

Negative Effects, Causes, and Interventions of Gender Stereotypes on Men: Descriptive versus Prescriptive/Proscriptive

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Abstract

Gender stereotypes shape widely held beliefs regarding what characteristics, attributes, and behaviors men and women possess (descriptive gender stereotypes), and what they should or should not be (prescriptive/proscriptive gender stereotypes). Not only women, but also men may suffer significantly from them, including undermined linguistic and emotional expression, reduced participation in healthcare, early education, and family domains, hindered attention to physical and mental health, and reinforced masculine competitive culture. According to the integrated process model of stereotype threat effects, descriptive gender stereotypes primarily exert negative influences on men through the depletion of working memory; according to role congruity theory and the status incongruity hypothesis, prescriptive/proscriptive gender stereotypes primarily exert negative influences on men through violations of gender roles and status roles. Intervention pathways may target the process by providing positive role models, utilizing multiple social identities, and enhancing self-affirmation; alternatively, according to social role theory, gender roles may be changed at their source. Future research could focus on how to buffer negative effects by leveraging the positive effects of gender stereotypes on men, how cultural differences shape these effects, the impact of gender stereotypes on boys, and exploring new pathways for intervention using artificial intelligence.

Full Text

The Negative Effects, Causes, and Interventions of Gender Stereotypes on Men: Descriptive vs. Prescriptive/Proscriptive

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Abstract: Gender stereotypes shape culturally shared beliefs about what characteristics, attributes, and behaviors men and women typically have (descriptive gender stereotypes) and what they should or should not have (prescriptive/proscriptive gender stereotypes). Not only women but also men suffer from these stereotypes, including diminished linguistic and emotional expression, reduced participation in healthcare, early education, and domestic roles, hindered attention to physical and mental health, and reinforcement of masculine-contest cultures. According to the integrated process model of stereotype threat effects, descriptive gender stereotypes primarily exert negative impacts on men by depleting working memory. In contrast, based on role congruity theory and the status incongruity hypothesis, prescriptive/proscriptive gender stereotypes mainly harm men through violations of gender and status roles. Intervention pathways can target the process by providing positive role models, leveraging multiple social identities, and strengthening self-affirmation, or they can address the source by changing gender roles based on social role theory. Future research should explore how to buffer negative effects using positive effects of gender stereotypes on men, how cultural differences shape these impacts, how gender stereotypes affect boys, and how artificial intelligence can be utilized for novel intervention approaches.

Keywords: descriptive gender stereotypes, prescriptive/proscriptive gender stereotypes, social role theory, role congruity theory, status incongruity hypothesis

“Real men do not shed tears easily, only because they have not yet reached the point of heartbreak.”

—*The Sword Record* (Li Kaixian)

Gender stereotypes refer to culturally shared beliefs about the attributes of men and women in cognitive abilities, role behaviors, occupations, and physical characteristics (Ellemers, 2018). Their content primarily manifests along two fundamental dimensions: agency, which emphasizes goal achievement, task execution, and self-orientation (including assertiveness such as superiority, dominance, and confidence, and competence such as capability, efficiency, and execution), and communion, which emphasizes interpersonal relationships, social functioning, and other-orientation (including warmth such as caring, emotional expressiveness, and empathy, and morality such as reliability, trustworthiness, and thoughtfulness) (Abele et al., 2021). Typically, men are widely perceived as more agentic, while women are seen as more communal (Hsu et al., 2021). Gender stereotypes exist in two distinct forms: descriptive and prescriptive/proscriptive (Koenig, 2018; Sullivan et al., 2022). Descriptive gender stereotypes concern what men and women are like—for instance, believing that women are emotional and romantic, while men are confident and decisive (Eagly et al., 2020). Prescriptive/proscriptive gender stereotypes, however, specify what men and women should and should not be like. For example, women are expected to be communal and prohibited from displaying agency,

while men are expected to be agentic and prohibited from showing communion (as reflected in the Chinese saying, “real men do not shed tears easily”) (Moss-Racusin et al., 2010; Rudman et al., 2012). By solidifying normative expectations about how the sexes should and should not behave, gender stereotypes constrain individuals’ behavioral choices, motivation, self-conception, and aspiration development, ultimately generating a series of negative consequences at individual, interpersonal, intergroup, and societal levels (Croft et al., 2021). Therefore, investigating the manifestations, causes, and interventions of these negative effects is particularly important.

