An Under-Examined Inequality: Cultural and Psychological Barriers to Men’s Engagement with Communal Roles

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Men’s Engagement with Communal Roles
Abstract

Social psychological research has sought to understand and mitigate the psychological barriers that block women’s interest, performance, and advancement in male-dominated, agentic roles (e.g., science, technology, engineering, and math). Research has not, however, correspondingly examined men’s underrepresentation in communal roles, traditionally occupied by women (e.g., careers in healthcare, early childhood education, and domestic roles). In this article, we seek to provide a roadmap for research on this under-examined inequality by: a) outlining the benefits of increasing men’s representation in communal roles, b) reviewing cultural, evolutionary, and historical perspectives on the asymmetry in status assigned to men’s and women’s roles, and c) articulating the role of gender stereotypes in creating social and psychological barriers to men’s interest and inclusion in communal roles. We argue that promoting equal opportunities for both women and men requires a better understanding of the psychological barriers to men’s involvement in communal roles.

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An Under-Examined Inequality:

Cultural and Psychological Barriers to Men’s Engagement with Communal Roles

“We’ve begun to raise daughters more like sons…but few have the courage to raise our sons more like our daughters.” -- Gloria Steinem

Gender inequality is typically thought of as a problem that only women have to face, and most of the attention in society and in science has focused on improving women’s freedom to seek out opportunities in traditionally male-dominated roles. Indeed, over the past half-century, a convergence of economic, sociological, and technological factors have enabled women to enter the paid workforce in unprecedented numbers. Social psychological research has sought to identify and mitigate the subtle biases and barriers to women’s advancement in domains still dominated by men. At the same time, the growing scientific interest in and public support for promoting women’s entry and advancement in more agentic roles and occupations has not been matched by similar efforts to understand and rectify the lack of gender equality in communally-oriented roles.

Although economists and sociologists have long tracked gender differences in both paid and unpaid labor (Sayer, 2005; Sayer, England, Bittman, & Bianchi, 2009), and a handful of social psychologists have examined the identity threats (e.g., Bosson & Vandello, 2012; Rudman, Mescher, & Moss-Racusin, 2013) and social backlash (see Moss-Racusin, 2014 for a summary) that men experience when they enact female-dominant roles and activities, there has been no systematic review that consolidates the different mechanisms that prevent men from developing an interest in taking on more communal roles. Our goal in the current paper is to provide a framework for understanding the psychological processes that explain men’s relative underrepresentation in communal roles and to chart a course for new social psychological
research on this topic. After outlining the broad range of benefits of increasing men’s involvement in communal roles, we review the broader, distal factors that have shaped the current cultural climate of gender-typed behavior, and then provide a discussion of the proximal social and psychological factors that preclude men’s interest and inclusion in communal roles.

A starting observation for this work is the distinct asymmetry in the extent to which gender roles have been changing for women more rapidly than for men during the last half century (England, 2010; 2011). Women’s traditional roles of caregiving and domestic responsibility have indeed been expanding to include men’s traditional role of doing paid work outside the home, whereas men’s involvement in communal roles has not been expanding in a complementary fashion (England, 2010; 2011; Saad, September 7, 2012). For example, using data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013), Figure 1 charts the average change in gender ratios over the past 18 years for twenty careers that were notably female- (e.g., nurse, social worker, elementary school teacher) or male-dominated (e.g., lawyer, physician, industrial engineer) in 1995. As one can see, the proportion of women in once male-dominant jobs has steadily increased in the past two decades, whereas the proportion of men in female dominant jobs has remained relatively unchanged during the same time frame.

These gender inequalities in the labor market also extend into the domestic sphere. Although men have increased their contribution to childcare and domestic chores, women continue to manage life inside the home and act as primary caregivers to children, still doing disproportionately more than men, even when they work full-time (PEW Research Center, 2013; Hochschild & Machung, 2012). This gendered division of domestic labor also continues to receive the public’s approval. While 50% of respondents to a representative poll state that they feel children would be better off with their mother at home rather than working, only 8% feel
that it would be beneficial for kids if their father stayed home (PEW Research Center, 2013). By accepting such gender inequality in the home, people tacitly endorse that there will subsequently be disproportionate barriers to women’s advancement in paid work.

Consistent with social role theory (Eagly & Steffen, 1984), these gender disparities in chosen roles are mirrored by – and perhaps lead to – gender disparities in self-perceived attributes. Whereas women have begun to see themselves as possessing increasingly agentic traits over the past few decades (meta-analyses suggest a change of .8 of a standard deviation over just 20 years), men have exhibited very little if any increase in their self-ratings of communal traits; Twenge, 1997, 2009; Twenge, Campbell, & Gentile, 2012). The social sanctions from others, such as backlash for transgressing traditional gender role stereotypes (e.g., Bosson & Vandello, 2012; Rudman et al., 2013), represent one potent reason why men hesitate to adopt such traits. Later in this paper we will discuss the social psychological research that explores these and other external barriers to men’s adoption of communal traits and roles. Importantly, though, according to social role theory, changes in such gendered beliefs come about in direct response to changing gender roles that occur only when structural forces allow or demand one gender to enter a role that has previously been held almost exclusively by the other (Diekman, Eagly, Mladinic, & Ferreira, 2005). However, social role theory has not elaborated on the distal and proximal psychological explanations for why women’s roles should be changing more quickly than men’s. In this review, we seek to understand the host of processes (both distal and proximal) that explain the widespread acceptance of gender inequality in communal roles and perhaps challenge some of the existing assumptions underlying it.

In this synthesis of the existing literature, we will lay out how several factors and their interplay contribute to men’s relatively weaker interest and inclusion in communal roles. To
highlight the importance of this issue, we begin with a consideration of the benefits of increasing men’s involvement in communal roles above current levels (see Table 1). Next, we outline the distal factors in human history that have played a role in fostering a status asymmetry between men and women in respective roles (see Figure 2). These include evolutionary, biological, cultural and social factors that contribute not only to gender differences in preferences but, more novel to the social psychological literature, also to the asymmetry in how these preferences have been changing over time. Thirdly, we propose a framework for understanding the proximal psychological barriers to men’s participation in such roles (see Figure 3), encompassing both internal barriers, such as internalized gender norms and values, and external barriers, such as discrimination, backlash, and status costs. Lastly, we use the proposed model of proximal factors to generate hypotheses for future social psychological research eventually aimed at dismantling these barriers, and to allow for greater gender equality in communal roles.

A Change we Should Believe in?

Benefits of Addressing Men’s Under-Representation in Communal Roles

In 1963, Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, a book that launched the second wave of the feminist movement by calling attention to the fact that many (though by no means all) women would benefit from the ability to pursue work outside the home. Now, over 50 years later, women make up roughly 50 percent of the American labor force (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Is there a similar argument to be made for more (and again, most certainly not all) men to take on more communal pursuits? Before trying to understand why men are currently less likely to engage with these roles, we start by examining the possible benefits to society, women, children, and men themselves of fostering more communal traits and behaviors in men (see Table 1).
**Benefits to society**

One benefit to society of men’s entry into communal roles is economic. There are more women today earning post-secondary degrees and entering professions that were once dominated by men than in any prior time in history (Boushey, 2009; Brooks, 2010; Mason, 2009). But at the same time, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013) has projected a massive increase in job openings over the current decade for occupations traditionally held by women, such as registered nurses, retail salespeople, health aides, office administrators and personal care aids. These health- and service-oriented professions are and will become particularly valuable to society at large as life expectancies increase and health care needs are on the rise due to the aging baby-boomer population. Yet if we continue to encourage young women to seek out more male-dominated roles, the number of opportunities for men to take on previously female-dominated occupations should only increase. In addition to these labor shortages, as more women no longer feel the need to put their own career ambitions second to men’s (Harrington, Deusen & Jamie, 2010), someone is needed to fill the gap in childcare and domestic responsibilities as well. Nevertheless, these more communally oriented roles tend to be personally devalued by men.

**Benefits to men**

A second reason for promoting men’s involvement in communal roles are the psychological benefits that men themselves might enjoy from taking on communal roles and activities. The need to belong is a fundamental human motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and both men and women who have more positive interactions with others (i.e., have a more communal orientation or who feel they are able to meet communal goals) tend to be happier and more satisfied with their lives (Fleeson, Malanos, & Achille, 2002; Le, Impett, Kogan, Webster, & Cheng, 2013; Sheldon & Cooper, 2008). In a recent study, both male and female college
students increased in subjective well-being to the degree that they exhibited an increase in their goals for communion (but not agency) over their three years at university (Bauer & McAdams, 2010). In fact, cultivating a strong network of support and social connection with one’s family and surrounding community has been shown to increase life expectancy (Holt-Lundstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010). Thus, although communion and social connectedness are stereotypically associated more with women than with men, men do benefit psychologically – to the same degree as women – when they have stronger social ties and communal goals.

Consistent with the general benefits of social connectedness, more specific research reveals that men’s involvement in the care of others, especially their own children, is associated with: a) greater overall well-being, b) a general sense of emotional growth, c) better health and marital satisfaction, and d) broader community involvement (Duckworth & Buzzanell, 2009; Knoester, Petts, & Eggebeen, 2007; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004; Zimmerman, 2000 as cited in Fischer & Anderson, 2012; Yarwood, 2011). In one such example, a longitudinal, daily diary study showed that fathers’ involvement with their children cultivated more supportive caregiving interactions over time (Almeida, Wethington, & Mcdonald, 2001). Furthermore, evolutionary psychologists have recently proposed the existence of a fundamental motivation for parenting that underlies not only the care of offspring but also protective and care-giving tendencies more generally, among both women and men (Kenrick, Griskevicius, Neuberg, & Schaller, 2010).

In addition to the evidence summarized above, research also points to the psychological benefits of prioritizing motives for social connection and communion over motives for esteem or status. In a prospective study of adjustment, a motivation for intimacy, rather than power, predicted better psychological and life outcomes among both men and women (Zeldow, Daugherty, & McAdams, 1988). This is important because it challenges conventions that
construe striving for status and power as central to men’s basic functioning. Experimental studies find that investing in and affirming relationships with others yields greater psychological rewards than investing in or affirming oneself (Burson, Crocker, & Mischkowski, 2012; Crocker, Niiya, & Mischkowski, 2008; Dunn, Aknin, & Norton, 2008). Moreover, both men and women rank failing to form or maintain social relationships higher than failing to advance work or educational goals among their biggest regrets in life (Morrison, Epstude, & Roese, 2012; Morrison & Roese, 2011). In sum, a great deal of data converge to suggest that men (just like women) can find a sense of meaning in their lives through communal activities and roles that promote a sense of social connectedness and caregiving, build networks of support, and deepen bonds with family.

Benefits to children

A third factor to consider is that, as men begin to take on more communal roles, especially those involving childcare, their children will benefit as well. The quality of relationships between fathers and children can have a profound effect on children’s social and cognitive development (Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000), which may persist well into adulthood (Fletcher, 2011). Research suggests that high-quality father involvement (independent of mother involvement) predicts fewer behavioral problems in grade-school aged and adolescent children (Aldous & Mulligan, 2002; Amato & Rivera, 1999; Carlson, 2006). This is perhaps because family units are more cohesive when the distribution of labor at home is gender-balanced between parents (Stevens, Kiger, & Riley, 2002). As well, research from our own lab suggests that – controlling for fathers’ explicitly endorsed beliefs about domestic gender roles – fathers who make a greater contribution to domestic work and childcare have daughters who report less stereotypic occupational aspirations (Croft, Schmader, Block & Baron, 2014). Thus,
from a developmental perspective, fathers who are more involved with their children not only weaken stereotype-constrained roles for future generations, they also bring about distinct psychological benefits for their children (see Pleck, 2007 for a theoretical review). Similarly, education experts have drawn attention to the importance of recruiting more male elementary school teachers to serve as role models for young students (Martino, Rezai-Rashti, & Lingard, 2013). Not only is there no evidence that female teachers are more effective than their male counterparts (Carrington, Tymms, & Merrell, 2008), but according to social role theory, early exposure to both male and female teachers could help to weaken traditional gender stereotypes in young children.

