

Let your  
**research** do  
the **talking.**

Let **Wiley Editing Services** provide you with expert  
help to ensure your manuscript is ready for submission

[Find out more and submit your manuscript](#)

WILEY

[Go to old article view](#)

## British Journal of Social Psychology

Volume 53, Issue 2

June 2014

Pages 201–216

Original Article

### Why did Italians protest against Berlusconi's sexist behaviour? The role of sexist beliefs and emotional reactions in explaining women and men's pathways to protest

[Maria-Paola Paladino](#) , [Sara Zaniboni](#), [Fabio Fasoli](#), [Jeroen Vaes](#), [Chiara Volpato](#)

First published:

18 January 2013 [Full publication history](#)

DOI:

10.1111/bjso.12023 [View/save citation](#)

Cited by:

0 articles [Check for new citations](#)



## Abstract

By taking advantage of the Italian protest in 2009 in reaction to the behaviour of then Prime Minister Berlusconi, in this research, we investigated the role of sexist beliefs (i.e., hostile sexism, complementary gender differentiation, protective paternalism, and heterosexual intimacy) and group-based emotional reactions (i.e., anger, humiliation, and sadness) to women's and men's action mobilization against public forms of sexism. The findings of this study suggest that women and men engaged in this protest for different reasons. Women mobilized to express their anger at Berlusconi's sexist behaviour, an emotion related to the condemnation of hostile sexist views and benevolent sexist beliefs about heterosexual intimacy. In contrast, the strength of men's participation in the protest was affected by humiliation, an emotion related to the condemnation of

hostile sexist beliefs and support for complementary gender differentiation. This emotional path suggests that men likely protested to restore their reputations. These findings underline the role of sexist beliefs and group-based emotions in transforming the condemnation of a sexist event into action mobilization against sexism for both women and men.

## Enhanced Article Feedback

## Background

The behaviour of former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi towards women did not go unnoticed. The media reported several related events in 2009,<sup>1</sup> both within and outside Italy. When a female student raised the issue of unemployment and financial troubles of young people during a TV panel discussion, Berlusconi suggested that she should marry a rich man like his son. In a similar situation, he said, 'Young ladies, please, first your telephone number and then the questions'. On some official occasions, he did not hesitate to ogle the body of his female interlocutor. Some people excused these actions as jokes or as 'an appreciation for women'; however, many others saw Berlusconi's behaviour as clear evidence of sexism perpetuated by a person serving in an institutional role.

In response to these events, an interesting and lively public debate developed in Italy, dissent was raised, and several actions (e.g., petitions and manifestations) ensued in protest against the degradation of women supported by some institutional figures and the media that culminated in a public manifestation in Rome in the spring of 2009. What motivated people to join this protest movement? Did motivations differ between women and men? Given that Berlusconi was the Prime Minister of the Italian government at that time, the protest was also a political issue. However, we believe that other, more psychological, variables played a role, making this context an interesting opportunity for research on action mobilization against sexism and, in particular, against 'public sexism' when female derogation is perpetuated by a public institution<sup>2</sup> (Walby, 1990 ).

From a psychological perspective, protesting against sexism involves labelling the event as prejudiced and being motivated to publicly respond to it. In this research, we focused on women and men who already identified Berlusconi's behaviour as offensive and disrespectful of women. Focusing on these people, we investigated whether their sexist beliefs and the (group-based) emotional reactions of anger, humiliation, and sadness about these events affected the degree of their participation in the ongoing collective protest. Thus, the focus of the research is on action mobilization that involves the transformation of condemnation of Berlusconi's behaviour into protest (Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2007 ). In developing our predictions, we drew on previous research showing that being a target of sexism may elicit several negative emotions and that this emotional experience affects the way women deal with the situation (e.g., from no involvement to high involvement in the protest). However, our approach can be distinguished from the existing literature in several respects. First, we focused on the vicarious and group-based (instead of direct and individual) emotional reactions of women and men who witness sexism. In particular, males' reactions to these issues are rarely empirically investigated, but they are of primary importance for understanding potential sources

of societal change with respect to gender relationships. Second, we examined the role of sexist beliefs and emotional reactions towards female derogation in transforming the sympathizers of a movement into active protesters. Third, we investigated actual protest involvement (and not intentions) in reactions to sexism. Finally, note that in this case sexism was perpetuated by a government institution because Berlusconi behaved in this way when exercising his function as Prime Minister, implying that we study people's reactions towards an instance of public sexism. We will first discuss the potential role of sexist beliefs in motivating women and men to collective action and then turn to the link between specific emotional reactions and protest making.

## Sexist beliefs and the pathway to collective protest

People might participate in protest for instrumental reasons (i.e., to gain social change in favour of their group at affordable costs) and/or to express their views and emotions and gain moral integrity through participation. This 'ideological motive' (Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2007 ; Van Stekelenburg, Klandermans, & Van Dijk, 2009 ; Van Stekelenburg, In Press) refers to people's values and beliefs and the assessment of whether or not these have been violated, thus motivating them to participate in social protest. People may view the sexist behaviour of an institutional figure or, more generally, a sexist event as a violation of their own beliefs and values about how women should be treated, which may generate emotions that propel them into action to express their views. This ideological motive suggests that what people think about women and gender relationships in general (i.e., endorsement/disapproval of sexist beliefs) could influence the pathway to collective action. However, sexism is a complex ideology involving several types of beliefs. Its relationship with collective action can be less straightforward than expected, particularly when considering different types of sexist beliefs and their endorsement by women or men.

