

When Men Break the Gender Rules: Status Incongruity and Backlash Against Modest Men

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Adherence to masculine norms and stereotypes has been linked to negative consequences for men, suggesting that liberating men from the bonds of traditional masculinity would be beneficial (Courtenay, 2000; Pollack, 1998). However, when people deviate from stereotypic expectations, they encounter backlash (i.e., social and economic penalties; Rudman & Phelan, 2008). The current research demonstrated backlash in the form of prejudice against modest (i.e., atypical) men and supported predictions derived from the status-incongruity hypothesis (SIH) to account for backlash (Rudman, Phelan, Moss-Racusin, & Nauts, 2009). Modest men were perceived as violating men's proscriptions linked to low status (e.g., weakness and uncertainty), as well as agentic men's prescriptions linked to high status (e.g., confidence and ambition). By contrast, status-neutral communal traits were not an explanatory factor in backlash. These findings suggest that perceived status violations underscore backlash, pressuring men to conform to masculine norms and stereotypes that limit their human potential.

Keywords: gender stereotypes, gender prejudice, backlash effects, impression management

Stereotypes dictating what men and women ought (and ought not) to be function as a set of "gender rules," which powerfully shape expectations for human behavior (Eagly, 1987; Prentice & Carranza, 2002). Historically and cross-culturally, men have been stereotyped as more agentic (i.e., independent and self-focused) than women, and women as more communal (i.e., other-oriented and modest) than men (Williams & Best, 1990). Because gender stereotypes legitimize men's greater status relative to women (Eagly, 1987; Ridgeway, 2001), their negative effects on men are often overlooked. Nonetheless, pervasive masculine stereotypes demanding power displays, self-reliance, and stoicism can be harmful to men (Levant & Pollack, 1995; Pleck, 1981). Indeed, pressure to adhere to mas-

culine ideals damages men's mental and physical health (Courtenay, 2000), their social relationships (Burn & Ward, 2005), and increases men's propensity to enact physical harm through demands for aggression (Reidy, Shirk, Sloan, & Zeichner, 2009). Thus, despite their advantages, pressure to conform to gender rules is detrimental for men.

An obvious solution would be to encourage men to behave in ways that are less traditionally masculine (e.g., Kimmel, 2004; Pleck, 1981). Terms like "sensitive new age man" and "metrosexual" reflect changes in gender roles that ought to afford men more latitude for communality and less demand for agency (Edwards, 2006). However, research on dynamic stereotypes (i.e., people's future projections of gender stereotypes) suggest that men will continue to be held to a high standard of agency (and a low standard of communality) even 50 years from now (Diekman, Goodfriend, & Goodwin, 2004). More importantly, considerable research has demonstrated that individuals who violate gender stereotypes risk social and economic penalties (i.e., *backlash*; Phelan, Moss-Racusin, & Rudman, 2008; Rudman, 1998). Specifically, backlash emerges when atypical men and women are judged more negatively (e.g., as less likable and hireable) compared with identically

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behaving members of the other gender. For example, men who self-disclose their personal problems are perceived less favorably than women who do so (i.e., as psychologically unstable; Derlega & Chaiken, 1976). Thus, although stereotype conformity carries high costs for men, stereotype violation places men at risk for backlash.

This dilemma is not particular to men (women suffer from it as well), but to date, the research investigating backlash effects has focused predominately on costs for atypical women (for a review, see Rudman & Phelan, 2008). Moreover, research has yet to examine the specific gender stereotype violations responsible for backlash against atypical men. The present research addressed this gap in the literature in two ways. First, we sought to demonstrate prejudice (i.e., dislike) against atypical men who behaved modestly during a job interview. That is, because modesty (defined as having a moderate opinion of oneself, or a lack of pretentiousness) conflicts with masculine stereotypes demanding self-promotion, we predicted that modest men would be disliked and suffer hiring discrimination (i.e., be less likely to be hired) relative to modest women—hallmarks of backlash for violating gender stereotypes (Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Phelan, 2008). Second, and more importantly, we sought to account for backlash by specifying the gender rules that are culpable. Because gender stereotypes harm men as well as women, it is important to illuminate the reasons why men are penalized when they violate masculine stereotypes.

