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Women's Sexist Attitudes and Their Self-Silencing Tendency to Sexismthe Buffering Role of Personal Belief in a Just World and Gender Role-Related Attitudes

Iraklis Grigoropoulos[1]

1 Technological Education Institute of Thessaloniki

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Abstract

The current study tested the hypothesis that personal belief in a just world and gender role-related attitudes would mediate the effect of women's sexist attitudes (hostile and benevolent sexism) on their self-silencing tendency to sexism. An online cross-sectional study was administered between September 2 and December 30, 2021. The total sample comprised two hundred and twenty-one respondents (M_{age} =38.22, *SD = 2.75)*. A between-subject, correlational design was utilized. Bootstrapping analysis for simple mediation models (Hayes, 2013; Model 4) was performed to test the current study's hypothesis. This study demonstrates that gender role-related attitudes and a personal belief in a just world could act as a set of a system justifying beliefs buffering women's motivation to challenge everyday sexism. The theoretical implication of this relationship is that individuals who endorse sexist attitudes and gender stereotypes are expected to exhibit corresponding behaviors.

Keywords: Ambivalent sexism, personal belief in a just world, gender role-related attitudes, self-silencing to sexism, system legitimizing beliefs.

Women's everyday discrimination underlines that sexism and oppression toward women are until now widespread all over the world. As regards, everyday discrimination research findings show that women experience one to two sexist incidents per week (Swim et al., 2010). These incidents may involve traditional gender stereotypes (i.e., expectations about women's appropriate behaviors) and unwanted sexual attention (e.g., unwanted sexual touching). Moreover, violence against women still persists in intimate relationships (Swim et al., 2010). Consequently, many women may be accustomed to sexism since it is assimilated into everyday routines and socio-cultural norms. In addition, women may internalize it as normal behavior or do not consider it as something harmful (Benokraitis & Feagin, 1995; Swim et al., 2005). West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that gender per se and hence all gender differences are socially established. In particular, "doing gender means creating differences between girls and boys and women and men, differences that are not natural, essential, or biological" (West and Zimmerman, 1987, p.24). In this way, both women and men internalize gender stereotypes and gender-specific behavior. Hence, social and cultural constructions of gender shape the ways

individuals perceive their gender (Fields et al., 2010).

In particular, socio-cultural norms and expectations concerning women maintain gender restrictive patterns about how women are supposed to behave, act, and withhold in many cases feelings and thoughts (Hurst & Beesley, 2012). Accordingly, sociocultural messages related to gender profoundly influence self-silencing (Jack, 1991; Jack & Dill, 1992). Hence, self-silencing beliefs might stem from gender-related beliefs about appropriate behavior for women. In turn, women may internalize self-silencing beliefs portraying their inclination to restrict their thoughts and feelings (Swim et al., 2007).

Gender differentiation and stereotyped considerations of gender may also be reinforced by sexism. The ambivalent sexism framework reports that sexism influences self-perceptions through gender stereotypes (Smith-Castro et al., 2019). Interestingly, belonging to the target group of gender discrimination does not necessarily preserve women from endorsing the current gender hegemony (see Jost & Banaji, 1994). Thus, many women might agree with sexist beliefs (Salvaggio et al., 2009). Taking into account that sexism is essentially ambivalent (i.e., is comprised of both positive and negative characteristics (Glick & Fiske, 1996) and that many women endorse sexist considerations towards other women the current study examines the impact of women's sexist attitudes and system-legitimizing beliefs on their self-silencing tendency to sexism.

