p$ s  $> .222$ ).

### ***Perceived maternal gatekeeping***

Besides the support men perceived from their partners to engage in childcare and to take parental leave, we included a more detailed measure of maternal gatekeeping behavior from their partners at T2. We asked participants how often in an average week their partner behaved in a certain way towards them on a 9-point scale from “never” to “very often” (adapted from Puhlman & Pasley, 2017). We included two behaviors on controlling maternal gatekeeping (e.g., “set the rules for how you parent the child”) and two behaviors on discouraging maternal gatekeeping (e.g., “criticize you as a father”), which we aggregated to one gate-closing subscale based on a factor analysis ( $\alpha = .61$ ). In addition, we included two behaviors on encouraging maternal gatekeeping (e.g., “say positive things about how you talk/interact with your child”), which we aggregated to a gate-opening subscale ( $r = .89$ ).

We included perceived gate-closing and gate-opening in the regression analyses focusing on discrepancies regarding childcare but not in the regression analyses focusing on breadwinning, as the measures focus on specific behaviors concerning childcare that we assume to be less relevant for breadwinning discrepancies. Generally, we did not find any significant relations; however, when outliers were included, a trend for maternal gate-closing being negatively related to discrepancies regarding playtime emerged: Fathers’ playtime with their children tended to be lower than expected and desired when they experienced gate-closing behavior from their partners (i.e., their partner criticized them, supervised their interactions with the child, etc.;  $\beta = -.19$ ,  $p = .059$ ).

**Table A4.3. Correlations between dashed expectations and unmet desires.**

	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
1. Dashed expectations – Breadwinning	<b>.76***</b>	-.02	-.02	-.17	-.20 <sup>†</sup>	-.19	-.20 <sup>†</sup>	-.30**	-.28*
2. Unmet desires – Breadwinning		.13	.15	.00	-.02	-.11	-.15	-.19 <sup>†</sup>	-.22 <sup>†</sup>
3. Dashed expectations – Engaging with child			<b>.83***</b>	.35**	.17	.00	-.17	.24*	.33**
4. Unmet desires – Engaging with child				.35**	.29*	-.10	-.21 <sup>†</sup>	.12	.28*
5. Dashed expectations – Playing with child					<b>.71***</b>	-.11	-.13	.33**	.22 <sup>†</sup>
6. Unmet desires – Playing with child						.08	.08	.17	.21 <sup>†</sup>
7. Dashed expectations – Family management							<b>.79***</b>	.06	.13
8. Unmet desires – Family management								-.05	.08
9. Dashed expectations – Physical childcare									<b>.52***</b>
10. Unmet desires – Physical childcare									

Notes.  $N = 76$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ , †  $p < .10$ . Correlations of variables averaged to discrepancy scores are printed in bold.

**Table A4.4. Regression models (with standardized regression coefficients) for discrepancy scores predicting intended parental leave-taking after birth, controlling for T1 expectations.**

	Desired parental leave-taking (T2)	Parental leave- taking intentions (T2)	Expected length of parental leave (%; T2)
Country of residence	.19	.41**	-.42***
Age	-.16*	-.05	.03
Relative income	-.12	-.11	.09
Educational level	-.27*	-.42**	-.15
Work hours	-.15	-.26*	-.27**
Expectations – Breadwinning	-.40**	-.25 <sup>†</sup>	-.03
Expectations – Engaging with child	-.22	-.19	-.25
Expectations – Playing with child	-.14	.09	.06
Expectations – Family management	.04	-.02	.10
Expectations – Physical childcare	.02	-.04	.01
Discrepancy – Breadwinning	.29**	.19 <sup>†</sup>	.16
Discrepancy – Engaging with child	-.09	-.12	-.14
Discrepancy – Playing with child	-.06	-.00	.19 <sup>†</sup>
Discrepancy – Family management	.01	-.13	-.14
Discrepancy – Physical childcare	.05	-.11	-.23*
Adjusted $R^2$ – Covariate model	.06	.19	.29
Adjusted $R^2$ – Full model	.20	.19	.36
$\Delta$ Adjusted $R^2$	.14	.00	.07

Notes.  $N = 69$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ , <sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ .



## **5 Chapter: Discussion**

Achieving gender equality and loosening the grip of traditional gender roles are goals of many nations and leaders worldwide (European Commission, 2020; United Nations, 2015). However, when considering the division of paid work and care work, the focus has been on women and their advancement in areas originally dominated by men. Only recently has attention also turned to men and their underrepresentation in care (Croft et al., 2015; Meeussen et al., 2020). This can be seen as a positive development, as many benefits come along with men taking on more of the tasks and roles held initially by women. Men's higher orientation towards care in general, but also in terms of childcare, can improve their own well-being as well as personal relationships, supports women in pursuing their careers, and can be beneficial for children's development (e.g., Croft et al., 2014, 2019; Dunn et al., 2013; Le et al., 2013, 2018; Petts & Knoester, 2019; Sarkadi et al., 2008). One tangible way of reaping these multifaceted benefits and reducing gender inequality is through the provision of parental leave for fathers. Research has linked men's parental leave-taking to higher well-being, life satisfaction and relationship quality, continuing father involvement, more gender egalitarian attitudes in parents, and more egalitarian beliefs in men's personal environment beyond their nuclear family (e.g., Bünning, 2015; Kramer et al., 2019; Moss-Racusin et al., 2021; Petts & Knoester, 2018, 2019; Tavits et al., 2023; Unterhofer & Wrohlich, 2017).

In this doctoral research, we aimed to gain a deeper understanding of contributors to men's interest in taking parental leave and men's orientation towards care more broadly. A recent cross-national examination of parental leave-taking intentions in young women and men showed that gender gaps in intended leave uptake persist and that individual-level factors such as gendered attitudes trumped country-level, policy-related factors in predicting men's parental leave-taking intentions (Olsson et al., 2023). Thus, it is crucial to advance our understanding of such individual-level factors and their relation to men's motivation for involvement in care and for taking parental leave. Across three empirical chapters, our goal was to shed light on the influence of gender ideals and role beliefs by examining prototypical conceptions of masculinity (Chapters 2 and 3), in addition to attitudes towards fatherhood roles (Chapters 3 and 4). Moreover, we were interested in the relation of such gendered beliefs to the future men can imagine for themselves in the form of their possible selves and in the emergence and consequences of discrepancies between future expectations and actual realities (Chapters 2 and 4). Besides influences related to individual beliefs and the internalization of communion and care in such, external forces can also affect whether men want to engage in care and take parental leave. Here, we aimed to complement the previous focus on external barriers by also considering facilitative external factors in the form of social support (Chapters 3 and 4). In all

chapters, we investigated men's intended parental leave uptake as an outcome variable; yet, across different stages in men's lives – from potential to expectant to actual fatherhood.

## 5.1 Summary and discussion of key findings

In Chapter 2, we used an experimental design and manipulated agentic and communal content in male prototypes. By that, we aimed to learn which representations of masculinity could promote communal content in young, childless men's possible selves and increase their intended parental leave-taking. Although findings were mixed, we gained tentative evidence that especially representations of a prototypical man as agentic *and* communal could foster higher parental leave-taking intentions in men. This finding is in line with recent models on avoiding backlash for counter-stereotypic behavior and non-traditional role engagement. Both the role prioritization model and the prototype inversion technique stress the importance of addressing both stereotype dimensions simultaneously (despite differing approaches, see later section on implications for research and theory; Danbold & Bendersky, 2020; Haines & Stroessner, 2019).

Nevertheless, male participants also showed higher intentions to take leave compared to a control condition when a prototypical man was described as highly agentic. We interpreted this finding as a contrast effect (Biernat, 2005; Bless & Burger, 2016) – being pushed away from this extreme and one-sided representation of masculinity towards a consideration of communal engagement. Alternatively, one could also see this effect as a paradoxical intervention (Bar-Tal et al., 2021; Swann et al., 1988): Men who themselves ascribe agentic attributes to a prototypical man consider communal engagement more due to being confronted with a consistent but exaggerated ideal of masculinity. Boundary conditions that we explored also point in that direction: The agentic condition was especially effective for employed men in contrast to students. Although employment status does not allow for conclusions about individual attitudes, employees are, nevertheless, engaged in the traditional role of breadwinning. Being confronted with an exclusive focus on this domain could, thus, be perceived as undesirable by the generally care-oriented sample and increase their communal intentions (or cause them to express their disagreement by indicating higher intentions).

At the same time, exploratory analyses suggested that a balanced prototype in terms of agency and communion resonated with non-traditional men who did not feel close to their gender group. Despite their distance from traditional masculinity, non-traditional men are likely still exposed to pervasive agency and breadwinning prescriptions. Thus, affirming

agentic content could facilitate the expression of counter-stereotypic communal intentions for non-traditional men, in line with research showing that affirming aspects of the ingroup identity provides leeway for exploring outgroup dimensions (Derks et al., 2006, 2007; Van Laar et al., 2010, 2013). Yet, more research is needed, as we generally found limited support for the hypotheses on how male prototypes affect men's communal intentions. Moreover, initial attempts to uncover underlying mechanisms such as affirmation and threat were unsuccessful (Scheifele et al., 2021).

