

Paying a Price for Domestic Equality: Risk Factors for Backlash Against Nontraditional Husbands

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Abstract For the sake of gender equality, it is vital to determine why husbands who relieve their wives' domestic burden are stigmatized as “unmanly” (Brescoll and Uhlmann in *Psychol Women Q* 29(4):436–445, 2005; Rudman and Mescher in *J Soc Issues* 69(2):322–340, 2013). We used biographical vignettes to examine whether masculinity penalties stem from not earning income (a male prescription) or performing domestic labor (“acting like women”). In Experiment 1, we held husbands' domestic labor constant but manipulated how much income they earned from home; in Experiment 2, we held husbands' earnings constant but varied their domestic labor. In Experiment 1, only low-income husbands were stigmatized (e.g., viewed as weaker than comparable wives); successful husbands working from home were spared penalties. In Experiment 2, husbands who performed 50 or 30% of the domestic labor were viewed similarly and more favorably than husbands who did 70%. Thus, across two experiments, men can relieve women's domestic burden without penalty provided they also earn some income and do not shoulder domestic inequality themselves. These findings are optimistic for domestic and gender equality.

Keywords Backlash theory · Social role theory · Gender stereotypes · Close relationships

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Introduction

Women in the US now earn more advanced degrees than men [14], comprise 48% of the workforce [7], and 40% are their families' primary breadwinner [27]. Yet, even full-time working wives continue to perform the majority of domestic labor (childcare and housework) [23], an added workload that has been termed the "second shift" [17]. Unfortunately, the prognosis for a reprieve of the "second shift" is grim [3, 12, 25]. Compared with the past, women perceive themselves as more agentic (e.g., independent, career-oriented), but they continue to view themselves as more communal than men, who have shown no rise in communality [38–40]. Thus, while women have embraced agency to succeed in the workforce, men have not adopted communality to herald a substantially increased domestic role.

Nonetheless, there are signs of change. Compared with the past, men have increased their domestic responsibilities [24] and thus, report more work-family conflict [10]. Further, young adults prefer egalitarian to traditional marriages [15], and both men and women in egalitarian unions report more relationship stability and satisfaction [9, 33]. However, despite the benefits of domestic equality, achieving it remains challenging. In two studies, we examined men's risk factors for suffering backlash, defined as social and economic penalties for behaviors that challenge the status quo [34]. The overarching goal was to discern whether nontraditional husbands are penalized for performing domestic labor, for failing to earn income, or both.

Violating Gender Rules Evokes Backlash

Gender stereotypes are not merely descriptive, but also rules that dictate how men and women should act (prescriptions) and ought not to act (proscriptions). Social role theory posits that gender rules stem from the traditional division of labor, with men serving as breadwinners and women as caretakers [11]. Therefore, men are prescribed to be agentic (e.g., confident and ambitious) and prohibited from weakness (e.g., weak and indecisive) to promote masculine career success, whereas women are prescribed to be communal (e.g., warm and kind) and prohibited from dominance (e.g., controlling and arrogant) to promote feminine nurturing [11, 26, 35]. As a result, gender rules function to preserve the gender hierarchy by funneling men into high status roles and women into low status roles [29]. Notably, agency and dominance are high status characteristics, whereas weakness is low in status [35]. Therefore, when a man is judged as weak or low in agency, or a woman is seen as dominant, the inference is that their behavior threatens the gender status quo [34, 35].

According to backlash theory, gender vanguards are people who violate gender rules in ways that threaten the gender hierarchy, which incurs backlash [34]. In other words, backlash does not occur arbitrarily; it functions to maintain the status quo. For example, to justify why they should not be hired, agentic female leaders are viewed as more dominant than male counterparts [35], and communal male leaders

are seen as weaker and less agentic than female counterparts [4, 21]. Men also risk a weakness penalty when they endorse feminism [36] or excel in female-dominated occupations [16]. Notably, communality is status-neutral and not proscribed for men [35]. Thus, in theory, men can be family-oriented provided they do not display behaviors that challenge the gender status quo. As we describe next, there is considerable evidence that men invested in their families are at risk for backlash, but whether it stems from performing domestic labor (“women’s work”) or from failing to earn income is unknown.

The Role of Backlash in Domestic Inequality

Because working wives are burdened by domestic inequality, it is important to investigate reactions to men who alleviate it. Backlash effects emerge in two main ways. The first concerns gender double standards, whereby identical behaviors are punished more for one gender than the other. For example, compared with stay-at-home mothers, stay-at-home fathers were evaluated more negatively [5] and undergraduate men who displayed child-raising expertise were sabotaged by their peers (i.e., given less helpful clues when completing an anagram task, on which high scorers would earn money) more than comparable women [31]. Further, men who take advantage of laws designed to protect working caregivers risk backlash. For instance, men who asked for family leave were judged more negatively (e.g., viewed as less committed to their work and less eligible for rewards) than women making the same request [1, 43]. In addition, male workers experiencing a work-family conflict received lower performance ratings and reward recommendations than female counterparts [8].

