Ambivalent Sexism and the Sexual Double Standard

Yuliana Zaikman · Michael J. Marks

Abstract The sexual double standard is the notion that women are evaluated negatively and men positively for engaging in similar sexual behaviors. Because traditional, gender-based stereotypes are reflected in the attitudes that people hold towards men and women, it is likely that sexism plays a part in the manifestation of the double standard. The goal of the present study is to investigate the relationship between sexism (prejudice against individuals based on their gender) and the sexual double standard. There are two types of sexism: hostile (negative prejudice) and benevolent (positive prejudice). We hypothesized that participants displaying high levels of either type of sexism would be most likely to exhibit the sexual double standard. A US-sample of 232 undergraduates from a Southwestern university completed the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) and the Ambivalence Towards Men Inventory (AMI) and then evaluated a hypothetical target individual who reported having zero, one or 12 sexual partners. Results show that participants’ sexist attitudes towards men and women were related to their exhibition of the sexual double standard. Specifically, men and women’s hostile attitudes towards targets of their own gender were related to negative evaluations of highly sexually active targets of the same gender, while men and women’s benevolent attitudes towards the opposite gender were related to positive evaluation of highly sexually active targets of the opposite gender. Implications of the present results and directions for future research are discussed.

Keywords Sexual double standard · Sexism · Ambivalent sexism · Sexist attitudes · Sexual activity · Gender norms

Introduction

The sexual double standard is the notion that women in Western cultures are derogated and men praised for engaging in identical sexual behaviors (Marks and Fraley 2005; all cited empirical studies are based on U.S. samples unless noted). Several theoretical frameworks have been used to explain the emergence of the double standard (e.g. evolutionary psychology, Oliver and Hyde 1993; Petersen and Hyde 2010, social role theory, Eagly et al. 2000), but the role of sexism has not been explored. Because a) there are positive and negative stereotypes associated with highly sexually active men and women respectively (Marks 2008), and b) stereotypes are often reflected in the attitudes people hold (Eagly and Mladinic 1989), sexist attitudes are likely related to the exhibition of the double standard. The goal of the present research is to determine whether and to what extent sexism moderates the exhibition of the sexual double standard.

Sexism’s role in the double standard is important to understand because negative perceptions of sexually active women can adversely affect women in many ways. Regarding sexual health and safety, men report higher expectations for post-date sexual activity if a woman initiates a date (Mongeau and Carey 1996; Morr Serewicz and Gale 2008), possibly placing women at risk of undesired consequences if sexual expectations are not met. Documented examples of negative outcomes following a woman-initiated date include perceptions of date rape as more justifiable (Muehlenhard et al. 1985) and greater endorsement of rape myths (Emmers-Sommer et al. 2010). Furthermore, men judged women who provided a condom to use in a sexual encounter more negatively than men who provided a condom in the same scenario (Young et al. 2010). These perceptions can influence women’s behavior in ways that can have serious consequences (e.g., sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies). For example, a woman might decide against providing a condom for a sexual
Sexist attitudes towards women can also have negative consequences for women. Sexist attitudes towards women are related to stigmatization of acquaintance rape victims and more victim blame in cases of stranger rape (Yamawaki 2007). Moreover, these attitudes correlate to greater violent treatment of women by their male partners (Allen et al. 2009), and verbal aggression (Forbes and Adams-Curtis 2001). Therefore, understanding whether sexism plays a role in the exhibition of the double standard is an important preliminary step of ultimately reducing its manifestation and its negative health consequences for women. We begin by reviewing the theory underlying ambivalent sexism. Next, we report an experiment that examines the relationship between sexist attitudes and the sexual double standard. Finally, we discuss the implications of our results.

Sexism and the Sexual Double Standard

Some studies conducted in the U.S. show little to no evidence supporting the existence of the sexual double standard (e.g., Gentry 1998), whereas others were able to detect the sexual double standard under specific circumstances (Jonason and Marks 2009; Kreager and Staff 2009; Marks 2008; Marks and Fraley 2006, 2007). The sexual double standard appears to be a contextual phenomenon, so it is important to document as many factors as possible that are related to its emergence.

