

# The Role of Masculine Defaults in Reinforcing Gender Biases and Its Impact in the Corporate World

Jiho Park

Daechi St.Paul

## Abstract

This paper examines how masculine defaults reinforce gender biases and adversely affect men and women. It poses two critical research questions relating to how masculine defaults manifest in modern corporate policies and the impacts they have on gender equity within these environments. Employing a mixed-methods approach that incorporates case studies and content analysis, this research aims to provide new insights into the interaction between gender norms and corporate culture. It further proposes systematic changes to promote a more inclusive and equitable workplace. The findings of the paper demonstrate that by devising creative policies and schemes that consider equality and adaptability as altruistic factors, workplaces can create environments in which all members, regardless of gender, can develop themselves both privately and vocationally.

## Introduction

In contemporary business environments, masculine defaults have been observed to pervasively influence organizational cultures, subtly shaping expectations, behaviors, and opportunities. These defaults relate to unspoken norms and behaviors typically associated with traditional masculinity, such as independence, self-orientation, and risk-taking.

They are often prioritized within organizational settings to the detriment of both women and men. As highlighted by Sapna (2020) in "Masculine Defaults: Identifying and Mitigating Hidden Cultural Biases," this paradox manifests when these masculine traits are imposed on female workers, often undermining their workplace effectiveness and visibility.

Furthermore, masculine defaults influence how

thoughts are organized and expressed, impacting communication styles, beliefs, and practices across organizational layers. These traits are mirrored in policies and procedures, enforced through legal frameworks, and embedded in gender practices, creating cycles of interaction that reinforce these norms. However, although these approaches may appear advantageous, they perpetuate discrimination, limiting women's contributions to business management and leadership and imposing rigid norms that adversely affect men's work-life balance.

Thus, given the pervasive influence of these masculine defaults, this paper argues that the deep-rooted masculine defaults in organizational cultures within modern business environments shape opportunities, behaviors, and expectations in ways that hinder women's career advancement and impose restrictive norms on men. It will examine how these defaults reinforce gender biases and adversely affect men and women and propose systematic changes to promote a more inclusive and equitable workplace.

To comprehensively address these issues, the paper poses critical research questions: How do masculine defaults manifest in modern corporate policies, and what impacts do they have on gender equity within these environments? Employing a mixed-methods approach that incorporates case studies and content analysis, this research aims to provide new insights into the interaction between

gender norms and corporate culture. Ultimately, the findings will contribute to academic discussions on organizational behavior and gender studies and propose practical interventions for organizations striving to enhance gender inclusivity and equity.

Additionally, this paper presents a robust theoretical foundation that is based on the works of scholars such as Cialdini and Trost, Gelfand, Harrington, and Jackson, and Morris, Hong, Chiu, and Liu to delineate how socially constructed norms and default settings direct behaviors differently across genders. It will delve into the cyclic reinforcement of these norms through repeated interactions and the profound effects these have on organizational culture. Through an extensive examination, this paper intends to draw attention to the ubiquitous nature of masculine defaults in business settings and advocate for systemic reforms that facilitate the creation of a more balanced and equitable work environment.

## **Section 1: The Concept and Historical Context of Masculine Defaults**

In present-day society, norms and expectations—including actions and rules—are predominantly established by men, thereby embedding masculine defaults as the foundation of traditional masculinity, often to the detriment of women. Research by Kanter (1975) found that men in positions of authority established social structures and cultural discourses that inherently valued male experience while marginalizing female experience. Similarly, Bem's (1993) analysis highlights how these structures have continued to privilege male

experiences. Thus, it can be observed that masculine defaults permeate various aspects of society and culture, including norms, beliefs, policies, actions, practices, and ideas, ultimately shaping the rules and dynamics of workplaces and influencing individual behaviors (Cheryan, 2020).

### **Defining Masculine Defaults and Distinguishing from Norms**

To fully understand the impact of gender standards, it is crucial to distinguish between masculine defaults and broader social norms. Researchers like Morris, Hong, Chiu, and Liu (2015), Cialdini and Trost (1998), Gelfand et al. (2017), and others have clarified that while norms are generally understood as socially constructed patterns that guide behavior, masculine defaults are specific behaviors and traits that are often regarded as standard but primarily favor male characteristics. In various cultural contexts, social norms are essential for maintaining social cohesion and coordinating behavior, as demonstrated by Gelfand et al. (2017). They describe how norms function at multiple levels, impacting both individual and group behavior across different societies.

Cialdini and Trost (1998) further expand on social norms by dividing them into two categories: injunctive norms and descriptive norms. Inductive norms involve behaviors that people approve or disapprove of) while descriptive norms involve behaviors that most people engage in. The researchers further add that “social norms are rules and standards that are understood by members of a group, and that

guide and/or constrain social behavior without the force of laws.” Therefore, while social norms cover a broad range of behaviors applicable to all society members, masculine defaults specifically support and uphold male dominance in various domains. Acknowledging this distinction is essential for examining how cultural norms shape conduct and impact gender relations, and addressing these male tendencies is critical for striving toward more comprehensive and inclusive social norms.

