PNAS

Lost opportunities: How gendered arrangements harm men

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Traditional gendered arrangements—norms, roles, prejudices, and hierarchies—shape every human life. Associated harms are primarily framed as women's issues due to more severe consequences women face. Yet, gendered arrangements also shape *men*'s relationships, career paths, and health. Current work on gender equity overlooks men's perspectives. Despite benefits they gain from out-ranking women, men's position paradoxically entraps them in restrictive roles, compelling them to prioritize dominance. An inclusive framework challenges prevailing narratives by considering personal costs borne by men. Identifying with a man's traditional role is a mixed privilege, as five gendered arrangements show for men who subscribe to them: 1. *Masculine norms* can restrict men's choices and are associated with adverse health trajectories; 2. Some *men's disengagement from communal roles* denies them positive outcomes associated with caring for others; 3. *Hostile sexism* fosters antipathy, fueling tension in some men's interactions with women; 4. *Benevolent sexism* forces some men into scripted interactions, preventing genuine connections and burdening them with unrealistic breadwinner and protector roles; 5. *Societal shifts in gender hierarchies* can elicit threat responses in men, depending on intersections with social class and racial identities. Understanding costs to men calls for more empirical research. Gender equity for men, whose circumstances differ from those of women, would enable men to make informed choices and achieve better outcomes for themselves—paralleling the progress women have made in many areas of life. Striving for equity for *all* genders can ultimately enhance overall human well-being.

gender | masculinity | sexism | norms | roles

Society arranges different lives for men and women, based on socially constructed identities. These gendered arrangements guide individuals' thoughts, behaviors, and relationships, permeating everything from daily activities to institutional policies. Although extensive research documents how gendered arrangements limit women's opportunities (1, 2), the current perspective focuses on the less-discussed costs borne by men, especially those in traditional roles.

Gendered arrangements impose stricter constraints on men than on women. Whereas women often juggle dual roles—balancing career and home—men are typically pressured to prioritize their advantaged position across all domains. Although status confers privileges, it also traps men into stressful competitions for dominance. Thus, as we argue here, gendered arrangements harm men by limiting their social and intimate relationships, distorting their work dynamics, and compromising their health. The current perspective analyzes these demands through the lens of

different worldviews that reflect gendered arrangements, ranging from everyday norms, roles, and behaviors to broader societal issues such as prejudice and hierarchy.

Masculine *norms* prioritize career success over well-being (3, 4), emphasize self-sufficiency, and discourage seeking help (5). These norms align with risky behaviors that threaten health (6) and trigger anxiety or aggression when masculinity is questioned (7). These norms further deprive men of opportunities to develop nurturing, communal *roles* (8, 9), restricting emotionally supportive friendships (10), quality relationships with partners (11) or children (12), and fulfilling life experiences (13). *Prejudices* against women harm men too (14); hostile sexism breeds conflict, while so-called "benevolent" sexism burdens men with traditional breadwinner and protector roles. As society shifts toward gender equality (15), some men struggle to adapt to changing *hierarchies*, facing maladaptive responses (16, 17) and adverse health trajectories (6, 18).

This perspective sets the stage by acknowledging the well-documented consequences of gendered arrangements for women, then integrates insights from social-science evidence into five specific arrangements identified as harming men. Advancing research in this area can not only improve men's personal outcomes but also incentivize reducing men's prejudice toward women. The implications concern individuals, society, diversity science, and the broader scientific community.

The Harm of Gendered Arrangements: An Inclusive Framework

The contemporary landscape has witnessed strides toward gender equity in the "gender revolution" over the past 50 years. Societal shifts have increased opportunities for women in employment (19), education (20), and political participation (21). Advances have narrowed gender pay gaps, decreased career segregation, and increased baccalaureate and doctoral degrees. Yet progress has plateaued or even regressed

(22), allowing persistent gender gaps to endure (23). This stagnation raises questions about the distinctive features of gender relations that might resist egalitarian shifts, despite progressive trends.

Consider how power differences and mutual dependence uniquely work together in gender relations, setting them apart from other intergroup relations, for example, based on ethnicity or race. Patriarchy, where men hold more social and political power than women, defines gender relations across cultures (24). This traditional power imbalance positions men as dominant and women as subordinate (25). Yet, this view overlooks the mutual dependence that exists, especially in heteronormative contexts. Many men and women rely on each other for reproduction, sexual fulfillment, intimacy, and defined social roles (26). This interdependence means that cooperative dynamics, rather than direct oppression, maintain gendered arrangements (27). Conforming to these expectations brings at least some rewards, while deviating carries some penalties (17, 28).

