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Sabrina Tanquerel, Marc Grau-Grau

Institutions: École de management de Normandie, International University Of Catalonia

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journals.sagepub.com/home/org**Sabrina Tanquerel**

Ecole de Management de Normandie, France

Marc Grau-Grau 

Harvard Kennedy School, USA; Universitat Internacional de Catalunya, Spain

Abstract

This article explores the barriers and strategies experienced by Spanish working fathers regarding work-family balance. Based on 29 in-depth interviews with Spanish working fathers in different types of organizations and sectors, the results of this study present different barriers that are divided into three groups: contextual barriers, organizational barriers and internalized barriers. The results also suggest that the study's participants fall into three categories or patterns: hegemonic gender order conformers, borderers and deviants, who use three different strategies (no strategies, invisible strategies and visible strategies) to overcome the barriers detected in this research. The dynamics of reinforcing, being complicit and challenging hegemonic masculinities within the workplace are discussed in light of recent theories regarding gender and organizations, masculinities and fatherhood.

Keywords

Barriers, fathers, flexible policies, masculinities, men, strategies, work-family balance

Introduction

This article explores the barriers and strategies experienced by Spanish working fathers regarding work-family balance and how their positioning regarding masculinities and fathering influence the strategies they use to overcome such barriers. The recent research suggests that the majority of employees want to spend more time with their families, with no significant differences between men and women (Parker and Wang, 2013). This new trend, together with a rising expectation for men as involved fathers (Kaufman, 2013), generates new tensions, contradictions and competing discourses among men.

To address to this complexity, organizations and governments in post-industrial societies are making efforts to institutionalize flexible policies to foster a sustainable work-family balance

Corresponding author:

Marc Grau-Grau, Women and Public Policy Program, Harvard Kennedy School, 79 John F. Kennedy Street, Cambridge, MA, 02138, USA.

Joaquim Molins Figueras Child Care and Family Policies Chair, Universitat Internacional de Catalunya, Immaculada 22, Barcelona 08017, Spain.

Emails: marc_grau-grau@hks.harvard.edu; mgraug@uic.cat

among employees. Flexibility raises a new array of choices, and flexible work arrangements are perceived as a positive tool to increase control and autonomy (Sennett, 1998). However, still mostly used by women, flexible work arrangements are associated with different status, which serve as symbolic forms with opposite organizational consequences. For instance, while men usually consider flexibility to be a symbol of control, women perceive it as a key resource to find work-family balance (Loscocco, 1997). Another study (Leslie et al., 2012) suggests that while using flexibility for non-caring reasons is associated with career premiums, using it for caring reasons may lead to negative career consequences, which could be one explanation for the 'perplexing underutilization' of such arrangements (Williams et al., 2013).

A burgeoning research on work-family balance over the last five decades (Powell et al., 2019) has clearly provided excellent empirical evidence as well as complex theoretical frameworks to understand the interrelation between work and family. Nevertheless, this growing literature has tended to ignore gender in its analyses (Gerson, 2004), and when gender has been analysed, it has generally been considered to be a dichotomous category with univocal descriptions. For that reason, Gerson (2004) encouraged scholars to enrich the study of work-family dynamics by going beyond these two absolute categories of men and women and using a gender lens to understand heterogeneity within gender groups.

Along these lines, this study responds to this call and aims to better understand diversity and heterogeneity among a surprisingly understudied group in organization studies: working men (Collinson and Hearn, 1994). Although there are a few exceptions (Brandth and Kvande, 2002; Cooper, 2000; Halrynjo, 2009; Murgia and Poggio, 2009, 2013), organization studies have tended to neglect any critical attention to men and masculinities. Drawing on a growing body of scholarship on gender and organization (Acker, 1990; Collinson and Hearn, 1994), men and masculinities (Collinson and Hearn, 2005; Connell, 2005; Elliott, 2016; Hanlon, 2012) and fatherhood (Kaufman, 2013; Williams, 2009), this study aims to contribute to the critical scholarship by showing how men, masculinities and fatherhood intertwine when considering work-family balance in a context such as Spain, which is characterized by a rapid but incomplete shift towards gender egalitarianism.

The article is organized as follows. After this introduction, we present the theoretical frames of this article and show how they guide our analysis and contribute to understanding the focus of our work. Next, we contextualize the Spanish case and develop the methodological aspects of our study. We then provide the results of our fieldwork. Finally, we address the contributions of our work and suggest some implications.

Gendered organizations: work-family balance intertwined with masculinities and fatherhood

To understand the rationale underlying men's perceptions and experiences regarding work-family balance, this study is rooted in an increasing body of scholarship on gender and work, masculinities and fatherhood.

Working in gendered organizations for men and women

Organizations are not gender neutral (Acker, 1990) or 'sex-neutral machines' (Kanter, 1977), and their gendered nature is partially uncovered by the embodied nature of work. Assuming that organizations are gendered means that they systematically provide advantages and disadvantages for particular gender groups. However, this research assumes that gendered organizations not only negatively affect women, but also those men who openly challenge and explicitly resist the dominant gender order (Murgia and Poggio, 2013).

Organizations are a crucial arena in which gender identities are produced and reproduced (Acker, 1990). However, critical studies of men and masculinity have tended to neglect the importance of

organizations as sites for reproductions of men's power and specific forms of masculinities (Collinson and Hearn, 2005). Jobs are often seen as an abstract category with no gender, body or occupant. The reality suggests that male workers with poor non-work obligations and emotions under control seem better suited to fulfil these disembodied positions. According to Acker (1998), 'the ordinary worker is a man, an abstract person who has few obligations outside work that could distract him from the centrality of work' (p. 197). This 'universal' (Ellingsæter, 1995), 'abstract' (Acker, 1990), 'ordinary' (Acker, 1998) or 'ideal' (Williams, 2001) worker is distinguished by being unencumbered (Halford et al., 1997), with no caring duties that require his time, energy and attention. It is now undisputed that men implicitly are the 'ideal workers' as they have been viewed as naturally unencumbered (Halrynjo, 2009). The notion of the ideal worker is based on the scarcity approach (Goode, 1960), which considers that time, energy and attention are limited and finite, and therefore, participating in one role tends to reduce the time, energy and attention devoted to another one. This conflicting approach, which has not been challenged until recently (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006), has dominated the work-family balance literature as well as the dominant managerial discourses.

