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Date of publication: October 21st, 2012

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To cite this article: Bosson, J.K., Vandello, J.A., Michniewicz, K.S. & Lenes, J.G. (2012). American Men's and Women's Beliefs about Gender Discrimination: For Men, It's Not Quite a Zero-Sum Game. *Masculinities and Social Change*, 1(3), 210-239. doi: 10.4471/MCS.2012.14

To link this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4471/MCS.2012.14>

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# American Men's and Women's Beliefs about Gender Discrimination: For Men, It's Not Quite a Zero-Sum Game

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## Abstract

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We surveyed Americans regarding their beliefs about gender discrimination over the past several decades. Men and women agreed that women faced much more discrimination than men in the past, and they agreed that the discrimination gap between men and women has narrowed in recent years. However, men perceived the gap as narrower than women did at all time periods, and reported that there is little difference today in the amount of gender discrimination women and men face. Political ideology moderated these beliefs such that conservative men were most likely to report that anti-Man bias now equals or exceeds anti-Woman bias. Similar to recent research on beliefs about racism, these findings suggest that groups which differ historically in status and power exhibit perceptual differences regarding the changing nature of discrimination.

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**Keywords:** gender discrimination, sexism, gender differences, intergroup conflict, political ideology

# Creencias de los Hombres y Mujeres americanos sobre la Discriminación de Género: Para los Hombres, Esto No Es Precisamente un Juego de Suma Zero

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## Abstract

Hemos realizado encuestas a personas americanas sobre sus creencias respecto a la discriminación de género durante las últimas décadas. Tanto hombres como mujeres estaban de acuerdo en que en el pasado las mujeres han sufrido mucha más discriminación que los hombres, y también en que esta diferencia se ha ido estrechando en los últimos años. Sin embargo, a los hombres esta diferencia siempre les ha parecido más estrecha que a las mujeres durante todos los periodos, y perciben que ahora hay pocas diferencias entre la discriminación que afrontan hombres y mujeres. Las ideologías políticas moderan estas creencias, de manera que los hombres conservadores son más propensos a afirmar que el sesgo anti masculino es igual o mayor al sesgo anti femenino. Al igual que algunas investigaciones recientes sobre las creencias respecto al racismo, nuestros hallazgos sugieren que grupos que difieren históricamente en estatus y poder perciben de forma diferente la naturaleza cambiante de la discriminación.

**Palabras clave:** discriminación de género, sexismo, diferencias de género, conflicto intergrupalo, ideología política

The second wave of the American feminist movement brought about substantial changes in Americans' beliefs and attitudes about women's opportunities. Between 1972 and 1978, for example, Americans decreased in their endorsement of the belief that "women's place is in the home," and correspondingly increased in their endorsement of the belief that "women should have an equal role with men in running business, industry, and government" (National Election Survey, 1982). By the mid-1980s, almost 60% of American adults perceived that women's opportunities had "improved greatly" over the past 10-20 years (Kluegel & Smith, 1986). At the same time, about 39% reported that women's employment opportunities remained much worse than men's, and this proportion did not differ by respondents' gender. Where American men's and women's beliefs about women's opportunities differed was in their perceptions of the degree of gender bias that women faced: Men were more likely than women to characterize women as facing only "a little" discrimination (Kluegel & Smith, 1986).

§ In the current research, our goal is to examine further these gender differences in Americans' beliefs about the degree of discrimination faced by women over time, in part by broadening our focus to include perceptions of men's discrimination as well. Our central question is whether American men perceive that women's gains (in power and status) have come at the direct expense of men's social standing. Women now earn more academic degrees (Peter & Horn, 2005) and are more likely to enter the workforce (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008) than in the past. Because of these gains in women's status, Americans' views of women as the primary targets of gender-based discrimination have likely declined. If so, then people might perceive an overall reduction in gender-based discrimination as the playing field has become more level. However, another possibility is that American men perceive a gradual reversal of gender bias trends such that women's improved status means that men are increasingly becoming targets of gender-based discrimination. That is, men might perceive that women have only achieved greater social standing at the direct expense of their own status. Such a pattern would mirror recent evidence that White Americans view racism as a zero-sum game in which gradual reductions

in anti-Black discrimination, accompanied by increases in anti-White discrimination, have resulted in Whites experiencing more race-based discrimination than Blacks (Norton & Sommers, 2011). The goal of this study is to determine whether American men perceive gender discrimination as a zero-sum game that they are now losing, in the same way that White Americans view racism as a zero-sum game.

### **Do Men Perceive Gender Discrimination as a Zero-Sum Game?**

Groups with greater versus lesser historical social power and status tend to hold different beliefs about the degree of discrimination faced by low-status groups, as well as different beliefs about the degree to which low-status groups' fortunes have or have not improved with time (Eibach & Ehrlinger, 2006; Hochschild, 1995; Kluegel & Smith, 1986). For instance, recent findings indicate that Whites, but not Blacks, view racism as a zero-sum game in which one group's gains are the result of another group's losses. Norton and Sommers (2011) asked Black and White participants to rate the degree to which both Blacks and Whites were targets of race-based discrimination (on scales of 1 = not at all to 10 = very much) in each decade from the 1950s to the 2000s. The zero-sum effect was characterized by two specific response patterns. First, Whites perceived that race-based discrimination had changed so much over time that, by the 2000s, anti-White racism exceeded anti-Black racism. Second, Whites perceived that decreases in anti-Black racism were accompanied by increases in anti-White racism, as indicated by negative correlations between their ratings of each group's discrimination at all time points, as well as across time. In contrast, Blacks reported that although discrimination against Blacks had decreased over time, it was still much greater than discrimination against Whites at any time. Thus, White but not Black participants endorsed the belief that one race's decreases in oppression came at the cost of the other race's increases.