Most research in this area has focused on how gender dynamics, embedded in daily interactions, help maintain the existing social order (29), hierarchy (25), and inequities (30); all predominantly disadvantage women. This work, enriched by feminist theorizing (31), incorporates contributions from sociology (32), law (33), media (34), and health (35). Although women's perspective warrants its own full-scale dedicated review, here instead are key areas central to understanding the extensive harm endured by women, to provide a brief framework for context of harms to men.

Research identifies two dominant social roles assigned to women: their domestic role and their role as a sexual object (1, 2). Outside work is not accommodated. The tensions inherent in overlap of work and home are a recurring theme. For example, a woman might finish a full day at work only to come home and take on the majority of household chores and childcare, creating a "second shift" that perpetuates their disadvantage in both professional (36) and domestic spheres (37). The pervasive scrutiny of women's bodies—through objectification (38) and unrealistic beauty standards (39)—not only harms their mental health (e.g., body image issues) and physical health (e.g., cosmetic procedures) but also impairs cognitive functioning by diverting attention to their bodies (40). Compounding these challenges are power dynamics that subject women to a range of threats, from sexist comments in public spaces (41) to sexual harassment (42) and intimate partner violence (43), all of which exact an additional emotional and physical toll on women.

Acknowledging the widespread gendered arrangements in women's lives, however, is not the primary focus here. Instead, note the imbalance in scientific attention to harm experienced by women compared to *men*. In fact, our own work reflects this focus, predominantly documenting sexism's harm to women (14). However, a comparable body of research on men is lacking (44). Investigations into men's experiences have mainly focused on masculinity (traits culturally associated with men; 3) or manhood (social status; 7), with occasional insights into men's absence from communal roles (8, 9) and into prejudiced dynamics in relationships (45).

What remains absent is a unified framework that synthesizes this research, to understand how gendered arrangements shape men's lives. This perspective identifies five gendered arrangements harmful to men, spanning those with substantial evidence and more established concepts (masculine norms, disengagement from communal roles) to those with limited research on the consequences *for men* (sexism, hierarchy shifts). We discuss these arrangements in a logical order, moving from micro-level norms and roles to macrolevel constructs such as prejudice and hierarchy. Each gendered arrangement highlights specific harms to men and briefly acknowledges known harms to women for context. *SI Appendix*, Fig. S1 offers a visual representation of this framework.

Relevant Outcomes. This perspective focuses on three key outcomes—relationship trajectories, workplace dynamics, and health (respective reviews: 46–48)—as these domains have been extensively studied in relation to men's adherence to gendered arrangements. Psychology has long assessed these outcomes in various ways. For relationship outcomes, common measures include self-report questionnaires on interpersonal accuracy, relationship satisfaction, partner responsiveness, and observer ratings of couples' interactions. Work outcomes examine job burnout, job satisfaction, career progression, and performance assessments to gauge productivity or teamwork. Health outcomes focus on well-being through surveys on happiness, affect, and mental health indicators, such as anxiety and depression. Physical health is commonly tracked using physiological markers (e.g., heart rate reactivity), along with behaviors that risk or neglect health, such as substance use or poor diet. These outcomes are typically studied cross-sectionally or longitudinally, and within experimental frameworks to observe situational responses.

Each gendered arrangement is linked to these outcomes in different forms and amounts, supported by varying levels of evidence. To illustrate, the link between masculine norms and health issues is well established, while initial evidence for sexism in this context remains emerging but relevant. In each gendered arrangement, we begin with the strongest evidence linking these patterns to men's harm. While some outcomes are more clearly tied to specific arrangements, most share a common theoretical basis and initial empirical support.

Though this analysis centers on these three domains, other areas, such as education and politics, also warrant attention. Recent discussions raise concerns over boys' declining school performance (49), slow growth in men's educational attainment (20, 22), and the narrowing pool of political candidates shaped by masculine defaults (50). Though these areas are increasingly relevant, the focus remains on relationships, workplace dynamics, and health, where the evidence of harm to men is more substantiated (1, 2).

Caveats That Inform Our Approach. Several caveats guide our approach to addressing the harm experienced by men:

(1) Inclusive framework. This perspective offers fresh insights into fostering gender equity by recognizing the costs to men without downplaying the more severe consequences faced by women, who remain at greater disadvantage (51). It emphasizes that gender equity is *not* a zero-sum game (52).

(2) Mixed privilege. Gendered arrangements have historically maintained patriarchy (25, 26). The advantages men receive may outweigh the costs highlighted here, underscoring the mixed nature of male privilege.

(3) Cultural variations. Although gender stereotypes and roles can manifest differently across cultures (53), the associated costs for men are likely to be similar. Men are perceived worldwide as dominant (53), and patriarchy (24), sexism (14), and conceptions of manhood (54) are pervasive. In traditional societies, men may lose more privileges but also stand to gain more from breaking free of these constraints (55).