### **Exploring Practical Examples: The Case of Conversational Interruptions**

To illustrate the distinction between masculine defaults and social norms, it is appropriate to consider the scenario of interruptions during conversations. The act of one person interrupting another to dominate the dialogue exemplifies how masculine defaults manifest. Research by Anderson and Leaper (1998) shows that women are interrupted more frequently than men, a clear instance of differential treatment with negative consequences for women (Blair-Loy et al., 2017; Jacobi & Schweers, 2017; Karpowitz & Mendelberg, 2014). Furthermore, observing this dynamism within a team and deciding to counter it by consciously interrupting men more frequently may work in fostering equality in voice. While this might seem like an equitable solution, it inadvertently establishes a masculine default by promoting a culture where forceful interruptions—typically associated with masculine communication styles—become the

normative and valued way to converse. This approach sidelines other interaction styles, such as validation, waiting one's turn, posing questions, or connecting with previous comments in a supportive manner.

Furthermore, building on the theme of conversational interruptions, it's important to recognize that even in environments where women begin to adopt more assertive, typically masculine styles of interruption, they may find these settings more challenging than their male counterparts. A 2014 study by Kieran Snyder found that men interrupted women two and a half times more frequently than they interrupted other men in workplace conversations. Additionally, a 2017 analysis by George Washington University researchers also found that male justices interrupted female justices three times more often during oral arguments at the U.S. Supreme Court.

However, despite attempts to balance the frequency of interruptions between genders, women are generally less likely to engage in intrusive interruptions. This disparity suggests that while initial access to participate in conversations may appear equal, the underlying dynamics still favor masculine communication styles, creating an environment that inherently advantages men and places women at a disadvantage (Cheryan, 2020).

Moreover, even women who naturally exhibit assertive traits may face significant challenges. They often encounter backlash or social and

economic penalties for deviating from traditional gender roles. This reaction reflects a broader societal issue where women are penalized for behaviors that contradict expected gender norms, a phenomenon well-documented by researchers like Amanatullah & Tinsley (2013), Heilman et al. (2004), Williams and Tiedens (2016), and Rudman and Fairchild (2004). In summary, these dynamics illustrate how masculine defaults not only shape interaction styles but also reinforce traditional gender roles, stifling genuine equality and diversity in workplace communications.

### **Historical Context and the Evolution of Masculine Defaults in the Workplace**

The conceptualization and evolution of masculine defaults in the workplace can be rigorously analyzed through various theoretical frameworks, including evolutionary psychology and social role theory. Evolutionary psychologists like Buss and Kenrick (1998) argue that differential reproductive strategies have shaped distinct behavioral traits—aggressiveness and competitiveness in men, nurturance in women—that ostensibly align with biological imperatives. However, such a biologically deterministic approach requires scrutiny to avoid oversimplification and bias, which can obscure the complex interplay of societal influences on gender behaviors.

Complementing this perspective, social role theory, as articulated by Eagly and Wood (1999) and further expanded by Wood and Eagly

(2013), elucidates how societal structures have historically conferred power upon men based on their roles in labor and resource provision. This theory underscores the significance of both physical and social traits in shaping gender dynamics within societal hierarchies.

Moreover, insights from feminist theories and women's studies challenge these traditional paradigms by asserting that cultural and contextual factors significantly mold gender roles. This critique is crucial for reevaluating the assumptions of more traditional evolutionary views, suggesting that gender roles are not merely biologically ordained but are deeply influenced by societal constructs and dynamics. For instance, Cynthia Stavrianos's application of feminist critique in professional settings provides practical tools for dissecting and addressing entrenched societal norms (*Gender and Power Dynamics Learned in Women's and Gender Studies*, n.d.).

Furthermore, the interplay of 'environmental factors' and 'affordances'—including elements like cultural values, technological advancements, and economic conditions—enhances our understanding of how individuals navigate and sometimes transcend prescribed gender roles (Xia & Li, 2023). These factors facilitate a broader array of choices for individuals, influencing their participation in societal roles and contributing to shifts in traditional gender dynamics.

Additionally, further insights into how these

large-scale social upheavals have left enduring impacts on professional landscapes can be observed as we delve deeper into historical shifts, such as those during the Second World War, which catalyzed temporary but significant changes in gender roles due to the mass conscription of men. The insights gleaned from historical occurrences and feminist literature are instrumental in dissecting professional environments, revealing the entrenched nature of masculine defaults and illuminating paths toward more equitable workplace dynamics.

