

# Infra-humanization: Ambivalent sexism and the attribution of primary and secondary emotions to women<sup>☆</sup>

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## Abstract

Leyens and colleagues (e.g., Leyens et al., 2001) have observed that people are more likely to attribute uniquely human (secondary) emotions to the in-group than to the out-group. We examined whether males and females differentially attribute primary and secondary emotions to women. We hypothesized that individual differences in hostile sexism (HS) and benevolent sexism (BS), rather than participant sex, would predict the attribution of emotions to women. As expected, high BS individuals were more likely to attribute positive secondary emotions to women than low BS individuals. In contrast, high HS individuals were more likely to deny positive secondary emotions to women than low HS individuals. Participant sex was not related to the attribution of emotions to women after the effects of HS and BS were accounted for.

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The distinction between primary and secondary emotions has been relatively important to a number of emotion researchers (e.g., Ekman, 1992; Epstein, 1984; Izard, 1977). According to this distinction, primary emotions are experienced by both humans and animals, while secondary emotions are unique to human beings (Ekman, 1992). Researchers generally agree that emotions such as anger, fear, and joy are common to both animals and humans, while emotions such as guilt, melancholy, and embarrassment are unique to human beings (Ekman, 1992). In a recent series of studies, Leyens and colleagues (e.g., Demoulin et al., in press; Leyens et al., 2000), investigated lay-people's conceptions of emotions. In their studies (e.g., Demoulin et al., in press) they observed that lay-people perceive what scientists have termed secondary emotions (e.g., melancholy) as more unique to humans than primary emotions (e.g., anger). Furthermore, sec-

ondary (vs. primary) emotions are perceived as more internally caused, more invisible, more moral, and longer in duration (Demoulin et al., in press; Vaes, Paladino, & Leyens, 2002).

The idea that people have a tendency to favor their own groups (in-group bias) is a relatively common research finding (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Hogg & Abrams, 1988; see also Brewer & Brown, 1998 for a review). According to Leyens et al. (2000), the tendency to favor one's own group may result in people perceiving their own-group as more human than other out-groups. Leyens et al. (2000) have named this process "infra-humanization." Leyens et al. (2000) predict that individuals are more likely to attribute uniquely human secondary emotions to the in-group in comparison to an out-group. In a series of Implicit Association Test studies (IAT; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998), Paladino, Leyens, Rodriguez, and Rodriguez (2002) found that participants associated more rapidly secondary emotions with in-group names and primary emotions with out-group names than the reverse. Consistent with these findings, Leyens et al. (2001) also found that both low and high status groups attributed more secondary emotions to the in-group than the out-

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group. Leyens et al. (2001, Study 3) had participants estimate the means of two distributions with numbers that supposedly represented characteristics of either the out-group or the in-group. The results indicated that participants were reluctant to estimate a high mean number of secondary emotions for the out-group in comparison to the in-group. Leyens et al. (2001) concluded that their results have important implications for inter-group relations. If the out-group is perceived as having lesser humanity, this may result in them being treated as sub-human (e.g., slavery).

In this paper, we investigate whether Leyens et al.'s (2000, 2001) conception of inter-group relations is applicable to male–female relationships. We specifically examine whether participant sex or individual differences in sexism predict the attribution of primary and secondary emotions to women as a social group. In developing our approach we utilize Glick and Fiske's (1996); also (Glick et al., 2000) research on *ambivalent sexism*. Consistent with Glick and colleagues, we propose that male–female relationships do not easily fit the in-group bias explanation of inter-group relations. As such, we do not expect participant sex to predict differences in attribution of primary and secondary emotions to women. Rather, we expect individual differences in hostile and benevolent sexism to predict the attribution (or lack thereof) of uniquely human emotions to women.

### Prejudice and sexism

In defining prejudice, Allport (1954) described it as “an antipathy based upon a faulty and inflexible generalization. . .” (p. 9). Although, some parts of Allport's definition have been challenged (e.g., the idea that prejudice is based on a faulty generalization; Brown, 1995), very few researchers have questioned Allport's assumption that prejudice is based on antipathy. Indeed, researchers investigating gender prejudice have tended to conceptualize sexism as a unitary hostility towards women (e.g., Spence & Helmreich, 1972; Tougas, Brown, Beaton, & Joly, 1995). However, Glick and Fiske (1996; Glick et al., 2000) note that prejudice researchers have neglected the subjectively positive feelings towards women that characterize several sexist stereotypes (c.f. Eagly & Mladinic, 1993; Eagly, Mladinic, & Otto, 1991). Glick and Fiske (2001) propose that the antipathy model of prejudice may not be appropriate for describing the nature of male–female relationships. They argue that sexism may not manifest as a unitary hostility. Rather sexist hostility may co-exist with subjectively positive benevolent attitudes, resulting in *ambivalent sexism* (Glick et al., 2000).

According to Glick and Fiske (1996), sexist ambivalence arises from two forms of complementary, yet

evaluatively different, forms of sexist attitudes: *hostile sexism* (HS) and *benevolent sexism* (BS). Hostile sexism can be described as the typical antipathy that is commonly assumed to characterize sexist prejudices (e.g., Tougas et al., 1995). In contrast, benevolent sexism is defined as “. . . a set of interrelated attitudes toward women that are sexist in terms of viewing women stereotypically and in restricted roles, but that are subjectively positive in feeling tone” (Glick & Fiske, 1996, p. 491). Glick and Fiske (1996) developed the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI). The scale contains two 11-item sub-scales which tap into the ideologies of hostile sexism (HS) and benevolent sexism (BS). Studies conducted using the ASI have produced results consistent with the two hypothesized types of sexism (i.e., BS and HS) (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Glick et al., 2000; Masser & Abrams, 1999).

Responses to the HS and BS sub-scales have been reported to be positively correlated (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Glick et al., 2000; Masser & Abrams, 1999). These results suggest that those individuals who are high in BS are also likely to be high in HS. Nevertheless, Glick and Fiske (1996) maintain that “even if the beliefs about women that generate hostile and benevolent sexism are positively related, they have opposing evaluative implications, fulfilling the literal meaning of ambivalence” (p. 494). To investigate this hypothesis, Glick et al. (2000) had participants generate 10 traits they associated with women. After generating these traits, participants rated each one on how negative or positive it was. In line with ambivalent sexism theory, HS was significantly related to negative evaluations of women, while BS predicted positive evaluations of women. Similarly, Glick, Diebold, Bailey-Werner, and Zhu (1997) found that HS predicts negative evaluations of non-conforming women (e.g., feminists and working women), while BS predicts the positive evaluations of conforming women (e.g., mothers and wives; see also Masser, 1998).

### Overview and hypothesis

Leyens and colleagues' (Leyens et al., 2000, 2001) findings are consistent with the idea that individuals demonstrate an in-group bias when it comes to associating particular groups with uniquely human characteristics. However, given the complexity of male–female relations, a simple in-group bias account of infra-humanization may not be sufficient (c.f. Glick & Fiske, 2001). Indeed, Leyens et al. (2000) suggest that it may be difficult to deny secondary emotions to women on the basis of categorization alone. There is also research evidence that indicates that women are stereotyped as experiencing and expressing more emotions than men (e.g., Plant, Hyde, Keltner, & Devine, 2000). As such, we propose that participant sex per se may not predict

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