

A Review on the Impact of Stereotype

Xiaoyu Dong^{1,a,*}

¹*The College of Arts and Sciences, Syracuse University, Syracuse, 13210, The United States*
a. xdong27@syr.edu

**corresponding author*

Abstract: Stereotype of women is that they are weak, caring and emotional in people's society. It leads to prejudice or discrimination against women, such as sexism (benevolent sexism). But other studies have suggested that stereotypes about women are not entirely negative. This article explores how stereotypes about women affect women and whether they are harmful. In the first part of the literature review, it will first summarize the impact of stereotypes on the workplace. As times change, stereotypes about women's employment are much more positive than they used to be. However, most people still have more negative thoughts about women's employment attitudes, especially female leaders. In the second part, this paper will demonstrate the influence of stereotypes on mate preference. While some research contends that benevolent sexism can have a favorable influence on women's social status, others highlight that benevolent sexism actually has a more detrimental effect on women. Women tend to prefer males who exhibit benevolent sexism, despite being aware of the possible risks associated with such attitudes.

Keywords: Stereotypes of women, Benevolent sexism, Leadership, Mate preference, Relationship

1. Introduction

Stereotypes are ubiquitous in people's lives, such as gender, race, age, and so on. Prejudice and discrimination brought about by stereotypes can affect people's attitudes, moral judgments and performance [1]. Many researchers have done a lot of research on gender stereotypes. Stereotypes about women also have an impact on women in the workplace. There are other studies that prove gender stereotypes have more negative effects on women's behaviors in the workplace. Stereotypes about women often create benevolent sexism [1]. It seems to benefit women more when it comes to choosing a mate. Women tend to choose benevolent sexist men as romantic candidates. However, it has hidden dangers.

2. Theoretical Frameworks

In previous studies, stereotypes have been provided that have a significant impact on people's performance. When people are conscious of the unfavorable stereotypes connected to their social group, they may experience anxiety and fear of confirming those stereotypes, which can lead to underperformance [2].

It also influenced women. In the workplace, stereotypes about women being less competent or less capable than men can lead to biased evaluations and limited opportunities for advancement [3]. Women may face social pressure to conform to gender standards and meet certain expectations, which can restrict their behavior and limit their ability to assert themselves or take on leadership roles. This can result in women being less likely to speak up, negotiate for higher salaries, or pursue challenging assignments. In academic settings, stereotypes can also affect women's performance. There has been some research suggesting that women may experience stereotype threat when they realize that their abilities in certain subjects, such as math or science, are subject to negative stereotypes [2].

This is the fear of confirming the stereotype, which can lead to increased anxiety and decreased performance. Women may also internalize these stereotypes and underestimate their own abilities, leading to lower confidence and motivation [3].

However, some studies show stereotypes have some advantages for women. According to Helena et al's study, socially dominant women who believe that women's lower status in society is justified and that they have a greater need to protect themselves from men, which predict that they support benevolent sexism [4].

3. Stereotypes in Workplace

In Rodler et al's research, it investigates changes in gender stereotypes of leaders over the years [5]. It suggests that gender stereotypes of leaders have changed over time. In the 1970s and 1980s, women leaders were described as neither task-oriented nor person-oriented, while male leaders were consistently described as task-oriented. However, in the 1990s, women leaders' attributes became more work-related and there was a shift towards a more person-oriented style for male leaders. The study also found that the perception of success in obituaries for female leaders increased over time, indicating a convergence of gender images. The traditional views of leadership stereotypes have started to change, probably as a result of the rise in women leaders and the removal of obstacles based on gender.

The study uses German language newspapers between 1974 and 1998 published to examine the content of obituaries of women and men leaders. The analysis categorizes the terms used to describe former leaders in obituaries and investigates the frequency of descriptions in terms of leadership success, stability of traits, and task-orientation versus person-orientation. The result shows the content of gender images in obituaries differed each year, indicating changes in stereotypes over time. Male leaders were consistently described using success-related attributes, while female leaders' attributes varied over the years. Female leaders who adopted stereotypical masculine styles faced role conflicts and received more negative evaluations compared to men. Descriptions of male leaders more often referred to stability, while descriptions of female leaders focused on effort and social qualities. There was an increase in the percentages of words related to person-orientation for male leaders over the years.

The limitation of this study is that this research can not fully represent the broader societal perceptions of leaders. It focuses on obituaries from 1974 to 1998, which may not capture more recent changes in gender stereotypes of leaders.

