



# Handbook of Peace Psychology

Christopher Cohrs, Nadine Knab & Gert Sommer (Eds.)

Steffens & Niedlich: Sexualised violence  
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**Cover picture:** Hope (Esperanza). Peace, gratitude, creativity and resilience are the symbols and elements that are harmonised in this artwork. In large format, it is part of the graffiti tour in Community 13 in Medellín, Colombia. The artwork conveys an important message of hope to both the local community and foreign visitors.

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## From beauty standards to sexualised violence: Prejudice and discrimination in relation to gender and sexual orientation

Melanie Caroline Steffens & Claudia Niedlich

### Abstract

This overview illustrates that sexualized violence affects individuals and structures within society in different ways. Even if the present can be characterised by a more conscious discussion of the topic, sexism and sexualised violence shape social roles and opportunities in direct and subtle forms. The more people believe that women should have different social roles than men and that men with high social status are more competent than women, the lower is gender equality in society. A modern, subtle form of sexism is the denial of discrimination against women. An even more subtle form is benevolent sexism characterized by an apparently positive cavalier attitude towards women. Nonetheless, benevolent sexism is related to hostile sexism and discrimination against women – particularly women in non-traditional roles. With regard to sexual orientation, negative attitudes as well as legal and interpersonal discrimination are decreasing in many countries. Nonetheless, the presence of feared and experienced discrimination as well as hate crimes is alarming. They exist in all nations, albeit to different extents. Negative attitudes towards sexual minorities remain present in more subtle forms, including negating the need for social change processes, which is closely related to the acceptance of discrimination. Sexualised violence appears in serious forms of gender-based and sexual harassment, as does rape – and in its most extreme form rape as a means of war. The presence of these forms of violence is alarming. Even though sexualized violence and rape are legally punishable in most countries, the power to define what constitutes consensual sexuality is often externally determined. Our review on the topic of sexualized violence highlights that individual self-determination of one's own body and sexuality as well as legal equality are indispensable prerequisites for attitudes to move away from a willingness to act in a discriminatory manner and move closer to acceptance.

*Keywords: Sexism, Homosexuality (Attitudes Toward), Bisexuality, Sexual Abuse, Rape*

## Steffens & Niedlich: Sexualised violence

What do beauty norms related to women, chivalry, negative attitudes towards gay men and male role norms have to do with sexualised violence? To give a first impression of the commonalities of these constructs, we have listed in Table 1 some sample statements used to measure them. In the following, we argue that both sexism and the devaluation of LGBTI\* (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans\* and inter\*) can be seen as intertwined gender-based systems of oppression that permeate societies, form the foundations of sexualised violence and ultimately cement inequality and discord.

Table 1: Sample statements for measuring the constructs discussed in this chapter (see text for sources of scales)

Sample statement	Scale
It is important for women to invest a lot of effort in looking attractive.	Beauty standards
You are standing at the bus stop when a person behind you says to another: "Look, nice butt!" <sup>1</sup>	Catcalling
In Western countries, discrimination against women is no longer a problem.	Modern sexism
There are actually very few women who get a kick out of teasing men by seeming sexually available and then refusing male advances.	Hostile sexism
No matter how accomplished he is, a man is not truly complete as a person unless he has the love of a woman.	Benevolent sexism
Most men sexually harass women, even if only in subtle ways, once they are in a position of power over them.	Hostile sexism towards men
Men are more willing to put themselves in danger to protect others.	Benevolent sexism towards men
You have a daughter who goes to kindergarten, and you learn that your daughter's teacher has recently come out as lesbian. How likely is it that you will try to change your daughter's class placement? <sup>2</sup>	Attitudes towards lesbians
I am willing to get into a physical fight if it is necessary. <sup>3</sup>	Male role norms
If the accused "rapist" doesn't have a weapon, you really can't call it a rape.	Rape myth acceptance

**Notes.** <sup>1</sup> Participants are asked how they would rate the corresponding statement (flattering to annoying). The statement is taken from a self-developed, unpublished scale. <sup>2</sup> Statement from the scale by Preuß et al. (2020). <sup>3</sup> Statement from the scale by Levant et al. (2020)

## Sexism

One basis of sexualised violence is sexism: the subordinate social, political and economic position of women in society. Sexist (pre-)attitudes assign women subordinate positions and restrict them in their personal development (McHugh & Frieze, 1997). Sexism includes hostility towards women who fill non-gender stereotypical roles (such as "career women") as well as negative attitudes towards equality between men and women. Sexism further includes the evaluation of women – but not men – solely based on their physical appearance (e.g., discussions about the physical attractiveness of female politicians; Ramati-Ziber, Shnabel & Glick, 2020) and the sexual objectification of women by seeing them merely as (beautiful) bodies for others to enjoy (e.g., Saguy, Quinn, Dovidio & Pratto, 2010). Women must at all times expect to be treated as "bodies", for example by being shouted at in public ("catcalling"). Girls and boys between the ages of 13 and 18 already view sexualised images of men and women in social media with a "watchful eye" on certain bodily ideals. One study showed that for girls these ideals encompass the standard to be slim, for boys the male sexualised ideal is more associated with a standard of muscularity (Skowronski, Busching & Krahe, 2022).

Besides the emphasis on gender as the central characteristic of a person, we also posit the complementary consideration of women and men to be a socially sexist attitude. Thus, sexism also comprises the dichotomisation of gender disregarding inter\*. This dichotomisation contains the assumption that all people can be clearly categorised as "men" or "women" both physically and in their gender identity. For decades, surgery was carried out on children whose physical appearance could not be clearly classified as "female" or "male" (e.g., Gregor, 2021) until surgery of this kind was banned in Germany in 2021. These "alignments" often had stressful consequences for the people affected. The option to identify with both genders or to feel that one does not belong to either gender required a long process of social negotiation (Anerkennung der Kategorie "divers" in Deutschland [Recognition of the category "diverse"]; Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2021). Today, these legal regulations allow children born intersex in Germany to develop their gender identity. In the further course of this chapter, we will not discuss intersexuality much as the topic has so far been neglected in the literature on sexism and sexual violence.