§ Here, we ask whether a similar type of zero-sum game thinking characterizes American men's beliefs about gender discrimination. Because men have traditionally had greater status and power than women (Eagly & Steffen, 1984), they may interpret women's gains (in education, the workplace, government, etc.) as a threat to their social

standing (e.g., Gibson, 1994). This may be especially true given that manhood, relative to womanhood, is widely viewed as a precarious social status that is difficult to achieve and easy to lose (Bosson & Vandello, 2011; Vandello, Bosson, Cohen, Burnaford, & Weaver, 1998). If men interpret women's rise in power as a challenge to their already-tenuous manhood status, this may lay the groundwork for the sort of "us against them" mindset that fuels zero-sum competitions.

§ Alternatively, although race- and gender-based discrimination share some features in common (e.g., Fiske, 1998; Pratto et al., 2000; Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995), there is good reason to suppose that the zero-sum game pattern obtained by Norton and Sommers (2011) may not replicate quite so cleanly when examining beliefs about gender discrimination. Men and women, on average, have more frequent contact with one another than do members of different race groups (cf. Kluegel & Smith, 1986). Whereas patterns of racial segregation in the United States ensure that some White persons rarely if ever encounter Black persons (Farley & Frey, 1994; Glaeser & Vigdor, 2001; Sidanius, Van Laar, Levin, & Sinclair, 2004), the same cannot be said of men's tendency to encounter women. Frequent contact with women may provide men with at least indirect knowledge of and/or appreciation for women's discrimination experiences. Indeed, groups that have more contact with one another tend to harbor less prejudice toward one another (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

§ Moreover, men's lives are usually more interdependent with women's, in domains of interpersonal and family relationships, than are Whites' and Blacks' lives (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2011). Such interdependence may ensure that men perceive women's outcomes as inextricably tied to, rather than counter to, their own (e.g., Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). To the extent that men view their own goals as mutually interdependent with those of women, they may be disinclined to perceive gender discrimination as a zero-sum game in which one gender's gains are accompanied by the other gender's losses. This logic is consistent with intergroup conflict theories such as social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), realistic group conflict theory (Campbell, 1965), and relative deprivation theory (Walker & Pettigrew, 1984). In short, these theories all assume that individuals perceived as belonging to one's ingroup are less likely to be targets of prejudice,

competition, and resentment than are members of outgroups. If men on average view women as ingroup members to a greater degree than Whites on average view Blacks as ingroup members, then we should not necessarily find that men view gender discrimination in competitive, zero-sum game terms.

### **Potential Attitude Moderators: Modern Sexism and Political Ideology**

Despite men's and women's mutual interdependence, research on modern sexism indicates that men, more strongly than women, tend to downplay the extent to which women endure sexist treatment. Modern sexism refers to a subtle form of gender bias characterized by a denial of discrimination against women, lack of support for policies that assist women in employment and education, and antagonism toward women's perceived demands (Swim et al., 1995). Perhaps not surprisingly, men tend to endorse modern sexism beliefs more strongly than women do (Swim et al., 1995), and they feel less anxiety than women do after reading statements that downplay the prevalence and severity of gender discrimination against women (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005). Moreover, scores on a measure of modern sexism predict negative attitudes toward "feminists" and a reduced tendency to view workplace sexual harassment of women as unfair and unprofessional (Swim & Cohen, 1997). Given these findings, we treated modern sexism scores as a potential moderator of our effects in the current study. If modern sexism is characterized, in part, by a tendency to deny the prevalence and severity of gender discrimination against women, then those male respondents scoring higher in modern sexism may be especially likely to view gender discrimination as a zero-sum game that men are losing.

§ As another potential moderator we considered political ideology, or people's beliefs about social and political life and how these should be structured (Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009). Specifically, we asked people to identify themselves along dimensions ranging from "very liberal" to "very conservative." These labels encompass relatively broad belief systems characterized by underlying dimensions that reflect the acceptability (versus unacceptability) of social inequity and the desirability (versus undesirability) of social change (Jost, Glaser,



Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003). Whereas those with a more liberal orientation resist inequitable, hierarchical power structures and embrace social change, those with a more conservative orientation tolerate inequity and oppose changes to the status quo (Jost, Nosek, & Gosling, 2008). Most germane to the current study, political conservatism (versus liberalism) is predicted by both a desire to justify hierarchical social structures (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994) and a perception that one's groups must compete with other groups for access to limited opportunities and resources (Matthews, Levin, & Sidanius, 2009). Based on these findings, we wondered whether men with a more conservative orientation would be particularly inclined to view gender discrimination as a zero-sum game that men are losing.

### **Overview of Current Research**

We examined whether American men perceive gender discrimination as a zero-sum game in the same way that Whites view racism as a zero-sum game. In doing so, we replicated the methods reported by Norton and Sommers (2011) but modified them to capture beliefs about gender rather than race groups. Specifically, we measured men's and women's beliefs about the amount of gender discrimination faced by both men and women, across seven different time points from the 1950s through today (2012). We also measured and treated as moderators people's modern sexism beliefs and their political ideology (liberalism vs. conservatism). To access a sample that is more representative of the American population than a convenience sample of college students, we recruited respondents from Amazon's Mechanical Turk website (MTurk; www.MTurk.com). MTurk respondents generally display greater age and racial/ethnic diversity than American college samples (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011), thus making them an ideal sample for our purposes. Given the diversity of this sample, however, we controlled for various demographic factors in follow-up analyses.