## **Section 2: Impact of Masculine Defaults on Women**

Gender norms serve as significant barriers to women's upward career mobility in the workplace, exacerbating already-existing disparities. These norms not only shape recruitment and management perceptions but also directly influence women's professional development and daily workplace experiences (Cislaghi et al., 2022). These norms promote qualities and attributes that are commonly associated with masculinity, thus disadvantaging women in hiring procedures, promotion pathways, and day-to-day interactions at work (Cislaghi et al., 2022).

These defaults impact the gender order and reinforce stereotypes about particular professions, as demonstrated by historical examples such as programming being initially considered 'women's work' (Abbate, 2012; Ensmenger, 2010). Likewise, gendered career

perceptions are strikingly evident in the nursing profession. Due to the efforts of pioneers like Florence Nightingale, nursing, which was once thought of as 'women's work,' became professionally recognized in the 19th century. Nevertheless, as regulatory standards rose during this era of empowerment, nursing quickly became associated with femininity (Kübler et al., 2017). This association created a dual barrier: while elevating the profession's status, it also solidified gender-based expectations within it. In a field dominated by women, male nurses had to overcome numerous obstacles and fight for acceptance. The struggle for recognition among male nurses illustrates the pervasive impact of gender norms that restrict both genders in different ways. It was not until the mid-1900s that the gender balance in the profession began to shift, reflecting a gradual change in societal norms.

Moreover, a major societal shift occurred during World War II when women began working outside the home in roles traditionally held by men, like the aircraft industry, after they started to take on roles in defense plants and factories across the country. This period highlighted women's capabilities in traditionally male-dominated sectors, challenging long-held societal norms. In certain industries, women accounted for the majority of workers by 1943. Initially, programming was thought to be low-level clerical labor with little intellectual significance, leading to women being excluded from participation. This exclusion prevented

women from pursuing opportunities in computing and other emerging technical fields, thus perpetuating gender disparities. Male managers often underestimated the complexity of programming assignments, which resulted in inadequate support and a systematic undervaluation of women's contributions (Ensmenger, 2010). These misjudgments by male supervisors not only affected immediate job roles but also influenced long-term career paths for many women. This false belief led to workplace policies that hindered women's advancement and discouraged them from entering computer-related fields. As a result, the archetype of a successful programmer began to embody traits typically associated with men, such as intense focus and disregard for collaborative approaches. The perpetuation of these stereotypes continues to create formidable psychological and social barriers, marginalizing women in the field of computer science and influencing their professional identities.

Furthermore, other historical examples and academic references can further illustrate the impact of masculine defaults on women's career progression. For instance, studies have shown that masculine defaults were solidified in workplaces through specific historical events and organizational practices. The post-World War II era, in particular, saw a reversion to traditional gender roles, with women being pushed out of jobs they had held during the war (Goldin, 1991). In the 1950s and 1960s, corporate cultures often emphasized masculine

traits such as competitiveness and assertiveness, which were seen as essential for leadership roles (Kanter, 1977).

However, research indicates that gender bias is still present in current workplace practices. Studies conducted recently reveal that when women exhibit ambition or assertiveness, they are frequently viewed more negatively than men (Laouiti et al., 2023). Gender prejudice in recruiting and advancement procedures is still reportedly pervasive. One investigation conducted by Moss-Racusin et al. (2012) discovered that scientific faculty members (consisting of both male and female) evaluated male applicants as more competent and employable than equivalent female applicants. This prejudice impairs women's ability to advance in their careers and adds to the lack of female leaders.

In addition to academic references, carefully considered case studies can also add context to the discussion and offer tangible examples of the problems raised. A notable example is the case of Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg, who has talked widely about the obstacles she encountered as a woman in technology (Sandberg, 2013). Her experiences demonstrate the extra difficulties that women aspiring to leadership positions may face as a result of male defaults in company culture.

### **Section 3: Masculine Norms and Men's Career Progression**

Men frequently experience social pressure to

conform to male-specific norms in work environments and, as a result of these norms, are less likely to discuss or seek help for mental health problems (Roche et al., 2016). Research indicates that depression rates are higher within male-dominated workforce groups (such as transportation, police, and manual occupations) than in the general population due to factors like job demands, time pressure, and effort-reward imbalance (Roche et al., 2016; Z. Wang et al., 2010). In addition to mental health risks arising from occupational characteristics, environments characterized by "masculinity culture contests" may amplify these risks. Researchers have theorized that such environments host social pressures and stigma to conform to gendered behavior, resulting in a conflation of top performance with masculine gender performance, which negatively impacts mental health (Berdahl et al., 2018, p. 430). Because of this early conditioning, men feel pressured to conform to traditional masculine norms in the workplace by displaying emotional restraint and competitiveness. This association of elite performance with masculine behavior creates detrimental social pressure and stigma, negatively affecting mental health.