One such factor, sexism, is defined as prejudice or discrimination toward people based on their gender (Helgeson 2009). There are two types of sexism relevant to the present topic: Hostile sexism is defined as holding negative and derogatory attitudes toward women, whereas benevolent sexism is defined as holding positive yet stereotypical attitudes toward women (Glick and Fiske 1996). Although the two types of sexism are distinct, they can both be exhibited simultaneously (also called ambivalent sexism). Further, both types of sexism involve conceptualizing women as the weaker gender that should be relegated to domestic roles (Glick and Fiske 1996). Glick and Fiske (1996) suggest that hostile sexism emerged as a consequence of societal differences between men and women, whereas benevolent sexism emerged due to the power that women hold in sexual reproduction. Benevolent sexism is characterized by the view that women are responsible for bearing children and satisfying men’s sexual and psychological needs, and consequently need to be protected and cherished by men. Moreover, benevolent beliefs are also related to social elements such as viewing women as fragile and not taking them seriously professionally (Glick and Fiske 1996). Hostile sexism towards women derives from their perceived power over sex. It can be viewed via discriminations and sexual harassment at the work place, and accepting women as leaders less frequently than men (Glick and Fiske 1996). In addition, hostile sexism involves perceiving women as incompetent in different domains (e.g. analytical thinking; Glick and Fiske 1996).

Despite the fact that sexism is usually associated with attitudes toward women, the concept has been applied to men as well (Glick and Fiske 1999). It has been suggested that hostility towards men derives from the acknowledgement that men hold the most social power (e.g. career, sexual freedom) and women consequentially resent them for this (Glick and Fiske 1999; Glick and Whitehead 2010). Women’s resistance to men’s societal power can be reflected in negative stereotypes they attribute to men (Glick and Fiske 1999). Another reason why women might hold resentment and hostile attitudes towards men can be explained by male sexual aggressiveness (Glick and Fiske 1999). Similarly to men, women also depend on the other gender for sexual reproduction and romantic relationships and thus exhibit benevolent attitudes towards men (Glick and Fiske 1999; Glick and Whitehead 2010). Women’s benevolence towards men can be derived from admiration of men’s higher status. Women justify the higher status that men hold by attributing positive traits to them and perceiving them as more dominant, possessing structural power and as more competent (Glick and Fiske 1999). Women can go as far as to believe that “they are less ambitious, intelligent, and competent than members of the dominant group” (Glick and Fiske 1999, p. 521), thus diminishing their own value compared to men’s.

Although hostile and benevolent attitudes can be exhibited simultaneously, they can be expressed differently. For example, Glick and Fiske (1996) found that both male and female participants exhibited hostile and benevolent sexism towards women, but men tended to score higher on both scales than women (this gender difference was larger for benevolent sexism). Similarly, women’s scores were higher on the hostility toward men scale and lower on the benevolence toward men scale compared to men’s scores on both the hostility and benevolence toward men scale (Glick and Fiske 1999; Glick and Whitehead 2010).

Not only are hostile and benevolent sexism attitudes related to one another, they are related to other types of attitudes as well, such as attitudes toward romantic relationships. For example, traditional gender beliefs influence mate choice preferences; this pattern of results was seen across different cultures (Eastwick et al. 2006). United States and Chinese men and women high on benevolent sexism reported desiring romantic partners who complied with traditional gender roles (Chen et al. 2009). United States and Chinese men and women scoring higher on hostile sexism were more likely to hold traditional gender-role norms in marriages (Chen et al. 2009). Moreover, German women who exhibit hostile sexism towards other women do so against norm-deviant women who do not adhere to the traditional gender-role (Becker 2010).
To summarize, previous research shows that sexist attitudes influence people’s attitudes and perceptions of others. Specifically, men and women’s sexist attitudes relate to traditional views of masculinity and femininity (e.g., men as possessing more power than women), division of labor (e.g., men being career oriented, women as more domestically oriented), and more general aspects of gender (e.g., discrimination and sexual harassment of women, views of women as less intellectually competent). If people’s attitudes towards men and women relate directly to attitudes about gender and sexuality, then sexist attitudes (hostile and benevolent) should affect the manifestation of the sexual double standard.