In Chapter 3, we measured rather than manipulated male prototypes and examined them in addition to father role attitudes and social support as predictors of expectant fathers' intended leave-taking. Here, male prototypes were especially predictive of expectant fathers' desire to take parental leave: The more men saw a prototypical man as agentic, the lower their desire to take leave, whereas communal prototypes were related to an increased wish to take leave. The fact that both agentic and communal content in male prototypes was relevant for men's desire to take leave speaks again to the relevance of considering traditional as well as progressive aspects in an ingroup identity when considering non-normative behavior (Danbold & Bendersky, 2020; Haines & Stroessner, 2019). Not only is communal orientation needed to pull men towards communal roles, but ties to the traditional role need to be loosened.

Furthermore, the relevance of prototypes for especially shaping behavioral preferences rather than more concrete behavioral intentions is plausible: Prototypes represent ideal standards and describe which traits and behavior are desirable for group members (Hogg et al., 2012; Oakes et al., 1998; Wenzel et al., 2007). Yet, for more concrete leave-taking plans, such as for how long men intend to take leave, external circumstances need to be factored in (see Schmidt et al., 2015). The findings for social support align with this proposition. The support men perceived from their partners for taking parental leave was the strongest predictor of their pre-birth leave-taking intentions. This finding mirrors existing work which found that men's leave-taking depended strongly on the partner's career ambitions and the partner's wishes for how parental leave should be shared. Yet, mothers can feel pressured by societal ideals for involved motherhood, which may push them to act as gatekeepers for their partner's leave uptake (Beglaubter, 2017; Kaufman & Almqvist, 2017; McKay & Doucet, 2010; also see Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018). Other existing research framed parental leave decisions as father-centered by prioritizing fathers' leave over mothers' (Schmidt et al., 2015). Mothers prioritizing the fathers' wishes can also be understood as an expression of support from the partner and illustrates parental leave as a couple-based decision. Thus, the present findings



highlight the nature of men's parental leave-taking as an interpersonal negotiation process, the conditions and outcomes of which still require closer inspection.

Chapter 4 highlighted the complex nature of the transition to parenthood and the division of labor between partners. Even though fathers generally strove for an egalitarian division of labor, they struggled to put their expectations and desires into practice once their child was born. This finding complements past research suggesting that mothers and couples often experience violated expectations during the transition to parenthood and that the division of labor is often more traditional after birth than expected (e.g., Ascigil et al., 2021; Biehle & Mickelson, 2012; Milkie et al., 2002; Mitnick et al., 2022). Moreover, parents' gender role attitudes often become more traditional after childbirth (especially given non-traditional prenatal attitudes; Baxter et al., 2015; Endendijk et al., 2018; Katz-Wise et al., 2010; Schober & Scott, 2012). A potential explanation for this observation can be cognitive dissonance, elicited by experiencing a more traditional division of labor after birth than initially expected, which leads to an adjustment of attitudes (Baxter et al., 2015; Grinza et al., 2017). Hence, the current findings underline the difficulties fathers – just like mothers – have in realizing the aspired division of labor in their partnership.

Besides this longitudinal examination of men's struggle to translate their breadwinner and caregiver possible selves into behavior, the results further speak to the interplay of internal and external factors for men's communal engagement (see Croft et al., 2015). On the one hand, attitudes towards the father role were predictive of whether men exceeded or failed to reach expectations and desires regarding breadwinning and physical childcare. On the other hand, receiving support from their partners to engage in childcare once the child was born was related to fathers being less likely to be overly involved in breadwinning postnatally and to reach their desired involvement in childcare. This adds to the evidence we gathered for female partners functioning as gatekeepers for men's care engagement. Importantly, we conceptualize gatekeeping here not only as gate-closing behavior but also as opening the gate and supporting men in reaching a more egalitarian division of labor (see Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Puhlman & Pasley, 2013). This notion is in line with the argumentation for considering facilitators in addition to barriers to men's communal engagement, as these can also inform interventions.

However, prenatal support for taking leave from partners but also people at work also tended to be linked to heightened expectations and desires for an egalitarian division of childcare. These heightened expectations are likely more difficult to fulfill after birth, with potential negative consequences for parents' satisfaction with their division of labor or relationship more generally (Ascigil et al., 2021; Biehle & Mickelson, 2012; Khazan et al.,

2008; Lawrence et al., 2007; Milkie et al., 2002; Mitnick et al., 2022; Shockley & Allen, 2018). While this may sound disadvantageous at first, negative experiences and dashed expectations can also become catalysts for change and motivate action (Gollwitzer et al., 2018; Inzlicht & Legault, 2014; Pinquart et al., 2021). Moreover, many fathers had not taken leave yet, although they were planning to do so. Hence, experiencing discrepancies from their desired division of labor could also foster higher leave-taking intentions in fathers. In fact, we found that the more fathers exceeded their expectations and desires regarding breadwinning, the more they wanted and intended to take parental leave in the future. Conversely, falling short of their expected and desired involvement in physical childcare and family management was linked to expectations for taking longer leave.

Parental leave may, therefore, represent a tool to reach a division of labor that aligns more closely with fathers' ideals. When men take over responsibility for childcare by taking parental leave, they can develop stronger bonds with their children and become more invested in their upbringing. Indeed, men's parental leave-taking has consistently been linked to continued father involvement after the leave period (Almqvist & Duvander, 2014; Bünning, 2015; Haas & Hwang, 2008; Meil, 2013; Nepomnyaschy & Waldfogel, 2007; Petts & Knoester, 2018; Schober & Zoch, 2019; Tanaka & Waldfogel, 2007). Sharing childcare and breadwinning more equally helps reduce the strong association of women with primary caregiving. By that, motherhood penalties can be alleviated, pertaining to the negative consequences of parenthood for mothers, such as career setbacks and income losses (Steffens et al., 2019). Besides the potential for more gender equality in relationships, the provision of parental leave for fathers seems to foster more progressive attitudes in women and men on a societal level (Omidakhsh et al., 2020; Tavits et al., 2023; for a review, see Schober & Büchau, 2022). Consequently, men's parental leave-taking represents an important puzzle piece on the road towards gender-related social change. Although we did not directly examine outcomes of men's parental leave-taking, the present research contributes to an increased understanding of what hinders and motivates men to take parental leave. Thus, the current results may represent initial building blocks for developing interventions to increase fathers' parental leave uptake, for example, by leveraging the potential of social support.

Finally, all studies converged on the finding that young men and first-time fathers in the current samples had a high orientation towards care to begin with. Across experimental manipulations in Chapter 2, young men who could eventually imagine having a child held communal possible selves for their future, had high intentions to take leave once approaching parenthood, and expected to share available leave somewhat equally with their partners.

Additionally, presenting a prototypical man as highly communal was perceived positively and not as highly non-normative. In Chapters 3 and 4, ratings on father role attitudes for those who were soon to become fathers or already were fathers suggested that these men very much considered themselves to be responsible for physical and social caregiving. Like the as-yet childless men in Chapter 2, these first-time fathers had high intentions for their parental leave uptake. Moreover, fathers were striving for a relatively egalitarian division of breadwinning and childcare in their partnership and perceived their partners as supportive of high father involvement. However, we also found that fathers had difficulties translating their egalitarian intentions into actual behavior: They divided breadwinning and childcare more traditionally with their partners than expected and desired. These findings mirror recent observations that attitudes towards involved fatherhood seem to progress faster than actual fathering behavior (Buchler et al., 2017; Lewington et al., 2021; Offer & Kaplan, 2021; Petts, 2022; Wall & Arnold, 2007). Therefore, increased attention to facilitators of men's communal engagement is necessary to enable men to turn their intentions into reality. We gathered initial evidence for such a facilitator in the present doctoral thesis, in which social support – especially within partnerships – was positively related to fathers taking over childcare.

## **5.2 Strengths and limitations**

### **Strengths in scope, methodology, and societal relevance**

The findings of this dissertation should be viewed in light of its limitations but also its strengths. First, this doctoral work adds to the emerging literature on the underexamined inequality of men's underrepresentation in communal roles (Croft et al., 2015; Meeussen et al., 2020). On the pathway towards gender equality, it is a necessary step to consider men's engagement in childcare and domestic labor to provide leeway for women's career pursuit and financial independence. Parental leave is repeatedly named a promising gateway for establishing a more balanced division of labor early during parenthood (Meeussen et al., 2020; Schoppe-Sullivan & Fagan, 2020). Through the present research, we increased current knowledge on what hinders and supports men in considering taking parental leave and being more involved fathers. Thus, we also answered calls to pay more attention to fathers' unique experiences during the transition to parenthood (Cabrera et al., 2018; Harwood et al., 2007; Powell & Karraker, 2019; Schoppe-Sullivan & Fagan, 2020). Across three empirical chapters, we sketched out pathways to fatherhood and examined men's parental leave-taking intentions and orientation towards care across different life stages.