Backlash may also emerge as a nonconformity tax, whereby gender vanguards are penalized more than traditional, same gender counterparts. For example, relative to traditional male workers, men who sought flexible work arrangements after the birth of a child received poorer job evaluations [42], and men who requested family leave to care for a sick daughter were at higher risk for career penalties (e.g., salary reduction and job termination) [32]. Finally, in survey research, fathers who spent more time caring for their children suffered higher rates of masculinity harassment (i.e., being taunted as “unmanly”) in the workplace, compared with traditional fathers and single men [2]. Thus, relative to traditional men or comparable women, men who perform domestic labor are penalized, suggesting that nontraditional husbands experience both forms of backlash.

Undoubtedly, progress towards domestic equality will remain stagnated unless men are able to relieve women of the second shift without penalty [12]. Unknown, however, is whether men are punished for failing to earn income (a male prescription) or for performing domestic labor (a female prescription). It could be both, due to the perceived nature of work-family conflict, whereby domestic responsibilities are assumed to result in less devotion to earning power (and vice versa; e.g., career women are presumed to have less time for their children than full-time mothers [19, 41]). To discern whether husbands who promote domestic equality are penalized for failing to earn income, or for performing women’s work (or both), we conducted two experiments.

In Experiment 1, we manipulated earnings (while holding domestic labor constant) for husbands who work from home. If domestic labor is a risk factor, then stay-at-home husbands should be punished regardless of their income, but if earning income protects men from backlash, they should only be penalized when they work from home unsuccessfully (i.e., do not have financial success). In Experiment 2, we manipulated domestic labor (while holding earnings constant). If domestic labor is a risk factor for backlash, then husbands who perform 50% of the housework and childcare should be penalized (1) more than traditional husbands (who perform the minority of the domestic labor), and (2) to the same extent as husbands who perform the majority of domestic labor. However, if earning income protects men from backlash, then husbands who perform 50% of the domestic labor should be spared backlash (i.e., they should not be penalized relative to the other two conditions).

Experiment 1

In Experiment 1, participants read biographical scripts in which one spouse worked from home, while the other earned a substantial salary in the workplace. Domestic labor was held constant while the financial success of the spouse who worked from home was manipulated. The key comparison groups were husbands and wives who worked from home to capture backlash in the form of gender double standards.

Spouses were rated on the four gender rules (agency, communality, dominance, and weakness). Because penalties for gender vanguards emerge on status-relevant rules, for men, this results in being judged as (1) higher on weakness (low status attribute proscribed for men), and (2) lower on agency (a high status attribute proscribed for men), compared with comparable women [34]. We did not expect nontraditional husbands to be judged as “too nice” because communality is status-neutral and not a male gender rule [34, 35].

Hypothesis 1 If men’s failure to earn income is a risk factor for backlash, husbands should only be penalized more than comparable wives when they unsuccessfully work from home, not when they are successful. Specifically, unsuccessful husbands should be perceived as higher in weakness but lower in agency, compared with unsuccessful wives.

Hypothesis 2 If domestic labor is a risk factor for backlash, husbands working from home should be penalized more than wives (i.e., as higher in weakness and lower in agency) *regardless of earned income*.

Hypothesis 3 Communality should not differ for husbands and wives working from home, regardless of earned income.

Finally, to address alternative explanations for backlash, we measured domestic spouses’ parenting quality and career motivation. In addition, participants estimated how much childcare spouses performed to ensure it was not higher for domestic husbands than wives. In that event, backlash against unsuccessful domestic

husbands would be attributable to their unpaid childcare labor (H2), rather than to not earning income (H1).

Method

Participants

Participants were 274 (180 female) Amazon Mechanical Turk workers, an online marketplace for research with a demographically diverse participant pool, who participated for a monetary compensation of \$.30, a common wage for brief research in this participant pool [6]. Amazon Mechanical Turk participants provide quality data and are diverse with respect to age, gender, and income [6, 30]. Their age ranged from 18 to 74 years ($M_{\text{age}} = 34.68$, $SD = 12.38$). The majority (206) were White (75%); 24 were African American (9%), 16 were Asian (6%), and 14 were Hispanic (5%). The remaining 17 participants (6%) identified as multiracial or “other”. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study and all procedures and materials were approved by the Rutgers IRB.

Materials and Procedure

To increase generality, all participants read about two couples with the same work dynamics (see “Appendix A”). Depending on random assignment, either the wife or the husband worked successfully outside the home as a lawyer (Couple 1) or an investment banker (Couple 2). Their income enabled their spouses to quit their job to pursue a more desirable career after the birth of their first child; the switch was from insurance agent to day trader (Couple 1), or from lawyer to writer (Couple 2). Investment banker and lawyer were selected as high-status careers that would allow the couple to hire a nanny for six hours a day, affording the spouse who worked from home time to pursue their new career. Day trader and writer were selected as careers that could be plausibly manipulated to produce high or low income while working from home. Depending on random assignment, participants were informed that, for example, the day trader “has not had much success” or “has been very successful”.

