

On the Link Between Benevolent Sexism and Orgasm Frequency in Heterosexual Women

Emily Ann Harris¹ · Matthew J. Hornsey¹ · Fiona Kate Barlow²

Received: 23 December 2015 / Revised: 19 May 2016 / Accepted: 25 May 2016 / Published online: 15 June 2016
© Springer Science+Business Media New York 2016

Abstract Previous research on subclinical orgasmic difficulties among women has focused on intrapsychic and interpersonal variables, but little attention has been paid to the more distal ideological factors that might indirectly constrain sexual pleasure. We hypothesized that women’s endorsement of a benevolently sexist worldview would be negatively associated with orgasm frequency. Specifically, we predicted that benevolent sexism would be associated with increased perceptions of male sexual selfishness. This perception of men as interested in their own sexual pleasure would then predict decreased willingness to ask a partner for sexual pleasure, which in turn would be associated with less frequent orgasms. We found support for our model across two studies (Study 1: $N = 339$; Study 2: $N = 323$). We did not, however, find a direct effect of benevolent sexism on orgasm frequency. We discuss possible additional variables linking benevolent sexism with orgasm frequency, implications, and future directions.

Keywords Benevolent sexism · Orgasm · Sexual functioning · Gender beliefs

Introduction

Many women struggle to achieve orgasm as frequently as they would like, with population estimates of women’s orgasm difficulties ranging from 3.1 to 28.6 % (Hayes, Bennett, Fairley, &

Dennerstein, 2006). Not only are orgasm difficulties potentially distressing (Öberg, Fugl-Meyer, & Fugl-Meyer, 2004), but more frequent orgasms have been shown to have a number of benefits, such as increased sexual and relationship satisfaction (e.g., Fugl-Meyer, Öberg, Lundberg, Lewin, & Fugl-Meyer, 2006; Haavio-Mannila & Kontula, 1997; Klapilová, Brody, Krejčová, Husárová, & Binter, 2015). It is, therefore, important to consider the factors that may account for differences in women’s orgasm frequency.

Previous research has identified a number of relationship and lifestyle factors associated with women’s orgasm ability, with a focus on clinical dysfunction (Althof et al., 2005; Birnbaum, 2003; Laan & Rellini, 2011; Laumann, Paik, & Rosen, 1999; McCabe & Delaney, 1992; McCabe & Giles, 2012). This research is essential for identifying the factors directly causing and maintaining women’s orgasm dysfunction, and creating tailored interventions (Heiman, 2002). There is also some social-psychological research aiming to address “subclinical” orgasm difficulties in women—that is, women who do not have an orgasm dysfunction, but who are unable to orgasm as easily or consistently as they would like. For the most part, these predictors have focused on intrapsychic and interpersonal factors that are conceptually proximal to sexual behavior. For example, decreased sexual assertiveness (Haavio-Mannila & Kontula, 1997; Sanchez, Phelan, Moss-Racusin, & Good, 2012), sexual guilt (Nobre, 2009; Woo, Brotto, & Gorzalka, 2011), romantic attachment avoidance (van den Brink, Smeets, Hessen, & Woertman, 2015), and body dissatisfaction (Sanchez & Kiefer, 2007; Satinsky, Reece, Dennis, Sanders, & Bardzell, 2012) are all negatively associated with women’s ability to orgasm.

In this article, however, we examine a more distal factor that might help shape and constrain women’s orgasm frequency: their stereotypes and worldviews about gender and how women should be treated by men (operationalized here as benevolent sexism). There is relatively little research looking at the link

✉ Emily Ann Harris
emily.harris@uqconnect.edu.au

¹ School of Psychology, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, QLD 4072, Australia

² School of Applied Psychology and Menzies Health Institute Queensland, Griffith University, Brisbane, QLD, Australia

between broad ideologies and specific sexual behaviors, but it is easy to make an intuitive case for such a link. First, it can be argued that ideologies provide the backdrop against which more proximal variables—such as sexual assertiveness—are developed and framed. Second, because the sexual domain is one where direct social comparisons are not readily available—and for which personal experience may be limited to a few sexual partners—women may be particularly likely to rely on their pre-existing attitudes about gender and gender roles as a template to guide their behavior (for commentary, see Daniluk, 1998). Below, we define our key terms and review the existing literature before introducing a model drawing a potential link between benevolent sexism and orgasm frequency in women.

Benevolent Sexism

There are two distinct forms of sexism—hostile and benevolent sexism—which together are captured by the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Hostile sexism describes an overt dislike of women. Benevolent sexism, on the other hand, comprises attitudes that are seemingly complimentary toward women, (e.g., “women have a quality of purity that few men possess”), and also afford women special treatment from men (e.g., “women should be cherished and protected by men”). However, this set of seemingly positive attitudes not only suggest that women should be looked after by men, but also that women need to be looked after by men. Benevolent sexism assumes female passivity and romanticizes the belief that women should be reliant on men. In this way, benevolent sexism is argued to be a form of legitimizing myth, whereby prejudicial attitudes toward women are justified through the guise of care and protection (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005; Becker & Wright, 2011; Glick & Fiske, 1996; Kilianski & Rudman, 1998).

