



The Effect of Sexism Exposure on Women's Narrative Memories

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Abstract

The effect of sexism exposure on gender related narratives was examined. Past literature reveals that individuals exposed to benevolent sexism recollect more memories of incompetence than when exposed to hostile sexism, (Dumont, Sarlet, & Dardeene, 2008); however, the authors examined the frequency of participants' memories rather than the narrative content and failed to examine relevant modifiers of the effect. The current study replicated and extended the work by Dumont and colleagues (2008). Participants (N=45, 45 female) were exposed to either benevolent, hostile, or no sexism and subsequently documented a gender relevant memory. Memories were coded for gender memory topic, presence of incompetence, meaning making, emotion, agency and communion. Participants were also scored on stigma consciousness and gender identity development. It was hypothesized that benevolent sexism would be more likely to elicit memories of incompetence than hostile and no

sexism conditions and that stigma consciousness would moderate this effect. There was a significant interaction between sexism condition and stigma consciousness on the presence of incompetence and levels of meaning making in women's narrative memories. This finding suggests that both sexism type and individual interpretation can impact how sexism affects women's narrative memories.

In our modern society, gender-based discrimination continues to be both pervasive and problematic. Discrimination refers to the unjust behaviors or verbalizations toward an individual or group based on identity and operates by limiting access to important life domains (Major & O'Brien, 2005). Gender discrimination is exemplified in society's tendency to over-value masculine traits and devalue feminine traits. Once acted upon, these prejudicial opinions result in discriminatory behaviors that can range from the systemic wage gap between genders, gender typed feminine jobs and masculine jobs, to underrepresentation of women in leadership positions (Barreto, Ellemers, Piebinga, & Moya, 2010; Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995).

Though these examples are specific to occupations, gender-based discrimination can also affect women outside of the workplace. The use of discriminatory language and stereotypes pervade women's everyday experiences and can lead to economic and social inequity (Dumont, Sarlet, & Dardeene, 2008; Kaiser, Brooke Vick, & Major, 2006). These experiences of discrimination have negative psychological effects which have been shown to influence a woman's performance on cognitive tasks (Brown & Pinel, 2003; Kaiser et al., 2006), self-construal (Barreto et al., 2010), autobiographical memories (Dumont et al., 2008), and stress levels (King, 2005). Examining the ways in which women are affected by discrimination in various aspects of their lives provides an opportunity to understand the widespread and problematic effects of gender-based discrimination. In the current study, the author will examine the impact of discrimination on women's narrative recollection of their past experiences.

Systematic gender-based discrimination, referred to as sexism, is an oppressive phenomenon which is often demonstrated in gender stereotyping, degrading comments, and negative behaviors toward women (Swim, Cohen, Hyers, Ferguson, 2001). Sexism can also have an ambivalent quality (Glick & Fisk, 1996; Swim et al., 1995), meaning that while some sexism is overtly antagonistic or hostile, other sexism can devalue women while still appearing socially acceptable. This ambivalence of sexism is displayed in positive attitudes toward women, while simultaneously acknowledging and perpetuating women's lack of competence and ability (Barreto et al., 2010). The ambivalence helps to distinguish two distinct forms of sexism: hostile and benevolent sexism (Glick & Fisk, 1996; Swim et al., 1995).

Hostile sexism is an overt form of sexism, expressing blatant and antagonistic forms of gender inequity toward women (Glick & Fisk, 1996). An example of this sexism would be treating a working woman with disrespect and telling her that her place should be in the home rather than in the work place.

Comparatively, benevolent sexism expresses the devaluation of women in a paternalistic and patronizing manner that is rarely perceived as sexism, despite its perpetuation of gender inequality (Glick & Fisk, 1996). Benevolent sexism is exemplified by praising a working woman for her clean household rather than her occupational success or by telling a woman that she is “too pretty” to pursue higher education and she can rely on her looks to be successful in life. Compared to hostile sexism, benevolent sexism can be difficult to identify as problematic due to its ambiguous nature, it both compliments and patronizes women, calling their self-efficacy into question. The hidden nature of benevolent sexism compared to the blatant nature of hostile sexism can produce distinct differences in women’s psychological response to sexism (Glick & Fisk, 1996).

Many studies investigating a singular conception of sexism examine the hostile aspect of sexism. These studies have found a negative effect of hostile sexism on cognitive performance (Johns, Schmader, & Martens, 2015) and affective stress reactions (King, 2005). Johns and colleagues (2015) employed a stereotype threat paradigm in which antagonistic attitudes toward women’s math ability were elicited and women’s performance on a math test were measured. Participants were told that a math test was designed to show gender differences in math performance, suggesting that women would perform worse on the test. Results showed that this hostile sexism led the women to perform worse on a math test than their male peers in the same threat paradigm. Thus, hostile sexist claims have the ability to pervade women’s cognitions and subsequently affect women’s math performance.

King (2005) also examined the effect of hostile sexism by exposing participants to an audio recording of two males negatively evaluating study participants. After listening to the audiotape, participants recorded whether they attributed the negative evaluation to their own gender or race, how important, or central, the experience was to them, and the stress participants felt. King found that centrality of the evaluation was correlated with an increase in the women’s affective stress reactions, wherein women who rated the negative evaluation as more central to them, showed higher affective stress reactions. This finding suggests that an individual’s interpretation of sexism moderates the effect it has on him or her.

