How Women and Men Should (Not) Be: Gender Rules and Their Alignment With Status Beliefs Across Nations

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Abstract

Gender rules, that is, prescriptive and proscriptive gender stereotypes, dictate how women and men should and should not be, and thereby perpetuate the gender hierarchy that privileges men over women. Across seven nations that span the continuum of gender equality, we investigated gender status norms by identifying the extent to which gender rules correspond with social status beliefs. As expected, in all investigated nations, participants ($N = 4{,}327$) believed that men should not show low-status traits reflecting weakness (e.g., weak, naive) but should show high-status traits reflecting agency (e.g., leadership ability, ambitious). Correlational analyses found that the more gender-equal a nation, the more men's agency prescriptions were aligned with high-status and their weakness proscriptions with low-status characteristics. Moreover, participants believed that women should not show high-status traits reflecting dominance (e.g., dominant, demanding) in the United States, Turkey, India, and Ghana—that is, in the relatively less gender-equal nations. Yet, no trait was proscribed for women in the relatively more gender-equal nations of Switzerland and Sweden. The status alignment of women's prescriptions and proscriptions did not relate to nations' achieved gender equality. We discuss how the alignment of men's gender rules with status beliefs represents a hidden barrier to achieving full gender equality.

Keywords

gender rules, gender stereotypes, status norms, gender equality, cross-cultural

Gender inequality is a pressing issue with men having more power and status than women around the world. No country has yet achieved gender parity in economic participation, health and political empowerment, and wages (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; World Economic Forum, 2024). Gender inequality is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon with ramifications for various domains of life including work, family, health, culture, economics, politics, and legislation (Else-Quest & Grabe, 2012). In relatively gender-equal societies, women's and men's roles and opportunities have converged considerably as women have entered leadership roles in corporations and politics and started earning more university degrees than men (World Economic Forum, 2024). Reflecting women's educational advancement over time, public opinion polls from the United States (U.S.) revealed that the percentage of respondents who viewed women and men as equally competent has increased from less than 25% in 1940 to more than 50% in 2018 (Eagly et al., 2020).

Gender equality is typically assessed with composite indicators that aggregate micro- and macrolevel national statistics such as the Global Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum, 2024). Such indicators, however, often disguise persisting gender inequalities within countries (Teigen & Wängnerud, 2009). In fact, despite the progress

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toward gender equality in relatively gender-equal nations, the traditional gender hierarchy that privileges men over women persists worldwide (England et al., 2020; Knight & Brinton, 2017) with women being viewed as less socially worthy and of lower social status than men (Ridgeway & Bourg, 2004). For instance, although Sweden is consistently ranked as one of the most gender-equal countries in the world, Swedish women reported that women in their society face numerous issues including domestic abuse (according to 34% of respondents), sexual violence (25%), and unequal pay (31%; Statista Research Department, 2024). Also, relatively gender-equal countries see larger gender gaps in adolescents' subjective well-being (i.e., life satisfaction and positive and negative affect), indicating that greater gender equality does not benefit girls' subjective well-being although it might enhance boys' well-being (Guo et al., 2024). Such persisting inequalities raise the question of how the gender hierarchy with its status inequality that privileges men over women is sustained, particularly in nations that have made progress towards greater gender equality.

The present research examined cross-cultural variation in *gender status norms*, defined as the extent to which gender rules (i.e., prescriptive and proscriptive gender stereotypes) align with social status beliefs. The relative status of a gender group is important for how people behave toward women and men. Various distinctions of social status have been proposed such as power-based, dominance-based, and prestige-based status (e.g., Cheng et al., 2013). According to Ridgeway and Markus (2022), the allocation of status is a process that takes place at multiple levels of society and is governed by both "implicit, taken-for-granted norms [for] allocating status, e.g., socially enforced expectations that give status to people who appear valuable in the situation" and by "explicit, historically changing beliefs about status, e.g., what types of people are more worthy and competent than others" (Ridgeway & Markus, 2022, p. 11). Given the far-reaching consequences of status allocation in society, this research is set to uncover norms for women's and men's desired status in different nations, as well as to to understand why women are given lower social status than men—even in relatively gender-equal nations.

The present research makes several novel contributions to the literature on gender (in)equalities. From a theoretical point of view, this research is the first to identify cross-cultural variations of gender status norms—that is, the alignment of gender rules with social status beliefs. Gender status norms likely work as a subtle mechanism and uphold the gender hierarchy, even in relatively gender-equal nations. From an empirical point of view, the bottom-up approach of the present research allows for the identification of those traits that actually are gender rules in a nation. Additionally, this research overcomes limitations of past work that presented participants with a predetermined set of traits, thereby possibly obscuring gender rules in specific national contexts.

Gender Stereotypes and Gender Rules

Different explanations have been offered for the persistence of gender inequality, ranging from gender differences in goals and preferences to institutionalized and structural gender biases (see review by Schmader & Nater, 2025). One prominent explanation are descriptive gender stereotypes, which are people's widely shared beliefs about the typical characteristics of women and men (Eagly et al., 2020). According to social role theory (Eagly & Wood, 2012), the content of gender stereotypes derives from people's daily observations of women and men in their typical social roles and social standing, as people assume that women and men possess the qualities of the roles that they occupy. Worldwide, people observe that more men than women are the primary breadwinner of their families and occupy high-profile roles in society, and more women than men tend to be primary caregivers in the home and occupy care-oriented roles at work (World Economic Forum, 2024).

As a consequence, in their descriptive stereotypes, people worldwide believe that women are more communal (e.g., warm, caring) than men, and men are more agentic (e.g., assertive, ambitious) than women (Charlesworth et al., 2021; Williams & Best, 1990). Agency and communion represent the two fundamental dimensions of gender stereotype content (Sczesny et al., 2019; see Abele et al., 2021; and Ma et al., 2022, for further subdimensions of descriptive stereotypes). Descriptive beliefs affect how people perceive and evaluate members of social groups and can thus result in negative outcomes for individuals based on their group membership. For instance, women may be judged as less suitable for jobs that require assertiveness (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2012), and men may be judged as less suitable for jobs that require social sensitivity (Croft et al., 2015; Haines et al., 2024; Sczesny et al., 2022).

In addition to being descriptive, gender stereotypes can also be *prescriptive* and *proscriptive* in nature, with these stereotypes often being referred to as gender rules (e.g., Prentice & Carranza, 2004). Gender rules regulate behavior because they stipulate "how women and men should be (prescriptions), and how they should not be (proscriptions)" (Rudman et al., 2012b, p. 165). When a trait is believed to be more desirable for one gender than the other (e.g., women should be warmer than men, men should be more ambitious than women), it represents a prescriptive gender rule. When a trait is more undesirable for one gender than the other (e.g., women should not be as dominant as men; men should not be as weak as women), it represents a proscriptive gender rule.

Cross-cultural research suggests that gender rules may vary across nations. Undergraduates in 62 nations indicated the extent to which they held prescriptions and proscriptions for women and men on composite scales (with eight predetermined traits per dimension; Bosson et al., 2022). The results

found double standards in gender rules, such that gender rules were endorsed more strongly for men than women. Specifically, respondents viewed agency in men as more desirable than communion in women (prescriptions), and weakness in men as less desirable than dominance in women (proscriptions) in all investigated nations (Bosson et al., 2022). Yet, the extent to which participants held prescriptions for women and men varied across cultures. Specifically, participants in relatively gender-equal countries showed a weaker double standard in prescriptions; that is, they viewed men's agency as more desirable than women's communion to a lesser extent than participants in less gender-equal countries. Yet, the double standard in proscriptions (viewing men's weakness as less desirable than women's dominance) was unrelated to a nation's level of gender equality. In sum, these results document stronger gender rules for men than women in all investigated nations and provide initial evidence that people's prescriptions for men might vary along nation-level gender equality.

Gender Status Norms: The Alignment of Gender Rules with Social Status Beliefs

In their seminal study, Rudman et al. (2012b; Study 1) documented how the four primary gender rules align with social status beliefs in the United States. In this study, students received a set of 64 traits and indicated how desirable it is in American society for a woman (or a man) to possess each of these traits, how typical each trait is for women (or men) in American society, or how typical each trait is in someone who has high (versus low) status. The results found support for *gender status norms* in the United States, a moderately gender-equal nation (World Economic Forum, 2024). That is, men's proscriptive traits reflecting weakness (e.g., weak, indecisive) were aligned with low status, whereas their prescriptive traits reflecting agency (e.g., assertive, competent) were aligned with high status. For women, proscriptive traits reflecting dominance (e.g., dominant, arrogant) were aligned with high status, whereas their prescriptive traits reflecting communality were status neutral with some traits being aligned with low status (e.g., warm, interested in children), and others with high status (e.g., cheerful, enthusiastic), while many were neither high nor low in status (e.g., friendly, supportive, and helpful). In concert, these findings showed that men must be high in status (and must not be low in status), whereas women are prohibited from being high in status.