According to Glick and Fiske ( 1996 ; Glick *et al.*, 2000 ), sexism is more than simple antipathy because it can be characterized by both hostility (often at the societal level) on the one hand and a chivalrous and benevolent attitude towards women (often in intimate relationships) on the other. Both hostility and benevolence towards women are products of the structural relationships between sex groups: gender differentiation (men and women possess different traits and abilities), paternalism (men have more status and power than women), and heterosexuality (because it creates dependency between the sexes). Specifically, these structural relationships foster hostility to the extent that they offer a justification for male dominance (i.e., women lack traits necessary to rule, women need guidance from men) and for antagonism towards women, who might challenge men's dominance (i.e., feminists) or who try to obtain favours from men by using their sex appeal. Instances of these hostile sexist (HS) beliefs in the *Ambivalent Sexism Inventory* (ASI; Glick & Fiske, 1996 ) are as follows: 'Women are easily offended', 'Most women interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist', and 'Once a woman gets a man to commit to her, she usually tries to put him on a tight leash'.

The same structural relationships also contribute to benevolent sexism. Focusing on complementary traits that women possess rather than those that they lack, which is the focus in hostile sexism, gender differentiation leads to an idealized view of women (complementary gender differentiation [CGD]). Similarly, paternalism fuels the expectation of male protection of women (protective paternalism [PP]), and heterosexuality fosters a romanticized perception of the relationship between women and men (heterosexual intimacy [HI]). Instances of these beliefs included in the ASI are as follows: 'Women,

compared to men, tend to have a superior moral sensibility' for CGD, 'Women should be cherished and protected by men' for PP, and 'No matter how accomplished he is, a man is not truly complete as a person unless he has the love of a woman' for HI. Unlike HS, CGD, PP, and HI depict women as well as men in a positive light. Still, these beliefs contribute to seeing women as 'the weaker sex' (PP) or reduce the female role to being a complement of the male personality (CGD) and a source of pleasure and affection for men (HI). Despite the positive tone, CGD, PP, and HI are also sexist because they help preserve male dominance.

The coexistence of hostility and benevolence in sexism has been successfully demonstrated cross-culturally in a study in which the ASI was administered to samples from 19 nations and five continents (Glick *et al.*, 2000). This study also highlighted that, unlike hostile sexism, benevolent attitudes involve a more complex structure of beliefs. In the factor analysis, CGD, PP, and HI appeared as three distinct sub-factors for benevolent sexism. Because of these findings, and to better grasp the nature of the ideological motives behind women's and men's protest in this study, we focused on hostile sexism, CGD, PP, and HI to make our predictions.

Different predictions can be made for hostile sexism and the other beliefs. HS beliefs not only affirm male superiority but also justify hostility towards women who challenge men's superiority, as feminists do. Therefore, participation in a movement against female derogation requires a certain level of condemnation of HS: women and men who condemn hostile sexism should be especially bothered by evidence of public sexism and willing to express these negative emotions to gain dignity and preserve moral integrity. Stated differently, endorsement of HS beliefs is expected to undermine the negative emotional reactions towards female derogation and, therefore, impair women's and men's strength of participation in protesting female derogation.

Given their focus on intimate relationships, CGD, PP, and HI beliefs might play a less relevant role in the mobilization against public forms of sexism perpetuated by an institution. However, previous studies showed that CGD alone and in combination with PP and HI might undermine the importance that women attribute to sexism and, in turn, their motivation to collective action (Becker & Wright, 2011; Jost & Kay, 2005). In line with these studies, women's endorsement of CGD, PP, and HI sexist beliefs are expected to be associated with less negative emotional reactions to instances of public sexism and less involvement in collective protest.

Would support for CGD, PP, and HI also impair men's mobilization against female derogation?

Although no studies directly investigated this issue, we suspect that these beliefs might have different implications for men. Looking at CGD, PP, and HI as a unitary construct of benevolent sexism, Sakall-Uğurlu, Salman, and Turgut (2010) recently showed the different role of these beliefs for women and men. Specifically, they found that sexual harassment towards women was judged as a serious offence by men to the extent that they disapproved hostility, but supported benevolent sexist attitudes, and by women to the extent that they disagreed with both sets of beliefs. This finding opens up the possibility that, in contrast to HS, endorsement of sexist beliefs involving benevolence and a chivalrous attitude might make men react against (at least certain forms of) female derogation. Specifically, a man who degrades women could be perceived as violating one's own idealized view of women (i.e., women are wonderful and should not be harmed), suggesting that men who endorse CGD beliefs would be especially bothered by this evidence of sexism and willing to protest against it. A man who derogates women could also be seen as damaging the masculine role of protecting women, suggesting that, in

addition to CGD, PP would also predict men's negative emotional reactions towards a sexist event and the strength of their involvement in protest. Accordingly, the specific role of support for CGD and PP in both regulating negative emotional reactions to instances of public sexism and strengthening participation in the protest will be investigated.