Overview and Hypotheses

We used the number of sex partners as the basis of comparison for the double standard, because many theoretical perspectives on the double standard describe it in terms of the amount of sexual activity a person has engaged in (e.g., Gentry 1998), and it is a clear and unambiguous descriptor. Previous double standard research also operationalized the sexual double standard in terms of target’s number of sexual partners, because using descriptive accounts of sexual behavior (e.g. “a lot above average”) implies abnormality and inappropriateness (Marks 2002; Marks and Fraley 2005, 2007). A prior, worldwide online survey of sexual attitudes participants indicated that, worldwide, as well as in the US (i.e., the US results were the same as in the entire sample), eight was viewed as a “normal” amount of sex partners for men, and six for women (Marks 2002). Accordingly, we manipulated target gender and number of sexual partners (zero, one, or 12) in a between subjects design. In previous studies, researchers used 12 partners as representative of a high number of sexual partners (Marks and Fraley 2005). Therefore we decided that 12 partners would be characterized as a high yet believable number of sex partners for both men and women. In addition, due to the possibility of virgin stigmatization (Carpenter 2001, 2009; Sprecher and Regan 1996), it was unclear whether zero partners or one partner would be more appropriate for the low partner condition. There is some evidence that men are stigmatized for being virgins more than are women (e.g. Sprecher and Regan 1996), whereas other evidence suggests that female virginity is viewed as a valued state (e.g., Carpenter 2001). Thus, we tested whether people’s sexist attitudes differed between evaluations of targets with zero or one partners.

Based on theoretical (see literature review) and statistical (see methods) considerations, we created two evaluative domains based on an assortment of relevant evaluative items used in past research (Marks and Fraley 2005, 2007). The first domain was labeled traditional positivity (TP), which represents traditional values, roles, and stereotypes (e.g. men are perceived as more career-oriented than women, and women are perceived to be more sexually conservative than men). The second domain was labeled external positivity (EP). This domain represents more socially-related concepts, such as sexual intelligence and popularity.

H1a We hypothesize that male participants will score higher on hostility and benevolence towards women and benevolence towards men, and female participants will score higher on hostility towards men because in general men tend to be more sexist than women (Glick and Fiske 1996) and due to theories of intergroup relations, women, compared to men, are more likely to exhibit more hostility and less benevolence towards men (Glick and Fiske 1999).

H1b We hypothesize that male participants will rate highly sexually active targets more positively than female participants because men are more accepting of pre-marital, sexually-permissive behaviors than are women (e.g. Sprecher 1989), and men are less critical of sexual activity in general (e.g. Koon-Magnin and Ruback 2012).

H2 We hypothesize that participants high on hostility toward women will rate male targets with 12 partners higher on TP than female targets with 12 partners, because individuals high on hostility toward women believe that women use their sexuality in order to control and manipulate men and obtain success, and are less accepting of female leaders as they believe that women are less competent than men (Glick and Fiske 1996).

H3a We hypothesize that participants high on benevolent sexism toward women will rate male targets with 12 partners higher on TP than female targets with 12 partners, because individuals high on benevolent sexism toward women believe that women need to be cherished, protected, and follow “purity rules”, and do not take women seriously professionally (Glick and Fiske 1996).

H3b We hypothesize that participants high on benevolence toward women will rate male targets with 12 partners higher on EP than female targets with 12 partners, because people high on benevolence towards women tend to hold the assumption that women are the weaker gender (Glick and Fiske 1996) and would thus be at greater risk of sexual victimization.