Individuals who do not conform to gender rules can suffer backlash, defined as social and economic penalties for breaking gender norms (Heilman & Wallen, 2010; Moss-Racusin et al., 2010; Rudman et al., 2012b). These penalties for gender rule violations and their status alignment "reinforce and defend the gender hierarchy" (i.e., status incongruity hypothesis; Rudman et al., 2012b, p. 166). To better

understand when and why gender rules uphold the gender hierarchy, this research examined gender status norms in seven nations that cover the full continuum of gender equality; that is, Switzerland, Sweden, the United States, Turkey, Iran, India, and Ghana.

Consequences of Progress Towards Gender Equality

In general, the socially appropriate behavior for women and men depends on the nation's unique cultural context that is characterized by various factors such as gender equality, political system, religion, and human and economic development. Less gender-equal nations have an unequal division of resources and opportunities between women and men in a nation (World Economic Forum, 2024), with many traditional rules and sometimes even laws enforcing gender conformity (Banda, 2008). Iran, for example, is characterized by a strong and authoritarian state with religious laws and institutions, and a political system that neither accepts the primacy of democracy nor equality between men and women (Hoodfar & Sadr, 2010), as illustrated by the fact that courts can allow early marriage for girls (as young as 12 years old; Banda, 2008). In India, a parliamentary secular republic, the level of women's literacy and educational attainment has increased in the last decades; yet, women's labor force participation has been declining with rising gender gaps in wages (Ghosh, 2018). Moreover, early marriage and polygyny in India continue to be a violation of women's right to equality (Banda, 2008). In Ghana, a presidential representative democratic republic, objectives to increase gender equality have gained recognition, yet gender wage gaps and women's underrepresentation in tertiary education persist (Ayentimi et al., 2020), and the legal system continues to "permit" polygyny and nonconsensual sex in marriage (Banda, 2008).

A further characteristic of some nations with relatively lower achieved gender equality is a culture of honor. Honor cultures are defined by the fact that honor and dignity are central themes that organize people's shared beliefs, values, behaviors, and practices (Leung & Cohen, 2011; Triandis, 1996). For example, in Iran and Turkey, status and public reputation are crucial and people are highly motivated to hold an honorable status, with its defense becoming a matter of life or death in its most extreme forms (Kardam, 2005). In honor cultures, men are expected to be brave, strong, and dominant enough to control and protect women and others in the family; women are expected to be virgins until marriage and to be faithful, modest, and reserved after marriage (Glick et al., 2016; Uskul & Cross, 2019). In concert, the cultural contexts in many less gender-equal nations effectively assure men's advantages and invoke little threat to their group's higher social status.

When societies become more gender equal, one might assume that gender stereotypes and gender rules would

diminish, as people would observe women and men being represented equally in various social roles. Yet, socioeconomic statistics and empirical stereotype data refute this assumption. The gendered division of labor endures in all nations, with women performing relatively more domestic work and men more paid work in the labor force (World Economic Forum, 2024). Within the labor force, when societies have become more gender-equal, women's and men's occupational roles have paradoxically become more—rather than less—segregated (Blackburn et al., 2000; Levanon & Grusky, 2016). In fact, the most gender-equal nations (e.g., Finland, Denmark, Sweden) are among those with the highest occupational gender segregation (Jarman et al., 2012; Wong & Charles, 2020). This is because of structural accommodation (e.g., long maternity leaves, availability of part-time jobs) that foster women's entry into occupations that have lesser penalties for discontinuous employment, such as the highly communal occupations of teaching and nursing (Goldin, 2014). Consistent with this reasoning, public opinion polls from the United States revealed that the descriptive stereotype that women are more communal than men has increased—rather than decreased—over time as the United States has become more gender equal (Eagly et al., 2020). Furthermore, the theories discussed next (i.e., realistic group conflict theory, intergroup threat theory, and precarious manhood theory) support the notion that greater gender equality is likely accompanied by increased—rather than decreased—societal gender norms.

With progress towards gender equality, increased competition between men and women overtly challenges the gender hierarchy affording men higher social status in society (England et al., 2020; Knight & Brinton, 2017). According to realistic group conflict theory (see overview by Nshom, 2024), conflicting goals and competition over limited resources can prompt intergroup prejudice and discrimination toward the outgroup. Importantly, for the present research, intergroup competition can create perceptions of threats to the status and power of the privileged group (e.g., men), cause feelings of anxiety, and prompt actions to push back against the sources of threat (group-based threats; Hodson et al., 2022). Threats can not only be experienced as realistic, marked by concerns about the loss of the ingroup's resources and power, but also as symbolic, including concerns about the ingroup's values, identity, and way of life (intergroup threat theory; Stephan et al., 2015; see also Rios et al., 2018).

Closely related to symbolic threats, precarious manhood theory (Vandello et al., 2008; Vandello & Bosson, 2013) proposes that men are more sensitive than women to changes that threaten their gender identity. Following this theory, manhood is an achieved social status that can be easily lost, whereas womanhood is biologically bestowed at puberty. The precariousness of manhood—which people around the world share (Bosson et al., 2021)—can have detrimental consequences. For example, stronger beliefs in precarious manhood leave men more vulnerable to potentially problematic workplace behaviors and relate to men's greater support for aggressive politicians and policies (e.g., the death penalty; DiMuccio & Knowles, 2021). Moreover, men's life expectancy was found to be six years less in countries that have stronger precarious manhood beliefs (Vandello et al., 2023).

Even for men living in a relatively gender-equal nation, the need to prove their masculine identity remains. For example, adolescent boys in Australia felt high pressure from their parents and themselves to show stereotypic masculine behavior and high pressure from peers to avoid stereotypic feminine behavior (e.g., "start a girly activity like ballet"); whereas girls felt pressure, particularly from themselves, to conform to masculine behavior (e.g., "join a boys' sports club"; Jackson & Bussey, 2020, p. 307). Relatedly, adolescent boys in the United States showed increased aggression when their gender typicality was pressured, and this was particularly the case among boys whose parents thought that men should have more power than women (Stanaland et al., 2024). These findings illustrate that in societal contexts with progress towards gender equality and subsequent increased intergroup competition, male primacy is threatened and boys and men feel pressure to avoid losing status.

For men, progress toward gender equality can result in resistance. Compared to women, men believed that reduced discrimination against women causes men to lose out (Ruthig et al., 2017). This zero-sum perspective of gender status further explains men's resistance to gender equality. For example, when confronted with a gender hierarchy threat, men were less likely to support gender-fair policies due to an increase in zero-sum thinking (Kuchynka et al., 2018). Moreover, data from New Zealand and the United States suggests that men defend the status quo by endorsing reverse sexism; that is, nowadays, men (rather than women) are discriminated against in their society (Bahamondes et al., 2022; Zehnter et al., 2021). Thus, progress towards equality and the liberalizing of gender values can create resistance and backlash against gender equality and women's empowerment (see also the cultural backlash theory, Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Off, 2023; Parth, 2022). Consistent with this argument, younger men in European regions with high unemployment rates are more likely to see advances in women's rights as a threat to their opportunities than older men and women, likely because younger men face strong pressure to behave in ways that afford them high status and secures male primacy (Off et al., 2022).

The pressure on men's social status when societies progress towards greater gender equality likely results in the stronger alignment of gender rules and status beliefs. This stronger status alignment may represent a subtle mechanism that contributes to the upholding of men's higher social status in relatively gender-equal societies and thereby circumvents the truly equal status of women and men. Specifically, to

reinforce and defend the gender hierarchy with its male primacy, traditional gendered expectations such that men should not be weak or otherwise low in status are likely strengthened rather than relaxed in more gender-equal nations. Evidence for such a paradoxical pattern would emerge when gender rules were particularly strongly aligned with status in nations high on women's empowerment. In these societies, gender status norms would create particularly strong expectations for men to behave in ways that uphold their high status (e.g., being dominant, aggressive) and to not show traits that are low in status (e.g., being weak, naive) in relatively gender-equal cultures. Advancing the understanding of the interconnection between gender equality and gender rule alignment with social status beliefs seems crucial, considering recent research that has documented paradoxical consequences of greater gender equality.