§ We entertained two possible, competing hypotheses. On the one hand, if American men view gender discrimination as a zero-sum game that they are now losing, we should observe the same two data patterns found by Norton and Sommers (2011). Specifically, a three way interaction of respondent gender, target gender, and time should reveal



that men and women both view anti-Woman discrimination as decreasing across time, but that men alone view corresponding increases in anti-Man discrimination such that men's discrimination now exceeds women's. Moreover, men but not women should evidence negative correlations between their ratings of men's and women's discrimination at each time point and across time (from the first to the last time points). Further, these patterns should be moderated by modern sexism and political ideology such that politically conservative men, and those higher in modern sexism, should exhibit the most pronounced zero-sum game thinking. On the other hand, if the fundamental dynamics underlying race- and gender-based intergroup relations differ in ways that reduce men's tendency to view themselves in competition with women, then we should observe weak or no support for the zero-sum patterns reported by Norton and Sommers (2011).

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Two-hundred and six participants (117 men and 89 women) were recruited through MTurk and completed the online survey in exchange for \$0.40. Table 1 includes a summary of the sample on surveyed demographics. Because our discrimination questions asked specifically about "American society," we restricted eligibility to persons currently living in the United States. As shown in Table 1, however, three non-residents somehow participated; including versus excluding their data did not affect any of the findings we report below, so we retained them in analyses.

Table 1  
*Sample Demographics.*

Characteristic	<i>N</i> (%)	Characteristic	<i>N</i> (%)
Gender		Race / Ethnicity	
Men	117 (56.5%)	White	160 (77.3%)
Women	89 (43.0%)	Black / African American / Caribbean Hispanic / Latin (o/a)	13 (6.3%)
Age ( <i>Md</i> = 25 years)		Asian / Asian American	8 (3.9%)
18 - 24	89 (43.3%)	Native American	18 (8.7%)
25 - 34	65 (31.6%)	Pacific Islander	2 (1.0%)
35 - 44	18 (8.4%)	Other	1 (0.5%)
45 - 54	20 (9.3%)		4 (1.9%)
55 - 64	15 (7.2%)		
Income		Highest Education Completed	
< \$10,000	18 (8.7%)	9 <sup>th</sup> Grade or below	2 (1.0%)
\$10,001 - \$15,000	12 (5.8%)	10 <sup>th</sup> or 11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	2 (1.0%)
\$15,001 - \$20,000	19 (9.2%)	High School	27 (13.0%)
\$20,001 - \$35,000	43 (20.8%)	Some College / Special Training	80 (38.6%)
\$35,001 - \$50,000	39 (18.8%)	Bachelor's Degree	70 (33.8%)
\$50,001 - \$75,000	35 (16.9%)	Graduate Degree	25 (12.1%)
> \$75,000	36 (17.4%)		
Current Country of Residence		Native Language	
United States	203 (98.1%)	English	192 (92.8%)
Other	3 (1.5%)	Not English	13 (6.3%)
Continent of Origin		Sexual Orientation (1-7 scale)	
Africa	1 (0.5%)	Exclusively Heterosexual (1)	141 (68.1%)
Asia	10 (4.9%)	Between Heterosexual and Bisexual (2, 3)	32 (15.5%)
Australia	1 (0.5%)	Bisexual (4)	11 (5.3%)
Europe	5 (2.4%)	Between Bisexual and Homosexual (5, 6)	17 (8.3%)
North America	187 (90.8%)	Exclusively Homosexual (7)	5 (2.4%)
South America	2 (1.0%)		

## Measures

**\$ Political Ideology.** Participants completed two items gauging their political ideology both “in general” and “when it comes to social issues.” Answers to both items were made on continuous scales from 1 (*Extremely Liberal*) to 7 (*Extremely Conservative*). These two items were highly correlated ( $r = .84, p < .001, \alpha = .91$ ) so we averaged them to yield an index of political ideology.

**\$ Modern Sexism Scale.** The 8-item Modern Sexism Scale (MSS; Swim et al., 1995) measures beliefs about women that reflect subtle forms of sexism (e.g., disagreement with public policies to reduce discrimination against women). Sample items include “It is rare to see women treated in a sexist manner on television,” and “Women often miss out on good jobs due to sexual discrimination” (reversed). Answers were provided on continuous scales ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly Agree*) and were averaged across all items ( $\alpha = .87$ ).

**\$ Perceptions of Discrimination.** Participants retrospectively estimated the amount of gender discrimination (defined as “unfair treatment based on one’s gender”) experienced by both men and women “in American society” over several decades. On scales of 1 (*Not at all*) to 10 (*Very Much*), participants estimated the extent to which both men and women were targets of discrimination in the United States during the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, and the current year (2012) for a total of seven estimates.

