

Benevolent Sexism: Understanding the Factors, Impact, and Implications for Gender Equality

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Abstract. This paper summarizes previous research articles on Benevolent Sexism (BS) from the perspectives of the role of attachment. The aim is to promote gender equality and improve the fairness experienced by individuals. The research findings indicate that women are more susceptible to accepting gender discrimination displayed by men, hindering their awareness of gender equality. Additionally, women with high attachment anxiety tend to prefer men who support BS attitudes, as BS weakens the recognition of sexism. Social factors also influence BS, as women are more inclined to form relationships with men who hold BS attitudes due to ignorance of the harmful consequences and the influence of evolution and social culture. BS also leads to gender segregation and differences, impeding women's achievements in male-dominated positions. However, the methods used in the aforementioned studies primarily involve questionnaires or scenario simulations, and it would be beneficial to incorporate behavioral experiments and other assessment methods to mitigate inevitable dishonesty. Furthermore, research on BS can be expanded to other fields such as political science, economics, and media studies to gain a more comprehensive understanding of its role and impact, and to develop effective countermeasures. Additionally, interdisciplinary and comparative studies can further enhance people's understanding of BS, including its acceptance and impact in different cultural contexts, as well as the dissemination methods and influencing factors within social groups.

Keywords: Benevolent sexism, attachment, gender discrimination, stereotypes.

1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing public interest in gender issues, making gender equality and the eradication of gender discrimination important goals in today's society. To achieve these objectives, it is crucial to have a deep understanding of how gender norms affect different aspects of life, including health. This knowledge will facilitate the implementation of effective interventions and systems that promote equality and well-being. Consequently, contemporary gender research focuses on the significance of gender equality and highlights the obstacles posed by gender discrimination and stereotypes, particularly concerning women's career advancement. Strategies for regulating women's work within the framework of human resource management have also been proposed. Moreover, existing research has provided insights into how gender discrimination affects health outcomes through biological mechanisms. Numerous studies have explored various dimensions of gender discrimination and stereotypes, revealing their detrimental effects. For example, research has demonstrated that women face unique challenges in leadership roles, with stereotypes negatively impacting their evaluation and effectiveness as leaders [1]. Additionally, workplace gender diversity has been found to have both positive and negative effects on performance [1]. The chronic stress resulting from gender-specific pressures has been shown to have adverse effects on the physical and mental health of individuals, with women being disproportionately affected across different domains. Physiological studies investigating gender effects have revealed that gene expression, physiological stress responses, and even epigenetic modifications contribute to the influence of gender discrimination on health, increasing the risk of mental health issues among those who experience gender discrimination [2].

However, there is limited research specifically focusing on the factors that contribute to the persistence of Benevolent Sexism (BS). Understanding these factors is crucial for addressing and dismantling the subtle forms of sexism that continue to exist in society. This paper aims to bridge this

research gap by summarizing eight articles that shed light on BS, with the ultimate goal of promoting gender equality and combating the injustices individuals face. The paper will approach the topic from three distinct perspectives: the role of attachment, the influence of social factors, and the concealed negative impacts of Benevolent Sexism. By examining BS through these lenses, a more comprehensive understanding of its underlying mechanisms can be gained, leading to the identification of strategies for mitigating its negative consequences.

While existing research has extensively examined gender discrimination and its implications, there is a need for more exploration in the area of Benevolent Sexism. By delving into the factors contributing to the perpetuation of BS, this paper aims to contribute to the broader goal of promoting gender equality and eliminating all forms of discrimination. Through a comprehensive review of relevant articles, the paper seeks to enhance awareness, understanding, and action related to BS, emphasizing the significance of attachment, social factors, and the hidden negative impacts of this form of sexism. Furthermore, advocating for diverse assessment methods, interdisciplinary approaches, and cross-cultural studies will enable a comprehensive examination of BS within various contexts and facilitate the development of effective countermeasures.

2. Relevant Factors to the Maintenance of Benevolent Sexism

Within the extensive body of research on benevolent sexism (BS), a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon has been developed through various studies. Eight articles on BS have provided valuable insights into different aspects of this complex and multifaceted issue. These articles can be categorized into two main sections: "Relevant Factors to the Maintenance of Benevolent Sexism: The Role of Attachment and The Effects of Social Factors," and "The Concealed Negative Impacts of Benevolent Sexism." The first section focuses on exploring the factors that contribute to the persistence of benevolent sexism. Several studies within this category examine the role of attachment in shaping individuals' attitudes and behaviors regarding gender. These investigations delve into how attachment styles, such as anxious attachment or avoidant attachment, relate to the endorsement of BS. Understanding these attachment-based factors can provide valuable insights into why some individuals are more likely to uphold benevolent sexist beliefs and behaviors. Additionally, this section examines the impact of social factors on maintaining benevolent sexism. The studies delve into various societal and cultural influences that contribute to the acceptance and perpetuation of BS. Social norms, media representations, and traditional gender roles are among the factors explored to determine their role in shaping individuals' attitudes and behaviors related to BS. Uncovering these social factors provides a deeper understanding of the broader context in which benevolent sexism operates.