Women are more likely to endorse benevolent sexism than hostile sexism (Kilianski & Rudman, 1998), and typically express similar levels of benevolent sexism to men (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Glick et al., 2000). Interestingly, in countries with greater gender inequality, women report higher levels of benevolent sexism compared to men (Glick et al., 2000). Furthermore, women who endorse benevolent sexism are less likely to be a victim of intimate partner violence (Sakalli, 2001). These findings suggest that adopting benevolent sexism may act as a protective ideology, such that expressing acquiescence to male dominance makes women less likely to be a target of male aggression (Glick et al., 2000; Rudman & Glick, 2008).

Although this may be functional, there is evidence that endorsing benevolently sexist attitudes carries a cost for women. For example, women who endorse benevolent sexism show lower personal and career ambition (Fernández, Castro, Otero, Foltz, & Lorenzo, 2006) and increased hostile sexism over time (Sibley, Overall, & Duckitt, 2007). Furthermore, women who are exposed to benevolent sexism experience higher levels of body shame and body surveillance (Calogero & Jost, 2011) and are

more likely to de-emphasize their task-related and academic competence (Barreto, Ellemers, Piebinga, & Moya, 2010). Thus, benevolent sexism may have damaging effects on women’s sense of competence and self-esteem by limiting what it means to be a “good woman” (Dardenne, Dumont, & Bollier, 2007; Glick, Diebold, Bailey-Werner, & Zhu, 1997; Glick & Fiske, 1996)

The Link Between Women’s Benevolent Sexism and Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors

In this article, we argue that benevolent sexism might also be implicated in sexual attitudes and behaviors that negatively influence orgasm frequency. First, we hypothesize that women’s benevolent sexism will be associated with an increased perception of men as sexually selfish. This first hypothesis is founded on a theoretical extrapolation of ambivalent sexism theory. A core assumption within the benevolent sexist worldview is that women should be placed on a pedestal of virtue above men, and that they are more moral, culturally refined, and more pure than men (Glick & Fiske, 1996). The flipside of this belief is that men are less moral, refined, and pure compared to women: where women are heavenly and uncorrupted, men are earthly and flawed. One implication of such a belief might be that men are driven by their sexual urges; that they are more carnal than women and more driven by the “pleasure principle.”

Two previous studies provide some tentative evidence for an association between benevolent sexism and the belief that men are more driven by their personal sexual needs than are women. Durán, Moya, and Megías (2011) found that after reading a hypothetical scenario in which a husband insists on having sex with his wife, participants high in benevolent sexism were more likely to state that sex was the husband’s “right” and the wife’s “duty.” This study also compared ratings of the husband when he was depicted as either a benevolently sexist husband or his ideology was not described in the hypothetical scenario. The benevolently sexist husband was rated as more justified in demanding sex from his wife than the non-benevolently sexist husband. It was argued that when a man is seen to have cared for and protected his wife in other domains, he is more likely to be seen to deserve sexual favors from her.

A more recent study found that the more women were exposed to benevolent sexism in their daily lives, the more they reported having sex for relational reasons, rather than for their own pleasure (Fitz & Zucker, 2015; see also Albarracín & Plambeck, 2010). This in turn predicted a decreased likelihood of women using condoms. Together, these findings suggest that women who espouse benevolently sexist beliefs feel that men’s sexual needs are of primary importance, and women’s sexual needs are secondary.

On face value, the perception that men are selfish might seem inconsistent with the role prescription—common among those high in benevolent sexism—that men should sacrifice themselves in order to protect women. However, while benevolent sexism

encourages men to care for and protect women who adopt a traditional role, such benevolence is domain-specific. Men are expected to provide physical and financial security for women (Chen, Fiske, & Lee, 2009; Glick & Fiske, 1996; Sibley & Overall, 2011; Viki, Abrams, & Hutchison, 2003); however, there is nothing in the theorizing (or the scale) that suggests this chivalry should extend to the sexual domain. Indeed, the notion that women would expect or display sexual agency is highly inconsistent with the cluster of values and attitudes that comprise the benevolent sexist worldview. For example, Viki et al. (2003) found that benevolent sexism was significantly positively correlated with a measure of “paternalistic chivalry,” which includes statements such as “A man should make the first move to have sex” and “It is not right for a woman to kiss a man first.”

Furthermore, previous studies identified a link between women’s benevolent sexism and exposure to erotica in which a man sexually dominates his female partner, whipping, spanking, and tying her up (Harris, Thai, & Barlow, 2016). After reading male-dominance erotica, women expressed significantly higher benevolent sexism compared to men (Harris et al., 2016), and were especially likely to endorse benevolent sexism if they rated erotica in which a man dominates a woman as “romantic” (Altenburger, Carotta, Bonomi, & Snyder, 2016). Thus, these studies suggest that a benevolently sexist worldview is associated with attitudes that limit women’s sexual expression and endorse men’s sexual dominance.

Second, we hypothesize that women who believe that men are sexually selfish will be less likely to ask their partner to give them sexual pleasure. This link is intuitive: a request for pleasure may be considered inappropriate (and potentially pointless) if men are expected to ignore their partner’s sexual needs.