Although the notion of the ideal worker does not match the reality of many employees (Davies and Frink, 2014), the expectation to adhere to the norm of the unencumbered worker remains pervasive and dominant in contemporary organizations (Acker, 1990, 2006; Hochschild, 1997). In this context, using flexibility for caring reasons exposes work-family policy users to risks of stigmatization – *flexibility stigma* – and marginalization (Coltrane et al., 2013; Rudman and Mescher, 2013; Williams et al., 2013). In a very interesting study, Reid (2015) examined how people navigate pressures to embrace the identity of an ideal worker. Her results showed that while some people embrace this identity, for others, it is a source of conflict. To address this identity conflict, two main strategies drawing on Goffman's (1963) work were identified: passing as an ideal worker or revealing one's deviance.

Although some men reveal their deviance (Murgia and Poggio, 2009), in general, most men continue to embrace or pass as having embraced the ideal worker image. Moreover, for men, digressing from these norms also raises the question of one's gender identity. For that reason, and to understand work-family balance barriers and strategies among working fathers, we turned to Connell's (2005) and Elliott (2016) concepts of masculinities together with the emergence of different types of fathers (Kaufman, 2013).

Intertwining male work-family experiences with masculinities and fatherhood

Although there is a growing body of scholarship on men and masculinities, masculinity remains an ill-defined concept (Collinson and Hearn, 1994, 2005; Connell, 2005). There is still no clear consensus on whether masculinity is related to behaviours, identities, practices, relationships or discourses. Today, we can find different approaches for defining a person as masculine: the essentialist approach (masculinity with a feature), the positivist perspective (what men actually are), the normative perspective (what men ought to be) and the semiotic approach (masculinity as a symbolic system). However, none of these approaches are exempt from important criticisms. For this study, we draw on Connell's (2005) concept of masculinity, which, instead of focusing on definitory traits, behaviours, norms or symbols, is described as 'simultaneously 1) a place in gender relations, 2) the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender relations, and 3) the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture (p.71)'. Considering masculinity in terms of gender relations involves the recognition that more than one type of masculinity may coexist (Carrigan et al., 1985). Along these lines, Connell (2005) defined hegemonic masculinity as 'the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations' (p. 76). The remaining masculinities are defined in contraposition to this dominant position and include types such as 'subordinated' (at the opposite side of the hierarchy), 'marginalized' (oppressed or not taken into consideration) and

'complicit' (close to the dominant group and enjoys the benefits of patriarchy without having to embody the hegemonic pattern).

Although hegemonic masculinity, as a centre of dominance (Hearn, 1996), has costs for both women and men in terms of violence, high-risk behaviour, a lack of self-care, poor health and impoverished relationships, it remains a normative force in gender relationalities (Connell, 2005). The hegemonic construction of masculinity continues to tie masculinity to the work sphere (Liebig and Oechsle, 2017), which is linked with the notion of the ideal worker described above. A 'successful' career seems to still be an important medium through which middle-class men seek to establish masculine identities (Collinson and Hearn, 1994). However, some men are beginning to adopt other forms of masculinity such as caring masculinities, which reject discrimination and are associated with traits that embrace values of care (Elliott, 2016; Hanlon, 2012). Such men challenge the dominant gender order when they explicitly practice their caring masculinities in a traditional environment. The rich narrative of a hospital surgeon in Murgia and Poggio's (2013) study, under the name of Atlas, could serve as an excellent example of this type of man who challenges the gender order in his own organization.

Like Atlas, other men who are motivated by a caregiving ambition (Bear, 2019) are making major adjustments in their careers. Nevertheless, while care seems to be a moral and social imperative for women, it is *only* a choice for men. In this vein, some scholars have made efforts to categorize men considering men's volume of care and work. For example, Hanlon (2012) distinguished between three types of men: *conservatists*, who define masculinity through paid work and care such as breadwinning; *sharers*, who are in favour of caring equality but still associate their masculinity with paid work; and *carers*, who see themselves as primary carers and who are divided into *no choice carers* (sacrificing paid work since there is no other option) and *nothing to lose carers* (who also experience not having a choice together with very little investment in paid work). In a very similar way, Halrynjo (2009) distinguished four adaptations of work and care among men: *career position*, which is mainly motivated by the work-devotion schema (Blair-Loy, 2003); the *care and career position*, which is similar to the *sharers* category defined by Hanlon (2012); the *care position*, which mainly refers to men working part-time with substantial care responsibilities who earn less than their partners; and the *patchwork career*, who never considers paid work to be a source of self-realization.

The new research suggests that the cultural meaning of fatherhood (Cabrera and Tamis-LeMonda, 2013) has evolved from a distant breadwinner to a more nurturing father, generating new expectations for men towards fatherhood (Humberd et al., 2015; Kaufman, 2013), which seems to be incompatible with the pattern of hegemonic masculinity (Murgia and Poggio, 2013). In her book, Kaufman (2013) presented three types of father according to three different strategies men use to balance their opposite expectations: *old dads*, who make little change in their working life upon becoming fathers; *new dads*, who may alter some of their work practices; and *superdads*, who 'deliberately adjust their work life' to fit their new family lives (p. 7). In her analyses of fatherhood and masculinity among high-tech workers in Silicon Valley, Cooper (2000) also distinguished between *traditional*s, fathers who believe in egalitarianism ideologically but not in practice; *transitional*s, fathers who want to be more involved at home but who still leave much of the work to their wives or other women; and *superdads*, who meet all their work and family obligations while they do not appear to resent doing it using four different strategies: self-sacrifice, silencing work-family conflict, disguising the care they do and turning to women to help them. One of the novel discoveries of Cooper's (2000) work is the emergence of newly constituted masculinity that coincides with the new way in which work is organized, which has very similar points as the 'transnational business masculinity' developed by Connell (2005) and which functions as a key mechanism of control in organizations.

According to Hunter and her colleagues (2017), masculinity also informs what fathers are expected to be. Thus, hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005), caring masculinities (Elliott, 2016) or a newly constituted form of masculinity not only informs what a good worker is but also what a

good father is. However, little research has tended to intertwine masculinity and fatherhood when considering work-family balance.

Consequently, in this context of imposed masculinities and new aspirations among men, together with a triple-call for research on men and organizations, on using a gender lens to understand heterogeneity among men, and by exploring not only new categories of men but also how these categories are interrelated, this study aims to advance and enrich the research on gender and work and on masculinities and fatherhood by highlighting how men, masculinities and fatherhood intertwine when considering work-family balance in a fruitful context such as Spain.

