



## Article

# Gender Stereotypes and Their Impact on Social Sustainability: A Contemporary View of Spain

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**Abstract:** Gender roles are sociocultural constructs that shape the behaviors, attitudes, and values associated with men and women that influence social structures, equity, and sustainability. While these constructs reflect societal expectations, they also limit opportunities and affect emotional well-being. As their evolution has not been consistent, rigid norms continue to hinder social progress. Ensuring that gender norms evolve toward inclusivity and equality is essential for the long-term well-being of societies. This study examines conformity to gender norms in Spain, considering age and educational level, with the aim of guiding public policies and educational strategies to foster social cohesion and equity. A quantitative methodology was employed, using the Conformity to Masculine Gender Norms Inventory and the Conformity to Feminine Gender Norms Inventory to assess adherence to traditional gender expectations. The sample consisted of 380 individuals aged 18 to 85 years. This study reveals a moderate-to-low level of conformity to gender norms but highlights a resurgence of traditional roles among younger individuals. These findings underscore the need for interventions that promote inclusive models and emphasize the importance of ongoing research to understand the impact of cultural, media, and generational factors on attitudes toward gender roles.

**Keywords:** gender stereotypes; roles; conformity; social sustainability



Academic Editor: Xiaoling Shu

Received: 3 March 2025

Revised: 22 April 2025

Accepted: 6 May 2025

Published: 9 May 2025

**Citation:** Palomino-Suárez, Carla, and Marta Evelia Aparicio García. 2025. Gender Stereotypes and Their Impact on Social Sustainability: A Contemporary View of Spain. *Social Sciences* 14: 292. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci14050292>

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## 1. Introduction

Gender roles and norms function as sociocultural frameworks that regulate behaviors, attitudes, and values, delineating social expectations for men and women (Deaux 1985; Ridgeway and Correll 2004). These constructs are internalized from early childhood through language, dress codes, and behaviors (Hyde et al. 2019), and, rather than being static, evolve across different historical periods and social contexts, adapting to societal changes. However, the persistence of gender stereotypes restricts both individual and collective development, reinforcing systemic inequalities that hinder social cohesion and long-term sustainability. Gender norms influence access to education, employment, and decision-making, shaping the trajectory of sustainable development (Eagly and Wood 2016; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

Assessment tools for gender norm conformity, such as the CMNI and the CFNI, indicate that men are often associated with emotional self-sufficiency, dominance, control over women, and risk-taking (Mahalik et al. 2007). In contrast, women are linked to caregiving, the importance of maintaining relationships, modesty, and physical appearance (Mahalik et al. 2007). It seems that these norms not only define expectations and guide behavior; they also limit individual opportunities and may reinforce structural inequalities

and internal conflicts. Many include negative attributes, such as aggression being associated with men and submission being linked to women, which impact emotional well-being (Martínez-Marín and Martínez 2019).

Although advances in gender equality legislation and policies have transformed social structures in many countries, concerns remain regarding violence, the rejection of diversity, and the perpetuation of stereotypes. The rigidity of these frameworks affects not only those who conform but also those who attempt to challenge these norms, creating tensions that impact social cohesion and collective well-being.

#### Why Analyze Society's Conformity to Gender Norms?

Understanding gender norm conformity is crucial for fostering inclusive and sustainable societies. Research demonstrates that rigid gender roles contribute to psychological distress, social exclusion, and systemic inequalities, which undermine progress toward gender-equitable social sustainability. Restrictive gender norms are linked to higher stress levels, interpersonal conflicts, and lower relationship satisfaction (Daoultzis and Kordoutis 2023). Many studies have explored the connections between conformity to traditional gender roles and factors such as relationship satisfaction, mental health, stress perception, and overall well-being. Adhering to traditional gender roles can negatively impact romantic relationships (Ventura Navarro and García Torres 2016) and reduce sexual satisfaction (Herrero Sánchez 2023); it can also increase levels of anxiety and depression, lower self-esteem in women (Fernández-Álvarez et al. 2022), and decrease the likelihood of seeking help from professional mental health services (Toribio Caballero et al. 2022). Previous research also links conformity to traditional gender norms with risk behaviors, such as alcohol consumption (Patrón-Hernández et al. 2019) and intimate partner violence (Vinagre-González et al. 2023). Men who internalize dominance and aggression norms have higher rates of problematic alcohol use. Women who conform to caregiving and submissive norms are more vulnerable to mental health risks, such as anxiety and depression (Toribio Caballero et al. 2022). Men with high conformity to masculine norms are more likely to justify violence, while women with high conformity to feminine norms tend to blame themselves for being victims (Vinagre-González et al. 2023).

