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Beyond Being Beneficiaries: Two Mechanisms Explain Why Women Have More Favourable Attitudes Towards Gender Quotas Than Men

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ABSTRACT

This research identified two mechanisms that explain gender differences in attitudes towards gender quotas. Using a multi-method approach, we assessed attitudes as self-reported support for gender quotas and rater-coded valence of participants' free associations with gender quotas. Study 1 examined quotas for university professorship positions ($N = 237$) and Study 2 quotas for corporate leadership positions ($N = 587$). Supporting the first mechanism, women's greater perceptions of discrimination against women related to greater perceived necessity of gender quotas, which related to more favourable attitudes. Supporting the second mechanism, men's greater concerns that quotas discriminate against men related to greater concerns that quotas stigmatize women as incompetent, which related to less favourable attitudes. By advancing the understanding of key mechanisms behind attitudes towards gender quotas, this research contributes to effectively designing and successfully implementing hard affirmative action policies aimed at overcoming women's underrepresentation in leading academic and corporate positions.

1 | Introduction

A growing number of nations and organizations have introduced gender quotas to increase women's representation in economic, academic and political leadership (EIGE 2021). For instance, the European Commission mandated that publicly listed companies in the European Union must achieve a quota of 40% women among non-executive board members or 33% women in all board director roles by 2026 (Huet 2022). Albeit increasingly prevalent, gender quotas—a hard form of affirmative action—often ignite strong opposition with men typically holding less favourable attitudes than women (Bell, Harrison, and McLaughlin 2000;

Harrison et al. 2006; Kravitz, Bludau, and Klineberg 2008). The most prominent and widely shared explanation for this gender difference is that women benefit from such policies individually and collectively, whereas men do not (Harrison et al. 2006; Kane and Whipkey 2009; Martins and Parsons 2007; Olsen et al. 2016). Although self-interest surely is a powerful predictor of attitudes towards gender policies (for reviews, see Crosby, Sabattini, and Aizawa 2013; Morgenroth and Ryan 2018), the formation of attitudes towards gender quotas is likely more complex than simply being or not being a beneficiary of the policy. Advancing the current scientific knowledge, the present research seeks to test more specific mechanisms underlying women's and

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men's attitudes towards gender quotas, aiming to understand the formation of attitudes towards an increasingly prevalent, yet controversial, policy.

1.1 | Mechanisms Underlying Gender Differences in Attitudes Towards Gender Quotas

Going beyond the explanation that women are beneficiaries of gender policies and thus hold favourable attitudes, qualitative research found that women were more likely than men to describe gender quotas as necessary to overcome discrimination against women, whereas men were more likely to voice concerns over quotas being discriminatory against men and, surprisingly, were more worried that gender quotas would stigmatize women as incompetent than women themselves (Zehnter and Kirchler 2020). Building on these qualitative results, we aim to empirically examine whether two hitherto untested mechanisms help explain gender differences in attitudes towards gender quotas. The first mechanism we propose is that women perceive more anti-women discrimination than men, thus perceiving gender quotas as more necessary, and in turn hold more favourable attitudes towards quotas. The second mechanism we propose is that men are more concerned that gender quotas discriminate against men than women, yet hide their self-interest behind concerns over women being stigmatized as incompetent, and in turn, hold less favourable attitudes towards quotas.

1.1.1 | Mechanism 1: Perception of Discrimination Against Women and Perceived Necessity of Gender Quotas

Women tend to perceive greater levels of discrimination against women than men (García-González, Forcén, and Jimenez-Sanchez 2019; Swim et al. 2005), and this gender gap is particularly pronounced for institutional sexism (Blodorn, O'Brien, and Kordys 2012). Such gender differences in perceived discrimination may underlie gender differences in attitudes towards gender policies. Indeed, one study found that among academics from an Australian university, gender differences in attitudes towards affirmative action targeting women could be explained by perceptions of gender discrimination. Specifically, women were more likely than men to perceive discrimination against women and thus held more positive attitudes towards affirmative action (Konrad and Hartmann 2001). Vice versa, participants' denial of continued gender discrimination and their perception of the current system as fair related to their negative attitudes towards affirmative action and organizations using affirmative action when recruiting new personnel (Phelan and Rudman 2011).

Gender quotas can broadly be conceptualized as a way of confronting sexism and a form of collective action. Both approaches highlight that recognizing discrimination precedes action. Staircase models such as the 'ask, answer and announce' model (Stangor et al. 2003) and the 'confronting prejudicial response' model (Ashburn-Nardo, Morris, and Goodwin 2008) suggest that the perception of sexism is a necessary first step in confronting it. Similarly, perceiving injustice is an important antecedent of collective action (van Zomeren, Postmes, and Spears 2008) and perceiving gender-based injustices is key to igniting women's interest in collective action to overcome sexism (Ellemers and Barreto 2009; Radke, Hornsey, and Barlow 2016).

Importantly, recognizing discrimination is an important first step towards action, but not the last one. For example, in the 'confronting prejudicial response' model, perceiving discrimination was followed by classifying it as an emergency that warrants action (Ashburn-Nardo, Morris, and Goodwin 2008). Similarly, Konrad and Hartmann (2001) suggested that perceiving discrimination may lead women to classify affirmative action policies as necessary and consequently hold favourable attitudes towards them. In fact, the notion that perceptions of continued discrimination against women relate to greater perceived necessity and subsequently to more favourable attitudes towards gender policies was suggested early on (Kluegel 1985). However, these links have not yet been tested.

The present research proposes and empirically tests whether women's compared to men's greater perception of continued discrimination against women relates to women perceiving gender quotas as more necessary and, consequently, helps explain women's more favourable attitudes towards quotas.

To critically appraise our theoretically proposed mechanism, we use the Hyman-Tate criterion, which states that 'mediation requires a conceptual time-ordering of the predictor, mediator and outcome' (Tate 2015, 237). Although predictor, mediator and outcome variables do not have to be measured in a sequential time order, it must be plausible that the predictor (i.e., gender) emerges prior to the mediators (i.e., perceived discrimination of women, perceived necessity of gender quotas), which in turn emerges prior to the outcome (i.e., attitudes towards gender quotas). Gender as a natural group variable can only be a predictor (Tate 2015). The above-described literature and in particular the staircase models that describe the recognition of discrimination as the first step in a chain of reactions towards discrimination (e.g., Ashburn-Nardo, Morris, and Goodwin 2008; Stangor et al. 2003) underpin the theoretical plausibility of our proposed mechanism. In fact, discrimination against women is an ongoing problem and gender quotas are one, albeit controversial, solution. It thus is the logical sequence of events that the awareness of a problem precedes the perception that a solution is necessary, which in turn precedes the evaluation of the solution.

1.1.2 | Mechanism 2: Concerns Over Anti-Men Discrimination and Anti-Women Stigmatization

Past qualitative research has further shown that men were not only more concerned than women that gender quotas would discriminate against men but also worried more than women themselves that gender quotas would stigmatize women as incompetent (Zehnter and Kirchler 2020). Although concerns over gender quotas discriminating against men and stigmatizing women are often voiced together (Bell, Harrison, and McLaughlin 2000), little research has examined whether these concerns may jointly drive attitudes towards gender policies. We next discuss both concerns and how they may relate to each other and subsequently to attitudes towards gender quotas.

So far, an extensive body of research shows that self-interest underlies attitudes towards affirmative action, with men endorsing these policies to a lesser extent than women (for reviews, see Crosby, Sabattini, and Aizawa 2013; Morgenroth and Ryan 2018).

