

The Role of Knowledge about Mal-Intent on Judgments of Benevolent Sexism

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Abstract

Benevolent sexism (BS) is a subtler form of sexism and is characterized by subjectively positive attitudes of its perpetrators towards female targets. This subtleness often leads to BS actions not being perceived as sexist. Generally, knowing about an actor's intention influences people's judgments about moral issues such as racism and discrimination. This study extends these previous findings to judgments of sexism and proposes that BS may not be judged as sexist if people do not attribute bad intention or negative mental state (i.e., intent to undermine women) to an actor's behaviour. Two specific hypotheses were tested. Hypothesis 1 stated that *the more negative the actor's mental state, the higher perceived mal-intent perceived harm, and perceived sexism*. Hypothesis 2 stated that *a higher score on feminism relates to a higher score on perceived mal-intent, perceived harm, and perceived sexism*. These hypotheses were tested using a cross-sectional design with a between-subject study ($N = 262$). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the following conditions: one baseline condition with no further information about the actor's intent, two positive conditions (egalitarian motive and benevolent motive), and two negative conditions (negative stereotype and undermining motive). Two workplace-related scenarios, one concerning helping behaviour and one concerning complimenting attractiveness, in line with BS were used. Besides that, participants were asked to answer the feminist attitude scale by Koyama, McGain, and Hill (2004). The results show that knowledge of an actor's negative mental state (i.e., a man that behaved in a BS manner while having negative stereotypes or aiming to undermine) led to participants perceiving the actor as having worse intent in comparison to the more positive mental states (i.e., a man that behaved with egalitarian or benevolent motives). However, judgments of the perceived harm were not influenced by participants' knowledge about an actor's mental state. Participants perceived both scenarios as harmful and sexist. Moreover, a more negative mental state led participants to judge these scenarios as more sexist compared to an actor with a seemingly more positive mental state. In most cases, higher feminism was related to higher perceived mal-intent, harm, and sexism. These findings emphasize the role of intent to harm on judgments of BS. Moreover, it is suggested that a reason for not labelling BS as sexist is that the mal-intent (i.e., negative mental states) is not recognized by people despite recognizing harm. Thus, this study extends the understanding of why BS may not be judged as sexist, as has been questioned by past research.

Keywords: benevolent sexism; intent; harm; behavioural judgments; feminism

The Role of Knowledge about Mal-Intent on Judgments of Benevolent Sexism

The relationship between gender roles is unique. No other social groups that are experiencing such an inequality continue to tolerate these circumstances while being physically and psychologically connected (Glick & Fiske, 1999). Historically, men have had greater power, that is, controlling social, political, and economic variables, while women have had dyadic power, meaning that men depended on them as wives and mothers (Glick & Fiske, 1999; Guttentag & Secord, 1983, as cited in Glick & Fiske, 1996). Nowadays, these roles are not as fixed anymore and various movements against sexism, sexual harassment, assault, and discrimination such as the #MeToo campaign are present. These movements are understood as important steps towards gender equality (Hopkins-Doyle et al., 2019). Yet, less progress can be seen than might be expected (Hopkins-Doyle et al., 2019).

Usually, sexism has been understood as a reflection of hostile behaviour towards women, as well as the endorsement of traditional gender roles (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005a; Glick & Fiske, 1996, 1997). However, Glick and Fiske (1996, 1997) suggested traditional gender roles to be ambivalent and associated with both positive and negative evaluations of women. They thought of sexism as a multidimensional construct and formulated the Ambivalent Sexism Theory (AST) to differentiate between Hostile Sexism (HS) and Benevolent Sexism (BS) (Glick & Fiske, 1996). HS is understood as portraying women in misogynistic terms (e.g., “women are manipulative and inferior to men”) (Glick & Fiske, 1996). In contrast, BS involves subjectively positive attitudes, such as “women should be cherished and protected by men” and chivalrous behaviours toward women (Glick & Fiske, 1996). The latter behaviours are subjectively positive for the sexist actor, as they comprise protective feelings and affection (Glick & Fiske, 1997). Thus, regarding the traditional gender roles, Glick and Fiske (1997) suggested that BS encompasses the more positive, but still sexist attitudes regarding women, whereas HS encompasses the negative equivalents.

Past research argued that both forms of sexism are meant to provide maintenance and justification of traditional gender roles, with BS acting in more subtle ways (Bohner et al., 2010; Glick & Fiske, 1996; Goh & Hall, 2015; Hopkins-Doyle et al., 2019). Most women realize when they are a victim of HS, but in the case of BS it is more difficult to notice (Swim et al., 2001). In addition, the distinction between HS and BS suggests an explanation for why society dismisses explicit forms of sexism (i.e., openly preferring men over women), but not more subtle forms of sexism such as BS (e.g., a man helping a woman to carry her luggage as an expression of paternalism, or a man paying for a woman’s meal because he thinks that she is inferior) are not dismissed (Dardenne et al., 2007). In fact, these subtle, benevolent forms

of sexism might even be encouraged by society as they seem positive at first (Dardenne et al., 2007). And even though BS feels subjectively positive and flattering to women, research showed that it tends to uphold traditional gender stereotypes and can have harmful long-term consequences for the victims (Dardenne et al., 2007; Good & Rudman, 2010; Kilianski & Rudman, 1998).

Various studies demonstrated the connection between exposure to BS at the workplace and harmful consequences for women. Jones et al. (2014) demonstrated that BS can decrease self-efficacy, which gives information about the likelihood to succeed in a task, but only when enacted by the opposite sex. Similarly, Dardenne et al. (2007) found a decrease in women's cognitive performance whenever BS was expressed. They proposed that BS resulted in women doubting their capabilities as it suggests them being inferior, even when not actively realizing any consequences or identifying it as a prejudice (Dardenne et al., 2007). These results emphasise that BS does not necessarily have to be openly identified as "sexist" by the victims to have consequences. Dumont et al. (2010) replicated the findings of BS being worse than HS regarding the performance of women and that BS activates women thinking that they are incompetent. They showed that BS is capable of driving women into internalizing gender inequality, that is, believing that women are incompetent (Dumont et al., 2010). Additional negative effects of exposure to BS in different settings include intensified relational qualities and diminished task-related competencies (Baretto et al., 2010). Furthermore, exposure to BS can lead to increased women's self-surveillance and body shame, which both are associated with self-objectification (i.e., viewing your body as another person would) (Calogero & Jost, 2011; Shepherd et al., 2011). Besides that, using BS as a justification for gender inequality can increase women's approval of discrimination (Moya et al., 2007). Furthermore, Becker and Wright (2011) found that being exposed to BS leads to a decline in support for collective action against gender inequality. In addition, Becker and Swim (2012) found that informing women (and men) about possible harmful consequences decreased the endorsement of BS attitudes. Thus, being exposed to BS results in critical consequences.