The Gender Role Conflict theory (O'Neil 1982) explains the psychological tension that arises when individuals try to conform to rigid, sexist, or restrictive gender norms. This conflict occurs when social expectations contradict personal identity or lived experiences, leading to psychological distress, anxiety, and feelings of inadequacy. Uncritical acceptance of rigid gender norms restricts autonomy, reinforces systemic inequalities, and creates structural barriers to sustainable gender inclusion in education, employment, and leadership. Gender role conflict can affect multiple areas of life, including work and relationships, reinforcing emotional repression, excessive self-demand, and difficulty managing vulnerability (Mahalik et al. 2007).

When gender role conflict involves outright rejection, this creates significant difficulties for those who do not conform to traditional norms. People who reject many gender stereotypes face higher levels of discrimination, social rejection, and violence (Hyde et al. 2019), resulting in a severe negative impact on mental health, thereby increasing the prevalence of anxiety, depression (Xu et al. 2024), and suicidal thoughts (Stanton et al. 2025). Rigid social expectations make it harder for people to express diverse identities in educational and workplace settings, where the risk of harassment and exclusion remains high (Rodino-Colocino 2018). These expectations limit individuals' ability to participate fully in society.

These findings underscore the importance of examining gender role conformity over time. Although traditional gender roles have evolved across decades, their trajectory has not followed a linear or uniform path; instead, their influence appears to intensify or

diminish at different historical moments. This variability highlights the need for ongoing critical investigation. In 2009, a cohort of adolescents assigned instrumental traits to men and expressive traits to women, reinforcing traditional stereotypes (Sánchez et al. 2009). By 2016, generational shifts indicated a decline in adherence to traditional gender roles, with young individuals demonstrating greater support for gender equality (Andrade 2016; Moya and Moya-Garófano 2021). Recent findings suggest a countertrend: 31.8% of Spanish adolescents aged 12 to 15 still strongly adhere to traditional gender roles and hold clearly sexist attitudes (Palomino Suárez and Aparicio García 2024).

These previous studies make us reflect on the idea that not only does a linear path not exist, but gender norm conformity could also be shaped by sociocultural context and could vary according to different variables, such as age and educational level. Age is a key factor in the internalization and potential transformation of gender norms, as individuals are exposed to different social expectations and experiences at various stages of life. Adolescents and young adults, in particular, appear highly vulnerable to the influence of digital environments that may reinforce traditional ideals (Diepeveen 2024). At the same time, older individuals may exhibit either greater resistance or openness to change, depending on their generational context and accumulated life experience. The influence of educational attainment also warrants closer examination. While prior studies have found a correlation between higher education and egalitarian gender attitudes (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004), recent research suggests that this relationship may be less consistent, especially among men (Raz-Yurovich and Okun 2024).

In light of these considerations, this study provides an updated assessment of gender role conformity in Spain, identifying its implications for gender equity and social sustainability, with particular attention being paid to variations across age groups and educational backgrounds. Our findings will contribute to the development of educational and policy interventions that foster inclusive, gender-equitable environments and mitigate the structural barriers that hinder sustainable social progress. Future research must examine how different forms of oppression—such as sexism, homophobia, and racism—interact within specific social contexts (Ferreira 2022).

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Objective

The first objective of this study was to examine the degree of acceptance/rejection of the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors associated with gender norms within the Spanish population. This approach is based on the premise that gender normative systems, although historically ingrained, do not fully align with the realities and needs of the current population.

Our second objective was to assess whether the degree of acceptance/rejection of gender norms varies according to age, considering generational differences in attitudes toward traditional roles.

The third objective was to explore the influence of educational level on the degree of acceptance/rejection of gender roles.

This approach allows for both diagnosing the current degree of conformity to gender norms and reflecting on the implications of these findings for designing public policies and educational strategies that promote equity and social well-being.

**Hypothesis 1.** *The Spanish population does not conform to traditional gender roles and norms.*

**Hypothesis 2.** *Younger generations, exposed to a more dynamic and open cultural environment, will show less adherence/conformity with these norms compared with older generations.*

**Hypothesis 3.** *Individuals with higher educational levels will show less adherence/conformity to gender norms than those with a lower educational level.*

## 2.2. Participants

The initial sample consisted of 394 individuals. After a data quality review, cases with response times of under five minutes or inconsistent responses (e.g., selecting the same option for all items or entering random letters) were removed. After this filtering process, the final sample included 380 participants comprising 66.3% women, 31.6% men, and 2.1% who identified themselves as non-binary.

Participants ranged in age from 18 to 85 years ( $M = 40.33$ ,  $SD = 17.68$ ). The sample included 33.2% young adults ( $n = 126$ ), 28.7% early middle-aged adults ( $n = 109$ ), 23.4% late middle-aged adults ( $n = 89$ ), and 14.7% older adults ( $n = 56$ ).

Regarding sexual orientation, 74% identified as heterosexual, 11.6% as homosexual, 11.3% as bisexual, and 2.9% selected “other”.

In terms of educational attainment, 61.6% had achieved a university degree, 33.7% had finished high school, 4.5% had finished elementary school, and 0.3% had not completed any formal education.