### **Typology of Masculine Role Norms and Their Effects on Men's Perception of Work-related Stress**

According to Addis et al. (2010), three fundamental norms underpin masculinity: the cohesive norm, the descriptive role norm, and the injunctive role norm. The cohesive norm

promotes male unity and solidarity, pushing members to adhere to norms and behaviors to feel like they belong. The descriptive role norm lists qualities and actions commonly associated with masculinity, such as emotional control, assertiveness, and competitiveness. Lastly, the injunctive role norm refers to social pressures and expectations specifying how men should act to be accepted by others. These norms dictate behavior and frame responses to stress, often discouraging vulnerability and exacerbating stress, thus negatively impacting mental health.

Furthermore, the way men handle work-related stress is shaped by these norms. For instance, men tend to conceal their stress because the injunctive role norm forbids displaying vulnerability. Similarly, the descriptive role norm's emphasis on competition leads men to overwork themselves, while the cohesive norm promotes conformity, increasing stress and harming mental health. Thus, these norms reinforce societal stereotypes and gender attitudes, worsening occupational stress for male employees. Additionally, it has been observed that significant internal strain is caused by the demands to conform to a masculine identity characterized by dominance, emotional suppression, and competition. Research highlights the negative consequences of these inflexible masculine ideals, demonstrating that men who internalize these norms experience higher rates of anxiety and depression (Roche et al., 2016; Z. Wang et al., 2010).

### **Psychological Reactions to Norms Governing Masculine Behavior at Work**

It has also been observed that a man's emotional well-being, sense of self, and job satisfaction are significantly influenced by whether he complies with or defies macho norms at work. Resisting these macho norms can result in conflict and isolation, while conforming can cause stress and burnout, underscoring the need for work environments that value individual differences. The social norms perspective explains that when men adhere strongly to traditional masculinity, they may gain validation and develop a sense of belonging in male-dominated environments, which can boost their self-esteem and workplace satisfaction. This highlights the perspective and principle that male behavior and attitudes are socially learned and transmitted (Addis et al., 2016). However, it is important to note that the internal conflict between expressing true feelings and feeling vulnerable can be lessened by compliance with certain regulations, but this can also result in complex emotions and mental health issues (Gross & John, 2003). In essence, men who resist conventional masculine norms may experience higher stress levels and social exclusion at work. Similarly, women who do not align with stereotypical gender beliefs may face pushback or hostility from colleagues and bosses, increasing workplace misery. However, while this opposition can be challenging, it can also empower individuals to feel good about their genuine selves and their integrity.



## **Recommendations for Creating Inclusive Work Environments**

It has been highlighted that the burden of following masculine norms in the workplace can significantly impact men's career advancement and realization. To address this, organizations can foster inclusive, supportive work environments by acknowledging the various manifestations of male cultural norms and their negative effects on the workplace. This will assist employees in balancing work and personal obligations without career worries. Thus, it is recommended that organizations should provide flexible work policies, offer mental health support programs, and provide leadership training with a strong emphasis on emotional intelligence.

### **Section 4: Work-Family Balance and the Perpetuation of Gender Norms**

Balancing work and family responsibilities poses significant challenges for men due to traditional gender norms. These norms often conflict with modern family dynamics, making it difficult for men to manage their roles effectively. The resultant stress and decreased family involvement are common outcomes of this imbalance.

When work-family balance is viewed as an individual responsibility, employees tend to focus solely on their resources, blaming themselves for any shortcomings in achieving balance (Alemann et al., 2017; Lewis et al., 2007). The ideal employee norm expects men to

prioritize work commitments and measure career success as a familial duty, reinforcing the traditional male breadwinner model. The breadwinner model posits that men should be the primary breadwinners and devote the majority of their time and energy to their work, leaving women primarily responsible for taking care of the home and raising the children (Nadim, 2016). This model assumes the father is the provider of financial support for the household.

However, this model is increasingly challenged by modern trends. Increased male involvement in family life and the desire for work-life balance and shared parenting responsibilities are highlighted by the rise in the number of men taking on active parenting roles. Fathers who want a more balanced role find it difficult to find a job because many workplaces still strongly reinforce the breadwinner norm.

To address this, inclusive policies should be established. For instance, these policies should support working fathers by offering equitable parental leave and flexible work schedules (Williams et al., 2013). The notion that work and care are incompatible perpetuates gender inequality, suggesting that involved fathering is inconsistent with ideal employee norms (Alemann et al., 2017). Thus, these policies can help men recognize the injustices of work-family balance, particularly in contexts where extended paternity leave is absent (Hobson et al., 2011).

Furthermore, the social and organizational implications of adhering to masculine defaults in work-family policies complicate the realization of shared parenting responsibilities. Present workplace policies tend to ignore the full range of fathering roles, adhering to outdated gender norms that place men primarily as wage earners (Hobson et al., 2013; Lewis & Stumbitz, 2017). Therefore, policy changes addressing this should incorporate support for shared parenting responsibilities, flexible work schedules, and paternal leave. The impact of these policies can be observed in countries like Sweden, where progressive parental leave laws are prevalent, and work-life balance and employee satisfaction are higher.