Over the decades, researchers have developed different conceptions of sexism. Measures of sexism differ in whether they contain blatantly sexist statements, whether they contain subtly sexist statements or whether they refer to gender equality. *Traditional sexism* comprises restrictive attitudes towards women's roles, the rejection of women's rights, and stereotypes about female incompetence. A sample statement reads: "The intellectual leadership of a community should be largely in the hands of men" (Spence & Buckner, 2000). The level of sexism in a given country (i.e., the extent to which sexist statements are on average agreed with) is related to the objective gender equality in that country (e.g., Brandt, 2011). Sexist attitudes are further linked to sexist behaviour (de Oliveira, Laux, Ksenofontov & Becker, 2015). The individual experience of sexism leads to stress (Steffens & Ebert, 2016).

Since the 1970s, the proportion of people who agree with blatantly sexist statements such as the one mentioned above has declined. In more recent studies, attitudes have therefore appeared more egalitarian (Swim & Cohen, 1997). Accordingly, the more subtle *modern sexism* has been conceptualised. Modern sexism scales measure resistance to equality measures (Swim, Aikin, Hall & Hunter, 1995) as well as denial of continued discrimination against women (such as "In Western countries, discrimination of women is no longer a problem", Eckes & Six-Materna, 1998).

The most influential theory on modern sexism is that of *ambivalent sexism* (e.g., Glick, Diebold, Bailey-Werner & Zhu, 1997; Glick et al., 2000). As the researchers argue, patriarchy at the societal level is characterised by the dominance of men: Men – even today – exercise more power than women. However, these relations cannot be transferred to private relationships because, on the heterosexual relationship level, the individual man is dependent on (at least) one woman. Men thus have a socially higher status than women and at the same time are dependent on them. Due to this ambivalence, the group of women is divided into differently evaluated subtypes (such as "Madonna" vs. "whore", e.g., Bareket, Kahalon, Shnabel & Glick, 2018). As the name "ambivalent sexism" implies, it encompasses both negative and positive aspects. It is made up of two components: hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. *Hostile sexism* contains negative prejudice against women (such as "Women are too easily offended") and denial of discrimination (such as "When women lose to men in a fair competition, they typically claim about being discriminated against"; Glick & Fiske, 1996).

The more innovative aspect of ambivalent sexism theory is *benevolent sexism*. Benevolent sexism is defined as "attitudes towards women that are sexist in terms of seeing women stereotypically and in restricted roles but that are subjectively positive in feeling tone (for the perceiver)" (Glick & Fiske, 1996, p. 491). Therefore, both hostile and benevolent sexism legitimise inequality between men and women. Benevolent sexism is reminiscent of chivalry and comprises three components. *Benevolent paternalism* ("Women should be cherished and protected by men") describes the relationship between woman and man as the equivalent of a father-child relationship: the father decides and protects. *Complementary gender differentiation* ("Women, as compared to men, tend to have a more refined sense of culture and good taste") includes positive stereotypes of women. *Heterosexual intimacy* ("Every man ought to have a woman whom he adores") is seen as an important source of male ambivalence towards women. Such statements convey the belief that men are imperfect without a woman by their side.

Studies show that hostile and benevolent sexism are related: People who agree with hostile sexist statements are also very likely to agree with benevolent sexist statements (e.g., around  $r = .50$  in Glick & Fiske, 1996). This can be observed both within a given culture and across cultures (Glick & Fiske, 2001). In addition, both hostile and benevolent sexism are related to objective gender inequality in a given country (Glick et al., 2000).

According to ambivalent sexism theory, positive attitudes are reserved for those women who occupy traditional gender roles (Glick & Fiske, 1996). While hostile sexism

predicts negative attitudes towards women who violate traditional gender roles (such as "career women"), benevolent sexism predicts positive attitudes towards women in traditional gender roles (such as "housewives"; Glick & Fiske, 2001). According to this, women can choose between roles in which they are valued (but cannot make a career) and roles in which they are devalued. This freedom of choice is seen as a mechanism that effectively contributes to the perpetuation of occupational gender inequalities.

There is also ambivalent sexism towards men, which consists of a hostile and a benevolent component (Glick & Fiske, 1999). These two aspects can be illustrated by statements such as "Men will always fight to have greater control in society than women" and "Women ought to take care of their men at home because men would fall apart if they had to fend for themselves".

Benevolent sexism justifies existing inequalities of opportunity: Women are supposed to be protected, positive characteristics are attributed to them and they have their rightful place in society. Accordingly, benevolent sexism is more likely to be accepted by women than hostile sexism, and women on average agree with benevolent sexist (but not hostile sexist) statements to the same extent as men (Glick & Fiske, 2001). If, for example, it is assumed by both men and women that women are particularly well suited for care work, then it does not seem unfair that only a small proportion of men work in – rather poorly paid – caring professions. As Pratto, Stallworth, Sidanius and Siers (1997) concluded about stereotypes: "These culturally shared and culturally enacted ideas [are] [...] probably the largest kind of self-fulfilling prophecy because they legitimise themselves and the unequal social systems of which they are part" (p. 51).