(4) Heteronormative focus. This analysis primarily considers cisgender heterosexual experiences, as these are most prevalent. However, more research needs to address the challenges faced by individuals of diverse gender and sexual identities (56).

(5) Call for empirical research. The framework highlights the harm men experience but does not prescribe direct solutions, instead encouraging further inquiry and awareness.

(6) Gender equity rather than equality. Emphasizing harm to men does not mean men must be equal to women in every aspect. Instead, it promotes men's freedom to pursue paths based on personal preferences, recognizing these choices are partly shaped by socialization (57). Men start from different circumstances, with both advantages and disadvantages. Awareness of gender harm allows for informed decisions that may lead to better outcomes. Thus, this approach advocates for equity—ensuring everyone has opportunities to grow, while recognizing unique challenges of each gender.

(7) Multifaceted nature of men's harm. Men's harm is shaped by multiple factors beyond the social-psychological focus here. For example, gender differences in longevity and mortality that disadvantage men can also be explained by biological (58) and evolutionary (59) aspects. The psychology and behaviors of men and women result from a mix of influences (26). This complexity does not undermine our argument—as the ultimate outcome is still harm to men—but rather highlights the multifaceted nature of these phenomena. Relatedly, much empirical evidence is correlational, making it challenging to infer causality regarding the roles gendered arrangements play in men's harm.

Five Gendered Arrangements That Harm Men

Arrangement 1: Adherence to Masculine Norms and Practices. The most comprehensive research on the harm of gendered arrangements to men emerges from masculinity studies, an area that crosses social science disciplines. From an early age, men are pressured to conform to "real men" standards—a constant in their lives (3). Traditional masculinity ideology prescribes rigid behavioral norms for men, setting more stringent expectations compared to those faced by women. While women frequently grapple with conflicting roles, men are expected to prioritize status and dominance. This dynamic propels men to maintain a privileged societal position but also burdens them with stressful demands.

Recent decades have clarified that masculine norms are linked to mental and physical health challenges in men.

A meta-analysis (60) examined this connection through studies utilizing the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (61). This inventory assesses the degree to which men adhere to culturally defined masculine norms, such as competing successfully (e.g., "In general, I will do anything to win"), emotional control (e.g., "It is best to keep your emotions hidden"), and dominance (e.g., "I should be in charge"). The analysis considered both positive mental health indicators—such as life satisfaction and self-esteem—and negative aspects, such as psychological distress and depression, as well as attitudes toward seeking professional help. Data from 78 samples comprising almost 20,000 participants indicated that higher conformity to masculine norms is associated with poorer mental health and greater reluctance to seek psychological help.

Further, masculine norms connect with risk behaviors harmful to men's health (6). Masculine norms are negatively associated with health-promoting activities, such as attending annual medical check-ups (62) or seeking medical help (5). They also correlate with an increase in behaviors that elevate the risk of disease, injury, and death (63), such as substance and alcohol use (64), unhealthy eating (65), risky sexual behaviors (66), and physical confrontations (67).

These risk behaviors are amplified by the precarious state of manhood, which portrays masculinity as fragile and needing constant validation (7). The Precarious Manhood Beliefs scale (54) assesses this concept, showing manhood is difficult to earn (e.g., "Other people often question whether a man is a 'real man'") and easy to lose ("Manhood is not assured—it can be lost"). A recent study of 62 countries (55) found that stronger cultural beliefs about manhood's precarity are linked to higher rates of risky health behaviors (e.g., smoking, heavy drinking) and adverse health outcomes (e.g., liver cirrhosis, death from injuries). In fact, men in countries strongly endorsing these beliefs (e.g., Albania, Iran) live over six fewer years on average than those in countries with lower endorsement (e.g., Finland, Spain).

Broader societal beliefs translate into individual-level stress responses when men's masculinity is threatened. Experimental studies show that when men perceive a threat to their masculinity, they become anxious and often respond in ways that can be harmful to themselves and others (7). An experiment (68) gave heterosexual undergraduates a "gender knowledge test" with false feedback indicating either high (nonthreatening) or low (threatening) performance relative to their gender. The researchers measured feelings of anxiety and related emotions using indirect measures, such as a word completion task (e.g., completing "THREA__" as "THREAT"). Men who perceived a threat exhibited higher anxiety, discomfort in sharing scores, and claimed they would perform better in the future; women did not show corresponding effects when their femininity was threatened. Such stress responses extend to various emotions such as anger and guilt (69) and physiological changes, including heart rate variability (70) and cortisol levels (71).

