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## Benevolent sexism toward men: Its social legitimation and preference for male candidates

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Rubini, Guermandi, & Mosso, 2005). While considerable research has explored how complementary stereotypes toward women relate to system justification, there is little research on how stereotypes toward men do so. The current studies focus on the relationship between benevolent attitudes toward men, general system-justifying beliefs, and behaviors that reinforce gender inequality.

Studying gender discrimination, Glick and Fiske (1996) argued that people typically hold two opposite and complementary forms of sexism which fulfill a gender disparity justifying function. Hostile sexism (HS) designates the typical sexist attitudes towards women, based on the idea that women are weak and inferior to men. Benevolent sexism (BS) refers to seemingly positive attitudes that nevertheless position women in stereotypically restricted roles by including stereotypes linked with warmth and morality rather than competence and status. Gender inequality can be promoted and supported not only by HS, but also by BS, which represents a more subtle and insidious injury. For example, adopting an experimental approach, Jost and Kay (2005) showed that the prime of benevolent sexism and complementary stereotypes increases support for the system as a whole and demonstrated that complementary gender stereotypes rationalize the status quo. Moreover, previous research (Christopher & Mull, 2006; Mosso, Briante, Aiello, & Russo, 2013; Sibley, Wilson, & Duckitt, 2007) showed that ambivalent sexism toward women may form part of a larger ideological set of values. More specifically, ambivalent attitudes toward women have been considered as mediating variables of the relationship between the endorsement of conservative ideologies and traditional role preferences (Christopher & Wojda, 2008).

Glick and Fiske (1999) developed an instrument to measure ambivalent attitudes toward men, the Ambivalence Toward Men Inventory (AMI). This scale complements the original Ambivalent Sexism Inventory subscales (Glick & Fiske, 1996) by tapping both hostile and benevolent prejudices and stereotypes toward men. Hostility toward men (HM) is mainly related to

resentment of male dominance and stereotypes men as controlling and condescending; people with attitudes high in HM negatively characterize men based on their position of advantage over women in society. Benevolence toward men (BM) is related to beliefs in support and justification of male dominance. As noted by Glick et al. (2004), BM portrays men as emotionally stronger than women, more willing to take risks for success, and, on the whole, stereotypes men as being higher in competence and status than women. Since BM is characterized as positive stereotyping of complementary gender differences, it should be related to individual dispositions to justify the system. However, to date, little research has addressed the link between social ideologies and sexism toward men. Glick and Whitehead (2010) have recently investigated the relationship between HM and BM and the perceived stability and legitimacy of male dominance. In their research, they used a measure of the perceived legitimacy of gender inequalities, tapping the justification of extant gender differences. Their results showed that the perception of legitimacy of gender inequality was related to BM but not to HM.

Studying ambivalent attitudes toward men is relevant considering that, similar to HS and BS, they seem to play a prominent role in predicting the endorsement of gender differences and inequality. For example, Glick et al. (2004) found that HM and BM were positively correlated with national measures of gender inequality. Similarly, Silván-Ferrero and Lopez (2007) showed that HM and BM were positively related to gender-typed tasks suggesting that ambivalent attitudes toward men contribute to the maintenance of established traditional gender roles. Thus, the focus on sexism toward men can be extremely important to detect its potential (behavioral and social) consequences.

The aim of these studies was to investigate the relationship between a *general* personal disposition to justify the social system, the specific endorsement of sexist attitudes toward men, and behaviors that reinforce gender inequality. To this end, Study 1 addressed the relationship between social ideologies and the endorsement of ambivalent

attitudes toward men in testing the hypothesis that SJ would predict BM, but not HM. Based on previous research (Mosso et al., 2013; Roets, van Hiel, & Dhont, 2012), we considered SJ as a proximal predictor of sexism toward men relying on the assumption that system justification can be considered as a motivational disposition to defend and legitimize the social system (Jost et al., 2010). In Study 2, we also tested the hypothesis that SJ would predict people's preference for male (vs. female) political candidates, and that this relationship would be mediated by benevolent sexism toward men.