Moreover, we considered a comprehensive set of predictors: We studied beliefs about masculinity and fatherhood simultaneously, examined the role of men's possible selves, and considered social support as an external facilitator of men's communal intentions and engagement. This approach enabled us to shed light on the relevance of internal as well as external factors for men's interest in communal roles (see Croft et al., 2015). We gained tentative evidence that internal factors, such as prototypes of men, seem to matter especially during earlier stages of men's leave-taking decisions. In contrast, attitudes towards the father role were related to the extent to which fathers experienced discrepancies regarding their expected, desired, and actual division of labor. Perceived support from the partner as an external factor was generally an important predictor of leave-taking intentions. It was also predictive of whether fathers could realize their expected and desired involvement in physical childcare. Thus, we broadened the scope of this doctoral work to be meaningful for an understanding of not only men's parental leave-taking but also their engagement in childcare more generally.

Furthermore, the present research is characterized by the use of different methodologies to reap the benefits of each approach. Experiments conducted in Chapter 2 helped to gain a more accurate picture of cause-and-effect relations. In Chapter 3, we took a closer look at predictors of different facets of men's intended leave-taking using cross-sectional data. We complemented this approach with an analysis of longitudinal data in Chapter 4, in which we examined pre- and postnatal data and studied men's actual communal engagement in addition to communal intentions. Hence, we succeeded in collecting data from first-time fathers for our longitudinal study on the transition to fatherhood. This can be considered a strength of the present research, as fathers represent a population that has been somewhat challenging to reach (see L. S. Leach et al., 2019; Wigfall et al., 2013; Yaremych & Persky, 2023). What is more, the time around the first birth can be a particularly intense and busy period, limiting the resources of first-time parents to participate in scientific research and underlining the value of the collected data. Moreover, we did not limit data collection to a single country and its parental leave policies. Instead, we collected data in Belgium and Germany and, thus, took into account differences in leave policies regarding income replacement and transferability of leave periods between partners – aspects of parental leave policies that are crucial for men's leave uptake (Brandth & Kvande, 2009; Castro-García & Pazos-Moran, 2016; Karu & Tremblay, 2018; McKay & Doucet, 2010; Ray et al., 2010).

### **Advantages and disadvantages of the research design**

Although the present research is characterized by a number of strengths, the following constraints should be considered when interpreting the results. First, while Chapter 2 contains experimental studies, we can only make limited causal claims for the other two chapters. For example, Chapter 3 included cross-sectional data collected from expectant fathers before the birth of their children. While ideal, an experimental examination of, for example, how social support relates to intended leave-taking would have been ethically questionable given the real-life consequences for participants' lives. However, an experimental examination of workplace support is conceivable, using vignettes presenting a work context as highly vs. lowly supportive of men's parental leave-taking and measuring men's intended (hypothetical) leave uptake.

In the current context, collecting data at several time points before birth would have been beneficial. With the help of longitudinal prenatal data, it would have been possible to make stronger statements about the causal order of the examined relations. For example, it is plausible that expectant fathers who firmly intend to take parental leave receive more support from their partners to pursue these intentions. Such relations likely occur in a reinforcing spiral in which social support increases intentions to take parental leave, and expectant fathers with clear intentions attract more support. Further reverse relations could be that expectant fathers who consider taking parental leave – possibly because of external incentives – could adjust their beliefs about their gender group and father role to match their intentions and to prevent resulting cognitive dissonance (see Baxter et al., 2015; Grinza et al., 2017). However, theoretical models such as the theory of planned behavior see attitudes and norms before intentions in the causal order (Ajzen, 1991; Ross-Plourde et al., 2022; although an adjustment of attitudes to match behavior is also possible; Baxter et al., 2015).

What is more, we collected longitudinal data from first-time fathers at several time points: roughly three months before birth, four months after birth, and twelve months after birth. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, data collection and participant recruitment have been rather difficult. The slow addition of participants led to the data collection spreading over years, with data still being collected for the second and third measurement points. Given these challenges that we faced already with the current design, including more measurement points was not feasible within the framework of this dissertation. Nevertheless, we managed to collect data from fathers before and after the birth of their first child, which we examined in Chapter 4, and Chapter 2 included experiments on some of the hypothesized relations. Thus, we see a

strength of the current doctoral work in the utilization of different methodologies, which provide a balance between the prioritization of internal and external validity.

### **Limitations of the samples and the generality of findings**

Another limitation pertains to the samples in the empirical chapters. As noted, a challenge we faced across studies was the recruitment of male participants. In fact, men tend to be generally less willing to participate in research studies (likely related to women more than men being socialized to be helpful and caring), and the recruitment of male participants is a known issue (e.g., in health-related research; Glass et al., 2015; Ryan et al., 2019). Researchers have also faced challenges recruiting fathers in parenthood research, leading to the publication of experiences and best practices for attracting fathers to scientific research (L. S. Leach et al., 2019; Wigfall et al., 2013; Yaremych & Persky, 2023). As mentioned, the COVID-19 pandemic additionally increased the barriers to recruitment because healthcare facilities such as hospitals, gynecology practices, or midwife centers were difficult to access.

These difficulties resulted in smaller samples across studies and associated problems with statistical power to detect the presumed effects. Even though we conducted a-priori power analyses, some of the examined effects could have been smaller than assumed, leading to underpowered studies (e.g., in Chapter 2). Moreover, knowing the required sample size does not mean that this sample size is reached within the available amount of time and resources – and this was the case for the longitudinal study on men’s transition to parenthood. Too small sample sizes can entail uncertain effect sizes and significance levels and low statistical power to detect truly existing effects, ultimately leading to low reproducibility in the research field (Button et al., 2013; Lakens & Evers, 2014). Furthermore, due to the small sample sizes, it was not possible to use more complex analysis methods that would have been superior to the current ones. For example, we could have examined the interrelatedness of constructs more closely by using path models, and the use of latent instead of manifest difference scores is recommended when sample size allows for it (Gollwitzer et al., 2014). Nevertheless, studies conducted across the transition to parenthood often feature sample sizes of around 100 fathers (e.g., Ascigil et al., 2021; Biehle & Mickelson, 2012; Khazan et al., 2008; Mitnick et al., 2022; Powell & Karraker, 2019). Given the described challenges and the underrepresentation of fathers as research subjects, also small sample studies provide crucial pieces to the overall puzzle of men’s engagement in communal roles.

Besides their size, the samples were also limited in their representativeness. In Chapter 2, the sample of the first experiment exclusively comprised students. In spite of efforts to reach

a more representative sample in Experiment 2, students also represented the majority of the generally young, heterosexual, and highly educated sample. Although the oversampling of students is a common issue in psychological research, it is problematic because students may vary from the general population, for example, in terms of personal or attitudinal variables. These deviations additionally seem non-systematic, which further complicates generalization (Hanel & Vione, 2016; Peterson, 2001). However, despite the image of students as relatively progressive, students are still exposed to gendered expectations and tend to overestimate traditional masculinity norms in their peers (Van Grootel et al., 2018). Even if they were more liberal in their attitudes than the general public, this would represent a more conservative test when examining communal behavior. This is due to ceiling effects and decreased variance on key variables, such as male prototypes and parental leave-taking intentions (as was the case in the present research). In addition, highly educated young men are likely to hold high-status positions in the future, which grants them power to initiate change towards higher gender equality. Also, when social attitudes change, elites in society are often the first to adopt such behaviors. Hence, studying patterns amongst these groups can be informative as to processes that later will affect the general population (see Olsson et al., 2023). Therefore, understanding barriers and facilitators to their interest in communal roles can have particularly wide-ranging effects.

Furthermore, to ensure a more ecologically valid examination of men's intended parental leave-taking, Chapters 3 and 4 included data from men during the transition to parenthood. Although we did not target a specific subgroup of fathers and used various recruitment channels, the sample was again biased in terms of socioeconomic background and gender attitudes. Likely, fathers committed to involved fatherhood are present in prenatal classes or at parenting fairs and are motivated to participate in scientific research on their experiences during this critical period in life. Nevertheless, this may again imply a more conservative testing of the studied relations and could explain why we partially did not find relations between male prototypes or father role attitudes and intended parental leave-taking.

Still, studying men at various stages in life is a strength of the current work. In Chapter 2, we started with men who could imagine becoming fathers in the future but for whom this transition was not imminent. This approach allowed us to study intended parental leave-uptake experimentally and to learn more about leverages of change towards men's communal engagement in the broader society. Next, moving to men approaching fatherhood enabled us to zoom in on predictors of men's parental leave-taking intentions before birth. Lastly, we followed these men across the transition to parenthood and studied contributors to and

consequences of whether their prenatal expectations and desires for dividing caregiving and breadwinning with their partners matched postnatal experiences.

Despite covering different life stages, a last limitation of the sample concerns the countries of data collection. Belgium and Germany represent WEIRD societies (i.e., Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic; Henrich et al., 2010). People in Western societies, compared to non-Western ones, tend to have more independent self-concepts and positive views of themselves (Henrich et al., 2010). This could have affected the results in Chapter 2, especially for possible selves: On the one hand, communal possible selves (i.e., being warm and understanding and taking care of their future children) could represent a positive outlook that men are motivated to claim. On the other hand, an independent self also matches the agency subdimension. Thus, Western samples could generally attribute agency more to their future selves than non-Western ones (see Cuddy et al., 2015). Still, while absolute levels of the examined constructs may differ between WEIRD and non-WEIRD samples, the processes between beliefs about masculinity and fatherhood, future-oriented self-views, social support, and intended leave uptake could be comparable (for recent cross-national evidence for the assumptions of social role theory, see Froehlich et al., 2020).

