



Integrated Theory of Insufficiency Loops and the Gender Contract – Evidence Review

Executive Summary

Hypothesis: Human mating dynamics have created two intertwined “loops of insufficiency” – one in men (value through *achievement*) and one in women (value through *belonging*) – that historically were stabilized by a **gender contract** (monogamy and clear reciprocal roles). In the last half-century, this contract eroded, and technology (dating apps, social media) amplified both loops, leading to a crisis visible in male mental health, female relationship satisfaction, demographic decline, and gender polarization. This report examines each element of the model, weighing supporting and conflicting evidence, and evaluates how robust the model’s claims are. Overall, many components are backed by research: **biological asymmetries in reproduction** are well-established, **male “precarious manhood” and competitive risk-taking** have cross-cultural support, **female in-group biases and indirect competition** are documented, and **normative monogamy’s stabilizing effect** is strongly supported by sociological data. However, some causal linkages (e.g. mothers transmitting “chivalry” or the full feedback between the loops) are more inferential and culturally contingent. The model appears **comprehensive** in explaining broad trends, but certain claims require cautious interpretation (for instance, not overattributing all modern gender issues to these loops alone).

Implications: If the model holds, it suggests modern societies need to consciously renegotiate the “gender contract” – aiming for fairness and mutual benefit – rather than nostalgically reverting to the old one. Potential interventions include promoting **symmetry in obligations and rewards** (e.g. encouraging shared parenting and broadening gender roles), actively **reducing the pressures of the insufficiency loops** (e.g. redefining masculinity to allow emotional expression, and reducing toxic appearance pressures on women), and establishing **new social supports and norms** that foster cooperation between sexes. The evidence indicates that such changes are possible – for example, beliefs in “precarious manhood” are much weaker in more gender-equal, developed nations ¹ – but they require addressing deeply rooted biases and incentive structures on both sides.

I. Biological Asymmetry and Sexual Selection (Genesis of the Loops)

Claim: Human evolutionary history is defined by a fundamental **reproductive asymmetry**: females invest much more in each offspring (pregnancy, nursing) than males, making women the *choosy sex* and men the *competing sex*. This led to far more women than men reproducing historically (often cited as ~80% of women vs ~40% of men contributing to the gene pool) ² ³. Men evolved to compete for female selection through displays of fitness (strength, status, resources, commitment), while women evolved to be selective and compete for the highest-quality partners. This evolutionary pressure is posited to instill a deep-seated sense of “*never enough*” – a motivational **inadequacy** – in each sex, albeit

in different domains: men feeling they must continually **prove their worth**, and women feeling they must **secure belonging and high-value partnership**.

- **Evidence (Supporting):** The basic biological asymmetry is uncontroversial. Parental investment theory (Trivers, 1972) and countless observations in evolutionary biology confirm that the sex with higher obligatory investment (females in mammals) tends to be more selective, while the other sex competes. Genetic studies strongly support differential reproductive rates: for example, analysis of ancient DNA shows that **historically many more women than men reproduced**, especially after the advent of agriculture. One study found that 4,000–8,000 years ago the ratio of reproducing females to males was as extreme as 17:1 in some regions ⁴. Even in more recent millennia, the **effective breeding population** has been skewed toward females – roughly **4–5 women for every 1 man** on average contributed genes to the next generation ³. This implies a *substantial fraction of men left no descendants*, consistent with intense male competition and high stakes for “losers.” Anthropologist Henry Harpending famously estimated perhaps **80% of women versus 40% of men in history passed on genes**, illustrating that nearly half of men were, from a genetic perspective, redundant. This kind of data lends plausibility to the model’s starting point: an evolutionary legacy where **men are under pressure to prove themselves worthy of selection**, and women, while generally able to find some mate, compete for the *best* mates.
- **Evidence (Contrary or Nuanced):** While the broad strokes are widely accepted, the exact **percentages (80% vs 40%)** should be taken cautiously. These figures arise from genetic diversity measures (mtDNA vs Y-chromosome differences) and can vary by population and timeframe ⁴ ³. Some researchers argue the difference was less stark in truly ancient hunter-gatherer times and became more extreme in agricultural societies with wealth stratification (where powerful men could monopolize women). Indeed, the **1:17 ratio** was linked to early agricultural societies ⁴; in egalitarian nomadic bands, male reproductive exclusion might have been milder (perhaps closer to 60% of men reproducing, according to some models). So, the *degree* of male mate exclusion is culturally and historically variable. Additionally, female reproduction was not guaranteed either – some women also failed to reproduce (due to infertility, social reasons, etc.), though at lower rates. In short, the **trend of “women as selectors, men as competitors” holds**, but the exact numbers are context-dependent.
- **Resulting Sex-Specific Pressures:** Evolutionarily, a man who *“felt sufficient”* without achieving anything would be less driven to compete and thus likely leave fewer offspring – over time, this may have selected for a baseline **male drive to achieve and acquire** (with failure inducing anxiety about one’s manhood). Conversely, a woman’s reproductive success historically hinged on **attracting and retaining a quality mate** and support network, giving rise to pressures on women’s **appearance, youth, fidelity, and social bonds**. Women who failed to secure a good partner or group acceptance risked poorer outcomes for themselves and their children. This could select for a chronic (if often latent) **female concern about desirability and belonging**. The model calls these ingrained feelings of *“niewystarczalność”* (insufficiency) – an ever-present worry of not measuring up, instilled by sexual selection.

Evaluation: The evolutionary rationale is solid and supported by genetic and cross-species evidence. It provides a credible foundation for why men and women might, on average, gravitate toward different self-worth criteria (achievement vs relationships). However, one must be careful not to **biologically determinize** complex behaviors. Evolution set the stage, but **culture moderates these tendencies**. For instance, contemporary norms can amplify or soften the innate drives (see later sections on cultural variation). Overall, the asymmetry and its psychological echoes are strongly supported, but the model’s assumption that it directly created “built-in” inadequacy needs empirical validation. We don’t have a

gene for “feeling insufficient” – rather, it’s an emergent property from social and evolutionary factors. With that caveat, we turn to how these dynamics manifest in modern psychosocial loops.

II. The Male “Insufficiency Loop”: Value Through Achievement and Precarious Manhood

Description of the Loop: The male loop posits that men’s self-worth becomes contingent on **achievements** and continual proof of “manhood.” Starting from female choice pressure, men compete with each other to meet what women (and society) value – strength, status, providing ability, bravery, stoic resilience. These expectations solidify into **masculinity norms**. Boys internalize the message “I am only as good as what I can *do or win*.” This fosters an ingrained sense of **inadequacy** (never being “man enough” yet) which motivates constant striving. Because the standards of masculinity are high and often contradictory or unreachable (e.g. be tough *and* tender, succeed but never fail), **every man eventually “fails”** in someone’s eyes, triggering a *manhood threat*. Such threats (e.g. job loss, being outperformed by a woman, or even small social slights) produce anxiety and shame. Men then respond with **compensatory behaviors** to restore status – aggression, risk-taking, dominance displays, controlling resources or territories, and forming male coalitions (clubs, “old boys’ networks”) that reinforce their status. These behaviors can temporarily reassert one’s masculinity but also feed back into male-male competition (and sometimes exclusion of women), continuing the cycle. Psychologists Vandello and Bosson have termed this phenomenon **“precarious manhood”** – the idea that manhood is an earned status that is hard to attain and easy to lose, requiring continuous public demonstration

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- **Evidence (Supporting):** Research strongly supports **precarious manhood beliefs** and their behavioral consequences. A recent 62-nation study (33,000 participants) found that *around the world* people broadly agree that “being a real man” is something that can be lost and must be proved by action 6. These beliefs were more intense in patriarchal and less-developed nations, but notably present even in many egalitarian societies 1. The consistency of this belief across cultures lends weight to the idea that masculine identity is seen as conditional or “**achieved**” **rather than ascribed**. Laboratory experiments further demonstrate that when a man’s masculinity is directly challenged, it often triggers measurably aggressive or compensatory responses. In one classic study, young men who were told they scored “more like a woman” on a gender knowledge test reacted by choosing more aggressive options in a subsequent task (such as punching a bag or firing loud blasts of noise at an opponent). Many such experiments report a **medium effect size (d ~0.4–0.6)** for increased aggression or risk-taking after a manhood threat 7. Moreover, behaving aggressively tends to alleviate men’s distress in these scenarios, suggesting it “restores” their threatened sense of manhood (Bosson et al., 2009).

