Nepotism

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4 "Like Father Like Son"

"The apple doesn't fall far from the tree"

Nepotism is often viewed negatively because it is considered unfair, unethical, morally wrong and even a criminal act that deserves a formal sanctioning. In the context of the meritocracy ideal, we like to think of nepotism as obsolete, practiced by the monarchs, barons, or nobles in the past. However, the contemporary prominence of family ties in politics, businesses, and other occupations suggests that nepotism may still play an important role in determining individuals' career success (Bellow, 2003; Geys & Smith, 2017; Sundell, 2014). Whereas the success of children in following the footsteps of their parents may not necessarily be attributable to nepotism, research has shown that people tend to infer nepotism on the basis of family ties, regardless of competence and qualification (Chapter 3 and 4). If what is perceived as nepotism is deemed to be undesirable, it makes little sense for people to support individuals with family ties to others in prominent positions. And yet, the success of individuals with family ties in politics, such as Robert Kennedy, George W. Bush, or Hillary Clinton might suggest that what is often viewed as nepotism may be something that some people approve.

The present research examined why people sometimes support nepotism in leaderships, that is, when people prefer an individual for a certain leadership position when this individual has family ties with successful leaders in that particular domain (e.g., business, politics). We propose that people infer certain desirable leadership characteristics on the basis of shared family membership. If a leader is viewed as an effective leader, they would expect family members of the leader to bear similar effective traits. We also proposed *belief in the merit of nepotism* as an individual difference construct that reflects whether a person would be more or less likely to support nepotism. Empirical testing of this construct may help to explain why some people are more likely to support nepotism than others. This can help to explain why it is possible for political

dynasties to persist even in societies where nepotism is publicly condemned.

Leadership Effectiveness and Support for Nepotism

Whether governmental, for-profit, or NGO, people look for an effective leader who can ensure the prosperity of their institution as well as their well-being as members. For this reason, citizens elect politicians whom they think could bring them prosperity and avoid the ones who potentially lead them to a downfall. Likewise, in businesses, board members elect CEO's whom they think could increase their companies' profit and market shares. This bring us to the question: how do people decide whether a specific person would make an effective leader?

According to implicit leadership theory (Lord et al., 1984), people possess a prototype or implicit expectation and assumption about the personal characteristics, traits, and qualities of a good leader. A prototype is an abstract summary of all members of a category known to a person (Hampton, 2016), which means that people form their prototype of an effective leader on their experience with instances or exemplars of effective leaders they have encountered. To the extent that they have a voice in the election of their leader, they use this prototype to guide them in deciding who should lead them (Nye & Forsyth, 1991). In this sense, people infer a candidate's leadership by matching the candidate's characteristics with their prototype of effective leader. If the characteristics of the candidate matches with their prototype, the candidate is then classified into the category of effective leader.

The prototype matching strategy is a heuristic that people use to infer the quality of their future leader. However, this strategy can have some drawbacks. First, choosing a leader is often a case of choosing a stranger, and people need to rely on limited information (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). In a presidential election for example, most people could only infer the characteristic of candidates from what is presented to them in the media. They often have only a rough and uncertain estimate of the fit between the characteristics of a candidate and their prototype. Second, research has shown that object classification based on a prototype (i.e., deciding whether a candidate fits the category of effective leader) can be ineffective when one has insufficient experience with the category (e.g., when one knows only a few relevant leaders). The use of exemplar-based

categorization (i.e., comparing a candidate to a specific known leader) may be a better approach in those situations (Homa et al., 1981).

The use of exemplars (as oppose to prototypes) in inferring leadership quality has been proposed by (Ritter & Lord, 2007) in their leadership transference theory, which is an extension of implicit leadership theory (Lord et al., 1984). According to this theory, people store mental representations (exemplars) of their previous leaders in their minds. The extent to which a candidate is similar to a previously established leader triggers an exemplar-based evaluation, rather than the general prototype-based evaluation, in which the candidate is compared to the previously established leader. If a candidate is similar to a previously established leader, people could mistakenly regard the characteristics, traits, behaviors and other relevant qualities of the previous leader as if they were the qualities of the candidate. For this reason, they may come to believe and expect that the candidate will treat them the same way they were treated by the previous leader. This expectation provides people with a subjective certainty about how they will be treated by their potential future leader.

The leader transference perspective provides a theoretical explanation for people sometimes support nepotism in leadership. Whether because of biological (e.g., parents and children share the same genes) or social reasons (e.g., parents socialize their children), it is natural for people to assume a high degree of similarity between parents and their children. If a person's parent is known to be an effective leader, people would expect the leader's offspring to hold the same effective leadership qualities. However, research has shown that many people tend to view nepotism negatively, regardless of the beneficiaries' competence and qualification (Padgett et al., 2015). This suggests that not all people are inclined to support nepotism. We therefore propose an individual-difference construct called the belief in the merit of nepotism, that reflects individual differences in the belief that nepotism is beneficial to social groups.

Belief in the Merit of Nepotism

Belief in the merit of nepotism involves the belief that kinship or family ties intrinsically determine people's positive and desirable qualities and attributes. This belief is a product of psychological essentialism, which refers to laypeople's beliefs that social categories have an essence or intrinsically defining properties (Medin & Ortoni, 1989). Haslam, Rothschild, and Ernst (2000) pointed out two dimensions on which social

categories can be essentialized: As a 'natural kind' (e.g., mammals are biologically different from fish) or through 'reification' (i.e., perceived entitativity: the perception that categories are homogenous). A family is a category that can be essentialized simultaneously through both of these dimensions. In terms of the natural kind, family members are genetically related. As such, they are expected to have natural or biologically defining properties. In terms of reification, parents are expected to pass down their knowledge, beliefs, and ways of life to their children. For this reason, outsiders are more likely to expect a homogenous and unified pattern of attitudes and behaviors among members of a family. In short, essentializing families may lead people to the conclusion that a 'good' person must come from a 'good' family, and that a 'good' family would bring forth 'good' people. Thus, people who strongly believe in the merit of nepotism would be more inclined to believe that a child of an effective leader would make a better leader than other who are not related by kinship to the effective leader.

Overview of Studies

In two studies, we explored the predilection for nepotism in leadership. In Study 1, we examined how people perceive the leadership effectiveness of a child of a previously known effective leader, relative to a friend of the leader and someone who is unrelated to the leader (i.e., a stranger). In Study 2, we further examined how people evaluate the leadership effectiveness of a leader's child (relative to a stranger) when the child is the offspring of an effective leader and when the child is the offspring of an ineffective leader. In general, we expected that because high believers in the merit of nepotism are predilected to view children as similar to their parents, they would be more likely to expect children of effective leaders to become as effective as their parents compare to people with a low belief in the merit of nepotism.

