

The Danger in Sexism: The Links Among Fear of Crime, Benevolent Sexism, and Well-being

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Abstract In two studies utilizing undergraduate students at a large public university in the Northeastern U.S., we examined how fear of crime negatively impacts psychological well-being and gender relations. In Study 1, students ($N=216$, 105 female) who indicated higher levels of fear of crime also indicated greater endorsement of benevolent sexism (but not hostile sexism) as well as higher levels of behavioral inhibition and lower self-esteem. In Study 2, fear of crime was manipulated and participants ($N=115$, 73 female) in the crime condition indicated greater endorsement of benevolent sexism, greater behavioral inhibition and lower self-esteem, as compared to participants in a control condition. The implications of the findings for gender relations and psychological well-being are discussed.

Keywords Benevolent sexism · Fear of crime · Health outcomes · Chivalry

Introduction

The damsel in distress, in dire need of a hero to rescue her from harm's way, is a classic character in literature, art, and

film. As Chaucer, Goethe and even Walt Disney know, the secret to a successful story is a persecuted maiden in need of rescue from a valorous prince (e.g., Chaucer 2005; Disney 1937; Goethe 1984). Feminist critics often recognize these stereotypical portrayals as sexist (Haase 2004; Zipes 1987). However, the underlying belief that women require male protection still lingers in almost every culture (Glick and Fiske 1996; Glick et al. 2000), and may become particularly strong when threats are salient.

The purpose of the present research is to examine whether heightened fear of crime is detrimental to equitable gender relations and psychological health because it exacerbates both men and women's perception that women ought to be protected by men, and decreases self-esteem and behavioral autonomy. As news reports of crime become increasingly sensationalized (at least in the US and Europe; Hendriks Vettehen et al. 2005; Scott and Gobetz 1992; Slattery et al. 2001), it is important to investigate the consequences of the increased prominence of violent crime. Therefore, utilizing a racially diverse U.S. undergraduate sample, in Study 1 we test whether an individual's fear of crime is positively associated with chivalrous beliefs but negatively linked to psychological well-being. In Study 2, crime salience is experimentally manipulated so that the causal role of fear of crime on sexist beliefs and well-being can be determined. This research not only explores the negative impact of fear of crime on well-being, but also investigates whether the threat of crime helps to preserve the gender hierarchy by reinforcing the belief that women need male protection.

Ambivalent Sexism and the Gender Status Quo

Men possess higher status in virtually all societies across cultures and throughout time (Harris 1991). Theorists have

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argued that this unequal arrangement stems from traditional labor divisions, with men and women historically assigned to the roles of breadwinner and homemaker, respectively (Eagly 1987; Eagly et al. 2000). Because women are primary caretakers for their young, their roles have typically been restricted to domestic duties (Stockard and Johnson 1992) whereas men have had more latitude to occupy positions of power. For most groups, such unequal status would breed hostility (Allport 1954). However, because men and women are uniquely interdependent (i.e., rely on each other for intimacy), Glick and Fiske (1996) have suggested that gender attitudes are more complicated.

Specifically, Glick and Fiske (1996) propose the existence of two interrelated forms of prejudice towards women—*hostile* and *benevolent sexism*. Hostile sexism encompasses the traditional definition of prejudice as antipathy (Allport 1954), and is reflected in negative attitudes towards women. Hostile sexists perceive women as not fully competent, believe that only men have the traits necessary to hold positions of power, and view women as temptresses who use their sexual allure to gain dominance over men (Glick and Fiske 1996). These negative beliefs about women are most frequently directed towards those who violate traditional gender roles, such as feminists and high-power career women (e.g., Glick et al. 1997; Sibley and Wilson 2004). For example, Sibley and Wilson (2004) found that male undergraduates in New Zealand expressed higher levels of hostile sexism towards sexually promiscuous (“bad”) women, as compared to sexually conservative (“good”) women.

Benevolent sexism, on the other hand, is subjectively positive in tone, and reflects the desire to protect and idealize women. Thus, benevolent sexists believe that women ought to be cherished and adored by their men, that they possess uniquely positive traits (e.g., sensitivity) that men lack, and that a man cannot be happy without the love of a woman (Glick and Fiske 1996). These subjectively positive beliefs about women are typically reserved for those who conform to traditional gender roles (Glick et al. 1997). In fact, benevolent sexism and hostile sexism covary within individuals and societies, with benevolent sexism reserved for women who conform to benevolent stereotypes, and hostile sexism directed towards those who stray from such expectations (e.g., Sibley and Wilson 2004). Unlike hostile sexism, women often endorse benevolently sexist beliefs at levels similar to men, perhaps because it is perceived to offer some benefits, such as favor and protection (Glick et al. 2000; Kilianski and Rudman 1998).

Despite a tone that conveys admiration towards women, benevolent sexism perpetuates male dominance by ascribing positive, but nonetheless low-status, traits to women (e.g., kind and nurturing) which undercuts perceptions of

competence and assertiveness (Eagly and Mladinic 1989, 1993) and reinforces the belief that women are fragile and ought to be protected and cherished by men. However, because of its kinder, gentler face, benevolent sexism may be a particularly insidious form of prejudice. As Jackman (1994) noted, by sweetening the exchange with a little flattery, dominant groups can make the status quo more palatable to subordinates. That is, chivalrous protection and praise for being the right kind of women may reduce women’s dissatisfaction with and resistance to gender inequality (e.g., Fischer 2006; Glick and Fiske 2001). However, paternalistic pro-female orientations are dependent on women occupying low-status roles (e.g., Eagly and Karau 2002; Rudman and Kilianski 2000). For example, Glick et al. (2000) found that across cultures, levels of benevolent sexism were negatively correlated with objective indicators of national gender equality (see also Glick 2006). Thus male dominance appears to be bolstered by paternalism and chivalry.

