


How Attractive Are Sexist Intimates to Adolescents? The Influence of Sexist Beliefs and Relationship Experience

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Abstract

The emergence of heterosexual intimate relationship experiences has been described as central to the development of ambivalent sexist attitudes during adolescence. The quality of these relationships might be largely determined by the perceived attractiveness and expectancies about potential partners also in ideological terms. In a questionnaire study, 262 Spanish adolescents reported their attraction toward various sexist (hostile, benevolent, and ambivalent) and non-sexist profiles of other-sex targets as potential friends and intimate partners. Relationships between attraction judgments and participants' own sexist beliefs as well as their experiences in romantic relationships were examined. Results show that young women considered benevolent sexist young men to be most attractive and young men considered ambivalent sexist young women to be most attractive. Congruency effects were found between these preferences and participants' own sexist attitudes. In addition, young women's experiences in romantic relationships significantly predicted their preference for benevolent sexist young men. Discussion focuses on the importance of socialization in the development of such preferences and on the endorsement of benevolent sexism in female and male adolescents. More generally, theoretical and applied implications of these results in relation to ambivalent sexism theory are discussed.

Keywords

sex role attitudes, sexism, interpersonal attraction, social dating, adolescent attitudes

Heterosexual romantic relationships are influenced by the interplay between male dominance and heterosexual interdependence (Rudman & Glick, 2008). Glick and Fiske (1996, 2001) argued that these two factors determine the ambivalent content of status-perpetuating sexist ideologies. Specifically, they proposed the existence of two correlated types of sexism—hostile sexism and benevolent sexism—that characterize adult gender relations. The first type, hostile sexism (HS), is based on the presumed inferiority of women compared to men and conceives of women as threatening for male dominance through sexual (dyadic) power and feminist ideology. The second more subtle and insidious type, benevolent sexism (BS), is based on protectionist beliefs and reverence for stereotypically feminine traits as complementary to masculinity; it conceives of women as wonderful creatures and heterosexual intimacy as necessary to fulfill men's romantic needs. Both types of sexism function as legitimizing ideologies that serve to perpetuate gender inequality across cultures, including Spain (Glick et al., 2000, 2004; Moya, Glick, Expósito, de Lemus, & Hart, 2007).

But are gender relations always characterized by this ambivalence? Research on the development of intergroup gender relations suggests that gender-based segregation

characterizes childhood (Leaper, 1994; Maccoby, 1990, 1998, 2002; Mehta & Strough, 2009). First intimate heterosexual contact begins in adolescence (Martin & Ruble, 2010) when sexual interdependence leads to increasing interactions and friendship between young men and young women (Leaper & Anderson, 1997; Pellegrini, 1994; Petersen, Leffert, & Graham, 1995). In an attempt to explain the development of sexist attitudes from childhood to adulthood, Glick and Hilt (2000) propose that the image of the other sex starts to evoke ambivalent feelings as the segregated relationships that characterize childhood gradually give way to interdependence between the sexes caused by sexual attraction

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during adolescence. If this is the case, the patterns of attraction between male and female adolescents should be influenced by the benevolent and hostile sexist attitudes that each one of them endorses, as well as by the previous romantic relationship experiences through which they have gone. In the present study, we examine how attractive adolescents find sexist attitudes expressed by possible other-sex partners in a Spanish cultural context. We also analyze the role of adolescent romantic relationship experiences in the assessment of such sexist attitudes. We propose that the interdependence motive that Glick and Hilt describe as central to ambivalent attitudes is related to the emergence of heterosexual intimate relationship experiences during adolescence. Hence, romantic relationship experience might be a good predictor of personal endorsement of sexism as well as perceived attractiveness of sexist others.

How Attractive Are Sexist Young Men?

According to the theoretical model of the development of sexism proposed by Glick and Hilt (2000), adolescence is the time when interdependence between the sexes and sexual attraction leads to an increase in BS, coexisting with HS, in young men. BS, characterized by courteous and chivalrous attitudes, is consistent with traditional romantic ideals communicated to girls during childhood (Rudman & Glick, 2008; Walkerdine, 1984). From a very early age, girls are socialized to endorse benevolently sexist romantic ideals through play and tales (Holland & Einsenhart, 1990). For instance, children's tales promote the "princess" ideal for girls in search for a "Prince Charming" that cares for and protects them (Rudman & Glick, 2008; Walkerdine, 1984). As early as 4 years old, girls prefer romantic stories whereas boys prefer adventure tales (Collins-Standley, Gan, Yu, & Zillman, 1996). The chivalrous attitudes of Prince Charming learned in girls' childhood are associated with BS (Viki, Abrams, & Hutchison, 2003) and are still present in adult women, who endorse positive attitudes toward such romantic ideals even at the implicit level (Rudman & Heppen, 2003). In research recently conducted in Spain, young men's romantic relationship experience was found to be positively related to their acceptance of benevolent sexist beliefs (de Lemus, Moya, & Glick, 2010), despite the general decrease in sexism that is observed with increasing age (Lameiras & Rodríguez-Castro, 2002, 2003). The development of BS in male adolescents may play an instrumental role in their ability to approach young women because young women may interpret young men's benevolent behaviors as indicators of closeness and romanticism and may even demand these behaviors in their romantic relationships (de Lemus et al., 2010).