In Basfirinci et al's research, it investigates the implicit gender stereotypes in the workplace among Turkish university students. [6]. Certain occupations were perceived as more masculine or feminine based on their job titles, and this perception was consistent across different groups of students. For instance, most participants thought nurses were feminine. The research supports both circumscription and compromise theory and social role theory, which suggest that societal expectations and stereotypes influence individuals' perceptions of gender and occupations.

The study used a sample of 954 students from Turkish university and explored which jobs were implicitly perceived as masculine or feminine. The researchers conducted additional tests to examine

the impact of respondents' gender, upbringing location ((metropolitan or rural), and level of knowledge about the occupation (job title or job description) on these stereotypes. Then, the research also used a hypothetical scenario method to assess gender stereotypes, which allowed for the revelation of implicit information processing. Among Turkish university students, both studies showed that job titles convey gender stereotypes strongly.

The study also has limitations. The study relied on a homogeneous university student population, which limits the generalizability of the findings. The study also presumed that university students possess comprehensive knowledge of the professions associated with their respective academic departments, which may not always be the case. It did not collect information about the respondents' knowledge level regarding the jobs, which could have influenced their gender evaluations.

In Baldner and Pierro's research, it discusses the challenges faced by women leaders in the workplace and the potential impact of cognitive closure on the acceptance of negative gender stereotypes [7]. The stereotypes of women and leaders are not consistent, the former are warm and communal and the latter are assertive and competent. These differences create a mismatch that leads people to keep negative attitudes towards women leaders. However, not each person is sensitive to these stereotypes in the same way. People who need cognitive closure or desire stability and specific information are more sensitive to these stereotypes. The research hypothesizes that negative attitudes towards women leaders change with personal need for closure without impacts of their gender. This association can be mediated by binding moral foundations. The research uses two studies to test their hypothesis.

Rodler et al's study examines the associations between the need for cognitive closure and negative attitudes towards women leaders. The participants were 149 workers from Amazon Mechanical Turk. Participants completed a 30-item Moral Foundations questionnaire, a single question, and a 21-item Women as Managers Scale. The results indicated that attitudes toward female leaders became more negative as the need for cognitive closure increased. The association was unaffected by gender and instead influenced by individuals' endorsement of the binding moral foundations.

Basfirinci et al's study found a positive correlation between persons with a greater demand for cognitive closure and their tendency to support harmful gender stereotypes and hold unfavorable views towards women in leadership positions inside the workforce. The participants in Study 2 were 207 employees from the same company as in study 1. Most of the participants were women (121, 58.5%). These participants completed the same revised scale which was used in study 1. This relationship was mediated by individuals' perceptions of threat and their endorsement of traditional gender roles. It also revealed that women leaders who displayed agentic traits were perceived as competent but less likable compared to women leaders who displayed communal traits.

However, this research has some limitations. The limitations of this research include the use of a sample that may not be representative of the general population, as well as the reliance on self-report measures which may be subject to biases. This means that the findings may not be applicable to a broader population and may not accurately reflect individuals' true attitudes and beliefs. Additionally, the study focused solely on attitudes towards women leaders in the workforce and did not explore other factors that may influence these attitudes, such as organizational culture or individual experiences.

Rodler et al's research proves gender stereotypes of women in leadership occupations have changed. However, female leaders are still perceived to be more focused on social quality and effort than stability [5]. Female leaders also receive more negative reviews. Basfirinci et al's research claims stereotypes affect students' impressions of most occupations are male, not female [6]. Baldner and Pierro's research demonstrates that Women are passionate and gregarious, while leaders are confident and capable [7]. This stereotype creates a mismatch that leads to negative attitudes towards female leaders. Overall, these three research depict how gender stereotypes affect how people evaluate

different occupations [5-7]. Most occupations are considered more suitable for men. Female workers, especially female leaders, are expected less and judged more negatively because they do not match stereotypes.

4. Stereotypes in Mating Preference

In Gul and Kupfer's research, it explores why women prefer men who keep benevolent sexism attitudes and behaviors despite recognizing their potential to be undermined [8]. It finds women tend to choose men with benevolent sexism (BS) attitudes and behaviors because they perceive them as more attractive and as willing to invest in the relationship. The studies confirmed the idea that women are more drawn to BS men, despite being aware of their tendency to be patronizing and potentially detrimental. It also showed that the attractiveness of BS men was primarily driven by cues of willingness to invest, such as protection, provision, and commitment. Despite being aware of the harmful consequences, women still tend to choose BS men.