Further support for the idea that benevolent sexism helps to maintain the gender status quo comes from system justification theory (Jost and Banaji 1994). System justification theory suggests that people are motivated to perceive existing social arrangements (i.e., “the system”) as legitimate and fair, in part because of their need to view the world as a just place. As Lerner (1980) described, “people want to believe they live in a just world so that they can go about their daily lives with a sense of trust, hope, and confidence in the future.” Benevolent sexist beliefs serve system-justifying motives because they portray men and women as complementary, but equal (Bem and Bem 1970). In other words, although men may hold the positions of power, women are perceived as possessing valued traits that men do not have (e.g., are warmer than men). This arrangement allows people to perceive the system as fair and balanced because each group is seen as possessing some advantages and some disadvantages (Jost and Kay 2005; Kay and Jost 2003). Thus, benevolent stereotypes help to counterbalance men’s advantages in terms of agency and status, making male dominance more palatable. Jost and Kay (2005) demonstrated support for the system-justifying function of benevolent sexism, finding that undergraduate women perceive society to be fairer after merely being exposed to benevolent stereotypes.

Fear of Crime and Benevolent Sexism

Because benevolent sexism represents a difficult barrier to gender equity, it is important to understand mechanisms that promote or sustain individual endorsement of these beliefs. While there is little reason to expect that fear of crime would affect hostile attitudes towards women, we propose that fear of crime may increase both men and

women's endorsement of benevolent sexist ideology. As noted above, benevolent sexism is thought to stem from men's reliance on women for psychological and sexual intimacy (Glick and Fiske 1996). When violent crime threatens to disrupt this bond, this dependence may become more salient enhancing men's motives to protect women. Further, the threat of crime may enhance women's willingness to be protected by men in order to remain safe. This chivalry is precisely the kind of behavior that is likely to be misconstrued as beneficial to women, but in reality threatens to undermine gender equity by reinforcing the notion that women are weak and helpless.

Moreover, to the extent that crime threatens the legitimacy of the system, fear of crime may increase benevolent sexism simply because benevolent sexist beliefs help to restore faith in the status quo (e.g., Jost and Kay 2005). Put simply, the desire to perceive the status quo as stable, legitimate, and fair is threatened by the existence of random criminal acts. Therefore, in the face of such threats, we may turn to other psychological processes that serve system-justifying motives, including endorsement of benevolent sexism. In support of this possibility, research has found that threats to the federal system increased Canadian undergraduate men's interest in women who embodied benevolent sexist ideals (Lau et al. 2008), suggesting that benevolent sexism is attractive, in part, because it preserves the stability of the status quo. In the present research, we examine whether the threat of crime behaves similarly and increases endorsement of benevolent sexism on the part of both men and women.

The notion that threat serves to preserve the status quo of male dominance has most notably received support in the literature investigating fear of rape. Feminist theorists have hypothesized that rape has an intimidating effect on women, which has the function of preserving men's power over women (Brownmiller 1975). In support of this possibility, correlational research has demonstrated that societies with a high prevalence of rape are more likely to have high levels of gender inequality, both cross culturally and within the United States (Baron and Straus 1987; Sanday 1981), as well as more negative attitudes toward women's rights (e.g., Costin and Schwarz 1987). Moreover, Schwarz and Brand (1983) found that undergraduate women exposed to a description of rape indicated greater traditional gender role attitudes.

The present research builds on this previous work by investigating how the threat of crime in general affects *both* men and women's gender attitudes. In addition, by differentiating between hostile and benevolent sexism we are able to determine more precisely what gender attitudes are impacted by threat. Research by Bohner et al. (1993) examined how reading about a non-sexual violent crime influenced undergraduate men and women's gender-role

attitudes, and found no influence of the threat of crime on men and women's attitudes. However, they utilized the Attitudes Towards Women Scale (e.g., "a woman's social status should be determined by the status of her husband," Costin 1985; Costin and Schwarz 1987; Spence and Helmreich 1972), which does not differentiate between hostile and benevolent sexism, and tends to more strongly correlate with hostile sexism (at least among undergraduate samples; Glick and Fiske 1996). Because benevolent sexism reflects the protective aspects of attitudes towards women and serves a system-justifying function, the current research investigates the possibility that it is more likely to be influenced by the threat of crime.

Fear of Crime and Well-Being

In addition to having damaging consequences for gender attitudes, fear of crime is likely to be associated with negative mental health outcomes. Crime is not only threatening to the system, but it is also threatening to the self and therefore may lower behavioral autonomy and self-esteem. Crime, especially when seemingly random, may increase our perceived lack of control. The perception of control is important to well-being (see Taylor and Brown 1994; Thompson and Spacapan 1991 for reviews). For example, in a large study using an adult sample in California, Thompson et al. (2006) found that a sense of control was strongly associated with lower distress following the September 11th attacks. Similarly, Zeidner and Hammer (1992) examined Israeli responses to missile attacks during the Gulf War, and similarly found that "feeling in control" was associated with less distress. In addition, studies conducted in medical settings consistently demonstrate that people who believe they are in control during stressful procedures cope better than those who do not feel in control (Thompson and Spacapan 1991; for a review see Taylor 1991). Thus, threat of crime may disrupt an individual's sense of personal control, which can negatively impact their well-being.