Manhood threats can further trigger physically aggressive cognitions and behaviors in men (72). For example, a series of studies (73) showed that men assigned to perform a feminine hair-braiding task chose to hit a punching bag more often and harder than those assigned to braid a rope. This aggressive response helped reduce their anxiety from the

perceived threat. Masculinity threats also led men to endure more pain, as shown by tolerating increasing pressure from an algometer until it was too painful (74). While these tough-guy displays may alleviate men's anxiety, they also promote harmful behaviors that risk injury to themselves and others.

Masculine norms and practices harm men's social interactions and relationships, with consistent links to poor social functioning, alexithymia, communication issues, and limited support from social networks (60, 75). In friendships, masculine norms hinder intimacy and favor pragmatic, stoic exchanges (10). In heterosexual relationships, masculine conformity is linked to men's lower self-efficacy in maintaining romantic and sexual relationships (76). Masculine norms also foster prejudice toward women (77), further straining cross-gender dynamics. For example, norms advocating playboy behaviors and dominance (60) encourage men to sexually objectify women (e.g., checking out their bodies; 78), a behavior linked to dissatisfaction in heterosexual relationships, including for the men involved (79, 80).

Cultures infused with masculinity exacerbate psychological and social challenges for men. In honor cultures (81), men's pressure to adhere to masculine norms serves as means of defending their reputation, usually through aggressive behavior. These environments foster strained relationships, confrontational interactions, and deteriorating health for all involved, men included (82). A set of studies (83) show how honor culture norms shape Southern White men's reactions. When insulted by a confederate who bumped into them and called them an "asshole", Southern men were more likely than their Northern counterparts to feel their masculine reputation was threatened, become more upset (indicated by increased cortisol levels), become physiologically primed for aggression (indicated by increased testosterone levels), and exhibit more aggressive thoughts and behaviors (e.g., yielded at a shorter distance to the confederate in the "chicken game"). Similarly, endorsement of the machismo concept, emphasizing traditional Hispanic gender roles, predicted stress and depression among Mexican American men (84).

Masculine defaults—cultural biases that prioritize traditionally masculine traits such as competition, independence, and risk-taking—dominate many workplaces (85). These norms reinforce the "ideal worker" model (86), which demands constant availability and long hours. Although this expectation often conflicts with women's caregiving responsibilities, it also penalizes men who seek work flexibility, with career penalties such as reduced promotions and wage stagnation (87).

In some workplaces, masculine defaults manifest as masculinity-contest cultures, marked by intense competition and a dog-eat-dog mentality that fosters toxic masculinity (88). The fallout from these cultures extends beyond organizational outcomes and their more obvious harm to women employees, also deeply involving men employees. A survey of over 1,000 employees (89) assessed their work environments using the Masculinity Contest Culture scale (e.g., "Admitting you don't know the answer looks weak"; "If you don't stand up for yourself people will step on you"). Higher scores not only correlated with negative work dynamics, such as toxic leadership and peer behaviors (bullying and harassment), but also with individual costs including burnout, low commitment, poor performance, job dissatisfaction, and high turnover.

In summary, traditional masculinity grants men collective power and privilege but comes with personal costs. However, men's experiences with these norms vary. For example, work and status-focused norms can foster resilience (90) and sometimes align with positive health behaviors (e.g., physical fitness; 6). In contrast, norms centered on self-reliance and misogyny (e.g., playboy beliefs) are tied to negative mental health outcomes (e.g., loneliness, body image problems; 60). Embracing more inclusive and flexible models of masculinity (91) could yield better outcomes for men. Although the (mostly negative) link of masculine norms to men's health is well established, further research is needed to understand how specific norms—particularly those demeaning women, which seem particularly harmful to both sides—play out in men's everyday interactions and limit their capacity for meaningful connections.

Arrangement 2: Disengagement from Communal Roles. Masculine norms further discourage men from taking on roles perceived as feminine (6). Despite societal progress, traditional domestic roles for women have seen minimal change even as women join the workforce. This creates a gender-role imbalance: Women are embracing agentic roles, but men's engagement in communal roles lags (8, 92). This disparity hinders gender equity, especially at home, where women still shoulder most childcare and household chores (93). The resulting "second shift" is associated with challenges for working mothers, including career progression barriers (37), reduced leisure time (94), increased stress and fatigue (95), and lower perceived health (96). However, women are only one side of this equation.

Men's disengagement from communal roles might appear advantageous, sparing them from mundane and less lucrative tasks (97). However, this view overlooks the benefits of communal activities that foster social connections, strengthen family bonds, and enrich life (8). Communal engagement fulfills the core human need to belong (98), yet men endorse these values less than women, missing out on personal and relational growth (99). A meta-analysis of 100 studies with over 26,000 participants (100) found that caring for others, especially within close relationships, is linked to more satisfying relationships and improved well-being (e.g., life satisfaction, positive emotion), if balanced with self-care. Caring for others also has long-term benefits. A 3-year study following college students revealed that communal goals, such as enhancing one's understanding of others and relationships, predicted increases in happiness and life satisfaction (13).