Thus, men's greater concerns over the discrimination of their gender group likely explain why men hold less favourable attitudes towards gender quotas than women do. Indeed, past research found that men saw affirmative action as more threatening to their careers than women, and therefore held less favourable attitudes towards these policies (Konrad and Hartmann 2001). Moreover, confronting White men with pro-diversity messages not only led them to verbally express concerns over being discriminated against but also caused them to experience physical threat reactions such as elevated heart rates (Dover, Major, and Kaiser 2016). Gender quotas may feel particularly threatening to men. In contrast to softer affirmative action policies for women such as special training or mentoring opportunities, gender quotas—as a hard form of affirmative action—pursue a fix-the-system rather than fix-the-women approach (Burkinshaw and White 2017). Such perceived threats to the system can increase system-justifying beliefs (Brescoll, Uhlmann, and Newman 2013; Jost and Hunyady 2005), which in turn relates to greater opposition to affirmative action and collective action (Fraser, Osborne, and Sibley 2015; Osborne et al. 2019; Phelan and Rudman 2011).

At a more general level, a growing body of research showed that men tend to believe that women's advancement leads to increases in anti-men discrimination. For instance, while women and men believed that discrimination against women has decreased over the last six decades, men believed that discrimination against men is increasing (Kehn and Ruthig 2013). Some men even believe that due to women's advancements, the tables have turned and that today men (and not women) are the primary victims of gender discrimination (Zehnter et al. 2021). Zero-sum thinking seems to underlie men's perceptions of increasing anti-men discrimination. That is, men more than women tend to see gender relations from a competitive win-lose perspective and believe that any gains women make in the workplace create losses for men (Ruthig et al. 2017). The consequences of men's zero-sum thinking regarding gender issues can be dire. For example, research showed that across 42 nations, zero-sum thinking was negatively associated with men's support for collective action for women (Kosakowska-Berezecka et al. 2020).

Whereas concerns that gender quotas discriminate against men plausibly reduce men's support for this policy, it seems plausible that concerns over the stigmatization of women would reduce women's rather than men's support for the policy, given that women face these negative effects. In fact, experimental research documented that female leaders selected through quotas were seen as less competent and deserving of their roles than those selected based on merit (Heilman et al. 1992; Heilman and Welle 2006; Nater, Heilman, and Sczesny 2023). Paradoxically, yet importantly for the present research, members of the group not targeted by a quota may more likely raise concerns over the stigmatization of the target group. Past research on affirmative action benefiting ethnic minorities provides support for this assumption. In fact, White Americans voiced more concerns over affirmative action stigmatizing Black American beneficiaries as incompetent than Black Americans themselves (O'Brien et al. 2010). This research established a causal link between framing affirmative action as hurting White Americans and the expression of concerns for Black American beneficiaries. Specifically, members of the majority group (i.e., White) raised concerns over the stigmatization of beneficiaries (i.e., Black) to mask their

own individual and collective self-interests, rather than out of 'genuine' concern for the beneficiaries (O'Brien et al. 2010).

Based on this reasoning, we propose that men, compared to women, are more concerned that gender quotas discriminate against men, and in turn—masking their self-interest—voice greater concerns over gender quotas stigmatizing women, which then relates to men's less favourable attitudes towards gender quotas.

Again, we assessed this mechanism against the Hyman—Tate criterion (Tate 2015). Supporting our theoretical reasoning, Bell, Harrison, and McLaughlin (2000) showed that beliefs about the attributes of affirmative action, including beliefs about the discrimination of non-beneficiaries and negative consequences for beneficiaries, predicted attitudes towards affirmative action. The fact that their experimental manipulations of these attributes successfully changed attitudes towards affirmative action strengthens the assumption of causality between perceived attributes of affirmative action and attitudes towards them (Bell, Harrison, and McLaughlin 2000). The above-described results from O'Brien and colleagues' experiments—namely that White Americans' concerns that race-based affirmative action stigmatizes Black Americans was a direct response to an experimental manipulation that presented race-based affirmative action as disadvantageous for them—further underline the plausibility of our proposed mechanism. At least some men may mask their self-interest (which is not being discriminated against by gender quotas) behind concerns over gender quotas stigmatizing women.

2 | Present Research

In this research, we seek to test two mechanisms to explain why women hold more favourable attitudes towards gender quotas than men. The first mechanism focuses on perceptions of discrimination against women and necessity and the second mechanism on concerns about discrimination against men and stigmatization of women. Figure 1 visualizes the two proposed mechanisms.

Hypothesis 1. *Women, compared to men, perceive greater discrimination against women, which relates to greater perceived necessity of gender quotas, and subsequently more favourable attitudes in the form of both self-reported support (1a) and free associations with quotas (1b).*

Hypothesis 2. *Men, compared to women, have greater concerns over men being discriminated against by gender quotas, which—masking their own self-interest—relate to greater concerns over women being stigmatized by gender quotas and subsequently to less favourable attitudes in the form of both self-reported support (2a) and free associations with quotas (2b).*

Across two studies, we examined whether the proposed mechanisms explain attitudes towards gender quotas for university professorship positions (Study 1) and leadership positions in the corporate world (Study 2). Using structural equation modelling (SEM), we tested whether the proposed mechanisms explain attitudes in terms of (a) self-reported support for gender quotas

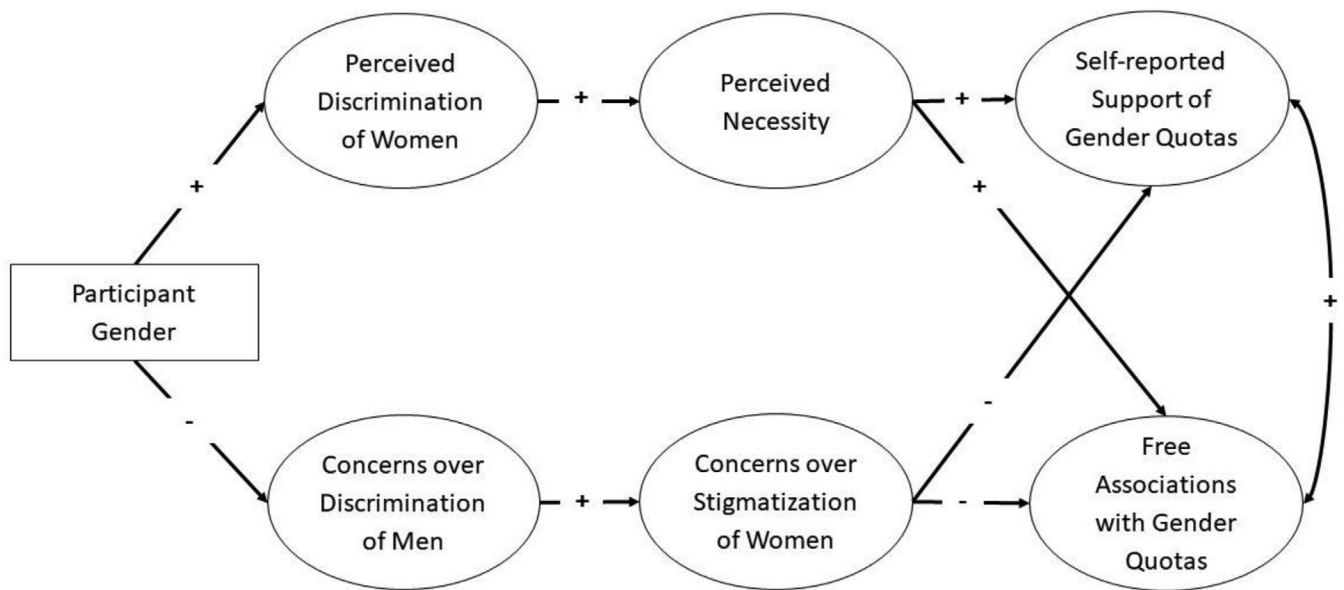


FIGURE 1 | Illustration of the two hypothesized mechanisms underlying gender differences in attitudes towards gender quotas. Participant gender was coded men = 0, women = 1.

and (b) the rater-coded valence of participants' free associations with gender quotas. This multi-method approach reduced bias based on common method variance and increased the generalizability and robustness of our findings (Jakobsen and Jensen 2015; Tehseen, Ramayah, and Sajilan 2017).