People are overly optimistic regarding their likelihood of (not) experiencing a wide variety of negative events, including being a victim of crime (Perloff and Fetzer 1986; see Taylor and Brown 1988 for a review). However, this illusion of control may be difficult to maintain when the threat of crime is salient. Feeling increased vulnerability to crime may heighten the desire to engage in precautionary behaviors designed to avoid risk and regain personal control. For example, Riger and Gordon (1981) found in a survey conducted in three U.S. cities that women's fear of violent crime was positively correlated with defensive behaviors such as self-imposed isolation (e.g., not going out alone for entertainment). The current research investigates whether this pattern extends to men. Specifically, we

examined behavioral inhibition, which Carver and White (1994) describe as one of two motivational systems purported to underlie behavior and affect (Carver and White 1994). Behavioral inhibition is the motivational system thought to regulate aversive motives (i.e., avoiding something unpleasant) and it has been linked to negative feelings such as fear, anxiety, frustration and sadness, as well as decreased movement toward goals (Gray 1978, 1981, 1987, 1990). For example, activation of the behavioral inhibition system may lead an individual to avoid any form of confrontation or negative outcome, but by doing so also miss out on any positive outcomes or rewards (Wright et al. 2008). Because fear of crime threatens our sense of control, it may trigger the behavioral inhibition system, including increasing the extent to which men and women engage in defensive behaviors designed to avoid crime.

For similar reasons, fear of crime may also be damaging to an individual's feelings of self-worth. Research has amply demonstrated that threats (such as social rejection and failure feedback) negatively impact self-esteem (e.g., Leary and Baumeister 2000; Rudman and Fairchild 2004; Williams et al. 2000). The threat of crime may similarly threaten self-esteem because it heightens a sense of vulnerability and decreases people's sense of efficacy, at least temporarily. Terror management theory suggests that the function of self-esteem is to buffer humans from the anxiety associated with their own mortality (Greenberg et al. 1986; Harmon-Jones et al. 1997; Solomon et al. 1991). Conversely, the threat of crime may increase individual's anxiety and perceived susceptibility to physical harm, which can damage their feelings of self-worth. In support of the negative effect of threat on self-esteem, the fear of rape literature shows that undergraduate women exposed to a description of rape indicate lower self-esteem than those in a control group (Bohner et al. 1993; Bohner et al. 1999; Schwarz and Brand 1983). The current study examines whether fear of crime more generally negatively impacts both men and women's self-esteem.

Demographic Differences in the Link Between Fear of Crime and Psychological Health

Whether the impact of fear of crime on psychological health differs by gender or race is a matter of empirical investigation. Riger and Gordon (1981) found that women indicated significantly higher levels of fear of crime than men in their survey of three U.S. cities (see also Ferraro and LaGrange 1992; Fisher and Sloan 2003; Killias and Clerici 2000). In addition, survey research has documented racial differences in levels of fear of crime, with Blacks and other racial and ethnic minorities indicating greater fear than Whites (e.g., Baumer 1978; Covington and Taylor 1991; Pantazis 2000; Thompson et al. 1992; but see also Ortega

and Myles 1987). Scholars have suggested several possible reasons for why women and minorities demonstrate greater levels of fear of crime (for a review see Franklin et al. 2008). For example, the vulnerability model suggests that women, the elderly, racial minorities and those living in poverty feel more vulnerable to crime because they perceive themselves as either less physically or financially capable of protecting themselves and their possessions than dominant groups (see Hale 1996 for a review). Moreover, because ethnic minorities are more likely to live in economically distressed, high-crime neighborhoods the threat of crime may simply be more salient (Covington and Taylor 1991; Lewis and Salem 1986).

In addition to differing levels of fear of crime, a recent meta-analysis suggests that men and women often report different levels of self-esteem, at least in Western industrialized nations (Kling et al. 1999). Specifically, women's self-esteem tends to be moderately, but significantly, lower than men. Racial differences in self-esteem have also been extensively examined, especially focusing on differences between Whites and Blacks. This research has typically found that Blacks report higher self-esteem than Whites (e.g., Gray-Little and Hafdahl 2000; Twenge and Crocker 2002) and Asians (e.g., Phinney et al. 1997), in part because Blacks are less likely to base their self-esteem on the approval of others (Zeigler-Hill 2007). Moreover, research has reported that women express more anxiety and behavioral inhibition than men (Carver and White 1994; Leone et al. 2001; Mardaga and Hansenne 2007). Thus, there is a good chance that the overall levels of our focal variables may differ by gender and race.

However, despite having different levels of fear of crime, self-esteem, and behavioral inhibition, there is no theoretical reason to suggest that men and women, and those of different races who *do feel* threatened by crime would not also experience a heightened vulnerability, resulting in decreased feelings of self-worth and behavioral autonomy. That is, although we might expect mean level differences in fear of crime, the downstream effect of that fear on self-esteem and inhibition may not differ. On the other hand, research by Bohner et al.'s (1993) found that male undergraduates who read about crimes did not show decreased self-esteem, suggesting that fear of crime may not be similarly detrimental to men's health. However, their manipulation may not have been strong enough to evoke fear of crime for the male participants, or their procedures may have primed rape more than nonsexual violent crimes because their participants filled out the rape myth scale after they read about the crime. Indeed, because men are more often the victims of nonsexual violent crimes than women (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2007), it would seem strange if the unfortunate reality of crime did not affect them psychologically. Therefore, although we expected

male and White participants to show lower levels of fear of crime in comparison to female and non-White participants, respectively, we did expect their level of fear of crime to predict lower psychological health and greater inhibition.

