



The impact of gender ideologies on men's and women's desire for a traditional or non-traditional partner



Manuela Thomae^{a,b,*}, Diane M. Houston^c

^a University of Winchester, UK

^b Open University, UK

^c University of Kent, UK

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 13 October 2015

Received in revised form 8 February 2016

Accepted 9 February 2016

Available online xxxx

Keywords:

Benevolent sexism
benevolence toward men
partner preferences
relationship satisfaction

ABSTRACT

Two studies examine preferences for a long-term partner who conforms to traditional or non-traditional gender roles. The studies both demonstrate a link between benevolent sexism and preference for a traditional partner. However, Study 1 also demonstrates a strong preference among women for a non-traditional partner. We measured ambivalent sexist ideologies before introducing participants to either a stereotypically traditional or stereotypically non-traditional character of the opposite sex. In Study 1, women high in benevolence toward men reported a preference for a traditional man when compared to women low in benevolence toward men. We found no such link for hostility toward men. Study 2 showed that men high in benevolent sexism preferred a traditional woman more than men low in benevolent sexism. Again, this was not the case for hostile sexism. The studies provide evidence using both the Ambivalence Toward Men Inventory and the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory and demonstrate a relationship between benevolent ideology and partner choice that adds to a literature on partner preference which has to date been focused on preference dimensions of attractiveness and resources.

© 2016 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Ambivalent sexism theory purports that sexism is the combination of complementary gender ideologies, held by both men and women (Glick et al., 2000), that serve to maintain the social hierarchy. According to ambivalent sexism theory, benevolent sexism (BS) is a paternalistic ideology in which women are regarded as subordinate to men and in need of protection; they are cherished and revered for their virtue. Hostile sexism (HS) is a combative ideology that is hostile toward women who challenge traditional patterns and are seen as seeking to control men, either by using their sexuality or feminist ideology. The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI; Glick & Fiske, 1996) is a 22-item self-report measure, which includes both benevolent and hostile subscales and assesses the extent to which people maintain benevolent and hostile attitudes toward women. Heterosexual relations and sexual reproduction highlight the interpersonal interdependence of men and women. The hostile perspective of this interdependence is that women are able "to use sex" to control men, whereas the benevolent perspective asserts that women are a valuable resource (essential for family life and happiness, but inferior).

On the flipside of gender relations, women can hold hostile as well as benevolent beliefs about men, resulting in sexist ambivalence toward men (Glick & Fiske, 1999). Benevolence toward men (BM) is an

upwardly directed ideology, based on women's admiration for the higher status of men and the need to protect women's positive distinctiveness from men by 'taking care of them' (e.g. Glick & Hilt, 2000). In contrast, hostility toward men (HM) is rooted in women's resentment of men's higher status, dominance (e.g. sexual aggressiveness, paternalism) and the continued inequality between women and men (Glick & Fiske, 1999). 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 is mainly related to attitudes to male dominance and stereotypes men as controlling and condescending; people with attitudes high in hostility toward men negatively characterize men based on their position of advantage over women in society. Benevolence toward men is related to beliefs about support and justification of male dominance. 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 (Glick et al., 2004).

Glick and Fiske (1996) view the systemic interpersonal dependency between women and men as crucial antecedent to sexism and a considerable body of research has addressed the relationship between gender ideologies and partner preferences. Research on partner preferences, precedes that on ambivalent sexism by many years and can be traced back to the 1940s (e.g. Hill, 1945). This work has examined sex

* Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, The University of Winchester, Sparkford Road, Winchester, SO22 4NR, United Kingdom.
E-mail address: manuela.thomae@gmail.com (M. Thomae).

differences in preferences for particular characteristics or traits in a potential partner. Generally studies have demonstrated that women prefer potential partners with high earning potential, whereas men report greater preference for attractiveness in a partner (e.g. Buss, 1989).

Recently, Eastwick, Luchies, Finkel, and Hunt (2014) conducted a meta-analysis of ninety-seven studies which examine preferences for physical attractiveness and earning prospects in relation to romantic evaluation of a potential partner, the meta-analysis included only studies in which a 'partner' was a person of the opposite sex who the participant had (at a minimum) met face to face. They found that physical attractiveness predicted romantic evaluations for both sexes with moderate to strong effect sizes and that earning potential also predicted romantic evaluations of both men and women with a small effect size. Sex differences in these correlations were small and non-significant indicating that men and women value both attractiveness and earning potential in a potential partner.