Besides psychological differences, societies can also differ in terms of their political frameworks and laws. Especially in the case of parental leave, results are affected by country-specific leave policies. For example, fathers first need to be eligible to take parental leave, and if they are eligible, then their leave uptake is affected by the level of income replacement or the availability of earmarked leave for fathers (Brandth & Kvande, 2009; Castro-García & Pazos-Moran, 2016; Karu & Tremblay, 2018; McKay & Doucet, 2010; Ray et al., 2010). Here, although the countries of data collection can both be classified as WEIRD, there are distinguishing factors based on their specific leave policies. These factors include the differing levels of income replacement and the (partial) transferability of available leave between partners in Germany but not Belgium. Nevertheless, future research should consider other countries of data collection with different national regulations regarding parental leave and non-WEIRD cultural backgrounds to test how the evidence gathered in the present research generalizes to other contexts.

Another characteristic of the current data is that we partly collected data during the global COVID-19 pandemic. The consequences of the pandemic were discussed as a double-edged sword: On the one hand, the division of domestic labor and of the increased childcare (due to closed schools and childcare facilities) could have become more egalitarian because of the increase in telework and men being more present at home. On the other hand, there was a



risk that the division of labor would stay stable and that women would have to step up to meet the increased need for care. In fact, research conducted in various countries, amongst them Belgium and Germany, showed that women continued to shoulder the majority of childcare and housework (Hipp & Bünning, 2021; Kreyenfeld & Zinn, 2021; Petts et al., 2023; Van Tienoven et al., 2023; Yerkes et al., 2020), and that, if changes in the division of household labor occurred, these were rather temporal (Van Tienoven et al., 2023). Moreover, although we planned to start data collection for the present longitudinal study during the onset of the pandemic, we delayed the start to avoid collecting biased data. Thus, only a minority of participants filled in the first surveys when measures such as mandatory teleworking were still implemented. In addition, since we recruited first-time expectant parents, they were not affected by the closure of schools and childcare facilities yet. Even though there was a risk that the division of labor and gendered beliefs could have been affected by the unique period in which we collected parts of the data, we believe that biases are not substantial and that the findings would also generalize to other times.

### **Challenges in conceptualization and measurement**

A last limitation concerns the conceptualization and measurement of the constructs under study. First, the definition of prototypes implies an intergroup context: The highest degree of prototypicality is achieved at a position where similarities to the ingroup and differences to the outgroup are maximized (Oakes et al., 1998; J. C. Turner et al., 1987; Wenzel et al., 2007). It could be argued that the present manipulation and measurement of prototypes did not take the construct's intergroup nature into account. Consequently, the operationalizations show similarities with related constructs such as norms or stereotypes. However, the binary perception of gender and sex is still pervasive in society, and progress towards disrupting this binary is (unfortunately) slow and met with resistance (Morgenroth et al., 2021; Morgenroth & Ryan, 2021). Moreover, also stereotypic content and gender roles are predominantly categorized into two dimensions, namely agency and communion and breadwinning and childcare (although this binary view has also been challenged; Koch et al., 2016). Thus, it could be argued that an intergroup comparison is automatically activated in the current context of men and traditionally female care roles.

What is more, the concept of prototypes aligns with sociological examinations of hegemonic and caring masculinities (Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Elliott, 2016), which have been linked to men's parental leave-taking. These theories and the prototype construct share a multi-layered and contextual understanding of masculinity and group identity

that is defined in distinction from outgroups, such as women, and represents an ideal that group members strive for. Prototypes, representing the essence of a group, are therefore a suitable construct to capture the understanding of “what it means to be a man” and to build on past evidence on men’s leave-taking. Nevertheless, a clear conceptualization and operationalization of prototypes are missing in the research field. Besides the described conceptualization, approaches differ in that they see prototypes, for example, as mental representations, sets of typical or average traits, or exemplars of groups and their features (e.g., Ehrlinger et al., 2018; McPherson et al., 2018; Mölders & Van Quaquebeke, 2017; Peters et al., 2012). Thus, theoretical work is needed to integrate different approaches and help develop validated scales to measure prototypes.

Measurement was generally a challenge in the current doctoral work, as validated measures were unavailable for most of the studied constructs. This resulted in adapting existing scales to the current needs or creating own scales based on prior research (which is standard practice given the lack of alternatives; Flake et al., 2017; Flake & Fried, 2020). Yet, sound measurement is crucial for ensuring that what is claimed to be measured is actually getting measured and for ensuring the validity and informative value of research evidence (Flake & Fried, 2020). Doubts are increasingly being raised regarding the measurement in psychological research, with terms emerging such as measurement schmeasurement, questionable measurement practices, and v(alidity)-hacking (Flake & Fried, 2020; Hussey & Hughes, 2020). A first step in counteracting this validity crisis is clearly defining the latent construct to be measured (Flake & Fried, 2020).

As discussed, there is room for improvement in the prototype construct, but also possible selves are somewhat vaguely defined. Originally, possible selves were conceptualized as an individual’s ideas of the self in the future and were supposed to provide a link between cognition and motivation through the differentiation of expected, desired, and feared possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Such a broad definition bears several risks, which Erikson (2007) described in his review of the possible selves construct and its necessary adjustments: On the one hand, there is a risk of subsuming too many aspects under the name of possible selves, such as general life tasks or all fears and hopes that an individual could have (e.g., being a good parent). On the other hand, too narrow definitions have been applied, which, for example, just focused on realistic possible selves instead of seemingly unattainable ones that can still be drivers of behavior (Erikson, 2007). Erikson (2007) suggests specifying the definition of possible selves to include a sense of agency, personalized meaning, and feeling

of being in the future situation. Thus, instead of “being a good parent”, a possible self would be “seeing my child as grown up, feeling that I had been a good parent”.

Nevertheless, possible selves remain a somewhat elusive construct, and the measurement of possible selves remains diverse and unresolved (Oyserman & James, 2011). Some authors favor open-ended measures because of the associated comprehensiveness and reduction of self-presentation concerns (Oyserman & James, 2011). In contrast, we followed recent research in the field of social psychology and gender which also included the division of breadwinning and childcare in the future as possible selves (Croft, 2016; Croft et al., 2019, 2020). Besides using open- or closed-ended measures, researchers’ degrees of freedom exist in possible selves measures regarding setting temporal anchors (e.g., after childbirth, in 15 years, or generally in the future) or including positive as well as negative aspects (i.e., desired and feared selves, which also varied in the current research; Oyserman & James, 2011). Again, a better theoretical basis – not only from the possible selves literature but also the field the construct is applied to – is needed for making informed decisions about these aspects when designing or using measures (for general calls on better theorizing in psychology, see Fiedler, 2017; Oberauer & Lewandowsky, 2019).

### **5.3 Implications for research and theory**

#### **Qualifying the current research**

A helpful framework for interpreting the discussed limitations is the distinction between exploratory and confirmatory research. Following the replication crisis in psychological research, researchers called for more rigorous standards regarding methodologies and transparency to reduce questionable research practices (Nelson et al., 2018). One strategy is preregistration, which means that hypotheses and planned analytical procedures are registered publicly before data are collected or analyzed. By that, confirmatory and exploratory research can clearly be distinguished (Wagenmakers et al., 2012). However, Fife and Rodgers (2021; based on Tukey, 1973) move away from this dichotomous understanding and see confirmatory and exploratory data analysis as two poles of a continuum. Thus, they describe a third form of data analysis that falls between both: rough confirmatory data analysis. In doing so, they acknowledge the common need for respecification (e.g., in latent variable modeling) also in hypothesis-testing research or the lack of knowledge regarding measurement, operationalization, and estimated effect sizes for sample size planning. In fact, the latter three represent issues that also applied to the present doctoral work. Hence, although we developed

hypotheses based on the current basis of theory and research, further rigorous tests are needed to substantiate the initial findings. Nevertheless, in an emerging research field such as men in communal roles, it is inevitable to do exploratory or rough confirmatory research to arrive at valid theoretical models that can systematically be tested and to motivate new research directions. Therefore, more openness – also in publishing – is needed for hypothesis-generating research when strict confirmatory research is premature.

Another issue we faced during the research process, which concerns much of the current psychological research, is the challenge of recruiting research participants. Even though best-practice recommendations were followed and monetary resources were available, challenges persisted. As described, the COVID-19 pandemic represented an unusual barrier. But also generally, ethical regulations exist – and rightfully so – which, for example, prohibit the use of overly high incentives to prevent coerced participation. Often, researchers fall back on paid on-demand recruitment services and access panels such as Prolific or Amazon’s Mechanical Turk. However, questions have been raised regarding the related data quality and the representativeness of participants (Chmielewski & Kucker, 2020; McCredie & Morey, 2019). Moreover, inquiries to paid on-demand recruitment services regarding participant recruitment for the present longitudinal study on men’s transition to parenthood were turned down. Reasons for this were difficulties in guaranteeing the required sample, given the countries of data collection and the inclusion criteria (e.g., first-time fatherhood). This assessment by experts in recruiting emphasizes the challenging recruitment we faced in the present research.