This research is the first empirical test of two detailed mechanisms that should underly gender differences in attitudes towards gender quotas. Knowledge about these mechanisms advances the scientific understanding of attitude formation regarding gender quotas and has high practical relevance as it informs the framing and communication of often controversial gender quotas. Another innovative aspect of this research is its consideration of attitudes in terms of both self-reported support for gender quotas and the valence of free associations with gender quotas. Past work has mainly focused on self-reported support for gender-based affirmative action (e.g., Kane and Whipkey 2009; Konrad and Hartmann 2001; Olsen et al. 2016). In contrast to deliberate self-reports, free associations are words and short sentences that spontaneously come to mind (Nelson, Mcevoy, and Dennis 2000). Reflecting people's naturalistic thoughts, free associations are an ecologically valid measure of attitudes (Joffe and Elsey 2014). In particular, the valence of free associations, that is, the ratio of positive and negative associations with an attitude object tends to be stable over time (Schnabel and Asendorpf 2013). Compared to self-reported support, free associations tend to be less susceptible to social desirability (Joffe and Elsey 2014) and more predictive of behaviour (Rooke, Hine, and Thorsteinsson 2008). Hence, examining what fosters free associations with gender quotas is important given that these may better predict behaviours such as pursuing jobs at organizations that use gender quotas (Shaughnessy et al. 2016).

All data and analysis code are available at OSF (<https://osf.io/pdxv6>). The verbatim study materials are available in [Supporting Information S1a-S1c](#) in the online supplemental material. The studies were approved by the Data Protection Commission of

the Medical University of Vienna (Pilot Study) and the Ethics Commission of the University of Bern (Studies 1 and 2).

3 | Pilot Study

Given this research's unique methodological approach, we conducted a pilot study to examine (1) the strength of the relationship between self-reported support of gender quotas and the rater-coded valence of participants' free associations with gender quotas and (2) whether the same mechanism, namely perceptions of continued discrimination against women, would predict both. To this end, an online survey, conducted in 2014, assessed 192 undergraduate medicine students' (93 women, 99 men) attitudes towards gender quotas for professorship positions at universities in Austria.

According to Austrian public legislation, universities must select equally qualified women over men until a quota of 50% women researchers is achieved (Austrian University Act 120/2002 §20b 2002). Although the Austrian gender quota was introduced as early as 1993 (Austrian Federal Act for Gender Equality 100/1993 §11b 1993), women remain a minority among university professors to this day. At medical universities in Austria, where the pilot study was conducted, the percentage of women professors increased from 14% in 2010 to 23% in 2018 (FEMTech 2018).

A detailed description of the pilot study is provided in the [Supporting Information S2](#). In short, results revealed a strong relationship between self-reported support for gender quotas and the rater-coded valence of participants' free associations with gender quotas. Answering the main question of the pilot study—whether the same simplified mechanism underlies gender differences in both attitudes—results confirmed that perceptions of continued discrimination against women explained gender differences in both. That is, women perceived greater anti-women discrimination than men and in turn, showed more support for

gender quotas and more positive free associations with gender quotas.

4 | Study 1

Study 1 examined attitudes towards gender quotas for university professorship positions in Switzerland, testing the two hypothesized mechanisms (see Figure 1). Notably, Switzerland did not have gender quotas for professorship positions in 2018 (at the time this study was conducted). Instead, we informed participants about the quota at Austrian universities to then assess their attitudes. This provided a realistic scenario given that Austria is culturally and geographically close to Switzerland.

4.1 | Method

4.1.1 | Participants

Participants were undergraduate medical students (as in the pilot study) but this time from the medical department at the University of Bern (Switzerland). In total, 245 students completed the study. We excluded one (<1%) from data analysis for missing values in key variables and seven (3%) for mean times per association exceeding the sample's mean by three standard deviations. The final sample included 237 participants, 149 (63%) women and 88 (37%) men. Participants were between 18 and 31 years of age ($M = 22.57$, $SD = 2.65$). Power calculations with pwrSEM (Wang and Rhemtulla 2021) showed that this sample size was sufficient to detect medium-sized indirect effects ($abc = 0.04$), path coefficients ($a = 0.40$, $b = 0.30$, $c = 0.30$), with a power of 80% and alpha of $p < 0.05$.

4.1.2 | Procedure

Students received an email invitation for a study on academic recruitment decisions. After giving informed consent, the study started with the free association task. Participants were presented with a description of gender quotas (similar to those at Austrian universities; Austrian University Act 120/2002 §20b 2002) and learned that such a quota may be discussed in Switzerland in the future. Concretely, participants read that 'Several countries dictate the application of gender quotas and demand that when hiring for research positions, equally qualified women are to be treated preferentially until a certain percentage of women (e.g., 50%) is reached. In Switzerland, no such quota is currently applied; however, these might be discussed in the future'. Participants then wrote down their free associations with this gender quota and indicated their support for it, responded to questions containing the mediator variables and demographic information.

4.1.3 | Measures

4.1.3.1 | Valence of Free Associations With Gender Quotas. Following current recommendations (Schnabel and Asendorpf 2013), we used participants' first two associations as they are most spontaneous. Two independent raters (one

woman, one man) rated each association as either a positive, neutral or negative response to gender quotas, with substantial interrater agreement, Cohen's kappa = 0.70. Disagreements were resolved by a third independent rater. Based on these ratings, we calculated each participant's valence of free associations by subtracting the number of negative associations from the number of positive associations divided by two (Schnabel and Asendorpf 2013). Supporting Information S3 describes the method of free associations and the calculation of their valence in detail.

4.1.3.2 | Self-Reported Support for Gender Quotas. Participants indicated their attitude on seven pairs of short phrases and words with opposite meanings (e.g., 'I don't support this'—'I support this' and 'unfair'—'fair') on a 6-point rating scale. Greater values indicated more positive attitudes, $\alpha = 0.97$. To facilitate comparability between the valence of free associations ranging from -1 to 1 and self-reported support ranging from 1 to 6 , we standardized these measures using z-scores (Fischer and Milfont 2010). The resulting scores ranged from -4 to 4 , with higher scores indicating more positive attitudes.

4.1.3.3 | Mediator Variables. Perceived discrimination against women was assessed with the German 10-item version of the Modern Sexism Scale (Eckes and Six-Materna 1998) that asks for participants' agreement to statements such as 'The discrimination of women is still a problem in Switzerland', $\alpha = 0.81$.

Perceived necessity of gender quotas was assessed with three items, namely, 'Gender quotas in research in Switzerland would be necessary', '[...] important' and '[...] dispensable' (reversed), $\alpha = 0.89$.

Concerns over discrimination against men were assessed with three items, such as 'Gender quotas in research lead to the discrimination of men in recruitment decisions', $\alpha = 0.63$.

Concerns over the stigmatization of women were measured with three items, such as 'Because of gender quotas in research, women in research are taken less seriously', $\alpha = 0.68$. All ratings were made on a 7-point scale ($1 = strongly disagree$, $7 = strongly agree$).

4.1.4 | Analysis Plan

Hypotheses 1 and 2 were tested using SEM with maximum-likelihood estimation (lavaan R package; Rosseel 2012). To optimize the indicators of the latent variables, confirmatory factors analyses (CFAs) ensured one-factor solutions of all measures and items with weak standardized factor loadings (≤ 0.40) were dropped and residuals of item pairs with similar wording were allowed to co-vary. The SEM included the rater-coded valence of participants' free associations as a single indicator latent variable and included the residual covariance of support and valence of free associations. For tests of indirect effects, we used 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals based on 10,000 bootstrap samples and reported unstandardized coefficients. Model fit was assessed with the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker—Lewis index (TLI) and the root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA; Hu and Bentler 1999).