4.1 Study 1

In Study 1, we examined whether people would evaluate a child of an effective leader as more effective than someone unrelated to the leader (i.e., a stranger) or a friend of the leader. Following the leader's transference theory (Ritter & Lord, 2007), by assuming similarity between the child and the leader, people can expect the child to become a more

effective leader than someone who is a stranger to the leader. Although people can infer similarity based on 'actual kinship' (e.g., parents and children), they can also assume similarity based on 'psychological kinship' (Ackerman et al., 2007), such as in the case of close-friendship. Indeed, friendship is often formed on the basis of similarity in attitudes, interests, personality, and social status between two people (Ilmarinen et al., 2016; Nahemow & Lawton, 1975). This means that people can also transfer the leadership quality of a known effective leader to a friend of the leader, which may pave a way for people to accept cronyism (i.e., favoritism based on non-kin reciprocal exchange: (Chen et al., 2004; Khatri & Tsang, 2003). With this in mind, the comparison of a child (nepotism) versus a friend (cronyism) of an effective leader serves as a conservative test of our reasoning that high believers in the merit of nepotism are more inclined than low believers to support nepotism in leadership.

Overall, the following hypotheses were tested in Study 1. First, we expected that people would assume a child of an effective leader to be more similar to the leader than a stranger to the leader or a friend of the leader (Hypothesis 1). Because a child is expected to be seen as more similar to the leader than a stranger or a friend of the leader, people would expect the child to become a more effective leader than the stranger or the friend of the leader (Hypothesis 2). Considering the predisposition for high believers in the merit of nepotism to assume similarity between children and their parents, the extent to which a child is perceived as more similar to the leader (Hypothesis 3) and more effective as leader (Hypothesis 4) than a stranger or a friend of the leader, would depend on their belief in the merit of nepotism. Additionally, if belief in the merit of nepotism is the presumed product of psychological essentialism, participants' belief in the merit of nepotism should positively correlate with their beliefs in biological determinism (i.e., the natural aspect of psychological essentialism: Keller, 2005) and the expected entitativity of a family (i.e., the reification aspect of psychological essentialism: Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2007). We therefore included measures of beliefs in biological determinism and expected entitativity of a family to test this assumption.

Method

Participants

Participants were 200 people recruited via the online research platform Prolific Academic. They participated for a 2 GPB compensation. We assigned a predetermined filter such that participants who completed the study unusually quick were omitted from further analysis.[1] The final sample involved 188 participants. Participants' gender and age was not assessed in this study. The study used a between-subjects design in which participants were assigned to either the child, friend, or stranger condition.

Procedure and Measures

Unless indicated otherwise, all responses were assessed on five-point scales (1 = *not at all* to 5 = *very much*). After obtaining their consent, participants were asked to answer questions regarding their *belief in the merit of nepotism* (e.g., "A child of an effective leader will most likely become an effective leader too"; 8 items; $\alpha = .91$). Subsequently, we asked participants to examine a personality (based on the Big-Five personality dimensions) and leadership profile of a leader (e.g., persuasion skills, intellectual stimulation, concern toward others). We described the leader as an effective leader in all conditions. The leader was described as either a man or woman with 25 years of professional experience. Participants then answered questions regarding their *liking for the leader* taken from Rubin (1970: e.g., , "I would highly recommend the person for a responsible job"; 11 items; $\alpha = .93$) and expectation concerning the *leader's effectiveness* (adapted from (van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg [2005]: e.g., "The person is an excellent leader"; 5 items; $\alpha = .88$).

After evaluating the described leader, participants were asked to rate the *target-leader similarity* in terms of personality and leadership qualities (e.g., "Openness to experience", "Persuasion skills"; 1 = *very different* to 5 = *very similar*; 10 items; $\alpha = .92$). In the *child* condition, the target was the leader's child. In the *friend* condition, the target was the leader's friend. In the stranger condition, the target was a *stranger* to the leader. Note that in the child condition, the child was always described as a son if the leader was initially described as a man, or as a daughter if the leader was initially described as a woman. Subsequently, participants in each respective condition rated the *target's effectiveness* (e.g., "The

child/friend/stranger will be an excellent leader"; 5 items; α = .93). Finally, to check our assumption that belief in the merit of nepotism is a product of psychological essentialism, we measured participants *beliefs in biological determinism* (taken from Keller [2005]: e.g., "I think the chief reason why parents and children are so alike in behavior and character is that they possess a shared genetic inheritance"; 18 items: α = .88) and their expected *entitativity of a family* (adapted from Spencer-Rodgers et al., [2007]: e.g., "How cohesive (i.e., united) do you expect a family would be?"; 14 items; α = .74). On completion, participants were thanked, debriefed, and paid.

Results

We analyzed the data using R (R Core Team, 2019). Means, standard deviations, and correlations are presented in Table 4.1. Unless otherwise indicated, we tested the hypotheses through regression analyses.

Checks

We examined leader's effectiveness across the conditions using ANOVA. Participants in the child (*M* = 4.01, *SD* = 0.73, 95%CI: 3.82, 4.19), stranger (*M* = 3.96, *SD* = 0.59, 95%CI: 3.81, 4.11), and friend condition (*M* = 3.99, *SD* = 0.64, 95%CI: 3.83, 4.15) had equally high expectation of leadership effectiveness toward the described leader, $F(2, 185) = 0.08$, $p = .924$, $\eta^2 = .001$. Participants in the child condition, (*M* = 4.08, *SD* = 0.62, 95%CI: 3.92, 4.23), stranger condition (*M* = 3.97, *SD* = 0.58, 95%CI:

Table 4.1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations in Study 1

	M	*SD*	95%CI LL	95%CI UL	1	2	3	4	5	6
(1) Beliefs in the merit of nepotism	2.92	0.84	2.80	3.04						
(2) Liking for the leader	3.99	0.66	3.89	4.08	.34*					
(3) Leader's effectiveness	4.01	0.61	3.92	4.10	.37*	.84*				
(4) Target-leader similarity	3.40	0.66	3.30	3.49	.50*	.40*	.37*			
(5) Target's effectiveness	3.17	0.82	3.06	3.29	.50*	.48*	.46*	.69*		
(6) Beliefs in biological determinism	2.75	0.68	2.65	2.85	.51*	.11	.15*	.31*	.37*	
(7) Perceived entitativity of family	3.41	0.40	3.35	3.47	.49*	.37*	.33*	.38*	.40*	.22*

Note: * = $p < .05$, ns = not significant

3.82, 4.12), and friend condition (M = 3.98, SD = 0.62, 95%CI: 3.83, 4.13) also had equally high liking toward the described leader, $F(2, 185) = 0.58$, $p = .558$, $\eta^2 = .006$. As expected, the described leader was perceived as an effective and likeable leader in all three conditions. Moreover, as shown in Table 1, participants' belief in the merit of nepotism correlated significantly with both their beliefs in biological determinism and perceived entitativity of a family. These correlations provide support for the assumption that belief in the merit of nepotism is a product of psychological essentialism.