The Costs of Masculine Gender Stereotype Conformity

“Walk tall,” “Be a man,” “Don’t be a sissy”; these familiar phrases underscore the extent to which gender stereotypes generally call for men to be strong and proud (Mahalik et al., 2003; Prentice & Carranza, 2002; Prime & Moss-Racusin, 2009). That is, men are expected to be successful, powerful, and dominant (“winners”; Kimmel, 2004), show no weaknesses or chinks in the armor (Prentice & Carranza, 2002; Prime & Moss-Racusin, 2009), and avoid acting in ways that might be perceived as feminine (Berndahl, 2007; Bosson, Prewitt-Freilino, & Taylor, 2005; Prentice & Carranza, 2002). In general,

masculine stereotypes prescribe men to be “bad but bold” (Glick et al., 2004), demanding that they strive to gain and maintain the respect of others (Collinson & Hearn, 1996; Prentice & Carranza, 2002). To do so, men consistently overestimate their own abilities (Heatherington, Burns, & Gustafson, 1998) and self-promote more effectively than women (Moss-Racusin & Rudman, 2009; Rudman, 1998), underscoring the greater latitude for men’s (vs. women’s) boastfulness (Miller, Cook, Tsang, & Morgan, 1992). Although gender differences in ability estimation have been termed the “female modesty effect” (Daubman, Heatherington, & Ahn, 1992), they are also by definition the “male immodesty effect,” in that men are expected to outdo rivals and engage in one-upmanship when they compete for resources (Tannen, 1994). Thus, displays of dominance, including immodesty, are a key component of playing by the masculine gender rules.

However, conforming to gender rules has negative consequences for men. The demand for male dominance is harmful to men’s relationships (Burn & Ward, 2005), and proscriptions against men’s modesty and deference are associated with increased aggression toward women (Parrott & Zeichner, 2003; Reidy et al., 2009). Indeed, men’s mental and physical health can suffer from adhering to masculine ideals (Levant & Pollack, 1995). For example, conforming to stereotypes calling for men to be self-reliant and stoic (even in the face of difficult life events) is associated with heightened levels of depression and psychological distress (Cochran & Rabinowitz, 1999; Hayes & Mahalik, 2000; Magovcevic & Addis, 2008; Real, 2000), and promotes risky behaviors that impinge on men’s health and longevity (Courtenay, 2000; Mahalik, Lagan, & Morrison, 2006; Pleck, 1981). Taken together, these findings suggest that men suffer when they conform to masculine stereotypes.

Backlash for Stereotype Violations

Despite the high costs of adhering to masculine stereotypes, stereotype violation is associated with its own set of risks (Rudman & Phelan, 2008). For men, backlash effects have been underinvestigated, but some evidence suggests that, relative to comparable women, they are penalized for passiveness (Costrich, Feinstein, Kidder, Maracek,

& Pascale, 1975), emotional self-disclosure (Derlega & Chaiken, 1976), and achieving success in feminine domains (Cherry & Deaux, 1978; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). Given that modesty is associated with women (Heatherington et al., 1998), it should incur penalties for men because acting “macho” is a key component of men’s professional power (Collinson & Hearn, 1996). Indeed, men who act modestly may be viewed as weak, and in turn experience ostracism in the workplace for not behaving like “one of the boys” (Berdahl, 2007). It therefore seems likely that men tend to behave immodestly because to do otherwise risks social and economic penalties.

To date, considerably more research has focused on backlash against atypical women than men, likely because backlash interferes with women’s professional success and is thus an obvious impediment to gender equality (Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004; Phelan et al., 2008; Rudman & Phelan, 2008). A large body of research has demonstrated that women striving for leadership roles suffer backlash when they violate gender stereotypes by exhibiting agency (e.g., Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992; Gill, 2004; Heilman et al., 2004; Phelan et al., 2008; Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Glick, 1999, 2001). Because agency is required of leaders, women face a Catch-22; they are viewed as unqualified to lead if they do not break the gender rules, but risk backlash when they do (Eagly & Karau, 2002). As reviewed below, progress has been made toward understanding the mechanisms responsible for backlash against atypical women. By comparison, research has yet to investigate the underpinnings of backlash against atypical men.

