



Religiosity and ambivalent sexism: the role of religious group narcissism

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Abstract

Although religious identification often correlates positively with traditional gender role attitudes and ambivalent sexism (Mikołajczak & Pietrzak, *Sex Roles*, 70(9–10), 387–399, 2014), other work shows it has countervailing associations with related conservative views (Lockhart et al., *Religion, Brain & Behavior*, 10(4), 379–392, 2020). One reason these opposing effects emerge is that insecure (or narcissistic) and secure forms of religious identification may have differing impacts on ambivalent sexism. To test this possibility, we analysed data from a nationwide random sample of adults who identified as religious ($N = 1116$). Whilst religious identification alone was unassociated with hostile and benevolent sexism, religious narcissism correlated positively with both forms of sexism. After including both predictors in a regression, religious identification correlated negatively with both forms of sexism and religious narcissism became a stronger positive correlate of sexism. These findings demonstrate that secure and insecure forms of religious identification suppress the respective positive and negative associations religious identification and religious narcissism have with sexism.

Keywords Religious identification · Ambivalent sexism · Collective narcissism · Religious group narcissism

“I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.”

– 1 Timothy 2:12

As illustrated by the opening epigraph, religious scripture often frames gender relations hierarchically by enculturating values that promote and justify rigid gender roles to which women must conform (Mikołajczak & Pietrzak, 2014; Van Assche et al., 2019). Consistent with this assumption, hierarchical biblical beliefs correlate positively with adherence to traditional gender roles, as well as the endorsement of both hostile and benevolent sexism (Eliason et al., 2017). Religious identification also correlates positively with paternalistic attitudes towards women (Burn & Busso, 2005), thereby legitimising gender inequality by characterising women as weak and in need of men’s protection (Glick et al., 2002).

Although some forms of religious identification foster unequal gender relations (Eliason et al., 2017), such work may conceal the complex nature of religiosity. Indeed, past studies reveal that diversity in religious and spiritual identities can produce countervailing effects on socio-political attitudes that are often concealed when considering the broader construct of religious identification (see Hirsh et al., 2013; Lockhart et al., 2020). As such, the relationship between religious identification and sexism may be more nuanced than it appears at first glance. To these ends, faith can instil a fundamental sense of fairness and tolerance (Golec de Zavala & Bierwiazzonek, 2021), as religious identification can promote universalism, benevolence, and social justice (Saroglou et al., 2004). As such, Mikołajczak and Pietrzak (2014) suggest that, whilst the traditional values of religion motivate sexism, the pro-social aspects of faith may weaken sexist attitudes. Consistent with this perspective, religious belief has countervailing impacts on some socio-political attitudes (Hirsh et al., 2013; Lockhart et al., 2020).

Given these nuances, the nature of the relationship between religious identification and sexism remains unclear. The current study aims to clarify this association by using data from a nationwide random sample of the New Zealand population to investigate the relationship between two forms of religious identification and ambivalent sexism.

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Accordingly, we argue that, whilst a secure form of religious identification may foster egalitarian views on gender relations, people's insecure attachment to their religious identity (namely, religious group narcissism¹) may instead foster the endorsement of sexist attitudes. We begin by reviewing the literature on the association between religiosity and ambivalent sexism. We then explore the literature on (ethnic) group narcissism before discussing how religious group narcissism may drive sexist attitudes. We conclude this section by summarizing the aims and hypotheses of the current study. In doing so, we contribute to the literature on the impacts of collective narcissism on intergroup relations, while also increasing understanding of the complexities of religious identification.

Religion and ambivalent sexism

Ambivalent sexism theory argues that sexist attitudes are comprised of two, separate, albeit correlated (Glick & Fiske, 1996), dimensions. Whereas hostile sexism (HS) captures traditional forms of gender-based prejudice characterised by hostility, benevolent sexism (BS) encompasses the subjectively positive attitudes towards women that subversively promote traditional gender roles (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Despite their seemingly antithetical nature, HS and BS correlate positively with each other across cultures (Glick et al., 2000; Glick & Fiske, 2001), and work in concert to propagate gender inequality. Key to these attitudes is the importance of gender roles, with women traditionally characterised by BS as warm, pure, and unskilled, whilst those who defy such roles are cast by HS as cold and hostile (Dardenne et al., 2007).

Notably, certain religious beliefs and identities have been argued to be strongly associated with these gender roles. Eliason et al. (2017) found that the endorsement of hierarchical biblical beliefs correlated positively with support for traditional gender roles. Religious identification (i.e., how important a role religion plays in one's life) has also been associated with specific subdimensions of benevolent sexism (namely, paternalism and complementary gender differentiation) which reduce women's agency by confining them to specific roles within society (Burn & Busso, 2005).

