

**AMBIVALENT ATTITUDES TOWARD WOMEN AND MEN.**  
*Recognizability of stereotypes and effects on self-perception*

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**RESUMEN**

En relación con el sexismo hostil la literatura indica que el sexismo benevolente suele ser evaluado positivamente. Sin embargo, las mujeres expuestas al sexismo benevolente tienden a descuidar sus características relacionadas con las tareas. El estudio pretende ampliar la investigación a la población adulta en general y a los hombres como objetivo de estereotipo. Dos objetivos principales se plantearon: 1) explorar la posibilidad de reconocer tanto las actitudes hostiles y benevolentes hacia las mujeres y los hombres, como perjudicados y 2) identificar los efectos de estas actitudes en las mujeres y los hombres de la autopercepción. Los resultados muestran que las actitudes benevolentes hacia las mujeres no son reconocidas como sexistas, mientras que los hombres parecen ser más sensibles en el reconocimiento de las ideologías sexistas en su propio grupo. Se confirma la tendencia de las mujeres y hombres a describirse en términos colectivos y como agentes, salvo cuando los hombres son expuestos a actitudes hostiles hacia su propio grupo.

**ABSTRACT**

Literature showed that, in respect to hostile sexism, benevolent sexism is relatively positively evaluated. Moreover, women exposed to benevolent sexism tend to neglect their task-related characteristics. The present study aimed at extending research to the general adult population and to men as target of stereotype. Two were the main goals: 1) to explore the possibility of recognizing both hostile and benevolent attitudes toward women and men as prejudiced, and 2) to identify the effects of these attitudes both on women's and men's self-perception. On the whole, our results showed that benevolent attitudes toward women are not recognized as sexist, while men seem more sensitive in recognizing sexist ideologies about their in-group. Concerning self-perception, data confirmed the tendency of women and men to respectively describe themselves in communal and agentic terms, except when men are exposed to hostile attitudes toward their in-group.

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**Key words:** estereotipos de género, sexismo benevolente, sexismo hostil, autopercepción, [stereotypes, benevolent sexism, hostile sexism, self-perception]

The uniqueness of the relationship between men and women as social groups is due to its long last, to its characterizing status inequality, to close physical and psychological intimacy.

Besides, another peculiarity refers to the ambivalence characterizing the women/men relationship due to the different spheres of power - the struc-

tural and the dyadic ones - in which respectively men and women seem to be dominant (Glick & Fiske, 1999).

Indeed, many theories (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Ridgeway, 2001; Sidanius and Pratto, 1999; Tajfel, 1981) assess that attitudes toward dominant groups convey a more positive image of that group than of subordinates, suggesting the idea that dominants deserve their status position.

Men's evaluation constitutes a remarkable exception to dominant-favoring attitudes being generally less positive than that of women (e.g. Eagly and Mladinic, 1989, 1994; Fiske et al., 2002; Nosek and Banaji, 2002) both on explicit and implicit measures.

Two questions emerge as particularly relevant: How can men be contemporarily privileged and viewed less favourably than women? And which kind of effects this ambivalence produce?

To answer the first question, Glick et al. (2004) posited that both positive and negative masculine traits refer to the achievement of power and status (agency or competence). In their negative side, they are associated with the "excesses of selfish ambition over concern for others" (Glick et al., 2004, p. 714).

In this way, Glick et al. (2004) enlarged Eagly and Mladinic's (1994) dictum "Women are beautiful" into a more inclusive "Men are bad but bold and women are wonderful but weaker".

The reciprocal evaluations have consequences both on the macro and on the micro level of interaction between sexes. At the macro (cultural, social) level they can contribute to maintain the current social order, reinforcing the perception of the stability of the status quo even in their descriptive (and not necessarily prescriptive) nature (Glick et al., 2004).

Indeed, empirical research gives evidence of the negative correlation between ambivalent sexist attitudes and national indices of gender equality (Glick et al., 2000; 2004). In their cross-cultural studies, Glick and colleagues (2000; 2004) considered two United Nations indices: (a) the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), which reflects women's representation in powerful occupational roles and government and (b) the Gender Development Index (GDI), which focuses on women's life expectancy, literacy rates, education and other standards of living. It was found that ambivalent ideologies directed at both women and men were negatively correlated with GEM and GDI (Glick et al., 2000; 2004).