Regarding birthplace, 80.5% were born in Spain (52.9% from Madrid and 27.7% from other regions). Additionally, 17.1% were born in Latin America, and 2.1% were from Europe.

Being 18 years or older was the inclusion criterion, as required by the questionnaires that were administered.

## 2.3. Instruments

To assess conformity to feminine gender norms, women were given the Spanish version of CFNI-45 (Aparicio-García and Alvarado-Izquierdo 2019). The inventory consists of 45 items, rated on a four-point Likert scale (0 = strongly disagree, 1 = disagree, 2 = agree, and 3 = strongly agree), and measures nine dimensions: Relational, Sweet and Nice, Thinness, Modesty, Domestic, Care for Children, Romantic, Sexual Fidelity, and Appearance (time invested in personal care). The reliability for the Spanish sample was  $\alpha = 0.82$ . In our sample, reliability was  $\alpha = 0.74$ .

To assess conformity to masculine gender norms, men were given the CMNI-46 (Parent and Moradi 2011), with items from the Spanish version (Flores et al. 2011). The inventory consists of 46 items, rated on a four-point Likert scale (0 = strongly disagree, 1 = disagree, 2 = agree, and 3 = strongly agree), and evaluates nine constructs associated with masculine gender roles: Competitiveness, Emotional Control, Work Primacy, Risk-Taking, Violence, Heterosexual Presentation, Power, Self-Reliance, and Power Over Women. Reliability for the Spanish sample was  $\alpha = 0.89$ . For this study sample, reliability was  $\alpha = 0.86$ .

## 2.4. Procedure

The data collection process was conducted using an online questionnaire. The questionnaire was initially distributed through snowball sampling via social media (representing less than 25% of the total sample). After a preliminary analysis, stratified sampling was used, and additional questionnaires were distributed in strategic locations across different areas of the Madrid metropolitan region, including public libraries, train and metro stations, medical offices, health centers, laundromats, and senior citizen groups to ensure a diverse and heterogeneous sample.

In the final phase, the distribution focused specifically on recruiting more male participants to balance the sample in terms of sex. However, the proportion of men willing to participate was significantly lower, preventing full parity.

Study objectives were clearly explained. Participants were assured anonymity and data confidentiality in compliance with Spanish data protection regulations (Organic Law

3/2018 on Personal Data Protection and Guarantee of Digital Rights). Participants provided informed consent. A contact email was given for those seeking additional information about the study.

### 2.5. Data Analysis

The reliability of the instruments (Cronbach's alpha coefficient) and the normality of the sample (Kolmogorov–Smirnov test) were calculated to assess suitability of the data for inferential analyses. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for categorical variables (sex, age, and educational level).

To measure the participants' level of conformity with gender norms regarding attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, an initial descriptive statistical analysis was conducted, calculating the means and standard deviations for each gender conformity scale, as well as total scores and individual items within each subscale. The theoretical range of the masculinity scale is between 0 and 138. The theoretical range of the femininity scale is between 0 and 135.

To assess generational differences, an ANOVA was conducted, comparing conformity levels across different age groups. This analysis is based on life course theory (Elder 1998), which suggests that life trajectories are influenced by historical and social events that shape role perceptions; psychosocial development theory (Erikson and Erikson 1997), which divides adulthood into stages based on specific psychosocial challenges (ranging from identity exploration in youth to introspection in old age); and also contemporary studies that classify participants into similar categories to analyze gender and age differences in attitudes and roles (Twenge 2017). Four age groups were established: young adults (18–29 years), early middle-aged adults (30–44 years), late middle-aged adults (45–59 years), and older adults (60 years and older). These categories, consistent with previous research, facilitate comparisons across studies.

To evaluate the impact of educational levels, a one-way ANOVA was performed, comparing gender conformity scores across different educational levels (elementary, high school, and university education). Since one of the factor groups (no formal education) consisted of only one participant, which could affect variance homogeneity and statistical robustness, this category was removed from the variables, and the ANOVA was conducted with the remaining groups.

Data was analyzed using IBM SPSS, Version 29 (IBM Corporation 2023), applying a 95% confidence level in all analyses.

### 2.6. Ethical Approval

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines and was approved by the Complutense University of Madrid ethics committee. The research protocol received a Favorable Protocol Report under the reference number CE\_23012025\_10\_SOC.

## 3. Results

To analyze the first objective (degree of acceptance/rejection of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors associated with gender norms), Tables 1 and 2 present the descriptive statistics of conformity scores for masculine and feminine gender norms, differentiated by scales. The total scale of conformity to traditional masculine norms ( $M = 52.45$ ,  $SD = 13.39$ ) suggests a low level of conformity. The scale of conformity to traditional feminine norms ( $M = 72.81$ ,  $SD = 9.61$ ) indicates a moderate-to-low level of conformity. There was greater variability in the responses regarding conformity to masculine norms and lower variability in conformity to feminine norms, which indicates diverse opinions or attitudes toward gender norms in the group of men and in a less dispersed group of women.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics for the scores regarding conformity to masculine gender norms.

