"Sugar-Coated Arsenic: The Impact of Benevolent Sexism on Women' s Career Development"

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Abstract

Benevolent sexism is often difficult to recognize as prejudice due to the subjective goodwill of its holders, yet it reinforces gender inequality by restricting women' s role images and placing them in a position of weakness. In recent years, a substantial body of empirical research has found that benevolent sexism constrains women' s career development opportunities through family education, marital role division, and workplace competition; compared to direct effects from others' attitudes, these negative impacts are more significantly mediated by women' s self-internalization of benevolent sexism. In response to this mechanism, researchers have proposed various theoretical explanations from the individual psychological perspective of how women perceive and cope with benevolent sexism. We contend that examining research on benevolent sexism through a feminist psychology lens raises important questions regarding the maintenance of objectivity in research stance and value neutrality; moreover, recent theoretical developments in feminist psychology offer significant insights for future research trends on gender prejudice.

Full Text

Sweet Poison: How Benevolent Sexism Affects Women' s Career Development

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Abstract: Benevolent sexism (BS) comprises attitudes toward women that are subjectively positive in tone yet view women stereotypically in traditional gender roles. Although these attitudes are not typically detected as prejudice by perceivers, they reinforce women' s subordinate status by restricting their social roles and positioning them as weak. Recent empirical research reveals

that benevolent sexism constrains women' s career development across multiple domains, including family education, romantic relationships, and workplace competition. Rather than operating through direct external pressure, these negative effects are primarily mediated by women' s internalization of benevolent sexism. To explain this mechanism, researchers have proposed various theoretical accounts at the individual psychological level concerning how women perceive and respond to benevolent sexism. From a feminist psychology perspective, this review argues that the objectivity and value neutrality of research on benevolent sexism warrant critical reflection. Recent theoretical developments in feminist psychology also offer important insights for future directions in gender prejudice research.

Keywords: benevolent sexism; women' s career development; feminism; gender equality

Sexism refers to preconceived and unjust attitudes based on gender differences. For decades, social psychology adhered to Allport' s (1954) characterization of prejudice as an "antipathetic attitude" (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Glick et al., 2000), cementing the notion that gender prejudice is inherently negative. However, Glick and Fiske' s (1996) historical analysis revealed that objective denigration of women often coexisted with subjective affection: men simultaneously denied women's capabilities and rights while seeking emotional intimacy with them and offering assistance. This observation led to the formulation of ambivalent sexism theory (AST), which posits that to maintain patriarchal and reproductive needs, sexism encompasses not only hostile derogation of women who violate traditional roles but also positive regard for those who conform. This dualistic and contradictory attitude can be distinguished as hostile sexism (HS) and benevolent sexism (BS) (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Glick, Diebold, Bailey-Werner, & Zhu, 1997). These two forms coexist within individuals as complementary ideologies, targeting "bad women" who defy traditional gender norms and "good women" who comply, thereby jointly sustaining patriarchal social structures (Glick et al., 1997; Sibley & Wilson, 2004; Glick & Fiske, 2001). This theory clearly delineates and expands the conceptual dimensions of sexism, subsequently drawing widespread research attention to benevolent sexism.

Benevolent sexism refers to attitudes that subjectively express affection for women while confining them to traditional gender roles. According to the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) developed by Glick and Fiske (1996), the psychological structure of benevolent sexism comprises three dimensions: protective paternalism, complementary gender differentiation, and heterosexual intimacy. Proponents tend to view women as "beautiful yet fragile" stereotypes—wives, mothers, and romantic partners who require protection, possess virtuous qualities, and inspire romantic feelings—while offering positive evaluations of women who conform to these role expectations (Glick et al., 1997; 2000). Its essence lies in reinforcing gender inequality by rewarding women who meet male needs (Glick & Fiske, 2001). Early research primarily employed the ASI scale to examine group differences in ambivalent sexism levels, associated traits, and

relationships with cognitive evaluations of women (Chen & Chen, 2007). Compared to hostile sexism, benevolent sexism is more readily accepted by women because its seemingly positive affect and protective behaviors make it difficult to recognize as prejudice (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005).