Finally, we predict that women’s decreased willingness to ask for sexual pleasure will lead to decreased orgasm frequency. Previous research provides strong evidence for a link between sexual communication and orgasm ability (e.g., Coffelt & Hess, 2014; Larson, Anderson, Holman, & Niemann, 1998; Litzinger & Gordon, 2005; Mark & Jozkowski, 2013; Rehman, Rellini, & Fallis, 2011). For example, sexually assertive women have been shown to experience more frequent and consistent orgasms per sexual encounter and greater sexual desire compared to non-sexually assertive women (Hurlbert, 1991). Furthermore, women who report discomfort when talking about sex, and in particular, talking about clitoral stimulation, were significantly more likely to experience anorgasmia (i.e., inability to orgasm) (Kelly, Strassberg, & Turner, 2004). Thus, we suggest that if women are unwilling to ask their partner for pleasure, their likelihood of having an orgasm will be significantly diminished.

The Present Studies

We propose a model linking women’s worldviews about the place of women relative to men (benevolent sexism) to their orgasm frequency. We predict that women who are high in benevolent

sexism may be more likely to believe that men are more focused on their own pleasure than their partner’s pleasure. Through this, women may be less likely to ask their partner to pleasure them, which in turn leads to fewer orgasms.

The first study we present is a secondary data analysis of an existing dataset, in which we were able to test part of the model (benevolent sexism → perceived male sexual selfishness → orgasm frequency). The second study tested the complete model (benevolent sexism → perceived male sexual selfishness → willingness to ask for pleasure → orgasm frequency).

Study 1

Method

Participants

Data for Study 1 were taken from a larger survey (Barlow, 2016).¹ For the purposes of the current study, only female participants in heterosexual relationships ($N = 339$) were included in the present analysis. Participants were recruited from social networking sites (using a snowballing technique). Participants’ ages ranged from 18 to 64 years ($M = 28.09$, $SD = 8.39$), and their relationship lengths ranged from 0 to 39 years ($M = 5.12$, $SD = 5.85$). The majority of participants identified as Australian (84.4 %).

Procedure

Participants were informed that the study would ask sensitive questions regarding their personal sexual history, political attitudes, and sexual attitudes. After providing their consent, and confirming that they were over the age of 18, participants were asked a number of demographic questions, followed by measures of political orientation, racism, social dominance orientation, and questions relating to sexual history and current sexual practice. The order of the questionnaire remained constant between participants. At the end of the survey, participants were debriefed and thanked for their time. Below, we report only the measures relevant to the current study.

Measures

Hostile and Benevolent Sexism Because this was part of a larger questionnaire, only four items were selected from the original 22-item Ambivalent Sexism inventory to measure hostile and benevolent sexism. The two items measuring benevolent sexism were “Women have a quality of purity that

¹ The full survey measured men and women’s sexual attitudes, sexual history, and social attitudes, $N = 986$. Additional information regarding the full survey can be provided by the authors upon request.

few men possess” and “Women need to be protected by men,” $r(335) = .37, p < .001$. The two items measuring hostile sexism were: “Feminists want women to have more power than men” and “Women often seek special favors under the guise of asking for ‘equality,’” $r(335) = .58, p < .001$. Response options varied from 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 7 = *Strongly Agree*. Due to the typically strong correlation between hostile and benevolent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Glick et al., 2000), hostile sexism was measured so that it could be statistically controlled for in subsequent analyses.

Perceived Male Sexual Selfishness We created two novel items to assess the belief that men are selfish in bed: “During sex, men only care about their own pleasure” and “Men care more about ‘getting off’ than whether or not their partner has an orgasm,” $r(333) = .79, p < .001$. Response options varied from 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 7 = *Strongly Agree*.

Orgasm Frequency Three items from Costa and Brody (2007) were modified to measure women’s orgasm frequency during penetrative sex, oral sex, and manual stimulation. Items included: “How often during penetrative sex do you orgasm?,” “How often when receiving oral sex do you orgasm?,” and “How often when receiving manual stimulation do you orgasm?” ($\alpha = .63$). Response options varied from 1 = *Never* to 7 = *Always*.

Results and Discussion

Descriptive Statistics

Means, SDs, and inter-correlations for all measures are shown in Table 1.² Participants’ mean levels of hostile sexism were slightly higher compared to mean levels of benevolent sexism ($M_{HS} = 3.12, SD_{HS} = 1.49; M_{BS} = 2.66, SD_{BS} = 1.26; t(338) = 5.88, p < .001$), which is not typical (Glick & Fiske, 1996), but is likely due to the use of shortened two-item scales. Mean responses to “perceived male sexual selfishness” were below the midpoint ($M = 2.28$), suggesting low overall levels of perceived selfishness; however, there was reasonable variation in these scores ($SD = 1.15$). Overall, when considering average orgasmability through manual, oral, and penetrative sex, women reported experiencing orgasm approximately half the time ($M = 4.34, SD = 1.62$).

Main Analyses

A mediation analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis that women’s benevolent sexism predicts orgasm frequency indirectly, through the belief that men are focused on their own sexual pleasure (see Table 2). As is traditional when examining the pre-

dictive power of benevolent sexism, hostile sexism was entered as a covariate.

Using a bootstrapping approach, we estimated the indirect effect of benevolent sexism on orgasm frequency through “perceived male sexual selfishness.” Results based on 10,000 bootstrapped samples indicated that, consistent with hypotheses, there was a significant indirect effect of benevolent sexism on orgasm frequency through “perceived male sexual selfishness” ($\beta = -.11, SE = .03, 95\% \text{ CI} [-.19, -.05]$). Women’s benevolent sexism significantly predicted perceived male sexual selfishness ($\beta = .37, p < .001$), such that the more women endorsed benevolent sexism, the more likely they were to perceive men as sexually selfish. Perceived male sexual selfishness was, in turn, significantly related to women’s orgasm frequency ($\beta = -.29, p < .001$), such that the more women perceived men as sexually selfish, the fewer orgasms they experienced. Note, however, that there was no significant bivariate correlation between benevolent sexism and orgasm frequency, $r(337) = -.01$.

