

SEXIST ATTITUDES AND SUPPORT FOR THE STATU QUO

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RESUMEN

Los estereotipos de género y el sexismo ambivalente promueven y explican de las desigualdades sociales. Este trabajo tiene como objetivo poner a prueba un modelo de integración de los predictores socio-demográficos de ideologías sexistas, cuatro dimensiones de sexismo ambivalente y la justificación del sistema específico de género. En el estudio se realizó con una muestra de personas que viven en el noroeste de Italia. Los resultados muestran que la aprobación de las actitudes sexistas varía en función del sexo, la edad, el nivel educativo y la orientación política. No obstante, la benevolencia hacia la justificación sistema aumenta en el hombre, mientras que disminuye la hostilidad. Inesperadamente, las actitudes sexistas hacia las mujeres no tuvieron ningún efecto sobre el apoyo al statu quo. Se analiza las posibles implicaciones teóricas de los resultados.

ABSTRACT

Gender stereotypes and ambivalent sexism promote and give reason for social inequalities. The present study aimed at testing a model integrating socio-demographic predictors of sexist ideologies, four dimensions of ambivalent sexism and gender-specific system justification. 522 common people living in the North-West of Italy participated in the study. Results showed that the endorsement of sexist attitudes varies according to gender, age, educational level and political orientation. Moreover, benevolence toward men enhanced system justification, whereas hostility decreased it. Unexpectedly, sexist attitudes toward women had no effect on support for the statu quo. Theoretical implications are discussed.

Key words: sexismo ambivalente, muestra comunitaria, justificación del sistema [ambivalent sexism, community sample, system justification]

Because of the basic structure of traditional male-female relationships, in which a power differentiation coexists with a strong interdependence between the groups, sexist attitudes encompass considerable ambivalence on the part of each sex toward the other (Glick and Fiske, 2001). Glick and Fiske (1996, 1999) define this phenomenon as “ambivalent sexism”. In respect to women, hostile sexism (HS) is an adversarial view of gender relations in which women are perceived as seeking to control men and usurping men’s power. Benevolent sexism (BS) idealizes women as pure creatures who ought to be protected, supported and whose love is necessary

to make a man complete, but it implies that women are weak and best suited for conventional gender roles. Similarly, sexist attitudes toward men include both hostility toward men (HM) and benevolence toward men (BM). The first refers to the expression of hostility in response to power inequalities, cultural attitudes that portray men as superior, and the ways in which men exert control within intimate relationships. Benevolence toward men represents overtly positive attitudes and is based on a set of beliefs holding that, just as women are dependent on men, so are men dependent on women.

As Glick and colleagues (2000; 2004) have shown, HS and BS, as well as HM and BM, are complementary sexist ideologies that are common across cultures. Indeed, ambivalent sexism has been studied in many countries and results have shown that all the dimensions correlate each other and to national indices of gender inequality in Latin America, the Middle East, Australasia, and Europe.

Sexist ideologies are shared by men and women. As Glick et al. (2000) showed in their cross-cultural research, as men's sexism increased, so did women's acceptance of sexist ideologies. However, significantly higher scores on HS for men (as compared to women) have consistently been found in different samples from many nations, whereas gender differences on BS, though not uncommon, are less frequent. Indeed, in every country studied by Glick and colleagues (2000) women reported lower levels of HS than men did. Instead, gender difference in BS scores was nonsignificant in almost half of the countries (Glick et al., 2000). Similarly, Chen, Fiske and Lee (2009) found that both in China and in the U.S. men scored higher than women on HS, but only within the Chinese sample women outscored men on BS (Chen et al., 2009). In a random sample of Spanish adults, men scored higher than women on both BS and HS (Glick, Lameiras, & Rodríguez Castro, 2002). Among high school students, boys showed higher levels of HS (Silván-Ferrero and Bustillos López, 2007). In the Italian context, Manganelli Rattazzi, Volpato and Canova (2008) found that women score higher than men on HS, but not on BS. Also ambivalence toward men has been examined cross-nationally and in relation to respondents' gender (Glick et al., 2004). In all but one sample (England), women reported higher levels of hostility than did men, whereas in 11 of the 16 involved nations men significantly outscored women on benevolence toward men (Glick et al., 2004). These data are in line with previous studies with U.S. undergraduates and adults (Glick and Fiske, 1999) and with more recent research on HM and BM with both undergraduates (Anderson, Kanner, and

Elsayegh, 2009; Manganelli Rattazzi et al., 2008) and high school students (Silván-Ferrero and Bustillos López, 2007).