Participants rated each spouse after reading about each couple using their names (designated as “X” below). Order of couple was randomized across participants, as was ordering of which spouse was rated first. After completing the measures in the order described below and providing demographics, participants were debriefed and compensated.

Dependent Measures

Manipulation Check

As a check on career success, participants responded to the item, “X has a successful career” on a scale from 1 (*Extremely Unlikely*) to 7 (*Extremely Likely*).

Gender Rules

Using the same scale, participants rated each spouse on the four gender rules (agency, weakness, communality, and dominance), obtained using the prompt, “How likely is it that X is...?” Communal items (*warm*, *friendly*, and *kind*) were averaged ($\alpha = .90$), as were agency items (*ambitious*, *confident*, and *intelligent*; $\alpha = .87$), weakness items (*weak*, *indecisive*, and *naïve*; $\alpha = .88$), and dominance items (*dominant*, *assertive*, and *pushy*; $\alpha = .74$). Items were derived from Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan et al. [35].

Other Measures

Using the same scale, participants rated each spouse’s (1) parental quality on two items, “X is a good parent” and “X is a caring parent” and (2) career motivation, “X is committed to his [her] career” and “X is hardworking”. These items were averaged to form the parental quality ($r = .76$, $p < .001$) and career motivation ($r = .69$, $p < .001$) indexes. Additionally, participants estimated the percentage of childcare each spouse did, ranging from 0 to 100%.

Results and Discussion

Within subject ratings of husbands and wives in Couple 1 and Couple 2 were significantly correlated on all variables (for husbands, all $r_s > .60$ and $< .72$, all $p_s < .001$, $Mr = .68$; for wives, all $r_s > .59$ and $< .68$, all $p_s < .001$, $Mr = .64$), so we collapsed participants’ responses across couple. The analytic design was a 2 (Spouse at Home: Husband, Wife) \times 2 (Home Success: Yes, No) \times 2 (Target Gender) \times 2 (Participant Gender) mixed factorial, with repeated measures on target gender. We submitted each variable to a mixed ANOVA analysis, accompanied by planned comparisons between husbands and wives working from home to test our focal hypotheses. Because our main focus was backlash in the form of gender double standards, we present these findings in the text. To simplify presentation of results, within gender comparisons (e.g., comparing husbands who worked from home to those in the workplace) are included in the supplementary materials. Descriptive statistics for ratings of spouses working from home on the four gender rules are shown in Table 1.

Manipulation Check

Analyses for perceived success revealed only a main effect of Home Success, $F(1, 266) = 137.80$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.44$, such that unsuccessful spouses working from home were rated as less successful ($M = 4.72$, $SD = .07$) than successful spouses working from home ($M = 5.82$, $SD = .07$), regardless of gender.

Table 1 Means (SD) for gender rules (Experiment 1)

Index	Spouse at home	
	Successful?	
	No	Yes
Weak		
Husbands	3.66 (1.01)	2.98 (1.24)
Wives	3.30 (.99)	2.62 (1.00)
Agentic		
Husbands	4.75 (.97)	5.41 (.95)
Wives	5.29 (.75)	5.69 (.75)
Dominant		
Husbands	3.42 (.90)	4.05 (.76)
Wives	3.95 (.72)	4.16 (.80)
Communal		
Husbands	4.87 (1.02)	5.15 (.92)
Wives	4.91 (.88)	5.16 (.86)

Column means in bold differ (all p s < .05)

Backlash Against Nontraditional Husbands

Weakness Penalty

The weakness index showed main effects for Target Gender, $F(1, 266) = 18.76, p < .001, d = .53$, and Home Success, $F(1, 266) = 10.83, p = .001, d = .40$, qualified by a significant Target Gender \times Spouse at Home \times Home Success interaction, $F(1, 266) = 116.80, p < .001, d = 1.34$. Planned comparisons (see Table 1) revealed that husbands working unsuccessfully from home were viewed as significantly weaker ($M = 3.66, SD = 1.01$) than comparable wives ($M = 3.30, SD = .99$), $t(136) = 2.13, p = .04, d = .36$. By contrast, this comparison was not significant in the Home Success condition, $t(134) = 1.87, p = .06, d = .32$ ($M_{\text{men}} = 2.98, SD = 1.24; M_{\text{women}} = 2.62, SD = 1.00$). Supporting hypothesis 1, not earning income evoked a weakness penalty for nontraditional husbands, whereas financial success protected them. Thus, hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Agency Deficit

For agency, there was a main effect of Target Gender, $F(1, 266) = 15.91, p < .001, d = .49$, qualified by a significant Target Gender \times Spouse at Home \times Home Success interaction, $F(1, 264) = 26.19, p < .001, d = .63$. Supporting hypothesis 1, unsuccessful husbands working from home were viewed as less agentic ($M = 4.75, SD = .97$) than comparable women ($M = 5.29, SD = .75$), $t(136) = 3.68, p < .001, d = .63$. However, this effect was nonsignificant in the Home Success condition ($M_{\text{men}} = 5.41, SD = .95; M_{\text{women}} = 5.69, SD = .75$), $t(134) = 1.91, p = .06, d = .33$. Further supporting hypothesis 1, financial failure

(but not success) evoked an agency deficit for men working from home. Thus, hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Communality

Analyses revealed a significant Target Gender \times Spouse at Home interaction, $F(1, 266) = 7.58, p < .01, d = .34$. As expected, husbands and wives working from home were rated as similarly communal whether or not they were successful, both $t_s < .20, p_s > .84$. Supporting hypothesis 3, husbands were not penalized as “overly nice” relative to wives.