¹ We note that the term "religious group narcissism" may appear confusing to readers. For our purposes, religious group narcissism emphasises an individual's insecure attachment to their religion, expressed through identification with one's specific religious group. In particular, religious group narcissism denotes a form of religious identification rooted in a sense of insecurity and lack of personal control. Accordingly, religious group narcissism is associated with an inflated sense of the importance of one's religious (group) identity, and a corresponding heightened sensitivity towards perceived threats towards one's group image, rather than towards one's broader religious identity.

Given this focus on traditional gender roles, it is perhaps unsurprising that religious belief is often linked to both hostile and benevolent sexism. For example, simply being exposed to religious content can foster sexist attitudes (Haggard et al., 2019). Moreover, Taşdemir and Sakallı-Uğurlu (2010) found that religious identification amongst Muslim men correlated positively with both hostile and benevolent sexism. This suggests that religious belief may foster the endorsement of hostile sexism, although perhaps only implicitly for some religious believers. Indeed, Taşdemir and Sakallı-Uğurlu suggest that Muslim men in Turkey are more comfortable with open expressions of hostile sexism than men in Christian countries. Finally, a study examining religious conformity showed that ambivalent sexism in both Christian and Muslim adolescent females was driven by pressure to adhere to religious norms governing the status and behavior of women (Mastari et al., 2021). Various forms of religious belief seem to foster the endorsement of BS and HS.

Although numerous studies reveal a positive correlation between religious belief and ambivalent sexism, the relationship is more complex than it first appears. Notably, the relationship between religiosity and benevolent sexism appears to be predicated on fostering the purity of women, leaving the reasons for why religiosity might correlate with hostile sexism unclear. Past work suggests that religiosity may only directly motivate benevolent sexism and is antithetical to (or at least unassociated with) hostile sexism (Burn & Busso, 2005; Hellmer et al., 2018). Indeed, Gaunt (2012) noted that Jewish religiosity was *negatively* associated with hostile sexism. Other forms of religiosity such as religious quest—a form of religious belief characterised by an acceptance of doubt and an open-minded approach to faith—also correlate negatively with both hostile and benevolent sexism (Ozdemir, 2016). Thus, the impact of religiosity on sexism appears paradoxical, both motivating and demotivating ambivalent sexism.

What is driving these paradoxical effects? Past work suggests that explanations for sexist attitudes lie not in differences in religious affiliation itself (see Hannover et al., 2018; Mastari et al., 2021) but rather, how, and to what extent, affiliates identify with their religion. In essence, religious sexism seems to be a product of individual differences in religious identification rather than group-level differences in affiliation. The complex relationship between religious identification and ambivalent sexism may thus be partially explained by differences in how people identify with their religious group.

Collective narcissism

According to social identity theory, identification with a social group satisfies various psychological needs (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Although identification with an ingroup can elicit positive feelings towards those who share the

same social category (Abrams & Hogg, 1990), Cichocka and colleagues (Cichocka et al., 2016) note that ingroup identification may sometimes be harmful for intergroup relations. One such destructive form of ingroup identification is collective narcissism, a type of ingroup positivity that arises when fundamental needs for personal control are frustrated. Notably, collective narcissism reflects an inflated sense of the group's worth, combined with a need for external validation and an increased defensiveness that manifests as a sensitivity and aggression toward perceived threats to the group's image.

Past research demonstrates that collective narcissism is closely linked with a belief that others are a threat to the ingroup (Cichocka, 2016). For example, Cichocka et al. (2018) found that national collective narcissism correlated positively with belief in conspiracies related to threats from foreign governments. Similarly, Golec de Zavala et al. (2016) found that collective narcissism, but not private collective self-esteem, heightened sensitivity to ingroup insults or humiliations which, in turn, increased direct and indirect hostility towards the perpetrating outgroup. Notably, collective narcissism does not seem to ameliorate frustrations regarding fundamental needs. Rather, these inflated feelings of group-worth appear to decrease self-esteem and refuel one's sense of entitlement, further increasing threat sensitivity (Golec de Zavala et al., 2019; Golec de Zavala & Lantos, 2020). As such, the perception of power and control through a greater collective self is only unstably maintained through an exaggerated threat perception, with the sense of threat constantly reinforced, rather than ameliorated, by collective narcissism (Golec de Zavala & Lantos, 2020).

