



# Don't Blame the Siblings!

## Social Experiences of Gender Non-Conformity: Does a Higher Proportion of Male Siblings and Negative Feedback Affect Masculinity Among Sexual Minority Men?

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### Introduction

Social role theory (Eagly et al. 2004; Eagly, 1987) suggests that individuals who conform strongly to traditional gender roles promote the hegemonic male's hierarchy- a model of power, status, and strength- to receive the benefits of social inclusion. For sexual minority men, however, violating these gender roles can lead to negative consequences such as social exclusion, physical violence, and suicidal thoughts (Fiske et al. 2002; Vaughn et al. 2017). As a result, sexual minority men may feel pressure to conform to traditional masculinity standards to gain social approval (Taywaditep, 2002; 2001).

Research has often neglected to consider the significance of sibling relationships from the perspective of sexual minority men. Although sibling relationships are viewed as a normative part of growing up, they can have a significant impact on one's emotional and behavioral development. Positive sibling relationships may serve as protective factors against mental and physical health risks faced by individuals who experience prejudice based on their sexual orientation (Hilton & Szymanski, 2014). Therefore, it is important to investigate the role of sibling relationships in the developmental trajectories of sexual minority men.

This study aimed to explore the relationship between a sexual minority man's experiences with their sibling's social feedback about their gender nonconforming behavior and his subsequent levels of masculinity. Specifically, does negative feedback from brothers or sisters because of their gender nonconformity in childhood affect a sexual minority man's schema of masculinity and adherence to traditional gender roles in adulthood?

**Table 1. Pearson Correlations**

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Total Number Of Siblings	—											
2. Birth Order Number	.437**	—										
3. Proportion of Sisters	-.043	.081	—									
4. Proportion of Brothers	.043	-.081	-1.000**	—								
5. Recalled Gender Nonconformity	.140	.067	-.038	.038	—							
6. Hegemonic Masculinity Ideology	.079	-.042	-.041	.041	-.110	—						
7. Masculine Consciousness	.110	.088	-.030	.030	.022	.533**	—					
8. Experienced Rejection	-.006	.163*	.106	-.106	.446**	-.051	.045	—				
9. Experienced Rejection by Older Sister	.050	.259**	.296**	-.296**	.349**	-.018	.083	.893**	—			
10. Experienced Rejection by Younger Sister	.112	-.142	.297**	-.297**	.292**	.013	-.010	.770**	.525**	—		
11 Experienced Rejection by Older Brother	.188*	.392**	-.259**	.259**	.473**	.045	.144	.798**	.398**	.099	—	
12. Experienced Rejection by Younger Brother	.058	-.110	-.123	.123	.418**	-.083	-.064	.822**	.456**	.536**	.425**	—

\*\* p-value is significant at the .01 level (two-tailed)  
\* p-value is significant at the .05 level (two-tailed)

### Results

The conducted correlational analysis showed that HMI was positively correlated with MC ( $r = .533, p < .01$ ). As expected, there was no relationship between HMI and RGNC ( $r = -.110, ns$ ). Further results showed no relationship was found between HMI and proportion of brothers ( $r = .041, ns$ ) or total number of siblings ( $r = .079, ns$ ). Additionally, no relationship was found between MC and proportion of brothers ( $r = .030, ns$ ) or total number of siblings ( $r = .110, ns$ ). However, the results indicated a significant relationship between RGNC and NF ( $r = .446, p < .01$ ) from sibling(s).

The results of a 2 (Sibling Age: older vs. younger) x 2 (Sibling Sex: brother vs. sister) repeated measures ANOVA revealed significant main effects for both sibling age,  $F(1, 84) = 18.475, p < .001, \eta^2 = .180$ , and sibling sex,  $F(1, 84) = 8.775, p = .004, \eta^2 = .095$ , as well as a significant interaction between sibling age and sibling sex,  $F(1, 84) = 6.208, p = .015, \eta^2 = .069$ .

Simple main effects analyses explored the significant interaction. Negative feedback received from the participants' brothers was significantly greater  $F(1, 84) = 15.997, p < .001, \eta^2 = .160$  when compared to sisters  $F(1, 84) = 6.135, p = .015, \eta^2 = .068$ .

A pairwise comparison of negative feedback among older siblings was significant,  $M$  (older brother) = 1.562,  $M$  (older sister) = 1.265,  $p < .001$ . The mean difference in negative feedback among younger siblings was also significant  $M$  (younger brother) = 1.181,  $M$  (younger sister) = 1.129,  $p = .015$ .

### Hypotheses

H1: It was predicted for a sexual minority man, the number of siblings he has and the proportion of male siblings he has would be positively related to his levels of hegemonic masculinity and masculine consciousness.

H2: It was predicted that a sexual minority man with a higher proportion of female siblings would show less endorsement of hegemonic masculinity and masculine consciousness, due to a less 'threatening' or 'competitive' environment present in female majority families.

H3: It was also predicted that for a sexual minority man, the number of siblings he has, and the degree of negative feedback experienced in childhood because of his gender nonconformity, would be positively related to the degree of hegemonic masculinity ideology and masculine consciousness displayed.

### Methods

Biological males who identified as either gay, bisexual, or pansexual were recruited using Prolific ( $N = 182$ ). Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 80 years ( $M = 34.05, SD = 12.056$ ). Participants were mostly White (69.2%).

Participants completed an online survey that consisted of four scales measuring their degree of adherence to hegemonic masculinity ideology, degree of masculine consciousness, recalled experiences of childhood gender nonconformity, and experienced rejection (i.e., negative feedback) from their sibling(s).

All scales showed good-to-excellent reliability:  
 The Hegemonic Masculinity Ideology Scale (Taywaditep, 2002; 2001).  $\alpha = .91$   
 The Masculine Consciousness Scale (Taywaditep, 2002; 2001).  $\alpha = .95$   
 The Recalled Childhood Gender Identity/Gender Role Questionnaire-form for males (Zucker et al. 2006)\*  $\alpha = .74$   
 The Experienced Rejection Scale (Bos et al. 2004)\*  $\alpha = .95$

\*Some items adapted for sibling analysis

### Conclusions

This study on the relationship between brothers, negative feedback, and masculinity in sexual minority men found no evidence that having more brothers or receiving negative feedback from sibling(s) increased measures of masculinity.

These results differ from previous research and suggest that the effect of sibling composition on masculinity may be weaker than assumed. Deviating from gender norms can result in social disapproval, but gender nonconformity was not positively related to masculine consciousness or hegemonic masculinity ideology.

More research is needed on sexual minorities and their social environment to prevent cognitive dissonance and promote equality. Deviating from traditional male role norms can lead to negative effects and victimization. To produce a generational social shift towards gender equalization, it should be introduced early and reinforced through education and media normalization