The Status Incongruity Hypothesis (SIH)

To determine the gender stereotypes that promote backlash, it is useful to distinguish between *prescriptive* rules dictating what men and women ought to be (i.e., agentic and communal, respectively; Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000) and *proscriptive* rules delineating what men and women ought *not* be (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). For example, women are allowed to be weak, whereas this trait is strongly proscribed (i.e., viewed as unacceptable) for men; by contrast, dominance is reserved for men and prohibited for women

(Rudman et al., 2009). Thus, gender stereotypes are comprised of four sets of rules, and expectations for behavior consist of both the *shoulds* (prescriptions) and the *should nots* (proscriptions) for each gender.

It is critical to determine which type of stereotype violations result in backlash. That is, to understand the processes responsible for backlash, it is necessary to clarify whether atypical men are penalized for violating men’s prescriptions, proscriptions, or both. Previous work on the SIH provides a theoretical framework for approaching this novel question. The SIH posits that defending the status quo provides a strong motivation for backlash; as a result, people who violate stereotypes that justify the gender hierarchy should be most at risk for backlash (Rudman et al., 2009). To test this hypothesis, Rudman et al. focused on backlash against women striving to be leaders (i.e., agentic women). They first determined that women’s proscriptions (e.g., dominant and intimidating) were aligned with high status, whereas men’s proscriptions (e.g., weak and insecure) were aligned with low status. Men’s prescriptions (e.g., confidence and leadership ability) were strongly linked to high status; they consisted entirely of agentic traits expected of leaders. However, women’s communality prescriptions (e.g., supportive and friendly) were neutral with respect to status. According to the SIH, agentic women should be penalized for violating status-linked women’s proscriptions (breaking the dominance rule) rather than violating women’s prescriptions, which are unaligned with status and thus, not threatening to the gender hierarchy.

Results from four experiments supported the SIH hypothesis. Specifically, as in prior research, agentic women were disliked relative to agentic men (i.e., they suffered backlash), but they were also perceived to be more dominant, intimidating, and arrogant than agentic men. More important, violating women’s proscriptions mediated (i.e., explained) backlash. That is, after controlling for dominance perceptions, backlash was reduced to nonsignificance, suggesting that agentic women are not liked because they are perceived to be “too powerful” (for a woman). By contrast, they were not viewed as less communal than agentic men, ruling out women’s prescriptions as a mediator of backlash. This finding supports the SIH

because women's communality prescriptions are neutral with respect to status and thus, were not expected to underscore backlash. However, because atypical male targets were not included in these studies, the specific set of gender rules responsible for backlash against men remains unknown.

Overview of the Current Research

The current research employed the SIH to predict that backlash against modest men stems from perceived violations of both men's prescriptions and proscriptions. As noted (and in contrast to women), both men's prescriptions and proscriptions are highly related to status (Rudman et al., 2009). According to the SIH, a modest man should be disliked because he violates (a) the high status prescriptions men are charged with upholding (e.g., confidence, ambition, and leadership ability) and (b) the low status proscriptions that men must avoid (e.g., weakness, insecurity, and uncertainty). Therefore, to support the SIH, backlash against modest men (relative to modest women) should be accounted for by both men's prescriptions and proscriptions. That is, modest men should experience backlash in the form of dislike and hiring discrimination relative to modest women, and these gender differences should be mediated by perceptions of insufficient men's prescriptive traits and excessive men's proscriptive traits.

However, if modest men are viewed as "too communal" (for a man), they should be overcharged with women's prescriptive traits (e.g., warm, supportive, and friendly) relative to modest women, and these communal traits should mediate backlash effects. Because communal traits are neutral with respect to status, this result would contradict the SIH. Therefore, it was important to the discriminant validity of the SIH that all four gender rules be included, in order to be assessed as mediators of the expected gender differences in likability and hirability. The fourth set, women's proscriptions (e.g., dominant, intimidating, and arrogant), were not expected to play a role in backlash against modest men because they are the antithesis of modesty, and thus, all applicants should score particularly low on these traits. Specific hypotheses were as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Modest men will experience social and economic backlash (i.e., be viewed as less likable and less hireable than modest women).