Referring to consequences of these attitudes on a personal level, we are going to consider the effects exposure to sexist statements can have on perception of the source of sexist attitudes, on own emotional reaction, and on self-perception.

### **Ambivalence toward women and men**

In their Ambivalent Sexism Theory, Glick and Fiske (1996, 1999; 2001a) theorized that traditional attitudes towards both sexes have benevolent as well as hostile components whose roots must be traced back to long-existing male-female relations and related to other traditional ideologies (e.g., Burn and Busso, 2005; Christopher and Mull, 2006; Glick et al., 2004).

Moreover, benevolent and hostile attitudes refer to the same three content domains: a) paternalism, including both domination as well as protection and affection; b) gender differentiation, which can assume connotation of both competitive as well as complementary gender differentiation; and c) heterosexuality, comprehensive of the genuine desire of intimate closeness – heterosexual intimacy – and of the desire to dominate other – heterosexual hostility (Glick and Fiske, 1996).

Concerning attitudes toward women, Glick and Fiske (1996) clearly pointed out that the true nature of sexism encompasses both hostile sexism (HS) and benevolent sexism (BS). The first one explicitly communicates antipathy, as it is an adversarial view of gender relations in which women are perceived to seek control over men. On the contrary, BS seems to shape a positive attitude toward women, but in fact it patronizes stereotyped beliefs about them, since it characterizes women as pure creatures who ought to be protected and supported, and thus best suited for conventional gender roles (Glick and Fiske, 2001b).

Yet, because benevolent sexism is not clearly recognizable as a form of prejudice, it is more difficult to combat than hostile attitude. In the end, the consequences of BS can be even more pernicious than those exerted by explicitly hostile sexism as demonstrated in a growing body of research.

Indeed, BS predicts endorsement of gender stereotypes and of old fashioned and modern sexist beliefs (Glick and Fiske, 1996; 2001a). Although benevolent sexism vehicles the idea that women need male protection, it has been shown to be related to attitudes that legitimate domestic violence (Glick et al., 2002; Sakalli, 2002), to sexual harassment (Fiske and Glick, 1995; Pryor et al., 1995) and to negative reactions to rape victims (Abrams et al., 2003; Viki and Abrams, 2002). Research conducted in Spain suggested that protective paternalism can lead women – especially those who score high on BS – to accept protectively justified prohibitions (Moya et al., 2007). Indeed, Glick et al. (2000) showed that, as HS, also BS is related with gender inequality across different countries.

Referring to the evaluation of perpetrators, the study conducted in the US by Kilianski and Rudman (1998) showed that people evaluate perpetra-

tors of BS much more positively than those of HS. Similarly, in their research with Dutch University students, Barreto and Ellemers (2005) found that people do not classify benevolent sexism attitudes as sexism, nor prejudice. Since an attitude must be perceived as prejudicial to be stigmatized and challenged as an illegitimate cause of inequalities (Jost and Major, 2001), Barreto and Ellemers (2005) argued that BS could play an important role in maintaining gender discrimination.

Another field of research underlines the effects of BS on self-perception and self-esteem: Studies carried out in Belgium, with both adults and undergraduates, showed that exposure to BS generates intrusive thoughts and consequently slows response time in performance tasks, increasing women's autobiographical memories of incompetence (Dardenne et al., 2007; Dumont et al., 2010). In their research with Dutch college students, Barreto, Ellemers, Piebinga and Moya (2010) found that women experimentally exposed to BS emphasized their relational self and de-emphasized their task self, cooperating in this way in confirming the prescriptions of benevolent sexism. Similarly, Sinclair, Huntsinger, Skorinko and Hardin (2005), in their experiments with American female college students, showed that women's self-description and behavior were more gender stereotype consistent when the interaction partner expressed gender stereotypes than when the ostensible views of the interaction partner were stereotype inconsistent.

