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Control Threat Induces Internalization of Benevolent Sexism among Women

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CONTROL THREAT INDUCES INTERNALIZATION OF GENDER INEQUALITY AMONG WOMEN

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ACCEPTING INEQUITY FROM AN EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE

System-Justification Theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994)

- People are (usually unconsciously) motivated to support the current state of socio-economic and political arrangements.
- The explanation --
 - The system provides consistency, certainty, and meaning
 - The system manages threats and distress
 - People need a stable system to manage social relationships and achieve a shared reality with others (Hennes, Nam, Stern, & Jost, 2012).



EXISTENTIAL THREATS INDUCE SYSTEM-JUSTIFYING BELIEFS/ INTERNALIZATION OF INEQUALITY

- When people are reminded with uncertainty and death anxiety, they tend to:
 - gravitate towards conservatism (i.e., system-justifying beliefs) rather than ideological extremism, mediated by opposition to equality (Jost et al., 2007).
 - be less angry and less likely to protest when facing inequality (Jost et al., 2012).



HOW WOMEN JUSTIFY THE SYSTEM AND INTERNALIZE GENDER-INEQUALITY

- Benevolent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996) :
Chivalrous attitudes towards women —
women are delicate and need protection; conservative attitude covered with a positive tone

Benevolent sexism is more restrained and refined, easier for (men and) women to accept; but it insidiously confines women in traditional roles (Glick & Fiske, 1996)



HYPOTHESES

- Female participants exposed to control threats will tend to endorse benevolent sexism and traditional gender roles rather than gender equality.

This relationship will be mediated by gender-specific system justification and moderated by gender identification.



METHOD- PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

Participants and Design

- Two samples: 139 female college students and 160 community women
- Participants were randomly assigned into two conditions

Procedure

- Gender identification for women ($\alpha = .87$ in student sample and $.84$ in community sample)
- Premeasure of gender-equality ($\alpha = .68$ in student sample and $.75$ in community sample)



- **Manipulation of control threat**

1. Reading articles about the world as a random/ predictable place (Banfield, 2013)
2. Writing up an essay about not having/having control