TABLE 1 | Study 1: Means, standard deviations and correlation matrix.

	Women <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Men <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	DW	PN	DM	SM	S
Discrimination of women (DW)	4.49 (0.97)	4.08 (0.85)	-3.41	<0.001					
Perceived necessity (PN)	3.88 (1.68)	3.11 (1.48)	-3.67	<0.001	0.61*				
Discrimination of men (DM)	3.31 (1.10)	4.17 (1.22)	5.48	<0.001	-0.34*	-0.54*			
Stigmatization of women (SM)	3.81 (1.16)	3.83 (1.29)	0.09	0.928	-0.22*	-0.43*	0.45*		
Self-Reported support for quotas (S)	0.16 (0.99)	-0.27 (0.97)	-3.30	0.001	0.51*	0.83*	-0.60*	-0.42*	
Free associations with quotas (FA)	0.10 (0.99)	-0.16 (1.00)	-1.93	0.055	0.34*	0.61*	-0.41*	-0.42*	0.65*

Note: Gender was coded as 0 = men and 1 = women. Support and free associations are indicated as standardized z-scores ranging from -4 to 4, with higher scores indicating more positive attitudes.

* $p < 0.05$.

4.2 | Results

As shown in Table 1, women perceived greater levels of anti-women discrimination than men, perceived gender quotas as more necessary and were less concerned about gender quotas discriminating against men. Notably, women were neither more nor less concerned than men that gender quotas could stigmatize women. Moreover, women's self-reported support for gender quotas was greater than men's and women's free associations with gender quotas were descriptively more positive than those of men although non-significant. Table 1 displays the means, standard deviations and intercorrelations of all variables included in this study.

4.3 | Mechanisms Underlying Gender Differences in Support and Valence of Free Associations

The proposed model had good fit, $\chi^2(258) = 559.85$, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.931; TLI = 0.920; RMSEA = 0.070, 95% CI [0.06, 0.08] and accounted for 81% of the variance in self-reported support for gender quotas and 41% of the variance in the rater-coded valence of participants' free associations with gender quotas. Figure 2 displays the model, Supporting Information S4 shows results from CFAs and Supporting Information S5a shows the SEM regression results.

Supporting Hypothesis 1a, gender predicted support for gender quotas through perceived discrimination of women and perceived necessity, indirect effect $\beta = 0.35$, 95% CI [0.17, 0.59]. Women perceived greater levels of anti-women discrimination than men, $b = 0.29$, $p < 0.001$, which related to greater perceived necessity of gender quotas, $b = -0.61$, $p < 0.001$, and in turn to more support, $b = 0.89$, $p < 0.001$. Supporting Hypothesis 1b, gender also predicted the valence of free associations with gender quotas through perceived anti-women discrimination and perceived necessity, indirect effect $\beta = 0.16$, 95% CI [0.08, 0.28]. The greater perceived necessity of gender quotas also related to more positive free associations, $b = 0.93$, $p < 0.001$.

Contrary to Hypothesis 2a, gender did not significantly predict support through concerns over discrimination against men and concerns over the stigmatization of women, indirect effect $\beta = -0.01$, 95% CI [-0.23, 0.08]. Specifically, concerns over the

stigmatization of women were not related to support for gender quotas, $b = 0.02$, $p = 0.812$. Supporting Hypothesis 2b, gender predicted the valence of free associations with gender quotas through concerns over discrimination against men and concerns over the stigmatization of women, indirect effect $\beta = 0.08$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.26]. Men, compared to women, perceived gender quotas as more discriminating against men, $b = -0.39$, $p < 0.001$, which, as predicted, related to greater concerns over the stigmatization of women, $b = 0.70$, $p < 0.001$ and in turn to less positive free associations, $b = -0.31$, $p = 0.021$.

Additional exploratory results revealed that gender predicted support for gender quotas through concerns over anti-men discrimination only, indirect effect $\beta = 0.25$, 95% CI [0.11, 0.56]. Men had greater concerns over anti-men discrimination than women, $b = -0.39$, $p < 0.001$, which related to less support, $b = -0.29$, $p < 0.001$. Furthermore, gender predicted the valence of free associations through concerns over the stigmatization of women, indirect effect $\beta = -0.08$, 95% CI [-0.29, -0.01]. Once the impact of concerns over anti-men discrimination was controlled for, women, compared to men, had more concerns over women being stigmatized, $b = 0.26$, $p = 0.001$.

4.4 | Discussion

Overall, women expressed greater support for gender quotas and their free associations tended to be more positive than those of men. As predicted, these differences could largely be explained by the two hypothesized mechanisms, accounting for large percentages of variance in both support for quotas and the valence of free associations with gender quotas. First, women's greater perceptions of continued anti-women discrimination related to greater perceived necessity of gender quotas, which related to more support of quotas and more favourable free associations. Second, men's greater concerns over discrimination against men related, as predicted, to greater concerns over the stigmatization of women, which related to less favourable free associations, but not less self-reported support of quotas.

Notably, women and men were equally concerned over the stigmatization of women through quotas. Only when controlling for concerns over anti-men discrimination, did gender differences in concerns over the stigmatization of women occur, with women

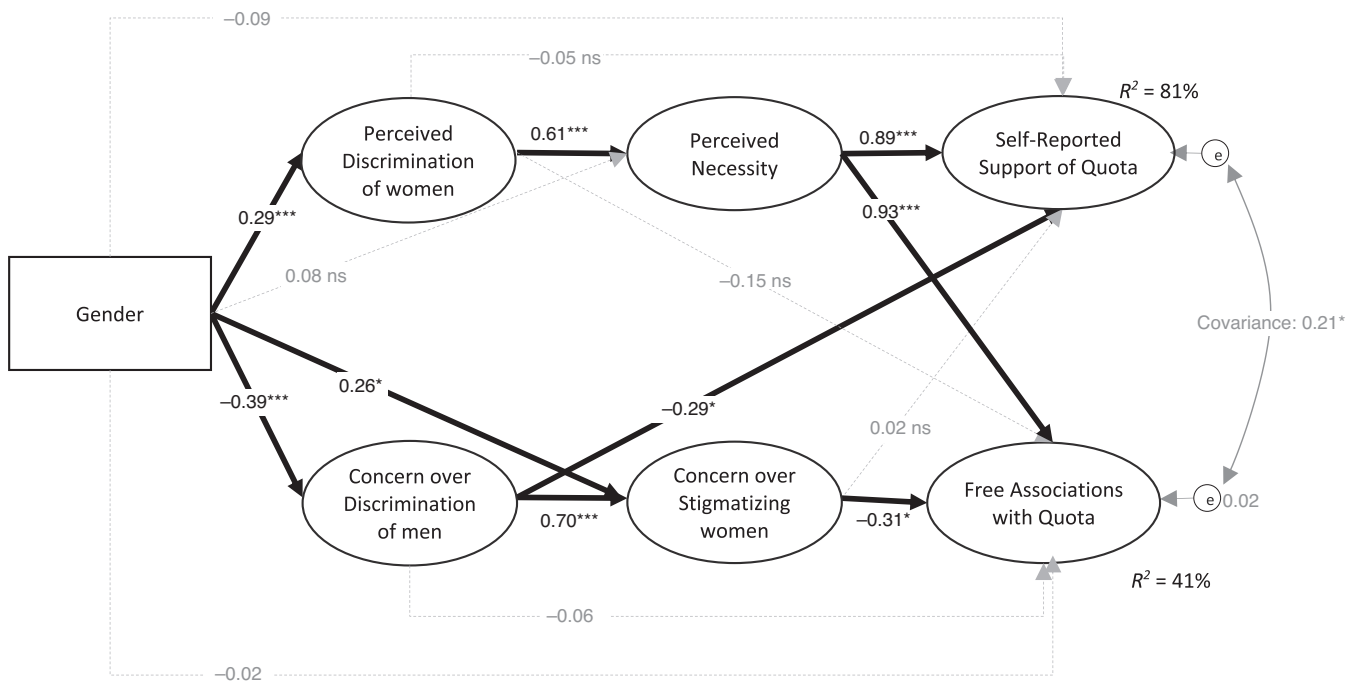


FIGURE 2 | Study 1: Structural equation model of mechanisms underlying gender differences in attitudes towards gender quotas for university professorship positions. Standardized results are depicted. Significant paths are indicated by solid lines, and nonsignificant paths are indicated by dashed lines. Gender was coded men = 0, women = 1. Rectangles represent observed variables, and ellipses represent latent variables. Significance levels are indicated as * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ and *** $p < 0.001$.