Study 1 provided initial support for an indirect relationship between benevolent sexism and orgasm frequency, whereby benevolent sexism was not directly related to orgasm frequency, but it was indirectly related to fewer orgasms through increased likelihood of perceiving men as sexually selfish.

Study 2

In Study 2, we aimed to (1) replicate the findings from Study 1 using the complete 22-item Ambivalent Sexism Inventory to measure hostile and benevolent sexism, and (2) test an expanded model including women’s willingness to ask her partner for pleasure as a predictor of orgasm frequency. We hypothesized that women who believe that men are focused on their own sexual satisfaction would be less willing to ask their partner for pleasure, and as a result, would experience fewer orgasms.

Method

Participants

Participants from the U.S. were recruited using the online survey platform Amazon Mechanical Turk ($N = 1,054$) (Chandler & Shapiro, 2016). MTurk has been shown to produce results comparable to studies conducted in laboratory settings, with the benefit of a more demographically diverse sample (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Goodman, Cryder, & Cheema, 2013). However, one potential risk associated with using MTurk is decreased participant engagement (Goodman et al., 2013). In order to address this problem, two items were included as attention checks that asked participants to select a specific response. Participants who did not select the correct response for at least one of the items were excluded from analyses ($n = 50$). A further 23 participants were excluded because they dropped out after

² In both Study 1 and 2, each variable had >5% missing data; hence, series mean substitution was used.

Table 1 Means, SDs, and inter-correlations among variables in Study 1

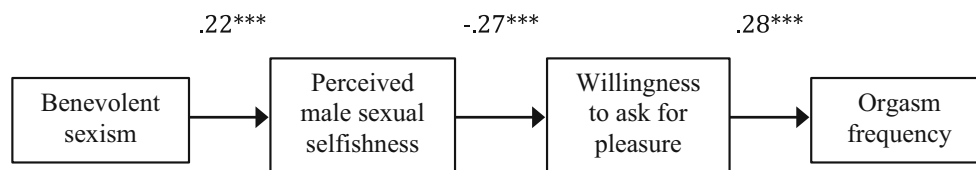
Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	2.	3.	4.
1. Benevolent sexism (1–7)	2.66	1.26	.35***	-.01	.47***
2. Perceived male sexual selfishness (1–7)	2.28	1.15		-.26***	.14*
3. Orgasm frequency (1–7)	4.34	1.62			-.01
4. Hostile sexism (1–7)	3.12	1.49			

* $p < .05$ *** $p < .001$ **Table 2** Summary of hierarchical multiple regression analysis predicting orgasm frequency in Study 1

	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2
Step 1						
Hostile sexism	-.01	.07	-.01	-.14	.000	
Benevolent sexism	-.01	.08	-.01	-.13		
Step 2						
Hostile sexism	-.02	.07	-.02	-.30	.074	.074***
Benevolent sexism	.13	.08	.10	1.57		
Perceived male sexual selfishness	-.41	.08	-.29	-5.16***		

*** $p < .001$ **Table 3** Means, SDs, and inter-correlations among variables in Study 2

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1. Benevolent sexism (1–7)	3.64	1.20	.18***	-.09	-.07	.48***	-.19***
2. Perceived male sexual selfishness (1–7)	2.86	1.40		-.27***	-.12*	.05	.03
3. Willingness to ask for pleasure (1–5)	3.37	1.15			.38***	-.10	.16*
4. Orgasm frequency (1–10)	4.76	2.41				-.02	.66***
5. Hostile sexism (1–7)	3.06	1.26					-.06
6. Masturbation frequency (1–10)	3.31	2.05					

* $p < .05$ *** $p \leq .001$ **Fig. 1** Path analysis from Study 2. Hostile sexism and masturbation frequency were included as covariates in the model. *** $p < .001$

providing their demographic information and a further two participants were excluded because they were under the age of 18. As in Study 1, we selected only heterosexual women in relationships

for the present analysis (final $N = 323$). Participants' ages ranged from 19 to 66 years ($M = 36.10$, $SD = 10.71$), and their relationship lengths ranged from 0 to 45 years ($M = 10.62$, $SD = 9.28$).

Procedure

Study 2 was conducted using the same procedure as Study 1; however, the content of the survey differed such that only questions relating to participants' sexual history, sexual attitudes and behaviors, and sexist attitudes were included. As in Study 1, at the end of the survey, participants were debriefed and thanked for their time. The survey took approximately 15 min to complete, and participants were reimbursed US\$1 for their time.

Measures

Hostile and Benevolent Sexism The 22-item Ambivalent Sexism Inventory was measured to assess hostile and benevolent sexism (see Study 1 for example items). Eleven items measuring hostile sexism were combined to form a reliable scale ($\alpha = .93$), as were the remaining 11 items measuring benevolent sexism ($\alpha = .90$).

Perceived Male Sexual Selfishness The same two items from Study 1 were used to measure "perceived male sexual selfishness," $r(320) = .87, p < .001$.