Caring for others also benefits physical health and longevity. A meta-analysis of 148 studies with over 300,000 participants from diverse backgrounds (101) found that individuals with strong social ties and active community involvement had a 50% higher survival rate than those with weaker connections. Offering support, not just receiving it, was linked to reduced mortality risk among older adults (102). In fact, neglect of positive social connections (along with being a male) emerged as a key nonbiological predictor of mortality in a US national health and retirement survey (103).

Adopting a communal lifestyle at home, such as sharing domestic duties and childcare, is linked to improved relationships for men with their partners and children. In heterosexual couples, sharing responsibilities correlates with greater relationship satisfaction and better sex life. A survey of US

adults (11) found that couples are worst off when women handle most childcare. Men in such relationships reported the lowest satisfaction with childcare, sexual intimacy, and overall relationship quality, along with the highest conflict levels. For fathers, actively caring for children strengthens father-child bonds (104). A study analyzing five waves of data from over 1,000 primarily low-income families (12) found that taking paternity leave is associated with greater involvement, closeness, and communication throughout childhood. This corresponds with higher levels of fathers' relationship satisfaction, engagement, and self-identification as good fathers.

Professionally, men face barriers in caregiving-focused careers, which can be intrinsically rewarding. Their underrepresentation in HEED fields (health care, elementary education, and the domestic sphere) reflects this disengagement (8). Yet, HEED professionals report high job satisfaction due to their societal contributions and personal connections with those they serve. For example, nursing and teaching are regarded as meaningful and fulfilling careers in recent surveys from the UK (105) and the US (106).

Even in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), communal goals create a more inclusive and productive work environment. This not only benefits women by increasing their interest and participation in STEM but also enhances men's work experiences. Fostering a sense of shared purpose and improving teamwork through communal goals can boost innovation and problem-solving (107). Research involving STEM majors and employees found that communal goals, such as helping others, were rare but valued. Individuals preferred STEM mentors who were supportive and caring, and a communal orientation predicted engagement and learning (108).

Despite these benefits, men's disengagement from communal roles remains an overlooked issue (109). Encouraging men to adopt communal values is challenging due to societal incentives that devalue traditional women's roles (97). This aligns with loss aversion; adopting communal roles may jeopardize men's status. Supporting this, men often view women's gains (e.g., reduced discrimination) as a loss to their own position (110). Moreover, those who embrace caregiving face backlash for defying masculine norms (111), discouraging their participation. Research shows that men requesting family leave are perceived as less competent and committed, reflecting a "femininity stigma" that hinders career prospects (112). Fathers are praised for weekend caregiving but criticized on weekdays for neglecting work (113). This backlash extends beyond caregiving—modest men who avoid self-promotion are viewed as weak and unambitious (114). Likewise, men in traditionally feminine roles, such as elementary teaching, face doubts about their motives (115).

Research on advancing men in communal roles and HEED professions is limited compared to extensive research on women in STEM (36). Future efforts should expand opportunities for men in these roles while alleviating domestic burdens on women. Key strategies include raising the perceived value of communal roles (8), targeting backlash against men in these roles (111), and mitigating maternal gatekeeping from mothers setting unrealistic expectations (116). Initiatives are already shifting norms around communal traits in men (117); yet emphasizing personal benefits and aligning communal roles with masculine identities could further support inclusion. While family studies have laid a solid foundation for understanding domestic labor dynamics (118), broader methodologies and experimental designs could deepen insights into shared domestic responsibilities.

Arrangements 3 and 4: Ambivalent Sexism. Ambivalent sexism theory (28) identifies two complementary ideologies managing gender dynamics: hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. To assess these ideologies, Glick and Fiske developed the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory. Hostile sexism views women as competitors seeking dominance through sexuality or feminism (e.g., "Women seek to gain power by getting control over men"). Benevolent sexism views women as morally superior yet inherently weaker, deserving protection and admiration (e.g., "Women should be cherished and protected by men").

Our recent systematic review (14) analyzed empirical studies on ambivalent sexism in workplaces and relationships, revealing how it maintains control over women. Hostile sexism employs aggressive tactics, such as predicting rape proclivity (119) and domestic aggression (120), and leads to blatant discrimination against nontraditional, career-oriented women. For example, when evaluating job candidates, hostile sexism predicts women receiving lower recommendations for managerial positions (121) and being seen as less hirable (122).

Benevolent sexism, while less recognized as gender bias, promotes paternalistic behaviors, such as assigning women fewer challenging tasks (123) and fostering their reliance on men (124). It encourages women to support a status quo that harms them (29), to focus on appearance (125), and internalize incompetence, which undermines their workplace performance (126).