## Emotional reactions and collective protest

Up until now, we have advanced the idea that female derogation can be perceived as a violation of one's own beliefs about how women should be treated. Consequentially, we expected that the emotional reactions to these events would be related to such beliefs. Here, we want to discuss how these emotions may shape the way people react to evidence of sexism (i.e., from inertia to high involvement in the protest). According to Van Stekelenburg (In Press), violated beliefs and values motivate people to protest through moral outrage. In line with this concept, condemnation of (hostile, CGD, PP, HI) sexist beliefs towards women and a mix of condemnation (i.e., hostile) and support (PP and CGD) of sexist beliefs in men are expected to generate anger in response to Berlusconi's sexist behaviour, and this emotion predicts the strength of participation in the protest.

However, being exposed to sexism is an emotionally complex event. Studies showed that female targets (i.e., Ellemers & Barreto, 2009 ; Matheson & Anisman, 2009 ; Swim & Hyers, 1999 ; Swim, Hyers, Cohen, & Ferguson, 2001 ) or witnesses of sexism (Chaudoir & Quinn, 2010 ) reported anger, feelings of lack of control, and helplessness typical of sadness and depression (Bosson, Pinel, & Vandello, 2010 ; Swim *et al.*, 2001 ), and the sensation of being ridiculed and devalued in one's status in the eyes of others that characterizes humiliation<sup>3</sup> (Matheson & Anisman, 2009 ; Swift, 1991 ). In line with these studies, condemnation of (HS, CGD, PP, and HI) sexist beliefs is expected to generate sadness and humiliation in women, in addition to anger. However, several studies showed that sadness and humiliation do not motivate women to react when confronted with sexism, whereas anger does (Gill & Matheson, 2006 ; Matheson & Anisman, 2009 ), a finding consistent with an ideological motive to social protest and other theoretical accounts (i.e., Van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004 ; Klandermans, van der Toorn, & van Stekelenburg, 2008 ). Consequently, only the experience of anger is expected to predict the strength of women's participation in protesting against female derogation.

### What about men?

Although highly relevant, men's reactions to female derogation have rarely been investigated. We can speculate that once an event is judged as offensive and not respectful of women, feelings of anger, humiliation, and sadness may also characterize men's experience (Bosson *et al.*, 2010 ). Following an ideological motive, the intensity of these emotional reactions is expected to be related to men's beliefs about how women should be treated. Specifically, condemnation of HS and support of CGD and PP are expected to be associated with stronger negative emotional reactions. The issue that arises next is how these emotions shape protest behaviour.

Note that the object of these emotions, particularly of anger and humiliation, differs in women and men, raising the question of whether their roles in collective action may diverge. In the realm of sexism, the object of anger is the out-group for women, whereas for men it is the in-group or some in-group members. Some studies also suggest that anger towards the in-group fuels support for collective

actions, particularly for measures implying confrontation with those responsible for the misdeed and actions to compensate the out-group (Iyer, Schmader, & Lickel, 2007 ; but see Iyer & Ryan, 2009 ; Mallett, Huntsinger, Sinclair, & Swim, 2008 ). Thus, for men, anger is hypothesized to be associated with the strength of their involvement in protest.

The object of emotion also varies for humiliation. Although sexist behaviour (committed by a man) can have a negative effect on in-group identity in both genders, women likely feel ridiculed and devalued for what they are (i.e., essence), whereas men are offended because of what (a member of) the in-group did (i.e., behaviour).<sup>4</sup> These different focuses are expected to result in different male and female reactions. Specifically, for men, the focus is on something controllable (i.e., behaviour) and on a specific individual (i.e., a man who degrades women), opening the possibility to redressing the situation. For men to join a protest against sexism demonstrates that not all men are sexist, but that some choose to behave up to the standard (i.e., respect women). Thus, protesting for men is a way to gain moral dignity by restoring the in-group and/or one's personal reputation. Consequently, in addition to anger the feeling of humiliation created by the sexist behaviour of an in-group member is expected to predict the degree of men's involvement in protest against female degradation.