## Study 1

### *Hypotheses*

As BM emphasizes a positive description of traditional gender roles and Glick and Whitehead (2010) found that the perception of legitimacy of gender inequality is related to BM but not to HM, we expected SJ to be positively related to BM. On the contrary, since HM taps overt resentment toward male dominance, which is consistent with existing gender relations in society, we did not expect a significant relationship between HM and SJ.

### *Method*

*Participants and procedure.* Two-hundred and twenty Italians, recruited through a snow ball procedure at the University of Torino (69% women, mean age = 27.07,  $SD = 5.02$ ), participated in an online survey.

### *Measures*

*Independent variables.* SJ was assessed using a six-item scale translated and adapted from Kay and Jost (2003) to measure participants' support for the societal status quo. Items were as follows: "In our society not everyone has a fair shot at success. This is inevitable" (reversed); "The poor are not the same as the rich" (reversed); "I think everybody in Italy has the same rights and duties"; "I think in Italy everybody can be happy,

regardless of group belonging"; "In Italy everyone has a fair shot at wealth and happiness"; "I think that in Italy everybody can get what he/she deserves." Since the scale did not reach the acceptable reliability threshold ( $\alpha = .55$ ), we had to exclude the first two items. We computed a mean score of SJ ( $\alpha = .72$ ). Age and gender (1 = women, 0 = men) have been included as control variables. Moreover, we also identified political orientation (1 = *strongly left-wing*, 7 = *strongly right-wing*) as a control variable, in that previous research showed that political conservatism is a form of system justification as it offers moral and intellectual support for the status quo (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003).

*Dependent variables.* Participants completed the Italian version (Manganelli, Volpato, & Canova, 2008) of the 20-item Ambivalence Toward Men Inventory (AMI; Glick & Fiske, 1999). The scale includes 10 items for each subscale. The subscales showed good internal reliability ( $\alpha = .79$  for HM and  $\alpha = .83$  for BM).

### *Results*

We ran two linear regression analyses predicting BM and HM respectively. We entered the demographic variables, political conservatism, one form of sexism (as explicitly suggested by Glick & Fiske, 1999), and SJ as predictors. The models predicting BM and HM are displayed in Table 1. Participants' gender was related to both the dependent variables with men showing higher levels of BM and women higher levels of HM; political orientation was significantly and positively related to BM only; each form of sexism had a positive relation with the other while age was not associated with either form of sexism. Finally, consistent with our hypothesis, SJ positively correlated with BM but not HM. In order to verify whether there were any gender differences in regard to the relationship between SJ and ambivalent sexism, we ran two moderated regressions adding the interaction term between gender and SJ. In both cases, the interaction term did not reach statistical significance (predicting BM,

Table 1. Linear regression analyses predicting benevolent and hostile sexism toward men.

	BM			HM		
	B	SE	P	B	SE	P
Intercept	3.20	.06	<.001	4.03	.06	<.001
Gender	-0.46	.06	<.001	0.44	.07	<.001
Age	-0.00	.01	.755	0.02	.01	.228
Political orientation	0.10	.04	.006	0.01	.04	.771
HM/BM	0.56	.05	<.001	0.59	.06	<.001
System justification	0.10	.05	.045	-0.04	.05	.407
	.42			.38		

Gender x SJ = .07,  $p < .169$ ; predicting HM, Gender x SJ = -.07,  $p = .201$ ).

### Discussion

In line with expectations, we found SJ to be related to BM (even when the effect of HM was partialled out) but not to HM. This finding highlights the system-justifying function of BM as proposed by Glick and Fiske (1999). Jost and Banaji (1994) argued that the justification of the social, political, and economic system leads people to engage in cognitive adjustments in order to preserve a distorted image of reality and a view of the world as a just place: Our findings indicated that a personal disposition to justify the system is related to the endorsement of BM, thus supporting the idea that positive gender stereotypes may represent a strategy to bolster the status quo.