Additional studies examining the differential impact of hostile and benevolent sexism have revealed interesting results. For example, women were more likely to describe themselves with relational terms (e.g. warm, attentive romantic) as opposed to task related terms (e.g. self-assured, ambitious, dominant) when exposed to benevolent sexism relative to hostile sexism or the control condition (Barreto, Ellemers, Piebeinga, & Moya, 2010). This finding suggests that women’s identity and self-efficacy can be manipulated through exposure to different types of sexism, demonstrating that benevolent sexism, in particular, can be harmful to women, despite its apparent innocuous nature. Dumont, Sarlet, and Dardenne (2008) also investigated the varying effects of benevolent and hostile

sexism on women's self-construal and memories. After exposure to benevolent, hostile, or no sexism, their participants were asked to report the number of times they could remember feeling incompetent. Results indicated that the participants exposed to benevolent sexism recalled significantly more memories of incompetence than the women who were exposed to hostile or no sexism.

Other researchers have inadvertently found an effect of benevolent sexism on women's attention to stimuli. Kaiser, Brooke Vick, and Major (2006) measured women's preconscious attention to words in a lexical decision task. They exposed participants to gender-based social threats (e.g. ho, bitch, whore), illness-injury threats (e.g. virus, stroke, disease), and household items (e.g. broom, stove, Tupperware), then measured the time it took them to decide if the stimulus was a word or not. Their results revealed that women had faster reaction times for gender threats and the household items compared to the illness-injury threatening stimuli. Though the household items were meant to be a control measure, the authors note that it was possible that women interpreted it as a form of benevolent sexism, which explains the lack of significant difference in their performance on the lexical decision task between the gender threats and the household items (Kaiser et al., 2006). Women's faster response time to gender threats and household items is further evidence that negative psychological effects can result from both hostile sexism and benevolent sexism.

This differential impact of hostile and benevolent sexism on women, as evidenced in the aforementioned studies, also suggests that all women may not respond to, or see, benevolent and hostile sexism in the same way. This idea is supported by evidence from research on the moderating effect of stigma consciousness following exposure to sexism. Kaiser and colleagues (2006) showed that individual differences in expectations for sexism moderate preconscious attention paid to gender-based threatening stimuli. These expectations for prejudice were operationalized and measured using Pinel's (1999) Stigma Consciousness Questionnaire (SCQ). Stigma consciousness is an indicator of the extent to which an individual is aware of his or her status as a target of discrimination. In the Kaiser et al. (2006) study, women who were high in stigma consciousness responded faster to both the gender threatening (hostile sexism) stimuli than women who were low in stigma consciousness. Moreover, there was no difference between these groups in their attention to the illness-injury (no sexism) condition. This finding suggests that stigma consciousness is a key variable in understanding differential effect of sexism on women's reaction time to sexist stimuli. Other research employing Pinel's (1999) concept of stigma consciousness examined its effect on women's performance on a math test following stereotype threat. Stereotype threat was manipulated using a hostile sexism to explain gender-based differences in math ability (Brown & Pinel, 2003). The researchers found that after exposure to the stereotype threat condition, women high in stigma consciousness performed worse on a math test than those low in stigma-consciousness, while no differences were found between the two groups in the no threat condition.

Additionally, Brown and Pinel found that stigma consciousness was positively related to gender identification for those in the high threat condition, suggesting that gender identity is relevant to how one responds to experiences of gender discrimination.

Together, these findings demonstrate that individual differences in stigma consciousness and gender identity development significantly impact the ways in which women are affected by sexism. Research on these two constructs calls for the use of a narrative approach to identity development to understand the process through which our identity and individual differences shape experiences of sexism (McLean, Shucard, & Syed, 2017). Further, the aforementioned study by Barreto and colleagues (2010), suggests that sexism has the ability to impact the way women talk about and see themselves, as operationalized by terms self-construal. How we think and talk about ourselves can provide clear insight into the development of our identity. Within narrative approach to understanding identity development, it is held that examining the way people talk about themselves and their past experiences gives us insight into the ways these experiences affect them (McLean et al., 2017). This was done by Syed and Azmitia (2010), who examined ethnic (rather than gender) identity development and autobiographical narratives to better understand individuals' ethnicity-related social experiences. They found that individuals higher in ethnic identity development were more likely to write about ethnic-based experiences of prejudice and group belonging, while individuals low in ethnic identity development were more likely to write about memories of a solo minority experience. This finding illustrates a difference in memories generated as a function of ethnic identity development level. Additionally, it suggests that identity development status, in this case ethnic identity, and recollection of being stigmatized, are related. This relationship demonstrates the value of examining memory narratives as a means of investigating experiences of discrimination. Further, individual differences in gender identity development levels and the contents of narratives memories could function effectively as an approach to understanding women's experience with sexism.

