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# *Gender, Attitudes, and Behaviors: an Analysis of Contemporary Sexism*

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## Introduction

Sexism has become a more complex phenomenon in recent years. Modern sexism is perceived to be subtler than previous generations of overt sexism, to the extent that a man may be more hesitant to label certain beliefs as sexist, motivated by the desire to avoid labeling himself as sexist (Swim, Mallett, Russo-Devosa, & Stangor, 2005). The distancing of oneself from negatively-stigmatized labels is found in women as well. It is of note that, while feminist women are regarded positively compared to other women, feminists are judged more than women in general (Anderson, 2009).

Alternatively, “benevolent sexism,” according to Guttentag and Secord (1983), is characterized by protective attitudes, prescribed gender roles, and objectification, all of which suggest that women are a step below men (as cited by Glick & Fiske, 1996). Benevolent sexism arises from men idealizing women as “pure” or “innocent” and in need of male protection (Glick & Fiske, 1999).

Benevolently sexist men view women as romanticized, dyadic beings and may, for example, offer unsolicited help to a woman, assuming he is more competent than she (Glick & Fiske, 1997). Benevolent sexism is so called because these attitudes are subjectively positive to the perceiver and may elicit prosocial behavior. This is not to say that benevolent sexism is perceived positively by the receiver (Glick & Fiske, 1996). The idealization of women creates an excuse for men to relegate women to subservient roles, further perpetuating the gender gap. Benevolent sexism, like modern sexism, is usually considered to be a form of traditional manners or chivalry, i.e. a “ladies first” mentality or the urge to assist women with strenuous, physical activities (Swim et al., 2005).

Despite its societal significance and the plethora of research on the subject, sexist attitudes have been shown to be incredibly resistant to change, even when people are presented with evidence revealing sexist structures in society (Moss-Racusin, Molenda, & Cramer, 2015). Such findings have only increased the need to find effective inroads into the junction of gender and sexism, both in attitudes and behaviors.

Using a traditional resume example (Wright, Domagalski, & Collins 2011) for an anonymous review experiment, this study seeks to examine

self-reported attitudes toward gender and implicit behavioral gender biases. Few studies comprehensively examine behavioral and attitudinal interactions between, and within, men and women (Roets et al., 2011). The current study seeks to contribute to that gap in the literature by examining the intersections of gender and sexist attitudes and behaviors.

## Methods

*Participants:* A Qualtrics survey distributed through Facebook garnered 117 participants, 85 of whom finished the survey. Of these respondents, 37 self identified as male (31.6%), 77 self identified as female (65.8%), and 3 respondents did not identify as male or female (2.6%).

*Procedure:* Participants were asked to fill out an online survey. The given purpose of the survey was to examine current gender trends and opportunities for advancement; the wording was left vague so as to hide the true purpose of the experiment. The participants were randomly assigned to assess the competency and hireability of an applicant, to recommend a salary for one of two identical resumes, and then to complete a set of questions using a Likert scale. The resumes differed only in that one was for “John Smithfield” and the other for “Shannon Smithfield.” The online survey was open to participants for a period of two weeks, after which data were coded for analysis.

*Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI):* This measure assesses negative attitudes and overall ambivalence toward women (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Benevolent sexism towards women was operationalized as subjectively positive attitudes or behaviors grounded in feminine stereotypes. Participants rated the degree to which they agreed with the given statements on a scale of zero (disagree strongly) to five (agree strongly).

*Ambivalence towards Men Inventory (AMI):* This scale measures negative attitudes and overall ambivalence toward men (Glick & Fiske, 1999). This series of questions pertains to benevolent prejudices and stereotypes of men (e.g. “Women ought to take care of their man at home, because men would fall part if they had to fend for themselves”; Glick & Fiske). Participants rated the degree to which they agreed with the given statements on a scale of zero (disagree strongly) to five (agree strongly).

*Modern Sexism Scale:* This measure assesses modern sexism in the participants (Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995). The modern sexism scale assesses skepticism about the prevalence of modern discrimination against women (e.g. “it is rare to see women treated in a sexist manner on television”); antagonism towards women’s collective organization (“it is easy to understand the anger of women’s groups in America”); and policies that attempt to

address gender bias (“the government and news media have been showing more concern about the treatment of women than is warranted”; Swim et. al. 1995). Participants rated the degree to which they agreed with the given statements on a scale of one (agree strongly) to five (disagree strongly).

## Results

Three 2x3 ANOVAs were conducted using the gender of the target applicant, the self-identified gender of the participant, and one of the dependent variables: competency, hireability, and recommended salary, respectively. The ANOVA regarding hireability showed a main effect for applicant gender,  $F(1, 83)=8.516$ ,  $p=.005$ , showing that both women ( $M=7.4286$ ,  $SEM=0.489$ ) and men ( $M=7.4286$ ,  $SEM=0.414$ ) scored Shannon more favorably in hireability in comparison to their scores of John.