Hypothesis 2: Modest men will be viewed as weaker (possessing excessive men's proscribed traits) and less agentic (possessing insufficient men's proscribed traits), compared with modest women.

Hypothesis 3: Perceived violations of both men's proscriptive and prescriptive stereotypes will account for (i.e., reliably mediate) backlash against modest men. That is, modest men will experience backlash *because* they are viewed as excessively weak and insufficiently agentic.

Hypothesis 4: Perceived violations of women's proscriptive and prescriptive traits should not play a role in backlash against modest men (i.e., they should show no gender differences and therefore, be ineligible as mediators of backlash).

Method

Participants

A total of 232 (132 female, 100 male) students (M age = 20.00) participated in exchange for partial credit toward their introductory psychology course requirement. Of these, 134 (58%) were White, 52 (22%) were Asian, 15 (7%) were Hispanic, 14 (6%) were Black, 7 (3%) were Multiracial, and the remaining 10 participants (4%) reported another ethnic background.

Materials

Interview tapes. Participants viewed videotaped interviews (approximately 15 min in length) of either a male or female confederate (i.e., paid actor) posing as an applicant ostensibly being considered for a computer lab manager position. To enhance perceptions that the job was gender-neutral, the position was described as requiring both strong technical abilities (to maintain the computers) as well as excellent social skills (to interact with and assist users). The script, developed by the coauthors in concert with confederates and the IT expert in the psychology department, included 10 questions likely to be

asked during an interview (e.g., “What kind of leadership skills would you bring to the job?” and “How do you propose to keep up-to-date with technological advances?”), and the applicants’ responses were designed to be competent but modest (see the Appendix). For example, in response to the question, “What are your technical skills?” applicants answered:

Well, I’ve taken several computer classes where we wrote programs using most of the major languages. And I’m familiar with Windows and Mac operating systems. I’m also pretty experienced using Windows programs. I think I’m pretty good at identifying computer problems and troubleshooting. Most of the time people have printer problems and those aren’t too hard to fix. So I think I’ve got some pretty good technical skills to offer.

The text of each question was presented on-screen before each response, so that participants would not be influenced by the interviewers’ characteristics (e.g., gender and attractiveness).

Confederates. Two male and two female graduate student confederates were trained to enact identical responses to the interview questions. Confederates were chosen to be similar in attractiveness based on the opinion of the authors and confirmed by the assessments of other graduate and undergraduate assistants. Two training sessions were conducted to ensure that the confederates delivered their lines as identically as possible and displayed similar nonverbal behaviors (e.g., smiling and eye-gaze). During these training sessions, the confederates practiced their lines together until a team of observing researchers (including the authors and other graduate and undergraduate assistants) agreed that their approach was standardized (i.e., reflecting both competence and modesty). Once training was complete, filming took place before an off-camera laptop displaying the script in order to avoid memorization and impaired line delivery.

Applicant competence. Participants responded to seven items assessing applicants’ competence on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*very much*). To match the job description, items pertained to both the technical (e.g., “Did the applicant strike you as competent?” and “How likely is it that the applicant has significant technical skills for this job?”) and social (e.g., “Is the applicant willing to listen to and support clients?” and “How likely is it that users would feel comfortable seeking help from

the applicant?”) qualifications of the job. Items were averaged to form the competence index ($\alpha = .77$).

Applicant liking. Using the same scale, participants responded to three items assessing applicant likability (i.e., social penalties). These were, “How much did you like the applicant?”; “Would you characterize this person as someone you want to get to know better?” and “How popular would the applicant be with colleagues?” Items were averaged to form the liking index ($\alpha = .74$).

Applicant hirability. To assess hirability (i.e., economic penalties), participants responded to three items using the same scale. The items were, “How much would you like to personally interview the applicant?”; “How likely would you be to hire the applicant?” and “How likely is it that the applicant will get the job?” Responses were averaged to form the hirability index ($\alpha = .93$).

