Disparities exist in how sexual assault and domestic violence victims are perceived and treated (Ben-David & Schneider, 2005; Israel et al., 2009). One factor that affects perceptions and subsequent treatment is the victim's gender role, with gender role conforming women, or women fitting traditional gender expectations (e.g., feminine, nurturing), receiving better treatment than gender role nonconforming women, or women not fitting traditional gender expectations (e.g., masculine, assertive; Marin & Guadagno, 1999; Viki & Abrams, 2002). To advance our understanding of this disparity, a second factor related to perceptions and treatment was examined, namely perceivers’ endorsement of benevolent sexism.

**Hostile and Benevolent Sexism**
The literature has identified two types of sexism that affect how women are perceived and treated: hostile and benevolent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 2001). Hostile sexism is directed at nontraditional roles elicit benevolent sexism (Glick, Diebold, Bailey-Werner, & Zhu, 1997). Hostile sexism is the belief that women are incompetent and inferior to men. Hostile sexists view women to be in competition with men and believe women are out to dominate men in the workplace and relationships. Hostile sexism often results in unequal treatment of women (Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995). Such blatant sexism is less socially acceptable than subtle sexism among women and men, and less common in the United States, however, it is more endorsed by men internationally than women (Glick & Fiske, 2001).

The more prevalent form of sexism is benevolent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001). Benevolent sexism advocates placing women on pedestals to be “protected, supported, and adored” (Glick & Fiske, 2001, p. 109). Benevolent sexism is defined as a set of beliefs that are subjectively positive to the perceiver, seen as legitimate and not really sexism, even to the perpetrators themselves (Glick...
Women themselves often endorse benevolent sexism and do not view it as problematic (Glick & Fiske, 1996). However, benevolent sexism is based on stereotypic and restricted roles of women and portrays women as weak and in need of men’s protection and care (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Despite the relatively positive evaluation of women, benevolent sexism is still rooted in the belief that women are subordinates of men, which has damaging consequences such as unequal career opportunities (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Viewing women as subordinate to men and in need of men’s protection provides justification for viewing women as incompetent, which perpetuates hostile sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1997). This symbiotic relationship between hostile and benevolent sexism is characterized as ambivalent sexism (see Glick & Fiske, 1996, 1997), where hostile sexism creates negative feelings toward nontraditional women, and benevolent sexism creates positive feelings toward traditional women (Glick et al., 1997).

As a set of beliefs, benevolent sexism serves as an ideology through which people can perceive, understand, and interpret the social world, particularly as it relates to gender. Benevolent sexism as an ideology also serves to explain or justify gender inequality such as the unequal distribution of social or material goods in society (Major, Kaiser, O’Brien, & McCoy, 2007). Thus benevolent sexism serves to justify hostile sexism, which explains why an unequal distribution of power between men and women exists (Glick & Fiske, 1996). When people who highly endorse a benevolent sexist ideology are presented with a woman who does not fit the profile of someone who needs to be “protected, supported, and adored” (Glick & Fiske, 1996, p. 491), the woman poses a threat to their ideology in that evidence against one’s worldview may suggest it is not valid (Major et al., 2007).

Perceptions of Gender Role Conformity
Consistent with theorizing on benevolent sexism, we argued that people who endorsed benevolent sexism would positively evaluate a gender role conforming woman target, but negatively evaluate a gender role conforming target. Several lines of research have found support for gender role conforming women receiving more positive overall evaluations and eliciting more positive personality ratings than gender role nonconforming women (Casad, 2007; Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Marin & Guadagno, 1999; Prentice & Carranza, 2002; Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Kilianski, 2000). Women who fulfill traditional gender roles, for example, by being feminine and becoming mothers, are perceived as having more positive personality traits such as being warm and highly likeable (Diekman & Goodfriend, 2006; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Glick & Fiske, 1996). Hebl, King, Glick, Singletary, and Kazama (2007) studied the reactions to a pregnant woman versus nonpregnant woman in a nontraditional job applicant role or a traditional store customer role. The researchers found that employees showed more hostile behavior toward the pregnant job applicant, and more benevolent behavior such as touching toward the pregnant customer. Glick and colleagues (1997) have also shown that benevolent sexism predicted favorable feelings toward traditional women (e.g., homemakers). Other research showed that benevolent ideologies were related to a higher preference of traditional partners in both men and women respondents (Chen, Fiske, & Lee, 2009). According to Glick and Fiske (2001), benevolent sexism serves as a means for men to maintain a positive self-image as the caretaker of the women in their lives, and as a result women who seek power were perceived as “ungrateful shrews or harpies deserving of harsh treatment” (p. 111). It makes sense then that nontraditional women such as career women and women with masculine personalities (e.g., assertive, independent) are perceived as lacking warmth and being overbearing (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Fiske et al., 2002; Rudman, 1998).