Contextualizing Spain

Four main dimensions make Spain a special context for analysis: (1) the rapid change from a very male-dominated culture towards gender egalitarianism, (2) the normal chaos of Spanish schedules, (3) the lack of flexibility in Spanish organizations and (4) the lack of generous family policies, especially those oriented towards men.

In the last 25 years, Spain has experienced very rapid changes in gender attitudes, female political representation and female participation in the (paid) labour market, as shown in Table 1. In 1990, 2 years before the Olympic Games in Barcelona, almost one-third of Spaniards agreed that when jobs are scarce, men should be given jobs before women, with no significant differences between men’s and women’s attitudes. As shown in Table 1, this situation has changed dramatically. The same trend can be seen regarding female participation in politics (higher than the European Union (EU)) and in the labour market.

The chaotic schedule in Spain is an important reason to conduct research in this context. Today, Spaniards face a real conflict between their work and family expectations. Among other factors, the main reasons for this normal chaos are the incompatibility between school hours and work, a long lunch break that extends the length of the working day, the late prime time (10pm) and being in an incorrect time zone since Franco decided Spain should have the same time zone as Hitler in 1942.

The lack of flexibility among Spanish organizations is another factor that makes Spain an interesting subject of study. The rigidity of many Spanish organizations does not help working parents organize their lives. According to a study, more than half of Spanish employees reported a lack of flexibility and autonomy in how they organize their working day (Grau-Grau, 2013). Finally, despite some efforts and an intense agenda aimed towards gender egalitarianism, there is a lack of family policies; a lack of public nurseries that might facilitate the entry of many employees into the (paid) labour market, especially since the impactful economic crisis; and a lack of promotion of active parenthood, which could reduce the *micromachismos* that reinforce the idea of domination perceived by Spaniards (Meil Landwerlin, 2006).

Table 1. Spain: A rapid change towards gender equality.

Indicators		1990	1997	2002	2007	2015
<i>Attitudes towards gender equality</i>	Proportion of Spaniards who totally agree with the following statement: <i>when jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women</i> ^a	Men 29.3	26.8	15.4	19.8	12.6
		Women 30.8	27.0	17.4	14.6	11.5
<i>Female political participation</i>	Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament ^b	14.6	24.7	28.3	36.6	41.1
<i>Female labour force participation</i>	Female labour force participation rate ^c	42.2	49.2	54.7	62.8	70.0

Sources: ^aWorld Values Survey (1990–1994, 1995–1999, 2000–2004, 2005–2009, 2010–2014); ^bInter-Parliamentary Union (1990, 1997, 2002, 2007, 2015); and ^cOECD (1990, 1997, 2002, 2007, 2015).
 OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Table 2. Spanish context.

Dimension	Sub-dimension	Conflict
Work	Working hours	Long working hours/long lunch breaks Poor flexibility
	Career	Family care is not a priority for companies Classic notion of ideal worker Male-gendered culture
	Discrimination	Interest on gender equality Risk for women New risk for active fathers Flexibility stigma
Family	Family time	Bad habit of not having breakfast together Late dinner time Poor family time
	Family life	Together alone Tensions due to little time to family members Insufficient sleep time
	Discrimination	Women continue working a second shift <i>Micromachismos</i> and symbolic power New caring masculinities
Policies	Social policies	Growing interest on gender equality and fathers Poor family policies Few public nurseries

Source: Adapted from Cardús (2003) and Grau-Grau (2017).

Research aims and methods

Against this background, the aim of this research study is to explore the link between masculinities, fatherhood and work and how men *practising* different masculinities perceive different barriers regarding work-family balance. Accordingly, the study posed the following research questions:

1. What are the barriers perceived by working fathers regarding work-family balance?
2. What are the strategies used by working fathers to overcome these perceived barriers?

To answer these questions, this study is based on 29 in-depth interviews with Spanish working men. All of the participants were selected according the following requirements: having children under 10 years old, working full time and living with their children and partner in the same household. The strategy that was used to identify these working fathers was a snowball process that began with different focal points to obtain a heterogeneous sample. An initial focal point included two HR departments of two large organizations, one located in Barcelona and one in Madrid, which resulted in 11 interviews. A second focal point was a Catalan primary school where an advertisement was posted, which led to a very interesting sample (from a cartoonist to a purchasing manager). Finally, a third group comprised professional contacts. In some cases, the participants suggested additional contacts who fulfil the requirements set forth above. These sample techniques may have important limitations. Although the study description was constructed to be as generic as possible to not condition the perceptions of the participating working fathers, a 'self-selected' sample may be more aware of the importance of work-family balance in their lives. However, the heterogeneity of our sample, together with the reliance in some cases on professional contacts, led

to a sample that in any case is representative. However, this sampling technique has already been used in similar studies on masculinities at work (Simpson, 2004). Thus, our sample methods, considering the aforementioned drawbacks, seem to be appropriate for the aim of this research.

All of the interviews were conducted face-to-face from November 2012 to March 2014. Each interview lasted approximately 1 hour and was conducted in Spanish or Catalan. All of the interviews were audio-recorded and fully transcribed in the languages that were used to conduct them. Seventeen of these interviews took place in the interviewees' workplace, five in their homes and seven in other locations (e.g. at a university). The interviewees' mean age was 40.2 years old, and they worked in different hierarchical positions in a variety of organizations. All of them were full-time workers with permanent positions, except six working fathers who worked freelance, as table 3 shows.

Table 3. Characteristics of the interviewees.

	Name	Age	Position	Working arrangement	Family status
1	Eladio	45	Sales Representative	Permanent	Married, 1 child
2	Eduardo	43	Warehouse Supervisor	Permanent	Married, 2 children
3	Santiago	52	Sales Representative	Permanent	Married, 1 child
4	Pablo	33	Head of Financial Department	Permanent	Married, 1 child
5	Fonsi	32	Head of After Sales Service	Permanent	Married, 1 child
6	Jaime	55	Financial Director	Permanent	Married, 2 children
7	Fabian	61	Commercial Assistant	Permanent	Married, 2 children
8	Mariano	46	Business Director	Permanent	Married, 1 child
9	Jorge	33	Marketing Analyst	Permanent	Married, 1 child
10	Francesc	41	Chief Information Officer	Permanent	Married, 2 children
11	Òscar	48	Managing Director	Permanent	Married, 1 child
12	Javier	50	Managing Director	Permanent	Married, 2 children
13	Genís	31	Consultant	Permanent	Married, 2 children
14	Gabriel	38	Marketing Manager	Permanent	Married, 2 children
15	Bernat	35	Consultant	Self-employed	Married, 1 child
16	Carles	36	Architect	Self-employed	Married, 1 child
17	Oriol	36	Purchasing Manager	Permanent	Married, 3 children
18	Ignasi	32	Marketing Manager	Permanent	Married, 2 children
19	Guillem	50	Cartoonist	Self-employed	Married, 4 children
20	Mario	34	Consultant	Self-employed	Married, 1 child
21	Martí	37	Policy Administration Professional	Permanent	Married, 2 children
22	Jaume	32	Financial Professional	Permanent	Married, 3 children
23	Sergio	34	Quality Manager	Permanent	Married, 3 children
24	Joan	43	Warehouse Manager	Permanent	Married, 1 child
25	Adrià	54	Clerical Support Worker	Permanent	Married, 2 children
26	Rubén	31	Plumber	Permanent	Married, 2 children
27	Enric	44	Painter	Self-employed	Married, 2 children
28	Isaac	33	Painter	Self-employed	Married, 1 child
29	Raül	33	Parking Guard	Permanent	Married, 1 child