Willingness to Ask for Pleasure Drawing from the Hurlbert Index of Sexual Assertiveness (Hurlbert, 1991), we used a single-item measure to assess women's willingness to ask her partner for sexual pleasure: "Do you tell your current sexual partner how to pleasure you?" Responses options varied from 1 = *Never* to 5 = *Always*.

Orgasm Frequency In order to assess general orgasm frequency, participants were presented with the single item: "How many orgasms do you have per week, on average?" Responses options varied from 1 = *None* to 10 = *More than seven*.

Masturbation Frequency In order to statistically control for differences in orgasm frequency as a function of masturbation frequency, we also asked participants: "How many times a week do you masturbate, on average?" Response options were the same as those used for the measure of orgasm frequency.

Results and Discussion

Descriptive Statistics

Means, SDs, and inter-correlations for all measures ($N = 323$) are shown in Table 3. Women's average levels of benevolent sexism were slightly higher compared to their levels of hostile sexism ($M_{HS} = 3.06, SD_{HS} = 1.26; M_{BS} = 3.64, SD_{BS} = 1.20; t(322) =$

$8.41, p < .001$), consistent with previous findings (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Women reported experiencing approximately three orgasms per week based on $M = 4.76, SD = 2.41$.

Main Analysis

A path analysis was conducted using AMOS 22.0. Benevolent sexism was included as the exogenous variable that predicted "perceived male sexual selfishness," which in turn predicted "willingness to ask for pleasure," which finally predicted orgasm frequency (see Fig. 1). Hostile sexism and masturbation frequency were included as control variables. The model was assessed for goodness of fit using the chi-squared test, chi-squared/degrees of freedom ratio, the comparative fit index (CFI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and the standardized root-mean-square residual (SRMR). According to Hu and Bentler (1995), indications of a model with a satisfactory fit include a non-significant χ^2 , or a χ^2/df ratio ≤ 3 , a CFI $\geq .95$, and values of RMSEA less than .06 and SRMR less than .08. All reported effect sizes have been standardized.

The full model provided adequate fit to the data, $\chi^2(3, 323) = 7.16, p = .067, \chi^2/df = 2.39; CFI = .99; RMSEA = .07; SRMR = .02$. All proposed paths were significant, $ps < .001$ (see Fig. 1). Consistent with hypotheses, the indirect effect of benevolent sexism on orgasm frequency, mediated by "perceived male sexual selfishness" and "willingness to ask for pleasure," was significant ($\beta = -.02, SE = .01, 95\% CI [-.04, -.01]$). Since no direct path linking benevolent sexism and orgasm frequency was modeled, the total effect and the indirect effect were the same.

We then tested the model including a direct effect of benevolent sexism on orgasm frequency. Again, consistent with hypotheses, when a direct effect was modeled, the total effect became non-significant, ($\beta = .05, SE = .05, 95\% CI [-.04, .15]$), which is likely due to a positive but non-significant direct effect ($\beta = .07, SE = .05, 95\% CI [-.01, .16]$). This positive direct effect suggests the presence of a suppression pathway, discussed further below.

We tested an alternative model in which the order of the mediators was switched, such that benevolent sexism predicted willingness to ask for pleasure, which predicted perceptions of male sexual selfishness, which then predicted orgasm frequency. However, this model did not meet the threshold for acceptable model fit, $\chi^2(3, 323) = 53.39, p < .001, \chi^2/df = 17.80; CFI = .86; RMSEA = .28; SRMR = .06$, and was therefore rejected.

We conclude that the model presented in Fig. 1 was a good fit for the data. Specifically, benevolent sexism was linked to higher beliefs that men are selfish in bed, and through this was associated with assertiveness about how to be pleased and fewer orgasms. As in Study 1, however, the significant pathway was indirect: the overall relationship between benevolent sexism and orgasm frequency was non-significant.

General Discussion

In order to address how women's social attitudes may play a role in their sexual functioning, we tested the effect of women's benevolent sexism on orgasm frequency. We provide evidence for a model of women's benevolent sexism as an indirect predictor of women's orgasm via two pathways. First, we showed that women high in benevolent sexism were more likely to believe that men are sexually selfish; this effect was demonstrated across two independent samples from two different countries. Second, in Study 2, we showed that perceived male sexual selfishness predicted a significantly lower willingness to ask a partner for sexual pleasure, which in turn predicted lower orgasm frequency. The present study therefore furthers our understanding of how broad ideological factors such as benevolent sexism may (indirectly) impact women's orgasm functioning.

Of course, our proposed model was based on cross-sectional data and so causality cannot be established. Alternative directions in our model cannot be ruled out; however, they seem less plausible. The belief that men are sexually selfish is unlikely to precede benevolent sexism, since benevolent sexism represents a broad ideological construct, and as such is likely to shape more specific attitudes surrounding sex rather than the other way around. With regard to the second proposed link in our model, it is possible that women who do not ask their partner for pleasure believe that men are sexually selfish because they have not explicitly asked for sexual attention. However, this alternative causal pathway did not find support in the data. Finally, while asking for pleasure is the logical antecedent to achieving orgasm, we acknowledge that this may be somewhat bi-directional, whereby women who find it difficult to experience orgasms are less likely to ask for sexual pleasure. Future research should test this possibility using longitudinal data.

