

What are the factors associated with LGBTQ+ individuals' ambivalent sexism?

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Introduction

Sexism, traditionally understood as discrimination against women, has evolved with modern understandings of gender to encompass a broader range of experiences. It operates within a hierarchical structure that places heterosexual cisgender men at the top and oppresses other groups in various ways. The Ambivalent Sexism theory, introduced by Glick and Fiske in 1996, distinguishes two components: Hostile Sexism (HS) and Benevolent Sexism (BS). HS involves aggressive behavior and strongly negative attitudes towards women, reflecting classic prejudice that punishes women who defy traditional gender roles. On the other hand, BS encompasses seemingly positive attitudes towards women but is intended to keep them in a submissive and devalued position. In essence, BS rewards individuals who conform to traditional gender roles.

The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) has been widely used in studies to assess sexism across different groups. One of the comparisons that has been made is the level of ambivalent sexism in heterosexual individuals and LGBTQ+ individuals. Both HS and BS encompass the three components, Paternalism (domination and protection), Gender Differentiation (belief in fundamental differences between men and women), and Heterosexuality (men seeking intimacy from women and perceiving women as controlling through arousal). However, LGBTQ+ individuals are an exception to heterosexuality; therefore, whether they have the same level of HS and BS as heterosexual individuals becomes interesting to researchers. Studies have found out that lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals exhibit lower levels of ambivalent sexism compared to heterosexual individuals (Cowie et al., 2019). Nevertheless, they still exhibit certain degrees of ambivalent sexism in various forms. The LGBTQ+ community already faces vulnerability due to their deviation from dominant heterosexual social norms. Consequently, adopting sexist attitudes and conforming to publicly expressed prejudices can become coping

mechanisms, providing a shield against further violations of the prevailing ideology. According to Sherif's argument that prejudice arises from group membership (as cited in Crandall et al., 2002), once a culture containing sexism takes hold within the LGBTQ+ community, individuals who seek identification within that community are compelled to conform to its norms.

Importantly, the manifestation of sexism can vary across different group cultures, which begs the research question: what are the factors associated with ambivalent sexism expressed by members of the LGBTQ+ community? To address this question, it is necessary to delve into research on various subgroups within the LGBTQ+ community, examining how these subgroups have cultivated their distinct cultures and how these cultures intersect with the dominant ideology. Understanding the impact of ambivalent sexism on the LGBTQ+ community and the diverse ways in which it manifests within the community will provide insights into the internalization of social norms and prejudice.

Method

This article aims to conduct a literature review of the present studies examining the level of ambivalent sexism of LGBTQ+ individuals and considering different factors. The review includes articles from databases: Google Scholar and ProQuest. The major population in this research is LGBTQ+ individuals from different countries. Research keywords include: "Sexual orientations", "Sexual minority," "gender identity", "Ambivalent sexism", etc. Both quantitative and qualitative evidence are included in this article. Included studies should satisfy either of these two criteria: contain the examination of one and more than one subgroup of LGBTQ+ and ambivalent sexism; evaluate different attitudes to different sexual roles inside a specific subgroup of LGBTQ+ individuals, such as lesbians. Furthermore, similar studies completed in different areas are included for comparison of differences due to region and ethnicity. At last,

Glick and Fiske's studies are included as they are the original authors of the concept of ambivalent sexism whose subjects encompassed a wide range of populations.

Results

Gender Identities

Gender identity, a crucial aspect of LGBTQ+ individuals' identities, extends beyond the traditional binary framework of men and women, encompassing transgender and gender expansive individuals who face distinct societal situations. Consequently, these diverse gender identities contribute to the formation of ingroups and corresponding cultures, leading to variations in the levels of ambivalent sexism experienced.

Two approaches have been employed to categorize gender identities and facilitate comparisons. The first approach involves classifying gender identities based on the binary framework of men and women. Cowie et al. (2019) conducted a study using data from the New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study, which is a longitudinal national probability study focusing on social attitudes, personality, and health. In their investigation, the researchers assessed levels of HS and BS across gender and sexual orientation. The sample included lesbians, gays, and bisexuals who are part of the LGBTQ+ community. Ambivalent sexism was evaluated using ten items from the ASI. The findings revealed that gay and bisexual men scored higher on both HS and BS compared to lesbian and bisexual women, indicating men experience more HS and BS compared to women.