On the other hand, boys' games are generally focused on adventures and heroes that involve danger and aggressiveness, unrelated to romantic ideals (Flannery & Watson, 1993). However, some of the scripts learned through these activities might be useful later on as templates for

protectionist, chivalrous behaviors of male adolescents toward young women when other interpersonal motivations come into play (Glick & Hilt, 2000). We propose that such romantic scripts implied in BS might even be demanded by female adolescents themselves, as some research with adult women already suggests. Studies with the adult population have shown that women prefer benevolent sexist men to hostile sexist men (Bohner, Ahlborn, & Steiner, 2010; Kilianski & Rudman, 1998). In Kilianski and Rudman's (1998) research, North American women preferred a non-sexist man overall, but preferred a benevolent man to a hostile man. Bohner, Ahlborn, and Steiner (2010) assessed German women's preferences for four types of men—hostile, benevolent, ambivalent, and non-sexist—by including information about both their benevolent and hostile attitudes (a major procedural difference to Kilianski and Rudman's study). They found that women preferred a purely benevolent (and non-hostile) man over a non-sexist man. It is thus plausible to assume that adolescent young men with greater romantic relationship experience would show increased BS (de Lemus et al., 2010) because benevolent attitudes in young men are positively valued (i.e., perceived as attractive) by adolescent young women themselves.

Thus, young women may prefer benevolent sexist young men that match their romantic ideals as intimate partners over young men who show a certain degree of sexist hostility (i.e., who are hostile or ambivalent sexists). They may even prefer benevolent sexist young men to non-sexist young men because the latter do not endorse such beliefs that promise them the affectionate positive reward of benevolence in intimate relationships (Glick & Fiske, 2001) and that match their romantic ideals (Lee, Fiske, Glick, & Chen, 2010). Therefore, a novel aspect of the present research is that we analyze this attraction to male benevolence in adolescence at the key developmental stage in which romantic relationship experiences emerge.

How Attractive Are Sexist Young Women?

Previous research (Bohner et al., 2010; Kilianski & Rudman, 1998) has focused on the perceived attractiveness of sexist men in the eyes of women, but to date no known research has addressed the question of how sexist ideologies influence the perceived attractiveness of females in the eyes of males. To address this novel question is an important aim of the present research.

Although BS in young men increases during adolescence, HS does not disappear and actually coexists with BS (de Lemus et al., 2010). Glick and Hilt (2000) propose that heterosexual young men target their benevolence toward young women whom they consider as possible future partners, that is, young women with whom they could have a romantic relationship; at the same time, they focus their hostility on young women who represent a threat to their male power and/or do not represent the traditional stereotype of femininity. It is thus

reasonable to expect that young women's sexist ideology should considerably influence their attractiveness to young men. Following the assumptions of ambivalent sexism, women can also endorse sexist attitudes toward their own group (Glick & Fiske, 2001). The extent to which young women endorse hostile beliefs is related to their acceptance of traditional roles and characteristics for women that do not challenge men's status (Glick et al., 2000). On the other hand, the extent to which young women endorse benevolent beliefs is related to their motivation to fulfill the intimate needs of young men and comply with their demands when they are framed in paternalistic terms. For instance, benevolently sexist women are more inclined to accept discrimination from their intimate male partners, even if it reduces their career opportunities (Moya et al., 2007). Hence, men who are interested in holding their privileged status in intimate relations might value positively the fact that women endorse both hostile and benevolent attitudes.

Several studies corroborate that counter-stereotypical behavior regarding gender roles can lead to punishments and negative assessments for adult women, an effect known as "backlash" (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992; Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004; Rudman & Glick, 1999, 2001), particularly in work relations (Becker, Glick, Ilic, & Bohner, 2011; Davidson & Burke, 2000; Schein, 1994, 2001; Schein & Davison, 1993). Being incongruent with men's internalized image of the prototypical woman or not supporting the prevailing sexist ideas can also affect women negatively in their friendship or romantic relationships, even during adolescence, when the first romantic relationships are shaped. Following this rationale, heterosexual young women who accept both hostile and benevolent sexist beliefs that legitimize the traditional structure of gender relationships may be seen as more attractive to young men.

Individual Characteristics and Dating Preferences

Some individual factors, such as personal experiences with heterosexual romantic relationships and adolescents' own endorsement of sexism, might influence the perceived attractiveness of other-sex peers. Given the importance of early experiences with romantic relationships (de Lemus et al., 2010; Glick & Hilt, 2000; Leaper & Anderson, 1997), this factor may be a key aspect in establishing what women expect from men and vice versa. Experience in intimate relationships may change the expectations that one sex has regarding the other, making the "advantages" or "disadvantages" of having a sexist or non-sexist partner more salient for both sexes. Romantic relationship experience may make young women more aware of the "benefits" of having a young man to protect and idealize them; that is, a benevolently sexist partner who is consistent with the romantic ideals of their childhood. Regarding males, both types of sexism act as legitimizing ideologies of gender inequality (Glick

et al., 2000, 2004) and provide advantages and benefits to young men in their romantic relationships; thus, romantic relationship experience is likely to increase their attraction to both hostile and benevolent sexist young women. In females, HS implies their acceptance of traditional roles, whereas BS reinforces their femininity and romanticism to satisfy their need for interdependence with males.

Various studies have highlighted that individual attitudes and expectations regarding gender roles influence preferences for intimate partners. We are usually attracted to individuals who share our beliefs and attitudes (Beall, Eagly, & Stenberg, 2004; Byrne, 1971; Kerckhoff & Davis, 1962; Newcomb, 1961) or are similar to us in terms of education, occupation, and economic resources (Kalmijn, 1991, 1994; Schwartz & Mare, 2005). Moreover, studies have shown that sexist men and women prefer partners whose behaviors conform well with traditional gender roles—caregiver for women; provider for men (Eagly, Wood, & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2004; Eastwick et al., 2006; Johannesen-Schmidt & Eagly, 2002; Lee et al., 2010)—and gender expectations—physical attractiveness for women; high resources for men (Sibley & Overall, 2011). Bohner et al. (2010) found a congruency effect between the BS of female participants and their preference for male profiles high in benevolence (i.e., both fully benevolent and ambivalent). Greater attraction to people who share the same benevolent or hostile sexist attitudes is also likely to exist in adolescence.

