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Item Type	Journal article
Authors	Gaunt, Lily;Guy, Alexa;Wolke, Dieter;Lee, Kirsty
Citation	Gaunt, L., Guy, A., Wolke, D. and Lee, K. (2024) Sibling and peer bullying victimization in adolescence : masculinity, femininity, and the moderating role of sex and popularity. Journal of Adolescence, 96(4), pp. 760-770. DOI:10.1002/jad.12296
DOI	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1002/jad.12296">10.1002/jad.12296</a>
Publisher	Wiley
Journal	Journal of Adolescence
Download date	2025-05-24 07:15:20
License	<a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/</a>
Link to Item	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/2436/625442">http://hdl.handle.net/2436/625442</a>

# Sibling and peer bullying victimization in adolescence: Masculinity, femininity, and the moderating role of sex and popularity

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## Funding information

Departmental Fellowships, University of Warwick; UKRI Future Research, Grant/Award Number: EP/X023206/1; Undergraduate Research Support Scheme, University of Warwick

## Abstract

**Introduction:** We investigated whether gender-typed traits (masculinity and femininity) contemporaneously predicted self-reported peer victimization, peer-reported peer victimization, and sibling victimization. We also tested the moderating role of sex and popularity.

**Methods:** A sample of 2782 British pupils aged 11–16 from Central England, UK was screened for bullying involvement and popularity using self-report and peer nominations, and a subsample of 704 (52.7% girls) completed a measure of gender-typed traits (masculinity and femininity).

**Results:** Hierarchical multiple regression analyses revealed that low levels of masculine traits were associated with greater risk of self-reported peer victimization, there were no associations with peer-reported peer victimization, and low levels of feminine traits were associated with greater risk of self-reported sibling victimization. The effects were not moderated by sex, while popularity decreased the risk of self- and peer-reported peer victimization.

**Conclusions:** Bullying prevention interventions could benefit from including the positive facets of feminine and masculine traits.

## KEYWORDS

adolescence, bullying, gender, popularity, victimization

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Bullying is defined as repeated, unwanted, and intentional infliction of harm involving a real or imagined power imbalance (Gladden et al., 2014). Bullying is highly prevalent among adolescents, with 30.5% reporting having been victimized in the past 30 days (Biswas et al., 2020; Lebrun-Harris et al., 2020). Being bullied has been associated with negative consequences across multiple domains, including wellbeing, physical health, mental health, social adjustment, educational attainment, and occupational outcomes (Moore et al., 2017; Schoeler et al., 2018; Wolke et al., 2013). As poor outcomes can persist across the lifespan (Wolke et al., 2013) and the currently available antibullying intervention have limited effectiveness (Hensums et al., 2022), further research is needed to inform prevention science.

One antecedent that has been consistently linked to social exclusion and victimization among adolescents is nonconformity to gender-typed traits (e.g., masculine and feminine attributes), such as boys not conforming to stereotypically masculine traits of competitiveness and independence, and girls not conforming to stereotypically feminine traits of warmth and sensitivity (Drury et al., 2012; Navarro et al., 2011; Nielson et al., 2022; Young & Sweeting, 2004). In contrast, adherence to gender-typed traits has been correlated with increased popularity and likeability (Jewell & Brown, 2014). Knowledge of gender-typed traits emerges in infancy (Eichstedt et al., 2002; Goldberg et al., 2012;

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Serbin et al., 2001), with 2-year-old children identifying gender labels and a distinct preference for gender-typed toys (Zosuls et al., 2009). Awareness of gender-typed traits is particularly salient during adolescence (Crosnoe & McNeely, 2008) and remains prevalent throughout the lifespan (Haines et al., 2016; Martin & Dinella, 2012; Master et al., 2021). The substantial impact of peer relationships on adolescent health and wellbeing means that adolescents can be especially susceptible to explicit or implicit peer pressure (Helfert & Warschburger, 2013; McCoy et al., 2019), including conformity to socially prescribed gender-typed traits (Kornienko et al., 2016).