Research on the "gender-equality paradox" challenges the simple assumption that greater gender equality would result in weaker gender stereotypes and fewer inequalities in high-status masculine domains. Specifically, women's underrepresentation in math-related fields was found to be more pronounced in more (rather than less) gender-equal countries (Stoet & Geary, 2018). Stereotypes relating math more to boys than girls were stronger in more gender-equal and developed countries (Breda et al., 2020). Baby names were more phonetically gendered in more gender-equal societies, thereby contributing to optimal distinctiveness between the two gender groups (Leonardelli et al., 2010; Vishkin et al., 2022). Furthermore, although in relatively gender-equal nations people were more supportive of mothers being employed, they were less supportive of gender equality at home (Yu & Lee, 2013)—a pattern consistent with the "gender-equality paradox." In sum, these findings illustrate that advances in gender equality result in a reshaping rather than eradicating of gender norms (Breda et al., 2020).

The Present Research and Hypotheses

To uncover the alignment of gender rules with social status beliefs across nations, the first aim of this research was to identify traits that reflect women's and men's gender rules. The second aim was to examine gender status norms; that is, the alignment of gender rules with status within each nation. To test how the identified prescriptive and proscriptive gender rules align with social status across nations that vary in their achieved gender equality, we selected nations that reflected the full continuum of gender equality in terms of gender differences in reproductive health, empowerment, and economic status (Gender Inequality Index; United Nations Development Programme, 2017). Specifically, data came from these seven nations: Switzerland (ranked 1 out of 160 nations), Sweden (ranked 3), the United States (ranked 43), Turkey (ranked 70), Iran (ranked 115), India (ranked 122), and Ghana (ranked 130).

Past research examining gender rules across cultures has typically used a top-down approach and asked participants to indicate how desirable a preselected set of traits (reflecting the four gender rule dimensions of agency, weakness, communality, dominance) are for women and men (e.g., Bosson et al., 2022; Prentice & Carranza, 2002; Williams & Best, 1990). Although this approach reveals the degree to which the aforementioned gender rule dimensions (e.g., male weakness proscription) are desirable for women and men, it does not indicate whether the provided traits are actually seen as gender rules in a nation. To overcome this limitation, this research applied a bottom-up approach to identify those traits that constitute gender rules in a nation in the first place.

For this purpose (following Rudman et al., 2012b), we classified a trait as a prescription for women or for men when it was rated high on desirability for one gender and substantially differed from the desirability rating for the other gender. Relatedly, we classified a trait as a proscription for women or men when it was rated low on desirability for one gender and substantially differed from the desirability rating for the other gender. Once traits were identified as being gender rules in a nation, this research examined the alignment of these traits with social status characteristics and analyzed how gender status norms—that is, the alignment of gender rules with social status beliefs—uphold the gender hierarchy, particularly in nations with relatively greater achieved gender equality.

The first set of hypotheses concerns the existence of gender rules in different nations by identifying those traits that either stipulate how women and men should be (prescriptions) or should not be (proscriptions).

> Hypothesis 1a: In each nation, women's prescriptions mainly include communal traits that are aligned with a mix of low, neutral, and high status; whereas women's proscriptions mainly include dominance-related traits that are aligned with high status.

> Hypothesis 1b: In each nation, men's prescriptions mainly include agentic traits that are aligned with high status; whereas men's proscriptions mainly include weakness-related traits that are aligned with low status.

The second set of hypotheses concerns whether the alignment of gender rules with social status beliefs differs across nations depending on their achieved gender equality.

> Hypothesis 2a: The more gender-equal a nation, the more women's dominance proscriptions are aligned with high-status characteristics.

We refrained from making predictions for the alignment of women's communality prescriptions with status,

as past research found these prescriptions to be status-neutral on average (Rudman et al., 2012b; also see Hypothesis 1a).

> Hypothesis 2b: The more gender-equal a nation, the more men's agency prescriptions are aligned with high-status characteristics, and the more men's weakness proscriptions are aligned with low-status characteristics.

Finally, past research does not allow for clear predictions on whether women and men differ in the gender rules they hold. On the one hand, women and men differ more in their social dominance orientation, with women being less likely to support the gender hierarchy in societies that have achieved greater gender equality (Lee et al., 2011), suggesting different gender rules among women and men. On the other hand, women—similarly to men—support men's privilege when they feel proud of their society's traditions and when it is difficult to challenge the gender-unequal reality (Owuamalam et al., 2024; see system justification theory, Jost, 2019), suggesting similar gender rules among women and men. Past research that examined gender rules with a predetermined set of traits (and thus did not identify rules per se) revealed that women (more than men) prescribed less communion and more agency to men versus women, suggesting that women participants held more traditional prescriptive gender rules than men participants (Kosakowska-Berezecka et al., 2024). Therefore, exploratory analyses first examined whether women and men endorse similar gender rules and, second, whether the alignment of these rules with social status exists among both gender groups.

Methods

The study materials, data, and analysis code are available at OSF (https://osf.io/evkfd). We report all data exclusion, sample size, manipulations, and measures in the study.

Participants

The samples included university students as this enabled comparing this study's findings and those of the relevant past work by Rudman et al. (2012b). In total, 4,327 university students (2,594 women) completed the full survey and everyone who finished the survey was included. The sample consisted of 784 students from Switzerland (498 women; $M_{Age} = 23.60$, $SD = 4.91$), 864 from Sweden (655 women; $M_{Age} = 26.79$, $SD = 7.78$), 812 from the United States (452 women; $M_{Age} = 19.03$, $SD = 2.32$), 668 from Turkey (362 women; $M_{Age} = 21.85$, $SD = 3.55$), 412 from Iran (209 women; $M_{Age} = 27.03$, $SD = 6.80$), 437 from India (240 women; $M_{Age} = 22.35$, $SD = 3.44$), and 350 from Ghana (178 women, 7 no information; $M_{Age} = 20.58$, $SD =$

3.39). For each nation, the *a priori* target sample size was at least $N = 400$ (200 women, 200 men). Yet, the limited time available for the in-person data collection in Ghana resulted in a smaller sample.

Materials and Procedure

Assessment of Trait Ratings. To reflect a large array of potential gender rules, we began with the traits used by Rudman et al. (2012b) and Prentice and Carranza (2002). After eliminating duplicates and synonyms, the resulting 120 traits were included in six separate surveys designed to capture the desirability of (1) prescriptive and (2) proscriptive gender rules, the typicality of the traits for (3) women and (4) men, as well as the typicality of the traits for people with (5) high and (6) low status.

In the two *gender rules* surveys (i.e., surveys 1 and 2), we asked participants to indicate "how desirable it is in your society for a woman [man] to possess each of the following characteristics" on a scale from 1 (*not at all desirable*) to 9 (*very desirable*).

In the two *gender typicality* surveys (i.e., surveys 3 and 4), we asked the participants to indicate "how common or typical you think each of the following characteristics is in women [men] in your society" on a scale from 1 (*not at all typical*) to 9 (*very typical*).

In the two *status typicality* surveys (i.e., surveys 5 and 6), we asked participants to indicate "how common or typical you think each of the following characteristics is in someone who has high [low] status in your society" on a scale from 1 (*not at all typical*) to 9 (*very typical*).

Each participant was randomly assigned to complete one of the six surveys. By measuring each type of judgment separately, context and demand effects were reduced, thus providing a pure estimate of the degree to which gender rules overlap with status. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were thanked for their participation and debriefed.

All measures were administered online, except for the data collected in Ghana, which was partly conducted online and partly with paper surveys. For use in the different nations, bilingual psychology researchers translated—and back-translated—the English survey into their native languages: Swedish, German, Turkish, and Farsi. In India and Ghana, the English survey was used because English is an official language in both nations, and a few traits were replaced by synonyms to reflect the local English language use. In the Online Supplemental, Appendix S1 displays the verbatim questionnaire, and Appendix S2 the traits in all languages. The Ethics Commission of the University of Bern approved the study as risk-free for the participants and anonymity was assured.

Identification of Traits That Are Gender Rules. Following past work (Rudman et al., 2012b), men's prescriptions were defined as traits rated above 6 on the desirability scale for

men (1 = *not at all desirable*, 9 = *very desirable*) and, that when compared to the desirability rating for women, also had a gender difference effect size greater or equal to $d = .40$. Relatedly, women's prescriptions were defined as traits that were rated above 6 for women and, that when compared to the desirability rating for men, also had a gender difference effect size less than or equal to $d = -.40$. In contrast, men's proscriptions were traits rated below 4 on desirability for men and also had a gender difference effect size greater than or equal to $d = .40$. Women's proscriptions were traits rated below 4 for women and also had a gender difference effect size less than or equal to $d = -.40$. Finally, traits that did not meet these requirements were not identified as a gender rule and the ascribed status of a trait was considered neutral (i.e., as neither high nor low in status) when the respective effect size was smaller or equal to Cohen's $d = .20$ (e.g., Rudman et al., 2012b).

