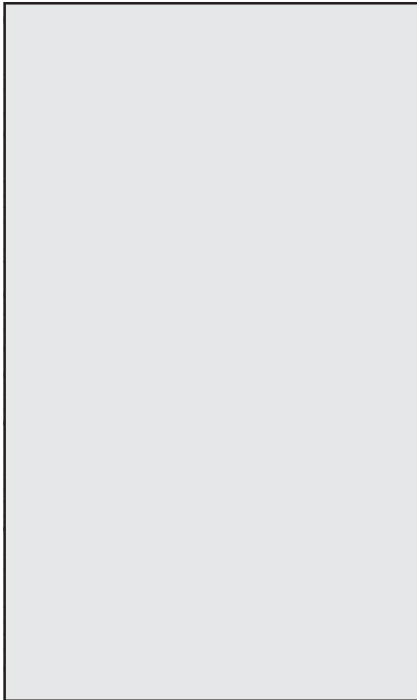


# Comment



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## Ambivalent Sexism Inventory: Where's the Ambivalence?

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Glick and Fiske (February 2001), a distinguished pair of scholars, introduced an intriguing perspective of how benevolent sexism may play a potent role in the inequality between the genders, as does hostile sexism. They also provided an overview of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI; Glick & Fiske, 1996; Glick et al., 2000), which is a central measure supporting the findings relevant to their arguments. In an impressive undertaking, Glick and Fiske (2001) reported means from 19 different countries represented by over 15,000 participants across the two main scales of the ASI: hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. They provided compelling arguments about the important impli-

cations of these findings for how researchers conceptualize and study both obvious and "kinder/gentler" forms of prejudice. They also cleverly used earlier findings, such as those of Glick, Diebold, Bailey-Werner, and Zhu (1997), to explain how the dissonance generated from endorsements of both hostile and benevolent sexism can be reconciled.

Glick and Fiske (2001) discussed the prevalence of hostile and benevolent sexism and used the ASI results as a basis for describing the prevalence of these types of sexism. However, a close examination of both hostile and benevolent sexism scale means across the 19 countries, as well as the rating scale that participants used for completing the ASI, does not suggest that much ambivalence existed among the samples examined by the experimenters.

In the ASI, 11 items compose the hostile sexism scale, and 11 separate items compose the benevolent sexism scale. A 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (*disagree strongly*) to 5 (*agree strongly*) is used to complete each of the 22 items. Raw scores for both scales are added and divided by 11. Thus, potential scale scores range from 0 to 5 for both scales.

On average, men from 6 of the 19 countries and women from only 1 country endorsed hostile sexism above 3.0 (*agree slightly*). Likewise, on average, men from only 5 of the 19 countries and women from 5 countries endorsed benevolent sexism above 3.0. Further, using the means displayed in Glick and Fiske's (2001) Figures 2 and 3, approximate descriptive data were computed for hostile sexism ( $M = 2.75$ ,  $SD = 0.49$  for men;  $M = 2.04$ ,  $SD = 0.42$  for women) and benevolent sexism ( $M = 2.56$ ,  $SD = 0.62$  for men;  $M = 2.57$ ,  $SD = 0.46$  for women). For hostile sexism, these descriptives are slightly greater for men and much greater for women when comparing them with Glick and Fiske's (1996) descriptive results for a smaller sample. For benevolent sexism, the general results of Glick and Fiske's (2001) research are moderately reduced for men and women compared with the data reported by Glick and Fiske (1996). Assuming that the Likert-type scale can be used as a continuum of agreement or endorsement of both hostile and benevolent sexism, their 2001 results suggest that both

men and women, on average, "disagreed slightly" to "agreed slightly" with both constructs. Ambivalence, or *cognitive dissonance* as Festinger (1957) first described it, would seem to exist only if two separate cognitions are equally endorsed. Both men and women appear to endorse hostile and benevolent sexism to very minimal degrees. Thus, a discrepancy between the constructs does not appear to exist according to the ASI.

The data examined by Glick and Fiske (2001) were also reported in Glick et al. (2000). However, neither article reported standard deviations of the hostile and benevolent sexism scales by country. Much of the dilemma discussed here may be remedied by an examination of the variance of scale scores. However, if little variance does exist among the scale scores, the dilemma discussed here may also have important implications for the correlational results that are discussed within Glick and Fiske (2001). Given the degree of variance reported by Glick and Fiske (1996), it does not appear that the majority of participants endorsed hostile or benevolent sexism past "slightly disagree." Researchers are cautioned against considering the results discussed by Glick and Fiske (2001) as anything more than preliminary. Although the factor structure of the ASI has been supported, alternative instruments that better reveal benevolent prejudices are warranted before researchers can appropriately examine the intriguing ideas discussed by Glick and Fiske (2001).