The effect of other socio-demographic characteristics on ambivalent sexism has rarely been studied. As Glick and colleagues (2002) argue, generational changes toward sexist attitudes and the role played by education must be taken into account, and not overlooked as in studies whose samples are comprised of mainly or exclusively University students. In the few research on the effect of age, results indicate that under 42 years of age, women and men display significant less hostile and benevolent sexist attitudes in general as compared to older subjects (Lameiras Fernández, Rodríguez Castro, and González Lorenzo, 2004). More specifically, for both men and women, age predicts BS, HM and BM, but has no significant influence on HS (Glick et al., 2002).

Increased education is associated with less prejudiced attitudes in general (Farley, Steeh, Krysan, Jackson, and Reeves, 1994) and with less sexist attitudes in particular (Sidanius, 1993), whether hostile or benevolent, directed at men or at women (Glick et al., 2002).

Another interesting characteristic, which appears to be related to sexist ideology, is the political orientation. To our knowledge, only one study investigated the role played by this variable, showing a positive correlation between right-wing orientation and both hostile and benevolent sexist attitudes (Manganelli Rattazzi et al., 2008). However, research has demonstrated that three facets of conservatism - social dominance orientation, right-wing authoritarianism, and Protestant work ethic - predict sexism toward women (Christopher and Mull, 2006). More specifically, social dominance orientation and Protestant work ethic are significantly related to HS, whereas right-wing authoritarianism influences BS (Christopher and Mull, 2006).

Ambivalent Sexism and Gender Inequality

Ambivalent sexism forms a coordinated ideological system that justifies and maintains gender inequality (Glick et al., 2000; 2004; Rollero and Fedi, 2012). In other words, stereotypes of men and women serve as psychological tools that promote and give reason for social inequality (Lau, Kay, and Spencer, 2008; Rollero and Fedi, 2012). As Jackman (1994) has suggested, engaging in stereotypic differentiation treats each gender group as well-suited to occupy the positions and roles that are prescribed for them by society. As well as hostile attitudes, also benevolence toward women, although positive in tone, pacifies women's resistance to gender subordina-

tion by masking gender inequality with the cloak of chivalry (Burn and Busso, 2005).

Empirical research gives evidence of the negative correlation between ambivalent sexism toward women and national indices of gender equality (Glick et al., 2000). It was found that BS, HS, BM and HM were negatively correlated with Gender Empowerment Measure and Gender Development Index (Glick et al., 2000; Glick et al., 2004). The only exception is represented by a recent study by Glick and Whitehead (2010), who examined how ambivalence toward men and women relate to the perceived legitimacy and stability of gender hierarchy. They found that only endorsement of BM predicted legitimacy for both male and female participants, whereas only HM predicted the perceived stability for both sexes.

From a system justification perspective, stereotypes serve not only to rationalize specific aspects of intergroup relations, but also to bolster the overall sense that the system as a whole is legitimate and justifiable (Jost and Banaji, 1994). Indeed, the System Justification Theory (Jost and Banaji, 1994) explains how subordinate groups tend to accept system-justifying ideologies of their own inferiority that are propagated by dominant groups. Concerning gender stereotypes, as Jost and Kay (2005) established, the culturally available gender stereotypes do lead women – and in some circumstances men – to embrace and justify the system, with its degree of inequality (Jost and Kay, 2005).

In short, on the one hand correlational studies gave evidence of the relation between ambivalent sexism (directed at both men and women) and indices of gender equality (Glick et al., 2000; 2004). On the other, experimental research showed that exposure to benevolent and complementary gender stereotypes increased gender-specific (and sometimes more general) system justification (Jost and Kay, 2005). However, the effects of the four different dimensions of ambivalent sexism (BS, HS, BM and HM) on gender-specific system justification have not been investigated yet.