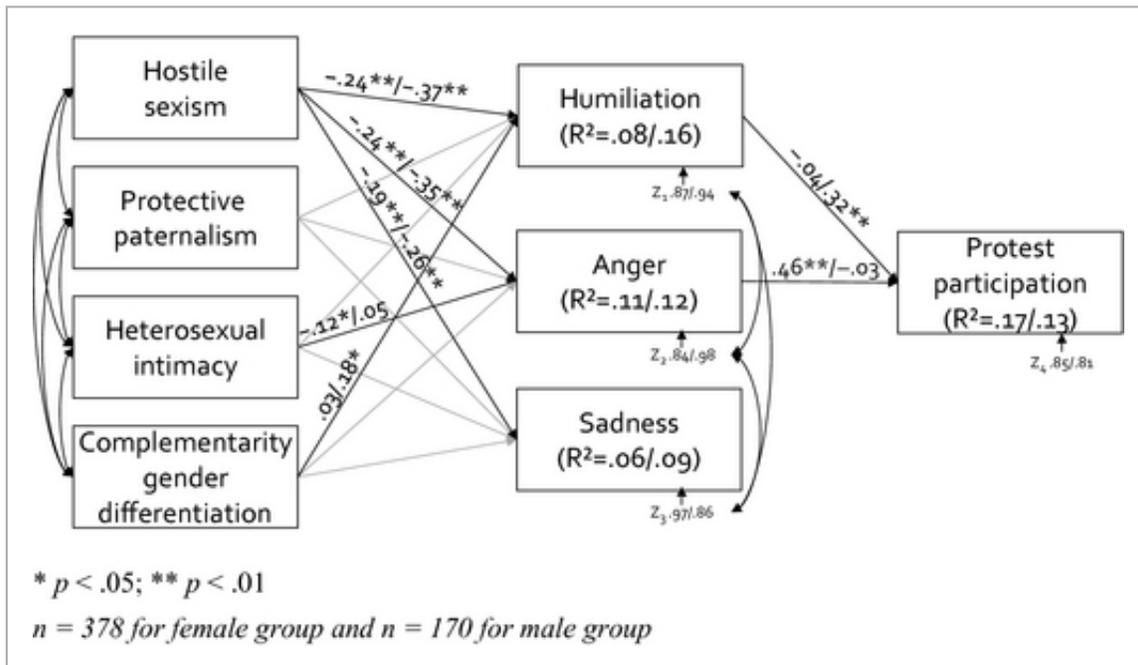
## The present study

Taking advantage of the protest raised in reaction to Berlusconi's public behaviour towards women when he was the Italian Prime Minister, we conducted this study to investigate the role of sexist beliefs and group-based emotions of anger, humiliation, and sadness in the pathway of women and men to social protest.

Based on a review of the literature, different predictions were advanced for women and men. Specifically, for women, condemnation of HS and, to a lesser extent, disapproval of CGD, PP, and HI beliefs were expected to be associated with stronger group-based emotional responses of anger, humiliation, and sadness in reaction to Berlusconi's sexist behaviour. However, only the experience of anger was predicted to be linked with women's strength of involvement in protest. Stated differently, women were expected to participate in the protest to express their anger because Berlusconi's behaviour violated their anti-sexist beliefs.

For men, their motives for protesting were suggested to be different and somehow more complex. Similar to women, condemnation of HS was expected to be related to a more intense group-based experience of anger, humiliation, and sadness. Moreover, unlike women, support for CGD and PP was predicted to be associated with a stronger negative emotional reaction to Berlusconi's sexist behaviour. Finally, both anger and humiliation were expected to affect their degree of participation in protest. To sum up, men's participation in protest was expected as a means of expressing their anger and humiliation because Berlusconi's behaviour violated their anti-HS beliefs and their views that men should idealize and protect women. In this respect, for men, joining the protest was both an expression of beliefs in gender equality and chivalry towards women.

On the basis of these predictions, we tested multi sample models for female and male participants (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1.**

[Open in figure viewer](#)

Path models for females/males linking their sexist beliefs, emotional reactions, and strength of protest participation.

## Method

### Participants

The questionnaires completed for all the main variables of interest were included in the analysis. The participants were 632 (424 women and 208 men). Most (78.5%) were 40 or younger (average age = 32 years), had a university degree (78%), were employed (55%), and were left-winged (78% rated, on a 7-point scale: 1 = *extreme left*, 7 = *extreme right*, their political orientation from 1 to 3).

### Procedure and questionnaire

Female and male adults were recruited to complete an online questionnaire about Prime Minister Berlusconi and women. The research was presented as follows: 'The public behavior of Prime Minister Berlusconi toward women has raised opposing reactions. In some people's opinion, this behavior is respectful of women, while for others, this behavior is disrespectful and offends women. With this questionnaire we are interested in your opinion about the issue'. The questionnaire started by assessing hostile and benevolent sexism. Then, a 2-min movie showing Berlusconi's behaviours that could be identified as sexist was shown, followed by the assessment of the group-based emotional reactions to these behaviours and a request to make an overall dichotomous judgment of Berlusconi's behaviour (respectful vs. disrespectful and offensive towards women). If the behaviour was judged

positively, the questionnaire ended; otherwise, participants were asked whether they expressed their dissent on the issue to friends and/or acquaintances and whether they participated in a series of collective actions organized in 2009 to protest against Berlusconi's behaviour and female derogation.

Data collection started in December 2009 and ended in the beginning of April 2010. Several strategies were used to recruit participants. First, a blog site and a Facebook group were created. Second, the invitation was e-mailed to informal networks of colleagues and acquaintances who were unfamiliar with the research questions, with the request to respond to the questionnaire and to spread the invitation to other people. Third, an invitation to respond to the questionnaire was posted in various chat rooms and discussion groups of different political orientations.

