Ambivalent sexism in Romanian students: Examining gender, sex roles and social dominance

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Abstract: The prejudice against women is an important topic in Romania and the study of it comes as a normal concern to psychologists. We chose to differentiate between hostile and benevolent sexism, thus using the Ambivalent Sexism Theory. We were interested in the differences in the level of ambivalent sexism based on variables like gender, sex roles (masculine, feminine, androgynous and undifferentiated) and social dominance. Our sample consisted in 222 participants from the student population. From them, 102 were males and 120 were females. We predicted that males would be more hostile and women more benevolent in their attitudes. Socially dominant individuals would be more sexist (both hostile and benevolent). Finally, masculine individuals would show the highest level of hostile sexism, while feminine and androgynous one the highest level of benevolent sexism. Results supported some hypothesis and rejected the others. Our suppositions about the gender differences were correct. We found no variation in regards to social dominance. The androgynous individuals were more benevolent compared with masculine, feminine and undifferentiated individuals. There were no interaction effects between the independent variable. We discussed possible causes and effects of our results.

Keywords: ambivalent sexism, social dominance, sex roles, gender.

Introduction

In Romania, the subject of sexism directed toward women is studied rather seldom in the psychology domain. We can find just a few psychological researches on this subject that were conducted on Romanian population. Such as the research conducted in 2001 by Mihaela Boza, the one conducted by Napier, Thorisdottir and Jost (2010) or the one developed by Secui and Danciu (2011). This can be proved too by the low number of psychology research papers on the subject published in Romanian journals. From the three examples given previously, just one research paper was published in a Romanian Journal, that

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being the "Sexism and self-esteem in adolescence" one (Boza, 2001). Even if sexist attitudes toward women are not as present today as they were in the past, there is still a lot to improve.

Therefore, psychological research around the subject can have an important impact in the way men and women interact and can help them understand better the role that sexism has in the inter-gender relationship. In addition, a better understanding of the phenomena might help reduce the destructive effects sexism has on women, such as psychological distress (DeBlaere et al., 2014; Stevens-Watkins, Perry, Pullen, Jewell & Oser, 2014) or violence against them (Flood, 2015; Koepke, Eyssel & Bohner, 2014).

Traditionally, sexism has been seen as a negative stereotype of women, but the research of Peter Glick and Susan Fiske (1996) showed that in sexism two sides can be found – the hostile one, and the benevolent one. The benevolent sexism (BS) and the hostile sexism (HS) are the components of the ambivalent sexism. The BS is defined as a set of attitudes toward women that are sexist in terms of stereotype and gender roles but have a positive undertone and the HS is seen as the ambivalent sexism's component that matches the prejudice definition given by Allport (1954 as cited by Glick & Fiske, 1997). Studies have found a positive correlation between BS and HS suggesting that if a person has a high score on BS scale is most probable that will also have a high score on the HS scale (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Glick & Fiske, 1997; Glick, et al., 2000). These findings contradict the popular belief that there is no link between hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. Therefore, women assume that men have higher scores on the hostile sexism scale and men think that women rate higher on the benevolent sexism scale. One possible explanation for this is that many people believe that benevolent sexism ideologies are pro-women. These perceived differences appear because both genders believe that the other has attitudes that give advantages for it (Rudman & Fetterolf, 2014).

According to the ambivalent sexism theory, ambivalent sexism has three main sources: paternalism, gender differences, and heterosexuality (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Societal level paternalism and gender differences perpetuate the men's dominance over the traditional sex roles, while the heterosexuality and procreation force men on being dependent on women (Glick, et al., 2000).

### *Ambivalent sexism and gender differences*

The link between ambivalent sexism and gender seem to be an important one. Men tend to have higher scores than women on the ambivalent sexism scale. In regard of the subscales, it was revealed that men have a greater level of hostile sexism than women (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Hammond, Milojev, Huang & Sibley, 2017).