Researchers have warned that the subtlety of benevolent sexism renders it akin to an "iron fist in a velvet glove" (Jackman, 1994), leaving women ill-equipped to effectively guard against or respond to it (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Glick et al., 1997; 2000; Barreto & Ellemers, 2005). In recent years, numerous empirical studies have investigated how benevolent sexism affects women' s rights across private and public domains (Connor, Glick, & Fiske, 2018) and have developed psychological explanations for its mechanisms at the individual level. A systematic literature review of this body of research is currently lacking. Given the continuous nature of these effects throughout women' s career development, this review adopts the career development research approach advocated by contemporary vocational psychology, which emphasizes the interaction between individuals and their multiple systemic contexts (Patton & McMahon, 2014). We examine both the impact of benevolent sexism on women' s career development and the psychological mechanisms underlying women' s perception and response. Furthermore, as gender prejudice represents an intersection of social psychology and feminism, a critical examination from a feminist psychology perspective reveals that the objectivity and value neutrality of research stances warrant reflection. Drawing on recent theoretical developments in feminism can also inform future trends in gender prejudice research. We elaborate on these issues below.

2 The Impact of Benevolent Sexism on Women' s Career Development

Women' s career development has unique characteristics that currently lack a consensual, robust theoretical explanation (Patton & McMahon, 2014). Nevertheless, recent scholarship has achieved some consensus: women' s career development is inseparable from other life domains; both work and family constitute central aspects of women' s lives; and human and social capital are key factors in women' s career advancement (O' Neil, Hopkins, & Bilimoria, 2008). Accordingly, we examine how benevolent sexism influences women' s career goals, occupational choices, and professional development across three critical domains: family education, marital role division, and workplace competition.

2.1 Mechanisms of Benevolent Sexism's Influence on Women's Career Development

Education serves as a crucial indicator of human capital (O'Neil et al., 2008), and parental support along with educational resources shape individuals' career goal selection (Patton & McMahon, 2014). A paired survey study of 164 Canadian mother-daughter dyads revealed that mothers' BS levels positively predicted their adolescent daughters' BS levels and expectations for traditional goals (such

as appearance and marriage), while negatively predicting daughters' academic goals (degree attainment) and academic performance (Montañés et al., 2012). This aligns with findings that women's education levels correlate negatively with BS (Glick, Lameiras, & Castro, 2002), demonstrating the detrimental impact of benevolent sexism on daughters' academic achievement and career aspirations in family contexts, with effects transmitted intergenerationally.

Work-family conflict remains a pivotal challenge in women' s career development, with relational orientation significantly influencing women' s occupational choices (Patton & McMahon, 2014; O' Neil et al., 2008). Research shows that women with higher BS levels demonstrate greater endorsement of traditional marital roles such as "men for the outside world, women for the home" and are more willing to sacrifice their own career development to support their partners' careers, an attitude positively reinforced by their partners' BS levels. For instance, Chen, Fiske, and Lee (2009) found that both men' s and women' s BS levels were significantly positively associated with the belief that "wives supporting husbands' careers is a natural duty." Moya et al. (2007) discovered that when romantic partners opposed women' s internships involving counseling dangerous men or interviewing criminals, women high in BS were more willing to accept such restrictions regardless of whether reasons were provided. Lü (2009) interviewed three Chinese women about their career trajectories, documenting how they relinquished professional development for love or family, reflecting high identification with the protective paternalism and heterosexual intimacy dimensions of benevolent sexism. Hammond and Overall (2015) found that women high in BS were more willing to provide support for their partners' career goals, despite not receiving equivalent reciprocity. Why would women engage in such "self-sacrifice" ? Beyond exchanging for men' s "paternalistic protection," it also represents a cost paid to maintain relationship stability. Overall and Hammond (2018) proposed an interactive model of BS between intimate partners, noting that men' s BS benefits relationships and enhances female partners' endorsement of BS (Hammond, Overall, & Cross, 2016), while women' s own BS creates a trade-off dilemma between maintaining relationship stability and pursuing career success (Overall & Hammond, 2018). Although career development is a key indicator of socioeconomic status in modern society, women high in BS sacrifice this right to maintain intimate relationships.

In workplace contexts, women encounter gender discrimination at virtually every stage of career development (Wang, Mei, & Wei, 2017). Current research on benevolent sexism' s impact on female employees can be divided into two categories. The first directly examines the relationship between participants' BS levels and evaluations of female employees, finding no direct connection. For example, Masser and Abrams (2004) showed that while participants high in HS were more likely to negatively evaluate female promotion candidates, participants' BS levels neither hindered nor helped evaluations of female candidates. In a study on mechanisms of occupational gender segregation, participants high in HS tended to select more women for charity organizations and more men for securities firms, but participants' BS levels did not affect this tendency re-

gardless of their magnitude (Qiao, Zheng, Song, & Jiang, 2014). This suggests that workplace gender discrimination primarily stems from hostile rather than benevolent sexism. Working women are typically perceived as embodying modern spirit and violating traditional role norms (Connor et al., 2018), making them more susceptible to HS than BS, which aligns theoretically. However, this more likely reflects differences in expression and pathways between benevolent and hostile sexism, making such direct examinations inadequate for revealing BS' s influence.

