



AMBIVALENT SEXISM AND REGRET AFTER CASUAL SEX: HOW GENDERED BELIEFS SHAPE EMOTIONAL RESPONSES TO ONE-TIME SEXUAL ENCOUNTERS

GAL SHARON ALON, NOAM SOFER, TALIA GUREWITZ, TAL HOSHEN
PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT. ADVISOR - DR. ORLY BAREKET

INTRODUCTION

- Sexual regret is more commonly reported by women than by men after casual sex (Oswalt et al., 2005; Paul & Hayes, 2002).
- This gender gap is often explained not only by biological differences, but by the **sexual double standard**, which judges women more harshly than men for the same sexual behavior (Crawford & Popp, 2003).

Ambivalent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 2001) offers a framework for understanding how such norms are sustained. It includes:

- Benevolent sexism:** Idealizes women who conform to traditional roles, especially purity and modesty.
- Hostile sexism:** Derogatory attitudes toward women who challenge men's power.

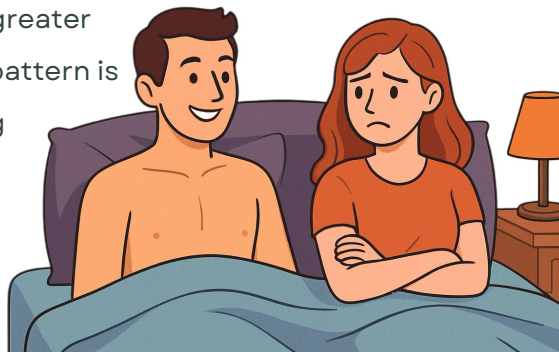
Although hostile sexism is overt and often resisted, benevolent sexism subtly undermines women's sexual autonomy (for a review, see Bareket & Fiske, 2023). By promoting restrictive ideals and negative views of sexually active women (Glick & Fiske, 2018), it may foster internalized judgment.

THE CURRENT STUDY

This study examined whether benevolent sexism predicts imagined regret following casual sexual encounters among heterosexual women but not men.

Hypotheses:

- Women will report higher imagined sexual regret than men.
- Benevolent sexism will moderate this gender difference: among women, higher benevolent sexism will be linked to greater regret; no such pattern is expected among men.



We also explored whether hostile sexism shows a similar pattern and whether the effect of benevolent sexism holds when controlling for it.

METHOD

Participants

- Initial sample: 126 participants; excluded from analysis: 13 incomplete responses, 6 non-heterosexual
- Final sample: 107 participants (76 women, 31 men); mean age: 25.8 years ($SD = 3.4$, Range = 19–37)

Measures

- Short form of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Rollero et al., 2014).
- Sexual Regret Vignettes (Galperin et al., 2011): Participants rated gender-tailored casual sex scenarios on a 9-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all regretful*, 9 = *extremely regretful*). Average regret scores were computed across scenarios.

Variables

- Dependent variable: Sexual regret
- Independent variable: Participants' gender
- Moderator: Benevolent sexism
- Control variable: Hostile sexism

RESULTS

Linear regression analyses tested the effects of benevolent sexism (standardized), gender (dummy coded such that men=0, women=1), and their interaction on imagined sexual regret.

Main effect of gender, $B = 0.89$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.16$.

- Women reported higher levels of imagined sexual regret than men.