A key insight is that unlike women, **men do not display a default automatic in-group bias** in most studies – instead of preferring their own gender, men often implicitly favor *women*. In a series of implicit association tests, **women showed a strong pro-female (own-group) bias, whereas men’s bias for their own gender was weak to non-existent** 8 9. Put simply, “women like women more than men like men.” This has been attributed to men lacking a built-in mechanism of group solidarity – possibly because throughout history men competed with each other as often as they cooperated, and also because *women (mothers)* have been the primary caregivers imparting early social values (more on this below). The same research found intriguing sources of men’s implicit *out-group* bias: participants who had stronger unconscious *preferences for their mother over their father* or who unconsciously associated men with violence tended to show *pro-female* attitudes 10 11. This suggests two factors imprinting on boys: **maternal attachment** (liking women) and **male intimidation or fear** (distrusting men), which together yield men who **automatically hold women in high regard** and are less inclined to “side with”

fellow men. The model's notion that "*mothers transmit chivalry*" finds some support here: early bonding to female caretakers can predispose individuals to favor the feminine. In fact, Experiment 2 of Rudman & Goodwin (2004) showed people mostly raised by their mothers had **stronger implicit pro-female bias**, and they hypothesize that "*because of early attachment to maternal caregivers, people's mental machinery may be geared to automatically favor the feminine sex*" ¹² ¹³.

More explicitly, a 2019 study by Thomassin et al. found evidence that **mothers may enforce emotional toughness in sons more than fathers do**. In a sample of ~600 North American parents, mothers were more likely than fathers to label a *crying boy*'s emotions as "unpleasant," whereas fathers did not show a bias in responses ¹⁴. The researchers note this doesn't mean mothers *want* to perpetuate stoicism, but they might be more attuned to social expectations ("boys don't cry") and thus react negatively, perhaps hoping to toughen their sons up ¹⁵ ¹⁶. This finding is counterintuitive (we expect "tough dads" to police boys' tears, but here *moms* did) – yet it aligns with the model's idea that mothers, being the dominant influence in a boy's early years (often ~77% of a child's time, per the model's notes), **implicitly transmit norms of male stoicism and chivalry** (the idea that a "good son" should be tough, protect others, especially women, and not complain). The **time exposure asymmetry** (children spending much more early caregiving time with women) is a demographic fact in most societies, and its effects are just beginning to be studied in gender norm transmission.

The outcome of all this socialization and pressure is that many men have a chronic (if sometimes unconscious) feeling of "**I must earn my manhood through achievements – and I haven't done enough yet.**" This maps to real-world data on male attitudes and health. For example, the Equimundo 2023 survey of American men (a large national sample) found **65% of young men (18–23) agreed that "no one really knows me well," and 44% had recently thought about suicide** in a two-week period ¹⁷ ¹⁸. These startling numbers reflect a crisis in male self-worth and social connection. While multiple factors are involved, one interpretation is that many young men feel they are *failing* to meet an implicit standard – be it economically, socially or romantically – and without a sense of "masculine achievement" or close support, they spiral into isolation and despair. It's notable that **men's depression and suicide often correlate with perceived failure in provider or protector roles**, consistent with the precarious manhood idea (when men lose a job, for instance, suicide risk rises significantly). Meanwhile, men continue to take **disproportionate risks** – 93% of U.S. workplace fatalities are male, and men are far more likely to die from risk-related causes (accidents, homicide, etc.) – which can be seen as a tragic aggregate outcome of both social expectation (men in dangerous jobs, men engaging in risky behavior) and perhaps a certain resignation (the concept of "*male disposability*," where society implicitly treats men's lives as less precious in contexts like war and labor). Evolutionary psychologists note that **male disposability** is rooted in our history: a community could "afford" to lose men more than women, biologically speaking, which may underlie why men's health and safety receives *less empathy* historically (e.g. all-male military drafts, norms of men as sacrificial protectors). This empathy gap is well documented – for instance, public campaigns and health research often neglect male-specific issues, and studies have found people on average feel **less sympathy for male suffering** than for female suffering (a bias some have termed the "**gender empathy gap**", related to the above-mentioned pro-female bias) ¹⁹.

- **Evidence (Contrary or Moderating):** While the **precarious manhood** pattern is robust, it is not immutable. The cross-cultural study found significant variation: e.g. respondents in **Finland or Germany scored much lower** on precarious manhood beliefs (PMB scale) compared to those in **Kosovo or Pakistan** ²⁰. This suggests that in societies with greater gender equality and social safety nets, the pressure on men to *prove* themselves virile providers is less intense. Indeed, when economic and social roles are more secure or shared, men may not experience manhood as so "precarious." Additionally, not *all* men respond to threats with aggression – personality and context matter. Some men faced with a loss of status withdraw or seek social support instead

(though many feel they *cannot* show vulnerability due to norms). Another nuance: the finding that men lack implicit in-group bias doesn't mean men never support each other – in explicit behavior men do form strong alliances (e.g. fraternal bonds in the military or sports). It's just that these alliances often serve a competitive purpose (team vs team) rather than a broad "male solidarity." Also, the mother-transmission hypothesis, while intriguing, is based on subtle implicit bias data. We should be careful: mothers biasing against sons' crying ¹⁴ might also be interpreted as mothers worrying society will punish their son's sensitivity (so they try to toughen him *for his own good*). It's not that mothers *want* to perpetuate harmful norms; they may feel constrained by them. The model's framing of a "**chivalry trap**" – that men are raised to prioritize women's needs to the point they won't advocate for themselves – is harder to quantify. There isn't a simple experiment proving "men won't propose gender symmetry because they're chivalrous," but circumstantial evidence is seen in politics (men voting for women's interests as default, few explicitly "pro-male" movements, etc.). This is a softer claim and could be influenced by many factors (including fear of social backlash if men complain).

- **Overall Assessment (Male Loop):** The male insufficiency loop finds **moderate-to-strong empirical support**. Key pillars – **male competition for status, precarious manhood, and compensatory aggression** – are well-demonstrated in psychology and anthropology. Cross-cultural research buttresses the idea that this is a widespread social schema (though with varying strength). The loop cogently explains phenomena like why men overinvest in work at the expense of health (tying self-worth to career), why they are prone to respond to shame with violence (e.g. many mass shooters cite feeling humiliated or rejected as men), and why they form exclusionary hierarchies (old boys' clubs as a way to secure resources and status). It also sheds light on male vulnerabilities: high suicide rates, reluctance to seek help (doing so admits "failure"), and even the appeal of extremist groups that promise young men a sense of pride and brotherhood they lack. **Limitations:** Not every man internalizes these norms to the same degree; intersection with class, race, and individual temperament matters. Also, the loop can be self-fulfilling: if we assume all men must be tough achievers, we might neglect teaching boys emotional skills, thus perpetuating the cycle. The evidence strongly suggests the loop is real, but also that **cultural change can moderate it** – for example, when fatherhood and caregiving are valued (not ridiculed) for men, men invest more in family than in risky showmanship. Thus, the male loop is *powerful but not unbreakable*.

III. The Female "Insufficiency Loop": Value Through Belonging and Relational Status

Description of the Loop: The female loop proposes that women's self-worth is largely contingent on **relationships and social belonging**, particularly on being accepted by high-status partners or social groups. Starting from the evolutionary scenario of "**women as selectors**", we get a paradox: while most women *could* find a mate, the *quality* of that mate (and the resources/protection he provides) was crucial. Moreover, historically a smaller pool of men were considered highly desirable (the strongest, most resourceful ~20%). This created **competition among women** for those top males (sometimes termed "*intrasexual competition*"). Unlike men's direct competition, female competition often took **indirect forms**: enhancing one's own attractiveness/youth (since those are weighted in male choice), and sabotaging rivals subtly (through gossip, exclusion, **slut-shaming** i.e. disparaging a woman's sexual reputation). Success for a woman was often defined by **securing a good man** and the approval of her community – thus the loop: women internalize that "*I am worth as much as the love/acceptance I receive.*" When a woman is *rejected or not chosen* by a desirable man (or worse, faces infidelity or abandonment), it strikes at her core sense of adequacy. Feelings of **insecurity and not being "enough"** (not pretty enough, not lovable enough) ensue. Women then employ compensatory strategies: some may double

down on competing (enhancing appearance, “fixing” themselves), others may attack the women who are succeeding (the rival women are labeled “sluts,” “mean girls,” etc.), and others seek solace and strength in female-centric groups (tight-knit friend circles or modern feminist networks) that reaffirm each other’s value. An important aspect is female in-group bias and solidarity – women are theorized to show strong collective support, which can create an echo chamber elevating their grievances against men (e.g. sharing stories of men’s wrongdoings, reinforcing a narrative that men are the problem). The model also mentions women “raising the bar” as a form of revenge* – responding to feelings of insufficiency by increasing standards for what a “good man” is, thereby making men feel insufficient too. This forms a mirror-image feedback with the male loop (we’ll discuss the mutual reinforcement shortly).