However, current research in this domain suffers from several limitations. First, because men occupy dominant positions in politics and economics in many countries worldwide (Cuddy et al., 2015), a subtle form of cultural bias—masculine defaults—has gradually emerged, wherein characteristics and behaviors associated with male roles are more likely to be valued, rewarded, or regarded as standard, conventional, or essential aspects of a given cultural context (Cheryan & Markus, 2020; Cheryan & Muragishi, 2025). This male advantage has led contemporary research on the negative effects of gender stereotypes to focus primarily on women, particularly examining unfair treatment in male-dominated fields such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) regarding employment opportunities, status, and economic income (许玲瑞娜 & 张丽, 2025; 张慧 et al., 2020; Croft et al., 2021; Van Laar et al., 2024). Yet since gender stereotypes target both men and women, they may also hinder men from entering female-dominated domains such as healthcare, early education, and domestic roles (HEED) and negatively affect them (Bareket & Fiske, 2025; Croft et al., 2015; Eareckson & Heilman, 2024). Examining this direction will help reveal the full picture of gender stereotypes’ negative impacts.

Second, previous studies on the negative effects of gender stereotypes on men have concentrated mainly on prescriptive/proscriptive stereotypes, rarely integrating descriptive stereotypes into a comprehensive analysis (Bareket & Fiske, 2025; Croft et al., 2015; Van Rossum et al., 2025). On one hand, according to role congruity theory, society reinforces the perpetuation of descriptive gender stereotypes and maintains normative expectations about how men and women “should” and “should not” behave by rewarding behaviors that conform to gender roles and punishing deviations (Diekmann & Goodfriend, 2006; Renström, 2024). This suggests that descriptive and prescriptive/proscriptive gender stereotypes are generally considered consistent, meaning that negative effects on men likely involve both forms. However, on the other hand, the underlying processes through which they generate negative effects differ (Manzi, 2019). Prescriptive/proscriptive stereotypes primarily manifest as devaluation and punishment for violating gender norms, such as when men displaying communal characteristics face social or economic consequences (e.g., being disliked or having reduced hiring opportunities), a phenomenon known as the “backlash effect” (Moss-Racusin et al., 2010). Descriptive stereotypes, by contrast, trigger negative effects through perceptions of ability differences in specific roles and occupations. For example, the stereotype that “men are less communal than

women” impedes men’s pursuit of female-dominated fields, manifesting as gender stereotype threat effects (Spencer et al., 2016). Therefore, a systematic and comprehensive understanding of gender stereotypes’ negative effects on men requires simultaneous examination of both descriptive and prescriptive/proscriptive dimensions.

Third, although current societal efforts to increase women’s representation in STEM have achieved significant results, men’s representation in HEED has shown no noticeable change (Croft et al., 2015; van de Rozenberg et al., 2024). Thus, investigating how to intervene in the negative effects of gender stereotypes on men can not only help men enter HEED fields and improve their social relationships with women at the individual level but also foster a low-gender-bias environment at the societal level, further advancing gender equality and contributing to a healthier, more productive society (Bareket & Fiske, 2025).

Based on these considerations, this study systematically examines the negative effects of descriptive and prescriptive/proscriptive gender stereotypes on men (Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]). Specifically, we first review the negative impacts of gender stereotypes on men, then discuss the underlying causes based on theories of stereotype threat and backlash effects, subsequently identify intervention measures from both process and source perspectives, and finally propose future research directions in this domain. We hope this study will help society avoid underestimating or even neglecting the negative effects of gender stereotypes on men in discussions of gender issues.

1.1 Negative Effects of Descriptive Gender Stereotypes on Men

Descriptive gender stereotypes negatively affect men primarily by limiting them through the belief that “men are less communal than women,” thereby hindering their pursuit of female-dominated domains such as language. For instance, research examining the impact of gender stereotypes on French children’s reading abilities found that in a control condition (where the reading test was described as a game), boys’ reading performance was significantly higher than girls’, whereas in a threat condition (where it was described as a diagnostic test of reading ability), boys’ performance was significantly lower, demonstrating a stereotype threat effect (Pansu et al., 2016). Similar phenomena have been observed in studies from China and Canada (Chaffee et al., 2024; Li & McLellan, 2021), suggesting cross-cultural consistency in these negative effects. Notably, gender stereotypes may not only directly impair men’s language abilities but also indirectly damage their reading self-concept, self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and achievement through influences from parents, teachers, or peers (Muntoni & Retelsdorf, 2019; Muntoni et al., 2021; Retelsdorf et al., 2015).