Stereotypic trait indexes. To test the SIH, participants also rated the applicants on men’s and women’s prescriptive and proscriptive stereotypic traits drawn from previous research (Rudman et al., 2009). Participants were asked, “How much does this trait characterize the applicant?” and responses were indicated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*very much*). The men’s prescribed traits were *confident*, *strong leader*, *ambitious*, *independent*, *intelligent*, and *competitive* ($\alpha = .86$). The women’s prescriptions were *cooperative*, *supportive*, *friendly*, *warm*, and *sensitive to the needs of others*, ($\alpha = .84$). The men’s proscriptions were *weak*, *insecure*, *spineless*, *indecisive*, and *uncertain* ($\alpha = .77$). Finally, women’s proscriptions were *dominating*, *intimidating*, *arrogant*, *self-centered*, *cold toward others*, and *selfish* ($\alpha = .77$). The stereotype indexes were originally derived from results of a survey asking participants to rate how desirable it is in American society for a woman or man to possess various traits (Rudman et al., 2009). A factor analysis showed that each index reflected a single component (accounting for more than 50% of the variance and with all factor loadings greater than .52).

Confederate credibility. To test the effectiveness of confederates’ training, we included a measure of how credible participants found them to be during the interview. Using the same scale, participants rated the confederates’ *sincerity* and

honesty, which were averaged to form the credibility index, $r(232) = .58, p < .001$.

Procedure

Participants were brought into the lab to participate in an "Interview Skills" project, and completed the study in individual cubicles. They were told they would evaluate videotaped job applicants (in reality, the interview tapes of the paid confederate actors) for a computer lab manager position. Participants were then randomly assigned to view the tape of either a male or female applicant. After watching the interview, the experimenter started a desktop computer program that administered all measures. Participants rated the applicant's competence, liking, and hirability (in that order). Next, they completed the stereotypic trait indexes and credibility index (presented in random order). Items within each measure were randomly presented by the computer program. Finally, participants were fully debriefed as to the purpose of the study and awarded academic credit.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

To ensure that confederates' training was successful, we analyzed the credibility index in a 4 (confederate) \times 2 (participant gender) analysis of variance (ANOVA). No main effects or interactions emerged, all $F_s(3, 224) < 1.00, ns$, indicating that the confederates were viewed as

equally believable. A similar analysis showed that confederates were perceived to be equally friendly, all $F_s(3, 224) < 1.81, ps > .18$.

To examine possible effects of participant race, it was necessary to collapse across minority groups because there were not enough participants from several ethnic groups to examine them individually. We then conducted 2 (applicant gender) \times 2 (participant gender) \times 2 (participant race: White, non-White) ANOVAs on each of the dependent variables. No significant main or interaction effects emerged, all $ps > .08$. Therefore, we collapsed across participant race for our focal analyses.

Backlash Against Modest Men

To determine whether stereotype-violating modest men incur backlash, we submitted the competence, liking, and hirability indexes to separate 2 (applicant gender) \times 2 (participant gender) ANOVAs. The top half of Table 1 shows the results. No differences emerged for competence (all $ps > .29$), suggesting that modest men and women were viewed as similarly qualified. Supporting hypothesis 1, a significant main effect of applicant gender emerged for liking, $F(1, 228) = 17.46, p < .001$. As expected, male applicants were liked less than female applicants, resulting in a moderately large effect size for social backlash ($d = .52$). In contrast, no significant main or interaction effects emerged for hirability, all $F_s(1, 228) < 4.98, ps > .07$, indicating that modest men were not discriminated against relative to

Table 1
Evaluations of Male and Female Computer Lab Manager Applicants

	Male		Female		Sex difference	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
Competence	3.50	.74	3.57	.79	.72	.09
Liking	3.11	1.01	3.61	.91	3.97***	.52
Hirability	3.18	1.18	3.31	1.24	.82	.11
Stereotypes						
Men's prescribed	2.96	.93	3.32	.91	3.00**	.39
Women's prescribed	4.73	.85	4.73	.76	.05	.00
Men's proscribed	3.61	1.16	3.16	.99	3.17**	-.42
Women's proscribed	1.74	.77	1.76	.71	.15	.03

Note. Effect sizes (Cohen's *d*) represent applicant gender differences. Positive effect sizes favor female applicants; negative effect sizes favor male applicants. Conventional small, medium, and large effect sizes for *d* are .20, .50, and .80, respectively (Cohen, 1988).

** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

modest women. Nonetheless, liking was strongly related to hiring recommendations for both female applicants, $r(117) = .43, p < .001$, and male applicants, $r(111) = .62, p < .001$. Therefore, it is important to illuminate why modest men were liked less than modest women. Because hypothesis 1 was only partially supported, we employed the SIH to account for social backlash (i.e., prejudice against modest men). Finally, in keeping with past research, no significant effects were associated with participant gender (all $ps > .07$), suggesting that men and women were equally likely to exhibit backlash against modest men (see Rudman & Phelan, 2008, for a review).

Testing the Status Incongruity Hypothesis for Men

To examine support for the SIH, we submitted the four stereotypic trait indexes to separate 2 (applicant gender) \times 2 (participant gender) ANOVAs. Table 1 (bottom half) displays the results. Supporting hypothesis 2, an applicant gender main effect emerged for men's prescriptive traits, $F(1, 228) = 6.73, p < .01$, such that modest men were rated lower than modest women on high status, agentic traits (e.g., leadership ability, ambition, and confidence). There was also the predicted applicant gender main effect for men's proscriptive traits, $F(1, 228) = 12.81, p < .01$, such that male applicants were rated higher than female applicants on low status traits (e.g., weak, uncertain, and

insecure). Thus, modest men were viewed as both insufficiently agentic and excessively weak, as predicted by Hypothesis 2. These results support the SIH because men's prescriptions and proscriptions are linked to high and low status, respectively. Providing discriminant validity and supporting hypothesis 4, there were no reliable effects for status-neutral women's prescriptions (e.g., warm and supportive; all $ps > .23$). Thus, modest men were not viewed as more communal than modest women, but neither are these traits linked to status. Not surprisingly, there were also no reliable effects for women's proscriptive traits (e.g., dominance and arrogance; all $ps > .56$). Modest targets were rated particularly low on this index, irrespective of gender. Finally, no main or interaction effects emerged for participant gender (all $ps > .19$).

Mediation analyses. The SIH predicts that prejudice against modest men should be accounted for by violations of men's proscriptions and prescriptions (hypothesis 3). Coding applicant sex such that 0 = *male* and 1 = *female*, we standardized all other variables and then used a series of regressions to test this prediction (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Frazier, Tix, & Baron, 2004). A pattern of support for the hypothesized mediation effect of men's proscriptions on liking was shown (see Table 2, Model 1): (a) In Step 1, applicant gender predicted liking, $\beta = .25, p < .001$, such that women were liked more than men; (b) in Step 2, the applicant gender regression coefficient was reduced to $\beta = .17$,

Table 2
Mediation Analyses Predicting Applicant Liking

Model	Step	β	t	ΔR^2	Z
1. Proscribed trait mediation					
Applicant gender	1	.25	3.96***	.06***	
Applicant gender	2	.17	2.88**		
Men's Proscribed Trait Index	2	-.39	6.45***	.15***	2.61**
2. Prescribed trait mediation					
Applicant gender	1	.25	3.96***	.06***	
Applicant gender	2	.17	2.85**		
Men's Prescribed Trait Index	2	.45	7.80***	.20***	2.55**
3. Comparing predictors for men					
Men's Prescribed Trait Index	1	.48	5.84***	.24***	
Men's Prescribed Trait Index	2	.36	3.57**		
Men's Proscribed Trait Index	2	-.23	2.26*	.03*	

Note. Applicant gender was coded 0 (*male*) and 1 (*female*). Regression coefficients are standardized. The last column shows Sobel's (1988) Z test for significant mediation.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

$p < .01$, and the effect of men's proscriptions on liking was significant, $\beta = -.39$, $p < .001$ (i.e., applicants were not liked to the extent they were viewed as weak and insecure). Critically, Sobel's (1982) test for the significance of the mediation effect was reliable, $Z = 2.61$, $p < .01$. Because men were viewed as weaker than women (see Table 1's men's proscription index), this suggests that modest men were not liked as much as modest women because they were viewed as "too weak" (for a man). Finally, the model explained a significant amount of the variance in applicant liking, $F(1, 228) = 30.03$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .21$. These findings are consistent with hypothesis 3 because prejudice against modest men was significantly accounted for by perceptions that violate men's proscriptions.