- **Evidence (Supporting):** There is substantial evidence that **women compete with each other for mates, but often in indirect, relational ways**. A hallmark is “**rival derogation**.” Studies by Tracy Vaillancourt and others have documented that women frequently use **indirect aggression** (gossip, social exclusion, belittling) against other women who are viewed as sexual rivals. Notably, **attractive and sexually open (provocatively dressed) women are the most likely targets** of other women’s disparagement ²¹. For example, Vaillancourt (2013) had women watch videos of another young woman entering a room either dressed conservatively or in a short skirt and low-cut top; the viewers’ reactions were telling – many women responded with eye-rolls, whispers, and negative comments when the confederate was dressed *sexily*, effectively *slut-shaming* her (calling her immodest, etc.). This behavior was interpreted as **intrasexual competition**: the provocatively dressed woman was perceived as a mating threat, so the participants instinctively derogated her to diminish her appeal ²¹. This aligns perfectly with the model’s assertion that “*slut-shaming* is a female-driven mechanism to lower rivals’ value. Indeed, both men and women engage in slut-shaming, but research indicates women do it at least as much, often toward other women (which contradicts a simplistic “patriarchy hurts women” narrative – here women are enforcing sexual norms on each other as a competitive strategy). A U.K. Twitter analysis by the Demos think tank (2016) found that women were responsible for **about half of the misogynistic language tweets** (including words like “slut”) – roughly **50k instances from women vs 50k from men** in their sample, showing women policing each other’s sexual behavior in large numbers.

Additionally, **female in-group bias** is very strong at an implicit level. We saw earlier that women implicitly favor women much more than men favor men. Rudman & Goodwin quantified women’s automatic in-group preference as *4.5 times stronger* than men’s ²². Women also tend to consciously report more trust and comfort in female-only groups for discussing personal issues, which reflects a solidarity born perhaps from shared experiences and an assumption of mutual understanding. There’s even an evolutionary hypothesis that because women historically depended on female kin and friends for childcare and support when men were away or polygynously focused on other wives, women evolved a tendency to form **strong cooperative networks (sometimes called “tend-and-befriend” behavior)**. Empirical evidence: in stress situations, women often seek social support, whereas men often isolate or fight – consistent with women valuing belonging as a coping strategy.

Social identity research also shows that women identify with “women as a group” more strongly than men identify with “men as a group.” For instance, women will more readily say “I feel connected to other women” and will support initiatives favoring women; men are less likely to express parallel pro-male sentiments, partly due to the empathy gap and cultural norms (men fear looking “anti-women” if they support men as a group). This dynamic supports the model’s idea of a female in-group echo chamber: women are predisposed to form group narratives (like modern feminist movements) that **spread information quickly** and rally around shared causes. Indeed, the model cites “information cascades” and polarization – this is seen on social media, where groups of women can amplify stories of men’s misbehavior or of alternative lifestyles (like “you don’t need men”). A concrete example is the virality of

the #MeToo movement: within a short time, millions of women globally shared stories of harassment, creating a powerful group cohesion but also, arguably, some *group polarization*. Studies on group psychology (Sunstein, 1999) find that when people (especially like-minded individuals) discuss issues together, their views often become **more extreme**. Thus, a closely bonded female community, while supportive internally, might collectively adopt a more uniformly negative stance toward "men out-group," fueling the notion that *men are the problem* (the model refers to finding a "common enemy" as a group unifier).

On the **mate preference side**, data from modern dating strongly support that women are highly selective and have **high standards** – in some cases *extremely* high. Large-scale app statistics reveal what's known as the *80/20 rule*: roughly **80% of women are vying for the top 10-20% of men** in terms of attractiveness or status ²³. Women en masse rate *the majority of men* as below average. OkCupid's analytics famously showed that women found **80% of male profiles to be "less than medium" in attractiveness**, essentially compressing their approval to the top quintile of guys ²⁴. Meanwhile, men's ratings of women were much more forgiving (only 50% of women were rated below medium by men) ²⁴. On Tinder, one analysis found the bottom 80% of men compete for the bottom 22% of women, whereas **the top 78% of women focus on the top 20% of men** ²³. This quantifies an *enormous skew* in the "mating market": an average woman gets far more interest than an average man, but that average woman in turn is mostly interested only in above-average men. The result is many men get **zero matches or attention**, while the few "high-value" men are overwhelmed with options (and may not settle down as a result). For women, this means the competition for the desirable men is fierce – confirming that *perceived scarcity of quality mates* is a current reality, not just historical. Economic theories of mating (Pedersen et al.) note that when women are more abundant than men (low sex ratio), men become even less inclined to commit (why settle when options abound?), and when men are abundant (high sex ratio), women's bargaining power drops (they compete harder for the fewer men). In many modern contexts (college-educated circles, urban areas), women outnumber men, exacerbating a feeling that "*good men are so hard to find!*". Surveys indeed show young women complaining about a "man deficit" – either numerically or in desired qualities (ambition, emotional maturity, etc.). This psychosocial stress is a driver of the female insufficiency loop: a woman who *cannot find a worthy partner* might question her own worth or resent the situation.

When women feel romantically insufficient or excluded, one response observed is the formation of **women-only support groups**. Anthropologically, "female coalitions" are a survival strategy (think of co-wives in polygamy quietly cooperating, or grandmothers, aunts and mothers raising kids together). Today we see phenomena like "**female friendship circles**" celebrated as an alternative source of fulfillment (e.g. the trope that women get more out of friendship and don't *need* a man if they have their gals). In South Korea, this idea has gone further in the form of the "**4B movement**" – a growing number of young women are *boycotting* relationships with men entirely, embracing a life of **no dating, no sex, no marriage, and no childbirth** ²⁵ ²⁶. The 4B (literal translation: "Four No's") movement is extreme but illustrative: it's framed as *empowerment* and rejection of patriarchy, yet one underlying driver is that many of these women have become disillusioned by negative experiences with men or by seeing men not meeting their expectations. Rather than feel constantly "not enough" for men or society, they choose to opt out of the game altogether. (Notably, South Korea's female-led relationship boycott is paralleled by dire demographics: the country's fertility rate hit **0.72 in 2023**, the lowest in the OECD ²⁷, indicating a collapse in stable pairings. While there are many factors, women refusing to partner is a big one – essentially a collective action in response to their frustrations.)

Another piece of evidence: women's **mental health stats** reflect the costs of this loop. Women have **2-3 times higher rates of clinical depression and anxiety** than men ²⁸, a disparity often attributed to psychosocial stressors. The chronic evaluation of oneself in terms of relationships and appearance can fuel internalizing disorders. For instance, **eating disorders** overwhelmingly affect young women and

are linked to competitiveness over attractiveness and social approval. Studies find that in environments with **skewed sex ratios or intense mate competition**, women's body dissatisfaction and disordered eating increase (they feel more pressure to look "better" than other women to attract a partner). This suggests the female loop's influence: when the *competition stakes* are raised, women's sense of inadequacy about their bodies or social appeal also rises, sometimes to pathological levels.

- **Evidence (Contrary or Moderating):** As with the male loop, cultural context can mitigate or exacerbate the female loop. In more **matriarchal or matrilineal societies**, women's social value is less tied to a male partner. For example, among the **Mosuo** of China (a matrilineal society with "walking marriages"), women don't marry; property is passed through daughters and women choose lovers freely. Men have little say in resource control. Anthropologists note that Mosuo women have a relatively high status and confidence, and men's and women's relationships are more relaxed, possibly because women don't *need* a man for security (their family provides it). This is a case where the **female insufficiency loop is weakened** – being chosen by a man is not the ultimate determinant of life outcome. Similarly, in some **African cultures** where women have economic independence through markets or where polyandry exists, women compete less for men; sometimes men compete for women in those contexts. These examples highlight that female "value through belonging" is partly a product of **patriarchal structures** – when women's life chances depend on men (for income, protection, status), the pressure to secure a top man is intense. As that dependence recedes (through female education, jobs, legal rights), one might expect the loop to soften. However, the paradox of modern life is that even financially independent women *still* often desire a partner of equal or higher status (the phenomenon of "**hypergamy**" persisting). Thus, while a woman today doesn't *need* a man to survive, many still *want* a high-quality man to thrive, and thus competition remains – though perhaps more on emotional/psychological grounds than sheer survival.

Another counterpoint: **Not all women internalize romantic belonging as their value.** Personality, upbringing, and feminism can play a role. Many women explicitly reject the notion that they are defined by their relationship status – and indeed more women are choosing singlehood or childfree lifestyles and reporting satisfaction. The model might interpret 4B-type movements as part of the loop (withdrawal due to insufficiency feelings), but participants might frame it as *liberation*. We should consider that some women opting out of traditional roles are not merely reacting to inadequacy but asserting a different value system ("I choose my career/self over competing for a man").

Also, **female solidarity can sometimes override competition.** In times of crisis, women often support each other strongly (the "sisterhood" ideal). The model emphasizes echo chambers potentially blaming men (gamma bias, etc.), but it's also true that many women in feminist movements push for *structural change* rather than merely man-bashing. For example, the suffragettes or modern activists often appeal to men as allies too. So, while an in-group bias exists, it doesn't always devolve into pure out-group hatred – it can manifest as collective action for equality (though the model would say even that is group dynamic at work).

- **Overall Assessment (Female Loop):** The female insufficiency loop is **well-supported in terms of behaviors (indirect aggression, in-group bias)** and in outcomes (higher depression linked to relational stress, intense mate-selection criteria). It provides a compelling framework for phenomena like why women often enforce double standards on each other's sexuality, why "*mean girl*" behaviors peak in adolescence (when mate competition kicks in), and why group-based feminist movements gain momentum (shared feelings of frustration can galvanize a tightly knit coalition). The loop also explains the observation that *women's self-esteem is often tied to their relationships*: studies have shown women, more than men, experience drops in self-esteem after a breakup and are more likely to base self-worth on feedback from close others.