HS is the most obvious form of sexism, yet BS has the same effects but it is masked by a "sugar-coated" layer, meaning that is more susceptible to be

accepted by women, especially in cultures that have high rates of physical and psychological abuse on women (Glick & Fiske, 2001). Ambivalent sexism attitudes can have an important role in the process of choosing a romantic partner. The hostile sexism is a better predictor for men's romantic choices, while benevolent sexism is better in predicting partner choices for women (Lee, Fiske, Glick, & Chen, 2010). Researchers that focused on ambivalent sexism and gender had found that women with a high level of BS prefer men that are wealthier and men with a high level of HS prefer partners that are more attractive (Forbes, Collinsworth, Jobe, Braun, & Wise, 2007; Lee, Fiske, Glick, & Chen, 2010; Sibley & Overall, 2011). Results like these are important, because they show why women from Eastern Europe were more prone to use cosmetics to enhance their attractiveness and chances to find a wealthier partner (Forbes, Doroszewicz, Card, & Adams-Curtis, 2004). In addition, women that endorse a high level of benevolent sexism believe that men feel threatened by women's success and as a result, they will become aggressive. Therefore, women with a high level of BS will tend to renounce quicker at their professional aspirations (Exposito, Herrera, Moya, & Glick, 2010).

Sex Roles

One of the most important theoretical frameworks for discussing sex roles was developed by Sandra Bem. In Bem's vision, there are two different axes, one for femininity and one for masculinity, as can be seen in Figure 1. When a person has a high number of characteristics from both axes, she or he is androgynous. Also, a person can have a low number of masculinity, and femininity characteristics, in which case he or she will be assessed in the undifferentiated category (Bem & Lewis, 1975).
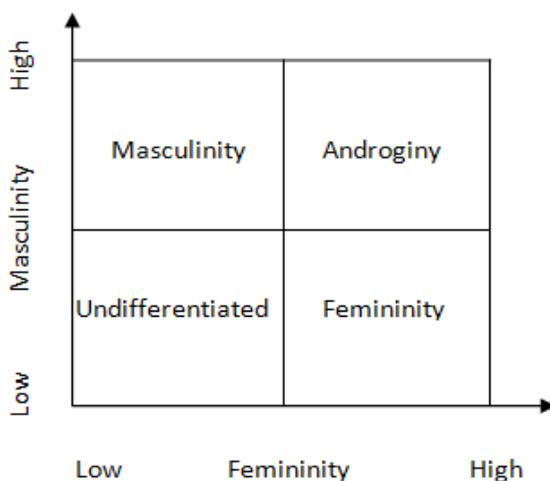
Figure 1. Sex roles classification (Bem & Lewis, 1975)

Persons with a higher level of masculinity might believe that women have a lower human potential than men and that vulnerability, feelings, and emotion are specific for women and must be avoided. They might consider masculinity as more valued form of gender identity. Persons that endorse this kind of stereotypes might have a higher level of hostile sexism because they would believe that women are somehow inferior and the characteristics that are more feminine aren't to be desired (O'Neil, 1981). The efficiency of leaders seems to be the highest when they have high numbers of masculine and feminine characteristics (Kark, Waismel-Manor, & Shamir, 2012). A study that focused on the perception of the leaders shown that persons with a high level of femininity perceived female leaders to be more efficient if they showed greater sensitivity, a feminine characteristic. Those who had a high level of masculinity did not perceive the leaders, male or female, to be more efficient if they showed a greater sensibility. Still, both those with a high level of masculinity and those with a high level of femininity perceived leaders as more efficient when they showed strength, a masculine characteristic (Johnson & Murphy, 2008).

In regards to their sexist attitudes, individuals with a masculine sex role can show a higher hostile sexism than individuals that are in the feminine, androgynous or undifferentiated category. Persons that are categorized as feminine or androgynous can have a higher level of benevolent sexism than those that are masculine or undifferentiated (Ogunleye, 2012). Also, masculine men and feminine women tend to have higher sexism scores, while the feminine men and masculine women tend to have the lower sexism scores (Faulkender, 1985). The same study showed that androgynous participants do not have the lowest sexism scores.