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Competitiveness	119	0.00	17.00	8.7143	3.21317
Emotional Control	119	0.00	18.00	7.9664	3.36969
Work Primacy	119	0.00	12.00	3.6555	2.29013
Risk-Taking	119	0.00	15.00	6.9244	2.91158
Violence	119	0.00	16.00	7.8571	3.56605
Heterosexual Presentation	119	0.00	18.00	5.5966	4.31654
Power	119	0.00	12.00	4.4538	2.66092
Self-Sufficiency	119	0.00	14.00	5.5210	2.50710
Power Over Women	119	0.00	9.00	1.7647	1.76935
Total	119	17.00	92.00	52.4538	13.39286

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics for the scores regarding conformity to feminine gender norms.

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Relational	252	4.00	14.00	9.0079	1.84238
Care for Children	252	0.00	12.00	7.0754	2.91279
Thinness	252	0.00	15.00	7.1230	3.29746
Sexual Fidelity	252	1.00	12.00	5.4802	2.01083
Modesty	252	1.00	14.00	6.5952	2.27818
Romantic Relationships	252	0.00	15.00	6.9802	2.60317
Domestic	252	4.00	15.00	11.2857	2.31006
Appearance	252	0.00	15.00	8.3929	3.09357
Sweet and Nice	252	4.00	15.00	10.8770	2.18760
Total	252	45.00	97.00	72.8175	9.61398

Based on the initial descriptive statistical analyses, the next step was to identify the highest and lowest means and medians for each subscale, to provide a detailed perspective of the conformity of men and women to gender norms.

The analysis using CMNI confirms that no subscale has a mean higher than 9, with a possible range of 0 to 20, reinforcing the finding of a low level of conformity to masculine gender norms and roles. The highest means are associated with Competitiveness ( $M = 8.71$ ,  $SD = 3.21$ ), Emotional Control ( $M = 7.97$ ,  $SD = 3.37$ ), and Violence ( $M = 7.86$ ,  $SD = 3.57$ ). Table 3 provides a detailed breakdown of each subscale by item, with a response range of from 0 to 3.

**Table 3.** Items with the highest scores in terms of conformity to masculine gender norms.

Item	Mean	Median
Winning matters to me	1.71	2.0
I hate asking for help	1.26	2.0
I tend to keep my feelings to myself	1.54	2.0
I am willing to get into a physical fight if necessary	1.38	1.0
Violent action is sometimes necessary	1.45	2.0

The analysis of masculinity subscales with the lowest mean scores reveals themes indicating a rejection of Power Over Women ( $M = 1.76$ ,  $SD = 1.77$ ), low conformity with Work Supremacy ( $M = 3.66$ ,  $SD = 2.29$ ), and limited adherence to Power and Dominance ( $M = 4.45$ ,  $SD = 2.66$ ). Table 4 presents a detailed breakdown of each subscale by item, with a response range from 0 to 3.

**Table 4.** Items with the lowest scores in terms of conformity to masculine gender norms.

Item	Mean	Median
Women should be subordinate to men	0.21	0.0
I love it when men are in charge of women	0.49	0.0
In general, I control the women in my life	0.51	0.0
Things tend to go better when men are in charge	0.55	0.0
Work comes first	0.78	1.0
My job is the most important part of my life	0.91	1.0

The same descriptive statistical analysis, when applied to feminine gender norms, provides a detailed perspective on women's attitudes and perceptions. The findings confirm that no subscales exceed a mean score of 12, within a possible range of 0 to 20, reinforcing a moderate-to-low level of conformity with traditional feminine norms and roles. The highest mean scores are associated with personal environment care (Domestic) ( $M = 11.29$ ,  $SD = 2.31$ ), compliant attitudes (Sweet and Nice) ( $M = 10.88$ ,  $SD = 2.19$ ), and the importance of interpersonal relationships and caregiving (Relational) ( $M = 9.01$ ,  $SD = 1.84$ ). Table 5 presents a detailed analysis of each subscale item, with scores ranging from 0 to 3.

**Table 5.** Items with the highest scores in terms of conformity to feminine gender norms.

Item	Mean	Median
It is important to keep the living space clean	2.56	3.0
I enjoy spending time making my living space look pleasant	1.98	2.0
Being nice to others is extremely important	2.05	2.0
I try to be sweet and kind	2.06	2.0
I feel good about myself when others know I care about them	2.25	2.0
I believe I must maintain my friendships at all costs	1.58	2.0
I make an effort to meet with my friends regularly	1.86	2.0
I clean my house regularly	2.05	2.0

The subscales with the lowest mean scores reflect lack of endorsement for the belief that a romantic relationship is an essential component of life (Romantic Relationship) ( $M = 6.98$ ,  $SD = 2.60$ ). Participants also expressed disagreement with the expectation to minimize personal achievements and avoid appearing arrogant or self-promoting (Modesty) ( $M = 6.60$ ,  $SD = 2.28$ ). There was low conformity with the notion that women should uphold sexual fidelity and adhere to restrictive sexual behavior (Sexual Fidelity) ( $M = 5.48$ ,  $SD = 2.01$ ). Table 6 presents a detailed breakdown of each subscale item, with scores ranging from 0 to 3.