Given this literature on gender role conformity affecting perceptions of likeability and warmth, these measures are included in the present study.

Perceptions of Abuse Victims
Research on the perceptions and treatment of abuse victims has suggested that the victim’s gender role matters (Marin & Guadagno, 1999; Viki & Abrams, 2002). Viki and Abrams (2002) examined whether the victims’ behavior had an influence on participants’ reactions. The researchers had participants read about a woman who was raped after inviting a man into her house, and the victim was either described as a mother of three, or no information was provided. The mother of three was either described as a mother of three, or no information was provided. The mother of three was described as “ungrateful shrews or harpies deserving of harsh treatment” (p. 111). It makes sense then that nontraditional women such as career women and women with masculine personalities (e.g., assertive, independent) are perceived as lacking warmth and being overbearing (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Fiske et al., 2002; Rudman, 1998). Given this literature on gender role conformity affecting perceptions of likeability and warmth, these measures are included in the present study.

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sexual harassment, she was blamed more and was ascribed fewer feminine traits than when that same incident was not labeled as sexual harassment. Because the traditional role for women is to remain passive, labeling and reporting an incident as sexual harassment is considered assertive, or a gender role violation (Diekman & Goodfriend, 2006). The mere act of labeling an incident as sexual harassment led to the perception that the victim was less trustworthy and less likeable.

Furthermore, research has shown that the ideologies and attitudes of the perceiver also matter. Viki and Abrams (2002) showed that high benevolent sexism acted as a moderator in assigning blame to a married mother who was raped in the context of committing adultery. Those who had high benevolent sexist beliefs rated the married mother, compared to a control target, with higher blame than those with low benevolent sexist beliefs. In another study, high sexist attitudes were correlated with more blame to sexual harassment victims, as well as higher tolerance of sexual harassment and sexual harassment proclivities (De Judicibus & McCabe, 2001). Other research showed that high benevolent sexism was correlated with more blame (Abrams, Viki, Masser, & Bohner, 2003). The researchers concluded that more blame was assigned when the participant showed higher benevolent sexism because they viewed the woman’s behavior as inappropriate. Abrams and colleagues (2003) also concluded that, although benevolent sexism was correlated with victim blame, high hostile sexism was related with rape proclivity.

The Present Study
The present study extended previous work by testing whether benevolent sexism moderated perceptions of women who conformed or violated gender role stereotypes in the context of domestic violence. Unlike the studies mentioned previously, our study explicit manipulated the gender role personality and characteristics of the victim to be gender conforming or nonconforming. Benevolent sexism was selected as the target ideology because, as mentioned previously, it was correlated with blame, although hostile sexism is correlated with proclivity toward violence. Previous research in this domain found that only benevolent sexism, and not hostile sexism, was a significant moderator of perceptions of rape victims (Viki & Abrams, 2002). In addition, research has documented that hostile and benevolent sexism operate separately and are mediated by different perceptions of the victim (Abrams et al., 2003). Because domestic violence, or spousal abuse victims, are generally characterized with weakness, dependence on their partner, and the need of protection (Heater, Walsh, & Sande, 2002), we focused on benevolent sexism in this study. We hypothesized that participants who endorsed benevolent sexism would rate a gender conforming victim more positively (more likeable, more positive overall impression, and more positive personality traits) than participants who did not endorse benevolent sexism. Further, participants who endorsed benevolent sexism would rate a gender nonconforming victim more negatively (less likeable, more negative overall impression, and more negative personality traits) than participants who did not endorse benevolent sexism.