In parallel with the Ambivalent Sexism Theory, Glick and Fiske (1999; Glick et al., 2004) postulated the existence of hostile (HM) and benevolent (BM) attitudes also toward men.

HM refers to overtly negative attitudes toward men in response to sex power inequalities; BM represents positive or affectionate attitudes toward men, based on recognizing their dependence on women depicted as "pure" creatures who need male protection (Glick and Fiske, 1999).

Men stereotypes have been less investigated than attitudes towards women. The studies on this topic have a corner stone in the creation of the Ambivalence toward Men Inventory (AMI, Glick and Fiske, 1999).

AMI proved to be stable across studies and countries (Glick et al., 2004): Recent examples are the results by Silvàn-Ferrero and Bustillo López (2007) obtained in a group of Spanish high school students; or Yakushko's study (2005) with a sample of Ukrainian college students and young professional. Both the studies showed the relation between ASI and AMI, and most, the role of BS and BM in maintaining gender inequality and legitimating discrimination.

Moreover, Chapleau, Oswald, and Russell (2007) interviewing 420 US college students found that benevolent attitudes toward men positively correlated with rape myth acceptance, as well as hostile sexism toward women did.

Interestingly, Glick, Lameiras, and Rodríguez (2002) tested the effect of education and of catholic religiosity on hostile and benevolent attitudes toward women and men in a sample of Spanish adult. The results showed that, both for women and men, the level of education attainment is negatively correlated to HS and BS, whilst Catholic education predicted more benevolent sexist attitudes (and not hostile ones).

Recently, Glick and Whitehead (2010) investigated how ambivalent gender ideologies relate to the perceived stability and legitimacy of gender hierarchy. Their findings showed correlation of each ASI and AMI subscale with the perceived legitimacy of male dominance. Moreover, the endorsement of BM consistently predicted legitimacy for both male and female participants, whereas HM was a significant predictor of perceived stability (Glick and Whitehead, 2010).

These results seem to confirm the important role of reciprocal perceptions and of ambivalent attitudes in maintaining men's structural power and traditional gender relations. Indeed, given male power to reward women who adopt traditional roles, punishing those who do not, it can be natural for women who adopt benevolent attitudes towards men to justify this power structure, so increasing their dependence and contemporarily their resentment toward men (Glick and Fiske, 1999).

### **Recognizability of and reactions to sexist attitudes**

As above anticipated, Barreto and Ellemers (2005) demonstrated that when people express benevolent sexism, they are less likely to be recognized as holding sexist views than when expressing hostile sexism. This happens because the source of benevolent sexism does not match the mental prototype of sexist perpetrator and thus is relatively positively evaluated. Such judgmental process takes place in similar ways for both men and women, and it is relatively independent of affective reactions. However, when considering emotional response people experience, women feel more angry when facing HS than when facing BS, whereas men report similar levels of anger in both conditions (Barreto and Ellemers, 2005).

In order to investigate whether exposure to BS might have other negative effects, in a more recent study, Barreto, Ellemers, Piebinga and Moya (2010) analyzed the consequences of BS on women's self-perception. They found that compared to exposure to HS, exposure to BS increases the ex-

tent to which women define themselves in relational terms and decreases the extent to which they underline their task-related characteristics. Both these studies were conducted with Dutch undergraduates.

Concerning attitudes toward men, at best of our knowledge, the recognizability and the effects of benevolent and hostile sexist attitudes have not been explored yet. Indeed, the extant literature has touched a great deal on the consequences of sexism toward women and less so on sexism toward men. However, men also face sexism and this topic is important to pursue (Lee et al., 2010).

### **The current study**

The present study had two main goals: 1) to explore the possibility of recognizing both hostile and benevolent attitudes toward women and men as prejudiced, in line with Barreto and Ellemers (2005), and 2) to identify the effects of these attitudes both on women's and men's self-perception.

Concerning the first aim, we extended Barreto and Ellemers' procedure (2005) to: a) a different population, i.e. adults; b) a different cultural context, i.e. the Italian one, and c) men, along with women, as target of prejudice.