Categorization of Traits Into Gender Rule Dimensions. Gender rules have typically been classified into four key dimensions (Rudman et al., 2012a): Agency (A) and Communality (C), comprising positive traits prescribed for men and women, respectively, and Dominance (D) and Weakness (W), comprising negative traits proscribed for women and men, respectively. Agency (A) includes traits linked to self-orientation, mastery, and goal achievement (e.g., men should be assertive, ambitious, leadership ability), Communality (C) includes traits linked to people's orientation towards others and caring for others (e.g., women should be affectionate, caring, and loves children; Bakan, 1966). Classifying proscriptions, weakness, and dominance reflect a third dimension often labeled potency (Kervyn et al., 2013) or dominance (Rudman et al., 2012b) that reflects how much influence and control a person can exert: Dominance (D) includes traits linked to an exaggerated form of agency (e.g., women should not be demanding, intimidating, and cold), Weakness (W) includes traits linked to vulnerability (e.g., men should not be weak, naive, and indecisive).

In addition, we included several traits as filler items that were either gender-neutral (e.g., literary, materialistic) and/or not classifiable into the four dimensions (e.g., sexually promiscuous, attends to appearance). Appendix S3 in the Online Supplemental displays the categorization of the 120 traits.

Finally, although relevant theory and past research guided our classification of the traits, exploratory factor analyses (EFAs) empirically examined whether traits loaded onto one of the four dimensions within each of the seven included nations and within each stereotype condition (i.e., descriptive for women, descriptive for men, prescriptive for women, prescription for men; with no EFA for proscriptive stereotypes as these were derived from the same two surveys as the prescriptive stereotypes, see Methods).

As shown in Appendix S4 in the Supplemental Materials, EFAs on *descriptive* stereotypes for women and men supported the four-factor solution in all nations, except for Iran where for women's descriptive stereotypes no weakness dimension emerged. Yet, the EFAs on *prescriptive* stereotypes revealed slightly different patterns in the different nations. That is, all four theoretical dimensions emerged in the United States and Iran. However, for women's prescriptive stereotypes, the dimensions of Communality (reflecting understanding), Dominance, and Agency emerged in Turkey and India, yet in these nations, the fourth factor reflected another facet of Communality (reflecting kindness) rather than Weakness. For men's prescriptive stereotypes, the four theoretical dimensions emerged in the United States, Turkey, and Iran. In Switzerland and India, Communality, Dominance, and Agency (reflecting career orientation) emerged, yet the fourth factor reflected another type of Agency (risk-taking). These findings speak to the importance of this research's bottom-up approach to identifying traits that are seen as gender rules in a given nation.

Tables 1 to 7 list the traits that were identified as gender rules. These tables further show when a gender rule relates to one of the four theoretical dimensions and indicate whether the trait loaded onto the respective dimension in the factor analysis (in the last column).

Relation of Status Alignment with Gender Inequality Index (GII). Gender inequality scores for each nation stem from the 2017 Gender Inequality Index (GII; United Nations Development Programme, 2017). The GII reflects gender-based disadvantage in three important dimensions: reproductive health (i.e., maternal mortality ratio, adolescent birth rates), civic empowerment (i.e., women's share of parliamentary seats and secondary education), and economic status (i.e., labor force participation). The GII thus shows the loss in potential human development due to inequality between women's and men's achievements. GII scores, as a measure of inequality, range from 0 to 1 with higher values indicating larger power disparities between women and men. The selected seven nations reflect a continuum from low to relatively high gender inequality: Switzerland = .040, Sweden = .043, the United States = .202, Turkey = .321, Iran = .488, India = .522, and Ghana = .543. For ease of interpretation, we recoded the GII scores (i.e., by subtracting each value from 1.00) so that higher scores reflect greater gender equality. Pearson correlations examined the hypothesized relationships.

As a robustness check, we ran Spearman correlations and treated the gender equality measure as an ordinal variable that ranged from (1) Ghana to (7) Switzerland.

Results

Throughout the results, a positive effect size (d) reflects stronger prescriptions, proscriptions, or typicality for men rather than women. Also, a positive effect size score (d)

Table 1. Gender Rules for Women and Men in Switzerland.

Trait	Pre-/proscriptive d	Male M	Female M	Typicality d	Status d	Dimension
Women's prescriptions (total = 3)						
Sympathetic	−0.56	6.82	7.63	−1.52	−0.61	C[b]
Warm	−0.51	6.49	7.36	−1.10	−0.56	C[b]
Gentle	−0.42	5.51	6.30	−0.96	−0.46	C[b]
Average	*−0.50*	*6.27*	*7.10*	*−1.19*	*−0.54*	
Women's proscriptions (total = 0)						
NA						
Men's prescriptions (total = 3)						
Rational	0.58	7.01	6.17	0.76	2.54	A
Analytical	0.54	6.64	5.75	0.87	2.13	A
Ambitious	0.48	7.20	6.52	0.16	3.28	A[a]
Average	*0.53*	*6.95*	*6.15*	*0.60*	*2.65*	
Men's proscriptions (total = 2)						
Gullible	0.56	2.02	2.96	−0.86	−1.98	W
Naive	0.45	2.13	2.80	−0.82	−2.05	W
Average	*0.51*	*2.08*	*2.88*	*−0.84*	*−2.02*	

Note. N = 784. The total indicates the number of traits classified as prescriptions or proscriptions, based on the identification procedure outlined (see Methods). In the first column on pre-/proscriptions, positive *d*s indicate that a rule is more desirable (prescriptions) or prohibited (proscriptions) for men, whereas negative *d*s indicate prescriptions and proscriptions for women. The second and third columns display the mean desirability ratings for women and men, ranging from (1) *not at all desirable* to (9) *very desirable*. The fourth column shows the effect size for typicality, with positive *d*s indicating traits rated as more stereotypical for men and negative *d*s indicating traits rated as more stereotypical for women. The fifth column provides effect sizes for the difference between high status and low status ratings, with positive *d* scores reflecting traits linked to high more than low status people and negative *d* scores reflecting the reverse. The last column indicates whether a trait is indicative of one of the four gender rules dimensions, with C = Communality, A = Agency, D = Dominance, W = Weakness.
[a]Trait loaded substantially onto respective dimension (loading > .40).
[b]EFA did not converge (due to small sample size).

Table 2. Gender Rules for Women and Men in Sweden.

Trait	Pre-/proscriptive d	Male M	Female M	Typicality d	Status d	Dimension
Women's prescriptions (total = 3)						
Sensitive to needs of others	−0.53	6.16	7.18	−1.87	−0.44	C
Gentle	−0.49	6.03	7.04	−1.75	−0.73	C[a]
Good listener	−0.40	7.27	7.94	−1.66	−0.04	C[a]
Average	*−0.47*	*6.49*	*7.39*	*−1.76*	*−0.40*	
Women's proscriptions (total = 0)						
NA						
Men's prescriptions (total = 6)						
Humorous	0.74	7.93	6.83	−0.08	0.52	—
Leadership abilities	0.63	6.93	5.74	−0.31	2.69	A[a]
Self-confident	0.52	7.54	6.64	0.77	2.42	A[a]
Willing to take risks	0.49	6.40	5.53	1.05	1.29	A
Strong personality	0.47	6.70	5.85	−0.46	1.45	A[a]
Independent	0.46	7.24	6.41	−0.20	1.34	A[a]
Average	*0.55*	*7.12*	*6.17*	*0.13*	*1.62*	
Men's proscriptions (total = 4)						
Indecisive	0.53	2.70	3.63	−0.63	−1.28	W[a]
Naive	0.49	2.41	3.23	−0.35	−0.79	W
Weak	0.48	2.51	3.34	0.10	−1.10	W
superstitious	0.43	2.17	2.88	−1.14	−1.29	W[a]
Average	*0.48*	*2.45*	*3.27*	*−0.51*	*−1.12*	

Note. N = 864.
[a]Trait loaded substantially onto respective dimension (loading > .40).

Table 3. Gender Rules for Women and Men in the United States.