In an experiment by Jost and Kay (2005), women were shown statements about women. The present system appeared more just after women were exposed to stereotypes that described women as community-oriented. This result confirms the assumption that benevolent-sounding stereotypes serve to make the status quo of existing inequalities seem more acceptable. As further studies have shown, benevolent sexism reduces women's motivation to stand up against injustice (Becker & Wright, 2011), reduces their interest in positions of power (Rudman & Heppen, 2003) and even directly negatively affects their performance (Dardenne, Dumont & Bollier, 2007). Similarly, women showed poorer cognitive performance after watching sexist as compared to neutral comedy (Weber, Appel, Steffens & Hirschhäuser, 2020). Such findings show that "It's just a harmless joke!" is not always true. Additionally, benevolent sexism contributes to housework and childcare remaining women's domains (Bareket, Shnabel, Kende, Knab & Bar-Anan, 2020). Family care work remains in the hands of women, which, in turn, hinders career opportunities and, thus, gender equality (Croft, Schmader & Block, 2015). Overall, the idea of being provided for by a benevolent husband thus spreads and perpetuates benevolent sexism. Positive stereotypes of women justify the belief that women's and men's characteristics are naturally complementary and keep women in less influential social roles. Women hence accept inequalities disguised as differences. However, education about the negative consequences of benevolent sexism can reduce agreement with benevolent sexist statements (Becker &

Swim, 2012).

Can explanations be found for the fact that while sexism has taken different forms over the decades (from blatant to subtle and seemingly benevolent), it seems to be particularly difficult to combat? Some studies have directly compared the evaluation of sexism and racism and confirm that, for example, a sexist joke is comparatively considered more harmless (Woodzicka, Mallett, Hendricks & Pruitt, 2015) and that people feel less bad or men even act amused when they are accused of sexist behaviour (Czopp & Monteith, 2003). Categorisation by 'race' is avoided, while that by gender is ubiquitous (Norton, Sommers, Apfelbaum, Pura & Ariely, 2006). Why is sexism often seen as "half as bad"?

The underestimation of sexism could be related to the fact that the closest relationship that adult heterosexual people have is typically with someone of the other sex. This reason is also found in the theory of ambivalent sexism (*heterosexual intimacy*). The relationship between women and men as social groups differs in this respect from all other groups (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Women themselves earn considerably less money than men (Lips, 2013) but when families are considered as economic units, this difference is reduced: Love and "gender struggle" are difficult to reconcile. Correspondingly, general findings show that positive contact with members of privileged groups undermines the motivation of members of disadvantaged groups to fight for their rights (e.g., Saguy, Tausch, Dovidio & Pratto, 2009).

We assume that another reason for the continued underestimation of sexism is that there are biological differences between men and women that sometimes justify or even necessitate different treatment: Examples are sports competitions or maternity leave before and after the birth of a child. Our argument is that (unjustified) discrimination is harder to detect and eliminate when the same social groups experience legitimate differential treatment at the same time.

In addition, one can consider more generally (beyond benevolent sexism) what function sexist attitudes fulfil in legitimising and thereby maintaining existing relations between groups in societies. Studies that examined the reduction of sexism and gender stereotypes over the course of decades (Diekmann & Eagly, 2000; Twenge, 1997) provide clues. These found interesting exceptions: For example, women in 1950s Germany were perceived as less traditionally feminine and were attributed positive masculine characteristics as they took on typically masculine roles in post-war Germany (Wilde & Diekmann, 2005). Based on such findings, it can be argued that sexism serves to justify the very roles women were supposed to take on for society – for example, during the war as caring nurses, after the war as strong construction workers. Conversely, the findings indicate that changing social roles lead to changing stereotypes (Eagly & Koenig, 2021).

We take such findings as a starting point for considering how much societal and individual change would be necessary to consistently eliminate sexism and gender-based discrimination. Let us imagine that within the following decade men and women should on average be equal in terms of income and pensions, leadership positions, decision-making power, care work, housework and parental leave. What changes would be necessary to



achieve this goal? As this thought experiment shows, a considerable change of the existing conditions would be necessary. This could be one reason why sexism persists – especially since people find too much change threatening and therefore cling all the more strongly to the prevailing situation (Jost & Hunyady, 2005).

### Negative attitudes towards lesbian women, gay men and bisexuals (LGB)

Negative (pre-)attitudes towards LGB are closely related to sexism as both are based on the consideration of gender as a central category. We do not use the common term "homophobia", which is a misconception as negative attitudes towards these groups are not based on an exaggerated fear reaction but on socially mediated devaluation and discrimination.

Attitudes towards LGB can be conceptualised as consisting of three interrelated components. Feelings towards these groups of people form the *affective component* (e.g., "How comfortable or uncomfortable do you feel in the following situation? A gay couple is kissing near me", Seise, Banse & Neyer, 2002). Thoughts and beliefs regarding LGB make up the *cognitive component* ("Male [female] homosexuality is a natural expression of sexuality in men [women]", Herek, 1984, 2002; for German translation, cf. Reese & Steffens, 2014). The *behavioural component* is most closely related to discriminatory behaviour. It is measured by agreement with statements such as "It is Friday night. You are alone at home, a friend calls you. She is on her way to a birthday party to which she is welcome to bring a friend. She invites you to go along. She mentions that the host is lesbian. How likely is it that you accept the invitation to go along?" (original German language scale by Preuß, Ottenstein, Kachel & Steffens, 2020).

Over the past decades, the social, political and legal situation of LGB people has improved considerably in many countries accompanied by the observation of less negative attitudes (M. A. Morrison & T. G. Morrison, 2003; Peterson, Dalley, Dombrowski & Maier, 2017). At the same time, "hate crimes" against lesbian women and gay men persist (e.g., 49 deaths in an attack in 2016, "Attack of Orlando on 12. June 2016", n. d.). Many bisexual people also report having experienced discrimination (Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012; Ortiz-Hernández & Granados-Cosme, 2006; Steffens & Wagner, 2009).