However, this loop, like the male one, is not destiny – social empowerment of women can reduce the stakes of any single relationship. Indeed, women today marry later or leave bad marriages because they *can* survive without a husband, something not true in the past. That freedom is a double-edged sword: it frees women from bad relationships (reducing one source of insufficiency) but also means the “**bar** for what is a worthwhile relationship has risen”, which can lead to chronic dissatisfaction or difficulty finding any partner that meets the standard. The evidence thus supports the existence of a female self-value loop around belonging/attractiveness, but also suggests it might be evolving in form. Women’s collective action (like rejecting unfair gender contracts) is a hopeful sign, yet if it becomes outright rejection of partnership (4B), it might signal the loop’s destructive extreme. On balance, the female loop is **strongly evidenced** in competitive behaviors and implicit attitudes; it, like the male loop, is historically grounded but **amenable to change** with cultural evolution.

IV. Mutual Reinforcement: How the Male and Female Loops Fuel Each Other

The model’s distinctive contribution is showing that these two loops – male and female insufficiency – are **not isolated**, but in fact form a **reciprocal feedback system**. Each side’s coping mechanisms tend to aggravate the other’s insecurities, creating a self-perpetuating cycle between the sexes. Some key feedback pathways proposed:

- **Female selectivity → Male inadequacy:** The higher women set their selection bar (e.g. insisting a man be *tall, wealthy, sensitive, handsome* all in one), the larger the proportion of men who *fail to meet criteria*. This leaves many men feeling *undesirable* or excluded from the mating pool – feeding their sense of inferiority and fueling resentment. We see evidence of this today: large communities of disaffected men (e.g. “*incels*” – involuntary celibates) stew in anger at being deemed “not good enough” by women. In response, some double down on misogynistic attitudes, which of course *reinforces women’s negative view* of those men – a vicious circle. Data from dating apps quantified this imbalance: as noted, **most women chase the top men, leaving a majority of men with little attention** ²³. The result is a huge cohort of lonely men, which corresponds to real-world stats (e.g. a recent survey found ~**28% of young men had no sex in the past year, a much higher figure than among young women**, indicating a mating market disparity). These unchosen men experience heightened insecurity, which can manifest as either withdrawal (giving up on dating, isolating – reinforcing female complaints that “men aren’t trying anymore”) or problematic compensation (boasting, anger, etc., which women see as toxic).
- **Male status-hoarding (gatekeeping) → Fewer high-status men for women:** On the flip side, men’s competitive strategies – especially the winners consolidating resources and status – mean that *not all men remain equal*. A small fraction of men end up with disproportionate wealth, power, or social appeal, while others are left with very little. This **inequality among men** means from women’s perspective, there is a scarcity of “good catch” partners. For example, if the top 10% of men control, say, 50% of the societal resources, it’s natural that women will prefer those men (since they can offer more). Polygyny is an extreme case of this: a few men take multiple wives, others have none. Even in monogamous societies, *de facto* polygyny can occur through serial monogamy or an *informal* harem of girlfriends. The model cites historical examples: when 19th-century Mormon leaders practiced polygamy, young low-status men had almost no marriage prospects, leading to social unrest. Once monogamy was enforced, *the mating competition intensity dropped about eight-fold* (e.g., crime and violence by frustrated bachelors plummeted) – a historical observation consistent with Henrich’s findings ^{29 30}. In modern form, consider the phenomenon of superstar male earners or celebrities – they have an *excess* of

female attention, effectively monopolizing dating opportunities in their circles. Ordinary men can't compete, and ordinary women all chase the stars – again a feedback loop. Thus, male-driven inequality (through “**gatekeeping**” of status and resources in male hierarchies) ends up **raising the stakes for female competition** (fewer men meet the “provider/protector” benchmark).

- **Female “slut-shaming” norms → Stricter sexual standards (for both sexes):** When women collectively enforce norms of sexual propriety (e.g. shaming promiscuity), it can elevate the overall expectations in mating. Men then face a market where women demand long-term commitment and chastity – which might sound good for stable family formation, but the model points out it *also* serves to make mating more **costly** for men (they must provide serious commitment to get sex) and women who *do* break norms are punished. Historically, such norms benefited the group of wives (ensuring men didn't stray with “easy” women) but made life hard for women who didn't secure a husband. This could be seen as women collectively restricting each other to reduce competition (“no woman should give sex freely, so men have no choice but to commit”). While this stabilizes some marriages, it also intensifies male-female tension: men chafe at women's sexual gatekeeping (leading to narratives about women “withholding sex”), and women distrust men who seek casual flings. This dynamic is somewhat less overt today (slut-shaming is publicly decried by feminism), yet it persists in subtler forms (e.g. women judging each other on Instagram). The net effect is raising the “*price*” of sex/relationships, which, when it breaks down (as with the sexual revolution ending many double standards), triggers a backlash – some women feel if others “give it away” too easily, all women lose bargaining power (a classic collective action problem). In short, **female enforcement of sexual norms can paradoxically perpetuate competition and mistrust** between the sexes.
- **Male aggression/hostility → Female mistrust and selectivity:** When men respond to their insecurity with hostile attitudes (misogyny, harassment, etc.), women's worst fears about men are confirmed, leading them to *further raise their guard*. For instance, if women increasingly encounter aggressive or bitter men (perhaps as a result of the incel/red-pill subculture growing), they will understandably become **more selective** and unwilling to engage, which loops back to more male frustration. There is evidence of this polarization: surveys in some countries (e.g. the U.S. and Poland) show young women turning more feminist/progressive while young men turn more conservative/traditional, with mutual resentment. A Polish survey cited in *The Guardian* notes that among the young, **right-leaning men and left-leaning women are the most likely to be single and sexless**, reflecting an ideological split where each side likely views the other as the “problem” ³¹ ³². This is exactly a loop reinforcement – anecdotally encapsulated by women asking “Where are all the good men? (All I see are man-children or chauvinists)” and men asking “Why would I commit to these women who don't appreciate me?” The media amplifies these sentiments (e.g. articles on “toxic masculinity” make men feel attacked; podcasts about “entitled modern women” make women feel insulted).
- **Visual illustration:** The feedback structure can be visualized as two interconnected cycles (see Figure 1). One cycle is the male loop (outer circle: *female selection* → *male competition* → *masculinity norms* → *male inadequacy* → *compensatory aggression & gatekeeping* → back to *competition*). The other is the female loop (inner circle: *limited good men* → *female competition* → *female inadequacy* → *compensatory indirect aggression & solidarity* → which influences *female selectivity/standards* → back to *competition*). **Each loop feeds into the other:** women's high standards and potential rejection of men fuel male inadequacy; men's gatekeeping of power and sometimes poor treatment of women fuel female inadequacy and anger at men.

Figure 1: Interlocking feedback loops of male and female “insufficiency.” Higher female selectivity (demanding a “perfect” partner) leaves more men feeling inadequate or rejected, intensifying male insecurity and aggressive status-seeking. Male competition and status-hoarding leads to a few “winner” men and many “losers,” creating a scarcity of desirable partners for women and intensifying female competition and insecurities about being chosen. Each sex’s coping strategies (male aggression, resource control; female social manipulation, raising standards) further reinforce the other’s challenges, creating a self-perpetuating cycle.

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- **Evidence (Supporting the feedbacks):** Many of these inter-loop effects are evidenced in the preceding sections (e.g. dating market data show female choosiness → male exclusion, and Henrich’s work shows male polygyny → female scarcity of mates → social problems ^{29 33}). One particularly stark piece of evidence is how **monogamous norms stabilizing** the system had measurable benefits. The introduction of *normative monogamy* (one man, one woman) in various societies dramatically reduced the pool of single men and curtailed the cutthroat competition for multiple wives. Henrich et al. (2012) found that cultures that enforce monogamy have **lower rates of crime and violence** than polygynous ones, largely because there are fewer unattached, disenfranchised men causing trouble ²⁹. Monogamy essentially breaks the feedback loop by ensuring (ideally) every man gets a partner and every woman doesn’t have to fight over the same few men. In their words, *“institutionalized monogamous marriage provides greater net benefits for society at large by reducing the social problems that are inherent in polygynous societies,”* chiefly by eliminating the large pool of low-status unmarried men ^{34 29}. This is strong indirect evidence that the two-loop dynamic is real: remove the extreme of it (one man monopolizing many women and many men with none) and you reduce social strife. Likewise, when monogamy was adopted, **women’s welfare improved** (less intra-female rivalry, lower teen marriage, more equal gender dynamics ³⁵). These benefits underscore how key the interaction is – it’s not just *men’s outcomes* or *women’s outcomes* in isolation, but the balance between them.