Religious group narcissism and ambivalent sexism

In terms of religious identification, religion may offer an attractive group identity to ameliorate frustrations by providing a culturally respected normative ingroup which promises to recapture a sense of control over one's life by shifting agency to a divine God. Given the importance of gender roles to one's religious identity, those who (insecurely) identify as religious may perceive those who deviate from the traditional gender roles as a threat to the ingroup. Indeed, Golec de Zavala and Bierwiaczonek (2020) argued that Catholic collective narcissism might motivate sexism by perceiving gender equality as a threat to the Catholic faith. Consistent with this argument, Catholic collective narcissism correlated positively with tolerance of violence against women.

Marchlewska et al. (2019) also examined the relationship between insecure religious identification and gender-related beliefs. Specifically, the authors showed that Catholic collective narcissism correlated positively with gender conspiracy beliefs that framed gender equality as a threat to traditional values. Moreover, endorsement of these conspiracy beliefs mediated the positive relationship between Catholic collective narcissism and outgroup hostility towards those perceived as threatening Catholic values. This work shows that religious group narcissism has negative impacts on gender relations by fostering a threat-based perception of equality—at least amongst Catholics. Thus, religious group narcissism should show a positive relationship with ambivalent sexism through endorsement of gender roles and hostility towards those who defy them.

In addition to independently predicting sexism, religious group narcissism may suppress the countervailing (positive) relationship between a secure form of religious identification and attitudes toward women. Non-narcissistic (i.e., secure) forms of group identification express an ingroup positivity that is not contingent on external validation, thus resulting in a lower sensitivity to threat (Cichocka, 2016) and more secure dealings with outgroups. As Golec de Zavala et al. (2013) demonstrate, secure ingroup positivity correlates positively with positive outgroup attitudes. Moreover, this relationship suppresses the negative impact of collective narcissism on attitudes towards outgroups.

Consistent with this perspective, religious identification is associated with kindness, equality and universalism values alongside conservation values (Gennerich & Huber, 2006). As such, hostile sexism (i.e., an antagonistic attitude towards women) may not resonate with the benevolent and self-transcendence values associated with religion (Saroglou et al., 2004). Conversely, the seemingly positive nature of benevolent sexism may be promoted by the traditional values also associated with religion (Glick et al., 2002). Thus, religious identification may either motivate and weaken sexist attitudes (Mikołajczak & Pietrzak, 2014), depending on whether one has an insecure or secure identification with their religious group, respectively.

Current study

The current study examines the relationships secure and insecure forms of religious identification have with both hostile and benevolent sexism. Past work suggests that religious identification displays a complex and paradoxical relationship with ambivalent sexism (Burn & Busso, 2005; Gaunt, 2012; Taşdemir & Sakallı-Uğurlu, 2010). However, consistent with previous research (Maltby et al., 2010), we hypothesised that, on its own, religious identification would correlate positively with benevolent sexism but would not

correlate with hostile sexism. Given the importance of both traditional gender roles and conservation values to one's religious identity (Burn & Busso, 2005; Mikołajczak & Pietrzak, 2014), those who identify more with their religion should show greater endorsement of benevolent sexism.

Past research also reveals that group narcissism is a powerful motivator of ingroup defensiveness and correlates with increased threat perception and negative outgroup attitudes (Cichocka, 2016). However, this ingroup defensiveness may target ingroup members who threaten the group's self-image (perhaps by violating group norms), particularly in the realm of gender relations (Mikołajczak & Pietrzak, 2014; Marchlewska et al., 2019). As conservation values often lie at the heart of religious beliefs (Gennerich & Huber, 2006), those high on religious group narcissism might perceive non-conformist women as a threat to their religious values (Golec de Zavala & Bierwiazzonek, 2021). We thus expect religious group narcissism to correlate positively with both hostile and benevolent sexism.

Finally, we expect that both religious identification and religious group narcissism would act as mutual suppressors when estimated simultaneously. Once religious group narcissism is partialled out, the remaining variance of religious identification should reflect a secure form of (religious) ingroup positivity (Cichocka et al., 2016). In line with past work on secure ingroup positivity (Golec de Zavala et al., 2013), as well as the egalitarian values often espoused by religious rhetoric (Gennerich & Huber, 2006), religious identification should correlate negatively with both hostile and benevolent sexism after accounting for religious group narcissism. Likewise, secure group identification can suppress the negative impact of collective narcissism on outgroup attitudes (Cichocka et al., 2016). Specifically, given that secure group identification and collective narcissism are often strongly correlated, religious narcissism, when estimated alone, should capture some of the variance of secure ingroup positivity. As such, the positive relationship between religious group narcissism and both hostile and benevolent sexism should strengthen after adjusting for religious identification. That is, after adjusting for a secure form of religious identification, the remaining insecure component of religious identification captured by religious group narcissism should be a particularly potent correlate of sexism.