**Table 6.** Items with the lowest scores in terms of conformity to feminine gender norms.

Item	Mean	Median
I hate talking about my achievements to people	0.97	1.0
I would feel extremely embarrassed if I had many sexual partners	1.16	1.0
My life plans do not depend on having a romantic relationship	0.99	1.0
I would feel guilty if I had a one-night stand	0.97	1.0
It is not necessary to be in a committed relationship to have sex	0.85	1.0
I would only have sex if I were in a committed relationship, such as marriage	0.56	0.0

### 3.1. Gender Norm Conformity by Age

To address the second objective, an analysis was conducted to examine differences in conformity to masculine and feminine gender norms, based on age.

The results for masculine gender norm conformity, based on the responses from male participants (Table 7), indicate statistically significant differences between age groups ( $p < 0.001$ ). In contrast, feminine gender norm conformity, based on the responses from female participants, did not reveal significant differences across the age groups ( $p = 0.549$ ).

**Table 7.** Differences in conformity to masculine gender norms among male participants, according to age.

Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Competitiveness	175.896	3	58.632	6.468	<0.001
Emotional Control	111.669	3	37.223	3.485	0.018
Work Primacy	43.562	3	14.521	2.903	0.038
Risk-Taking	94.747	3	31.582	4.011	0.009
Violence	254.687	3	84.896	7.836	<0.001
Heterosexual Presentation	164.111	3	54.704	3.092	0.030
Power	116.259	3	38.753	6.196	<0.001
Self-Sufficiency	42.855	3	14.285	2.351	0.076
Power Over Women	47.222	3	15.741	5.618	0.001
Total	4205.797	3	1401.932	9.506	<0.001

Tukey’s post hoc tests revealed significant differences among the age groups of male participants ( $p < 0.05$ ) in multiple subscales (Table 8). Young adults exhibited greater conformity to various masculinity norms, compared with older groups.

**Table 8.** Multiple comparisons of conformity among male participants, according to age.

Dependent Variable	Compared Groups (I–J)	Mean Difference (I–J)	Sig.
Competitiveness	young—early middle-age	2.18859 *	0.016
	young—older adults	3.46102 *	<0.001
Emotional Control	young—late middle-age	2.49935 *	0.027
	young—older adults	2.33602 *	0.047
Work Primacy	young—early middle-age	1.40778 *	0.049
Risk-Taking	young—older adults	2.51344 *	0.007
Violence	young—early middle-age	2.10753 *	0.044
	young—older adults	4.31586 *	<0.001
Heterosexual Presentation	early middle-age—older adults	−3.14423 *	0.024
Power	young—early middle-age	1.44665	0.082
	early middle-age—late middle-age	−2.04923 *	0.010
	early middle-age—older adults	−2.51923 *	<0.001
Self-Sufficiency	young—early middle-age	1.20844	0.180
Power Over Women	young—early middle-age	1.63937 *	<0.001
Total	young—early middle-age	12.02647 *	<0.001
	young—late middle-age	11.92903 *	0.002
	young—older adults	16.00403 *	<0.001

\*  $p < 0.05$ .

Young adults assigned greater importance to competitiveness, scoring significantly higher than early middle-aged adults ( $p = 0.016$ ) and older adults ( $p < 0.001$ ). This finding suggests that young adults place a stronger emphasis on achievement and success, compared with other groups. Additionally, young adults scored higher in emotional control, with significantly greater scores than late middle-aged adults ( $p = 0.027$ ) and older adults ( $p = 0.047$ ). Young adults may experience stronger social pressure to suppress emotions and maintain a resilient self-image. Moreover, young adults demonstrated a stronger orienta-

tion toward work, with higher scores than early middle-aged adults ( $p = 0.049$ ), indicating that young adults may perceive work as a fundamental component of their identity.

Another relevant aspect is young adults' higher tendency to take risks, with significantly higher scores than older adults ( $p = 0.007$ ), suggesting that risk-taking decreases with age. Similarly, young adults exhibited a stronger association between violence and masculinity, scoring higher than early middle-aged adults ( $p = 0.044$ ) and older adults ( $p < 0.001$ ), which may indicate a closer alignment between traditional masculinity and aggression among young individuals. Furthermore, young adults showed a higher level of identification with male dominance over women, with significantly higher scores than early middle-aged adults ( $p < 0.001$ ). This suggests that young individuals demonstrate greater acceptance of male dominance compared with other age groups.

Overall, total masculinity scores indicate that young adults scored higher than early middle-aged adults ( $p < 0.001$ ), late middle-aged adults ( $p = 0.002$ ), and older adults ( $p < 0.001$ ). These findings suggest a stronger adherence to traditional masculinity ideals among younger individuals.

