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[Home](#) > [Social Sciences](#) > [Psychology](#) > [News Articles](#) > Printer-friendly

# Benevolent Sexism - How Positive Attitudes Toward Gender Equality Backfire

By *News Account*

Created Jan 20 2011 - 10:35am

How can a man who writes an article noting the many positive strides made in eliminating gender discrimination be sexist? Well, he isn't, but men who go out of their way to help women can be considered sexist, though it is a more benevolent sexism than the real kind.

New research from the University of Granada warns about the negative effects of "benevolent sexism", a term used for apparently positive ideas and attitudes of men towards women, which are based on the assumption that men must take care of and sacrifice themselves for women.

Their research uses an odd example, like when individuals are told that a man has attitudes socially considered as good towards his wife, even though those attitudes are sexist if they were framed in a different way, they go so far as to justify 'violence' within the couple, in this instance unwelcome sexual advances, and to exonerate the man (they believe he is entitled to have sexual relations with his wife) and blame the woman (it is a woman's duty to sexually satisfy her husband).

For the purpose of the study, six experimental studies were conducted, where more than 700 students aged between 18 and 24 and from different Faculties participated.

Mercedes Durán Segura at the Department of Social Psychology and Behavioural Sciences Methodology says that while other studies only analyzed how gender beliefs affect the judgment that individuals make regarding rape and rape-victims, this new study claims that men's 'benevolent sexist' attitudes towards women can justify sexual violence within the couple.

In other words, if you object to a broad, vague designation of virtually anything as sexual violence within the couple, you are sexist.

They say the results obtained from this study "could be applied for designing and enhancing educational programs in sexual harassment prevention mainly for men – with the purpose of reducing sexual harassment rates, but also for women, to help

them become aware of the reality of the problem and help them in identifying what factors could weaken their assertive reactions in such cases".

According to Durán Segura, what is important about this study is that it remarks the negative impact that benevolent sexist attitudes of men towards their couples have on society. Protection and affection for women "are not innocent, since men with benevolent sexist attitudes consider women as inferior to men, and that is the reason why they assume that women need their protection and care".

In other words, it is going to take another generation before actual equality occurs when men who care too much are considered sexist.

The results were published in *Sex Roles*.

Psychology

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