

**Benevolent sexism
and attitudes toward
myra hindley lesley
smith**



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Viki, Massey, and Masser (2005), conducted empirical research to determine if the hypothesis “ that paternalistic attitudes may influence people’s perception of female offenders” could be accepted or not (p. 109). Research has shown that paternalism can be defined as either hostile sexism or benevolent sexism (Glick and Fiske, 1996). Benevolent sexism is the positive evaluation of women in traditional gender role, while hostile sexism is the negative evaluation of women who violate traditional gender roles (Glick, Deibold, Bailey-Weerner, & Zhu, 1997; Masser & Adams in press).

This article focuses on the influence that hostile and benevolent sexism has on people’s perceptions of female offenders (Viki, Massey, and Masser, 2005, p. 109). The researchers chose to conduct this study to examine where benevolent sexism and hostile sexism would differentially predict participants’ evaluations of female offender Myra Hindley (Viki, Massey, and Masser, 2005, p. 110-111). Paternalistic influence is important because it may actually result in harsher treatment of female offenders (Nagel, 1981; Saulter-Tubbs, 1993).

Research was done concerning Myra Hindley, who was convicted in England for the murder of two children and the accomplice to another similar murder and tortured them as well, because she is an example of the female stereotypical role of nurturing behavior violated in the most extreme way (Viki, Massey, and Masser, 2005, p. 110). The participants in the research were various volunteers from southeast England (Viki, Massey, and Masser, 2005, p. 112). Most of the volunteers were from a college campus, the city center, and a train station (Viki, Massey, and Masser, 2005, p. 112).

One hundred and twenty three people participated, eighty seven of which were females and thirty six were male with a mean age of 26. 03 (Viki, Massey, and Masser, 2005, p. 112). Participants were given a three part questionnaire that assessed the participant's attitudes toward Myra Hindley using various items from newspapers of her death, an evaluation of Myra Hindley's traits using semantic differential scales, and an Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) consisting of two 11 items sub scales, Hostile and Benevolent Sexism (Viki, Massey, and Masser, 2005, p. 112).

Principal components analysis with a varimax rotation was used to assess the attitudes toward Myra Hindley as well as the trait measures (Viki, Massey, and Masser, 2005, p. 113). The analysis of attitudes toward Myra Hindley resulted in a correspondence between participants' judgment of Myra Hindley as an evil person and evaluations of the injustice of her treatment (Viki, Massey, and Masser, 2005, p. 113). The analysis of the trait evaluations showed a focus on her unpleasant nature and the violation of the female stereotype revealing an important correlation (Viki, Massey, and Masser, 2005, p. 113).

Correlation analysis was used on the ASI to find a correlation between Hostile and Benevolent sexism (Viki, Massey, and Masser, 2005, p. 114). The results also showed that individuals who scored high on benevolent sexism, evaluated Myra Hindley as a bad person which indicates a relationship when a significant relationship between benevolent sexism and the evaluation of Myra Hindley as a bad person. , $t = 2.81$, $P < .01$ (Viki, Massey, and Masser, 2005, p. 114).

Judgements of Hindley's traits suggested that benevolent sexism influenced the view of Myra Hindley as possessing traits in violation of the female stereotypes., $t = 2.10$, $p < .05$ (Viki, Massey, and Masser, 2005, p. 115). An evaluation of the unjustness of Myra Hindley's treatment suggests that benevolent sexism influenced the same view as found in the judgment of Hindley's traits , $t = 2.30$, $p < .05$ (Viki, Massey, and Masser, 2005, p. 115). In a Sobel Test during the mediation analyses, it was found that the evaluation of injustice in Hindley's treatment was ' regressed onto perceptions of Myra violating the female norm for behavior and benevolent sexism (Viki, Massey, and Masser, 2005, p. 115).

The findings from this study build upon recent research (e. g. Abrams et. al, 2003; Viki & Abrams, 2002) by showing that benevolent sexism can have negative effects on female offenders. The study shows that negative effects from benevolent sexism are caused by counter-stereotypical crimes or norm-violating individuals (Viki, Massey, and Masser, 2005, p. 116-117). The study concludes that women who violate the sexist norms expected of them will have chivalry back on them and benevolent sexism " may translate into individual malevolence (Viki, Massey, and Masser, 2005, p. 118).

I agree with the conclusion that benevolent sexism can have positive and negative effects on the perception of women. The use of a specific individual that violates the norms expected of her shows both the positive and negative effects evidenced by the bad perception of her and the evaluation of the injustice of her treatment. The article is an important addition to findings from past studies, and offers the possibility of other hypotheses to the study.

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For instance, if violating the norm of behavior can have negative effects on a male offender and what negative effects does benevolent sexism have on the career woman. This article sets the precedent for examining the influence that benevolent sexism has on the evaluation of female offenders. Moreover, it presents the presence of bias caused by benevolent sexism when evaluating female offenders. I believe that a greater number of men should have been engaged in the study, so that there would be more gender differences in evaluation and also that the sample used for the study was too small.

Additionally, the sample was skewed in age to the below 30 group, and the area range was too small to represent the influence of benevolent sexism on every one's evaluation of female offenders. Furthermore, I found that the article is relevant to health psychology. It provided information about psychological influences on gender role and its perceptions in communities. Also, the female gender is greatly impacted by the effects paternalistic attitudes have on individuals' evaluations of female offenders. Finally, the article provided information about social issues including murder in societies.