Benefits to women

Finally, the degree to which men fill communal roles can also benefit women’s own aspirations and major life decisions. Given that the majority (more than 60%) of couples with children under the age of 18 in the United States are now dual-earner parents (PEW Research Center, 2013), wherein both parents’ are employed full-time in paid work, one might expect a more egalitarian distribution of household labor as well as in paid work. However, men’s careers are often given precedence to women’s and at home, women remain disproportionately more likely than men to take care of the household and more mundane childcare chores even after spending the day doing a similar shift of paid work (Biernat & Wortman, 1991). This second shift among working mothers (Hochschild, 1989; Hochschild & Machung, 2012) is a widely documented phenomenon that has been observed using a variety of methodologies, including interviews, questionnaires, large-scale polls and daily diary studies (e.g., Beckwith, 1992; Klute, Crouter, Sayer, & McHale 2001). Specifically, a recent American Time Use Survey reveals that in families with young children, women spend 80-85% more time taking care of children and
twice as much time on other domestic tasks as do men (June 20, 2013, Bureau of Labor Statistics). A finer grained analysis of the second shift further reveals that wives spend significantly more time than husbands on low-control, traditionally female household tasks, such as washing the dishes (vs. high-control, traditionally male tasks; Bartley, Blanton, & Gilliard, 2005). Recent research has even shown that working mothers are significantly more likely than working fathers to experience interrupted sleep due to caring for their children during the night (Burgard, 2011).

Given that women recognize the existence of the second shift and anticipate having to do the majority of chores at home well before they have even begun having children (e.g., Brown & Diekman, 2010; Maines & Hardesty, 1987; Park et al., 2008), many adjust their future career goals and aspirations accordingly. In Lean In, Facebook C.O.O. Sheryl Sandberg states that marriage is not just a personal decision, but also one that affects a woman’s career (Sandberg, 2013). She joins an expanding cadre of successful professional women who extol the virtues of selecting a mate who will share the responsibility for domestic tasks and childcare. After all, data suggest that professional women only fall behind their male counterparts in salary and career advancement once they begin having children and must shoulder a disproportionate amount of parenting responsibilities (e.g., Budig & England, 2001).

Thus, as men take on more communal roles, particularly helping with the care of young children, women might then be free to pursue more agentic career goals if they so desire. In fact, increasing paternal involvement in childcare might be the key to closing the gender gap in career achievement. And the availability of infant formula and breast pumps, daycare, and family friendly workplace policies has made it increasingly easier for men to have a greater share in the responsibility of childrearing. Undoubtedly, these freedoms are not universally available;
however, the emergence of such changes all within the space of the past 50 years means that, now more than ever, the responsibility of caring for young children need not be tied to the biological sex of the parent. That said, there are still heated debates about the superiority of having women in these roles, with women themselves often arguing for their unique right to be primary caregivers to others, especially their own children (e.g., Allen & Hawkins, 1999). Later in this review, we will examine the evidence for biological predispositions that might advantage women as caregivers. For now, we simply point out the benefit of having men take on more caregiving of children for women themselves.

Sharing the responsibility for domestic tasks does not only broaden women’s opportunities in the workplace, marriage quality and family dynamics are also directly impacted by men’s involvement in traditionally feminine chores. For example, women who feel that their husbands do not help out enough around the house are less satisfied (Frisco & Williams, 2003; Stevens, Kiger, & Riley, 2001; Wilkie, Ferree, & Ratcliffe, 1998), more depressed (Bird, 1999), and more likely to divorce (Frisco & Williams, 2003) than women who feel they are equally supported in carrying out the domestic tasks. The proportion of families with female breadwinners is on the rise as well (PEW Research Center, 2013), and the help of a supportive partner vastly improves these breadwinning women’s experiences (Meisenbach, 2010). Therefore, with greater numbers of men contributing to the unpaid work at home and reducing the second shift, women might enjoy the liberty to pursue more involved careers and feel less pressure to choose between family and career.

Summary

Encouraging men’s involvement in more communal roles could lead to several benefits for society, for men themselves, and for their families. If men’s avoidance of communal roles is
to some degree the result of gender roles and stereotypes that exaggerate true sex differences in interest or ability, then reducing those biases might free some men to pursue roles and careers that they might be constrained from considering. In addition, once a steadily increasing number of men move into communal roles, we might also expect to see the rigidity of gender stereotypes diminish (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). Of course, these benefits are currently outweighed by a long history of sex role differentiation and more proximal social psychological factors that constrain men’s interest in these roles. In the next section of the paper, we review the distal factors that underlie not just gendered divisions of labor but also the asymmetry in how these roles have been changing.

**Setting the Stage for Gender Differences in Roles:**

**How Distal Evolutionary and Socio-Cultural Factors Have Led to a Status Asymmetry**

We next review the evolutionary and socio-cultural backdrop for the differences in the roles that men and women currently occupy. Although this review will acknowledge that both biological and cultural factors have contributed to current role differentiation, our interest is not just in understanding the initial basis for gender differences in the roles people occupy, but more importantly, whether and how such divisions of labor narrow over time. Ultimately, our goal in this section is to understand why there is currently an asymmetry in how gender roles have been changing over the past century in order to predict, if not shape, future social change. Figure 2 provides a schematic synthesis of various theoretical processes discussed.

*Gendered division of labor in our evolutionary past*

One answer to the question of why men and women occupy different roles is quite simply that these roles reflect inherent propensities and abilities that men and women have. And indeed, one cannot overlook the fact that part of the reason for a gendered distribution of labor is
biological (Figure 2, the links between boxes A, B, & C). Because women invest a greater amount of time and physical resources in the gestation, birthing, and rearing of children, they have assumed more of a primary caregiving role for young children in the ancestral environment as a matter of biological necessity. In contrast, men typically had the greater physical strength and size necessary to protect, hunt, and provide for their families (see Buss & Kenrick, 1998 for a review). From an evolutionary perspective, sex differentiation in many physical attributes and behavioral traits evolves to the degree that those differences aid in the successful reproduction and maturation of offspring (Trivers, 1972). If there was a fitness advantage to dividing roles between the sexes, then over many thousands of years of both natural and sexual selection, communal traits could have been selected for in women, whereas agentic traits could have been selected for in men.

There is some evidence consistent with this reasoning. For example, females are more attracted to short-term mates who possess attributes indicative of dominance, whereas males are more attracted to short-term mates who display attributes indicative of fertility and the ability to nurture young (Gangestad & Simpson, 2000; Gildersleeve, Haselton, & Fales, 2014). As a result of these selection pressures, behavioral tendencies toward agency and communion (in addition to these physical characteristics) could have become genetically linked to biological sex.

In addition, evolutionary explanations presume the existence of biological mechanisms that have evolved over time. Evolutionary psychologists have pointed to the role of hormones as a biological mechanism through which this sex differentiation in behaviors could occur (Ellis, 2011). Specifically, known sex differences in basal levels of testosterone (linked to dominance and higher in men) and oxytocin (linked to social bonding and higher in women) are often taken as evidence of a biologically based mechanism for sex differences in agency and communion.
respectively. For example, those exposed to a higher level of prenatal testosterone while in the womb later exhibit more masculine behavior patterns and lower empathic skills as children and adults, effects that are often more pronounced for males (Chapman, Baron-Cohen, Auyeung, Knickmeyer, Taylor, & Hackett, 2006; Manning, Reimers, Baron-Cohen, Wheelwright, & Fink, 2010). The lack of social skills evident in autistic individuals (who are more likely to be male) has been described as an extreme form of the masculinized brain (Baron-Cohen, 2002), and a recent study suggests that testosterone treatment can impair empathic skills, even among adult women (van Honk, Schutter, Bos, Kruijt, Lentjes, & Baron-Cohen, 2011). In contrast, higher levels of circulating oxytocin, but also vasopressin, in women may partially explain their advantage in empathic skills and lower levels of autism diagnoses, as well as a tendency to tend-and-befriend in response to threats (Carter, 2007; Feldman, 2012; Taylor et al., 2000). Such biophysiological findings are often interpreted as evidence that women may be inherently better equipped to occupy roles that involve social connections and nurturing, whereas men are inherently better suited to positions of dominance and status.

At this point, however, the role of hormones in nurturing behavior is far from clear. While testosterone is widely assumed to promote masculine behavior such as dominance and status seeking, it has also been found to promote nurturing behaviors (e.g., huddling and grooming in mice pups) among fathers in some species (Trainor & Marler, 2001). In contrast, there is also evidence of reduced testosterone levels among people who engage in communal and cooperative activities (Gettler, McDade, Augustine, & Kuzawa, 2011; Gray, Kahlenberg, Barrett, Lipson, & Ellison, 2002; Kuzawa, Gettler, Muller, McDade, & Feranil, 2009). In one recent study, men who spent more than three hours a day caring for children exhibited a marked decrease in waking levels of testosterone (Gettler et al., 2011). Such research points to a much
more dynamic role for testosterone in human mating patterns than was traditionally assumed. Men with higher testosterone levels are more successful in finding a mate and having offspring, but if they assume a role in caring for those offspring, their testosterone levels decline. Taken together, the mixed evidence of hormonal and other biological markers of communal versus agentic interests indicates the fluid and changeable nature of these biomarkers, which makes it problematic to point to these biological mechanisms as the primary explanation underlying stable patterns of gender role differentiation. Furthermore, evidence that humans are an outlier in paternal caregiving compared to other mammalian species where fathers play almost no role in caring for offspring (Geary, 2000), might be interpreted to suggest that an evolutionary explanation is limited in explaining contemporary human parental behavior.

From these evolutionary and biological perspectives, part of the between-sex variance in the roles and traits that differentiate men and women are due to basic biological differences that have evolved to become sex-typed predispositions (Wood & Eagly, 2013). However, this evolutionary and biological perspective does not help us understand why women’s traits and roles have changed so quickly during the past century, whereas men’s traits and roles have remained relatively more stagnant. Evolutionary theorists suggest that it takes thousands of years for complex behavioral traits to evolve (Cosmides & Tooby, 1992), although the evolution of simple traits requiring variation of only a single gene or set of genes might occur within 10,000 years (Hawks, Wang, Cochran, Harpending, & Moyzis, 2007). A sharp increase in agentic traits and behaviors among women in just half a century - an increase that has considerably narrowed the gap in self-perceived agency between the sexes (Twenge, 1997) - is quite difficult to explain in terms of biological adaptations on sex-specific genes. Furthermore, even traits specific to parenting (emotional responsiveness and protection) are estimated to be only 20-30% heritable,
suggesting that these communal traits can be considerably influenced by environmental factors (Pérusse, Neal, Heath, & Eaves, 1994). Thus, although biological differences between the sexes likely formed the initial basis for sex role differentiation in the human species (Figure 2, box C), they cannot adequately account for the asymmetry in changing gender roles we currently observe across many modern industrialized societies.

The cultural evolution of status differences in gender roles

Whereas biologically-based evolutionary theories might be ill equipped to explain relatively sudden shifts in human behavior, cultural evolutionary perspectives can more readily account for changing norms and cultural beliefs through processes of social learning (Richerson & Boyd, 2005). Most notably, understanding the asymmetry in men’s slower adoption of communal traits and roles requires an understanding of how the differential status that is assigned to men and women developed over time. Theories of status maintain that one’s position in a status hierarchy reflects the relative ease with which that individual has access to valuable resources and commodities (Figure 2, the links between boxes C, D, & E). People are said to have higher status when others in the hierarchy generally acquiesce to the arrangement (i.e., maintain the status quo). This can be contrasted against having power or dominance when one’s access to resources is gained or maintained with the use or threat of force (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001).