Many studies have documented the negative impact of gender atypicality (Di Giacomo et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2019), but some research suggests that gender-typed traits affect both sexes similarly. For example, Kreiger and Kochenderfer-Ladd (2013) found no evidence for an interaction between gender-typed behaviors and sex assigned at birth; rather, among boys and girls, masculine traits were linked to high peer acceptance, while feminine traits were linked to high victimization. It is therefore unclear whether victimization is primarily associated with sex assigned at birth, gender-typed traits (masculinity or femininity), or gender atypicality and the nonadherence to gender-stereotypical traits (i.e., gender  $\times$  sex interaction). As stereotypical masculine traits are associated with leadership, dominance, and assertiveness, while stereotypical feminine traits involve compassion and submissiveness toward others (Athenstaedt, 2003; Evans & Davies, 2000; Gustafsson & Björklund, 2008; Koenig et al., 2011), masculine traits may reduce the risk of victimization, while feminine traits may increase the risk of victimization, regardless of sex.

Social status has also been proposed to moderate the association between gender-typed traits and peer victimization (Kreiger & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2013). Using peer nomination methods, De Bruyn et al. (2010) concluded that indicators of social status, such as likeability and popularity, were negatively associated with peer victimization. Using a multi-informant approach, Guy et al. (2019) reported that victims of peer bullying were ranked lowest in social preference. Although less research has examined social status and gender-typed traits, Kleiser Polk and Mayeux (2022) reported an association between peer-perceived gender atypicality and lower liking and popularity among peers for boys and girls. This is in line with Gender Prototypicality Theory, which predicts that social power and prestige (i.e., popularity) in adolescents will be higher among those who conform to gender-stereotypical traits, behaviors, and physical appearance (Mayeux & Kleiser, 2020). Having friends and being liked and accepted by peers can therefore act as a protective factor against peer victimization (Cantin et al., 2019; Longobardi et al., 2022; Pellegrini et al., 1999). However, as the role of popularity in moderating the association between gender-typed traits and victimization has not been examined, investigating whether popular adolescents are protected against the risk of victimization due to gender-typed traits is needed and could inform future bullying prevention in school settings.

Prior research on the association between gender-typed traits and victimization has focused on peer bullying, and to our knowledge, there are no studies on the associations between gender-typed traits and sibling bullying. This signifies an important gap in the literature, as sibling bullying is more prevalent than peer bullying (Skinner & Kowalski, 2013; Wolke et al., 2015), and victimization has been associated with adverse psychosocial and health outcomes (Bowes et al., 2014; Dantchev & Wolke, 2019; Plamondon et al., 2021). Additionally, peer and sibling bullying are highly correlated, with those reporting sibling rivalries and aggression being at significantly increased risk for victimization by peers (Foody et al., 2020; Hoetger et al., 2015). This overlap may be due to children's underlying characteristics that endure across contexts and elicit similar reactions from siblings and peers (Gleason et al., 2005), including gender-typed traits. Alternatively, social learning theory posits that children tend to imitate behaviors observed and experienced in their home environment (Bandura & Walters, 1977), which may explain the positive association between peer and sibling bullying perpetration, as aggression at home can be subsequently mirrored among peers (Powell & Ladd, 2010). Similarly, the negative impacts of being bullied by siblings can be moderated by support from peers and vice versa (Coyle et al., 2017), and dose-response effects on depression, anxiety, and social introversion have been found for adolescents who report being victimized by peers and siblings (Duncan, 1999; Monks et al., 2009).

As gender-typed traits and gender expression remain consistent across social contexts (Garbarski, 2023), there is potentially a higher risk of victimization by peers and siblings. For instance, children are often stigmatized by family members for displaying traits that are considered to diverge from the norm (Martinez & McDonald, 2021) and adolescents with minority sexual or gender identities experience significantly more violence by siblings than heterosexual and cisgender adolescents (McDonald & Martinez, 2017; McGeough & Sterzing, 2018). There is currently no evidence on the role of gender atypicality in sibling bullying, but the increased vulnerability of gay and transgender youth to being bullied by siblings suggests that displaying traits which are seen as gender atypical may also increase this risk. Examining victimization and gender-typed traits across contexts will thus help to identify doubly vulnerable adolescents.

