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# The Role of Legitimizing Ideologies as Predictors of Ambivalent Sexism in Young People: Evidence from Italy and the USA

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**Abstract** The studies presented here focus on the relationship between legitimizing ideologies and ambivalent sexism. 544 Italian students (Study 1) and 297 US students (Study 2) completed several scales: social dominance orientation (SDO), system justification (SJ), political orientation, religiosity, and the Glick and Fiske (*J Pers Soc Psychol* 70(3):491–512, 1996) Ambivalent Sexism Inventory. Zero-order correlations revealed all facets of ideological attitudes to be positively related to each other and correlated with ambivalent sexism. In particular, the SDO was related to both ideology components of SJ and political orientation and to ambivalent sexism (hostile and benevolent). Moderated regressions revealed that SDO has a positive impact on hostile sexism for men only, while SJ has a positive impact on hostile sexism for women only. While the first result was stable across the two studies, the last moderated effect has been detected only in Study 1. We discuss the results with respect to different facets of social ideologies and cultural differences between the two countries.

**Keywords** System justification · Social dominance orientation · Ambivalent sexism · Conservative ideology

The aim of this study was to investigate the role of ideologies in the development of prejudicial attitudes among young people, by considering the relationship between certain social ideologies and ambivalent sexism.

As explained by Sidanius and Pratto (1999), “social ideologies” can be defined as all the shared knowledge, anchored in the specific social system, that give people an indication of the ways and manners governing relationships between groups and people.

The ideologies related to intergroup relationships also take root at the organized social level, with clear rebounds on social and political attitudes. For instance, beliefs that legitimize and justify relationships in terms of dominance/compliance can assume openly manifest forms of discrimination or more subtle attitudes, directed toward establishing and maintaining dynamics of intergroup dominance and compliance without even seeking or taking any notice of approval at institutional level. The stability of social systems is often guaranteed through the coordinated cooperation of members of dominant and subordinate groups, in which the status of the dominant groups’ members is also safeguarded by the “victims” themselves who adopt asymmetrical attitudes and behavior. In western societies the legitimization of gender differences and the use of negative stereotypes toward women are typical examples of asymmetrical behaviors and attitudes.

This research investigates the way in which such ideologies are ingrained in young people and how they characterize gender prejudice. Social ideologies embrace a spectrum of intercorrelated beliefs systems such as social dominance orientation (SDO, Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), system justification (SJ) (Jost & Hunyady, 2002), religiosity, and political orientation. These beliefs explain social, economic, and political outcomes in a way that perpetuates the subjective legitimacy of the status quo. Such concerns may affect attitudes, interpersonal relationships, religion, and politics, in various domains of everyday life (cf. Jost & Kay, 2005).

The SDO most directly applies to relationships and conflicts between groups. According to the social dominance theory (SDT, Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) post-industrial human societies are conceived as group-oriented social hierarchies and most forms of intergroup discrimination, oppression, and conflict serve the function of establishing and maintaining particular group-based, hierarchical social systems (see also Ng, 1980). A SDO scale has been developed to test the proposition of the SDT. This scale is intended to measure the degree to which individuals endorse anti-egalitarian values and support and perpetuate hierarchical group-based systems of inequality. The SDO scale comprises items that tap the beliefs that some groups are inherently inferior or superior to others, and the approval of inequality in group relationships. Individuals who endorse social dominance support maintenance of a hierarchy that distinguishes between superior and inferior groups and derogate people of the out-groups with which they are in actual or perceived competition. This tendency toward SDO should be greater among men than among women and should also be robust over situational and cultural factors. Social Dominance theorists have labeled this thesis as the invariance hypothesis, that is, even if the degree to which males have higher levels of social and group dominance orientation may vary across contexts, on average, females should never have higher levels of SDO than males, everything else being equal (Pratto & Walker, 2004). Moreover, social dominance theorists state that members of advantaged groups hold attitudes that are supportive of authority figures, legal institutions, and the social order more

than members of disadvantaged groups, which is consistent with self-interest needs for dominance.

Similar to SDO, the system-justification theory (SJT) was developed to explain the legitimization of intergroup inequality and discrimination in society (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Jost & Hunyady, 2002). The aim of system-justification researchers is mainly to identify social and psychological variables that lead people to accept, defend, bolster, and justify existing forms of social arrangements rather than reject, challenge, attack, and criticize them. In particular, SJ researchers have argued that people may sometimes adopt ideologies and belief systems that serve as justifications for maintaining existing political, social, and economic established system at least in part to make themselves feel better about the status quo. According to Jost and Hunyady (2005), SJ fulfills a palliative function in that people often engage in cognitive adjustments that preserve a distorted image of reality in which the world is a fair and just place (Lerner, 1980; Walster, Berscheid, & Walster, 1973), without striving to make changes that will increase the overall amount of fairness and equality in the system.