A wealth of research finds that men enjoy higher status than do women (e.g., Conway, Pizzamiglio, & Mount, 1996; Feinman, 1981; Ridgeway, 1991; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Williams, Paluck, & Spencer-Rodgers, 2010), and the association between men and status occurs across many (but not all) human societies (United Nations Development Programme, 2009). This higher status is reflected in the relative levels of power, economic advantage, and professional
success enjoyed by men and women (Major, 1993; Ridgeway, 1991). There are different perspectives, however, on why these status differences emerged in the first place. Economists have pointed out that status differences between men and women are partly explained by historical differences in the contribution to food production (Sanday, 1973) and ownership of economically viable property (Sacks, 1979; but see Whyte, 1978 for an opposing view). Another plausible viewpoint is that men’s relatively larger size and strength have generally allowed them to have more power over women (Fedigan, 1986), which stabilizes into shared assumptions of status given the interdependent relationship that men and women have with one another.

More recently, Nathan Nunn and colleagues (Nunn, Alesina, & Giuliano, 2013) have linked an agricultural account with a strength account, providing empirical support for a hypothesis wherein geographic regions that led preindustrial societies to adopt the plough instead of the hoe for farming continue to maintain more traditional beliefs about gender roles today, even after controlling for many other societal factors that could have contributed to gender inequality. The argument is that men’s greater upper body strength made them uniquely qualified to use plough technology when it was invented, leading to a gendered division of labor between work in the field and work in the home. From this perspective, gender roles are not so much a function of biological evolution as they are a function of cultural evolution, which can happen over a much shorter time span. Physical differences between the sexes paired with an environmental context favoring a certain technology have meant that a culture could flourish to the degree that it divided labor by sex. Furthermore, when food and property are the major commodities of value, the sex with greater access to these commodities develops the position of status. Viewed through this lens, we can better appreciate why women’s gender roles have recently become more flexible. Compared to the experience of prehistoric and preindustrial
societies, the arrival of the information age has meant that success in today’s global market structure relies much more on intellectual ability than on physical ability. Although traditional gender roles persist, they also change in response to these changing cultural needs (Figure 2, the link between Boxes G and H).

Social role theory and the development of gender stereotypes. Social role theory posits that once groups of people self-segregate into different roles, those groups are then stereotyped to possess the qualities deemed necessary to carry out those distinct roles (Eagly, Wood & Diekman, 2000). In the case of gender roles, the biological and cultural factors outlined above have ensured that men and women segregate into different social roles and subsequently are seen as possessing the abilities and preferences compatible with these roles. In this way, people come to expect men to possess agentic qualities associated with the higher status and breadwinning roles they have traditionally occupied and women to possess communal qualities associated with their more subordinate and caregiving roles (Figure 2, the links between boxes C, E, and F).

What is more, social perceivers use gender as a tool to categorize and judge others, often automatically (Banaji, Hardin & Rothman, 1993; Banaji & Hardin, 1996), and they give gender-congruent information primacy (von Hippel, Sekaquaptewa, & Vargas, 1995; Eagly & Karau, 2002). As will be discussed in great detail in the next section, the existence of these gender stereotypes sets the stage for both internal and external barriers to women and men engaging in counterstereotypic behavior. Thus, even if gender-segregated roles originally appeared because the division of labor was functional for the success of a culture, the gendered division of roles is partly perpetuated by stereotype-based inferences about the essential differences between groups and the differentiation of behaviors that results (Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Eagly & Wood, 2013; Eagly et al., 2000; Wood & Eagly, 1999).
Furthermore, because societies can function more efficiently when the status quo is accepted as legitimate, there are psychological and cultural incentives for both men and women to justify and endorse gender stereotypes (Glick & Fiske, 2001; Jost & Banaji, 1994). For example, research reveals evidence of complementarity among group stereotypes wherein those groups that enjoy higher status in a society are assumed to have agency, and those with lower status (assuming they accept the status hierarchy) are stereotyped to be more communal, cooperative, and moral (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). Likewise, sexist attitudes towards women are fundamentally ambivalent, encompassing both hostile and benevolent facets that correlate positively (Glick & Fiske, 1996). These stereotypes serve to justify a traditional division of labor between the sexes in that beliefs about women’s more communal skills glorify the stereotypically feminine role while inhibiting women from seeking out agency (Glick & Fiske, 2001, 2011; Jost & Kay, 2005). This ambivalent sexism allows women to feel a sense of moral superiority over men in the face of assumed incompetence (Glick & Fiske, 2001) but also makes women more likely to accept a partner’s protectively framed requests to compromise their careers (Moya, Glick, Expósito, de Lemus, & Hart, 2007). Such ambivalent stereotypes can lead both men and women to accept gender inequality (Jost & Kay, 2005), and cross-national studies reveal that nations with greater ambivalent sexism scores also have greater gender inequality (Glick et al., 2000, 2004).

Social role theory provides a powerful explanation for the origins of gender stereotypes and the role they play in differentiating men’s and women’s behaviors. According to the theory, these stereotypes will change only when external economic and socio-structural changes in a society encourage citizens to adopt roles outside of traditional gender norms (Figure 2, the links between boxes F, G, & H). For example, Brazil and Chile have undergone a rapid shift toward
capitalism over the past three decades, and as a result, both women and men have moved to urban centers, entered the workforce, and had fewer children. Research suggests that these changes in the roles that men and women perform have been paralleled by perceptions that both men and women possess more masculine traits now than they did in the 1950’s (Diekman, Eagly, Mladinic, Ferreira, 2005). Similarly, the increasing number of women in the workforce in North America has also corresponded to an increase in agentic traits ascribed to women (Twenge, 1997). Such studies of dynamic stereotypes or self-perceived traits consistently report this increase in agency for women, but indicate little evidence of a corresponding increase in communion for men (Diekman & Eagly, 2000; Eagly & Diekman, 2003; Twenge, 1997). Thus, although social role theory suggests that men will be perceived as more communal if they come to adopt more communal roles, the theory has not delved into the host of factors that have led men to be relatively slower to adopt these roles.

Understanding the status asymmetry of gendered traits. Once a division of labor is in place and men and women are afforded different levels of status in society and assigned different traits, presumptions of group status inform the perceived utility of traits, behaviors, and preferences observed among the two groups (Berger, Cohen, & Zelditch, 1972; Correll & Ridgeway, 2003). For example, people assume that an unknown trait has more value or utility when men (or any higher status group) score higher on that trait compared to when women score higher on that trait (Schmader, Major, Eccleston, & McCoy, 2001). In naturalistic contexts, this manifests as men being paid more than women for the same work (Biernat & Kobrynowicz, 1999; Jackson & Grabski, 1988). In fact, people from individualistic societies automatically associate men more than women with wealth-related cognitions, an association that subsequently predicts a general assumption that men earn higher wages than women do (Williams, Paluck, &
Spencer-Rodgers, 2010). Even women themselves buy into and perpetuate these inequalities, paying themselves less money (Major, McFarlin, & Gagnon, 1984) or negotiating a lower salary (Kray & Thompson, 2005) than would men for the same job done. Similarly, occupations that are traditionally held by women pay significantly lower salaries than other jobs (England, Budig, & Folbre, 2002; Oliker, 2011).

The implication of assigning higher status to men’s versus women’s roles is that women now have an interest in entering fields once dominated by men more than men have an interest in entering fields still dominated by women (Figure 2, the links between boxes E, F, G, and H). In other words, the asymmetry of changing gender roles can be understood as a manifestation of a more general process whereby lower status groups aspire to possess the traits and attributes associated with those of higher status, whereas higher status groups readily devalue the personal importance of traits and attributes associated with lower status groups (Schmader et al., 2001). To the degree that these gender differences in status and roles are still implicitly endorsed and justified, we as a society will continue to undervalue female roles and associated communal traits and interests. As a result, and as Gloria Steinham’s quote suggests, young girls are now being socialized to be more agentic in their interests and pursuits, while similar efforts to encourage the development of communal interests in boys is largely absent.

A Framework of Psychological Barriers to Men’s Engagement in Communal Roles

Under the broader context of distal factors reviewed above, we outline a model in Figure 3 that maintains that men’s interest in communal roles is slowed by the existence and persistence of several psychological barriers. Part of this process is that, given prevailing stereotypes, men internalize communal traits and values relatively less than do women, and as a result have relatively lower interest in communal roles (links between Boxes A, D, E, & G). In addition,
because these same stereotypes are openly endorsed by others, there are clear external sources and societal constraints that further block men (even those who have internalized communal goals and values) from feeling completely comfortable in these roles (links between Boxes A, F, & G). In this section of the paper, we will review how these internal and external processes work alone or in concert to constrain men’s interest in taking on communal roles, both in their personal lives and in paid occupations. We will also examine how the perceived lower status assigned to communal roles makes each of these pathways particularly strong relative to what women might encounter with respect to agentic roles (Boxes C₁ & C₂). Finally, in discussing each pathway, we will provide examples of future research that is needed to better understand or alleviate these social psychological barriers to men’s interest in communal roles. But first, we take a closer look at the gender stereotypes that lead to each of these internal and external barriers.

Gender stereotypes about men’s caregiving abilities

We point out that the historical backdrop to developing gender roles leaves a legacy of persistent cultural beliefs about men’s and women’s unique strengths and abilities (Figure 3, box A). As reviewed above, social role theory states that the trait inferences we assign to men and women are directly informed by the roles that they occupy in society (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). Thus, because people witness more women than men occupying caregiving and other traditionally-female roles, the stereotype develops that women more so than men possess the traits and skills needed for caregiving and other communally oriented occupations. Similarly, the agentic traits and characteristics associated with traditionally male roles are seen to be more stereotypic of men (Wood & Eagly, 2002). As a result, men are stereotyped as being lower than women in communal/nurturing goals and as being less emotionally expressive, empathic, warm
and concerned for others (Deaux & Major, 1987; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Shields, 1987; Manstead, 1992; Widiger & Settle, 1987; J. E. Williams & Bennett, 1975). Put succinctly, people perceive men to be significantly more competent than warm, but perceive women to be more warm than competent (Fiske et al., 2002). As such, we are immersed in a culture that assumes that women, more than men, have the basic traits and abilities needed to carry out communal roles.

*Are there sex differences in communal abilities?* Before developing our ideas for how the mere existence of these stereotypic beliefs can constrain men’s interest and involvement in communal roles, it’s worth examining the evidence that such stereotypes might in fact be true (Figure 3, box B). In other words, an obvious reason why men might be reluctant to take on communal roles is that men are, in fact, less suited for roles involving caregiving, or relatively lower in the socioemotional skills needed to be sensitive to, care for, and able to interactively address others’ needs. For example, in light of the historical demand for and evolutionary advantage to a gendered division of labor described earlier in this paper, one could argue that there are inherent differences between the sexes with respect to their ability to succeed in different domains. Such arguments have been used when explaining gender inequality in terms of the under-representation of women in the sciences, claiming that women lack the natural quantitative and spatial abilities needed to succeed in math and science fields (e.g., Eccles, 2007; Ceci & Williams, 2011; Ceci, Williams, & Barnett, 2009; Pinker, 2005). Similarly, some researchers have posited that men’s relative deficiency in verbal ability restricts their choice of occupation, resulting in sex-segregated careers (e.g., Wang, Eccles, & Kenny, 2013). If we assume that communal roles require socioemotional traits like empathy, communication skills,
and social intelligence more broadly, then a female advantage on these dimensions could offer a reasonable account for women’s higher interest in and overrepresentation in these roles.