Additionally, it is important to note that working adaptations designed to advance job-life balance generally come with the margin of narrowed gender stereotyping. When pursuing work-life balance, male employees frequently worry about the stigma associated with flexibility and possible repercussions on their careers. According to research, men who use flexible work schedules might be viewed as less dedicated, which could hinder their ability to advance in their careers. This anxiety prevents many people from utilizing work-life balance policies, which exacerbates stress and job discontent (Burnett et al., 2012). The stigma of environmental flexibility is particularly acute for men, as they may be seen as denying the "heroic" masculinity that sends a message to young adults about working long hours or

implies that their bodies and their language are separate from their will and, therefore can be disregarded (Williams et al., 2013).

Bowman (2007) further explains that men are under increasing pressure to put work before family responsibilities because of their prestige in the workplace, in society, and as executives (Bowman, 2007). The pressure to constantly be available for work is evident in many organizational cultures and can have a detrimental effect on one's psychological health. On the other hand, worker productivity and well-being have increased in companies that have implemented flexible work schedules and encouraged work-life balance. In companies where the commitment and devotion of staff to the organization are seen to be first and absolute, trade-offs between loyalty or work may require men to find new identities and make conscious choices against traditional career paths.

Thus, to address these issues, comprehensive policies and programs must be put in place. By passing comprehensive paternity leave laws, for example, some countries have equalized caregiving responsibilities. Examples of equitable sharing of childcare responsibilities are the generous paternity leave programs in place in Norway and Iceland. The outcome of these policies can be observed in the increased work-life balance, greater employee satisfaction, and higher retention rates. Thus, these policies

do more than just provide funds; they also stigmatize and embrace men's involvement in caring roles. When implemented effectively, initiatives aimed at changing the organizational culture to one of greater flexibility and supportive leadership can improve employee satisfaction and engagement. Employers can help employees balance work and family obligations without worrying about jeopardizing their careers by offering flexible work arrangements and supportive leadership practices, as shown by case studies from companies like Google and Microsoft.

In summary, equity in work from the angle of masculine defaults and biological bases should be addressed through a comprehensive strategy that includes promoting work-family balance, challenging traditional gender roles, and encouraging cultural change within organizations. By devising creative policies and schemes that consider equality and adaptability as altruistic factors, workplaces can create environments in which all members, regardless of gender, can develop themselves both privately and vocationally.

## **Section 5: Masculine Norms and Occupational Health**

Research indicates that the norms of masculinity and their occupational factors significantly and multidimensionally impact men's mental health. Thus, building on studies like the Australian Welfare Study on Male Health and the function of masculine norms in

male-dominated professions, we can explore the complex system affecting men's mental health in the workplace.

### **Influence of Masculine Norms and Occupational Factors**

Masculine culture, characterized by behaviors, attitudes, and personality traits ascribed to men, greatly influences men's work experiences, particularly in more masculine professions (Mahalik et al., 2003). Men's mental health problems are exacerbated by conforming to stereotypically masculine ideals such as emotional repression and independence. Men are expected to hide their weaknesses and display strength and competence. Studies highlight the need for supportive environments that promote emotional expression and vulnerability, linking higher rates of anxiety and depression to this emotional suppression.

These problems are compounded by demanding work environments. For example, airline pilots face significant stress due to shift work and strict medical requirements tied to their income. For instance, Jeff, an airline pilot, provides a first-hand account of maintaining a healthy perspective on depression despite the demanding nature of his work:

According to Jeff, "There's tons of fatigue. We're dealing with shift work, so it's very stressful. It's dynamic. We have flight tests every six months. So if you don't pass... if you're depressed, you lose your medical [medical certificate], and your medical is tied to your income. You have no

medical; you have no income. And a lot of pilots don't have a lot of transferable skills because we've spent so much time getting to this point. And we're making good money. And if I'm going to share with you that I'm depressed and lose my medical, I lose my career."

Through this narrative, it can be observed that there is an intricate connection between masculine ideals, career demands, and mental health outcomes. This highlights the risky position that many men find themselves in as they balance their professional lives and well-being.

### **Comparative Analysis across Cultures**

Examining the complex effects of these factors on men's well-being allows us to understand how differences in masculine gender norms affect mental health across cultures or countries. While certain aspects of male identity are universal, their representation and influence vary greatly among cultural contexts, power dynamics, and historical periods.

For example, strong collectivist communities might place more emphasis on community welfare than individual achievement, relieving some pressure from inflexible gender roles. Conversely, societies with deeply ingrained patriarchal leadership might uphold toxic masculinity and harmful stereotypes that deter men from seeking mental health treatment.