As stated by Jost (2011), one of the key differences between SDO and SJT is referred to the question of evolutionary origins of ideology and specific forms of intergroup behavior. While social dominance is a sociobiological theory that holds ethnocentrism as “part of human nature” (Sidanius, 1993), SJT highlights processes of ideological socialization as determinants of stereotypes and other social-political attitudes and the fact that people are motivated to bolster the status quo. Even more important for the current research, SJT researchers claimed that SDO fails “to account for the degree to which psychological responses to the social and political status quo are characterized by active bolstering and system justification, especially among members of disadvantaged groups” (Jost et al., 2004, p. 885). In this light, SDO may help to explain bolstering and justification of the existing social hierarchies through mechanisms of ingroup favoritism and outgroup derogation by members of dominant groups (Levin, Federico, Sidanius, & Rabinowitz, 2002), while SJ accounts also for the complicity of members of the subordinated groups in maintaining the status quo through mechanisms of outgroup favoritism (Jost, 2011).

There are several psychological reasons for which people would actively seek to justify the status quo, such as cognitive-motivational needs to believe in order, structure, and stability or bolstering their own group status. The justification tendency is also reflected in the use of stereotypes and formulation of judgments that justify arbitrary (and even illegitimate) differences between social categories, so that the social position held by the different social groups is seen as just, fair, and legitimate (see also Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003). Therefore, the system-justifying effect of stereotype activation may be either more general or domain-specific. This effect also includes the use of gender stereotypes. That is, gender stereotypes may be expected to increase the tolerance for gender-specific inequality and support for the current state of gender relations in society as a sort of carryover effect to the system (Jost & Kay, 2005).

Gender stereotypes represent a particularly good example of the capillary nature of the tendency to legitimize forms of social discrimination and the validity of the SJT. According to Jackman (1994), complementary stereotypes (i.e., stereotypic

differentiation between men and women) accomplish two things that are important for maintaining the system: (a) they treat each gender group as essentially well-suited to occupy the positions and roles that are prescribed for them by society; (b) they serve to elevate low-status groups and derogate high-status groups, suggesting that they have “balancing” characteristics. As an extension of the research on complementary gender stereotyping, Glick and Fiske (1996) have proposed that sexism can involve a strange mixture of hostility and benevolence. To capture this phenomenon they developed and validated an instrument for measuring hostile (HS) and benevolent sexism (BS) as separate but related constructs. While HS is an open and negative view of gender relations in which women are overtly held as inferior to men, BS is a more subtle form of prejudice characterized by the view of women as pure creatures that deserve to be protected and adored. Glick and Fiske (2001) found that the two subscales are positively inter-correlated and both predict the endorsement of common gender stereotypes as well as old-fashioned and modern forms of sexism. According to the sexism theory, attitudes toward women are ambivalent: female stereotypes include both highly favorable and unfavorable attributes in order to maintain inequalities between men and women.

In particular, Glick et al. (2000), comparing hostile and benevolent attitudes in a 19-nation study, noted that HS–BS correlation was significantly stronger for women than for men. Furthermore, using nations as units of analysis, they found that in more sexist cultures HS–BS correlation tended toward greater independence. HS and BS go hand-in-hand as complementary ideologies, providing a system of rewards and punishments that justify and maintain system inequalities, mainly in highly patriarchal cultures where all ideologies that effectively help to maintain the status quo will find adherents for BS and HS. Applied to SJ, empirical studies support this prediction, by showing that women exposed to BS or complementary stereotypes increased their endorsement to the system-justification beliefs (Jost & Kay, 2005; Sibley & Becker, 2012).

Recent research (Christopher & Mull, 2006; Sibley, Wilson, & Duckitt, 2007) explored the relationships between conservative ideologies and ambivalent sexism. They found that SDO is more strongly related to HS than BS, as their study was conducted in a traditional country; the results supported the notion that when men are more sexist, women are more likely to embrace sexist ideologies, both hostile and benevolent. Although an alternative is that men take their lead from women’s sexism, system justification theories presume that dominant groups are in a better position to propagate ideologies. Expanding on Christopher and Mull’s (2006) model aimed at explaining HS and BS, we conducted two studies in order to test the role of social ideologies (SDO and SJ) in explaining ambivalent sexism among young males and females. Besides SDO and SJ, we also identified political conservatism and religiosity as potential predictors of HS and BS. As a matter of fact, 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), and that religiosity is positively related to BS both in Catholic countries (Glick, Lameiras, & Castro, 2002) and Islamic countries (Taşdemir & Sakallı-Uğurlu, 2010). We carried out two correlational studies to investigate the relationships between social ideologies and ambivalent sexism in young people in two different societies.