Most studies of bullying rely on self-reports. However, self-reported and peer-reported victimization have been shown to be differentially associated with psychosocial outcomes (Košir et al., 2020). For example, Kreiger and Kochenderfer-Ladd (2013) found that engagement in gender atypical activities among boys was related to self-reported, but not peer-reported, peer victimization. Peers may be ignorant of certain power imbalances within others' relationships, causing them to overlook incidents of bullying. Conversely, individuals are not always aware of their own relational victimization, which can lead to an underreporting of victimization experiences. The current study employs a multi-informant approach, using self-reports and

peer nominations of peer victimization, thus mitigating self-report bias. As the existing literature does not point strongly toward any directional hypothesis for the association between self- and peer-reports of victimization and gender-typed traits, this aim is exploratory.

The aims of the present study were to investigate: (1) the associations between gender-typed traits (masculine and feminine traits) and victimization by peers (self-report and peer-report) and siblings (self-report); (2) the moderating role of sex assigned at birth in the association between gender-typed traits and victimization by peers and siblings; and (3) the moderating role of popularity in the association between gender-typed traits and victimization by peers. We hypothesized that (H1) self-reported and peer-reported peer victimization and self-reported sibling victimization would be associated with higher levels of feminine traits and lower levels of masculine traits, (H2) sex assigned at birth would moderate these associations, such that higher levels of peer and sibling victimization would be associated with gender atypicality; (H3) popularity would moderate the associations between gender-typed traits and victimization by peers, such that popularity would exhibit a protective effect (lower levels of peer victimization for adolescents low in gender-typed traits).

## 2 | METHODS

### 2.1 | Design and sample

Data came from the two-stage, cross-sectional Bullying, Appearance, Social Information Processing, and Emotion Study (BASE Study; Lee et al., 2017). In stage 1, 2782 secondary school pupils aged 11–16 were screened for bullying involvement and popularity using self-report and peer nominations (Wolke et al., 2017). As there were a large number of pupils who were identified as victims, bully-victims, or uninvolved in bullying, all those who were identified as bullies were invited to take part in stage 2 alongside a random subsample of adolescents who were identified as victims or uninvolved, selected using Microsoft Excel's random number generator and balanced by sex. In total, 1088 pupils were selected for stage 2.

In stage 2, 306 of the selected pupils were absent from school or could not take part due to school organizational difficulties (i.e., one school was unable to allocate the maximum time and computer resources needed for the study). Three parents refused their child's participation (bully  $n = 1$ , uninvolved  $n = 2$ ), four pupils refused to participate (bully-victim  $n = 4$ ), and five were excluded due to school concerns about vulnerability (victim  $n = 1$ , bully-victim  $n = 3$ , uninvolved  $n = 1$ ). In total, 771 pupils completed the stage 2 battery of assessments. After removing participants who did not provide complete data ( $n = 67$ ), the final analytic sample was 704. The mean age of the final sample was 13.68 (SD = 1.36), 52.7% ( $n = 371$ ) were girls, 88.5% ( $n = 623$ ) were white, and 97% ( $n = 683$ ) had at least one sibling. For self-reported bullying involvement, the percentage of participants identified in each of the four bullying groups were: bullies 23.8% ( $n = 27$ ), victims 27.4% ( $n = 193$ ), bully-victims 22.7% ( $n = 160$ ), and uninvolved 46% ( $n = 324$ ). For peer-nominated bullying involvement, the percentage of participants identified within each group were: bullies 26.7% ( $n = 188$ ), victims 8.7% ( $n = 61$ ), bully-victims 10.2% ( $n = 72$ ), and uninvolved 54.4% ( $n = 383$ ).

### 2.2 | Procedure

School recruitment took place between July 2014 and February 2015. Headteachers of secondary schools in the United Kingdom were approached with full details of the study ( $k = 160$ ). Headteachers of five schools (mixed sex  $n = 4$ ; all girls  $n = 1$ ) agreed to participate in the study, and all pupils ( $N = 3883$ ) were invited to participate via written information sheets, which were sent home in sealed envelopes. Parents were asked to return an opt-out form if they did not want their child to participate and pupils provided their own written assent. In stage 1 and 2, an online survey that took approximately 50 min to complete was administered in classrooms to groups of 20–30 pupils during normal school hours. Full ethical approval for the study was obtained from the University of Warwick Ethics Committee.