3. Measures



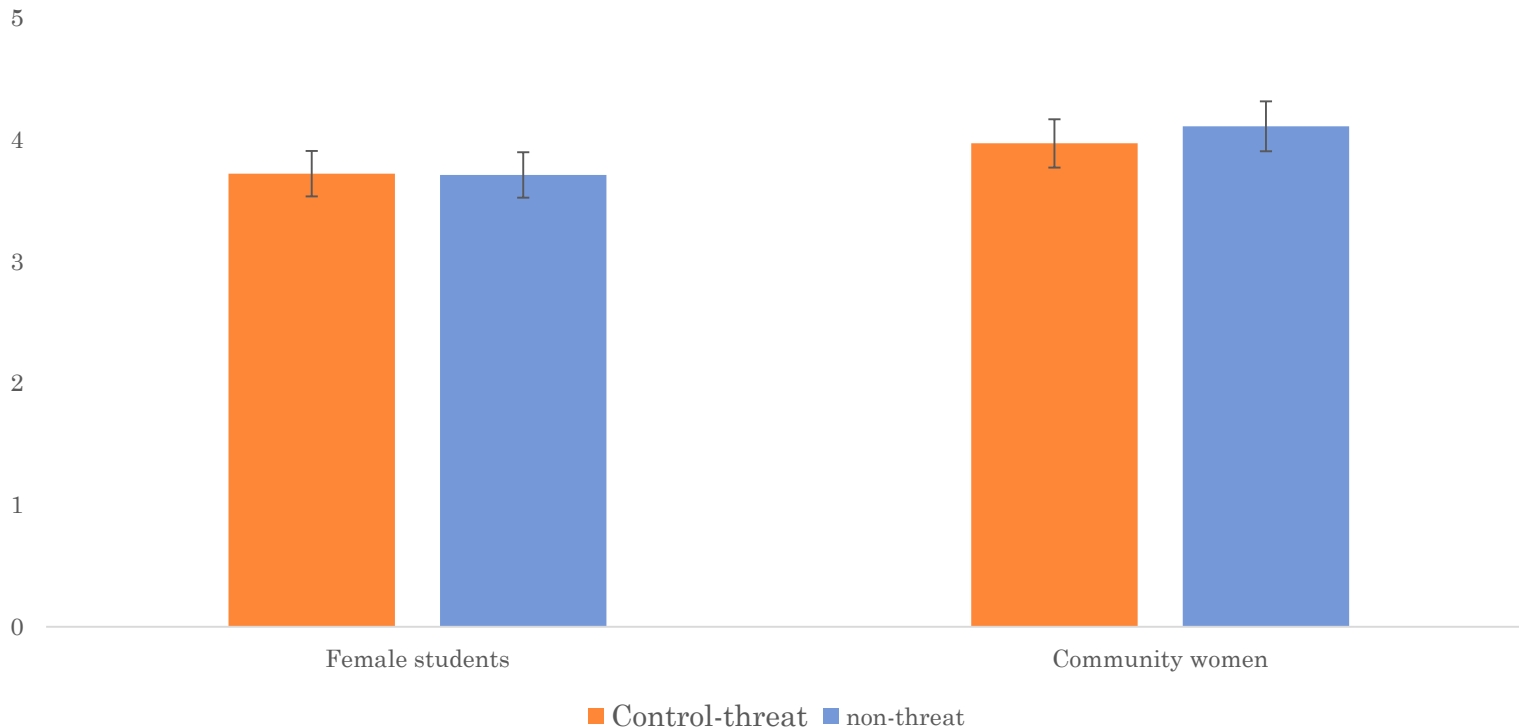
MEASURES

- 1. Author-generated scale about traditional gender-roles ($\alpha = .72$ in community sample; “*Which one is more important for you, pursuing a career or having a family?*”)
- 2. Benevolent Sexism Scale ($\alpha = .75$ in student sample and $.87$ in community sample; “*Women should be cherished and protected by men*”; Glick & Fiske, 1996)
- 3. Gender-specific System Justification Scale ($\alpha = .69$ in student sample and $.76$ in community sample; “*For women, the United States is the best country in the world to live in*”; Jost & Kay 2005)



PRE-EXISTING ATTITUDES ON GENDER-EQUALITY

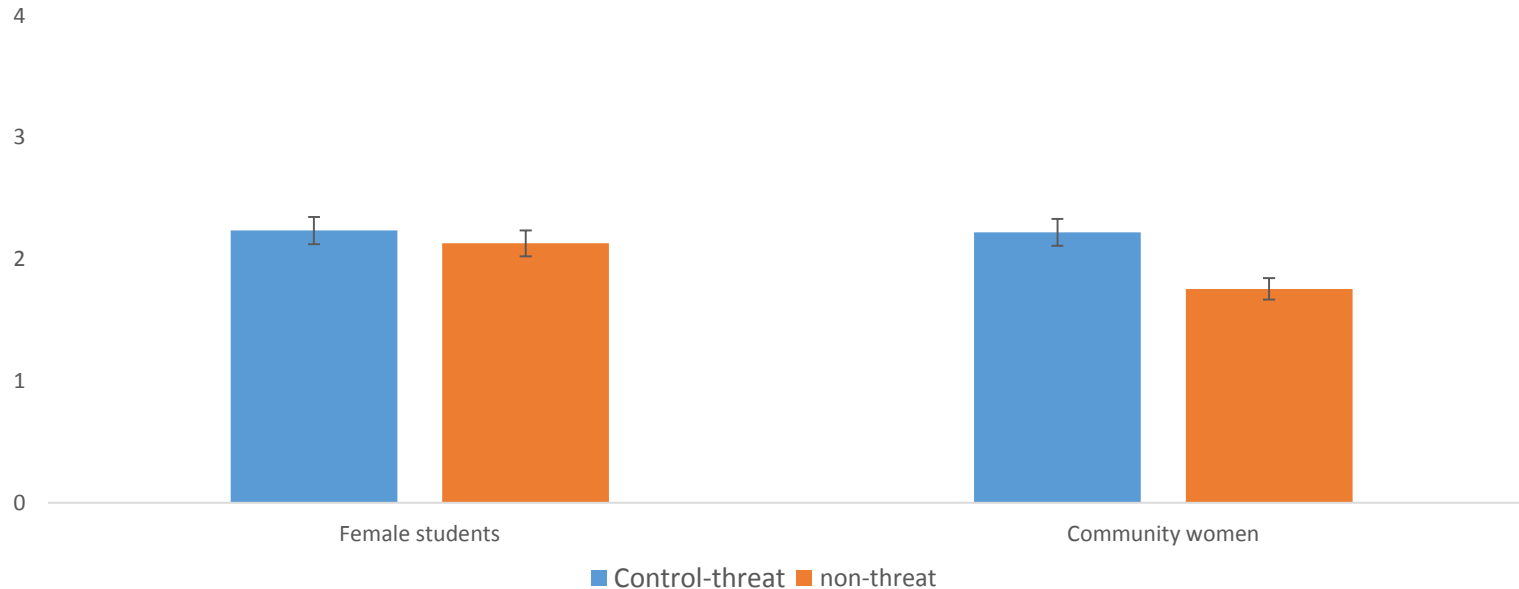
(higher scores indicate greater support for gender-equality)