Target-Leader Similarity

We hypothesized that participants would evaluate a child of a leader as more similar to the leader than a friend and a stranger to the leader (Hypothesis 1). In contrast to Hypothesis 1, one-way ANOVA indicated a no effect of Condition, $F(2, 185) = 1.27$, $p = .283$, $\eta^2 = .014$. Participants in the child condition (M = 3.47, SD = 0.68, 95%CI: 3.30, 3.64), stranger condition (M = 3.29, SD = 0.63, 95%CI: 3.12, 3.45), and friend condition (M = 3.43, SD = 0.66, 95%CI: 3.26, 3.59) had about equal perception concerning the similarity between the target and the described leader.

We further hypothesized that in comparison to a stranger or a friend of the leader, high believers in the merit of nepotism would view a child of an effective leader as more similar to the leader than low believers in the merit of nepotism (Hypothesis 3). To test this moderation hypothesis, we conducted a regression analysis, in which the friend and stranger conditions were dummied with the child condition treated as a point of reference. We entered the friend and stranger conditions, belief in the merit of nepotism (centered), and the interaction terms (friend condition x belief in the merit of nepotism, stranger condition x belief in the merit of nepotism) as predictors of target-leader similarity. Belief in the merit of nepotism was significantly and positively associated with perceived target-leader similarity, B = 0.50, SE = 0.08, t = 6.46, $p < .001$, 95%CI: 0.34, 0.65. In line with Hypothesis 3, the interaction between the stranger condition and belief in the merit of nepotism was significant, B = -0.22, SE = 0.11, t = -2.09, p = .038, 95%CI: -0.43, -0.01. As shown in Figure 4.1, although the effect of belief in the merit of nepotism was significant in both the child and stranger conditions, its role appeared to be stronger in the child condition, B = 0.41, SE = 0.05, t = 7.50, $p < .001$, 95%CI: 0.30, 0.52, than in the stranger condition, B = 0.19, SE = 0.08, t =

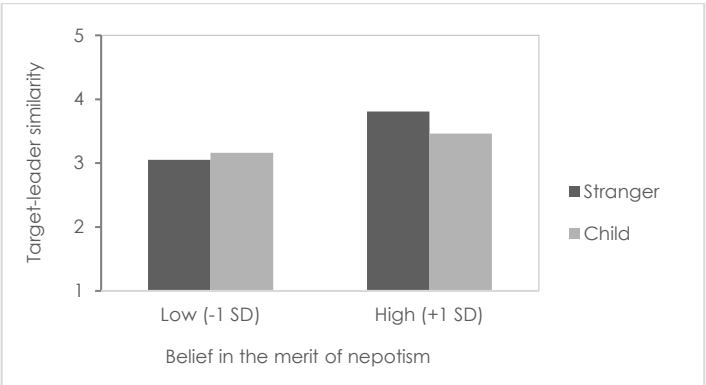

Figure 4.1 The interaction of stranger condition and belief in the merit of nepotism on target-leader similarity belief in the merit of nepotism on target-leader similarity

2.31, p = .022, 95%CI: 0.03, 0.35. Among high believers in the merit of nepotism (+1 SD), participants in the child condition perceived the target as more similar to the leader than participants in the stranger condition, B = -0.34, SE = 0.15, t = -2.35, p = .020, 95%CI: -0.63, -0.06. Among low believers in the merit of nepotism (-1 SD), target-leader similarity between participants in the child and stranger conditions was not significantly different, B = 0.10, SE = 0.15, t = 0.70, p = 0.487, 95%CI: -0.19, 0.4. These results supported Hypothesis 3 in showing that in comparison to a stranger, high believers in the merit of nepotism are more prone to view a child of an effective leader as similar to the leader than low believers in the merit of nepotism.

The interaction between the friend condition and belief in the merit of nepotism was also significant, B = -0.24, SE = 0.10, t = -2.38, p = .018, 95%CI: -0.44, -0.04. As shown in Figure 4.2, although the effect of belief in the merit of nepotism was significant both in the child and friend condition, it appeared to be more important in the child, B = 0.43, SE = 0.06, t = 7.41, p < .001, 95%CI: 0.31, 0.54, than in the friend condition, B = 0.18, SE = 0.07, t = 2.50, p = .013, 95%CI: 0.04, 0.33. Moreover, among low believers in the merit of nepotism (-1 SD), participants in the child condition perceived the target as somewhat less similar to the leader than participants in the friend condition, B = 0.26,

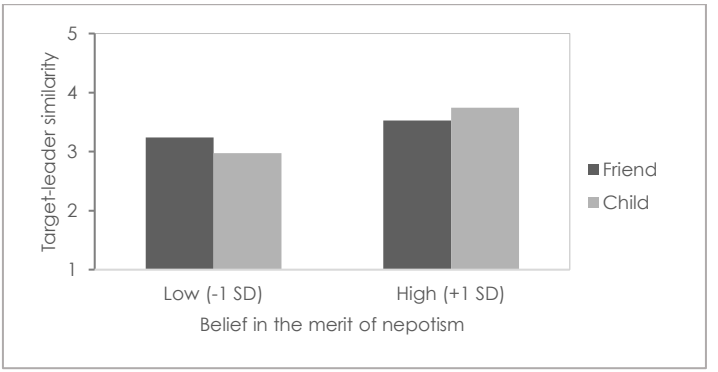

Figure 4.2 The interaction of friend condition and belief in the merit of nepotism on target-leader similarity

SE = 0.14, *t* = 1.82, *p* = .070, 95%CI: -0.02, 0.55. Among high believers in merit of nepotism (-1 SD), target-leader similarity between participants in the child and friend condition appeared to be about equal, *B* = -0.22, *SE* = 0.14, *t* = -1.56, *p* = .121, 95%CI: -0.49, 0.06. These results suggest that a lower belief in the merit of nepotism made participants less inclined to view a child of an effective leader (in comparison to a friend of the leader) as similar to the leader, but a higher belief in the merit of nepotism made a child of an effective leader (in comparison to a friend of the leader) appear more similar to the leader.