Still, we succeeded in recruiting many first-time fathers through various channels and efforts. One of the most effective strategies was focusing on in-person recruitment in which it is possible to directly talk to and convince members of the population of interest to participate (e.g., expectant fathers visiting parenting fairs). In addition, focusing on mothers and multipliers, such as midwives who received compensation for referring expectant fathers to the study, proved helpful. Nevertheless, researchers should consider new avenues for obtaining data. Examples can be citizen science projects in which members of the general public are integrated more into scientific endeavors (Vohland et al., 2021) or the possibility of using sources of available “big data” such as social media platforms (Chen & Wojcik, 2016; Garg et al., 2018).

### **Avenues for future research on men’s parental leave-taking and orientation towards care**

Also for the research questions examined in the current work, new avenues for future research emerged. Most importantly, although we extended our understanding of how men’s

leave-taking intentions are shaped, questions remain about how these intentions translate into actual behavior. At four months after birth, only a minority of participants had taken leave yet. However, we are planning a third measurement point as part of this longitudinal study twelve months after birth. Likely, we will have more variance in the data then, enabling us to examine the relations amongst the studied constructs and men's actual leave uptake as well as the overlap between intended and actual leave uptake. Both research on the intention-behavior gap (Sheeran & Webb, 2016) as well as our findings on discrepancies between the expected and actual division of labor suggest that realizing parental leave plans may not be as straightforward. Thus, future research could investigate the conditions under which translating intentions into behavior succeeds in the current context of men's parental leave-taking.

Moreover, not only whether and for how long fathers take parental leave is of interest but also how. For example, differences can exist in how women and men intend to use their time off work. Recent findings suggest, for example, that men are more likely than women to plan in time for career-related development during their parental leave (Tharp & Parks-Stamm, 2021). Furthermore, the consequences of men's leave-taking may differ depending on whether fathers take leave alone or simultaneously with their partners (Bünning, 2015). When fathers do not assume responsibility for childcare to a similar extent as mothers, they risk remaining in a helper role instead of an equal co-parent.

Consequently, a further aspect of domestic labor besides physically engaging in household labor or childcare that has received less attention can remain unequal: the cognitive labor of thinking, planning, and organizing for the family. Meta-analytic evidence suggests that women are doing more of this mental labor than men, which can negatively affect their well-being and career advancement (Reich-Stiebert et al., 2023). When fathers take parental leave, they are more likely to recognize the daily demands of childcare and to assume responsibility for often overlooked aspects of domestic labor, such as its cognitive aspects. Possibly, higher regard for and involvement in childcare and domestic labor especially occurs when fathers take parental leave independently from their partners and (temporarily) take on the role of the primary caregiver. Thus, we recommend directing attention not only to whether but also to how fathers take parental leave and to the understudied topic of cognitive labor and how it relates to men's parental leave-taking.

Besides the potential consequences of men's actual leave-taking for the division of labor, an avenue for future research is how men's leave-taking affects their gendered beliefs. Past research has mainly focused on the consequences of becoming a parent for women and their gendered attitudes, but evidence for fathers is scarce and mixed. Some studies suggest

that men's gender attitudes and stereotypes become more traditional during the transition to parenthood (Endendijk et al., 2018; Grinza et al., 2017). However, such examinations often included one-sided measures of gender role attitudes that mainly focused on women's roles and motherhood (McDonnell, 2018). Accordingly, in one of the few studies on attitudes towards fatherhood, men's attitudes became more egalitarian than women's (Buchler et al., 2017). The data collected as part of this doctoral work provide an opportunity to examine how men's gendered beliefs regarding masculinity and fatherhood develop during the transition to parenthood. We measured prototypes of men and father role attitudes roughly three months before birth, four months after birth, and twelve months after birth (with data collection still ongoing for the latter two measurement points). Using these data, latent growth models could be implemented to analyze trajectories of gendered beliefs across the transition to parenthood. In addition, attitudes often change as a response to the division of labor that establishes after birth (Baxter et al., 2015; Grinza et al., 2017). Yet, research is lacking on whether men's parental leave-taking has consequences for whether attitudes are adapted after birth. Thus, an important research question to investigate in the data still currently being collected (and in other research) is to examine the role of men's parental leave uptake and whether it can act as a buffer or driver of changes regarding beliefs towards masculinity and fatherhood.

### **Potentials to diversify future research**

Furthermore, studies conducted with more diverse samples or focused on specific subgroups of men and fathers would complement the current findings. As outlined, the samples used in the present research were predominantly highly educated, heterosexual, from WEIRD countries, and had rather liberal, care-oriented attitudes. To generalize the current findings to broader populations of men, it would, thus, be interesting to study the proposed relations, for example, in non-WEIRD countries. Most studies on men's parental leave-taking are conducted in Northern and Western European countries with comparatively progressive leave policies, such as Sweden, Norway, Finland, and also Germany and Belgium (although the latter to a lesser degree). A notable exception represents a recent comparison of the gender gap in leave-taking intentions across 37 countries (Olsson et al., 2023). The gender gap indeed varied depending on the national leave policies and general gender equality present in the respective country.

Also, more general examinations of father involvement and the gendered division of labor suggest that racial, cultural, and national background can play a role in men's parental leave-taking decisions. Compared to White and Latino married fathers, Black married fathers

are less likely to experience a fatherhood wage premium and an increase in work hours following fatherhood or their wives' decreased work hours (Glauber, 2008). This suggests that financial concerns may create an even larger barrier for Black fathers to take parental leave, while at the same time, they may experience less ties to the breadwinning role.

Moreover, studies conducted with migrant couples suggest that national context and cultural background may affect the gendered division of labor and, in turn, men's leave-taking. Speaking to the role of national context, a comparison of couples in Poland and Polish migrant couples in Norway indicates that the more gender egalitarian climate in Norway helped Polish migrant couples to share breadwinning and childcare more equally compared to couples in their home country (Żadkowska et al., 2022). Another study points to the role of cultural background since women tended to take over larger shares of housework when they migrated from more gender-traditional countries, regardless of the receiving national context (Carriero, 2021). This finding can partially be explained by demographic characteristics, such as women's lower educational level or employment status, leading to a more traditional division of labor (Carriero, 2021). Thus, in different national and cultural contexts, men may expect and desire less than in the current contexts to share breadwinning and childcare equally, which could affect their intentions to take parental leave.

Social class represents another understudied diversity dimension in the context of men's parental leave-taking. Past evidence suggests that blue-collar workers receive less support from their workplace for taking leave than white-collar workers (Haas & Hwang, 2009). Moreover, blue-collar workers' worries pertain to keeping their jobs, whereas white-collar workers worry more about career advancement (Haas & Hwang, 2019a). Therefore, workplace support could play a larger role for employees in blue-collar occupations than the predominantly studied white-collar workers (also see Reimer, 2020). In addition, financial considerations are often named as barriers to men's parental leave-taking (e.g., Marynissen et al., 2019; Samtleben, Bringmann, et al., 2019). On the one hand, fathers with lower socio-economic status (SES) could potentially less afford to take leave due to their lower income. On the other hand, relative but capped income replacement, as in Germany, can cause low-SES fathers to receive higher shares of their income than high-SES fathers, resulting in lower monetary losses because of their leave-taking. Furthermore, researchers have linked higher educational levels to more liberal gender attitudes, which could, in turn, foster leave-taking intentions more in high-SES fathers (Geisler & Kreyenfeld, 2019). These examples illustrate how socio-economic status and social class, as sample characteristics that could be varied more

in future research, can relate to the studied constructs and influence men's intentions to take parental leave.

### **The interplay of internal and external factors regarding men's communal engagement**

At the same time, these considerations stress the interplay of internal and external factors, as suggested by Croft et al. (2015). The current findings were based on men and fathers who had at least in part internalized communion and caretaking already in their values and self-views. Yet, they still profited from a supportive environment, which further fostered their communal intentions. It is conceivable that a highly supportive environment can additionally help highly motivated men to translate their communal intentions into behavior and to lower potential barriers. In more traditional samples, gendered beliefs regarding masculinity and fatherhood could play an even more crucial role and determine whether men even consider communal engagement for themselves. In addition, when men have a low orientation towards care, external factors such as high monetary incentives or strong support from important others can foster leave-taking intentions regardless of internal motivation. Beglaubter (2017) described such cases as circumstantial leave-takers: fathers who did not have a strong desire to take leave but did so out of pragmatic reasons. Thus, generous leave policies and organizations and partners supporting men's engagement in childcare can not only help care-oriented men to translate their intentions into behavior but can also make leave-taking attractive for men without a strong orientation towards care.