However the study had some limitations. First, participants were contacted through an e-mail recruitment procedure: This method may have led to a self-selection bias (Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002). Second, the lack of gender-moderated effect on the relationship between SJ and BM may be due to insufficient statistical power (men represent 30% of the sample). Finally, we focused exclusively on the relationship between SJ and ambivalent sexism toward men, thus limiting our investigation to the attitudinal level. Therefore, in Study 2, we expanded our focus to a behavioral outcome, namely the preference for male political candidates. We identified

the political domain as a suitable field in which to study potential consequences of the endorsement of ambivalent attitudes toward men. Indeed, the presence of women in politics today is still scarce as evidenced by data from the Inter-parliamentary Union (<http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classifhtm>). Thus, in the political domain the traditional gender gap still persists.

### Study 2

#### Hypotheses

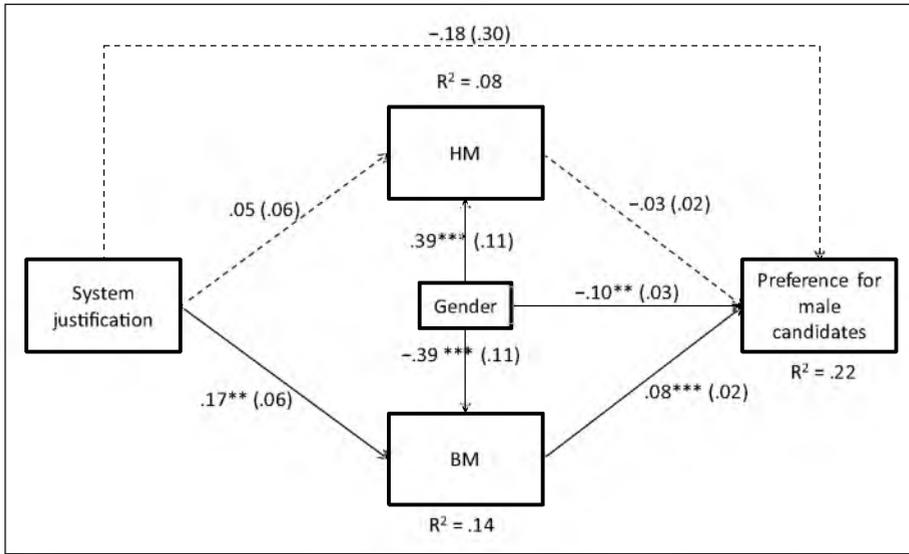
In line with Study 1 results we expected SJ to be positively related to BM but not to HM. Moreover, considering that BM is related to beliefs in support and justification of male dominance, we expected to find a positive relationship between BM and the preference for male candidates.

#### Method

*Participants and procedure.* One hundred and fifty-eight Italian students at the University of Torino (58.9% women, mean age = 22.73,  $SD = 4.62$ ) filled out a pencil-and-paper questionnaire.

*Independent and mediating variables.* Participants completed the Italian version of the AMI (Manganello et al., 2008) that showed good internal reliability (BM:  $\alpha = .83$ ; HM:  $\alpha = .80$ ). As in Study 1, system justification was assessed using six items: We calculated a mean score including all the





**Figure 1.** Mediation model predicting the preference for male candidates as a function of ambivalent sexism toward men and system justification beliefs. Unstandardized coefficients are displayed, standard error in parentheses (dotted lines indicate nonsignificant paths,  $***p < .001$ ,  $**p < .01$ ). Age and political orientation have been excluded from the figure for the sake of clarity.

**Table 2.** Linear regression analyses predicting benevolent sexism toward men for men and women separately.

	Men			Women		
	B	SE	<i>p</i>	B	SE	<i>p</i>
Intercept	1.16	.44	.010	-0.10	.31	.737
Source (1= Study 1)	0.22	.18	.224	-0.05	.12	.674
Age	0.00	.01	.952	-0.00	.01	.923
Political orientation	-0.00	.04	.960	0.13	.03	<.001
HM	0.53	.08	<.001	0.53	.05	<.001
System justification	0.00	.06	.984	0.11	.04	.007
$R^2$	.41			.44		

political orientation: Being conservative had a positive and significant relationship with BM only for women.