Self-silencing

Self-silencing, the internal constraint of self-expression is the outcome of a gendered society (Jack, 1991). The concept of gender implies a set of social norms and cultural expectations from women and men. Thus women's self-silencing could be characteristic of the societal expectations attributed to the female gender (Cramer & Thoms, 2003; Ussher & Perz, 2010). Gender-specific origins of self-silencing propose that women's self-silencing is culturally enforced since any counteraction to sexism could be negatively considered and have undesirable consequences on women's lives (Hurst & Beesly, 2013; London et al., 2012). Research findings concerning gendered messages and societal expectations for women to silence themselves support the influence of societal gender roles on the prevalence of women's engagement in self-silencing (Tolman et al., 2006). In addition, research data show that women's self-silencing is significantly predicted by the level of women's commitment to traditional gender roles (Swim et al., 2010; Witte & Sherman, 2002). Moreover, self-silencing is significantly associated with cultural and relational contexts rather than specific personality characteristics (Hurst & Beesley, 2013). Hence, within a gendered social context, self-silencing becomes apparent as an expression of the social roles and expectations appointed to women (Harper & Welsh, 2007).

Ambivalent sexism

One way to evaluate the acceptance of gender stereotypes is by assessing sexist attitudes. Specifically, attitudes are considered as an interpretative lens that affects people's evaluations of others (Salvaggio et al., 2009). Swim & Hyers (2009) define sexism as "individuals attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, and organizational, institutional, and cultural

practices that either reflect negative assessments of individuals based upon their gender or support unequal status of women and men". Due to societal changes from explicit to subtle sexism scholars have developed new models to reflect contemporary forms of sexism such as the concepts of Modern Sexism/Neosexism (Swim et al., 1995) and the concept of Ambivalent Sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Ambivalent sexism is based on traditional woman stereotypes that support masculine dominance (Etchezahar & Ungaretti, 2014). In particular, ambivalent sexism theory suggests that hostile and benevolent sexism are deep-rooted in culture and therefore pervade all levels of society (Fields et al., 2010).

Ambivalent sexism theory implies that contemporary sexism involves complex beliefs about women (Glick & Fiske, 1996). This means that it is comprised of both positive (benevolent) and negative (hostile) components. In particular, benevolent sexism (BS) involves seemingly positive attitudes toward women based on "likable" stereotypes of women (Fiske et al., 1999) while hostile sexism (HS) reports antipathy toward women based on the traditional antipathy model of prejudice (Allport, 1979; Glick & Fiske, 1996). In this way benevolent and hostile sexism act as an interlocking set of beliefs that reflect a system of rewards (benevolent sexism) and sanctions (hostile sexism) that give women significant motive to accept, rather than challenge, power differences between the sexes (Glick & Fiske, 2001, p.117). Thus, women who behave according to sexist prescriptions that maintain traditional gender role behaviors are "rewarded" (e.g., with affection) whereas those who challenge men's power (e.g., feminists) are penalized with hostility (Glick et al., 1997). In addition, benevolent sexism is negatively linked with values of self-direction such as freedom and independence undermining the aspirations of women toward autonomy. Altogether benevolent sexist ideology increases women's forbearance for acts of discrimination. Hence, benevolence sexism is more likely to promote gender inequality whereas hostile sexism is more likely to provoke women's rebellion (Feather, 2004).

On the other hand, both women and men may benefit from being sexist or from subtle sexism and hence not consider various attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors as prejudicial (see Watkins et al., 2006). Interestingly past studies show that a substantial share of women reinforces subtle sexism (Benokraitis & Feagin, 1995). Benevolent sexism provides women a way of coming to terms with a sexist system individually without having to challenge the structure of the system as a whole. Therefore, several women may not consider benevolence as discriminatory to their own lives (Glick & Fiske, 2001). In addition, since social conformity is appreciated whereas deviation is reprised some women may want to avoid rejection by not confronting sexism. Specifically, several women were found to comply with sexist humor to be accepted by a male group (Benokraitis & Fegan, 1995). Research findings also show that complaining about discrimination might lead to negative consequences (e.g., being a whiner) inhibiting women's will to confront sexism (Swim et al., 2003). Thus, since people in general desire to appear nice and/or get potential rewards from dominant group members self-stereotyping may in several cases increase women's self-esteem reinforcing in this way gender stereotypes (Swim et al., 2003).