### 2.3 | Measures

#### 2.3.1 | Self-reported peer victimization

Self-reports of peer victimization were measured using the Bullying and Friendship Interview schedule (Wolke et al., 2000). The scale consists of 13 behavioral descriptions of victimization (e.g., “been hit or beaten up,” “had lies/nasty things spread about you,” “had embarrassing pictures posted online without permission”). Participants were asked to indicate how often they had experienced each behavior during the past 6 months. The response options ranged from 1 = *never*, 2 = *sometimes*, 3 = *quite a lot (several times a month)*, 4 = *a lot (at least once a week)*. A total peer victimization score was obtained by

averaging responses to the 13 items, with higher scores indicating greater peer victimization. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for this measure was .83.

### 2.3.2 | Peer-reported victimization

Peer-reported victimization was measured using a peer-nomination technique adapted from Coie et al. (1982). Participants were given a numbered list of names of all the pupils in their tutor group and asked to nominate up to three pupils (not themselves, and including the option to respond with “I don't know,” “Nobody,” or “I don't want to answer”) who were victims of the behavior described (e.g., “repeatedly hit, shoved around, beaten up, threatened, blackmailed, insulted, called nasty names, played tricks on or stolen from”) by selecting their corresponding number on screen. Nominations were limited to three to encourage participants to consider their nominations carefully and select those who best fit the descriptions. Nominations were limited to peers in participants' tutor group to limit the demands of selection to a small group of peers that the participants know well, rather than their entire year group. To account for the variable number of children within each tutor group (typically around 10–30 pupils), nominations were transformed into *Z* scores, where higher scores indicated greater peer-reported victimization.

### 2.3.3 | Self-reported sibling victimization

Bullying by siblings was assessed using four items from Wolke and Samara (2004). Participants were asked “how often do any of your brothers or sisters do any of the following to you at home?” (i.e., “hit, kick, or push you”; “take your belongings”; “call you nasty names”; and “make fun of you”). Responses were given on a 5-point Likert scale from 0 = *never*, through 1 = *only ever once or twice*, 2 = *2 or 3 times a month*, 3 = *about once a week*, to 4 = *several times a week*. A total sibling victimization score was obtained by averaging responses to the four items, with higher scores indicating greater sibling victimization. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for this measure was .92.

### 2.3.4 | Gender-typed traits

Masculine and feminine traits were assessed using the Children's Personality Attributes Questionnaire (CPAQ; Hall & Halberstadt, 1980), which asks respondents to indicate their identification with 21 items on a 4-point scale (from 1 = *very true* to 4 = *not at all*). This measure consists of three subscales: the masculinity subscale which consists of eight traits deemed as desirable for both sexes but more common among men (e.g., “When things get tough, I almost always keep going”), the femininity subscale which consists of eight traits deemed as desirable for both sexes but more common among women (e.g. “I try to do everything I can for the people I care about”), and the masculinity-femininity subscale which consists of five traits deemed desirable for either males or females, but not both (e.g., “I cry when things upset me,” “it is hard to hurt my feelings”). Due to its low reliability ( $\alpha = .40$ ), the masculinity-femininity subscale was not included in the analysis. In addition, one item was omitted from the masculinity subscale to improve the reliability (from 0.59 to 0.72) (“in most ways, I am better than most other kids my age”). Responses were averaged to obtain total scores of masculine traits and feminine traits, where a higher score on each subscale indicated greater endorsement of those traits. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  were .85 for the femininity subscale and .72 for the masculinity subscale.

### 2.3.5 | Popularity (peer-nominated)

Popularity was assessed using peer-nominations (Cillessen & Marks, 2011). Adolescents were asked to nominate up to three members of their tutor group who were the most popular and three who were the least popular (including the options to respond with “I don't know,” “Nobody,” and “I don't want to answer”). Peer nominations were summed and standardized to create two *Z* scores for “most popular” and “least popular.” Popularity was computed by subtracting the “least popular” *Z* score from the “most popular” *Z* score. A higher score indicated higher levels of popularity.