Beyond its well-documented effects on women, our review (14) uncovered a gap in understanding the personal consequences of ambivalent sexism for men. Attempts to theorize sexism toward men as being seen as dominant yet lacking sociality ("bad but bold"; 127) lack extensive empirical support. We propose that ambivalent sexism, though primarily harmful to women, also carries drawbacks for men who endorse and practice these attitudes. The next two gendered arrangements coincide with ambivalent sexism and explain the harm it brings to men.

Arrangement 3: Hostile sexism. Hostile sexism, mostly endorsed by men (14), involves antipathy toward women. Adopting such a negative stance is unlikely to be personally beneficial, even when aimed at others.

Although consequences for women are most evident in the workplace, hostile sexism's destructive nature for men becomes apparent in intimate relationships. Studies on heterosexual couples use dyadic and longitudinal methods to track ambivalent sexism and its relationship outcomes over time, through self-report questionnaires, daily diary, and recorded interactions (45). Findings show that men endorsing hostile sexism are preoccupied with relational power, dependency, and trust. These men tend to have biased perceptions of their relationships, underestimating their own power (128) and overestimating their partners' negativity (129). They experience poor conflict resolution marked by lower openness and increased hostility (130). Consequently, they report lower relationship quality (129), with reduced stability, emotional bonding, and sexual intimacy (131). Thus, hostile sexism undermines those men's ability to form, maintain, and enjoy meaningful romantic relationships.

This dynamic extends to platonic interactions, as hostility toward women impedes men's ability to build friendly and collegial connections with women colleagues, limiting access to women's resources and collaboration in the workplace. Men exhibiting hostile sexism often misinterpret women's motives (132), which impairs interpersonal accuracy (the ability to correctly assess others' states or traits)—a key factor for workplace success (133). Hostile sexism, which harbors distrust toward women, can erode communication with women colleagues, undermining teamwork and work performance. Initial findings support this, linking hostile sexism to unpleasant interactions, such as making sexist jokes (134) and exhibiting fewer friendly gestures toward women (e.g., less smiling; 135).

Hostile sexism also hints at broader health risks. Large-scale surveys link it to lower life satisfaction (136, 137) and increased mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, and stress (138). Although its effects on physical health remain unexplored, the animosity fostered by hostile sexism likely contributes to adverse outcomes.

Arrangement 4: Benevolent sexism. The personal consequences of benevolent sexism to men are less understood than those of hostile sexism. Benevolent sexism benefits men by preserving their privileged status and reinforcing a positive self-image as women's protectors (37, 124), while mitigating the moral discomfort from dominating others (139). In heterosexual relationships, especially when both parties subscribe to it, benevolent sexism creates favorable dynamics for men (45). These include smoother conflict resolution (130), increased intimacy and self-esteem (140), and extending to overall life satisfaction (136). Benevolent sexism can thus be functional for men, fostering relationship harmony in traditional roles (e.g., getting along, being satisfied).

However, benevolent sexism also imposes rigid expectations that constrain men's choices. Adhering to traditional norms in courtship, such as paying for dates (141), proposing marriage (142), and providing financially (143), can lead to guilt (144) and negative judgments (145) when these expectations are not met.

Benevolent sexism also demands men's self-sacrifice for others' safety. In the extreme, men are obligated to serve in life-threatening combat roles—risks rarely demanded of women (146). Though framed as honorable, these roles can lead to severe physical and psychological harm, including PTSD (147), and contribute to long-term health issues (148). Self-sacrifice extends to emergencies, such as war evacuations (149) and maritime disasters like the Titanic (150), where men are expected to save others first. Such norms render men's lives expendable, imposing lasting burdens on their health and well-being under the guise of duty and honor.

The breadwinner role, prescribed by benevolent sexism, adds financial pressure and expectations of career success. Although this role grants men social status and aligns with traditional ideals of masculinity (85), it demands constant work commitment at the cost of well-being (87). Men face stigmatization when seeking flexibility, despite valuing it as much as women (4). A US family survey reveals that men lose either way: "inadequate" breadwinners reported more depression and marital conflict, while those fulfilling the role experienced greater work-family strain (151). This aligns with role strain theory in sociology (152), which highlights the challenges of meeting conflicting role demands—an idea later applied to gender contexts (153).

In professional settings, men might benefit from positive stereotypes associated with benevolent sexism, such as being seen as competent (154) or brilliant (155)—leading to stereotype lift effects, where individuals can perform better when not stigmatized in a relevant domain (156). However, being confronted with these stereotypes can also have downsides (157). For example, Asian American men who imagined being a target of positive stereotypes about their race ("Asians are ambitious") or gender ("Men are ambitious") also believed they faced corresponding negative stereotypes, such as being antisocial or arrogant (158). Israeli men exposed to agency-related stereotypes performed poorly on a task emphasizing communal traits (159). Positive stereotypes can also lead to a "choking effect" in domains where individuals are stereotyped to excel, ironically impairing their performance (160, 161).