The scales and the material used in the study were presented in the online questionnaire in the following order.

### **Ambivalent Sexism Inventory**

The ASI (Glick *et al.*, 2000 ; see Manganelli Rattazzi, Volpato, & Canova, 2008 for the Italian version) was used to assess these variables: endorsement of hostile sexism (11 items), CGD (three items), PP (four items), and HI (four items) beliefs. Responses were registered on a 5-point scale (1 = *completely disagree* to 5 = *completely agree* ).

### **Video**

Participants watched a 2-min (created October 9, 2009 by La Repubblica web TV, <http://tv.repubblica.it/cronaca/silvio-e-le-donne-il-blob/37820?video>) video showing some instances of Berlusconi's public behaviour when he was the Italian Prime Minister that could be identified as sexist. The preponderance of these events could be seen as evidence of unjustified gender stereotyping and sexual objectification. This article started with some of these.

### **Group-based emotions**

A list of emotions including terms related to anger (i.e., *arrabiato/angry*, *indignato/indignant*, *furioso/furious*), humiliation (i.e., *umiliato/humiliated*, *offeso/offended*, *sminuito/discounted*, *ridicolizzato/ridiculed*, *preso in giro/teased*, *trattato con disprezzo/scorned*, *ferito nella dignità/hurt in one's dignity*, adapted from the Hartling and Lucchetta ( 1999 ) Humiliation Inventory), and sadness (i.e., *triste/sad*, *scoraggiato/discouraged*, *sconfortato/hopeless*) was presented. Participants were asked to indicate the degree to which they experienced, as women/as men (depending on the gender of the respondent), each of the emotions in response to Berlusconi's behaviour (1 = *not at all* to 5 = *very much* ).

### **Condemnation/approval of Berlusconi's behaviour**

Then participants expressed their opinions about Berlusconi's behavior by choosing between two statements: 'I think that the behavior of the Prime Minister is offensive toward women' or 'I think that the Prime Minister is unfairly accused of being disrespectful of women'.

If the behaviour was judged positively, the survey ended with the completion of the respondents' demographic information. Otherwise, the questionnaire continued and included questions regarding

the reactions to Berlusconi's behaviour and the participants' participation in the protest.

## Expressing dissent with friends and/or acquaintances

Participants were asked to indicate whether they had expressed their dissent on the issue with friends and/or acquaintances (Yes/No).

## Strength of participation in protest

Participants were presented with a list of actions organized in 2009 at the national level to protest the degradation of women supported by institutional figures and the media (i.e., public sexism). The list included signing a petition, wearing a badge or other symbol of protest, joining a demonstration, sending a postcard/e-mail to the government, organizing a protest initiative (i.e., writing a letter to a journal, organizing a public debate), and other initiatives. The number of actions taken was used as an index of strength of participation in protest. The index ranged from 0 (= *no action/participation*) to 6 (= *all actions taken/strong participation*).

On the last page, participants were asked to indicate their gender, age, education, occupation, and political orientation. The response to this last question was registered on a 7-point scale (1 = *extreme left* to 7 = *extreme right*).

# Results

## Differentiating sympathizers from non-sympathizers for protest movement cause

Of the 632 questionnaires completed, 548 judged the public behaviour of Berlusconi as offensive and disrespectful (sympathizers of the movement included 378 women and 170 men), whereas 84 identified the same behaviour as respectful of women (non-sympathizers, 46 women and 38 men). In both groups, the majority of respondents were women (at least 55%) and had a university degree (>75%), and approximately half of the respondents were employed (>49%). The two groups differed in other respects. Those judging the behaviour as offensive were more left-winged ( $F(1, 630) = 295.73$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .32$ ,  $M = 2.51$ ,  $SD = 1.15$  and  $M = 4.89$ ,  $SD = 1.39$  for sympathizers and non-sympathizers, respectively) and less sexist on all indices (all  $F(1, 630) > 21.97$ , all  $p$ s  $< .001$ , all  $\eta^2 > .03$  HS  $M = 3.19$ ,  $SD = 0.68$  and  $M = 2.48$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ ; HI  $M = 3.26$ ,  $SD = 0.86$  and  $M = 2.78$ ,  $SD = 0.89$ ; PP  $M = 2.96$ ,  $SD = 0.79$  and  $M = 2.54$ ,  $SD = 0.76$  for non-sympathizers and sympathizers, respectively) except CGD ( $M = 3.14$ ,  $SD = 0.94$  and  $M = 3.02$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ,  $p > .22$ ,  $\eta^2 = .00$ ). Moreover, they reported more anger ( $F(1, 630) = 308.36$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .33$ , sympathizers  $M = 3.47$ ,  $SD = 1.21$  and non-sympathizers  $M = 1.13$ ,  $SD = 0.39$ ), humiliation ( $F(1, 630) = 290.30$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .32$ , sympathizers  $M = 3.35$ ,  $SD = 1.17$  and non-sympathizers  $M = 1.16$ ,  $SD = 0.34$ ) and sadness ( $F(1, 630) = 339.54$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .35$  sympathizers  $M = 3.57$ ,  $SD = 1.21$  and non-sympathizers  $M = 1.12$ ,  $SD = 0.37$ ) over Berlusconi's behaviour. This pattern suggests that both endorsement of sexist beliefs, except CGD, and emotional reactions were associated with participants' evaluations of this issue. As previously stated, we were interested in action mobilization that is the

motives that led female and male sympathizers to participate in the protest movement. We therefore focused our analysis on those respondents who judged Berlusconi's behaviour as disrespectful of women.