Paradoxically, studies showed that despite BS having harmful effects, women do not label BS as actually being "prejudiced/sexist". The predominant explanation has been that women react to the positive appearance of BS while lacking awareness of the harmful and undermining effects that it can have on them (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001; see also Barreto & Ellemers, 2005a, 2005b; Goh & Hall, 2015). However, recent research showed that women do, in fact, prefer BS men and rate them as more attractive despite recognising that these

attitudes and behaviours can be undermining to them (Bohner et al., 2010; Gul & Kupfer, 2019). These findings suggest that the positive aspects of BS can compensate for the negative ones. In addition, these results were found independently of the women's feminist beliefs, which proposes that women perceive BS men to be attractive, even if they support progressive gender roles (Gul & Kupfer, 2019). Given that BS attitudes and behaviours represent more traditional gender roles, these findings are surprising since one would have expected to find differences between the low and high feminist groups regarding BS. As recent research suggested that recognizing the consequences of BS does not influence the preference of BS men (Gul & Kupfer, 2019), the question of why women do not label BS as "sexist" remains. An important factor in determining an actor's behaviour as sexist or not is his underlying intention (Dardenne et al., 2007; Goh & Hall, 2015). Due to that, one possible explanation for the discrepancy between recognizing the harm but not labelling the behaviour as sexist may be that people also consider the mental state and intention of the actor displaying BS behaviours rather than only focusing on the harmfulness of the actions (e.g., "was his intention to undermine me, was it based on gender-stereotypical beliefs, or was it based on genuine kindness and meant to be flattering?").

To address the knowledge gap of why BS is not labelled as sexist, this research examined the role of intent and harm on people's judgments of BS, that is, whether the intent attributed to an agent's behaviour has an influence on people's judgments of these situations as "sexist". *Intent* refers to an actor's desire to demonstrate BS behaviour and harm a victim, with *harm* referring to the negative consequences of an actor's behaviour (Swim et al., 2003). It was hypothesized that people may be less likely to judge an actor's behaviour and character as sexist if they perceive innocent intent (i.e., no intention to harm women; e.g., "if he did not mean to be undermining, then his behaviour is not sexist"). It was expected that knowledge of an actor with a more negative mental state would lead to more perceived mal-intent, harm, and sexism. Additionally, feministic attitudes of the perceivers are thought to be a moderating variable, that is, the higher the feministic attitude the higher the perceived mal-intent, harm, and sexism.

The Role of Intent and Harm on Judgments of Sexism

To understand the role of intent and harm on moral judgements of sexism, it is necessary to understand how children's development leads to the primacy of intent in moral judgements. Generally, knowing the actor's intention is thought to influence observers' judgments of the situation (Swim et al., 2003). However, an actor's intention is internal, wherefore observers and targets can only know about it when it is being expressed by the

actor (Malle & Knobe, 1997). First, to understand what influences these judgments and what they are based on, it should be considered how people develop the capability to make judgments in the first place. Pre-schoolers' moral judgments are based on the outcomes or harm of an action without any consideration of the intent. When growing up, children between 4 and 8 years old increasingly take an actor's intention into account (e.g., Cushman et al., 2013). Later, the intent to harm can be enough for a judgment, even without any actual consequences taking place (Cushman, 2008).

Next, the difference between judgments of intent and harm can also be seen during legal decisions. A sentence highly depends on the outcome of an action. For example, if someone gets caught driving while being intoxicated, they will be fined and penalized much less compared to when being caught after crashing into another person while driving intoxicated (Cushman, 2008). Thus, our judgments of deserved verdict greatly depend on the harm caused by an actor (Cushman, 2008). However, intent does play a role too, for example, to differentiate murder from manslaughter (Young & Saxe, 2011). Hence, legal judgments seem to be influenced by intent and harm.

Additionally, researchers studied the importance of intent on harm in the context of morality. For instance, Young and Saxe (2011) studied moral judgments as well as judgments of an agent's intention. They found that when judging a situation with a harmful consequence, intent played a key role, while actions done with guilty intent were judged more severely than accidental harm. Thus, intending to harm, no matter the actual outcome, was judged as morally wrong (Young & Saxe, 2011). Further, even failed attempts to harm were judged as morally wrong (Young & Saxe, 2011). On the contrary, accidental harms caused by innocent intent were judged as less morally wrong (Young & Saxe, 2011). Hence, the knowledge of an actor's intent plays a crucial role when judging harmful consequences. Applying these findings to the judgments of BS, it could be hypothesized that there needs to be awareness of harmful consequences to pay attention to the intent. Moreover, an actor's negative intention might lead to perceiving the situation as worse. Consequently, the positive tone of BS and targets not being aware of the consequences could mean that they are also not aware of an actor's intention and, therefore, would not judge the behaviour as sexist.

Similarly, the role of intent and harm were also studied in the context of judgments of prejudices. For instance, Swim et al. (2003) studied how the influence of an actor's intention and the experienced harm by the target influence judgments of prejudice and discrimination. To assess these judgments, they had participants read potentially discriminating scenarios, with a man as the actor and a woman as the victim. Even though the authors researched

various prejudices, their scenarios involved typical actions in line with sexism. Their experiments showed that when intent was present participants were likely to judge an actor as more prejudiced and his behaviour as more discriminating, no matter the harm. Hence, harm did not have any influence on the judgments of the actor and their behaviour whenever information about intent was available, but only when the intent was uncertain or unknown. Connecting these findings to judgments of BS, two things can be hypothesized. First, knowing about an actor's mal-intent might lead to judging the actor as more sexist. Second, the recognized harm, on the one hand, does not influence the recognition of mal-intent, and on the other hand, is not influenced itself by the attributed intent to an actor's behaviour.

To summarize, according to moral judgments research, people give more value to someone's intention than to the actual outcome of an action. On the one hand, according to Young and Saxe's (2011) findings, being aware of the harm is necessary to take intent into account. But on the other hand, according to Swim et al. (2013), harm is only of importance if information about intent is not available. Thus, the exact relationship between judgments of intent and harm needs to be evaluated further. Nevertheless, the actor's intent matters in judging the actor and his action as either wrong or not. Yet, it is important to note that an actor's mental state can vary on a continuum in terms of the intent to harm. On the one hand, they can be strongly negative and clearly emphasizing on harming the victim. For example, this might include the actor expressing negative stereotypes. And on the other hand, they can be more positive and innocent, where harmful consequences are more of an accident than intended, for example, acting chivalrous without thinking of its consequences. The former one, being more direct, might be easier to detect as an instance of sexism than the latter, subtle one. BS with its subtle form might indicate an actor's innocent or positive intent as opposed to merely negative intent. And with victims not being aware of the consequences of BS, in comparison to the obviousness of HS, BS is not as evident in its harmful intent. This might explain why people do not label BS as sexist.

The Present Study

The present study aimed to give insight into why people do not label BS behaviour as sexism, as has been shown by previous research (e.g., Barreto & Ellemers, 2005a; Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001; Goh & Hall, 2015). Past research concluded that BS is not labelled as sexist because women do not recognize its harm on women, probably because BS is more subtle and seen as positive and flattering (e.g., Barreto & Ellemers, 2005a, 2005b). This idea has been challenged by Gul and Kupfer (2019). They proposed that BS behaviours suggest a willingness to invest which makes the men be perceived as attractive by women, despite

being aware of the undermining nature of BS. Further, this current study explored the proposal that BS is not labelled as sexist because judging BS as sexist depends on the mental state of the actors. Moreover, an explicitly negative mental state may lead to BS behaviour being judged as more sexist.

Thus, it was expected that without any knowledge of an actor's mental state being negative, BS would not be labelled as sexist, with less perceived mal-intent, perceived harm, and perceived sexism. In addition, feministic attitudes were expected to have an influence on perceived mal-intent, perceived harm, and perceived sexism. Hence, it was hypothesized that:

H1: The more negative the actor's mental state, the higher the perceived mal-intent, the perceived harm, and the perceived sexism.