Conversely, early middle-aged adults exhibited significantly lower scores in terms of heterosexual self-presentation compared with older adults ( $p = 0.024$ ), suggesting that older adults place greater importance on reaffirming their heterosexual identity. Similarly, early middle-aged adults scored lower in power perception, with significantly lower values than late middle-aged adults ( $p = 0.010$ ) and older adults ( $p < 0.001$ ). This indicates that the perception of power as a core component of masculinity is stronger at older ages.

These findings suggest a greater acceptance of traditional gender roles among young male individuals compared with those in older age groups, indicating a potential regressive trend in terms of gender norm conformity.

Although the analysis of variance (ANOVA) for overall conformity to feminine norms among women did not show statistically significant differences (Table 9), the post hoc analyses examined these specific subscales. Differences were identified in the Domestic subscale, where younger women scored lower than young adult women (mean difference =  $-1.19780$ ,  $p = 0.007$ ). This suggests that younger women show a lower level of predisposition toward household tasks and domestic life and identify less with this role.

**Table 9.** Differences in conformity to feminine gender norms among female participants, according to age.

Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Relational	25.155	3	8.385	2.515	0.059
Care for Children	45.571	3	15.190	1.808	0.146
Thinness	20.371	3	6.790	0.622	0.602
Sexual Fidelity	22.267	3	7.422	1.854	0.138
Modesty	17.524	3	5.841	1.127	0.339
Romantic Relationships	9.781	3	3.260	0.478	0.698
Domestic	56.629	3	18.876	3.649	0.013
Appearance	36.442	3	12.147	1.273	0.284
Sweet and Nice	20.144	3	6.715	1.410	0.240
Total	196.479	3	65.493	0.706	0.549

### 3.2. Conformity to Gender Norms According to Educational Level

Tables 10 and 11 present the results of gender norm conformity based on educational level, addressing the third objective. The analysis did not find statistically significant differences in overall conformity to masculine norms ( $p = 0.066$ ) or feminine norms ( $p = 0.553$ ) across different education levels (elementary school, high school, and university degree).

The category “no formal education” was considered a missing value, as it included just one participant.

**Table 10.** Conformity to masculine gender norms among male participants, according to educational level.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Competitiveness	2.472	2	1.236	0.117	0.89
Emotional Control	30.909	2	15.454	1.362	0.26
Work Primacy	36.33	2	18.165	3.597	0.031
Risk-Taking	17.265	2	8.632	1.02	0.364
Violence	41.172	2	20.586	1.622	0.202
Heterosexual Presentation	112.764	2	56.382	3.126	0.048
Power	15.528	2	7.764	1.089	0.34
Self-Sufficiency	0.412	2	0.206	0.033	0.968
Power Over Women	7.304	2	3.652	1.176	0.312
Total	962.147	2	481.074	2.781	0.066

**Table 11.** Conformity to feminine gender norms among female participants, according to educational level.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Relational	10.131	2	5.065	1.498	0.226
Care for Children	7.188	2	3.594	0.422	0.656
Thinness	0.272	2	0.136	0.012	0.988
Sexual Fidelity	50.035	2	25.018	6.456	0.002
Modesty	21.696	2	10.848	2.109	0.124
Romantic Relationships	1.177	2	0.588	0.086	0.917
Domestic	10.046	2	5.023	0.941	0.392
Appearance	22.099	2	11.05	1.156	0.316
Sweet and Nice	1.372	2	0.686	0.142	0.867
Total	110.09	2	55.045	0.594	0.553

Although the analysis of variance (ANOVA) shows no statistically significant differences in overall conformity to masculine and feminine norms, post hoc analyses identify differences in Subscale 3 of the CMNI (Work Primacy) and Subscale 4 of the CFNI (Sexual Fidelity) variables. The results indicate that men with a medium level of education scored Work Primacy higher than those with a university degree ( $p = 0.031$ ), meaning that they placed greater importance on work primacy. Similarly, women with a medium level of education scored Sexual Fidelity higher than those with a university education ( $p = 0.02$ ), indicating a higher predisposition toward sexual fidelity.

#### 4. Discussion

The results reveal distinct patterns of conformity to gender norms based on sex and age, with no significant differences observed in relation to educational level. Overall, the findings confirm that the Spanish population currently exhibits a moderate-to-low level of adherence to traditional gender norms.

Generally, women do not strictly conform to traditional gender roles and expectations. However, certain values associated with femininity remain significant in terms of their identity and behavior. On the one hand, women continue to place importance on cleanliness and household maintenance, politeness, and kindness in social interactions, as well as the need to maintain strong interpersonal relationships. On the other hand, women

reject the notion that a romantic relationship is essential for personal fulfillment, the expectation of modesty that requires them to minimize achievements and avoid appearing arrogant, and the demand for sexual fidelity as a core component of the female role. These findings suggest that certain values may be influenced by sociocultural factors that reinforce the associations between women and caregiving roles, social harmony, and domestic responsibilities. At the same time, there is a clear distancing from traditional norms reinforcing the assumption that female identity must be validated through a stable relationship and be regulated by conservative sexual expectations. In general, although some aspects of traditional femininity persist among women, there is a clear rejection of more restrictive and limiting norms.