Target's Effectiveness

We hypothesized that people would expect a child of an effective leader to be more effective than a friend or a stranger to the leader (Hypothesis 2). One-way ANOVA showed a significant effect of Condition, $F(2,185) = 3.39$, $p = .036$, $\eta^2 = .035$. As expected, participants in the child condition (*M* = 3.24, *SD* = 0.80, 95%CI: 3.03, 3.44) rated the target as more effective than participants in the stranger condition (*M* = 2.95, *SD* = 0.83, 95%CI: 2.74, 3.17). Although the effect appeared in the expected direction of Hypothesis 2, Tukey post-hoc tests showed that this difference was not significant, *p* = .128, 95%CI: -0.63, 0.06. Moreover, target effectiveness in friend condition (*M* = 3.31, *SD* = 0.80, 95%CI: 3.12, 3.51) was virtually the same as the child condition, *p* = .865, 95%CI: -0.26, 0.41. Additionally

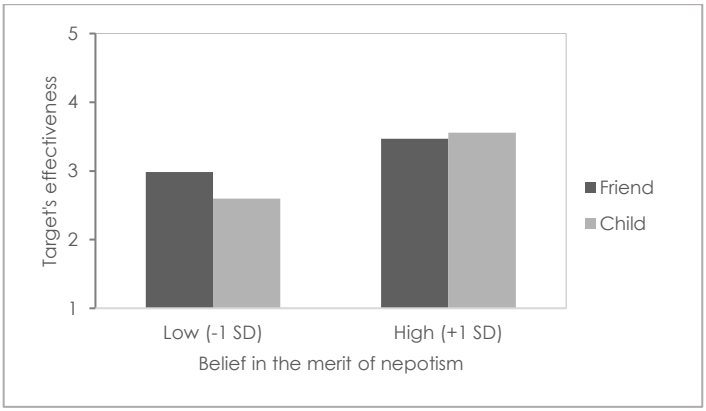

Figure 4.3 The interaction of friend condition and belief in the merit of nepotism on target's effectiveness

participants in the friend condition rated the target as more effective than participants in the stranger condition, p = .037, 95%CI: -0.70, -0.02.

We hypothesized that in comparison to a friend or a stranger to the leader, how people evaluate the leadership effectiveness of a child would depend on their belief in the merit of nepotism (Hypothesis 4). We repeated the previous moderation analysis, substituting the dependent variable with target's effectiveness. Belief in the merit of nepotism was significantly and positively associated with target's effectiveness, B = 0.55, SE = 0.10, t = 5.86, p < .001, 95%CI: 0.37, 0.74. There was meaningful interaction between the friend condition (versus the child condition) and belief in the merit of nepotism, B = -0.24, SE = 0.12, t = -1.92, p = .057, 95%CI: -0.48, 0.01. As shown in Figure 4.3, although the effect of belief in the merit of nepotism was significant in both the child and friend conditions, it appeared to play a stronger role in the child condition, B = 0.51, SE = 0.07, t = 7.18, p < .001, 95%CI: 0.37, 0.65, than in the friend condition, B = 0.27, SE = 0.09, t = 2.96, p = .003, 95%CI: 0.09, 0.45. Moreover, among low believers in the merit of nepotism (-1 SD), participants in the friend condition perceived the target as more effective than participants in the child condition, B = 0.39, SE = 0.18, t = 2.19, p = .030, 95%CI: 0.04, 0.74, while target effectiveness among high believers in the merit of nepotism (+1 SD) in the child and friend condition

did not differ significantly, B = -0.09, SE = 0.17, t = -0.50, p = .615, 95%CI: -0.43, 0.25. These results are in line with Hypothesis 4 in showing that, in comparison to the leadership effectiveness a friend of an effective leader, the leadership effectiveness of an effective leader's offspring depends on observers' beliefs in the merit of nepotism. Unexpectedly, the interaction between the stranger condition (versus the child condition) and belief in the merit of nepotism was not significant, B = -0.15, SE = 0.13, t = -1.13, p = .259, 95%CI: -0.41, 0.11.

Target-Leader Similarity as a Mediator

Our prediction that people would expect a child of an effective leader to become a more effective leader than a stranger and a friend of the leader is based on an assumption that people infer similarity between children and their parents. This means that target-leader similarity should mediate the interaction effect of Condition and belief in the merit of nepotism on target-effectiveness. To test whether this was the case, we conducted a moderated-mediation analysis, simulating PROCESS Model 7 as described by (Hayes, 2013) using the *lavaan* package in R (Rosseel, 2012). The indirect effect of friend condition x beliefs in the merit of nepotism, B = -0.19, SE = 0.08, z = -2.37, p = .018, 95%CI: -0.34, -0.03,, and stranger condition x beliefs in the merit of nepotism, B = -0.17, SE = 0.08, z = -2.09, p = .036, 95%CI: -0.34, -0.01, was significant. This shows that because high believers in the merit of nepotism in the child condition tended to view the target as more similar to the leader than those in the friend and stranger condition, they expected a child of an effective leader to be a more effective leader than a friend or a stranger to the leader.

Discussion

This first study showed that, on the surface, participants appeared to evaluate a child of an effective leader no different from a friend or a stranger to the leader. This suggests that Hypotheses 1 and 2 were not supported. However, a closer look revealed that participants' evaluation of the leader's offspring depended on their belief in the merit of nepotism. In line with Hypothesis 3, low believers in the merit of nepotism were somewhat less inclined to view the leader's child as similar to the leader compared to a friend of the leader, whereas the similarity of the child to the leader was virtually equal to the similarity of the friend of the leader, among high believers in the merit of nepotism. In comparison with the

stranger to the leader, high believers in the merit of nepotism tended to view the child as more similar to the effective leader, whereas the similarity of the child to the leader was about equal to the similarity of the stranger among low believers in the merit of nepotism. These results support the notion that, the extent that a child of an effective leader is viewed as similar to the leader depends on observer's levels of belief in the merit of nepotism.

In line with Hypothesis 4, low believers in the merit of nepotism were more inclined to view the child of an effective leader as less effective than the friend of the leader, whereas the child was viewed just as effective as the friend among high believers in the merit of nepotism. Moreover, moderated-mediation analysis suggests that this perception of leader-child similarity among high believers in the merit of nepotism appeared to be the reason they tended to expect a child to become as effective as a friend of the leader. A moderated-mediation analysis also suggests that, because high believers in the merit of nepotism were more inclined to view the child as more similar to the leader, they became more likely to rate the child as more effective than the stranger.

All in all, Study 1 showed that high believers in the merit of nepotism were inclined to assume a child of an effective leader to be as similar and as effective as the leader. However, this study only looked at a situation involving an effective leader. We argued that high believers in the merit of nepotism support nepotism in leadership because they believe that parents intrinsically bequeath their successful leadership qualities to their offspring. Therefore, if a candidate is a child of an *ineffective* leader, high believers in the merit of nepotism would *not* be expected to support nepotism. This notion was examined in the second study.

4.2 Study 2

The goal of Study 2 was to examine the interplay between a leader's effectiveness and belief in the merit of nepotism in determining people's expectation on the effectiveness of the leader's offspring. Additionally, we examined the interplay of leader's effectiveness and belief in the merit of nepotism on people's liking for the child, as well as their expectation of whether the child would engage in toxic leadership behaviors. To limit the complexity of the study's design, we focused on the comparison between a child of a leader and someone unknown to the leader (i.e., a stranger).

