How Exposure to Ambivalent Sexism Impacts Individual Perceptions and Career Expectations

This study seeks to understand the effects of ambivalent sexism to women in the workplace, and to determine whether gender predicts career expectations. Moreover, it adds to the current literature on ambivalent sexism by testing whether ambivalent sexism directly contributes to the gender pay gap. To reveal whether a relationship between ambivalent sexism and the gender pay gap exists, this study exposes individuals to a hypothetical situation that involves sexism taking place.

Ambivalent Sexism

Sexism, by definition, is the negative view held, or unfair treatment performed, by one gender against another based on stereotypical gender assumptions (Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary, n.d.). The widely-accepted gender norm (that men are dominant and assertive, and women are submissive and nice) can lead to discrimination, especially against women in the workplace (Rudman & Glick, 2001). The seminal article by Glick and Fiske (1996) expounds on the underlying reasons why women are discriminated against socially and, consequently, at work. This article introduced the concept that subsequent researchers have used to study gender issues: the Ambivalent Sexism Theory.
The Ambivalent Sexism Theory was developed by Glick and Fiske (1996) to explain two different forms of sexism: benevolent sexism and hostile sexism. Benevolent sexism (BS) is defined as a stereotypical view of women as the sex that completes men. This view holds that women should be protected and cared for by men, and that any strength women may have (such as carrying a pregnancy and giving birth) are meant to complement men. Hostile sexism (HS), on the other hand, stereotypes women as the inferior sex. According to this view, women are not capable of the same talents that men possess. The result of BS is that women who stay within their gender roles and maintain the status quo will elicit positive attitudes from others – both men and women, and the result of HS is that women who defy their domestic roles and compete with men will produce negative attitudes from others.

Benevolent and hostile sexism comprise what is called ambivalent sexism (AS; Glick & Fiske, 1996). Research on ambivalent sexism indicates that there is indeed a positive correlation between BS and HS – although they hold different views of women. Glick and Fiske (1996) assert that BS helps legitimize HS. Simply put, BS gives men justification to think women are weak and incapable. Because it is a subtle form of HS, BS often goes unnoticed even though the end result is the same for women: they are viewed as weak and inferior beings (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005).

Gender Predicts Career Expectations

A research study, using a sample size of 23,413 postsecondary students between 18 to 27 years old (14,237 of which were women), revealed that women are willing to settle for “less-than-ideal” jobs and constantly switch employers perhaps because they want more flexibility for a family-friendly lifestyle (Eddy et al., 2010, p. 289). In addition, Heckert et al. (2002) conducted a study (with a sample consisting of 406 women and 194 men who were either college seniors or
alumni) that found women to be more inclined to accept lower salaries if it meant being able to have time away from work, and that women cared more about the benefits of the job than pay and promotion. The same study indicated the reverse was found true for men. Sallop & Kirby (2007) found evidence in their own study that supports Heckert et al.’s (2002) findings. In surveying graduating business students, they found that, contrary to the findings of Sumner and Brown (1996), male and female students had no significant difference in salary expectations. In addition, female students were found to care more about work/life balance and cultural fit than their male counterpart.

- **H1a**: Men will care more about extrinsic rewards (e.g. salary, status, and promotion)
- **H1b**: Women will care more about intrinsic rewards (e.g. work-life balance, contributions to society, and flexible schedules)

**Gender Predicts Sexism Levels**

Previous research by Fowers and Fowers (2010) and Sibley and Wilson (2004) reveal that men’s sexist attitudes toward promiscuous women are stronger than their sexist attitudes toward chaste or traditional women. These findings suggest that men seem to want to establish, and maintain, their dominance over women. In line with the results of Sibley and Wilson’s (2004) study, men are found to express hostile attitudes toward women who have the same level of sexual experiences as they do. These feelings of contempt may be generated by the idea that sexually experienced women threaten men’s dominance (at least sexually). This sense of entitlement that men possess about their perceived dominance is explained by the Social Dominance Theory (SDT). According to the Social Dominance Theory, men do not like policies that put women at equal ranks with them because it threatens their dominance (Mosso et al., 2013; Sibley & Perry, 2010). The study conducted by Mosso et al. (2013) states that men’s HS
level can be projected by the SDT, and this may help explain the strong HS feelings men hold toward women.

- **H2**: Men will identify themselves with HS more than women.

**How Ambivalent Sexism Impacts Professional Women**

Previous studies have shown that sexist beliefs expose women to a negative atmosphere, especially in a professional setting. HS and BS contribute to how women are perceived at work and how they see themselves (Good & Rudman, 2010; Dumont et al., 2010). More precisely, BS has been shown to make women feel incompetent, thus leading them to accept lower status jobs and not challenge men (Dumont et al., 2010). According to Dumont et al. (2010), depending on the type of job (such as male-dominated careers), BS, masked by kind and chivalrous gestures, may be utilized by men as an elusive tool to keep women away from attaining high positions.

- **H3a**: Women exposed to BS will have lower career expectations than women exposed to HS & NS.
- **H3b**: Men exposed to BS & HS will have higher career expectations than those exposed to NS.

**Results**

A survey was administered online to undergraduate students taking upper-division business courses at a large public university in the Western United States. Using a final sample of 195 students (102 male and 93 female) with a mean age of 23.79 years, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to test whether gender predicted career expectations or sexism levels, and whether sexist conditions affect one’s career expectations (analysis and results pending). The following initial results were derived:
No support was shown for hypothesis H1a ($\alpha = .86$, R Square = .005, F(1,193)=1.048, p=.307), which may be indicative of women now caring more about extrinsic job rewards, such as salary and promotion opportunities, than was exhibited in the past.

Hypothesis H1b was supported ($\alpha = .82$, R Square = .020, F(1,193)=3.953, $\beta=.142$, p<.05), indicating that women still care about more about intrinsic job rewards more than men.

Hypothesis H2 was supported ($\alpha = .83$, R Square = .070, F(1,193)=14.458, $\beta=-.264$, p<.01), which portrays that men possess hostile attitudes toward women.

This study is still currently ongoing, with analyses still being conducted for subsequent hypotheses. Final results and findings will be submitted upon completion of thesis on April 18.
References


Fowers, A., & Fowers, B. (2010). Social Dominance and Sexual Self-Schema as Moderators of