## Study 1

This work expands on previous research showing that rationalization of inequalities is linked to ambivalent sexism even among young people. Specifically, we expect to replicate with young people some basic findings (Glick et al., 2000): (a) BS and HS are distinct but related constructs; (b) women (more than men) should show BS; men (more than women) should endorse HS.

Generally speaking, we also expected all facets of ideological attitudes to be positively related to each other and correlated with ambivalent sexism. However, given that HS is an open form of prejudice, we expected SDO and SJ to be more strongly correlated with BS and HS. Moreover, as BS and HS represent complementary forms of prejudice toward women, we regard gender as potential moderating factor of the relationship between social ideologies and gender prejudice. In particular, we expect the effect of social ideologies on ambivalent sexism to be moderated by gender, especially in the expression of HS: Considering that SDO is a group justification ideology used by members of a dominant group (men) to assert superiority over another group (women), we expected that the legitimizing myths identified by Sidanius (1993) will be positively related to HS especially among men. On the contrary, SJ, being related to the justification of the existing order, should be more appealing for members of subordinate groups (Jost, 2011) and serve the function of internalizing the hierarchical social order. For this reason we expected SJ to be associated to HS, but only among women.

Concerning BS, we expected religiosity to be positively correlated with this expression of prejudice. As far as the legitimizing ideologies are concerned, we advanced two alternative expectations because previous research provided somewhat heterogeneous findings. In line with Christopher and Mull (2006) and with Sibley et al. (2007), we should expect SDO to be uncorrelated with BS while, following Lee, Pratto, and Li (2007), we should expect SDO to be positively related to BS.

While the first study has been conducted in Italy, a traditional southern European country, the second study extended our analysis to a thoroughly different context, namely the USA, where policies are based more on equal opportunities. Since it is reasonable to regard a certain ideology as more relevant, shared, or widespread also in relation to the prevailing social-political climate (Moscovici, 1986), it would be realistic to assume that a certain ideology might be more prevalent and widespread within a same political environment of a given social system. We, therefore, decided to replicate the study in another country. Both studies were conducted in May 2008.

## Method

### *Participants*

544 Italian students (182 males and 362 females), of ages ranging from 14 to 20 years ( $M = 18$ ,  $SD = 1.59$ ) participated in the study. 280 Italian participants were from small towns in northern Italy, and 264 from an island in southern Italy. Statistical comparison between the students from northern Italy and those from the

island in southern Italy revealed no statistically significant differences in ambivalent sexism. All the analyses reported below thus reflect data collapsed across both groups. 89 % were high-school students ( $M = 17.26$  years;  $SD = 1.53$ ) and 11 % University students ( $M = 19.32$ ;  $SD = .54$ ).

### *Procedure*

As mentioned previously, the study was conducted in high-schools and among first year psychology students at the Universities of Torino and Cagliari. Students completed the questionnaire in the classroom before lessons started. Parents provided consent for the high-school students to participate, and the young people themselves agreed to participate in accordance with Italian law and the ethical code of the Professional Psychologists Association in Italy. After completing the questionnaire, participants were fully debriefed about the aims of the study and thanked. Data were collected over a two-month period in spring 2008.

### *Measures*

Participants completed the following scales:

*Social Dominance* The SDO Scale (Italian version of SDO6 by Aiello, Chirumbolo, Leone, & Pratto, 2005) consists of 14 items that assess the tendency to derogate members of outgroup with whom there may be actual or perceived conflict or competition. Participants indicated how negatively or positively they felt about statements such as “Some groups are simply not equals of others” and “Some people are just more deserving than others” on a 0 (*very strongly negative*) to 6 (*very strongly positive*) response range. This measure has been used in numerous studies and displayed excellent validity and multiple forms of reliability (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). In the current study  $\alpha$  of Cronbach was .84.

*System Justification* System justification was assessed using eight items that were translated and adapted from Kay and Jost (2003) to measure participants’ degree of support for the societal status quo. Sample items include: “In general, the Italian political system works as it should,” “Everyone has a fair shot at wealth and happiness,” and “Italian society needs to be radically restructured” (reverse-scored). We conducted a principal component analysis to ensure that the translated items formed a cohesive scale. The results showed the one-dimensional structure of the scale with the first factor explaining 40 % of total variance and good reliability ( $\alpha = .77$ ).<sup>1</sup>

*Hostile and Benevolent Sexism* We used the 22-item Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (translation into Italian Manganelli, A. M., Volpato, C., & Canova, L. (2008)) to measure HS and BS (11 items each). Examples of items to measure HS include “Once a woman gets a man to commit to her, she usually tries to put him on a tight leash” and “Many women are actually seeking special favors, such as hiring

<sup>1</sup> Principal component analysis, with all the items from SDO and SJ scales, confirmed that the items used really tapped two different constructs.