To extend the research of Syed and Azmitia on memory narratives and experiences of discrimination, the current study examines the impact of benevolent and hostile sexism on women's narratives of past gender relevant experiences, while aiming to replicate and extend the work by Dumont and colleagues (2008) who examined the frequency women's memories of incompetence in response to benevolent and hostile sexism in job ads. The present study expands upon both these works by collecting full narratives of the women's memories, after exposure to sexism, and examining the potential moderating effect of both stigma consciousness and gender identity development on those memories. Based on the initial work by Dumont et al. (2008), it is hypothesized that women exposed to benevolent sexism, relative to hostile and no sexism conditions, would be more likely to mention incompetence within their narrative memories of gender relevant experiences. In line with the previous findings (Kaiser et al., 2006, Barreto et al.,

2010), I expected to see a stronger effect of sexism on narrative memories for women high in stigma consciousness and gender identity development, than those low on these measures.

Method

Participants

Participants were 45 predominantly white (75%) undergraduate students ($M_{\text{age}} = 19.27$, $SD = 1.21$) attending a small private liberal arts college in the Midwest United States. Students were recruited using the Gustavus SONA system, online subject recruitment software that allows students in psychology courses to register to participate in studies for course credit. Students were also recruited from other upper-level psychology, theater, and dance classes. They also were compensated with extra credit in their respective courses.

Materials

Demographics survey. Participants were asked to provide their age, ethnicity, and gender.

Stigma consciousness questionnaire (SCQ, Pinnel, 1999). The stigma consciousness questionnaire examined women's perceptions of sexism with items such as, "When interacting with men, I feel like they interpret all my behaviors in terms of the fact that I am a woman" (Pinnel, 1999). Participants responded to the 10 questions using a 6 point Likert Scale from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (6). Construct validity was found to be high in its positive correlations with perception of group discrimination and recollection of sexism and its negative correlation with the Modern Sexism Scale. Reliability of the measure is evidenced in the Cronbach's alpha of .72 (Pinnel, 1999).

Gender identity measure (GIM). The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure originally designed by Phinney (1999) was adapted from its use with ethnic identity development to examine gender identity development. The 12-item revised version was used in the present study to replicate the work by Syed and Azmitia (2010) who also utilized this scale. In all items, the word "gender" was substituted for "ethnicity." Participants responded on a 4-point scale from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly disagree* (4). The Cronbach's alpha of .72 reveals reasonable reliability (Phinney, 1999). In support of the adaptation of this measure for gender identity development, Sarno and More (2016) also adapted Phinney's scale to examine lesbian, gay, and bisexual development. In that study, Cronbach's alpha was found to be .83 (Sarno & Mohr, 2016). Together, the use of this measure in adapted form and its high validity, as indicated by the scales correlations with life satisfaction and self-esteem, suggest that adaptation for gender identity development is acceptable. The adapted measure includes items such as, "I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my gender group membership"

and “I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own gender group” (Phinney, 1999).

Rosenberg self-esteem scale (RSE, Rosenberg, 1965). The scale consists of 10 items which are responded to on a 4-point Likert Scale from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (4), with a Cronbach’s alpha of .88 (Robins, 2001). This measure was used to account for the effect of individual self-esteem differences as they affect perceptions of sexism and included items such as, “I feel that I’m a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others” (Rosenberg, 1965).

Procedure

Participants ($N= 45$) were randomly assigned to one of three sexism exposure conditions: benevolent sexism ($n = 15$), hostile sexism ($n = 15$), and no sexism ($n = 15$) ((Dumont et al., 2008). Each level of the sexism manipulation included a job ad that reflects on the employment of women in a company. The ad describes a position in a company which, “requires typically feminine traits and four key skills: being sensitive to clients’ needs, cooperative orientation, having good social abilities, and attentive to clients” (Dumont et al., 2008, p. 548). Following this general description of the position was an explanation of the importance of hiring women in the company, which served as the sexism exposure. The exact wording of the manipulation was used by Dumont et al., (2008, p. 548), which is employed in the present study and is as follows:

Benevolent sexism

Women who would be hired would work as much with men as women and this should not be a problem because everybody is well aware of the importance of hiring women in our organization. Indeed, all think that the presence of women, who are more cultured and well-groomed than men, would allow the organization to benefit from their morality and good taste, whereas these aspects usually lack in environments where only men work.

Hostile sexism

Women who would be hired would work as much with men as women, and this should not be a problem because everybody is well aware of the importance of hiring women in our organization, even if women always look for special favors and get easily offended by trivial remarks. It is true that women often exaggerate the problems they face in organizations simply to get power and control over men.

No sexism

Women who would be hired would work as much with men as women and this should not be a problem because everybody is well aware of the importance of hiring women in our organization.

All participants were told they were in an experiment investigating career aptitude which had four parts: exposure to a job ad, a memory task, a writing task, and a personality test. The participants first followed along with the experimenter who read the job ad aloud, which had either benevolent, hostile, or no sexist components. Participants then completed a Reading Span Task (RST, Daneman & Carpenter, 1980), which they were told was a measure of their working memory. The reading span task was used as a means of replicating the study by Dumont and colleagues (2008). Its intended function was to be a filler task between the exposure to sexism and the memory writing prompt. It also served to reinforce the cover story that examining career aptitude was the purpose of the study.