The second research approach, adopting different methodologies, has yielded different conclusions. These studies focus on identifying which workplace behaviors constitute benevolent sexism and examining their effects on women themselves, revealing the subtle and indirect nature of BS' s impact. For instance, research has found that male managers give female subordinates more verbal praise but assign them less challenging tasks, a benevolently sexist practice that undermines women' s opportunities for growth through challenging assignments (Biernat, Tocci, & Williams, 2012; King et al., 2012). Other studies use simulated scenario experiments to present hiring contexts with BS attributes, examining both female applicants and bystander evaluators. The results demonstrate negative impacts on both groups' cognitive and behavioral responses (see [Figure 1: see original paper]): (1) Female applicants' cognitive task performance declines. In Dardenne, Dumont, and Bollier' s (2007) simulated chemical plant recruitment experiment, female applicants in BS conditions—whether protective paternalism or complementary gender differentiation—scored lower on cognitive tasks than those in HS or no-sexism conditions. Researchers explained that BS in the hiring context created distracting interference, impairing working memory investment in the task. (2) Bystanders' evaluations of female applicants decrease. Good and Rudman (2010) had American college students read interview transcripts where male interviewers exhibited BS, HS, or neutral attitudes toward female applicants, then evaluate the applicants' competence and hireability. Results showed that in both HS and BS conditions, participants' personal liking for the male interviewer predicted lower evaluations of the female applicant' s competence and hireability. In BS conditions, participants' own HS levels predicted harsher evaluations, as they perceived the female applicant as undeserving of BS benefits (applying for a management position and challenging male dominance violated gender norms). (3) Bystanders' self-evaluations are also negatively affected. Bradley-Geist, Rivera, and Geringer (2015) replicated Good and Rudman' s (2010) materials to examine effects on participants' self-esteem and career aspirations after reading the interview transcripts. They found that in BS conditions, the impact on work performance self-esteem did not differ significantly between male and female participants, but female participants experienced higher appearance-based self-esteem compared to HS/neutral conditions, while male participants experienced lower appearance-based self-esteem. Together, these studies demonstrate that workplace benevolent sexism operates less overtly than hostile sexism but produces profound negative consequences.

These studies reveal the mechanisms through which benevolent sexism in social

systems affects women' s career development: (1) **Deceptiveness**, manifesting as positive attitudes and protective behaviors toward women while essentially restricting their social roles and developmental space; (2) **Indirectness**, primarily realized through women' s self-internalization and compliance, such as choosing traditional career goals and exhibiting insufficient career development motivation or even self-handicapping behaviors; and (3) **Spillover effects** on others through social learning processes.

2.2 The "Positive" Effects of Benevolent Sexism on Women' s Rights

Although the vast majority of research identifies negative effects of benevolent sexism, some scholars propose a dialectical view that acknowledges its positive components of care for women (Chen & Xu, 2013). We believe this warrants specific clarification. In Chen and Xu' s (2013) study on ambivalent sexism and attitudes toward workplace sexual harassment, experimental materials presented four types of female victims. Overall, participants' BS levels were positively correlated with anti-harassment attitudes and support for victims seeking legal assistance. However, further analysis revealed that when victims were typical traditional gender role women (the type most deserving of BS protection), the positive correlation between participants' BS levels and victim-blaming was not significant, nor was the negative correlation with perpetrator-blaming. The apparent positivity of BS in this study emerged only in comparison with HS. We argue that comparing high versus low BS groups would yield more convincing conclusions. Moreover, evaluating benevolent sexism should use non-sexism as the reference point, not employ a "lesser of two evils" comparison with hostile sexism.