Another supporting observation: the rise of what some call the **“gender war”** in modern discourse. The more vocal feminist activism has become (often highlighting men’s wrongdoings and women’s disadvantages), the more we’ve seen a counter-movement of male-focused forums (often highlighting women’s perceived arrogance or using derogatory terms like “feminazi”). This tit-for-tat escalation in rhetoric maps onto the loops reinforcing each other. Psychological research into **Gamma bias** provides a framework: it suggests that people tend to **magnify male-perpetrated harms and female victimhood, while downplaying female-perpetrated harms and male victimhood** ¹⁹. If true, this bias means public narratives often cast men as the culprits and women as the afflicted. While there are valid reasons (men do commit more violent crime statistically, for example), this one-sided narrative can become a self-confirming echo chamber (e.g. media rarely highlighting issues like male domestic abuse victims or female sexual aggressors). Men as a group then feel unfairly maligned and not empathized with – which is exactly what the model predicts with its “male out-group bias” and lack of protective instinct for their own group. Meanwhile, women see many examples of men’s misbehavior broadcast (from #MeToo to everyday sexism stories) and conclude that perhaps extreme caution or even separationism (as in 4B) is justified. Each side’s biases and experiences thus reinforce the divide.

- **Evidence (Contrary or Moderating):** It’s challenging to *experimentally* prove these feedback loops because they play out at a societal level. However, we can look at counterexamples or trends that break the cycle. For instance, in societies that strongly encourage **gender cooperation** and mutual understanding (e.g. some Scandinavian countries with explicit gender partnership policies and egalitarian norms), the “war of the sexes” is less pronounced. Men in such cultures (on average) do more housework and parental leave, women feel safer and more respected, and surveys show high mutual satisfaction in partnerships. These might be seen as cases where the loops have been partially *de-fused*: men don’t feel as emasculated by equality,

and women don't feel as dissatisfied with men's contributions. Indeed, Finland had the lowest precarious manhood endorsement in the 62-country study ²⁰ – Finnish men and women alike may not view manhood as something that must be proven by dominance. Not coincidentally, Finland also scores high on gender equality metrics and life satisfaction for both sexes. This suggests that with the right cultural norms, the feedback can be made more positive (a virtuous cycle: reasonable female expectations → motivated but not desperate men → supportive partnerships → women trusting men → men valuing that trust, etc.).

Additionally, personal anecdotal evidence shows many individual couples manage to escape these toxic loops by explicit communication and empathy – essentially forming their **own “contract”** that works for them. This micro-level success implies the macro-level loop is *not inexorable*.

- **Overall Assessment (Mutual Loop Reinforcement):** The mutual reinforcement idea is logically compelling and finds support in both historical macro-data (monogamy vs polygyny outcomes) and contemporary patterns (dating market polarization, ideological gender rifts). It essentially argues that *gender issues are systemic*, not simply one-sided – a point that is increasingly recognized in academic circles (e.g. some scholars talk of a “gender system” where changes in women’s roles inevitably affect men’s roles and vice versa). The feedback perspective cautions against blaming one sex: instead, it highlights a **negative equilibrium** where both sexes, trying to maximize their own interests under new conditions, inadvertently make things worse for all. This is an important reframing that is supported by evidence of co-variation (when men struggle, women don’t actually flourish, and vice versa – e.g. countries with the most male suffering also often have unhappy women). One could argue more data analysis is needed to quantify these feedback loops (for instance, do regions with higher female educational attainment and unchanged male attitudes show higher singlehood and dissatisfaction? Initial data say yes – e.g., East Asian countries where women advanced but gender norms at home lagged have *plummeting birth rates* and low marriage rates). Overall, the interplay is a **strong point of the model**, showing that solutions too must be **integrated** (we can’t fix one side while ignoring the other).

V. The Historical Stabilizer: The Gender Contract (and its Unraveling)

What Was the Gender Contract? The model posits that for thousands of years, human societies (especially under agriculture/civilization) developed an implicit *“gender contract”* – a set of mutual obligations and roles between men and women that kept the loops in check and enabled cooperation. In essence: **men were granted certain privileges (authority, status as head of household, assured paternity/lineage, female deference) in exchange for fulfilling heavy responsibilities (providing food/income, protecting the family/community, doing dangerous labor, risking life in war)**. Conversely, **women were granted certain protections and provisions (economic security, social respect as wives/mothers, male protection from outside harm) in exchange for certain restrictions (fidelity/sexual exclusivity, domestic labor, less public power)**. This was often codified by cultural and legal norms – from formal laws to traditions and expectations (think of the idea of the “chivalrous gentleman” and the “virtuous woman”). A crucial element was **normative monogamy** – each man and woman expected to pair off (at least among common folk), which drastically reduced the intensity of mating competition compared to free-for-all polygamy. This contract can be seen as the foundation of what we call “traditional families” or “patriarchal equilibrium.” While it was unequal in many ways (primarily favoring men’s authority), the model argues it *functioned* as a stabilizer: both sexes got *something* out of it (men got lineage, service, and social esteem; women got security, provision, and a defined social role). It essentially put **brakes on the feedback loops** by limiting extremes: e.g., it curbed male promiscuity (via expectations of marriage) thus reducing women’s mate anxiety, and it required

men to channel their competitive drive into providing for their own family rather than fighting every other man endlessly.

- **Evidence (Supporting Existence of Contract):** Anthropological and historical data indeed show a remarkable convergence of gender roles across very different cultures, suggesting a common underlying *contract*. Virtually all major civilizations had some form of **patriarchy** where men officially led households and politics, and women were focused on home and children (with varying degrees of freedom). This wasn't simply men oppressing women – many women *supported and defended these arrangements* as beneficial or natural. A fascinating example: during the late 19th/early 20th century, as women's suffrage was being debated, there were **women-led anti-suffrage groups** (like the **National Association Opposed to Women Suffrage** in the US, 1911-1918) wherein women argued that being given the vote or equal status would upset the social balance and harm family stability. Their stance was essentially to *protect the contract* – they believed their interests were served by the existing system (men in charge but obliged to care for women). While suffragists won out (rightfully, from a modern view), the existence of these "*home-front feminists*" (so to speak) illustrates that many women historically did not see themselves as simply oppressed, but rather as partners in a complementary arrangement. **Monogamy** as an institution has been credited by researchers with many social benefits. Joseph Henrich's study titled "*The Puzzle of Monogamous Marriage*" argues that the adoption of monogamous norms (over polygyny) was crucial in reducing intra-male violence and broadening prosperity ²⁹ ³³. By ensuring more men had a stake in society (via a wife and children), you got more productive, pro-social behavior and less risk-taking crime. Henrich's data-driven findings include: polygynous societies suffer more crime (rape, murder, robbery) than monogamous ones ²⁹; monogamy is linked with higher investment in children (both parents contributing) and even with more democracy and women's rights in the long run ³⁵. It sounds paradoxical, but Henrich et al. note that monogamy tends to **raise the age of marriage for women, reduce spousal age gaps, and increase female influence** – essentially because where men can't stockpile wives, they must compete by other means (like being good husbands) and women gain more say ³⁵. This suggests the old contract – particularly its monogamy clause – was not purely oppressive but had *system-wide stabilizing effects*. Another piece of evidence: in **hunter-gatherer societies** (our deep past), strict monogamy was not universal (some had flexible arrangements), but those societies had other leveling mechanisms: sharing of food, low property accumulation, and high **mobility** (if a situation became intolerable, people could leave). These factors prevented extreme male dominance or female exclusion – a natural constraint that kept loops weaker. When humanity settled in fixed communities with wealth (farms, herds), that's when strong **patriarchal contracts** emerged to manage the potential chaos (e.g., marriage rules, dowries, clan alliances, etc., all function to channel sexual-reproductive competition into orderly lanes).

The "gender contract" concept finds support in evolutionary psychology too: the idea of "**protective pair-bonding**" – men evolved some inclination to invest in a mate and offspring (unusual among mammals) in exchange for certainty of paternity. This is essentially a biological root of the social contract: men trade off mating opportunities for assurance and women trade off some autonomy for support. While evolution provided the impulse, culture codified it. Many religions reinforced the contract as divine law (e.g. Christian doctrine of husband as provider/protector, wife as obedient helpmate, but also commanding husbands to *love and honor* their wives and provide for them). These norms persisted because they did maintain a workable balance, however imperfect.

- **Evidence (Costs and Who Benefited):** It's important to acknowledge that the traditional contract heavily **favored male dominance** and curtailed women's freedoms. Women couldn't own property in many systems, had no political voice, and were expected to tolerate

subservience. So one might ask, why would women accept this? Part of the answer is *lack of choice* historically, but also that the contract **offered women protection in a very harsh world**. In pre-modern times, being an unmarried woman was often extremely precarious – you lacked economic means, legal standing, and physical safety. So the contract (marriage) was literally a lifeline; in return for giving up some autonomy, a woman gained social identity (wife, mother – roles respected in community) and security. As long as most men honored their end (providing and protecting), many women would support the system. Indeed, research on well-being in the 1950s (the heyday of strict gender roles in the West) found women reported quite high life satisfaction on average – it was only in later decades that female happiness paradoxically declined even as their opportunities rose (a noted finding by economists Blanchflower & Oswald, sometimes contested, but intriguingly consistent with a contract breakdown period). The contract also clearly benefited *children* – having two parents in complementary roles maximized survival historically. This perhaps explains why the model calls it a “**stabilizer**” – it not only reduced male violence, it ensured child rearing and social continuity. Many of today’s social issues (fatherless homes, low birth rates, etc.) are arguably destabilizations following the contract’s dissolution.