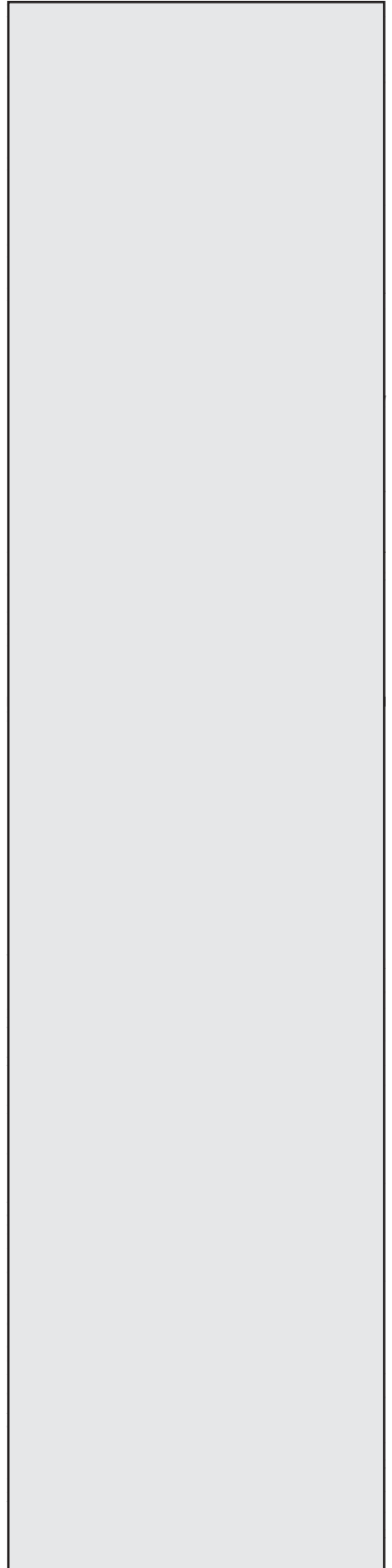
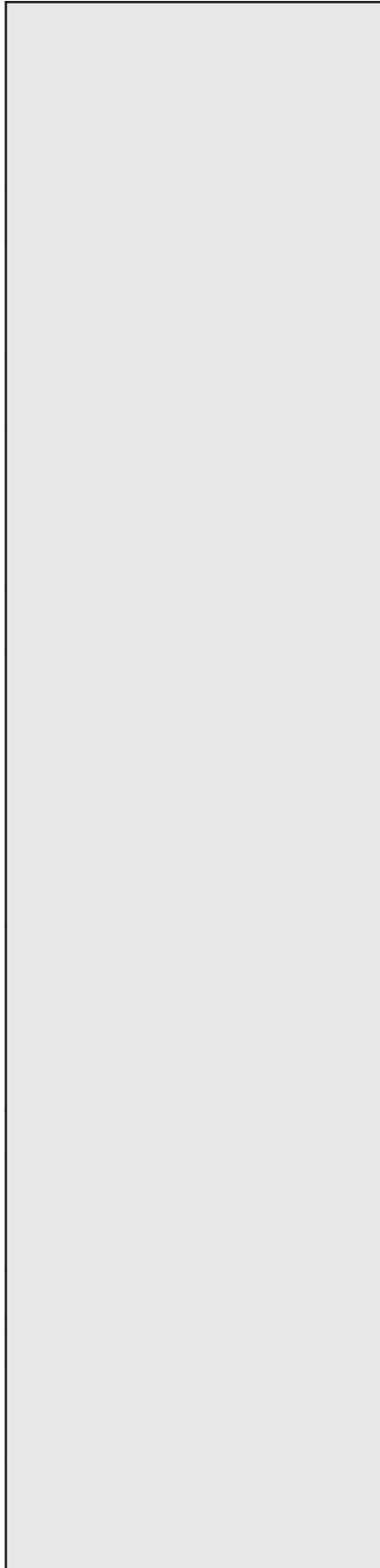
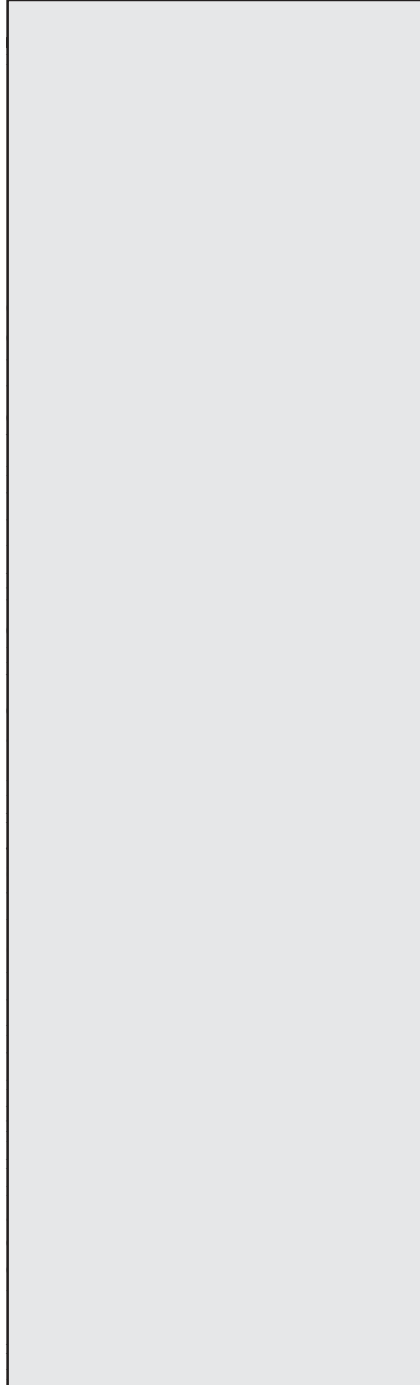
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## **Ambivalent Responses**

