

# Women are hard-wired to find well-meaning sexist men attractive and to ignore soyboys

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Women are more attracted to men who are sexist because they think they are more willing to protect them, provide for them and commit to a relationship, scientists say.

Men who are considered to be sexist in a well-meaning way – for example if they are chivalrous or think women need a man to protect them – may be more attractive.

Even though women find these men patronising and can feel undermined by them, they are more likely to want to couple up with them than with men who don't give them special treatment.

Researchers say women may be hard-wired to think the benefits of being with a kind but sexist man outweigh the downsides.

The scientists maintain that, despite romantic and flattering elements of the relationship, even well-meaning sexism reinforces the idea women are inferior.

And even women who consider themselves strong feminists showed the same preferences in the study by British and US researchers.

Scientists from the University of Kent and Iowa State University carried out five tests to explore the theory that women are more attracted to what they call 'benevolent sexists'.

Benevolent means well-meaning or kind, and experts define the sexism as men who, for example, think women are more delicate or should be cherished or looked after by a man.

This is different to hostile sexism in which women are degraded, such as saying a woman's place is in the kitchen.

Sexist attitudes were the norm for decades, particularly after the Second World War, and saw men as breadwinners and women as homemakers.

But this has shifted in recent years as gender attitudes change, more women focus on their careers, and couples increasingly share their parenting duties.

However, this study suggests heterosexual women's preferences for partners may not be moving on as quickly.

The researchers' tests found women are more attracted to men who have benevolent sexist attitudes or actions than they are to men who treat them as equals or don't give them special treatment.

The scientists, Pelin Gul and Tom Kupfer say: 'Women find benevolent sexist [BS] men attractive, not because they are ignorant of the harmful effects, but despite being aware of them.'

‘This suggests that the desirable aspects of BS attitudes and behaviors are sufficient to overcome the perceived negative effects.

‘Our proposal is that women approve of BS attitudes and behaviors because they are taken as cues that a man is willing to invest by being protective, providing, and committed.’

In the study, women’s attraction to this willingness to invest is traced to a more basic hard-wired survival instinct, in which females choose mates in order to improve their children’s chance of survival.

A male who is more likely to be protective or provide food for the family would improve the chance of offspring surviving, the study explains.

This may have in turn shaped women’s psychology to make them subconsciously prefer men who are a bit sexist.

In the study the researchers write: ‘Evidence shows that many women – even those who desire [equal]relationships – want a man to be chivalrous, by, for example, paying for dates and opening doors for them.

‘Furthermore, the finding that high feminist women, and not only low feminist women, rated a [sexist]potential romantic partner as more attractive despite being more aware of the detrimental effects, suggests that the attraction may be a mate preference for women in general, and not just for women who endorse traditional gender roles.

Women in the five study groups – the biggest study contained 233 women, the smallest 104 – were asked to look at scenarios of interactions with men or profiles of men and to consider them as either a work colleague or romantic partner.

The scenarios included men who were kind but in what is considered a sexist way, and men who treated the women as equals and didn’t offer any special treatment.

The women then rated the men’s warmth and attractiveness, and how willing they thought they would be to provide for, protect or commit to them.

Women were also asked to rate their own feminist views, and how patronising or undermining they found the men in the scenarios.

Men who displayed benevolent sexist traits were consistently rated as more attractive and, at the same time, more patronising.

The results suggest women find the men more attractive despite knowing their attitudes have negative effects.

The pair's findings were published in the journal *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*.