Grounded on the notion that sexism does not concern behaviors and practices of men alone (Fordham, 2019) this study examines the impact of women's endorsement of sexist ideologies on women's self-silencing tendency. According to Akarsu and Sakalli (2021), benevolent and hostile sexism are associated with women's self-silencing tendency, however, they also argue that there is still little research emphasizing these relationships.

Personal belief in a just world (PBJW)

The just-world theory posits that people need -or rather want - to believe that they live in a world where everyone harvests what they sow (Hafer & Sutton, 2016). Believing otherwise might entail the notion that the world is an unpredictable place and that they may be treated unfairly (Dalbert, 2009; Furnham, 2003). People usually avoid such beliefs as they may raise feelings of discomfort (van den Bos & Lind, 2002). Accordingly, belief in a just world reduces anxiety and uncertainty and also rationalizes inaction against social injustice as the most disadvantaged have the most to legitimize and explain (Jost & Hynyady, 2002). Consequently, the most disadvantaged may display a predisposition to justify social outcomes and arrangements even though these outcomes might put in an unfavorable position their own group (Jost et al., 2003).

Individuals with a high personal BJW may also be more sensitive toward injustices (e.g., Dalbert, 1999), strive for justice themselves (e.g., Dalbert, 2009, Schindler & Reinhard, 2015), and are more committed to just means (e.g. Sutton & Winnard, 2007). In light of the above, the present study introduces the socio-psychological construct of personal belief in a just world in the examination of women's self-silencing tendency. Specifically, this study examines the impact of women's personal beliefs in a just world on their self-silencing tendency. Given that individuals with a high personal BJW may also be more sensitive toward injustices a negative link between women's personal belief in a just world and self-silencing tendency was assumed.

Gender roles

Based on a constructivist view, we acknowledge gender not as a person's characteristic but instead as something an individual does in a social context which also varies by the situation (Bohan, 2002). As Lorber (2001) suggests gender inequality is grounded on the division of people into two distinct categories that are valued differently. In particular, social discourse concerning explicit as well as implicit information from the media, education, religion, family, and other social institutions affects how attitudes and expectations are established and enacted as people "do" gender. Thus, everyday social interactions among people both replicate gender differences and promote gender inequalities (Kimmel, 2000). Hence, dichotomous beliefs about gender have a profound influence on everyday behaviors, activities, and power imbalances (Baber & Tucker, 2006).

Considering gender as a configuration of social norms and practices that develop through social relationships influenced by power differences provides a perspective of how gender differences are generated and maintained (Bohan, 2002). Therefore, women's gender role-related attitudes are rather useful in examining self-silencing tendencies. To summarize, the social constructivist approach challenges the culturally embedded notion of naturalness of the gender concept moving beyond a system comprised of only two categories (Baber & Tucker, 2006). Therefore the social constructivist perspective underlines the need for an instrument that assesses both gender equality (i.e., role egalitarian) and binary categorized roles (Naz et al., 2021). In this study, the social roles questionnaire is used to examine women's gender role-related attitudes. Given that people who endorse a gender-egalitarian approach to social roles tend to support nontraditional roles for women (Baber & Tucker, 2006) a positive link between participants' support of gendered social roles and higher levels of self-silencing tendency was assumed. Thus, self-silencing is assumed to be driven by efforts to meet prescribed gendered socio-cultural roles and expectations.

The current study

The current study is conducted in Greece within a sociocultural setting that values conventional family, sexual and gender values (Grigoropoulos, 2023a, c, 2022b, 2021b). Importantly the Greek Orthodox Church is a significant institution profoundly affecting gender issues, and family values (Grigoropoulos, 2023b, 2022d, 2020). Regarding sexual behavior and attitudes, Greece has a very conservative institutional structure and culture (Grigoropoulos, 2023d, 2022a, c, 2021a, 2019).