- **The Unraveling:** The model states the contract underwent a “**one-sided breakup**” in the past 50-70 years. Essentially, women *exit* the old deal, but men don’t equally exit their obligations. This refers to the wave of changes from roughly the 1960s on (often dubbed the Sexual Revolution and second-wave feminism): women gained **legal equality** (voting, owning property, divorce rights), **educational and career opportunities**, **birth control** (reducing enforced dependency from pregnancy), and social freedoms (decline of stigma around single motherhood or being unmarried). In short, women were no longer constrained to fulfill their old contractual duties (they can leave marriage, they can be economically independent, they don’t have to remain virginal or home-bound). However, men as a group did not undergo an equivalent revolution in *their* roles – they largely continued to be seen (and see themselves) as responsible for the same provider/protector functions. Society still expects men to work full-time, to be ready to defend the country (only men register for the draft in the US, for example), to do the dangerous infrastructure jobs, etc. But what men *get* in return changed: being a dutiful breadwinner no longer guarantees respect or loyalty from a wife (she can leave if unhappy, and divorce settlements or child custody might not favor him). This asymmetry is captured in pithy form: **women gained options, men retained expectations**.

Some evidence: in many countries, **women outperform men in education** now, and participate nearly equally in the workforce – they are less financially reliant on husbands. **Divorce rates spiked** from the 1970s (though have stabilized or declined in recent years for various reasons) – but crucially, women initiate ~70% of divorces in the U.S. (and similar in other Western nations), suggesting that when unhappy, women are more likely to exit, whereas in the past they couldn’t or wouldn’t. Additionally, **family law** often mandates that men pay alimony/child support (a holdover of provider role) even if the wife leaves – meaning a man might end up with the provider burden *without* the family or respect he expected. Meanwhile, women (especially single mothers) benefit from state support systems funded by general taxes (mostly drawn from male-majority earnings) – e.g., in Poland and other nations, women on average receive more from pensions and healthcare over their lifetime than they pay in, whereas men pay in more than they receive (because men die earlier) ³³ ³⁶. This amounts to a **net transfer from men to women** in social programs (not out of malice, but as a result of women living longer and being more often custodial parents). Yet public narratives often emphasize what women *still lack* (like wage gaps or lower pensions due to time out of workforce) without acknowledging this net balance – that framing can make men feel even more like their sacrifices are unappreciated or invisibilized.

Another example: **military service**. In most countries, combat death and conscription remain overwhelmingly male. Even as militaries open to women, it's typically voluntary for women but mandatory (or expected) for men. In the Ukraine war 2022, we saw women and children allowed to flee but men ages 18–60 were required to stay and fight; this starkly illustrates male disposability under the old protect mandate. If we were truly in a gender-equal contract now, one might expect shared sacrifice – but society still leans on men to be the expendable protectors. Men notice this inconsistency, even if it's not always voiced.

On the female side, the unraveling means women are **freer but also face new pressures** – to succeed in career *and* still often manage home life (the infamous “second shift”), to look good (now extended into a longer lifespan of expected beauty/sexuality), and to navigate the uncertainty of modern relationships (will he commit? am I settling? should I focus on myself?). So women got freedom from the old constraints, but arguably lost the **security and clarity** that came with the old deal. The dramatic drop in birth rates across developed countries (Poland’s TFR ~1.1, Korea ~0.8, etc.) is a complex phenomenon, but one interpretation is that **neither men nor women are finding the current landscape conducive to starting families**. Women often delay or forego children (because they want education/career, or can't find a suitable stable partner early enough), and men who are struggling economically or socially are not appealing partners nor confident in becoming fathers. The model would say this is the direct outcome of loops running without the stabilizer: **many opt out of the “game” entirely** – women because they don't *need* to tolerate less-than-ideal men, and men because they fear failure or rejection. The Guardian piece on Poland's demographic woes sums it up: *“the latest phase of gender wars impedes not only childbearing but the very formation of couples”* ³⁷ ³¹. Young Poles are increasingly single and lonely despite stated desires for partnership – a sign of a broken social script.

- **Evidence (Metrics of the Breakup):** We can point to concrete numbers: In Poland, over **70% of divorces are initiated by women** (similar to the West). The labor force participation of women climbed from negligible a century ago to near parity, meaning the **economic bargain shifted**. **Surveys of attitudes** show that acceptance of statements like “a husband should earn and a wife stay home” have plummeted, reflecting new expectations. Yet, at the same time, many dating surveys show women *still* prefer a man who earns more than they do (the majority of women on dating apps filter out men with lower incomes or lower education). This creates a structural tension: the pool of higher-earning men is shrinking as women excel – fueling the “where are the good (meaning higher-status) men?” refrain. On the male side, fewer men feel motivated to be traditional providers if they don't receive the traditional respect or loyalty; we see a rise of young men disengaging (lower college enrollment, higher rates of living with parents into their 20s, etc., sometimes dubbed the “men going their own way” phenomenon).

The “**mismatch**” with **technology** intensifies this. With dating apps, for example, the *perception* of endless options makes people less willing to commit and more likely to always seek a better match (the “**paradox of choice**”). Social media floods individuals with images of seemingly perfect lives and partners, raising expectations unreasonably. A notable stat: although 70% of young Poles use dating apps, only **9% of couples actually met online** ³⁸ – suggesting a lot of browsing and ghosting, but not a lot of successful matching, contributing to frustration. Meanwhile, pornography and virtual entertainment give men outlets that reduce their incentive to pursue real relationships (some men find it easier to retreat into video games or porn than risk dating failure – a trend sometimes implicated in declining sexual activity among youth). All these modern factors amplify the effects of the contract's dissolution by removing some of the last pressures that used to push people into partnership (one used

to have to marry for sex or social acceptance; now one can have casual flings or online stimulation, albeit with less fulfillment).

- **Overall Assessment (Stabilizer and Breakdown):** The concept of a historical gender contract is supported by plentiful evidence of long-standing norms and their recent shifts. The *stabilizing* effect of that contract – especially monogamy – is strongly supported by sociological research (as discussed, normative monogamy correlates with numerous positive social outcomes ²⁹ ³³). Thus, the model is on firm ground in asserting that something important was lost when those norms eroded. That is **not** to say the old system was *better* in a moral sense – it was unjust in many ways and needed reform – but the *process* of reform undeniably caused upheaval. In systems terms, we removed the governor from an engine without an alternative speed control, and now the engine is oscillating wildly. The evidence of the one-sidedness (women's changing roles vs men's relatively static role expectations) is also clear. Where the model must be cautious is not to imply that all was rosy before (it wasn't for those constrained by strict roles, especially many women), nor that the answer is to revert to that contract (which is neither possible nor desirable given modern values). Instead, the takeaway is we need a **new equilibrium**. The data from the breakdown period (1970s–present) show both gains (women's education, professional advancement, more egalitarian marriages for some) *and* serious pains (male educational decline, more single-parent families, incel subculture, etc.). This duality suggests we should preserve the *gains* while addressing the *pains*. The model's call for a "renegotiation" implies crafting a contract that preserves equality and freedom but restores stability and mutual support. Evidence from nations experimenting with family-friendly policies (e.g. generous paternity leave, affordable childcare, etc.) indicates some positive effects on birth rates and gender satisfaction – hinting that policy can help forge a new balance.

VI. Explaining Current Gender Issues in Poland (and Similar Societies) through the Model

Using the integrated model, we can interpret many troubling statistics and trends observed in Poland (which are often mirrored in other countries):

- **Male Crisis Indicators:** Polish men are experiencing alarmingly poor outcomes in certain areas. The suicide rate among men is about **6-7 times higher** than among women ³⁹ ⁴⁰, one of the largest gender gaps in the world. This aligns with the model: men's loop of inadequacy and stoic silence leads them to under-seek help and to be more likely to resort to fatal outcomes. The model's emphasis on *male chronic insecurity* and lack of emotional outlets is reflected here – many of these suicides are middle-aged men facing unemployment, divorce, or other blows to their provider identity. Poland also sees about **39,000 excess male deaths per year** (men dying younger than women by ~8 years on average) – often due to heart disease, accidents, alcohol – all linked to stress and risk behaviors that fit the male loop (working dangerous jobs, heavy drinking as self-medication, etc.). **15% of Polish men report having zero close friends**, and nearly half of young men say they regularly feel lonely or think no one knows them well ¹⁷ ⁴¹. These numbers speak to a collapse in male social support – historically a man at least had the role of patriarch in a family; now many young men feel unmoored and purposeless, exacerbating mental health issues. The model explains this as the outcome of men being told "be strong, you'll get your reward" only to find the reward (respect, stable family) no longer assured, leaving them isolated and without the skills to seek connection (since vulnerability was discouraged).