Further research has examined the actual utility of the "positive" behaviors accompanying benevolent sexism. Hideg and Ferris (2016) investigated both positive and negative effects of BS on gender equality policies in employment, finding that high-BS individuals were more likely to support such policies when mediated by compassion, but that this support was limited to women in traditionally female-dominated occupations. The researchers concluded that benevolent sexism superficially promotes workplace gender equality while actually reinforcing occupational gender segregation. Radke, Hornsey, and Barlow (2018) compared support for feminist action versus protective action toward women, finding that men' s BS levels positively correlated with support for protective action. Both male and female participants were equally supportive of protective action, but men were less supportive than women of feminist action. Further investigation revealed that this attitudinal difference arose because women more readily perceived gender injustice, whereas men believed feminists sought more power than men. This confirms that the "benefits" of benevolent sexism are limited to women and behaviors that do not threaten male power.

Research on help-giving types and benevolent sexism found that higher BS levels led men to prefer providing dependency-oriented help rather than autonomy-promoting assistance, while women were more likely to seek

dependency-oriented help (Shnabel et al., 2016). Extending this research, Cao and Cao (2018) found that men' s perceptions of women' s competence and conformity to traditional gender roles moderated helping behaviors. Given that dependency-oriented help promotes within-group inequality (Chernyakhai & Waismelmanor, in press), gendered helping behavior under benevolent sexism, while superficially beneficial, essentially reinforces traditional gender role norms.

Overall, the caring attitudes and protective behaviors of benevolent sexism resemble sweet bait. If women accept it, they enjoy the sweetness of depending on men while paying the price of relinquishing their rights. For instance, to obtain men' s love, women may voluntarily abandon investment in education and career; accepting special care from supervisors results in lost opportunities for professional growth. By the time women realize their career development space has narrowed and their rights increasingly constrained, they have lost the capacity to reclaim them. As Simone de Beauvoir (1949/2011) wrote in *The Second Sex*: "When she discovers she has been deceived by a mirage, it is too late; her strength has been exhausted by the adventure." In this sense, benevolent sexism possesses a seductive yet dangerous 杀伤力 (lethal power). Rather than an "iron fist in a velvet glove," it is more accurately "sweet poison."

3 Psychological Mechanisms of Women Affected by Benevolent Sexism

As previously discussed, the negative effects of benevolent sexism on women are primarily realized through influencing recipients' own cognition and behavior. Generally, women with higher BS levels tend to endorse traditional role norms (Chen et al., 2009; Overall & Hammond, 2018). However, research also indicates that women lack effective recognition of benevolent sexism (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005; Moya et al., 2007). Are women passive recipients or active endorsers of benevolent sexism? What factors influence women' s perception and response? To reveal these psychological mechanisms, researchers have proposed theoretical explanations from two perspectives: women' s cognitive attitudes toward benevolent sexism and their motivational responses.

3.1 Women' s Cognitive Attitudes Toward Benevolent Sexism

Research reveals that women' s own benevolent sexism levels are influenced by multiple factors including cultural background, education level, age, and personality traits. Early cross-cultural surveys using the ASI scale found that while men generally scored higher than women on both HS and BS, in regions with lower gender equality—such as many developing countries—women often held higher BS levels than men (Glick et al., 2000). Chen et al.' s (2009) cross-cultural comparison of Chinese and American university students similarly found that Chinese women held higher BS levels than American women. This suggests that in contexts with lower gender equality, women may more strongly

desire the "benefits" offered by benevolent sexism, such as economic dependence on men and male protection (Glick et al., 2000). Multiple studies have also found that women' s education levels correlate significantly negatively with BS (Lipowska et al., 2016; Glick et al., 2002). A large-scale survey in New Zealand found that men' s BS levels increased linearly and steadily across the lifespan, whereas women' s BS levels followed a U-shaped curve, declining across most age groups in cross-sectional comparisons (Hammond, Milojev, Huang, & Sibley, 2018). Individual difference factors such as personality traits also influence attitudes toward BS. For instance, psychological entitlement far exceeds other known predictors of sexism (such as low openness) and relevant covariates (such as impression management) in effectively predicting women's BS levels (Grubbs, Exline, & Twenge, 2014). Considering BS scale items such as "In a disaster, women should be rescued before men" (Glick & Fiske, 1996) and the common criticism that "feminists reject HS but desire BS" (Kilianski, 1998), women high in psychological entitlement may indeed view BS as an in-group privilege rather than prejudice.