H2: A higher score on feminism relates to a higher score on perceived mal-intent, perceived harm, and perceived sexism.

These two hypotheses were tested using two scenarios that each involved a different type of BS behaviour related to the workplace. The importance of BS and its resulting consequences at the workplace have been shown by various research (e.g., Fraser et al., 2015; Good & Rudman, 2010; Hideg & Ferris, 2016). Further, Glick and Fiske (1996) defined BS as typically evoking prosocial behaviour, for example helping behaviours, due to the subjectively positive feeling. Various research has studied the influence of helping behaviours and its resulting negative consequences (e.g., Eagly & Crowley, 1986; Shnabel et al., 2016). Thus, the first scenario involves helping behaviour at the workplace. Besides that, Glick and Fiske (1996) argued that a man complimenting a female co-worker could lead to the woman feeling undermined and not be taken seriously. Hence, the second scenario involves complimenting a woman's attractiveness.

Method

Participants

This study comprised a convenience sample, by using snowballing and SONA (the University of Twente's test subject pool system). Of the 326 participants that were recruited, 273 participants completed the survey, however, 11 participants failed to correctly answer the attention check item, thus leaving 262 participants (62.6% female, 36.6% male, 0.4% non-binary, 0.4% prefer not to say) for analysis [$M_{\text{age}} = 27.03$ years; $SD_{\text{age}} = 10.08$ years; minimum 18 years, maximum 78 years]. Moreover, 32.1% of the participants were sampled through SONA system and received credits in return. As far as the participants' sexuality is concerned, 83.6% of the participants were heterosexual, 2.7% homosexual, 11.1% bisexual, 1.5% asexual, and 1.1% selected 'other'. Most participants were German (60.7%), 10.7%

were Dutch, and 28.6% had other nationalities. Participants' highest level of education was examined and ranged from less than high school (0.8%), to high school (43.1%), to College/professional degree (11.8%), to Bachelor's degree (22.9%), to Master's degree (21.0%), to Doctoral degree (0.4%), with 64.5% currently being a student. Participants' political orientation ranged from strongly left-oriented (5%), left-oriented (26.7%), slightly left-oriented (27.9%), to moderate (24.4%), to slightly right-oriented (11.1%), moderately right-oriented (4.6%), to strongly right-oriented (0.4%). According to a post-hoc power analysis, this sample had at least 80% power for a small to medium effect size (Cohen's $f = .22$).

Design and Procedure

The quantitative research used a cross-sectional between-subject experimental design with two scenarios each having five conditions. The survey program Qualtrics was used for this study. Participation took approximately 10 minutes. Participants took part in one session and completed the survey at home. The study was approved by the University of Twente ethics committee and participants gave active consent by signing a consent form before starting the survey (Appendix A) as well as afterwards when being debriefed (Appendix B).

Firstly, participants got the aim of the research explained, but the term "sexism" was avoided to ensure that the participants would not be probed. Afterwards, they were asked to actively agree to the informed consent to approve that their data will be used. Subsequently, participants were asked to provide demographic information comprising age, gender, nationality, education, political orientation, and sexual orientation.

Next, participants were randomly assigned to one of the five conditions. These conditions included a baseline scenario, where no further information about the mental state of the actor was given. Thus, the baseline condition asked for free attributions from the participants regarding the perception of the scenarios, with some assuming a bad motive and some not. In comparison, the other four conditions (egalitarian motive, benevolent motive, negative stereotype, undermining motive) each included an additional sentence informing about the mental state of the actor. Participants got a short scenario of a man behaving in a benevolently sexist manner towards women and then describing the reason (i.e., mental state) for his behaviour. With the scenario in mind, participants were asked to rate how intentional, harmful, morally wrong, and sexist the actor and his behaviour was. To test two types of BS, this procedure was repeated one more time with a second scenario. The first scenario was related to helping behaviour at the workplace, and the second one to complimenting a woman's attractiveness in the work setting. Afterwards, participants answered the feminist

attitude scale by Koyama, McGain, and Hill (2004). On the last page, participants were provided with the full aim of the study, including an explanation of benevolent sexism. After knowing the real aim of the study, participants were asked to sign an informed consent again. Contact details of the researchers were given in case follow-up questions occur.

Measures

Scenarios

To examine participants' evaluation of the role of an actor's mental state on their judgments of BS, they were given two short, written scenarios related to BS, and information about the actor's mental state (Appendix C). Depending on the participant's condition, each scenario had an additional description of the actor's mental state, which was more or less obviously sexist. In both scenarios, there was no information about harm given.

The first scenario described helping behaviour towards women using computers, connected to the work field, and the baseline scenario was stated as:

A training officer of a big tech company, Tom, sends out an email inviting employees for an extra training course for a new computer program the employees have been briefly shown to use. The extra training can help employees become more skilled at using the computer program. He only sends the email to the female employees.

To illustrate, participants in the egalitarian motive condition were given the additional sentences: *Tom doesn't think that women need extra help with the computer program. He just wants to make sure that women feel welcome, included and supported in the company.* Next, participants in the benevolent motive condition were given the additional sentences: *Tom doesn't think that women are less able at computers than men are. He just likes to act chivalrous because he thinks women should be appreciated and cherished.* Further, participants in the negative stereotype condition received the following information: *Tom has the negative stereotype about women, that they are less able with computers than men are.* Last, participants in the undermining motive condition received the following description: *Tom wants to make women feel less competent than himself and other men in the organization.* The second scenario described complimenting women's attractiveness at the workplace including similar information about the actor's mental states (Appendix C).

Judgments of the Actor and his Behaviour. Afterwards, to examine how participants judge the given scenarios, they were asked to indicate their opinion by answering five statements about the actor's behaviour, e.g., Tom's behaviour/action was intentional, on a 7-point Likert scale from 0 (not at all) to 6 (very much) (Appendix D). To measure these judgments, three constructs were used: *perceived intent* ("his intent/motive is bad"),

perceived harm (“his behaviour/action was harmful”), and *perceived sexism* [consisting of three items: morally wrong (“his behaviour/action was morally wrong”), sexist behaviour (“his behaviour/action was sexist”), and sexist character (“he is a sexist man”)] (scenario 1 $\alpha = .84$; scenario 2 $\alpha = .89$).

Feminism

To check for a possible correlation between feminism and the judgment of BS, participants were asked to fill in the feminist attitude scale by Koyama, McGain, and Hill (2004). This questionnaire consists of 18 statements (e.g., “It is insulting to the husband when his wife does not take his last name”; “When they go out, a man and a woman should share dating expenses if they both have the same income”) and had to be judged on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) (Appendix E). An attention check item (“To show that you are paying attention to the questions, please select 2 (disagree) for this item.”) was embedded in these items, and the items were presented in random order. Some item scores of the feministic attitude scale had to be revised (see Appendix E). After scores were revised a scale with mean scores was computed ($\alpha = .81$).

Data Analysis

A significance level of .05 was chosen. To present the patterns in the data, descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) on the three dependent variables (perceived intent, perceived harm, perceived sexism) per five conditions (baseline, egalitarian motive, benevolent motive, negative stereotypes, undermining motive) were conducted.