Beyond language, negative effects extend to other female-dominated domains. In dance, Bastos et al. (2023) found that boys in a stereotype threat condition (told that boys’ dance performance is inferior to girls’) showed poorer dance performance compared to a control group. In emotional intelligence, substantial

evidence indicates that gender stereotypes impair men's abilities to perceive, understand, manage, and use emotions (Doyle & Thompson, 2021; Koenig & Eagly, 2005). Since emotional intelligence correlates with interpersonal relationship quality, negotiation ability, and mental health (Mayer et al., 2016), these negative effects may further generate associated adverse consequences.

In summary, descriptive gender stereotypes indeed produce numerous adverse effects on men, manifested as stereotype threat effects. However, it remains unclear whether these effects appear in organizational work settings. Extensive research has found that gender stereotypes cause a series of negative impacts on women in the workplace, such as increased job burnout, identity detachment, negative emotions, and turnover intentions, while also reducing career aspirations, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, work engagement, performance, positive emotions, and self-efficacy (von Hippel et al., 2024). If this is the case, men in work organizations may also suffer negative effects from gender stereotypes. Future research should systematically examine this to broaden understanding of descriptive stereotypes' detrimental effects.

1.2 Negative Effects of Prescriptive/Proscriptive Gender Stereotypes on Men

Prescriptive/proscriptive gender stereotypes negatively affect men primarily by constraining them through the expectation that "men should exhibit agency rather than communion," leading to social obstacles when entering female-dominated domains like HEED, potential harm to physical and mental health, and intensification of masculine-contest cultures that adversely affect men.

First, these stereotypes contribute to men's underrepresentation in HEED fields. Gender stereotypes reduce men's interest in HEED domains, thereby hindering their representation (周艳 & 周莲, 2023; Croft et al., 2015; Meeussen et al., 2020). For example, research examining high school boys' interest in masculinized versus feminized university majors found that boys showed significantly less interest in feminized majors. Studies on job seekers' interest in gender-typed occupations found that when men learned a career had feminine characteristics, their interest decreased (Suh et al., 2025). Van de Rozenberg et al. (2024) directly examined adolescents' gender-stereotypic attitudes toward HEED careers, finding these attitudes significantly predicted interest in such careers, with boys showing lower interest. Notably, this study also found that boys' attitudes were influenced by mothers' gender stereotypes and fathers' socialization values, suggesting that earlier intervention may be more effective due to the intergenerational transmission of gender stereotypes.

Second, these stereotypes impede men from attending to their physical and mental health. Regarding physical health, unhealthy behaviors (e.g., smoking, drinking, overeating) are often viewed as markers of masculinity, leading men to engage in them to prove their manhood and consequently harming their

health (Van Laar et al., 2024). Traditional gender stereotypes encourage men to be independent, brave, and to suppress emotional expression and help-seeking (唐卫海 et al., 2014; Prentice & Carranza, 2002), causing men who base their self-worth on traditional masculinity to avoid medical services (Himmelstein & Sanchez, 2016). Additionally, since risk-taking is often used to maintain masculine identity, men who feel they fail to meet gender norms may exhibit more pronounced risky behaviors, such as aggression, risky economic decisions, and dangerous sexual behavior (Giaccardi et al., 2017). Cross-cultural research has found that more precarious manhood predicts greater engagement in high-risk health behaviors, and in countries emphasizing manhood more strongly, men's life expectancy is on average six years shorter (Vandello et al., 2023).

Regarding mental health, masculine norms such as “keeping distance from others” reduce the likelihood of men seeking mental health help (Van Rossum et al., 2025), negatively affecting their psychological well-being. Research shows that traditional masculinity ideology exacerbates men's suboptimal mental health (卢勤 et al., 2015) and even increases suicidal ideation (Joyce et al., 2024).

Third, these stereotypes intensify masculine-contest cultures in the workplace. Masculinity-contest culture refers to organizational environments that require employees (regardless of gender) to prove they conform to masculine work ideals—avoiding vulnerability or support-seeking, demonstrating strength and toughness, prioritizing work above all, and showing intense competitiveness (Berdahl et al., 2018). This highly restrictive and competitive work culture reflects the core of masculine gender norms. Research indicates that gender stereotypes negatively affect men's work through masculine-contest cultures. Peters et al. (2015) found that highly masculinized occupational stereotypes (e.g., military imagery) deterred not only women but also men who perceived themselves as not fitting the “tough guy” image, making them feel excluded. Bosak et al. (2018) found that men applying for internal promotions who were described as advocating for their team rather than themselves (violating masculine-contest culture) were evaluated as less agentic and more likely to be dismissed than women in similar situations. Thus, masculine-contest cultures triggered by gender stereotypes may cause men who deviate from these stereotypes to face social and workplace backlash. Furthermore, such cultures may increase imposter feelings and reduce belonging (Vial et al., 2022), increase turnover intentions (Workman-Stark, 2021), and cause work-life imbalance (Matos et al., 2018).