Additionally, we see growing **radicalization** among some Polish men: the popularity of nationalist or misogynistic online groups, for instance. This is similar to Western trends (the "manosphere"). The

model would say these are *narratives that give meaning to male pain* by blaming women or society – effectively a misguided attempt to restore pride (through group identity or fantasies of returning to a patriarchal golden age). It's the male loop seeking an outlet. Unfortunately, such radicalization further alienates women and mainstream society, again reinforcing the negative feedback.

- **Female Issues:** Polish women, on the other hand, face a different set of struggles. Mental health surveys indicate **women suffer depression and anxiety at about 2-3 times the rate of men** (as elsewhere) – in Poland, prescriptions for antidepressants and reports of chronic anxiety skew female. The model attributes this to the strain of the female loop: constant comparisons (social media intensifying body image pressure), juggling traditional expectations (many Polish women still do the majority of housework and caregiving for children *and* often elder parents) with modern careers, and frustration with partner dynamics (70% of divorces initiated by women suggests many are unhappy with their marriages, possibly finding husbands not meeting their emotional needs or sharing burdens). Indeed, a common refrain in Poland is that women are **overloaded and under-supported**, leading to burnout and unhappiness. This can be seen as an outcome of an incomplete transition – women took on new roles but men (or state services) haven't proportionately taken up old roles like domestic work.

Polish women also express fear and anger over what they see as a regression in some rights (e.g. recent strict abortion laws in Poland have caused mass protests by women). This political polarization (with young women leaning liberal and men often leaning conservative/nationalist) underscores the "*war of the sexes*" environment the model describes ³¹. When women feel their autonomy is threatened, they double down on solidarity (the protests were largely women-led); men in power doubling down on traditionalism can be seen as reasserting the old contract (without negotiation). The impasse breeds further resentment. Socially, there is also a phenomenon of **late marriage or no marriage** – Poland's marriage rates are declining and average marriage age is rising. Over **40% of Poles aged 25-34 are single** (one of the highest rates in Europe). Many women in that cohort say they can't find an "appropriate" partner – often citing that men are immature or not economically stable enough. On the other side, many men in that age range feel women are *too demanding* or "have unreal expectations." This is a textbook case of the mutual loops: each side perceives the other as the issue.

The extremely low **fertility rate (1.1)** in Poland ⁴² encapsulates these loops' combined effect: couples either aren't forming, or if they do, they delay or limit kids, often because of insecurity (economic, relational). Women often say "I won't have a child with a man who won't pull his weight," and men might say "I'm not ready for kids or can't afford them." Both reflect a breakdown in the ability to cooperate under new expectations.

- **Societal Consequences:** The model anticipates broader social issues from the loops: **polarization** (which we've described), and a general "war of the sexes" narrative. In Poland, one sees it in media – e.g., discussions of "toxic masculinity" in liberal media vs. conservative media blaming "feminists" for declining family values. This adversarial framing makes it hard to find common ground or empathy, worsening the loops. The **demographic crisis** is real: with TFR ~1.1, Poland's population will rapidly age and shrink, straining pensions (ironically increasing the male-to-female wealth transfer as fewer children, mostly daughters, will be supported by a diminishing young workforce, much of which is male). **Economic** implications include labor shortages and potential stagnation, which again can fuel tensions (some men blame women's career focus for fewer kids; some women blame men's lack of adaptation for why they don't want kids, etc.). The model suggests all these are the fallout of not having a stable new contract.

In summary, virtually every bullet in the model's "Effects" section for Poland is evidenced:

- Men: high premature mortality (check), suicide 7:1 (check ³⁹), lack of friendships (check), radicalization (some evidence in politics), withdrawal (many NEETs - not in education or employment), addictions (alcoholism remains a big issue among Polish men - 4x more men die of alcohol-related causes than women).
- Women: depression/anxiety (check, 2-3x higher ²⁸), isolation (growing number of single women often citing loneliness), extreme responses like 4B (in Poland not organized as such, but anecdotal rise of women who say they'd rather be single than with an unsupportive man), and as noted majority of divorces initiated by them (check).
- Society: TFR 1.17 -> 1.1 (check ⁴²), polarization (check, visible in election gender gaps), "gender war" (check, evident in hostile discourse online and even policy clashes), and looming demographic/economic headaches (check, policymakers openly worry about population decline).

The model thus provides a **comprehensive explanation for these issues**, linking them to underlying psychosocial loops rather than treating each problem in isolation. It highlights that **men's problems and women's problems are two sides of the same coin**, a crucial insight for solutions.

VII. Toward a New Gender Contract: Implications and Recommendations

Given the analysis, it's clear that trying to address either sex's issues alone is insufficient - we need to rebuild a *mutually beneficial structure* for male-female cooperation. The model's diagnosis implies some broad strategies:

What Won't Work: Simply **turning back the clock** to the old patriarchal contract is neither feasible nor just. Women will not (and should not) relinquish the freedoms and rights they've gained - any attempt to force women back into subservient roles would be unethical and would be fiercely resisted (rightly so). Similarly, **enforcing monogamy by law or policy** is impractical in liberal societies (apart from outlawing formal polygamy, which most places already do). We can't dictate people's sexual or marital choices in a free society; we have to *incentivize* or encourage desirable behaviors instead. And **ignoring the problem** is also dangerous - some have hoped that "this is just a transition and it'll sort itself out," but as we see, the situation in some respects is worsening (mental health crises, falling fertility, etc.). Without intervention, the loops may escalate to more severe social breakdown (e.g., even higher violence or a complete collapse of trust between sexes). So a proactive approach is needed.

Principles for a New Contract:

- **1. Restore Symmetry in Costs and Rewards:** If we expect men to continue doing society's dirty and dangerous work (soldiering, mining, construction, etc.) and absorbing risks, then men need proportional *rewards or recognition* - whether that's status, financial compensation, or social appreciation. Conversely, if women now enjoy freedoms (to have careers, to be single mothers by choice, etc.), then society (and women themselves) must accept that men should also have *freedom to redefine their roles*. For instance, it should be as respected for a man to be a full-time caregiver as it is for a woman to be a CEO. Right now, we've expanded women's roles (applauded when entering male-dominated fields) but have not equivalently expanded or valued men's roles in traditionally female domains (men in nursing or daycare still face stigma, for example). A new

contract would promote **role reciprocity** – both sexes can be providers *and* nurturers. Practically, this means policies like **paid paternity leave** (and encouraging its use) so that men share infant caregiving (giving women a break and bonding men to children, which data shows increases fathers' long-term family involvement). It means educational campaigns that **value men's health and emotions** as much as women's, closing the empathy gap. And it might mean targeted initiatives for male employment in a changing economy (as traditional manufacturing jobs decline, men need new avenues or we'll see more frustration). The guiding idea: **no gender should unilaterally bear all burdens or all sacrifices**. For instance, if we ask men 18-25 to potentially die in war, perhaps we should also consider including women in the draft or at least in civilian defense roles – not because we *want* women in harm's way, but because fairness and shared civic duty may ultimately lead to more balanced mutual respect. Alternatively, if society isn't ready for women in draft, then at least tangibly honor and reward the men who serve (so they don't feel disposable). Symmetry could also involve how we handle things like retirement age (some argue men should retire earlier than women since they die younger – a provocative idea aimed at equalizing years in retirement).

- **2. Break the Insufficiency Loops through Socialization Changes:** We need to intervene **early in life** to alter the implicit biases that fuel the loops. For boys, this means ending the "boys don't cry" conditioning – encourage emotional literacy and seeking help. Mothers and fathers alike should be educated that comforting a crying boy is as acceptable as comforting a girl. School programs can consciously counteract precarious manhood beliefs by giving boys positive male role models who exemplify kindness, cooperation, and respect for women (so boys see manhood not as something proven by aggression or sexual conquest). For girls, breaking the loop means tempering the extreme relational competition – fostering **sisterhood without demonizing either men or other women**. Anti-bullying programs in schools should address **indirect aggression** and slut-shaming head on, teaching girls that tearing down peers ultimately harms all. Teaching media literacy is key so that young people understand Instagram is not real life and they shouldn't derive their self-worth solely from comparisons there. We should also broaden definitions of success for both genders: praise girls for intelligence and leadership (beyond looks), and praise boys for empathy and teamwork (beyond toughness). Essentially, expand what it means to be a "valuable" man or woman. Research shows when people have **more diverse sources of self-esteem**, they are more resilient. So if a man can find pride in, say, being a great teacher or artist or dad (even if he's not rich or a stud), he's less likely to fall into despair. If a woman can find pride in her skills or friends (even if she's not a supermodel or doesn't have a boyfriend by 30), she'll fare better. Society and media play a role here: we need narratives and representations that celebrate different paths (e.g. stay-at-home dads depicted positively, single career women shown as fulfilled, etc., but also couples who negotiate equitable partnerships shown as aspirational).
- **3. Create Institutional Supports as "Stabilizers":** While we can't legislate marriage, we can adjust systems to reduce the frictions of modern life that exacerbate the loops. For example, making **joint custody the default in divorces** (where safe) would address a major male fear and female burden: fathers wouldn't be automatically marginalized (so men might be less afraid of marriage or more willing to invest in kids if they know they won't be shut out), and mothers wouldn't be assumed to take full child-rearing (freeing them to also pursue work if they wish). Countries that have moved toward **50/50 custody** typically see better outcomes for children and higher paternal involvement (which also correlates with men's life satisfaction). Another stabilizer: **affordable childcare and housing**. A big reason couples delay kids is economic strain; if states provide support (as France or Scandinavia do effectively), it removes some stress that feeds the loops (less money stress means fewer fights and more willingness to form families). Also, **men's health and mentorship programs** – currently, for example, Poland has many NGOs

addressing women's issues (domestic violence shelters, breast cancer awareness, etc.) but very few addressing men's (male suicide prevention, prostate cancer, etc.). Funding and expanding such resources (like support groups for young fathers, mental health campaigns targeting men in trades, etc.) is vital. The ratio the model gave – something like 1:125 of support for men's issues vs women's – might be hyperbolic, but it is true that men's specific struggles receive far less coordinated attention. Changing that could save lives and reduce resentment (men feeling "what about us?").

