



Under (Extrinsic) Pressure: Gender Hierarchy Perceptions & Parents' Sexism Predict Children's Gender Conformity Pressure



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1. Introduction

- Gender conformity pressure is a central component of children's gender development.¹
- For example, this pressure can foster children's sexist beliefs,² limit their academic goals,³ and decrease their self-esteem.⁴
- Here, we explore two potential sources of this pressure, one more distal (**societal gender inequities**⁵) and one more proximal (**parents' benevolent sexism**⁶).

Research Questions and Hypotheses

1. To what extent does children's awareness of **societal gender inequities** relate to their gender conformity pressure?
H₁: Given that manhood is often a desirable status, boys' awareness of men's higher status will positively predict their gender conformity pressure.
2. To what extent does **parents' benevolent sexism** relate to children's gender conformity pressure?
H₂: Given traditional notions of gender embedded in benevolent sexism, parents' sexist beliefs will positively predict both boys' and girls' gender conformity pressure.

2. Method



- **Participants.** 191 ($n_{girls} = 96$) 5- to 10-year-olds ($M_{age} = 8.07$, $SD_{age} = 1.78$) online over Zoom and at NYC parks and museums.
- **Awareness of societal gender inequities.** 6 Qs explaining our world to alien Zeppy. 3 dimensions (wealth, influence, and power) with 2 Qs per dimension (e.g., *Zeppy wants to know, in our world, who has more money? Do women have more money than men, or do men have more money than women? A little more or a lot more?*).
- **Parents' benevolent sexism.** 6 Qs from the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory, answered from 1 = Disagree strongly to 7 = Agree strongly (e.g., *Men are incomplete without women*).
- **Gender conformity pressure.** 4 Qs about pressure from parents, others, peers, and media (e.g., *When you act like a [girl/boy], is it because your parents want you to act like a [girl/boy]?*).



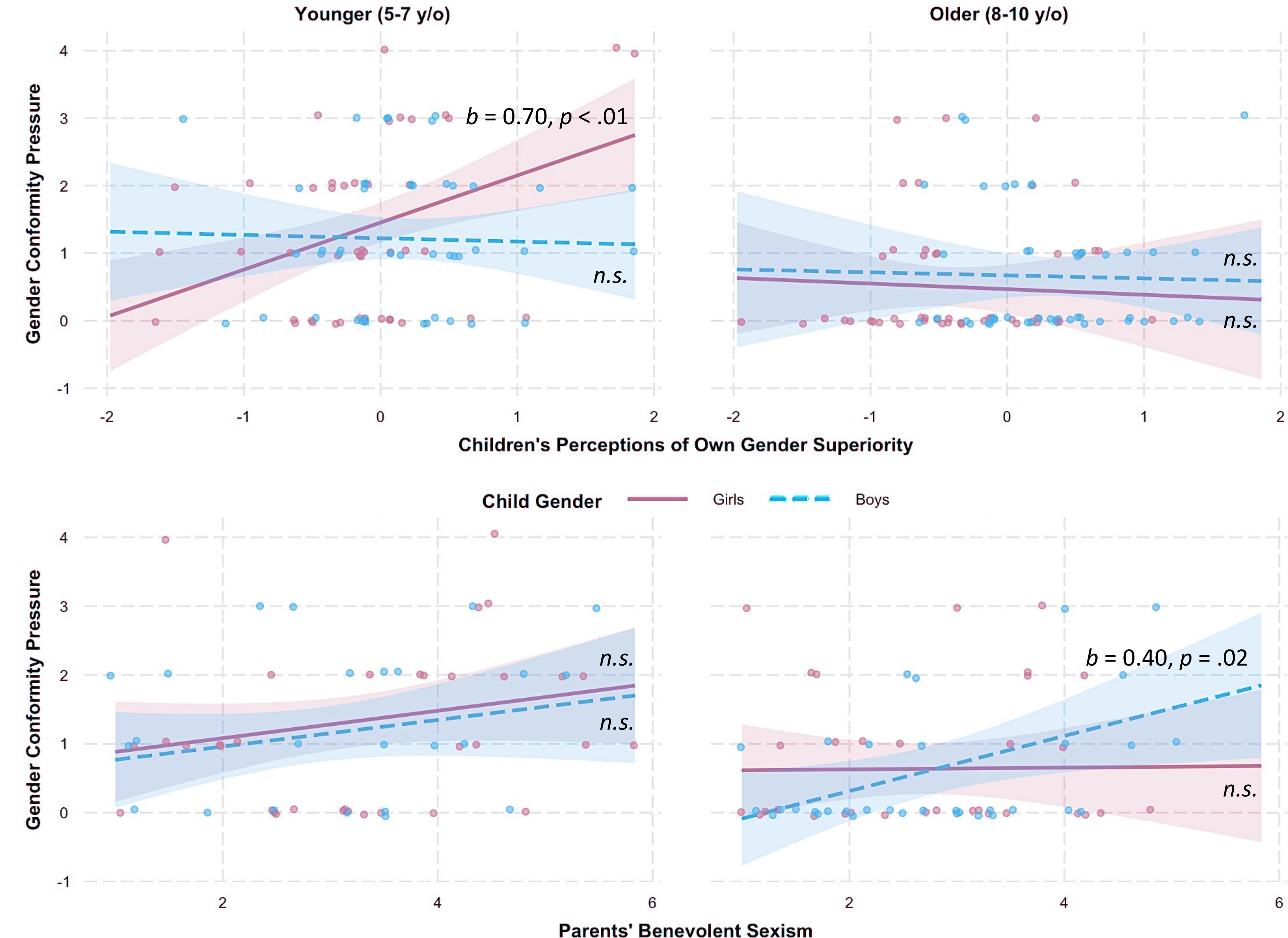
3. Results

H₁: Results were significant, though not in the expected direction.

- The extent to which younger girls (5-7 y/o) thought that women held more societal power than men predicted their gender conformity pressure ($b = 0.70$, $p < .01$).
- There was no such association for older girls nor boys of any age.

H₂: Results were again significant but only among older boys.

- Parents' benevolent sexism predicted older boys' (8-10 y/o) gender conformity pressure ($b = 0.40$, $p = .02$).
- There was no such association for young boys nor girls of any age.



4. Discussion and Conclusion

Gender hierarchy perceptions predicted young girls' gender conformity pressure.

Past work has shown that young girls hold especially rigid gender beliefs that become more flexible with age.⁷ Our results suggest that perceiving that women are high-status in society may be a source of this. As children get older (beyond 10 years) and realize that men are high-status, boys may then begin to experience more conformity pressure (i.e., in adolescence).

Parents' benevolent sexist beliefs predicted their older sons' gender conformity pressure.

Benevolent sexism is based on the "gentleman" construct. Thus, it makes sense that older boys (vs. younger) may feel pressured to match that standard if raised in an environment where this is common. For girls, it may be the case that other types of sexism (e.g., hostile sexism) predict their conformity pressure.

Children's **gender conformity pressure** appears to be shaped by **gender hierarchy perceptions** and **parents' sexism** differently for girls and boys across different age groups.

Future work should focus on the consequences of these beliefs: Do adults that believe in own-gender superiority feel greater gender conformity pressure? Can this be traced back to their conformity pressure as children? Is this linked to their parents' sexism (when they were children)?



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