Research has indeed identified some evidence that men are outperformed by women on tasks of interpersonal and emotional skills. For example, meta-analyses reveal that men rate themselves as being less empathic ($d = .99$, Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983) and report lower interest in people vs. things as compared to women ($d = -1.18$, Lippa, 2010). Researchers also point to the striking male preponderance of autism spectrum disorders (Fombonne, 2009; Attwood, 2006), characterized by a deficit in social and verbal skills, as evidence of an extreme manifestation of what Baron-Cohen calls the masculinized brain (Baron-Cohen, 2002). Some of the most compelling evidence of performance-based differences in the general population comes from infant studies where, before much socialization can occur, girls outperform boys in recognizing facial expressions and responding to others emotions ($d = .18 - .27$; McClure, 2000; Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983). As alluded to earlier, other researchers point to the male offspring’s relative lack of exposure to the ostensibly prosocial hormone oxytocin during critical periods of development (Carter, 2007; Yamasue, Kuwabara, Kawakubo, & Kasai, 2009) and the masculinizing effects of androgens on the brain (Ellis, 2011) as candidate mechanisms that could bring about these early sex differences in socioemotional ability.

It should be noted, however, that research with adult samples does not always find such clear evidence of sex differences on socio-emotional tasks, especially when more behavioral measures (rather than self-report measures) are used to assess basic skills or propensities that are not directly linked to chosen roles. For example, experimental studies have shown that gender differences in some kinds of social sensitivity tasks can be magnified or reduced by changing the salience of contextual cues (Allen & Smith, 2011; Bosson, Haymovitz & Pinel, 2004; Ickes,
Gesn, & Graham, 2000; Leyens, Desert, Croizet, & Darcis, 2000; Wraga, Duncan, Jacobs, Helt, & Church, 2006). Specifically, when men believe that their social skills are being evaluated through the lens of a gender stereotype, their performance on social or emotional sensitivity tasks and self-reported empathic skills actually become more stereotype consistent. These effects are sometimes interpreted as evidence of stereotype threat (Leyens et al., 2000); that is, as resulting from an increased effort to disconfirm negative stereotypes about men’s relatively inferior skill at emotional sensitivity that undermines their performance. However, the evidence that men rate themselves as having lower empathic skills when they know their empathy is being assessed is more consistent with a form of self-stereotyping whereby men are motivated to deny possessing traits that they undervalue and associate more with women. In either case, the evidence that gender differences in socioemotional skills are readily affected by context suggests that the gender differences in performance on these tasks might be exaggerated by participants’ own gender stereotypic beliefs about these dimensions rather than true differences in socioemotional proclivity (see also Koenig & Eagly, 2005). Furthermore, a meta-analysis of the neural activation indicative of an empathic response to another’s pain revealed no sex differences across the 32 samples studied (Lamm, Decety, & Singer, 2011), and contrary to the popular belief that women are inherently more communicative and social, there is no solid evidence that women talk more than men during their day to day experience (Mehl, Vazire, Ramirez-Esparza, Slatcher, & Pennebaker, 2007).

Although these null effects do not necessarily rule out the possible existence of innate differences in socioemotional competencies between the sexes, they should at least raise some doubt about the prevalence, magnitude, and meaning of such effects. In her seminal paper on the gender similarity hypothesis, Janet Hyde (2005) argues that while gender differences of small
(e.g. in leadership style) to large effect sizes (e.g. spatial reasoning) have been observed consistently, the sum of research on gender differences suggests that men and women are more similar than different in their abilities and preferences (for a more recent review on the issue, see Hyde, 2014). In fact, recent quantitative analysis across a broad range of literatures suggests that the gender differences in mean levels of empathy, communion, or care orientation that exist are better characterized as differences along a single dimension of human variability rather than as indicative that men and women are distinct categories (Carothers & Reis, 2013). Furthermore, any of the small fundamental differences in ability that are tied to biological sex are not likely to account for the much larger differences in how men and women view themselves and are viewed by others (which is why, in Figure 3, we provide only dotted rather than solid predictive links from sex differences in ability). Instead, the existence of societal gender stereotypes is likely to magnify any baseline sex differences that might exist. And because gender is a social category that is often essentialized (Gelman & Taylor, 2000; Prentice & Miller, 2007; Taylor, Rhodes, & Gelman, 2009), people’s awareness of the basic physiological differences between the sexes can readily reinforce the perception that men are inherently less equipped to carry out traditionally feminine roles.

If people have the perception that men lack a natural aptitude for caregiving, they are also less likely to endorse the idea that the roles of men can change to involve more prosocial and communal activities, which only serves to perpetuate and strengthen the gender role stereotypes and behavioral norms of future generations (e.g., Wood & Eagly, 2000; 2002). In the sections that follow, we examine how the presence of these stereotypes might shape both the internal factors that underlie men’s relatively lower interest in and motivation toward communal roles (Figure 3, the link between Boxes A, D, and E), as well as the external constraints that block
their entry into these domains (Figure 3, the link between Boxes A and F). As part of this discussion, we point to the moderating role of the perceived social status of communal roles (Boxes \(C_1\) and \(C_2\)) in setting apart these psychological processes from those that block women from adopting traditionally male roles.

**Internal Factors that Preclude Men from Adopting Communal Roles**

One author on this paper was discussing the ideas in this paper with a colleague whose initial response to the question of why men do not take on more communal roles in society was, “Well, why would they want to?” So deep is the assumption that boys and men simply do not internalize or relate to the more communal roles in society, that we seldom stop to examine or question the psychological processes that shape these preferences. Yet, given the evidence we have reviewed suggesting potential benefits of men taking on more communal roles, it is important to identify the degree to which societal stereotypes constrain the development of men’s interest in these roles. As we will review in this section, one pathway by which this happens is a relatively weaker tendency among men to internalize communal traits into their self-concept, to embrace communal values for their behavior, and to develop communal possible selves for their future (Figure 3, Box E). As we will also describe, the existence of strong gender stereotypes that are readily endorsed promotes this lack of internalization of communion through various pathways including automatic tendencies to learn and conform to gender-normative behaviors, more direct forms of socialization by others, and a lack of salient communal role models (Figure 3, Box D). Finally, we’ll discuss how this process of internalization is stronger to the degree that communal roles are assumed to have lower status in society (Figure 3, Box \(C_1\)).

**Mechanisms to Internalizing Communal Self-Attributes**
Early learning of gender stereotypic associations. Tendencies to automatically learn and conform to the behavior of same-sex peers represent key processes that inhibit males from internalizing communal traits, value, or possible selves. These processes begin at a very early age (Martin & Ruble, 2004). Gender stereotypic toy preferences are established as early as nine months of age (Campbell, Shirley, Heywood, & Crook, 2000; Lutchmaya & Baron-Cohen, 2002) and the ability of infants to match toys with the stereotypic gender group is well-documented by 18 months of age (Serbin, Poulin-Dubois, Colburne, Sen, & Eichstedt, 2001), showing that most infants have internalized gendered associations well before reaching their second birthday (Jadva, Hines, & Golombok, 2010). This early development of knowledge about appropriate behavior for boys and girls only becomes stronger as children grow, and in adulthood agentic and communal traits become more inversely related over time (Biernat, 1991; Cherney & London, 2006). Furthermore, evidence suggests that kids pick up on the asymmetry of gender role options. For example, one study found that children between 8-9 years old made up sentences implying that girls can be doctors, but that boys cannot be nurses (Wilbourn & Kee, 2010). The restriction of male roles, in particular, is therefore already evident in childhood.

These gender typical behaviors can be learned through direct observation of sex differences in behavior, but they are also reinforced more directly by knowledge of gender stereotypes, even at an implicit level. Around the same time children become aware of and learn gender-typical behaviors and preferences, they also develop implicit stereotypes that inform their developing beliefs about males and females. Once in place, these implicit associations can be automatically activated, subtly influencing behavior and preferences distinct from explicitly held values or beliefs (Banaji & Hardin, 1996). In fact, because of the lingering pervasiveness of stereotyped role and occupational preferences, even people who explicitly hold gender
egalitarian attitudes still exhibit evidence of strong automatic associations linking men more with agentic qualities and roles and women more with communal qualities or roles (Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002; Park, Smith, & Correll, 2010; Rudman & Goodwin, 2004; Rudman, Greenwald, & McGhee, 2001). Moreover, through processes of identity balance, these implicit associations with one’s gender group then shape implicit associations about oneself (Baron, Schmader, Cvencik, & Meltzoff, 2014; Greenwald, Banaji, Rudman, Farnham, Nosek, & Mellott, 2002). For example, not only do adults exhibit gender-consistent implicit stereotypes about themselves (e.g., Devos, Blanco, Rico, & Dunn, 2008; Devos, Diaz, Viera, & Dunn, 2007; Rudman & Phelan, 2010), but these gender-stereotypic associations with the self can also show up as early as age eight but long after knowledge of gender typical preferences have been learned (see Baron et al., 2014, for a review).

Perhaps because of this early learning of stereotypic associations, we would expect boys and men to develop a relatively weaker association between themselves and communal characteristics, traits, and values. Indeed, traditionally female roles are not as central to the implicit self-concepts of men as they are to the implicit self-concepts of women (Devos et al., 2008). In other words, men show a much clearer implicit association between self and work, whereas women have equally strong implicit associations between “self and work” and “self and home.” With a weaker self-concept connected to communal self-constructs, the motivation to embody communal roles is also likely to be weaker as well. For example, men are less likely than women to report having a strong parenting motivation, a difference that does narrow, however, when people find themselves in the role of being a parent (Buckels, Beall, & Schaller, 2014).
Expanding this discussion of internalization more broadly to other communal-oriented traits, like empathy, research suggests that sex differences in empathic accuracy are much larger when people self-report their empathic skills (Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983). Thus, much like the rather small to non-existent male advantage in math performance during adolescence that is dwarfed by a quite large gender difference in math self-confidence (Else-Quest, Hyde & Lin, 2010), men’s knowledge of stereotypes that presume lower socioemotional skills among men also seem to bias their self-conceptions beyond what their true capacity or skill level might suggest. Furthermore, such endorsement of gender stereotypic views of oneself are more likely when the assumed status hierarchy between the sexes is unquestioned (Schmader, Johns, & Barquissau, 2004). Together, this evidence points to the ways in which men are less likely than women to internalize communal traits, values, and possible selves, and as a result exhibit a relatively weaker internal motivation to take on communal roles.

*Active socialization efforts.* In addition to the more passive process by which people learn and incorporate gender-normative behaviors into their self-concept, more active efforts at socialization by parents, teachers, and others also plays a role in shaping the traits people accept as part of their self-concept, the values that guide their preferences, and the possible selves they aspire to. Evidence of socialization of socioemotional skills and interests suggests that these behaviors and skills can be direct shaped in children. For example, education scholars have examined programs aimed more generally at teaching empathy and perspective taking in school aged children (Battistich, Solomon, Watson, Solomon, & Schaps, 1989; Greenberg, Kusché, Cook, & Quamma, 1995; Schonert-Reichl, Smith, Zaidman-Zait, & Hertzman, 2012). In one recent intervention, elementary school aged boys and girls showed equivalent understanding of an infant’s needs after repeated experience with infants and new mothers over the course of the
school year. Remarkably, students in this intervention were also rated as being more prosocial by their peers and less aggressive by their teachers (and again effects were not moderated by the child’s gender), even though children did not rate themselves as higher in empathy or perspective taking. Even prosocial video games have shown some efficacy in increasing people’s empathy for others (Greitemeyer, Osswald, & Bauer, 2010; Greitemeyer & Osswald, 2011).