Method
Participants
Participants were 231 college students who participated for course credit. There were 161 women (69.7%) and 70 men (30.3%). The mean age was 22.39 (SD = 3.96) with a range from 18 to 48. The racial and ethnic groups represented in the sample included 31.2% (n = 72) Asian Americans, 28.6% (n = 66) Latinos, 22.9% (n = 53) European Americans, 9.1% (n = 21) multiracial or other categories, 5.6% (n = 13) Middle Easterners, and 2.8% (n = 6) African Americans. The majority of participants (67.5%, n = 156) identified themselves as liberal (somewhat, moderately liberal, or very) and the remaining 32.5% (n = 75) identified themselves as conservative (somewhat, moderately conservative, or very). All but three participants answered all the manipulation check questions correctly, resulting in the sample of 231 participants for analyses. This study was conducted with the university’s institutional review board approval, and all participants provided informed consent.

Materials
Scenarios. The target person, named Karen Johnson, was described as a 35-year-old married mother of two children in both conditions. In the gender nonconforming condition, she was employed full time as a stockbroker and had stereotypically masculine hobbies (watching football and reading Forbes Magazine). The gender nonconforming target was described as assertive, intelligent, and capable. In the gender conforming condition, Karen was a stay-at-home mom who enjoyed stereotypically feminine hobbies (knitting
and reading *Good Housekeeping Magazine*). She was described as being warm, friendly, and nurturing. In both scenarios, Karen’s husband was described as commonly coming home from work angry and getting violent with Karen. His behavior included yelling insults, swearing, and throwing things at the wall. To imply that Karen was hurt in these tirades, the scenario specified that she wore make-up and baggy clothing to cover her cuts and bruises.

**Manipulation check questions.** To ensure the participants attended to the manipulation, they were asked four questions pertaining to Karen: her hobbies, personality characteristics, profession, and her husband’s characteristics. The manipulation of gender role was tested by having participants rate the target on the items “femininity” and “masculinity” on a scale from 1 (*low*) to 10 (*high*). All but three participants answered all the manipulation check questions correctly.

**Benevolent sexism.** The 11-item Benevolent Sexism Scale (Glick & Fiske, 1996) was administered with a rating scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Sample items included “A good woman should be set on a pedestal by her man” and “Women should be cherished and protected by men.” The scale had acceptable internal consistency (α = .89), which is consistent with prior studies (Glick et al., 1997; Glick & Fiske, 1996, 1997).

**Likeability.** A 6-item likeability measure (Fiske et al., 2002) was rated on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*extremely*). The items included statements assessing the target’s tolerance, warmth, sincerity, friendliness, trustworthiness, and well-intentions. The scale had adequate internal consistency (α = .78), which is consistent with previous studies (Fiske et al., 2002).

**Overall impression.** A 3-item measure of overall impression (Casad, 2007) was used. Two items asked participants to imagine that they were Karen’s neighbor, and to rate the likelihood that they would engage with Karen such as “How likely would you to befriend Karen?” using a rating scale, ranging from 1 (*definitely not*) to 6 (*definitely*). The third item was “What is your overall impression of Karen?” rated from 1 (*very unfavorable*) to 6 (*very favorable*). The items were converted to z scores, averaged, and had acceptable internal consistency (α = .82).

**Personality trait ratings.** A 7-item personality trait scale (Casad, 2007) was measured using a rating scale ranging from 1 (*low*) to 10 (*high*). Participants rated Karen on each of the following traits: creativity, interpersonal warmth, introversion (reversed scored), extraversion, emotional stability, openness to new ideas, and interpersonal skills. The measure had acceptable internal consistency (α = .75).

**Design**

The study was a 2 (gender role: conforming or nonconforming) x 2 (benevolent sexism: high or low) between subjects design. The dependent variables included the victim’s likeability, overall impression, and personality traits ratings.

**Procedure**

The study was administered online using Sona Systems survey software. Participants were presented with one of two study titles, which were presented in random order, and constituted random assignment to one of the two conditions. Participants read the scenario about Karen, a victim of domestic violence, who was described as either gender role conforming (e.g., feminine) or gender role nonconforming (e.g., masculine). They then completed a questionnaire measuring the target’s likeability, personality traits, impressions of the target, and participants’ benevolent sexism.

**Results**

To determine whether the descriptions of the targets in the scenarios were regarded by participants as gender conforming or nonconforming, a comparison of the ratings on the masculine and feminine items was made. The independent samples *t* test showed that the manipulation was effective. Participants rated the gender nonconforming target as more masculine (M = 4.65, SD = 2.20) than the gender conforming target (M = 2.57, SD = 1.71), *t*(229) = 7.93, *p* < .001, *r*² = .22, and the gender conforming target was rated more feminine (M = 7.24, SD = 2.20) than the gender nonconforming target (M = 5.72, SD = 2.28), *t*(229) = 5.14, *p* < .001, *r*² = .10.