expressing more such concerns than men. These incidental results suggest that men indeed voice concerns about the stigmatization of women to mask their own self-interest to not be discriminated against by quotas—a mechanism first suggested by O'Brien et al. (2010) in the context of race-based affirmative action.

Limitations of Study 1 raise questions for further inquiry. The relatively small and homogeneous sample consisting of medicine students potentially reduced test power and the robustness and generalizability of the results. Moreover, the assessment of perceived necessity, concerns over the discrimination of men and concerns over the stigmatization of women with three items each has potentially limited the capability to calculate fit models for these measures. Finally, the focus on attitudes towards gender quotas for university professorship positions limits the applicability of our findings to other contexts, as attitudes might be different in the corporate world where quotas are more often in place. Study 2 was designed to overcome these limitations.

5 | Study 2

Study 2 examined the same set of hypotheses as Study 1 (see Figure 1) to test whether our proposed mechanisms also explain women's and men's attitudes towards gender quotas in the corporate world. Study 2 was conducted in Switzerland in 2021, where gender quotas for corporate boards have been effective since January 2021. Specifically, large, listed companies are to employ 30% women on the board of directors and 20% women on the executive board (Poggio 2020).

5.1 | Method

5.1.1 | Participants

Participants were students from the University of Bern (Switzerland). After receiving an e-mail invitation, 610 students completed the study. Six (1%) participants were excluded because of missing values in key variables and 11 (2%) for average response times per association above three standard deviations from the sample mean. Six (1%) individuals who did not self-identify as either a woman or a man were excluded from the main analyses. The final sample consisted of 587 students, 396 (67%) women and 191 (33%) men. Their age ranged from 18 to 68 years ($M = 24.09$, $SD = 5.60$). Power calculations showed that this sample size was sufficient to detect small-sized indirect effects ($abc = 0.01$) and path coefficients ($a = 0.20$, $b = 0.20$, $c = 0.20$), with a test power of 80% and alpha of $p < 0.05$.

5.1.2 | Procedure

The procedure was identical to that of Study 1, except for the different quota stimuli. Specifically, participants read: 'Since January 2021, there has been a gender quota for management positions in large, listed companies in Switzerland. Specifically, from now on, companies are to employ 30% women on the board of directors and 20% women on the executive board'. After learning about this newly introduced gender quota, participants provided their free associations, indicated their support for it and responded to questions containing the mediator variables and demographic information.

TABLE 2 | Study 2: Means, standard deviations and correlation matrix.

	Women M (SD)	Men M (SD)	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	DW	PN	DM	SM	S
Discrimination of women (DW)	4.99 (0.99)	4.23 (1.17)	-7.72	<0.001					
Perceived necessity (PN)	4.98 (1.60)	3.77 (1.79)	-7.96	<0.001	0.61*				
Discrimination of men (DM)	2.32 (1.19)	3.56 (1.53)	9.79	<0.001	-0.55*	-0.61*			
Stigmatization of women (SM)	3.80 (1.47)	4.18 (1.56)	2.80	0.005	-0.28*	-0.55*	0.47*		
Self-reported support for quotas (S)	0.18 (0.91)	-0.37 (1.08)	-6.07	<0.001	0.50*	0.79*	-0.60*	-0.58*	
Free associations with quotas (FA)	0.14 (0.96)	-0.28 (1.03)	-4.67	<0.001	0.39*	0.64*	-0.44*	-0.51*	0.64*

Note: Gender was coded as 0 = men and 1 = women. Support and free associations are indicated as standardized *z*-scores, ranging from -4 to 4, with higher scores indicating more positive attitudes.

**p* < 0.05.

5.1.3 | Measures

5.1.3.1 | Valence of Free Associations With Gender Quotas. As in Study 1, two independent raters categorized participants' first two free associations as a positive, a neutral or a negative response to gender quotas. Their agreement was substantial, Cohen's kappa = 0.77. Based on these ratings, we calculated the valence of the free associations.

5.1.3.2 | Self-Reported Support for Gender Quotas. As in Study 1, support for gender quotas was again assessed with the seven-item pairs of opposite meanings, $\alpha = 0.96$. To facilitate comparison between the valence of free associations and self-reported support, we again standardized both attitude measures using *z*-scores, ranging from -4 to 4. Greater values indicate more positive attitudes.

5.1.3.3 | Mediator Variables. As in Study 1, perceived discrimination against women was measured using the German 10-item Modern Sexism Scale, $\alpha = 0.88$.

Extending the scales used in Study 1, a four-item scale assessed the perceived necessity of gender quotas, $\alpha = 0.91$, concerns over discrimination against men, $\alpha = 0.85$ and concerns over the stigmatization of women, $\alpha = 0.89$. Participants indicated their agreement with all statements on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

5.1.4 | Analysis Plan

Following the analysis plan of Study 1, SEM tested the proposed mechanisms outlined in Hypotheses 1 and 2.

5.2 | Results

As shown in Table 2, women perceived more anti-women discrimination than men, perceived gender quotas as more necessary and were less concerned about gender quotas discriminating against men. Notably, women were less concerned than men that gender quotas could stigmatize women as incompetent. Moreover, women's self-reported support for gender quotas was greater than men's. Similarly, women's free associations with gender quotas were more positive than those

of men. Table 2 displays the means, standard deviations and inter-correlations of all variables included in Study 2.

5.3 | Mechanisms Underlying Gender Differences in Attitudes

The proposed model had good fit, $\chi^2(417) = 1,424.83$, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.927; TLI = 0.919; RMSEA = 0.064, 95% CI [0.061, 0.068] and accounted for 73% of the variance in self-reported support for gender quotas and 41% of the variance in the rater-coded valence of participants' free associations with gender quotas. Figure 3 displays the model, Supporting Information S4 shows results from CFAs and Supporting Information S5b shows the SEM regression results.

Supporting Hypothesis 1a, gender predicted support for gender quotas through perceived discrimination against women and perceived necessity, indirect effect $\beta = 0.47$, 95% CI [0.34, 0.64]. Women perceived greater levels of anti-women discrimination than men, $b = 0.33$, $p < 0.001$, which related to greater perceived necessity of gender quotas, $b = 0.61$, $p < 0.001$, and in turn to more support, $b = 0.85$, $p < 0.001$. Supporting Hypothesis 1b, gender also predicted the valence of free associations with gender quotas through perceived discrimination against women and perceived necessity, indirect effect $\beta = 0.17$, 95% CI [0.12, 0.25]. Greater perceived necessity of gender quotas related to more positive free associations, $b = 0.61$, $p < 0.001$.