To demonstrate the robustness of our predicted results, we controlled for covariates associated with the endorsement of both benevolent and hostile sexism. Given that both right-wing authoritarianism (RWA), an attitude reflecting conformity to group norms, and social dominance orientation (SDO), an attitude reflecting a preference for group hierarchy, are positively associated with benevolent and hostile sexism (Sibley et al., 2007), we controlled for both. Furthermore, as men tend to endorse both forms of sexism to a higher degree than women (Akrami et al., 2011),

we controlled for gender. We also controlled for age, as endorsement of both hostile and benevolent sexism change across the lifespan (Hammond et al., 2018). Additionally, we controlled for majority/minority ethnic group membership because ethnic status may impact stereotypes of women and attitudes towards more equitable gender relations (Robnett et al., 2012). Finally, we controlled for personal locus of control, as a perceived lack of control is thought to underlie collective narcissism (Cichocka et al., 2016). We thus aim to contribute to the extant literature on group narcissism by demonstrating the noted suppression effect(s) of this form of group identification within the domain of gender relations, as well as show that the relationship between religious beliefs and sexist attitudes is more complicated than it first appears.

Method

Sampling procedure

Data for the current study came from the New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study (NZAVS)—a nationwide longitudinal panel study that began in 2009. Participants were sampled from the New Zealand electoral roll, which represents all citizens over 18 years of age who were eligible to vote regardless of whether they chose to do so. Here, we focus on participants who completed our variables of interest, which were only included at Time 3.5 and Time 4. Time 3.5 (2012, mid-year) of the NZAVS was a supplementary, online-only, questionnaire that contained responses from 4514 participants, 1690 of whom identified as religious at Time 3.5. Time 4 was collected throughout 2012 as part of the annual NZAVS data collection, containing responses from 12,179 participants. Of those 1690 participants who identified as religious at Time 3.5, 1307 remained in the study at Time 4 and continued to identify as religious. The current study focuses on the 1116 participants who completed our variables of interest (i.e., 85.4% of the 1307 religiously identified participants who completed both Time 3.5 and Time 4).

Participants

Of our 1116 participants, 66.1% (738) were female and 33.9% (378) were male. The age range was 18–87, with a mean age of 53.45 ($SD = 15.2$). In terms of ethnicity, 81.8% (913) of participants identified as part of the ethnic majority group (i.e., NZ European or Pakeha), whilst 18.2% (203) identified as part of a minority group (i.e., Māori, Pacifica, or Asian). In terms of religious affiliation, 87.6% (978) of participants identified as Christian, whilst 12.4% (138) of participants identified with other religious affiliations including Buddhism, Hinduism, and Spiritualism/New Age beliefs.

Measures

The current study focused on religious identification, religious group narcissism, and endorsement of hostile and benevolent sexism (see Glick & Fiske, 1996), as well as relevant covariates. Unless noted, all items were rated on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) scale. Items were interspersed within the larger omnibus NZAVS survey containing other measures outside of the scope of the current study.

Predictors

Religious identification was assessed at Times 3.5 and 4 using a single item: “How important is your religion to how you see yourself?”. This item was drawn from Hoverd and Sibley’s (2010) work on religiosity in New Zealand.

Religious group narcissism was examined at Time 3.5 using these three items adapted from Golec de Zavala et al. (2009): “I insist upon my religious group/denomination getting the respect that is due to it”, “If my religious group/denomination had a major say in the world, the world would be a much better place”, and “The true worth of my religious group/denomination is often misunderstood” ($\alpha = .67$).

Hostile Sexism was examined at Time 4 using five items from Glick and Fiske (1996). Example items include: “Women seek to gain power by getting control over men” and “Once a woman gets a man to commit to her she usually tries to put him on a tight leash” ($\alpha = .83$).

Benevolent Sexism was examined at Time 4 using five items Glick and Fiske (1996). Examples items include: “Every man ought to have a woman whom he adores” and “Women should be cherished and protected by men” ($\alpha = .73$).

Covariates

Our covariates included age, ethnic majority/minority status, gender, personal locus of control, RWA, and SDO. Age, ethnic majority/minority status, and gender were assessed using open-ended questions. Dummy codes were created for ethnicity (0 = NZ European/Pakeha; 1 = minority) and gender (0 = Woman; 1 = Man). Personal control was assessed at Time 3.5 using these three items from Paulhus and Van Selst (1990): “I can learn almost anything if I set my mind to it”, “Almost anything is possible for me if I really want it,” and “I can usually achieve what I want if I work hard for it” ($\alpha = .80$). RWA was assessed using six items from Altemeyer (1996). Example items include: “Our country will be destroyed someday if we do not smash the perversions eating away our moral fibre and traditional beliefs” and “Some of the best people in our country are those who are challenging

our government, criticizing religion, and ignoring the ‘normal way’ things are supposed to be done” (reverse-coded; $\alpha = .71$). Finally, SDO was assessed using six items from Sidanius and Pratto (2001). Example items include: “To get ahead in life, it is sometimes okay to step on other groups” and “We should do what we can to equalise conditions for different groups” (reverse-coded; $\alpha = .74$).