### 2.3.6 | Analysis

All analyses were performed using SPSS 27.0 software. Descriptive statistics were computed for all variables. Gender differences in masculine- and feminine-typed traits were examined using independent samples *t* tests to ensure the

heterogeneity of the sample. Group differences between schools were nonsignificant for all outcome variables (all  $p$ 's > .05, with effect sizes ranging from .003 to .012), hence multilevel modeling was deemed unnecessary. A series of hierarchical multiple regression analyses were then conducted in steps to address each research question and hypothesis. Three hierarchical regression models were built, one for each of the three outcome variables (self-reported peer victimization, peer-reported peer victimization, and self-reported sibling victimization). To test H1, the impacts of gender-typed traits, masculinity and femininity were first entered into each model (model 1). To test H2, the impacts of gender atypicality, sex was first entered into the three base models, followed by multiplicative interaction terms (masculinity  $\times$  sex, femininity  $\times$  sex). To test H3, the protective role of popularity, self-reported popularity was first entered into the base models predicting self-reported peer victimization and peer-reported peer victimization, followed by multiplicative interaction terms (masculinity  $\times$  popularity, femininity  $\times$  popularity). Additional multiplicative interaction terms were entered in the final step (masculinity  $\times$  sex, femininity  $\times$  sex, masculinity  $\times$  popularity, femininity  $\times$  popularity).

### 3 | RESULTS

#### 3.1 | Missing and descriptive data

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the study variables. Of the core analytic sample ( $n = 704$ ), all participants had complete data on sex, age, peer victimization, masculinity and femininity, and popularity; 21 participants (3.0%) were missing data on sibling victimization and were assumed to not have siblings and therefore still included in analysis for the remaining variables. As expected, girls reported higher levels of femininity than boys ( $t(702) = -4.51, p < .001$ ), while boys reported higher levels of masculinity than girls ( $t(702) = 7.11, p < .001$ ). Endorsement of masculine and feminine traits was generally high, with means averaging 2.5–3 on a scale of 1–4. Girls reported significantly higher feminine than masculine traits ( $t(370) = 15.4, p < .001$ ), while there was no significant difference in the level of masculine and feminine traits reported by boys ( $t(332) = 2.06, p = .40$ ). Correlations between all study variables are reported in Table 2. Among both boys and girls, self-reported peer victimization was significantly correlated with both peer-reported peer victimization (for boys,  $r = .122, p = .015$ ; for girls,  $r = .231, p < .001$ ) and sibling victimization (for boys,  $r = .139, p = .013$ ; for girls,  $r = .224, p < .001$ ).

#### 3.2 | Are masculine or feminine traits associated with peer or sibling victimization?

The associations between gender-typed traits and each victimization outcome are reported in Table 3, model 1. For self-reported peer victimization, there was a negative association with masculine traits ( $\beta = -.18, p < .001$ ), and no significant association with feminine traits. For peer-reported victimization, there was no significant association with masculine or feminine traits. For sibling victimization, there were negative associations with feminine ( $\beta = -.16, p < .001$ ) and masculine traits ( $\beta = -.08, p < .05$ ).

#### 3.3 | Does sex moderate the association between gender-typed traits and peer or sibling victimization?

The main effects (model 2) and interaction effects (model 3) of sex on gender-typed traits and peer and sibling victimization are reported in Table 3. For self- and peer-reported peer victimization, there were no significant associations with sex. For

TABLE 1 Means and standard deviations of study variables.

	Boys ( $n = 333$ )		Girls ( $n = 371$ )		Total ( $n = 704$ )	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Self-reported peer victimization	1.70	0.87	1.87	1.00	1.79	0.94
Peer-reported peer victimization	0.05	0.95	0.12	0.99	0.08	0.97
Self-reported sibling victimization	4.42	5.14	5.24	5.24	4.86	5.21
Masculine-typed traits	2.78	0.49	2.50	0.49	2.63	0.51
Feminine-typed traits	2.84	0.51	3.03	0.53	2.94	0.53
Popularity	0.19	1.71	-0.15	1.51	0.01	1.62

Note: Peer-reports of victimization and popularity were standardized into  $Z$  scores to control for total number of peers in the tutor group.