As we noted earlier, sex differences in autism spectrum disorders are often cited as the strongest biological argument that men are inherently lower in socioemotional skills than women. But emerging evidence that these skills can be shaped and cultivated in children with autism spectrum disorders provides some suggestion that any biological differences existing between the sexes need not end the debate over encouraging more equal representation in caregiving roles. One recent intervention program was successful in training socioemotional skills in a sample of children with autism spectrum disorders. In this remarkable study, autistic children between four and seven years old showed significant improvement in emotion recognition after a four week intervention of watching an animated show where vehicles were portrayed with faces that displayed emotions (Golan et al., 2010). Not only did the autistic children’s emotional understanding increase as a result of the intervention, but their success in anticipating people’s emotional reactions in a new context did not differ from a non-autistic control group.

Taken together, this research reveals that the same socioemotional skills that people so often assume are lacking in boys and men can be taught and cultivated through direct socialization efforts. And yet there is also evidence that boys systematically receive less exposure to such environmental experiences. For example, those who express and understand sadness and fear should find it easier to empathize with others and help those who are in need,
but as children, boys are often discouraged from feeling or expressing these emotions (see Eisenberg, Cumberland, & Spinrad, 1998, for a review). Moreover, even with children as young as 18 months, caregivers use less emotion-related language when talking to boys than to girls (Dunn, Bretherton, & Munn, 1987). Thus, just as girls receive less socializing support for the development of their math skills and early number concepts (Eccles, Jacobs, & Harold, 1990) - skills that might foster a later interest in science and technology - so too do boys seem to receive less environmental support for the development of their socioemotional skills that might foster a subsequent interest in communal and caregiving roles.

A lack of role models. One observable consequence of the underrepresentation of men in communal roles and the stereotypes that they lack the ability for these roles is that there are relatively fewer examples of communal male role models. One of the ways that people develop a sense of what they value, who they are, or who they might become is through exposure to role models who provide representations of possible selves (Bandura, 1971; Markus & Nurius, 1986). Thus, boys and men might not internalize communal traits, abilities, and values as much as women do because of the lack of exposure to other men who successfully embody these traits and roles. Men are not only underrepresented in communal roles in reality, but positive depictions of men in these roles are also rare in the media. In fact, media scholars document an asymmetry of roles in the media representations that the viewing public consumes. Content analyses of television commercials shows that media representations of men remain shrouded in masculinity and traditionalism; whereas stereotyping of women in commercials is less pronounced (Gentry & Harrison, 2010; Kaufman, 1999; Tsai & Shumow, 2011). Even print media (e.g., comic strips, children’s books, newspaper articles) maintain the stereotypical division of labor between men and women, portraying fathers as secondary parents or passive
subjects in the background (Diekman & Murnen, 2004; Glascock & Preston-Schreck, 2004; Wall & Arnold, 2007). When men are shown in non-traditional female-dominated roles in mass media, they are often portrayed as inept clowns (e.g., men failing at domestic tasks, Scharrer, Kim, Lin, & Liu, 2006). The cultural message that is conveyed is not just that men don’t do communal roles, but also that, perhaps, they shouldn’t do them.

As with any descriptive evidence of biased representations in the media, it’s not possible to ascertain whether these one-sided portrayals help to create the existing role asymmetry we see or if they are merely a reflection of it. However, given at least some causal evidence that stereotypic TV commercials can affect women’s interest and achievement in leadership and science (Davies, Spencer & Steele, 2005), we might reasonably assume that a steady diet of these biased media depictions can severely limit the degree to which men develop a possible self that includes communal roles, further alienating them from these domains (Gentry & Harrison, 2010). Moreover, just as positive role models of female leaders promote the internalization of leadership into the self-concepts of young women (Stout, Dasgupta, Hunsinger, & McManus, 2011), the same effects might be likely for men who could internalize a more communal self-concept with the help of communally-oriented male role models.

**Status moderates gendered internalization of communal roles**

Taken together, the research just reviewed reveals that the prevalence of strong gender stereotypes (and the gendered division of labor they promote) prevents boys and men from internalizing communal traits, values, and possible selves because of a passive learning of associations of communal roles with female rather than with male, relatively fewer efforts to directly socialize boys to develop communal skillsets, and a lack of salient communal male roles models. Although the processes by which people internalize stereotypic associations and
normative behaviors into their self-concept are likely to be the same for both men and women, the status asymmetry described earlier likely magnifies the degree to which boys and men fail to internalize communal traits and roles (Figure 3, Box C1).

First, recall that there is simply less inherent motivation for people to seek out roles or adopt the characteristics of a lower status group (Schmader et al., 2001). In addition, because societies can function more efficiently when the status hierarchy is accepted as legitimate, there are psychological and cultural incentives for both men and women to justify and endorse the existing status hierarchy between men and women (e.g., Glick & Fiske, 2001; Jost & Banaji, 1994). For example, the accepted lower status of communal roles means that fewer efforts are made to include examples of successful communal men in advertising and media as role models, compared to the efforts to now represent more women in agentic roles. Similarly, if men accept that communal roles have lower status in society, their reluctance to internalize communal traits and values into their own self-concept will be enhanced. This pressure against men’s internalization of communion is likely to be stronger than the pressure against women’s internalization of agentic traits and values, which are counter-stereotypic for women but are still widely viewed as having high status. Finally, boys, more so than girls, are directly socialized to adhere to stereotypical gender roles from an early age by being rewarded for congruent and chastised for incongruent behaviour (Blakemore, 2003; Levy, Taylor, & Gelman, 1995; Fagot, 1995). In sum, although many of these mechanisms of internalization have been applied to understand the underrepresentation of women in science and leadership domains, the lower status assigned to communal roles might make it even less likely that communal traits and values and socioemotional skills become associated with men as a group or to individual men more specifically.
The asymmetry in how gender roles are changing might also have interesting implications for the development of implicit theories about these more communal traits and abilities (Levy, Stroessner, & Dweck, 1998). As women’s roles in society are beginning to change, the explicit and implicit stereotypes surrounding women’s roles are also becoming increasingly fluid, which serves to further facilitate changing roles. Consider, for example, that women with more egalitarian views are less likely to do domestic chores than women with traditional views (Hoffman & Kloska, 1995; Stevens, Minnotte, Mannon, & Kiger, 2006), and as more women eschew traditional roles, people’s stereotypes about women’s roles will continue to evolve (Diekman et al., 2004).

In contrast, because men’s roles are not changing at a consistent pace alongside women’s roles, the stereotypes and prescriptions informing the behavioral norms for men are viewed as much more rigid (Diekman, Goodfriend & Goodwin, 2004; Diekman & Eagly, 2000; Feinman, 1981; Hort, Fagot, & Leinbach, 1990; Levy et al., 1995; Martin, 1990). Perhaps as a result, masculine traits and concepts are also essentialized to a greater degree than are feminine traits, especially among men themselves (Smiler & Gelman, 2008). Thus, because people do not see men’s roles evolving, they might also come to believe that men’s interests and/or abilities in these roles are also less changeable. Such beliefs reinforce the prevailing sense that the existing gender status structure is legitimate. We argue, instead, that the asymmetric value and status placed on agency over communion has led to relatively meager efforts to represent salient communal male roles models in the media or to actively promote the socialization of communal traits and values among boys and men. As a result, that status asymmetry of these traits has facilitated relatively faster internalization of agency among girls and women, as compared to the much slower internalization of communion among boys and men.
How men’s lower internalization of communion undermines their interest in communal roles

People tend to seek out roles that fit their values and self-concept. Not only does the internalization of gender normative behaviors lead boys and men to develop weaker associations of the self with communal traits, values, and ability, but this weaker internalization of communion will then predict their career interests and personal pursuits (Figure 3, the link between boxes E and G). For example, according to role-congruity theory, people pursue occupations and roles that they perceive as a good fit to their internalized values and goals (Brown & Diekman, 2010; Eagly & Diekman, 2005; Evans & Diekman, 2009; Diekman, Brown, Johnston & Clark, 2010; Diekman & Eagly, 2008). Because women tend to internalize more communal, other-oriented goals and men tend to endorse more agentic, status-oriented goals, women and men are drawn to different careers. Careers that are female-stereotypic are seen as affording communal goals, and because men endorse these goals less strongly, they are less motivated to engage with communal roles (e.g., Block, Schmader & Croft, 2014; Diekman et al., 2010). One study even found that when college students made projections about their future possible-selves, both men and women hoped for a role-congruent self and actually feared a role-incongruent self (Brown & Diekman, 2010).

From this role-congruity perspective, then, one clear reason for the underrepresentation of men in communal roles is that these roles might not be perceived by men as affording their more agentic goals and values, and without greater internalization of communal traits and goals, they seem like a poor fit to their self-concept. For example, men’s conceptions of themselves as a worker and a parent are more highly overlapping than they are for women, because for men both roles are defined to some degree in terms of competence-based traits whereas for women, motherhood is defined in terms of communal attributes rather than competence (Hodges & Park,
This evidence can explain why women experience more role conflict in their professional lives; but it also might suggest that men who try to take on a more communal and nurturing role as a parent also experience high conflict. Similarly, past work has theorized and shown that an implicit sense of fit plays a role in women’s lack of interest in computer science (e.g., Cheryan, Plaut, Davies, & Steele, 2009; Cheryan, 2011). The same process likely applies to men’s under-representation in communal roles. For example, men’s lack of interest in English as a college major (a field dominated by female students) is mediated by their perceived dissimilarity to others in the field (Cheryan & Plaut, 2010), which circles back to the need for positive, successful role models in communal domains.

Because communal roles are so closely tied to stereotypical femininity, occupying these roles likely induces gender role conflict in men. Indeed, the tension from this conflict between internalized notions of oneself and beliefs about roles in men who do enter stereotypical feminine professions more so than in men who enter stereotypically masculine professions (Dodson & Borders, 2006). Furthermore, qualitative interviews reveal that men report feeling highly conflicted about their reasons for entering and remaining in counter-stereotypic occupations (Bagilhole & Cross, 2006). Evidence from organizational psychology suggests that men in female stereotypic occupations feel tension between their gender and their work role, regardless of their reasons for pursuing the occupation in the first place (Simpson, 2005). Furthermore, gender-role conflict is related to feeling less at home in one’s chosen career. For example, male elementary school teachers who report high gender-role conflict are less satisfied with their jobs and report lower overall well-being (Wolfram, Mohr, & Borchert, 2009).

Therefore, out of a motivation to maintain consistency between their goals and roles, as well as
an avoidance of tension resulting from these identity conflicts, men choose not to enter communal roles or feel like they do not belong there when they do.

*Future research directions on men’s internalization of communal traits and goals*

As we have described, gender stereotypes in part affect the environmental experiences that boys and men have in ways that prevent internalization of communal traits, values, and future selves. Before transitioning to a discussion of external barriers, we next outline a few important directions for future research on the internal pathway to men’s underrepresentation in communal roles.

*Increasing the intrinsic value of communal roles.* As we have argued, a key reason for men’s slower progress into communal roles is the lower status these roles are given. Thus, one strategy for increasing men’s interest in communal pursuits is to reeducate men (and women) on the value and significance of these roles. The most obvious and direct way to increase the value that we perceive as inherent to communal roles would be to reframe the broader significance of communal traits, values, and roles and to disassociate these exclusively from women. Doing so would strengthen the perceived congruity between men’s internalized goals and communal roles. For example, efforts to reframe science professions in more communal terms has had success reducing the perceived masculinity of these roles and increasing women’s stated interest in science (Diekman et al., 2011). Similar experimental work can be undertaken to examine whether reframing helping and caregiving profession as facilitating agentic goals might also elevate men’s interest in these roles.