Results

Although religious identification is often associated with the endorsement of traditional gender roles, the evidence for this relationship is surprisingly mixed. We aimed to clarify this relationship by differentiating between secure and insecure forms of group identification. Consistent with past research, we hypothesised that religious identification would correlate positively with benevolent sexism, but would be unassociated with hostile sexism, when examined on its own (e.g., Burn & Busso, 2005; Hellmer et al., 2018). However, because group narcissism captures the extent to which group members hold an inflated view of their ingroup that is contingent upon external validation (Cichocka, 2016), we expected that religious group narcissism would be associated with greater sensitivity towards perceived threats to their group’s image. Specifically, we expected an insecure religious identification would perceive attempts to stray outside traditional gender roles as threats to their group’s image and their inflated sense of self-esteem. As such, we hypothesised that religious narcissism alone would correlate positively with both hostile and benevolent sexism.

Past research also indicates that, after accounting for collective narcissism, the remaining variance of religious identification should reflect secure forms of religious group identification. Because secure group identification should decrease sensitivity to group threats (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; Golec de Zavala et al., 2013), we hypothesised that religious identification would be negatively associated with both hostile and benevolent sexism after adjusting for religious group narcissism. We also expected that the relationship between religious narcissism and both hostile and benevolent sexism would strengthen after adjusting for a secure religious identification. In other words, insecure and secure religious narcissism should function as mutual suppressors when predicting sexist attitudes.

To investigate our hypotheses, we first estimated two separate regression models in *Mplus* version 8.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2020). In the first model, we regressed hostile and benevolent sexism onto religious identification, as well as our control variables. In the second model, we regressed HS and BS onto religious group narcissism, as

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for variables of interest

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Gender ^a	0.34	0.47	–									
2. Age	53.65	15.18	.223***	–								
3. Ethnicity ^b	0.18	0.39	–.033	–.281***	–							
4. Religious Identification	4.85	1.87	–.037	–.061*	.051	–						
5. Religious Group Narcissism	3.60	1.40	.043	–.084**	.112***	.485***	–					
6. Hostile Sexism	2.96	1.19	.308***	.062*	.067*	–.008	.155***	–				
7. Benevolent Sexism	3.86	1.16	.160***	.145***	.103***	.097***	.209***	.358***	–			
8. RWA	3.75	1.10	.060*	.101***	.016	.353***	.343***	.244***	.384***	–		
9. SDO	2.38	0.90	.216***	.149***	–.012	–.099***	.016	.362***	.175***	.233***	–	
10. Personal Locus of Control	5.44	1.04	–.071*	–.187***	.164***	–.019	–.026	–.039	.065*	–.073**	–.058*	–

^aGender was dummy-coded (0 = Female, 1 = Male)

^bEthnicity was dummy-coded (0 = NZ Euro/Pakeha, 1 = ethnic minority)

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

well as our control variables. We then estimated a third regression model that included both religious identification and religious group narcissism as simultaneous predictors of HS and BS. All models were estimated using full information maximum likelihood estimates and 95% Bias Corrected (BC) confidence intervals (CIs).

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations of our measures. Table 2 reveals the results of our three separate models. Contrary to past research, the results from Model 1 show that the direct relationship between religious identification and both HS ($B = -0.038$, 95% BC $[-0.077, 0.001]$, $p = .054$) and BS ($B = -0.011$, 95% BC $[-0.045, 0.024]$, $p = .543$) was non-significant when religious group narcissism was excluded from the model. However, we note that the negative relationship between religious identification and HS approached significance. This aligns with past work suggesting that religious identities may promote values such as benevolence and agreeableness (Saroglou et al., 2004). By contrast, Model 2 shows that religious narcissism correlated positively with both HS ($B = 0.081$, 95% BC $[0.028, 0.134]$, $p = .003$) and BS ($B = 0.088$, 95% BC $[0.040, 0.137]$, $p = < .001$).