The opening can be one of the most important parts of an interview, and it can set the tone for the rest of the session. In our case, we decided to start with the following steps: provide a brief introduction of the research, thank the participants for their contribution, explain confidentiality and anonymity, inform them that they can say 'no' and obtain permission to audio-record the session. We also began the interview with an easy question (e.g. occupation) to initiate the collection

of the data but at the same time provide a comfortable atmosphere. The interview was divided into the following sections: demographic data, work, family, work-family-work conflict, work-family-work enrichment, fatherhood and boundaries.

The data from the interviews were analysed in three stages. First, we listened to the recordings, read the transcriptions and wrote a summary for each father. Each summary was divided into blocks to facilitate comparisons with the rest of the interviews. The second stage consisted of conducting a thematic analysis of barriers and strategies using only our transcriptions. We conducted line-by-line codification generating a codebook with common categories (e.g. barriers), subcategories (e.g. sub-barriers) and some of the descriptions given by the participants. We used a qualitative data analysis package to code these new variables.¹ A generic qualitative approach was used too in our analysis (Rossman and Rallis, 2003). Based on the codebook generated during the second stage, the third part of the data analysis consisted of rechecking all of the categories and subcategories together against the original transcriptions (Strauss and Corbin, 1994).

To construct our typologies of working men, we considered three main variables: ideal worker norm, fatherhood and masculinity. Regarding the ideal worker norm, for each participant, we examined the number of working hours, if they work from home, the use of a flexible work arrangement, their perception towards those who use it and if they always put their jobs first. According to these variables, and drawing on Reid's (2015) strategies, each participant was classified into one of the following three categories: Embracing, passing or revealing their deviance towards the ideal worker image. Using our multiple questions on fatherhood, such as the number of hours per day spent at home, the specific tasks in childcare on a daily basis compared with their wives, their definition of fatherhood and their aspirations, we classified each father following Kaufman's (2013) categories: old dads, new dads and superdads. Finally, taking into consideration the men's participation in domestic work (e.g. ironing, cleaning) compared with their wives, their gender attitudes and the home-work arrangements, we organized the data for each participant in three potential categories, two of which were based on Connell's (2005) work (hegemonic masculinity and complicit masculinity) and one that draws on Elliott's (2016) work (caring masculinity). The link and the interrelations among these three new categorial variables helped us to generate a new typology of working men, which is also intertwined with barriers and strategies towards work-family balance.

Results

The results are presented as follows. First, we present a typology of working men based on our qualitative data. Then, we present the perceived barriers faced by these new categories of working men. Finally, three types of strategies regarding work-family balance are presented.

Typology of working men

Our analyses suggest a typology of working fathers according to their masculinity, fatherhood and strategy to embrace, pass as or reveal the ideal worker image: Hegemonic gender order (HGO) conformers, HGO borderers and HGO deviants (table 4). We borrow the term 'hegemonic' from Connell (2005), who in turn used the concept 'hegemony' from Gramsci's analysis of class relations. The 'hegemonic gender order' refers to the 'patriarchal system of gender relations' (Connell, 2005) wherein hegemonic masculinity, at the pinnacle of the gender order, serves to legitimize and maintain dominant positions (Elliott, 2016). Although few men are able to live up to the ideals of hegemonic masculinity, it remains a normative force in gender relations (Connell, 2005) and as an interpretive pattern for locating oneself in the gender order. Thus, the concept of 'hegemonic gender order' is used in our typology because it still provides a cultural reference point where men decide to locate themselves. That is why we also use it to describe men who actually challenge and reject it.

Table 4. Typology of working men and types of barriers.

Types of barriers	Sublevel	Hegemonic		Complicit		Caring		Masculinity	
		Embracing	Old	Passing as	New	Revealing	Super	Ideal worker	Fatherhood
Contextual	Poor political support	+		+		+			
	Our common past	+		+		+			
Organizational	Poor management support	+		+		+			
	Poor peer support	+		+		+			
Internalized	Anticipation of career consequences	+		+		+			
	Internalized ideal worker image	+		+					
Internalized	Internalized classic gender norms	+						Strategies used	
		+						No strategy	
Disclosure line				+				Invisible strategy	
						+		Visible strategy	
Disclosure line		Public conformity		Private disconformity		Public conformity			

HGO: hegemonic gender order.

HGO conformers are defined by demonstrating what we refer to as *public conformity* towards the HGO (convergence). The centrality of their life is paid work, and they do not usually show soft signals at work. They do not usually discuss their families at work, and, if they do, it is to reinforce their authority, power or status. This group of so-called HGO conformers are the men behind the dominant description of masculinity (hegemonic masculinity). They also display (embrace) traditional ideal worker norms and adopt the traditional codes of fatherhood (old fathers), as suggested by the following quotations:

After my daughter was born, I went for a business trip for two weeks. (Francesc, 41, Chief Information Officer, 2 children)

When my son was 5, I realized that I missed 4 of his 5 birthdays, because I was travelling like a *dog*. (Javier, 50, Managing Director, 2 children)

Work is very important for me, it allows me to give to my children the same *resources* that I received in terms of education, studying abroad ... yes, it's important for me for the opportunities and *things* I can give to my children. (Ignasi, 32, Marketing Manager, 2 children)

