

HOSTILE AND BENEVOLENT ATTITUDES TOWARDS WOMEN IN ADOLESCENCE

Monica SECUI and Magda DANCIU
University of Oradea, ROMANIA

The model of ambivalent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 1997) has claimed that sexist attitudes towards women include both benevolent and hostile sexism, due to the structure of the traditional male-female roles and relationships, characterised by power difference and also by strong interdependence between the groups. The purpose of our paper is to identify the presence of benevolent and hostile sexist attitudes in adolescence, this period being considered very important for the development of gender beliefs system. The participants were 208 girls and boys, aged between 13 and 18 years, who were administered a version of Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske, 1996) and a task designed to assess the content of gender stereotypes. The results showed a higher level of hostile sexist attitudes for the boys in middle and late adolescence, as compared to boys in early adolescence. Furthermore boys presented a higher level of hostile sexism and a lower level of benevolent attitudes than girls. The prejudicial attitudes towards women who are viewed as trying to "usurp" men's power are not correlated with the benevolent representation of women who conform to their traditional roles. So, in case of our study, the two attitudes are not interrelated within an ambivalent sexist ideology. The findings are discussed in relation to the assumptions of the ambivalent sexism model and to the problem represented by the girls' approval of benevolent attitudes, which can reinforce hostile sexism.

Adolescence is seen as a crucial period for gender beliefs system development, being the start of an intensified gender identification and differentiation. Major changes are considered to strongly mark this stage, as physical and sexual maturation, the increasing development of the cognitive abilities and the interest for opposite-gender and for identity influence adolescents' attitudes and behaviours related to gender roles.

The persons foster images about characteristic features of both men and women in terms of personality traits, competences, behaviours, based on the observation of the models, paralleled by the direct social reinforcement of traditional gender roles. They identify and define themselves in accordance with the already constructed representations. The knowledge about social prescriptions and representations is doubled by their own positions toward the degree to which the content of the gender traditional roles should be prescriptive for self and others. Furthermore, the gender beliefs system is multidimensional: the self-identity defined in terms of gender roles is related to stereotypes about men and women and attitudes towards gender roles (Deaux & LaFrance, 1998).

Sexism, because of the close connection between women and men, can harder be assimilated to the pattern of prejudice traditionally defined as a negative attitude. Glick and Fiske (1996, 1997) ground their research on the existence of some complex, mixed feelings of persons toward an out-group. Women's image is neither uniformly negative nor positive, as negative feelings are often doubled by positive feelings of appreciation and respect. The authors consider that sexism is a multidimensional construct including two sets of attitudes, hostile and benevolent. If hostile sexism can be equated with a negative attitude toward women, benevolent sexism refers to a set of attitudes toward women that are sexist because they perceive women in a stereotyped way and make women fit into certain restrictive roles. These attitudes could be perceived as positive by the persons who observe the interactions between individuals, and also they could be seen in their tendency to generate beliefs and reactions considered pro-social (e.g. offering help), protecting women (Glick & Fiske, 1996,

p.491). Despite the positive feelings that could be associated to benevolent sexism - preventing it from overlapping the concept of prejudice - the authors do not consider it desirable because it has its roots in the traditional stereotypes and in the idea of male dominance (the man as protector and provider) on the one hand, and the woman's weakness and dependency on man on the other hand. The consequences are most often negative: even if for an observer of the social interaction the manifestations of the benevolent sexism seem positive, they cannot be perceived identically by the woman concerned (e.g. within the relationship chief-subordinate, the professionally irrelevant compliments, those related to personal attraction, may undermine the subordinate's self-assessment of professional competence).

The issues related to benevolent sexism are presented in a number of studies: Eagly and Mladinic (1994, apud Glick et al., 2000) point out that members of both genders generally more often assign desirable traits to women, as compared with men, a result that they referred to as „women are a wonderful effect”; women are assessed more positively when related to certain social norms focused on expressing nurturance, compassion, sensitivity (Prentice & Carranza, 2002); in case of helping behaviour, there is a tendency of the participants to rather offer help of a female requester than to a male potential beneficiary of the help; the degree of self-disclosure of both male and female participants is higher when interacting with an unknown woman compared with the situation in which the potential confidant is an unknown man (Brehm & Kassin, 1989).

Glisk and Fiske (1996) consider that the polarization of the attitude toward women has always been present, having its origin in the social and biological conditions common to human societies: patriarchy, gender differentiation, and heterosexual interdependence.