In short, we predicted congruency effects in participants' attractiveness ratings, with high own BS (HS) being associated with higher attractiveness ratings of profiles that are high in BS (HS) for both sexes. Furthermore, we predicted that romantic relationship experience would be positively related to young women's attractiveness ratings for young men high in BS (i.e., the benevolent and ambivalent profiles) and to young men's attractiveness ratings for young women high in any form of sexism (i.e., the benevolent, hostile, and ambivalent profiles). Moreover, we predicted that romantic relationship experience would reinforce, in both young women and men, the belief that sexist attitudes benefit them and would thus reduce their attraction to non-sexist profiles, which do not give them the expected rewards associated with sexism.

The Present Study

In the present study, adolescent young men and young women were asked to assess the attractiveness of targets of the other sex whose levels of acceptance of hostile and benevolent sexist beliefs differ. This was done using the methodology applied by Bohner et al. (2010), building four profiles of young men and four profiles of young women who differed in their sexist attitudes. Each profile presented information on both kinds of sexism: benevolent (high vs. low) and hostile (high vs. low). These four profiles represented people high in HS but low in BS (hostile sexist profile), high in BS but

low in HS (benevolent sexist profile), high in both BS and HS (ambivalent profile), and low in both BS and HS (non-sexist profile). These profiles were developed on the basis of hypothetical responses of these young men and young women to 10 items of the *Inventario de Sexismo Ambivalente para Adolescentes* (ISA; Ambivalent Sexism Inventory for Adolescents; de Lemus, Castillo, Moya, Padilla, & Ryan, 2008; de Lemus et al., 2010). This instrument was developed by de Lemus and her colleagues (2010) in order to adapt the original Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI; Glick & Fiske, 1996) to a Spanish adolescent sample. Previous research using this scale has shown higher BS than HS scores in Spanish young men and young women, as well as higher BS scores for young women than young men (de Lemus et al., 2008, 2010); these results were replicated for German young men and young women with a German adolescent version of the ASI that was derived from the Spanish version (see Kreft, Eyssel, Bohner, & Habitzreither, in press).

The three main objectives of the present study were to (a) analyze the attractiveness patterns of the various sexist profiles in adolescent young men and females; (b) explore the influence of participants' own sexist beliefs on the assessment of sexist profiles; and (c) explore the influence of romantic relationship experience on preferences for sexist profiles of adolescent young women and males. Our hypotheses were:

Hypothesis 1: Male adolescents will prefer benevolent and hostile sexist young women to young women with low sexist beliefs. The highest-rated female profile will be the ambivalent profile, which shows high endorsement of both hostile and benevolent sexist beliefs.

Hypothesis 2: Female adolescents will prefer young men high in benevolent sexism to those low in benevolent sexism, and young men low in hostile sexism to those high in hostile sexism. The highest-rated male profile will be the benevolent profile, which shows high endorsement of benevolent but not hostile sexist beliefs.

Hypothesis 3: A congruency effect will be found between sexist beliefs of participants and sexist beliefs of the profiles regarding both HS and BS; thus, higher participant BS will positively predict attractiveness ratings for targets high in BS (Hypothesis 3a), and higher participant HS will positively predict attractiveness ratings for targets high in HS (Hypothesis 3b).

Hypothesis 4: Romantic relationship experience will positively predict young women's attractiveness ratings for targets who are high in BS (Hypothesis 4a); it will also positively predict young men's attractiveness ratings for targets who are high in either BS (Hypothesis 4b) or HS (Hypothesis 4b) or both (Hypothesis 4c).

Hypothesis 5: Romantic relationship experience will negatively predict young men's and young women's attractiveness ratings for non-sexist targets (i.e., profiles low in both HS and BS).

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 262 adolescents: 106 young men and 156 young women. Participants were secondary education students in two Spanish high schools. Ages ranged from 12 to 17 years ($M = 15.29$ years, $SD = 1.23$). Ninety-two participants (35%) had never had a romantic relationship, and 170 participants already had some relationship experience (29% reported only one intimate relationship, 27% reported two relationships, 22% reported three relationships, and 22% reported more than three relationships). Participation in the study was voluntary. No information about sexual orientation was collected because this could have been perceived as sensitive by the adolescents or their parents.

Procedure and Materials

The surveys were administered collectively to students in three secondary education schools (two in the region of La Rioja and one in the region of Andalusia, both in Spain) and in several school years: second year of compulsory secondary education (12- to 13-year-olds), fourth year of compulsory secondary education (14- to 15-year-olds), and first year of non-compulsory secondary education (16- to 17-year-olds). Explicit permission by the Head of each school as well as by the academic tutors was obtained; also, each participant gave his or her individual informed consent to participate voluntarily in the research and responses were anonymous. The survey took 50 to 60 minutes to complete. Materials were presented in the order described below, ending with sociodemographic variables (age, citizenship, and school year). Young women assessed the attractiveness of the four male profiles (A, H, B, and N) and young men assessed the attractiveness of the four female profiles (A, H, B, and N), making the profiles a within-subjects variable. We specified in the instructions that the study was dealing with dating relationships.