To test the hypothesis that benevolent sexism moderated evaluations of the gender role conforming and gender role nonconforming targets, multiple hierarchical regression analyses were used. Regression was chosen, as opposed to ANOVA, in order to keep benevolent sexism as a continuous measure, instead of blocking participants into high and low groups, which reduces statistical power (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2000). The continuous independent variable, benevolent sexism, was centered in accordance with standard practice to reduce multicollinearity (Aiken & West, 1991). The
dichotomous independent variable, gender role, was dummy coded as zero (conforming) and one (nonconforming). In the simple slopes analysis, the dummy variable was recoded to test the effect of gender role conformity at high (+1 SD) and low (-1 SD) levels of benevolent sexism (Aiken & West, 1991). The predicted mean values were calculated from the overall unstandardized regression formula (Dawson & Richter, 2006).

**Benevolent Sexism**

To determine adequate variation in benevolent sexism scores, descriptive statistics were computed. The full range of possible ratings was used, 1 (low) to 6 (high), with a mean of 3.51 (SD = 1.04). The means were nearly normally distributed with a slight (but not problematic; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2000) negative skew (-.34).

**Likeability**

There was a two-way interaction between target gender role and benevolent sexism for likeability, $F(1, 227) = 3.66$, $p = .05$, $r^2 = .09$ (see Table 1). The simple slopes analysis indicated that the gender conforming target was rated as more likeable by participants scoring higher on benevolent sexism ($M = 5.06$) than lower ($M = 4.62$), $β = .32$, $t(227) = 3.55$, $p < .001$, $r^2 = .05$ (see Figure 1). The ratings of the gender nonconforming target were not significantly different for participants high ($M = 4.59$) or low ($M = 4.49$) in benevolent sexism, $β = -.075$, $t(227) = .84$, $p = .40$. These results supported the hypothesis that participants higher in benevolent sexism have more positive ratings of the gender conforming target than participants lower in benevolent sexism.

**Overall Impression**

There was a two-way interaction between target gender role and benevolent sexism for overall impression, $F(1, 227) = 3.93$, $p = .049$, $r^2 = .04$ (see Table 1). The simple slopes analysis indicated that the gender conforming target was rated more positively by participants scoring higher on benevolent sexism ($M = 4.63$) than lower ($M = 4.26$), $β = .207$, $t(227) = 2.25$, $p = .025$, $r^2 = .02$ (see Figure 2). The ratings of the gender nonconforming target were not significantly different for participants higher ($M = 4.14$) or lower ($M = 4.24$) in benevolent sexism, $β = -.051$, $t(227) = -.56$, $p = .58$. This finding supported the hypothesis that participants who endorsed benevolent sexism gave positive ratings to a victim who fit the stereotype of women as weak and in need of protection.

**Personality Traits**

There was a two-way interaction between target gender role and benevolent sexism for personality trait ratings, $F(1, 227) = 15.19$, $p = .001$, $r^2 = .10$ (see Table 1). The simple slopes analysis indicated that the gender conforming target was rated more positively by participants scoring higher on benevolent sexism ($M = 6.48$) than lower ($M = 5.29$), $β = .430$, $t(227) = 4.83$, $p < .001$, $r^2 = .09$ (see Figure 3). The ratings of the gender nonconforming target were not significantly different for participants higher ($M = 5.49$) or lower ($M = 5.66$) in benevolent sexism, $β = -.062$, $t(227) = -.69$, $p = .49$. These results were consistent with the hypothesis that participants higher in benevolent sexism gave more positive ratings to a gender role conforming victim compared to participants lower in benevolent sexism.

**Discussion**

The present study first hypothesized that participants who endorsed benevolent sexism would rate a gender conforming domestic violence victim more positively than participants who did not endorse benevolent sexism and second that participants who endorsed benevolent sexism would rate a gender nonconforming victim more negatively than participants who did not endorse negative sexism. Findings supported the first hypothesis that participants who endorsed a benevolent sexist

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<th>TABLE 1</th>
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<td><strong>Regression Statistics</strong></td>
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Note: $^*$ $p < .05$, $^*$ $p < .01$, $^{**}$ $p < .001$
ideology rated the gender conforming target more positively than participants who did not endorse a benevolent sexist ideology. These findings were consistent with previous research on benevolent sexism as a prescriptive gender role ideology, with more positive evaluations associated with women who conform to gender roles. Perceiving a woman as having feminine personality traits and hobbies was related to a potential confirmation for participants with a benevolent sexist worldview, that women are supposed to be feminine (Glick & Fiske, 2001).