The second section of the article sheds light on the concealed negative impacts of benevolent sexism. While BS may initially seem positive or well-intentioned, these studies reveal the detrimental consequences it has on gender equality and individual well-being. They highlight how benevolent sexist attitudes and behaviors can contribute to gender disparities in employment and reinforce traditional gender norms and stereotypes. Additionally, the studies reveal how benevolent sexism can hinder women's progress and empowerment, particularly in male-dominated sectors, perpetuating gender inequality. By categorizing these articles and examining their findings collectively, a more comprehensive understanding of BS and its implications emerges. The sections on relevant factors and social influences provide insights into the underlying mechanisms that contribute to the maintenance of benevolent sexism. On the other hand, the exploration of the concealed negative impacts exposes the broader societal consequences of endorsing BS. This categorization of research on BS serves as a valuable resource for scholars, activists, and policymakers. It offers a framework for analyzing the complex factors sustaining benevolent sexism and understanding its harmful consequences on individuals and society as a whole. Armed with this knowledge, interventions, educational programs, and awareness campaigns can be developed to challenge and question benevolent sexist attitudes, ultimately fostering a more equitable and inclusive future.

2.1. The Role of Attachment

It is observed that gender discrimination demonstrated by men is accepted by women, thus hindering their awareness of gender equality. Previous researchers indicate that women are more likely to recall benevolent gender discrimination and perceive it as positive behavior [3]. This phenomenon can be attributed to various factors, including societal conditioning and internalized gender norms. Women may have been socialized to believe that certain forms of discrimination, such as chivalry or well-intentioned protection, are inherently beneficial. As a result, they may not recognize such behaviors as discriminatory or recognize the potential harm they perpetuate. This lack of awareness hampers progress toward achieving gender equality as it reinforces the prevalent gender hierarchies and sustains existing power imbalances between men and women. Additionally, the study highlights that men with Benevolent Sexism (BS) characteristics are more supportive of gender equality. Given the tendency of women to accept BS, it becomes essential to promote a deeper understanding of gender equality and challenge the underlying assumptions and biases that contribute to the acceptance of discriminatory behavior.

Furthermore, the study conducted by Cross and Overall emphasizes that Benevolent Sexism (BS) can promote the idea of protecting and cherishing women in intimate relationships but may simultaneously weaken women's abilities, aspirations, and independence [4]. This dichotomy in BS's impact is particularly relevant when considering women with higher attachment anxiety. These individuals may seek a sense of security and reassurance, especially from male partners. The researchers surveyed 632 highly anxious women, evaluating their attachment styles and attitudes toward BS. The results indicated that women with higher attachment anxiety find men with BS attitudes more attractive. This finding suggests that BS attitudes may fulfill the need for security and support for these women, which can overshadow the detrimental effects of gender inequality perpetuated by such attitudes. Thus, the study highlights the complex interplay between attachment anxiety, the pursuit of security, and the acceptance of BS, contributing to the overall understanding of the perpetuation of gender inequality.

In a comprehensive study by Kural and Kovács, the relationship between attachment anxiety, security, belongingness, and male attitudes endorsing Benevolent Sexism (BS) among Hungarian women was examined [5]. The researchers assessed attachment styles, male BS tendencies, and levels of acceptance. Consistent with the previous findings discussed, the study revealed that women with higher attachment anxiety tended to prefer men with BS attitudes. These women may rely on the perception of security and investment provided by men exhibiting benevolent behaviors. However, it can be inferred that if these women are afforded sufficient security and support in other aspects of their lives, their need for belongingness and validation from partners endorsing BS would likely diminish. This realization offers a potential pathway for reducing preference for BS attitudes and ultimately breaking the cycle of harmful gender relationships. By addressing and dismantling the underlying factors contributing to attachment anxiety and fostering a more inclusive and equitable society, it becomes possible to counter the perpetuation of BS attitudes and their negative consequences on gender equality.

2.2. The Effects of Social Factors

The research conducted by Gul and Kupfer sheds light on women's willingness to engage with men who hold Benevolent Sexism (BS) attitudes due to their perception of these men being more willing to invest in the relationship [6]. Unlike previous studies that suggested women may be unaware of the negative impacts of BS, these researchers discovered that women, even when aware of the potential harm, still choose to trust and engage with men exhibiting BS characteristics. These findings imply that women's preference for BS men in established relationships is not solely rooted in ignorance but influenced by evolutionary and sociocultural factors that shape partner preferences. Women may associate BS attitudes with qualities such as commitment and nurturing, leading to their attraction towards such men. These research insights provide a deeper understanding of the

motivations behind women's support for BS and highlight the complex dynamics of attractiveness and perception within relationships.