We followed the same procedure to test men's prescriptions as a mediator of social backlash (see Table 2, Model 2). In accord with hypothesis 3, men's prescriptions proved to be a reliable mediator of the link between applicant gender and liking $Z = 2.55$, $p < .01$. Model 2 also explained a significant amount of the variance in applicant liking, $F(1, 228) = 40.31$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .26$. Because men were judged to be significantly less agentic than women (see Table 1's men's prescription index), this suggests that modest men were not liked as much as modest women because they were viewed as insufficiently confident and ambitious.

Finally, the correlation between men's prescriptions and proscriptions was robustly negative, $r(232) = -.63$, $p < .001$. Therefore, it was important to establish the incremental validity of the masculine stereotype indexes as predictors of liking modest men. Table 2's Model 3 reveals that, for male applicants, both stereotype indexes were significant predictors of liking (i.e., both prescriptions and proscriptions added unique variance). Moreover, the model explained a significant amount of variance, $F(1, 109) = 20.22$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .27$.

In concert, Table 2's mediation results support the SIH by showing that men suffer backlash when they are perceived to violate masculine stereotypes that legitimize the gender hierarchy. Because women's proscriptions and prescriptions did not show applicant gender differences, they could not be tested as potential mediators (in keeping with hypothesis 4). Thus, modest men were not punished for being "too communal,"

but neither are communality prescriptions linked to status (Rudman et al., 2009). Instead, the findings suggest that status-related gender stereotypes are key to understanding why counterstereotypical men are at risk for backlash. To prevent being disliked, men may be required to both exhibit agency (the high status traits associated with leaders) and to avoid any signs of weakness associated with low status people.

Discussion

Although masculine stereotypes legitimize men's cultural status, their demands on men are unrealistic (Pleck, 1981), and conforming to gender rules harms men and their relationships (e.g., Burn & Ward, 2005; Levant & Pollack, 1995; Pollack, 1998). Changes in gender roles that have afforded women more financial independence have not yielded relaxed demands for men. That is, men are still required to uphold masculine ideals that require chronic exhibitions of strength while avoiding signs of weakness (Prentice & Carranza, 2002; Rudman et al., 2009). As a result, atypical men are at risk for backlash—a phenomenon that reinforces the gender rules and prevents men and women from realizing their full human potential (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004).

Although past research on backlash has focused on reactions to agentic women, it is equally important to investigate the underpinnings of negative reactions to atypical men, illuminating how gender rules force men to conform to (sometimes detrimental) masculine norms and contribute to the gender status quo. To that end, the present research served as an initial test of the SIH when predicting backlash against atypical men. Specifically, we investigated penalties for men's modesty, because displays of dominance (including immodesty) are not only more acceptable in men (Daubman et al., 1992; Heatherington et al., 1998; Miller et al., 1992; Rudman, 1998), they are likely to be *required*, at least in professional settings where men are expected to behave assertively and competitively (e.g., to outdo rivals; Tannen, 1994). As expected, modest men applying for a managerial job suffered prejudice relative to identically modest women (i.e., they were disliked).

More importantly, this effect was reliably mediated by perceptions that they violated men's proscriptions that are aligned with low status (e.g., weakness and uncertainty)—qualities that are prohibited for men but acceptable in women. Furthermore, it was reliably mediated by perceptions that modest men violated men's prescriptions that are strongly linked to high status (e.g., confidence and ambition)—agentic qualities that characterize leaders. Thus, modest men suffered backlash because men are obliged to engage in status-enhancing displays, whereas they are penalized for status-attenuating behavior. By contrast, women's prescriptions played no role in backlash against modest men. Because communality rules are status-neutral, these findings provide discriminant validity for the SIH. Had modest men been overcharged with being "too nice" (for a man), results would have contradicted the SIH because women's prescriptions do not justify the gender hierarchy.