To test H1 (*The more negative the actor’s mental state, the higher the perceived mal-intent, the perceived harm, and the perceived sexism*), one-way ANOVAs were conducted on each dependent variable (perceived intent, perceived harm, perceived sexism) and mental state condition as the independent variable (baseline, egalitarian motive, benevolent motive, negative stereotypes, undermining motive) on the two BS scenarios. Tukey HSD post-hoc tests were performed for all variables to compare significant differences between the conditions (baseline, egalitarian motive, benevolent motive, negative stereotypes, undermining motive) regarding the three constructs (perceived intent, perceived harm, perceived sexism).

To test H2 (*A higher score on feminism relates to a higher score on perceived mal-intent, perceived harm, and perceived sexism*), Pearson’s correlation tests between the three dependent variables (perceived intent, perceived harm, perceived sexism) and the feminism

scale per five conditions (baseline, egalitarian motive, benevolent motive, negative stereotypes, undermining motive) on both BS scenarios were conducted.

Results

Table 1 presents means and standard deviations on the three constructs (perceived intent, perceived harm, perceived sexism) for each BS scenario (helping behaviour and complementing appearance) and feminism by condition (baseline, egalitarian motive, benevolent motive, negative stereotypes, undermining motive). Regarding the baseline condition, table 1 reveals means above 4, which indicates that people attributed negative intent to the actor, recognized the harm, and perceived it as sexist. Bivariate correlations between the three constructs (perceived intent, perceived harm, perceived sexism) for each scenario and feminism are presented in tables as well (see Table 2 for baseline condition, Table 3 for egalitarian motive condition, Table 4 for benevolent motive condition, Table 5 for negative stereotypes condition, and Table 6 for undermining motive condition).

Table 1. Mean Scores of Dependent Variables and Feminism by Condition.

		Baseline	Egalitarian motive	Benevolent motive	Negative stereotype	Undermining motive
Dependent measures		<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
Scenario 1 (Helping Behaviour)	Perceived intent	4.21 (1.94)	3.00 (1.62)	3.52 (1.76)	4.73 (1.76)	6.23 (1.45)
	Perceived harm	4.87 (1.90)	5.17 (1.37)	4.90 (1.67)	5.61 (1.54)	5.60 (1.64)
	Perceived sexism	5.30 (1.50)	4.58 (1.50)	4.79 (1.41)	5.80 (1.22)	6.25 (1.04)
Scenario 2 (Complimenting Attractiveness)	Perceived intent	4.88 (1.82)	3.42 (1.65)	4.04 (1.73)	5.12 (1.57)	6.02 (1.53)
	Perceived harm	5.04 (1.62)	5.50 (1.34)	5.10 (1.72)	5.69 (1.56)	5.96 (1.28)
	Perceived sexism	5.68 (1.28)	5.21 (1.53)	5.30 (1.35)	5.80 (1.36)	6.32 (1.17)
Feminist attitudes		5.50 (.78)	5.71 (.76)	5.58 (.60)	5.65 (.68)	5.72 (.67)

Note. $N=262$; Baseline condition: $n=56$; Egalitarian motive condition: $n=48$; Benevolent motive condition: $n=50$; Negative stereotype condition: $n=51$; Undermining motive condition: $n=57$.

Table 2. Correlations between the Dependent Variables and Feminism in the Baseline Condition.

		1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	
Baseline	Scenario 1	1. Perceived intent	-	.31*	.48**	.32*	-.01	.24	.13
		2. Perceived harm		-	.67**	-.04	.30**	.32*	.40**
		3. Perceived sexism			-	.28*	.21	.64**	.36**
Scenario 2	Scenario 2	4. Perceived intent			-	.46**	.69**	.28*	
		5. Perceived harm				-	.50**	.42**	
		6. Perceived sexism						-	.46**
7. Feminism									-

*. Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Note. $N=262$; Baseline condition: $n=56$.

Table 3. Correlations between the Dependent Variables and Feminism in the Egalitarian Motive Condition.

		1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	
Egalitarian motive	Scenario 1	1. Perceived intent	-	.12	.35*	.43**	-.09	.05	-.08
		2. Perceived harm		-	.45**	.09	.41**	.38**	.15
		3. Perceived sexism			-	.34*	.35*	.63**	.26
	Scenario 2	4. Perceived intent				-	.42**	.48**	.16
		5. Perceived harm					-	.81**	.61**
		6. Perceived sexism						-	.56**
	7. Feminism								-

*. Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Note. $N=262$; Egalitarian motive condition: $n=48$.

Table 4. Correlations between the Dependent Variables and Feminism in the Benevolent Motive Condition.

		1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	
Benevolent motive	Scenario 1	1. Perceived intent	-	.34*	.59**	.58**	.25	.42**	.37**
		2. Perceived harm		-	.81**	.46**	.75**	.58**	.48**
		3. Perceived sexism			-	.46**	.57**	.59**	.50**
	Scenario 2	4. Perceived intent				-	.58*	.73**	.55**
		5. Perceived harm					-	.78**	.55**
		6. Perceived sexism						-	.63**
	7. Feminism								-

*. Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Note. $N=262$; Benevolent motive condition: $n=50$.

Table 5. Correlations between the Dependent Variables and Feminism in the Negative Stereotype Condition.

		1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	
Negative stereotype	Scenario 1	1. Perceived intent	-	-.04	.26	.54**	.08	-.01	-.03
		2. Perceived harm		-	.38**	.11	.54**	.36**	.42**
		3. Perceived sexism			-	.36**	.45**	.65**	.42**
	Scenario 2	4. Perceived intent				-	.40**	.37**	.25
		5. Perceived harm					-	.70**	.42**
		6. Perceived sexism						-	.55**
	7. Feminism								-

** . Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Note. $N=262$; Negative stereotype condition: $n=51$.

Table 6. Correlations between the Dependent Variables and Feminism in the Undermining Motive Condition.

		1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	
Undermining motive	Scenario 1	1. Perceived intent	-	.40**	.53**	.63**	.21	.29*	.11
		2. Perceived harm		-	.61**	.66**	.73**	.49**	.42**
		3. Perceived sexism			-	.59**	.59**	.78**	.37**
	Scenario 2	4. Perceived intent				-	.62**	.59**	.41**
		5. Perceived harm					-	.72**	.29**
		6. Perceived sexism						-	.49**
	7. Feminism								-

** . Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Note. $N=262$; Undermining motive condition: $n=57$.

Test of Hypothesis 1

Perceived Intent

Regarding the helping behaviour scenario, a one-way ANOVA on perceived intent revealed a significant main effect of condition, $F(4, 257) = 28.09, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .30$. Tukey HSD post-hoc-tests showed that participants in the *undermining motive* condition perceived the actor to have worse intent compared to the participants in the other conditions: *egalitarian motive*, *benevolent motive*, and *negative stereotypes* conditions (p 's $< .001$). Besides that, participants in the *negative stereotype* condition perceived the man's intent to be worse compared to participants in the *egalitarian motive* condition, $p < .001$, and the *benevolent motive* condition, $p = .004$. No statistically significant difference was found between the *egalitarian motive* and the *benevolent motive* conditions, $p = .563$.