## Differentiating female and male sympathizers

The means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliability for female and male participants are shown in Table 1. Women differed from men by being slightly less sexist in all indices (all  $F_s > 6.87$  and  $p_s < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 \geq .01$ ) except for CGD, on which females scored slightly higher than male participants ( $F(1, 546) = 6.37$ ,  $p = .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .01$ ). Compared with men, women also reported more group-based anger ( $F(1, 546) = 13.09$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .02$ ) and humiliation ( $F(1, 546) = 21.71$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .04$ ), but indicated being equally sad ( $F(1, 546) = 1.03$ ,  $p > .30$ ). Differences in the emotional experience for each gender were also considered. Although the ANOVA indicated that women's experience of anger was more intense than that of humiliation ( $F(1, 377) = 5.10$ ,  $p = .02$ ,  $\eta^2 = .01$ ), the means were very similar; no other comparisons were significant. For male participants, the feeling of sadness was the most intense, followed by anger and humiliation (all comparisons were significant, all  $F_s(1, 169) > 7.43$ , all  $p_s < .008$ , all  $\eta^2 \leq .04$ ). Aside from these differences, female and male participants did not differ in terms of strength of participation in the protest ( $F(1, 546) = 1.01$ ,  $p > .30$ ,  $\eta^2 = .00$ ).

**Table 1.** Means, standard deviations, and correlations for females/males (Cronbach's alpha in brackets on the diagonal)

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
1. Protest participation	0.91/0.81	1.13/1.08	–		
2. Humiliation	3.50/3.01	1.12/1.21	.313** / .365**	(.92/.92)	
3. Anger	3.59/3.19	1.17/1.26	.417** / .289**	.786** / .755**	(.87/.87)
4. Sadness	3.53/3.64	1.22/1.17	.270** / .276**	.626** / .627**	.576** / .547
5. Hostile sexism	2.37/2.72	0.67/0.78	-.194** / -.107	-.265** / -.321**	-.299** / -.3
6. Protective paternalism	2.47/2.68	0.75/0.76	-.235** / .047	-.168** / .052	-.198** / -.0
7. Heterosexual intimacy	2.71/2.93	0.88/0.88	-.255** / .047	-.153** / .010	-.239** / -.0
8. Complementary gender differentiation	3.09/2.87	0.89/0.98	-.108* / .187*	-.059 / .150*	-.113* / -.0

\*  $p \leq .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

$n = 378$  for female group and  $n = 170$  for male group.

Nearly all sympathizers (93%) reported having expressed condemnation to friends and/or acquaintances for Berlusconi's behaviour. Approximately 52% indicated that they took part in one or more actions of collective protest. Specifically, 29% took part in at least one action, 14% participated in two actions, and the rest engaged in three or more actions. The most commonly taken action was signing a petition (42%).

## Path analysis: Differentiating women's and men's strength of involvement in the protest

Multi sample structural equation analysis was used to compare the relationship between the variables measured in the study for women and men. Prior to conducting the analysis, we verified whether the data were appropriate for use in a path analysis (Schumacker & Lomax, 1998). The path analysis was performed using LISREL 8.7 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2004). In the analyses, covariance matrices were used, and model robustness was estimated using the maximum likelihood method. Assessment of fit was based on several indices: Chi-square test; Normed chi-square ( $\chi^2/df$ ; Jöreskog, 1969); Comparative Fit Index (CFI; Bentler, 1990; Bentler & Bonett, 1980); Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI; Bentler & Bonett, 1980; Tucker & Lewis, 1973) and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA; Steiger, 1989). Satisfactory fit is obtained when the chi-square test is non-significant, but given the dependence of the chi-square test on sample size, other indices were also used (Bollen & Long, 1993). The Normed chi-square measure ( $\chi^2/df$ ) revealed values between 1.0 and 5.0, which fell within the level of acceptance (Schumacker & Lomax, 1998). The CFI and NNFI indicated acceptable model fit to the data given that they equalled or exceeded .90. RMSEA index values in the range of .05–.08 indicate a fair fit (Browne & Cudeck, 1989). The key parameters and the  $R^2$  value were inspected to determine the predictive power of the models.

Figure 1 shows the findings of the path analysis models for women and men. Standardized parameter estimates are presented for ease of interpretation. The model showed acceptable fit indices ( $\chi^2(10) = 20.53$ ,  $p = .02$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 2.05$ ; RMSEA = .06; NNFI = .96; CFI = .99).<sup>5</sup> The variance explained by the tested model was for women and men, respectively:  $R^2 = .17/.13$  for strength of protest participation;  $R^2 = .08/.16$  for humiliation;  $R^2 = .11/.12$  for anger; and  $R^2 = .06/.09$  for sadness.