Trait	Pre-/proscriptive d	Male M	Female M	Typicality d	Status d	Dimension
Women's prescriptions (total = 9)						
Sympathetic	−0.63	6.68	7.72	−0.97	−0.01	C[a]
Cheerful	−0.58	6.59	7.51	−0.49	0.83	C[a]
Gentle	−0.57	6.33	7.37	−0.92	0.13	C[a]
Affectionate	−0.50	6.93	7.75	−1.04	0.25	C[a]
Loves children	−0.47	6.65	7.53	−0.93	0.04	C[a]
Warm	−0.45	6.72	7.48	−0.81	0.33	C[a]
Understanding	−0.45	7.25	7.95	−0.73	0.45	C[a]
Sensitive to needs of others	−0.44	6.14	7.08	−1.33	−0.04	C
Polite	−0.42	7.14	7.79	−0.61	0.67	C[a]
Average	*−0.50*	*6.71*	*7.58*	*−0.87*	*0.29*	
Women's proscriptions (total = 5)						
Aggressive	−0.55	4.62	3.35	0.70	0.63	D
Cold	−0.49	3.43	2.42	0.35	0.23	D
Intimidating	−0.44	4.57	3.54	0.28	0.81	D
Stubborn	−0.42	4.36	3.51	0.45	0.17	D
Ruthless	−0.42	4.17	3.22	0.28	0.43	D
Average	*−0.46*	*4.23*	*3.21*	*0.41*	*0.45*	
Men's prescriptions (total = 12)						
Dominant	0.76	6.07	4.40	0.74	1.10	D[a]
Career-oriented	0.63	7.17	6.03	−0.06	1.64	A
Leadership abilities	0.61	7.30	6.15	−0.09	1.85	A[a]
Strong personality	0.60	7.04	5.91	−0.11	1.44	A
Ambitious	0.54	7.58	6.65	−0.20	1.83	A
Self-reliant	0.54	7.43	6.43	0.10	0.81	A[a]
Assertive	0.49	6.71	5.73	0.24	1.70	A[a]
Courageous	0.48	7.52	6.74	−0.14	0.93	A
Good business sense	0.45	7.00	6.20	0.27	1.93	A[a]
Athletic	0.44	7.01	6.17	0.61	0.46	—
Independent	0.41	7.40	6.60	−0.09	0.78	A[a]
Competitive	0.40	6.65	5.88	0.53	1.57	A
Average	*0.53*	*7.07*	*6.07*	*0.15*	*1.34*	
Men's proscriptions (total = 2)						
Weak	0.74	2.36	3.71	−0.06	−0.72	W[a]
Shy	0.47	3.41	4.28	−0.34	−0.96	W[a]
Average	*0.61*	*2.89*	*4.00*	*−0.20*	*−0.84*	

Note. N = 812.
[a]Trait loaded substantially onto respective dimension (loading > .40).

reflects stronger typicality for people with high than low status. Negative *d* scores reflect the reverse; that is, traits that were more prescribed, proscribed, or typical for women rather than men (see Methods for details).

Identification of Gender Rules and Their Alignment With Social Status

Tables 1 to 7 display the gender rules identified in each nation. In these tables, the top half shows women's prescriptions and proscriptions, and the bottom half shows men's prescriptions and proscriptions, ranked by *d* scores. Table 8 provides a summary of the gender rules at the national level by showing the mean effect size for women's and men's prescriptive and proscriptive gender rules in each nation.

Descriptively, the number of traits that were identified as women's or men's gender rules varied extensively between nations. As displayed in the summary Table 8, for women, three prescriptions emerged in Switzerland and Sweden, yet nine in the United States and 14 in Turkey. Unexpectedly, there were no proscriptions reported for women in Switzerland and Sweden, whereas five rules each emerged in the United States and Ghana and 29 in Turkey. For men, three prescriptions were reported in Switzerland, six in Sweden, 12 in the United States, 15 in Ghana, and 37 in

Table 4. Gender Rules for Women and Men in Turkey.

Trait	Pre-/proscriptive d	Male M	Female M	Typicality d	Status d	Dimension
Women's prescriptions (total = 14)						
Naive	−1.53	3.33	6.69	−1.19	−1.28	W
Shy	−1.47	3.10	6.09	−1.17	−1.48	W
Yielding	−1.16	4.62	7.25	−1.01	−1.01	W
Approval seeking	−1.04	3.95	6.20	−0.53	−0.72	W
Ingratiating	−0.82	5.08	6.91	−0.52	0.16	C
Emotional	−0.79	4.70	6.41	−1.81	−0.73	C
Conservative	−0.58	5.81	7.06	0.39	−0.19	—
Loves children	−0.58	6.95	7.97	−1.29	−0.31	C[a]
Likeable	−0.56	6.52	7.59	−0.98	−0.34	C[a]
Understanding	−0.51	7.08	7.95	−0.94	−0.05	C[a]
Good listener	−0.47	6.87	7.73	−1.02	0.10	C[a]
Polite	−0.46	6.67	7.56	−1.06	0.36	C[a]
Patient	−0.42	7.16	7.83	−0.85	0.11	C[a]
Gentle	−0.40	6.83	7.57	−1.03	0.14	C[a]
Average	*−0.77*	*5.62*	*7.20*	*−0.93*	*−0.37*	
Women's proscriptions (total = 29)						
Leadership abilities	−2.28	7.73	3.57	0.78	1.54	A[a]
Career-oriented	−2.03	7.03	3.36	0.73	2.11	A[a]
Assertive	−1.92	7.56	3.91	0.97	1.64	A[a]
Dominant	−1.91	6.66	2.84	1.20	2.06	D
Independent	−1.66	6.82	3.32	1.07	0.78	A[a]
Idealistic	−1.51	6.82	3.80	0.01	1.37	—
Ambitious	−1.37	6.61	3.84	0.45	2.21	A[a]
Adventurous	−1.28	6.16	3.38	1.06	0.73	A[a]
Intimidating	−1.05	3.89	1.87	0.87	0.64	D
Self-righteous	−1.01	4.62	2.43	0.97	1.19	D
Controlling	−0.99	6.13	3.90	0.39	1.49	D
Stubborn	−0.99	4.71	2.72	0.39	1.08	D
Angry	−0.95	4.18	2.28	0.99	0.14	D
Worldly	−0.93	5.03	2.92	1.07	0.65	—
Self-centered	−0.92	4.02	2.08	1.03	0.88	D
Bossy	−0.91	4.95	3.01	0.73	1.12	D
Coarse	−0.86	3.55	1.97	1.46	0.11	D
Rebellious	−0.85	3.92	2.20	0.72	−0.41	D
Materialistic	−0.82	5.29	3.46	0.40	0.73	—
Inventive	−0.77	5.67	3.91	0.39	0.38	A[a]
Desires to be center of attention	−0.75	5.15	3.38	0.12	1.13	—
Individualistic	−0.71	4.44	2.95	0.65	0.42	A
Aggressive	−0.69	3.66	2.12	1.22	0.01	D
Demanding	−0.69	5.03	3.57	0.20	0.81	D
Cold	−0.64	3.58	2.38	0.62	0.53	D
Ruthless	−0.60	3.48	2.28	0.85	0.70	D
Cynical	−0.56	3.23	2.19	1.33	0.59	D
Complicated	−0.52	4.40	3.28	−0.65	0.21	—
Selfish	−0.47	3.27	2.31	0.83	0.71	D
Average	*−1.06*	*5.09*	*2.94*	*0.72*	*0.88*	
Men's prescriptions (total = 37)						
Leadership abilities	2.28	7.73	3.57	0.78	1.54	A
Career-oriented	2.03	7.03	3.36	0.73	2.11	A
Assertive	1.92	7.56	3.91	0.97	1.64	A
Dominant	1.91	6.66	2.84	1.20	2.06	D[a]
Self-confident	1.89	7.85	4.20	0.99	1.74	A[a]

Table 4. (continued)

Trait	Pre-/proscriptive d	Male M	Female M	Typicality d	Status d	Dimension
Strong personality	1.80	8.16	4.56	0.19	1.18	A
Courageous	1.73	8.05	4.97	0.60	0.79	A[a]
Independent	1.66	6.82	3.32	1.07	0.78	A[a]
Good business sense	1.58	7.32	4.06	1.36	1.54	A
Idealistic	1.51	6.82	3.80	0.01	1.37	—
Willing to take risks	1.48	6.80	4.02	1.05	1.12	A
Self-reliant	1.38	7.31	4.31	0.29	0.74	A
Energetic	1.37	7.72	5.14	0.09	1.77	—
Ambitious	1.37	6.61	3.84	0.45	2.21	A
Competitive	1.34	6.64	4.06	0.22	1.85	A
Athletic	1.30	7.14	4.44	0.70	0.22	—
Defends own beliefs	1.29	7.16	4.44	0.80	1.08	A
Adventurous	1.28	6.16	3.38	1.06	0.73	A
Analytical	1.22	6.64	4.18	0.40	1.12	A[a]
Extroverted	1.18	7.27	4.88	0.51	1.12	—
Intelligent	1.10	7.68	5.50	−0.24	0.74	A[a]
Self-starter	1.04	7.48	5.42	0.18	0.89	A
Competent	1.01	7.17	5.03	0.12	1.23	A[a]
Controlling	0.99	6.13	3.90	0.39	1.49	D[a]
Broadly interested	0.96	6.21	4.30	−0.01	0.81	—
Persuasive	0.96	7.17	5.39	−0.10	1.73	A
Rational	0.94	7.74	5.91	0.08	0.97	A[a]
Clever	0.92	7.56	5.75	−0.28	0.92	A[a]
Creative	0.90	6.87	5.13	−0.30	0.94	A[a]
Humorous	0.89	6.55	4.79	0.92	0.07	—
Enthusiastic	0.77	6.38	4.93	−0.10	0.57	—
Principled	0.69	7.11	5.75	−0.10	0.97	—
Self-promoting	0.66	7.43	6.05	−0.08	1.69	A
Open-minded	0.54	6.29	5.05	−0.47	0.50	—
Intense	0.50	6.98	6.07	0.12	1.25	—
Generous	0.49	7.53	6.69	−0.18	−0.14	—
Mature	0.44	7.99	7.35	−0.46	0.50	—
Average	*1.22*	*7.13*	*4.71*	*0.35*	*1.13*	
Men's proscriptions (total = 11)						
Weak	1.63	1.76	5.10	−0.51	−1.35	W[a]
Naive	1.53	3.33	6.69	−1.19	−1.28	W[a]
Gullible	1.25	2.13	5.05	−0.79	−1.11	W
Childlike	1.05	3.16	5.37	−0.65	−0.72	W[a]
Approval seeking	1.04	3.95	6.20	−0.53	−0.72	W
Melodramatic	0.88	2.70	4.62	−2.12	−0.81	W[a]
Indecisive	0.76	2.23	3.58	−0.51	−1.20	W
Anxious	0.73	2.43	3.73	−1.05	−1.11	W
Superstitious	0.68	3.20	4.76	−0.86	−0.67	W
Excitable	0.62	3.34	4.56	−1.14	−0.72	—
Gossipy	0.55	1.98	3.00	−1.01	−0.51	W
Average	*0.97*	*2.75*	*4.79*	*−0.94*	*−0.93*	