Participants were then asked to provide an autobiographical memory that they believed was a writing sample for the purpose of measuring career aptitude. The writing prompt used in the present study was adapted from Syed and Azmitia's study (2010) on ethnic identity development and autobiographical memories. The adapted prompt asked participants to record a memory regarding their *gender* relevant experiences rather than an ethnicity-related experience. The full prompt was as follows: "Please write about a time when you felt your gender was relevant. Please be as specific as possible and include as many details as you can, including when the event took place and how it made you feel." Participants typed their memories into a computer, as is consistent with other research on gender-based narratives (McLean, Shucard, Syed, 2017). Further, it has been suggested that writing narratives, as opposed to recording responses verbally, allows a greater sense of anonymity for participants (Syed & Azmitia, 2008). For these reasons, in addition to the increased efficiency of coding typed narratives, as opposed to interviewing, transcribing, and coding spoken narratives, the current study employed an electronic means of collecting narrative memories. After typing their memories, participants then completed the stigma consciousness questionnaire (Pinel, 1999), the gender identity measure, and the Rosenberg self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965). All questionnaires were presented and answered on a computer. At the end of the study, participants were debriefed and dismissed.

Coding

Narrative memories were coded by two independent coders with discrepancies resolved by a third coder. Coders were trained with practice materials from the pilot study. All coders were blind to the conditions of the participants' narratives which they were coding. Additionally, the third coder was blind to the hypothesis of the study. The memories were coded for six main constructs: gender

topic, incompetence, meaning making, agency and communion, and emotion words.

Gender-relevant memory topic. Memories were assigned one of five gender memory topics adapted from Syed and Azmitia (2010) ethnic memory topics. The five topics included: awareness of difference, awareness of underrepresentation, experience of prejudice or positive connection, or no experience, as they pertain to one's gender. All of the following ethnic identity development level coding requirements were adapted from Syed and Azmitia (2010). A memory was coded as "awareness of difference" and scored as level one if participants mentioned in any way being different from others in terms of gender, behaviors, or social practices. A memory was coded as "awareness of underrepresentation" and scored as level two if participants mentioned in any way, recognizing being a member of an underrepresented gender group in a particular setting, or recognizing lack of representation in a group of which one is not a part. A memory was coded as indicating "experience of prejudice" and scored as level three if any experience of prejudice, sexism, discrimination, or oppression no matter if the perception of intention was present. A memory was coded as "positive connection" and scored as level four if there was any suggestion of a positive experience associated with gender. A memory was coded as "no experience" and scored as level five when gender relevance was not indicated in the memory. All memories were coded as one of the five memory topics. If more than one topic was present, the memory was coded for the topic with the highest numerical level, as previously done by Syed and Azmitia (2010).

Incompetence. Narratives were coded for the presence or absence of incompetence. The memory was given as score of one if any suggestion of feeling "silly, incompetent, or less smart than others" was present (Dumont et al., 2008). Narratives were given a score of zero if no suggestion of incompetence was present.

Meaning making. As a means of determining the level of insight reported in the narrative, memories were coded for aspects of meaning making using the coding scheme employed and described in detail in Mclean and Pratt (2006). According to this coding scheme, a score of zero indicated no meaning reported, a score of one indicated the presence of a lesson learned without extension past the event recalled, a score of two was given to meaning that was more sophisticated than a lesson but not as explicit as insights, and a score of three indicated the presence of a specific insight which extended to a broader understanding of the world, oneself, and relationships.

Agency. The narratives were coded for the presence or absence of agentic themes using the coding scheme established by McAdams, Hoffman, Mansfield, and Day (2007). For this construct, the presence of agency was scored as a one if one or more of the agentic themes (self-mastery, status, achievement/responsibility, or empowerment constituted the expression of agency) were present. Self-mastery was constituted by "any suggestion of attempts to master,

control, enlarge, or perfect an autonomous self” (McAdams et al., 2007, p. 346). Status was indicated by “any suggestion of striving to attain heightened status or prestige, or honors or recognition from others” (McAdams et al., 2007, p. 347). Achievement/responsibility was constituted by “any suggestion of aiming to accomplish goals and build better self-legacy” (McAdams et al., 2007, pp. 347-348). Empowerment was constituted by “any expression of being motivated by the power of oneself or others” (McAdams et al., 2007, p. 348). A score of zero was given to narratives where none of the aforementioned themes were present. Further, this nominal measurement of presence/absence was chosen after examining narratives from the pilot study, which, on average, only exhibited one of the four themes of agency.

Communion. The narratives were coded for the presence or absence of themes of communion, the coding scheme established by McAdams, Hoffman, Mansfield, and Day (1996). For this construct, the presence of one or more of communion themes (love/friendship, dialogue, care/help, or community) was scored as a one. Love/friendship was indicated by “any suggestion of interpersonal relationships” (McAdams et al., 1996, p. 349). Dialogue was indicated by “any suggestion of conversation or dialogue with others” (McAdams et al., 1996, pp. 349-350). Care/help was indicated by “any suggestion of taking care of others” (McAdams et al., 1996, p. 350) and the theme of community was indicated by “any suggestion of relatedness/rootedness in community with others” (McAdams et al., 1996, pp. 350-351). A score of zero was given to narratives where none of the aforementioned themes were present. Further, this nominal measurement of presence/absence was chosen after examining narratives from the pilot study, which, on average, only exhibited one of the four themes of communion.

