

Delusions of gender: Men's insecurities may lead to sexist views of women

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He loves her, he loves her not.

A new study led by Joshua Hart, assistant professor of psychology, suggests that men's insecurities about relationships and conflicted views of women as [romantic partners](#) and rivals could lead some to adopt [sexist attitudes](#) about women.

The study was recently published in *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, a peer-reviewed journal.

Hart and his co-authors, Jacqueline Hung '11, a former student of Hart's, and psychology professors Peter Glick of Lawrence University and Rachel Dinero of Cazenovia College, surveyed more than 400 [heterosexual men](#) to gauge their responses to questions about their attachment style, hostile and benevolent sexism, and views on romance.

Attachment style refers to the way people relate to others in the context of [intimate relationships](#), defined by two [personality traits](#): attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance. Both traits reflect different kinds of relationship insecurities; people who are low in both traits are considered secure.

Hostile sexism depicts women as mean-spirited foes who aim to dominate men. Benevolent sexism regards them as objects of adoration and affection, but also fragile and needy of chivalrous treatment.

Previous research has found that some men view women as offering the possibility of romantic fulfillment, but also competing with them in areas such as the workplace, where both vie for similar resources.

Hart's study found that anxiously attached men tend to be ambivalent sexists—both hostile and benevolent—whereas avoidantly attached men typically endorse hostile sexism, while rejecting benevolent sexism.

"In other words, anxious men are likely to alternate between chivalry and hostility toward [female partners](#), acting like a knight in shining armor when she fulfills his goals and ideals about women, but like an ogre when she doesn't," Hart explained this month to the Society of Personality and Social Psychology's web-based news site, Connections. "Avoidant men are likely to show only hostility without any princely protectiveness."

The survey results also showed that anxiously attached men tend to be romantics at heart who adopt benevolently sexist beliefs, while avoidantly attached men lean toward social dominance. That, in turn, leads them to embrace hostile sexism.

The findings highlight how personality traits could predispose men to be sexists, according to Hart. This information could help couples build stronger relationships, particularly during therapy.

Provided by Union College

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