Interestingly, despite an indirect pathway that implied higher benevolent sexism should lead to lower orgasm frequency overall, we did not find a direct effect of benevolent sexism on orgasm frequency. Instead, we found that after controlling for the indirect effects in our final model, benevolent sexism had a positive but non-significant effect on orgasm frequency. This suggests that there may be an untested pathway through which benevolent sexism links positively with orgasm frequency, and that this variable is suppressing the negative pathway identified in our data. One possibility is that women high in benevolent sexism have more masculine partners, consistent with their preferences for traditional gender roles (Backus & Mahalik, 2011). If this is the case, they may experience more frequent orgasms, as past research suggests that women find it easier to orgasm with masculine partners (Puts, Welling, Burriss, & Dawood, 2012). A second possibility is that women high in benevolent sexism may have sex more often with their partner because they feel it is their duty (Durán et al., 2011), and as a consequence may experience more orgasms. Future

research could test these possibilities by assessing partner masculinity and sexual frequency.

A limitation of Study 2 was the use of a general measure of orgasm frequency. We did not specify whether orgasms were due to partnered sex or masturbation, thus adding noisy variance to our data. However, since this limitation would have made finding effects more difficult, it is not necessarily a threat to our conclusions. Second, it is important to note the use of a single-item measure of "willingness to ask for pleasure." We were interested specifically in how women's belief that perceived male sexual selfishness would predict their willingness to ask their partner to pleasure them; however, it would be interesting to test whether a broader measure of women's sexual assertiveness would also fit this model. It seems plausible that the more women believe men are only interested in their own sexual pleasure, the less sexually assertive they would be in general (e.g., they might be less likely to initiate sex or reject unwanted sex) (Morokoff et al., 1997).

Future research should extend the present work by testing non-Western samples. The effect sizes in the current study were weak to moderate in size, suggesting modest but statistically reliable effects in Western samples. However, these effects may be even greater in more sexually conservative cultures. Woo et al. (2011) found that East Asian women reported lower sexual desire compared to Caucasian women, and this effect was explained by increased sexual guilt among East Asian women. Thus, the indirect effects of benevolent sexism on orgasm frequency may be even stronger among more sexually conservative cultures, where women who endorse traditional gender roles may be particularly likely to perceive the bedroom as a man's domain, and hence be less likely to express their own sexual desires. Finally, future research may focus on the role of women's benevolent sexism in their likelihood of faking orgasm. Women who endorse traditional gender roles may be more likely to fake orgasm because they may believe their partner does not care about their orgasm, or they may place a lower value on women's orgasm relative to non-traditional women (Cooper, Fenigstein, & Fauber, 2014). Faking orgasm may be an important indicator of women's ability to orgasm, as well as her desire to reach orgasm, yet we have a limited understanding of the psychological antecedents of faking orgasm.

In conclusion, the present study suggests that our ideas about gender can shape specific sexual attitudes and behaviors. At present, we do not have a good understanding of how our ideologies may form a basis for how we think about sex, and what we perceive to be sexually desirable, undesirable, appropriate, or inappropriate. It is therefore important for future research to expand its scope in order to investigate how ideologies function to constrain or enhance our sexual experience.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Ethical Approval All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the University

of Queensland Human Ethics Committee, the Australian National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed Consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