## General Discussion

In this research we investigated the relationships between the endorsement of system justification ideology and ambivalent attitudes toward men (Study 1), as well as their impact on a behavioral outcome, that is, the preference for male

candidates (Study 2). We showed that people who tend to justify the general social system also endorse BM: This finding clearly supports the proposition that SJ promotes people's support of gender differences and gender roles as tapped by BM. More specifically, supplementary analyses showed that system justification motivations drove BM only for women, supporting the general idea that the motivation to justify the system accounts for the complicity of members of subordinated groups in maintaining the status quo

(Jost et al., 2004). Indeed, the mediating role of BM indicated that it reflects the justification of men's roles as *pater familias* and as high-status members in society and, consequently, promotes behaviors that perpetuate the status quo, such as the preference for male political candidates. Even if the seeming specificity of the model to female participants was unexpected, it might be understood as an example of increased system justification among the disadvantaged: Indeed, system justification motives should be more appealing for members of subordinate groups like women; these motives should "lead people to endorse system-serving beliefs that are contrary to their own social and political interests" (Jost, 2011, p. 225; Jost et al., 2004; Jost, Pelham, Sheldon, & Sullivan, 2003). On the contrary, men's endorsement of benevolent attitudes toward their own group should be the norm, since it is in line with self and group interests. Our results support this idea in that system justification motives were related only to women's endorsement of benevolent attitudes toward men.

Besides this main finding, two other interesting results emerged. First, supplementary analyses showed that, in line with the idea that political conservatism is a form of system justification because it offers support for the status quo (Jost et al., 2003), conservative women tend to endorse BM more than liberal women. Thus our data indicated that women's conservative ideologies play a prominent role in explaining their level of BM.

Second, we found the preference for male candidates to be related to BM and, indirectly, to system justification beliefs, above and beyond an in-group bias orienting participants' preference for candidates of their own gender (Brewer & Brown, 1998). This finding is in line with Sanbonmatsu's (2002) claim that people have a baseline preference for members of their own gender group, in accordance with the gender affinity effect (e.g., Dolan, 1998; Plutzer & Zipp, 1996), as well as gender stereotypes. Our findings highlight the prominent role played by benevolent attitudes toward men in directing people's preference for male candidates, at least in a low-informational environment. Indeed, we might not definitively conclude that the

endorsement of system justification and benevolent sexism determines people's voting choice in a real electoral context where much more information about candidates is typically available and where party identification would likely overcome the effect of system justification. However, we believe that the role played by social ideologies should not be underestimated, at least among women: They may shape a predisposition to prefer men over women that might have an impact in low-informational races, such as in primary elections when party cues are lacking, and for people with low interest in politics. Future studies addressing the role played by sexist beliefs in real political campaigns may help to disentangle this issue.

This research had two main limitations. First of all, it was based on two correlational studies. As a consequence, the causal relationship between system justification and ambivalent sexism that we proposed could not be tested. Longitudinal research is needed in order to study the impact of justification beliefs on ambivalent sexism toward men over time. The second limitation concerns the assessment of male candidates' preference in Study 2: Among the male–female candidate pairs, we inserted eight same-sex pictures pairs. However, it is possible that this strategy was not sufficient to disguise the purpose of the study. Future studies should add more information about the candidates presented so that the purpose of the study may not be as readily apparent.

In spite of these limitations, we believe this research represents a valuable contribution to the social psychological literature by examining the link between general system justification beliefs and the more specific attitudes toward men that imply support for traditional gender differences. Indeed, we showed that such attitudes may, at least among women, impact on behavioral outcomes such that the extant gender inequality is maintained.

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## Note

1. We also tested the competing hypothesis that SJ would mediate the relationship between BM and participants' preference for male candidates: results showed that, while BM predicted SJ as well as the preference for male candidates, SJ did not function as a mediator (indirect effect = .002, 95% CI [-.017, .007]).

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