Dominance

Because dominance is high in status but negative and not proscribed or prescribed for men, we did not make a specific prediction. Results for the dominance index showed a main effect of Target Gender, $F(1, 266) = 14.04, p < .001, d = .46$, qualified by a significant Target Gender \times Spouse at Home \times Home Success interaction, $F(1, 264) = 11.74, p = .001, d = .41$. Planned comparisons revealed that unsuccessful domestic husbands were perceived as significantly less dominant than their female counterparts, $t(136) = 3.87, p < .001, d = .66$. However, this difference was eliminated when domestic spouses were successful, $t(134) = .84, p = .40, d = .14$. Thus, financial failure evoked a dominance deficit for husbands who worked from home, but earning income protected them. Although unexpected, the pattern is consistent with robbing low income husbands’ high status, masculine attributes (agency and dominance), while overcharging them with low status, feminine characteristics (weakness).

Alternative Explanations for Backlash

By demonstrating backlash against unsuccessful (not successful) husbands working from home, our findings suggest that earning income protects men from being punished on status-relevant rules (weakness and agency, but also dominance), relative to comparable women. We next examined alternative explanations for these effects.

Parenting Quality

Analyses showed a significant Target Gender \times Spouse at Home \times Success at Home interaction, $F(1, 264) = 9.76, p < .01, d = .38$. The key comparison showed that unsuccessful husbands and wives did not differ in their parenting quality ($M_{\text{men}} = 5.01, SD = 1.13; M_{\text{women}} = 5.04, SD = 1.06$), $t(136) = .17, p = .87$. Therefore, backlash for unsuccessful husbands working from home cannot stem from their parenting skills.

Career Motivation

A main effect of Target Gender, $F(1, 266) = 6.17, p < .02, d = .31$, was qualified by a significant Target Gender \times Spouse at Home \times Success at Home interaction, $F(1, 264) = 18.72, p < .01, d = .53$. When comparing spouses who worked from home, unsuccessful husbands ($M = 4.92, SD = 1.13$) were seen as less motivated than unsuccessful wives ($M = 5.32, SD = .94$), $t(136) = 2.28, p < .03, d = .41$. However, successful husbands ($M = 5.51, SD = .95$) were also seen as less motivated than successful wives ($M = 5.82, SD = .83$), $t(134) = 2.00, p = .05, d = .35$. Therefore, backlash against unsuccessful (but not successful) husbands cannot be due to a gender gap in career motivation because it emerged regardless of success at home.

Estimated Childcare

Analyses revealed a main effect of Target Gender, $F(1, 266) = 13.03, p < .001, d = .44$, such that wives were perceived as doing more childcare than husbands, qualified by a significant Target Gender \times Spouse at Home \times Home Success interaction, $F(1, 263) = 4.48, p = .04, d = .26$. Planned comparisons showed that in the success condition, husbands working from home were perceived as doing less childcare ($M = 61.54, SD = 14.44$) than comparable wives, ($M = 66.41, SD = 12.91$), $t(134) = 2.08, p = .04, d = .37$. Critically, unsuccessful domestic husbands ($M = 56.87, SD = 13.98$) were also perceived as doing significantly less childcare than unsuccessful domestic wives ($M = 65.00, SD = 14.17$), $t(136) = 3.40, p = .001, d = .62$. Therefore, backlash against unsuccessful men cannot be attributed to their doing more childcare than unsuccessful women.

Discussion

Taken together, the findings support hypothesis 1 (not alternative hypothesis 2), because only unsuccessful domestic husbands suffered backlash, whereas financial success eliminated it. Supporting hypothesis 3, backlash emerged only on attributes that convey status (weakness, agency, and dominance), not on communality. These results align with backlash theory's prediction that people who challenge the gender hierarchy are punished on the basis of status-relevant gender rules [34]. Uniquely, Experiment 1 suggested that husbands pose a stronger threat to patriarchy when they fail to earn income than when they perform domestic labor.

Regarding alternative explanations, results showed that compared with unsuccessful wives, unsuccessful husbands were not viewed as poorer parents or as doing more childcare (in fact, they were seen as doing less). Further, regardless of home success, husbands working at home were seen as less career motivated than comparable wives. This is unsurprising as these husbands were portrayed as leaving a high-status career in order to pursue an alternative career from their homes. Notably, while husbands working from home were seen as less career motivated regardless of success, husbands who continued to have earning power were not penalized on gender rules, and were able to maintain their masculinity. In

Experiment 2, we directly test our assumption that men's weakness and agency ratings were aligned with perceived masculinity. Apparently, the status men earn from financial success offsets any challenge to patriarchy derived from performing domestic labor. Nonetheless, even husbands working from home successfully were judged to be less motivated workers than identical wives, signaling that domestic labor may be costly to men's careers. Therefore, Experiment 2 included a measure of career penalties.