Partner profiles. Following the methodology used by Bohner et al. (2010), participants were shown four profiles of other-sex targets, each containing the target's hypothetical responses to 10 items (5 HS and 5 BS) taken from the ISA (de Lemus et al., 2008; see Appendix). A 2 (HS: high vs. low) \times 2 (BS: high vs. low) design was used to develop four profiles: non-sexist profile "N" (low HS and low BS), hostile profile "H" (high HS and low BS), benevolent profile "B" (low HS and high BS), and ambivalent profile "A" (high HS and high BS). We selected those 5 HS items and those 5 BS items that had the highest correlation with the total of the corresponding subscale from a previous study (de Lemus et al., 2008) for building the profiles. To increase the ecological validity of the present study, the sexism scores of the various profiles were developed from the mean scores in BS and HS of an equivalent sample from the study by de

Lemus, Castillo, Moya, Padilla, and Ryan (2008). One standard deviation (*SD*) was added or subtracted from the mean scores obtained for each item to obtain a profile high or low in hostile or benevolent sexism, respectively. The four profiles were shown to the participants simultaneously, on an A3 page (29.7 cm × 42.0 cm). To control for the effects of order, we used incomplete counterbalancing, following a Latin square design (AHNB, HNBA, NBAH, and BAHN).

Profiles were assessed by participants using an attractiveness rating scale specially developed for our study. The scale had 10 items with a 5-point response format from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*totally*) to assess each profile in terms of friendship and intimate relationship: “Would you like to have this boy/girl as a classmate?”; “Would you like to be friends with this boy/girl?”; “Would you like to go out alone with this boy/girl?”; “Would you like to be his/her boyfriend/girlfriend?”; “Do you think he/she is a good boy/girl?”; “Do you find him/her attractive?”; “Would you like to hook up with this boy/girl?”; “Is it the kind of boy/girl you would hook up with?”; “Would you like your friends to be like him/her?”; “Would you like to have a boyfriend/girlfriend like him/her?”; and “Thinking about the future, would you like your husband/wife or partner to be like him/her?” The results of Bartlett’s sphericity test and a Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin index greater than 0.91 in all profiles confirmed that the measure was fit for a factor analysis. The principal components analysis with oblique rotation showed the appropriateness of using one single factor in each case that explained at least 57.35% of the variance. No other factor with an eigenvalue above 1 emerged. All items showed factor loadings ranging from .52 to .71. The scale was very reliable (Cronbach’s α s > .90) for each of the four profiles assessed.

Intimate relationship experience. A broader 17-item scale was developed from the index of romantic relationship experience proposed by de Lemus, Moya, and Glick (2010). Items assessed the current or previous intimate relationships of adolescents (participants could report up to four previous relationships). For both previous and present relationships, participants reported the following information: seriousness of the relationship (“Do you consider that person is/was your boyfriend/girlfriend or just a fling?” where *fling* = 0; *girlfriend/boyfriend* = 1), occurrence of sexual intercourse (“Have you had/did you have full sexual relations?” where *no* = 0; *yes* = 1), and length of the relationship (“How long is/was the relationship?” reported in number of months). Also, participants indicated the frequency of interactions in their current relationship (“How often do you see each other?” coded: *once every 2 or 3 weeks or less* = 1; *only on weekends* = 2; *several times a week [from Monday to Sunday]* = 3; *every day* = 4), and the number of finished past relationships (“How many relationships have you already had?” coded: *none* = 0; *one* = 1; *two* = 2; *three* = 3; *up to 3 or more than 3* = 4). We standardized all variables to average them into a measure of relationship experience so

that higher scores represented greater relationship experience (i.e., greater number of relationships, longer relationships, more serious or intense relationships, and experience of sexual intercourse). The scale was reliable ($\alpha = .74$). All items had discrimination indexes above .35, and item-total correlations above .50.

Ambivalent Sexism Inventory for Adolescents. This ISA scale (de Lemus et al., 2008) contains 20 items divided into two subscales that measure hostile sexism and benevolent sexism, using a response format from 0 (*totally disagree*) to 5 (*totally agree*); higher scores reflect more sexist attitudes. The first 10 items measure hostile sexism (e.g., “Young men should exert control over who their girlfriends interact with”), and the remaining 10 items measure benevolent sexism (e.g., “A boy will feel incomplete if he is not dating a girl”); more item examples can be found in Appendix. Internal consistency α s obtained in our study were .86 for the HS subscale and .82 for the BS subscale.

Results

In order to test our predictions regarding the perceived attractiveness of female targets by male participants (Hypothesis 1) and of male targets by female participants (Hypothesis 2), we first conducted a mixed analysis of variance (ANOVA) with benevolence (high vs. low) and hostility (high vs. low) of profiles as within-subject factors and participant gender (female vs. male) as a between-subjects factor. In doing so, we followed the analysis strategy used by Bohner et al. (2010). Considering the existing correlations between HS and BS in previous research, using a two-factor design to examine the influence of each one of these components orthogonally was the most appropriate strategy for testing our hypotheses. It allowed us to test to what extent benevolence itself led to increased attractiveness and whether this effect was moderated by the presence versus absence of hostility (and vice versa). Second, we conducted a series of multiple regression analyses to examine the predictive role of own endorsement of sexism (Hypothesis 3) and romantic relationship experience (Hypothesis 4) on the perceived attractiveness of each one of the profiles.

Perceived Attractiveness of Sexist Profiles

To test Hypothesis 1, which predicted a preference for high sexist young women by young men, and Hypothesis 2, which predicted a preference for high benevolent sexist and low hostile sexist young men by young women, we conducted a mixed 2 × 2 × 2 ANOVA with benevolence (high vs. low) and hostility (high vs. low) of profiles as within-subject factors and participant gender (female vs. male) as a between-subjects factor. Mean scores of the attractiveness ratings of each profile are shown in Table 1.