The findings regarding the men's responses suggest relatively low levels of conformity to traditional gender norms in the current sample, which may reflect a shift away from the internalization of conventional masculine roles. However, further research comparing historical data would be needed to confirm any long-term decline in these perceptions.

However, some aspects of masculinity remain more pronounced, particularly regarding the need for achievement and success and the tendency to suppress emotions to avoid appearing vulnerable or weak. These expectations can negatively impact mental health and well-being (Levant and Richmond 2016). To a lesser extent, some men still express their relative acceptance of violence as a legitimate means of conflict resolution. In contrast, these men strongly reject masculine norms related to power over women, work primacy, and dominance. They actively oppose patriarchal values that promote female subordination, aligning with recent studies indicating a progressive transformation in perceptions of masculinity and a greater acceptance of more equitable gender relations (Bosson and Vandello 2011). Furthermore, these findings support the notion of a gradual shift in gender expectations, particularly with a reduced association between professional success and masculinity (Eagly et al. 2020).

These results suggest a convergence between genders, reflecting, on the one hand, the empowered femininity model of recent decades. This is consistent with previous research showing that women have adopted roles that were traditionally associated with men in response to sociocultural changes (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). On the other hand, men appear to be redefining masculinity, moving toward attitudes emphasizing emotional connection and the rejection of violence (Kimmel 2008). These patterns indicate that the population is moving away from prescribed norms and adopting a more fluid approach to gender roles. Consequently, the dominant normative model, which reinforces dichotomous and rigid gender roles, is no longer sustainable in the current sociocultural context. Additionally, this model may generate internal conflicts for individuals who do not identify with a normative system that does not align with contemporary societal expectations.

Although overall conformity to traditional gender norms was low, contrary to expectations that were based on previous research reporting an association between education and egalitarian attitudes (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004), we did not find significant differences in conformity across educational levels. Conformity with traditional gender roles remained consistent across all educational backgrounds, questioning the commonly held assumption that education, by itself, leads to more progressive views on gender. One possible explanation is that education may influence how people think or speak about gender in public or abstract terms, especially in policy discussions or ideological debates, but may not necessarily shape their day-to-day behaviors or the internalized norms that they live by. These interesting findings open the door for future studies to explore the role of educational institutions more closely. They prompt us to ask to what extent schools and universities genuinely encourage students to question traditional gender norms, or whether, consciously or not, they may at times contribute to reinforcing them. Understand-

ing how gender-related content is approached within educational settings could provide valuable insight into why higher education does not always translate into lower levels of conformity with traditional gender roles. Interestingly, our results are in line with more recent findings that point to a more complex relationship between education and gender attitudes, particularly for men, suggesting that men of all educational backgrounds may be adopting more egalitarian attitudes, possibly due to changing expectations in relationships (Raz-Yurovich and Okun 2024). These findings suggest that educational attainment alone may no longer be a reliable indicator of one's stance on gender norms, especially among men, and highlight the need to explore not only the level of education that people have received but also to what kind of messages they have been exposed regarding gender throughout their lives. It would be worth exploring in future research not just how far people have progressed in their education, but also to what kind of gender-related content they have been exposed, and whether that content affects men and women differently.

However, young men (aged 18–29) exhibit greater conformity to traditional gender norms, a trend that decreases with age. Young men display higher competitiveness and greater pressure to control their emotions, suggesting the internalization of the traditional expectation that masculinity is associated with emotional strength and the suppression of vulnerability. Another defining trait of young men is a stronger emphasis on work primacy, indicating that professional success is perceived as an essential component of their identity. Young adults also show a higher tendency toward risk-taking, both personally and professionally. One of the most concerning aspects of this profile is the stronger association between masculinity and violence and greater identification with power over women.

These findings contradict previous studies and do not align with the study hypotheses, which suggested that young individuals and those with higher education would be less likely to adhere to traditional gender roles (Twenge 1997; Inglehart and Norris 2003). The results highlight the influence of contemporary social and cultural factors on gender role adherence and indicate a resurgence of traditional norms among male younger generations. This resurgence may be driven by increased exposure to messages reinforcing gender norms and promoting hypermasculinity and violence through social media. The use of digital platforms appears to be revitalizing traditional gender ideologies, counteracting the expected equalizing effects of education (Manago 2013). Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok may be reinforcing traditional gender roles and may inadvertently be perpetuating outdated stereotypes. Hypermasculinity and hyperfemininity are frequently marketed through fashion, fitness, and lifestyle trends, potentially exerting a disproportionate influence on young, digitally connected individuals (Gil 2007). Similarly, the rise of influencers promoting traditional roles may contribute to this phenomenon. Additionally, the perceived crisis of male identity in a context of greater gender equality may be motivating young men to reaffirm traditional roles as an adaptive mechanism (Kimmel 2008). Recent studies corroborate the same interpretation, highlighting how social media platforms significantly shape gender norms among adolescent boys, often reinforcing narrow and stereotypical ideals of masculinity, and support the idea that digital spaces are not only influential in the construction of male identity but may also contribute to the re-emergence of traditional gender norms, particularly among younger generations (Diepeveen 2024).

