

# Parental Antecedents of Children's Adherence to Maladaptive Masculinity Norms: A 9-year Longitudinal Study of Urban Chinese Families

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## Background

- Masculinity norms:**
  - Not showing vulnerabilities, not seeking help, emphasis on physical toughness<sup>1</sup>
  - Harmful for individual well-being<sup>1,2</sup>
  - Implicate both boys and girls<sup>3,4</sup>
  - Little is known about its developmental antecedents
- Parental gender socialization:**
  - Through explicit gender beliefs (e.g., boys should be independent)<sup>5</sup>
  - Through implicit practices (e.g., house chores)<sup>5</sup>
- Parental sensitivity** may influence masculinity adherence:
  - Attentiveness to child's signals; prompt/consistent responsiveness<sup>6</sup>
  - Child learns to express distress and seek help with sensitive parenting
  - Higher parental sensitivity -> child's lower masculinity norms adherence
- Chinese contexts:**
  - Chinese adolescents are similarly harmed by masculinity norms adherence<sup>3,4</sup>
  - Increasing emphasis on cultivating masculinity<sup>7</sup>

## Present Study

- 9-year longitudinal study in Nanjing, China
- Test longitudinal associations between:
  - Parental gender role beliefs & child's masculinity norms adherence
  - Parental sensitivity & child's masculinity norms adherence
- Test if the associations are moderated by child's sex

## Methods

### Participants

- 356 mother-child dyads (48.88% girls)

### Procedure

- 14 & 24m old: Mother-infant free play observation in lab
- 24m old: Father and mother report gender role beliefs
- 10 years old: Child self-report masculinity norms adherence

### Measures

#### Maternal Sensitivity Scale

- Coded based on three dimensions (scale 1-5):
  - Following the child's need,
  - Positive regard
  - Intrusiveness [reverse coded]
- Composited scores from three dimensions ( $\alpha = .70 - .89$ )
- Two Nanjingnese double coded the videos (ICCs = .79-.92)

#### Parental gender role beliefs

- Four item 4-point scale adapted
- $\alpha = .60$  for fathers and mothers
- e.g., "It is more important to foster independence for boys than for girls"

#### Gender-typed Attitudes with Peers Scale (GAPS)

- Eight item 4-point Likert scale ( $\alpha = .65$ )
- e.g., "I do not let it show to my friends when my feelings are hurt"

## Results

- Parental gender role beliefs *did not* predict children's adherence to masculinity norms
- Higher* maternal sensitivity during infancy predicted children's *lower* levels of masculinity norms adherence, controlling for child's sex and maternal education
- Child's sex moderated* the association between maternal sensitivity and child's masculinity norms adherence
- Only slope for *boys* was significant

## Discussion

- First longitudinal investigation of parental sensitivity and children's masculinity norms adherence
- Masculinity behaviors as a mechanism to cope with unmet emotional needs
- Enduring effects of maternal sensitivity in fostering *resistance* to gender norms

## Future directions

- Role of sensitivity of fathers and other caregivers
- When do girls start to be pressured by masculinity norms
- New path for gender equality education interventions:
  - Address and care for child's emotional needs
  - Support parents to promote sensitive caregiving

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Table 1.

Results of hierarchical multiple OLS regression models with FIML estimating associations between parental gender beliefs, maternal sensitivity, and children's adherence to masculinity

Child masculinity	$\beta$	b	S.E.	p-value	95% CI	R <sup>2</sup>
1. Child's sex	.11	0.11	.06	.063	[-0.01, 0.22]	.031
Mother education	<b>.14</b>	<b>0.03</b>	<b>.01</b>	<b>.020</b>	<b>[0.00, 0.05]</b>	
2. Child's sex	.08	0.08	.06	.237	[-0.05, 0.20]	.036
Mother education	<b>.14</b>	<b>0.03</b>	<b>.01</b>	<b>.022</b>	<b>[0.00, 0.05]</b>	
Parental gender beliefs	.08	0.08	.08	.281	[-0.07, 0.24]	
3. Child's sex	.06	0.05	.06	.400	[-0.07, 0.18]	.077
Mother education	<b>.17</b>	<b>0.03</b>	<b>.01</b>	<b>.006</b>	<b>[0.01, 0.06]</b>	
Parental gender beliefs	.09	0.10	.08	.190	[-0.05, 0.25]	
Maternal sensitivity	<b>-.19</b>	<b>-0.15</b>	<b>.05</b>	<b>.005</b>	<b>[-0.25, -0.04]</b>	
4. Child's sex	.06	0.05	.06	.391	[-0.07, 0.18]	.082
Mother education	<b>.18</b>	<b>0.04</b>	<b>.01</b>	<b>.003</b>	<b>[0.01, 0.06]</b>	
Parental gender beliefs	.09	0.10	.08	.182	[-0.05, 0.25]	
Maternal sensitivity	<b>-.19</b>	<b>-0.15</b>	<b>.05</b>	<b>.004</b>	<b>[-0.25, -0.05]</b>	
Gender beliefs x sensitivity	-.09	-0.17	.14	.235	[-0.45, 0.11]	
5. Child's sex	.06	0.06	.06	.340	[-0.06, 0.18]	.093
Mother education	<b>.19</b>	<b>0.04</b>	<b>.01</b>	<b>.001</b>	<b>[0.02, 0.06]</b>	
Parental gender beliefs	.10	0.11	.11	.297	[-0.10, 0.32]	
Maternal sensitivity	.02	0.01	.08	.891	[-0.15, 0.17]	
Gender beliefs x child sex	-.01	-0.02	.15	.896	[-0.32, 0.28]	
Sensitivity x child sex	<b>-.25</b>	<b>-0.26</b>	<b>.11</b>	<b>.014</b>	<b>[-0.47, -0.05]</b>	

Note. Child's sex (0=female, 1=male). Bold numbers indicate statistically significant results ( $p < .05$ ).