References

- Albarracín, J., & Plambeck, C. R. (2010). Demographic factors and sexist beliefs as predictors of condom use among Latinos in the USA. *AIDS Care*, 22, 1021–1028. doi:10.1080/09540121.2010.487089.
- Altenburger, L. E., Carotta, C. L., Bonomi, A. E., & Snyder, A. (2016). Sexist attitudes among emerging adult women readers of *Fifty Shades* fiction. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*. doi:10.1007/s10508-016-0724-4.
- Althof, S. E., Leiblum, S. R., Chevret-Measson, M., Hartmann, U., Levine, S. B., McCabe, M., ... Wylie, K. (2005). Psychological and interpersonal dimensions of sexual function and dysfunction. *Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 2, 793–800. doi:10.1111/j.1743-6109.2009.01618.x.
- Backus, F. R., & Mahalik, J. R. (2011). The masculinity of Mr. Right: Feminist identity and heterosexual women's ideal romantic partners. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 35, 318–326. doi:10.1177/0361684310392357.
- Barlow, F. K. (2016). Sex and political attitudes. Unpublished raw data.
- Barreto, M., & Ellemers, N. (2005). The burden of benevolent sexism: How it contributes to the maintenance of gender inequalities. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 35, 633–642. doi:10.1002/ejsp.270.
- Barreto, M., Ellemers, N., Piebinga, L., & Moya, M. (2010). How nice of us and how dumb of me: The effect of exposure to benevolent sexism on women's task and relational self-descriptions. *Sex Roles*, 62, 532–544. doi:10.1007/s11199-009-9699-0.
- Becker, J. C., & Wright, S. C. (2011). Yet another dark side of chivalry: Benevolent sexism undermines and hostile sexism motivates collective action for social change. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 101, 62–77. doi:10.1037/a0022615.
- Birnbaum, G. E. (2003). The meaning of heterosexual intercourse among women with female orgasmic disorder. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 32, 61–71. doi:10.1023/A:1021845513448.
- Buhrmester, M., Kwang, T., & Gosling, S. D. (2011). Amazon's Mechanical Turk: A new source of inexpensive, yet high-quality, data? *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 6, 3–5. doi:10.1177/1745691610393980.
- Calogero, R. M., & Jost, J. T. (2011). Self-subjugation among women: Exposure to sexist ideology, self-objectification, and the protective function of the need to avoid closure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 100, 211–228. doi:10.1037/a0021864.
- Chandler, J., & Shapiro, D. (2016). Conducting clinical research using crowd-sourced convenience samples. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 12, 53–81. doi:10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-021815-093623.
- Chen, Z., Fiske, S. T., & Lee, T. L. (2009). Ambivalent sexism and power-related gender-role ideology in marriage. *Sex Roles*, 60, 765–778. doi:10.1007/s11199-009-9585-9.
- Coffelt, T. A., & Hess, J. A. (2014). Sexual disclosures: Connections to relational satisfaction and closeness. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy*, 40, 577–591. doi:10.1080/0092623X.2013.811449.
- Cooper, E. B., Fenigstein, A., & Fauber, R. L. (2014). The faking orgasm scale for women: Psychometric properties. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 43, 423–435. doi:10.1007/s10508-013-0212-z.
- Costa, R. M., & Brody, S. (2007). Women's relationship quality is associated with specifically penile-vaginal intercourse orgasm and frequency. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy*, 33, 319–327. doi:10.1080/00926230701385548.
- Daniluk, J. C. (1998). *Women's sexuality across the life span: Challenging myths, creating meanings*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Dardenne, B., Dumont, M., & Bollier, T. (2007). Insidious dangers of benevolent sexism: Consequences for women's performance. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 93, 764–799. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.93.5.764.
- Durán, M., Moya, M., & Megías, J. L. (2011). It's his right, it's her duty: Benevolent sexism and the justification of traditional sexual roles. *Journal of Sex Research*, 48, 470–478. doi:10.1080/00224499.2010.513088.
- Fernández, M. L., Castro, Y. R., Otero, M. C., Foltz, M. L., & Lorenzo, M. G. (2006). Sexism, vocational goals, and motivation as predictors of men's and women's career choice. *Sex Roles*, 55, 267–272. doi:10.1007/s11199-006-9079-y.
- Fitz, C. C., & Zucker, A. N. (2015). Everyday exposure to benevolent sexism and condom use among college women. *Women and Health*, 55, 245–262. doi:10.1080/03630242.2014.996721.
- Fugl-Meyer, K. S., Öberg, K., Lundberg, P. O., Lewin, B., & Fugl-Meyer, A. (2006). On orgasm, sexual techniques, and erotic perceptions in 18- to 74-year old Swedish women. *Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 3, 56–68. doi:10.1111/j.1743-6109.2005.00170.x.
- Glick, P., Diebold, J., Bailey-Werner, B., & Zhu, L. (1997). The two faces of Adam: Ambivalent sexism and polarized attitudes toward women. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 23, 1323–1334. doi:10.1177/01461672972312009.
- Glick, P., & Fiske, S. T. (1996). The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory: Differentiating hostile and benevolent sexism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70, 491–512. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.70.3.491.
- Glick, P., Fiske, S. T., Mladinic, A., Saiz, J. L., Abrams, D., Masser, B., ... López, W. (2000). Beyond prejudice as simple antipathy: Hostile and benevolent sexism across cultures. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79, 763–775. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.79.5.763.
- Goodman, J. K., Cryder, C. E., & Cheema, A. (2013). Data collection in a flat world: The strengths and weaknesses of Mechanical Turk samples. *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making*, 26, 213–224. doi:10.1002/bdm.1753.
- Haavio-Mannila, E., & Kontula, O. (1997). Correlates of increased sexual satisfaction. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 26, 399–419. doi:10.1023/A:1024591318836.
- Harris, E. A., Thai, M., & Barlow, F. K. (2016). Fifty shades flipped: Effects of reading erotica depicting a sexually dominant woman compared to a sexually dominant man. *Journal of Sex Research*. doi:10.1080/00224499.2015.1131227.
- Hayes, R. D., Bennett, C. M., Fairley, C. K., & Dennerstein, L. (2006). What can prevalence studies tell us about female sexual difficulty and dysfunction? *Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 3, 589–595. doi:10.1111/j.1743-6109.2006.00241.x.
- Heiman, J. R. (2002). Sexual dysfunction: Overview of prevalence, etiological factors, and treatments. *Journal of Sex Research*, 39, 73–78. doi:10.1080/00224490209552124.
- Hu, L. T., & Bentler, P. (1995). Evaluating model fit. In R. H. Hoyle (Ed.), *Structural equation modeling: Concepts, issues, and applications* (pp. 76–99). London: Sage.
- Hurlbert, D. F. (1991). The role of assertiveness in female sexuality: A comparative study between sexually assertive and sexually nonassertive women. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy*, 17, 183–190. doi:10.1080/00926239108404342.
- Kelly, M. P., Strassberg, D. S., & Turner, C. M. (2004). Communication and associated relationship issues in female anorgasmia. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy*, 30, 263–276. doi:10.1080/00926230490422403.
- Kilianski, S., & Rudman, L. (1998). Wanting it both ways: Do women approve of benevolent sexism? *Sex Roles*, 39, 333–352. doi:10.1023/A:1018814924402.
- Klapilová, K., Brody, S., Krejčová, L., Husárová, B., & Binter, J. (2015). Sexual satisfaction, sexual compatibility, and relationship adjustment in couples: The role of sexual behaviors, orgasm, and men's discernment of women's intercourse orgasm. *Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 12, 667–675. doi:10.1111/jsm.12766.