Nevertheless, valuing communion in men can not only contribute to gender equality at home but can also have consequences in the public sphere. In fact, correlational findings suggest that holding communal values relates to interest in HEED domains, valuing such for society, and potential support for salary increases in respective occupations (although men generally had lower communal values than women; Block et al., 2018). Men who would either like to engage more in care work themselves or support others in doing so can, thus, become allies in the fight for increasing gender equality. Besides taking leave themselves and sharing domestic labor equally in their relationship, they can a) support policies that facilitate men's communal engagement, such as more generous leave policies, and b) provide support in the workplace by supporting their coworkers' childcare engagement or speaking up for gender-egalitarian practices at work (Sudkämper et al., 2020; also see Drury & Kaiser, 2014). In sum, a contribution of the current work is the joint examination of internal and external contributors to men's parental leave-taking intentions and communal orientation more broadly. By focusing on social support for communal engagement, we further extended and complemented past



theorizing to consider facilitators in addition to barriers to men's communal engagement more strongly (e.g., Croft et al., 2015; also see Meeussen et al., 2020; Schreiber et al., 2023).

### **Implications for research on gender counter-stereotypic engagement**

Furthermore, the current findings complement accruing evidence on the importance of considering both stereotype dimensions – agency and communion – when examining transgressions of gender boundaries. However, existing approaches differ in their suggested mechanisms and scope, as described and integrated in the following. For example, Danbold and Bendersky (2020) examined the case of women in firefighting and suggested the technique of prototype inversion for increasing the representation of minority groups in professional contexts. This technique is based on emphasizing traits associated with the underrepresented group (i.e., women, in the firefighter example) but still acknowledging traits associated with the prototypical group (i.e., men) in descriptions of category prototypes such as firefighting. By that, both feelings of fit of the non-prototypical group in this domain can be increased as well as backlash from the prototypical group avoided (see also research on group affirmation; Derks et al., 2006, 2007; Van Laar et al., 2010, 2013).

Haines and Stroessner (2019) also developed a model for avoiding gender-related backlash. Yet, they focus on how covering both traditional and non-traditional aspects in individual's *behavior* can reduce backlash for transgressing traditional gender norms. Contrary to Danbold and Bendersky (2020), the role prioritization model posits that individuals first have to fulfill their traditional gender role before augmenting it with non-traditional or counter-stereotypic engagement to avoid backlash (Haines & Stroessner, 2019). Thus, the approaches differ in that they a) either recommend the emphasis on traditional (role prioritization) or non-traditional (prototype inversion) content and b) focus on the balance of stereotypic content either in individual role engagement (role prioritization) or general category prototypes (prototype inversion).

Van Grootel et al. (2018) provide a third perspective through their findings on presenting altered masculinity norms for men's communal orientation. With the goal of revealing men's overestimation of traditional masculinity norms in peers, men were presented with actual peer norms which stressed the compatibility of agency and communion in men (amongst other conditions). As a result, men reported more communal self-descriptions, lower intentions to hide communal engagement, and more progressive attitudes towards gender-related social change (Van Grootel et al., 2018). The approach we took in the present work is most closely aligned with the work by Van Grootel and colleagues, as both examinations

pertained to group norms or prototypes. Yet, we extended current knowledge by testing the role of different group prototypes on men's intentions to take parental leave and their communal possible selves. Although results were mixed, we also gained tentative evidence that a combined presentation of agency and communion may foster communal intentions in men.

Even though the present findings require further investigation, what we can take away from an integrative consideration of prior and present research is the relevance of balance in gender role and stereotype content for women's and men's counter-stereotypic engagement. Regardless of whether focusing on category prototypes, group prototypes, or individual role engagement, gathered evidence suggests that an acknowledgment of agency *and* communion can be fruitful for reducing backlash for counter-stereotypic behavior and eventually increasing counter-stereotypic engagement. Nevertheless, future research is needed to test these indications more rigorously and potentially integrate the different approaches.

A potential avenue for future research is considering varying category prototypes also for men's counter-stereotypic engagement. Similar to the emphasis on communal traits for firefighters, childcare and parental leave could be reframed by emphasizing the relevance of agentic traits for this role. In fact, men are often reframing care already for themselves by describing a need for courage to take parental leave or a need for perseverance to master the hard work that is childcare (Beglaubter, 2021; Brandth & Kvande, 2018; Schmidt et al., 2015). However, when altering category prototypes, it is crucial not to reduce the perceived fit of the prototypical group. Thus, when reframing care, communal traits and behaviors associated initially with women still need to be acknowledged, as suggested by the prototype inversion technique (Danbold & Bendersky, 2020).

A further advantage of emphasizing agentic aspects of communal roles could be an increased regard for care in society which could eventually be reflected in higher remuneration of care-oriented occupations. Findings by Block et al. (2019) suggest that people currently attach lower importance to the advancement of men in HEED than women's advancement in STEM and that increasing men's motivation to engage in communal roles could benefit society-wide appreciation of care and support for advancing gender equality. Thus, several avenues for future research exist to shed more light on barriers and facilitators of counter-stereotypic engagement, such as men's participation in childcare and parental leave. Against the backdrop of prior research, combining agentic and communal content, for example, in conceptions of masculinity or care seems to be the most promising approach and deserves further research attention.

## 5.4 Practice implications

### Challenging masculinity norms

The evidence we collected in the current doctoral work can be applied to practical contexts. For example, in addition to the first preliminary results on the effectiveness of combined agentic and communal male prototypes for men's parental leave-taking intentions, we also gained insights into the impact of prototypical representations of men that exclusively focus on one stereotype dimension. First, agentic male prototypes partially evoked contrast effects and pushed male participants towards communal intentions. However, we would not recommend using these insights to develop interventions for several reasons. To begin with, pushing away from a point of reference lacks control of the outcome, contrary to being pulled towards a point of reference. Thus, highly traditional masculinity norms could also heighten adherence to such and contribute to maintaining the fences that keep men tied to one form of masculinity. Here, we would like to point out that holding traditional gender role attitudes and gender stereotypes is not problematic per se; however, it can limit men's engagement in counter-stereotypic domains such as parental leave, which is why strengthening such attitudes is counter-productive in the current context (see Croft et al., 2015; Meeussen et al., 2020).

Second, when interpreting the effect as a paradoxical intervention, being pushed towards more communal outcomes could result from a presentation of masculinity that is in line with but also more extreme than prior attitudes (Bar-Tal et al., 2021; Swann et al., 1988). Yet, for men who already have rather extreme traditional attitudes towards masculinity, the agentic prototype could affirm traditional masculinity beliefs (with potentially negative consequences, see Rivera & Dasgupta, 2018). Third, we cannot rule out that the observed contrast effects were mainly an artifact of the experiments. The highly traditional agentic prototype could have elicited reactance in the rather liberal samples. Thus, it could have motivated participants to express that they disagree with such one-sided prescriptions by indicating higher communal intentions without actually influencing intentions that would be relevant in real-life settings.

Although we do not recommend working with highly agentic masculinity ideals in interventions, the current findings suggest that considering agency *in addition to* communion is crucial. Results of Chapter 2 implied that focusing on exclusively communal prototypes of men does not seem to affect men's communal intentions: At least in these rather liberal samples, describing an ideal man as highly communal and involved in caretaking did not foster communal possible selves or parental leave-taking intentions of men. This result stands in

contrast to what lay theories may suggest: that focusing on the so far neglected dimension of communion is necessary to pull men towards it.

This prioritization of care is also evident in media campaigns and advertisements related to involved fatherhood. Fortunately, it becomes more common for brands to create campaigns that highlight the caregiving side of fathers and show fathers engaging in traditionally female behavior, such as baking cakes or dressing up as princesses (Bol.com, 2021; Grau & Zotos, 2016; Tesco, 2020). Also, MenCare, a global fatherhood campaign led by NGOs Equimundo and Sonke Gender Justice, puts care at the center of their campaign (Equimundo, 2023). While this is in line with their goals of increasing men's share in domestic labor and fostering involved, non-violent fatherhood, the present as well as previous findings suggest that breadwinning and agentic traits and behaviors traditionally associated with men and fathers should not be neglected. Instead, when aiming to foster communal intentions and behaviors in men through mass communication on masculinity and fatherhood, it could be beneficial to address agentic as well as communal content. Moreover, research on social norms as drivers of social change suggests that the effectiveness of such interventions depends on, for example, whether targets can identify with these messages and their sources and perceive them as believable (Tankard & Paluck, 2016). Hence, acknowledging traditional parts of masculinity and fatherhood, like breadwinning, could reflect men's lived realities more than an exclusive focus on care and, thus, increase the effectiveness of such campaigns.

### **Leveraging social support**

The findings of this dissertation on the role of social support also have implications for practice. We extended past research by showing that the support men receive from their partners for engaging in childcare and taking parental leave relates to men's parental leave-taking plans and their ability to translate their intentions for how to divide labor into action. Thus, partners can not only passively influence men's leave-taking through their gender role attitudes and general family versus career orientation. Beyond that, they can actively encourage men's leave-taking and childcare engagement, for example, through interpersonal encouragement and strengthening of men's self-efficacy as a father. Moreover, partners can leverage their own behavior by contributing to breadwinning and, thus, providing leeway for men to be more engaged at home. Hence, campaigns or educational offers to increase involved fatherhood could also target mothers as gatekeepers to father involvement.