The research method used in study 1a and 1b of the article involved a between-subjects design. Study 1a assigned randomly 233 female student participants to one of four experimental conditions. It's a 2 (attitude type: BS vs. non-BS) \times 2 (relationship type: romantic partner vs. work colleague) design. In study 1b, 178 female students were randomly assigned. Its research is exactly the same as 1a's design. Participants were asked to rate their interest in the relationship. The rating includes asking the target how interested the target is in having a relationship with a woman and with the right person in a relationship. The results are shown by seven scales. Participants in experiment 1b May have included non-heterosexual people. Both studies excluded participants who self-identified as non-heterosexual or who did not pass the attention check items. Research participants rated the target on a variety of characteristics using 7-point measures, and profiles of men characterized as having BS or non-BS attitudes toward women were utilized. In study 1b, in order to ensure that the reasons for non-BS men have lower attractiveness ratings were not because of negative-sounding attitudes or perception that he was not interested in a relationship, the profiles were adjusted.

In study 2a, the sample consisted of 114 heterosexual women who were randomly assigned through Prolific Academic. The design included a 2 (attitude type: BS vs. non-BS) \times 2 (relationship type: romantic vs. professional) factor. The profiles of men described as holding either BS or non-BS attitudes toward women were presented to the participants (potential romantic partner: John vs. Robert). Next, they evaluated the target based on a number of characteristics by 7-point scales. In study 2b, the sample consisted of 104 female students. It is exactly the same as 1a's design, except that romantic relationship type was only one condition. The profiles were adjusted as study 1b. The types of participants excluded were the same as those excluded in study 1a and 1b. Participants in both studies rated the target men on various characteristics using 7-point scales.

In study 3, the sample consisted of 153 female student participants. Participants imagined they were not in a relationship and viewed profiles of two men with and without BS. The profiles are the same as in study 1a, but both emphasize that both people desire to meet the right person with having a serious relationship. Then, they rated the men as the same by using 7-point scales. This study also excluded the same type of participants who were excluded in previous study 1 and study 2.

There are some limitations in this research. The study did not investigate the reasons that women think men with benevolent sexism are more possibly to be arrogant and destructive to women. Future research could investigate if women believe that men with BS don't hold egalitarian views or if they believe that men with BS are inadvertently undermining while acting with good intentions. It also did not provide the evidence relevant to hostile sexism (HS) directly, so it is uncertain whether women's assessment of BS men as condescending and undermining is influenced by their belief that these men also hold HS attitudes. Future research also can examine the link between BS and HS attitudes and how they influence women's perceptions.

In Dardenne, Dumont and Bollier's research, it discusses the insidious dangers of benevolent sexism and how it affects women's performance [9]. The research findings indicate that benevolent sexism brings a negative influence on performance of women. The four experiments conducted in this study consistently showed that women's cognitive performance was decreased by benevolent sexism. Benevolent sexism had a worse impact on women's performance compared to hostile sexism. The negative impact caused by benevolent sexism was completely mitigated by the mental intrusions women encountered regarding their perception of competence.

In order to determine how benevolent and hostile sexism affected women's performance, the study conducted four experiments. In experiment 1, the participants are unemployed low-educated women. These participants were assigned a task associated with stereotypes that did not match the qualities required for the job on offer. The results showed that women's performance decreased only when benevolent sexism appeared. This suggested that benevolent sexism created self-doubt and decreased self-esteem, leading to impaired performance. In Experiment 2, the female university students participated in this experiment. The participants were role-played instead of received written instructions conveying either benevolent sexism with help, benevolent sexism without help, or no sexism. The results indicated that Both benevolent and hostile sexism are considered unpleasant situations, but benevolent sexism generated more disturbing mental intrusions. Women's performance was not affected by hostile sexism. In Experiment 3, Female university students participated in this experiment. The participants were instructed to imagine themselves as if they had been extended an invitation to a chemical factory for a job interview. This experiment used written instructions to express one of the three attitudes. The task used in this experiment was different from the previous ones. The findings indicated that the expression of benevolence alone through complementing gender distinction was enough to reduce the performance of women. In Experiment 4, the low-educated women participated in this experiment. The participants were given a task similar to Experiment 1. The results replicated the findings from the previous experiments, demonstrating that benevolent sexism had a deleterious impact on women's performance. Overall, the findings consistently showed that benevolent sexism brought a negative impact on women's performance, which causes self-doubt and decreased self-esteem for women. According to this study, there was no direct correlation between hostile sexism and women's performance.

The research suggests several areas for future research. More research is needed to explore the full range of influences of benevolent sexism on women's behavior and its impact on intergroup relationships. This could involve examining different contexts and criteria to understand how benevolent sexism affects women's performance in various situations. It also suggests the research needs to pay attention to understanding the role of anxiety and arousal in benevolent sexism. Benevolent sexism can induce anxiety and doubts about performance abilities in women. Future research could delve deeper into the mechanisms through which benevolent sexism affects women's performance, such as exploring the role of anxiety and arousal in the deleterious effects of benevolent sexism.