In line with our hypotheses, we found a significant interaction of Benevolence × Hostility × Gender, $F(1, 260) = 6.08$; $p = .014$, $\eta^2 = .02$.¹ This interaction was further

Table 1. Perceived Attractiveness of Profiles by Participant Gender.

	Non-Sexist Profile	Benevolent Profile	Hostile Profile	Ambivalent Profile
Young men's ratings				
<i>M</i>	2.57 _c	2.90 _b	2.89 _b	3.12 _a
<i>SD</i>	.85	.97	.90	.96
Young women's ratings				
<i>M</i>	2.43 _c	3.94 _a	1.73 _d	2.76 _b
<i>SD</i>	.86	.86	.67	.99
Comparisons of young women's and men's ratings				
<i>t</i> (260)	1.27	-9.16	11.95	2.98
<i>p</i>	.20	< .001	< .001	< .01

Note. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation. Different subscripts within each row indicate significant mean differences (paired-samples *t*-tests) across profiles at $p < .05$. The possible range of the attractiveness scale was from 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating greater attractiveness.

analyzed with separate repeated-measures ANOVAs for each gender and paired comparisons between the various profiles using *t*-tests for repeated measures. Male participants showed main effects of benevolence, $F(1, 105) = 10.06, p = .002, \eta^2 = .09$, and hostility, $F(1, 105) = 8.67, p = .004, \eta^2 = .08$; as predicted in Hypothesis 1, young men rated profiles of young women high in benevolence as being more attractive ($M = 3.01$) than profiles low in benevolence ($M = 2.73$) and profiles high in hostility as being more attractive ($M = 3.01$) than profiles low in hostility ($M = 2.74$). The Benevolence \times Hostility interaction was not significant, $F < 1$. The main effects of hostility and benevolence were thus additive. Pairwise comparisons showed that the ambivalent sexist female was perceived as the most attractive by young men (further supporting Hypothesis 1), more than the hostile sexist female, the benevolent sexist female, and the non-sexist female. The non-sexist female was also perceived to be less attractive than the hostile and benevolent profiles; finally, there was no significant difference between the perceptions of attractiveness of hostile and benevolent young women (see Table 1).

Among female participants, the main effects of benevolence, $F(1, 155) = 254.48, p < .001, \eta^2 = .62$, and hostility, $F(1, 155) = 241.68, p < .001, \eta^2 = .61$, were also significant, as well as the Benevolence \times Hostility interaction, $F(1, 155) = 23.30, p < .001, \eta^2 = .13$. As predicted in Hypothesis 2, young women rated profiles high in benevolence as being more attractive ($M = 3.35$) than those low in benevolence ($M = 2.08$), and profiles low in hostility as being more attractive ($M = 3.19$) than those high in hostility ($M = 2.24$). Young women rated the benevolent sexist male as the most attractive, followed by the ambivalent sexist male and then the non-sexist male, whereas the hostile sexist male was rated as least attractive. All pairwise comparisons were significant (see Table 1). These results highlight the reinforcing component of BS, to the extent that the ambivalent male (high in BS and high in HS) was rated more highly than the non-sexist male.

Table 2. Benevolent Sexism (BS), Hostile Sexism (HS), and Romantic Relationship Experience by Participant Gender.

	BS	HS	Experience
Young men's ratings			
<i>M</i>	3.74	3.45	6.21
<i>SD</i>	.94	.95	5.48
Young women's ratings			
<i>M</i>	4.10	2.41	6.04
<i>SD</i>	.89	.76	5.10
Comparisons of young women's and men's ratings			
<i>t</i> (260)	3.13	9.72	.26
<i>p</i>	< .01	< .001	.79

Note. Range of HS and BS subscales was from 0 to 5, with higher scores indicating greater HS and BS, respectively. The range of the relationship experience scale was from 0 to 20, with higher scores indicating more experience. The *t* values in the last row indicate comparisons between young men and young women in each variable.

Participant Sexism and Relationship Experience

Mean scores of HS, BS, and relationship experience by gender are shown in Table 2. Preliminary analyses of gender differences on HS, BS, and romantic relationship experience showed that young women endorsed BS more than young men, whereas young men endorsed HS more than young women. Young women endorsed BS more than HS, whereas young men endorsed HS more than BS. Young men and young women reported having a similar level of relationship experience. These results are consistent with previous studies with similar samples (de Lemus et al., 2008, 2010; Lameiras & Rodríguez-Castro, 2002; Montañés et al., 2012).

Hypotheses 3 and 4 predicted influences of participants' own sexism and romantic relationship experience on their preferences for the various sexist profiles. These hypotheses were tested by performing several multiple regression analyses—one for each profile's attractiveness rating. Because young men and young women rated different targets (young men rated females, young women rated males), we conducted separate regression analyses for young men and young women. In the first step, to control for the order of profile presentation, we included three dummy variables representing the four different order conditions.² In the second step, participants' age, HS, BS, and romantic relationship experience were introduced as concurrent predictor variables. All predictor variables were centered before conducting the analyses. Data exploration showed that there was no multicollinearity present because no values exceeded the limits set in the various regression models (maximum variance inflation factor [VIF] = 1.61, minimum tolerance level = .61) or condition indices (maximum CI = 3.82). Results for the main predictors are shown in Table 3.

As can be seen in Table 3, we found congruency effects for BS in both young men and young women, with participants' own BS significantly and positively predicting attractiveness ratings for the two profiles high in BS (i.e., the benevolent and ambivalent profile), but not for the two profiles low in

Table 3. Prediction of Preferences for Sexist Profiles From Participants' Sexist Ideology and Relationship Experience.