HGO borderers are probably the most interesting group, but this is not because they are in transition as we expected at the beginning of our analysis but rather because they seem to place themselves between the two groups. They express private disconformity towards the HGO (dissonance); in other words, they express only their disconformity within intimate groups (family or very close peers). They perceive the barriers described in the following section, they evaluate them and, after an internal cost/benefit analysis, they decide to dissimulate (passing). Thus, they act or pass as HGO conformers, especially in their working life, replicating hegemonic masculinity (complicit masculinity). Furthermore, although they generally express egalitarian beliefs and the desire to be involved fathers (new dads), their participation at home and with children is not as active as they would like:

In multinationals, you need to send some signals, you have to ensure that I-don't-know-who sees you. (Gabriel, 38, Marketing Manager, 2 child)

I don't like to ask a favour to my company for caring reasons. If I have a family problem, I try to solve it after my work, but if there is no other possibility, well, I take one of the two extra days that we have for personal reasons, but I don't like it, I don't like to alter the rhythm of the company. (Raül, 33, Parking Guard, 1 child)

In my previous job, there were no dilemmas, I always had to be at work, always. Now, that I have flexibility, it has generated conflicts with my wife as well as auto-conflicts and dilemmas. (Bernat, 35, Consultant, 1 child)

Regarding the groceries, my wife is in charge of the daily groceries, while I am in charge of the 'big' groceries, like bottles of water ... (Carles, 36, Architect, 1 child)

Finally, we identified a small but probably growing group of men who can be described as HGO deviants. They clearly value care, and their family holds a central place in their lives (caring masculinity). They perceive the barriers described in the following section and evaluate pros and cons, however, in contrast with gender borderers, HGO deviants openly overcome them (public disconformity). They challenge ideal worker codes (revealing) and engage in involved fatherhood (super-dads) as suggested by the following quotations:

The other day, they put me a meeting last minute, but I cancelled to go to the paediatrician with my daughter [...] Also, another day I decided to go home because my wife was feeling sick. (Sergio, 34, Quality Manager, 1 child)

If I could finish thirty minutes earlier to be with my son, I did it. In contrast, if he [his working partner] could work one hour more, he worked more. I prioritized my family, while he prioritized his work. We had many arguments, and this generated a lot of tension. [...] In the end, I decided to terminate our partnership. (Isaac, 33, Painter, 1 child)

I like children. When I was 10 years old, I saw a baby and I felt tenderness, also with my little cousins. I remember that when I was a teenager, I was in a bar with my friends in Tres Torres [Barcelona, upper-side], and there was a nanny with a baby who did not stop crying, and I asked her if I could hold the baby. I took him, and he slept him in my arms. (Guillem, 50, Cartoonist, 4 children)

This typology of working men will be useful for examining the barriers perceived by the participants in the workplace and the strategies they develop to find work-family balance.

Barriers perceived by working fathers

What are the barriers perceived by different types of working men regarding work-family balance? Following the analysis described in the methodological section, we found various barriers experienced by working fathers, which we divided into three groups: contextual barriers, organizational barriers and internalized barriers. The contextual barriers comprise two sub-barriers: *poor political support* and *our common past*. The organizational barriers, collected as an overall meso-barrier, comprise three main sub-barriers: *poor management support*, *poor peer support* and *anticipation of career consequences*. Finally, our analyses suggest two main internalized barriers: *internalization of the ideal worker image* and *internalization of traditional gender norms*. As we describe in our analyses, while context and organizational barriers are to some degree experienced by all the participating working fathers in similar ways, the two internalized barriers are key in explaining the differences in our typology of men.

Contextual barriers

As described above, the Spanish context is crucial not only to bring forth voices that are rarely heard in discussions about men in organization studies, but also to facilitate a better understanding of how this particular context affects the perceptions or aspirations of Spanish working fathers in relation to work-family balance.

Poor political support. Although there have been recent political efforts to foster gender equality and encourage men's participation in domestic work, the participants still view Spain as a country that offers very poor support to families and fathers:

In our country, and I see this as a big failure, we had an enormous opportunity with the transition after Franco's death. In reality, we have a country with some laws which are not bad as a framework, but the real politics have not yet arrived. [...] In reality, we live in a very sexist country. (Guillem, 50, Cartoonist, 4 children)

We are coming from a very specific model of a family; it is a political issue in Spain. (Óscar, 48, Managing Director, 1 child)

Regarding new models of fatherhood, just have a look to the number of shared custody cases after a divorce. We again have a good political framework but in reality only 5% of the cases become shared custody. (Guillem, 50, Cartoonist, 4 children)

All these quotations suggest that although there have been important efforts and a rapid evolution towards gender egalitarianism in Spain, the recent new policies are not enough to support families and fathers. As Guillem highlighted, the new policies provide a good framework; however, they have not really affected the daily life of Spanish families in a positive way.

Our common past. As the above quotations suggest, and as the context section highlights, Spain comes out of a traditional past where Franco's regime (1939–1975), which together with a clear division of the labour market, imposed a traditional view of the family, and in turn, a traditional view of fathers, as the majority of our sample perceive in their own fathers:

I am the son of my father's values from an intellectual perspective, but my father was not at all involved in our childhood, he always returned home late from work, and it was difficult for him to express his emotions. (Óscar, 48, Managing Director, 1 child)

Some years ago, when men finished their working day, they went to the bar. [...] I experienced this with my father, and my father is not a bad person, but he has not been a father for me. He has not been a father. (Rubén, 31, Plumber, 2 children)

Did our parents change our nappies? My father did not. (Carles, 36, Architect, 1 child)

At home, my father did nothing. My mom, with three children, and feeling sick for long periods, did everything. I cannot understand how this was possible. (Enric, 44, painter, 2 children)

Organizational barriers

A second group of barriers emerged from our analysis: organizational barriers. According to our results, the key organizational barrier that does not allow fathers to ask for flexible arrangements for family reasons can be summarized as a lack of legitimacy. Indeed, our results show that men perceive a lack of management support (which does not necessarily mean a lack of policies), together with poor peer support, and they anticipate negative career consequences. Those three elements lead to the general feeling of a lack of legitimacy. According to their arguments, the problem is not asking for flexibility but the reason for asking for flexibility. For instance, while pursuing executive education could be a good and legitimate reason to ask for flexibility and at the same time could perpetuate their image as an ideal worker, asking for flexibility for family reasons is not a sufficiently legitimate reason since it weakens the requester's image as an ideal worker:

I think that [asking for flexibility] would not be welcome in my company. I speak from my point of view, but I guess that if a man asks to reduce his working day to take care of his son, honestly, I think that [...] for the company, our work, our sector, which is the agricultural sector, it does not make sense. [...] We are still very far from being ready for this. (Eladio, 45, Sales Representative, 1 child)