Experiment 2

In Experiment 2, participants read biographical sketches in which working husbands' earnings were held constant, but they performed either a minority (traditional), majority (second shift), or an equal share of housework and childcare (egalitarian). Because comparisons were between husbands, backlash was in the form of a nonconformity tax. Given that egalitarian unions are healthier and more stable than traditional marriages [9, 33], we examined whether working husbands in 50/50 marriages (i.e., dual-earning career couples who equally share family responsibilities) risk backlash. According to Experiment 1, their earning power might protect them. Nonetheless, because undergraduate men expect to engage in a minority of housework when they marry [13], we used a college student sample to provide a conservative test of our hypotheses.

In addition to measuring the four gender rules (agency, dominance, weakness, and communality), we assessed perceived masculinity and femininity, and recommendations for career penalties (e.g., reduced salary). If domestic labor is a risk factor for backlash, then husbands who perform either equal or a majority of domestic labor should be penalized more than traditional husbands. However, based on Experiment 1's results, our alternative hypotheses were as follows:

Hypothesis 1 If earning income protects men from backlash, then a working husband who performs 50% of the domestic labor should not be penalized relative to the other two conditions (i.e., egalitarians should be spared backlash).

Hypothesis 2 However, if shouldering the second shift is a risk factor for backlash, then a working husband who performs the majority of the domestic labor should be penalized more than husbands in the other two conditions. Specifically, he should be judged as less masculine and agentic (H2a), more feminine and weak (H2b), and be recommended for more career penalties (H2c).

Our predictions for the two remaining gender rules were more speculative. Based on social role theory, high communality and low dominance are rules for women because of their role as nurturers. Therefore, we might expect husbands who perform equal or the majority of the childcare and housework to be viewed as less dominant and more communal than the traditional husband, who performs less than his fair share. Whether this predicted pattern reflects a masculinity penalty for performing domestic labor depends on the association between each rating and the masculine and feminine indexes.

Method

Participants

Volunteers enrolled in Introductory Psychology ($N = 330$, 150 women) participated online in exchange for partial course credit ($M_{\text{age}} = 18.82$, $SD = 1.76$). Of these, 143 (43%) were White, 100 (30%) were Asian, 37 (11%) were Hispanic, 23 (7%) were multiracial, 19 (6%) were African American, and 8 (2%) did not respond or identified as “other”. Materials and procedure were approved by the Rutgers IRB.

Materials and Procedure

In the context of a study about “perceptions of how others dedicate their time,” all participants read about John, a 35-year-old married father of two children (ages 2 and 4). He and his wife both worked full-time as project managers at a marketing agency (see “[Appendix B](#)”). Depending on random assignment, participants learned that the husband did approximately 30, 50, or 70% of the domestic labor, with the latter condition reflecting a gender reversal of the second shift [17].

Next, participants were asked about John’s percentage of domestic labor; those who incorrectly responded reviewed the information again before being given a second chance to correctly respond to the manipulation check (six were excluded for failing to pass the second test). Participants then completed the dependent measures in the order presented below. After providing demographics, they were debriefed and compensated.

Dependent Measures

Gender Rules

Husbands were rated on scales ranging from 1 (*Not at all*) to 6 (*Very much*) using the prompt, “John strikes me as...”. For the sake of generality, we used different traits derived from Rudman et al. [35]. Weak items (*weak, uncertain, and naïve*) were averaged ($\alpha = .76$), as were agentic items (*ambitious, confident, intelligent, competitive, and a leader*; $\alpha = .74$), dominant items (*dominant, aggressive, intimidating, arrogant, and controlling*, $\alpha = .73$), and communal items (*warm, supportive, humble, a good listener, and cooperative*; $\alpha = .82$).

Gender Identity

Using the same scale, participants indicated how *masculine, manly, feminine, and girly* the husband was. The two masculine items were averaged ($r = .69$, $p < .001$), as were the two feminine items ($r = .71$, $p < .001$), to form the masculinity and femininity indexes, respectively.

Career Penalties

Adopted from Rudman and Mescher [32], participants were asked to imagine how likely they would be to recommend eight work penalties for John if they were his supervisor on a scale from 1 (*Very unlikely*) to 7 (*Very likely*). Sample items included, “Receive a salary reduction” and “Be let go next time the company is downsized”. Items were averaged to form the career penalty index ($\alpha = .91$).

Results and Discussion

Each dependent variable was submitted to a 3 (Domestic Labor Condition: 30, 50, 70%) \times 2 (Participant Gender) between-subject ANOVA. Descriptive statistics by experimental condition are shown in Table 2.