- Laan, E., & Rellini, A. H. (2011). Can we treat anorgasmia in women? The challenge to experiencing pleasure. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy, 26*, 329–341. doi:10.1080/14681994.2011.649691.
- Larson, J. H., Anderson, S. M., Holman, T. B., & Niemann, B. K. (1998). A longitudinal study of the effects of premarital communication, relationship stability, and self-esteem on sexual satisfaction in the first year of marriage. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy, 24*, 193–206. doi:10.1080/00926239808404933.
- Laumann, E. O., Paik, A., & Rosen, R. C. (1999). Sexual dysfunction in the United States: Prevalence and predictors. *Journal of the American Medical Association, 281*, 537–544. doi:10.1001/jama.281.6.537.
- Litzinger, S., & Gordon, K. C. (2005). Exploring relationships among communication, sexual satisfaction, and marital satisfaction. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy, 31*, 409–424. doi:10.1080/00926230591006719.
- Mark, K. P., & Jozkowski, K. N. (2013). The mediating role of sexual and nonsexual communication between relationship and sexual satisfaction in a sample of college-age heterosexual couples. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy, 39*, 410–427. doi:10.1080/0092623X.2011.644652.
- McCabe, M. P., & Delaney, S. M. (1992). An evaluation of therapeutic programs for the treatment of secondary inorgasmia in women. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 21*, 69–89. doi:10.1007/bf01542717.
- McCabe, M. P., & Giles, K. (2012). Differences between sexually functional and dysfunctional women in childhood experiences and individual and relationship domains. *International Journal of Sexual Health, 24*, 181–194. doi:10.1080/19317611.2012.680686.
- Morokoff, P. J., Quina, K., Harlow, L. L., Whitmire, L., Grimley, D. M., Gibson, P. R., & Burkholder, G. J. (1997). Sexual Assertiveness Scale (SAS) for women: Development and validation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 73*, 790–804. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.73.4.790.
- Nobre, P. J. (2009). Determinants of sexual desire problems in women: Testing a cognitive-emotional model. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy, 35*, 360–377. doi:10.1080/00926230903065716.
- Öberg, K., Fugl-Meyer, A., & Fugl-Meyer, K. (2004). On categorization and quantification of women's sexual dysfunctions: An epidemiological approach. *International Journal of Impotence Research, 16*, 261–269. doi:10.1038/sj.ijir.3901151.
- Puts, D. A., Welling, L. L., Burriss, R. P., & Dawood, K. (2012). Men's masculinity and attractiveness predict their female partners' reported orgasm frequency and timing. *Evolution and Human Behavior, 33*, 1–9. doi:10.1016/j.evolhumbehav.2011.03.003.
- Rehman, U. S., Rellini, A. H., & Fallis, E. (2011). The importance of sexual self-disclosure to sexual satisfaction and functioning in committed relationships. *Journal of Sexual Medicine, 8*, 3108–3115. doi:10.1111/j.1743-6109.2011.02439.x.
- Rudman, L. A., & Glick, P. (2008). *The social psychology of gender: How power and intimacy shape gender relations*. New York: Guilford.
- Sakalli, N. (2001). Beliefs about wife beating among Turkish college students: The effects of patriarchy, sexism, and sex differences. *Sex Roles, 44*, 599–610. doi:10.1023/A:1012295109711.
- Sanchez, D. T., & Kiefer, A. K. (2007). Body concerns in and out of the bedroom: Implications for sexual pleasure and problems. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 36*, 808–820. doi:10.1007/s10508-007-9205-0.
- Sanchez, D. T., Phelan, J. E., Moss-Racusin, C. A., & Good, J. J. (2012). The gender role motivation model of women's sexually submissive behavior and satisfaction in heterosexual couples. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 38*, 528–539. doi:10.1177/0146167211430088.
- Satinsky, S., Reece, M., Dennis, B., Sanders, S., & Bardzell, S. (2012). An assessment of body appreciation and its relationship to sexual function in women. *Body Image, 9*, 137–144. doi:10.1016/j.bodyim.2011.09.007.
- Sibley, C. G., & Overall, N. C. (2011). A dual process motivational model of ambivalent sexism and gender differences in romantic partner preferences. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 35*, 303–317. doi:10.1177/0361684311401838.
- Sibley, C. G., Overall, N. C., & Duckitt, J. (2007). When women become more hostilely sexist toward their gender: The system-justifying effect of benevolent sexism. *Sex Roles, 57*, 743–754. doi:10.1007/s11199-007-9306-1.
- van den Brink, F., Smeets, M. M., Hessen, D., & Woertman, L. (2015). Positive body image and sexual functioning in Dutch female university students: The role of adult romantic attachment. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 45*, 1217–1226. doi:10.1007/s10508-015-0511-7.
- Viki, G. T., Abrams, D., & Hutchison, P. (2003). The “true” romantic: Benevolent sexism and paternalistic chivalry. *Sex Roles, 49*, 533–537. doi:10.1023/A:1025888824749.
- Woo, J. T., Brotto, L. A., & Gorzalka, B. B. (2011). The role of sex guilt in the relationship between culture and women's sexual desire. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 40*, 385–394. doi:10.1007/s10508-010-9609-0.