In their study, Radke et al. explored how women with higher social dominance orientation navigate the social pressures they encounter, proposing that these women are more likely to adopt a BS worldview [7]. The study encompassed the measurement of social dominance orientation, hostile and benevolent sexism, perceptions of gender registration legitimacy, and perceptions of personal protection needs from men. The researchers found that, compared to men, social dominance orientation plays a more significant role in predicting women's endorsement of benevolent sexism. Furthermore, higher levels of social dominance orientation are linked to the belief that lower status for women is legitimate, subsequently leading to an increased perception of personal protection needs from men. This perception of needing protection is correlated with the endorsement of a benevolent sexism worldview. Thus, these findings underscore the influence of social factors, such as social dominance orientation, on the acceptance of BS attitudes among women. It highlights how societal pressures and beliefs about gender roles can shape individuals' perspectives and contribute to the perpetuation of BS.

3. The Concealed Negative Impacts of Benevolent Sexism

Hideg and Ferris conducted four studies to delve into the effects of BS on support for gender diversity within employment equity policies [8]. The research revealed that individuals who identify with BS demonstrate higher levels of empathy and stronger support for gender-based employment equity policies. However, this support is primarily focused on promoting the recruitment of women in female-dominated positions, rather than challenging gender norms in all types of work. This finding suggests that support for women's work remains confined to traditional stereotypes, further perpetuating gender segregation and disparities in the workplace. Consequently, women continue to face barriers in male-dominated sectors, hindering their progress and contributing to gender inequality. The seemingly positive attitudes towards BS and related occupational policies highlighted in the study reinforce gender differentiation in careers, leading to negative consequences.

In the study by Leone, et al., it was observed that males who adhere to BS are more inclined to exhibit pro-social bystander attitudes and behaviors [9]. The research indicates a positive correlation between a high level of BS endorsement and pro-social behavior when predicting bystander responses. However, a low level of BS endorsement does not show a significant relationship with pro-social behavior. This suggests that males with prominent BS characteristics may enhance their pro-social behavior as a means to display their high social status, thereby attracting women. However, this reinforcement primarily emphasizes the importance of male attitudes and beliefs, rather than fostering the development and empowerment of women. Furthermore, in the study by Bareket et al., it was discovered that individuals with BS attitudes are more likely to engage in dependency-oriented cross-gender helping relationships [10]. Male BS leads them to be more willing to assist women facing challenges in traditionally female domains, and likewise, female BS makes women more inclined to provide dependency-oriented help to men. This pattern of dependent mutual assistance is observed in cross-gender relationships and daily life, contributing to an unequal distribution of household chores and reinforcing traditional gender roles.

4. Conclusion

Gender discrimination and stereotypes have long been recognized as significant barriers to women's career development and impede progress toward achieving gender equality. Within this context, it has been observed that women are more likely to accept gender discrimination perpetuated by male dominance, while individuals who exhibit higher attachment anxiety tend to show a preference for men who hold benevolent sexism (BS) attitudes. This suggests that BS attitudes can reduce people's awareness of the underlying sexism present in their beliefs and behaviors. Social

factors also play a substantial role in shaping and perpetuating BS attitudes. Women, in particular, may be inclined to form relationships with men who endorse BS beliefs, partly because of a lack of understanding about the harmful consequences associated with such attitudes. Additionally, evolutionary and sociocultural influences contribute to the acceptance and perpetuation of BS. However, the presence of BS leads to gender segregation and differences, acting as a hindrance to women's progress in traditionally male-dominated positions.

Existing research in the field has primarily relied on questionnaires or scenario simulations to study BS. However, it is important to consider incorporating other evaluation methods, such as behavioral experiments, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of BS and its impact on individuals and society. Furthermore, there is a need to expand the scope of research beyond traditional disciplines, such as psychology, and explore the role and influence of BS in diverse fields like political science, economics, and media studies. In conclusion, the detrimental impact of gender discrimination and stereotypes on gender equality is well-documented, and further exacerbated by the prevalence of BS. To effectively address BS, it is crucial for research to employ a range of assessment methods, expand into different disciplines, and consider the influence of social factors for a more holistic analysis. The findings of these studies provide valuable insights for formulating strategies and measures aimed at promoting gender equality and improving individuals' experiences of injustice.

In the aforementioned studies, most researchers have utilized questionnaires or scenario simulations to investigate participants, with a limited use of experimental methods. For instance, researchers can incorporate behavioral experiments and other assessment methods to further mitigate the inevitable dishonesty that may occur when participants fill out questionnaires. Currently, research on BS is primarily focused on psychological, social, and physiological aspects, but researchers can expand the study of BS to broader sociological dimensions. For example, it can be explored whether the influence of BS further expands in countries with stable religious beliefs and collectivist systems. Such research may involve comparing the acceptance levels and attitudes towards BS in different cultural backgrounds and its impacts. Furthermore, research can examine the dissemination methods of BS within social groups to understand the pathways and influencing factors of BS in diverse social contexts. Moreover, there is potential to extend BS research to wider fields such as political science, economics, and media studies to better understand the role and impact of BS in different domains. These studies can help uncover the origins, motivations, and consequences of BS, providing a more comprehensive foundation for developing strategies and measures to address BS. By focusing on experimental methods, interdisciplinary research, and comparative analysis across different social backgrounds, people can enhance the understanding of the nature and impact of BS and offer more effective solutions to address it. By challenging and addressing BS, society can progress towards a more equitable and inclusive future.

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