	Non-Sexist		Benevolent		Hostile		Ambivalent	
	Profile		Profile		Profile		Profile	
	β	<i>t</i>	β	<i>t</i>	β	<i>t</i>	β	<i>t</i>
Young men								
Age	.03	.27	.11	1.07	.04	.48	.20	1.96*
BS	-.12	-1.19	.38	3.92**	-.28	-3.01**	.29	2.96**
HS	.11	1.06	-.09	-.90	.29	3.28**	.23	2.29*
Experience	.06	.53	.06	.62	-.01	-.09	-.15	-1.40
R^2	.14		.18		.33		.17	
$F(7, 98)$	2.21*		3.04**		3.93**		2.94**	
Young women								
Age	.14	1.62	.04	.52	.14	1.74 [†]	-.05	-.67
BS	-.04	-.44	.28	3.05**	.15	1.67	.34	3.98**
HS	.04	.43	-.24	-2.77**	.16	1.90 [†]	.11	1.39
Experience	-.19	-2.28*	.14	1.87 [†]	-.13	-1.66	.08	1.15
R^2	.07		.15		.18		.26	
$F(7, 147)$	1.58		3.72**		4.56**		7.48**	

Note. BS = benevolent sexism; HS = hostile sexism. Regression analyses were performed controlling for the order of profiles presentation (in three dummy variables). [†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

BS (i.e., the non-sexist and hostile profile). Thus, Hypothesis 3a was fully supported. In addition, young men's own HS significantly and positively predicted their attractiveness ratings for the two profiles high in HS (i.e., the hostile, $p < .001$, and ambivalent profile, $p = .02$), but not for the two profiles low in BS (i.e., the non-sexist and benevolent profile). A similar pattern of relations between young women's HS and attractiveness ratings was found, but it was neither significant for the hostile target ($p = .06$) nor for the ambivalent target ($p = .16$). Thus, Hypothesis 3b received support only in the case of young men, but not in the case of young women.

The regression results for the predictor "romantic relationship experience" were less clear-cut. There was weak support for Hypothesis 4a: Young women with more (vs. less) relationship experience showed a trend ($p = .06$) toward rating the benevolent target as more attractive, but no such effect was found for the ambivalent target. Hypothesis 4b and 4c, received no support (all $ps > .51$) because young men's relationship experience did not predict their attractiveness ratings for female sexist targets. Finally, Hypothesis 5 was supported for the young women with increasing relationship experience who rated non-sexist targets as less attractive; however, no such effect was found for the young men.

Discussion

Our results show that the benevolent sexist profile was the most attractive for young women. This is consistent with findings by Bohner et al. (2010) in adult women and suggests that such preferences of adults start early in adolescence. However, in contrast to previous findings by Bohner et al.

(2010), as well as by Kilianski and Rudman (1998), adolescent young women also considered ambivalent sexist young men—who endorse benevolence as well as hostility—as being more attractive than non-sexist males. This new finding could be due to the younger age of our participants, or alternatively to cultural differences between Germany and Spain. A recent study suggests that the latter aspect might not be so important because we entirely replicated Bohner et al.'s findings in a Spanish adult sample: Spanish adult women preferred benevolent sexist men and non-sexist men to ambivalent and hostile sexist men (Montañés, de Lemus, Megías, & Moya, 2013). Hence, it seems that the preference for ambivalent sexist versus non-sexist young men is a specific effect of this age group (i.e., adolescents). Teenage young women might simply be less aware of sexism than adult women, and they might find hostile attitudes as typically "boyish" rather than sexist and hence disregard them if benevolence is present. Further research is needed to clarify the underlying mechanism for these apparent age differences.

In any case, adolescent young women seem to approve of benevolent behaviors more than older women do; this suggests that adolescents may be ready to tolerate a certain degree of hostility from their partners as long as it is accompanied by benevolent behaviors. This is known as the "ambivalent alliance" (Glick & Fiske, 2001) that maintains a situation of inequality. In a similar vein, research suggests that women themselves may adopt benevolent sexist attitudes as a response to environments that they perceive as hostile to women. This was shown in a cross-cultural comparison, where levels of women's BS were particularly high in societies with a high prevalence of HS (Glick et al., 2000), as well

as in an experimental study where U.S. female participants reported higher BS after learning that men held negative (vs. positive) attitudes toward women (Fischer, 2006). Also, BS may play a legitimizing role for clearly sexist behaviors: Moya et al. (2007, Study 2) found that benevolent justifications increased women's acceptance of discriminatory behavior by their partners.

Regarding adolescent males, our hypothesis that they would perceive young women who do not endorse sexist ideology as being less attractive was supported; this might reflect a kind of punishment (backlash) toward non-sexist young women for not accepting traditional ideas about their gender. Results of our study confirm this hypothesis, given that the non-sexist female target was considered to be the least attractive profile. In fact, the highest-rated profile by adolescent young men was that of an ambivalent sexist female who accepts traditional male dominance and superiority (HS) but at the same time demands benevolent behaviors of protection, care, and idealization (BS). These results suggest that adolescent young women who do not endorse and internalize sexist beliefs may be rejected by young men, who will consider them less attractive than those young women who accept traditional gender roles. This idea is consistent with research by de Lemus et al. (2010), who showed a positive relationship between young women's romantic relationship experience and their acceptance of hostile sexist beliefs.

Overall, adolescents of both sexes were found to prefer partners endorsing sexist beliefs. Young women preferred young men who endorse complementary benevolent sexism, especially after their first experiences in romantic relationships. This experience also predicted young women's lower ratings of the non-sexist male profile. Young men preferred young women with both benevolent and hostile ideology, that is, young women who accept traditional male dominance and superiority but also demand benevolent behaviors. This endorsement of sexist ambivalence by women, demanded and rewarded by men, maintains gender inequalities alongside the intimacy and interdependence of romantic relationships (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2011).