**Table 1** Descriptive statistics for Study 1

Variable	Men ( <i>N</i> = 182)		Women ( <i>N</i> = 362)		All respondents ( <i>N</i> = 544)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Benevolent sexism	3.38	.84	3.81	.85	3.67	.87
Hostile sexism	3.47	.82	2.50	.91	2.82	.99
SDO	2.10	1.11	1.67	.98	1.81	1.04
SJ	1.91	.97	1.70	.91	1.77	.93
Faith	2.76	2.33	3.33	2.50	3.14	2.46
Political orientation	3.55	1.70	3.40	1.64	3.45	1.66
Age	17.53	1.50	17.44	1.64	17.47	1.59

policies that favor them over men, under the guise of asking for ‘equality.’” Examples of items to measure BS include “No matter how accomplished he is, a man is not truly complete as a person unless he has the love of a woman” and “In a disaster, women ought not necessarily be rescued before men” (reverse-coded). Participants used a 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*) response range. Higher scores on each scale indicate having more hostile or benevolent sexist attitudes toward women. These measures have demonstrated excellent psychometric properties in a number of investigations. Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  was .74 for HS and .77 for BS.

*Political Conservatism* We used two items to assess political orientation: (1) “How would you describe your own political party preference?” with a response range from 0 *strongly left-wing* to 8 *strongly right-wing* and (2) “How would you describe your general political orientation?” with a response range from 0 *very liberal* to 8 *very conservative*. The higher the score the greater the level of conservatism (Pearson  $r = .88$ ).

*Faith* One item was used to measure religiosity, with scores ranging from 1 (*not practicing at all*) to 8 (*very much*) that provided information on the level to which respondents practiced their faith.

## Results

Table 1 contains the descriptive statistics for the primary study variables. As an initial step, a series of paired sample *t*-tests were used to assess whether respondents rated the two groups differently with regard to gender. As expected, men showed higher levels of SDO ( $M = 2.10$ ) than women ( $M = 1.67$ ),  $t(452) = 4.58$ ,  $p < .001$ . Similarly, men justified (SJ) more ( $M = 1.91$ ) than women ( $M = 1.70$ ),  $t(452) = 2.56$ ,  $p < .001$ , and showed more HS ( $M = 3.47$ ) than women ( $M = 2.50$ ),  $t(452) = 12.15$ ,  $p < .001$ . Women practiced their religious faith more ( $M = 3.33$ ) than men ( $M = 2.76$ ),  $t(452) = -2.55$ ,  $p < .05$ , and showed higher levels of BS

( $M = 3.81$ ) than men ( $M = 3.38$ ),  $t(452) = -5.60$ ,  $p < .001$ . There was no difference among respondents on political orientation ( $t(542) = 1.06$  ns).

Southerners were more conservative ( $M = 3.85$ ) than Northerners ( $M = 3.07$ ),  $t(542) = -5.67$ ,  $p < .001$ , whereas in general respondents from North showed higher SDO ( $t(542) = -2.60$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and SJ ( $t(542) = 2.05$ ,  $p < .05$ ) mean values. Finally, there were no differences among respondents on ambivalent sexism, religion, and age (see Table 2).

Table 3 contains the zero-order correlations between all the variables included in the study. As expected, SDO scores were positively interrelated with both political orientation and system justification among both men and women. SJ was correlated positively with faith among both men and women and negatively with age. SDO scores only correlated with HS for male participants, whereas SJ scores only correlated with HS among women. BS and HS were not related to each other, but both correlated to political orientation. HS was positively related to SJ in females and only correlated to SDO in males. There was no difference according to the level of education.

**Table 2** Comparison between North and South respondents

Variable	North ( $N = 280$ )		South ( $N = 264$ )	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Benevolent sexism	3.67	.84	3.67	.91
Hostile sexism	2.80	.97	2.84	1.01
SDO	1.92	1.05	1.69	1.01
SJ	1.85	.94	1.69	.93
Faith	3.33	2.62	2.94	2.27
Political orientation	3.07	1.65	3.85	1.58
Age	17.36	1.74	17.60	1.40

**Table 3** Intercorrelations among study variables, men ( $N = 182$ ) are below the diagonal, women ( $N = 362$ ) above

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Benevolent sexism	–	.07	–.03	.03	.13*	.03	–.02	–.30
2. Hostile sexism	–.10	–	.10	.22**	.14**	–.07	.06	–.80
3. SDO	–.12	.33**	–	.22**	.29**	.06	–.03	–.80
4. SJ	.08	.06	.21**	–	.18**	.19**	–.22**	–.80
5. Political orientation <sup>a</sup>	.17*	.21*	.36**	.21**	–	.29**	–.16**	.04
6. Faith	–.04	.10	.03	.17*	.21**	–	–.14**	.38**
7. Age	–.00	.03	.01	–.18*	–.06	–.15*	–	–.70
8. Education <sup>b</sup>	.01	–.12	–.13	–.09	.07	.46**	–.12	–

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

<sup>a</sup> Higher scores indicate a more conservative political orientation

<sup>b</sup> Respondents were classified in high-school students (1) and University students (2)

Next, we ran two hierarchical regressions. We entered the demographic variables together on step one (gender, provenience, education); one form of sexism on step two, as recommended by Glick and Fiske (1996); the aspects of social ideology (i.e., SDO, SJ, faith, and political orientation) together on step three; and finally, the interaction gender by SDO, SJ, and political orientation on step four. The models predicting HS and BS are displayed in Table 4.