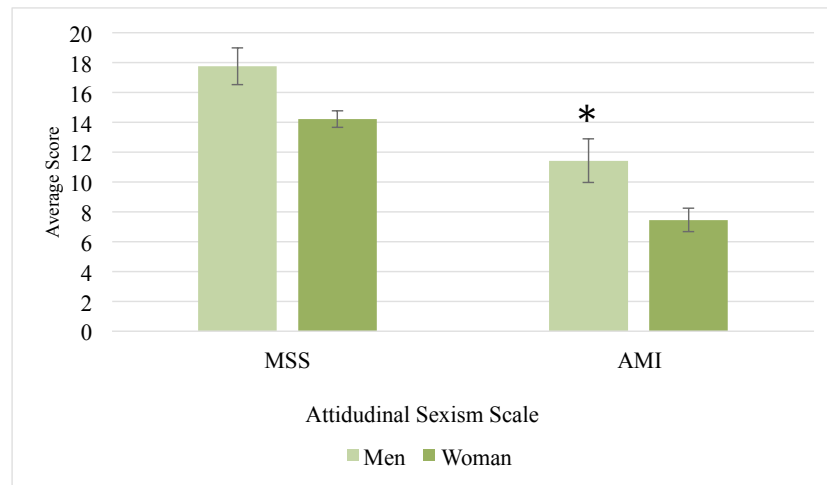


Figure 1 \* denotes males scored higher MSS and AMI scores than females ( $p<.05$ )

Two independent samples t-tests were conducted to determine differences between participant gender, MSS, and AMI. Statistically significant differences were found between males’ average scores and females’ average scores (see Figure 3). Two sets of independent groups’ t-tests with select cases for men and for women were performed regarding hireability and recommended salary of each applicant (see Figure 1 and Figure 2).

A series of nine multi-linear regressions were performed for each dependent variable (competency, hireability, and suggested salary), each sexism scale (MSS, ASI, and AMI), and each target applicant gender and self-identified participant gender constant across all regressions. The first set of regressions performed pertained to competency. AMI scores and self-identified gender were correlated,  $r(85)=-0.232$ ,  $R^2 = 0.054$ ,  $p=0.016$ , as were MSS scores and self-identified gender  $r(87)=-.287$ ,  $R^2 = .082$ ,  $p=0.004$ .

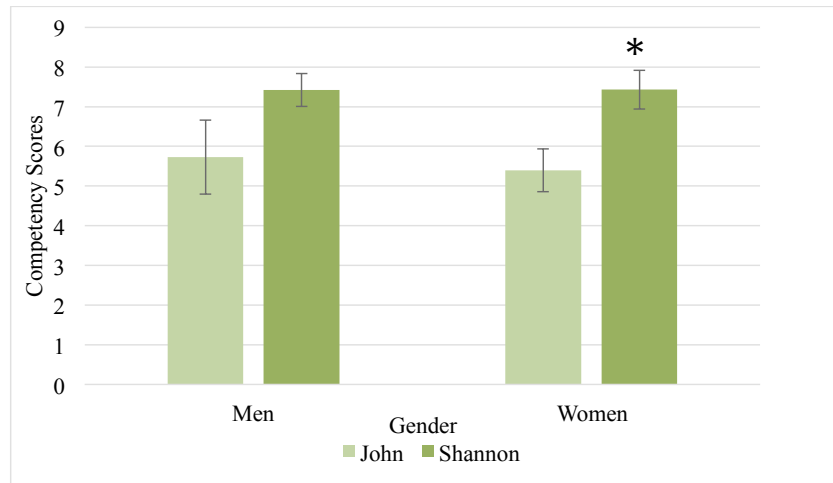


Figure 2 \* denotes females rated Shannon more favorably than John ( $p < .01$ )

The second set of regressions examined hireability. Hireability scores and MSS were correlated  $r(85)=0.185$ ,  $p=0.044$  as were hireability scores with applicant gender  $r(85)=0.312$ ,  $p=0.002$ . However, applicant hireability scores were strongly correlated with applicant gender  $r(95)=0.312$ ,  $p=0.002$ . Modern sexism scores significantly predicted hireability,  $R^2 = 0.142$ ,  $F(3, 83)=4.582$ ,  $p=0.005$ .

Gender of the applicant significantly moderated the regression equation  $\beta=0.330$ ,  $t(86) = 3.231$   $p=0.002$ . Ambivalence towards women had significantly predicted hireability of the applicant  $R^2 = 0.112$   $F(3, 84)=3.418$ ,  $p=0.021$ . The gender of the applicant also significantly moderated the regression equation,  $\beta=0.323$ ,  $t(84) = 3.072$ ,  $p=0.003$ . Ambivalence towards men also significantly predicted hireability  $R^2 = 0.124$ ,  $F(3, 81)=3.835$ ,  $p=0.013$ . Again, gender of the applicant significantly moderated the regression equation,  $\beta=0.320$ ,  $t(84) = 3.070$ ,  $p=0.003$ .