Regarding participants on the *baseline* condition (i.e., when no mental state was given) for the helping behaviour scenario, Tukey tests showed that participants perceived the actor's intent to be worse compared to participants in the *egalitarian motive* condition, $p < .001$. Next, participants in the *undermining motive* condition perceived the actor to have worse intent compared to the participants in the *baseline* condition, $p < .001$. There was no significant difference between participants in the *baseline* condition and participants in the *benevolent motive* condition, $p = .232$, nor between the *baseline* condition and the *negative stereotype* condition, $p = .538$.

Concerning the complementing appearance scenario, a one-way ANOVA on perceived intent also showed a significant main effect of condition, $F(4, 257) = 18.99, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .23$. Tukey HSD post-hoc-tests showed that participants in the *undermining motive* condition perceived the actor's intent as being worse in comparison to participants in the other conditions, that is, *egalitarian motive* ($p < .001$), *benevolent motive* ($p < .001$), *negative stereotype* ($p = .042$). Besides that, participants in the *negative stereotype* condition perceived the actor's intent as worse than participants in the *egalitarian motive* condition, $p < .001$, and the *benevolent motive* condition, $p = .011$. Lastly, there was no significant difference between *benevolent motive* and the *egalitarian motive* condition, $p = .344$.

Regarding the *baseline* condition for the complementing appearance scenario, Tukey tests showed that participants perceived the intent as worse than participants in the *egalitarian motive* condition, $p < .001$. Next, participants in the *undermining motive* condition perceived the actor to have worse intent compared to the participants in the *baseline* condition, $p < .001$. There was no significant difference between the *baseline*

condition and the *negative stereotype* condition, $p = .943$, nor between the *baseline* condition and the *benevolent motive* condition, $p = .077$

Perceived Harm

In the helping behaviour scenario, a one-way ANOVA on perceived harm displayed a significant main effect of condition, $F(4, 257) = 2.57, p = .039, \eta_p^2 = .04$. However, Tukey HSD post-hoc-tests showed no significant differences between the conditions regarding perceived harm.

Regarding the complementing appearance scenario, a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of the condition on perceived harm, $F(4, 257) = 3.71, p = .006, \eta_p^2 = .06$. Participants in the *undermining motive* condition perceived the caused harm as worse in comparison to participants in the *benevolent motive* condition, $p = .028$. Further, participants in the *undermining motive* condition perceived the caused harm as worse compared to participants in the *baseline* condition, $p = .011$. The Tukey HSD post-hoc-tests identified no other significant differences between conditions.

Perceived Sexism

Regarding the helping behaviour scenario, a one-way ANOVA on perceived sexism revealed a significant main effect of condition, $F(4, 257) = 14.14, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .18$. Tukey HSD post-hoc-tests showed that participants in the *undermining motive* condition perceived the scenario as more sexist than participants in the *egalitarian motive* condition, $p < .001$, and participants in the *benevolent motive* condition, $p < .001$. Participants in the *negative stereotype* condition perceived it as more sexist compared to participants in the *egalitarian motive*, $p < .001$, and the *benevolent motive* conditions, $p = .002$. There was no significant difference between the *egalitarian motive* and the *benevolent motive* participants, $p = .937$. Moreover, there was no statistically significant difference between the *undermining motive* and the *negative stereotype* conditions, $p = .415$.

Regarding the helping behaviour scenario, participants in the *baseline* condition perceived more sexism than participants in the *egalitarian motive* condition, $p = .048$. Next, participants in the *undermining motive* condition perceived the scenario as more sexist than participants in the *baseline* condition, $p = .002$. There was no significant difference between the *baseline* condition and the *benevolent motive* condition, $p = .277$, nor between the *baseline* condition and the *negative stereotype* condition, $p = .304$.

Following on, regarding the complementing appearance scenario, a one-way ANOVA on perceived sexism across the conditions showed a significant main effect of conditions, $F(4, 257) = 5.87, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .08$. Tukey HSD post-hoc-tests revealed that participants in

the *undermining motive* condition perceived the scenario as being more sexist than participants in the *egalitarian motive*, $p < .001$, and the *benevolent motive* condition, $p = .001$. Tukey HSD post-hoc-tests showed no other significant differences regarding perceived sexism.

Test of Hypothesis 2: Relationships with Feminism Beliefs

Baseline Condition

Regarding the judgments of the helping behaviour scenario by participants in the baseline condition, feminism did not correlate with perceived intent, but there were medium positive, correlations between feminism and perceived harm and feminism and perceived sexism. Regarding judgments of the complementing appearance scenario, a small positive correlation was found between feminism and perceived intent, and a medium, positive correlation between feminism and perceived harm, as well as between feminism and perceived sexism. Overall, the higher the feminist score, the higher the perceived intent, harm and sexism, besides perceived intent for the helping behaviour scenario which was not significant but revealed the expected positive direction.

Egalitarian Motive Condition

In the egalitarian motive condition, feminism did not correlate with perceived intent, perceived harm, or perceived sexism regarding the helping behaviour scenario. In addition, feminism did not correlate with perceived intent in the complementing appearance scenario. Positive correlations of medium strength were found between feminism and perceived harm and between feminism and perceived sexism in the complementing appearance scenario. Furthermore, despite the non-significant correlations, all other correlations - besides perceived intent in the helping behaviour scenario - showed the expected positive direction.

Benevolent Motive Condition

Regarding the benevolent motive condition, positive correlations of medium strength were found between feminism and perceived intent, perceived harm, and perceived sexism in the helping behaviour scenario. Concerning the complementing appearance scenario, positive correlations of large strength were found between feminism and perceived intent, perceived harm, as well as perceived sexism. Thus, the higher participants in the benevolent motive condition scored on feminism, the higher they scored on perceived intent, perceived harm, and perceived sexism.

Negative Stereotypes Condition

Feminism did not correlate with perceived intent in either scenario in the negative stereotype condition. A medium positive correlation between feminism and perceived harm

as well as feminism and perceived sexism were found regarding the helping behaviour scenario. Concerning the complementing appearance scenario, positive correlations between feminism and perceived harm at medium strength, as well as between feminism and perceived sexism at large strength were found. Consequently, for participants in the negative stereotype condition, a higher score on feminism is related to more perceived harm and perceived sexism, but the perceived intent, especially regarding the helping behaviour scenario, was independent of the feminism score.

Undermining Motive Condition

Lastly, regarding the undermining motive condition, feminism did not correlate with perceived intent in the helping behaviour scenario. However, medium positive correlations were found between feminism and perceived intent in the complementing appearance scenario, between feminism and perceived harm in both scenarios, as well as between feminism and perceived sexism in both scenarios. Hence, the higher the feminist score, the higher the perceived intent, harm and sexism, besides perceived intent for the helping behaviour scenario which was not significant but revealed the expected positive direction.

Discussion

This study examined why benevolent sexism (BS) is often not labelled as sexist and what roles intent and harm play in judgments of BS. Moreover, it revealed how understanding or misunderstanding an actor's mental state can affect judgements of a BS behaviour. Overall, participants perceived the workplace-related scenarios as sexist, even when not having any knowledge about the actor's mental state. An actor's negative mental state increased participants perceived sexism regarding the BS behaviour. Next, participants' perceptions of the scenarios as being harmful were not influenced by information about the actor's mental state. These findings are contrary to the predominant idea that BS is not labelled as sexist because women do not recognize the harmful consequences while reacting to the positive appearance of BS (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001; see also Barreto & Ellemers, 2005a, 2005b; Goh & Hall, 2015); Instead, results showed that not only harm but the actor's mental state (i.e., the perceived intent) matters when judging whether BS is sexist. Generally, higher feminism led to more pronounced perceptions of mal-intent, harm, and sexism. The results are generally in line with the predictions and emphasize the influence of knowledge about an agent's mental state when judging their behaviour.