In summary, compared to descriptive stereotypes, prescriptive/proscriptive stereotypes constrain what characteristics men should have and how they should behave (Haines et al., 2025), negatively affecting individuals' physical and mental health both socially and economically, and further hindering the creation of more equal, friendly, and harmonious environments (Van Laar et al., 2024).

2.1 Causes of Negative Effects from Descriptive Gender Stereotypes on Men

The integrated process model of stereotype threat effects posits that stereotype threat is a situational predicament in which stereotype threat cues trigger negative thoughts, appraisals, and emotions, leading to physiological stress responses, self-monitoring, and attempts to suppress these negative cognitions and feelings. This process ultimately impairs psychological and behavioral outcomes by depleting working memory and other executive resources (Schmader et al., 2008). According to this model, working memory depletion is the key mechanism through which descriptive gender stereotypes negatively affect men. For example, research examining the relationship between stereotype threat and men's language performance found that working memory mediated this relationship: higher levels of experienced stereotype threat were associated with lower working memory capacity, which in turn led to poorer language performance (Bedyńska & Krejtz, 2023; Bedyńska et al., 2020a, 2020b).

The psychological mechanisms through which descriptive stereotype threat produces negative effects are multifaceted and complex, extending beyond working memory to include affective, cognitive, and motivational pathways. Affective/subjective mechanisms involve anxiety, individuation tendencies, evaluation apprehension, performance expectations, explicit stereotype endorsement, and self-efficacy. Cognitive mechanisms involve cognitive load, thought suppression, mind-wandering, negative thoughts, cognitive appraisal, and implicit stereotype endorsement. Motivational mechanisms involve effort/motivation, self-handicapping, vigilance, and achievement goals (see Pennington et al., 2016). However, these mechanisms remain controversial and are primarily based on research with women, leaving their applicability to men as a cause of descriptive stereotype effects to be explored in future research.

2.2 Causes of Negative Effects from Prescriptive/Proscriptive Gender Stereotypes on Men

(1) Gender Role Violation. Social role theory posits that observations of social category members (e.g., “men” or “women”) performing specific social roles shape stereotypes about those categories (Eagly & Koenig, 2021). Since women primarily occupy caregiving roles, they are stereotypically perceived as communal; because men mainly serve as breadwinners, they are stereotypically seen as agentic (Froehlich et al., 2020; Hsu et al., 2021). Once formed, these stereotypes 反过来 create expectations for individuals in different domains. For example, the “women = communal” stereotype expects women to work in HEED fields, while the “men = agentic” stereotype expects men to work in STEM fields. Role congruity theory extends social role theory by proposing that when individuals' behaviors violate stereotypes associated with their social category, they may incur social or economic penalties (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Accordingly, when men engage in behaviors that violate these gender roles (e.g., seeking help), they are more vulnerable to negative effects from gender stereotypes (Moss-Racusin

et al., 2010). In terms of social penalties, research shows that men in childcare professions face prejudice due to inconsistency between gender stereotypes and the role requirements of their work (Sczesny et al., 2022). Haines et al. (2025) also found that men in childcare, compared to women, receive less positive perception and recognition on traits such as warmth, morality, and competence. Regarding economic penalties, research on how interviewers perceive male job candidates who violate gender roles found that gender-role-inconsistent male candidates were more likely to be seen as violating prescriptive stereotypes, less likable, and ultimately less likely to be hired compared to typical male candidates (Li & Wei, 2024).

(2) Status Role Violation. While the above research suggests that men suffer negative effects when violating gender roles (Moss-Racusin et al., 2010), other studies have found that men displaying communal behaviors (e.g., “humility,” “helping others”) sometimes do not face social penalties (e.g., Kozlowski & Power, 2022; Schlamp et al., 2021). This suggests that gender role violation as an explanation for negative effects from prescriptive/proscriptive stereotypes may have limitations. Researchers have therefore proposed status role violation as an alternative mechanism. According to the status incongruity hypothesis, perceivers punish stereotype-violating behaviors to maintain existing social hierarchies (Rudman et al., 2012). In the gender domain, because people are motivated to maintain the current gender hierarchy (where men are typically seen as having higher status than women), women exhibiting high-status behaviors (e.g., “assertiveness,” “competence”) or men exhibiting low-status behaviors (e.g., “passivity,” “weakness”) may be punished (Moss-Racusin et al., 2010; Rudman et al., 2012). Notably, unlike agency (often associated with high status), communion is not always seen as low-status and can sometimes be viewed as status-neutral (Eareckson & Heilman, 2024). Therefore, when men display communal behaviors unrelated to low status (e.g., “helping others”), they may not experience negative effects. Conversely, when men engage in low-status behaviors, they are likely to face social penalties. For example, research shows that men displaying behaviors or traits that may be interpreted as weak tend to receive negative evaluations (Rosette et al., 2015). Recently, Iacoviello et al. (2021) provided direct evidence for status role violation as an explanatory mechanism. They found that men who endorsed traditional masculinity beliefs (indicating a desire to maintain the gender hierarchy) showed stronger negative reactions toward men who violated traditional masculinity norms (e.g., working as nurses, staying home to care for children) when the gender hierarchy was threatened, including greater dislike and lower hiring intentions.