Patriarchy – as a form of social organization in which men possess a higher level of structural power than women – is, according to anthropological studies, considerably widespread along human cultures, even if its degree varies (Wood & Eagly, 2002). On the whole, the differences between genders in terms of power, status, and control of resources are in favour of men. The authors consider that this disparity should be associated with men's paternalism in their relationships with women originating in the idea of man's superiority and woman's dependence on man in order to be protected and offered a higher economic and social status. Paternalism includes both men's urge to dominate and control women and his desire to protect, help, direct her.

Gender differentiation refers to the fact that in each and every society the physical differences between genders lead to social distinctions between women and men, to the shaping of stereotypes and gender roles. Influenced by social cognition, the authors emphasize the effects induced by social categorization. There might appear a differentiation of the gender categories of either a competitive or a complementary type. In both cases the focus is on the differences between groups and the emerging tendency to generalize them and to consider them important, but competitive differentiation encompasses the idea of the woman's lower value compared to man, whereas the complementary differentiation involves the idea that women have a number of qualities that make them superior to men. Competitive differentiation has the function of social justification of male dominance in the professional, social and political areas. It is part of the negative attitude toward women mainly when they try to compete with men in the fields considered masculine.

The particular aspects of the sexual relations lead to interdependence between partners in couple, this representing an important source of satisfaction, intimacy, but also vulnerability. In addition to the worshipped image of the woman-as-object-of-romantic-love and her position as a wife and mother, that was also depicted by using sexual attraction, enabling her to „toy with” man, even to „emasculate” him. Thus the hostile attitude is based on the belief that women use their sex appeal as a weapon to control and manipulate men,

whereas benevolent sexism involves feeling of deep love, admiration, and intense affection and longing for intimacy.

Sexist hostile ideology includes dominant paternalism, competitive gender differentiation and hostile heterosexuality, whereas benevolent sexism is focused on protective paternalism, complementary gender differentiation and heterosexual intimacy. Glick and Fiske (1997) consider that the two sub-components do not mutually exclude each other, but are positively correlated. The term ambivalence, selected to reflect the very existence of the two sets of beliefs regarding women's traits and roles, is not meant to induce the idea of their co-existential impossibility but to pinpoint their opposite evaluative implications. A person can have certain beliefs about women that, in spite of generating opposite evaluations, do respect that principle of cognitive balance, because they are referring to different domains („Even if I feel hostility toward women who do not know their place and try to compete men, I am not sexist because I admire women who fulfil the traditional roles”). Thus ambivalence can occur as a non-conflicting form, where different subtypes induce positive or negative reactions (e.g. „the family-devoted housewife” versus „the career woman”). Yet sometimes a conflicting form can be detected when certain targets simultaneously activate hostile and benevolent feelings (the extremely physically attractive woman, yet assertive and independent). The authors proposed an instrument to validate hostile sexism and benevolent sexism – the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Comparing the results obtained in several studies that used this scale, the authors conclude that it measures the degree of acceptance of sexist ideology. Yet the similarity of factor structure of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory for both sexes sustains the idea that sexism is not only the result of typically masculine tendencies to positively differentiate the in-group and to grant its superiority, but it also implies a cultural construction which, to a certain extent, is adopted by women, too.

The purpose of our study is to verify the ambivalent sexism model on a sample of Romanian adolescents and to identify the gender stereotypes content.

Based on theoretical arguments of Glick and Fiske (1996), we assume that in case of boys there will be a significant positive correlation between the degree of hostile sexism toward the woman in the position of competing with man, and the benevolent attitude toward the woman seen through her traditional roles of mother and wife.

We also expect significant gender differences when assessing the attitudes towards women's role, both for the level of hostile sexism and of benevolent sexism.

METHOD

Participants

Our survey was carried out on 208 adolescents between 13-18 years old, recruited from public secondary-schools and high-schools from Oradea, Romania (Table 1).

Table 1. The composition of the sample

Age	Gender		Total
	Boys	Girls	
13-14 years	34	35	69
15-16 years	35	32	67
17-18 years	37	35	72
Total	106	102	208

Measures

1. Based on the items included in the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Ambivalent Sexism Inventory, Glick & Fiske, 1996), we assessed the *attitudes towards women's position and role*

- *hostile, respectively, benevolent sexism*. The original variant has 22 items grouped in two subscales (hostile sexism and benevolent sexism), the participants' task being to indicate their degree of agreement to each statement on a six-point scale. The version we used has 16 items, eight for each subscale, and the response format was a four-points Likert scale. The internal consistency of subscales, measured prior to this study for 94 adolescents, is .720 for the hostile sexism subscale and .711 for the benevolent sexism subscale.