**TABLE 2** Correlations between all study variables, separated by participant sex.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Self-reported peer victimization	—	.23***	.22***	-.14**	-.06	-.02
2 Peer-reported peer victimization	.13*	—	.05	-.03	-.01	-.39***
3 Sibling victimization	.14	.07	—	-.15**	-.22***	-.03
4 Masculine-typed traits	-.19**	.06	-.02	—	.18**	-.03
5 Feminine-typed traits	-.01	-.01	-.08	.30**	—	-.12*
6 Popularity	-.17***	-.38***	.02	.02	-.02	—

Note: Correlation coefficients ( $r$ ) are reported. Boys are reported above the diagonal and girls are reported below the diagonal.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**TABLE 3** Hierarchical regression analyses of main and interaction effects of masculinity, femininity, sex, and popularity on self-reported peer and sibling victimization and peer-reported peer victimization.

	Self-reported peer victimization			Peer-reported peer victimization			Sibling victimization		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Step 1</i>									
Feminine-typed traits	0.01	0.01	0.11	-0.02	-0.06	-0.03	-0.14***	-0.16***	0.03
Masculine-typed traits	-0.18***	-0.16***	-0.25	-0.01	0.02	0.25	-0.08*	-0.06	0.17
<i>Step 2</i>									
Sex	—	0.03	0.07	—	0.03	0.47	—	0.09*	0.81**
Popularity	—	-0.24*	-0.32	—	-0.28*	0.08	—	—	—
<i>Step 3</i>									
Sex $\times$ popularity	—	—	0.20	—	—	-0.02	—	—	—
Femininity $\times$ sex	—	—	-0.25	—	—	-0.08	—	—	-0.41
Masculinity $\times$ sex	—	—	0.16	—	—	-0.39	—	—	-0.41
Femininity $\times$ popularity	—	—	-0.17	—	—	-0.37	—	—	—
Masculinity $\times$ popularity	—	—	0.20	—	—	-0.02	—	—	—
$R^2$	0.03	0.04	0.03	-0.01	0.10	0.10	0.03	0.03	0.04
$F(5, 703)$	10.41***	5.95***	3.55***	0.12	15.80***	9.57***	9.57***	5.05***	3.96***

Note: Standardized beta coefficients are reported. Model 1: Femininity and masculinity variables only. Model 2: Femininity and masculinity variables entered first, followed by popularity, and sex, then the interaction terms. Model 3: Additional interaction terms entered.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

sibling victimization, there was a significant association with sex ( $\beta = .09$ ,  $p < .05$ ), in that girls were more likely than boys to report victimization. When sex was included in the model, the association between masculine traits and sibling victimization became nonsignificant. For all measures of peer and sibling victimization, there were no significant interactions between sex and gender-typed traits (masculinity or femininity).

### 3.4 | Does popularity moderate the association between gender-typed traits and peer victimization?

For self- and peer-reported peer victimization, there were negative associations with popularity ( $\beta = -.10$ ,  $p = .009$  and  $\beta = -.41$ ,  $p < .001$ , respectively), while there was no association with sibling victimization, as expected. There were no significant interactions between masculine or feminine traits and popularity in predicting self-reported or peer-reported peer victimization.

## 4 | DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the associations between gender-typed traits and peer and sibling victimization among adolescents, while simultaneously considering the moderating role of sex and popularity. In support of H1, we found that lower levels of masculine traits were associated with greater risk of self-reported peer victimization, while lower levels of feminine traits were associated with greater risk of sibling bullying victimization, even after controlling for sex. However, sex did not moderate these associations, meaning H2 (associations between gender atypicality and peer or sibling victimization) was not supported. We also did not find evidence for H3 (moderation by popularity). However, the pattern of results differed between self- and peer-reports of victimization, as peer-reported peer victimization had no association with gender-typed traits.