To examine our hypothesised suppression effect, we then included both religious identification and religious group narcissism in Model 3 as simultaneous predictors of both hostile and benevolent sexism. As shown here, results revealed that gender ($B = 0.586$, 95% BC $[0.448, 0.724]$, $p < .001$), minority/majority status ($B = 0.209$, 95% BC $[0.041, 0.377]$, $p = .015$), RWA ($B = 0.183$, 95% BC $[0.116, 0.249]$, $p < .001$), and SDO ($B = 0.352$, 95% BC $[0.275, 0.429]$, $p < .001$) were positively associated with HS. Neither personal locus of control ($B = -0.007$, 95% BC $[-0.076, 0.063]$, $p = .844$), nor age ($B = -0.001$, 95% BC $[-0.006, 0.003]$, $p = .587$), were significantly associated with HS. After controlling for these variables, religious group

narcissism correlated positively with HS ($B = 0.117$, 95% BC $[0.061, 0.173]$, $p < .001$), whilst religious identification correlated negatively with HS ($B = -0.072$, 95% BC $[-0.113, -0.032]$, $p = < .001$).

Table 2 also displays the correlates of benevolent sexism in Model 3. As shown here, age ($B = 0.012$, 95% BC $[0.008, 0.017]$, $p < .001$), gender ($B = 0.268$, 95% BC $[0.135, 0.401]$, $p < .001$), minority/majority status ($B = 0.347$, 95% BC $[0.178, 0.516]$, $p = < .001$), RWA ($B = 0.357$, 95% BC $[0.292, 0.421]$, $p < .001$), and personal locus of control ($B = 0.133$, 95% BC $[0.068, 0.198]$, $p < .001$) correlated positively with benevolent sexism. SDO, however, was not significantly correlated with BS ($B = 0.056$, 95% BC $[-.018, 0.129]$, $p = .139$). After controlling for these variables, religious group narcissism correlated positively ($B = 0.110$, 95% BC $[0.058, 0.161]$, $p < .001$), whereas religious identification correlated negatively ($B = -0.043$, 95% BC $[-0.083, -0.003]$, $p = .033$), with BS.

Discussion

The current study investigated the role of religious group narcissism on the relationship between religious identification and both hostile and benevolent sexism. Religious affiliation has been argued to undermine equitable gender relationships (Mikołajczak & Pietrzak, 2014) by enculturing a view of women as weak and in need of protection by men (Burn & Busso, 2005). Yet, past research has shown mixed results, with some forms of religious identification leading to lower endorsement of ambivalent sexism (Ozdemir, 2016). We argued that these contradictions within the literature are (at least partly) due to the differing impacts of secure versus insecure forms of religious identification. We further argued that those who fail to conform to traditional gender roles will

Table 2 Regression analysis results predicting hostile and benevolent sexism

Models	Variables	HS					BS				
		R ²	B	S.E.	Confidence Interval	p value	R ²	B	S.E.	Confidence Interval	p value
1 Covariates	Religious Identification	.225	-.038	.020	[-.077, .001]	.054	.213	-.011	.020	[-.050, .027]	.561
	Age		-.002	.002	[-.007, .003]	.393		.011	.002	[.007, .016]	<.001 ^{***}
	Gender		.604	.072	[.464, .745]	<.001 ^{***}		.285	.068	[.152, .418]	<.001 ^{***}
	Minority/Majority		.239	.087	[.069, .409]	.006 ^{**}		.375	.088	[.203, .547]	<.001 ^{***}
	RWA		.214	.033	[.149, .279]	<.001 ^{***}		.386	.032	[.323, .449]	<.001 ^{***}
	SDO		.349	.040	[.272, .427]	<.001 ^{***}		.053	.038	[-.021, .129]	.162
2 Covariates	Personal Locus of Control		-.008	.036	[-.079, .062]	.818		.132	.034	[.066, .197]	<.001 ^{***}
	Religious Group Narcissism	.238	.081	.027	[.028, .134]	.003 ^{**}	.223	.088	.025	[.040, .137]	<.001 ^{***}
	Age		-.002	.002	[-.006, .003]	.507		.012	.002	[.007, .017]	<.001 ^{***}
	Gender		.602	.071	[.463, .740]	<.001 ^{***}		.268	.068	[.135, .401]	<.001 ^{***}
	Minority/Majority		.211	.086	[.042, .381]	.014 [*]		.353	.086	[.184, .521]	<.001 ^{***}
	RWA		.155	.033	[.091, .219]	<.001 ^{***}		.338	.032	[.276, .400]	<.001 ^{***}
3 Covariates	SDO		.384	.039	[.308, .460]	<.001 ^{***}		.073	.037	[.001, .145]	.048 [*]
	Personal Locus of Control		-.015	.037	[-.087, .057]	.685		.127	.034	[.061, .193]	<.001 ^{***}
	Religious Identification	.238	-.072	.021	[-.113, -.032]	<.001 ^{***}	.225	-.043	.020	[-.083, -.003]	.033 [*]
	Religious Group Narcissism		.117	.029	[.061, .173]	<.001 ^{***}		.110	.026	[.058, .161]	<.001 ^{***}
	Age		-.001	.002	[-.006, .003]	.587		.012	.002	[.008, .017]	<.001 ^{***}
	Gender		.586	.070	[.448, .724]	<.001 ^{***}		.268	.068	[.135, .401]	<.001 ^{***}
Covariates	Minority/Majority		.209	.086	[.041, .377]	.015 [*]		.347	.086	[.178, .516]	<.001 ^{***}
	RWA		.183	.034	[.116, .249]	<.001 ^{***}		.357	.033	[.292, .421]	<.001 ^{***}
	SDO		.352	.039	[.275, .429]	<.001 ^{***}		.056	.038	[-.018, .129]	.139
	Personal Locus of Control		-.007	.035	[-.076, .063]	.844		.133	.033	[.068, .198]	<.001 ^{***}