The Present Research

To examine how fear of crime influences men and women's gender beliefs and health outcomes, two studies were conducted utilizing undergraduate college samples. In Study 1, we examined the link between fear of crime, benevolent and hostile sexism, self-esteem and behavioral inhibition using self-reported measures. In Study 2, we experimentally examined these links by increasing the cognitive accessibility of crime using a campus alert. Across both studies, we had two focal hypotheses. The first was that fear of crime would increase endorsement of benevolent (but not hostile) sexism for both men and women, thus indirectly perpetuating the gender status quo by enhancing the belief that women need to rely on men for protection. In addition, we expected that fear of crime would have a damaging effect on participants' psychological health, resulting in decreased self-esteem and increased inhibition.

Study 1

In Study 1, we conducted a preliminary examination of the effect of fear of crime on gender relations and psychological health. To do so, we administered a modified Fear of Rape Scale (Senn and Dzinis 1996) that was adjusted to tap fear of crime in general, rather than specific fear of rape, and was therefore relevant for both men and women. In addition, we assessed participants' endorsement of benevolent and hostile sexism. Finally, we assessed their self-esteem and behavioral inhibition. Our specific hypotheses were as follows:

1. We expected racial differences in level of fear of crime and self-esteem, with Whites indicating lower levels of fear of crime than racial minorities, and Blacks indicating higher self-esteem than other racial groups.
2. We expected gender differences in level of fear of crime, hostile sexism, self-esteem, and behavioral inhibition. Specifically, we expected that women would indicate greater fear of crime and inhibition than men, but lower levels of hostile sexism and self-esteem.
3. We expected greater levels of self-reported fear of crime to be associated with increased endorsement of benevolent sexism (but not hostile sexism) in both men and women.
4. Finally, we expected that greater levels of fear would negatively correlate with self-esteem but positively correlate with inhibition.

Method

Participants

In Study 1, 105 female and 111 male introductory psychology students from a large, diverse public university in the northeast participated in exchange for partial fulfillment of their research requirement (age range: 18 to 34 years old, $M=19.22$). Of these, 114 (48.5%) indicated they were White / European, 54 (23%) indicated they were Asian, 24 indicated they were Black / African American (10.2%), 19 indicated they were Hispanic / Latino (8.1%), 14 indicated they were multiracial (6%). The remaining 10 participants failed to indicate their race, and were therefore excluded from analyses involving race. Preliminary analyses indicated that mean age did not significantly differ by gender or race, $F_s < .47$, $p_s > .49$, and that the distributions of women and men by race did not significantly differ, $\chi^2(2)=1.46$, $p=.48$.

Materials

Fear of Crime Scale To measure fear of crime, participants responded to a 28-item modified version of the Fear of Rape Scale (Senn and Dzinis 1996, see Appendix). The few items that specifically mentioned sexual assault were changed to refer to physical assault. Example items include, "I avoid going out alone at night," and "I am afraid of being assaulted physically." Responses were indicated on a 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*) scale. After appropriate recoding, responses to the items were averaged ($\alpha=.93$).

Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) The ASI consists of two 11-item subscales that assess benevolent sexism (e.g., "Women should be cherished and protected by men") and hostile sexism (e.g., "Feminists are seeking for women to have more power than men."). Participants responded to items on the ASI using a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) scale. Responses were recoded and averaged such that higher scores on the subscales indicate greater levels of benevolent sexism (BS; $\alpha=.76$) or hostile sexism (HS; $\alpha=.84$).

Self-esteem Participants' self-esteem was assessed using the 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory (Rosenberg 1965). Responses to items such as, "I certainly feel useless at times," were indicated on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) scale. After appropriate recoding, responses were averaged ($\alpha=.88$).

Behavioral Inhibition Scale Carver and White's (1994) 7-item behavioral inhibition scale was administered to assess participants' avoidance motivation. Respondents

indicated how accurately statements such as, “I have very few fears compared to my friends” reflected them on a scale from 1 (*very true for me*) to 4 (*very false for me*). Responses were recoded and averaged ($\alpha=.73$) so that higher scores indicate greater levels of behavioral inhibition.

Demographics Participants also indicated their age, race, and gender.

Procedures

Participants were invited to complete a survey in exchange for course credit. They were told that the study was about identifying what personality factors are associated with people’s attention to their social environment. After signing a consent form, participants completed the measure in the order listed above using a computer survey program. Participants completed the survey in mixed-gender groups of 1–6. Participants were then debriefed and thanked.

Results and Discussion

Due to insufficient cell sizes, a new race variable was computed with three levels, White ($N=112$; 62 female, 50 male), Blacks and Latinos ($N=53$; 24 female, 29 male) and Asians ($N=46$; 24 female, 22 male). A post-hoc power analysis suggested that the cell sizes using the newly created race variable were sufficient, as the observed multivariate power was greater than .95, at the .05 level (D’Amico et al. 2001). Therefore, to examine participant race and gender differences on the dependent variables (Hypotheses 1 and 2), a 3 (Participant Race) \times 2 (Participant Gender) MANOVA was computed. Contrary to Hypothesis 1, which predicted racial differences in fear of crime and self-esteem, there was no significant multivariate effect of participant race, $F(10, 404)=1.33$, $p=.21$, $\eta_p^2=.03$, nor was there a significant multivariate interaction between participant race and gender, $F(10, 404)=1.59$, $p=.11$, $\eta_p^2=.04$ (see Table 1). However, results indicated a significant multivariate main effect of participant gender, $F(5, 201)=21.21$, $p<.001$, $\eta_p^2=.35$. We expected women to report higher levels of fear of crime and inhibition than men, but lower levels of hostile sexism (Hypothesis 2). In support of this, there was a significant univariate main effect of participant gender on fear of crime, $F(1, 205)=80.33$, $p<.001$, $\eta_p^2=.28$, with women ($M=2.86$, $SD=.54$) indicating greater fear of crime than men ($M=2.14$, $SD=.47$). In addition, there was a significant main effect of participant gender on hostile sexism, $F(1, 205)=21.78$, $p<.001$, $\eta_p^2=.10$, with men ($M=4.32$, $SD=.91$) indicating higher levels of hostile

sexism than women ($M=3.60$, $SD=.92$). Finally, women ($M=3.14$, $SD=.49$) reported greater levels of behavioral inhibition than men ($M=2.85$, $SD=.46$), and this difference was statistically significant, $F(1, 205)=11.81$, $p<.001$, $\eta_p^2=.05$. In addition, as expected there were no differences in benevolent sexism, $F(1, 205)=.02$, $p=.90$, $\eta_p^2=.00$. However, contrary to Hypothesis 2, the univariate analyses indicated no significant gender differences in self-esteem, $F(1, 205)=.00$, $p=.97$, $\eta_p^2=.00$.