## Procedure

Interested account holders on Amazon’s MTurk followed a link to our online survey hosted by Qualtrics ([www.Qualtrics.com](http://www.Qualtrics.com)). All participants first indicated their gender (male or female) and then completed the measures of political ideology and Modern Sexism. Participants were then randomly assigned to estimate men’s and women’s discrimination experiences in one of four order conditions. First, approximately half of participants rated the gender discrimination faced by one gender at all seven time points before making the same ratings for the other gender; the other half rated the gender

discrimination faced by both genders at the first time point, then by both genders at the second time point, and so on. Second, we counterbalanced the order in which each gender was evaluated so that some participants always rated “men” first and others always rated “women” first. These order variables did not produce any main effects, nor did they moderate any of our primary effects, so we collapsed across them in all analyses reported below. Finally, participants completed some scales not relevant to the current purposes and then provided several pieces of demographic information (see Table 1).

## Method

### Tests of Zero-Sum Game Effects

To test the whether men view gender discrimination as a zero-sum game, we submitted ratings of discrimination across time to a 2 (Participant gender: men, women) x 2 (Target gender: men, women) x 7 (Time point: 1950s through 2012) mixed-model analysis of variance (ANOVA) with repeated measures on the last two factors. This analysis yielded main effects of time and target gender,  $F_s > 123.00$ ,  $ps < .001$ ,  $f_s > .79$ , as well as two-way interactions of time x participant gender,  $F(6, 1158) = 3.87$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $f = .14$ , time x target gender,  $F(6, 1158) = 260.02$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $f = 1.16$ , and participant gender x target gender,  $F(1, 193) = 12.05$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $f = .25$ . The three-way interaction, however, did not reach significance,  $F(6, 1158) = 1.19$ ,  $p > .30$ , indicating that these data do not replicate the strong zero-sum pattern reported by Norton and Sommers (2011). Notably, as shown in Figure 1, men’s ratings of current-day discrimination (i.e., in the year 2012) against men (dotted gray line) are significantly lower than their ratings of current-day discrimination against women (solid gray line),  $F(1, 193) = 7.90$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $f = .20$ . This is different from the pattern obtained by Norton and Sommers, who found that Whites reported significantly more race-based discrimination against Whites than against Blacks when rating the current year. When we re-ran the ANOVA but entered as covariates the demographic variables listed in Table 1 (race/ethnicity, age, income, education, native language, continent of origin, country of residence, sexual orientation), all of the main and interactive effects reported above remained significant ( $ps < .05$ ) except the main effect of target gender ( $p < .58$ ).

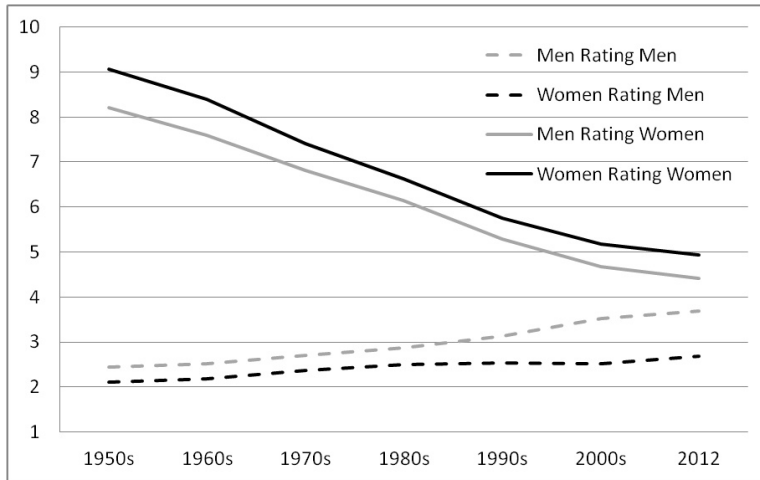


Figure 1. Men's and women's perceptions of discrimination against men and women in each decade.

Although these data do not support the strong version of the zero-sum hypothesis, the means in Figure 1 are consistent with a modified version of the zero-sum hypothesis as evidenced by the significant interaction of participant gender and target gender on perceived discrimination. Specifically, men perceive a substantially smaller gap between their own and women's experiences with gender discrimination than women do. To be sure, men and women both agree that discrimination against women decreased significantly between the 1950s and today (solid lines,  $ps < .001$ ), and that discrimination against men has increased in that same time span (dotted lines,  $ps < .02$ ). When considering 2012, however, men claim that women's discrimination experiences exceed their own by only 0.73 scale points, whereas women claim that their discrimination experiences exceed men's by 2.25 points. Also in 2012, men rate discrimination against men significantly higher than women do,  $F(1, 193) = 8.40, p < .01, f = .21$ , whereas they rate discrimination against women non-significantly lower than women do,  $F(1, 193) = 2.59, p < .11$ . Thus, although men's ratings of men's discrimination in 2012 do not exceed their ratings of women's discrimination, the trends illustrated in Figure 1 indicate a gradual approach toward this crossover effect. Extrapolating beyond the present, the lines depicting men's

ratings of men's versus women's discrimination should cross (if ever) before women's lines do.

In fact, a subset of individuals *does* think that American men today face more discrimination than women do. We categorized people's 2012 discrimination ratings to reflect whether they rated women as experiencing more discrimination than men, the same level of discrimination as men, or less discrimination than men. As shown in Figure 2, fully 17% of respondents rated anti-Man bias as exceeding anti-Woman bias in 2012 (bars at far right), while another 19% perceived men and women as facing equal amounts of gender bias today (bars in middle). Importantly, however, these beliefs were moderated by participant gender such that men were significantly more likely than women to report that men today face as much discrimination as, or more discrimination than, women,  $X^2(2, N = 205) = 9.41, p < .01$ . In total, nearly half of men surveyed reported that men face gender discrimination at rates that equal or exceed women's experiences. Compare these data to people's ratings of the 1950s where only 5% of respondents rated men's discrimination as exceeding women's, 2.5% rated men and women as facing equal discrimination, and these percentages did not differ significantly by respondent gender,  $X^2(2, N = 204) = 3.53, p > .17$ .