Since University students are more liberal and *politically correct* in prejudice-related attitudes than the general adult population (Henry, 2008), extending research to adults can represent a noteworthy advance. Moreover, although subtle forms of sexism are prevalent also in the Dutch context (Barreto and Ellemers, 2005), the Netherland is generally regarded as an egalitarian country. Indeed, according to the United Nations indices of gender equality usually considered in literature (Glick et al., 2000; Glick et al., 2004; Sczesny et al., 2004), among the 38 very high human development nations, Netherlands' rank is very good (rank 7 for Gender-Related Development Index and rank 5 for Gender Empowerment Measure). Italy, instead, is ranked 15 on Gender-Related Development Index and only 21 on Gender Empowerment Measure.

Thus, about sexism toward women, we hypothesized that also among Italian adults benevolent sexists are less likely to be seen as prejudiced than people endorsing hostile sexist views (Hypothesis 1a), since they are evaluated more positively and elicit less negative emotional responses (Barreto and Ellemers, 2005).

When considering ideologies toward men, no specific study concerning recognizability of benevolent attitudes was found. However, based on research concerning ambivalent attitudes toward women (Barreto and Ellemers, 2005) and considering the strong correlation between ideologies toward

women and those toward men (e.g. Glick et al., 2000; 2004), we hypothesized that benevolence toward men is less likely to be seen as prejudiced than hostility, in line with results concerning benevolence toward women (Hypothesis 1b).

In respect to the consequences of sexist attitudes, following Barreto et al.'s (2010) findings, we hypothesized that for women exposure to benevolent sexism can increase the extent to which they self-define in communal terms and decrease the perception of their agentic qualities (Hypothesis 2a).

Concerning men, a similar effect should be obtained: Since benevolence toward men positively emphasizes their agentic qualities (Glick and Fiske, 1999), in the benevolence condition men were supposed to increase the extent to which they self-define in agentic terms and to decrease the perception of their communal traits (Hypothesis 2b).

## **Method**

### *Design*

Following Barreto and Ellemers' (2005) original procedure, this study consisted of a 2 (Type of attitude: Hostile, Benevolent) X 2 (Gender of the source: Male, Female) X 2 (Gender of participant: Male, Female) between-participants design<sup>1</sup>. The same design was used with two different groups of participants: one primed with sexism toward women and the other one primed with attitudes toward men.

### *Participants*

A total of 486 Italian adults (49.8% male) were enrolled into the study. Most participants (94.4%) lived in a rural area around Turin, a town of about 900 000 inhabitants situated in the North-West of Italy. The others lived in the town. The average age was 41.58 years ( $SD = 11.06$ , age range: 21-65). About the education, the majority was high school graduated (44.2%), the 34.8% had a lower level of education and the remaining (21%) were college graduates. Most of the participants were workers (90.1%), followed by housewives (4.1%), retired people (3.9%) and a small percentage of unemployed people (1.7%).

Respondents were a convenience sample of volunteers who were obtained via student assistants. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two groups (primed with sexism toward women or primed with sexism toward men) and to the experimental conditions. No significant differences

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<sup>1</sup> Before proceeding with the analyses, we tested the effect of socio-demographical characteristics (age, educational level, place of residence) on the dependent variables. No significant effect was found.

emerged between the groups in relation to socio-demographic characteristics.

### *Manipulations*

As in the study carried out by Barreto and Ellemers (2005), participants in the group primed with sexism toward women read a description summarizing the results of a previous research concerning opinions about women in Italian society. Gender of the source was manipulated by varying the gender of the sample described in the research. Type of sexism was manipulated in reporting the results of the study. Thus, half of this group read that women/men in the sample agreed with several opinions based on Glick and Fiske's (1996) subscale of Hostile Sexism (e.g. "women seek to gain power by getting control over men", "women are too easily offended", "most women fail to appreciate fully all that men do for them"). The remaining participants of this group read that women/men in the sample agreed with opinions based on Glick and Fiske's (1996) subscale of Benevolent Sexism (e.g. "many women have a quality of purity that few men possess", "women should be cherished and protected by men", "men are not complete without women").

