

BRIEF REPORT

Communal Stereotypes Prime Men's Benevolent Sexism: Implications for Romance and Family

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Previous work suggests that men holding benevolent sexist views also hold favorable attitudes toward traditional women (Glick, Diebold, Bailey-Werner, & Zhu, 1997). This study examined whether priming heterosexual men ($n = 47$) with traditional views of women (e.g., the stereotype that women are more communally oriented than men) engenders more benevolent sexist views, as well as greater relational motivation. The authors predicted that the communal prime would activate a complementary view of gender relations and increase men's endorsement of benevolent sexism. In turn, activating benevolent sexism would increase men's desire to appeal to women, as evidenced by greater investment in romance and family. Results of a preliminary study suggested that men's benevolent sexism was associated with greater relationship motivation and greater investment in romantic ideals and family. Results from the priming experiment confirmed the authors' hypotheses: The communal prime led men to invest in romance and family, and the effect of the prime was mediated by benevolent sexism.

Keywords: benevolent sexism, communal, romantic relationship, gender stereotype

One of the most consistent gender stereotypes is that women are more communal than men. Men are believed to be more agentic (assertive and dominant), whereas women are believed to be more communal (warm and caring; Diekmann & Eagly, 2000; Prentice & Carranza, 2002). Across 30 countries, women were consistently rated as more communal and men as more agentic (Williams & Best, 1990). The present study aims to add to the literature by investigating how stereotypes about women affect men's attitudes toward women and romantic relationships.

We propose that priming the communal stereotype of women will increase men's desire to be with women because communal stereotypes trigger benevolently sexist beliefs. We predict that the desire to appeal to women will result in greater relational orientation (i.e., greater in-

vestment in romance and family as well as relationship motivation). This model was derived from work suggesting that communal stereotypes prime endorsement of complementary gender relations (Jost & Kay, 2005) and that benevolent sexism (BS) engenders paternalistic behaviors (Viki, Abrams, & Hutchison, 2003).

Communal Stereotypes Prime BS

System justification theory states that stereotypes endorsed by both advantaged and disadvantaged groups serve to maintain the status quo (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). BS justifies a system of gender inequality by focusing on the positive, complementary nature of gender stereotypes as endorsed by both men (advantaged) and women (disadvantaged; Glick & Fiske, 2001). Cross-cultural research shows that hostile sexism (HS) and BS are positively correlated for both men and women, and nations with higher HS and BS scores demonstrated greater gender inequality (Glick et al., 2000). This pattern supports the notion that BS, with its seemingly positive treatment of women, allows HS to go unchallenged and gender inequality to persist.

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Recent experimental evidence confirmed this system-justifying hypothesis, as participants primed with gender stereotypes increased gender-specific system justification (Jost & Kay, 2005). By priming participants with the stereotype that women are more communal, the authors activated a complementary view of gender relations in which women and men seem to mutually benefit from their gender roles. This positive view of gender role differentiation led men and women to believe in the fairness of the system's status quo, obscuring evidence of continued gender inequality. Thus, BS may seem positive, but in actuality it has severe negative consequences that include maintaining gender inequality (Jost & Kay, 2005; Lau, Kay, & Spencer, 2008); prescribing traditional, restrictive roles for women (Gill, 2004; Hebl, King, Glick, Singletary, & Kazama, 2007); and cognitive performance impairments (Darrenne, Dumont, & Bollier, 2007).

BS Predicts Communal Orientation

A complementary view of gender is central to BS (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Benevolent sexists believe that women have a more refined aesthetic and moral character and that men are not complete without the love of a woman (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001). Therefore, we predict that by priming traditional stereotypes about women, we will likely activate BS in men as a means of benefiting from women's complementary nature through romantic relationships.

Protective paternalism, a dimension of BS, encompasses the view that men depend on women as wives, mothers, and romantic partners and therefore must cherish and protect them (Glick & Fiske, 1996). By encouraging men to protect women, this type of paternalism implies that women are weaker and need protection. Thus, we predict that activating men's BS will lead to more family- and relationship-oriented views, because men will want to become the protectors and emotional intimates of communal women.