The Current Study

The primary goal of the present study was to investigate how the endorsement of ambivalent sexism affects gender-specific system justification. Moreover, we aimed at identifying socio-demographical predictors of every dimension of ambivalent sexism, through a model that takes into account and merges the main variables considered in literature. In particular, as exemplified in Figure 1, it was predicted that:

- BS, HS, BM, and HM positively correlate with each other and directly affect gender-specific system justification, in line with the notion that am-

bivalent sexism is an ideological system that justifies and maintains gender inequality;

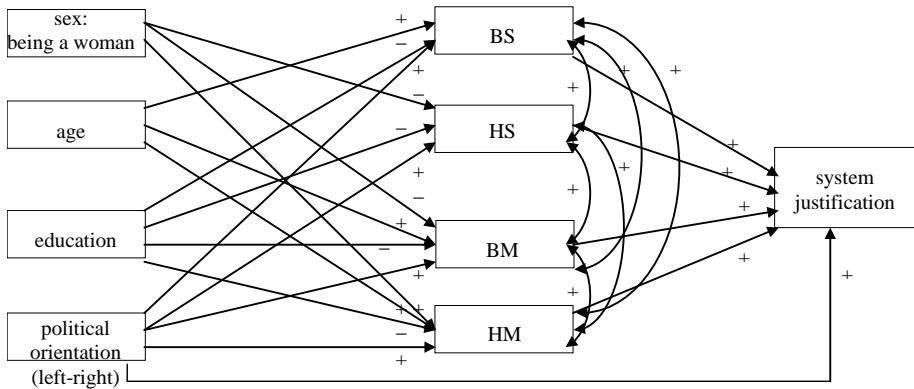
- Gender affects HS, BM and HM. Men are predicted to show higher levels of HS and to outscore women on BM, whereas women are supposed to report higher levels of HM;

- Age predicts BS, HM and BM;

- Educational level is a strong negative predictor of BS, HS, BM, HM;

- Political orientation affects ambivalent sexism: right-wingers are supposed to endorse BS, HS, BM, and HM more enthusiastically than left-wingers. Since research on political orientation showed that right-wingers are more likely than others to justify the *statu quo* a direct influence of political orientation on gender-specific system justification was also hypothesized.

Figure 1
Ambivalent sexism and gender-specific system justification: the hypothesized model
(with signs indicating predicted directions of path).



This model was tested on a sample of community people. Considering community people permits to investigate the role played by some important variables, such as age and educational level (Glick et al., 2002). Moreover, undergraduates, who are recruited in most studies, are more liberal and “politically correct” in prejudice-related attitudes than the general adult population (Henry, 2008).

Method

Participants

The research was carried out in Turin, a town of about 900 000 inhabitants in the North-West of Italy. A total of 553 adults were recruited for the

study. After data cleaning, the final sample included 522 (46.6% male). The average age was 39.90 years ($SD = 14.12$, age range: 18-70). About the education, the majority was high school graduated (40.2%), but there was also a considerable group of college graduates (35.6%), while the remaining (24.2%) had a lower level of education. Most of the participants were workers (84.9%), followed by retired people (7.8%), housewives (4.3%) and a small percentage of unemployed people (3.0%). Respondents were a convenience sample of volunteers who were obtained via student assistants.

Measures

Data were gathered by a self-reported questionnaire which took about 15 minutes to be filled in and comprised the following measures:

Gender-specific System Justification items (Jost and Kay, 2005). Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with eight opinion statements regarding the current state of gender relations and sex role division. The Italian translation of the Jost and Kay's scale (2005) was used. The strength of agreement or disagreement with each of these items was rated on a 7-point scale. Cronbach's alpha was .65.

Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI; Glick and Fiske, 1996). It is a 22-item self-report measure of sexist attitudes composed of BS and HS subscales. Respondents indicated their agreement or disagreement with each statement on a 0 (= strongly disagree) to 5 (= strongly agree) scale. The Italian version was used (Manganelli Rattazzi et al., 2008). Alphas for BS and HS were .82 and .89 respectively.

Attitudes toward Men Inventory (AMI; Glick and Fiske, 1999). It is a 20-item self-report measure of attitudes toward men composed of two subscales: BM and HM. Participants indicated their agreement or disagreement with each statement on a 0 (= strongly disagree) to 5 (= strongly agree) scale. The Italian version was used (Manganelli Rattazzi et al., 2008). Alphas for BM and HM were .83 and .88 respectively.

Political Orientation. Participants were requested to report their political orientation on a 10-point scale ranging from leftist to rightist (Jost, 2006; Kay et al., 2009).

Demographical variables. A final section of the questionnaire included questions on demographic characteristics.