While both role congruity theory and the status incongruity hypothesis can explain negative effects from prescriptive/proscriptive gender stereotypes on men, they involve different key mechanisms. The former posits that men deviating from their gender-prescribed social roles (gender role violation) may face social or economic penalties, whereas the latter argues that men whose behaviors do not align with their gender’s expected social status (status role violation) may suffer similar penalties. Which theory offers better explanatory power? As

noted, the status incongruity hypothesis can better explain why men sometimes do not face negative effects when displaying communal behaviors, suggesting it may be more powerful. However, research has also found that help-seeking by male leaders reduces perceived competence, an effect mediated by “leader typicality” (help-seeking violates expectations for male leaders, based on role congruity theory) rather than “leader weakness” (help-seeking is seen as low-status behavior, based on status incongruity theory) (Rosette et al., 2015). This suggests role congruity theory may better explain negative effects from prescriptive/proscriptive stereotypes. Given the scarcity of research directly comparing these theories, which provides superior explanatory power remains to be examined.

3 How to Intervene in the Negative Effects of Gender Stereotypes on Men

The negative effects of gender stereotypes on men often fly under the radar, receiving insufficient attention in social dialogue and policy-making (Van Laar et al., 2024). Therefore, exploring effective interventions is crucial. This study systematically outlines strategies to intervene in both descriptive (what men “actually are”) and prescriptive/proscriptive (what men “should/should not be”) gender stereotypes from dual perspectives of process mechanisms and root causes.

3.1 Intervening in the Process of Negative Effects (1) Providing Positive Role Models. According to social comparison theory, individuals are motivated to evaluate their abilities through objective standards or comparison with others (Wood, 1989). Upward social comparison helps eliminate group-related stigma and prevents evaluation-induced stress (Good et al., 2008). Therefore, providing positive ingroup role models can break negative stereotypes about stigmatized groups and change perceptions (Cortland & Kinias, 2019). For example, the negative effects of descriptive stereotypes on men’ s language performance can be mitigated by presenting outstanding male role models in this domain (e.g., literary figures: Mo Yan, Yu Hua, Jia Pingwa) to enhance self-identity and reduce stereotype threat. According to the influence hypothesis, when people define themselves through a shared social identity and identify strongly with it, they are more likely to influence each other (Van Rossum et al., 2025). Since expectations and norms from prescriptive/proscriptive stereotypes are collectively constructed by group members (with some leading and others following), contact with excellent male role models in HEED fields may help shift group norms (Croft et al., 2015) and alleviate negative effects. Wong et al. (2017) found that having a male role model actively engaged in domestic labor during upbringing was associated with holding fewer zero-sum gender beliefs (the belief that women’ s progress comes at men’ s expense). Moreover, in men’ s mental health, both men themselves and significant others (e.g., teachers, parents) widely recognize that positive male role models have significant potential for reshaping healthy, diverse masculine social norms (Wilson et al.,

2022).

(2) Leveraging Multiple Social Identities. According to social identity theory, individuals' self-enhancement motives prompt them to shift to another non-threatened identity when multiple social identities are activated (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Thus, activating individuals' multiple identities can effectively prevent them from being threatened by a single stigmatized identity. For instance, while gender stereotypes reduce women's math performance, activating their science student identity can improve it (Wang et al., 2022). Similarly, to reduce descriptive stereotype effects on men's language performance, interventions could activate other positive social identities (e.g., humanities student identity). According to the multiple identities hypothesis, possessing multiple compatible, positive, and important group identities yields more positive outcomes (Brewer, 2013). Evidence shows that drawing support and resources from numerous positive social identities is associated with higher well-being and organizational equality (Manzi et al., 2024; Roberts & Caza, 2025). Accordingly, men may reduce the behavioral constraints of gender stereotypes on their male identity by drawing on other multiple positive social identities (which may be associated with more positive expectations and norms), thereby mitigating negative effects. Notably, since current evidence for this intervention's effectiveness primarily comes from research on women, its applicability to men requires future validation.