Note. N = 668.
[a] Trait loaded substantially onto respective dimension (loading > .40).

Turkey. For men's proscriptions, 11 emerged in Turkey, four each in Sweden and Iran, two each in Switzerland and the United States, and one each in India and Ghana. As we describe next, there were strong cross-cultural similarities in the characterization of gender rules.

Classification of Gender Rules Into Four Dimensions

The last four columns of Table 8 display how gender rules in each nation are mapped onto the theoretical dimensions of communality, agency, dominance, and weakness. Supporting

Table 5. Gender Rules for Women and Men in Iran.

Trait	Pre-/proscriptive d	Male M	Female M	Typicality d	Status d	Dimension
Women's prescriptions (total = 2)						
Literary	−0.50	5.61	6.63	−0.66	0.53	—
Loves children	−0.45	7.64	8.21	−1.06	0.68	C[a]
Average	*−0.48*	*6.63*	*7.42*	*−0.86*	*0.61*	
Women's proscriptions (total = 1)						
Sneaky	−0.48	2.41	1.65	−0.12	−0.69	D
Men's prescriptions (total = 2)						
Good business sense	0.42	7.55	6.79	0.66	1.21	A[a]
Works well under pressure	0.45	7.99	7.24	0.13	1.09	A
Average	*0.44*	*7.77*	*7.02*	*0.40*	*1.15*	
Men's proscriptions (total = 4)						
Weak	0.62	1.43	2.35	−0.30	−1.06	W
Childlike	0.59	1.69	2.73	−0.36	−0.60	W
Gullible	0.61	1.67	2.79	−0.71	−1.12	W
Naive	0.51	3.73	4.97	−0.49	−0.58	W
Average	*0.58*	*2.13*	*3.21*	*−0.47*	*−0.84*	

Note. N = 412.
[a]Trait loaded substantially onto respective dimension (loading > .40).

Table 6. Gender Rules for Women and Men in India.

Trait	Pre-/proscriptive d	Male M	Female M	Typicality d	Status d	Dimension
Women's prescriptions (total = 4)						
Naive	−0.56	5.12	6.3	−0.57	−0.25	W
Affectionate	−0.51	6.88	7.7	−0.79	−0.05	C
Emotional	−0.43	5.57	6.45	−0.97	−0.43	C
Creative	−0.42	6.32	7.11	−0.92	0.32	A
Average	*−0.48*	*5.97*	*6.89*	*−0.81*	*−0.10*	
Women's proscriptions (total = 2)						
Aggressive	−0.51	5.09	3.83	0.51	0.17	D[a]
Sexual promiscuous	−0.45	3.85	2.82	0.86	0.64	—
Average	*−0.48*	*4.47*	*3.33*	*0.69*	*0.41*	
Men's prescriptions (total = 7)						
Career-oriented	0.63	7.64	6.45	0.34	0.40	A[a]
Good business sense	0.61	7.15	5.86	0.61	0.57	A[a]
Athletic	0.52	6.73	5.71	0.68	−0.21	—
Adventurous	0.48	6.96	5.89	0.44	0.65	A
Ambitious	0.47	7.35	6.42	0.24	0.55	A[a]
Competent	0.46	6.98	6.06	−0.04	0.55	A
Extroverted	0.41	6.65	5.86	0.26	0.44	—
Average	*0.51*	*7.07*	*6.04*	*0.36*	*0.42*	
Men's proscriptions (total = 1)						
Gossipy	0.48	3.63	4.71	−0.92	−0.13	W

Note. N = 437.
[a]Trait loaded substantially onto respective dimension (loading > .40).

Hypothesis 1a, in all nations, women's prescriptions almost uniformly reflected communality. In fact, of the 39 women's prescriptions identified, 33 were communal in nature (85%). Replicating results from prior research (Rudman et al., 2012b), these gender rules were aligned with a mix of low, neutral, and high status (*mean d = −.06*). On average, women's communality prescriptions were aligned with low status in the most gender equal nations, Switzerland and Sweden, as well as in Turkey (e.g., naive, shy, yielding), with high status in the United States and Iran (e.g., cheerful,

Table 7. Gender Rules for Women and Men in Ghana.

Trait	Pre-/proscriptive d	Male M	Female M	Typicality d	Status d	Dimension
Women's prescriptions (total = 6)						
Loves children	−0.70	7.45	8.54	−0.68	0.16	C[a]
Emotional	−0.64	4.83	6.44	−1.94	−0.39	C[a]
Helpful	−0.61	7.27	8.37	−0.73	0.15	C[a]
Good listener	−0.58	6.49	7.73	−0.44	0.10	C[a]
Charming	−0.49	6.88	7.79	−0.55	0.62	C[a]
Patient	−0.49	6.49	7.58	−0.33	0.10	C[a]
Average	*−0.59*	*6.57*	*7.74*	*−0.78*	*0.12*	
Women's proscriptions (total = 5)						
Rebellious	−0.71	4.27	2.50	0.41	0.37	D[a]
Stubborn	−0.60	4.49	2.90	0.45	0.32	D[a]
Individualistic	−0.58	5.31	3.75	−0.31	0.36	A[a]
Sexual promiscuous	−0.51	3.59	2.27	0.32	0.25	—
Bossy	−0.40	4.40	3.24	0.00	1.28	D[a]
Average	*−0.56*	*4.42*	*2.93*	*0.17*	*0.52*	
Men's prescriptions (total = 15)						
Athletic	1.00	6.93	4.63	1.26	0.08	—
Energetic	0.84	7.95	6.25	0.38	0.77	—
Leadership abilities	0.73	8.07	6.59	0.04	1.64	A[a]
Independent	0.71	7.75	6.11	0.50	1.04	A[a]
Strong personality	0.69	7.83	6.46	0.00	1.85	A[a]
Adventurous	0.68	7.20	5.49	−0.09	1.37	A[a]
Ambitious	0.60	7.58	6.29	0.07	0.95	A[a]
Dominant	0.56	6.19	4.8	−0.03	1.19	D[a]
Courageous	0.55	8.02	6.78	0.38	1.01	A[a]
Self-confident	0.55	8.02	6.95	0.16	2.27	A[a]
Career-oriented	0.51	7.56	6.42	0.28	1.43	A[a]
Willing to take risks	0.49	7.05	5.89	0.46	1.01	A[a]
Friendly	0.47	7.6	6.69	0.14	0.04	C[a]
Self-reliant	0.45	6.93	5.8	0.39	0.78	A[a]
Assertive	0.41	6.65	5.67	0.05	1.38	A[a]
Average	*0.62*	*7.42*	*6.05*	*0.27*	*1.12*	
Men's proscriptions (total = 1)						
Weak	0.45	2.39	3.43	−0.51	−0.37	W[a]

Note. N = 350.
[a]Trait loaded substantially onto respective dimension (loading > .40).

polite, loves children), and with neutral status in the least gender-equal nations Ghana and India (e.g., helpful, good listener, patient).