At work, internalized pressures from benevolent sexism can lead to less productive interactions. Protector roles demand greater effort and decision-making, and while men's benevolent sexism predicts affiliative expressions (e.g., positive word usage; 135), chivalry (162), and helping behaviors (124), these actions often follow prescriptive norms rather than fostering genuine connections (in the context of racism, see ref. 163). Benevolent sexism implies liking women without truly respecting them (164), so men may overlook women's strengths, hindering effective collaboration. Studies show that interacting with women under these expectations can compromise men's cognitive performance (165, 166) and induce stress when they need to compete with women (167).

Arrangement 5: Shifts in Gender Hierarchies. Carol Anderson's observation, "If you've always been privileged, equality begins to look like oppression", though contextualized within racial equality, resonates with men's experiences in the 21st century. As women increasingly excel in traditionally male-dominated fields (22), and surpass men in educational achievements (20), men face shifts in long-held social-power dynamics—matched by a growing public recognition of women's advances in political, economic, and occupational spheres (168). Changes in family structures—declining marriage rates, rising cohabitation, nonmarital births, and increasing divorce rates (169)—further reflect these evolving dynamics.

Hierarchy shifts can trigger a sense of threat in men accustomed to traditional gender roles. UK and Dutch samples (16) showed that men confronted with women advocating for gender equality experienced negative emotions (e.g., worry, tension), perceived threat (e.g., "I think the advancement of women is threatening for me/men"), and physiological stress responses (e.g., increased peripheral resistance, decreased cardiac output). These reactions were more pronounced in men with strong gender identification (e.g., "Being a man is important to me") and lessened when a woman legitimized the existing hierarchy.

These feelings extend beyond internal experiences to actions that aim to reassert traditional hierarchies. Theories in intergroup relations, such as social dominance theory (25) and backlash theory (17), explain how dominant group members react to perceived threats to their group's rank in the social hierarchy. In gender contexts, typical responses include

sabotaging women's efforts to succeed in a task (170), sexually objectifying women (e.g., looking more at women's bodies than faces; 78), harassment (e.g., sending pornographic material; 42), and gender-biased employment practices (e.g., recommending lower salaries; 171). However, backlash can also backfire on men, fueling resentment and hindering meaningful connections—though this argument is speculative.

Popular media (172) and academic discussions (52) emphasize the struggles of White, working-class men facing status loss due to the decline of manufacturing jobs and their reduced relative standing compared to women and minority men (173). This demographic has seen a rise in "deaths of despair"—fatalities from suicide, drug overdose, and alcohol-related diseases—often linked to economic and social stressors (18).

Thus, the threat posed by hierarchy shifts to men is becoming evident, but the personal costs for men warrant further investigation. Initial findings suggest that these shifts can trigger maladaptive responses that could harm men's long-term health (16), revealing a gap in knowledge with policy implications.

Interrelations among Gendered Arrangements. The five gendered arrangements discussed here are not isolated; they form a web of mutually reinforcing dynamics. Micro-level behaviors feed into larger, macrolevel structures, and vice versa.

From a bottom–up perspective, pressure to conform to masculine norms (Arrangement 1) shapes individual behaviors that favor independence and dominance over communal, nurturing roles (Arrangement 2). This reluctance reinforces broader societal patterns, such as ambivalent sexism (Arrangements 3 and 4) and gender hierarchies (Arrangement 5), where communal roles are devalued (97) and masculine ideals rewarded with status (85).

From a top–down perspective, societal structures like ambivalent sexism and gender hierarchies (Arrangements 3 to 5) reinforce traditional masculine defaults (14, 85), discouraging men from pursuing alternative roles (8). Men who deviate by embracing communal roles or rejecting competition often face backlash and penalties (111), pushing them back into conventional norms.

These arrangements intersect in multiple ways, perpetuating gendered constraints on men's lives. This analysis brings the discussion full circle, highlighting how interconnected these dynamics are, shaping both individual behaviors and broader societal patterns.

Broad Implications

This perspective highlights the burdens gendered arrangements place not only on women, traditionally the main focus of research, but also on men. Although these arrangements privilege men, they also impose personal costs. Ironically, the subjugation of women traps men in more restrictive, narrowly defined roles. Addressing role inflexibility and dismantling oppressive structures could benefit everyone—men, women, and society.