(3) Strengthening Self-Affirmation. According to self-affirmation theory, when individuals feel their self-integrity is threatened, they can maintain it by affirming other important self-values (e.g., social relationships, core skills). This integrity stems from a fundamental self-perception of being a good, moral, and capable person who can effectively navigate challenges and make positive impacts in important adaptive domains (e.g., academics, work) and moral domains (Cohen & Sherman, 2014). Therefore, when facing negative effects from descriptive stereotypes, self-affirmation can remind individuals of psychosocial resources beyond the negative situation, broadening their perspective when evaluating it (Reeves et al., 2023; Sherman, 2013), thereby weakening negative impacts. For example, 黄量杰 et al. (2024) found that self-affirmation effectively reduced men's endorsement of gender stereotypes and increased their interest in tasks. 刘怡珂 et al. (2024) also found that self-affirmation effectively protected men's cognitive functions from stereotype threat. For prescriptive/proscriptive stereotypes, self-affirmation can buffer threats to masculinity. Research shows that when facing masculinity threats, self-affirmation reduces compensatory toughness behaviors in highly masculine men (Fowler & Geers, 2017) and mitigates negative reactions toward feminine gay men (Wellman et al., 2021). Additionally, Lannin et al. (2019) found that self-affirmation alleviated threat-induced negative effects on health screening and information-seeking decisions. Thus, self-affirmation may help men seek help more readily (including psychological help), reducing health problems indirectly caused by gender stereotypes.

3.2 Intervening at the Source of Negative Effects While the above interventions can buffer negative effects from both descriptive and prescriptive/proscriptive stereotypes, their effects are heterogeneous and short-lived (Liu et al., 2021; Van Rossum et al., 2025). This is because they intervene in the process rather than addressing the root cause. As noted, social role theory suggests that gender stereotypes about what men and women are and should/should not be are formed through observations of the roles they play in daily life (Eagly & Koenig, 2021). Thus, process-based interventions “treat the symptoms” (only addressing negative effects) but do not “cure the disease” (failing to uproot stereotypes), allowing negative effects to resurface. Therefore, intervening at the source by changing gender roles is more effective and enduring.

Research shows that compared to reading about gender-neutral employment trends, reading about evolving paternal roles (e.g., increased involvement in child-rearing) changed perceptions of men as more communal (Park & Banchevsky, 2018). A recent big-data analysis of over 1.4 million implicit and explicit gender stereotypes in the U.S. from 2007-2018 found that traditional stereotypes have weakened significantly, reflecting changes in gender roles during this period—women’s participation in traditional male domains and men’s involvement in traditional female domains (Charlesworth & Banaji, 2022). This suggests that over time, changes in gender roles gradually weaken traditional stereotypes, reducing or eliminating their negative effects. Notably, while evidence of stereotype change primarily reflects concurrent role changes, men’s growth in traditional female domains has lagged significantly behind women’s advancement in traditional male domains (Croft et al., 2015). Therefore, changing men’s gender roles is urgent. For example, government intervention could include incorporating gender equality education in primary and secondary curricula to reduce stereotype content, universities establishing scholarships encouraging men to enter female-dominated humanities and social sciences, public awareness campaigns through media promoting successful male role models in HEED fields, and policies encouraging more equitable market environments to attract men to HEED occupations. In short, transforming men’s traditional social roles can weaken and eliminate gender stereotypes, ultimately breaking the vicious cycle between stereotypes and social roles.

3.3 Summary Recent evidence suggests that while gender stereotypes about women have changed (with growing perceived agency in women), whether stereotypes about men have changed remains controversial (with possible growth in perceived communion) (王祯 & 管健, 2024). This implies that stereotypes about men are more stable and resistant to change, making their negative effects more enduring and interventions more difficult. This requires not only process-level mitigation but also source-level “root removal.” However, beyond the common interventions for both descriptive and prescriptive/proscriptive stereotypes, each has unique intervention methods. For descriptive stereotypes, blurring group boundaries and emphasizing shared characteristics between men and women

can change negative stereotypic beliefs about men (Liu et al., 2021). For prescriptive/proscriptive stereotypes, communicating the importance of developing communion (e.g., its benefits for interpersonal relationships) can reduce rigid adherence to gender norms (Van Rossum et al., 2025). Future interventions should consider both common and unique approaches to enhance effectiveness. Additionally, while most interventions are gender-neutral, few target men specifically. Future research should focus on specific negative consequences for men and develop more gender-targeted strategies. For instance, since gender stereotypes may harm men's work by intensifying masculine-contest cultures, and problem-focused coping (aiming to manage problems and change distressing person-environment interactions) can effectively intervene in turnover intentions caused by such cultures (Xie & Zheng, 2022), organizations could train men in problem-focused coping strategies to weaken stereotype effects.