Supporting Hypothesis 2a, gender predicted support for gender quotas through concerns over discrimination against men and the stigmatization of women, indirect effect $\beta = 0.12$, 95% CI [0.06, 0.19]. Men had greater concerns over the discrimination of men, $b = -0.42$, $p < 0.001$, which were associated with greater concerns over the stigmatization of women, $b = 0.58$, $p < 0.001$, and in turn with less support, $b = -0.17$, $p < 0.001$. Supporting Hypothesis 2b, the effect of gender on the valence of free associations with gender quotas was also mediated by concerns over discrimination against men and the stigmatization of women, indirect effect $\beta = 0.08$, 95% CI [0.05, 0.13]. Greater concerns over the stigmatization of women related to less positive free associations, $b = -0.22$, $p < 0.001$.

Contrary to predictions, additional exploratory results revealed that gender predicted support for gender quotas through

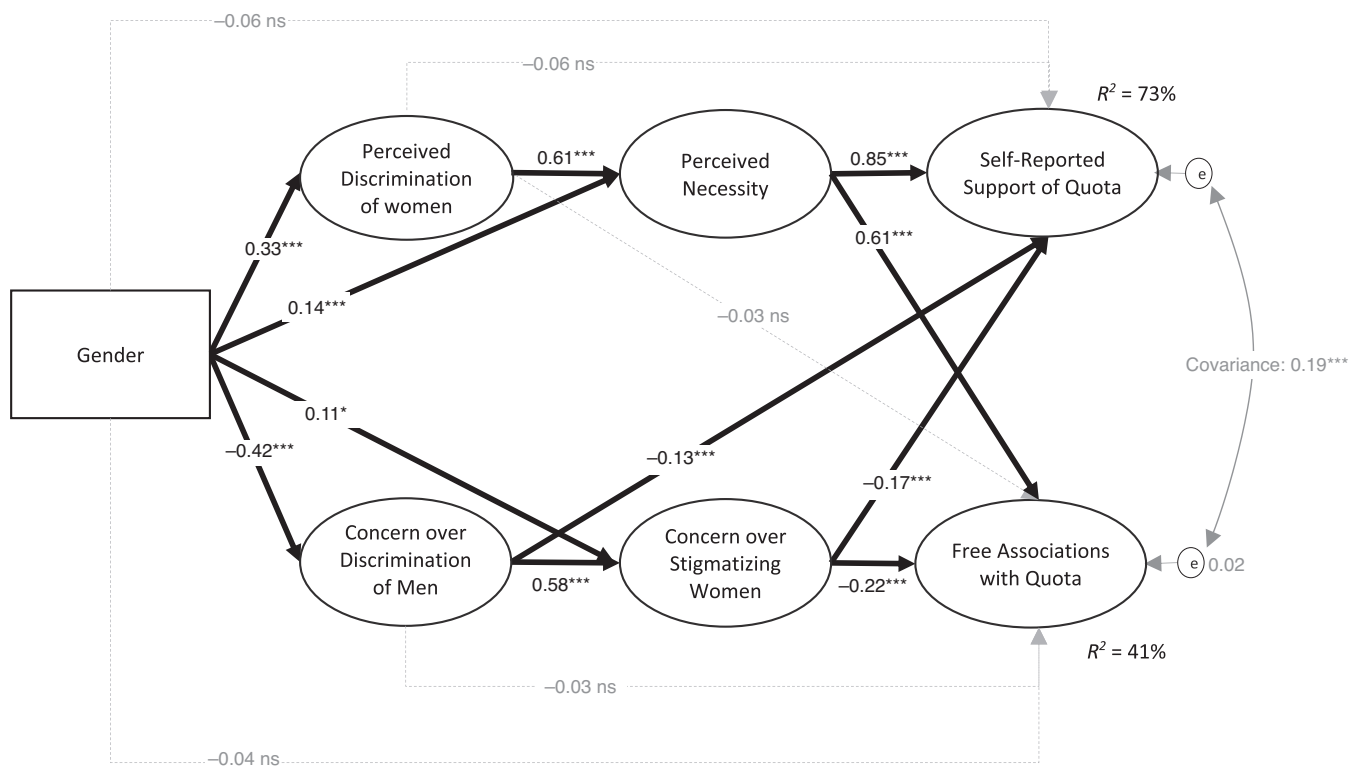


FIGURE 3 | Study 2: Structural equation model of mechanisms underlying gender differences in attitudes towards gender quotas for leadership positions in the corporate world. Standardized results are depicted. Significant paths are indicated by solid lines, and nonsignificant paths are indicated by dashed lines. Gender was coded men = 0, women = 1. Rectangles represent observed variables, ellipses represent latent variables. Significance levels are indicated as * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ and *** $p < 0.001$.

perceived necessity only, indirect effect $\beta = 0.32$, 95% CI [0.15, 0.50]. That is, women, compared to men, perceived gender quotas as more necessary, $b = 0.14$, $p < 0.001$. Gender also predicted the valence of free associations through perceived necessity only, indirect effect $\beta = 0.12$, 95% CI [0.06, 0.20]. Moreover, contrary to predictions, but consistent with findings from Study 1, gender related to support for gender quotas through concerns over discrimination against men only, indirect effect $\beta = 0.16$, 95% CI [0.06, 0.29]. Greater concerns over the discrimination of men resulted in less support, $b = -0.13$, $p < 0.001$. Again, gender also predicted support for gender quotas through concerns over women being stigmatized, indirect effect $\beta = -0.05$, 95% CI [-0.11, -0.01]. Once the impact of concerns over the discrimination of men was controlled for, women had more concerns over the stigmatization of women than men, $b = 0.11$, $p = 0.012$. Finally, gender also predicted the valence of free associations through concerns over women's stigmatization, indirect effect $\beta = -0.03$, 95% CI [-0.08, -0.01]. Note, however, that overall, women were less concerned over the stigmatization of women than men (see Table 2).

5.4 | Discussion

Women, compared to men, showed more support for and more favourable free associations with gender quotas in the corporate world. Replicating the results of Study 1, these differences could largely be explained through the two hypothesized mechanisms, which accounted for large amounts of variance in

self-reported support and the rater-coded valence of participants' free associations. First, women perceived greater levels of anti-women discrimination than men and, in turn, perceived gender quotas as more necessary, which related to more support and more favourable free associations. Second, men's, compared to women's, lesser support and less favourable free associations were explained by greater concerns over discrimination against men, which related to greater concerns over women being stigmatized.

Notably, overall, men expressed greater concerns over the stigmatization of women than women themselves. As in Study 1, only when controlling for concerns over anti-men discrimination, did women express greater concerns over the stigmatization of women. Again, these results were consistent with prior findings that members of majority groups may mask their own self-interests in relation to policies such as gender quotas behind concerns over such policies harming the benefitting minority (O'Brien et al. 2010).

6 | General Discussion

This research examined two mechanisms on why women hold more favourable attitudes towards gender quotas than men. Using a multi-method approach, the proposed mechanisms were tested for attitudes in terms of both self-reported support for gender quotas and rater-coded valence of participants' free associations with gender quotas. Two studies found support for our proposed mechanisms—namely (1) perceived discrimination against

women related to perceived necessity and (2) concerns over the discrimination of men related to concerns over the stigmatization of women—and both mechanisms explained large amounts of variance in attitudes towards gender quotas for university professorship positions (Study 1) and leadership positions in the corporate world (Study 2).

6.1 | Perceived Discrimination Against Women Related to Perceived Necessity of Quotas (Mechanism 1)

Results confirmed our assumption that women's greater perceived anti-women discrimination related to greater perceived necessity of gender quotas, which in turn related to more self-reported support for and to more positive free associations with gender quotas. This result is consistent with the long-presumed but not yet empirically tested notion (Kluegel 1985; Konrad and Hartmann 2001) that perceptions of continued discrimination against women on attitudes towards gender policies are mediated by the perceived necessity of such policies. Moreover, our results align with research showing that the recognition of discrimination against women tends to be the first, but not last step when confronting sexism or joining collective action for women (Ashburn-Nardo, Morris, and Goodwin 2008; Ellemers and Barreto 2009; Radke, Hornsey, and Barlow 2016; Stangor et al. 2003).