As in Study 1, we expected that people would assume that a child of a leader to be more similar to the leader than a stranger to the leader, regardless of whether the leader is described as effective or ineffective (Hypothesis 1). Following the leader's transference perspective (Ritter & Lord, 2007), people assume similarity between children and their parents. As such, we predicted that people would expect a child of an effective leader to be *more* effective than a stranger to the leader, whereas the child of an ineffective leader was predicted to be seen as *less* effective than a stranger to the leader (Hypothesis 2). Considering the predisposition of high believers in the merit of nepotism to assume similarity between children and their parents, we further predicted that, regardless of the leader's effectiveness (or ineffectiveness), the extent to which people perceive a child as more similar to the leader than a stranger to the leader would depend on their belief in the merit of nepotism (Hypothesis 3). Consequently, high believers in the merit of nepotism would be more inclined than low believers to perceive a child of an *effective leader* as more effective than a stranger to the leader (Hypothesis 4).

So far, we focused on cognitive and instrumental reasons of why people would support nepotism. However, not all leaders are elected based on their leadership qualifications. Indeed, some leadership elections appear to revolve more around a leader's overall popularity than around a careful weighing of the candidate's qualifications. Choosing a leader may involve a strong affective component (Wu & Coleman, 2014), in which an overall liking for the candidate plays a pivotal role. Although previous research on nepotism showed that people tended to dislike beneficiaries of nepotism (Padgett & Morris, 2005), it is actually possible for people to like a beneficiary of nepotism. Based on the leader transference theory (Ritter & Lord, 2007), when a leadership candidate is perceived as similar to a previously known leader, people would transfer not only the characteristics of the previous leader, but also their attitudes toward the previous leader to the candidate. Since people typically like effective leaders (Brown & Keeping, 2005), it can be expected that they would also like a child of an effective leader more than a stranger to the leader (Hypothesis 5). Moreover, considering the predisposition of high believers in the merit of nepotism to assume similarity between children and their parents, it can also be expected that, relative to a stranger to the leader, high believers in the merit of nepotism would be more inclined than low believers to like a child of an effective leader (Hypothesis 6).

The focus of the present paper so far has been on reasons for people to support nepotism in leadership. However, previous studies have identified reasons for people to oppose it. For example, people tend to expect beneficiaries of nepotism to be less competent than non-beneficiaries (Padgett & Morris, 2005). Moreover, employees also expected job candidates for a supervisor level position who are related by kinship to top management to be less capable in fulfilling their duties and responsibilities than those unrelated to top management (Padgett et al., 2015). These findings suggest that people may be reluctant to support nepotism out of fear that beneficiaries of nepotism are ill equipped to lead, and would lead in toxic or dysfunctional ways. We thus examined the interplay of leader's effectiveness and belief in the merit of nepotism in reducing people's expectation of a child to engage in toxic leadership behaviors (e.g., abusive supervision, unpredictability, authoritarian, narcistic; Schmidt, 2008).

Based on the leader transference theory we predicted that, when a child is the offspring of an effective leader, people would expect the child to exhibit *less* toxic leadership behaviors than a stranger to the leader. But when a child is the offspring of an ineffective leader, people would expect the child to exhibit *more* toxic leadership behaviors than a stranger to the leader (Hypothesis 7). Since high believers in the merit of nepotism are predisposed to assume similarity between children and their parents, high believers in the merit of nepotism were predicted to be *less* inclined than low believers to expect a child of an effective leader to engage in toxic leadership relative to a stranger to the leader (Hypothesis 8).

Method

Participants

Participants were 200 Americans recruited via the crowdsource platform Prolific Academic. They participated for a 2 GBP compensation. We used a filter so that participants who completed the questionnaire unusually quick are not included in the proceeding analyses.[11] The final sample

[11] The filter was set based on the fact that people read about 300 words per minutes with 14% more or less speed changes (Carver, 1983; Taylor, 1965). There were 1374 words in the manipulations and questionnaire of Study 1 and 1117 words in Study 2. Participants who completed Study 1 in less than 4 minutes and 11 seconds and those who completed Study 2 in 3 minutes and 15 seconds were omitted from further analysis because it can be assumed that they had paid insufficient attention to the manipulations and questions.

involved 198 participants (100 women, 97 men, 1 other, M_{age} = 34.16, SD_{age} = 12.55). The study used a 2 (Condition: Child vs. stranger) x 2 (Leader's effectiveness: Effective vs. ineffective) between-subjects design.

Procedures and Measures

After obtaining their consent, participants were asked to answer questions regarding their *belief in the merit of nepotism* (same items as in Study 1; α = .91). We subsequently asked participants to examine a personality and leadership profile of a leader with 25 years of professional experience. In the *effective leader* condition, the leader was described as having personality and leadership profiles scores higher than the average leaders. In the *ineffective leader* condition, the leader was described as having personality and leadership profiles scores lower than the average leaders. To address the limitation of Study 1, we included a profile of the average leaders as an anchor for the participants to evaluate the described leader in all conditions. Participants then answered questions regarding their *liking for the leader* (same items as in Study 1; α = .98) and expectation concerning the described *leader's effectiveness* (same items as in Study 1; α = .97). Next, participants were asked to rate the *similarity* between the described leader to a target (target-leader similarity) in terms of personality and leadership (same items as in Study 1; α = .93). In the *child* condition, the target was the described leader's child. In the *stranger* condition, the target was a stranger to the leader. Subsequently, participants in each respective condition rated their *liking for the target* (α = .91) and expected leadership effectiveness of the target (*target's effectiveness*: same items as in Study 1; α = .94). Liking for the target was measured using the same items as liking for the leader, but the subject in the items phrase were substituted to either an unrelated person (i.e., a stranger to the leader) or a child (α = .96). Finally, participants were asked about the likelihood for the target to conduct *toxic leadership* behaviors taken from Schmidt (2008: e.g., "Acts like a bully"; 30 items; α = .99). On completion, participants were thanked, debriefed, and paid.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations are presented in Table 4.2. We analyzed the data through regression analyses. Relevant interactions were further analyzed through simple slope analysis.