Taking into account that sexism is still culturally ingrained and the contemporary decrease in the social acceptance of overt sexism (Fields et al.,2010) this study examines the impact of sexist attitudes on the self-silencing tendency. Grounded also on the notion that sexism does not concern behaviors and practices of men alone (Fordham, 2019) this study uses a female-only sample. Glick & Fiske (1996) argue that even though benevolent sexism may often be experienced as emotionally positive by women both hostile and benevolent sexism suggest a stereotyped conceptualization of women (Fields et al., 2010). Moreover, we consider women's sexist attitudes toward other women through the lens of Jost and Banaji's (1994) system justification perspective that delineates situations of ingroup bias. That is when someone stereotypes themselves or ingroup members to justify inequality (Jost, 2019). System justification is described as the "process by which existing social arrangements are legitimized, even at the expense of personal and group interest" (Jost & Banaji, 1994, p.2).

This study proposes four models of indirect effects of women's sexist attitudes on their self-silencing tendency. First, we argue that stereotypic representations of women will influence women's personal beliefs in a just world which in turn may affect women's self-silencing tendency. In the same line, we also argue that a stereotyped conceptualization of women will influence gender role-related attitudes which in turn might affect women's self-silencing tendency. Thus, based on the reasoning presented above, this study examined the following hypotheses

- (H1): Personal belief in a just world will mediate the relationship between participants' endorsement of ambivalent sexism and their self-silencing tendency.
  (H2): Personal belief in a just world will mediate the relationship between participants' endorsement of hostile sexism and their self-silencing tendency.
- (H3): Women's conformity to gender-specific roles will mediate the relationship between participants' endorsement of benevolent sexism and their self-silencing tendency.
- (H4): Women's conformity to gender-specific roles will mediate the relationship between participants' endorsement of hostile sexism and their self-silencing tendency. To the researcher's knowledge, there is limited research associating women's sexist attitudes, personal beliefs in a just world, and gender role-related attitudes with women's self-silencing tendency. Moreover, additional research is needed to understand women's self-silencing tendency to everyday sexism (Akarsu & Sakalli, 2021). In summary, the current study examines sexist attitudes as predictors of women's self-silencing tendency and the mediating role of a) personal beliefs in a just world, and b) gender role-relating attitudes. Even though the current study took place in Greece it may have relevance for other cultures as well. Thus, this research could present information concerning the aforementioned relationships to researchers from other countries as

well.

Method

Participants and procedure

An online cross-sectional study was administered between September 2 and December 30, 2021. Respondents participated by employing incidental, non-probability sampling. The URL of the research project was publicized in social media groups and accounts (e.g. LinkedIn) and also on the researcher's university networks and forums. In addition, respondents were asked to forward the project's link to other possible participants. The online questionnaire was completely anonymous. Respondents indicated their agreement to participate by clicking the consent checkbox. Inclusion criteria were a) to identify as a woman b) agreeing to participate and c) being at least 18 years old. The process lasted approximately 10- 15 minutes. The current research project followed all principles of the Declaration of Helsinki on Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Subjects and all the ethical instructions and directions of the institution to which the researcher belongs. We set the sample size required to identify low to moderate mediation (i.e., α =.25, b =.25, in which v =.25*.25 =.06) using WebPower (Zhang & Yuan, 2018). With 80% test power, we required a sample of 220 participants. The total sample comprised two hundred and twenty-one respondents. The samples' mean age was 38.22 (*SD = 2.75)*. All the participants were Greek.

Measures

Respondents completed a demographics form (gender, age, ethnic group) and the following questionnaires

Explanatory variables

Translation accuracy for the Greek social context was verified through back-translation for all measures (Brinslin, 1980).

Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI)

Ambivalent sexism was assessed with the two subscales of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI), namely hostile sexism (eleven belief statements concerning hostile sexism; e.g., "Women are easily offended" and "A wife should not be more successful in her career than her husband") and benevolent sexism (eleven statements relating to benevolent sexism;e.g., "Every man ought to have a woman he adores" and "Every woman should have a man to help her when she is in trouble"; Glick & Fiske, 1996) using a 6-point Likert scale. Responses ranged from 1= strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree. Possible total scores ranged from 11 to 66 for each subscale. Total scale scores were estimated by calculating the average across items. Higher scores indicated higher levels of sexism. Past research findings have documented the psychometric properties of the ASI (see Glick & Fiske, 2001a; Rudman & Glick, 2008; Viki et al., 2004). In the current study, the alpha for the hostile sexism subscale was.89, 95% CI [.86,.91] and for the benevolent sexism

was.83, 95% CI [.78,.85]

The social roles questionnaire (SRQ)

The SRQ provides a way to assess attitudes toward social roles and thinking about gender that transcends dichotomous categories. Specifically, the SRQ includes up-to-date non-dichotomous items about social roles that are more likely to measure the subtle support of gender inequality (Baber & Tucker, 2006).
The SRQ measures social role attitudes in two ways. Specifically, the SRQ comprises of thirteen items (linked with expectations concerning the behavior that men and women must have in society) with two subscales, namely the gender-transcendent subscale (five items assessing responses on the domains of sex-egalitarian roles) and the gender-linked subscale (eight items assessing culturally specific binary roles for women and men). All items were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale (i.e., 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). Total scores range from 13 to 91. Items were averaged in one index. A higher global score is indicative of respondents' more positive attitudes toward gendered social roles. The SRQ was found reliable and valid (see Baber & Tucker, 2006). In the current study, the alpha for the 13-item SRQ was.80, 95% CI [.77,.85]

Personal belief in a just world (PBJM)

Using Dalbert's scale (1999), PBJM was measured with seven items (a =.93 [.92,.95]; e.g., "I believe that, by and large, I deserve what happens to me"). Participants responded to all items on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) with higher scores indicating a stronger PBJM.

Outcome measure

Self-silencing to sexism scale

The scale used was that by Akarsu and Sakalli (2021). Translation accuracy for the Greek social context was verified through back-translation (e.g. 'I do not allow people to restrict me because of my gender'; Brinslin, 1980). Participants completed 13 items on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". According to Akarsu and Sakalli (2021), the scale comprises of three factors: a) Self-silencing to sexist personal experiences, b) Self-silencing to observed sexist communications, and c) Self-silencing to discrimination against women. Items were averaged in one index. Increased scores signified self-silencing tendency to sexism. In the current study, the alpha for the 13-item self-silencing to sexism instrument was.79, 95% CI [.75,.83]

Design and Statistical analysis

A between-subject, correlational design was utilized. For each of the SRQ, the PBJM, and the self-silencing to sexism instruments, a single value was computed based on the average of the items. IBM SPSS statistics version 19 was utilized for the analysis of the data. Prior to the main statistical analyses, the parametric assumptions were examined (normality,

outliers). Shapiro-Wilk test was utilized to determine the normality of the data distribution. Data were non-normally distributed. The Mahalanobis distance reported no outliers. Bivariate correlation (Kendall's Tau correlation analysis) was used to examine the relationships between variables of interest. Next, we examined our hypotheses by performing a bootstrapping analysis for simple mediation models (Hayes, 2013; Model 4). Bootstrapping is proposed as a non-parametric approach to estimating indirect effects that do not assume a normal distribution (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). In addition, it bypasses power concerns in samples less than 200 (Hoyle & Kenny, 1999). Alpha level was set at 0.05.