Although we find strong support for the theoretically proposed model in two studies, alternative and extended mediation models are plausible. First, in addition to general perceptions of continued discrimination against women (measured in our studies), the perceived pervasiveness and severity of anti-women discrimination may also influence how necessary gender quotas are perceived to be. Moreover, perceptions of intersectional forms of discrimination may affect the perceived necessity of gender quotas. For instance, Women of Colour typically perceive greater barriers to aspiring to leadership than White women (Showunmi, Atewologun, and Bebbington 2016) and would thus likely perceive gender quotas as more necessary.

Notably, perceptions of discrimination against women fully mediated the effect of gender on the perceived necessity of gender quotas in research (Study 1). However, it only partly mediated the same effect for quotas in the corporate world (Study 2). This indicates that, besides perceptions of continued anti-women discrimination, additional variables may explain why women, compared to men, perceive gender quotas as more necessary. In particular, in the corporate context, perceptions that greater proportions of female leaders are good for business may predict the perceived necessity of gender quotas (Bernile, Bhagwat, and Yonker 2018; Kirsch 2018; Stark and Hyll 2014).

There may also be additional mediators between perceptions of anti-women discrimination and attitudes towards gender quotas. Individuals could perceive ongoing discrimination against women, but perceive gender quotas as invariable or inappropriate solution, which could lead to less favourable attitudes towards gender quotas. For example, research showed that gender quotas increased the representation of women in corporate boards in

Norway, but women reported having less ability than men to influence board decisions and felt largely excluded from the inner circle (Storvik and Gulbrandsen 2016). Other research found that the presence of gender quotas decreased organizational attractiveness among potential applicants (Shaughnessy et al. 2016).

6.2 | Concerns Over the Discrimination of Men Related to the Stigmatization of Women (Mechanism 2)

Results confirmed our assumption that men's greater concerns over men being discriminated against related to greater concerns over women being stigmatized, which related to less self-expressed support for and more negative free associations with gender quotas. Notably, from a self-interest perspective, one would expect that women, compared to men, would be more concerned that gender quotas stigmatize them as incompetent. However, in Study 1 women and men expressed this concern to an equal extent and in Study 2 men expressed this concern to an even greater extent than women. Only when controlling for concerns over anti-men discrimination did gender differences in concerns over the stigmatization of women occur (Study 1) or change direction (Study 2), with women expressing more such concerns. These incidental results add plausibility to O'Brien et al. (2010) and our own reasoning, suggesting that men raise concerns about gender quotas' negative consequences for women to mask their own self-interests. Notably, past work showed that men who feel threatened by gender quotas also appear to be the ones driving backlash against the beneficiaries of gender quotas. Specifically, fearing that gender quotas would have negative consequences for one's own career led men to evaluate women more stereotypically when they benefitted from gender quotas in the public sector in Albania (Faniko et al. 2017).

Overall, these findings raise the question of how genuine concerns over women being stigmatized by quotas are. Before delving into this question though, one must consider the possibility of alternative mediation models. For instance, concerns over gender quotas discriminating against men and concerns over gender quotas stigmatizing women as competent could be two parallel mediators between gender and attitudes towards gender quotas. Like this, the two concerns could be tantamount attributes of gender quotas that both predict attitudes towards them (Bell, Harrison, and McLaughlin 2000). At least some men could have genuine concerns regarding the fairness of quotas considering women and men alike (Bobocel et al. 1998). Moreover, not all men see gender discrimination as a zero-sum game. Instead, some men take a 'we are in this together' perspective, perceiving discrimination against women and men to co-occur (Bosson et al. 2012).

Importantly, not all men may hide their self-interests regarding gender quotas behind concerns over women being stigmatized. Indeed, our SEM results revealed that concerns over the stigmatization of women did not absorb all variance from concerns over anti-men discrimination. Men's greater concerns over anti-men discrimination also related directly to less self-reported support for gender quotas (but not to less favourable free associations with gender quotas). But who then are the men

who voice concerns over women being stigmatized to hide their own fears of being discriminated against?

Men may use this strategy to both avoid the negative consequences associated with complaining about discrimination and position themselves as benevolent protectors of women. Research studying reactions to women who complain about gender discrimination found that complainers tend to be disliked and seen as overly sensitive and overreacting (Czopp and Monteith 2003; Kaiser and Miller 2001). When men claim that gender quotas discriminate against them, they may fear being seen negatively (similar to women complaining about discrimination). In addition, men may fear that complaining about anti-men discrimination may be seen as violating norms of masculinity, which can lead to negative evaluations of being unmanly and unworthy of respect (Heilman and Wallen 2010; Moss-Racusin, Phelan, and Rudman 2010). On the flipside, concerns for women allow men to position themselves as beneficial protectors, which is in line with masculinity norms (Glick and Fiske 1999; Good, Sanchez, and Moss-Racusin 2018). In sum, men who hide their self-interests behind concerns for women may be characterized by the endorsement of traditional masculinity norms, including benevolence towards women (Glick, Wilkerson, and Cuffe 2015; Glick and Fiske 2001) and see their manhood as easily lost (e.g., when complaining about discrimination; Vandello et al. 2008; Vandello and Bosson 2013). Somewhat in line with this is a finding from recent research that was conducted in Austria, Germany and Switzerland after the introduction of gender quotas for leadership positions in political parties: Only men from political parties with conservative agendas that uphold traditional gender roles stigmatized female politicians who benefitted from gender quotas as incompetent (Radojevic 2023).

Men's masking of their own self-interest behind concerns for women may occur by an associative, spontaneous process, rather than by a propositional, deliberate process, which is common in attitude formation (Gawronski and Bodenhausen 2006; Sweldens, Corneille, and Yzerbyt 2014). Notably, the effect of concerns over anti-men discrimination on free associations (unlike self-reported support) was fully mediated by concerns over the stigmatization of women. Compared to self-reported support, free associations measure more spontaneous attitudes and default thinking (Joffe and Elsey 2014; Rozin, Kurzer, and Cohen 2002).

As discussed above, after controlling for anti-men discrimination, women were more concerned than men that gender quotas would stigmatize women and these concerns also related to less support for and more negative associations with gender quotas. So far, past work mainly explained women's support for gender policies with their self-interest as potential beneficiaries (Harrison et al. 2006; Kane and Whipkey 2009; Martins and Parsons 2007; Olsen et al. 2016). Expanding the literature on how attitudes towards gender policies form, the present results suggest that women's concerns over negative consequences of gender quotas likely is another facet of women's self-interest. That is, some women may reject gender quotas because they fear negative consequences of this policy, personally or collectively. For instance, affirmative action has been called demeaning for women in merit-driven contexts (Kimura 1997). In academia, quotas discouraged some women from taking on leadership positions for fear of being

stigmatized as less competent (van den Brink and Benschop 2012). In leadership contexts, affirmative action statements in job advertisements only increased women's inclination to apply when the organizations' focus on women's merit was present (Nater and Sczesny 2016).

Especially senior women sometimes reject gender policies, such as gender quotas, for junior women (Faniko, Ellemers et al. 2017). In particular, in men-dominated professions, senior women tend to assimilate into their masculine work environments and distance themselves from junior women (Derks, Van Laar, and Ellemers 2016; Faniko, Ellemers, and Derks 2021). Notably, this so-called queen bee behaviour was found to be a threat-response, which serves senior women to maintain a positive social identity and self-image in masculine work environments, where feminine qualities tend to be discounted (Derks, Van Laar, and Ellemers 2016). Similar to the process described for men (who masked their self-interests behind concerns for women), senior women may mask their own self-interests of being perceived positively behind concerns of junior women being stigmatized by gender quotas.