The second approach involves categorizing gender identities into three groups: cisgender, transgender, and gender expansive individuals. Schiralli et al. (2022) examined explicit gender attitudes (related to HS) and implicit gender-related stereotyping (related to BS) in their study. They assessed explicit gender attitudes in 3,298 participants and conducted the gender-leadership

Implicit Association Test, adapted from Dasgupta & Asgari, in a subset of 822 participants. The study compared the results among cisgender men, cisgender women, transgender men, transgender women, gender expansive individuals designated female at birth (FAB), and gender expansive individuals designated male at birth (MAB). The findings indicated that cisgender men scored significantly higher on HS compared to all other groups, while cisgender women and gender expansive individuals designated FAB scored significantly lower on BS and implicit attitudes compared to all other groups. The researchers concluded that transgender men, transgender women, cisgender men, and gender expansive individuals designated MAB exhibited a certain degree of endorsement of Gender Differentiation. These results suggest that one's experienced gender, designated sex at birth, and the interaction between these factors may correlate with the level of ambivalent sexism experienced.

Both studies reviewed in this session highlight the significance of gender identity in shaping the levels of ambivalent sexism. Within the subgroup of bisexual and homosexual participants, individuals identifying as men tend to exhibit higher levels of HS and BS, while those identifying as women tend to exhibit a lower level of HS and BS. Interestingly, when examining those with cisgender, transgender, and gender expansive identities alongside sexual orientation, this conclusion remains largely consistent. However, it is important to note that the second study did not restrict participants' sexual identities, which introduces uncertainty regarding the generalizability of these findings within the LGBTQ+ community. For instance, it remains unclear whether transgender lesbian women differ in their levels of ambivalent sexism compared to cisgender lesbian women. Furthermore, no existing studies have exclusively compared cisgender, transgender, and gender expansive identities as potential factors for HS and BS specifically within the LGBTQ+ community or within a single sexual orientation. Future

research is needed to address these gaps and minimize potential confounding effects of gender identities and sexual orientations on the results.

Sexual Orientations

Sexual orientations can be categorized into two types: monosexuality and non-monosexuality. Within the LGBTQ+ community, homosexuality represents a form of monosexuality, while non-monosexuality encompasses sexual orientations such as bisexuality and pansexuality. Research indicates that the existence of non-monosexuality has often been denied due to its challenge to the gender binary system, which posits only two genders, namely men and women (Roberts et al., 2015, as cited in Balezina et al., 2022). Additionally, the dichotomy of the monosexual system, which asserts that individuals are attracted to partners of either a different or the same gender (Bucholski, 2015; Worthen, 2013, as cited in Balezina et al., 2022), has contributed to the denial of non-monosexuality. Both systems, especially the former, are important base for traditional gender ideas which root in gender differentiation belief, one of the three components of ambivalent sexism. In other words, whether an individual believes in the monosexual system might influence their level of ambivalent sexism. To further examine this claim, Balezina et al. conducted a study that examined the association between ambivalent sexism and the denial of non-monosexuality, particularly bisexuality. The researchers analyzed questionnaire responses from a total of 2338 individuals and found that both HS and BS were linked to the denial of bisexuality. This result suggests that the belief in monosexual system is correlated to ambivalent sexism. Furthermore, monosexual individuals demonstrated a higher inclination to deny bisexuality compared to non-monosexual individuals, such as asexual and pansexual individuals. Another study by Cowie et al. (2019) also found that lesbian and gay participants had significantly higher scores on HS compared to bisexual individuals. These

results suggest that sexual orientation plays a role in ambivalent sexism, particularly concerning adherence to traditional gender roles and the gender binary system, and the belief in monosexual system is the mediator.

In conclusion, research indicates that different sexual orientations within the LGBTQ+ community can influence the levels of ambivalent sexism. For instance, lesbians and gays may exhibit higher levels of HS compared to bisexual individuals. Non-monosexual individuals often face prejudice from monosexual individuals due to their deviation from the gender binary system. However, there is a lack of existing studies investigating the impact of sexual orientations other than lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons on ambivalent sexism within the LGBTQ+ community. Therefore, the evidence regarding the extent to which different sexual orientations affect sexism remains limited.

Sexual Roles

Within individuals who build same-sex relationships, it is common for them to assume specific sexual roles within their partnerships. Ambivalent sexism has been found to be linked to various characteristics of homosexual relationships, including prejudice based on sexual roles, the expectation of a complementary partner, and the influence of hegemonic masculinity (the belief that masculinity should be on the dominant status)