In partial support of our first hypothesis, higher levels of masculine traits decreased the risk of being victimized by peers, regardless of sex. These findings contribute to research suggesting that traditional masculinity is associated with social power and dominance (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), which in turn reduces victimization. However, feminine traits predicted lower risk of being victimized by siblings. This may be indicative of a qualitative difference in children's social dynamics with peers and siblings. Sibling relationships involve more intense and frequent interaction compared to peer relationships, and are often comprised of a combination of the characteristics of adult and peer relations (Kramer, 2014; Whiting & Whiting, 1975). As a result, sibling relationships tend to be more intimate and nurturing than peer relationships (Boer et al., 2013). Sibling relationships may therefore benefit from the prosocial aspects of feminine traits to reduce conflict and victimization, as opposed to the assertive and dominant aspects of masculine traits, which appear beneficial for peer relationships. This finding provides a valuable addition to the existing knowledge base around sibling bullying (Toseeb et al., 2020). It also has the potential to inform family-based interventions and therapies aimed at reducing victimization and animosity between siblings and its consequent negative outcomes in later life (Dantchev & Wolke, 2019; Plamondon et al., 2021).

Another novel finding in this study was the lack of moderation by sex. This is inconsistent with our second hypothesis and with previous literature on the association between gender atypicality and victimization (Drury et al., 2012; Navarro et al., 2011; Young & Sweeting, 2004). This may be accounted for by variations in the measurement of gender-typed traits. The current study examined masculine and feminine traits using the Children's Personality Attributes Questionnaire (CPAQ; Hall & Halberstadt, 1980), a widely used measure of masculinity and femininity. However, evaluation of the CPAQ has observed that it tends to focus on the socially desirable traits of masculine instrumentality (e.g., independence, self-confidence) and feminine expressiveness (e.g., empathy, tactfulness) (Carlozzi & Hurlburt, 1982). Although these are important facets of gender normative behavior, they may not represent a comprehensive view of masculine and feminine traits. Consequently, the findings of the current study may be specific to limited aspects of gender-typed traits. Future studies would benefit from using alternative measures of masculine and feminine traits that include socially undesirable traits (e.g., hostility and aggressiveness for boys and excessive passivity for girls), such as the Multidimensional Gender Identity Inventory (Egan & Perry, 2001). It is plausible that gender atypicality only increases victimization when the nonconforming traits expressed are considered socially negative rather than positive, and therefore a more comprehensive measure would reveal impacts of gender atypicality that were not identified in the current study. Future research assessing socially undesirable gender-typed traits, such as stereotypically masculine traits of arrogance and stereotypically feminine traits of meekness, alongside gender-typed behaviors, hobbies, and peer affiliations will help to gain a deeper understanding of the social consequences of gender-typing among adolescents. Berger and Krahe (2013) found that subscales of positive and negative aspects of masculinity and femininity served as unique predictors (e.g., negative femininity highly correlated with anxious depressiveness; negative masculinity highly correlated with power seeking), beyond the predictive power of the PAQ. The negative traits associated with hyper-femininity and hyper-masculinity may therefore be associated with bullying victimization and perpetration and are important to consider in future research.

Popularity was significantly negatively associated with self- and peer reported victimization. This is in line with our third hypothesis and with previous research showing that popularity in adolescence can act as a protective factor against adverse social outcomes (Closson & Watanabe, 2018; Ferguson et al., 2016). However, contrary to our predictions, popularity did not interact with gender-typed traits in predicting self- or peer-reported victimization. This finding suggests that while popularity does decrease adolescents' likelihoods of being victimized by peers, it may not be sufficient in moderating the effects of low levels of masculine traits. This has practical implications for education, in that teachers could foster the socially desirable aspects of masculinity (e.g., confidence and agency) in all pupils. Additionally, a possible reason for the lack of moderation by popularity is our measurement method, as peer nominations included only the three most and least popular peers. This approach may have limited the information gathered on popularity, and therefore provide limited insight into its role in protecting adolescents from victimization. Further research using alternative measures of popularity is needed to fully understand its potential role in protecting adolescents with risky gender-typed traits from victimization.