The same procedure was used for the group primed with attitudes toward men. In this case, participants read opinions about men in Italian society and the results of the study were based on Glick and Fiske's (1999) subscales of Hostility toward Men (e.g. "even men who claim to be sensitive to women's rights really want a traditional relationship at home, with the woman performing most of the housekeeping and childcare", "men act like babies when they are sick", "men usually try to dominate conversations when talking to women") and Benevolence toward Men (e.g. "men are less likely to fall apart in emergencies than women are", "men are mainly useful to provide financial security for women", "men are more willing to put themselves in danger to protect others").

### *Dependent measures*

The evaluation of the source, perceived sexism and anger were assessed following the study conducted by Barreto and Ellemers (2005). To assess the evaluation of the source, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they expected that they would like people of the sample, and would be willing to collaborate with them ( $r = 0.77$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). As to the perception of sexism, participants were asked to what extent they thought that people who held those opinions were prejudiced against women. Concerning anger, participants were asked to indicate to what extent they expe-

rienced different negative emotions (angry, indignant, irritated, disappointed, and frustrated) after reading the description. Subsequently, the effect of manipulations on self-perception was assessed. Participants were asked to rate themselves on 6 expressive/communal traits (sensitive, sympathetic, kind, emotional, loyal, understanding) and on 6 instrumental/agenic traits (independent, decisive, ambitious, self-confident, assertive, efficient). Items were based on Space and Buckner's (2000) study on gender trait stereotypes. Communal and agenic traits were then grouped in two categories: communality ( $\alpha = .74$ ) and agency ( $\alpha = .71$ ).

All dependent measures were scored on 7 point rating scales ranging from (1) "not at all" to (7) "very much".

## Results

### *Recognizing sexist attitudes*

First we considered sexism toward women. We performed a 2 (Type of Sexism) X 2 (Gender of the source) X 2 (Gender of participant) between participants multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), with the evaluation of the source, perceived sexism and anger as dependent variables. The multivariate main effect for Type of sexism was significant,  $F(7, 233) = 3.94, p < 0.01$ . At the univariate level, the main effect of Type of sexism was significant for all dependent variables: evaluation of source,  $F(1, 236) = 8.07, p < 0.01$ , perceived sexism,  $F(1, 236) = 7.31, p < 0.01$ , and anger,  $F(1, 235) = 4.12, p < 0.05$ . Participants evaluated the Hostile sexist source less positively ( $M = 3.44, SD = 1.46$ ) than the Benevolent sexist source ( $M = 4.05, SD = 1.65$ ). They thought that the Hostile sexist source was more prejudiced ( $M = 4.12, SD = 1.93$ ) than the Benevolent sexist source ( $M = 3.43, SD = 2.08$ ). Finally, respondents expressed more anger in the Hostile sexism condition ( $M = 2.18, SD = 1.63$ ) than in the Benevolent sexism condition ( $M = 1.79, SD = 1.37$ ).

Concerning attitudes toward men, similarly, a 2 (Attitude toward men: Hostility, Benevolence) X 2 (Gender of the source) X 2 (Gender of participant) between participants multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed. The multivariate main effect for Attitude toward men was significant,  $F(7, 242) = 4.14, p < 0.01$ . This analysis revealed a significant multivariate effect also of participant's gender,  $F(7, 242) = 2.99, p < 0.01$ , as well as a significant interaction between Attitude toward men and participant's gender,  $F(7, 242) = 13.44, p < 0.001$ . At the univariate level, the main effect of Attitude toward men was significant only for anger,  $F(1, 242) = 11.02, p < 0.01$ : Participants felt less angry in the Benevolence condition ( $M = 1.66, SD = 1.30$ ) than in the Hostility condition ( $M = 2.32, SD$

= 1.76). The main effect of participant's gender was significant for perceived sexism,  $F(1, 242) = 6.91, p < 0.01$ , since in all the experimental conditions women saw the sample as less prejudiced ( $M = 3.13, SD = 2.08$ ) than did men ( $M = 3.78, SD = 2.03$ ).