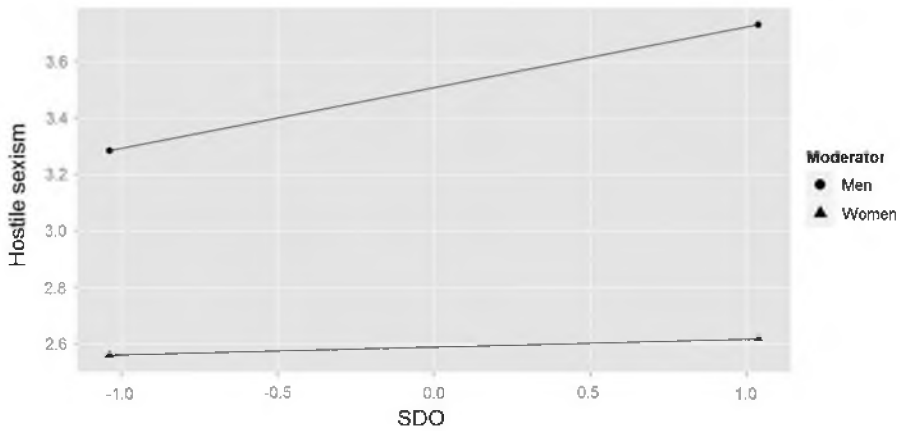
On step one, participants' sex predicted both criteria with men showing higher levels of HS and women higher levels of BS. On step two, none of the form of sexism predicted the other, contrary to the main findings published in the literature (Glick et al., 2004; Manganelli, Volpato, & Canova, 2008). On step three, only political orientation and SDO accounted for significant variability in both HS and BS. SJ had a positive impact on HS only, while faith did not account for each criterion. On step four, in order to verify whether there were any differences between males and females, we entered the interaction of social ideologies and gender.

Results shows that, while the interaction between gender and political orientation did not approach statistical significance, gender moderated the effect of both SDO and SJ on HS. Concerning gender and SDO, simple slopes analysis showed that SDO was a significant predictor of HS for men only: Indeed, SDO had a positive and significant effect on HS for men, simple slope = .22,  $t(532) = 3.37$ ,  $p < .001$ , but not for women, simple slope = .03,  $t(532) = .56$ ,  $p = .58$  (see Fig. 1 for simple slopes graphical representation).

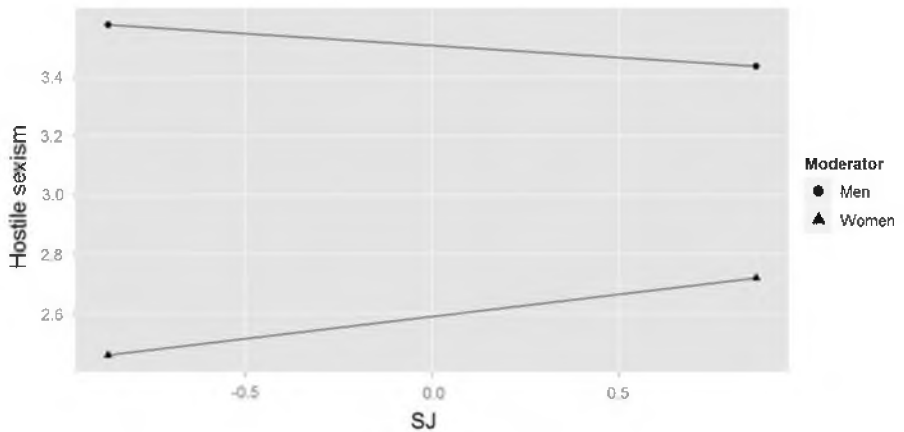
**Table 4** Hierarchical regression results predicting ambivalent sexism

Predictors	$R^2$	Benevolent sexism		$R^2$	Hostile sexism	
		$\beta$	SE		$\beta$	SE
Variables						
Step 1	.06		.97	.22		.89
Gender		.24***	.09		-.47***	.08
Provenience		.05	.09		-.02	.08
Education		-.03	.14		-.08	.13
Step 2	.06			.22		.89
Hostile/benevolent sexism		.02	.05			.04
Step 3	.09		.96	.25		.86
Political orientation		.19***	.05		.10*	.04
Faith		-.05	.04		.01	.04
SJ		.05	.04		.10*	.04
SDO		-.14*	.05		.10*	.04
Step 4: interactions	.10		.96	.26		.86
Gender $\times$ SDO		.21	.13		-.33*	.08
Gender $\times$ SJ		-.10	.09		.35**	.08
Gender $\times$ political orientation		-.11	.09		-.02	.08