Interestingly, the finding that young men prefer sexist young women is consistent with the literature on backlash against atypical women (for a review, see Rudman & Phelan, 2008), whereas the finding that young women prefer low (vs. high) hostile sexist young men might be seen as contradicting some previous findings in backlash against atypical men. Several studies have shown that when men violate gender stereotypes, they also encounter backlash (Brescoll, Uhlmann, Moss-Racusin, & Sarnell, 2012; Heilman & Wallen, 2010; Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Rudman, 2010). According to this research, women might prefer a hostile or at least ambivalent sexist man because he could be viewed as the most compliant with traditional male gender stereotypes. However, our results do not support this prediction for adolescents. In our research, the male profiles express their sexist attitudes toward females, but they do not express opinions

that could be regarded as clearly counter-stereotypical or status-incongruent. Those men who express high BS beliefs might be seen as stereotype-consistent exemplars (because they assume women's inferiority and need for protection), even if this is not coupled with HS. In future research, it would be interesting to examine whether the four different profiles employed in our research are perceived as more or less compliant with traditional gender stereotypes. Furthermore, including a profile expressing pro-feminist attitudes would allow us to test whether a clear violation of male stereotypes would lead to some form of backlash in terms of lower perceived attractiveness of those males. Another reason why our study might not show backlash toward less-stereotypical young men (e.g., BS males) is because endorsing benevolent sexist beliefs, or rejecting hostile sexist ones, does not necessarily imply a threat to men's heterosexual masculinity, which seems to be a clear component of backlash toward atypical men (see Rudman & Glick, 2008). In fact, because participants only rated profiles from the other sex, the heterosexuality of the male targets might have been assumed as a default.

Further, our results showed a clear effect of attitudinal congruence between perceivers and targets (Bohner et al., 2010; Byrne, 1971; Eagly et al., 2004; Kerckhoff & Davis, 1962; Newcomb, 1961). In other words, individual attitudes and expectations regarding gender roles can influence the preference for partners of the other sex. Although our study does not provide evidence for a causal relationship between these variables, it nonetheless shows that greater adherence to hostile sexist beliefs in young men predicts their preference for young women with a hostile sexist ideology. The same applies to young men's benevolent sexism and their preference for benevolent sexist partners. These results highlight the importance of gender ideology in legitimizing gender inequalities (Jost & Kay, 2005). Recent findings suggest that benevolent sexist people have higher life satisfaction, and in the case of women this effect is mediated by their perceptions of gender relations as fair and equitable (Hammond & Sibley, 2011). The fact that sexist profiles are preferred by both young men and young women might perpetuate the endorsement of these attitudes because they are attractive for the other sex. Research shows that women describe themselves more in accordance with female stereotypes when they are motivated to interact with a benevolent sexist man than when they are motivated to interact with an egalitarian man (Sinclair, Huntsinger, Skorinko, & Hardin, 2005). Hence, if women perceive high BS men as more attractive, they might also behave more in line with benevolent sexist stereotypes.

Our last objective was to study the role played by romantic relationship experience in establishing preferences for people with different levels of benevolent and hostile sexism in adolescence. We hypothesized that intimate relationships show adolescents the advantage or disadvantage of having a sexist versus non-sexist partner. We consider that romantic relationship experience may lead females to assess benevolent sexist

males more positively because of the reinforcing character of the protective and idealizing attitudes of benevolent sexism in the short term (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001, 2011). The results of the present study support this idea, although longitudinal studies would be more conclusive for establishing a causal relationship. In contrast, romantic relationship experience was not related to a greater preference for sexist female profiles in young men. This result was unexpected, as we predicted that young men would find sexist young women more attractive the higher their relationship experience. Possibly, young men's relationship experience does not increase their attraction toward high BS young women because meeting the benevolence standards of young women might actually be a demanding task for young men (as they might discover in their early experiences). On the other hand, hostility can be perceived as a non-stereotypically feminine trait, so that higher HS in young women might not be perceived as more attractive by young men with higher romantic relationship experience. A more optimistic interpretation of these findings is that non-sexist partners are simply better for heterosexual relations and young men may realize that point as their relationship experience increases. Prior research shows that adult men paired with feminist (i.e., non-sexist) female partners are more sexually satisfied than those paired with non-feminist partners and overall report higher satisfaction with their relationships (Rudman & Phelan, 2007).

Practice Implications

Overall, these results show the importance of adolescence as a key stage in the consolidation of sexist attitudes and of interrelation patterns between women and men that lie at the basis of gender inequalities. Apart from theoretical implications, our research also has practical implications for the development and implementation of effective interventions to prevent and reduce sexist attitudes and their consequences.

The present results confirm young women's preference for benevolent sexist heterosexual partners, particularly in the case of participants who endorse sexist beliefs. These results can be applied to the design of programs aimed at young women to help them detect BS and distinguish between benevolent sexist behaviors and genuine expressions of affection and intimacy. In this sense, there is evidence that education about the negative consequences of BS reduces the acceptance of such beliefs and increases the awareness of discrimination (Becker & Swim, 2011, 2012). Further, it would be necessary to work on deconstructing the idea of "romantic love" and the courteous and chivalrous attitudes of the "Prince Charming" ideal learned in girls' childhood (Walkerdine, 1984) and associated to BS (Viki et al., 2003). Regarding young men, results show that they prefer young women who endorse hostile sexist beliefs. Therefore, programs aimed at young men should focus on disarming HS and revealing the disadvantages of having intimate relationships based on inequality. Research suggests that an emphasis on

empathic responses based on perspective-taking can help reducing sexism in men (Becker & Swim, 2011).