2. In order to identify the *gender stereotype content* we employed a list of 40 attributes selected from the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI - Bem, 1974, apud Lenney, 1991) and the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ - Personal Attributes Questionnaire - Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1978, apud Lenney, 1991). The list contains 30 socially desirable traits considered typical for women (15 traits), respectively for men (15 traits). The other ten characteristics are neutral in terms of gender stereotypes, five being positive, and five being negative from the perspective of social desirability. The neutrality of the items in terms of gender stereotypes and social desirability had been previously checked. The participants were asked to evaluate using a five-point Likert scale - not at all characteristic, little, average, much, very much characteristic - the degree at which each of the 40 attributes on the list generally features women, respectively, men, seen as mature, healthy, and socially adapted individuals.

Procedure

Prior to the administration of the measures, the participants had been informed regarding the purpose of the study, and had been asked for their cooperation based on voluntary participation. The measures were administered collectively, the instructions preceding each instrument. They were read once by the operators and participants were provided with explanations related to some items that were difficult to understand. The survey was carried out during the educational classes; the operator suggested that the participants could use an identification name if they wish to receive personally relevant further details.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first hypothesis referred to the relation between the two sub-components of ambivalent sexism. The data we obtained for boys are not consistent to the supposition stated by Glick and Fiske (1996), as the value of the correlation coefficient between the two variables is of -.227 ($p=.022$). But for girls the value of the correlation coefficient is .240 ($p=.013$). It is of interest to present the relation between hostile sexism and benevolent sexism at different ages (Table 2). The relation is statistically significant for neither boys nor girls, inferring the idea of the two attitudes toward women existing independently, especially in case of boys.

Table 2. Correlations between hostile sexism and benevolent sexism in case of boys and girls at each age group

Sample		Age		
		13-14 years	15-16 years	17-18 years
Boys	Pearson Correlation	.060	-.283	-.230
	Sig.	.732	.116	.183
	Number	35	32	35
Girls	Pearson Correlation	.303	.307	.130
	Sig.	.082	.073	.445
	Number	34	35	37

In accordance with the authors' model of ambivalent sexism, there should be a positive correlation between the two forms of sexism, thus justifying the idea of the ambivalence of the sexist prejudice: a high level of hostile sexism is related to high degrees of

benevolent sexism. As regards our participants, there is a negative relationship between hostile and benevolent sexism toward women, statistically significant for the boys' sample. The two positions seem to be opposite poles of the same continuum, making ambivalence impossible to identify in the terms proposed by Glick and Fiske (1996). Boys who intensely express a hostile attitude toward women – perceived as unfair contenders in the fields traditionally assigned to men, thus „taking advantage” of their natural appeal used to manipulate men – show a low degree of the belief that women could complete men and should be appreciated mostly for traits that range them in the typical roles of lover and wife.

Thus, the two authors' idea of the ambivalent sexism – according to which the coexistence of a high degree of both attitudes makes it possible to justify a certain hostility toward women who break the gender roles' prescriptions by the admiration for those who fit the traditional pattern – is not supported by the opinions expressed by boys adolescents, the relationship between the two components being a reverse one. We mention that Boza (2001) also highlights a negative relationship between hostile and benevolent sexism, but reports the results only for her entire sample of adolescents (girls and boys). She arises the question whether „there is an ambivalent sexism at any age or whether there are two separate dimensions out of which one is prevalent at a certain moment” (p.103). Regarding this issue, Glick and Hilt (2000, apud Eckes, 2002) refer to a transitional stage during the evolution from a simple cognitive form of the position toward the opposite gender (where a high degree of hostility is accompanied by a low level of positive attitude) to an ambivalent form that is to manifest later. The boys in our research probably did not go through this evolution; it might occur as the nature of the gender relationship and the partners' dependence become more intense, and as the future plans imply a clearer idea of a stable couple. As a matter of fact, in their cross-cultural study on the relationship between hostile and benevolent sexism, Glick et al. (2000) foreground correlations with diverse magnitudes (from .49 for Spanish men to .08 for Italians and -.14 for men in Botswana), a situation that raises the issue of cultural differences.

The results for the girls from our sample are surprising as the relationship between the two dimensions is positive. The question raised is that of gender differences in structuring the ideology of ambivalent sexism, but the results should be carefully regarded, considering the small number of participants.

The second hypothesis postulates gender differences at the level of hostile, respectively benevolent attitudes. Together with competitive differentiation, hostile sexism also consists in the desire to dominate, to control persons of the opposite gender (starting from the belief in the superiority of in- group), and in the idea that women use their attraction to manipulate men (hostile heterosexuality). It is obvious that, as expected, the level of hostile beliefs is lower for girls as compared with boys, irrespective of their age (Table 3 and 4).