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .005$



**Fig. 1** Study 1: moderating effect of gender on the relation between SDO and Hostile sexism



**Fig. 2** Study 1: moderating effect of gender on the relation between SJ and Hostile sexism

Concerning gender and SJ, simple slopes analysis showed that SJ was a significant predictor of HS for women only: SJ had a positive and significant effect on HS for women, simple slope = .15,  $t(532) = 2.69$ ,  $p < .01$ , but not for men, simple slope =  $-.08$ ,  $t(532) = -1.13$ ,  $p = .26$  (see Fig. 2 for simple slopes graphical representation).

## Study 2

In Study 2, we decided to replicate our findings in a different social and cultural context such as the United States, where equal opportunities policies have been in place for longer. We, therefore, expected a greater tendency to justify sexism among

US participants than Italians and a close relationship between the two sexism attitudes (Glick et al., 2004).

Once again, our main aim was to assess how social ideologies influence sexism among young people, and in particular, ambivalent sexism. As in Study 1, we expected a relationship between social ideologies and sexism to emerge and, in particular, the effect of SDO and SJ on sexism to be moderated by gender.

## Method

### *Participants*

Data for US sample were collected from seven high-schools ( $N = 242$ ) in Washington DC and two Universities ( $N = 55$ ). 154 were boys and 143 were girls, of ages ranging from 14 to 20 ( $M = 16$ ,  $SD = 1.74$ ). 50 % of respondents were white, 10 % Afro American, 10 % Hispanic, and 3.3 % Asian, while the remaining 20 % of respondents did not reply. These data were collected in classrooms in spring 2008, where instructors had given researchers the permission to administer the questionnaires.

### *Procedure*

The design of Study 2 was similar to that of Study 1. Participants were asked to complete questionnaires investigating their ambivalent sexism and were also rated on SDO, SJ, political orientation, and faith social ideology scales. We were, therefore, able to assess the extent to which males and females reveal a similar pattern of differentiation in sexism and to replicate the regression models in the US context.

### *Measure*

Again we used all the measures of the previous study: SDO6 scale (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), SJ scale (Kay & Jost, 2003), HS and BS inventory (ASI, Glick & Fiske, 1996), political orientation, and faith, these two latter translated from the original Italian questionnaire.<sup>2</sup>

## Results

Table 5 contains the descriptive statistics for the primary study variables. As an initial step, a series of paired sample  $t$  tests assessed whether respondents rated the two groups differently with regard to gender. As hypothesized, men showed higher levels of SDO ( $M = 2.83$ ) than women ( $M = 2.63$ ),  $t(295) = 2.30$ ,  $p < .05$ . Similarly, men justified (SJ) more ( $M = 3.20$ ) than women ( $M = 2.84$ ),  $t(295) = 2.31$ ,  $p < .05$ , and showed more HS ( $M = 3.61$ ) than women

<sup>2</sup> As in Study1, a principal component analysis, with all the items from SDO and SJ scale, confirmed that the items used really tapped two different constructs.

**Table 5** Descriptive statistics of main variables in Study 2

Variable	Men ( <i>N</i> = 154)		Women ( <i>N</i> = 143)		All respondents ( <i>N</i> = 297)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Benevolent sexism	3.46	.74	3.41	.82	3.43	.78
Hostile sexism	3.61	.90	3.00	.90	3.31	.95
SDO	2.83	.78	2.63	.69	2.73	.74
SJ	3.20	.99	2.84	1.02	3.37	.85
Political orientation	2.68	1.48	2.49	1.53	2.59	1.51
Faith	3.77	2.32	3.94	2.25	3.85	2.27
Age	16.32	1.54	16.57	1.82	16.44	1.68

**Table 6** Intercorrelations among study variables (men are below the diagonal, women are above)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Benevolent sexism	–	.48**	.27**	.11	.38**	.15	–.20*
2. Hostile sexism	.45**	–	.14	.05	.23**	.15	–.25**
3. SDO	.18*	.41**	–	.23**	.26**	–.06	–.16
4 SJ	.09	–.01	.05	–	.22**	.13	.05
5. Political orientation	.14	.09	.04	.32**	–	.40**	–.32
6. Faith	.06	–.06	–.10	.24**	.31**	–	.00
7 Age	–.27**	–.24**	–.01	–.07	–.12	–.10	–

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

( $M = 3.00$ ),  $t(295) = 5.76$ ,  $p < .0001$ . There were no differences on religion  $t(295) = -.63$  *ns*, political orientation  $t(295) = 1.11$  *ns*, and age  $t(295) = -1.31$  *ns*.