The interaction between Attitude toward men and participant's gender was significant for both the evaluation of the source,  $F(1, 242) = 27.31, p < 0.001$ , and perceived sexism,  $F(1, 242) = 25.42, p < 0.001$ . When facing hostility, men evaluated the source less positively,  $F(1, 116) = 13.60, p < 0.001$  and more sexist,  $F(1, 112) = 16.62, p < 0.001$  than in the Benevolence condition, while women showed the opposite pattern. Indeed, they saw the hostile source as more positive,  $F(1, 116) = 13.42, p < 0.001$ , and less prejudiced,  $F(1, 112) = 9.93, p < 0.01$ , than the benevolent source (Table 1).

Table 1  
The significant interaction between Attitude toward men and gender of participant: means (and standard deviations) of evaluation of the source and perceived sexism.

	Gender of participant			
	Male		Female	
	Hostility	Benevolence	Hostility	Benevolence
Evaluation of the source	3.23 (1.53)	4.30 (1.66)	4.43 (1.88)	3.17 (1.85)
Perceived sexism	4.50 (1.65)	3.08 (2.14)	2.55 (1.74)	3.70 (2.25)

In sum, in the case of ideologies toward women, Type of sexism was significant for all the dependent variables (evaluation of the source, perceived sexism, and anger). When considering ambivalence toward men, both Type of attitude and participants' gender affected the dependent variables.

#### *The effects of sexist attitudes on self-perception*

First, sexism directed at women was considered. To test the effect of the experimental conditions, we performed a 2 (Type of Sexism) X 2 (Gender of the source) X 2 (Gender of participant) between participants multi-

variate analysis of variance (MANOVA), with communality and agency as dependent variables. This analysis showed a significant multivariate main effect of gender of participant,  $F(7, 215) = 15.31, p < 0.001$ .

At the univariate level, the main effect of gender of participant was significant for both agency,  $F(1, 230) = 5.54, p < 0.05$ , and communality,  $F(1, 234) = 19.64, p < 0.001$ . Women scored higher ( $M = 5.78, SD = .82$ ) than men ( $M = 5.28, SD = .91$ ) on communal traits, whereas men reported higher levels of agency ( $M = 5.15, SD = .86$ ) than did women ( $M = 4.87, SD = .97$ ).

Then, sexist attitudes toward men were taken into consideration. The MANOVA showed a significant multivariate main effect of all the independent variables: Attitude toward men,  $F(7, 227) = 4.90, p < 0.01$ , gender of the source,  $F(7, 227) = 4.17, p < 0.05$ , and gender of participant,  $F(7, 227) = 33.02, p < 0.001$ . This analysis revealed also a significant interaction between Attitude toward men and gender of participant,  $F(7, 227) = 3.72, p < 0.05$ , and between gender of the source and gender of participant,  $F(7, 227) = 4.40, p < 0.05$ .

At the univariate level, Attitude toward men was significant for both agency,  $F(1, 228) = 4.65, p < 0.05$ , and communality,  $F(1, 233) = 9.66, p < 0.01$ . Globally, the hostility condition increased the self-perception both in agentic ( $M = 5.33, SD = .95$ ) and in communal ( $M = 5.81, SD = .69$ ) terms, in respect to the benevolence condition ( $M = 5.06, SD = .92$  and  $M = 5.48, SD = .98$  respectively). Moreover, the main effect of gender of participant was significant for both agentic characteristics,  $F(1, 228) = 6.99, p < 0.01$ , and communal traits,  $F(1, 233) = 35.86, p < 0.001$ . Men reported higher levels of agency ( $M = 5.36, SD = .85$ ) than did women ( $M = 5.04, SD = 1.01$ ), whereas women outscored men on communality ( $M = 5.95, SD = .72$  and  $M = 5.34, SD = .88$  respectively). The gender of the source had also a significant effect,  $F(1, 228) = 6.99, p < 0.01$ , but only on agentic adjectives: when the source was male, participants described themselves as more agentic ( $M = 5.37, SD = .89$ ) than in the female source condition ( $M = 5.03, SD = .97$ ).