A number of studies have also explored the degree to which benevolent and hostile gender ideologies influence partner preferences (e.g., Eastwick et al., 2006; Travaglia, Overall, & Sibley, 2009). These studies have fairly consistently demonstrated that, in women benevolent sexism is related to preference for provider characteristics in a partner, and in men, hostile sexism is related to preference for attractiveness. Sibley and Overall (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of 32 studies (16 male samples, 16 female samples, $N = 5459$) which examined the relationship between benevolent sexism, hostile sexism and preferences for attractive and high-resource partners by men and women. The results of the meta-analysis demonstrated that for women, higher benevolent sexism was related to an increased preference for a partner provider potential; for men higher hostile sexism was related to an increased preference for attractiveness in a partner. The role of homemaker characteristics in partner preference has also been examined. Eastwick et al. (2006), using a nine nation sample, demonstrated that traditional gender ideology was positively associated with the importance of "good cook and housekeeper" qualities in a partner for both men and women, it was however a stronger predictor of men's preferences. Traditional gender ideologies were associated with a stronger preference for provider characteristics among women and "good cook and housekeeper" among men. In contrast, Eagly, Eastwick, and Johannesen-Schmidt (2009) reported that women in a North American student sample valued a spouse's homemaker characteristics as much as men did. Eagly et al., also found that being asked to envision oneself in either a homemaker or a provider role created a shift toward preference for a partner taking the complementary role for both men and women. These findings may reflect the reality of the considerable convergence in marital partners' earnings in some Western countries in recent years. In the USA forty percent of families have the mother as the sole or main earner (Wang, Parker, & Taylor, 2013); in the UK thirty-one percent of women are also the main 'breadwinner' in the family (Ben-Galim & Thompson, 2013).

Research into partner preferences has been subject to criticism, it has been argued (e.g. Eastwick & Finkel, 2008) that while there may be a consistent relationship between gender ideology and stated preference for particular characteristics in partner, these characteristics do not necessarily relate to attraction or relationship interest in a particular person. Eastwick and Finkel (2008) demonstrated that individual preferences did not predict interest in real-life romantic partners when faced with a speed dating situation. They suggested that preferences may reflect a priori theories about the characteristics of a potential partner, rather than factors that will actually attract one individual to another. Most studies which have examined partner preferences tend to use specific characteristics – traits, dimensions or values, as the means of evaluating preferences. One suggestion in Eastwick et al.'s (2014) paper is that stronger predictive validity for ideal partner preferences could be obtained by using low-level construal information – concrete behaviour – rather than specific traits. Another notable gap in the

literature on gender ideology and partner preference has been the relatively low use of the Ambivalence Toward Men Inventory (AMI; Glick & Fiske, 1996). While Eastwick et al. examined mate preferences in relation to both the AMI and the ASI, much of literature and meta-analyses have featured only the ASI, examining men and women's gender ideologies toward women.

Our aim in the research presented here is to quasi-experimentally test whether women's and men's endorsement of gender ideologies concerning the opposite sex impact on their reported preferences for a traditional or non-traditional partner, a partner that will either fulfil a provider role, or, one in which work takes second place to caring for children. We investigate women's attitudes toward men (AMI scores) and men's attitudes toward women (ASI scores), and their respective impact on long-term partner preference.

We propose that benevolent gender ideologies will particularly affect people's preferences for a long-term partner. In general, the more individuals subscribe to benevolent gender ideologies, the more they will prefer involvement with partners adopting traditional gender roles (i.e. communal females and agentic males). The current research therefore focuses on roles that are traditional for females and non-traditional for males (child-focused, communal) or that are traditional for males and non-traditional for females (career-focused, breadwinner, agentic). The clearest finding in the literature reported above is that benevolent gender ideologies are consistently related to men prioritizing attractiveness and women prioritizing providing as traits in romantic partner preferences (e.g., Buss, 1989; Chen, Fiske, & Lee, 2009; Lee, Fiske, Glick, & Chen, 2010). The current research reassesses these findings using quasi-experimental methods and vignettes to examine how gender ideology relates to long-term partner preference in relation to actual lifestyles rather than traits. Study 1 assesses how women's ambivalence toward men affects their choice of a long-term male partner; Study 2 assesses how men's ambivalent sexism toward women affects their choice of a long-term female partner.

We propose the following set of hypotheses: In the female sample, benevolence but not hostility toward men will predict a stronger preference for a traditional, provider-type man than for a non-traditional, homemaker-type man (Study 1). In the male sample, benevolent sexism will predict a stronger preference and higher anticipated relationship satisfaction for a traditional, homemaker-type woman than for a non-traditional career woman (Study 2). For men, hostile sexism may predict negative evaluations of a relationship with a non-traditional woman, because such a role is challenging to traditional patterns and those high in hostile sexism feel negatively toward women who challenge traditional patterns.

1. Study 1

1.1. Method

1.1.1. Participants

One hundred and twenty-eight heterosexual women participated in this study online. Six participants who indicated homosexual orientations were excluded from the dataset. The average age of participants was 24.20 years old ($SD = 3.72$), 59.8% of participants ($N = 73$) were in a relationship and 9.8% of participants ($N = 12$) reported having children. All participants were German and spoke German as their first language.

1.1.2. Design

This study employed a quasi-experimental between-subjects design with type of partner (traditional vs. non-traditional) and levels of gender ideology (hostility toward men: HM and benevolence toward men: BM) as independent variables. We based the description of the traditional and non-traditional hypothetical man on the vignettes used by Siebler, Sabelus, and Bohner (2008). A pilot study conducted online with $N = 89$ German women revealed that the traditional target

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7250299>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7250299>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)