Table 6 shows the bivariate intercorrelations among males and females between all study variables. In males and females political orientation was correlated to SJ and faith, BS was positively related to HS and to SDO. SDO was also related to HS among males only. Age was correlated with ambivalent sexism.

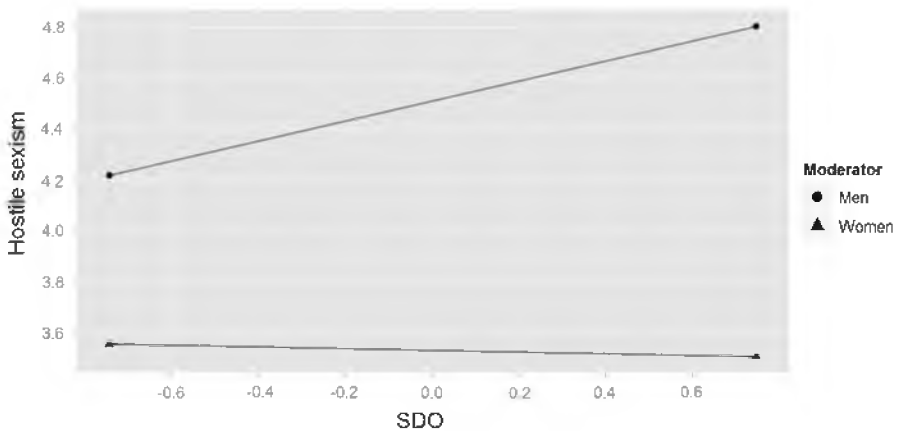
We repeated the procedure used in Study 1 to test the prediction made by the main hypothesis. This was done for each ideology and two dependent variables (BS and HS). These results are summarized in Table 7. For each dependent variable two columns show the estimates for the main effects and the interactions.

As shown in each model, only SDO showed a significant relationship with ambivalent sexism. HS and BS are strictly related to each other. Gender is a predictor of HS and moderates the influence of SDO. Simple slopes analysis revealed that SDO is a significant predictor of HS for men only. As a matter of fact, the impact of SDO on HS is positive and significant for men, simple slope = .40,  $t(284) = 4.94$ ,  $p < .001$ , but not for women, simple slope =  $-.03$ ,  $t(284) = -.34$ ,  $p = .73$  (see Fig. 3 for simple slopes graphical representation).

**Table 7** Hierarchical regression results predicting ambivalent sexism

Predictors	$R^2$	Benevolent sexism		$R^2$	Hostile sexism	
		$\beta$	SE		$\beta$	SE
Variables						
Step 1	.04		.95	.16		.92
Gender		-.01	.12		-.26***	.19
Education		-.22***	.15		-.27***	.05
Step 2	.24		.85	.32		.82
Hostile/benevolent sexism		.48***	.06		.42***	.05
Step 3	.29		.83	.35		.81
Political orientation		.17**	.06		-.01	.06
Faith		.03	.06		-.04	.05
SJ		-.01	.05		-.03	.05
SDO		.14*	.05		.18**	.05
Step 4: interactions	.30		.83	.36		.80
Gender $\times$ SDO		-.02	.11		-.26**	.10
Gender $\times$ SJ		.28	.11		-.05	.10
Gender $\times$ political orientation			.11		-.03	.10

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .005$

**Fig. 3** Study 2: moderating effect of gender on the relation between SDO and Hostile sexism

## Discussion

The present study investigated the relationship between social ideologies and ambivalent sexism in young people, and whether there are differences between men and women in their judgments. Our first aim was to replicate some basic findings concerning ambivalent sexism in young people living in two different countries (namely US and Italy). Consistent with previous research on the topic (Glick &

Fiske, 2001), our results showed that, in both countries, men have higher levels of HS than women. Concerning gender differences in BS levels, Italian women scored significantly higher than men, while this difference was not statistically significant in the US sample. This last finding was in line with Glick and Fiske's (2001) claim that in more sexist countries the gender gap in BS was reversed, with women endorsing BS more strongly than men. Indeed, in the Italian social atmosphere, next to globalization and other social radical changes (globalization, multiculturalism), there is a conservative tendency, placing more conformity pressure on men and women to develop and enact what they consider gender-appropriate roles.

Moreover, the lack of correlation in Italy versus the positively significant correlation in the US between HS and BS was also in line with Glick and Fiske's (2001) finding that the correlations between these two forms of sexism were generally smaller among respondents in the most sexist nations. However, an additional interpretation of these findings may be advanced: Italian data have been collected in small towns' schools, while American data were gained in a large city (Washington, DC). Thus, we could speculate that the cultural difference between the two countries may have even been exacerbated by the difference in the urban contexts. Indeed, interestingly, as far as the Italian sample was concerned, there were differences among North and South respondents just on social ideologies (not on ambivalent sexism) that may confirm the legacy of the ideology to the societal (socio-economic and structural factors) level. This may imply the mediating role of the ideologies between the societal level and prejudicial attitudes. Future studies conducted with a multilevel approach may help to better understand the intertwining of country-level cultural indicators and individual-level expression of ambivalent sexism.