Poor organizational support: 'these policies are not for all'. The sub-barrier 'poor organizational support' refers to a lack of support from an organizational perspective, which was reported by the male employees in our interviews. Poor organizational support is based on the idea that men know that flexibility and work-family balance policies exist within their companies but feel that these initiatives were not designed for them:

Companies have official policies and *real* policies. (Bernat, 35, Consultant, 1 child)

This feeling contributes to the belief that such organizational policies are not aimed at men. As a result, men often perceive that flexible work options are not masculine and are primarily designed and intended for women. As an illustration, Gabriel, a marketing manager, stated the following:

We have flexible work arrangements. They are new; we have already signed a charter regarding work-life balance. We have always had flexible policies, and they are not gender-oriented. However, people who use them are not viewed favourably, especially men. (Gabriel, 38, Marketing Manager, 2 child)

The interviewees feel that they are excluded from these benefits and unfairly treated by the corporation. They mentioned that they need more organizational support and, above all, a clear discourse and proactive communication of work-family balance options that involve men; in fact, they insist that work-family balance options should also be open and available to men. According to the participants, this would increase the feeling that work-family balance is legitimate, and it would allow them to effectively use work-family balance-related arrangements. This was Eduardo's perception, and he pointed out the poor organizational attitude towards his work-family balance concerns:

There are only two women in the warehouse; one is the secretary, who is around sixty, and the other one is Elisa, the manager, and I don't think she has problems with work-life balance. Today, we have to do the same tasks as women, but if, in a company like ours, we are not informed that we may have the option of leaving at 3 p.m. [like them] and consequently prevent our wife from having to do everything and assume all the responsibilities ... work-life balance is difficult. (Eduardo, 43, Warehouse supervisor, 2 children)

The results of this study also suggest that the men are not informed of opportunities for flexible arrangements, as Eladio suggests:

There are not many possibilities for us; in this company, there are mothers who are part-time workers, for example ... but men? Moreover, I truly don't know if I have this option; I don't know if I can do it ... Personally, if I had had more opportunity, if the company had offered me the possibility of spending more time with my kid, I would have accepted, of course! (Eladio, 45, Sales Representative, 1 child)

Poor peer support. If the lack of support from the board of directors was reported as a key barrier to asking for flexibility for caring reasons, the lack of comprehension and misuse of flexible arrangements among colleagues and peers reinforced this deep concern among the men who truly wanted to be involved at home. This second sub-barrier is defined as a lack of support and comprehension among colleagues and peers who do not use the flexible arrangements offered by the organization. These types of attitudes and behaviours, far from being supportive of the involved men, perpetuate hegemonic masculinity in the workplace.

I am feeling uncomfortable knowing that my colleagues think that I am again in a school meeting for my daughter. (Oriol, 36, Purchasing Manager, 3 children)

The participating men not only described a corporate culture that barely encourages men's work-family balance aspirations, but they also deplored the lack of support among colleagues on similar levels:

For me, there is no problem when people on my team use flexible options. However, what bothers me is when people in similar positions use them. Nacho [another director] is always late in the morning, it is true that he finishes very late in the afternoon, but he should arrive on time. He should be an example for the rest of the employees. (Javier, 50, Managing Director, 2 children)

The anticipation of negative career consequences. The third category includes statements in which the men clearly linked work-family arrangements with an expectation of career penalties. The ‘ideal worker’ norm and hegemonic masculinity in the workplace underlie these arguments, in which many of the interviewees mentioned the incompatibility between flexibility and career ambitions. They reported that career perspectives and promotions are hardly compatible with flexibility. They fear that flexibility measures limited their opportunities for promotion and career progression. They all felt that flexibility would have negative repercussions for their careers. It was interesting to observe that they accepted this reality and considered this incompatibility to be normal and logical.

I do not think that it is accepted for a man to leave early. No-one would say anything, but it could have negative consequences. (Gabriel, 38, Marketing Manager, 2 child)

I would not be where I am. (Oriol, 36, Purchasing Manager, 3 children)

Internalized barriers

While context and organizational barriers were perceived in a very similar way among our sample, we found that what truly differentiated our typology of working fathers described before was their degree of internalization of the ideal worker image, and the internalization of classic gender norms.

Internalization of the ideal worker image

I receive the information about our sales every morning at 10 am, and I look at it every day. Even during weekends, and holidays. Yes, I am not able to disconnect. I don’t know how. I have learned to live like this. It doesn’t bother me. At the beginning I thought, will all my life be like this? But then, you get used to it. (Oriol, 36, Purchasing Manager, 3 children)

This first quotation summarizes very well how some of the working men began to incorporate, little-by-little, the notion of the ideal worker. The pressure of a high workload and constant information (‘every morning at 10am’), together with the rise of smartphones as indispensable work devices (‘I look at it every day’), generates the new working dynamics (‘I have learned to live like this’). Although these dynamics can be questioned in some moments (‘will all my life be like this?’), some of the working fathers simply accept this condition (‘you get used to it’).

In our results emerged different strategies that some fathers use to embrace the notion of the ideal worker. However, our findings suggested that only HGO conformers and HGO borderers internalized the notion of the ideal worker.

In 12 years, I was only sick twice ... every year I get a flu vaccination to not stop coming [to work]. (Javier, 50, Managing Director, 2 children)

Internalization of traditional gender norms

Ironing, this is completely delegated to my wife, [...], men are not made to iron. (Rubén, 31, Plumber, 2 children)

I never clean at home. Washing clothes? Quite the same. I don't know how it works, and where everything needs to go, it's not too complicated either, but I do not know how to do it, and my wife does it. From time to time she complains. (Carles, 36, Architect, married, 1 child)

My wife does the bathrooms better than me -he *laughs*-. (Adrià, 54, Clerical Support Worker, 2 children)

This internalized barrier relates to men's reports of a personal perception that domestic work and care in general are not for them. Using a she-is-more-effective argument – my wife does the bathroom better than me – or – I do not know how to do it – together with a discourse of superiority to some degree – this is completely delegated to my wife, these men seem to have internalized the traditional gender norms in such a profound way that they were not able to perceive care and domestic work as a masculine trait or task to be done by men. In our analysis, only HGO conformers seem to have internalized these norms.

Strategies used by working fathers

What are the strategies used by the working fathers to overcome these perceived barriers? A third analysis of our data is related to understanding how the previously identified typologies of working men (HGO conformers, borderers and deviants) perceive the barriers defined in this section and the strategies that they use to overcome them, as table 5 shows.