Results

Data Screening and Preliminary Analyses

Cases with more than 20% missing data on any given subscale were deleted. For cases with at least 80% complete data on a subscale, a subscale-

mean substitution procedure was used to address missing data points: the participant's mean for the subscale without the missing item was substituted for the missing item response (see Downey and King, 1998; Fischer and Bolton Holz, 2010).

No significant gender difference emerged in relation to demographic characteristics and political orientation (Table 1).

Table 1
Gender differences on demographic characteristics and political orientation

	Men: <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Women: <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>T</i> value	Sig.
Age	39.89 (13.82)	39.90 (14.40)	-.002	n.s.
Educational level (years of schooling)	13.64 (3.39)	13.50 (3.47)	.47	n.s.
Political orientation (left – right)	4.78 (2.75)	4.51 (2.65)	1.15	n.s.

Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations among scales are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Intercorrelations among and descriptive statistics for political orientation, ASI,

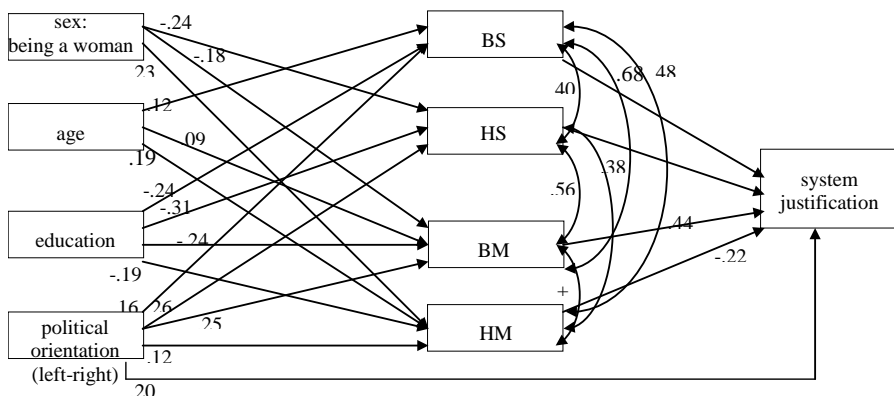
	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Political ori.						
2. BS	.17**					
3. HS	.28**	.47**				
4. BM	.27**	.71**	.65**			
5. HM	.11*	.51**	.36**	.47**		
6. SJ	.30**	.21**	.30**	.39**	.02	
<i>M</i>	4.64	2.44	2.41	2.14	2.73	3.51
<i>SD</i>	2.70	1.05	1.14	1.12	.93	.96
Possible Range	1-10	0-5	0-5	0-5	0-5	1-7

Model Testing

To test the hypothesized model, the software Amos 4.0 (Arbuckle and Wothke, 1999) was used. The model we tested proved satisfactory, according all the fit indexes: $\chi^2 (10) = 9.65$; $p = .47$; $GFI = .99$; $Adjusted\ GFI = .98$; $CFI = 1.00$, $RMSEA = .00$. However, two estimated parameters were not significant: BS and HS did not influence system justification. Then, a new model was tested, with only BM and HM directly affecting gender-specific system justification. Figure 2 shows the validated model. The fit indexes were excellent: $\chi^2 (12) = 12.30$; $p = .42$; $GFI = .99$; $Adjusted\ GFI = .98$; $CFI = 1.00$, $RMSEA = .01$. In this model, all estimated parameters were significant. The whole set of predictors explained 23% of the variance of gender-specific system justification. Concerning demographic variables, being woman heightened HM ($\beta = .23$), but reduced HS ($\beta = -.18$) and BM ($\beta = -.18$), whereas age positively affected BS ($\beta = .12$), BM ($\beta = .09$), and HM ($\beta = .19$). Educational level was a significant predictor of all the four dimensions: the more educated respondents were, the less likely they expressed BS ($\beta = -.24$), HS ($\beta = -.31$), BM ($\beta = -.24$), and HM ($\beta = -.19$). Political orientation affected all the dimensions of sexism (BS: $\beta = .16$; HS: $\beta = .26$; BM: $\beta = .25$; HM: $\beta = .12$) and had a direct influence on system justification ($\beta = .20$) as well.

BS, HS, BM and HM positively correlated with each other.

Figure 2
Ambivalent sexism and gender-specific system justification: the final model
(with standardized path coefficients).