Emotion words. Memories were coded for the frequency of explicit mention of positive and negative emotion words (McAdams et al., 2006). A positive emotion word was constituted by any specific statements of a participant’s positive feelings, which included descriptors such as happy, excited, and fun. It did not include actions that implied these feelings such as laughing or smiling. A negative emotion word was constituted by any specific statement of a participant’s negative feelings, which included descriptors such as anxious, bored, sad, angry, and lonely. It did not include actions that implied these feelings such as crying or blushing.

Results

Word Count

To examine where there were differences in the length of memories, narratives were submitted to a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with the number of words in each memory as the dependent variable and sexism condition as the between-subject’s factor. Results revealed that on average, participants in the benevolent sexism condition wrote fewer words ($M = 87$, $SD = 53$) than both

hostile sexism ($M = 100, SD = 61$) and no sexism conditions ($M = 114, SD = 42$), though this difference did not reach statistical significance, $F(2, 42) = .947, p = .396$.

Gender-Relevant Memory Topic

To determine the topic of women's memories, a chi-square test for association to determine the relationship between gender memory topic and sexism condition was conducted. This test for association allows a comparison of the proportion of memories assigned to each gender-relevant topic: (1) awareness of difference, (2) awareness of underrepresentation, (3) experience of prejudice, (4) positive connection, and (5) no experience. Table 1 displays the overall percentages of memories in each gender topic by sexism condition (benevolent, hostile, and no sexism).

Table 1

Percentage of Memories in Each Gender Memory Topic by Sexism Condition (N=45).

Gender Memory Topic	Sexism Condition			
	Average Overall (N= 45)	Benevolent (n=15)	Hostile (n=15)	None (n=15)
1. Awareness of Difference	26.7%	26.7%	25%	28.6%
2. Awareness of Underrepresentation	8.9%	0%	12.5%	14.3%
3. Experience Prejudice	42.2%	33.3%	43.8%	50%
4. Positive Connection	17.8%	33.3%	12.5%	7.1%
5. No Experience	4.4%	6.7%	0%	6.3 %

The data show that on average and independent of sexism condition, most women (42%) tended to write about an experience of prejudice. Results also showed slight variation in memory topic based on sexism condition, especially for the memories of positive connection. Namely, 33.3% of the memories from individuals in the benevolent sexism condition were memories of positive connection, compared to 12.5% and 7.1% in the hostile and no sexism conditions,

respectively. Additionally, all memories in the hostile condition included some mention of gender relevance, as evidenced in the finding of 0% no experience memories, whereas both the benevolent sexism and the no sexism conditions had memories with no mention of gender relevance. It is important to note, however, that a chi-square test for association showed that overall proportions in each category were not significantly different from chance, $\chi^2(8, N= 45) = 6.64, p = .58, h_p^2 = .38$.

Incompetence

To examine the impact of sexism condition on the likelihood that women would mention incompetence, a 3 (sexism: benevolent, hostile, and control) x 2 (Stigma consciousness: high vs. low) ANOVA was conducted. A median split was performed on stigma consciousness to group participants into high or low stigma consciousness levels.

These results demonstrate that the impact of the sexism condition on the presence on incompetence in the narrative memories was found to follow the hypothesized pattern. Specifically, the likelihood of mentioning incompetence was highest in the benevolent sexism condition ($M = .29, SD = .46$), as compared to the hostile sexism condition ($M = .25, SD = .5$). Further, the likelihood of mentioning incompetence was higher in both sexism conditions than the control condition ($M = .21, SD = .5$). Despite this trend, there was not a significant main effect of sexism condition [$F(2,45) = .122, p = .89, h_p^2 = .01$] or stigma consciousness [$F(1, 45) = .03, p = .88, h_p^2 = .001$] on mention of incompetence.

The interaction between stigma consciousness and sexism condition on mention of incompetence approached statistical significance [$F(2,45) = 2.22, p = .12, h_p^2 = .10$]. Figure 1 displays the mean likelihood that incompetence was mentioned in the narrative as a function of stigma consciousness (high vs. low) and exposure to sexism (benevolent, hostile, control). In this interaction, the effects of sexism condition on mention of incompetence had opposite effects for women who were high in stigma consciousness compared to those who were low in consciousness. Of the low stigma consciousness participants, those exposed to benevolent sexism were more likely to elicit mention of incompetence ($M = .43, SD = .53$) compared to those in the hostile sexism condition ($M = .14, SD = .38$) and the no sexism condition ($M = .25, SD = .46$). Alternatively, of the participants who were high in stigma consciousness, those who were in the hostile sexism condition were more likely to mention incompetence ($M = .44, SD = .53$), compared to those in the benevolent sexism condition ($M = .14, SD = .38$) and the no sexism condition ($M = .17, SD = .41$).