Despite individual differences in women' s benevolent sexism levels, women generally struggle to recognize benevolent sexism as prejudice (Connor et al., 2018; Barreto & Ellemers, 2005; Moya et al., 2007). This may stem from social cognitive biases—benevolent sexism does not match the psychological prototype of prejudice (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005). As Glick and Fiske (1996) noted, prejudice was historically conceived as a negative attitude, whereas BS's affective tone is subjectively positive, making it difficult to associate with prejudice. However, as societal gender equality consciousness evolves, this perception is gradually changing (Rollero & Fedi, 2014). Second, women' s judgments of benevolent sexism are influenced by contextual factors such as the communicator' s identity and motives. For example, Moya et al. (2007) found that benevolent sexism from husbands was not perceived as sexist, whereas the same behavior from colleagues was. Compared to BS based on personalized reasons ("because I' m worried about you"), women more readily identified BS based on categorical reasons ("because you' re a woman") as sexist, and their own BS levels did not affect this judgment. Additionally, a disconnect may exist between women' s rational cognitive judgments and actual emotional experiences regarding BS, contributing to evaluation biases (Bosson, Pinel, & Vandello, 2010).

In summary, factors influencing women' s cognitive attitudes toward benevolent sexism are diverse and complex, varying across individual differences, cultural backgrounds, and social contexts. This suggests we should recognize heterogeneity within women and the dynamic influence of interactions between individuals and their situations on gender prejudice.

3.2 Relevant Psychological Motivation Explanations

Regardless of how ambiguous women' s cognitive attitudes toward benevolent sexism may be, they are undeniably affected by it, manifesting in autonomous negative cognitions and behaviors (Dardenne et al., 2007; Moya et al., 2007).

Researchers have proposed several representative theoretical explanations for these psychological motivations.

(1) Stereotype Threat. Stereotype threat refers to the process whereby individuals or groups, perceiving negative stereotypes about their group in a situation, experience worry and anxiety that ironically confirms these negative stereotypes (Guan & Chai, 2011). Since benevolent sexism promotes a stereotype of women as beautiful yet "fragile" (Connor et al., 2018), its implicit assumption of female weakness may induce stereotype threat. In Dardenne et al.' s (2007) simulated chemical plant recruitment experiment, although female participants did not consciously perceive BS recruitment messages as sexist, they experienced emotional discomfort similar to that in HS conditions. Researchers attributed this to participants' implicit perception of stereotype threat from BS, which subsequently impaired their task performance. In Rollero and Fedi' s (2014) study on ambivalent sexism' s effects on students' career aspirations, participants read survey results describing their gender (randomly assigned to HS or BS conditions) and then assessed their likelihood of becoming leaders. Results showed that compared to HS conditions, female participants in BS conditions were less optimistic about becoming leaders in management and political domains. Dardenne et al. (2007) also found that while strong gender identity could buffer against stereotype threat in HS conditions, it was ineffective in BS conditions. Combined with Leicht et al.' s (2017) finding that in counter-stereotypical contexts, women' s gender identity positively predicted leadership aspirations, whereas in stereotypical contexts this relationship was moderated by feminist identity (persisting only among women with high feminist identification), future research should examine the interactive effects of gender identity and feminist identity in overcoming BS-induced stereotype threat.

(2) Fear of Success. Cai (2008) investigated the relationship between ambivalent sexism and achievement motivation among Chinese female university students, finding that scores on the "protective paternalism" dimension positively correlated with fear of failure, while "complementary gender differentiation" scores positively correlated with achievement motivation. However, overall BS scores did not significantly correlate with total achievement motivation scores, suggesting that BS' s "protective paternalism" offset the confidence provided by "complementary gender differentiation." Further analysis revealed that participants' fear of success was significantly higher for non-traditional female occupations (e.g., computer science) than for traditional ones (e.g., English literature) (Cai, 2008). Clearly, women do not lack desire for success but fear success that violates social expectations. This connects to the recently proposed backlash avoidance model, which suggests that women reduce self-promotion and associated potential success to avoid triggering negative reactions for behaviors inconsistent with traditional gender roles (Kosakowska-Berezecka, Jurek, Besta, & Badowska, 2017). Essentially, both represent self-inhibition stemming from negative expectations about "the price of success."