If controlled experiments point to promising effects, broader interventions and programs could scale up these processes. In the past decade, a collective interest in recruiting women into science and technology fields has led to large-scale (and sometimes controversial) efforts to
advertise science and math to girls at a very early age. For example, GoldieBlox is a new toy company designed by a female engineer to “give girls more choices than dolls and princesses.” Similarly, classroom-based interventions to engage girls in science have been shown to be successful at producing more interest and pursuit of science related fields in females, in the short and long-term (Fadigan & Hamrich, 2004). To our knowledge, no comparable programs have tried to increase boys’ interest in and engagement with communal activities or roles. Nevertheless, evidence from programs targeting the development of a link between girls and science gives us hope that young children’s gender-typed aspirations and values are flexible and boys’ communal values could be targeted in similar ways. Such interventions could take the form of educational programs designed to explicitly disassociate communal skills like empathy, compassion, emotional intelligence from women and reframe these as important human universals, with all the psychological and social benefits we described earlier in this article. Fostering and encouraging boys’ interest in communal values, and the development of socioemotional skills at an early stage in their development, could be the key to dispelling the more constraining message to “be a man,” that many young boys receive. As a consequence, communal goals might become more easily internalized, allowing such roles to feel like a better fit for boys and men. Such interventions need not only target boys, since both sexes seem to benefit equally from sensitivity and emotionality training (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2012).

**Questioning the legitimacy of the status asymmetry.** Framing communal traits and values as universally important and beneficial is one means of fostering greater interest in communal roles for men. Another possibility (and perhaps one to be used in combination with others) is to call into question the perceived legitimacy of the current status asymmetry that assigns lower status to communal roles. As mentioned previously, traditional divisions of labor persist to the
degree that people assume the status hierarchy to be legitimate and gender stereotypes to be true. Only as the Women’s Movement began calling into question prevailing assumptions that women lack the ability for work or leadership did women begin to value agentic roles for themselves (not just for men) and internalize beliefs that they might excel in these roles. Similarly, only by questioning the legitimacy of the lower status assigned to communal roles and men’s presumed lack of ability for communal tasks will more men internalize these traits and values into their self-concept.

Although research has shown that the perceived legitimacy of status hierarchies is important for shaping internalization processes among lower status groups (Schmader et al., 2001; 2004), no research has directly examined whether higher status groups (i.e., men) might also find more value in the traits of those lower in status when they see the system as unjust. Thus, perhaps those men who believe that both sexes should have equal status might also be more open to choosing communal roles and occupations. This is an important hypothesis that awaits empirical test, but consistent with social role theory, existing research suggests that people have a tendency to match their expectations to information they get about social trends concerning gender roles (Diekman & Goodfried, 2006). For example, there is some evidence that both men and women perceive it to be a problem that men’s communal tendencies have not changed over time, to the degree that they expect men to take on more communal roles in the future (Diekman & Goodfriend, 2006). Furthermore, when men and women are prompted to think that gender roles are changing, both predict that they could be successful (although they do not report an increase in interest) in non-stereotypic occupations (Diekman, Johnston & Loescher, 2013). Such findings provide preliminary evidence that as people’s beliefs about the
rigidity of gender roles soften (particularly men’s willingness to take on communal roles), men might be more likely to seek out and excel in these roles.

Retraining implicit self-concepts. As discussed, one of the mechanisms by which boys might internalize more communal traits and possible selves is through identity balance processes that happen at an implicit level. Whereas explicit education might be aimed at explicitly encouraging boys to develop communal beliefs about themselves, implicit retraining might weaken automatic associations between communal and female (and not male) and strengthen automatic associations between self and communal. There is already some evidence documenting the ability to directly alter people’s automatic or implicit associations through training techniques (Kawakami, Steele, Cifa, Phillips, & Dovidio, 2008; Schmader & Forbes, 2010). For example, by having women perform a task that forces them to repeatedly associate a tendency to approach with their concept of math, researchers have elevated women’s motivation for solving math problems (Kawakami et al., 2008). In a similar way, training a tendency to associate communion with men or to approach communal activities might also elevate men’s interest and motivation for pursuing communal roles. This strategy of direct retraining may be an especially fruitful approach given that people’s implicit cognitions can, in some circumstances, be better predictors of subsequent automatic behavior and preferences than people’s explicitly reported beliefs (Greenwald, Poehlman, Uhlmann, & Banaji, 2009).

From a theoretical standpoint, basic research is still needed to understand whether explicit or implicit messages might be more effective at encouraging internalization of communal goals. The deeply entrenched gender stereotypes that persist in preventing boys and men from adopting communal activities might also lead to initial reactance against explicit messages. Perhaps changing the implicit associations linking gender to communion and agency
would be an important first step in encouraging greater internalization of communal traits and roles. However, such efforts must also be mindful that men’s implicit self-concepts can be activated in ways that react against contexts that seem to threaten their masculinity (McCall & Dasgupta, 2007). Specifically, when men are given a subordinate, lower status role compared to a female confederate in a lab task, they show stronger patterns of “me = male” implicit self-stereotyping than when they are given a role superior to the female confederate (McCall & Dasgupta, 2007). Such evidence suggests that retraining efforts might be most effective to the degree they create a profile of balanced implicit cognitions and thereby avoiding the activation of identity threats (Greenwald et al., 2002; Schmader et al, 2008). In other words, it might be important to simultaneously encourage associations between “male = communal”, “self = male”, and “self = communal”.

Exposure to successful role-models. Although direct retraining efforts provide experimental control and allow for greater precision in testing theoretical claims, they are often impractical as actual interventions in the real world. However, research that has focused on the malleability of gendered associations with science and leadership demonstrates that role models do not only serve as a source of explicit inspiration but that they also help to shift people’s implicit associations. For example, women exposed to successful women in math and science develop a weaker tendency to associate men with science and leadership and an increased tendency to associate self with math (e.g., Asgari, Dasgupta, & Cote, 2010; Stout, Dasgupta, Hunsinger, & McManus, 2011).

By the same token, men might also find it easier to internalize communal values and roles to the degree that they see other men willingly and successfully embody these roles. This approach is not without a few caveats, however, as the characteristics of a “successful role
model” are not always clear (Sevier & Ashcraft, 2009). For example, if the role models are too idealized, they can promote contrast effects (i.e., a motivation to avoid rather than approach the behavior that is modeled) rather than assimilation or imitative effects (Rudman & Phelan, 2010). Furthermore, exemplars of men who are successful in communal roles might be more effective in elevating an interest in these roles among men who do not already strongly endorse status differences between men and women. As such, the most effective role models might be those who embody both high levels of agency in conjunction with high levels of communion (Frimer et al., 2012), to deflect possible misclassification and backlash effects (discussed in the following section) that could fuel contrast instead of assimilation. Future research will need to carefully examine these and other potential difficulties to inform future interventions.

Summary

In sum, stereotypic beliefs about gender roles that are maintained and perpetuated in society are likely to have a profound impact on men’s adoption of communal roles. Importantly, the scarcity of men in communal roles establishes strong behavioral norms about what constitutes appropriate behavior for men and women. These norms are then readily internalized, both directly by incorporating stereotype knowledge into the self-concept, and indirectly through biased patterns of socialization (Figure 3, boxes D and E). Without adopting the goal to be communal, and perhaps instead holding a distinct notion that being communal is counter-normative for one’s gender, men are not attracted to and are instead repelled from communal goals and activities. This internalization of gendered norms and stereotypes alone presents a clear explanation for the underrepresentation of men in communal roles. But even if men do internalize communal goals, they must also combat external pressures to adopt more stereotype-congruent roles. In the next section, we will turn to discussing the factors reflecting what men

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stand to lose and the external barriers they face if and when they do seek to enter communal domains.

External Factors that Preclude Men from being more Communal

Cultural stereotypes that associate women more than men with communal roles not only prevent men from internalizing communal traits, values, and possible selves into their self-concept, they can also create external barriers or costs to men’s involvement in communal roles. Thus, even if some men possess more communal traits and goals that amplify their interest in these roles, there are still other peripheral factors that can preclude their entry into such roles. In this section, we review several of these externally-based barriers (Figure 3, box F), and consider how the relatively lower status of communal roles might make these barriers somewhat more powerful than the barriers that women currently face to their entry into agentic roles (Figure 3, box C_2). Finally, review why external barriers undermine men’s interest in communal roles and outline possible avenues for future research.

External barriers faced by men who pursue communal interests

Financial costs. One external factor that deserves some initial discussion is the financial cost that comes from choosing communal roles - especially occupations - over more lucrative agentic career options. National Public Radio’s This American Life, featured an interview with Jason Pittman, a 38 year old teacher in Alexandria, Virginia (Glass, 2013). By all accounts, during his 10 years teaching, Pittman was an extraordinarily innovative teacher. His classroom was visited by Michelle Obama and he received an award for being an Aerospace Educator of the Year from the Air Force Association. In spite of his obvious passion for teaching and incredible success at his chosen career, he stated in his radio interview that he plans to leave the
profession because the $57,000 a year salary simply could not sustain him and his family. Jason Pittman’s story is not uncommon.

This gap in salary is pronounced for many communal, female-dominated occupations. For example, compare the average $90,960 a year an engineer makes to the $67,930 annual salary of a registered nurse (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Both these careers require a similar amount of education and the hours for a nurse are arguably more demanding. For a variety of reasons, traditionally female-occupied roles pay lower salaries, but differential status ascribed to men’s and women’s stereotypic traits are likely to a play a role. Because people automatically associate men more than women with higher salaries and greater wealth (Williams et al., 2010), occupations with more women might also come to pay lower salaries. Also, because men are often expected to earn a higher salary to provide for their families, choosing these lower paying communal roles can come at a steep financial cost. This economic standpoint could alone explain men’s relative lack of interest and involvement in communal roles. However, we believe it is unlikely that these economic concerns fully account for the constraints against men’s entry into these roles; rather, other psychological barriers are also at work.

Threats to masculine identity. One significant social psychological perspective that attempts to understand the challenges men face when they enter female-stereotypic roles is grounded in research on precarious manhood (Bosson & Vandello, 2011; Vandello & Bosson, 2012). According to this perspective, men are especially sensitive to judgments that threaten their gender identities, because manhood is precarious – meaning that masculinity, and the advantaged status that accompanies it, is something that can be lost and must thereby be constantly validated and reaffirmed (Vandello, Bosson, Cohen, Burnafort, & Weaver, 2008). The presumed theoretical rationale underpinning the precariousness of manhood, but not
womanhood, is based in the evolutionary pressures of mate selection (see Vandello & Bosson, 2012 for a review). Specifically, in order to attract desirable mating partners, men must compete with other men in displays of physical strength and bravery. Presumably, those who did not sufficiently prove their masculine value could not win the attention of female mates.

One aspect of these threats to masculinity, and precarious manhood in general, is the fear of identity misclassification (Bosson, Prewitt-Freilino, & Taylor, 2005). For instance, if a heterosexual man takes on a female role and is misclassified as gay, his identity as a man is then called into question. To prevent being misclassified (or to avoid having their gender identities scrutinized at all) and to bolster their precarious state of manhood, men engage in “macho” acts of aggression and use disclaimers to establish and advertise their masculinity or heterosexual orientation (Bosson, Prewitt-Freilino, & Taylor, 2005; Bosson & Vandello, 2011; Bosson, Vandello, Burnaford, Weaver, & Wasti, 2009; Prewitt-Freilino & Bosson, 2008; Weaver, Vandello, Bosson, & Burnaford, 2009). In some cases, these gender affirming acts extend to derogating gay men (Carnaghi, Maass, & Fasoli, 2011).