No significant difference between the two conditions in either sample ($ts < 1.2$, $ps > .25$)



5 BENEVOLENT SEXISM



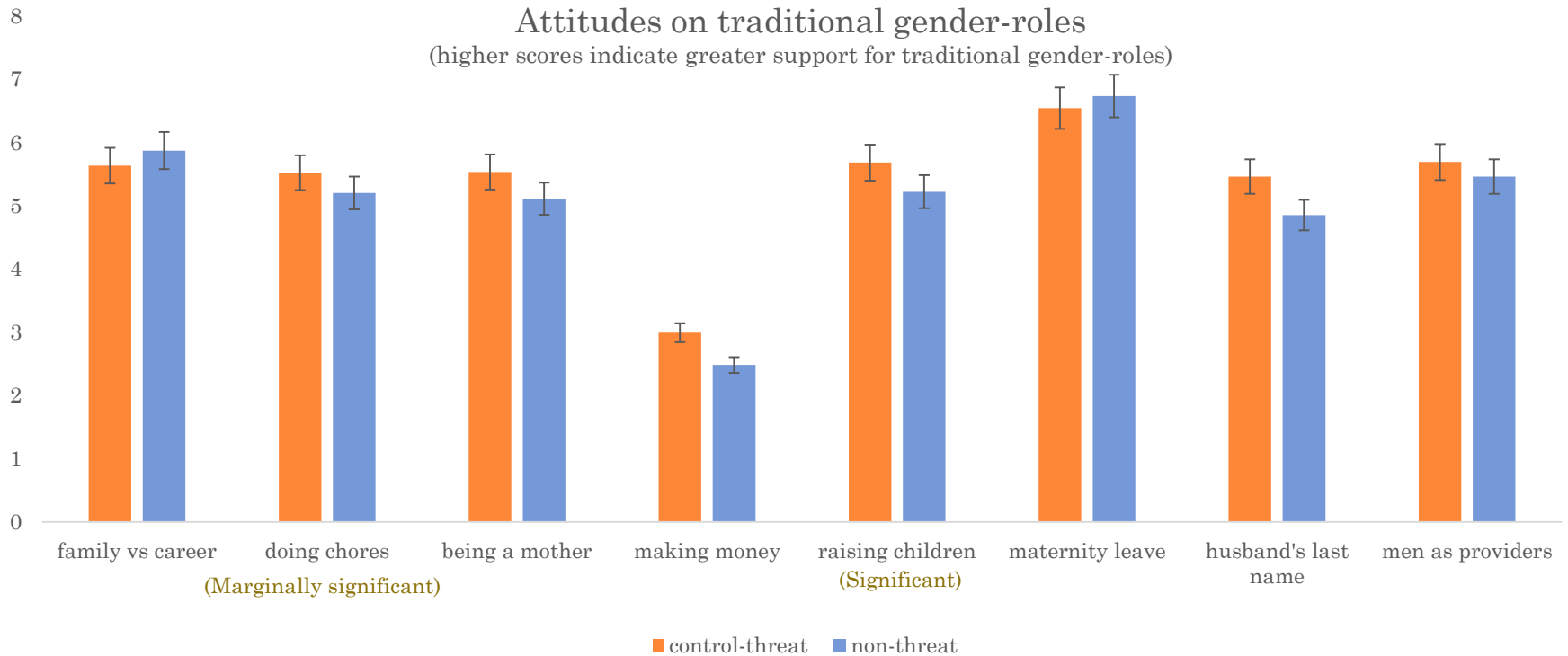
Community sample : $F [1, 157] = 7.62, p = .008, \eta^2 = .04$

But there was no moderating effect of gender-identity, $\Delta R^2 = .001, F (1, 156) = .15, p = .70$; control threat was not correlated with gender-specific system justification (no mediation effect; $r = .06$)



COMMUNITY SAMPLE

ITEMS ON TRADITIONAL GENDER-ROLES (EXPLORATORY)



The wife should do household chores, $p = .09$, $d = .28$

The wife should spend more time on raising children, $p = .008$, $d = .42$



SUMMARY

- When threatened, women tend to endorse benevolent sexism and traditional gender-roles, no matter what kind of belief they started with.
- But the effect is not explained by gender-specific system justification.
- The results might be explained by the Compensatory Control Model (Kay et al., 2008)
- The effects were not found in college students



LIMITATIONS

- Procedural issues (e.g., noise and support from each other) for lab studies
- Age and life experience for college students
- Stronger experimental control may be needed



IMPLICATION

- If women in the U.S. tend to resort to (unequal) traditional gender arrangements and recoil from gender egalitarianism when they feel they are losing control, then consider in countries where the government or the legal system is unreliable, how much the non-dominant group members such as women may feel threatened and hence forgo their rights.