(3) System Justification Theory. System justification theory posits that ex-

pressing benevolent behaviors is a strategy through which higher social classes dominate lower classes, as it makes the latter more likely to accept their disadvantaged position and even spontaneously maintain the social hierarchy (Jost & Kay, 2005; Jackman, 1994). The "benefits" accompanying benevolent sexism —such as care and protection—not only provide men with rationalizations for their gender-privileged position ("women need our protection") (Glick & Fiske, 1996) but also increase women' s identification with their social status (Jost & Kay, 2005), perceptions of social fairness (Connelly & Heesacker, 2012), life satisfaction (Hammond & Sibley, 2011), and relationship stability (Hammond & Overall, 2017), albeit at the cost of weakened rights and passive relationship positioning. These findings confirm benevolent sexism as an ideological tool for legitimizing gender inequality (Mosso, Briante, Aiello, & Russo, 2013). If women fail to recognize benevolent sexism' s group-level negative consequences and focus only on superficial individual-level benefits, they become its followers and even defenders. Dardenne et al. (2007) bluntly comment that in this sense, women become "accomplices" in their own disadvantage.

These theories explain benevolent sexism' s psychological impact on women from different angles and partially reveal women' s dilemmas in responding to it. However, they lack theoretical depth, remaining largely at the individual attribution level. When women discover that negative evaluations of their ingroup reflect real social mechanisms, and when pursuing success requires paying the "price" of punishment, these are clearly not problems solvable at the subjective individual level. While system justification theory suggests women bear some responsibility for their disadvantaged position (Dardenne et al., 2007), it fails to distinguish within-group differences, such as available choices or cultural value differences. Feminist theory has long offered profound and comprehensive discussions on how to understand the connection between individuals and society and how to evaluate women' s self-agency—insights worth learning from psychological research.

4 Reflections and Insights from a Feminist Psychology Perspective

Since feminism challenged Sigmund Freud' s theories on female psychology, feminist psychology has been committed to critiquing and improving mainstream empirical psychology' s covert male discourse hegemony behind its ostensibly objective and neutral stance (Eagly, Eaton, Rose, Riger, & McHugh, 2012). The formulation of benevolent sexism theory is highly feminist in nature, revealing the negative impact of a previously overlooked or even praised form of subtle prejudice on women and deepening understanding of gender injustice. However, gender prejudice is not merely a psychological phenomenon but also a social phenomenon involving value judgments about rights and justice, and relevant research has limitations. Feminist psychological theories can provide critical reflection and inspiration for this research.

4.1 Research Reflections

(1) Value Presuppositions in Benevolent Sexism Theory Regarding Gender Differences and Equality. Glick and Fiske (1996) argued that although the "complementary gender differentiation" dimension of benevolent sexism promotes the notion that women possess wonderful traits lacking in men (e.g., ASI items include "women have a superior moral sensibility," "women possess a purity that men lack," and "women have a more refined sense of culture and better taste"), "these traits are affective rather than rational and agentic. Women possessing these traits merely compensates for deficiencies in men with patriarchal dominance, making them more perfect, with the ultimate goal of reinforcing gender difference stereotypes and rationalizing women's subordinate status." This logical argument contains a value presupposition that "feminine" traits have less social value than "masculine" traits. Following this reasoning, should women weaken their connection to femininity and actively align with masculinity to combat benevolent sexism? Interestingly, research shows women do adopt such social recategorization strategies (Wang et al., 2017), but the consequence may be perceived violation of traditional gender role norms, eliciting hostile sexism punishment (Good & Rudman, 2010). Clearly, this implies a male-standard conception of gender equality whose danger lies in its adherence to patriarchal cultural values.

The core issue in gender equality concerns how to view gender differences. Feminist schools hold divergent views, broadly divisible into two camps: one advocating ignoring gender differences (e.g., early liberal feminism's pursuit of male-standard equality) and one emphasizing redefining gender differences (e.g., radical feminism's insistence that women should preserve and develop their own characteristics) (Li, 2005). The latter is represented by cultural feminist psychologist Carol Gilligan (1993), who, reconstructing Kohlberg's moral judgment experiments, proposed articulating women's experiences from women's standpoint using a "different voice" distinct from male discourse, and advocated for the social value of women's caring morality (e.g., valuing relationships, concern for others). When women shift from research "objects" to "subjects," and when "caring"(femininity) holds equal value to "justice"(masculinity), gender prejudice research will be presented from a new perspective and value system: whether benevolent sexism's "complementary gender differentiation" dimension's praise of femininity implies injustice (Glick et al., 2001), how to distinguish "protective paternalism" from genuine caring (Moya et al., 2007), and whether women's choice of family over work to maintain "heterosexual intimacy" is legitimate (Overall & Hammond, 2018)—all these judgments can be reversed. In postmodern feminism, gender is seen as a product of sociocultural construction; gender differences themselves become unimportant, while how they are constructed by political power from social reality becomes crucial (Guo, 2001; Li, 2005). These feminist theories not only enrich understanding of gender differences' value but also revolutionize the conceptualization of gender prejudice.