Moreover, research has shown that BS is also associated with paternalistic chivalry, or traditional views about romantic ideals (Viki et al., 2003). Both men and women who held BS beliefs were more likely to endorse chivalrous attitudes. Furthermore, women high in BS

tended to respond favorably to protective or paternalistic gestures from their male partners (Moya, Glick, Expósito, de Lemus, & Hart, 2007). Chivalry dictates that both men and women commit to their romantic relationships, albeit in traditional ways; therefore, we believe that BS will be related to men's investment in being the ideal man in a romantic relationship.

The Present Research

We first tested the proposed relationships between BS, investment in romantic ideals, investment in family, and relationship motivation. Although past research has shown that BS is associated with paternalistic chivalry (Viki et al., 2003), it is unclear from previous research whether endorsing BS predicts greater relational orientation. We conducted a pretest to explore these relationships, presented as Study 1 to fully describe our measures of relational orientation used in our main study (Study 2). In Study 2, we primed men with the stereotype that women are more communal to test whether investment in romantic ideals and family, as well as relationship motivation, increased as a result of activating BS.

Study 1: Pretest

Method

Participants

Fifty-five undergraduate men (mean age = 18.73) participated in the study as part of an introductory psychology course requirement. Racial composition was as follows: White/European, 47.3%; Asian, 25.5%; Hispanic/Latino, 12.7%; African American, 10.9%; other, 3.6%.

Materials

Investment in romantic ideals. We revised two items measuring investment in gender ideals (Wood, Christensen, Hebl, & Rothgerber, 1997) to measure participants' investment in meeting romantic ideals (e.g., "How important is it for you to be similar to the ideal man in your romantic relationships?"). Participants indicated their agreement on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*a great deal*). The original version of this scale demonstrated high

scale reliability ($\alpha = 0.85$; Wood et al., 1997). The present scale had similarly high reliability ($\alpha = 0.91$) and face validity.

Investment in family. To assess the extent to which men were invested in family, we administered the Family Support subscale of the Contingencies of Self-Worth Scale (Crocker, Luthanen, Cooper, & Bouvrette, 2003). The five items (e.g., “When my family members are proud of me, my sense of self-worth increases”) were rated on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The Contingencies of Self-Worth Scale has shown good test-retest reliability, internal consistency, and discriminant validity (Crocker et al., 2003). The Family Support subscale showed good reliability in Study 1 ($\alpha = 0.75$).

Relationship motivation. We measured relationship motivation with five items revised from the Multidimensional Relationship Questionnaire (MRQ; Snell, Schicke, & Arbeiter, 2002). These items included “I’m strongly motivated to devote time and effort to an intimate relationship.” Participants indicated their response on a 5-point scale ranging from A (*not at all characteristic of me*) to E (*very characteristic of me*). The full version of the MRQ has shown good test-retest reliability, as well as good structural and convergent validity (Büyükşahin, 2005). In Study 1, scale reliability was high, ($\alpha = 0.89$).

BS. We used the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI; Glick & Fiske, 1996) to measure participants’ self-reported BS. An example from the 11-item BS subscale is “Women should be cherished and protected by men.” Responses were indicated on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The ASI has shown good convergent, discriminant, and predictive validity (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Its factor structure has also been validated cross-culturally (Glick et al., 2000). Scale reliability was high, ($\alpha = 0.82$).

Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the zero-order correlations between all study variables. As predicted, BS was positively associated with investment in being the ideal romantic partner, investment in family, and motivation to engage in romantic relationships. Having established that men’s BS was associated with the relational orientation

Table 1
Correlations Among Pretest Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Investment in romantic ideals	—			
2. Investment in family	.35**	—		
3. Relationship motivation	.56**	.23	—	
4. Benevolent sexism	.57**	.30*	.45**	—

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

variables (investment in romantic ideals, investment in family, and relationship motivation), we sought to test the central part of our hypothesis regarding the effect of the communal prime. In Study 2, we primed men with the stereotype that women are more communally oriented than men. We expected men in the prime condition to report greater investment in romance and family, as well as greater motivation to pursue a romantic relationship because BS was activated (see Figure 1).