Table 5. Typology of working men and strategies used.

Category	Strategies	Sub-strategies	Using the 'Right to ask'	Model	Consequences
HGO conformers	<i>No strategy</i>	None	No	Convergence	Reinforcing the ideal work norm and hegemonic masculinity
HGO borderer	<i>Invisible strategies</i>	Informal flexibility Hidden arrangements Asking flexibility for other reasons	No	Dissonance	Being complicit of hegemonic masculinity and notion of ideal worker
HGO deviants	<i>Visible strategies</i>	Formal flexibility Visible arrangements Asking flexibility for caring reasons Quitting their jobs	Yes	Divergence	Challenging hegemonic masculinity and the notion of ideal worker

HGO: hegemonic gender order.

No strategy

In terms of the barriers defined above, HGO conformers seem to perceive to a similar degree the contextual and organizational barriers; however, they are the only group who seem to have internalized the ideal worker image as well as traditional gender norms. This type of man does not consider using any strategy in relation to work-family balance because they have no interest in becoming more involved at home than they currently are. For them, it is enough to maintain their present level of involvement at home (convergence). Their behaviours clearly reinforce the ideal worker norm that they have incorporated as well as the prevalence of classic hegemonic masculinity in the workplace and at home.

Despite the intense (political and organizational) agenda in support of gender egalitarianism, it seems that this type of man advances in his career and occupies dominant positions.

Invisible strategies

The HGO borderers perceive the same lack of organizational and governmental support as that reported by the other men. Similar to the HGO conformers, these men seem to have incorporated the notion of the ideal worker. However, in contrast, they do not tend to internalize the classic gender norms. They show private disconformity with hegemonic masculinity within small groups; however, they are not able to openly overcome the barriers with visible strategies (dissonance). After analysing the pros and cons, they decide not to ask for flexibility for caring reasons because they are afraid of the potential impact on their careers. Therefore, they use invisible strategies to try to be as involved with their families as they would like to be. Examples of these strategies are informal flexibility, hidden arrangements and asking for flexibility for other reasons such as cost optimization. Nevertheless, the use of invisible strategies to avoid being perceived as a gender deviant does not challenge hegemonic masculinity and the notion of the ideal worker, and they become – probably unconsciously – complicit with HGO conformers. Their decision not to use the ‘right to ask’ for flexibility and, ultimately, their invisible strategies perpetuate a system and practice of masculinities that is well-documented in the literature.

Visible strategies

Finally, the HGO deviants clearly value care and reject gender domination, and their family has a central place in their lives. They perceive the context and organizational barriers described in the section above; however, they internalized neither the notion of the ideal worker nor classic gender norms. Another difference with borderers is that they explicitly challenge the gender order (public disconformity). A way of showing their public disconformity and divergence with their organization is their use of the ‘right to ask’ for flexibility for caring reasons (as Sergio did when his wife was sick). Among other visible strategies, they have ample confidence and are able to quit jobs if necessary (Isaac with his partner). HGO deviants openly challenge hegemonic masculinity and are, according to them, redefining the classic notion of the ideal worker. However, in many organizations, these attitudes and behaviours can easily lead men to opt out of their careers or be forced to begin again in a new sector or business.

Discussion

This article set out to explore the perceptions and experiences of Spanish working fathers of work-family balance. In particular, it focuses on the barriers perceived by these fathers as well as the strategies they use to overcome such barriers. This research is important given the new competing expectations faced by many working fathers today (Humberd et al., 2015) together with the need to the use of a gender lens in the work-family balance field and organization studies to understand heterogeneity among gender groups (Gerson, 2004).

This research enriches the extensive body of scholarship on gender and work and, more particularly, the research on masculinities and fatherhood. First, a new typology of working fathers has been identified based on differences in men’s conceptions of masculinity (Connell, 2005; Elliott, 2016), fatherhood (Kaufman, 2013) and the way they embrace, pass as or reveal the ideal worker image (Reid, 2015), resulting in three categories: HGO conformers, HGO borderers and HGO deviants. This conforms with the research that has also identified different categories among men: Conservatists, sharers and carers from Hanlon (2012); career, caring and career and caring positions from Halryno (2009); and traditional, transitionals and superdads from Cooper (2000). Our new typology of men offers new insights into various issues. For example, it seems that the *carers* from

Hanlon (2012), and the men in *care positions* of Halrynjo (2009), mainly become carers because there is 'no-better option'. This is not our case with the HGO deviants. Far from becoming carers for not having a better option, HGO deviants such as Sergio (a quality manager) or Guillem (a notable cartoonist) seem to be moved by a natural caregiving ambition (Bear, 2019), that is, the aspiration to nurture and care for others above any other obligation. Another difference is that while the superdads presented by Cooper (2000) meet all their work and family demands and do not appear to resent doing it, they seem to disguise the care that they do. This is again not the case of our HGO deviants, who, far from disguising the care they do, are defined precisely by explicitly showing their deviance, and, in some sense, for challenging hegemonic masculinity. In this sense, they are close to the narrative of Atlas (Murgia and Poggio, 2013) who use it as an offensive and open resistance strategy towards hegemonic masculinity in their organization. Another difference with the categories that emerged in other studies involves our middle category: HGO borderers. In the other typologies, we find that the middle group (e.g. transitionals, sharers) are in transition, and in transition towards a more egalitarian model, although they experience important tensions and dilemmas. It seems that they have some features from the opposite categories, and they are simply in the middle. Our analysis revealed that they do not seem to be transitioning; in fact, they seem to choose to be in a middle position. Far from being neutral, our analysis suggests that with their invisible strategies, and by making an effort to pass as an ideal worker, what they are doing is reinforcing the hegemonic masculinity in the organizations. In other words, they are complicit (Connell, 2005) with the HGO conformers. Finally, another novelty of our typology is that it links men's work centrality, their positioning regarding the gender order and hegemonic masculinity and their vision of fathering.