The self-perception in agentic terms was affected also by the interaction between gender of the source and gender of participant,  $F(1, 228) = 6.15, p < 0.05$ . In the female source condition, men reported higher levels of agency than did women,  $F(1, 116) = 12.85, p < 0.001$ , whereas in the male source condition scores of men and women were similar,  $F(1, 110) = 0.01, n.s.$  (Table 2). Instead, communality was affected by the interaction between attitude toward men and gender of participant,  $F(1, 233) = 7.32, p < 0.01$ . In the hostility condition, men described themselves as more communal

than they did when facing benevolence,  $F(1, 116) = 16.40, p < 0.001$ . On the contrary, women's self-description did not significantly change,  $F(1, 114) = 0.03, n.s.$  (Table 3).

To sum up, in the case of sexism toward women, participants' gender was the only variable which played a key role. Instead, when sexism was directed at men, all the independent variables considered (Type of attitude, gender of the source, and gender of participant) had a significant effect on self-perception.

Table 2  
Attitudes toward men: the significant interaction between gender of the source and gender of participant. Means (and standard deviations) of agency.

Gender of the Source	Gender of participant			
	Male		Female	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Agency	5.37 (.89)	5.34 (.82)	5.36 (.90)	4.73 (1.02)

Table 3  
The significant interaction between attitude toward men and gender of participant. Means (and standard deviations) of communality.

Attitude toward men	Gender of participant			
	Male		Female	
	Hostility	Benevolence	Hostility	Benevolence
Communality	5.65 (.62)	5.03 (.99)	5.94 (.98)	5.96 (.72)

## **Discussion**

Concerning recognizability of sexist attitudes, results reveal several differences between ideologies toward women and those toward men. In the case of ambivalence toward women, globally our findings confirm what we supposed (Hypothesis 1a) and are in line with literature (Barreto and Ellemers, 2005). Indeed, people expressing benevolent sexism are less likely to be recognized as holding sexist views than those expressing hostile sexism. Moreover, benevolent source elicits less anger and is evaluated more positively than the hostile source, being more distant from the prototype of a sexist perpetrator. Instead, when men are the target of stereotype, type of attitude has a minor effect, in contrast with our hypothesis (1b). At the univariate level, it influences only the emotional reaction, but not the recognition of prejudice, nor the evaluation of the source. On the contrary, gender of participants plays a key role, since the male population perceives the source more prejudiced than do women both in the hostility and in the benevolence condition. Moreover, along with the attitude toward men, gender affects the evaluation of the source: Men consider the hostile source less positively and more sexist than the benevolent source, while women show the opposite pattern.

About the effects on self-perception, sexism toward women does not affect self-perception, in terms of communal and agentic traits. This is not in line with previous studies (Barreto et al., 2010) and with our hypothesis (2a). Indeed, in respect to men, women describe themselves as more communal and less agentic, regardless the experimental conditions. In the case of ambivalence toward men, the pattern of influences is more intricate. Men were expected to emphasize their agentic qualities in the benevolence condition (Hypothesis 2b). Instead, the present findings reveal that men, when facing benevolence, describe themselves as less communal than in the hostility condition. In other words, hostile attitudes make men emphasize their communal qualities. Moreover, while men are not influenced by gender of the source, women describe themselves as less agentic when the source of prejudice is female. Finally, for all individuals, the hostility condition increase the self-perception both in agentic and in communal terms, and globally men report higher agency and lower communality than women.

The results we obtained seem to confirm the ambivalence toward women and men as an interesting object of study, both in terms of its recognizability and of its consequences on self-perception.

Certainly, our research shows the limit related to the group of interviewees, which is not representative of the Italian adult population. Despite this, the data concerning ambivalence toward women are consistent with

those found by Barreto and Ellemers (2005) and we consider such a result an important confirmation of the difficulty in recognizing benevolent attitudes toward women as sexism. Indeed, it enlarges the extent of their results to an adult population and to a different socio-cultural context. As above pointed out, when benevolent sexism is not clearly recognizable as a form of prejudice, it is more difficult to combat than hostile attitude (Abrams et al., 2003; Barreto and Ellemers, 2005; Sakalli, 2002). It may allow men to maintain a positive self-image as protectors and providers who are willing to sacrifice their own needs to care for the women: If men's power is popularly viewed as a burden gallantly assumed, as legitimated by their greater responsibility and self-sacrifice, then their privileged role seems justified (Glick and Fiske, 2001b).