Despite the way results are presented and discussed here, we do not suggest that intervention programs should necessarily be directed toward adolescent women and men separately. For instance, an intervention program conducted with adult men and women and focusing on sexism and power differences awareness, emotions, and new ways of defining masculine identities has shown a positive impact on reducing sexism and system justifying beliefs in both genders (de Lemus, Navarro, Megías, Velásquez, & Ryan, 2013). Such interventions could be applied to younger women and men, with a focus on analyzing romantic relationships and dating behaviors from their perspectives in light of the existing theory and empirical evidence.

Limitations and Future Directions

Our study has certain limitations that should be discussed. First, our research presupposed heterosexual relationships as the norm and did not consider participants' sexual orientation. Not including questions about sexual orientation was a requirement by the school authorities, which limited our possibilities to avoid such heterosexist bias. Further studies should aim to consider sexual orientation in their designs in a way that would be approved by the institutions involved.

Second, participants' evaluation of some of the profiles may have been affected by the within-subject methodology, which invited a direct comparison between profiles. This might have increased participants' awareness of the research goals and hypotheses. Replication of these results in between-groups designs would provide a stronger test for the research hypotheses. Further, the current design in which the evaluated target changes depending on the sex of the participant limits the value of comparisons between male and female participants' ratings. In future studies, it would thus be important to vary sex of target and target's sexism independently of participant sex, in order to examine gender differences in perceptions of each target as a function of target sexism. This would allow testing predictions about backlash effects toward atypical men and women more directly.

Also, it is important to note that the materials used in our study might lack some ecological validity because the profiles represented hypothetical scores of young men and young women in a questionnaire on ambivalent sexism. To better assess the scope of our results, it would be good to replicate them using more realistic and ecologically valid scenarios or stories of adolescent young men and young women. Finally, the items used to develop the profiles were also included in the questionnaire completed by participants themselves to measure their own sexist beliefs; this repetition of some items may have generated a certain demand, which should be taken into account in future studies aimed at replicating these results. For example, non-overlapping and counterbalanced subsets of items could be used for the profiles and the

assessment of participants' own sexism, respectively (cf. Bohner et al., 2010). Furthermore, using a counterbalancing order of ISA and profiles could also help to address this issue in future research.

Future studies should aim to replicate the current findings, and those reported by Bohner et al. (2010), using samples of adult women from other contexts. Moreover, studies should explore how adult men rate the attractiveness of the various sexist profiles of women, given that prior research with adult samples (Bohner et al., 2010; Kilianski & Rudman, 1998) has not considered the male perspective. Another interesting question for future research is whether adolescent young women's and young men's acceptance versus rejection of sexist beliefs influences their subjective well-being and relationship satisfaction. Finally, future studies should explore the relationship between perceived attractiveness of sexist profiles and perception of sexism shown by these profiles. In other words, they should analyze whether the attractiveness attributed to sexist profiles reduces the probability of identifying such beliefs as being sexist or, conversely, whether the inability to detect sexism influences the ratings of sexist profiles.

Conclusion

In short, the results of our study replicate the main findings of Bohner et al. (2010) on female attraction for benevolent sexist men in a younger age group—adolescents—and a different cultural context. Furthermore, they extend previous research by showing that female sexist targets of their own age group are rated positively by adolescent males. Finally, our results provide evidence for the relationship between young men's and young women's sexist beliefs and romantic relationship experience on one hand and the development of preferences regarding the attractiveness of sexist profiles on the other. Overall, our results highlight the importance of adolescence as a key stage in the consolidation of sexist attitudes and relations between women and men that form the basis of gender inequalities in adulthood.

Appendix

English translation and original wording (in parentheses) of those items of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory for Adolescents (ISA) were included in each profile. The first 5 items represent HS; the last 5 items, BS.

1. Girls should help more in the home than boys. (Las chicas deben ayudar más en casa que los chicos.)
2. Sometimes girls take advantage of being girls in order to obtain special treatment. (A veces las chicas utilizan lo de ser chicas para que las traten de manera especial.)
3. Girls are too easily offended. (Las chicas se ofenden muy fácilmente.)

4. Girls often exaggerate their problems. (Las chicas suelen exagerar sus problemas.)
5. Under the guise of "equality," girls actually seek to have more power than boys. (Las chicas con la excusa de la igualdad pretenden tener más poder que los chicos.)
6. At night, boys should accompany girls home to make sure that nothing bad happens to them. (Por las noches los chicos deben acompañar a las chicas hasta su casa para que no les ocurra nada malo.)
7. Girls should be cherished and protected by boys. (Las chicas deben ser queridas y protegidas por los chicos.)
8. Boys should take care of girls. (Los chicos deben cuidar a las chicas.)
9. A good boyfriend should be willing to sacrifice things he likes to do in order to please his girlfriend. (Un buen novio debe estar dispuesto a sacrificar cosas que le gustan para agradar a su chica.)
10. Girls have greater sensitivity to others' feelings than boys. (Las chicas tienen una mayor sensibilidad hacia los sentimientos de los demás que los chicos.)

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Notes

1. When we repeated the analyses excluding from the attractiveness scores the 2 items that do not directly refer to a romantic relationship (referring to having the target as a classmate and having the target as a friend), the interaction of Benevolence \times Hostility \times Gender remained significant, $F(1, 260) = 4.89, p = .028, \eta^2 = .02$.
2. The order of the profiles' presentation did not affect differentially the relationships that will be described later between BS/HS and the attractiveness ratings. Of the 16 possible two-way interactions between BS/HS and order, only 3 of them reached statistical significance. In those cases, when we performed separate regression analyses for each order; the direction of the effects found were the same as in the general pattern.

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