Nowadays, negative statements about LGB receive little agreement but researchers have also developed more subtle, "modern" attitude measures to take into account the fact that more positive statements are now endorsed due to social desirability. These too focus on the negation of (continued) discrimination and insinuate that LGB demands for social change are unnecessary (e.g., "Enough is already being done for gays and lesbians in German society", Simon, 2008). Another component is the idea that LGB exaggerate the importance of sexual orientation (e.g., "If lesbian women [gay men] want to be treated like everyone else, then they need to stop making such a fuss about their sexuality/culture", M. A. Morrison & T. G. Morrison, 2003). Although these beliefs do not appear particularly negative on the

surface, they are closely related to attitudes towards hate crimes and hate speech (Cowan, Heiple, Marquez, Khatchadourian & McNevin, 2005; Lottes & Grollman, 2010). Even seemingly positive statements, similar to benevolent sexism, are used as attitudinal measures (such as "Most gay men have a flawless sense of taste", T. G. Morrison & Bearden, 2007).

The societal environment essentially determines how positive or negative individual attitudes towards LGB are (Stulhofer & Rimac, 2009). In Western and Northern Europe, attitudes can be characterised as neutral to positive whereas in Southern and especially Eastern Europe, acceptance is considerably lower (European Commission, 2019). In 2008, when asked which people one would not like to have as neighbours (e.g., drug addicts, criminals), "homosexuals" was selected by only 2 % of the population in Iceland but by 67 % in Lithuania (Kuyper, Iedema & Keuzenkamp, 2013). The other European countries lie in between these extremes (Stulhofer & Rimac, 2009). There was a similar gradient with regard to the question whether one thought gay men and lesbian women should be free to live their lives as they wish between Northern and Western Europe (more positive attitudes) and Eastern Europe (Kuyper et al., 2013). In an international survey, in a number of countries (Armenia, Tunisia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Jordan) the average population held the opinion that homosexuality could "never be justified" (score of 1 on a scale of 1-10, survey data from the World Values Survey of 2010-2014, Janssen & Scheepers, 2019). Such data illustrate how societal attitudes towards LGB vary internationally (e.g., Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009) and that positive changes achieved in Northern and Central Europe over the past decades should not be overgeneralised: There are still countries in which consensual sex between adults of the same gender is punishable by death (e.g., ILGA report, Mendos et al., 2020).

In all countries, negative LGB attitudes have the consequence that LGB are discriminated against and disadvantaged in aspects of social and societal life, for example in recruitment procedures (e.g., Hammarstedt, Ahmed & Andersson, 2015; Weichselbaumer, 2015; for an overview see Steffens, Niedlich & Ehrke, 2016). A random sample of LGB (over 500 people) was asked about their experiences of discrimination in 2001 (Steffens & Wagner, 2009). Gay men reported the most frequent discrimination experiences. 55 % of gay men and 26 % of lesbian women (11 % of bisexual men, 8 % of bisexual women) agreed with the statement: "I have already been insulted in everyday life because of my sexual orientation". Threats in daily life had been experienced by 21 % of gay men (2 % of lesbian women, 5 % of bisexual men, 1 % of bisexual women). Insults at work had been experienced by 14 % of gay men and 10 % of lesbian women (5/4 % of bisexual men/women, respectively), and the percentages for exclusion at work were similarly high. A series of surveys in Germany show continued discrimination at the workplace (Frohn, Meinhold & Schmidt, 2017; Knoll, Edinger & Reisbeck, 1997). When interpreting these figures, it should be taken into account that sexual orientation, unlike skin colour for example, is a minority status that one can potentially hide: If one feels unsafe in a certain neighbourhood or in a given work climate, one often has the choice not to disclose one's sexual orientation. Many lesbian women and gay men make use of this option (e.g., Steffens, Bergert & Heinecke, 2010). Against this background, these

figures are alarming.

Discrimination can also be shown in laboratory experiments (Talley & Bettencourt, 2008). In one experiment, heterosexual men were threatened in their masculinity (i.e., they received the feedback that they were atypical men) or not ("control condition"). Then they were asked to choose with how much noise they would punish an alleged interaction partner for bad answers (to measure aggressive behaviour in a modern variation of the well-known Milgram paradigm). Only if the interaction partner was allegedly gay, did the heterosexual men behave more aggressively following the threat to their masculinity than in the control condition. More recent studies suggest that this pattern of behaviour is limited to feminine gay men (Wellman, Beam, Wilkins, Newell & Mendez, 2021). Hence, negative behaviour towards gay men was specifically used to reassure oneself of one's identity.

Such experiences of discrimination are to be regarded as stressors for LGB, which can negatively impact well-being, mental and physical health and substance abuse (Amadio, 2006; Bobbe, 2002; Hatzenbuehler, Nolen-Hoeksema & Dovidio, 2009). In addition to direct experiences of discrimination, stress is already generated by fear of discrimination (Hatzenbuehler, 2009; Meyer, 2003). If negative attitudes towards LGB have been internalised in the course of socialisation (Mayfield, 2001; Szymanski & Chung, 2003), these need to be dealt with in order to achieve and maintain a positive self-image.

Another consequence of widespread negative LGB attitudes in the population is that such attitudes make it seem unnecessary to improve LGB rights. In turn, this improvement in the legal situation could contribute to positive attitudes (Bishin, Hayes, Incantalupo & Smith, 2016; Flores & Barclay, 2015; Ofori, Chambers, Chen & Hehman, 2019; Tankard & Paluck, 2017). In other words, negative attitudes stabilise existing inequalities.