(2) How to Properly Evaluate Women's Roles in Responding to Gen-

der Prejudice: Are They Passive Victims or Active Agents with Self-Agency? Research stance determines value judgment. For example, studies have found that when anticipating encounters with male chauvinist interviewers (similar to HS contexts), female applicants increase feminine self-presentation (Von Baeyer, Sherk, & Zanna, 1981). This phenomenon can be interpreted either as women being "accomplices" in gender inequality (Dardenne et al., 2007) or as active impression management strategies for gender identity (Wang et al., 2017). Feminism itself faces dilemmas in evaluating women' s agency: affirming women' s self-assertion facilitates self-empowerment, but overemphasizing individual agency may invite victim-blaming and neglect of broader social factors (Sischo & Martin, 2015; Negrin, 2002).

Postmodern feminism rejects universalized female identity positions, connecting women' s agency to specific sociocultural, historical, and political contexts, thereby providing a useful analytical framework for systematically understanding the multiple truths of women's lives (Guo, 2001; 2006). This offers important insights for benevolent sexism research: First, we must attend to heterogeneity within the research population. While praise for housewives may unsettle career women, does advocacy for economically independent women similarly pressure housewives? If we view women only at the aggregate level while ignoring internal differences, we not only disregard women' s self-voice but also fail to objectively and comprehensively reveal the true nature of gender prejudice' s effects. Second, we must avoid "decontextualizing"research subjects by separating them from their social and historical backgrounds. Postmodern feminism argues that gender injustice does not result solely from gender dichotomies but is influenced by other more important social identities such as race, ethnicity, social class, and sexual orientation (Li, 2005; Guo, 2001). Most current benevolent sexism research examines only the impact of single gender identity on women (Montañés et al., 2012; Rollero & Fedi, 2014; Bradley-Geist et al., 2015), risking essentialism by attributing inequality simply to gender differences while overlooking how intersecting identity statuses and power systems operate within actual social institutions.

4.2 Research Outlook

Feminist psychology' s contributions to mainstream empirical psychology extend beyond challenging "value neutrality" to sparking a paradigm revolution in gender research. Particularly, social constructionist theories of gender introduce gender as a cultural concept into psychological research, shifting the focus of gender analysis from intrinsic individual differences to connections between individuals and multiple social identities, thereby prompting deconstruction of gender binaries and attention to cultural value pluralism (Guo, 2001; 2006). These recent developments offer rich implications for future gender prejudice research.

4.2.1 Future Research Trends (1) Embrace Open Perspectives and Pluralistic Values to Interpret the Comprehensive Connotations of Gender Prejudice. The globalization of psychology has led scholars to recognize cultural boundaries; no researcher, however scientific, can avoid the value presuppositions implicit in their own sociocultural history (Christopher, Wendt, Marecek, & Goodman, 2014). For example, knowledge about women' s psychology in mainstream empirical psychology merely reflects the experiences of "middle-class, white, heterosexual women" (Guo, 2006). The cultural ideological "incompatibility" of mainstream psychology from the US and Western Europe has stimulated the rise of indigenous psychological research in other countries (Macleod, Marecek, & Capdevila, 2014). These developments undermine the possibility and necessity of seeking universal claims in gender research, shifting toward embracing multiculturalism and multiple research methods. For instance, we should attend to heterogeneity within women—women of different races, classes, and resources (economic, educational, political) may encounter different forms of gender prejudice, with corresponding variations in psychological perception and experiential interpretation. In cross-cultural research on different national and ethnic groups, we should not only "study" these cultures but also "learn from" them, seeking spiritual roots and interpretive stances within local cultures (Macleod et al., 2014).