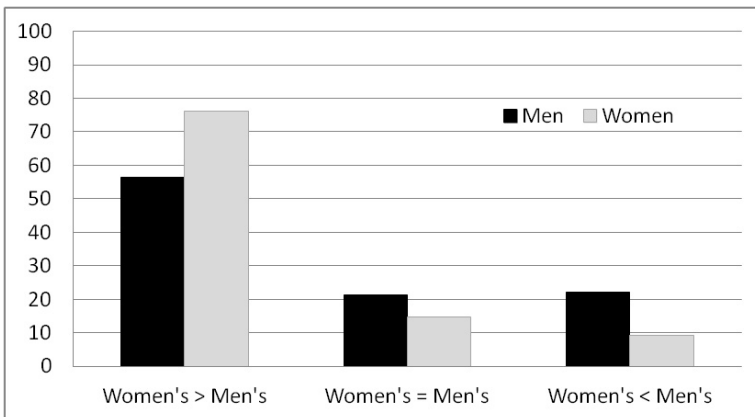


Figure 2. Percentages of men and women endorsing the belief that women face more discrimination than men, women and men face equal discrimination, and women face less discrimination than men in 2012.

Next, we computed correlations between respondents' ratings of men's and women's discrimination at each time point and across time, separately by participant gender (see Table 2). Recall that Norton and Sommers' (2011) zero-sum game pattern was reflected in negative correlations between Whites' ratings of Whites' and Blacks' discrimination at every time point, as well as a negative correlation between the change across time experienced by Whites and Blacks. In contrast to this pattern, our findings show that men and women both perceive gender discrimination in zero-sum terms in earlier decades (1950s, 1960s), but men view men's and women's discrimination experiences as positively correlated from the 1980s to the present. In a sense, men's ratings suggest a "we're in it together" view of gender discrimination such that higher levels of discrimination experienced by one gender correspond with more discrimination experienced by the other gender as well. Women do not display a similar tendency to view men's and women's discrimination experiences as linked.

Table 2  
*Correlations between Ratings of Anti-Man and Anti-Woman Discrimination, Split by Participant Gender.*

Decade	Men	Women
1950s	-.32**	-.21*
1960s	-.13	-.22*
1970s	-.05	-.08
1980s	.20*	.00
1990s	.22*	.15
2000s	.25**	.12
2012	.42***	.03
Change across time	.02	.06

*Note.* Change across time = (Discrimination in 2012 – Discrimination in 1950).

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .



When we recomputed these correlations but partialled out the set of covariates, the pattern displayed in Table 2 remained quite similar overall although several of the positive correlations observed in the men's data dropped to marginal significance. Controlling for the demographic variables reduced men's correlation for the 1980s to non-significance ( $p > .17$ ), and it reduced men's correlations for the 1990s and 2000s to marginal significance ( $ps < .10$ ). Men's correlation for 2012, however, remained significant ( $r[102] = .35$ ,  $p < .001$ ), demonstrating an "in it together" effect that could not be accounted for by variance on any of the demographic variables.

### **Moderation by Modern Sexism**

To test whether modern sexism scores moderated our effects, we dichotomized MSS scores at the scale median ( $Md = 3.63$ ) and categorized participants into low MSS and high MSS groups<sup>1</sup>. We then submitted discrimination ratings to a 2 (Modern sexism: low, high) x 2 (Participant gender: men, women) x 2 (Target gender: men, women) x 7 (Time point: 1950s through 2012) mixed-model ANOVA with repeated measures on the last two factors. The four-way interaction did not approach significance,  $F < 1$ ,  $p > .54$ , indicating that men and women did not differ in their perceptions of men's and women's gender discrimination across time as a function of their modern sexism levels. We therefore did not examine this variable further.

### **Moderation by Political Ideology**

To test whether political ideology moderated the effects reported above, we dichotomized political orientation scores at the median ( $Md = 3.00$ ) and categorized participants as either liberal (scores below the median) or conservative (scores at or above the median). We then submitted discrimination ratings to a 2 (Political ideology: liberal, conservative) x 2 (Participant gender: men, women) x 2 (Target gender: men, women) x 7 (Time point: 1950s through 2012) mixed-model ANOVA with repeated measures on the last two factors. The four-way interaction was significant,  $F(6, 1146) = 3.91$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $f = .14$ , indicating that the ratings provided by liberals and conservatives assumed different patterns.

Notably, this four-way interaction remained significant when we controlled for the sample demographic variables,  $F(6, 1080) = 2.98, p < .01, f = .13$ . To decompose the four-way interaction, we plotted the three-way interactions of participant gender, target gender, and time point separately for liberals and conservatives (see Figures 3a and 3b).