The findings suggest a counterintuitive resurgence of traditional values among young generations, while older groups appear to have internalized evolving social expectations over time. These generational differences in the internalization and acceptance of traditional masculinity are consistent with the idea that attitudes toward gender norms are shaped by sociocultural context and must be examined across different periods and settings. The persistence of attitudes reinforcing violence and male dominance raises critical concerns about their impact on contemporary social dynamics. These results underscore the need

for educational and cultural strategies to promote more inclusive and equitable models of masculinity, with the goal of transforming power dynamics and reducing the perpetuation of harmful gender stereotypes (Ruiz Repullo 2017).

## 5. Conclusions

The patterns observed in this study confirm that the Spanish population currently exhibits a moderate-to-low level of conformity to traditional gender norms. These findings provide valuable insights into the ongoing negotiation of gender roles in society and underscore the need to continue developing policies and educational programs that promote gender equity (Eagly and Wood 2016; Twenge 2017).

Despite significant progress in recent decades, the widespread belief that gender equality advances are irreversible should be questioned. The transformation of gender roles is neither linear nor unidirectional, and responds to multiple social, economic, and political influences that require continuous evaluation and research across different historical contexts (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Kimmel 2008).

The gradual return to traditional norms among young men highlights the need to foster a critical perspective on gender roles, as this demographic appears to face greater challenges in adapting to current cultural changes (Kimmel 2008; Bridges and Pascoe 2014). The persistence of rigid gender norms in this group may be linked to social pressures, making it more difficult to adopt inclusive and equitable models of masculinity (García-Cueto et al. 2015).

These findings underscore the complexity of gender norm evolution in the 21st century and raise critical questions about the trajectory of these norms in society. While broader social trends indicate a movement toward greater equality, the resurgence of traditional values among young individuals suggests potential resistance to this progress. These results highlight the need for ongoing research to explore the factors shaping these attitudes, as well as the roles of education, media, and generational shifts in defining the future of gender norms.

In this context, education plays a crucial role in deconstructing gender stereotypes. Studies have shown that coeducational programs can foster a more critical understanding of gender roles and contribute to overcoming the binary divisions that perpetuate inequalities (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). Therefore, implementing educational strategies that incorporate gender perspectives from an early age is recommended. Such strategies should promote the development of socioemotional skills that encourage individuals to challenge and redefine traditional models.

Finally, this study highlights the complexity of gender norm evolution in the 21st century and raises questions about the future trajectory of these societal changes. This study emphasizes the need for political, educational, and cultural interventions to ensure that progress not only persists but continues to advance toward a more inclusive and equitable society (Flood 2018). This complexity is particularly evident in the Spanish context, where the coexistence of progressive legal frameworks and persistent cultural attitudes creates a layered and sometimes contradictory social landscape. Over the past two decades, Spain has garnered international recognition for its gender equality policies, including groundbreaking legislation on gender-based violence in 2004, the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2005, and initiatives aimed at promoting co-responsibility and gender parity. These reforms have driven meaningful institutional change and helped shape a public discourse that broadly supports gender equality.

At the same time, long-standing cultural traditions continue to influence how people think, behave, and interact. This enduring cultural backdrop may help explain why, despite legal and institutional advances, traditional gender norms still manifest.

Taken together, these findings underscore the need to approach gender equality not only as a legal or educational issue but as a cultural one. Spain offers a particularly illustrative case, where progressive institutions and persistent cultural legacies intersect—sometimes reinforcing each other, but at other times producing ambivalent or contradictory outcomes in gender norm conformity. Addressing this tension requires multidimensional strategies that acknowledge the depth of cultural influence while building on the achievements of gender equality policy.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, C.P.-S. and M.E.A.G.; methodology, C.P.-S.; formal analysis, C.P.-S.; investigation, C.P.-S.; data curation, C.P.-S. and M.E.A.G.; writing—original draft preparation, C.P.-S.; writing—review and editing, M.E.A.G.; visualization, C.P.-S.; supervision, M.E.A.G. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research was funded by MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033/FEDER, EU as part of the project PID2022-136905OB-C22.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Ethics Committee of UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE DE MADRID (protocol code number CE\_23012025\_10\_SOC).

**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

**Data Availability Statement:** The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

## Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

CMNI	Conformity to Masculine Gender Norms Inventory
CFNI	Conformity to Feminine Gender Norms Inventory
ANOVA	One-way analysis of variance
IBM	International Business Machines Corporation

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