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Masculinity

Condition significantly affected perceived masculinity, $F(2, 324) = 3.51, p = .03, d = .29$. Supporting hypothesis 1, there was no significant difference between husbands who completed 30 or 50% of the domestic labor, $t(213) = .23, p = .82$. Supporting hypothesis 2a, the second shift husband (who performed 70% of the domestic labor) was viewed as less masculine ($M = 3.99, SD = 1.08$) than when he was egalitarian ($M = 4.29, SD = .95$), $t(224) = 2.21, p = .03, d = .29$, or traditional ($M = 4.32, SD = .93$), $t(217) = 2.41, p = .02, d = .33$.

Table 2 Means (and SD) for husbands' ratings by experimental condition (Experiment 2)

Measure	Experimental condition (husband's domestic labor)		
	Majority (70%)	Equal (50%)	Minority (30%)
Weak	2.29 _a (.99)	2.04 _b (.90)	2.03 _b (.86)
Agentic	4.07 _a (.79)	4.11 _a (.79)	4.07 _a (.86)
Dominant	2.18 _a (.66)	2.10 _a (.79)	2.67 _b (.85)
Communal	4.97 _a (.74)	4.91 _a (.77)	4.16 _b (.80)
Masculine	3.99 _a (1.08)	4.29 _b (.95)	4.32 _b (.93)
Feminine	2.52 _a (1.23)	2.05 _b (1.00)	1.87 _b (1.00)
Career penalties	3.16 _a (1.18)	2.72 _b (1.17)	2.84 _b (1.18)

$N = 330$. Means not sharing a subscript differ at $p < .05$

Agency

Unexpectedly, the agency index showed no effects, all $F_s(2, 324) < 1.45$, $p_s > .23$. Regardless of condition, husbands were rated as similarly agentic (see Table 2). Thus, hypothesis 1 was supported, but hypothesis 2a was only partially supported.

Femininity

Condition significantly affected perceived femininity, $F(2, 324) = 10.14$, $p < .001$, $d = .51$. There was no significant difference between the 30 and 50% domestic labor conditions, $t(213) = 1.32$, $p = .19$, supporting hypothesis 1. Supporting hypothesis 2b, the second shift husband was viewed as significantly more feminine ($M = 2.52$, $SD = 1.23$) than the egalitarian husband ($M = 2.05$, $SD = 1.00$), $t(224) = 3.15$, $p = .002$, $d = .42$, or the traditional husband ($M = 1.87$, $SD = 1.00$), $t(217) = 4.26$, $p < .001$, $d = .58$.

Weakness

The weakness index also showed a main effect of condition, $F(2, 324) = 2.95$, $p = .054$, $d = .27$. Supporting hypothesis 1, there was no significant difference between the 30 or 50% conditions, $t(213) = .08$, $p = .94$. Fully supporting hypothesis 2b, the second shift husband was viewed as weaker ($M = 2.29$, $SD = .99$) than the egalitarian husband ($M = 2.04$, $SD = .90$), $t(224) = 1.98$, $p = .048$, $d = .26$, or the traditional husband ($M = 2.03$, $SD = .86$), $t(217) = 2.06$, $p = .04$, $d = .28$.

Career Penalty

Condition significantly affected recommended career penalties, $F(2, 324) = 4.59$, $p = .01$, $d = .34$. Supporting hypothesis 1, career penalties did not significantly differ between the 30 and 50% domestic labor conditions, $t(212) = .75$, $p = .46$. Supporting hypothesis 2c, the second shift husband was recommended for more career penalties ($M = 3.16$, $SD = 1.18$) than the egalitarian husband ($M = 2.72$, $SD = 1.17$), $t(223) = 2.81$, $p = .01$, $d = .37$, or the traditional husband ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.18$) $t(217) = 2.00$, $p = .05$, $d = .27$.

In summary, hypothesis 1 was fully supported because husbands in 50/50 marriages were not penalized relative to traditional husbands who completed a minority of the domestic labor. Instead, only men shouldering the majority of the domestic labor faced a weakness penalty, as well as higher perceptions of femininity, and lower perceptions of masculinity. Indeed, Table 3's correlations indicate that low agency ratings and high weakness ratings negatively reflect husbands' perceived masculinity. Although their agency was not impugned, the findings as a whole are consistent with backlash effects emerging on status-relevant characteristics. Because backlash includes both economic and social penalties, it was also important to show that husbands in 50/50 marriages were not punished financially (e.g., by recommending them for demotion or firing). Instead, only men

Table 3 Correlations among dependent variables (Experiment 2)

Measure	Gender identity		Gender rules			
	Masc	Fem	Weak	Agentic	Dominant	Communal
Masculine	–					
Feminine	– .48**	–				
Weak	– .33**	.59**	–			
Agentic	.54**	– .26**	– .23**	–		
Dominant	.05	.18**	.38**	.14*	–	
Communal	.34**	– .04	– .20**	.44**	– .39**	–
Career penalties	– .27**	.37**	.33**	– .18**	.21**	– .17**

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

who “acted like women” by performing the majority of the housework and childcare suffered career penalties, relative to the other two conditions.