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

be seen as violating the group norms of tradition and conservation that underlie religious identification (Gennerich & Huber, 2006), but that only those high on religious group narcissism (i.e., those most likely to perceive non-conformist women as a threat to their religious group image) will perceive such violations as threats to their group's self-image. By contrast, those who have a secure religious group identification will be more confident in their group's status and, thus, less sensitive to perceived threats to their group's self-image (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). Thus, whilst religious group narcissism should correlate positively with attitudes that reinforce traditional gender roles, religious identification (after accounting for religious narcissism) should correlate negatively with the endorsement of sexist attitudes.

Although we expected that religious identification would correlate positively with BS when estimated alone, our results demonstrated that religious identification was unassociated with ambivalent sexism. This somewhat unexpected result corroborates the complex association between religion and ambivalent sexism (Burn & Busso, 2005; Gaunt, 2012). Nevertheless, as hypothesised, religious identification was negatively associated with both forms of ambivalent sexism once accounting for religious group narcissism. By contrast, religious group narcissism (as a single predictor) was positively associated with both hostile and benevolent sexism. Moreover, adjusting for secure religious identification strengthened the positive relationship between religious group narcissism and both hostile and benevolent sexism. Thus, both religious identification and religious group narcissism acted as mutual suppressors by strengthening the respective countervailing impacts of secure and insecure religious identification on both HS and BS.²

Our results demonstrate that religious group narcissism plays a role in the oft-mentioned positive relationship between religious identification and sexist attitudes. Conservation values have long been thought to underlie religious identity (Saroglou et al., 2004) and correlate positively with endorsement of traditional gender role attitudes and, thus, ambivalent sexism (Mikołajczak & Pietrzak, 2014). Given that group narcissism is associated with increased threat perception and group defensiveness (Cichocka, 2016), the violation of gender roles may be seen as a threat to one's faith (see Marchlewska et al., 2019). Moreover, religious narcissism has been shown

to foster acrimonious intergroup outcomes, such as by inhibiting outgroup contact (Ardi & Budiarti, 2020). As such, religious group narcissism may drive greater endorsement of both benevolent and hostile sexism in an attempt to maintain the integrity of one's social identity.

By partialling out religious group narcissism, religious identification should encompass a secure form of ingroup positivity (Golec de Zavala et al., 2013), characterised by a collective self-esteem without the need for external validation (Cichocka, 2016). Consistent with this intuition, religious identification correlated negatively with both forms of sexism, indicating that secure ingroup positivity appears to *increase* positive attitudes towards gender equality—at least after adjusting for an insecure form of religious identification. This corroborates past work showing that religion can sometimes foster egalitarian attitudes (Lockhart et al., 2020), as well as both inhibit and promote outgroup (interreligious) contact (see Ardi & Budiarti, 2020). Conversely, adjusting for religious identification strengthened the positive relationship between religious group narcissism and ambivalent sexism. These results indicate that both secure and insecure forms of religious identification mutually suppress their respective associations with hostile and benevolent sexism.

Past literature examining collective narcissism has found similar results. Cichocka and colleagues (Cichocka et al., 2016) noted that ingroup positivity was negatively associated with belief in anti-Polish conspiracies, but that this relationship was suppressed by the positive effect of collective narcissism on conspiracy belief. Other research on intergroup relations corroborates these findings, as collective narcissism and ingroup positivity act as mutual suppressors, with the true effects of a secure group identification only emerging after partialling out collective narcissism (see Golec de Zavala et al., 2013; Dyduch-Hazar & Mrozinski, 2021). Our results replicate and extend these findings by showing that religious identification has countervailing effects on both forms of sexism, once accounting for collective (religious) narcissism.