We found that the impact of gender-typed traits on peer victimization was only evident when predicting victimization based on self-reports, rather than peer nominations. This, again, may be due to our method of measurement limiting



adolescents to nominating up to three of their peers who experienced victimization. Self-reports of victimization, which were measured continuously, may have gathered a more comprehensive view of adolescents' bullying victimization. Additionally, power imbalances present in relationships are not necessarily accessible to peers (Cuadrado-Gordillo, 2012; Vivolo-Kantor et al., 2014). Peers may therefore overlook and underreport instances of bullying. The differences in outcomes according to method of measurement highlights the utility of adopting a multi-informant approach in future research.

The strengths of this study include a large sample, the use of well-validated, multi-item measures of masculinity, femininity, and peer and sibling victimization, and a multi-informant approach including self- and peer-reports of victimization.

There are also limitations to the study. First, the cross-sectional design prevents any assumptions regarding the direction of associations. For example, some studies suggest that negative treatment by peers can lead to a decrease in gender atypical traits and activities (Ewing Lee & Troop-Gordon, 2011a, 2011b). Furthermore, the associations between popularity and victimization may be accounted for by a third variable, such as psychological functioning or self-esteem (Cheek et al., 2020; Choi & Park, 2021; Lee et al., 2017). Longitudinal research is needed to further unravel these associations. Second, the sample consisted overwhelmingly of White participants. Generalization to other ethnicities should therefore be made with caution, as racial differences in bullying victimization have been reported (Tippett et al., 2013) and popularity has been associated with different traits depending on ethnicity (Meisinger et al., 2007). Third, the findings relate only to pupils from the five secondary schools recruited, which were from a relatively small geographical area and may not be representative of the UK as a whole. Finally, birth order of siblings was not reported in this study. This is an important area for future research as the associations between birth order and sibling bullying dynamics are not well understood, with mixed findings on perpetration (Cistaro, 2011; Ellis, 2013; Sultana & Latif, 2013) and no known studies focusing on birth order as a determinant of sibling victimization. Further investigation is needed to explore the impacts of birth order on sibling victimization among adolescents with risky gender-typed traits.

An additional limitation is our use of a binary sex variable. The response options to indicate sex in the current study included only "male" and "female," which means we were unable to differentiate adolescents with minority gender identities, such as transgender and nonbinary individuals. Recent studies have demonstrated a global increase in the prevalence of transgender and nonbinary identities, particularly among adolescents (Arcelus et al., 2015; Grant et al., 2011). For example, in the United States, 1.4% of those aged 13–17 identify as transgender, compared to 0.5% of adults (Herman et al., 2022). Research consistently shows that gender minority adolescents experience greater bullying and harassment by peers when compared to cisgender youth (Johns et al., 2019; Reisner et al., 2014). While the statistical infrequency of minority gender identities means this was unlikely to impact the current findings, these differences are important to consider when assessing the impact of gender-nonconformity on peer and sibling victimization in future studies.

In conclusion, victimization by peers is associated with decreased masculinity in adolescents while victimization by siblings is associated with decreased femininity, and popularity reduces the risk of peer victimization. Due to the prevalence and negative long-term consequences of victimization in adolescence, interventions supporting victims of bullying should include promotion of the positive facets of both masculinity and femininity, such as compassion, agreeableness, agency, and confidence in social settings.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The study was funded by the Undergraduate Research Support Scheme, University of Warwick, awarded to the first author. Kirsty Lee and Alexa Guy were supported by Departmental Fellowships to undertake this research. Dieter Wolke is supported by a UKRI Future Research grant (EP/X023206/1) under UK government's funding guarantee for ERC-AdG grants. Portions of these findings were presented at the BPS Division of Educational and Child Psychology Annual Conference, Nottingham, UK.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data sets generated for this study are available on request to the corresponding author.

## ETHICS STATEMENT

Full ethical approval for the study was obtained from the University of Warwick Ethics Committee.

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**How to cite this article:** Gaunt, L., Guy, A., Wolke, D., & Lee, K. S. (2024). Sibling and peer bullying victimization in adolescence: Masculinity, femininity, and the moderating role of sex and popularity. *Journal of Adolescence, 1–11*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jad.12296>