Sexual role prejudice refers to the bias or discrimination towards a specific type of sexual role, often associated with displaying more femininity. Within the gay community, sexual self-labeling, which reflects individuals' preferences for insertive or receptive roles during anal sex, serves as a fundamental aspect of sexual roles (Zheng et al., 2016). Different cultures may use varied terms to describe these roles; for the sake of convenience, this article will utilize the English terms "top," "bottom," and "versatile." "Top" refers to individuals who prefer the

insertive role, “bottom” refers to those who prefer the receptive role, and “versatile” indicates individuals who are open to both roles. Studies have consistently found that sexual self-labeling in male same-sex relationships mirrors the male and female gender roles observed in heterosexual relationships (Zheng et al., 2016; Brooks et al., 2017; DeVore et al., 2022). Zheng et al. (2016) analyzed the level of ambivalent sexism in 507 Chinese gay participants recruited on social media. The results suggest that individuals who identified as tops have higher level of BS than those who identified as bottoms and versatiles, while there are no significant differences between bottoms and versatiles. Interestingly, there are no significant differences in HS for all three sexual roles. Using a multinomial logistic regression model, the researchers investigated the relationship between BS, HS, and sexual self-label. The findings revealed that individuals with higher levels of BS were more likely to identify as tops rather than bottoms or versatiles, while HS did not significantly predict sexual self-label. These results mirror the gender differences observed in BS between heterosexual men and women. The researchers also adapted the Chinese version of Glick and Fiske’s (1996) ambivalent sexism scale by replacing “woman” with “bottom” and “man” with “top” to assess participants’ levels of sexual role prejudice. The results suggested the presence of sexual role prejudice in the sample, and its pattern was similar to the pattern of ambivalent sexism observed in heterosexual men and women. One of the most important findings from this study, supported by subsequent research (Brooks et al., 2017; DeVore et al., 2022), is that both HS and BS are positively correlated with hostile and benevolent sexual role prejudice.

In contrast, lesbian communities do not exhibit a shared pattern of sexual role prejudice. Similar to gay communities, lesbian communities use different terms to describe sexual roles based on region and ethnicity. In an English context, this essay will refer to the more masculine

sexual role as “butch” and the more feminine sexual role as “femme.” Validating gender roles are not a general characteristic for all lesbian women, suggested by Hahn, a researcher who analyzed qualitative data gained from American lesbian individuals (2014). On one hand, participants shared that there is a popular saying in their community: “butch in the street femme in the sheet”. Individuals can act masculinely when they are in the public space, but in the bedroom, they can easily transform into more feminine styles, indicating that sexual roles become less significant when entering an intimate relationship. One interviewee likened it to a mating call, similar to when a bird puffs its feathers and performs a mating dance to attract a mate. Many other interviewees agreed with this perspective. On the other hand, during the dating process, lesbian individuals who identified as butch were more likely to exhibit traditional heterosexual male behaviors, such as approaching women assertively (Hahn, 2014). This suggests some potential characteristics of benevolent sexism. In conclusion, sexual roles influence both lesbian and gay individuals’ level of ambivalent sexism. Specifically, the more masculine roles often display a higher level of BS. Sexual roles are not entirely congruent in gay and lesbian communities. In gay community it is very distinct for most individuals; in lesbian community it is only apparent during initial socialization and dating and becomes more ambiguous as the relationship progresses. This characteristic may be due to a variety of factors such as men occupying a higher status in society compared to women, but its effect on the different levels of ambivalent sexism in gay and lesbian is unknown.

The concept of requiring a complementary partner in homosexual relationships refers to the preference of individuals to form relationships with those who adopt the "opposite" sexual roles. For instance, a gay individual who identifies as a top may seek a partner who identifies as a bottom. Zheng et al. (2016) found that within the gay community, tops and bottoms who

expressed a requirement for a complementary partner had higher scores on HS, but not BS, compared to those who had no such requirement. Conversely, tops and bottoms who scored high on HS were more likely to express a need for a complementary partner, while no significant relationship was observed for BS. This may be the case because individuals with higher HS have a more conservative view of romantic relationships: in heterosexual relationships, men and women are complementary. These results suggest a correlation between the requirement of a complementary partner and the HS component of ambivalent sexism. It is important to note that there is a lack of existing research on the requirement of a complementary partner within the lesbian community, thus indicating that this conclusion may not represent a general pattern across the entire homosexual community.

Finally, hegemonic masculinity plays a significant role in shaping ambivalent sexism within LGBTQ+ community. Carrigan, Connell, and Lee (Year of Publication) defined hegemonic masculinity as “a system in which masculinity is viewed as a commodity that those in positions of power seek to keep” (as cited in Brooks et al., 2017). It is an ideology that promotes the dominance of masculinity and the subordination of femininity. This ideology establishes a hierarchical structure, with heterosexual, dominant, and controlling men at the top, while those who do not conform to this ideal are relegated to the subordinate feminine group. This ideology is not limited to heterosexual individuals but is also internalized by many LGBTQ+ individuals. Individuals try to fit themselves into a masculine form and those who cannot do so become low in self-esteem. Hegemonic masculinity consists of two components: the pursuit of masculinity and negative attitudes towards femininity, often referred to as femmephobia. Studies have found that individuals who score higher on masculinity in the gay community are also more likely to display higher levels of ambivalent sexism (Zheng et al., 2016; Brooks et al., 2017; DeVore et