Dominance and Communality

Dominance

Analyses revealed a main effect of condition, $F(2, 324) = 17.49, p < .001, d = .66$. Perceived dominance was similar for husbands doing 50 or 70% of the domestic labor, $t(224) = .83, p = .41$. However, the traditional husband was viewed as more dominant ($M = 2.67, SD = .85$), compared with the egalitarian husband ($M = 2.10, SD = .79$), $t(213) = 5.10, p < .001, d = .70$, or the second shift husband ($M = 2.18, SD = .66$) $t(217) = 4.79, p < .001, d = .65$ (see Table 2).

Communality

Analyses revealed a main effect of condition, $F(2, 324) = 38.75, p < .001, d = .97$, and a significant Participant Gender \times Condition interaction, $F(2, 324) = 3.72, p = .03, d = .29$. We decomposed the interaction by participant gender. The condition effect was significant for men, $F(2, 169) = 9.21, p < .001, d = .66$, but it was even larger for women, $F(2, 155) = 33.51, p < .001, d = 1.31$. Women viewed the egalitarian and second shift husbands as similarly communal, $t(103) = .36, p > .71$, as did men, $t(119) = .43, p = .67$ (see Table 2). However, women perceived the traditional husband as less communal ($M = 4.08, SD = .83$) than either the egalitarian husband ($M = 5.09, SD = .75$), $t(103) = 6.60, p < .001, d = 1.23$, or the second shift husband ($M = 5.14, SD = .66$), $t(104) = 7.34, p < .001, d = 1.43$. Similarly, men viewed the traditional husband as less communal ($M = 4.24, SD = .76$) than the egalitarian husband ($M = 4.75, SD = .75$), $t(108) = 3.53, p < .001, d = .68$, or the second shift husband

($M = 4.81$, $SD = .77$), $t(111) = 3.94$, $p < .001$, $d = .75$. Thus, the interaction reflected larger differences for women than for men, but the same pattern.

In summary, dominance and communality ratings bore out our speculative predictions for this study. However, to ensure that high dominance and low communality signified negative ratings for traditional husbands, rather than a loss of status for nontraditional husbands, we examined the correlations among Experiment 2's variables.

Correlations Among Variables

Table 3's first two columns show that masculinity and femininity were negatively correlated, and that weakness and career penalties were negatively associated with masculinity and positively associated with femininity, whereas agency was positively associated with masculinity and negatively associated with femininity. Thus, participants construed these measures as we intended (i.e., as reflecting gender identity). As a result, rating the second shift husband as relatively high on weakness, femininity, and career penalties reflected a threat to his masculinity, even though his agency was undiminished.

Should this interpretation be extended to dominance and communality ratings? Several findings in Table 3 argue against this interpretation. Dominance (highest for traditional husbands) was positively associated with femininity, weakness, and career penalties, all $r_s(328) > .18$, $p_s < .01$, but unassociated with masculinity. By contrast, communality (lowest for traditional husbands) was unassociated with femininity. Instead, it was positively associated with masculinity and agency, both $r_s(328) > .33$, $p_s < .01$, and negatively associated with weakness and career penalties, both $r_s(328) < -.16$, $p_s < .01$. In concert, these findings suggest that the traditional husband was judged more negatively than husbands in the other two conditions on dominance and communality, rather than reflecting a loss of masculinity status for husbands who alleviated domestic inequality.

Discussion

By holding career earnings constant, Experiment 2 revealed that husbands in 50/50 marriages are not penalized for promoting domestic equality. Replicating and extending the findings from Experiment 1, men who earn income can relieve women of the second shift by doing half of the childcare and housework without penalties. Unique to Experiment 2, it was only working men who shouldered the second shift who paid a nonconformity tax, as indicated by their relatively low masculinity ratings, but high ratings of femininity, weakness, and career penalties. These findings suggest that both social and economic sanctions for nontraditional husbands are incurred only when they perform the majority of the domestic labor.

General Discussion

Prior research suggests that husbands who alleviate women's domestic burden, whether by seeking flexible work arrangements, requesting a family leave, or increasing their commitment to childcare, suffer masculinity and career penalties relative to traditional husbands [2, 32, 42]. Because relieving women's second shift is vital for gender equality, it is critical to examine why. Backlash theory posits that both genders are penalized for threatening the gender status quo, but what, specifically, is threatening about nontraditional husbands' behavior? In two experiments, we examined whether they are punished for failing to earn income, or for performing domestic labor, or both. Taken together, the findings suggest that unearned income is the main reason why nontraditional husbands are punished.

In Experiment 1, we compared husbands and wives to examine backlash in the form of gender double standards that afford women more latitude than men to work from home – a popular career option for both genders [37]. The findings revealed that successful husbands who earned income from home were spared backlash, whereas financially unsuccessful husbands working from home were perceived as weaker, less agentic, and less dominant than identical wives. Backlash for husbands who worked from home unsuccessfully was not due to differences in estimated childcare labor, parenting quality, or career motivation between domestic husbands and wives. Instead, the findings indicate that husbands are punished for failing to uphold the gender status quo by not earning income. If domestic labor was a risk factor for backlash, then husbands working from home should have been penalized relative to comparable wives regardless of their earning power. Instead, husbands who worked from home successfully escaped backlash. Critically, because spouses in the workplace were described as high earners, it is likely that husbands working from home were likely perceived as earning less than their wives. Thus, men only have to earn some income to avoid penalties. Because 40% of wives in the US are the primary breadwinners [27], this is good news for American families.