H4a We hypothesize that participants high on hostility toward men will rate male targets with 12 partners higher on TP than female targets with 12 partners, because individuals scoring high on hostility toward men believe that men are allowed more career opportunities and have a higher success ceiling (Glick and Fiske 1999; Glick and Whitehead 2010).

H4b We hypothesize that participants high on hostility towards men will rate male targets with 12 partners...
higher on EP than female targets with 12 partners, because individuals scoring high on hostility towards men resentfully believe that men are more intelligent and hold greater societal power (Glick and Fiske 1999; Glick and Whitehead 2010).

H5 We hypothesize that participants high on benevolence toward men will rate female targets with 12 partners higher on TP than male targets with 12 partners, because individuals high on benevolence toward men admire men and believe that men are the protectors of women (Glick and Fiske 1999), and they could view more sexually active men as failing at their jobs to protect women and treat them with respect if those men engage in sexual activity with many women.

Method

Design

We employed a 2 (target gender) by 3 (zero, one, or 12 partners) between subjects design. The independent variables were target gender, target number of sexual partners (zero, one, 12), and participants’ scores on the benevolent and hostile sexism scales. The dependent variables were participants’ scores on two domains (TP and EP). The Internet-based survey was either completed in the lab (n=126, 65.9 % female) or from home (n=172, 65.1 % female). Preliminary analyses revealed no significant differences between the two methods of data collection, thus we combined the two samples.

Participants

An a-priori power analysis indicated that approximately 225 participants would be needed in order to achieve a power of .80 to detect a three-way interaction of a magnitude equivalent to approximately 5 % of the variance explained in a dependent measure. The original sample consisted of 298 undergraduates from a large Southwestern university, who participated in exchange for course credit in their introduction to psychology course. Forty-six participants were excluded from the analysis due to failing the attention check (two questions designed to determine whether the participants noticed the gender and the number of sexual partners of the target person), eight were excluded due to web browser errors, and 12 were excluded due to falling outside the demographic of age 18–29. The final sample contained 232 participants (65.5 % female). The median age was 19 (M=19.71, SD=2.18). Participants self-reported their ethnicity as White/Caucasian (35.3 %), Latino (32.3 %), Chicano (9.9 %), Black (6.0 %), Other Asian (2.6 %), Puerto Rican (1.3 %), Chinese (1.3 %), Korean (9 %) and Other (10.3 %). Eight participants identified as homosexual, five as bisexual, and four declined to report sexual orientation. See Table 1 for participant gender frequencies in each condition, and more information about descriptive statistics.

Measures

Sexism Attitudes Questionnaires Participants completed the 22-item Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI; Glick and Fiske 1996) and the 20-item Ambivalence toward Men Inventory (AMI; Glick and Fiske 1999). The ASI measures attitudes towards women and the AMI measures attitudes towards men. Sample hostile ASI items include, “In a disaster, women ought not necessarily to be rescued before men,” and “Women seek to gain power by getting control over men.” Sample benevolent ASI items include “Men would be lost in this world if women weren’t there to guide them,” and “Men act like babies when they are sick.” Sample benevolent AMI items include “Every woman needs a male partner who will cherish her,” and “Women are incomplete without men.” Participants rated each statement on a six point scale, (−1=Strongly Disagree, 1=Agree Strongly). Some items were removed from the subscales because of low scale reliability. The final scales were constructed by averaging the items of each scale. Reliability was as follows: hostility towards women (8 items, α=.87), benevolence towards women (8 items, α=.80), hostility towards men (9 items, α=.83) and benevolence towards men (10 items, α=.86). See Table 2 for means and standard deviations.

Sexual Double Standard The dependent measure consisted of 36 evaluative statements about the target person that assessed TP and EP. Several items were removed from the two domains due to low scale reliability. The final two domains were constructed by adding all the statements for that domain. To recap, Traditional Positivity (TP), represents more traditional gender-related concepts of positivity (18 items, α=.87), while External Positivity (EP), represents more socially-related concepts (15 items, α=.83). Examples of TP statements include, “This person is trustworthy” and “This person is successful.” Examples of EP statements include, “This person is intelligent” and “This person is popular.” Participants rated each item on a five point scale, (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree). See Appendix A for the complete list of all the statements, including those removed.