Implications for Individuals. Gendered arrangements limit men's relationships, careers, and health. As women advance in various fields, *men* should also have the chance to explore new roles. The goal here is not to prescribe better roles but to expand options. Traditional roles may offer familiarity and continuity for some (174), but they come with personal costs. In a society moving toward egalitarian values (15), exploring alternative choices can help men lead more fulfilling lives and better understand their identities. Recognizing privilege can also encourage men to uphold moral integrity (139).

For *women*, the benefits are clear. Highlighting costs to men serves as a compelling incentive—a motivation not readily attained otherwise—for men to move away from the more misogynic roles and behaviors that adversely harm women. This shift in perspective can foster a less prejudiced environment, indirectly enhancing women's well-being. Thus, bringing attention to the less visible burdens on men has broader implications for improving conditions for women as well.

Acknowledging these challenges benefits *interactions* between men and women. In professional settings, this framework helps clarify cross-gender dynamics in competitive and cooperative relationships (166, 167). It also extends to personal spheres, addressing issues like unequal household labor (118) and declining marriage rates (169). Expanding roles available to men can lay the groundwork for more balanced and equitable relationships across genders, enriching both professional collaborations and personal connections.

Implications for Society. The societal implications hinge on the idea that happier, more fulfilled individuals contribute to a healthier, more productive society (175). When men diversify their personal and occupational roles, well-being and economic benefits ensue, as diversification fuels creativity, innovation, and efficiency (176). This applies to men's participation in communal, HEED professions (8) and moving away from toxic masculinity in workplaces (88). Addressing gender biases is crucial for organizational success, as mixed-gender teams often face performance issues due to prejudiced dynamics (177).

Expanding men's roles also enables women to transcend traditional domestic responsibilities and fully participate in society, optimizing human capital (178). Societal progress is hampered when women are confined to traditional roles that do not leverage their full potential. Moving beyond these roles maximizes their contributions and time.

Some institutions have restructured roles to provide men with more flexibility. Sweden's shared parental leave encourages men to engage in family life (179). Iceland's gender quotas reduce male dominance in leadership, easing the pressure of competitive masculinity (180). Patagonia's work policies help men balance work and family (181). The Australian Defence Force challenges traditional military norms with flexible practices (182). These examples demonstrate how simple societal changes can lower the personal costs of gendered arrangements, enabling men to lead more balanced and fulfilling lives.

Implications for Diversity Science. This perspective advances diversity science by shifting the research focus toward how men, particularly those holding prejudiced and traditional views, are personally harmed by their own biases. This aligns with ongoing efforts to understand the self-damaging effects of prejudice, drawing parallels with research demonstrating racism's negative implications for society (183), and the racist individual (e.g., cognitive depletion

in interracial interactions; 163). A similar logic extends to gender relations.

Our approach seeks to understand the harm to men before making policy recommendations for diversity science. While we personally support gender equity, our goal is objective representation, guided by empirical evidence. A balanced view evaluates both traditional and nontraditional roles. Although future research may uncover potential advantages of gendered arrangements in certain contexts, the costs outlined here emphasize the need for more flexible, inclusive roles that better reflect current societal shifts.

Implications for General Science. This perspective encourages scientists across disciplines to integrate gender-awareness into their work. This applies not only to social sciences but also in fields where potential links to men's experiences may be less obvious. In psychiatry and medicine, understanding how gendered arrangements relate to men's health can improve research outcomes. For example, men are underdiagnosed with mood disorders (184) but face higher suicide rates (185). Understanding that societal expectations discourage men from expressing vulnerability or seeking help (5) can help researchers develop better survey tools and targeted mental health services. In the context of cardiovascular disease and stress (186), acknowledging men's unique stressors can refine data collection and intervention strategies.

In STEM fields, men's biases impede gender diversity, despite evidence that women's presence strengthens group dynamics, communication, and collective intelligence. Scientific innovations often arise from team collaborations (107). By excluding women, men miss valuable contributions and perspectives from half their colleagues, ultimately disadvantaging themselves.

Recognizing that gender issues extend beyond solely being women's concerns not only enriches scientific knowledge but also fosters more inclusive, equitable environments, enhancing the health and functionality of scientific communities.

Concluding Remarks

This analysis examines how gendered arrangements intersect with men's lives, complementing the existing focus on women. Although these structures elevate men's societal status, they paradoxically entrap them in restrictive roles. Key gendered arrangements harm men; identifying them supports a choice-based approach for individuals and scientists. Rather than offering a one-size-fits-all solution, our perspective suggests that easing rigid gender roles and dismantling gendered structures benefits everyone. Highlighting the harm to men can improve personal well-being and relationships, but also promotes inclusivity in scientific inquiry. Including men in this dialogue paves the way for more effective diversity strategies. Ultimately, allowing individuals to follow personal choice, rather than only societal expectations, fosters gender equity for all.

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