International comparisons as explained above show that a large proportion of differences in LGB attitudes can be attributed to the country in which one lives. Yet, most studies attribute an even larger proportion of differences in attitudes to individual characteristics (e.g., Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009; Janssen & Scheep, 2019). In a large German survey (Steffens & Wagner, 2004), the most positive attitudes towards LGB were exhibited by those who were younger, female, lived in a bigger city, with a higher level of education and a more left-wing political orientation. Typically, the most negative attitudes towards gay men are reported by men (e.g., M. A. Morrison & T. G. Morrison, 2011; Steffens & Wagner, 2004). Moreover, higher religiosity is associated with negative attitudes towards LGB rights (D'Amore et al., 2020) and people (Janssen & Scheepers, 2019; Whitley, 2009; for an overview see Steffens & Niedlich, 2015). Confirming a general finding from attitudinal research (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), more contact with LGB is further related to more positive LGB attitudes (Bartos, Berger & Hegarty, 2014; Preuß & Steffens, 2020; Steffens, Jonas & Denger, 2015).

Which psychological characteristics and processes explain negative LGB attitudes? LGB attitudes are social-culturally acquired components of broader value and belief systems (Herek & McLemore, 2013). Younger people are presumed to have more positive attitudes

than older people because they have grown up with less restrictive belief systems. Such a belief system comprises assumptions about *gender*: beliefs about what women and men are like, how they should (and should not) behave, and which social roles they should take on (Kite & Whitley, 1996). Stereotypes about lesbian women and gay men (and to a lesser extent about bisexuals) involve the transgression of gender roles: Lesbian women were on average thought to be more masculine than heterosexual women, gay men more feminine than heterosexual men (Whitley, 2001). According to this theory, negative LGB attitudes are due to the fact that people make strict demands on women and men to act within their predefined gender roles and people at the same time assume that LGB transgress these boundaries. The more negative attitudes of men (compared to women) towards gay men, in particular, can be explained by men having narrower ideas about appropriate gender roles than women (Kite & Whitley, 1996). In international comparison, too, attitudes towards LGB people are most positive in countries with the most liberal gender role expectations (Janssen & Scheepers, 2019; Kuyper et al., 2013).

One component of the gender-based belief system constitutes norms regarding the male gender role (e.g., "It is essential for a man to always have the respect and admiration of everyone who knows him", Thompson & Pleck, 1986; see also Levant et al., 1992). In one of our own surveys, among Mexican students, male (rather than female) role norms alone were related to negative attitudes towards lesbian women and gay men: The more restrictive and traditional the participants' ideas were about how men should (and should not) behave, the more negative their attitudes towards lesbian women and gay men (Steffens et al., 2015). These and many other findings support the assumption that attitudes towards LGB are embedded in larger belief systems about appropriate behaviour for a particular gender and confirm the strong link between gender role norms, sexism and LGB attitudes.

Another belief system, perhaps even more general than the gender-based belief system, is called authoritarianism (Whitley & Lee, 2000). Individuals with authoritarian personalities strive for conformity and security and, therefore, reject what appears "different" and "alien" (such as homosexuality, e.g., Haddock & Zanna, 1998; Stefurak, Taylor & Mehta, 2010). The relationship between religiosity and LGB attitudes is best explained when both traditional gender role ideas and authoritarianism are considered (Janssen & Scheepers, 2019).

## Transgender

Trans-identifying people do not or not only identify with the gender which they were assigned at birth (due to physical characteristics). They would like to live accordingly and do so in various individual ways. A physical alignment to the gender that is experienced as right can be connected to this. The change involves the transformation of one's own life as well as one's personal and external appearance ("Transsexuell", n.d.). We use the terms "transgender" and "trans-identifying people" and forego the terms "transsexuality" (or "gender identity disorder"), which are perceived as pathologising due to their medical background. As with lesbian, gay and bisexual people, sexualised violence against

transgender people arises from existing structures that permeate all areas of life in society. These include, for example, the assumption that only two genders ("man" and "woman") exist, that gender is clearly defined and cannot be changed, and that men and women adopt the gender roles attributed to them as part of their personality and internalise their attributes (Ohms, 2018). The currently existing psychological diagnosis still classifies "transsexuality" as a mental illness. The ICD-10 diagnosis code uses the term "transsexualism" as a "disorder of gender identity" (Bundesinstitut für Arzneimittel und Medizinprodukte [Federal Institute for Pharmaceuticals and Medical Products], n. d.). It is summarised under the definition:

“[T]he desire to live and be recognised as a member of the other gender. This is usually accompanied by discomfort or the feeling of not belonging to one's own anatomical sex. There is a desire for surgical and hormonal treatment to adapt one's own body to the preferred sex as far as possible.” (“ICD and DSM: Catalogues of Diseases and Diagnoses”, n.d., 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph under F64.0 Transsexualism; own translation)

Gender is not only based on the physical sex with which a person is born. It also includes social gender (to what extent is someone perceived as gender-typical in a particular culture?), sexual orientation (e.g., Ohm, 2018) and one's own gender identity (to which gender does someone feel they belong?). The term "cisgender" is used as a term to describe people whose biological sex assigned at birth matches their gender identity.

Discrimination against trans\* people is strong worldwide and affects not only the public but also family and work life as well as legal recognition (Mendos et al., 2020). For example, the possibility to legally change one's gender has existed in Sweden since 1972, in Germany since 1981 and in Turkey since 1988. The procedures in the countries have in common that they are associated with major legal and medical hurdles (e.g., reaching a certain age, being unmarried, extensive gender reassignment surgery, sterilisation). Due to their unconstitutionality, the Federal Constitutional Court overturned these requirements in 2011. However, the compulsory support by external expert opinions remained a legal obligation (Markwald, 2020).

Comparable to LGB attitudes, negative attitudes towards trans\* people are closely related to political conservatism, anti-egalitarianism and religiosity. People who understand gender as a binary concept (Morgenroth & Ryan, 2021) and who have little contact with members of sexual and gender minorities also show more negative attitudes towards trans\* people (Norton & Herek, 2013). In particular, high religiosity is associated with negative attitudes and an unfavourable stance towards medical gender reassignment (for overviews see Campbell, Hinton & Anderson, 2019; Regnerus & Vermurlen, 2022).