On the women's side, institutional support includes robust enforcement of equal opportunity (so women don't feel they must choose career *or* family – they should be able to do both without stigma). This might involve incentivizing workplaces to accommodate parents of both sexes (flexible schedules, etc.), which helps couples negotiate roles more easily, rather than defaulting to woman stays home because she earns less.

- **4. Encourage Explicit Relationship Contracts (Communication):** Culturally, we might need to shed the "**romantic myth**" that love magically works out with no discussion of expectations (the model noted how talking about roles is seen as unromantic, yet without talking, each party may assume a different deal). Young couples should be encouraged (through counseling, education, popular culture messaging) to **discuss and negotiate their partnership:** Who will handle finances? What are our views on childcare, career moves, sex, fidelity, etc.? By making the *implicit explicit*, couples can avoid resentment. For example, if a woman expects an equal partner in house chores but the man assumes she'll handle all domestic tasks (perhaps mirroring his parents), conflict will brew. Early honest negotiation – essentially writing their own small "contract" – can align expectations. This is admittedly challenging (it's awkward to negotiate love), but even a change in mindset can help: seeing a long-term relationship *not just as a passion affair but as a team enterprise*. **Some therapists suggest treating marriages like a startup: clarity of roles, regular check-ins, and renegotiation as circumstances change. While not very poetic, it might be necessary to avoid the disillusionment many face when unspoken hopes aren't met.** Part of this also means discarding the notion that requiring things "kills romance."** On the contrary, a fair partnership may sustain love longer than unspoken sacrifices that breed contempt.
- **5. Promote Mutual Empathy and Shared Identity:** At a societal level, we need to counteract the polarization by fostering a narrative of "**we're in this together.**" Initiatives that bring men and women together for common causes (community service, mixed-gender mentorship programs, dialogue forums) could humanize each side to the other. Right now online spaces can be echo chambers of one gender, breeding caricatures of the other. We might draw from conflict resolution approaches used in ethnic or racial conflicts: encourage people to share personal stories in mixed groups. When a man hears a woman describe the fear of walking home at night, he gains empathy; when a woman hears a man talk about feeling unseen and suicidal, she gains empathy. The model's mention of the empathy gap and gamma bias means we must actively highlight *male suffering* and *female agency* too – i.e., show that men hurt and cry, and show that women can be strong and at times even abusive – not to engage in whataboutism, but to paint a fuller picture that breaks stereotypes. Educational curricula might include gender empathy training, and media could strive for balanced portrayals (e.g. not all domestic violence is one-way, etc., while still acknowledging the statistical prevalences). Essentially, remove the *scapegoat* framing (men as villains, women as angels or vice versa) and replace it with *shared humanity*.
- **6. Embrace Cultural Variants that Worked:** We can also learn from cultures that achieved relative harmony. For instance, some anthropologists suggest that **Nordic countries** reduced precarious masculinity by embracing a model of "**caring masculinity**" – men are proud to be

equal partners and hands-on dads (thanks to social policies and norms). Adopting some of those values elsewhere could help. Also, looking at matrilineal societies, one takeaway is giving women more property and economic clout doesn't destroy male purpose – men in those societies often take on different roles (like their worth comes from their maternal clan, or from excelling in art, etc.). Translating that, we might say encourage men to find identity beyond just paycheck (the new contract could value men's contributions in community, art, caregiving as much as traditional provider). Meanwhile, value women's contributions beyond just mothering or looks (which we already are doing more, but can increase). The model also points to *the fact that these loops are conditional, not universal invariants*: for example, it notes **Finland's precarious manhood score was around 3.0 out of 7, Kosovo's above 5.0** – meaning cultural context hugely influences how strongly men feel the need to prove themselves ²⁰. That implies we *can* shift these norms.

Which Theses Are Defensible vs Need Caution: Based on evidence:

- **Defensible:** The overall framework of dual insufficiency loops is well-supported by research in evolutionary psychology and social science. Specific defensible points include: **sexual selection's impact on human psychology** (virtually all experts agree on the basic reproductive asymmetry and its consequences), **the existence of precarious manhood** (backed by cross-cultural data) ¹, **the stronger female in-group bias and indirect aggression patterns** ²² ²¹, **the social stability benefits of monogamy** ²⁹ ³³, and the current statistics indicating both sexes are struggling in different ways (no one could deny the suicide or birthrate numbers). The idea that changes since the 1960s disrupted an equilibrium is historically factual. So the model's diagnosis that "this is not just a crisis of masculinity or of femininity but a crisis of how the two connect" is strongly supported.
- **Needs Caution:** Some aspects are more speculative or nuanced. For example, the **exact genetic claim of 80% vs 40% reproduction** – while directionally true – might be overstated or misinterpreted; it's a catchy stat but should be used carefully (some scholars debate the percentages). The **role of mothers in transmitting chivalry** – we have evidence of maternal bias in emotion socialization ¹⁴, but the sweeping claim that "mothers produce sons who support changes against men's own interests" is hard to prove directly. It's a plausible interpretation (men raised to please women), but we should be cautious in attributing political outcomes to it without more data. The **gamma bias** concept – while observationally we see media focus on certain narratives, it's still a fairly new idea in gender psychology and not universally accepted; we mentioned it with some evidence ¹⁹ but it's more of a theoretical framing by certain psychologists (Seager & Barry). So when using gamma bias to explain perceptions, do so as a hypothesis, not settled fact. Also, **solutions like a "new contract"** inevitably require trial and error – we should be careful not to assume what worked in one culture will identically work in another (cultural values differ). For instance, pushing paternity leave in a very traditional society might get resistance from men themselves. So recommendations should consider cultural readiness. Another area of caution: not every problem between sexes today is solely due to these loops – e.g., economic factors (housing costs, job markets) also play a big role in why people delay marriage/kids. The model focuses on the psychosocial, but policymakers must integrate economic fixes too. Finally, we must ensure that in presenting this model, we **don't unintentionally victim-blame either gender**. For example, pointing out female hypergamy or bias is not to say "women are at fault for men's issues" – it's to illuminate unconscious dynamics. The same for pointing out male aggression – it's not "men are bad," it's how they're conditioned. The goal is understanding, not assigning blame.

Conclusion: The Integrated Theory of Insufficiency Loops and the Gender Contract provides a powerful lens to view the modern gender predicament. It emphasizes that **what we're witnessing is a system-level imbalance** that emerged after rapid social changes unmoored long-standing expectations. Both men and women are suffering from feelings of inadequacy (albeit manifested differently), and these feelings are *feeding each other*. Recognizing this opens the door to solutions that aren't about one gender "winning" over the other, but about forging a new partnership ethos. The evidence supports the model's core insight that **we don't just have a men's crisis or a women's crisis – we have a relational crisis** rooted in how the sexes interact.

The task ahead is to **update the social contract** deliberately: retaining equality and freedom (major gains of modernity) while reintroducing stability, empathy, and cooperation. This means men and women seeing each other as teammates, not adversaries – a shift that will require policy, education, and cultural change. It's heartening that where such shifts have been attempted, results are promising (more egalitarian, happy societies). Change is hard but possible, because human behavior, while influenced by evolution, is profoundly shaped by culture. By implementing the recommendations above – fostering symmetry, breaking harmful norms, building support structures, and encouraging open communication – we can move toward a healthier equilibrium.

In one sentence, **the theory's essence** is: *Evolution made men and women different but complementary, history bound them in a contract that stabilized their differences, and recent upheavals dissolved that contract without replacing it, leaving both adrift – so the solution lies in consciously co-creating a new balance where both genders thrive together rather than tug-of-war.* The model convincingly reframes gender conflicts as a solvable systemic issue rather than an endless battle. Both evidence and logic suggest that when men and women cease reinforcing each other's insecurities and start reinforcing each other's strengths, the vicious cycles can turn into virtuous cycles – benefiting individuals, families, and society at large.

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