Hypothesis 1 suggested that participants who react to actors with a more negative mental state (i.e., negative stereotype or undermining motive condition) would recognize higher perceived mal-intent, harm, and sexism than participants exposed to the more positive

mental states (i.e., egalitarian motive or benevolent motive condition). First, regarding the perception of intent, participants in the negative conditions perceived the intent as being worse in comparison to participants in the baseline and the positive conditions. Hence, knowledge of an actor's negative mental state results in more perceived mal-intent. Regarding perceived harm of both behaviours, however, it was generally not influenced by the knowledge of the actor's mental state. Last, the results showed that participants in the more negative conditions generally perceived the scenarios as more sexist in comparison to participants in the baseline and the more positive conditions. Further, the BS related scenarios were perceived as sexist across the conditions as seen in the mean scores from respondents regarding sexism. To conclude, hypothesis 1 can be partially accepted. The results suggest that knowledge of an actor's mental state influences judgments of intent and sexism, but not the perceived harm.

When connecting the results of the current study with past research, multiple similarities can be seen. First, connecting Young's and Saxe's (2011) research on moral judgments with BS suggested that when evaluating harmful consequences, knowledge about mal-intent leads to a more negative perception of the situation. The findings of the current research support this claim as participants perceived the situation as more harmful when a more negative mental state was attributed to the actor in comparison to a more positive mental state. Next, as mentioned before, Swim et al. (2003) indicated that harm only matters on judgments when facing unclear or unknown intent but not when information about the actor's intention is available. Hence, connecting this to the current study, it is suggested that participants acknowledged the available information about the actors' mental state, but it did not influence their perceived harm. Therefore, harm was perceived across the conditions regardless of the mental state.

Furthermore, the findings of the current research challenge past research regarding the harmful effects of BS, which suggested that targets have difficulties recognizing BS behaviour and its possible consequences (e.g., Dardenne et al., 2007; Dumont et al. 2010). The findings of the current research show that participants with knowledge about a more negative mental state indicated the situations as being more harmful compared to participants in the more positive mental state conditions. Nevertheless, comparing the mean scores to the baseline condition reveals that participants across the conditions perceived the scenarios as harmful. An explanation for this contrast arises when comparing the past research designs with the current one. Dardenne et al. (2007), for example, researched the consequences of BS in comparison to HS. Similarly, Dumont et al. (2010) found that performance after being

exposed to BS was slower than after HS. Hence, most research studied BS in direct comparison to HS. However, the current study studied different types of motives behind an actor's behaviour that is constructed on BS on its own as opposed to compared to HS.

Next, connecting the findings of Swim et al. (2003) to BS, it was hypothesized that a worse intent might lead to more perceived sexism. In line with that, participants in the more negative mental state conditions perceived the situations as being more sexist. However, descriptive analyses suggest that the other participants in the more positive conditions and the baseline condition identified the situations as sexist as well. This is contrary to past research suggesting that BS is not labelled as sexist (e.g., Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001; Barreto & Ellemers, 2005a, 2005b). Again, this resulted from directly comparing findings of BS with HS. And with HS being easier to detect by victims, BS is perceived as less sexist than HS. However, the current study compared different types of motives regarding a BS behaviour with the more negative motives being perceived as more sexist.

The baseline condition was asking for participants free attributions regarding the perceptions of the scenarios as it did not include any extra information about the actor's mental state. Thus, some participants assumed a worse motive than others. When examining the means it can be seen that the baseline condition falls in between the more positive mental states (i.e., egalitarian and benevolent motive) and the more negative mental states (i.e., negative stereotype and undermining motive) regarding the perceptions of the scenarios. Moreover, due to not receiving any information about the actor's motive one might expect participants' perceptions to be influenced by their feminist attitudes. Meaning that participants with higher feminist beliefs are more prone to detecting cues of BS and sexism. Hence, also perceiving mal-intent. Surprisingly, the relation between the perceived mal-intent regarding the baseline scenario and feminist beliefs showed a positive direction in the helping behaviour scenario but no clear correlation.

Hypothesis 2 suggested that participants displaying highly feminist attitudes would perceive the scenarios as having a worse intent, more harm, and stronger sexism. Descriptively evaluating the means shows that the sample is predominantly feminist. Generally, the feminist beliefs correlated with the other constructs (i.e., intent, harm, sexism) and if not statistically significant, still showed a positive direction. This supports hypothesis 2. The exception is that the perceived intent regarding the helping behaviour scenario did not always show the expected positive direction with feminism. Participants showing higher feminism perceived higher bad intent in the complementing appearance scenario, but not much in the helping behaviour scenario. This might be due to the complementing appearance

scenario representing a more recognizable sexist scenario, that is, the over-emphasis of looks of a woman in the workplace over capability. Regarding the egalitarian motive condition, feminism did not clearly influence participants' perceptions of mal-intent, harm, and sexism. This is contrary to the findings regarding the other conditions. However, participants indicated less perceived intent, harm, and sexism in comparison to most other conditions as indicated by the means, which might be the reason for fewer correlations. Next, the benevolent motive condition is the only one where all constructs, that is, perceived intent, perceived harm, and perceived sexism, were influenced by participants' feministic attitudes. Regarding the negative stereotype condition, participants' perceptions of mal-intent were not influenced by their feministic beliefs. Nevertheless, participants' feministic beliefs influenced their perceived harm and sexism. Last, the participants' perceived mal-intent regarding the helping behaviour scenario in the undermining motive condition was not influenced by their feministic attitudes. However, feminism influenced their other perceptions. Overall, feminism influenced participants' perceptions of harm and sexism but not the perceived intent.

The results showed that feministic attitudes had less influence on peoples' perceptions in the egalitarian motive condition, while feminism had more influence on participants' perceptions in the benevolent motive condition. These findings show that even though both conditions reveal more positive mental states the perceptions seem to be influenced by different variables. Goh and Hall (2015) emphasized the subtleness of BS, which both positive conditions were based on and which might explain these findings. Regarding the egalitarian motive condition, the actor's mental state was presented as him being nice and wanting to help. Thus, the BS behaviour could easily be interpreted as a positive behaviour dismissing its sexist character. Further, the more positive description of the actor's intent can have led to participants attributing more innocent intent to the actor and his behaviour. This innocent intent then led to less perceived intent, harm, and sexism. This is similar to past research findings regarding moral judgments (Swim et al., 2003). Regarding the benevolent motive condition, it seems that the difficulty of detecting BS (e.g., Swim et al., 2001) played a crucial role. The current study suggests that people with stronger feministic beliefs are more sensitive and knowledgeable about BS and can recognize BS more easily. Therefore, despite the benevolent mental states, the actions themselves were identified as sexist and harmful by participants displaying higher feministic attitudes.