Transgender people are massively affected by discrimination. For example, 54 % of German transgender employees report not talking to anyone or only a few colleagues about their gender identity. Every fourth person reports already having experienced job-related discrimination, 6 % report having been transferred, 8 % report having been terminated and

20 % report not having been offered a job. In addition, everyday work for 42 % of the respondents was characterized by experiences of trans-specific discrimination, which was expressed in the denial of access to toilets (27 %) and the non-adaptation of name tags and signatures (20 %) (Frohn et al., 2017). An effective intervention for negative attitudes towards trans\* people is interpersonal contact, as a study on the contact hypothesis showed (Tadlock et al., 2017). Both our perspective on sexism and negative attitudes towards LGB and trans\* people revealed the manifestations and effects of sexualised violence, which we discuss in more detail below.

### Sexual harassment and violence

Intensive discussions in the German media resulted when a (female) journalist made public the remark of a (male) politician: "You can also fill out a Dirndl" (Wallet, 2013). The subsequent #aufschrei [#outcry] movement encouraged an exchange of experiences of everyday sexism and sexual harassment (Hollstein, 2014). Linked to this was the question of whether such statements could be considered harmless "gentlemen's jokes", as a compliment or as gender-based harassment. Discussions revolved around recurring questions: How is the erotic perception of the (female) body related to power relations? Which interactions transcend (sexual) consent? Which people and conditions influence whether there is criminal relevance or whether the situation is dismissed as an unspectacular dramatisation?

The legal understanding of sexual harassment (section 3, paragraph 4 of the "Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz" [General Equal Treatment Act]) can be summarised as unwanted, sexually determined behaviour, which also includes unwanted sexual acts and requests. This encompasses sexually determined physical touching, remarks of sexual nature and the unwanted display of pornographic images. The effect or purpose of this is to violate the dignity of the person concerned and to make this person feel, for example, attacked, degraded or insulted.

Psychologically, sexual harassment refers to behaviour that is perceived negatively by those affected. At the same time, the intention of the actors is not necessarily a prerequisite for sexual harassment. In this respect, it should be examined in each situation individually how it should be assessed and what legal consequences should result from it.

Probably the central criterion for the definition of sexual harassment is that a person claims the right to define what is perceived as erotic or non-erotic. The core of the situation is not the consensual satisfaction of sexual needs but the exercise of power and violence. Sexual harassment does not exclusively contain body-related actions and touching but also offensive remarks. Asking a woman about her breasts, unsolicited, always implies an allusion to her physical vulnerability, reduces her to her body and her sexuality and distances her from her individual abilities.

Gender-based harassment is higher in work contexts where women are in the minority (Kabat-Farr & Cortina, 2014; Leskinen, Cortina & Kabat, 2011). In one of our own

studies, we found that women in middle management positions reported the least gender-based harassment when there was a balanced proportion of women and men in senior management, and that women in senior management reported more gender-based harassment than those in middle management (Steffens, Viladot & Scheifele, 2019). These findings are consistent with the interpretation that gender-based harassment serves to keep women in low status positions.

In the context of social discussion, it is often asked whether men have to live with the permanent concern that their romantic advances are interpreted as sexism and sexual harassment. In contrast, the results of a study show that there is usually agreement between men and women about which sexist jokes and remarks are perceived as harassing or unpleasant by the other person (Diehl, Rees & Bohner, 2012). Furthermore, hostile sexism (in addition to so-called social dominance orientation) predicts men's willingness to sexually harass women (in online games) (Tang & Fox, 2016). Men are also aware that sexism underlies these statements (e.g., derogatory jokes about women parking spaces).

From a societal point of view, it can by no means be assumed that these are isolated cases. Even though sexual harassment, especially in the private sphere, is difficult to prove, 58 % of all women in Germany report having experienced sexual harassment. Frequency estimates vary, and about one in five women report having experienced sexual harassment at work, school and in education. Reported experiences include sexual innuendos, comments about the body, repeated requests for a meeting, unnecessary physical closeness as well as unwanted "groping" and attempts at kissing. Of the women who experienced sexualised violence, almost one third reported that they had experienced one violent situation with their partner in the past, another third reported two to ten situations and another third described regular experiences of violence up to more than 40 situations. 64 % of the women surveyed suffered physical injuries (e.g., bruises, contusions, facial injuries); a good third reported no injuries (Müller & Schröttle, 2004). In Germany, it can be estimated that about 20 to 25 % of women and 7 % of men have already experienced sexualised violence at work. Harassers are predominantly male, at around 90 % (Schröttle, Meshkova & Lehmann, 2019).

In the study mentioned, the closing of legal loopholes is emphasised as a need for change. According to the "Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz" [General Equal Treatment Act], people affected have a fixed period of three months to file a complaint. This time frame is not considered sufficient by those affected and counselling centres, as legal advice must first be obtained. In addition, those affected often find themselves in need of proof, as sexual harassment situations are often one-on-one situations.

Research findings clearly show that the primary goal of sexualised violence is to perpetrate violence and that the sexual aspect is merely a means to an end. This can be achieved, for example, by the unsolicited showing of pornographic content, which is perceived as degrading or insulting by the addressees. Experiments have been able to show that men, under various conditions, are more inclined to send pornographic images to an allegedly female chat partner (Maass, Cadinu, Guarnieri & Grasselli, 2003): For example, when they wanted to demonstrate their own masculinity after receiving feedback that they

had achieved low typically-masculine task performance (Vandello, Bosson, Cohen, Burnaford & Weaver, 2008), or when the female chat partner had presented herself as professionally ambitious and competitive with men rather than as committed to the traditional female role. Moreover, associations were found between hostile sexism, social dominance orientation and gender-based and sexual harassment in the context of online games. Personality-psychological predictors such as machiavellianism and psychopathy predicted willingness to engage in sexual harassment (Reer, Tang & Quant, 2019). Such findings impressively show how closely sexism and sexualised violence are linked.