Intercorrelations for Full Sample

Because our primary goal in Study 1 was to examine the relationship between fear of crime and health and gender attitude related outcomes, correlations between all of the measures were computed for the full sample (adjusting for gender), as well as separately for men and women (see Table 2). As can be seen in Table 2, our predictions that fear of crime relates to problematic gender attitudes (Hypothesis 3) and lower psychological well-being (Hypothesis 4) were supported. Specifically, as predicted in Hypothesis 3, increased fear of crime was positively associated with benevolent sexism for both men and women (full sample $r=.24$, $p<.001$), but not hostile sexism. Thus, when men and women are wary of the threat of crime, they also subscribe more to the idea that women ought to be protected and cherished by men. In addition, as predicted in Hypothesis 4, increased fear of crime was associated with decreased self-esteem (full sample $r=-.17$, $p<.01$) and increased behavioral inhibition (full sample $r=.38$, $p<.001$), indicating that fear of crime can be detrimental to psychological well-being.

Although Table 2 shows slight differences in correlations among men and women (i.e., the relationship between fear of crime and benevolent sexism was marginal for men, but significant for women), follow up regression analyses were conducted to directly examine whether any of the fear of crime correlations were moderated by gender. Specifically, in separate regressions, each of the variables, participant gender and the interaction term were regressed on fear of crime. In all cases, the interaction was not statistically significant. Thus, the relationships observed in the full sample did not significantly differ for men and women. Similar analyses checking whether the pattern of correlations differed by race revealed that interactions involving race did not approach statistical significance.

Study 2

The results from Study 1 suggest that fear of crime has negative consequences for gender relations by promoting the belief that women need to rely on men for protection as

Table 1 Descriptive statistics as a function of gender and participant race.

| | White participants | | | | Blacks and Latinos | | | | Asian participants | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|-----------|-------------------|-----------|--------------------|-----------|--------------------|-----------|--------------------|-----------|--------------------|-----------|
| | Men | | Women | | Men | | Women | | Men | | Women | |
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| Fear of crime | 2.04 _a | .42 | 2.91 _b | .58 | 2.29 _{ac} | .56 | 2.93 _b | .48 | 2.20 _a | .42 | 2.69 _{bc} | .51 |
| Benevolent sexism | 4.02 _a | .87 | 4.05 _a | .89 | 4.16 _a | 1.00 | 4.40 _a | .72 | 4.42 _a | .70 | 4.10 _a | 1.06 |
| Hostile sexism | 4.35 _a | .97 | 3.55 _b | 1.05 | 4.22 _a | .92 | 3.56 _b | .80 | 4.32 _a | .78 | 3.87 _{ab} | .69 |
| Self-esteem | 5.26 _a | 1.11 | 5.09 _a | 1.02 | 5.08 _a | 1.22 | 5.47 _a | .99 | 5.36 _a | 1.02 | 5.13 _a | 1.15 |
| Inhibition | 2.17 _a | .41 | 1.71 _b | .50 | 2.10 _a | .55 | 2.02 _{ab} | .46 | 2.12 _a | .46 | 1.94 _{ab} | .46 |

Means with differing subscripts indicate significant differences at $p < .05$. Fear of crime was assessed on a 1 to 5 scale, Benevolent Sexism, Hostile Sexism, and Self-Esteem were assessed on a 1 to 7 scale, and inhibition was assessed on a 1 to 4 scale. For all variables, higher scores indicate greater levels.

well as negative psychological health outcomes. Because Study 1 was correlational, we cannot rule out the possibility that the paths are actually in the reverse direction. That is, it is possible that belief in the idea that women need protection from men leads to increased fear of crime. Similarly, it is possible that individuals with greater behavioral inhibition are more likely to worry about the possibility of negative events, such as crime, happening to them and are therefore more likely to be vigilant. Study 2 was conducted to provide stronger evidence of our hypothesized causal pathways. Specifically, in Study 2 we manipulated fear of crime by having half of the participants read a college alert about a crime committed on campus, and the other half of the participants read an alert about the weather. Our specific hypotheses were as follows:

1. Although not supported in Study 1, we again examined whether there were racial differences in self-esteem, with the expectation that Blacks would indicate higher self-esteem than other racial groups.
2. We expected gender differences in level of hostile sexism, self-esteem, and behavioral inhibition with women indicating more behavioral inhibition than men, but lower levels of hostile sexism and self-esteem.
3. We expected men and women in the crime condition to show increased endorsement of benevolent sexism (but not hostile sexism), compared to controls.

4. Finally, we expected men and women in the crime condition to show decreased self-esteem and increased inhibition, compared to controls.