Procedure

After granting informed consent, participants completed demographic and sexism attitudes questionnaires and then
Table 1 Description of the sample, by participant gender and condition

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<td>9%</td>
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<td>4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<tr>
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Note: Data for other ethnicities and sexual orientations are not provided in the table.
Table 2  Descriptive table of means for each cell of the ANOVA of the between-subjects variables of participant gender, target gender, and target partners

| Type of sexism | Female participants | | Female participants | | Male participants | | Male participants |
|----------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
|                | Zero partners (n=33)| One partner (n=25)  | One partner (n=21)  | 12 partners (n=21)  | Zero partners (n=17)| One partner (n=15)| One partner (n=15)  | 12 partners (n=15)  | Zero partners (n=11)| One partner (n=17)| One partner (n=5) |
| Hostility towards women | 2.74 (1.14) | 3.00 (1.13) | 3.18 (1.09) | 3.00 (1.08) | 3.15 (1.10) | 2.79 (1.29) | 2.98 (1.11) | 3.37 (1.65) | 3.33 (1.07) | 3.27 (1.07) | 3.38 (1.92) |
| Benevolence towards women | 3.13 (1.15) | 3.31 (1.11) | 2.93 (0.99) | 2.88 (0.62) | 2.91 (0.98) | 3.11 (0.66) | 2.88 (0.90) | 2.91 (0.80) | 3.08 (0.84) | 3.17 (0.30) | 3.00 (0.30) |
| Hostility towards men | 2.81 (0.91) | 3.04 (0.85) | 3.09 (0.95) | 2.90 (0.69) | 2.83 (0.73) | 2.86 (0.88) | 2.94 (0.71) | 2.93 (0.80) | 2.94 (0.76) | 3.17 (0.39) | 3.39 (0.74) |
| Benevolence towards men | 2.44 (1.01)a | 2.73 (0.96) | 2.52 (1.07)b | 2.53 (0.72)c | 2.50 (1.18)d | 2.74 (0.78) | 2.58 (1.19)e | 2.90 (0.72) | 3.05 (0.90) | 3.06 (0.91) | 2.43 (0.40) |
| Evaluative scales | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Traditional positivity | 61.69 (8.85)a | 62.65 (8.43)b | 55.29 (10.84)a,b | 58.48 (5.43) | 61.04 (7.46) | 57.60 (6.38) | 62.24 (6.34) | 60.13 (8.35) | 56.87 (6.42) | 60.45 (10.36) | 59.29 (6.37) | 60.00 (8.51) |
| External positivity | 51.47 (6.55) | 53.26 (4.89) | 50.95 (8.65) | 49.6 (4.96) | 51.15 (6.40) | 52.04 (5.78) | 50.47 (6.17) | 51.73 (6.71) | 51.93 (5.66) | 52.63 (5.80) | 52.12 (4.53) | 49.20 (8.23) |

Means and standard deviations for female participants (N=152) and male participants (N=80). All sexism scale ratings were made on a 0–6 scale, and averaged for the final scales. All sexual double standard ratings were made on a 0–5 scale, and were combined together for the final evaluative scales. Means with identical subscripts within rows are significantly different at the .05 level.
target gender, target partners and participant gender, Wilks’ λ = .96, F (4, 348) = 2.02, \( p = .092, \eta_p^2 = .02 \). Given the marginal significance of the overall test, univariate effects were examined. A marginal three way interaction was observed for EP, F (2,175) = 3.03, \( p = .051, \eta_p^2 = .03 \). Male participants rated male targets lower on EP and female targets higher on EP as the number of partners increased across the three conditions. Hypothesis 1b was not supported.

