

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

Rui Yang¹, Theodore Waters¹, Yufei Gu¹,
Niobe Way², Victoria Zhu¹, Hirokazu Yoshikawa²
¹New York University – Abu Dhabi, UAE ²New York University, USA

Dr. Rui Yang
rui.yang@nyu.edu

Background

- Masculinity norms:**
 - Not showing vulnerabilities, not seeking help, emphasis on physical toughness¹
 - Harmful for individual well-being^{1,2}
 - Implicate both boys and girls^{3,4}
 - Little is known about its developmental antecedents
- Parental gender socialization:**
 - Through explicit gender beliefs (e.g., boys should be independent)⁵
 - Through implicit practices (e.g., house chores)⁵
- Parental sensitivity** may influence masculinity adherence:
 - Attentiveness to child's signals; prompt/consistent responsiveness⁶
 - 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^{3,4}
 - Increasing emphasis on cultivating masculinity⁷

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 ✓

- American Psychological Association (2018). *APA guidelines for psychological practice with boys and men*.
- Wong, Y. J., Ho, M.-H. R., Wang, S.-Y., & Miller, I. S. K. (2017). Meta-analyses of the relationship between conformity to masculine norms and mental health-related outcomes. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 64(1), 80–93.
- Gupta, T., Way, N., McGill, R. K., Hughes, D., Santos, C., Jia, Y., Yoshikawa, H., Chen, X., & Deng, H. (2013). Gender-Typed Behaviors in Friendships and Well-Being: A Cross-Cultural Study of Chinese and American Boys. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 23(1), 57–68.
- Rogers, L. O., Yang, R., Way, N., Weinberg, S. L., & Bennet, A. (2020). "We're Supposed to Look Like Girls, But Act Like Boys": Adolescent Girls' Adherence to Masculinity Norms. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*.
- Ruble, D. N., Martin, C. L., & Berenbaum, S. A. (2006). Gender Development. In W. Damon, R.M. Lerner and N. Eisenberg (Eds.), *Handbook of Child Psychology*.
- Ainsworth, M. D. S., Blehar, M. C., Waters, E., & Wall, S. N. (1978). *Patterns of attachment: a psychological study of the strange situation*. Oxford, England: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Yang, R., Li, X., Way, N., Zhang, C., Yoshikawa, H., Chen, X., & Deng, H. (2019). Beliefs about being a girl or boy in China: Developmental and cohort changes over time in mothers' perspectives. Paper symposium presentation at 2019 Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Meeting, Baltimore, USA.

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	β	b	S.E.	p-value	95% CI	R ²
1. Child's sex	.11	0.11	.06	.063	[-0.01, 0.22]	.031
Mother education	.14	0.03	.01	.020	[0.00, 0.05]	
2. Child's sex	.08	0.08	.06	.237	[-0.05, 0.20]	.036
Mother education	.14	0.03	.01	.022	[0.00, 0.05]	
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	.17	0.03	.01	.006	[0.01, 0.06]	
Parental gender beliefs	.09	0.10	.08	.190	[-0.05, 0.25]	
Maternal sensitivity	-.19	-0.15	.05	.005	[-0.25, -0.04]	
4. Child's sex	.06	0.05	.06	.391	[-0.07, 0.18]	.082
Mother education	.18	0.04	.01	.003	[0.01, 0.06]	
Parental gender beliefs	.09	0.10	.08	.182	[-0.05, 0.25]	
Maternal sensitivity	-.19	-0.15	.05	.004	[-0.25, -0.05]	
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	.19	0.04	.01	.001	[0.02, 0.06]	
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	-.25	-0.26	.11	.014	[-0.47, -0.05]	

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