Thus, studying the cross-cultural variations offers unlimited opportunities to explore and

understand the delicate and complicated links between cultural norms, gender, occupational issues, and mental health outcomes. This understanding can help develop more sensitive approaches to promoting men's mental health in different contexts.

### **Towards a Unified Strategy**

Combating the masculine norms and occupational factors that impact men's mental health requires a coordinated effort. This unified strategy should focus on recognizing and resolving the covert exploitation of men's mental health in the workplace. First, cultural changes should be established that will enable men to see their mental health as a critical element of their overall well-being and professional success.

Additionally, corporate policy changes are also essential to this strategy. Organizations can support work-life balance through policies like flexible work schedules, remote work opportunities, and generous paternity leave. The impact of this policy can be observed in companies like Google and Microsoft, which have effectively instituted such policies and, as a result, recorded increased employee satisfaction and retention rates.

Furthermore, providing resources for mental health, such as stress management classes and counseling services, can also help employees manage their mental health. Similarly, regular mental health examinations and manager training to identify and assist staff members

with mental health concerns can also be beneficial.

Also, establishing support groups in the workplace gives workers a forum to discuss their experiences and seek guidance from colleagues. Partnerships with external mental health organizations can also offer additional tools and assistance to staff members.

Encouraging men to express vulnerability and seek support can also create healthier, more supportive workplaces. This shift will improve productivity and organizational health, benefiting individual men and the broader work environment.

Lastly, promoting gender equality can allow men to view mental health as an essential piece of their overall well-being and career success. This will facilitate the development of workplaces that are healthier and more supportive, thereby encouraging men to express vulnerability and seek support, which in turn will improve productivity and organizational health.

In conclusion, regarding the effectiveness of these strategies, successful case studies from Scandinavian nations, which have adopted comprehensive paternity leave policies and supportive work environments, show measurable improvements in men's mental health. These methods enhance individual well-being and improve overall organizational productivity and culture.

## **Section 6: Navigating and Countering Masculine Norms**

In the workplace, women typically face the challenge of negotiating and contending with masculine norms that have the potential to perpetuate gender inequality and obstruct opportunities for career advancement. A 2018 investigation from LeanIn and McKinsey & Company shows that women are considerably outnumbered at the manager level, holding just 38% of manager-level positions. This disparity arises because women are less likely than men to receive the first crucial promotion to manager, so fewer women end up on the path to leadership. For women of color, this difference is even more noticeable. However, despite these challenges, there have been periods where women have managed to upend the status quo and become a source of inspiration for change. Thus, this section aims to provide valuable insights by analyzing case studies of women overcoming masculine norms and identifying strategies for gender equity in the workplace.

### **Case Studies of Women Navigating and Countering Masculine Norms**

A notable example of a woman who navigated and countered masculine norms is Sarah, a software engineer who challenged gender biases and stereotypes in the male-centered tech industry. Sarah's experience reflects larger trends in the tech industry, where women make up only 25% of the workforce and frequently

encounter severe gender biases (Lean In, 2022). Her advocacy for equal opportunities resulted in the implementation of inclusive hiring practices and mentorship programs in her company, similar to the beneficial organizational changes observed in businesses supporting gender diversity (Fast Company, 2019). Programs like Girls Who Code (Lean In, 2022) also benefited from her influence. Despite facing doubt and resistance from her male colleagues, Sarah showcased her knowledge and skills, ultimately earning acceptance and commendation from her teammates. Through her perseverance, Sarah has become an example for others in the field, demonstrating how to break free from masculinity-driven positions.

Another example is Emily, a business executive who has advocated for gender-empowerment policies and procedures. Observing the overly masculine character of the leadership hierarchy, Emily initiated diversity and inclusion programs such as mentorship for women and unconscious bias training for employees. Her activism and leadership improved the work environment for other women, who now had supportive networks and advocates within the company.

### **Successful Strategies for Countering Masculine Norms**

Research indicates that there are several strategies that can be adopted to counter masculine norms. One of them is enforcing

gender-neutral parental leave policies. It has been observed that companies offering equal parental leave benefits to men and women are making significant progress toward transforming gender norms and increasing the number of men who take on caregiving duties. Organizations with these policies show more balanced gender representation at all workforce levels, with a noticeable rise in men taking caregiving responsibilities and women occupying leadership roles. In contrast, organizations without such policies often uphold traditional gender roles, leading to career interruptions for women and fewer men taking parental leave.

These regulations support gender equity by strengthening the family unit and creating a more cohesive and equitable work environment. Adopting gender-neutral parental leave guidelines create a more inclusive workplace culture, which demonstrates a commitment to equal opportunities.

In conclusion, women's ability to navigate and counter masculine norms in the workplace requires strong-minded individuals, supportive organizations, and societal commitment. By highlighting the stories of women who have broken these stereotypes, discussing platforms and strategies for achieving gender equity, and showcasing successful environment transformations, we can work towards creating equal and accommodating work settings for all. Sustainable change requires specific organizational and societal adjustments, such as

fostering an inclusive culture, encouraging diverse leadership, and implementing gender-neutral policies. Through collective action, we can create a society where gender equity is a shared goal, not just an individual accomplishment.