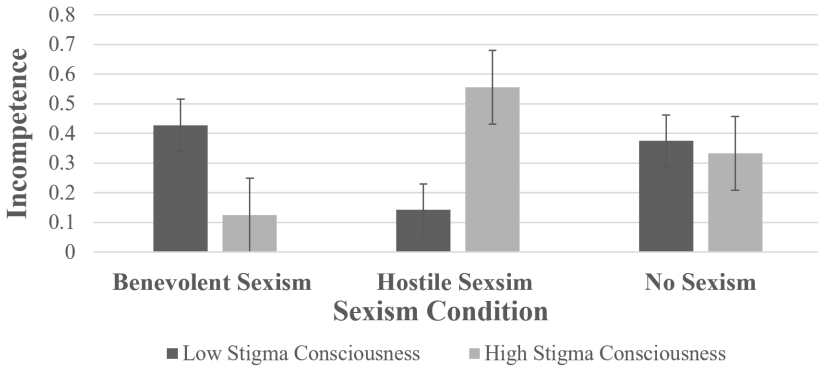


Figure 1. Mean likelihood of incompetence mentioned as a function of sexism condition and stigma consciousness.

Meaning Making

To examine the effect of sexism condition and stigma consciousness on the level of meaning making within memories, a 3 (Sexism condition) by 2 (Stigma Consciousness Level) ANOVA was conducted. There was a main effect of sexism condition [$F(2,45) = 3.95, p = .03, h_p^2 = .17$], such that women in the benevolent sexism condition had the highest level of meaning making in their memories ($M = 1.0, SD = .20$) compared to hostile sexism ($M = .43, SD = .20$) and no sexism ($M = .27, SD = .21$). There was also a main effect of stigma consciousness [$F(1,45) = 4.69, p = .03, h_p^2 = .1$] on meaning making, such that women in the low stigma consciousness had the highest levels of meaning making ($M = .84, SD = .167$) compared to those who were high in stigma consciousness ($M = .33, SD = .17$). These main effects were qualified by a significant interaction [$F(2,45) = 3.22, p = .05, h_p^2 = .14$] between sexism condition and stigma consciousness on meaning making. Figure 2 displays average meaning making as a function of stigma consciousness and sexism condition. In the benevolent sexism condition, those who were low in stigma consciousness had the greatest average meaning making ($M = 1.71, SD = 1.25$) in comparison to those in the high stigma consciousness condition ($M = .38, SD = .52$). In the hostile sexism condition, there was no difference in the meaning making for the women low in stigma consciousness ($M = .43, SD = .78$) and high in stigma consciousness ($M = .44, SD = .73$).

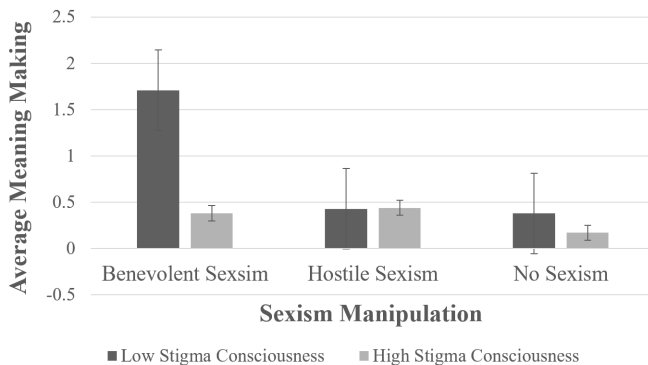


Figure 2. Average meaning making in narratives as a function of sexism condition and stigma consciousness.

Emotion Words

To examine the effect of sexism condition on the use of positive and negative emotion words in gender relevant narrative memories, separate one-way analyses of variance were conducted with frequency of positive emotion words mentions in the narratives and frequency of negative emotion words as the dependent variables. For positive emotion words, the effect of sexism condition was not statistically significant, $F(2, 43) = 1.35, p = .269, h_p^2 = .061$. Although, an examination of the means shows that the benevolent sexism condition had a greater average number of positive emotion words ($M = .4, SD = .63$) compared to hostile sexism ($M = .13, SD = .34$) and no sexism conditions ($M = .14, SD = .54$). Similarly, the effect of sexism condition on negative emotion words was not statistically significant, $F(2, 43) = 1.693, p = .196, h_p^2 = .075$. The no sexism condition had a greater average number of negative emotion words ($M = 1.3, SD = 1.6$) compared to benevolent sexism ($M = .53, SD = .92$) and hostile sexism ($M = .75, SD = .78$).

Agency and Communion

To determine whether exposure to sexism impacted themes of agency, the presence of agency was submitted to a chi-square analysis. This nominal means coding and analysis was chosen based on an analysis of the narratives from the pilot study, in which, on average, only one of the four possible themes was mentioned. Thus, the use of a chi-square test for association between the presence/absence agency and communion and sexism conditions allowed broader understanding of the relationship between the variables. The results display a greater likelihood of showing themes of agency in the sexism conditions than in the control condition [$\chi^2(2, 45) = 4.47, p = .107$] such that there was a greater likelihood of agency being mentioned in the benevolent sexism condition (43.5%)

and the hostile sexism condition (39%) than the control condition (17.4%). No significant differences were found for the effect of sexism condition on themes of communion [$X^2(2, N= 45) = .06, p = .97$].

Discussion

The current study tested the hypothesis that individuals exposed to benevolent sexism would be more likely to mention incompetence in their narrative memories than those exposed to hostile sexism or no sexism. This hypothesis stems from research by Dumont and colleagues (2008) who found that individuals exposed to benevolent, relative to hostile and no sexism, conditions generated more memories of incompetence. Additionally, stigma consciousness was expected to moderate the effect of sexism condition on the likelihood of mentioning incompetence in gender-related memories, in stigma consciousness moderated by the impact of women's performance on math tests (Brown & Pinel, 2003), and in women's reaction time to threatening stimuli (Kaiser et al., 2006).