Table 4.2. Means, standard deviations, and correlations in Study 2

	M	*SD*	95%CI						
			LL	UL	1	2	3	4	5	6
(1) Belief in the merit of nepotism	2.83	0.83	2.71	2.94						
(2) Liking for the leader	3.16	1.26	2.99	3.34	.21*					
(3) Leader's effectiveness	3.13	1.27	2.95	3.31	.21*	.96*				
(4) Target-leader similarity	3.07	0.69	2.97	3.17	.41*	.41*	.36*			
(5) Target's effectiveness	2.96	0.79	2.85	3.07	.44*	.37*	.36*	.56*		
(6) Liking for the target	2.85	0.80	2.74	2.96	.43*	.39*	.37*	.56*	.82*	
(7) Toxic leadership	2.36	0.96	2.22	2.49	.17*	.12ns	.12 ns	.15*	-.06	.07ns

Note: * = $p < .05$, ns = not significant

Leader's Effectiveness

We conducted regression analysis in which Condition (coded 0 = stranger, 1 = child), leader's effectiveness condition (coded 0 = ineffective, 1 = effective), and the Interaction (Condition x leader's effectiveness condition) as predictors of leader's effectiveness. As expected, participants in the effective leader condition (M = 4.09, SD = 0.82, 95%CI: 3.93, 4.25) perceived the leader as more effective than participants in the ineffective leader condition (M = 2.16, SD = 0.82, 95%CI: 1.99, 2.32), B = 2.19, SE = 0.16, t = 13.46, p < .001, 95%CI: 1.87, 2.52. These results support the success of the leader's effectiveness manipulation. The interaction of Condition x leader's effectiveness condition was also significant, B = -0.53, SE = 0.23, t = -2.28, p = .024, 95%CI: -0.99, -0.07. Further analysis showed that the effect of the leader's effectiveness condition was significant in both the stranger condition, B = 2.19, SE = 0.16, t = 13.46, p < .001, 95%CI: 1.87, 2.52, and the child condition, B = 1.67, SE = 0.16, t = 10.11, p < .001, 95%CI: 1.34, 1.99. The effect of Condition was significant among participants in the effective leader condition, B = -0.34, SE = 0.16, t = -2.09, p = .038, 95%CI: -0.66, -0.02, but not among participants in the ineffective leader condition, B = 0.19, SE = 0.16, t = 1.14, p = .256, 95%CI: -0.14, 0.51. Participants in the child and effective leader condition (M = 3.91, SE = 0.12, 95%CI: 3.62, 4.21) rated the described leader as somewhat less effective than participants in the stranger and effective leader condition (M = 4.25, SE = 0.11, 95%CI: 3.97, 4.54). The main effect of

Condition was not significant, participants in the child condition (*M* = 3.08, *SD* = 1.25, 95%CI: 2.83, 3.33) perceived the described leader as effective as participants in the stranger condition (*M* = 3.18, *SD* = 1.30, 95%CI: 2.92, 3.44), *B* = 0.19, *SE* = 0.16, *t* = 1.14, *p* = .256, 95%CI: -0.14, 0.51.

Liking for the Leader

We repeated the previous analysis, substituting leader's effectiveness with liking for the leader as the dependent variable. The effect of the leader's effectiveness condition was significant, *B* = 2.21, *SE* = 0.15, *t* = 15, *p* = 0, 95%CI: 1.92, 2.51. Participants in the effective leader condition (*M* = 4.17, *SD* = 0.70, 95%CI: 4.03, 4.31) liked the described leader more than participants in the ineffective leader condition (*M* = 2.14, *SD* = 0.78, 95%CI: 1.98, 2.29). The effect of Condition was not significant. *B* = 0.15, *SE* = 0.15, t = 0.98, *p* = .327, 95%CI: -0.15, 0.44. Participants in the child condition (*M* = 3.13, *SD* = 1.22, 95%CI: 2.89, 3.37) liked the leader as much as participants in the stranger condition (*M* = 3.19, *SD* = 1.30, 95%CI: 2.94, 3.45). The interaction term was marginally significant, *B* = -0.38, *SE* = 0.21, *t* = -1.8, *p* = .073, 95%CI: -0.79, 0.04. All in all, these results showed that liking toward the leader was largely determined by the leader's effectiveness condition.

Target-Leader Similarity

We conducted regression analysis in which Condition, leader's effectiveness condition, belief in the merit of nepotism (centered), all two-way, and three-way interaction were entered as predictors of target-leader similarity. In Hypothesis 1, we predicted that participants would assume a child of a leader as more similar to the leader than a stranger to the leader, regardless of whether the leader was described as effective or ineffective. Supporting Hypothesis 1, the main effect of Condition was significant, *B* = 0.28, *SE* = 0.12, *t* = 2.39, *p* = .018, 95%CI: 0.05, 0.52. Participants in the child condition (*M* = 3.24, *SD* = 0.69, 95%CI: 3.1, 3.38) perceived the target more similar to the described leader than participants in the stranger condition (*M* = 2.90, *SD* = 0.64, 95%CI: 2.77, 3.03). The main effect of the leader's effectiveness condition was also significant, *B* = 0.33, *SE* = 0.12, *t* = 2.82, *p* = .005, 95%CI: 0.10, 0.56. Participants in the effective leader condition (*M* = 3.26, *SD* = 0.69, 95%CI: 3.12, 3.4) perceived the target as more similar to the described leader than participants in the

ineffective leader condition (M = 2.88, SD = 0.64, 95%CI: 2.75, 3.00), regardless of whether the target was a child or a stranger. In Hypothesis 3, we predicted that, regardless of the leader's effectiveness, the extent to which people perceive a child as more similar to the leader than a stranger to the leader would depend on their belief in the merit of nepotism. The interaction effect of Condition x belief in the merit of nepotism was not significant however, B = 0.16, SE = 0.13, t = 1.20, p = .231, 95%CI: -0.1, 0.42. These findings therefore do not support Hypothesis 3.

Target's Effectiveness

We repeated the previous analysis, substituting the dependent variable with target's effectiveness. The effect of belief in the merit of nepotism was significant, B = 0.45, SE = 0.11, t = 4.20, p < .001, 95%CI: 0.24, 0.66. The interaction of Condition x belief in the merit of nepotism was also significant, B = -0.33, SE = 0.16, t = -2.11, p = .036, 95%CI: -0.64, -0.02. Importantly, in line with Hypothesis 4, the three-way interaction of Condition x leader's effectiveness condition x belief in the merit of nepotism was significant, B = 0.57, SE = 0.20, t = 2.83, p = .005, 95%CI: 0.17, 0.97. As predicted in Hypothesis 4 (see Figure 4.4), high believers in the merit of nepotism (+1 SD) in the effective leader condition perceived a child as more effective than a stranger, B = 0.41, SE = 0.18, t = 2.25, p = .026, 95%CI: 0.05, 0.78. Additionally, high believers in the merit of nepotism (+1 SD) in the ineffective leader condition also perceived a child as somewhat less effective than a stranger, B = -0.39, SE = 0.21, t = -1.83, p = .069, 95%CI: -0.82, 0.03. The interaction of Condition x leader's effectiveness was not significant, providing no support for Hypothesis 2, B = 0.24, SE = 0.2, t = 1.19, p = .234, 95%CI: -0.15, 0.62.