### **Conclusion**

The prevalent masculine defaults in the workplace have a negative impact as they shape the entire professional dynamic and continue to promote gender incompetence in working life. These gender-discriminatory norms not only stifle women's career paths but also create restrictive work standards that men find difficult to achieve in their careers and work-life balance. The pursuit of gender stereotyping disperses the chances and consequences in the realm of inequality, hence creating a large chain of unhealthy impacts.

For women, masculine norms place an additional hurdle in the way of achieving their goals, with few men occupying leadership positions and limited opportunities for equal treatment at the workplace. Balancing job and family obligations, especially when work is always prioritized, compounds these difficulties for women, making it hard for them to achieve personal and professional success. On the other hand, men struggle to be true to themselves and are scrutinized for deviating from the perceived ideal of masculinity, which often restricts them from seeking support for mental health issues. In traditionally male-dominated professions,

the emphasis on toughness and competition only intensifies work-related stress and perpetuates a culture of silence regarding mental health issues.

However, despite these difficulties, it is important to reaffirm that addressing gender biases benefits everyone by preventing opportunities and well-being from being compromised. This can be achieved by investigating related biases, such as how gender norms interact with race or class norms, and devising novel ways to promote gender equity and work-life balance.

This highlights the urgency of initiating policies that are focused on creating gender-inclusive and flexible workplaces. These policies should include gender-neutral parental leave, promoting diversity and inclusion initiatives, and providing for work-life balance with flexible work arrangements. Thus, by adopting new gender roles in organizations and fostering less biased corporate environments, organizations can give all workers, regardless of gender, the opportunity to fully achieve their personal and professional objectives.

Finally, addressing the negative impacts of masculine defaults requires a comprehensive plan involving research, policy, and cultural change. Recognizing the influence of these norms and advocating for an inclusive culture now will pave the way for a better and more fraternal workplace in the future. Through collective action and a commitment to gender

equity, we can create work environments that foster respect, inclusivity, and equal opportunities for all.

## References

1. Abbate, J. (2012). *Recoding gender: Women's changing participation in computing*. MIT Press. <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9014.001.0001>
2. Addis, M. E., Mansfield, A. K., & Syzdek, M. R. (2010). Is there a gender difference in sources of stress and their psychological impact on employees of a Midwestern academic health center? *Journal of Women's Health, 19*(5), 847–856.
3. Addis, M. E., Reigeluth, C. S., & Schwab, J. R. (2016). Socialization experiences among college student-athletes: The role of perceived masculine norms. *Journal of College Counseling, 19*(2), 172–185.
4. Alemann, S., Bátor, J., & Reimann, M. (2017). Agency and capabilities in managerial positions: Hungarian fathers' use of workplace flexibility. *Gender, Work & Organization, 24*(6), 669–688.
5. Berdahl, J. L., Cooper, R. A., Glick, P., Livingston, R. W., & Williams, J. C. (2018). Work as a masculinity contest. *Journal of Social Issues, 74*(3), 429–448.
6. Boettcher, N., Mitchell, J., Lashewicz, B., Jones, E. O., Wang, J., Gundu, S., Marchand, A., Michalak, E. E., & Lam, R. W. (2019). Men's work-related stress and mental health: Illustrating the workings of masculine role norms. *American Journal of Men's Health, 13*(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1557988319838416>
7. Bowman, C. L. (2007). Gender role beliefs and earned income: The mediating role of perceived job flexibility and work-life conflict. *Sex Roles, 57*(5–6), 363–374.
8. Burnett, S., Gattrell, C., Cooper, C. L., & Sparrow, P. (2012). The impact of flexible working arrangements on work-life conflict and job attitudes: A structural equation modeling analysis. *International Journal of Stress Management, 19*(1), 39–55.
9. Buss, D. M., & Kenrick, D. T. (1998). Evolutionary social psychology. In D. T. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *The Handbook of Social Psychology* (4th ed., Vol. 2, pp. 982–1026). McGraw-Hill.
10. Cheryan, S. (2020). Masculine defaults: Identifying and mitigating hidden cultural biases. In *Journal of Social Issues, 74*(3), 430–455.
11. Cialdini, R. B., & Cacioppo, J. T. (1998). Trodden paths and the perceived utility of choice. *Psychological Science, 9*(1), 40–43.
12. Dishman, L. (2019, February 6). These companies are making sure more women get promoted to management. *Fast Company*.