Study 2: Main Study

Method

Participants

Forty-seven heterosexual men (mean age = 19.32, $SD = 1.92$) participated in the study as part of an introductory psychology course requirement. Racial composition was as follows: White/European, 65.2%; Asian, 26.1%; African American, 2.2%; Hispanic/Latino, 2.2%; other, 4.3%.

Materials and Procedure

Communal stereotype prime. Participants were randomly assigned to either the communal-prime or no-prime condition. In accordance with the communal stereotype priming procedure utilized by Jost and Kay (2005), participants in the prime condition were asked to indicate whether five communal traits (considerate, honest, happy, warm, and moral) applied more to men or to women and to what extent. Participants responded on a 10-point scale ranging from 0 (“Men are more *considerate*”) to 9 (“Women are more *considerate*”), substituting the appropriate trait. Mean ratings in the prime condition were above the scale midpoint of 4, indi-

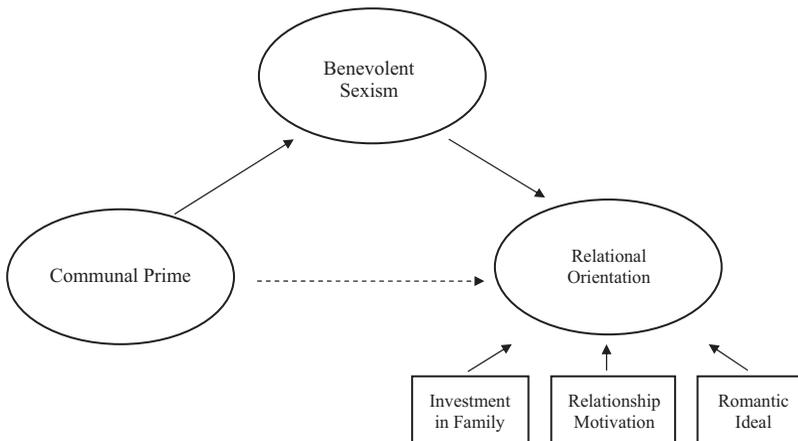


Figure 1. Hypothesized mediation model. Dashed line represents the path benevolent sexism will mediate.

cating that men rated women as more communal than men ($M = 5.14$, $SD = 0.86$).

Relational orientation and BS. After the priming procedure, we measured BS and relational orientation using the same scales from Study 1. In Study 2, we found the measures of investment in romantic ideals ($\alpha = 0.92$), investment in family ($\alpha = 0.83$), relationship motivation ($\alpha = 0.81$), and BS ($\alpha = 0.82$) reliable.

Results and Discussion

Table 2 shows the correlations between variables collapsing across conditions. Investment in romantic ideals, investment in family, and BS were all significantly positively correlated ($ps < .01$). Surprisingly, relationship motivation was not significantly correlated with any of the other variables. Table 3 shows the means and standard deviations for all variables by condition. To examine the effect of the communal prime, we conducted one-way analyses of vari-

ance (ANOVAs) on all dependent variables. Men reported significantly greater investment in romantic ideals, $F(1, 43) = 5.56$, $MS = 16.40$, $p = .02$; greater investment in family, $F(1, 45) = 12.86$, $MS = 12.13$, $p = .001$; more BS, $F(1, 45) = 5.74$, $MS = 5.63$, $p = .02$; and marginally more relationship motivation, $F(1, 45) = 3.02$, $MS = 1.99$, $p = .09$, in the communal-prime condition compared with the no-prime condition. Although the relationship motivation effect was marginally significant, all other effects were consistent with our hypotheses and the effect sizes were medium to large in size (Cohen, 1988; see Table 3).

Mediation Analyses

According to Baron and Kenny (1986), we must follow three steps to test for mediation: (a) regress the mediator on the independent variable, (b) regress the dependent variable on the independent variable, and (c) regress the dependent variable on both the mediator and the independent variable. Using these procedures, we tested our hypothesis that BS would mediate the effect of the communal prime on the indicators of relational orientation. As demonstrated in the aforementioned ANOVAs, the communal stereotype prime significantly increased two of the dependent variables (romantic ideals and investment in family), as well as the mediator (BS); therefore, we need only demonstrate the third step.