Social Dominance

Social dominance is both the extent to which a person wants his or her group to be the dominant one in the society and to rule over the others and the attitudinal orientation toward inter-group relationships that shows if a person prefers these to be on an equal level or hierarchic (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworh, & Malle, 1994). The theory created by Pratto et al. (1994) postulates that, on the one hand, a person with a high score on the social dominance scale will tend to endorse policy and ideologies that promote a greater gap between hierarchical levels. On the other hand, a person with low social dominance will be rather inclined to endorse the ideologies and policy that promote equality. Social dominance correlates negatively with the acceptance of welfare programs, racial equality policy, and women rights (Pratto et al., 1994).

It was shown that social dominance is positively associated with hostile sexism and negatively associated with positive attitudes toward feminist movement and women's rights (Rosenthal, Levy, & Militano, 2014). This result might be expected because persons that endorse social dominance believe in the

keeping of the social hierarchies and the prevention of social resources redistribution. Therefore, when another group will try to redistribute social resources, those with a high social dominance level will react in a negative way (Christopher & Mull, 2006). Another explanation might be that men will show higher levels of hostile sexism when they engage in intergroup competitions. Competitively determines men to want the ruling position and together with social dominance, this makes them think that world is a competitive place (Sibley, Willson, & Duckitt, 2007). Hostile sexism mediates the link between social dominance and hiring women especially on the jobs that are considered specific masculine. Individuals who have a high level of hostile sexism tend to believe that women seek power over men and by they can justify their skepticism over hiring a woman in a given position (Christopher & Wojda, 2008).

The effect of the social dominance on ambivalent sexism can be mediated by empathy and alienation. This means that the dominance can create a feeling of separation that in turn leads to the conviction that some people are intrinsically superior to others (Adelheid & Rounding, 2013).

Navarrete, McDonald, Molina and Sidanius (2010) argue that males' social dominance has developed as an adaptative mechanism to women's preference for wealthier men. At the same time, women's preference for men with more resources developed from gender differences and because females had limited access to resources. For men, wanting and having an attractive female partner can be a strong indicator he has a high level of social dominance. Therefore, it starts a vicious circle where men are evaluating in a positive manner qualities that have nothing to do with women's abilities and skills. For example, men may evaluate favorable beauty in detriment of certain skills that could help women grow professionally. This leads to a diminished access to resources for women – a fact that will determine them to want partners that are capable of bringing those resources (Sibley & Overall, 2011).

The present study

The amount of Romanian research on the problem of sexism is limited. Scientists are aware of the existence of the sexist attitudes, but we do not know the exact mechanism that lead to sexism. Previous results have shown that men are more sexist than women are, but in our study, we use both the hostile definition of sexism and the benevolent one. Firstly, we want to know if there are differences in the levels of hostile and benevolent sexism of men and women. We expect men to have greater scores for hostile sexism and women to have greater scores for benevolent sexism.

Secondly, we are interested to find out if the level of sexism (hostile and benevolent) is different based on the level of social dominance, meaning that individuals with higher social dominance will be more sexist than those with

lower social dominance. Based on the Social Dominance Orientation theory (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994), previous studies have shown that the dominant group, especially males, tend to have more prejudicious views on the lower level group and to denigrate its members. In this case, the prejudicious views would be represented by hostile sexist attitudes. Therefore, we expect individuals with a higher dominance to have higher scores at both the hostile sexism subscale and the benevolent sexism subscale when compared with individuals with lower dominance.

Thirdly, individuals with a more pronounced masculinity have demonstrated traces of a higher level of sexism, negative attitudes towards equality and even support towards sexual harassment (Jacobs, 1996, Sinn, 1997, as cited in Russell & Trigg, 2004). We want to verify if there are differences in the level of sexism of the masculine, feminine, androgynous and undifferentiated persons. We expect masculine persons to have the highest level of hostile sexism. Also, we expect feminine and androgynous persons to have higher levels of benevolent sexism in comparison with the masculine ones. Finally, we tested the interaction effect of gender, social dominance and sex roles on the level of sexism.