Method

Participants

In Study 2, 42 male and 73 female undergraduate introductory psychology students from the same university participated in exchange for partial fulfillment of their Psychology research requirement (age range: 18 to 35 years old, $M = 19.78$). Of these, 55 participants (48%) indicated they were White, 5 participants (4%) indicated they were Black, 41 participants (36%) indicated they were Asian, 8 participants (7%) indicated they were Latino. Fourteen participants (5%) reported another ethnicity. Preliminary analyses indicated that mean age did not significantly differ by gender or race, $F_s < 1.91$, $ps > .17$, and that the distributions of women and men by race did not significantly differ, $\chi^2(4) = 7.00$, $p = .14$.

Experimental Manipulation

Crime Condition To manipulate fear of crime, participants read a campus announcement about a recent armed robbery.

Table 2 Intercorrelations among the measures in study 1, separately for men and women.

| | Fear of crime | Benevolent sexism | Hostile sexism | Self-esteem | Behavioral inhibition |
|-----------------------|---------------|-------------------|----------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| Fear of crime | – | .30** | –.02 | –.11 | .41** |
| Benevolent sexism | .16+ | – | .35** | .06 | .00 |
| Hostile sexism | .07 | .38** | – | –.01 | –.04 |
| Self-esteem | –.24* | –.21* | –.04 | – | –.39** |
| Behavioral inhibition | .34** | .13 | .06 | –.40** | – |

+ $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. Correlations for men are below the diagonal, correlations for women are above the diagonal.

The announcement was formatted in the style used by Rutgers University to announce safety alerts over email, and was therefore familiar to the students and realistic. The announcement included details of the robbery, which was purported to occur on campus around 3:00 am. The perpetrator was described as a 6'2" male who wielded a handgun and demanded the victim's money. The gender of the victim was intentionally not indicated to make the prime equally applicable to men and women.

Control Condition In the control condition, participants read a campus announcement about a weather advisory for the area. The announcement matched the format of the Rutgers University weather advisories, and included detailed information from the National Weather service about dense fog in the area.

Materials

All of the scales used in Study 1 were used in Study 2 including the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick and Fiske 1996), the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale (SE; Rosenberg 1965), and the Behavioral Inhibition Scale (BIS; Carver and White 1994). Each of these scales were reliable for this sample (BS: $\alpha=.79$; HS: $\alpha=.81$; SE: $\alpha=.89$; BIS: $\alpha=.78$). In addition, as a quick check on the manipulation, participants were asked to indicate how alarming the campus announcement was to them on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*).

Procedure

Participants completed the study in groups of 2–6. Participants were told that the study was about personality and social issues. They were told that they would be randomly assigned an email sent by the campus administration, asked to evaluate the email's content, and then fill out multiple personality questionnaires. Each participant was randomly assigned to the crime ($N=54$, 34 women) or the control condition ($N=61$, 39 women). After reading the scenario, participants completed the measures described above in a counterbalanced order. Upon completing the measures, participants were debriefed and thanked.

Results and Discussion

Preliminary Analyses

An independent samples t-test indicated that the crime announcement ($M=5.65$, $SD=1.07$) was viewed as significantly more alarming than the weather announcement ($M=3.92$, $SD=1.52$) indicating that our manipulation was

successful, $t(113)=6.98$, $p<.001$, $d=1.32$. As in Study 1, we created a new race variable with three levels, White ($N=55$; 33 female, 22 male), Asian ($N=41$; 23 female; 18 male), and Black and Latino ($N=18$; 16 female, 2 male) to test for significant main effects and interactions involving participant race.

Focal Analyses

To examine all four of our hypotheses, we submitted the dependent measures to a 3 (Participant Race) x 2 (Participant Gender) x 2 (Experimental Condition) MANOVA. As in Study 1, we did not find support for Hypothesis 1 (which predicted racial differences in self-esteem). Results of the MANOVA indicated there was no significant multivariate main effect of participant race, $F(8, 200)=1.54$, $p=.15$, $\eta_p^2=.06$, nor any higher order interactions involving participant race, $F_s<1.59$, $p=.13$, $\eta_p^2=.06$. However, because some of our cell sizes were small (e.g., there were only 2 Black or Latino men), we lacked the statistical power necessary to detect higher order effects of race. Therefore, these results must be interpreted with caution.

For the next set of analyses, we collapsed across participant race to preserve statistical power (Crime Condition: 20 men, 34 women; Control condition: 22 men, 39 women; observed multivariate power $>.95$ at .05; D'Amico et al. 2001). The 2 (Participant Gender) x 2 (Experimental Condition) MANOVA revealed a significant multivariate main effect of gender, $F(4, 108)=9.70$, $p<.001$, $\eta_p^2=.26$, and a significant multivariate main effect of condition, $F(4, 108)=3.20$, $p<.05$, $\eta_p^2=.11$. The Participant Gender x Experimental Condition interaction was not statistically significant, $F(4, 108)=1.77$, $p=.14$, $\eta_p^2=.06$. Having found multivariate main effects, we next turned to 2 (Gender) x 2 (Condition) univariate ANOVAs to examine which dependent variables were influenced by participant gender and our crime manipulation.

Gender Differences

As predicted in Hypothesis 2, we expected women to report lower levels of hostile sexism and self-esteem than men, but greater behavioral inhibition. Univariate ANOVAs partially supported this hypothesis, revealing that the multivariate main effect of gender was driven by gender differences in hostile sexism, $F(1, 111)=8.57$, $p<.01$, $\eta_p^2=.07$, and behavioral inhibition, $F(1, 111)=33.06$, $p<.001$, $\eta_p^2=.23$. As expected, women ($M=3.60$, $SD=.71$) indicated significantly lower levels of hostile sexism than men ($M=4.04$, $SD=.90$), $d=.55$, but significantly greater inhibition (Women: $M=3.35$, $SD=.40$; Men: $M=2.87$, $SD=.49$), $d=1.08$. Men and women did not indicate significantly different levels of benevolent sexism or self-esteem, $F_s<1.27$, $p_s>.26$, $\eta_p^2_s<.01$.