However, benevolent and hostile sexism toward women played no significant role on gender-specific system justification, which instead was po-

sitively predicted only by BM ($\beta = .44$). HM had a negative influence ($\beta = -.22$), indicating that hostility toward men decreased support for the current state of gender relations.

Discussion

Results concerning the role played by demographic characteristics were completely in line with hypotheses. Gender differences on HS, BM and HM confirmed literature's findings. BS is the only dimension not affected by participants' gender and this datum seems to be typical of developed countries (see Glick et al., 2000; Chen et al., 2009).

Moreover, with the exception of HS, older individuals are generally more sexist. Since the present study was cross-sectional, two different interpretations can be suggested. On the one hand, probably the age effects are due to cohort differences, since in the last decades and mainly in the Sixties and Seventies, cultural and social changes have contributed to adopt more liberal and open-minded attitudes toward women. On the other, it is likely that as people move into the demands of daily adult living, become more familiar with and more involved in the *statu quo*.

Instead, in line with a previous study (Glick et al., 2002), the educational attainment is a sort of "protective" factor in respect to sexist ideologies, as higher education was consistently associated with less sexist attitudes, both hostile and benevolent, toward men and women.

Also the political orientation has a strong effect on the endorsement of sexist attitudes. Right-wingers held a more traditional vision of gender roles, and thus express more sexism, and are more likely than others to support and justify the current state of gender relations.

Results concerning the primary goal of the current study are instead unexpected. In contrast with hypotheses, present findings reveal that the four dimensions of sexism play a different role. Indeed, although BS, HS, BM and HM positively correlated with each other (and with system justification, with the exception of HM), as they were entered in the model and demographic variables were controlled for, only attitudes toward men had a significant influence on system justification. Nevertheless, their effects are opposite: if benevolent attitudes directed at the dominant group enhance support for the *statu quo*, hostile attitudes reduce system justification.

Thus, a first noteworthy consideration is related to the necessity of distinguishing the different aspects tested through AMI's and ASI's subscales. In other words, if it is well established that HM, BM, HS and BS are a complementary set of gender-traditional beliefs which reinforce the *statu quo* (Glick et al., 2004), more attention should be paid to the role each di-

mension can play in foster system justification. This is in line with a recent study by Glick and Whitehead (2010), who investigated the influence of BS, HS, BM and HM on the perceived stability and legitimacy of gender hierarchy. It was found that only the endorsement of BM consistently predicted legitimacy for both male and female participants, whereas HM was the only significant predictor of perceived stability. Combining their findings with our results, it could be argued that BM is the only subscale which predicts system justification, because it is the only dimension that depicts men as good protectors and providers, who are willing to sacrifice their own needs to take care for the women. If men are so positively perceived and their power is viewed as a burden gallantly assumed (Glick and Fiske, 2001), then gender relations and male privileged roles appear to be legitimated and justifiable. On the contrary, although HM predicts perceived stability of gender hierarchy (Glick and Whitehead, 2010), it expresses negativity toward men for behaving in line with the unlikable stereotypically masculine traits (Glick et al., 2004) and can be conceptualized as a reaction against male power (Silván-Ferrero and Bustillos López, 2007). Such conceptualization allows us to understand the negative influence of HM on system justification: individuals who show a negative reaction toward men's structural power are those who do not support the current status of gender roles.

The fact that sexism toward women has no effect on system justification is another interesting point. Glick and Whitehead (2010), in providing the above described findings, suggested that HS and HM differ in an important respect: although both have negative valence, HS criticizes women who fail to conform to traditional gender roles, while HM expresses hostility toward men for conforming to stereotypical roles. Other authors (Silván-Ferrero and Bustillos López, 2007) found no significant relationship between HM and HS and claimed that these two dimensions can be referred to as different aspects of sexism, not necessarily interrelated. Since the first pertains to the conformity to stereotypes of the dominant group, it is more directly linked to the judgment of the status quo.

However, why sexist attitudes directed at women have no influence on system justification remains an open question, which should be more in depth investigated. Two specific aspects should be explored: a) the differences among the dimensions of sexism; and b) the different role these dimensions play to support the status quo. For example, qualitative methods (i.e. in depth interviews) could be a useful means to better understand these topics. Moreover, although the studies on sexist ideologies provided cross-

national validity (Glick et al., 2000; 2004), testing the present model in different countries would strengthen the obtained results.

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