Second, our findings show how the barriers perceived by the fathers are strongly linked to legitimacy or, more precisely, to the lack of legitimacy in organizations. Legitimacy can be defined as 'a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions' (Suchman, 1995). Men generally do not feel legitimate when they ask for more flexibility in the workplace because they feel that their requests are neither appropriate nor welcome in the organizational system. Moreover, legitimacy 'remains a social evaluation made by others', underscoring the importance of the individual evaluator's own judgement – *propriety* – but also the potential collective consensus – *validity* (Bitektine and Haack, 2015; Haack and Sieweke, 2018; Tost, 2011). However, the perceived lack of support from their supervisors and peers presented in our results and the gap between discourse and reality (Pasamar and Valle, 2011; Williams et al., 2013) deprive men of this validity. Nevertheless, this seems to be true for our HGO conformers and borderers, but it is not for the HGO deviants. Although hegemonic masculinity may not be an accurate description of the daily practices of all men, to be a man who asks for flexibility for caring and fathering reasons is not part of the cultural ideals of masculinity that are most valued in Spanish society as our research suggested. According to Weber, legitimacy may be legal (coming from a rule), traditional (coming from a tradition) and charismatic (coming from an inspiring leader). Our study indicates that although some men aspire to have more work-family balance (HGO borderers and deviants), the weight of traditional norms impedes the possibility that flexibility can be a symbolic space of legitimacy for them, leading some of them to mobilize strategies to maintain their conformity to traditional conceptions of masculinity.

A third significant contribution of our research relates to how these identified masculinities reflect the specificities of the Spanish context. The traditional breadwinner ideal is still robust in Spain today, and the idea that 'A man who makes care-giving responsibilities salient on the job is less of a man' (Williams et al., 2013) persists despite gender equality efforts in the political arena. Thus, the specificities of the Spanish context might shape the types of masculinities men develop (Elliott, 2016). Working long hours, breadwinning, limited flexibility in the workplace and men's symbolic power (see Tables 1 and 2) still constitute the type of masculinity that is valued in Spanish culture today. Nevertheless, aspirations towards caring masculinities in Spain cannot be ignored:

many men no longer adhere to the traditional expectations of fathers (HGO deviants). These men are reconfiguring hegemonic masculinities.

Finally, our analysis suggests a conceptual model (Tables 4 and 5) of how Spanish men mobilize varied strategies to overcome such barriers, with differentiated impacts on hegemonic masculinity practices (Connell, 2005). Our study shows how men who do not adhere to the HGO deploy different strategies to emancipate themselves from the prevalent norms (Huault and Perret, 2014). They extensively use informal flexibility when possible, creating apparent new forms of caring masculinities (Elliott, 2016) that they can choose to make visible or invisible. They more frequently ask for informal and occasional flexibility and resort to ‘work-around strategies’ to free up more time for their personal lives. These hidden strategies may include altering the structure of their work, reducing their travel time and working from home. Of course, these efforts might be linked to the fear of stigmatization and the desire to embrace their expected professional identity; however, they may also indicate that men’s flexibility needs are different from those of women because their job positions are different. The previous research shows that managers often benefit from discretion over their working hours (Gregory and Milner, 2011). That is why they do not need to take advantage of formal measures and can use flexibility marginally. However, in our study, informal adjustments were relevant for all men and not only men in higher positions. The interesting point lies in the fact that the workers who have more autonomy at work are also the ones who resort more to ‘hidden strategies’ to achieve a better balance between work and family demands. Informal flexibility among men, then, is not truly related to job position but rather to the degree of autonomy in one’s job. In any case, consistent with the prior research, very few men decide to use formal arrangements and thus ‘reveal’ their deviance (Reid, 2015), although they are the only ones challenging hegemonic masculinity.

Conclusion and practical insights

This article illuminates the barriers and obstacles experienced by Spanish working fathers in the workplace when they want to balance work and personal obligations, and it also provides new insight into how they address this reality. It also offers an important empirical contribution regarding working fathers in Spain. The perceptions reported in our research generally perpetuate traditional cultural representations of hegemonic and complicit masculinity and fatherhood in a Southern European context.

Nevertheless, a major contribution of our research is the provision of a conceptual model for better understanding the different strategies deployed by working fathers to overcome such barriers and to try to emancipate themselves from the prevalent norms (Huault and Perret, 2014). Our research underscores how these strategies affect hegemonic masculinity and enable new forms of caring masculinities (Elliott, 2016) to emerge. Future research might investigate whether these strategies are still applicable when men are separated, divorced or single parents. Our study highlights how men’s emancipation from hegemonic masculinity and the ideal worker model is not taken for granted in organizations and thus calls for an urgent reconfiguration (Huault and Perret, 2014).

However, our research presents some limitations. Since the data were collected from 29 interviews, our results may not be generalizable. This analysis did not seek to represent most Spanish men’s experiences and perceptions regarding work-family balance. Rather, the aim was to identify significant dimensions and outline the important practices and discourses that construct men’s work and life relationships. We presented the words and voices of specific men who represent some of the main patterns: they exemplify typical cases of hegemonic, complicit and caring masculinities. Nevertheless, these barriers are not exhaustive, and there may be other barriers perceived by men who were not addressed in this analysis. Another potential limitation is regarding the sampling techniques as they are described in the methodological section. Finally, another limitation involves the complex process of internalizing norms. More research is needed to understand why some men internalize some gender norms and the notion of the ideal worker more easily than others.

Finally, this study also offers practical implications. Flexible work arrangements should be reframed to clearly recognize and emphasize men's legitimacy and responsibility in assuming parenting roles and in freely finding their own balance between work and personal commitments without being considered 'gender deviants'. Organizations must show greater commitment and support to all workers by presenting real opportunities for men to achieve their aspirations regarding work-family balance by training men's supervisors and by recognizing that a commitment to employees' personal lives is highly beneficial for their productivity. A change in organizational culture is necessary to motivate more men to use flex-time, to move away from the implicit norm of men as workers with unlimited accessibility, to bridge the gap between discourse and image (legitimacy with respect to growing public awareness and changing needs for fathers) and to foster organizational economic growth. The Spanish government should also foster a set of effective social policies not only to encourage involved fatherhood but also to allow working fathers and mothers to freely choose the way in which they balance their work and family domains.

Authors' Note

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Note

1. ATLAS.ti (version 7.5.2)

ORCID iD

Marc Grau-Grau  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3795-8461>

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Author biographies

Sabrina Tanquerel is an assistant professor of Organizational Behavior and Human Resources Management at the Normandy School of Management. She received her PhD in Management Science from the University of Strasbourg (France). Her research focuses on gender, the interplay between work and non-work spheres, masculinities and well-being at the workplace.

Marc Grau-Grau is a Research Fellow at the Women and Public Policy Program at Harvard Kennedy School and a Researcher and Coordinator of the Joaquim Molins Figueras Child Care and Family Policies Chair at the Institute for Advanced Family Studies, Universitat Internacional de Catalunya. Marc has a PhD in Social Policy from the University of Edinburgh. His research interests focus on work-family balance, fatherhood and flexible policies.