The current study demonstrated that sexism condition interacted with stigma consciousness at a marginally significant level. Individuals who were low in stigma consciousness and exposed to benevolent sexism were more likely to mention incompetence in their gender relevant memories than those with low stigma consciousness who were exposed to hostile sexism. In contrast, individuals who were high in stigma consciousness and exposed to hostile sexism were more likely to mention incompetence than their high stigma consciousness peers exposed to benevolent sexism.

This interaction shows that different types of sexism lead to two distinct responses from those high in stigma consciousness compared to those who were low in stigma consciousness. First, hostile sexism appears to have led women who were high in stigma consciousness to recall times where sexism made them feel incompetent. Exposure to hostile sexism may have reminded women who are sensitized to gender stereotypes of their past encounters with this form of sexism. These women, who very likely had more experiences with sexism from which to draw, may have then had a greater likelihood of mentioning incompetence, compared to the women who were low in stigma consciousness and also exposed to hostile sexism. This conclusion is supported by the findings by Brown and Pinel (2003) where women high in stigma consciousness, who were exposed to a stereotype threat, performed worse on a math test than those who were low in stigma consciousness, suggesting that a stereotype threat of hostile sexism elicits feelings and memories of incompetence, especially for women high in stigma consciousness.

Alternatively, the lower likelihood of mentioning incompetence for those low in stigma consciousness in the hostile sexism condition may be explained by the personal/group discrimination discrepancy (Taylor, Wright, Moghaddam, & Lalonde, 1990). This discrepancy occurs when an individual recognizes sexism toward members of his or her in-group, but does not believe

he or she is personally victimized by such discrimination. Participants who were low in stigma consciousness and in the hostile sexism condition may have been able to understand the job ad as sexist, but their failure to see discrimination in their own lives, as indicated by their low stigma consciousness and explained by the personal/group discrimination discrepancy, prevented them from recalling memories of sexism and mentioning incompetence.

In the benevolent sexism condition, women low in stigma consciousness were more likely to mention incompetence than women who were high in stigma consciousness.

These benevolent sexist attitudes may be leading individuals who are low in stigma conscious to feel inadequate in comparison, as exemplified by the mention of incompetence, to the gendered expectations that benevolent sexism elicits (i.e. being “well groomed, well cultured, with good taste and morals” (Dumont et al., 2008, p. 548)). This feeling of inadequacy, in response to exposure to the benevolent sexism job ad, may have led women to recall times where they felt the pressure of this gendered social comparison in their own lives, which is evidenced in the mention of social, academic, appearance-based, or work-related incompetence within the narratives.

In contrast, women who were high in stigma consciousness and exposed to benevolent sexism were not as likely to mention incompetence as their low stigma consciousness peers. This effect could be a function of the negative correlation between high stigma consciousness and the Modern Sexism scale (Pinel, 1999). This correlation demonstrates that individuals high in stigma consciousness score lower on the Modern sexism scale and thus may be less likely to adhere to or believe subtle, covert, socially accepted beliefs about gender and power that were mentioned in the benevolent sexism job ad.

Further support for these two distinct responses to sexism elicited by those high and low in stigma consciousness is evidenced in the effect of these same variables on meaning making. Meaning making refers to the degree to which an individual reflects on and assigns significance to an event which they are recollecting (McLean & Pratt, 2006). Significant main effects on meaning making were found for both stigma consciousness and the sexism manipulation.

The benevolent sexism condition produced the highest level of meaning making compared to hostile and no sexism conditions, especially for those low in stigma consciousness as evidenced in Figure 2. This different reaction from those low in stigma consciousness may be related to their increased expressions of incompetence in the benevolent sexism condition. Their employment of a strategy of social comparison may have forced them to create meaning out of the ways in which they felt inadequate in experiences where they were compared to societal conceptions of femininity. Their narratives of incompetence stemming from this social comparison may have simultaneously evoked a meaning making process. This interpretation is supported by research on meaning making where it has been found that meaning making is most likely to be found in narratives of conflict or

tension (McLean & Pratt, 2006).

Individuals exposed to hostile sexism, those both low and high in stigma consciousness, were less likely to make meaning in their recollection of gender relevant experiences. Perhaps being able to attribute the stigmatizing situation to the sexist beliefs of the individual or group with which they were interacting eliminates the need to create meaning. Assigning blame for negative outcomes by attributing them to prejudice functions as a defense mechanism in the face of social threat (Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002); however, if individuals fail to recognize an experience as sexist, they are unable to elicit the defense mechanism of altered attribution. This appears to be happening to the low stigma consciousness individuals who are exposed to benevolent sexism. For example, consider this narrative from a participant in the benevolent condition who discusses her dislike for a gym teacher presumably for his sexist behavior. She states:

When I was in high school gym class, I was around the age of 16 and the teacher was a male who only liked talking to the guys in my class. He also a lot of times would allow them to skip other class periods or home rooms to hang out in his room or office to mess around. I also just really hated gym class because we always had stupid activities like dodgeball, and I was very bad at dodgeball. The guys would throw the rubber balls way too hard. I'd usually refuse to play because I didn't think it was necessary. I didn't mind taking part in other sport activities like running the mile or playing volleyball, but dodgeball and that gym teacher pissed me off and I feel like he favored male students.