## Discussion

Women viewed the female applicant as more competent and deserving of a higher salary than the male applicant. Men did not exhibit any differences in rating male and female applicants. Analysis revealed that attitudinal sexism did not significantly indicate behavioral sexism for either gender; instead, the applicant gender moderated the one statistically significant regression relating attitudinal sexism and hireability. Secondary independent t-tests revealed that male participants scored statistically significantly higher on MSS and AMI scores than female participants.

The magnitude of women's gender bias in this experiment suggests that the difference in gender privilege in America is of more salience to women than it is to men. Rating other women as more competent and deserving of

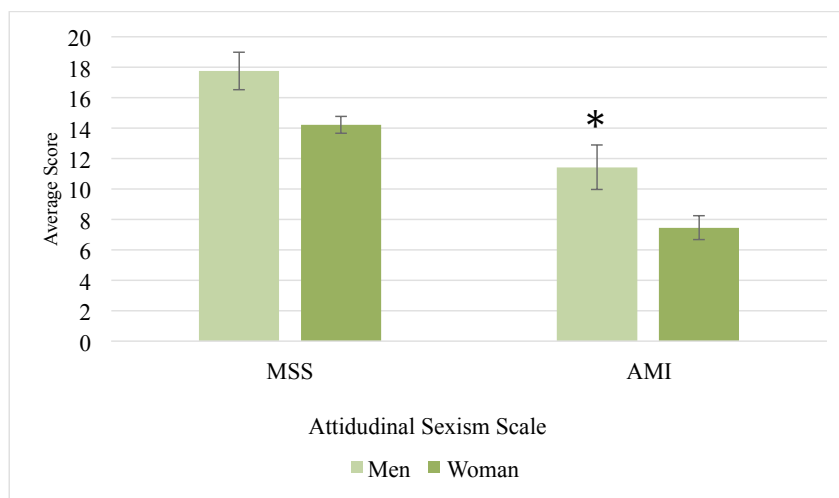


Figure 3 \* denotes males scored higher MSS and AMI scores than females ( $p < .05$ )

higher salary may be reflective of a gender-biased reality in which women must work to get ahead at all costs in order to succeed in male-dominated power systems in the workplace (Ridgeway, 1997).

In other words, women may have attempted to reconcile their marginalized gender status by expressing solidarity with this other, imaginary, woman, and raising her up to a position that possibly reflects participants' aspirational appraisals of themselves when perceiving others in a similar workplace situation. This may also have been seen as a step to help overhaul an unequal system. Though some prior literature has hypothesized that women may subscribe to disparaging sexual models (Connelly, 2012; Roets, 2011), the current findings suggest a resistance to total gender-role capitulation.

No significant correlations were found between the behavioral sexism constructs and attitudinal sexist scales within the regression equation for either men or women. The present analysis suggests that attitudinal sexism may have minimal to no relationship to behavioral sexism. Our finding showed men to be more ambivalent towards other men than women are to men. This finding possibly suggests that men view gender bias differently than women do.

Due, perhaps, to these male respondents' awareness of their gender privilege, men demonstrated greater awareness of gender inequality than expected, despite not having experienced the negative effects of gender inequality. This may be due to a lack of understanding of the magnitude of gender inequality. On one hand, because men are not exposed to the same sexist stressors as women, they may know that gender discrimination is a problem, but not understand to what extent. On the other hand, women may have a more realistic view of modern sexism and be better equipped than men to accurately rate modern sexism. This study's findings could suggest that this group of men is more aware of their gender privilege and thus does not share the belief system of stereotypical men or adhere to traditional masculinity.

This may also reflect the converse of the findings of Glick et al. (2015) in that highly masculine men were viewed more negatively than average men. The men in this sample, based on their high ambivalence towards men (AMI) scores, viewed the traditional in-group of men as incompetent and somewhat helpless without the aid of women. Through these results, it can be inferred that non-traditionally-masculine males are trying to distinguish themselves as separate from the male stereotype. Male respondents may have distanced themselves from traditional male stereotypes in an effort to compensate for their male privilege or past gender discrimination trends (Heman et al., 2014; Moss-Racusin et al., 2012).

## **Future Directions**

Considering the gender demographics of the sample, future research is needed to better evaluate the intersection of gender bias in attitudes and behaviors. Within-subjects experiments (in this case, where each participant viewed both resumes) may prove to be an effective way to compare participants' assessment of both genders at the same time. Additionally, because students tend to have little experience with resume evaluation, future research should consider evaluating what measures best reflect young adults' assessment of males and females.



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