The present study, however, failed to support the second hypothesis. Participants who endorsed benevolent sexism did not rate gender nonconforming victims more negatively than participants who did not endorse benevolent sexism. Two possible reasons for the unsupported hypothesis are discussed below: first, the hypothesis might have been incorrect; second, there might have been underlying methodological issues.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

First, it is important to consider that the hypothesis might have been unsupported simply because it was wrong. On a broader scale, the implications of an incorrect hypothesis are that benevolent sexism does not predict perceptions of gender nonconforming abuse victims. However, this is unlikely as the proposed hypothesis was supported by previous research. Specifically, previous studies have repeatedly shown a strong relationship between benevolent sexism and gender conformity (Chen et al., 2009; Glick et al., 1997). Furthermore, the means for ratings of overall impression and personality showed a nonsignificant pattern in the hypothesized direction that participants who endorsed benevolent sexism reported lower ratings of the gender nonconforming target than participants who did not endorse benevolent sexism, suggesting that the unsupported hypothesis is likely due to methodological errors, rather than incorrect hypothesizing.

One methodological issue to examine is that the target’s gender nonconformity was not strong enough to evoke a threat reaction. Although the gender nonconforming target was career oriented and independent, and therefore not stereotypically feminine, she might have confirmed the benevolent sexist ideology by being a victim and in need of help and protection. Thus, her status as a victim, albeit a masculine one, might not have been threatening.

Another methodological limitation includes the college age sample. Perhaps the sample of largely young liberal women played a role in the results. These young women might have shown a positivity bias toward a gender conforming woman, but not negativity toward a gender nonconforming woman.

A stronger manipulation of gender role nonconformity is needed to more thoroughly test the hypothesis that gender nonconforming victims elicit more negative evaluations from participants high in benevolent sexism. Further, inclusion of the hostile sexism measure would have allowed for the detection of more hostility toward the gender nonconforming victim. Perhaps participants who
endorsed benevolent sexism also endorsed hostile sexism or were ambivalent sexists, as research has documented that hostile and benevolent sexism are correlated (Glick & Fiske, 1997; Viki & Abrams, 2002). This ambivalence may be an explanation for null results. Future research should also test whether such perceptions are prevalent among emergency responders and whether these perceptions affect treatment.

Conclusion
Taken together, the results supported the hypothesis that benevolent sexism predicts how perceivers evaluate individuals who conform to gender roles. Participants who endorsed a benevolent sexist ideology potentially perceived confirmation of their beliefs when faced with a gender role conforming domestic violence victim, which resulted in more positive ratings of the target than participants who did not endorse a benevolent sexist ideology. These findings showed that the gender role of a domestic violence victim affects college students’ perceptions of a woman victim, which may similarly affect emergency responders’ perceptions of a woman victim. A gender conforming victim may be perceived positively, particularly among benevolent sexists, because she fits the normative image of a domestic violence victim.

This study supported existing research that disparities exist in how domestic violence victims are perceived (Ben-David & Schneider, 2005; Israel et al., 2009). The victim’s gender role is one factor that affects perceptions, with gender role conforming victims receiving more positive perceptions and better treatment than gender role nonconforming women (Marin & Guadagno, 1999; Viki & Abrams, 2002). The present study extended this research to show that individuals with stronger endorsement of benevolent sexism were more likely to show this positivity bias than individuals with weaker endorsement of benevolent sexism. An abuse context is a relevant context to test the role of benevolent sexism because benevolent sexism perpetuates portrayals of women as weak and in need of men’s protection and care (Glick & Fiske, 1996).

If future research extends this study to a sample of service providers, researchers can better understand whether biased perceptions of abuse victims, coupled with perceivers’ own benevolent sexist views, affects victims’ treatment. Such research findings could inform training interventions for service providers and emergency responders, raising awareness of this bias, and correcting for it in the treatment of domestic violence victims. In sum, this study added confirmation to the literature that benevolent sexism serves as a lens through which individuals judge others, specifically that individuals who endorse a benevolent sexist ideology perceive gender conforming individuals more positively.

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