Method

Participants

223 participants with ages between 18 and 30 years old took part in the study. All of them were students recruited from the campus of "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iaşi, Romania and their participation was voluntary. From them, 120 were females and 103 were males. The mean age for the females was 21.65 years (SD = 1,79) and the mean age for males was 21.97 (SD = 2,24). We eliminated one male subject before the analysis because he did not fill in two of the instruments.

Measures

Singapore Androgyny Inventory was used to assess the participants' sex role. Colleen Ward (2000) developed it and it is a modified version of the Bem's Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1975). It contains three subscales – Masculinity (M), Femininity (F) and Neutral (N), each of them having 15 items. The Femininity scale have items as such: "does not use harsh language", "kind", "gentle", "easily expresses tender emotions"; the Masculinity Scale has items as such: "willing to take risks", "adventurous", "active", "intelligent"; and the Neutral scale contains items as such "accommodating", "cool-headed", "poised", "humane". Each item can be rated on a seven-point scale ranging from "never or almost never true" to "almost always true", depending on how participants think the item is describing them. Only the items from the M and F scales are used for the assessment of the gender type. The items from the N scale are intercalated so

that the participants could not identify the category of the items, therefore they is not used in the further analysis. For every participant we calculated two scores, one for the M scale and one for the F scale. The results from the two scales form four different combination that represent four gender types: masculine (high M, low F), feminine (low M, high F), androgynous (high M, high F) and undifferentiated (low M, low F). Both feminine and masculine subscales had good Cronbach's Alpha coefficients. For the feminine subscale we obtained an Alpha of 0.867 and for the masculinity subscale the Alpha coefficient was 0.819.

Social Dominance Orientation Scale was developed by Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth and Malle (1994) and it was designed to measure a person's social dominance. The initial scale had 16 items and measured a person's social dominance regarding groups. A latter development used 11 items scale to assessed the inter-individual social dominance. For this study we considered to be more useful to use the 11 items version of the scale. The Social Dominance Orientation Scale consists of items as such "*Some people are just more worthy than others*", "*If people were treated more equally we would have fewer problems in this country*", "*It is not a problem if some people have more of a chance in life than others*". Each item can be rated on a seven-point scale, from 1 – very negative to 7 – very positive. Items 8, 9, 10 and 11 are reverse coded and higher scores indicate higher levels of social dominance. In the current sample, the scale had an internal consistency coefficient of 0.732.

Ambivalent Sexism Inventory was developed by Peter Glick and Susan Fiske (1996) and contains two subscales: Hostile Sexism subscale and Benevolent Sexism subscale. The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory has 22 items that are equally shared between the two subscales. The Hostile Sexism subscale contains items as such "Most women interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist", "Women are too easily offended", "When women lose to men in a fair competition, they typically complain about being discriminated against". In the Benevolent Sexism subscale, we can find items as such "A good woman should be set on a pedestal by her man", "Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess", "Women should be cherished and protected by men". Items 3, 6, 7, 13, 18 and 21 need to be reversed in order to calculate the final scores for the two subscales. Each item can be rated on a six-point scale ranging from 1 – disagree strongly to 6 – agree strongly. On the initial calculation of the internal consistency coefficient the result for the Hostile Sexism subscale was 0.676, therefore we eliminated the 18-th item. The consistency coefficient grew at 0.712 for Hostile Sexism subscale, but the authors of the inventory support the idea that each subscale should have an equal number of items, therefore we proceeded to eliminate 3-rd item from the Benevolent Sexism subscale. After this action, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient grew from 0.705 to 0.737, therefore becoming even stronger.

Procedure

Each participant received the instruments and then they completed them in about 30 minutes. The order of completion was SAI, SDOS and ASI. Researchers informed the participants about their anonymity and that their responses would be used in research purposes only.