Table 2
Correlations Among Study 2 Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Investment in romantic ideals	—			
2. Investment in family	.47**	—		
3. Relationship motivation	.09	.01	—	
4. Benevolent sexism	.51**	.54**	.22	—

** $p < .01$.

Table 3
Means and Standard Deviations by Condition

Variable	Communal prime (<i>n</i> = 21)		Control (<i>n</i> = 26)		Cohen's <i>d</i>	<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Investment in romantic ideals	6.88	1.38	5.66	1.94	0.72	−2.36*
Investment in family	5.87	0.59	4.75	1.23	1.08	−4.04**
Relationship motivation	3.75	0.86	3.34	0.78	0.50	1.74†
Benevolent sexism	4.16	1.05	3.47	0.94	0.69	−2.40*

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

When we regressed investment in romantic ideals on both the communal prime and BS, BS remained a significant predictor, $\beta = 0.45$, $p = .002$; whereas the communal prime became nonsignificant, $\beta = 0.20$, $p = .16$. A Sobel test confirmed the significant mediation effect, $z = 3.21$, $p = .001$. Next, when we regressed investment in family on both the communal prime and BS, BS again remained a significant predictor, $\beta = 0.42$, $p = .001$; and the effect of the communal prime was reduced, $\beta = 0.38$, $p = .003$. A Sobel test confirmed significant mediation, $z = 1.96$, $p = .05$. We therefore concluded that BS fully mediated the effect of the communal prime on investment in romantic ideals and partially mediated the effect on investment in family. Because BS was not correlated with relationship motivation in Study 2, we did not conduct mediation tests on this variable.

General Discussion

The present study tested the effect of priming the communal stereotype on men's investment in romance and family, as well as endorsement of BS. We predicted that the communal prime would activate a complementary view of gender relations (Jost & Kay, 2005) such that men would indicate greater endorsement of BS. Our findings were consistent with this perspective. Moreover, in response to stereotypes that favor women's relational abilities, men did not respond in ways consistent with stereotype threat effects such as disengaging from the relational domain (Koenig & Eagly, 2005). Men actually showed the opposite pattern—increased relational striving in response to communal stereotypes. We believe that there is an interesting

explanation. Romantic relationships present an opportunity to indirectly benefit from women's perceived superiority in the communal domain. Because BS posits that men are incomplete without women, aligning with women in a romantic relationship may allow men to "acquire" the communal qualities they lack themselves. Indeed, we found that the communal prime increased BS in men, which was associated with greater relational orientation.

We do not purport that this increased relational striving in men is necessarily positive. Indeed, desiring to enter a heterosexual relationship to achieve complementarity with women may serve to reinforce the status quo and maintain gender inequality (Jost & Kay, 2005). For example, men primed with the communal stereotype may only be relationally interested in communal or traditional women. This may explain why relationship motivation was unrelated to communal priming in Study 2. Men may not be generally motivated to be with women after communal priming but rather specifically motivated to be with communal women. Indeed, when under system threat, men showed greater interest in women embodying BS ideals (Lau, Kay, & Spencer, 2008). Future research should explore the system maintaining effects of threat-induced preference for communal women as relationship partners.

Although men report increased relational orientation after the communal stereotype prime, we do not know the effect of the prime on men's behavior toward women. Does the communal prime lead men to engage in egalitarian, respectful behavior toward women or, as we suspect, lead men to cherish, protect, and restrict women to traditional communal roles? Perhaps men who hold more BS beliefs before the prime are motivated to embody a

traditional male role as provider/protector, whereas men with lower levels of BS may strive to be a nonsexist/egalitarian romantic partner. Future research should explore the content of men's romantic ideals and include the effect of the communal stereotype prime on men's treatment of women.

Our study is limited in that we used an undergraduate sample, the romantic ideal measure contained only two items, and our sample size was small. Generally, one must be cautious in interpreting effects found with small samples; however, the magnitude of the effect sizes obtained indicate that our priming manipulation did have an effect on the dependent variables. Moreover, this research is important because it is contrary to stereotype threat predictions (Koenig & Eagly, 2005) and suggests that romantic relationships represent an important indirect route through which men may perceive themselves to benefit from women's communal aptitude.

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