How to Foster Male Engagement in Traditionally Female Communal Roles and Occupations

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What is the issue?
While women are increasingly entering traditionally male ‘agentic’ roles (which emphasize qualities such as being assertive, competent, and independent - such as jobs in science or engineering or leadership positions), there has been less of a shift of men moving into traditionally female ‘communal’ roles (which emphasize qualities such as being caring, warm, and kind like nursing, teaching, or childcare). Research shows that men’s lower representation in communal roles (just like women’s lower representation in agentic roles) does not solely stem from biological differences in skills or interests, but also from contextual forces restricting men’s opportunities to engage in these roles. Already early on in life, men are taught they should be agentic and not too communal – and they experience social punishments for deviating from these expectations, such as being disliked or even questioned whether they are a ‘real’ man. Yet, the fact that contexts can restrict men’s communal engagement also provides opportunities for contextual interventions to broaden men’s options in pursuing their personal communal and/or agentic interests, free of social restrictions based on their gender.

Why is it important?
Missed advantages of men’s communal engagement include increased freedom to choose as well as life and relational satisfaction for men; lower behavioral problems for their children; more leeway to pursue a career for their female partners; a better use of individual talents for society; and reduced labor shortages in communal occupations. Disadvantages that could be reduced through men’s communal engagement include men’s fewer health behaviors (such as healthy eating habits and use of health screenings), and
addressing men’s lower recognition and seeking of help for psychological problems, and their higher tendency towards unhealthy, risky, and aggressive behaviors (such as drug use, drinking, casual sex, violence, or suicide).

**What can we do?**
The table below provides an overview of potential ways to overcome the different barriers to men’s communal engagement in society, organizations, and social and romantic relations as reviewed in this paper.
## How to foster male communal engagement?

### Society
- Make people more aware of the disadvantages and missed advantages of rigid gender norms (teaching boys to be agentic and not too communal).
- Broaden socialization of young boys, allowing them to develop both their agentic and communal qualities and interests.
- Provide longer paternal leave and parental leave that is solely for fathers. Ensure sufficient income compensation during such leaves, ideally dependent on uptake by the father.
- Revise tax systems such that there are no disincentives for both partners to work.
- Make communal occupations more attractive with better financial and social rewards, and by highlighting agentic aspects of these jobs.

### Organizations
- Decrease expectations for employees to be fully devoted to work.
- Establish a work climate that encourages work-family balance (e.g., male leaders as role models taking paternity leave, no early morning or late night meetings) and the use of family-friendly policies.

### Social relations
- Increase the visibility of communal men who are also high in agency as role models.
- Strengthen social support networks for men in communal roles and occupations.

### Romantic relations
- Decrease societal norms of perfect motherhood.
- Improve men's self-confidence and efficacy in fathering.
- Highlight that men’s communal engagement is beneficial for women’s careers and relationship satisfaction.
- Enable women to participate in the labor market (e.g., affordable childcare)
- Foster communication between young men and women about future role divisions.