In further support of Hypothesis 1a, women's proscriptions mainly reflected dominance (e.g., aggressive, dominant, bossy). Of the 35 women's proscriptions identified, 26 were dominant in nature (74%). As expected, women's dominance proscriptions were on average aligned with high status (*mean d* = .31). However, in the most gender-equal nations, Switzerland and Sweden, no women's proscriptions emerged. Unexpectedly, in Iran, the one women's proscription (i.e., sneaky) was low status (*d* = −.69). Moreover, in the two least gender-equal nations, India and Ghana, women's proscriptions included sexually promiscuous (an unclassified trait viewed as more typical of men and of people high in status, especially in India). In sum,

Hypothesis 1a was supported for women's communality prescriptions and largely supported for their dominance proscriptions, despite unexpectedly finding no women's proscriptions in Switzerland and Sweden.

Supporting Hypothesis 1b, men's prescriptions in all nations uniformly reflected agency and were aligned with high status (*mean d* = 1.35). In every nation, men should enact high-status agentic traits (e.g., leadership ability, ambitious, self-confident, analytical, and good business sense). Of the 65 men's prescriptions identified, 59 were agentic (91%). In the two least gender-equal nations, India and Ghana, men's prescriptions additionally included strong bodily features (e.g., athletic, energetic). Further supporting Hypothesis 1b, men's proscriptions in all nations almost uniformly reflected weakness (e.g., weak, naive, gullible). Of the 21 men's proscriptions identified,

Table 8. Overview of Gender Rules and Their Dimensions Across Nations.

Nation (number of traits identified as pre-/proscriptions)	Pre-/proscriptive	Male	Female	Typicality	Status	Dimension			
	d	M	M	d	d	Communality	Agency	Dominance	Weakness
Women's prescriptions									
Switzerland (3)	−0.50	6.27	7.10	−1.19	−0.54	3	—	—	—
Sweden (3)	−0.47	6.49	7.39	−1.76	−0.40	3	—	—	—
United States (9)	−0.50	6.71	7.58	−0.87	0.29	9	—	—	—
Turkey (14)	−0.77	5.62	7.20	−0.93	−0.37	9	—	—	4
Iran (2)	−0.48	6.63	7.42	−0.86	0.61	1	—	—	—
India (4)	−0.48	5.97	6.89	−0.81	−0.10	2	1	—	1
Ghana (6)	−0.59	6.57	7.74	−0.78	0.12	6	—	—	—
Women's proscriptions									
Switzerland (0)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sweden (0)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
United States (5)	−0.46	4.23	3.21	0.41	0.45	—	—	5	—
Turkey (29)	−1.06	5.09	2.94	0.72	0.88	—	8	16	—
Iran (1)	−0.48	2.41	1.65	−0.12	−0.69	—	—	1	—
India (2)	−0.48	4.47	3.33	0.69	0.41	—	—	1	—
Ghana (5)	0.56	4.65	3.16	0.16	0.52	—	1	3	—
Men's prescriptions									
Switzerland (3)	0.53	6.95	6.15	0.60	2.65	—	3	—	—
Sweden (6)	0.55	7.12	6.17	0.13	1.62	—	5	—	—
United States (12)	0.53	7.07	6.07	0.15	1.34	—	10	1	—
Turkey (37)	1.22	7.13	4.71	0.35	1.13	—	23	2	—
Iran (2)	0.44	7.77	7.02	0.40	1.15	—	2	—	—
India (7)	0.51	7.07	6.04	0.36	0.42	—	5	—	1
Ghana (15)	0.62	7.42	6.05	0.27	1.12	1	11	1	—
Men's proscriptions									
Switzerland (2)	0.51	2.08	2.88	−0.84	−2.02	—	—	—	2
Sweden (4)	0.48	2.45	3.27	−0.51	−1.12	—	—	—	4
United States (2)	0.61	2.89	4.00	−0.20	−0.84	—	—	—	2
Turkey (11)	0.97	2.75	4.79	−0.94	−0.93	—	—	—	10
Iran (4)	0.58	2.13	3.21	−0.47	−0.84	—	—	—	1
India (1)	0.48	3.63	4.71	−0.92	−0.13	1	—	—	—
Ghana (1)	0.45	2.39	3.43	−0.51	−0.37	—	—	—	1

Note. N = 4,327.

20 were classified as weak (95%). These men's weakness proscriptions were on average aligned with low status (mean $d = -.89$).

Correspondence of Status-Based Gender Rules With Achieved Gender Equality Across Nations

For the second aim of this research, we tested whether the social status of gender prescriptions and proscriptions corresponded with the gender equality across nations. Based on the information summarized in Table 8, we examined the Pearson correlations between (reverse coded) Gender Inequality Index (GII) scores and average effect sizes (Cohen's d) for the status beliefs associated with the four gender rules. Table 9 presents the correlational results.

The interpretation of the results relied mainly on effect sizes and their 90% confidence intervals; that is, each correlation's magnitude, rather than statistical significance. This is because our degrees of freedom were small (range: 3–5) and, thus, the study was underpowered to detect significant correlations. The interpretation of effect sizes followed the empirically derived distribution of effect sizes in social psychological research with correlation coefficients of $r = .12$, $r = .24$, and $r = .41$ corresponding to small (25th percentile), medium (50th), and large (75th) effect sizes (Lovakov & Agadullina, 2021).

The results found no support for Hypothesis 2a on the stronger relation of women's dominance proscriptions with high status in more gender-equal nations. Women's dominance proscriptions were not significantly more aligned with high status in nations high on gender equality,

Table 9. Correlations of Women's and Men's Prescriptions and Proscriptions with Gender Equality.

Gender rule	Pearson correlations with gender equality (GII actual scores)				Robustness check: Spearman correlations with transformed rank-order scores for gender equality			
	df	r	90% CI	p	df	r	90% CI	p
Women's prescriptions	5	−0.61	(0.12, −0.91)	.148	5	−0.60	(0.22, −0.89)	.167
Women's proscriptions	3	0.35	(0.91, −0.66)	.564	3	0.10	(0.85, −0.79)	.950
Men's prescriptions	5	0.80	(0.96, 0.26)	.033	5	0.93	(0.96, 0.31)	.007
Men's proscriptions	5	−0.82	(−0.32, −0.96)	.024	5	−0.90	(−0.52, −0.98)	.006

Note. Correlations display the relation between the different indicators and average effect sizes (Cohen's *d*) for the status beliefs associated with the four gender rules (derived from the information summarized in Table 8). For GII, higher scores reflect greater gender equality (as we recorded this measure).

$r(3) = .35$, 90% CI (0.91, −0.66), $p = .564$, although results revealed a medium to large effect size (note that this analysis did not include data from Switzerland and Sweden where no proscription emerged, see Hypothesis 1a).

For women's prescriptions, we expected (and found) that women's communality prescriptions would be status-neutral on average, and thus did not make any prediction about cross-cultural differences as a function of women's empowerment. Exploratory results document that women's prescriptions were not significantly more aligned with *low* status in nations high on gender equality, $r(5) = −.61$, 90% CI (0.12, −0.91), $p = .148$.

In support of Hypothesis 2b, the more gender-equal a nation, the greater the alignment between men's agency prescriptions and high-status characteristics, $r(5) = .80$, 90% CI (0.96, 0.26), $p = .033$, as shown by a large effect size and the confidence interval not including zero. Moreover, the more gender-equal a nation, the greater the alignment between men's weakness proscriptions and low-status characteristics, $r(5) = −.82$, 90% CI (−0.32, −0.96), $p = .024$, as shown by a large effect size and the confidence interval not including zero. In sum, the more gender-equal a nation, the more men are prescribed high-status traits and prohibited from enacting low-status traits. These results suggest that in societies where women have achieved a relatively high level of empowerment, men are pressured to behave in ways defending the gender hierarchy.

The robustness check that examined Spearman correlations between the gender rules' status and the ordinal scaled gender equality measure found a similar pattern of results. As shown in Table 9, men's agency prescriptions and men's weakness proscriptions were more strongly aligned with the respective status characteristics in more gender-equal nations, whereas no such relation emerged for women's prescriptions and proscriptions.

Additional Exploratory Analyses Examining Women and Men Respondents Separately

Exploratory analyses examined the gender rules held by women and men respondents. As shown in Appendix S5 in the Online Supplemental, in general, women and men agreed on the four dimensions of gender rules (see summary in Table S8). Both women and men prescribed women to mainly show Communality and not show Dominance, whereas they prescribed men to mainly show Agency and not show Weakness. Thus, regardless of gender, participants tended to endorse gender rules that defend the status hierarchy with male primacy.

Discussion

This cross-cultural research applied a bottom-up approach to identify gender rules in seven nations that vary in their achieved gender equality—namely Switzerland, Sweden, the United States, Turkey, Iran, India, and Ghana. In addition, this research provided novel insights into the alignment of men's gender rules with social status, showing that gender rules may reinforce the traditional gender hierarchy, particularly in relatively gender-equal nations.