Possible Explanations for Additional Findings

The baseline condition was asking for participants free attributions regarding the perceptions of the scenarios as it did not include any extra information about the actor's

mental state. Thus, some participants assumed a worse motive than others. When examining the means it can be seen that the baseline condition falls in between the more positive mental states (i.e., egalitarian and benevolent motive) and the more negative mental states (i.e., negative stereotype and undermining motive) regarding the perceptions of the scenarios. Moreover, due to not receiving any information about the actor's motive one might expect participants' perceptions to be influenced by their feministic attitudes. Meaning that participants with higher feministic beliefs are more prone to detecting cues of BS and sexism. Hence, also perceiving mal-intent. Surprisingly, the relation between the perceived mal-intent regarding the baseline scenario and feministic beliefs showed a positive direction in the helping behaviour scenario but no clear correlation.

When comparing the results, it is revealed that the perceived intent shows the same trend regarding both scenarios. To specify, in both scenarios, the undermining motive condition displayed higher perceived intent than the other conditions; the negative stereotype condition displayed higher perceived intent than the positive conditions; the baseline condition displayed higher intent than the egalitarian motive condition. These findings suggest that both the helping behaviour and the complimenting appearance scenario had the same impact on participants' judgments of the actor's intention. Moreover, the perceived sexism regarding the helping behaviour follows the same trend as the perceived intent. Merely the undermining motive condition is not significantly different from the negative stereotype condition. Nevertheless, participants in the current study perceived the actor in the complimenting appearance scenario as having worse intent, being more harmful, and more sexist in comparison to the actor in the helping behaviour scenario. One possible explanation is that complimenting someone's attractiveness while also having more power is societally seen as worse than the helping behaviour of the helping behaviour scenario. As suggested by Glick and Fiske (1996), complimenting a woman's attractiveness in the workplace could result in the woman feeling undermined and not be taken seriously. Further, Good and Rudman (2010) suggested that the positive perception of BS behaviour during a job interview, in comparison to HS, leads to women being especially vulnerable. The helping behaviour however might indicate a positive act. This left more room for perceiving the actor as having innocent intentions and more difficult to perceive him as being willingly harming and sexist. In sum, participants' perceptions of the actor's intent were similar in both scenarios, however, the complimenting appearance behaviour was seen as being worse.

Theoretical Contributions

The present research emphasizes the roles of intentions to harm and the connected perceptions of harm and sexism as well as the influence of feministic beliefs. The question of when BS is correctly judged as sexist and when not is of importance when trying to challenge BS. This study was the first one that investigated the roles of different types of motives behind BS behaviour. Moreover, this study showed that knowing about an actor's negative motives results in attributing more mal-intent, harm, and sexism to the situation. To overcome BS, people need to be able to correctly identify it as sexist. Further, the subtleness of BS is thought to make this especially difficult (Becker et al., 2014).

The results regarding hypothesis 1 showed that people perceived less mal-intent, harm, and sexism when being informed about an actor's egalitarian or benevolent motive. Thus, they attributed innocent intent to the actors. Hence, the difficulty in judging BS as sexist seems to lay in its positive appearance. Further, this might encourage actors to behave in a benevolently sexist manner while being unaware of their own sexism. People can be hesitant about labelling something seemingly positive as including negative intentions. As Dardenne et al. (2007) suggested that BS and its positive feeling to it might be encouraged by society instead of dismissing every form of sexism, it is important to be careful in labelling those who show BS behaviours as purely negative and to engage them in a productive manner. Namely, to educate them about recognizing a potential sexist nature of their actions and the following harm without blaming them. This is because, in our cultural and societal values, prejudices are viewed as merely negative (Monin & Miller, 2001). Therefore, implying or accusing someone of being prejudiced will most likely result in a strong emotional reaction by the accused one (Swim et al., 2003). Furthermore, this accusatory nature and possible resulting conflicts can influence interpersonal relationships, wherefore these judgments can have psychological and behavioural consequences for all involved (Swim et al., 2003). This learned sensitivity emphasizes the difficulty of correctly labelling someone and their behaviour as sexist. Hence, the importance of understanding under which circumstances people recognize BS and its harm.

Furthermore, examining how people recognize BS, and how BS may be hidden or affected by the motives of people committing those acts, might help in raising awareness of BS and its effects, and to show that committing BS does not necessarily mean that someone is inherently sexist or prejudiced. The correlation between feminism and recognition of BS, even when BS is committed in a subtle manner, is a powerful indicator that those who are aware and supportive of feminism recognize BS more easily. As mentioned before, Becker and Swim (2012) showed that educating people about BS and its consequences reduces its

endorsement regarding everyday sexism. As such, it is proposed that a tempered, educational approach to teaching people about BS, and how to recognize it in themselves and others, can be effective in mitigating its negative effects in the workplace as well. In today's era, we are trying to enable women to have the chance to reach the highest echelons of power much like men do and be treated equally. Hence, defining, understanding, and finally mitigating hidden sources of prejudice and professional obstacles such as BS attitudes and actions is of importance.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The study made important contributions to the understanding of which variables influence judgments of BS, nevertheless, it is not without limitations. Most importantly, the relation between feministic beliefs and the perceived intent was not consistent across the conditions. Moreover, participants attributed less mal-intent to the actor showing helping behaviours in comparison to the actor pointing out attractiveness. This finding emphasises that targets' perceptions can differ when facing different types of BS behaviours. Moreover, BS in relation to the workplace has been the focus of research until now. Thus, future research should focus on BS outside of the workplace as well. However, using different scenarios acting in different settings, for example during dating, in long-term relationships, or in mixed-gender friend groups, is of importance to get a better and more general picture of BS. Kupfer and Gul (2019) for example, researched BS connected to mate preferences and showed that women found BS men more attractive despite recognizing it as harmful. Hence, it shows that recognition and judgments of BS can vary in different situations. Thus, the importance of studying BS within different contexts. Additionally, in the current study, it was found that there were differences between the judgments people had of each situation, despite both being workplace scenarios. This suggests that there are extra factors that could affect people's recognition and tolerance of BS. For example, one can ask if there are certain workplace cultures, rules or other elements which emphasise or de-emphasise BS as positive or negative behaviour. Moreover, it is of question to what extent people's judgments of BS differ between workplace and personal or domestic contexts. Hence, further research into how BS and judgments of BS occur depending on different scenarios and environments could help account for the differences within the results of this study and the ones that preceded it.

Another limitation is that the current study used a rather homogeneous sample due to convenience sampling. Examining the perceptions of heterogeneous populations with less feministic attitudes can help broaden the results of the current study. Future research should check if participants with less feministic attitudes find it more difficult to perceive the

situations as harmful and sexist. This knowledge then can help find strategies to overcome BS. As researched by Becker and Swim (2012), knowledge about the consequences of BS reduces its endorsement. Similarly, promoting feministic beliefs might be able to increase people's capabilities of detecting BS. Additionally, other moderating variables should be assessed by future research. Most importantly, possible gender differences and their perceptions towards work-related scenarios should be examined. A reason for this being of importance is that the scenarios described in the current study integrated a male agent acting on a female target. And with BS being gender-dependent, that means, women being the targets, men and women might perceive the scenarios and actors differently. This understanding is important for developing possible strategies, targeting different subgroups to be more efficient, for overcoming BS.