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We are not surprised that our contention (Glick & Fiske, February 2001) that sexism is based not solely on antipathy but also on apparently benevolent attitudes has elicited some skeptical reactions. It is ironic, however, that Petrocelli (2002, this issue) questioned the pervasiveness of benevolent (and therefore ambivalent) attitudes toward women, whereas Sax (2002, this issue) cited the ubiquity of such attitudes to support his argument that they reflect accurate perceptions of innate sex differences (and therefore ought not to be labeled as sexism). As with any basic research in psychology, questions about the frequency or strength with which a particular phenomenon actually occurs are not easily resolved, as the opposing claims of these two critics illustrate. Nevertheless, we believe that our research offers good evidence that ambivalent sexism exists and predicts discrimination against women.

Petrocelli (2002) asked, "where's the ambivalence?" (p. 443). He contended that low mean scores on both hostile sexism and benevolent sexism in many of the nations we studied suggest that there is not a significant degree of ambivalence toward women. As

Petrocelli pointed out, across 19 nations and more than 15,000 respondents, mean scores for hostile sexism and benevolent sexism were at about the neutral point of the scale. It seems fruitless to argue whether this indicates that the sexism glass is half empty or half full. As with any scales for which respondents indicate agreement or disagreement with a series of statements, the wording of individual items can be manipulated to alter the percentage of people who agree (e.g., by adding qualifications or softening the tone) or disagree (e.g., by making the statements more extreme).

When developing the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) scales, we deliberately weeded out items with extreme means (in either direction) in order to maximize the utility of the scales as individual difference measures (Glick & Fiske, 1996). In other words, the hostile sexism and benevolent sexism scales are not ratio scales with an absolute zero point, nor is there a benchmark score that would allow us confidently to categorize one individual as sexist and another as nonsexist. Nevertheless, we have demonstrated that the hostile sexism and benevolent sexism scales predict differing valences in attitudes toward women and, therefore, that people who score relatively higher on these scales can in some meaningful sense be said to be more ambivalent toward women than those who score lower. It would be a mistake to reify the numbers on the scale without reference to some comparison, a fallacy that we try to avoid when discussing our results.

Just how many people are significantly or strongly ambivalent toward women? Petrocelli (2002) rightfully suggested that one helpful statistic would be the typical standard deviations for hostile sexism and benevolent sexism scores. Petrocelli's own analysis of the national means for hostile sexism and benevolent sexism provided in our article yielded standard deviations of about 0.5. Because these standard deviations were based on national means as the unit of analysis, however, they underestimated the variance of individual scores, which in most samples was about 1 point on a 6-point scale, considerably greater variance than Petrocelli's figures suggested.

Petrocelli (2002) further noted that small variances in the scale scores would "have important implications for the correlational results" (p. 443) we reported. Indeed they would—given that restricted ranges attenuate correlations, the significant correlations we obtained between the ASI scales and other variables (e.g., indices of gender equality) would have been all the more impressive. The fact that individuals' hostile sexism and benevolent sexism scores significantly predicted attitudes toward women (with hostile sexism predicting negative and benevolent

sexism predicting positive valences) and the fact that national means on the ASI scales predicted United Nations indices of international gender equality indicate that there is meaningful variance on the scales (at both the individual and the national levels).