We also predicted that modest male applicants would suffer hiring discrimination, because agentic women suffer economic as well as social backlash (Rudman & Phelan, 2008). However, we found no gender differences in applicants' hiring recommendations, although liking and hiring were positively related. Although we can only speculate, it is possible that this finding represents an inconsistency between backlash directed against atypical men and women. Perhaps because men's status is higher than women's, atypical men are afforded a "benefit of the doubt" and are not as likely to encounter hiring discrimination as atypical women. Thus, it is possible that backlash against atypical men encompasses prejudice (dislike), but stops short of actual discrimination (hiring). However, this remains a question for a future research, which should continue to examine reactions to atypical men in a variety of domains.

Future research should also investigate moderators of backlash against modest men. For example, men who temper their modesty with displays of agency might avoid being penalized, much as women who temper their agency with low dominance are less at risk (Rudman & Glick, 2001). Moreover, individuals who endorse the gender status quo should be most likely to use status-related stereotypes to justify backlash (Rudman et al., 2009). Thus, future

investigations should investigate ways that men can avoid backlash, as well as individual differences in the propensity to administer it. Finally, our research employed college students. Although a recent review found that backlash against agentic women generalizes to working professionals (e.g., managers; Rudman & Phelan, 2008), researchers should ensure that this is also the case for atypical men by including older adults in future studies.

In sum, our findings demonstrate that men encounter prejudice when they behave atypically, and raise the possibility that men may avoid behaving modestly because they risk backlash for stereotype violation when they do. In support of the SIH, perceived violations of both men's proscriptive and prescriptive traits helped to explain backlash against atypical men. Because these gender rules are linked to status, behaviors that challenge the gender hierarchy may be censured in men, as well as women. In essence, gender rules reinforce gender power differences by constraining men to behave in ways consistent with high status people while prohibiting women from high status displays. Although past research has focused largely on stereotype-violating women, because men are also punished when they break the gender rules, it is critical to understand why counterstereotypical behavior in both genders elicits negative reactions. Indeed, in light of the high costs of conforming to masculine stereotypes, alleviating backlash would loosen the restrictions placed on men, allowing individuals to play by their own set of rules.

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Appendix

Sample Questions and Responses From Applicant Scripts

Q1: What are your technical skills?

Response. Well, I've taken several computer classes where we wrote programs using most of the major languages. And I'm familiar with Windows and Mac operating systems. I'm also pretty experienced using Windows programs. I think I'm pretty good at identifying computer problems and troubleshooting. Most of the time people have printer problems and those aren't too hard to fix. So I think I've got some pretty good technical skills to offer.

Q2: How do you propose to keep up to date with technological advances?

Response. Well, I know the local community college offers courses. That's the way I first got interested in this field, taking a web-design course there. They have some really good professors. And I'm certain your company offers tech-related courses or seminars to all your employees. So I'd do my best to take every opportunity that comes along to keep up on the latest technology.

Q3: Are you the kind of person who performs well under pressure?

Response. Well, pressure certainly isn't my favorite thing. Maybe it's necessary sometimes, but if it's not, then I don't go out of my way to put any extra pressure on myself. I remember in college I was the editor of the

school paper and it kind of got to me having to face a deadline all the time. I guess I like writing best when I have a lot of time to develop my ideas.

Q4: Are you a good self-starter? Describe an example where you took the initiative on a project.

Response. Sure, I'd consider myself a self-starter, but first I like to know that I'm going in the right direction. Give an example? Well, one summer I designed a website for the bookstore I was working at. They were a small, independent store, and I thought a website could help their business. I suggested it to my boss and she was interested, so we brainstormed some ideas and I asked the other employees and some of the customers what they'd like to see in a website. In the end, I think it turned out pretty well.

Q5: What kind of salary to do you expect?

Response. Well, if I should be lucky enough get the position, I'm sure you'd offer me a fair wage. You know, whatever the going rate is for someone with my skills and experience.

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