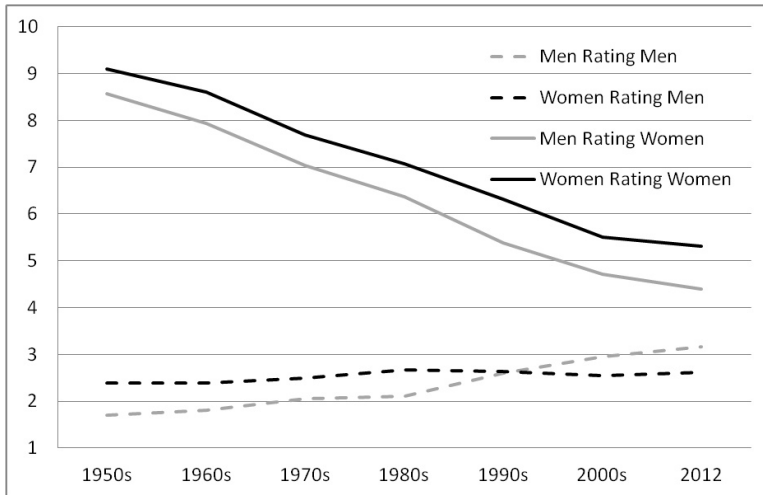


Figure 3a. Liberals' perceived discrimination against men and women in each decade.

Among liberal participants (Figure 3a), the participant gender-by-target gender interaction displayed in Figure 1 did not reach significance,  $F(1, 89) = 1.18, p > .27$ , indicating that liberal men and women do not differ from each other in their perceptions of the gender discrimination faced by men versus women. In contrast, the same participant gender-by-target gender interaction was highly significant among conservative respondents,  $F(1, 102) = 14.93, p < .001, f = .38$  (Figure 3b). It appears that the weak form of the zero-sum game pattern observed in the combined dataset (and displayed in Figure 1) is driven primarily by conservative respondents.

Comparing Figures 3a and 3b, the most notable difference between liberals' and conservatives' ratings of gender discrimination is found in men's ratings of anti-Man bias (gray dotted lines). Among liberals, men's perceptions of anti-Man bias started out lower than women's (black dotted line) and increased significantly over time ( $p < .001$ ) to surpass women's perceptions at the 1990s. By 2012, liberal men viewed anti-Man bias as non-significantly higher than women did,  $F(1, 89) = 1.38, p > .24$ , but as significantly lower than they viewed anti-Woman bias (gray solid line),  $F(1, 89) = 10.66, p < .01, f = .35$ . Conversely, conservative men's perceptions of anti-Man bias were higher than women's at every time point ( $F_s > 5.00, p_s < .03, f_s > .24$ ), and they increased significantly over time ( $p < .001$ ) such that, by 2012, conservative men perceived no difference in the gender discrimination faced by men versus women,  $F < 1$ . Still, however, the three-way interaction of participant gender, target gender, and time point among conservatives was not significant,  $F(6, 612) = 1.31, p > .24$ .

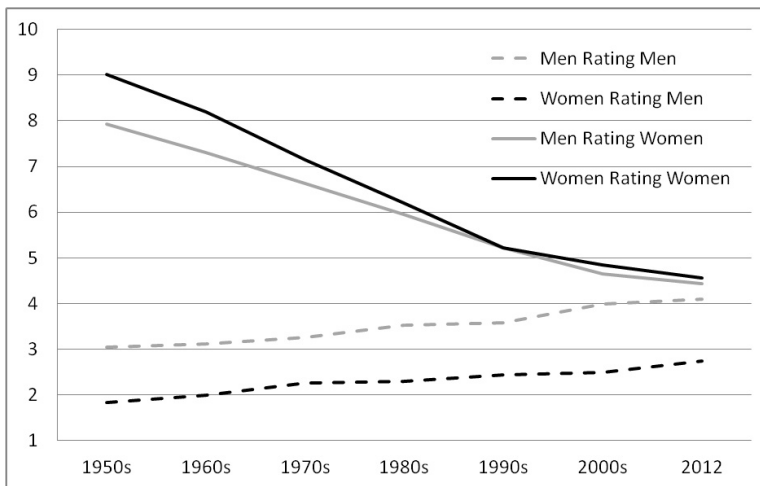


Figure 3b

Conservatives' perceived discrimination against men and women in each decade.

Next, we examined the percentages of conservative and liberal men and women who estimated that discrimination against men exceeds discrimination against women in 2012. Among liberals, men and women did not differ significantly in their likelihood of rating women's discrimination as more severe than men's (73.2%), men's as more severe than women's (14.4%), or women's and men's as equal (12.4%),  $X^2(2, N = 97) = 2.71, p > .25$ . Conversely, among conservatives, the proportions of people in each response category differed significantly by gender,  $X^2(2, N = 108) = 6.92, p < .04$ . Whereas 25.4% of conservative men reported that men today face more discrimination than women, only 8.9% of conservative women espoused this belief. Moreover, only 47.6% of conservative men claimed that men face less discrimination today than women do, compared to the 71.1% of conservative women who made a similar claim. In short, a small majority (52.4%) of conservative men believe that men's gender discrimination experiences today are greater than or equal to women's.

Finally, we computed correlations between respondents' ratings of men's and women's discrimination at each time point, separately by participant gender and political orientation. As shown in Table 3, the "in it together" effect displayed in Table 2 appears to be carried primarily by conservative men: From the 1980s through the current year, these men perceived a moderately strong positive correlation between the gender discrimination faced by men and women. No other group of respondents viewed men's and women's discrimination experiences as so closely tied, for so many decades. Moreover, partialling out the set of covariates did not substantially change the pattern of correlations displayed in Table 3. Even when controlling for the demographic variables, conservative men's ratings of discrimination faced by men and women were positive and significant for the 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, and today,  $r_s > .30, p_s < .03$ .