Results

Pearson Correlation Coefficients were calculated for hostile and benevolent sexism, masculinity, femininity and social dominance. We did not find any significant correlation between hostile sexism and another variable. Benevolent sexism was positively related to femininity, but the strength of the relationship was low ($r = .297$, $p = .00$). Still, it indicates that high scores at femininity are associated with high scores at benevolent sexism. Femininity was also associated with masculinity ($r = .374$, $p = .00$) and negatively related to social dominance ($r = -.199$), $p = .003$), meaning that persons with high femininity tend to have a low social dominance level. Table 1 displays the correlations coefficients, means and standard deviations for study's variables.

Table 1. Correlations coefficients, means and standard deviations for study's variables

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Hostile sexism	3,91	,81	1				
2. Benevolent sexism	3,96	,80	-,006	1			
3. Masculinity	72,61	11,65	,086	,120	1		
4. Femininity	71,16	13,42	-,099	,297**	,374**	1	
5. Social Dominance	35,11	8,89	,118	-,018	-,053	-,199**	1

** $p < .001$

In order to test out first two assumptions, we have used the Independent Sample T test. Results (Table 2) showed that men's attitudes are more sexist than those of women when we compared the level of hostile sexism ($t = -2.59$, $p = .01$). In the case of benevolent, sexism women tend to have a higher level compared to men ($t = 2.98$, $p = .003$).

Table 2. Independent Sample T-test comparing the level of sexism between female and male participants

	Gender	N	M	SD	SE	t	df.	p
Hostile Sexism	Female	120	3.78	.81	.07	-2.59	220	.010
	Male	102	4.06	.79	.07			
Benevolent Sexism	Female	120	4.11	.79	.07	2.98	220	.003
	Male	102	3.79	.78	.07			

We found no significant differences between participant with low social dominance and those with high social dominance in hostile sexism. The same result appeared in our analysis about benevolent sexism (Table 3).

Table 3. Independent Sample T-test comparing the level of sexism between low social dominance and high social dominance participants

	Social Dominance	N	M	SD	SE	t	$df.$	p
Hostile Sexism	Low	122	3.83	.83	.07	-1.55	220	.122
	High	100	4.01	.79	.07			
Benevolent		122	4.01	.82	.07	.95	220	.339
Sexism	Low							
	High	100	3.91	.78	.07			

For the third assumption, we have used ANOVA One Way. Firstly, we found that there is no difference based on the sex-role in the scores at the hostile sexism scale ($F_{(3,221)} = 1.57$, $p = 0.196$, p>0.05). Still, there are some differences when it comes to benevolent sexism ($F_{(3,121)} = 4.35$, $p = 0.005$). Our results show that androgynous persons are more sexist (in a benevolent way) than masculine and the undifferentiated individuals, but not more than the feminine individuals are. We found no significant differences between masculine, feminine and undifferentiated individuals (Table 4).

Table 4. ANOVA One Way comparing the level of benevolent sexism based on the participants' sex-role

		Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Masculine	Feminine	.36237	.18469	.306
	Androgynous	.19317	.16119	1.000
	Undiferentiated	.07596	.16039	1.000
Feminine	Masculine	-.36237	.18469	.306
	Androgynous	-.16920	.16388	1.000
	Undiferentiated	-.28641	.16309	.483
Androgynous	Masculine	-.19317	.16119	1.000
	Feminine	.16920	.16388	1.000
	Undiferentiated	-.11721	.13590	1.000
Undiferentiated	Masculine	-.07596	.16039	1.000
	Feminine	.28641	.16309	.483
	Androgynous	.11721	.13590	1.000

We were also interested in verifying the interaction effect of gender, social dominance and sex roles on hostile and benevolent sexism. For this, we used ANOVA Two Way. None of the interactions was significant.

Discussions

In this study, we wanted to examine the contribution of the social dominance orientation, sex roles, and gender to the prediction of the sexist attitudes toward women. Although social dominance orientation does not have a significant contribution in the prediction of the sexist attitudes, the gender and the sex roles, to some extent, do.