The multi sample analysis showed that, except for the negative relationship between hostile sexism and negative emotional reactions, all of the links between the variables in the model were different between the female and the male participants (see Figure 1;  $\gamma$  and  $\beta$  for female participants were presented first and followed  $\gamma$  and  $\beta$  for male participants).

For women, condemnation of hostile sexism beliefs predicted reactions of anger, humiliation, and sadness. In addition, only disapproval of HI beliefs resulted in more intense anger reactions. In turn, anger was the only emotion that predicted stronger involvement in protest participation.

As for women, men's disapproval of hostile sexism predicted more anger, humiliation, and sadness. Moreover, support of complementary gender beliefs predicted more intense feelings of humiliation. In turn, humiliation predicted greater protest participation. PP beliefs were not significantly related to any of the negative emotional responses, and anger did not predict the strength of participation in protest.

To verify whether or not the present results hold when controlling for participants' political orientation, we tested a model in which we added a direct path from political orientation to anger, humiliation,

sadness, and strength of participation in protest. Political orientation was associated with the strength of participation in protest in both women and men. Consistent with other studies, the more left-winged oriented the participants, the stronger their involvement in the protest (Hutter & Kriesi, In Press). Being left-winged was also associated with emotional reactions of anger, humiliation, and sadness for women but only with anger for men. Interestingly, controlling for political orientation did not substantially change the previous results regarding the role of sexist beliefs and emotions in the pathway to protest. The only difference was that HI beliefs were not associated with anger in female participants.

## Discussion

Why did Italian women and men protest against Berlusconi's sexist behaviour? The present findings suggest that Italian women and men who condemned Berlusconi's behaviour mobilized against it for different reasons. Women showed to engage in protest to express their anger and indignation for the Italian Prime Minister's behaviour, feelings that were related to their condemnation of hostile sexism and of HI beliefs (but not of CGD and PP). Hostile sexism beliefs sustain male superiority and promote hostility towards women who challenge men's superiority, as feminists do. Not surprisingly, support for these beliefs lowered women's negative emotional reactions of anger to Berlusconi's behaviour and, in turn, their participation in protest. Beliefs about HI revolve around the notion that intimacy with a woman is the greatest pleasure for a man. Support for this belief likely made women more indulgent towards Berlusconi's sexist behaviours that publicly expressed his appreciation and sexual attraction towards women.

Results for the path analysis suggest that men joined the protest for different reasons. Men's strength of participation in the protest was only related to the feeling of being humiliated and ridiculed as men, emotions that were associated with the condemnation of HS beliefs and the support of CGD beliefs. Thus, much like women, men's support for hostile sexism lowered their negative emotional reactions to Berlusconi's behaviour and, in turn, their mobilization. However, the emotional path suggests that men, unlike women and differently from what was hypothesized, did not participate in protest to express their anger, but to restore their group and/or personal reputations and gain the moral dignity that was supposedly challenged by Berlusconi's behaviour. Through protest, men distanced themselves from the perpetrator by showing that they condemned this type of behaviour and respected women. Interestingly, unlike women, men's support of sexist beliefs of CGD played a positive role in the pathway to protest. In fact, endorsement of these beliefs was associated with humiliation, a feeling that was in turn related to men's strength of protest participation. This finding is consistent with the notion that a chivalrous attitude may make men sensitive to offensive and aggressive behaviour towards women (Sakall-Uğurlu *et al.*, 2010). In this regard, the finding suggests that this is not an effect of paternalism (i.e., women should be protected by men) because PP beliefs were not involved in the pathway to protest. Instead, this sensitivity appears related to an idealized perception of women that characterizes CGD beliefs. Women are 'wonderful'; therefore, men who do not respect women humiliate the male identity. Taken together, this finding suggests that the motives underlying men's and women's involvement in protest were even more different than expected. Men signed petitions, went into the streets, and took other protest actions to the extent that they felt humiliated by the behaviour of a man who, in an institutional role, violated their anti-HS beliefs and their view that women

should be idealized. In this respect, for men, joining the protest was both an expression of beliefs in gender equality but also of chivalry. In contrast, women participated in the protest to the extent that they were angry at a public institutional figure who, through his derogation of women, publicly violated their anti-sexist beliefs.

Previous research on reactions against sexism has mainly focused on women's responses as targets of sexism and gender discrimination (i.e., Ellemers & Barreto, 2009 ; Matheson & Anisman, 2009 ; for an exception, see Chaudoir & Quinn, 2010 ). This research extends this work by focusing on emotional responses and collective reactions of women and men who are witnesses of sexism. The study shows that different feelings (i.e., anger for women and humiliation for men) and likely different goals (i.e., expressing their beliefs for women and restoring their group and/or personal identity for men) are involved in women's and men's engagement in protest against female derogation. In addition, this work underlines the central role of condemnation of hostile sexism in this process. To our knowledge, this is the first study to examine the role of ambivalent sexist beliefs in protest-taking and to show that hostile sexism can be, both for women and men, an obstacle to reacting against public sexism and asking for social change. Endorsing (or not opposing) a HS ideology may hinder the ability to individuate an event as sexist and offensive for women (see, for instance, the differences between sympathizers and non-sympathizers). In addition, the findings of this study suggest that HS beliefs may also undermine the motivation to actively participate in a protest movement against female derogation even among those who report to sympathize with the cause.