In contrast to the consistent findings for partner support, results were mixed regarding the role of workplace support in men's leave-taking and childcare engagement. Findings

mainly hinted at a potential for dashed expectations regarding men's childcare engagement after birth if they perceived their workplace as highly supportive before birth. Whereas results could differ in different samples or at later time points, this finding still speaks to the relevance of workplace support not only as a lip service but with the goal of actually offering men the opportunity to be more engaged fathers. Hence, it is essential that family supportive values are not only communicated as part of the organizational culture but that this is followed up by supportive interactions and behaviors (e.g., by expressing appreciation of fathers' decision to take leave or planning for substitutes so that fathers do not have to worry about their colleagues' increased workload when taking leave; see Kaufman & Almqvist, 2017; Samtleben, Bringmann, et al., 2019).

Besides focusing on partners and people at work as main reference groups for men's leave-taking, we further explored which role men's broader normative environment can play in their intent to take leave. Exploratory evidence from Chapter 3 suggests that how much other fathers in men's immediate surroundings took leave or were engaged in childcare can further contribute to men's parental leave-taking intentions. This finding has important implications as men often turn to informal sources of support, such as friends or family, during the transition to parenthood (Rominov et al., 2018; Venning et al., 2021). Thus, strengthening support amongst fathers in the personal environment can be helpful in motivating men to take leave or helping them reduce barriers to their increased engagement in childcare (e.g., through providing advice regarding own experiences of communicating wishes regarding flexible work to employers or similar).

In addition, broader support networks amongst fathers in communities could be activated. In fact, many efforts in that direction already exist, such as MoveMen, Vaderklap, or De Sloep (all organizations in Belgium we also worked with to recruit expectant fathers). For example, MoveMen organizes Papa Brunches, at which (low-SES) fathers can come together to exchange questions and experiences regarding being a father, receive information and advice, and just have a general feeling of being in this together (MoveMen, 2023). Vaderklap started as a blog by fathers for fathers but now also organizes yearly meetings and conferences for fathers, including expert talks and workshops (Vaderklap, 2023).

Such offers targeted explicitly at fathers and those serving fathers are essential as fathers often do not feel addressed by educational offers and guidance or fear taking support away from mothers and children (Bowles et al., 2022). However, it is crucial not to fully hand over the responsibility of supporting equitable participation in work and care to individuals, such as men themselves, their partners, and their personal environment. Bowles et al. (2022)

point out that promoting involved fatherhood and gender equality through forms of social support is only meaningful when framework conditions are created that enable men and fathers to realize their intentions. Accordingly, the provision of generous, job-protected, and earmarked parental leave for fathers through political regulations continues to be a necessary puzzle piece when examining men's uptake of parental leave and their involvement in care more broadly.

### **5.5 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the discussed research aimed to advance our understanding of contributors to men's parental leave-taking intentions and their general communal orientation. Using experimental designs, Chapter 2 contributed to the accruing evidence on considering both agentic and communal content in representations of masculinity to foster counter-stereotypic outcomes. Chapter 3 examined predictors of expectant fathers' intended leave uptake and provided evidence especially for the role of (female) partner support for men's intended leave-taking and for the role of male prototypes in predicting men's desire to take parental leave. Based on longitudinal data collected across the transition to fatherhood, Chapter 4 provided evidence for the extent to which first-time fathers' expected and desired division of labor matched experiences after birth. Men's attitudes towards the father role and, again, the support they received from their partners contributed to fathers' experience of dashed expectations and unmet desires regarding their postnatal involvement in childcare and breadwinning. Furthermore, the experience of such discrepancies was related to men's intentions to take parental leave in the future. Taken together, this doctoral work contributes to the current literature by examining contributors to men's communal intentions in the form of taking parental leave across varying stages in men's lives – from potential to expectant to actual fatherhood. A further contribution can be found in the emphasis on facilitators to men's interest in communal roles in addition to barriers by studying social support. Also, masculinity as well as fatherhood beliefs were examined simultaneously in the current work, following calls for considering both notions of what it means to be a man as well as of what it means to be a father. Lastly, we shed light on men's difficulties in realizing their expectations and desires for the division of breadwinning and childcare with their partners after birth. Even though further research is needed to corroborate the tentative evidence gained, the present research, nevertheless, contributed to a deeper understanding of men's underrepresentation in parental leave and care more generally, which is a necessary step on the road towards gender equality.

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## EDUCATION

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Leuphana University Lüneburg, Germany
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Shanghai Normal University, China
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## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

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## GRANTS AND AWARDS

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- 2022 Open Science Award (Gold), Open Science Commission, University of Koblenz-Landau
- 2021 Open Science Award (Gold), Open Science Commission, University of Koblenz-Landau
- 2020 Open Science Award (Gold), Open Science Commission, University of Koblenz-Landau
- 2019 Open Science Award (Gold), Open Science Commission, University of Koblenz-Landau
- 11/2019 – 10/2023 PhD Fellowship of the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO): four-year fully funded personal grant (grant number: 11H3420N)
- 2019 Travel grant for participation at the EASP Meeting “Defeating the 7-headed dragon: An exploration into causes of gender inequality” (550 €), Research Fond, University of Koblenz-Landau

## PUBLICATIONS AND SUBMISSIONS

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- Scheifele, C.**, Van Laar, C., & Steffens, M. C. (2023). *Predictors of expectant fathers' parental leave-taking intentions before birth: Masculinity, fatherhood beliefs, and social support* [Manuscript submitted for publication].
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- Scheifele, C.**, Ehrke, F., Viladot, M. A., Van Laar, C. & Steffens, M. C. (2021). Testing the basic socio-structural assumptions of social identity theory in the gender context: Evidence from correlational studies on women's leadership. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *51*(7), 1038-1060 (Special section of registered reports on the topic „Revisiting basic tenets of and new directions

for Social Identity Theory“). <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2746> (Stage 1 of registered report can be found at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2678>)

Steffens, M. C., Preuss, S., & **Scheifele, C.** (2019). Work-related impression formation: Reviewing parenthood penalties and investigating a “fatherhood penalty” for single fathers. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology, 41*(5), 287-304. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01973533.2019.1652177>

Steffens, M. C., Viladot, M. A., & **Scheifele, C.** (2019). Male majority, female majority, or gender diversity in organizations: How do proportions affect gender stereotyping and women leaders' well-being? *Frontiers in Psychology, 10*, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01037>

### Conference contributions

**Scheifele, C.**, Steffens, M. C., & Van Laar, C. (2022, September). *Wann ist ein Mann ein Mann? Wie Vorstellungen von Männlichkeit die Elternzeit-Intentionen von Männern beeinflussen*. Paper presented at the 52<sup>nd</sup> Congress of the German Psychological Society (DGPs), Hildesheim, Germany.

**Scheifele, C.**, Steffens, M. C., & Van Laar, C. (2020, June). *Joined forces: Combining agency and communion in male prototypes affects men's possible selves and paternal leave-taking intentions*. Blitz talk at the 19<sup>th</sup> General Meeting of the European Association of Social Psychology (EASP), Krakow, Poland (Conference cancelled).

**Scheifele, C.**, Steffens, M. C., & Van Laar, C. (2019, September). *Men who care: The effect of male prototypes on men's possible selves and paternal leave taking intentions*. Poster presented at the EASP Meeting “Defeating the 7-Headed Dragon: An Exploration into Causes of Gender Inequality”, Utrecht, Netherlands.

**Scheifele, C.**, Steffens, M. C., & Van Laar, C. (2019, September). *Do men care? The effect of male prototypes on men's possible selves and paternal leave taking intentions*. Poster presented at the 17<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Social Psychology Section of the German Society for Psychology, Cologne, Germany.

Niedlich, C., Steffens, M. C., Hansen, K., **Scheifele, C.**, & Pratto, F. (2019, September). *Stereotypes and individuating information in impression formation: An attempt to integrate theoretical models*. Paper presented at the 17<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Social Psychology Section of the German Society for Psychology, Cologne, Germany.

Steffens, M. C., Preuß, S., & **Scheifele, C.** (2019, March). *Work-related impression formation: Is there a “fatherhood penalty” for single fathers?* Paper presented at the International Convention of Psychological Science, Paris, France.

**Scheifele, C.**, Becker, T., & Oehl, M. (2017, March). *Young drivers and emotions – A driving simulator study*. Poster presented at the 59<sup>th</sup> Conference of Experimental Psychologists – TeaP 2017, Dresden, Germany.

Becker, T., **Scheifele, C.**, Oehl, M. (2017, February). *Age and emotion related differences in risk perception in a semi-automated driving task*. Poster presented at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Conference of the Traffic Psychology Section of the German Society for Psychology, Bergisch Gladbach, Germany.

**Scheifele, C.**, Becker, T., & Oehl, M. (2016, September). *Risky driving behavior of novice and young drivers in different affective states*. Poster presented at the 50<sup>th</sup> Conference of the German Society for Psychology (DGPs), Leipzig, Germany.