Condition Differences on Sexist Beliefs

We expected that increased fear of crime would be problematic for gender relations because it increases endorsement of male chivalry and paternalistic protection (Hypothesis 3). However, we did not expect fear of crime to similarly enhance hostile beliefs about women. In support of this hypothesis, univariate ANOVA results indicated a significant main effect of condition on benevolent sexism, $F(1, 111) = 4.99$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. Participants who read about a recent crime indicated significantly greater endorsement of benevolently sexist ideals (see Table 3). In contrast, there was not a significant effect of condition on hostile sexism, $F(1, 111) = 1.99$, $p = .16$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$ (hostile sexism was actually lower in the crime condition than the control condition, albeit not significantly).

Condition Differences on Psychological Health Outcomes

Hypothesis 4 proposed that participants in the crime condition would show decreased self-esteem and increased inhibition, compared to controls. In support of this hypothesis, results of a 2 (Condition) \times 2 (Gender) ANOVA revealed a significant univariate main effect of condition on self-esteem, $F(1, 111) = 3.82$, $p = .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. Participants who read the robbery scenario indicated significantly lower self-esteem than controls (see Table 3). In addition, the 2 (Condition) \times 2 (Gender) univariate ANOVA on inhibition suggested that reading about a recent crime increased participants' inhibition as compared to controls, $F(1, 111) = 4.04$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$.

General Discussion

The present research examined the impact of fear of crime on benevolent sexism, self-esteem, and behavioral inhibition.

Table 3 Average benevolent sexism, hostile sexism, self-esteem and behavioral inhibition as a function of experimental condition.

| | Crime condition | | Control condition | | <i>d</i> |
|-------------------|-------------------|-----------|-------------------|-----------|----------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | |
| Benevolent sexism | 4.22 _a | .78 | 3.93 _b | .76 | .38 |
| Hostile sexism | 3.64 _a | .83 | 3.86 _a | .79 | .25 |
| Self-esteem | 5.15 _a | 1.27 | 5.44 _b | .93 | .26 |
| Inhibition | 3.24 _a | .46 | 3.11 _b | .51 | .27 |

Means with differing subscripts indicate significant differences at $p < .05$. Benevolent Sexism, Hostile Sexism, and Self-Esteem were assessed on a 1 to 7 scale, and inhibition was assessed on a 1 to 4 scale. For all variables, higher scores indicate greater levels. Effect sizes were measured using Cohen's *d*—by convention, .2, .5 and .8 correspond to small, medium, and large effects, respectively.

Across two studies, our findings indicate that increased fear of crime has damaging consequences for gender relations, self-worth, and behavioral autonomy for men and women. Specifically, Study 1 indicated that fear of crime was associated with an increased endorsement of benevolent sexism. In addition, a generalized fear of crime was associated with greater levels of behavioral inhibition and lower levels of self-esteem. Study 2 investigated the causal role of fear of crime on endorsement of benevolent sexism and psychological well-being and found that when crime was made salient, participants indicated greater endorsement of benevolent sexism, lower levels of self-esteem, and greater behavioral inhibition, as compared to controls. Moreover, despite mean differences on several of the focal variables, the effect of fear of crime on benevolent sexism and well-being was similar for men and women across both studies. Because benevolent sexism helps to bolster the status quo of male dominance (Jost and Kay 2005), this suggests that fear of crime acts as a subtle, but significant barrier to equitable gender relations. Thus, these results suggest that the damaging effects of crime may extend well beyond the individual victim.

To our knowledge, the present research provided the first examination of the effect of fear of crime on endorsement of benevolent sexism. Across both studies, results indicated that men and women were more likely to support benevolently sexist ideology to the extent that they were fearful of the threat of crime. Thus, when there is a perceived threat, men show an increased desire to protect and cherish women, and women show an increased desire to be protected and cherished. While this response may seem only natural given men's typically greater size and strength compared to women, it has dangerous implications for gender relations because it reinforces the gender status hierarchy. In fact, our findings echo research that demonstrates that a nation's level of benevolent sexism is negatively linked to nationwide indicators of gender equality (Glick et al. 2000). In countries where some men are hostile towards women who act out of role, women seek protection from other men in order to remain out of harms way. Similarly, in the face of threatening (male) criminals, women may reach for protection and men may be eager to offer it. Unfortunately, this protection comes at a cost for women, as it is contingent upon women remaining dependent on men and conforming to gender stereotypical norms (e.g., Glick et al. 1997; Glick and Fiske 2001; Rudman and Kilianski 2000; Sibley and Wilson 2004) and it bolsters the status quo of male dominance (Jost and Kay 2005).

Fear of crime may have other damaging consequences for gender relations, and future research should explore this possibility. For example, Rudman and Heppen (2003) found that women who implicitly associate their partner with chivalry (e.g., prince charming) showed lower career

aspirations compared to women who did not associate their partners with chivalry. Because fear of crime increases approval of chivalrous beliefs and behaviors, the threat of crime may ultimately have a dampening effect on women's career aspirations. In addition, although fear of crime may push women into men's arms for protection, future research should examine the consequences of an increased fear of crime on romantic relationships. For example, fear of crime increases women's distrust of men (Schwarz and Brand 1983) yet simultaneously increases dependence on men; thus, future research should examine the consequences of these paradoxical views of men for heterosexual romantic relationships and heterosexual courtship.