Though she is aware of his preference for the male students, she still engages in meaning making to try to better explain her extreme dislike for dodgeball and the gym class. Of particular importance is that she does not mention the words "sexism" or "discrimination." This example demonstrates one of the ways women, who are unable to attribute their memories of incompetence to sexism, engage in reflection and make meaning of the situation in order to better understand the experience and its implications for their self-concept.

Employing this means of data interpretation also evidences more instances of agentic themes in memory narratives for the sexism conditions than the control condition. Although the differences did not reach statistical significance, themes of agency were found to be highest in the benevolent sexism condition. These themes of agency demonstrate actions intended to promote self-improvement, goal achievement, and empowerment (McAdams et al., 2007). This was further demonstrated by the higher percentage of positive connection memories found in the benevolent sexism condition compared to the hostile and no sexism conditions (See Table 1). Benevolent sexism could lead individuals to recollect experiences when their agentic actions were met with a form of benevolent sexism, making them more likely to recollect these experiences after exposure to benevolent sexism. For example, a participant in benevolent condition in the current study stated:

Because I was a female employee, my male boss thought that I was not as strong or capable as my male counterparts. This situation made me feel very frustrated and angry about some societal gender points of view. In response to his comment, I moved the tubs and tables myself stating that I did not need someone else to do my job for me and that I was entirely capable of lifting and moving things.

This narrative demonstrates the use of agency in response to experiencing benevolent sexism.

Finally, sexism condition was found to have no significant effect on the memory length or the frequency of positive and negative emotion words. Though it is not statistically significant, on average, participants in the benevolent sexism condition wrote fewer words than those in both hostile and sexism conditions. Individuals in the benevolent condition, on average, used positive emotion words more than the hostile sexism and no sexism groups, suggesting that the positive expression of feminine qualities in benevolent sexism may be priming positive emotions and experiences in individuals who feel adequate or do not engage in deep social comparison.

Limitations and Future Directions

The explanations of the analyses in the current study require future research on the effects of benevolent and hostile and the moderating effects of individuals differences in order to draw more explicit conclusions about their effects. Future research should also account for the limitations in the current study. First, the strength of the manipulation could be improved to increase its saliency. The current study, as replicated by Dumont et al (2008), exposed participants to sexism by displaying the written text of a job ad; however, the written text may not have been as memorable as an animation or video would have been. Though the written text manipulation was successful in the study by Dumont and colleagues and functioned effectively in the current study, the current study's use of full narratives, as opposed to memory frequency, may have required a more salient manipulation to achieve the same strength of effects.

Another limitation of the current study was that the narrative memories provided by the participants were relatively short. Future research could extend the time of writing to facilitate longer memories or by sampling from a population of older women who may have more gender-related memories. In the current study, participants were given five minutes to record their memories. During this time period, they were not allowed to move on to the next part of the study until the five minutes had elapsed; however, often participants would stop typing within the first one to two minutes and often waited during the remainder of the writing period. Additionally, other research on gender related memories suggests that on average these types of memories tend to be short and less dense than other domains of narrative memories (McLean et al., 2017). Facilitating an increase in

memory length could be vital in the determination of the mechanisms involved in women's recollection of past gender relevant experiences. Alternatively, the use of semi-structured interviews and verbally recorded narratives would allow further questioning and facilitate the collection of more information and details regarding the participants' memories and could be another means of collecting longer narratives.

Another limitation, a possible consequence of the aforementioned weaknesses, is that the frequency of coded constructs, such as meaning making, and emotion words, was low, thus leading to little variability in responses. Of the continuous coding constructs (word length, positive and negative emotion, and meaning making), there was very little variation in the codes given to the memories. For example, although the construct of meaning making can be scored from 0-3, the highest score for meaning making in the present study was two. The variance could be improved by facilitating access to longer, more complete memories. Perhaps sampling from older populations who have had statistically more opportunities to be exposed to sexism would facilitate an increase in memory length and coding variables.

Lastly, it is important to note that the number of participants in the study ($N=45$) and the number of participants in each condition ($n=15$) is a relatively small sample size for a psychological experiment. Constraints of participant availability and time prevented the current study from achieving a higher number of participants. Future research should aim to use a larger sample size to increase the power and improve the study overall.

Conclusion

Through the replication and extension of the work by Dumont and colleagues (2008), an understanding of the complex effect of sexism on women's narrative memories was illustrated. Although the results of the current study do not provide complete support for the hypothesis that exposure to benevolent sexism will elicit more memories with mentions of incompetence than exposure to hostile and no sexism, the current study does allow a more sophisticated interpretation of the effects of individual differences in the experience of sexism. The interactions between sexism condition and stigma consciousness on both the average mention of incompetence and meaning making within narratives suggested that the effect of sexism in general is contingent on the type of sexism and an individual's interpretation of that event. Future research engaging in research on the effect of sexism type and the moderating effect of individual variables, such as stigma consciousness, is necessary in the quest to better understand women's experiences with sexism.

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