Table 3 Descriptive statistics for hostile sexism

Gender	Age	Mean	Std. Deviation	Number
Boys	13-14 years	22.5429	3.20242	35
	15-16 years	24.8438	4.34117	32
	17-18 years	23.6000	2.61444	35
	Total	23.6275	3.52339	102
Girls	13-14 years	20.3824	2.90261	34
	15-16 years	20.6286	3.35266	35
	17-18 years	20.9730	3.08659	37
	Total	20.6698	3.10060	106

Table 4 Comparisons between gender and age for hostile sexism - ANOVA

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Gender	467.401	1	467.401	43.540	.000
Age	56.898	2	28.449	2.650	.073
Gender*Age	39.326	2	19.663	1.832	.163
Error	2168.478	202	10.735		
Corrected total	2717.995	207			

The results of previous studies show that sexist attitudes, either in their old-fashion, blatant form (supporting traditional division of gender roles, stereotypes about women's lower competence) or in a modern one (the belief that women discrimination is no longer a problem, disapproval of claims and policies designed to grant equal educational and professional opportunities, Swim et al., 1995), are by far more present in case of men than women (Bryant, 2003; Burt & Scott, 2002; Loo & Thorpe, 1998; Twenge, 1997). In addition, there are differences in the level of these beliefs according to adolescents' age. Jackson and Tein (1998) presented in their study that older boys show a greater agreement for the legitimized ideas of traditional roles: they believe that men should give priority to their careers in front of their family demands, they barely accept the idea that men should assume equal sharing of domestic responsibilities and chores, and wives have the same rights as their husbands to select their activities independently.

Burt and Scott (2002) examine English adolescents' and their parents' attitudes towards women's roles and show that women support at a greater extent the modern roles, adolescents being the most egalitarian. Boys and men agree upon women's professional involvement but are hardly eager to support either the modern complementarity of domestic roles (the efficient and consistent participation of both spouses to almost all domestic tasks) or their equality in terms of power and influence. These data are consistent with the principles of social identity theory according to which the dominant group tends to maintain its status, being satisfied with the existing status quo, whereas the group which perceives its position of inferiority as illegitimate and unstable supports actions aimed at redefining the intergroup relation (Tajfel, 1981). Indeed, Anthis (2002) shows that women's perception of discrimination on the grounds of gender category is a stressful event which does not always alter the centrality of gender identity but can lead to an increased exploration of one's own social identity and to a search for strategies to assert it. The problem is that sometimes the subordinate group accepts the „myths” constructed by the higher status group to justify inequality (Glick et al., 2000).

On the other hand, benevolent sexism can be attractive for women because it does not seem to be against the personal interests and promises protection, appreciation, and care from the dominant group. If hostile sexism is rejected by women, in case of benevolent sexism the attitude seems to be neutral or even approving (Kilianski & Rudman, 1998).

The results we obtained point that the degree of hostile sexism is higher for boys than for girls, but the level of benevolent sexism is higher for girls (Tables 5 and 6).

Girls are more likely to support the idea that a woman is worthy to be cherished and protected for her special qualities (empathy, compassion, devotion) and for the way she fulfils her traditional roles of mother and partner/wife providing affection, emotional support (protective paternalism, complementary gender differentiation and heterosexual intimacy). In addition, sharing this idea is more obvious with older girls, while for those 13-14 years old, the degree of benevolent attitude is closer to that of boys the same age.

Table 5 Descriptive statistics for benevolent sexism

Gender	Age	Mean	Std. Deviation	Number
Boys	13-14 years	24.1714	2.56086	35
	15-16 years	22.5312	4.91859	32
	17-18 years	22.4000	2.85121	35
	Total	23.0490	3.61070	102
Girls	13-14 years	24.2647	2.19239	34
	15-16 years	26.1429	2.76685	35
	17-18 years	25.7027	3.03557	37
	Total	25.3868	2.78968	106

Table 6 Comparisons between gender and age for benevolent sexism - ANOVA

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Gender	283.192	1	283.192	28.603	.000
Age	2.868	2	1.434	.145	.865
Gender*Age	130.755	2	65.377	6.603	.002
Error	1999.973	202	9.901		
Corrected total	2417.981	207			