Table 3  
*Correlations between Ratings of Anti-Man and Anti-Woman Discrimination, Split by Participant Gender and Political Orientation.*

Decade	Liberal		Conservative	
	Men <i>n</i> = 54	Women <i>n</i> = 43	Men <i>n</i> = 62	Women <i>n</i> = 45
1950s	-22	-51**	-32*	11
1960s	-16	-46**	-04	01
1970s	-24	-23	12	08
1980s	-12	-10	41**	06
1990s	-15	00	45**	28†
2000s	-03	06	44**	17
2012	+32*	04	49**	03
Change	+28*	04	-10	-09

Note. Change = (Discrimination in 2012 – Discrimination in 1950).

† $p < .10$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

## Discussion

People's reactions to their social positions are driven less by their objective status than by their perceptions of their position relative to others (Smith, Pettigrew, Pippin, & Bialosiewicz, 2012; Walker & Pettigrew, 1984). American women have made objective gains in power and status during the past half century that likely cause people to perceive anti-Woman discrimination as less pronounced than it once was. However, if men interpret women's gains as a direct threat to their own social standing, then men might perceive the gap between anti-Woman and anti-Man bias to be closing at a faster rate than women do. In essence, women's gains might be seen by men as coming at the cost of their own status.

Along these lines, our primary goal was to examine whether men see gender discrimination as a zero-sum game in which one group's gains bring about the other group's losses. To test this, we asked men and women about their perceptions of anti-Man and anti-Woman gender bias across the past several decades. Several findings stand out. On the one hand, men and women largely agree that discrimination against women was much greater in the past compared to the present and

compared to discrimination against men. That is, men and women generally agree that anti-Woman discrimination continues to be greater than anti-Man discrimination. On the other hand, we found a robust gender difference in the perceived degrees of discrimination faced by each gender group over time. Men perceive the discrimination gap (the relative degrees of discrimination facing women versus men) to be smaller at all time periods than women do. Moreover, men believe that there is now relatively little difference in the amount of discrimination facing men versus women. Thus, although we did not find evidence for a strong zero-sum game pattern similar to that reported by Norton and Sommers (2011) – i.e., that most men believe that men now experience more gender discrimination than women – we interpret our findings as evidence of a weak zero-sum game pattern in which men believe that the discrimination gap is closing more quickly than women do.

Parsing the sample further, we found that a subset of individuals does believe that contemporary American men face more discrimination than women. Who are these people? By and large, politically conservative men are more likely to hold this belief (25.4%) than are conservative women (8.9%) and liberals of both genders (12.4%). This suggests that political ideology may be critical to understanding men's beliefs about gender and discrimination. As noted earlier, research by Jost and colleagues finds that political conservatism is characterized by two underlying attitudinal tendencies: tolerance of social inequity and resistance to social and political change (Jost et al., 2003). To the extent that gradual reductions in anti-Woman discrimination reflect both widespread sociopolitical change and a leveling of the (uneven) playing field, these reductions should doubly evoke conservatives' ire. What remains unknown is which attitude dimension, inequity vs. change, underlies some conservative men's belief that they are now the primary targets of gender discrimination. It is also possible, of course, that the causal arrow operates in the reverse direction: Perceiving that one's group is in competition with others for access to limited resources may be a cause, rather than a consequence, of political conservatism (e.g., Matthews et al., 2009). Additional research is therefore needed to establish more clearly the links between political ideology and men's beliefs about the reversal of the discrimination gap.

Interestingly, we found little evidence of zero-sum game thinking in

the correlations between people's perceptions of anti-Man and anti-Woman discrimination. Recall that Norton and Sommers (2011) found that Whites' ratings of anti-White and anti-Black bias were significantly and negatively correlated at every time point, as well as across time. In contrast, we found evidence of a "we're in it together" pattern that was moderated by both participant gender and political orientation. Specifically, ratings of anti-Man and anti-Woman bias were moderately and positive correlated among conservative men for the 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, and the current year. At first glance, the emergence of these positive correlations seems to contradict the findings based on means, as shown in Figure 3b. After all, conservative men are the subgroup to which we attribute our "weak zero-sum game" pattern: They perceived the smallest discrimination gap at each time point, and were most likely to rank men's discrimination experiences as more extreme than women's in 2012. And yet, of all subgroups examined here, they are also most likely to yoke men's and women's gender discrimination experiences together, perceiving that increases in one gender's oppression are associated systematically with increases in the other gender's oppression.

On second glance, however, this pattern might reflect something about the different dynamics underlying inter-race and inter-gender group relations. As noted earlier, gender relations differ from race relations in both frequency of contact (Kluegel & Smith, 1986) and levels of mutual interdependence (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Given this, men might find it difficult to conceive of themselves as directly competing with women for status *in a winner-takes-all game*. Conservative men in particular might find it difficult to assume such a competitive stance against "women" as a whole. Consider the finding that conservatism (as indexed by a measure of right-wing authoritarianism; Altemeyer, 1998) is a moderately strong predictor of benevolent sexism, or the tendency to view women as morally virtuous and needing of men's protection (Christopher & Mull, 2006). Conservatives relative to liberals also hold more hostile, angry attitudes toward women they perceive as nontraditional (e.g., feminists; Jost et al., 2008), but we would argue that such women are not likely to be the ones with whom conservative men maintain high-contact, mutually interdependent relationships. Thus,



conservative men may experience relatively high levels of ambivalent sexism, or a mixture of positive and negative attitudes toward and beliefs about women (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2011). Such ambivalence could render intergroup zero-sum games unsuitable.