Social Status Norms Pressure Men and Women to Uphold the Gender Hierarchy

Supporting our predictions, men in all nations were prescribed agentic traits and proscribed weakness-related traits. Relevant to the upholding of the gender hierarchy, men's prescribed agentic traits were aligned with high status, and their proscribed weakness-related traits with low-status characteristics. These findings cross-culturally replicated prior research conducted in the United States (Rudman et al., 2012b), by showing that men are obliged to enact agency that is high in status and prohibited from weakness that is low in status in all seven nations investigated.

Our research is the first that examined gender status norms cross-culturally. Understanding such variations is crucial. As nations approach gender equality, the gender hierarchy with men's higher social status is overtly challenged due to the increased competition between men and women (England et al., 2020; Knight & Brinton, 2017). Our results suggest that the subtle alignment of gender rules with social status

beliefs perpetuates the gender hierarchy: The more gender-equal the nation, men's agency prescriptions were higher status, and men's weakness proscriptions were lower status. These findings suggest that men should display traits that are high rather than low in status when women are more empowered in society. In relatively gender-equal nations—such as Switzerland and Sweden—gender rules pressure men to show high status and avoid low status to maintain the gender hierarchy with its male primacy.

These results support several theoretical predictions. The emergence of increased competition between women and men, which follows from women's empowerment, likely creates realistic and/or symbolic threats (see overviews by Rios et al., 2018; Stephan et al., 2015). In fact, our findings suggest that following feminist advancements and increased gender equality, gender status norms uphold the status quo with male primacy. The emergence of this novel and subtle form of backlash undermining advancements toward gender equality extends past work finding that people defend the traditional division of labor at home when women face fewer barriers at work (Yu & Lee, 2013).

Furthermore, the strong pressure for men to uphold the gender hierarchy—by showing high status and avoiding low-status behavior—is consistent with the predictions of precarious manhood theory (Vandello et al., 2008; Vandello & Bosson, 2013), which states that manhood is an achieved social status that can be easily lost and thus requires continuous confirmation. For women, in contrast, gender rules were somewhat less stringent as womanhood is biologically bestowed at puberty and therefore needs less continuous reinforcement. The finding that stronger pressure exists for men than women further aligns with the fact that, at least in the United States, boys and men face more and stronger prescriptive stereotypes than girls and women (Koenig, 2018).

In contrast to men's gender rules that were strongly aligned with social status beliefs across cultures, women's gender rules were less consistently aligned with status across the different nations. Specifically, women were obliged to enact communality, which was a mix of low, neutral, and high status, and prohibited from dominance traits, which were of high status, in most but not all investigated nations. That is, women were prescribed communal traits in all investigated nations, yet were proscribed dominance-related traits in the United States, Turkey, India, and Ghana. The results for these nations validate prior research conducted in the United States (Rudman et al., 2012b), showing that women's prescribed communal traits were on average status-neutral, while their proscribed dominance-related traits were aligned with high status in these nations.

Advancing the current knowledge, our study revealed not a single proscription for women in Switzerland and Sweden, the two most gender-equal nations under investigation. Moreover, our results revealed that women in Iran only faced the one proscription of not being sneaky, which was

of low status. The finding that women's proscriptions vary depending on the cultural contexts adds evidence to past meta-analytical research. A meta-analysis concluded that women face greater backlash in the United States and Canada than in other nations, although conclusive evidence could not be established due to the small number of studies available outside North America ($k = 8$, Williams & Tiedens, 2016). The authors of this meta-analysis cautiously speculated whether non-North American nations might have weaker proscriptions against dominance in women, a suspicion supported by our results, finding no high-status proscriptions for women in Switzerland, Sweden, and Iran.

Our study further found that in the relatively less gender-equal nation, Turkey, not only dominance but even agency was proscribed for women. In addition, proscriptive gender rules in Turkey, India, and Ghana prohibited sexual promiscuity for women. This culture-specific gender rule of sexual promiscuity seems unsurprising given the unique cultural context in these nations that emphasizes public reputation and honorable status and prohibits women (but not men) from premarital sexual activity (Sakallı-Uğurlu & Glick, 2003). These findings emphasize the importance of taking a cross-cultural lens on gender rules.

Furthermore, given that high social status can result from different information such as dominance-based and/or prestige-based cues (Cheng et al., 2013), we explored which traits people perceived more common or typical for someone with high status in their society. As shown in Appendix S6 in the Online Supplement, people in all investigated nations reported that someone of high status has traits predominantly associated with assertiveness (e.g., self-confident, competitive), reflecting a dominance-based understanding of social status. Only in Iran, high social status was also associated with competence (e.g., intelligent, analytical), reflecting that aspects of prestige are part of social status in this society.

Practice Implications

Consistent with findings on the "gender-equality paradox" (e.g., Breda et al., 2020, Stoet & Geary, 2018), our results highlight the complexity of gender rules and status allocation when nations approach relatively greater gender-equality. The uncovered subtle, yet previously unknown detrimental side effect of achieving macrolevel gender equality, reveals that in particular men are under pressure to conform to status expectations when nations approach gender equality. One likely consequence of this strong norm pressure is that increasing men's engagement and representation in caring roles and domains, which are typically seen as lower status, is a difficult endeavor (Croft et al., 2015; Haines et al., 2024).

The stronger alignment between men's gender rules and status characteristics in more gender-equal nations suggests that deeply engrained cultural expectations continue to

shape the perceived values of women and men in society, especially when overt inequalities and legislation that defend male primacy have been removed. This result suggests that even nations that have achieved some level of gender equality should keep monitoring for unintended backlash effects. More research is needed that examines how this novel and subtle form of social pressure influences gender dynamics in cultural contexts approaching formal gender equality.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The present research was the first to investigate gender rules cross-culturally and examine their status alignment as a function of women's empowerment in society. As such, it has limitations that call for future research. First, although we obtained data from different regions of the world including historically understudied non-WEIRD nations (Henrich et al., 2010) such as Turkey, Iran, and Ghana, this study is limited to the relatively small number of nations included. Moreover, although the seven nations span the continuum of gender inequality, the included nations are skewed toward higher gender equality, and future research is required to generalize the current findings to nations with extremely low gender equality. Also, motivated by the possibility of comparison with past research, this study relied on student samples. To validate and increase the generalizability of the present findings, future research should both include additional nations and nationally representative samples.

Moreover, although the bottom-up approach used to identify the gender rules constitutes a strength of the present research that enabled the identification of traits that are seen as gender rules in different cultural contexts, this method limits the comparison of gender rules across nations. Future research thus needs to replicate and extend these findings by using alternative methods such as spontaneous free responses.

This research followed past gender rules research that typically classifies them into the following four subdimensions: Agency prescriptions for men and communality prescriptions for women, dominance proscriptions for men, and weakness proscriptions for women (e.g., Koenig, 2018; Rudman et al., 2012b). Yet, given that in some nations these theoretically established dimensions were not reflected in the data (as shown by the exploratory factor analyses, see Appendix S3 in the Supplemental Materials), future research should focus on examining the different dimensional structures of gender rules that likely emerge and reflect each nations' unique cultural context.

Furthermore, given that this research focused on the relation between achieved gender equality and the extent to which gender rules align with social status characteristics, a promising avenue for future research is to examine specific consequences of this stronger alignment in relatively gender-equal nations. For instance, future work in these nations should examine whether and how women and men experience the strong alignment with social status beliefs and how it affects their self-perception and behaviors. Future research could further examine whether the extent to which women's dominance proscriptions align with social status has implications for the backlash women face for dominant behaviors in relatively gender-equal nations (see meta-analysis by M. J. Williams & Tiedens, 2016).

Another aspect that warrants future research is the consequences of the stronger alignment of men's weakness proscriptions with social status in relatively egalitarian nations; it is unclear the extent to which this alignment counteracts men's full engagement in communal roles and motivates them to prevent status loss in relatively gender-equal nations. The novel insights from this study provide a starting point for developing interventions so that gender rules held by individuals on the microlevel do not work against macrolevel efforts to achieve greater gender equality in societies.

Conclusions

This research identified gender rules in seven nations across the world, finding that agency was prescribed and weakness proscribed for men and that communality was prescribed and dominance proscribed for women. It further uncovered the existence of subtle gender status norms by which men's gender rules perpetuate the gender hierarchy through their stronger status alignment in relatively gender-equal nations. Specifically, the greater the nation's achieved gender equality, the stronger men's agency prescriptions aligned with high status and their weakness proscriptions with low status. This research thereby provides evidence that societal development towards greater gender equality is accompanied by a paradoxical dynamic that perpetuates the traditional gender hierarchy in a subtle yet powerful way.

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

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