4.1 Exploring How Positive Effects of Gender Stereotypes on Men Can Buffer Negative Effects

While this study focuses on negative effects, research shows gender stereotypes can sometimes have positive effects on men. Regarding descriptive stereotypes, some studies find that stereotypes like “men's language ability is inferior to women's” do not reduce but rather enhance men's language performance (王祯 & 管健, 2023; Hausmann, 2014). For prescriptive/proscriptive stereotypes, similar positive effects exist. Although people generally believe women should work in communal humanities fields (e.g., education) and men in agentic STEM fields (e.g., physics), leading to backlash when these norms are violated (Heyder & Kortzak, 2024), some studies find that men in education are not punished but perceived as warmer and more competent than men in physics (Heyder & Kortzak, 2024). Furthermore, when men display communal leadership styles (Hentschel et al., 2018), engage in fatherhood (Morgenroth et al., 2021), perform communal tasks (Schlamp et al., 2021), or hold feminine personality traits (江红艳 et al., 2022; Kozlowski & Power, 2022), they are not negatively affected but rewarded. Given that stereotypes can have both negative and positive effects, identifying moderating variables could harness positive effects to buffer negative ones. For descriptive stereotypes, research suggests that implicitly presenting stereotypes may trigger self-monitoring to avoid errors, while explicit presentation causes distraction and working memory depletion (Stone & McWhinnie, 2008). Thus, shifting presentation from explicit to implicit may elicit positive effects that inhibit negative impacts. For prescriptive/proscriptive stereotypes, research indicates that men violating stereotypes in ways that meet negative expectancies (e.g., showing weakness) are punished, while positive expectancy violations (e.g., showing caring) are rewarded (Eareckson & Heilman, 2024). Therefore, shifting the valence of expectancy violation from negative to positive may trigger beneficial effects. Future research should explore more moderating variables to manipulate positive stereotype effects that buffer, inhibit, or eliminate negative impacts on men.

4.2 Examining Cultural Influences on Negative Effects of Gender Stereotypes on Men

Although research on negative effects of gender stereotypes on men is emerging, it has focused primarily on Western cultures, with scarce evidence from Eastern contexts. However, these effects may differ across cultures. Research shows that beliefs about men's characteristics, attributes, and behaviors vary cross-culturally (Kosakowska-Berezecka et al., 2024; Valved et al., 2021). In individualistic cultures, the stereotype linking communion with women is particularly strong (Cuddy et al., 2015; Kosakowska-Berezecka et al., 2025), suggesting men in these cultures may face stronger negative effects when violating stereotypes. Notably, in Asian cultures (e.g., Japan), greater concern about burdening others may reduce help-seeking (Chang et al., 2016), potentially making negative health effects of stereotypes more pronounced for men in these cultures. Different cultural perspectives may yield different outcomes, necessitating nuanced future research.

Examining effects on Chinese men is particularly valuable. On one hand, China's deep Confucian influence (emphasizing hierarchical social order and prescribed roles) means conservative, traditional values and gender norms are deeply rooted. This suggests that gender-role-inconsistent behaviors violate strict traditional values, potentially leading to more severe negative consequences for Chinese men (Li & Wei, 2024). For example, effeminate male celebrities in China's entertainment industry often face social and media criticism (Song, 2022). On the other hand, as society develops, Chinese men engaging in gender-role-inconsistent behaviors have gradually entered public view (Lau, 2018). According to social role theory, observing more men violating gender roles should gradually weaken traditional stereotypes and reduce negative effects. This creates uncertainty about whether Chinese men currently face severe punishment for such violations. This complexity warrants attention from researchers examining how gender stereotypes affect men in cultures influenced by both traditional strict values and modern perspectives.