Moreover, we were interested in seeing which implications were involved by exposing people to ambivalent descriptions of men.

One of the most remarkable results of our research is embodied by women: As we saw, they evaluated the benevolent source as more negative and more prejudiced than the hostile source. One possible interpretation relies on the peculiar strict interdependence between men and women and on the complementarity of gender stereotypes (Jost and Kay, 2005). Particularly, benevolent attitude toward men is depicted by means of some traits that can result offensive or devaluing for women (e.g. "men are mainly useful to provide financial security for women", "men are more willing to put themselves in danger to protect others", "men are less likely to fall apart in emergencies than women are" that entail women economically not independent, or less bold than men) (Glick and Fiske, 1999). Although men-oriented, it implies a derogation of women. In other words, benevolence toward men positively evaluates traditional gender power relations and roles, assessing beliefs that are strongly system-justifying (Glick et al., 2004).

Moreover, in general, men seem more able than women in recognizing hostile and benevolent descriptions about their ingroup as prejudiced. Why they recognize both the hostile and the benevolent ingroup stereotypes and not the outgroup stereotypes is an interesting question. Since our study is a first exploration on this topic, further research is needed to explain this phenomenon. However, we can argue that, whilst sexism toward women is more socially and culturally shared, less frequently men are the targets of a prejudice. This is probably why men react more significantly when described through stereotypes about their gender membership.

In our opinion, then, the relationship between the exposure to ambivalent attitudes and self-perception deserves attention. Both our studies con-

firm the tendency of women and men to describe themselves – respectively – in communal and agentic terms. Our data showed no significant results that can be traced back to the exposure to hostile and benevolent sexism toward women. This is in contrast with the previous study carried out by Barreto and colleagues (2010), where women experimentally exposed to BS emphasized their relational self and de-emphasized their task self. However, in the present case, we did not consider task-related characteristics, but agentic traits, along with communal traits.

The characteristics we selected seemed particularly relevant when the effect of attitudes toward men was considered. Indeed, although the hostile condition increases the self-perception both on communal and agentic traits among all participants, another outcome is particularly significant: when facing hostility, men describe themselves as more communal (in respect to the benevolent condition). Thus, men seem to *react* to the hostile description of their ingroup emphasizing their less stereotypical traits.

Following Reactance Theory (Brehm, 1966; Brehm and Weintraub, 1977), when a restriction is seen as unfair, people can get an unpleasant feeling that can play as an intense motivational state to get around the restriction. Research has already shown the importance of reactance in women's performance (e.g. Dardenne et al., 2007), but, at best of our knowledge, no study investigated this topic about self-perception.

This effect can also be connected to the general more positive evaluation of communal traits: As above described, women are more directly linked to liking, a strong component of overall evaluation (Wojciszke et al., 1998). Indeed, despite their higher status, usually men are evaluated less favourably than women (Eagly and Mladinic, 1989, 1994; Richeson and Ambady, 2001). Consistent with this view, Langford and Mackinnon (2000) identified a power hierarchy, related to agency, favouring men, and an evaluative hierarchy, connected to communality, favouring women. Thus, the fact that men in hostility condition emphasize their communal qualities could be seen as an attempt related to be more positively judged on the evaluative hierarchy.

All considered, we are persuaded of the importance of deepening the investigations about ambivalence attitudes in reference both to women and men. Indeed, on the one hand, benevolent sexism, as not recognized as a form of prejudice, can be even more pernicious than the hostile one for a society eager for gender equalities as a component of a full democracy. On the other hand, considering the strict interdependence between sexes, a deeper knowledge of gender stereotypes and of their effects can contribute

to build a more accurate understanding and more genuine relationships between men and women.

Finally, following Lee and colleagues' (2010) suggestions, our study posits a particular focus on sexism toward men and its consequences. Indeed, even if it is understandable why sexism toward men is less studied, representing prejudice toward the dominant group, this area should be important to pursue (Lee et al., 2010) and, as seen, it is likely to reveal dynamics that differ from sexism toward women.

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