Importantly, our results demonstrate that secure religious identification has positive impacts on attitudes towards gender equality. Once developing a secure religious identity, adherents appear unlikely to perceive women who fail to conform to traditional gender roles as a threat to their faith. By contrast, narcissistic religious identification fosters the endorsement of traditional gender roles and a threat-based view of gender equality (see Marchlewska et al., 2019), leading to greater endorsement of ambivalent sexism. Indeed, both hostile and benevolent sexism is argued to be motivated by collective threat hostility (see Lizzio-Wilson et al., 2020) which might closely align with the reactionary and threat-motivated nature of collective narcissism. These findings thus provide insight into the countervailing effects of religious identification on socio-political outcomes previously noted in the literature (see Lockhart et al., 2020).

² We also conducted follow-up analyses to investigate whether religious group narcissism moderated the association between religious identification and sexism. These analyses revealed that religious narcissism did not moderate the relationships between religious identification, and either hostile or benevolent sexism. Such results indicate that both forms of religious identification independently predict sexist attitudes. This aligns with work showing strong conceptual distinction between secure and insecure forms of religious group attachment, as well as our results demonstrating the countervailing effects of secure and insecure religious identification on sexism.

Strengths, limitations and future directions

The current study expands the literature on the relationship between religious identification and sexism, demonstrating that these effects are more nuanced than they first appear. Religious identification does not always result in negative attitudes towards social equality, particularly in the domain of gender relations. Indeed, our results reveal that, after adjusting for religious narcissism, the nonsignificant relationship between religious identification and both hostile and benevolent sexism becomes negative. Thus, secure and insecure religious group identification suppress their respective relationships with attitudes toward gender equality.

Importantly, we also found that these effects were significant after controlling for both RWA and SDO. Thus, religious identification and religious narcissism explain variance in ambivalent sexism beyond the focal socio-ideological variables identified in the dual process motivational model of ideology and prejudice (Duckitt, 2001). These results stand in contrast to past work which has suggested that the impact of religion on ambivalent sexism is likely a product of individual differences in political/ideological attitudes (specifically RWA and SDO; see Van Assche et al., 2019). Notably, the collective narcissism literature suggests that, whilst RWA and SDO share conceptual overlap with insecure group identification, they are distinct processes with differing underlying motivations (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). Consistent with this idea, the negative relationship between religious group narcissism and gender equality appears to be distinct from that of the dual process motivational model of ideology (Duckitt & Sibley, 2009).

Finally, past work demonstrates that group narcissism is strongly positively correlated with ingroup identification (Golec de Zavala et al., 2013). To account for this overlap, we attempted to partial out the shared variance of religious narcissism and religious identification by including both variables as simultaneous predictors in our model. We assumed that, in line with past work, once we had accounted for group narcissism, our religious identification measure would capture a secure form of religious identification. Despite this reasoning, we note that we were unable to assess the actual religious beliefs of non-narcissistic religious individuals in our sample. Thus, the exact mechanism of the relationship between (secure) religious identification and ambivalent sexism is unclear. Possible explanatory factors underlying the distinctions between secure and insecure forms of religious identification on sexism should be explored in future research.

Conclusion

The current study investigated the relationships religious identification and religious group narcissism had with hostile and benevolent sexism. Our results revealed that religious group narcissism and religious identification mutually suppress their respective relationships with sexism. Specifically, secure group identification correlated negatively with benevolent and hostile sexism, but only after adjusting for religious group narcissism. Conversely, the positive relationship between religious group narcissism and both forms of sexism became stronger after adjusting for secure religious identification. These results corroborate past research showing that collective narcissism suppresses the relationship between various forms of secure group identification and a range of outcomes, including gender relations (Cichocka et al., 2016; Marchlewska et al., 2019). In doing so, we demonstrate that the positive relationship between religious identification and sexism is specific to insecure forms of group identification. By contrast, a secure form of religious identification drives more equitable attitudes toward gender relations. Thus, the core tenets of religion may be geared towards equality, but such aspects are only engaged with when one is secure in their faith.

Author contributions All authors contributed to the study conception and design. Data collection was performed by Dr. Danny Osborne and Dr. Chris Sibley. Material preparation and analysis were performed by Dr. Christopher Lockhart and Dr. Danny Osborne. The first draft of the manuscript was written by Dr. Christopher Lockhart and all authors commented on previous versions of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Data and code availability The data and code that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Analysis for this manuscript was conducted using *Mplus* version 8.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2020).

Declarations

Ethics approval The NZAVS is reviewed every three years by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee. Our most recent ethics approval statement is as follows: The New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study was approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on 26/05/2021 for three years, Reference Number UAHPEC22576.

Conflicts of interest/Competing interests The authors of the current manuscript confirm that we have no potential conflicts of interest to declare.

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