Liking for the target

We repeated the previous analysis, substituting target's effectiveness with liking for the target. The effect of belief in the merit of nepotism was significant, B = 0.39, SE = 0.11, t = 3.50, p = .001, 95%CI: 0.17, 0.60. In line with Hypothesis 6 the three-way interaction of Condition x leader's effectiveness condition x belief in the merit of nepotism was also significant, B = 0.43, SE = 0.21, t = 2.06, p = .040, 95%CI: 0.02, 0.84. More specifically (see Figure 4.5), high believers in the merit of nepotism

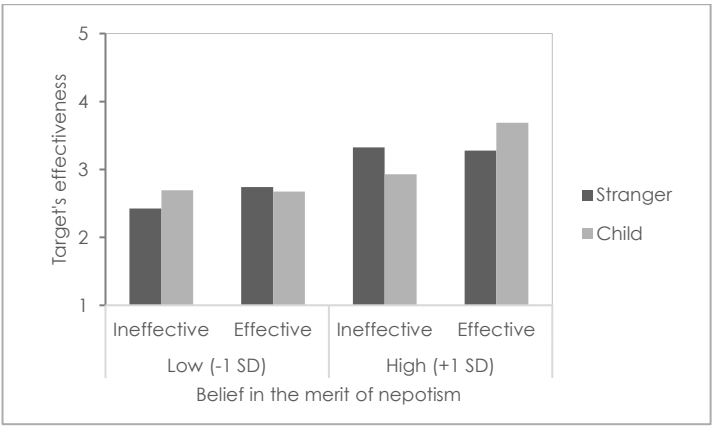

Figure 4.4 The three-way interaction of Condition x leader's effectiveness x belief in the merit of nepotism on target's effectiveness

than a stranger, B = 0.39, SE = 0.19, t = 2.06, p = .040, 95%CI: 0.02, 0.76. High believers in the merit of nepotism (+1 SD) in the ineffective leader condition had about the same level of liking toward a child and a stranger, B = -0.30, SE = 0.22, t = -1.37, p = .174, 95%CI: -0.74, 0.13. The interaction of Condition x leader's effectiveness was not significant, providing no support for Hypothesis 5, B = 0.26, SE = 0.2, t = 1.3, p = .196, 95%CI: -0.14, 0.66.

Toxic leaderships

Finally, we again repeated the previous analysis, entering toxic leadership as the dependent variable. The main effect of Condition was marginally significant, B = 0.35, SE = 0.19, t = 1.83, p = .069, 95%CI: -0.03, 0.73. The main effect of the leader's effectiveness condition was significant, B = 0.40, SE = 0.19, t = 2.09, p = .038, 95%CI: 0.02, 0.77. In line with Hypothesis 7, the interaction of Condition x leader's effectiveness condition was significant, B = -0.62, SE = 0.27, t = -2.31, p = .022, 95%CI: -1.15, -0.09. As shown in Figure 4.6, in the ineffective leader condition, a child was somewhat expected to exhibit more toxic leadership than a stranger, B = 0.35, SE = 0.19, t = 1.83, p = .069, 95%CI: -0.03, 0.73. However, in the effective leader condition, the levels of participants expected toxic leadership were about equal in the child and stranger cond-

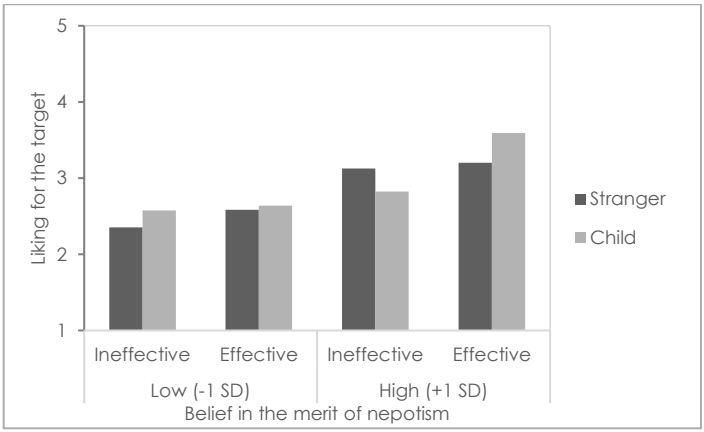

Figure 4.5 The three-way interaction of Condition x leader's effectiveness x belief in the merit of nepotism on liking for the target

itions, B = -0.27, SE = 0.19, t = -1.44, p = .151, 95%CI: -0.64, 0.10. Thus, there was only weak support for Hypothesis 7. Whereas a stranger in the effective leader condition was expected to exhibit more toxic leadership behaviors than a stranger in the ineffective leader condition, B = 0.4, SE = 0.19, t = 2.09, p = .038, 95%CI: 0.02, 0.77, a child in the effective leader condition was expected to show less toxic leadership than a child in the ineffective leader condition, B = -0.23, SE = 0.19, t = -1.19, p = .237, 95%CI: -0.60, 0.15. The three-way interaction of Condition, leader's effectiveness, and belief in the merit of nepotism was not significant, B = -0.34, SE = 0.28, t = -1.23, p = .221, 95%CI: -0.89, 0.21, providing no support for Hypothesis 8.

Discussion

This second study showed that participants assumed the child of a leader as more similar to the leader than a stranger to the leader, regardless of whether the leader was described as effective or ineffective (Hypothesis 1). Consequently, in line with Hypothesis 4, when nepotism involved the child of an *effective leader*, high believers in the merit of nepotism were more inclined than low believers to expect the child to become a more effective leader than someone not-known to the leader (i.e., a stranger).

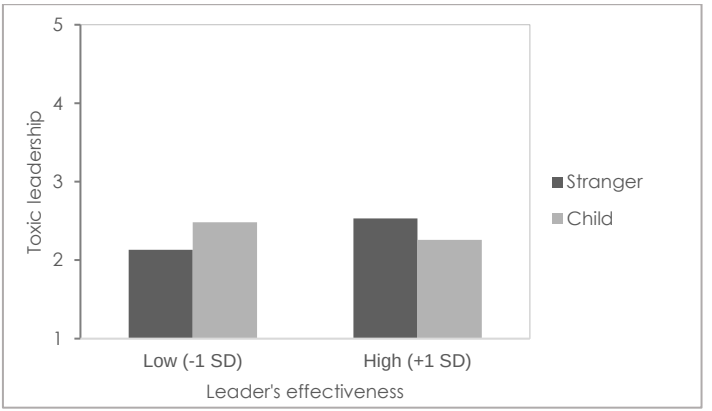

Figure 4.6 The interaction of Condition x leader's effectiveness on toxic leadership

On the other hand, when nepotism involved the child of an *ineffective leader*, high believers in the merit of nepotism were more likely than low believers to expect the child to become a *less* effective leader than a stranger to the leader. This shows that high believers in the merit of nepotism are potentially both prominent supporters and fervent opposers of nepotism. They support nepotism when it involves offspring of effective leaders, but oppose nepotism when it involves offspring of ineffective leaders.