In Cross and Overall's research, the results suggest that benevolent sexism is more attractive to women with a higher attachment anxiety level and a stronger need for relationship security [10]. These women rated men who agreed with benevolent sexism as relatively more attractive and were more likely to choose ideal partners with benevolent sexist attitudes. The study also discovered that women with high levels of anxiety viewed males who were described as egalitarians to be less appealing, and they also found men who displayed sexism to be considerably more attractive. Women with attachment anxiety may be more vulnerable to the negative consequences of benevolent sexism and less resistant against hostile types of sexism.

This research collects data from three different samples: a Mechanical Turk (MTurk) sample and two university samples. The MTurk sample consisted of 204 heterosexual single women, while the

university samples included 189 heterosexual single women and 239 women who reported as heterosexual and in romantic relationships.

The limitation of this research is the measure method. It relies on self-reported measures, which can be easily influenced by the effects of bias and social expectations. The study also only investigates women's attraction to men with benevolent sexism. It did not explore other factors that may influence women's attraction or consider men's perspectives on benevolent sexism.

In Gul and Kupfer's research, it investigates that women are more likely to prefer long-term relationships with benevolent sexist men, even if they understand that benevolent sexism may limit their potential [8]. Dardenne, Dumont and Bollier's research demonstrates that benevolent sexism negatively affects women's performance, even more so than hostile sexism [9]. Cross and Overall's research provides more information to support Gul and Kupfer's research [8,10]. The research concludes that even when women know that benevolent sexism can be potentially dangerous, they are more likely to choose men with benevolent sexism because of security and anxiety [8-10].

5. Conclusion

The stereotype of women has a great influence on women in both work and mate selection. They affect women's potential, performance and attitudes towards themselves. Women tend to receive more negative perceptions in the workplace, especially female leaders, because they tend not to conform to stereotypes. Although benevolent sexism can bring some benefits to women, it is potentially more harmful. Women still tend to choose men with benevolent sexism to enter into a new relationship. Based on the present research, one can understand that stereotypes have more negative effects on women. But these studies are not comprehensive. In the future, researchers could continue to explore how stereotypes affect women in other ways.

References

- [1] Gilovich, T., Keltner, D., Chen, S., & Nisbett, R. (2023). *Social Psychology, Chapter 10. 6th Edition.*
- [2] Seibt, B., & Förster, J. (2004). *Stereotype Threat and Performance: How Self-Stereotypes Influence Processing by Inducing Regulatory Foci. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 87(1), 38–56.*
- [3] Margolis, F. R. (1987). *Women And Achievement: The Role Of Sex Stereotypes In Theory, Reality, And Psychic Structure (Doctoral Dissertation, City University Of New York).*
- [4] Helena R. M. Radke, Matthew J. Hornsey, Chris G. Sibley & Fiona Kate Barlow (2018) *Negotiating the hierarchy: Social dominance orientation among women is associated with the endorsement of benevolent sexism, Australian Journal of Psychology, 70:2, 158-166.*
- [5] Rodler, C., Kirchler, E. & Hölzl, E. (2001). *Gender Stereotypes of Leaders: An Analysis of the Contents of Obituaries from 1974 to 1998. Sex Roles 45, 827–843.*
- [6] Basfirinci, C., Cilingir Uk, Z., Karaoglu, S., & Onbas, K. (2019). *Implicit occupational gender stereotypes: a research among Turkish university students. Gender in Management: An International Journal, 34(2), 157-184.*
- [7] Baldner, C., & Pierro, A. (2019). *The trials of women leaders in the workforce: How a need for cognitive closure can influence acceptance of harmful gender stereotypes. Sex Roles: A Journal of Research, 80(9–10), 565–577.*
- [8] Gul, P., & Kupfer, T. R. (2019). *Benevolent Sexism and Mate Preferences: Why Do Women Prefer Benevolent Men Despite Recognizing That They Can Be Undermining? Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 45(1), 146-161.*
- [9] Dardenne, B., Dumont, M., & Bollier, T. (2007). *Insidious dangers of benevolent sexism: consequences for women's performance. Journal of personality and social psychology, 93(5), 764.*
- [10] Cross, E. J., & Overall, N. C. (2018). *Women's attraction to benevolent sexism: Needing relationship security predicts greater attraction to men who endorse benevolent sexism. European Journal of Social Psychology, 48(3), 336–347.*