

WOMAN STEREOTYPES AND AMBIVALENT SEXISM IN A SAMPLE OF ADOLESCENTS FROM BUENOS AIRES

ESTEREOTIPOS DE LA MUJER Y SEXISMO AMBIVALENTE EN UNA MUESTRA DE ADOLESCENTES DE BUENOS AIRES

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Abstract

The main objective of this study was to determine which woman stereotypes are most common in a group of young adolescents from Buenos Aires; to then see how they value these stereotypes and analyse whether they can be categorised as hostile, benevolent or of another kind. The total sample was composed of 250 secondary school students from the City of Buenos Aires, aging between 16 and 18, of both sexes. The first five woman features to come to participants minds were analysed, along with a value scale for each of them that ranged from very positive to very negative. Additionally, levels of ambivalent sexism were assessed in both hostile and benevolent forms. The main stereotypes of women and their positive or negative evaluation are described, along with the relationship they keep with hostile and benevolent forms of sexism. Finally, we observe that several stereotypes categorized as benevolent were valued both positively and negatively, which opens a field of discussion about the relationship between ambivalent sexism and stereotypes of women.
Keywords: Stereotypes, role, women, prejudice, gender, ideology.

Resumen

El objetivo principal de este trabajo fue conocer cuáles son los principales estereotipos de la mujer en una muestra de jóvenes adolescentes de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, para luego indagar cuál es su valoración de tales estereotipos y analizar si los mismos pueden ser categorizados como hostiles, benevolentes o de otro tipo. Participaron del estudio 250 estudiantes de nivel secundario de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, con edades entre los 16 y 18 años, de ambos sexos. Se indagaron los cinco rasgos principales de las mujeres que más rápidamente les vinieran a la mente a los participantes, junto con una escala valorativa para cada uno de ellos cuyas opciones de respuesta iban desde muy positivo a muy negativo. Además, se evaluaron los niveles de sexismo ambivalente en sus formas hostil y benevolente. Se describen los principales estereotipos de la mujer y su valoración positiva o negativa, además de las relaciones que éstos guardan con las formas hostiles y benevolentes del sexismo. Por último, se observa que varios estereotipos categorizados como benevolentes fueron valorados tanto de manera positiva como negativa, lo cual abre un campo de discusión acerca de las relaciones entre el sexismo ambivalente y los estereotipos de la mujer.

Palabras clave: Estereotipos, rol, mujer, prejuicio, género, ideología.

Introduction

Without a doubt, one of the greatest worldwide changes to characterize the twentieth century was the advance of women in social, political and economic life, gaining access to areas that were historically denied for them. In Argentina, it was not until 1926 that the feminist movement achieved its first great conquest in terms of civil rights, when law 11,357 repealed the Vélez Sarsfield Civil Code that gave women the status of legally incapable. Years later, with the advent of Peronism in 1946 and as a result of the social action undertaken by the Foundation headed by Eva Perón, there was a vast improvement in dignifying women's social status, giving way to professional training and education. Politically, one of the principal measures was the passing of law number 13,010 that in 1947 set women's right to vote, allowing the arrival of women to Congress in the 1951 elections. The reach of this event was reflected sixty years later when in May 2007, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner became the first woman being elected president by popular vote.

Despite these progresses, in Argentina as well as in other countries, women are still subject of discrimination in different circles of social, political and economic life, such as professional and work environment (Glick, 1991; Fitzgerald & Betz, 1983), as well as individually, being the victims of various types of harassment (Gutek,

1985) and sexual violence (Unger & Crawford, 1992).

One of the main theoretical approaches in studying this phenomenon was developed by Glick and Fiske (1996, 2001), who consider sexism to have been traditionally conceived of as reflecting hostility towards women, excluding one of the phenomenon's central aspects: positive feelings towards women. This is relevant due to the fact that even though the research always emphasized man's hostility towards women, both sexes have been together from the beginning of humanity, being partners and sharing the most intimate levels of trust. In attempting to explain this phenomenon, Glick and Fiske (1996) developed the benevolent sexism concept, defining it as a positive attitude to protect, idealise and offer affection to women, while its hostile counterpart accounts for the domination and degradation of women, highlighting all behaviour that implies aggression and a disqualifying attitude.

According to the authors, both hostile and benevolent sexism imply a stereotyped conceptualization of women that restricts their field of action, even though it is often experienced as emotionally positive (for the receiver). In this sense, masculine behaviour considered to be prosocial (e.g., chivalry) and justified as of a fragile, weak or sentimental view of women, provide examples of benevolent sexism. From a

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