Importantly, women might also fear seeming unfeminine when performing well in agentic roles. Evidence shows that women in male roles manage these identity threats by bifurcating their identity into a feminine private self and a masculine work self – creating two distinct context-sensitive selves (Pronin, Steele, & Ross, 2004; von Hippel, Walsh, & Zouroudis, 2011). Yet, the same threat of being misclassified as a lesbian is not as severe (although it is also not completely absent), especially as women’s roles have become more flexible in the recent past. Thus, we would argue that there is not anything inherently more rigid or precarious about masculinity as compared to femininity. Rather for all the reasons outlined above, men are held to more rigid social standards of adhering to gender typical behavior, leading them to be hyper
vigilant to the risk of losing their male status advantage. Men therefore avoid putting themselves in contexts where this masculine status can be lost. Our contention is that the precariousness of manhood (and not womanhood) might instead reflect the greater value we give to agency as a masculine trait. As a result of the status asymmetry processes describe above, losing one’s standing on this valued dimension might simply carry a greater weight than losing one’s standing on the less culturally valued dimension of communion.

Social sanctions and discrimination. Although the fear of feeling or being seen as less like a man might prevent some men from entering into communal roles, the broader social psychological barrier is a threat to social status. Because the initial push for gender equality stemmed from a desire to increase upward mobility, women have had strong incentives to enter male-dominated domains but men have not demonstrated a motivation to enter female-dominated domains (England, 2010). As a result of these clear status differences between agentic and communal roles, men who do enter into communal roles can face more objective social sanctions and discrimination.

Across development and in different domains, evidence of these social sanctions is clear. Around the time they begin grade school, children rigorously enforce adherence to gendered behavioral norms, especially those focused on boys and men (Feinman, 1981). Boys are significantly more likely to be teased or admonished for transgressing gender role norms than are girls (Blakemore, 2003; Levy, Taylor, & Gelman, 1995). Among adults, men who have children but still work full-time are held to more lenient employment standards than are women (Crosby, Williams, & Biernat, 2004; Fuegen, Biernat, Haines, & Deaux, 2004), but this leniency has its limits. Stay-at-home fathers perceive more external losses (e.g., income, career progress) than do stay-at-home mothers (Helford, Burroughs, Frank, & College, 2003) and men, more than
women, worry that taking leave from their jobs after the birth of a child would falsely indicate to those around them that they are less serious about their careers (McKay & Doucet, 2010). And these worries are not unfounded; research reveals that men who take time off from work for family reasons are perceived less positively, less masculine and earn less money over the course of their career (Berdahl & Moon, 2013; Brescoll & Uhlman, 2005; Brescoll, Uhlmann, Moss-Racusin & Sarnell, 2012; Coltrane, Miller, DeHaan, & Stewart, 2013; Rudman & Mescher, 2013; Vandello, Hettinger, Bosson, & Siddiqui, 2013). For example, men who report spending more time caring for their children are more likely than female caregivers to report being made to feel like they are not tough or aggressive enough by other colleagues (Berdahl & Moon, 2013).

Furthermore, although men sometimes experience the “glass escalator” phenomenon in female occupations, where they more quickly rise to positions of greater authority (Williams, 1992), there is perhaps greater evidence that men can experience backlash for demonstrating highly communal traits and abilities. Most notable is research by Laurie Rudman and colleagues, which documents backlash against both counter-stereotypic women and counter-stereotypic men. For example, men who violate gender roles by succeeding at a counter-stereotypical task are more likely to experience sabotage, stigmatization, and unfavorable ratings of competence and likability (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004; Rudman et al., 2013; Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Rudman, 2010). When men behave counter-stereotypically by self-effacing (rather than self-promoting) in an interview context, they are viewed as less competent and less hireable (Rudman, 1998; Schmader, Croft, Whitehead & Stone, 2013). More specifically, modest men who apply for a managerial position are more likely to face prejudice (i.e., be disliked) than similarly modest women (Moss-Racusin et al., 2010) or gay men (Schmader et al., 2013, Study 3).
Finally, as a result of strong stereotypes that presume that men lack socioemotional traits and abilities, men sometimes experience direct forms of discrimination whereby their entry into these roles is blocked. For example, research on maternal gatekeeping shows that some women openly restrict men from infringing on their domestic territory (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Schoppe-Sullivan, Brown, Cannon, Mangelsdorf, & Sokolowski, 2008). And when men are successful in female occupations, people do not want them as bosses and rate them as less deserving of respect than either successful women in female occupations or successful men in male occupations (Heilman & Wallen, 2010). This kind of gender-role-related discrimination has a negative impact on men’s emotional well-being (Vandello et al., 2008) as well as their cognitive ability and attentional self-control (Funk & Werhun, 2011), paralleling research showing similar kinds of decrements for women who confront stereotyping and discrimination in STEM domains (Schmader, Johns, & Forbes, 2008). In general, there are no gender differences when it comes to providing harsh evaluations of role violating men; both men and women express overtly negative judgments of men who choose to enter into stereotypically-female roles (e.g., Cross & Bagilhole, 2002; Heilman & Wallen, 2010; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004).

Importantly, being faced with such strong social sanctions, identity threats, and financial costs to taking on communal roles is also likely to prevent men from internalizing communal traits, values, and possible selves into their self-concept (Figure 3, link between boxes F and E). Because there is little incentive for people to hide their biases against men in communal roles and because the stereotypes associating men with masculinity are openly endorsed in society, boys’ and men’s awareness of the external barriers at play poses yet another reason why men do might be more reluctant to develop a strong communal self-view. In this way, the external barriers that exist to keep men in their traditional, masculine roles continue to reinforce the
broader cycle by promoting the internalized beliefs that boys and men do, in fact, belong in such roles.

*Status moderates external barriers to men in communal roles*

Just as the relatively lower status of communion (compared to agency) is purported to moderate the degree to which gender stereotypes block men’s internalization of communal traits and values, we also propose that the lower status of communal roles moderates the external barriers men face when adopting traditionally female pursuits (Figure 3, Box C2). The financial costs, identity threat, and actual discrimination when men do take on communal roles are all likely to be much higher for men because these roles are assumed to have lower status. For women, stepping into agentic roles, though counter-stereotypic, can still be justified by the higher social status these roles have in modern society. For men, communal roles are both counter-stereotypic and of lower status. As a result, the external barriers they face are likely to be even stronger.

As one example, the connection of masculine roles to higher status may trigger particularly strong backlash against men (versus women) who violate prescriptive gender stereotypes, as social sanctions for violating gender roles are more severe when they also threaten the status hierarchy. In fact, according to the status incongruity hypothesis, it is violations of status, rather than the specific role violation in question, that are most likely to result in backlash against transgressors (e.g., Moss-Racusin, Phelan & Rudman, 2010; Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts, 2012). Men’s violations of gender roles are therefore seen as especially grave to the extent that they call the existing societal hierarchy into question (Eagly, Wood, & Diekman, 2000; Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Rudman, 2010; Moss-Racusin, 2014). Thus, although women too are admonished for transgression traditional gender role norms (e.g.,
women in leadership roles), society is quicker to punish men who take “demotions” in status to enter female-dominated domains.

Similarly, as discussed above, the underlying tenet of work on precarious manhood is that one’s identity as man is more easily threatened than one’s identity as a woman. We have argued that the differential status given to agentic (i.e., masculine) and communal (i.e., feminine) traits and roles is the real reason that masculinity might be something that can be ‘lost.’ Finally, differences in financial compensation to agentic and communal occupations might also stem partly from the status asymmetry in men’s and women’s roles. Because healthcare- and education-related professions often emphasize communal qualities and caregiving, one is assumed to go into healthcare or teaching for the sheer love of helping others (i.e., because it is morally right), rather than for some extrinsic compensation (i.e., for status or money) that we would associate with equitable or meritocratic exchange relationships. Thus, status-based stereotypic assumptions about traits that underlie these occupations might also be used to justify the observed, systematic differences in compensation.

*How external barriers undermine men’s interest in communal roles*

The external barriers we have reviewed provide another explanation for men’s lack of interest in communal roles (Figure 3, the link between boxes F and G). People go to great lengths to be accepted and included by their peers in everyday life, and seeking social inclusion at one’s place of work is no exception (for a review, see Williams & Nida, 2011). Interestingly, being socially rejected is not only unpleasant, but research suggests that the human body reacts similarly to both physical pain and social pain, such as in situations of interpersonal ostracism (e.g., DeWall et al., 2010). Subsequently, people generally do whatever they can to avoid situations where they might find themselves likely to be ostracized or set apart from the group.
for any reason. Some social psychologists have gone so far as to suggest that the construct of self-esteem exists as a mechanism for detecting and avoiding social exclusion (i.e., sociometer hypothesis; Leary, Tambor, Terdal & Downs, 1995). Given these strong motivations to maintain one’s self-esteem and belonging within social groups, people in general will avoid careers and occupations where they face ostracism and rejection.

Because of the severe social sanctions faced by men who do engage in communal activities, men in communal roles can find themselves feeling very isolated, and might even distance themselves from their female coworkers as a way of preserving their own sense of masculinity (Cross & Bagilhole, 2002). For example, a large scale archival study conducted by sociologists found that as the proportion of women in a given industry increases, men report feeling less co-worker support (Cook & Minnotte, 2008). Moreover, the attitudes of men’s female coworkers in predominately-female occupations have a surprising impact on men’s job satisfaction and depressive symptoms. For example, when female coworkers endorse strict beliefs that men’s behavior should be in line with traditional male stereotypes, men are more depressed and less satisfied with their occupations (Sobiraj, Korek, Weseler, & Mohr, 2011). These effects are surprisingly similar to the kinds of negative impacts that women experience in male-dominated domains, and yet they have not received the same empirical attention or efforts to enact any change. Such threats to inclusion prevent men from entering communal roles or lead them to leave these roles for others where they can expect to be accepted.

It is not only these concrete social sanctions that diminish men’s interest in communal roles, however, as the more tacit processes of identity misclassification are also highly relevant (e.g., Bosson et al., 2005). In view of men’s observed sensitivity toward engaging in behaviors that threaten their masculine identities, the fear of being judged negatively or misclassified as
gay presents a social psychological obstacle to heterosexual men’s adoption of communal roles. This goes beyond merely the absence of a possible self in communal roles among men to the development of a feared self in these roles (Carver, Lawrence, & Scheier, 1999). The risk of misclassification can constrain men’s performance even among men who have chosen these roles. For instance, male (more so than female) elementary teachers report being reluctant to form close bonds with their students for fear of being labeled as gay or being accused of molestation or pedophilia (Sargent, 2004). In turn, men who perform stereotypically-feminine tasks related to teaching and nursing after being primed with homosexuality cues have more negative experiences and are less motivated to do well on these tasks (Allen & Smith, 2011). This evidence of men’s lack of motivation in communal domains most closely reflects a broader lack of interest in communal roles, though more work is needed to document the direct link between external barriers and men’s avoidance of communal pursuits.

Future research to understand and remove external barriers to men in communal roles

In this section of the paper we have reviewed the external barriers men face when trying to adopt communal roles; particularly, the economic costs, symbolic threats to identity, and very real social sanctions and discrimination from others. As in the earlier section on internal psychological factors precluding men’s interest in communal roles, here we will suggest a few potential directions for future research aimed at understanding and dismantling these external barriers in an effort to increase men’s interest and inclusion in communal roles.

Raising awareness about the external barriers faced by communal men. People are only motivated to engage in social change when they believe the current social system is unjust or unfair. If people simply do not believe that men should take on communal roles or that men are actively discriminated against in these roles, they are unlikely to support any efforts toward
social change. Just as the Women’s Movement raised both men’s and women’s consciousness about the barriers that women face in pursuing paid work outside the home, so too might we need added awareness of the mere existence of these real and symbolic barriers. Without such awareness, people are less likely to view the lack of men in communal roles as reflecting anything but an inherent lack of interest or ability.