Beyond psychological perspectives, multidisciplinary approaches are needed. From a demographic viewpoint, social factors including gender stereotypes affect Chinese men's life expectancy. Analysis of census data since China's founding shows male mortality exceeds female mortality at all ages. Beyond natural factors, traditional gender norms often neglect men's health needs, contributing to shorter life expectancy (陈岱云 & 陈希, 2022). From a communication perspective, gender stereotypes affect how Chinese men's vulnerable situations are portrayed on social media. Research shows that male vulnerability topics (e.g., "wife abuses husband") on platforms like Weibo are intertwined with public stereotypes (e.g., "men are typically perpetrators"), leading to underestimation or neglect of men's 困境 (燕道成 & 蒋青桃, 2023). From a sociological perspective, China's traditional "family-based" culture follows gendered divisions (e.g., "men work outside, women inside"), meaning men engaging in "inside" work face social and economic penalties

like women engaging in “outside” work. However, individualization processes are breaking traditional divisions, creating complexity in how Chinese men experience stereotype effects (杜平, 2019). Future research should integrate multidisciplinary perspectives to examine these effects in the Chinese context.

4.3 Investigating Effects of Gender Stereotypes on Boys

While evidence shows gender stereotypes negatively affect adult men, particularly through social and economic penalties (Moss-Racusin & Johnson, 2016; Rudman et al., 2012), much less is known about effects on boys. Research shows that while girls violating gender norms (e.g., wearing boys’ clothes) are increasingly accepted, boys engaging in feminine behaviors (e.g., wearing skirts) face no such acceptance (Yu et al., 2017), suggesting stereotypes may affect boys more severely than girls. Sullivan et al. (2018) found that preschool children (age 3) violating gender stereotypes were less liked by adults, with boys experiencing stronger negative effects. This indicates that negative effects extend beyond adults to children, especially boys. However, recent research found that children violating stereotypes in classroom settings received relatively positive evaluations from adults, a trend continuing into early adulthood (Brenner et al., 2023), suggesting children may be less susceptible to negative effects than adults. Nevertheless, Brenner et al. (2023) still found that stereotype-violating boys received lower ratings of likability and appropriateness than girls, underscoring the importance of focusing on boys. In summary, research on boys is scarce and controversial, requiring more investigation. Clarifying reasons for these controversies is also crucial. For instance, political conservatism (vs. liberalism) correlates with stronger gender stereotypes and more restrictive gender attitudes (Prusaczyk & Hodson, 2020; Stern & Axt, 2021), suggesting individuals’ political identities may influence their evaluations of stereotype-violating children. Additionally, previous research has primarily examined adults’ reactions to stereotype-violating boys; future research should investigate children’ s own reactions and how they compare to adults’ . Such exploration would expand the developmental dimension of this field and provide insights for intervening at the source.

4.4 Exploring Artificial Intelligence Interventions for Negative Effects of Gender Stereotypes on Men

With AI’ s rapid development, human-AI interaction has become normalized, frequent, diverse, intensive, and relational, permeating private, social, and professional life (Hermann et al., 2025). According to intergroup contact theory, contact is one of the most effective methods for reducing prejudice (Dovidio et al., 2017), including not only actual interaction but also indirect contact such as imagined contact, parasocial contact, and computer-mediated virtual contact (Hermann et al., 2025). Thus, contact with counter-stereotypical AI (e.g., male-gendered healthcare, early education, or domestic robots) may weaken the tendency to associate agency with men and enhance men’ s belief that they

can excel in HEED fields. For example, Moradbakhti et al. (2023) found that men who viewed male-gendered care robots were more likely to prefer male or any-gender caregivers compared to those viewing female-gendered robots. This suggests that contact with gender-stereotype-breaking AI may reduce associations between gender roles and stereotypical traits. Given AI's integral role in present and future life, exploring its use to intervene in gender stereotype effects on men is significant and will become an important research topic.

Gender stereotypes remain a critical issue in psychology, with mechanisms, causes, and interventions continuing to attract scholarly attention. Influenced by diversity, equity, and inclusion movements, Western cultures increasingly emphasize fair treatment and full participation for all, particularly for traditionally underrepresented or discriminated groups (e.g., women, Black individuals, older adults). This cultural trend has driven research to focus primarily on women, examining their negative experiences, mechanisms, and interventions. Consequently, research on whether and how men suffer negative effects from gender stereotypes is relatively limited. This asymmetry warrants caution about the current Western-dominated research landscape: while examining women's experiences remains important, we must not underestimate or neglect potential adverse consequences for men. Critically, Chinese researchers should deeply examine this complex issue within the Chinese cultural context, revealing negative effects and mechanisms for both sexes, exploring how to reshape social gender norms at their root, enabling individuals to choose their practices and behaviors according to their needs and desires, and ultimately alleviating or eliminating the negative effects of gender stereotypes.

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

Source: ChinaXiv – Machine translation. Verify with original.