Importantly, note that the results (except for the path between HI beliefs and anger in female participants) were observed independent of participants' political orientation. This finding is interesting because it suggests that 'psychological variables' as an endorsement of HS beliefs and a lack of emotional reactions might also limit the motivation to protest against female derogation among those people whose political ideologies are traditionally more concerned with gender issues and supportive of collective action movements (Hutter & Kriesi, In Press).

This research underlines the importance of condemnation of HS beliefs in motivating women and men to protest against female derogation. At the same time, these results suggest that sexist beliefs involving benevolence and a chivalrous attitude towards women (e.g., CGD) are important because they allow the motives of men and women to engage in active protest to be distinguished from one another.

Another interesting implication of this research concerns the ideological and expressive motives of protest. The results suggest that, in addition to anger (Van Stekelenburg, in press), other emotions such as humiliation may push people into the streets when their values and beliefs are violated.

Like every study, this one has some limitations. The most obvious limitation is that cross-sectional data were used, indicating that inferences on the causal direction of the effects should be tempered. We cannot exclude the possibility that, for instance, participation in the protest movement made people more concerned about sexism, inflating the correlation between hostile sexism beliefs and mobilization. Longitudinal or experimental designs are necessary to accurately establish the extent to which hostile sexism beliefs affected participation in protest and vice versa. Another issue worth addressing further in future studies is the role of humiliation in the experience of sexism. We suggested that witnessing sexism may elicit in women a feeling of being ridiculed and devalued for what they are (i.e., essence), whereas men feel ridiculed and devalued for what (a member of) the in-group did (i.e., behaviour).

This difference in the object of the emotion is responsible for the different role of humiliation in women's and men's mobilization. Although a plausible explanation, it was not explicitly tested. Future studies should address this issue empirically because this difference in the object of the emotion could also reconcile the inconsistent findings in the literature on behavioural reactions to humiliation and related emotions such as shame. In fact, shame and humiliation in reaction to a group's misdeeds were shown to be related to withdrawal (Lickel, Schmader, Curtis, Scarnier, & Ames, 2005) and with reparation attitudes towards the out-group (Brown, González, Zagefka, Manzi, & Čehajić, 2008). These different behavioural responses likely depend on whether the object of the emotion is something controllable, such as behaviour, or not controllable, such as the essence of the group or the person. Finally, this research focused on ideological motives to protest. Still, other motives that are instrumental or related to identity are acknowledged to possibly have been involved as well.

Overall, analysis of the real protest in 2009 in reaction to the then-Italian Prime Minister's public behaviour towards women, even though a real-life and specific phenomenon, allowed the unravelling of important mechanisms related to how sympathizers of a movement engage in social action. The results revealed that both women's and men's disapproval of sexist beliefs and their emotional reactions shaped the strength of their participation in protest.

## Footnotes

- 1 The events that inspired this research took place in 2009, while the research itself was conducted in 2010. Silvio Berlusconi has subsequently come under investigation in a prostitution case.
- 2 Introducing the concept of patriarchy Walby ( 1990 ) distinguishes between the private and the public arena of gender discrimination. Whereas the first concerns gender discrimination within the home and the family, the second refers to the role of institutional structures (i.e., employment, government, schools) in perpetuating gender inequalities.
- 3 Matheson and Anisman ( 2009 ) did not use the word 'humiliation' but instead used 'shame'. However, the adjectives 'ashamed', 'embarrassed', and 'humiliated' were used to measure the emotional state of shame, suggesting that their study did not treat humiliation and shame as different emotions.
- 4 According to Hartling and Lucchetta ( 1999 ), what differentiates the emotional experience of humiliation from shame is whether devaluation refers to essence (which leads to a feeling of being humiliated) or to behaviour (which leads to shame). This study did not refer to 'shame' to frame male participants' experiences because this term was not included in the questionnaire.
- 5 Furthermore, the unconstrained model (i.e., parameters are free to vary between the groups) was compared with the constrained one (i.e., parameters are constrained to be equal between the groups). The chi-square difference test between the model with constrained paths and the model with free paths was significant ( $\Delta\chi^2(31) = 56.54, p = .0033$ ). Thus, the unconstrained model was preferred, showing that males and females differed significantly from one another.

## References

### Wiley Online Library

[Help](#) [Browse by Subject](#) [Browse Publications](#) [Resources](#)

[Agents](#) | [Advertisers](#) | [Cookies](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [About Us](#)

[Privacy](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Terms & Conditions](#) | [Media](#)

---

**WILEY**

[Wiley.com](#) [About Wiley](#) [Wiley Job Network](#)

**Copyright © 1999-2015 John Wiley & Sons, Inc. All Rights Reserved**