(2) Move Beyond Simple Gender Attribution to Adopt an Intersectionality Research Perspective. In gender prejudice, individuals' original identities are not the problem; the problem lies in how their identities are socially constructed and the resulting treatment (Macleod et al., 2014). Many studies have found that gender difference main effects are less significant than interactions with certain social factors (Eagly & Wood, 2011). For example, individual social-cognitive styles such as need for cognitive closure better explain the origins of gender prejudice than gender itself (Roets, Hiel, & Dhont, 2012). Husbands express more benevolent sexism toward wives in public than private settings, demonstrating social desirability effects on gender prejudice (Chisango, Mayekiso, & Thomae, 2015). In recent years, researchers have begun examining interactive effects between gender and social contexts and multiple identities (race, social class, sexual orientation, etc.). These effects involve not simply crossing different categorical dimensions but, more importantly, the consequences of power relations at these intersections. Although definitions, concepts, and operational methods for intersectionality research are still developing, such perspectives are emerging (Macleod et al., 2014).

(3) Beyond Perfecting Gender Prejudice Theory, Actively Explore Feasible Solutions to Eliminate These Negative Effects. From a social significance standpoint, social psychology addresses the "is" question—how gender prejudice is transmitted in human society, how recipients perceive and respond to it, and what effects it produces. However, empirical "is" cannot derive "ought." Gender prejudice research should not only focus on individual psychological experiences but also attend to women' s actual circumstances and propose relevant coping strategies and recommendations. Feminist practice in

political rights can provide references for psychological research, such as how different legal and policy systems effectively improve women' s status (Hideg & Ferris, 2016), the facilitating and hindering roles of men' s participation in promoting gender equality (Radke et al., 2018), and how role models and media discourse information affect women' s self-empowerment. These issues require examination from the perspective of group psychology and intergroup processes.

4.2.2 Chinese Cultural Context Benevolent sexism remains a novel concept in China. We found few indigenous studies, most of which accept the theory wholesale without examining cultural applicability. On one hand, compared to developed countries, China' s gender equality ranking is relatively low globally (The World Economic Forum, 2018), and research on women' s career development and gender equality awareness has long lagged. The academic community should actively attend to social realities and provide theoretical guidance. Both the *Third Survey on the Social Status of Chinese Women* and the *2018 Annual Observation and Analysis of Hot Public Opinion on Women and Children* have warned of a "backlash" of traditional gender concepts in recent Chinese public discourse (Third Survey on the Social Status of Chinese Women Research Group, 2011; *China Women' s Daily* Editorial Department, 2019-01-29). Research and dissemination of benevolent sexism theory will help counter gender stereotypes such as "men for the outside world, women for the home" and "marrying well beats working well," encouraging women to overcome self-imposed psychological barriers and pursue career development. On the other hand, Chinese gender culture has unique characteristics. Although traditional Confucian culture emphasizes gender differences and male superiority, research shows that unlike Western individualistic culture' s one-sided promotion of masculine traits, Chinese collectivist culture values androgynous individuals more highly (Cai, Huang, & Song, 2008). This reflects different cultural value judgments about gender traits, implying that indigenous Chinese gender prejudice has unique features requiring more culturally-specific applicability research. Future research should integrate traditional Chinese culture and current social phenomena to explore particularities in how gender prejudice affects Chinese women' s career development. For example, current government policies encouraging childbirth may affect the types and degrees of gender prejudice in society and their impact on women' s career development (Yang & Guo, 2017), urgently requiring more research attention and investigation.

The introduction of benevolent sexism theory represents an innovative expansion of traditional gender prejudice theory. It reveals a previously overlooked prejudice type that differs from hostile sexism in both expression and mechanism, helping to comprehensively present the multiple manifestations and effects of gender injustice in social life and holding important significance for preventing gender discrimination and promoting gender equality. This review has focused on research examining benevolent sexism' s impact on women' s career development in contexts of family education, romantic relationships, and workplace competition. We have summarized how benevolent sexism indirectly under-

mines women' s self-empowerment and reinforces patriarchal social structures by inducing autonomous negative cognitions and behaviors. The positive affect and caring behaviors expressed through benevolent sexism' s dimensions of "protective paternalism," "heterosexual intimacy," and "complementary gender differentiation" are seductive yet constitute "sweet poison," possessing a subtle yet dangerous lethal power against gender equality. Research on psychological mechanisms of women' s perception and response to benevolent sexism reveals that women lack effective recognition and exhibit passive coping, but current explanations remain largely at the individual level and lack theoretical depth. From a feminist psychology perspective, research on benevolent sexism warrants critical reflection regarding value judgments about gender differences and interpretive stances on women' s self-agency. Recent feminist thought emphasizing deconstruction of gender binaries and cultural value pluralism also provides rich, positive implications for future gender prejudice research to develop in more indigenous, differentiated, and contextualized directions.

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.