If viewing gender discrimination as a zero-sum game is inconsistent with conservative men's benevolent, paternalistic attitudes toward women, we propose that they may achieve a similarly motivated goal by yoking their gender discrimination experiences to women's. In doing so, they acknowledge the gender bias experienced by women but simultaneously downplay its severity by claiming comparable discrimination on the part of their own gender group. In the language of game theory, this could reflect a tit-for-tat (Axelrod, 1984) rather than zero-sum approach to gender discrimination. That is, conservative men recognize women's claims of discrimination but respond to them in kind (tit-for-tat), instead of conceiving of gender discrimination as a game in which one party's gains represent the other's losses. Such a response pattern could account for conservative men's means in Figure 3b (the relatively fast shrinking of the discrimination gap) and their positive correlations in Table 3 (the "in it together" effect). At this point, of course, we can only conjecture about the reasons behind the unpredicted, positive correlations observed between conservative men's ratings of anti-Man and anti-Woman bias. What is clear, however, is that conservative men do not view gender discrimination as a zero-sum game in the same manner that Whites view racism as a zero-sum game. On average, they view men as experiencing just as much gender discrimination as women, and they perceive increases in anti-Women bias as being accompanied by increases in anti-Man bias.

One puzzling finding – or lack thereof – was the failure of the Modern Sexism Scale (Swim et al., 1995) to moderate our results. Given the nature of the beliefs measured by the MSS, we expected people's scores on this scale to predict their discrimination perceptions such that high scorers, more than low scorers, should downplay the gender bias experienced by women, relative to men, over time. Indeed, looking just at the zero-order correlations, the MSS correlates negatively with perceptions of anti-Woman discrimination at all time points ( $r_s = -.29$  to  $-.54$ ,  $p_s < .001$ ), and it correlates positively with perceptions of anti-Man

discrimination ( $r_s = .21$  to  $.28$ ,  $p_s < .01$ ). Although these correlations speak to the predictive validity of the MSS, our failure to find evidence of statistical moderation suggests that high and low MSS scorers do not differ substantially in the overall patterns of anti-Man and anti-Woman bias that they perceive. We find it particularly interesting that a scale that measures specific beliefs about the attitude object under investigation here (i.e., gender discrimination) did not moderate our findings, whereas a scale that measures a broader and more abstract construct, i.e., political ideology, did. It appears that perceptions of men's and women's gender discrimination across time reflect people's broad-based assumptions about the social world and how it should be structured, rather than their specific beliefs about the sexism currently endured by women.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In recent decades American women have become more involved in the workforce (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011), earned increasingly higher wages (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), and exceeded men in terms of the numbers of undergraduate and graduate degrees earned (Department of Education, 2010). Despite such objective gains, however, discrimination against women remains. Consider the following facts: American women earn about 81% of what men earn (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011), and are underpaid relative to their male counterparts even in specialized professions like management and medicine (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2005). Only 3.6% of CEOs of Fortune 500 companies are women (Bosker, 2012). Women constitute only 17% of members of the U.S. Congress, 23.7% of state legislators, and 12% of state governors (Center for American Women and Politics, 2012). In the home, women do one-third more childcare than men (Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie 2006; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2003) and they spend two-thirds to three-quarters more time than men do on housework (Grote, Naylor, & Clark, 2002; Robinson & Godbey 1999; Shelton & John, 1996).

Despite women's continued underrepresentation in high-status government and industry positions, and their over-contributions to

domestic and household tasks, the results reported here indicate that men on average, and conservative men in particular, view the discrimination gap as negligible (and in some cases, reversed). We maintain that men's views thus indicate a pattern of motivated social cognition (e.g., Kunda, 1999) whereby groups historically higher in status interpret social and political gains by lower status groups as a threat to their standing. Although we did not replicate recent findings indicating that Whites view racism as a zero-sum game that they are now losing (Norton & Sommers, 2011), we nonetheless found that men perceive the discrimination gap to be dwindling at a much faster rate than women. The present results also suggest that this perception is held most strongly by men with conservative political ideologies, the same men who claim that men's experiences with discrimination rise and fall with women's.

Such perceptual gaps between men and women may make women's continuing struggle to achieve equality problematic, as women's efforts may be met with resistance and backlash by some men. Indeed, when asked recently whether they thought a strong women's movement was still needed, only 34% of America men said yes, as compared to 48% of women (CBS News, 2009). We suggest that the current findings shed light on this gender difference in views: If men perceive discrimination against their own gender group as steadily rising and anti-Woman discrimination as steadily decreasing, they may question the continual need for social changes that equalize women's opportunities.

## **Author Note**

We thank Elizabeth Vaquera and Carlos Garrido for their assistance with Spanish translation.

## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Median splits are problematic because dichotomizing continuous data typically leads to a loss of statistical power (Cohen, 1983). However, a popular solution to this problem – using regression analyses to test for interactions of continuous and categorical variables (Aiken & West, 1991) – was not feasible for analyzing our full design given that Time point is a within-subjects variable. We therefore used median splits despite the problems associated with them.

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