- <https://www.fastcompany.com/90299115/these-companies-are-making-sure-more-women-get-promoted-to-management>
13. Eagly, A. H., & Wood, W. (1999). The origins of sex differences in human behavior: Evolved dispositions versus social roles. *American Psychologist*, 54(6), 408-423.
  14. Ensmenger, N. (2010). *The computer boys take over: Computers, programmers, and the politics of technical expertise*. MIT Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9780262050937.001.0001>
  15. Gelfand, M. J., Harrington, J. R., & Jackson, J. C. (2017). The strength of social norms across human groups. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 12(5), 800-809.
  16. Goldberg, M. (2017, July 12). The absurd backlash against Sheryl Sandberg's "Lean In." *The Daily Beast*.  
<https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-absurd-backlash-against-sheryl-sandbergs-lean-in>
  17. Hobson, B., Duvander, A.-Z., & Halldén, K. (2011). Where to draw the line?: Exploring the boundary between work and family in a male-dominated profession. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 18(6), 691-710.
  18. Anderson, K. J., & Leaper, C. (1998). Meta-analyses of gender effects on conversational interruption: Who, what, when, where, and how. *Sex Roles*, 39(3-4), 225-252.
  19. Lewis, S., & Stumbitz, B. (2017). Reproducing gender inequality in work-family balance: A discursive and interactional study of interviews with men and women managers. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 24(2), 171-188.
  20. Liebig, B., & Kron, T. (2017). In search of "authentic" and "intensive" fatherhood: East and West German experiences. *Men and Masculinities*, 20(4), 488-509.
  21. Mahalik, J. R., Burns, S. M., & Syzdek, M. R. (2007). Development of the conformity to masculine norms inventory. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 4(1), 3-25.
  22. Milner, A., Kavanagh, A., King, T., & Currier, D. (2018). The influence of masculine norms and occupational factors on mental health: Evidence from the baseline of the Australian longitudinal study on male health. *American Journal of Men's Health*, 12(4), 696-705.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1557988317752607>
  23. Morris, M. W., Hong, Y., Chiu, C., & Liu, Z. (2015). Normology: Integrating insights about social norms to understand cultural dynamics. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 129, 1-13.
  24. The Strength of Social Norms Across Human Groups. *APS*. (2017). *APS*.

- [https://6da7445f6d634d8a8fb3-542cdc35731b.filesusr.com/ugd/6df109\\_5757bd05b5ce4d07beb8a41263262434.pdf](https://6da7445f6d634d8a8fb3-542cdc35731b.filesusr.com/ugd/6df109_5757bd05b5ce4d07beb8a41263262434.pdf)
25. Lean In. (2022). The state of women at work. Lean In. <https://leanin.org/state-of-women-at-work>
26. McKinsey & Company. (2023). Women in the Workplace 2023: Designed report. [https://sgff-media.s3.amazonaws.com/sgff\\_r1eHetbDYb/Women+in+the+Workplace+2023\\_+Designed+Report.pdf](https://sgff-media.s3.amazonaws.com/sgff_r1eHetbDYb/Women+in+the+Workplace+2023_+Designed+Report.pdf)
27. Williams, J. C., Blair-Loy, M., & Berdahl, J. L. (2013). The new dad: Take your leave. *Harvard Business Review*, 91(6), 110–116.
28. Wood, W., & Eagly, A. H. (2013). Biosocial construction of sex differences and similarities in behavior. In J. M. Olson & M. P. Zanna (Eds.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (Vol. 47, pp. 55–123). Academic Press.
29. Writer, K. M. N. (2014, July 22). Women get interrupted more than men in meetings. Tech.co. <https://tech.co/news/women-get-interrupted-more-than-men-at-work-2014-07>
30. Gender bias and the pervasive interruption of women. (2019, March 1). Secured Lender. <https://www.sfnet.com/home/industry-data-publications/the-secured-lender/magazine/tsl-article-detail/gender-bias-and-the-pervasive-interruption-of-women>
31. Xia, W., & Li, L. M. W. (2023). Societal gender role beliefs moderate the pattern of gender differences in public- and private-sphere pro-environmental behaviors. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 92, 102158. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2023.102158>
32. Bhatia, A., Hallgren, E. S. T., Horanieh, N., Weber, A. M., & Darmstadt, G. L. (2022). Gender norms and gender equality in full-time employment and health: A 97-country analysis of the World Values Survey. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 689815. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.689815>
33. Kübler, D., Schmid, J., & Stüber, R. (2017). Be a man or become a nurse: Comparing gender discrimination by employers across a wide variety of professions. *Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung*.
34. Laouiti, R., Haddoud, M. Y., Nakara, W. A., & Onjewu, A.-K. E. (2022). A gender-based approach to the influence of personality traits on entrepreneurial intention. *Journal of Business Research*, 142, 819–829. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.01.018>
35. Nadim, M. (2016). Undermining the male

breadwinner ideal? Understandings of women's paid work among second-generation immigrants in Norway. *Sociology*, 50(1), 109-124. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380385145602>