## Rapes

According to the German Criminal Code, rape is deemed to have occurred when an aggressive or sexually motivated penetration of a person's body is carried out to which this person has not given his or her consent<sup>1</sup>. Attempted rape is also punishable. Rape is classified as the most extreme form of sexualised violence because it causes considerable psychological and physical harm to the people concerned. Consent and self-determination, which should be a prerequisite in a sexual context, are violated in this case, and the opportunity to say no is ignored and passed over by the offender.

Across Europe, the rate of registered rapes per 100,000 inhabitants varies greatly: The most frequent rapes are recorded in England (180 women, 23 men) and Sweden (147 women, 10 men). In countries such as Iceland, Albania, and Poland, fewer than four rapes were recorded. It can be assumed that the willingness to report is low in these countries and that the number of unreported cases is significantly higher (Statista, 2018). Contrary to widespread assumption, rapes are rarely committed by strangers but rather by spouses and family members. Often, these acts are not reported because women have self-doubts about whether it is a "real" rape if the act was not committed by a stranger. Additionally, the people affected often ascribe responsibility for the crime to themselves if the perpetrator is not a stranger (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights [FRA], 2014).

It is also rape if a spouse or relationship partner does not take no for an answer. At the same time, counselling centres for women and girls who have been victims<sup>2</sup> of rape or attempted rape criticise the fact that misconceptions about this issue still prevail. Thus, trivialisation and denial are common within society: The belief in a "just world", in which the mistaken belief prevails that rape can be averted if women only "behave properly", is

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<sup>1</sup> According to the legal definition, "aggravated rape" is linked to forced coitus or penetration of the victim's body. It can be critically questioned here (from a feminist perspective) that the concrete physical act (i.e., penetration) is used as a criterion for the categorisation of rape. In the framework of legislation and jurisprudence, this is defined as an objective act that is considered a "criterion" for rape. At the same time, however, it limits the spectrum of what can be subjectively perceived as a serious sexualised offence.

<sup>2</sup> The use of the term "victim" to describe people in the context of rape is controversial. On the one hand, "victim" implies that the person is not to blame or to be held responsible for the situation. On the other hand, it portrays the person as passive and defenceless. In the context of sexualised violence in war, the terms "survivor" and "experiencer" are discussed. Concurrently, it can seem dubious that rape is perceived as an "experience". We do not position ourselves in favour of one of the terms mentioned but use them alternately so that readers can form their own opinion.



problematic. The prejudice prevailing in this context leads, among other things, to women and girls blaming themselves or feeling partly to blame for the crime, which can make their individual coping difficult. Rape myths play a special role in this. They comprise assumptions about what constitutes a "real" rape and are measured, for example, by the agreement to statements such as "Women often provoke rape through their appearance or behaviour" (Costin, 1985, cited in Bohner, 1998). Acceptance of rape myths tends to predict higher victim blaming whereas empathy predicts lower victim blaming (Ferrão & Gonçalves, 2015).

The underlying process is called "victim blaming", in which victims are to a certain degree held partly responsible for the crime (Eigenberg & Garland, 2003). For example, there is the bogus argument that the victim was "dressed too provocatively" (Kanekar, Kolsawalla & D'Souza, 1981; Kanekar, Shaherwalla, Franco, Kunju & Pinto, 1991) and the prejudice that women use men to gain power over them (Yamawaki, 2007). Thus, the acceptance of rape myths is related to hostile sexism towards women (see also sample statement in Table 1). Benevolent sexism towards women is also positively linked to rape myth acceptance while higher rape myth acceptance is associated with lower benevolent paternalism (Chapleau, Oswald & Russell, 2007).

Furthermore, various factors – such as social status – influence the ascription of blame to the offender. For example, less blame was ascribed to perpetrators when they had low status (bus driver) than when they had high status (doctor) (Black & Gold, 2008). In comparison, there was a high attribution of blame to the victim if they were low status compared to high status (cashier vs. accountant; Spencer, 2016).

Contrary to rape myths, rapes more rarely take place in parks, streets, and other public places. In frequent cases, women are exploited in vulnerable situations, e.g., drunkenness or sleep. Rape can be characterised by the administration of drugs to girls and women, so-called "knock-out drops", in order to render them weak-willed and defenceless. In public discourse, the assumption emerges that false accusations are abused by women, for example, to damage the reputation of men. However, in a German study, only 3 % of rape allegations were proven to be false (Seith, Lovett & Kelly, 2009). To prove the crime, the women concerned are advised to undergo a gynaecological examination and criminal proceedings. Yet, the steps involved in the legal process represent considerable psychological stress for the women as they have to tell strangers about the rape.

In addition, the social environment does not always provide the expected protective function since people are confronted with defensive reactions to the subject and not seldomly experience exclusion and hostility. For victims, rape is accompanied by traumatisation, which causes an acute stress reaction that can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder. This can manifest itself in distressing dreams (or nightmares) and a feeling of helplessness or even fear of death (Steinbauer, 2004). Not infrequently, counselling and psychotherapy are necessary to overcome the long-term consequences. In the available studies, there is consensus that rape is an experience that constitutes a traumatic event and crosses psychological as well as physical boundaries.