Another critical revelation that was found during this study was that it appears that placing BS on its own, as opposed to contrasted with HS, as well as placing it in a formalized environment such as the workplace is effective in having people recognize the harm, potential mal-intent, and sexism of BS actions. This indicates the need for future research to study BS on its own and not only in connection to the excessively negative element of HS to re-evaluate past research findings (e.g., Dardenne et al., 2007; Dumont et al. 2010). Future research could be done to see how priming people with HS could affect their recognition of negative intents, harm, and sexism of BS. This could explain some discrepancies regarding this study and the aforementioned ones. If this is proven then it could also indicate that in any attempt to persuade or educate people regarding the harm of BS, it might be unproductive to contrast with HS as HS may affect people's evaluation of the harm and their understanding of the full consequences of BS actions.

Conclusion

BS can be seen as upholding traditional gender stereotypes (Bohner et al., 2010; Glick & Fiske, 1996; Goh & Hall, 2015; Hopkins-Doyle et al., 2019) resulting in inequality and various harmful consequences (e.g., Dardenne et al., 2007; Dumont et al., 2010), hence understanding judgments of BS is of importance. Gaining an understanding of how society reproduces and accepts BS is important in not only reducing it but also in pointing it out in a careful and productive manner. More emphasis should be put on how to recognize BS behaviour despite its positive look. In line with research on moral judgments and legal decisions (Swim et al., 2013; Young & Saxe, 2011), it was suggested that the subtleness of BS indicates an innocent intent. Knowledge of an actor's intention to harm plays a crucial

role in judging a BS situation as sexist or not, with people attributing more mal-intent and sexism when actors' motives are negative.

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Appendices

Appendix A

PROJECT TITLE: Judgments of Behaviour

INVESTIGATORS: Lina Böttcher (B.Sc. Psychology Student), and Dr. Pelin Gül, Department of Psychology, Health, and Technology, University of Twente, Netherlands.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to advance our understanding of the many factors that influence people's judgments of various behaviours.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you found this survey online or were asked to participate by one of the researchers or data collectors, and because we are interested in these processes in a wide variety of people. **We are seeking individuals who are at least 18 years old.** If you are under 18, please do not participate.

PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to answer several demographics (age, gender, nationality, education, political orientation, and sexual orientation). Next, you will be asked to read two short scenarios and answer questions regarding your thoughts about these scenarios. Followingly, you will be asked to indicate your (dis-)agreeable with statements related to men and women in today's society. Finally, you will be provided with more details about this study.

Your participation will last approximately **10 minutes**. People who participate via SONA Systems will be compensated with **0.25 credits**.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to decline to participate, refuse to answer any individual questions, or withdraw from the study at any time without the need to give any reason.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

There are no known or anticipated risks associated with this study. Although this study will not benefit you personally, we hope that our results will add to the knowledge about factors influencing people's judgments of partner violence.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your responses are completely anonymous, and cannot be traced back to you because no personally identifying information such as names are asked in this survey. The information you provide will not be disclosed to third parties, and they will be aggregated with the responses of other participants and examined for hypothesized patterns. Your anonymous

responses will be used for scientific research into various aspects of personality and social psychology. Data from this study may be stored in an online repository and shared publicly to adhere to best practices in scientific transparency.

ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Your responses will be strictly anonymous; we will not be collecting or retaining any information about your identity. The information you provide will not be disclosed to third parties, and they will be aggregated with the responses of other participants and examined for hypothesized patterns. Data from this study will be stored in an online repository and shared publicly to adhere to best practices in scientific transparency.

QUESTIONS

For further information about this study, you may contact **Dr. Pelin Gül**, p.gul@utwente.nl, the person in charge of this research study, or write an email to **Lina Böttcher**, l.boettcher@student.utwente.nl.

If you would like to talk with someone other than the researchers to discuss any problems or concerns, to discuss situations in the event that a member of the research team is not available, or to discuss your rights as a research participant, please contact the Ethical Review Committee of the Behavioral and Management Sciences Faculty, University of Twente, Netherlands, ethicscommittee-bms@utwente.nl.

CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION PROVISIONS

In order to continue with this survey, you have to agree with the aforementioned information and consent to participate in the study.

- I agree to taking part in this survey
- I do not agree to taking part in this survey

Appendix B

You have come to the end of this survey.

Thank you very much for participating in this study!

Information about The Study

This study was designed to examine the role of intent and harm on judgments of benevolent sexism. Benevolent sexism is a subtle form of sexism and involves subjectively positive attitudes such as "women should be cherished and protected by man"

Now that you know about the full aim of this study, you are asked to give your consent in participating in this study and the use of your anonymised answers again. If you changed your mind and do not want to participate anymore, you are free to refuse.

If you have any questions regarding this research, feel free to contact the researcher of this study, **Lina Böttcher (l.boettcher@student.utwente.nl)**, University of Twente.

- I agree to taking part in this study
- I do not agree to taking part in this study

Appendix C

Baseline scenario (BS - helping women with computers):

A training officer of a big tech company, Tom, sends out an email inviting employees for an extra training course for a new computer program the employees have been briefly shown to use. The extra training can help employees become more skilled at using the computer program. He only sends the email to the female employees.

Mental state nice but egalitarian: Tom doesn't think that women need extra help with the computer program. He just wants to make sure that women feel welcome, included and supported in the company.

Mental state benevolent motives: Tom doesn't think that women are less able at computers than men are. He just likes to act chivalrous because he thinks women should be appreciated and cherished.

Mental state negative stereotype: Tom has the negative stereotype about women, that they are less able with computers than men are.

Mental state is to undermine: Tom wants to make women feel less competent than himself and other men in the organization.

Baseline scenario (BS - complimenting women's attractiveness):

A hiring manager of a big brokerage firm, Paul, is seeking to hire new talented employees who have promising potential to excel in the firm. Out of approximately 100 applications he receives for the job, he invites 10 candidates for an interview. During the interviews with female candidates, he makes comments regarding how in addition to sales skills, their attractive looks can help in this job.

Mental state nice but egalitarian: Paul doesn't think that attractiveness or being a woman matter for being a successful broker. He just wants to make sure that women feel encouraged and supported in the interviews.

Mental state benevolent motives: Paul doesn't think that attractiveness matters for being a successful broker. He just likes to act chivalrous and complement women, because he thinks women should be cherished.

Mental state negative stereotype: Paul has the negative stereotype about women, that they are only able to sell stocks if they are attractive.

Mental state is to undermine: Paul wants to make women feel objectified, not matter their competencies.

authority over his children.*

Both husband and wife should be equally responsible for the care of their children.



The first duty of a woman with young children is to home and family.*



A man who has chosen to stay at home and be a house-husband is not less masculine than a man who is employed full time.



An employed woman can establish as warm and secure relationship with her children as a mother who is not employed.



A woman should not let bearing and rearing children stand in the way of a career if she wants it.

Women should be more concerned with clothing and appearance than men. *

Men and women should be able to freely make choices about their lives without being restricted by gender.

Abortion is an issue of women's rights.

If men were the sex who got pregnant, more reliable and convenient birth control would be available.

It is reasonable to boycott a company's product if you think that their commercials are sexist.

There is no such thing as rape between a man and his wife.*

People who complain that pornography treats women like objects are overreacting.*

Men still don't take women's ideas seriously.

All men receive economic, sexual, and psychological benefits from male domination.

To show that you are paying attention to the questions, please select 2

(disagree) for this
item.