Our research also demonstrated the detrimental impact of fear of crime on psychological health. Although previous research has routinely demonstrated that fear of rape negatively impacts women's psychological health (for a review see Bohner and Schwarz 1996), the present research expands upon this finding by investigating fear of crime in general, and including both men and women in our samples. In doing so, we demonstrated that the damaging consequences of fear may not be unique to rape in particular, and are not specific to women. Because the perception of control is important to well-being (Taylor and Brown 1994), any challenges to this control likely damages our feelings of self-worth and self-efficacy. Both men and women not only indicated decreased levels of self-esteem after crime was made salient, but also showed increased levels of behavioral inhibition after crime, which has been linked to a host of negative feelings and outcomes (see Carver and White 1994 for a review).

Although our research provides a necessary first step in examining the impact of crime on psychological constructs, it is limited in its scope. For example, future research could further examine the precise mechanism by which fear of crime leads to increased benevolent sexism. We suggested that fear of crime may challenge the legitimacy of the system. In response, individuals may engage in system-justifying processes, such as bolstering their support for benevolent sexism. Because benevolent stereotypes portray men and women as complementary, with each group possessing some advantages and some disadvantages, they allow people to perceive the system as fair and balanced (Jost and Kay 2005; Kay and Jost 2003) and help to restore faith in the status quo. However, the present research did not directly measure personal endorsement of system justifying beliefs in the face of crime, and future research should do so.

Nevertheless, research examining dangerous worldview, threat, and right-wing authoritarianism lends support to our interpretation. Individuals who are high in right-wing authoritarianism show an ideological commitment to tradition, established authority, and social

convention (Altemeyer 1998; Jost et al. 2003). Thus, authoritarianism is a system-justifying ideology because it reflects a resistance of change and the legitimization of existing social arrangements. Duckitt et al. (2002) demonstrated in samples of American and White Afrikaner students that perceptions of the world as a dangerous place is positively associated with right-wing authoritarianism (see also Altemeyer 1988). Moreover, cross-sectional research in the US has demonstrated that perceived social threats increase individual levels of authoritarianism (e.g., Altemeyer 1998; Doty et al. 1991). Authoritarianism, in turn, has been shown to predict greater levels of benevolent sexism (e.g., Sibley et al. 2007). Thus, fear of crime may enhance the perception that society is dangerous and threatening, which can increase motivation for security (i.e., right-wing authoritarianism), which results in system-justifying processes such as increased endorsement of benevolent sexism (Jost and Kay 2005; Kay and Jost 2003).

Future research should also examine whether the effects found in this research generalize to other types of crime and threat, as well as whether they hold true when the gender of the victim is specified. In addition, our research utilized an undergraduate sample. To examine the generalizability of our findings, future research should employ a non-student sample. The fact that we found similar results when employing a correlational design that used a general measure of fear of crime in Study 1, and when employing an experimental design that used a crime salience manipulation in Study 2 suggests that the effects found are robust. However, future research should explore whether the effects of fear of crime are different for those who have actually been a victim of crime in the past. Moreover, a more diverse sample would be useful for reexamining our hypothesis regarding racial differences in fear of crime and self-esteem. Because race was not evenly distributed, we had to collapse Blacks and Latinos into one racial category, which may have obscured the predicted greater fear of crime and self-esteem of Black participants (as compared to White participants).

While stories of the damsel in distress are rarely taken at face value, we are continually bombarded by news stories, tv shows, and books that sensationalize violent crime. The present research suggests that to the extent that this exposure increases the salience of crime, it may have unintended consequences for gender relations and well-being. While the damage to well-being may be obvious, fear of crime's impact on gender relations is more subtle and therefore potentially more dangerous. Under the guise of nobly protecting women from harm, benevolent sexism relegates women to a subordinate role and therefore reinforces male dominance.

Appendix

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements or engage in the following behaviors on a scale from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always) scale.

1. Before I go to bed at night I double check to make sure the doors are securely locked.
2. When someone rings/knocks at my door I ask who it is (or look through the peephole) before I open the door.
3. I think twice before going out for a walk late at night.
4. If I have to take the subway/bus alone at night I feel anxious.
5. I avoid going out alone at night.
6. I ask friends to walk me to my car / the subway if it is late at night.
7. I think about the shoes / clothes I am wearing in terms of my ability to run in a dangerous situation.
8. In general, I feel safe at night (reverse-coded).
9. When I am walking alone I think about where I would run if someone came after me.
10. I have turned down invitations / opportunities because I didn't want to risk coming home alone afterwards.
11. I feel confident walking alone late at night (reverse-coded).
12. I am especially careful of wearing the 'proper' clothes.
13. If I was waiting for an elevator and it arrived with one man alone inside, I would wait for the next one.
14. I am afraid of being assaulted physically.
15. I feel safe walking to my car alone if it was parked in an underground parking lot (reverse-coded)
16. The possibility of physical assault affects my freedom of movement.
17. If I have to walk outside late at night I take precautions.
18. If it was dark and I had to walk to my car, I would make sure I was accompanied by someone I trusted.
19. If I was driving alone and I had to park my car, I would try to park on a well lit street.
20. I feel safe going into public washrooms in subways or malls (reverse-coded)
21. I feel safe in my apartment / house when I am home by myself (reverse-coded)
22. I carry objects (keys, knife, something sharp) when I walk alone at night.
23. When I'm walking out alone at night I am very cautious.
24. If I heard that someone had been assaulted in my neighborhood, I wouldn't leave the house unless I really had to.
25. When I am choosing a seat on the bus or subway I am conscious of who is sitting nearby.

26. I feel very safe being out alone in my neighborhood at night (reverse-coded).
27. If I am going out late at night, I avoid certain parts of town.
28. When I get on the bus / streetcar / subway I take a seat that allows me to keep an eye on those sitting nearby.

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