Results

Descriptive results

To examine the associations between the variables of the research, Kendall's Tau correlation analysis was performed between all variables of interest. The results are presented in Table 1. Self-silencing was positively correlated with hostile sexism (rτ =.150, p <.01), benevolent sexism (rτ =.158, p <.01), and gender role-related attitudes (rτ =.242, p <.01) and negatively associated with personal beliefs in a just world (rτ = -.179, p <.01). Hostile sexism was positively associated with benevolent sexism (rτ =.512, p <.01) and gender role-related attitudes (rτ =.522, p <.01). In addition, hostile sexism was negatively correlated with personal beliefs in a just world (rτ = -.161, p <.01). Also, benevolent sexism (rτ =.505, p <.01) was positively correlated with gender role-related attitudes.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables*

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Self-Silencing	2.15	04	-				
2. HS	2.63	.06	.150**	-			
3. BS	2.80	.06	.158**	.512	-		
4. SRQ	1.89	.05	.242**	.522**	..505**	-	
5. PBJW	3.94	.07	-.179**	-.161**	-.07	-.08	-

Note HS = Hostile Sexism, BS= Benevolent Sexism, PBJW = Personal Belief in a Just World Questionnaire, SRQ = Social Roles Questionnaire

***p< .01,*

Mediation Analysis

Based on our hypotheses and the pattern of bivariate correlation we assessed the mediating role of personal belief in a just world on the relationship between women's benevolent sexism and their self-silencing tendency to sexism. However, personal beliefs in a just world failed to mediate the relationship between women's benevolent sexism and self-silencing tendency to sexism (H1). The confidence interval for the indirect effect included 0 [-0.002, 0.043]. There was also

evidence that women's benevolent sexism influenced their self-silencing tendency to sexism independent of its effect on sexual prejudice (c' = 0.152, p =.001). Mediation analysis summary is presented in Table 2.

Next, we assessed the mediating role of personal belief in a just world on the relationship between women's hostile sexism and their self-silencing tendency to sexism. As depicted in Table 3 hostile sexism indirectly influenced the self-silencing tendency to sexism through its effect on personal beliefs in a just world (b =.024) supporting H2 as confidence intervals did not include zero. Furthermore, the direct effect of hostile sexism on the self-silencing tendency to sexism in the presence of the mediator was significant (b =.122, p<.05). Hence personal beliefs in a just world partially mediated the relationship between hostile sexism and self-silencing to sexism.

To investigate our third hypothesis (H3) we assessed the mediating role of gender role-related attitudes on the relationship between hostile sexism and self-silencing tendency to sexism. The results show that hostile sexism indirectly influenced the self-silencing tendency to sexism through its effect on gender role-related attitudes (b =.198) supporting H3 as confidence intervals did not include zero. Furthermore, the direct effect of hostile sexism on the self-silencing tendency to sexism in the presence of the mediator was not significant (b = -.051, p>.05). Hence gender role-related attitudes fully mediated the relationship between hostile sexism and self-silencing tendency to sexism. Mediation analysis summary is presented in Table 4.

Finally, we assessed the mediating role of gender role-related attitudes on the relationship between benevolent sexism and the self-silencing tendency to sexism (H4). The results show that benevolent sexism indirectly influenced the self-silencing tendency to sexism through its effect on attitudes toward social roles (b =.237) supporting H4 as confidence intervals did not include zero. Furthermore, the direct effect of benevolent sexism on the self-silencing tendency to sexism in the presence of the mediator was not significant (b = -.070, p>.05). Hence attitudes toward social roles fully mediated the relationship between benevolent sexism and self-silencing tendency to sexism. Mediation analysis summary is presented in Table 5.