## Sexualised violence in the context of war

For a long time, it was assumed that rape in war is an act of violence by individuals and less so a result of political or ideological motivation (Stark & Wessells, 2012). However, there is growing recognition that it is being used as a strategic and tactical weapon of war in armed conflicts where gender-based power imbalances are expressed (Kirby, 2013). It occurs through armed or unarmed forces within war and has also been present in conflicts over the last decade (Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung [Federal Center for Political Education], 2011). These experiences are associated with significant trauma that can trigger post-traumatic stress disorder and last a lifetime (Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung [Federal Center for Political Education], 2011; Louis, 2010). Affected women suffer from panic attacks, chronic pain, and sleep disorders as possible trauma reactions (Griese, 2021). Women who have experienced war-related sexualised violence report greater post-traumatic stress and sexual problems than women with war trauma without sexualised violence (Kuwert et al., 2014). It is not uncommon for survivors to be blamed and to experience stigmatisation and exclusion within their families and partnerships. Even 60 years after the end of the Second World War, nurses report that old women woke up screaming at night because sexualised violence and rape had left a psychological trauma. This includes, among other things, rape by soldiers as well as by husbands returning from the front (Louis, 2005).

In this context, it is discussed to what extent sexualised violence in war affects women of all ages and socio-economic status as victims of militarised (male) violence, to what extent it only affects some women, and to what extent men and women are victims of war rape (Skjelsbæk, 2001). Explanatory factors for rape from personality psychology include the internalisation of exaggerated masculinity, sexual dominance and the humiliation of women and "weaker" men (Stark & Wessells, 2012).

Sexual violence and rape are used in war as a systematic weapon of war (e.g., Card, 1996). Mass rape is characterised by the expression of racist and degrading motives towards another ethnic group and their dehumanisation. Superordinately, the purpose of rape in war is to devalue people from other cultural and ethnic backgrounds, to gain dominance over certain areas, to humiliate enemies and to express this with hypermasculinity. This creates a change of perspective in perpetrators in that rapes of "the enemy's women" tend to be more accepted. For example, rape was used in Kosovo in the late 1990s by Serbian paramilitaries in order to drive away the Kosovar population (Amnesty International Publications, 2004, cited in Stark & Wessells, 2012). From a superordinate perspective, sexualised violence in war has far-reaching effects on individuals, families, and their social environment, which is why prevention must be implemented at different levels of society (Stark & Wessells, 2012)<sup>3</sup>.

Following Germany's initiative, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1820 against sexualised violence in conflicts ("UN Security Council resolution 1820 on women,

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<sup>3</sup> In concrete terms, this means holding perpetrators accountable through higher-level institutions. This also includes the representation of the offences in the public sphere and the establishment of therapy and healing programmes for affected people.

peace and security (2008)", n. d.). This resolution aims to counteract rape and abuse as well as so-called forced prostitution, sterilisation, abortion and pregnancy, and to advocate for support and compensation for survivors (Intergovernmental Working Group on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, 2021). The resolution declared "rape and other forms of violence" as "war crimes" and "crimes against humanity".

The possibility of being able to cope with experiences depends fundamentally on available offers of help. The problem is that even after the end of wars and dictatorships, those politically responsible remain in influential positions. This blocks the reappraisal and change in political and social structures – violent experiences can hardly or not at all be processed. If there is a policy of impunity after the war, this also stands in the way of sustainable processing of traumatic experiences (Griese, 2021). A research study conducted in Bosnia showed that assessments of victims of sexualised violence in war are also characterised by an ethnocentric perspective. Attitudes towards the victims are less supportive if the perpetrators belong to the same ethnic group than if they belong to a different ethnic group. The results further show that assessors express more positive attitudes towards female victims than towards male victims. In particular, people who express negative attitudes towards same-sex sexual activities and homosexuality show negative attitudes towards male victims of sexual violence in war (Page & Whitt, 2020).

The women's rights organisation *Medica Modiale* works in conflict and post-conflict regions to ensure that women and girls affected by sexualised violence receive appropriate support (Griese, 2021). In this context, the organisation is active together with partner organisations in the countries Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Afghanistan, and Liberia. Summarised, the support offers can be characterised by four features: 1) Security can be conveyed by stabilising trust and creating safe spaces. 2) For many women, experiences of war are associated with feelings of shame and guilt that can last a lifetime. The experiences of violence create the experience of being left alone. In therapy programmes, the removal of taboos surrounding the reporting of sexualised violence is promoted to break the isolation. 3) Survivors should also be empowered (e.g., through group therapy and education programmes) by imparting emotional autonomy and control over their own situation and own lives (e.g., through regular counselling offers to support them in coping with trauma). 4) A focus in the organisation of work is on staff and self-care. Since activist as well as professionals and managers can also be traumatised indirectly through working with affected people, measures are established that are conducive to strengthening the staff (UNFPA, 2006)<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Example Liberia: In Liberia, there was a civil war for 14 years. It is estimated that 50-70 % of all women have experienced sexualised violence (UNFPA 2006). In this country, violence against women is still prevalent in the post-war period. In this respect, the possibility of dealing with and overcoming experiences of war is very limited. The organisation *Medica Liberia* offers support here. Trauma-sensitive psychosocial and legal counselling is used. Medical assistance is also provided. In addition, measures to create a sense of belonging promote the processing of traumatic experiences. It is assumed that such measures will greatly improve the situation of women and have a positive effect on the reduction of sexualised violence.

## Conclusion

Sexism and sexualised violence are visible and invisible mechanisms that are widespread in all societies. These mechanisms influence individual biographies, interactions in everyday life and are present in organisations and companies. They take place in processes of the more powerful against the less powerful. In order to cope with sexism, discrimination and sexualised violence, a social consensus should be developed, under which knowledge about the underlying processes is communicated. To eliminate the discord they create, fundamental structural and social change processes would be necessary. There is no doubt that changes are taking place in a positive direction but their potential can still be exploited.

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