Although we acknowledge that a variety of questions remain about how to interpret what we have found, the extensive body of data we have gathered has (in our view) gone a long way toward establishing the utility of considering sexism to be ambivalent. We agree that it is unclear just how pervasive strongly ambivalent feelings toward women are; however (on the basis of our factor analyses), the constructs of hostile sexism and benevolent sexism seem, at the very least, to be pervasively recognized as coherent ideologies that exist—with greater or lesser degrees of overt endorsement—in a variety of cultures.

Sax (2002) suggested that we have defined benevolent sexism as a set of erroneous beliefs, a view that he finds contradicted by data on the existence of average sex differences in men's and women's personalities. Sax's concern is based on a misunderstanding of our position. We did not define prejudice in terms of erroneous beliefs. Rather, we criticized Allport's (1954) often used definition of prejudice as "an antipathy based upon a faulty and inflexible generalization" (p. 9). We explicitly noted that both components of Allport's definition (antipathy and erroneous generalization) are problematic (although we concentrated on problems with the former, rather than the latter), and we suggested instead that Allport's immediate afterthought, that "the net effect of prejudice . . . is to place the object of prejudice at some disadvantage" (p. 9), was more on the mark (i.e., that prejudice should perhaps be defined in terms of the justification of discrimination). Although we reviewed research on stereotypes about men and women (primarily to illustrate that women are ascribed mostly positive traits), we did not address the accuracy of these beliefs (for readers interested in varying perspectives on stereotype accuracy, see Fiske, 1998; Lee, Jussim, & McCauley, 1995; Stangor, 1995).

Clearly, Sax (2002) was correct in asserting that there are some reliable sex differences in personality traits. The more germane issues from our point of view are as follows: (a) Why do these differences exist? (b) What are the effect sizes, rather than just the statistical significance? (c) Do sex differences warrant discriminatory treatment based on sex categorization? Although the nature–nurture question about the origins of sex differences in personality is by no means currently resolved, abundant evidence indicates that status differences between men and women and conformity to social roles can account for

personality differences between women and men (Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000). In other words, sex differences in personality are to some degree caused by structural sexism in societies, with more patriarchal societies placing more conformity pressure on men and women to develop and enact what they consider to be gender-appropriate roles and self-images (e.g., see Eagly & Wood, 1999; Wood & Eagly, in press). Thus, the relationship between a sexist society and observed sex differences is circular.

If structural sexism is at least partly a self-fulfilling prophecy, then belief in sex differences, arguably, could be both accurate and sexist (i.e., a justification for discrimination) at the same time. We do not believe, however, that the hostile sexism and benevolent sexism scales label as sexist people whose beliefs are merely accurate reflections of reality. In developing the scales, we found, for example, that items claiming that women are more nurturing, expressive, and sympathetic than men (plausible sex differences in personality) did not correlate with the items that now compose the benevolent sexism scale. Why? Because everyone, sexist and nonsexist alike, views these as real sex differences.

A close examination of the benevolent sexism scale items reveals that they do not assess beliefs about the well-established sex differences in personality cited by Sax (2002). Rather, benevolent sexism (the scale Sax, 2002, seemed more concerned about) taps into beliefs and values about women being more pure than men (what personality scale measures that?), about how women ought to be protected and provided for by men, as well as about the necessity of romantic relationships with women for a man to be complete. Sax probably does not wish to argue, for example, that women accurately do require men's protection because of their emotional expressiveness and compassion toward others. The accuracy of sex stereotypes is beside the point (whether or not they are due to neuroanatomy and neurophysiology) when it comes to deciding whether benevolent sexism is indeed a form of sexism.

Sax (2002) cited the pervasiveness of benevolent sexism as an indication that it is not a form of sexism, noting that benevolently sexist beliefs are "foundational to Judaism" (p. 444) and can be found in cultures and times ranging from medieval France to Korea. That a belief is pervasive and religiously justified does not make it unprejudiced; Europeans once pervasively believed that God created various non-Europeans to be exploited as cheap laborers or as obstacles to overcome. It is no secret that traditional Judaism is highly patriarchal. Sax emphasized Judaism's benevolent beliefs about women but neglected to mention its hostile side, such as the daily prayer recited every

morning by Orthodox Jewish men, "Thank God I was not born a woman" (after similar prayers of thankfulness for not having been born a Gentile or a slave). The juxtaposition of benevolent and hostile beliefs about women within Judaism, and in other major religious traditions, such as Christianity and Islam, perfectly illustrates our theory.

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