Table 2. *Mediation Analysis*

Relationship	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
BS ♢ PBJW ♢ Self-Silencing to Sexism	.166 (.000)	.152 (.001)	.148	-.002	.043

Note HS = BS= Benevolent Sexism, PBJW = Personal Belief in a Just World Questionnaire

Table 3. *Mediation Analysis*

Relationship	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
HS ♢ PBJW ♢ Self-Silencing to Sexism	.147 (.001)	.122 (.007)	.024	.001	.059

Note HS = Hostile Sexism, PBJW = Personal Belief in a Just World Questionnaire

Table 4. *Mediation Analysis*

Relationship	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
HS ♢ SRQ ♢ Self-Silencing to Sexism	.147 (.001)	-.051 (.339)	.198	.111	.284

Note HS = Hostile Sexism, SRQ = Social Roles Questionnaire

Table 5. *Mediation Analysis*

Relationship	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
HS ♢ SRQ ♢ Self-Silencing to Sexism	.166 (.000)	-.070 (.244)	.237	.145	.333

Note HS = Hostile Sexism, SRQ = Social Roles Questionnaire

Discussion

The current study tested the hypothesis that personal belief in a just world and gender role-related attitudes would mediate the effect of sexist attitudes (hostile and benevolent sexism) on the self-silencing tendency to sexism. In particular, this study examined whether the effect of benevolent sexism on self-silencing to sexism would be mediated by a personal belief in a just world (H1). This study's results did not support the aforementioned hypothesis. In this case, we found that the effect of benevolent sexism on self-silencing absent the mediator was significant. As several scholars argue benevolent sexist ideology enhances women's forbearance for acts of discrimination (Connelly & Heesacker, 2012; Feather, 2004; Watkins et al., 2006). This suggests that participants who endorse benevolent sexism may not be motivated to activate system legitimizing beliefs that offer a satisfactory rationale for the current status quo. This result coincides with past research data reporting that both women and men view benevolent sexism as less offensive than

hostile sexism (Bohner et al., 2010; Connelly & Heesacker, 2012; Swim et al., 2005). In addition, the endorsement of benevolent sexism may boost a general sense of security decreasing the stressful feelings related to an unfair status quo (Connelly & Heesacker, 2012; Jost & Hunyady, 2005). Also, Moya et al. (2007) argue that women endorsing benevolent sexism are expected to conform to men's behavioral restrictions. Thus, this result may imply that in the case of benevolent sexism, system legitimizing beliefs may not be needed to be activated. Nevertheless, women's benevolently sexist attitudes are associated with the self-silencing tendency to sexism. This result is in line with Becker and Wright's (2011) study proposing that benevolent sexism decreases motivation to act against gender inequality. Hence, benevolent sexism is a significantly perilous ideology as it undermines participants' need to combat sexism while at the same time restricts gender roles (i.e., self-silencing tendency; Connelly & Heesacker, 2012).

Next, this study's results partially support H2. Specifically, system-legitimizing beliefs (i.e., personal belief in a just world) partially mediated the association between hostile sexism and a self-silencing tendency to sexism. This result suggests that because hostile sexism is openly antagonistic toward women it might destabilize participants' sense that the world is fair toward them (Napier et al., 2010) increasing at the same time the motivation for system legitimizing beliefs (i.e, personal belief in a just world; Kay et al., 2005) which in turn result in the self-silencing to sexism. Under a system justifying perspective women may adopt the dominant ideology to have a positive image of the social system in which they live (Jost & Hunyady, 2003). In addition, hostile sexism directly influences women's self-silencing tendency to sexism. As Connelly and Heesacker (2012) argue hostile sexism invalidates women's complaints concerning gender inequality. Hence in fear of a negative impact on their lives women (e.g., being considered as a whiner) are more likely to silence themselves (Connelly & Heesacker, 2012). Overall hostile sexism may indirectly- by prompting system justification beliefs- and directly influence the self-silencing tendency to sexism.