The first step for research is to examine the degree to which people fail to see men as experiencing discrimination as a reason for men’s underrepresentation in these roles. One way to empirically test this question would be to measure people’s perceptions of the root causes for gender inequality in traditionally female (as compared to male) domains. We might predict that people endorse efforts to change gender inequalities only to the degree that they see those imbalances as stemming from the presence of unfair external barriers rather than from the presence of an inherent lack of interest or ability. Furthermore, if people generally believe that men are underrepresented in communal roles because they are simply uninterested or ill equipped for these roles (i.e., due to internal factors) and not because of the presence of social backlash or discrimination (i.e., external factors), this might explain a general lack of interest in policies aiming to increase the recruitment of men into these roles. In other words, a first step in reducing social sanctions against men in communal roles is to explore whether people even view this as a problem.

Once studies have established that people do not perceive the lack of men in communal roles as being due to discrimination or other external barriers (to the same degree as they see the lack of women in agentic roles as being due to these factors), research can then progress toward examining ways of changing these misperceptions. Studies can be designed to examine what types of information or data changes people’s beliefs that social factors do in part constrain
men’s interests in these roles and that these factors could be changed with social policy. Only once these external factors are acknowledged and recognized as a problem, can policy- and organization-level interventions by effective at leveling the playing field for men interested in pursuing communal roles.

**Destigmatizing communal men.** One prong of any effort to increase the representation of men in communal roles is to remove the potential threat of discrimination and loss of masculine identity that men in communal roles face (e.g., Bosson, Prewitt-Freilino, & Taylor, 2005). Efforts to integrate communal activities into the traditional male role might be one way to reduce the extent to which men fear being devalued or stigmatized by others when taking on such roles. As reviewed above, researchers have succeeded at making science careers (which are traditionally thought of as masculine) more interesting to women by highlighting the communal aspects of this work (e.g., Diekman et al., 2010).

In turn, one way to make communal men more acceptable for observers – and thereby for men who want to take on these roles – could be to reframe such roles as being more compatible with agentic traits associated with masculinity. Reframing communal roles as affording traditionally masculine goals might be one way to increase the perceived compatibility of agency and communion. For instance, framing childcare as an opportunity for males to pass on their legacy and fulfill their role as the protector of the family or describing the job of a social worker as an opportunity to put one’s vision for society into action could allow people in general to reconcile communal pursuits with agentic goals and divorce these activities from notions of masculinity and femininity altogether. Such reframing might also highlight the fact that moral heroes throughout history (both men and women) are those who integrate agentic behaviors in the pursuit of communal goals (Frimer, Walker, Lee, Riches, & Dunlop, 2012).
this type of reframing at the larger, societal level might help mitigate the incidence of backlash and discrimination against men in communal roles.

*Women’s role in removing barriers.* Because of the nature of heterosexual relationships, women can play a unique role in removing certain barriers to men taking on communal roles. For example, in line with work on precarious manhood (Vandello & Bosson, 2012), heterosexual men might be interested in maintaining their masculine identity to the degree that they believe that these traits are important for attracting a mate. Indeed, individual differences in masculine traits, such as dominance, predict males’ mating success, over and above physically masculine features (Hill et al., 2013). Such mating success likely incentivizes men to behave in masculine and dominant ways. Reasons why heterosexual women prefer masculinity in their mates are likely partly evolutionary and partly culturally determined (Pisanski & Feinberg, 2013). In either case, women play a role in proving these incentives.

However, as women increase their own levels of status and power, they gain some ability to select partners with traits that can balance tradeoffs that working couples with children face. For example, in countries with greater gender equality, women’s higher preference for agentic qualities in men (good financial prospects, high social status, ambition) is reduced and in some more egalitarian countries (i.e., Finland, Germany, the United States, and Italy), women are significantly more likely than men to indicate a preference for a mate who is a good cook and housekeeper (Zentner & Mitura, 2012). As women start to desire and seek out men who are more egalitarian and willing to take on communal roles, men should become incentivized to fit this ideal. Men who recognize these changing preferences among women will subsequently have a competitive advantage in the dating pool. Efforts to publicize these cultural shifts can thus inform people that these barriers to men’s entry into certain communal roles are breaking down
and that communal tasks are not seen as conflicting with masculinity or mate value by women who are searching for a spouse.

Similarly, once couples have children, women play a parallel role in the degree to which they exert preferences to maintain control of the domestic sphere and assert their natural ability for childrearing (e.g., Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Williams & Chen, 2014). Just as boys are socialized to value masculine pursuits and characteristics above feminine ones, girls are raised to believe that their ideal traits and futures will include the rearing of children and the maintenance of a proper household (perhaps in addition to striving for a successful career in a male-dominated field). As a society, we are encouraging girls to not only take on new agentic roles, but we continue to encourage them to retain their role as maternal gatekeeper, contributing to the second shift phenomenon (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). One approach to promoting men’s involvement in communal roles, then, would be to reinforce that mothers need not maintain traditional conceptions about their own roles in the household and can share or even relinquish caregiving responsibilities and domestic management to fathers.

*Changing the societal incentive structure.* Oftentimes, the way to change public attitude is to first change public policy. Thus, just as funding agencies have invested in research and programs to support the recruitment and retention of women into science, we as a society might consider the broader economic and sociocultural advantages to encouraging men’s interest in communal roles. As outlined earlier, such efforts have the potential to rectify labor shortages in certain caregiving and educational sectors as well as to serve broader goals of achieving gender equality. Furthermore, attention to the underrepresentation of women in science increased once there was a clear shorthand for referring a range of careers where stereotypes block women’s progress. As a counterpoint to the popular STEM acronym (science, technology, engineering,
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BARRIERS TO MEN IN COMMUNAL ROLES

and math) that has galvanized funding efforts and research interest over the past decade, we suggest representing communal roles using the acronym HEED (to include healthcare, elementary education and the domestic sphere). Importantly, we believe the acronym HEED captures a variety of caregiving roles in which men are underrepresented, as HEED encompasses healthcare-related occupations (e.g., nursing, social work, and hospital administration) and the field of early childhood education (e.g., preschool and elementary teachers, special education teachers, school counselors, and librarians). Although neither acronym, STEM nor HEED, is meant to include all roles dominated more by one gender than the other, these labels have utility for highlighting a collection of roles that rely on a core set of skills and abilities (e.g., math and competence in the case of STEM, and communal attributes in the case of HEED) and are culturally relevant for the broad impact these roles have for society (advancing innovation in STEM, and support and care for others in HEED).

In addition, one strategy for studying the effects of social policy on changing attitudes would be to take advantage of international variation in paternal leave policies that provide a naturalistic experiment for how changing policies and incentives might trickle down to changing stereotypes, self-concepts, and social sanctions. Whereas the United States is one of only a handful of countries that offer no federal guarantee of paid leave after having a child even to working mothers, at the other extreme is Norway, which, for over two decades, has provided 14 weeks of paid paternity leave exclusively for new fathers (i.e., that cannot instead be added to the mother’s maternity leave). Cross-cultural studies could be used to investigate how such nation-level variation in social policy affects people’s reactions to men in caregiving roles, specifically, and in communal roles, more generally.
**Taking a multi-pronged approach to addressing external and internal barriers.** As the evidence reviewed in this paper has shown, men’s interest in and occupation of communal roles is dampened by multiple factors. Such a complex system of obstacles to men’s success in communal roles likely warrants a multi-pronged approach to overcoming these barriers. For example, combining threat reduction or education efforts to minimize external barriers alongside interventions that also increase the internalization of communal goals and values could be the key catalyst for change. Specifically, if men come to recognize the intrinsic value of communal roles (perhaps through early training programs) and see ways to combine communal roles with their masculine identities (perhaps through reframing of these roles), these roles might become more attractive options. As a consequence, men might also become more interested in and motivated to pursue roles that have traditionally been occupied by women, especially to the degree that men adopt communal goals and values, while simultaneously adhering to traditional agentic traits (Diekman, 2007). And finally, once larger numbers of successful exemplars are visibly transgressing traditional gender role norms without experiencing external costs, the traits ascribed to men should change, as predicted by social role theory (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). All of these changes could lay the groundwork for a future shift in the broader culture and context surrounding gender stereotypes.

**Summary**

In sum, just as women experience backlash and discrimination when they excel in highly agentic domains, men can confront these same social sanctions when they engage in communal tasks or enter into communal roles. In addition, the threat of identity misclassification or tendency to essentialize masculinity might mean that the costs of behaving counter-stereotypically are even more pronounced for men than they are for women. Because
transgressors of gender norms openly fear backlash and discrimination, they might often try to hide their role violations from perceivers (e.g., Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). The penalizing consequences of transgressing the existing gender role structure are bitter enough that even a small taste is likely to be enough to dissuade potential trailblazers from going against the grain. Thus, even those men who identify with more communal traits and domains might still struggle to achieve broad acceptance for adopting communal roles.

Concluding Remarks

The models presented here delineate the distal and proximal processes driving men’s relatively lower interest and underrepresentation in more communal roles (see Figures 2 and 3). Although a complex interplay of evolutionary, historical, cultural, and economic factors has led to the differentiation of gender roles observed in contemporary society, there is also an unprecedented relaxation of what previously were rather strict boundaries for the roles that men and women could occupy. We have argued that stereotypes serve to maintain and perpetuate gender role differentiation by processes of internalization and maintenance of external barriers that lead people to self-select into those roles that best fit both how they see themselves and how others see them. Although these processes generally create unequal representations of both men and women in different roles, we suggest that the psychological barriers men face have been relatively understudied. And both as a cause and a consequence of these processes, men’s roles are changing much more slowly than are women’s. Together, these processes discourage, if not prohibit, men’s involvement in communal roles where they might otherwise make positive contributions to society and experience benefits to well-being themselves.

Gender role stereotypes are changing over time, though there is a marked gender-based discrepancy in the composition of that change. While women are entering previously male-
dominated roles at a surprisingly rapid rate, men are not coming forward to fill the corresponding gaps in previously female-dominated roles. The aim of the current paper was to shed light on this distinction and to explain it from a social psychological perspective. To this end, we have outlined the benefits of encouraging men to enter communal roles, offered a framework for understanding the status asymmetry in gender role change, and presented a model outlining the role of gender stereotypes in creating internal and external psychological and social barriers to men’s adoption of communal roles. We are optimistic that by synthesizing the various literatures about the asymmetrical gender revolution and providing a framework for understanding the phenomenon, researchers will be better able to design interventions that can bring society closer to achieving gender equality across domains.
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Table 1. Benefits to men’s increased involvement in communal roles

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who Benefits?</th>
<th>What is at Stake?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Society</td>
<td>More men are needed to fill occupations such as teaching and nursing that are of great value to society and that are in high demand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Communal activities and roles satisfy a universal human need for belonging, increase psychological well-being, and increase life expectancy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Children thrive psychologically, socially, and academically when their fathers are more involved in their care.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Women are free to pursue a greater range of workplace and leadership opportunities to the degree that their male partners are willing to share in domestic responsibilities at home.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1. Asymmetrical change in gender ratios for male- vs. female-dominated careers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013).
Figure 2. Distal factors that have led to an asymmetry in changing gender roles

Environmental and Cultural Factors

A. Evolutionary Pressures

B. Biological Sex Differences

C. Sex-Based Division of Labor

D. Control of Commodities

E. Status Asymmetry

F. Gender Stereotypes

G. Changing Social Structures

H. Asymmetry in Changing Gender Roles
Figure 3. Proximal factors and psychological barriers to men’s engagement in communal roles