6.3 | Limitations and Future Research

The presented research is not without limitations but paves promising avenues for future work. First, although we tested the two proposed mechanisms in different contexts (i.e., 50% gender quotas for university professorships and 20–30% gender quotas for management positions), we relied on students as research participants. Future research should examine whether the here-tested mechanisms can be replicated in more heterogeneous samples including participants working in different industries.

Second, the cross-sectional nature of the collected data does not allow for causal claims regarding the tested model (Tate 2015). Future experimental research is needed to lend stronger support to the proposed mechanisms underlying gender differences in attitudes towards gender quotas. In particular, Mechanism 2 (men's greater concerns over the discrimination of men, related to greater concerns over the stigmatization of women, related to attitudes towards gender quotas) deserves further attention and experimental research. Such work might use a paradigm similar to O'Brien et al. (2010). Manipulating the extent to which men are disadvantaged by gender quotas could confirm that men's self-interests precede concerns over the stigmatization of women. It would also be valuable to further examine whether the process by which men conceal their own self-interests behind concerns for women is spontaneous or deliberate. Limiting to the present study, we did not include individual difference variables that may help explain why some men mask their concerns over being discriminated by quotas behind concerns over the stigmatization of women. Future work should include variables, capturing among other zero-sum thinking, beliefs about masculinity and benevolent sexism to shed further light on this mechanism.

Furthermore, research on women's concerns over gender quotas stigmatizing them as incompetent would be valuable. For example, it seems promising to examine whether certain context factors increase women's concerns for the negative side effects of a policy that is designed to promote them. Recent research

found that women benefitting from gender quotas for political parties were only perceived negatively in conservative parties (Radojevic 2023). Similarly, women could be more concerned about being perceived negatively when gender quotas are applied in organizations with a masculine rather than a more egalitarian gender-inclusive organizational culture. Another promising route for future research would be to examine how women weight potential advantages (e.g., access to top positions) and disadvantages (e.g., being perceived as undeserving) in their attitudes towards gender quotas.

Given that beliefs about anti-men discrimination are on the rise (Kehn and Ruthig 2013; Zehnter et al. 2021), a closer examination of the antecedents and consequences of these beliefs, also in the context of gender quotas, is warranted. First and foremost, it would be worthwhile to disentangle justified concerns over the discrimination of men in communal domains (Manzi 2019) from an unjustified perception of anti-men bias in all, including masculine typed, domains (Zehnter et al. 2021), and to then examine how these different motivations relate to support for pro-women interventions. Investigating predictors of concerns over anti-men discrimination, future research could examine whether the perception of the status quo, including the overrepresentation of men in research and leadership roles, as fair and legitimate, may lead to the belief that policies, such as gender quotas, discriminate against men (Jost et al. 2010).

Finally, investigating the consequences of concerns over the discrimination of men, future research may test whether these concerns affect perceptions of women selected under a quota policy. Because negative perceptions can serve to penalize women (Faniko et al. 2017), those perceiving gender quotas to discriminate against men may be particularly motivated to portray quota beneficiaries in a negative light. Also, those who perceive anti-men discrimination may reject policies that promote women, while they embrace policies promoting men (Zehnter et al. 2021). Supporting this idea, past research found that women quotas were perceived as less favourable than men quotas for university professorship positions (Zehnter and Kirchler 2020). Even in the highly men-dominated domain of physics, support (e.g., through mentoring) was perceived fairer when provided to men rather than to women (Van den Brink and Stobbe 2014). It would be worthwhile for future research to investigate whether different concerns over anti-men discrimination, that is, the justified (Manzi 2019) and unjustified perceptions of anti-men bias (Zehnter et al. 2021), lead to the endorsement of policies promoting men.

6.4 | Practical Implications

The present findings have several practical implications for organizations and policymakers. Given the strong association between the perceived necessity of gender quotas and attitudes towards them, it seems highly important to clearly communicate why gender quotas are needed upon or before implementing them. Thereby, men and the general public seem to respond particularly well to moral arguments, such as gender quotas increasing fairness (Muriaas and Peters 2024; Prime, Moss-Racusin, and Foust-Cummings 2009). Moreover, the present research suggests that raising awareness of the persistent dis-

crimination against women can be a solid strategy to increase the perception that gender quotas are necessary and ultimately increase the acceptance of this policy. The recognition of continued discrimination against women was particularly important in convincing men to support policies for women (Prime and Moss-Racusin 2009). However, this strategy can entail some pitfalls that are discussed below. To highlight the necessity of gender quotas, organizational representatives and policymakers can also draw on an extensive body of research alluding to the advantages of greater proportions of women in leadership positions (Chen, Leung, and Evans 2018; Kim and Starks 2016; Ritter-Hayashi Id, Vermeulen, and Knoben 2019; Simionescu et al. 2021) and on some research showing the positive consequences of gender quotas more specifically (Balafoutas and Sutter 2012; Calsamiglia, Franke, and Rey-Biel 2013; Stark and Hyll 2014).

As concerns over gender quotas discriminating against men affect attitudes towards gender quotas, organizational representatives and policymakers are advised to take such concerns seriously (Dover, Major, and Kaiser 2016). Addressing and deterring these concerns would likely increase men's acceptance of gender quotas. Hitherto, there is a lack of research on effective strategies to ameliorate concerns over anti-men discrimination. However, factors that foster perceptions of anti-men bias should be consciously considered. For example, pointing at men as the perpetrators of anti-women discrimination can lead men to engage in competitive victimhood and focus on anti-men discrimination, rather than taking in information on continued anti-women discrimination (Noor et al. 2012). Thus, raising awareness about the persistent discrimination against women—as advised above—needs to be accomplished in a sensitive manner. Again, strategies that appeal to men's empathy and morality may be most effective in engaging them in women's issues (Becker and Swim 2012; Čehajić-Clancy and Bilewicz 2021). In addition, promising approaches may appeal to men's self-interest by referring to research showing that gender quotas do not only increase chances for competent women to be selected over less competent men but also for competent men to be selected over their less competent counterparts (Besley et al. 2017).

Finally, organizational representatives and policymakers need to address concerns over the stigmatization of women as incompetent. These concerns are valid, as women who benefit from policies such as gender quotas are often perceived more negatively than their merit-based selected counterparts (Heilman et al. 1992; Heilman and Welle 2006; Nater, Heilman, and Sczesny 2023). As a way to reassure quota beneficiaries and women more generally, organizations and policymakers can commit interventions that manage negative perceptions of quota beneficiaries.

7 | Conclusion

This research examined why women hold more favourable attitudes towards gender quotas than men. Two key mechanisms explained gender differences in attitudes towards gender quotas: (1) Women's greater perceptions of discrimination against women related to greater perceived necessity of gender quotas and (2) men's greater concerns over the discrimination of men related to greater concerns over the stigmatization of women. In addition

to advancing the scientific understanding of attitudes towards gender quotas, the present findings have important practical implications for organizations and policymakers. To increase the acceptance of gender quotas, it is important to raise awareness of persistent discrimination against women and clearly communicate the necessity for gender quotas. In addition, addressing and deterring concerns over the discrimination of men and the stigmatization of women would likely increase acceptance of gender quotas among women and men. Combining these two strategies seems a promising road to effectively frame and successfully implement policies aimed at overcoming women's underrepresentation in research and leadership.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Ethics Statement

The manuscript adheres to ethical guidelines specified in the APA Code of Conduct and the present studies were approved by the Data Protection Commission of the Medical University of Vienna (pilot study) and the Ethics Commission of the University of Bern (Studies 1 and 2). All studies were risk-free for the participants, and anonymity was assured.

Data Availability Statement

The data, and analysis code that support the findings of this research are available at OSF (<https://osf.io/pdxv6>).

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section.