al., 2022). Specifically, Brooks et al. (2017) examined toughness norms, which emphasize the belief that men should be strong, and found that hostile sexism towards bottoms was influenced by adherence to these norms. Furthermore, research suggests that femmephobia exists not only within the lesbian community influenced by the "butch-femme" dating culture but also within the LGBTQ+ community as a whole (Karen et al., 2014). In analyzing the experiences of 146 femme-identified participants, discrimination against femininity was discovered. Many participants felt that their femme identity placed them in a submissive position, with one individual expressing, "the more femme I act, the less seriously I am taken... it seems that people want to take care of femmes, as if they're fragile and unable to fend for themselves." (Karen et al., 2014) Similar phenomena have been observed within the gay community by researchers such as Brooks (2017) and DeVore (2022) and their colleagues. In fact, negative attitudes towards femininity can predict sexual role prejudice (Brooks et al., 2017), highlighting the significance of femmephobia in shaping sexist beliefs.

In conclusion, individuals' sexual roles within same-sex relationships are associated with their level of ambivalent sexism. Sexual role prejudice, the requirement of a complementary partner, and hegemonic masculinity are key factors that shape sexist beliefs in relation to sexual roles; hegemonic masculinity encompasses the pursuit of masculinity and the presence of femmephobia, both of which correlate with components of sexual role prejudice and ambivalent sexism. Existing studies provide valuable discussion on how genders and gender norms are constructed and learned socially by demonstrating the patterns of sexual roles in the same sex relationships. However, there is a scarcity of research examining sexual roles specifically within the lesbian community.

Region and Other Speculated Factors

Region plays a crucial role in shaping various cultural aspects, including within the LGBTQ+ community. This essay mentions studies conducted in different regions, such as China, the United States, and Russia, which demonstrate the presence of ambivalent sexism to some extent within LGBTQ+ communities across multiple locations. However, there is a lack of comparative research examining ambivalent sexism in LGBTQ+ communities, that specifically explores the influence of region, ethnicity and their intersection. One study compared levels of ambivalent sexism among gay men in the United States and the United Kingdom, considering several potential factors (Blumell et al., 2019). The results indicated that US participants had significantly lower BS scores than UK participants, but higher HS scores, suggesting regional differences. However, this single study alone does not provide sufficient evidence to establish region as a significant variable. It has several limitations, such as the fact that the US and UK are predominantly white countries with relatively close cultural proximity. There is a lack of knowledge about how LGBTQ+ communities in the US and East Asian countries differ in terms of the extent and manifestations of ambivalent sexism. Other factors, such as media consumption, religion, and political ideology, have been speculated to influence the level of ambivalent sexism, as indicated by Blumell and colleagues' study (2019). Once again, there is insufficient evidence to support these factors as significant influences on the entire LGBTQ+ community as a whole.

Discussion

Previous studies have identified three main factors associated with the level of ambivalent sexism within the LGBTQ+ community: gender identity, sexual orientation, and sexual role. While other factors, such as region, have been mentioned, their impact remains speculative due to the lack of corresponding research. Furthermore, there is a scarcity of studies examining

minority groups, including lesbian and transgender individuals. The academic discussions on this research topic primarily focus on white gay communities, reflecting social privilege and resulting in limited accessibility to studies involving other groups. This represents a limitation in the scope of this essay. Additionally, it is important to consider sequence effects (the effect caused by the order of experimental treatments) in many of the studies mentioned, particularly those that rely heavily on survey data collection methods. For instance, in the study done by Zheng et al. in 2016, participants' answers to the current question might be influenced by the content of a previous question.

Conclusion

While LGBTQ+ individuals generally exhibit lower levels of ambivalent sexism compared to heterosexual individuals, it still persists within the LGBTQ+ community. Previous studies have examined various factors that can predict ambivalent sexism among LGBTQ+ individuals. However, there is a limited number of studies focused on this research topic, and the subjects included in these studies are not sufficiently diverse.

Future research should aim to explore region as a potential factor influencing ambivalent sexism within the LGBTQ+ community. Additionally, there is a need to investigate other factors that have received less attention thus far. For instance, researchers should also consider the social learning perspective and examine the factors that contribute to the adoption of sexist attitudes within the LGBTQ+ community. Such investigations will enhance our understanding of how prejudice is formed and enable us to address the normalization of discrimination in our society effectively.

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