Further demonstrating that men who earn income can participate in domestic labor without penalty, Experiment 2 held husbands' earnings constant while varying their amount of domestic labor. If performing unpaid, feminine labor elicits penalties, husbands who performed 50% of the housework and childcare should have been viewed more negatively than those who performed 30%. Instead, only men who performed 70% of domestic labor were perceived as weaker, less masculine, more feminine, and more deserving of career penalties, compared with men who performed equal or the minority of "women's work". Because husbands who performed 50 and 30% of the labor were viewed similarly, performing a fair share of domestic labor did not elicit backlash. Only husbands who shouldered the second shift themselves suffered masculinity and career penalties.

Notably, traditional husbands were also penalized, as indicated by relatively low communality and high dominance ratings, which were correlated negatively and positively with career penalties, respectively. Because a husband in a 50/50 marriage escaped these costs, as well as career penalties and a loss of masculinity, men may have more flexibility to relieve domestic inequality than prior findings

might suggest. This is optimistic news for gender equality. Specifically, these findings indicate that husbands can engage equally in domestic labor without career or social penalties, relieving working wives of the burden of the second shift, which should have positive outcomes for marriages and women's careers [18].

Limitations and Future Directions

The age diversity (Experiment 1) and racial diversity (Experiment 2) of our samples lend confidence to the present findings' generality. To our knowledge, there is no theoretical reason to expect different ethnicities to respond differently to the present stimuli. Regardless of ethnicity, husbands are expected to financially provide for their families more than wives [22]. This is likely why Black and White husbands who requested family medical leave to care for relatives faced career penalties due to a perceived loss of masculinity to the same extent [32]. Nonetheless, more research is needed that manipulates husbands' ethnicity before strong conclusions can be drawn. Further, given the rise in interracial marriages [20], we encourage future research that examines backlash for couples with varying racial characteristics.

In addition, future research might examine whether support for traditional gender roles moderates reactions to husbands who work from home or who relieve their wives from the second shift. Because working wives who endorse traditional gender roles also report doing the majority of domestic labor [13], individual differences on this dimension may also moderate reactions to nontraditional husbands.

In conclusion, by manipulating either earned income or domestic labor, two experiments demonstrated that penalties for nontraditional husbands stem more from not earning income, not from doing domestic labor (unless they shoulder the second shift). If the fading trend of "traditional marriages" evolves into more husbands earning at least some income while performing their fair share of the domestic labor, men need not fear penalties for engaging in more sustainable, equal marriages.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

Ethical Approval All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed Consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in these studies.

Appendix A: Stimuli for Experiment 1 by Spouse Working from Home (in Brackets)

Couple 1

Jane and John are in their late thirties and have been married for 12 years after meeting at a golfing event at a local country club. John [Jane] is a partner at a successful law firm while Jane [John] works from home as a day trader. After the birth of their child, who is now 5 years old, Jane [John] decided she [he] wanted to leave her [his] job as an insurance agent, a position she [he] had never enjoyed, and work from home as a day trader, a job she [he] had regretted not pursuing earlier in her career. John [Jane] is the youngest partner at the firm and highly respected. His [her] income allows them to hire a nanny who works 6 h a day during the week giving Jane [John] time to trade from home. Jane [John] greatly enjoys working as a day trader and has been very successful [has not had much success] over the last 5 years.

Couple 2

Carol and David first met at a café in college and have since been married for 8 years. David [Carol] is a successful investment banker and Carol [David] works from home as a blogger. Carol [David] previously worked as a lawyer but realized her [his] real passion was for writing. She [He] left her [his] job at a law firm 3 years ago to become a blogger when she [he] and her husband [his wife] had their first child. David [Carol] has been very successful as an investment banker and his [her] salary allows them to pay a nanny to work several hours a day during the week. While the nanny is there, Carol [David] is able to work on her [his] blog which has become very popular over the last year and a few stories have even been picked up by major news sources [has not yet gained many readers].

Appendix B: Stimuli for Experiment 2 by Domestic Labor Condition (in Brackets)

John is a 35 year old married father of two children (ages 2 and 4). He and his wife, Rachel, both work full-time (around 45 h) as project managers at the marketing agency where they met. During his short commute to and from work, he listens to the news in his car to stay up to date on current affairs. In an average week, John does approximately 30% [50 or 70%] of the housework and childcare. This includes helping out with [doing the majority of or doing his equal share of] tasks such as shopping for, prepping, and cooking meals; vacuuming, dusting, and cleaning; doing laundry; and bathing, feeding, and playing with his two children. Thus, John and Rachel have a traditional [equal or nontraditional] marriage in which Rachel is responsible for the majority [both are responsible or John is responsible for the majority] of the housework and childcare. On the weekends, when he is not cleaning

or spending time with his children, John likes to go for a bike ride or to the gym. He and his wife often set time aside when the children are with friends or family to spend time together.

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