Moreover, this study's results support H3 and H4 as the gender role-related attitudes mediate the effect of sexist attitudes on the self-silencing tendency to sexism. Specifically, this study's results show that women's justification of gender differences fully mediated the relationship between hostile sexism and the self-silencing tendency to sexism. Past research findings have also shown that self-silencing in women is significantly predicted by the level of women's adherence to traditional gender norms (Swim et al., 2010; Witte & Sherman, 2002). Thus, the stereotypic representations of women offered by hostile sexism intensify the justification of gender differences resulting in an increased self-silencing tendency to sexism. Hence this study's results provide support for the impact of hostile sexism on the self-silencing tendency to sexism through women's justification of gender differences. Finally, this study's results demonstrate that the justification of gender differences fully mediated the relationship between benevolent sexism and the self-silencing tendency to sexism in line with previous research data showing that women tend to consent to beliefs that justify existing gender inequality to make the best of an adverse situation (Napier et al., 2010; Wakslak et al., 2007).
The aforementioned results demonstrate that the relationship between participants' sexist attitudes and their self-silencing tendency to sexism was fully mediated by the justification of gender differences. The gender-specific origins of the self-silencing tendency also suggest that women's self-silencing is culturally enforced. For example, any counteraction to sexism would be negatively considered and have undesirable consequences on women's lives (see Hurst & Beesly, 2013; London et al., 2012). The theoretical implications of this relationship is that individuals who endorse sexist attitudes and

gender stereotypes are expected to exhibit corresponding behaviors. This study demonstrates that gender role-related attitudes and a personal belief in a just world could act as a set of a system justifying beliefs buffering women's motivation to challenge everyday sexism.

Overall the current study emphasizes the harmful role of system-justifying beliefs (i.e., the belief in a just world and the justification of gender differences) in rendering one's reaction to sexism seem unnecessary as it would be unlikely for individuals to combat a system that they perceive as right and fair (Wright, 2010). Interestingly these beliefs seem to maintain social stereotypes and beliefs that disadvantage the belief-holder and consequently their ingroup**.** Accordingly, women's self-silencing is implied as a socially-expected characteristic stereotypically attributed to the female gender (see also Cramer & Thoms, 2003; Ussher & Perz, 2010). In this way, gender injustice is maintained, and made even harder to challenge. Individuals are more likely to challenge social inequalities when they perceive them to be illegitimate (Wright, 2010). Thus, it seems as if this study's participants are willing to tolerate sexist incidents and feel reluctant to combat sexism. Future studies could emphasize in examining whether the internalization of ambivalent sexism affects gender-role-related attitudes and in turn self-perceptions and motivations.

In all, the process of putting interventions into effect to combat gender inequalities and gender injustice may be interrupted by individuals considering these differences as legit. Hence the focus of gender equality policies should emphasize combating the endorsement of sexist beliefs as well as adherence to traditional gender roles and system-legitimizing beliefs. Taking into account that stereotypes influence judgments and behavior (see Wheeler & Peety, 2001) actively encouraging individuals to question stereotypic representations of women and men offered by hostile and benevolent sexism and the societal justification of gender norms might raise awareness concerning gender injustice. Thus, a strategic goal in achieving gender equality is the need to deconstruct gender stereotypes and the established gendered socio-cultural expectations in parallel with system-legitimizing ideologies. Information about the negative consequences of ambivalent sexism and how it promotes gender inequality (Becker & Wright, 2011) both for women and men might contribute to overcoming gender dichotomies that lie at the foundations of stereotypic representations of women and men (Etchezahar & Ungaretti, 2014).

Limitations

This study is not without limitations. There may be a sampling bias as participants more interested in sexism, in general, may have taken part. In addition, research on the internet limits the participation of some social groups. This use of respondents limits the general applicability of the results. Also, the present research does not permit causal explanations of the relationships among the variables tested.

Conclusions

Amidst changing attitudes, the current study echoes prior work suggesting self-silencing to be driven by attempts to meet cultural imperatives prescribing what it means to be a "good woman" (Jack, 1991, p.85). This seems most significant in the

light of research data suggesting that girls and women experience countless instances of sexism wherein they act in ways that are inconsistent with their own or their group's best interests. Intersestingly little research surrounds the sexism that occurs within groups of women

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