## TEACHING

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Summer term 2023	Teaching assistant for courses Statistics VI: Seminar on statistical analyses of psychology (M. Sc. Psychology: Theory and Research, KU Leuven); Lectures in psychology, culture, and society (B. Sc. Psychology, KU Leuven)
Summer term 2022	Teaching assistant for courses Statistics VI: Seminar on statistical analyses of psychology (M. Sc. Psychology: Theory and Research, KU Leuven); Lectures in psychology, culture, and society (B. Sc. Psychology, KU Leuven)
Summer term 2021	Teaching assistant for Lectures in psychology, culture, and society (B. Sc. Psychology, KU Leuven)
Winter term 2018/19	Empirical seminar (B. Sc. Psychology, University of Koblenz-Landau)
Summer term 2019	Selected topics in economic psychology (B.Sc. Psychology, University of Koblenz-Landau)
Winter term 2018/19	Teaching assistant for Prof. Dr. Felicia Pratto, Seminar: Conflict and Cooperation (M. Sc. Psychology, University of Koblenz-Landau)
Summer term 2018	Bachelor colloquium and preparatory course (B. Sc. Psychology, University of Koblenz-Landau)

### Thesis supervision

2023	<p>Über mögliche Zusammenhänge zwischen männlichen Geschlechternormen werdender Väter, Angst vor Benachteiligung im Beruf und Intentionen, Elternzeit zu nehmen [Simon Weis], Bachelor thesis</p> <p>Einstellungen werdender Väter zu Vaterschaft, ihre wahrgenommene Unterstützung durch ihr Umfeld und ihre Intentionen Elternzeit zu nehmen [Silvia Scheil], Bachelor thesis</p> <p>Transitioning into parenthood: Are expecting fathers' own and work-related perceptions of masculinity and fathering norms linked with their parental leave-taking intentions? [Ayşe Nur Asyali], Master thesis</p> <p>How do partners' attitudes and fathers' expectations influence parental leave decisions of fathers in Belgium? Partner support and fathers' fathering norms as important driving sources in this decision among couples [Figen Kırkgöz], Master thesis</p>
2022	Masculinity in the transition to fatherhood – With a specific focus on paternity leave-taking [Donia Babuder], Master thesis
2021	<p>Frauen in Führungspositionen – Die Rolle von wahrgenommener Legitimität und feministischer Identifikation für die Bereitschaft zu sozialem Wettbewerb nach der Theorie der sozialen Identität [Mieke Blanke], Bachelor thesis</p> <p>Frauen in Führungspositionen und die Theorie der sozialen Identität – Die Rolle von Permeabilität und Identifikation bei der Wahl der Strategie der individuellen Mobilität [Larissa Sarah Janetschek], Bachelor thesis</p>
2020	Männlichkeit im Wandel – Verbesserung der Einstellung gegenüber Männern in kommunalen Rollen durch die Aktivierung von männlicher Vielfalt? [Jana Plößer], Bachelor thesis, Second supervisor

Der Mann von heute: Der Einfluss von männlichen Prototypen und Selbsttypikalität auf zukünftiges kommunales Engagement von Männern am Beispiel von Elternzeit [Jasmin Krivec], Bachelor thesis

Men in communal roles: Influence of descriptive and injunctive norms on men's intention to take up parental leave [Flore Debruyne], Master thesis

Men in communal roles: How family leave policies can shape men's communal possible selves [Ella Maes], Master thesis

2019 Das Interesse der Männer an Elternzeit: Der Einfluss von Prototypen und dem zukunftsorientierten Selbstkonzept [Greta Scholtz], Bachelor thesis

Väter außer Dienst? Der Einfluss von männlichen Prototypen und prekärer Männlichkeit auf zukunftsorientierte Selbstkonzepte von Männern und ihre Intentionen Elternzeit zu nehmen [Elisabeth Erhardt], Bachelor thesis

## FURTHER ACTIVITIES

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### Ad-hoc reviewer for

European Journal of Social Psychology; Frontiers in Psychology; Group Processes and Intergroup Relations; Journal of Educational Psychology; Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science; Journal of European Psychology Students; Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin; Psychology, Crime, Law

### Memberships

since 04/2019 Member of the European Association of Social Psychology (EASP)  
since 11/2018 Member of the German Society for Psychology (DGPs)  
2018 – 2020 Member of the Advisory Board of the Interdisciplinary Doctoral Center (IPZ), University of Koblenz-Landau

### Consulting

02/2022 Assisted research consultancy for Leagas Delaney  
11/2019 Research consultancy for the UK Behavioural Insights Team

## TRAINING AND WORKSHOP PARTICIPATIONS

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01/2022 – 02/2022 “Introduction to leadership for doctoral students”, KU Leuven, Belgium  
05/2021 “Collecting and analyzing big data”, Online course by Prof. Neal Caren, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, USA  
09/2020 FLAMES Summer School, Flanders Training Network for Methodology and Statistics (FLAMES), KU Leuven, Belgium

- Data analysis in Python (13.5 hours)
- Introduction to machine learning (20 hours)
- Building web-apps in R Shiny (15 hours)

02/2020 – 03/2021 Open HPI, Hasso-Plattner-Institut, Potsdam, Germany

- Praktische Einführung in Deep Learning für Computer Vision
- Data Engineering and Data Science – Klarheit in den Schlagwort-Dschungel
- Let's Git – Versionsverwaltung und OpenSource

11/2019 Scientific Writing Course by Prof. Kail, KU Leuven, Belgium

- 09/2019 “Reproducible data analyses in R using RStudio, RMarkdown, and the tidyverse”, 17<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Social Psychology Section of the German Society for Psychology, University of Cologne, Germany
- 03/2019 Doctoral workshop of the Social Psychology Section of the German Society for Psychology, Saarbrücken, Germany
- 01/2019 “Foundations for successful scientific presentations”, Interdisciplinary Doctoral Center, University of Koblenz-Landau
- 09/2018 “Introduction to statistical data analysis with R”, Center of Methods, University of Koblenz-Landau
- 10/2017 – 03/2018 “Diversity Training“, Perspektivwechsel<sup>+</sup>, Central Welfare Office of Jews in Germany, Friedrich-Schiller-University Jena
- 06/2016 “The psychology of political ideology: Insights from intergroup approaches“, 18<sup>th</sup> Jena workshop on intergroup processes, Friedrich-Schiller-University Jena
- 04/2016 “Introducing R as a flexible tool for statistical analyses“, Department of Methodology and Evaluation Research, Friedrich-Schiller-University Jena

## LANGUAGES

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German (native), English (fluent), French (basics), Chinese (basics)

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## Eidesstattliche Erklärung

Die vorliegende Dissertation wurde im Rahmen einer binationalen Promotion an der RPTU Kaiserslautern-Landau und der KU Leuven verfasst. Dadurch wurde die Dissertation an beiden Universitäten eingereicht zum Erhalt eines „double degree“ (Dr. phil., PhD). Die untenstehenden Erklärungen beziehen sich auf Einreichungen an anderen Institutionen als der RPTU Kaiserslautern-Landau und der KU Leuven.

Hiermit erkläre ich, Carolin Scheifele, eidesstattlich, dass ich

- die vorliegende Dissertation selbstständig verfasst habe und keine anderen als die angegebenen Quellen genutzt habe. Die aus fremden Quellen direkt oder indirekt übernommenen Gedanken habe ich als solche kenntlich gemacht.
- die Dissertation oder Teile hiervon noch nicht als Prüfungsarbeit für eine staatliche oder andere wissenschaftliche Prüfung eingereicht habe.
- die gleiche oder eine andere Abhandlung nicht bei einer anderen Hochschule als Dissertation eingereicht habe.

Für die gemeinsam verfassten Publikationen habe ich folgende individuelle Beiträge erbracht:

**Manuskript 1.** Scheifele, C., Steffens, M. C., & Van Laar, C. (2021). Which representations of their gender group affect men's orientation towards care? The case of parental leave-taking intentions. *PLoS ONE*, 16(12), Article e0260950.

<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0260950>

- Maßgeblich verantwortlich für die Planung, Datenerhebung und Auswertung beider Experimente
- Maßgeblich verantwortlich für die Literaturrecherche, das Verfassen des Manuskripts und die Überarbeitung nach Vorlage der Reviewer\*innengutachten

**Manuskript 2.** Scheifele, C., Van Laar, C., & Steffens, M. C. (2023). *Predictors of expectant fathers' parental leave-taking intentions before birth: Masculinity, fatherhood beliefs, and social support* [Manuscript submitted for publication].

- Maßgeblich verantwortlich für die Planung, Datenerhebung und Auswertung der Studie
- Maßgeblich verantwortlich für die Literaturrecherche, das Verfassen des Manuskripts und die Einreichung des Manuskripts

**Manuskript 3.** Scheifele, C., Steffens, M. C., & Van Laar, C. (2023). *Dashed expectations and unmet desires of first-time fathers regarding their engagement in breadwinning and childcare* [Manuscript in preparation].

- Maßgeblich verantwortlich für die Planung, Datenerhebung und Auswertung der Studie
- Maßgeblich verantwortlich für die Literaturrecherche und das Verfassen des Manuskripts

Ort, Datum: \_\_\_\_\_

Unterschrift: \_\_\_\_\_