The assumption that sexist attitudes are different based on social dominance orientation was not confirmed. One possible explanation for this result is given by Pratto et. al (1994). They suggest that a person from a certain group tend to denigrate another group when he/she is in two possible situations. Either he/she wants to obtain a stronger in-group affiliation or feel that his or her group status is threatened. The target population of this study consisted of students, a group that naturally would not feel very threatened by women. Therefore, despite the gender differences, our participants may have not found the need to adhere more strongly to a group and were in no relationship to another threatening group, so their social dominance may have not been activated.

In addition, women are by no mean a minimal out-group. According to the same authors, social dominance orientation can cause prejudice only when a person with a high social dominance level is a member of the dominant group, a situation that is not very likely in a Romanian generalist university.

As expected, gender has an impact on the prejudice of women among the student population and the results showed that our assumption was correct. The results in this study showed that men scored higher on the Hostile Sexism subscale and women scored higher on the Benevolent Sexism subscale.

Our results are in accord with some of the previous works in this field that showed that men tend to have higher scores on the Hostile Sexism subscale and women tend to have higher scores on the Benevolent Sexism subscale (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Ogunleye, 2012). One possible explanation for the men's results might reside in the assumption that their hostile sexist beliefs reflect the desire to dominate women. This would lead to hostility toward women that act in a non-traditional way (Glick & Fiske, 1997). Glick and Fiske (1996) also believed that women would endorse more benevolent sexist attitudes, because on the surface they seem to have a positive tone and may carry potential benefits for them. Another possible explanation for women's higher scores on the Benevolent Sexism subscale might come from Exposito, Herrera, Moya and Glick (2010). Their research showed that in the societies where men's violent behavior toward women happens more often, females tend to endorse the benevolent sexist attitudes as a means of protection. Romania has a culture that is strongly shaped

by the sex roles and has a high rate of abuse against women (Oprica, 2008; Rada, 2014). Even though the victims do not report many of these events, their existence is well known. Therefore, women's stereotypes about men and their power might have an influence on their benevolent sexist believes and might act as a protective device against violence and abuse.

We observed differences on the benevolent sexist attitudes of the participants based in their sex role identity. The androgynous participants had higher scores than masculine and undifferentiated ones on the Benevolent Sexism subscale. Androgynous individuals have both masculine and feminine characteristics and these may offer a better understanding of the prejudice of women. In addition, some studies show high correlations between androgyny and emotional intelligence and between emotional intelligence and flexibility towards gender roles (Guastello & Guastello, 2003). Even though they have masculine traits, androgynous persons might try to delimitate themselves from this role and lean towards their feminine part (Zysberg & Moore, 2017). At the same time, their higher level of EI determines them to treat women in a more positive way and even behaving in a sexist, albeit benevolent way.

Contrary to our belief, masculine participants did not show more hostile sexist attitudes. The reason for this might be that our participants were young and in their generation, men and women roles are less important. Men and women tend to be more similar and this leads to lower levels of hostility toward each other and especially from men towards women (Russell & Trigg, 2004).

We must address some limitations. Firstly, we selected the participants using a convenience sampling. Moreover, all of them were young students, thus preventing us from extending the interpretation of the results to others age groups. Secondly, we only used self-reporting scales, which may cause distensions in the result of some participants. This problem may affect especially the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory, where participants could have responded in a sociable desirable way and not according to their true believes. In addition, this tendency might be also explained by the researcher's effect. A female researcher applied all the scales and the participants (males and females) might have responded more positively because of this. Thirdly, this study is a cross-sectional one, thus preventing us from making assumptions about the directionality of the link between the variables we studied.

Our study shows that men prove to be more sexist and hostile towards women, but neither social dominance nor sex roles bring such differences. On the contrary, in regards to benevolent sexist attitudes, women and androgynous individuals have higher levels than men or masculine individuals. We may say that Romanians from the student community learned how to deal with prejudices and hostility but benevolent sexist is also an issue. It may be detrimental towards women but beneficial to men. When showing benevolent attitudes, men had higher chances of holding leadership positions, but women's chances of being in

such positions are decreasing with their benevolent behavior and beliefs (Rollero & Fedi, 2014). In other words, it might be not enough for men to become less sexist, but women must also change something in their views towards this topic.

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