The second aim of the study was to investigate the moderating role of gender on the link between social ideologies (SDO and SJ) and ambivalent sexism. Consistent with the notion that SDO is a group justification ideology used by members of dominant groups to maintain superiority over other groups, results from both studies showed that SDO was a significant predictor of HS for men only. Similarly, consistent with the idea that SJ accounts for the internalization of the hierarchical social order and it is mainly adopted by members of subordinated groups, our results showed that SJ was a significant predictor of HS for women only. These findings confirm the theoretical notion that SDO and SJ may be legitimizing ideologies differently employed by members of dominant versus subordinated groups (men vs. women, respectively). Still, it is important to notice that the moderated effect of gender on the link between SJ and HS has been detected only in the Italian sample (cf. Study 1). This inconsistency may reflect the aforementioned cultural differences between Italy and the US: As the latter is a less sexist country where egalitarian values are more widespread and social hierarchy does not accentuate status differences between men and women and given that SJ concerns the legitimization of the status quo, it is reasonable that SJ did not influence sexism neither for men nor for women. This finding supports the idea that the need of legitimization may be higher in specific circumstances and against particular groups.

Beyond this last consideration, the results provided empirical evidence in line with the theoretical assumptions regarding SDO as a form of justification mainly



adopted by members of dominant groups (Levin et al., 2002) and SJ as a form of justification mainly embraced by members of subordinated groups. Both these forms of justification differently affected the two expressions of sexism, thus indirectly confirming that HS and BS really represent different forms of prejudice toward women. More specifically, HS is regarded as a negative and open expression of prejudice toward women while BS is regarded as a form of more subtle prejudice. Our results partially support this idea by showing that legitimizing ideologies have a stronger impact on the former than on the latter.

On the other hand, according to the justification-suppression model of the expression of prejudice (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003), BS, being a subtle expression of prejudice and being more socially acceptable, may be less related to the endorsement of legitimizing ideologies. In line with Lee et al. (2007), in the US sample, SDO was positively related to BS. However, our results also showed that, in the Italian sample, SDO negatively influenced BS. Even if unexpected, we believe that this result may be potentially interesting: Participants with high SDO, who devalue social equality and support hierarchical relationships in society, tend to express lower levels of BS, just as if they would not even support the idea of women as creatures that deserve to be protected and adored. On the whole, we believe future studies should focus on the relationship between SDO and BS, especially in highly sexist cultural contexts where the two dimensions of ambivalent sexism tend to be uncorrelated. It is also to be noticed that this inconsistency may be explained by a third potentially intervenient factor, namely gender identification. Indeed, previous research showed that gender identification is positively correlated with SDO (see, for example, Snellman, Ekehammar & Akrami, 2009) and negatively related to sexism, at least among women (Becker & Wagner, 2009).

### Strengths, Limitations, and Possible Developments

The current research had two main limitations. The first one is related to the limited focus on individual-level variables. As already discussed, we tested two models aimed at predicting ambivalent sexism in two countries characterized by very different social and cultural atmospheres. However, a more systematic approach (such as the multilevel) that allows researchers to simultaneously test the impact of country- and individual-level variables as well as their cross-level interactions would greatly help to a better understanding of the expression of prejudice toward women.

The second is related to the cross-sectional design of the study: The causal relations between social ideologies and ambivalent sexism discussed in this study have to be interpreted with caution. Further studies need to be carried out to investigate how the interrelationship between ideologies can contribute to the development of sexism over time. Moreover, as reported in some classical studies (Allport & Ross, 1967), it is also important to consider the reasons underlying adherence to certain ideologies or religious faiths rather than others, the representations of knowledge, aims, and expectations that change with the acceptance of certain values or statements.

The next step in this line of research will be to use more complex strategies of analysis which could shed more light on the phenomenon under study. It might be interesting to investigate these associations over time and also to vary the stimuli and introduce additional measures of system justification (such as perceived legitimacy of the status quo). It may be also very interesting to test path analysis models in order to detect the effects of socio-demographic variables on mediating variables such as social ideologies and, in turn, the impact of social ideologies on ambivalent sexism.

On the whole, in spite of its limitations, this study also has the advantage of offering a contribution with regard to the relationship between social and political ideology and prejudicial attitudes and, most importantly, it is the first study to analyze the role of social ideologies in the expression of sexism among young people. It, therefore, offers some important implications for future planning of educational schemes aimed at curbing prejudice toward women.

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