According to the theoretical assumptions of the ambivalent sexism model, benevolent sexism, even when describing a positive position, is based on traditional gender stereotypes, placing women who „deserve” being cherished in restrictive roles, eventually leading to the same conclusion as hostile sexism does, and contributing to the preservation of traditional attitudes toward gender relationships. The idea that women are worthy of admiration especially when performing their traditional roles, displaying certain characteristics, justifies the adversity toward those who fail to match to this pattern. Kilianski and Rudman (1998) observe that in the long run the consequences of accepting benevolent sexism are negative. The differences between the typical beliefs of protective paternalism and dominative paternalism are subtle: being considered and accepted a person’s protector might make you feel entitled, when you disagree with the person’s opinions or actions, to make decisions in that person’s place, to control and impose on her. Similarly, accepting complementary gender differentiation at both instrumental and expressive-emotional domains of personality is likely to be accompanied by a certain limitation of the position a woman can have in the labour market, where instrumental traits may better grant a higher performance than emotional ones, especially in the top fields and better paid jobs. Privacy and the desire of heterosexual intimacy can become embarrassing for women if manifested in certain contexts, undermining their confidence in professional competences and generating negative situations (sexual harassment, the idea of being looked upon as a „sex object”). The authors insist on the „trap” that accepting benevolent sexist attitudes can create for women: by having a positive reaction women contribute to the preservation of the prejudice rooted in the traditional gender roles. Also sometimes women manifest an equivocal egalitarian attitudes (“want it both ways”, according Kilianski & Rudman, 1998), consisting in the fact that women appear to be in favour of inequality, as long as they are its beneficiaries, and they disapprove the inequality only when they are disadvantaged by it.

Another topic of interest for our study is represented by the adolescents’ gender stereotypes. We analysed the participants’ assessments for the 40 attributes presented, with focus on typically feminine and masculine traits. We notice that a part of the traits included in the traditionally masculine stereotype are equally attributed to both men and women by our participants: defending one’s own beliefs, self-confidence, dominance, willing to take risks,

ambition. Consequently, the representation regarding abilities and traits characteristic to women and men is more egalitarian. The traits that differentiate genders, being still strongly associated to the masculine gender role, are: leadership abilities and behaviour, willing to take stand, independence, competitiveness, standing up well under pressure. These elements are those our subjects associated mostly to men, the „core” of masculinity, comprising traits commonly considered predictors of performance in leading positions. Assessment based on the feminine traits draws the attention to the participants’ tendency to almost equally attribute both man and woman the following traits: kindness, warmth, affection, awareness of others’ feelings, understanding. Women are generally seen as having a higher level of sensitivity to others’ needs, compassion, gentleness, eagerness to soothe hurt feelings.

The adolescents’ tendency to assess genders in close terms can be interpreted as levelling the subjects’ mentality regarding the two genders’ traits, following to the growth of social role distribution between genders, of women’s participation to professional and social life, to the androgynous image of the woman, promoted in some mass media productions. It can also be related to the participants’ tendency for favouring the in-group (group serving bias).

CONCLUSIONS

When analysing the attitudes toward women’s roles and positions, several aspects are important. Firstly, it is the positive relationship presumed by Glick and Fiske (1996) between hostile and benevolent sexist attitudes, which is not to be found for the boys participating in our study. So we cannot speak, at least at this age, of an ambivalent sexist ideology where the hostility against women adopting modern roles is counterbalanced, even justified, by respect, admiration, idealization of those women who exhibit typically feminine traits and the exemplary accomplishment of the requirements of the traditional roles of mother and wife. Yet a longitudinal study could clarify the outlining of such an ideology for the following age periods. The girls’ rejection of hostile attitude toward women is doubled by a higher acceptance of the traditional condition of women, thus drawing attention to the fact that girls are not aware of the possible relation between hostile sexist ideology and the benevolent attitudes towards women conforming to gender roles’ prescriptions.

The content of the gender stereotypes of the participants to our study grounds a greater acceptance to portraying women and men following the androgyny pattern.

Regarding the future directions of research, we mention the need of combining the perspectives of cross-sectional studies with longitudinal investigations. Only this approach could respond to the problem of gender intensification hypothesis during adolescence. We also insist on taking into account the idea of gender multidimensionality by including in studies the attitudes toward men’s roles and status.

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Magda Danciu is professor at the University of Oradea, Romania where she lectures on a number of courses within the English Department of the Faculty of Letters (Contemporary British and Scottish literature, a course on postmodernism, multiculturalism and the case of Scotland, Gender representation in the media). She has authored a large number of papers related to her research areas.

e-mail: magda_danciu@yahoo.com

Monica Secui received her Ph.D. in Psychology from Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj (2006). Now she is reader at the Faculty of Social Humanistic Sciences, the University of Oradea, Romania. Her current research interests include different aspects of Human Development, Social Cognition and Gender Identity. She has authored 2 books and more than 35 scientific papers in journals and conferences proceedings.

e-mail: msecui@uoradea.ro