Study 2 also showed evidence that people do not always dislike beneficiaries of nepotism. Specifically, in line with Hypothesis 6, if a leadership candidate was a child of a previously known effective leader, there was a tendency for high believers in the merit of nepotism to like this child more than a stranger to the effective leader. Additionally, although the evidence was quite weak, whereas participants expected the child of an ineffective leader to exhibit more toxic leadership behaviors than a stranger to the leader, they expected the child of an effective leader to exhibit about the same level of toxic leadership behaviors as a stranger to the leader (Hypothesis 7). All in all, these results show that people sometimes do support nepotism, particularly those who strongly believe in the merit of nepotism.

4.3 General Discussion

Nepotism is often frowned upon, because it is considered unfair and unethical. Indeed, much of the previous research on this topic has focused on people's negative attitudes and opposition toward nepotism (Arasli et al., 2006; Padgett & Morris, 2005). However, the fact that many leaders who are tied by kinship to other influential people are thriving throughout the world suggests that there may be enough positive elements to nepotism for people to support it (Geys & Smith, 2017). The present research examined the conditions under which people sometimes support nepotism in leadership, despite the negative connotations attached to it. The results from Study 1 showed that, on the surface, participants did not seem to think that the offspring of an effective leader would make a better leader than a friend of the leader or a stranger to the leader. However, by taking into account individuals' belief in the merit of nepotism, it became clear that those who strongly believe in the merit of nepotism were more inclined to assume similarity between the effective leader and their child. They consequently were more inclined to view the child of an effective leader as more effective than a stranger to the leader or a friend of the leader, which can be a powerful reason to support nepotism in such circumstances.

Study 2 extended these findings by showing that strong believers in the merit of nepotism were not only inclined to view the child of an effective leader as more effective than a stranger to the leader, but they were also inclined to view the child of an *ineffective* leader as less effective than a stranger to the leader. This could make strong believers in the merit of nepotism both prominent supporters of nepotism and fervent opposers of nepotism, depending on the situation. Strong believers in the merit of nepotism also had a tendency to like a child of an effective leader more than a stranger of the effective leader. Finally, Study 2 showed that, whereas participants expected the child of an ineffective leader to become a toxic or dysfunctional leader (relative to a stranger to the leader), such expectations were not expressed with respect to the child of an effective leader. All in all, the findings help shed more light onto the question of why people sometime support nepotism, and sometimes oppose it.

Theoretical Implications

The present research is in line with leadership transference theory (Ritter & Lord, 2007), by showing that people tend to transfer their perception of a leader's qualities, and their affective evaluation of this leader, to someone they assume to be similar to the leader by virtue of a familial relationship or a friendship. The results are also in line with cognitive balance theory (Heider, 1946). According to this theory, people strive to maintain evaluative balance when thinking about the relationships of objects in their minds. In Heider's original formulation, cognitive balance is achieved when $pLo + oUx + pLx$. In plain words, this means that if an observer (*p*) likes (*L*) a particular leader (*o*), the observer has to like (*L*) the leader's child (*x*) because the child is similar (*U*) to the leader. Similar predictions can also be derived from this theory for other variables examined in the present research (i.e., target's effectiveness, toxic leadership). In the present research, the balancing mindset of "I like the child because I like the father" was prominently shown by high believers in the merit of nepotism, but not by low believers in the merit of nepotism. It would be interesting to examine what kind of balance mechanisms took place in the minds of low believers in the merit of nepotism. For instance, did they re-assess their favorableness for the leader (i.e., by disliking the leader) so that they can disfavor the child?

The present research proposed a new construct called the belief in the merit of nepotism. We view this belief as a product of psychological essentialism beliefs (Haslam et al., 2000). While social categories are often essentialized as either a natural kind or through reification, a family can be essentialized simultaneously in both ways. In terms of the natural kind, parents and children share the same gene. In terms of reification, parents are often the ones who raise their children, so people expect the attitudes and behaviors of parents to be present in their offspring. Indeed, as shown in Study 1, belief in the merit of nepotism correlated highly with both beliefs in biological determinism (the 'natural kind' component) and perceived entitativity of a family (the 'reification' component). While the correlation of beliefs in biological determinism and perceived entitativity of a family was significant, the correlation was modest. It is also worth noting that we conceptualized belief in the merit of nepotism such that it concerns successful leadership qualities, but not the opposite, i.e., unsuccessful qualities. The fact that high believers in the merit of nepotism had a tendency to oppose nepotism when it involved a child of an

ineffective leader suggests that our measure may have tapped into both the belief in the *merit* and *demerit* of nepotism.

Limitations

Nepotism is a deeply-rooted cultural value in places such as Latin America, the Arab world, and Asia (Khatri & Tsang, 2003; Wated & Sanchez, 2015), while it is often presumed to be less prevalent in Western societies. One could argue that this limits the generalizability of the present work, which was conducted among samples from Western, industrialized societies. However, a closer look at studies of nepotism suggest that nepotism is in fact also quite common in Western societies. For example, by analyzing shared last-names, Allesina (2011) concluded that nepotism is prominent in Italian academia, particularly in the sectors of industrial engineering, law, and medicine. In Sweden, kinship is common at most workplaces, especially in the rural areas (Holm et al., 2018). In the U.S., Canada, and Denmark, it is also quite common for young men and women to work for the same employers as their parents (Bingley et al., 2011; Stinson & Wignall, 2018). Importantly, research about nepotism involving Americans and Indonesians showed that participants from these culturally different societies responded very similar to nepotism in organizational and political contexts (see Chapter 2 and 3). The fact that nepotism is quite common in Western societies, combined with the notion that Americans and Indonesians exhibited similar responses to nepotism, lends credence to the generalizability of the present research.

Practical Implications

The results of the present study have several practical implications as well. Previous research has shown that people suspect that nepotism is at play when they realize that political leaders are related by kinship ties (see Chapter 3), and that beneficiaries of nepotism are assumed to be incompetent (Darioly & Riggio, 2014). An important reason to oppose nepotism is therefore the fear that leadership positions will be filled by incompetent individuals. However, the current research suggests that perceived kinship ties could also, under the right circumstances, help to reduce the fear for a new, ineffective leader. Aspiring leaders and political campaigners could make good use of this knowledge. Specifically, if a leadership candidate is tied by kinship to a previously known effective and

likeable leader, political campaigners could highlight this information to make the candidate appear more competent and likeable than other candidates who are not tied by kinship to the previously known effective and likeable leader.