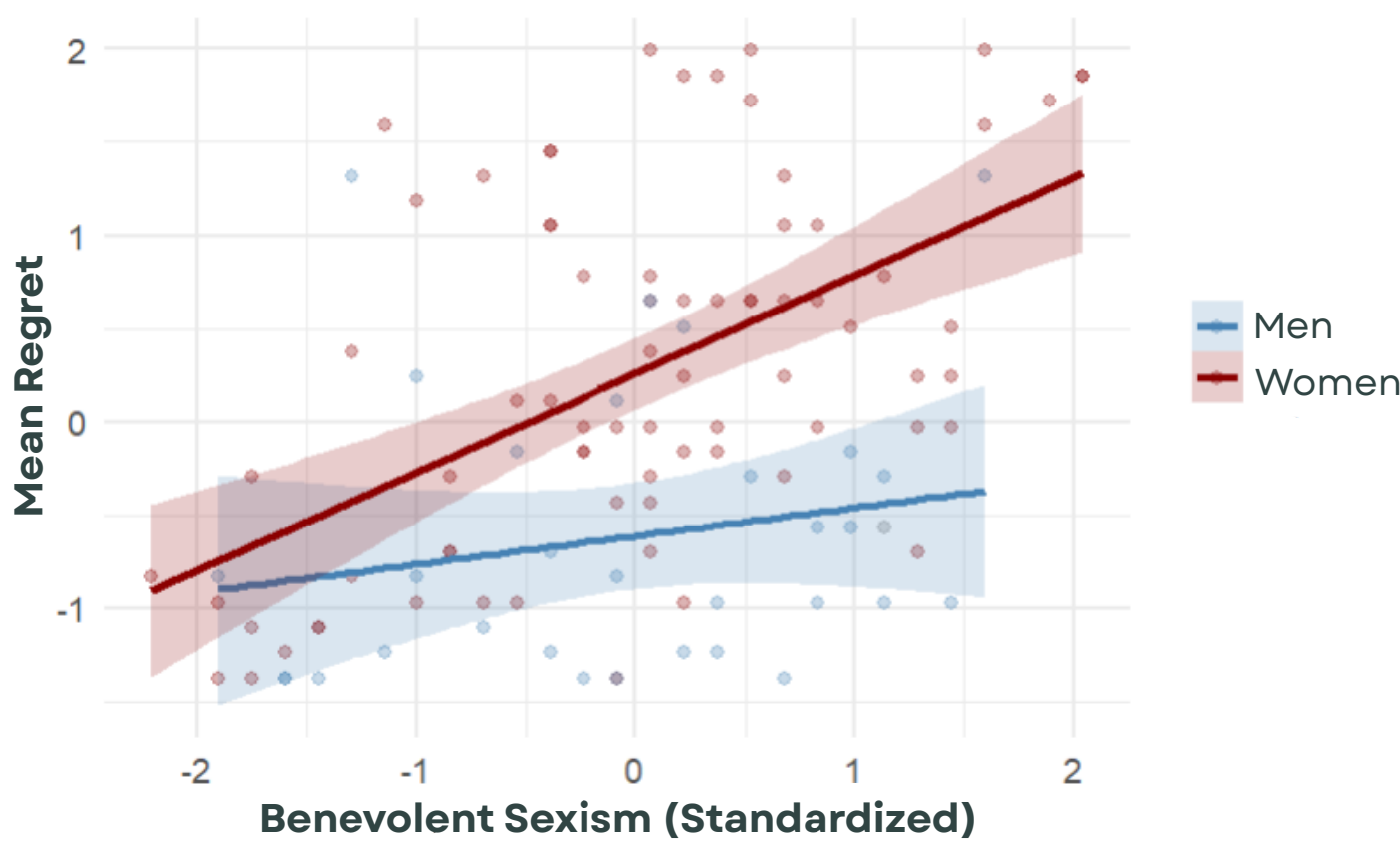
Main effect of benevolent sexism, $B = 0.43$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.18$.

- Higher benevolent sexism predicted imagined sexual regret.

Benevolent Sexism $\times$ Gender Interaction, $B = 0.37$, $p = .037$, $\eta^2_p = 0.04$.

- The sexism-regret link was significant for women ($B = 0.53$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.30$) but not for men ($B = 0.15$, $p = .305$, $\eta^2_p = 0.04$).
- This interaction remained marginally significant when controlling for hostile sexism ($B = 0.34$, $p = .056$, $\eta^2_p = 0.04$).

Sexual Regret Imagined by Benevolent Sexism and Gender



DISCUSSION

Findings supported the hypotheses: benevolent sexism predicted women's (but not men's) imagined regret after casual sex.

This pattern aligns with ambivalent sexism theory (Glick & Fiske, 2001), suggesting that gendered beliefs shape how women evaluate their own sexual behavior. For women high in benevolent sexism, casual sex may feel at odds with traditional norms, prompting greater regret. Challenging these beliefs may foster more equitable views of sexuality.

Limitations & Future Directions:

The use of hypothetical scenarios, a small sample, and correlational design and analyses limits generalizability and precludes casual interpretation. Future research should examine real experiences, use larger and more diverse samples, and explore potential mediators underlying the sexism-regret link, such as sexual norms, anticipated social judgment, or self-objectification.

Conclusion:

Benevolent sexism was linked to women's imagined sexual regret, suggesting that such regret may reflect internalized gender norms rather than personal preference. These results point to the subtle role of gendered beliefs in shaping how women interpret their own sexual behavior.



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