

Authenticity from Benevolent Sexism: Women's Perception of Male Allies

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Presentation Description:

Women may encounter men who become allies in ways that reinforce gender inequity. The presentation will discuss a study investigating whether women's beliefs about feminism and sexism will influence whether they perceive these kinds of male allies as authentically wanting to improve women's status.

Abstract:

Men are often called to be allies for women to challenge sexism and gender inequity. However, despite intentions to help, men may still approach allyship from a position of benevolent sexism. Benevolent sexism (BS) appears positive but is based on restrictive gender roles and stereotypes that women are weak and need protecting. Such beliefs lead male allies to overhelp or provide help that is ineffective in improving women's status. However, women may interpret the protective and supportive face of BS as an authentic desire to improve women's status.

This interpretation may also depend on how strongly women identify with feminism which can inform their awareness of gender inequity and recognition of sexism. The current study explored whether women will perceive help from a male ally as an authentic desire to improve women's status even if he exhibits BS. Women recruited from undergraduate psychology classes completed a pre-test survey measuring their endorsement of BS and identification with feminism. They were then randomly assigned to one of two conditions in which they read about a man engaging in efforts to help women in his school's robotics club but who also exhibited either BS or egalitarian views. Participants then completed measures about their perceptions of the ally, including his motives and intentions. Women who identify as feminists and are low in their endorsement of BS should be more able to recognize sexism and be more suspicious of the intentions of an ally who exhibits it.