### Hostile Sexism Towards Women

Although there were only differences between male and female participants in the EP domain on the benevolence towards men scale, all analyses were conducted separately for each gender for exploratory reasons. Because we include continuous variables in our model (sexism scores), we used hierarchical regression. In order to facilitate comparisons of individual target partners’ conditions, we performed two hierarchical regressions, one comparing targets with 12 partners vs. targets with one partner, and the other comparing targets with 12 partners to targets with zero partners. Only the significant and marginally significant results are reported here. There were no multi collinearity violations; all VIF’s were under 5.

In order to determine whether participants’ hostility towards women relates to the exhibition of the sexual double standard, hierarchical regression was performed. The hostile sexism towards women score was mean centered, and the conditions were dummy coded such that the “female target” condition was coded 1 and the “male target” condition was coded 0.” Furthermore, the “12 partners” was coded “2”, “one partner” was coded “1” and “zero partners” was coded “0.” Because we conducted two sets of hierarchical regressions (12 vs. one and 12 vs. zero), the three variables were never placed in the same hierarchical model. In any case, this coding allows target partners to be treated as a categorical variable (Aiken and West 1991). In Step 1, the total evaluative score was regressed on target gender, the number of target partners, and hostility towards women scores. In Step 2, the interactions terms between target gender and target partners, hostility towards women score and target gender, and hostility towards women score and target partners were entered. In Step 3, the three way interaction between hostility towards women score, target partners and target gender was entered. For brevity, only the statistics of significant three-way interactions that were hypothesized will be reported in the text. Hypothesized interactions that were not significant are briefly noted in the text.

We predicted that participants high on hostility toward women would rate more sexually active male targets higher on TP than more sexually active female targets (H2). When comparing 12 partners vs. zero in the TP domain, the model in step 3 was significant, \( \Delta R^2 = .03, F (7,81) = 2.33, p = .032 \). There was a marginal three way interaction between target partners, target gender and women’s hostility towards women, \( b = -.34, p = .089 \). Simple slope analyses revealed female participants scoring high on hostility towards women rated male targets with 12 partners higher on TP than female targets with 12 partners, \( t = -2.53, p = .013 \). Hypothesis 2 was partially supported. Other finding revealed that female participants rated female targets with zero partner higher on TP than female targets with 12; however the difference in evaluation was greater for those scoring high on hostility towards women, \( t = -3.96, p < .001 \).

### Benevolent Sexism Towards Women

We predicted that participants high on benevolence towards women would rate more sexually active male targets higher on both TP and EP than more sexually active female targets (H3). In the domain of EP, though the model in step 3 was not significant, \( \Delta R^2 = .07, F (7,42) = 1.53, p = .185 \), there was a marginal three way interaction between target partner, target gender and men’s benevolence towards women, \( b = -1.52, p = .066 \). Simple slope analyses revealed that male participants scoring low on benevolence towards women rated female targets with 12 partners higher on EP than male targets with 12 partners, whereas those scoring high on benevolence
towards women displayed the reverse pattern, \( t=-4.55, p<0.001 \). Hypothesis 3a was not supported, while 3b was partially supported. Other findings revealed that male participants scoring low on benevolence towards women rated female targets with 12 partners higher on EP than male targets with one partner, whereas those scoring high on benevolence towards women displayed the reverse pattern, \( t=-4.22, p<0.001 \). There were no other three way interactions.

**Hostile Sexism Towards Men**

We predicted that participants high on hostility towards men would rate more sexually active male targets higher on TP and EP than more sexually active female targets (H4). In the domain of EP, the model in step 3 was marginally significant, both for 12 vs. one partners, \( \Delta R^2=.13, F (7,42) = 2.17, p=.057 \), and 12 vs. zero partners, \( \Delta R^2=.18, F (7,38) = 1.91, p=.095 \). There was a three way interaction between target partner, target gender and men’s hostility towards men, both for 12 vs. one partners, \( b=-2.25, p=.009 \), and 12 vs. zero partners, \( b=-.97, p=.005 \) (see Tables 4 and 5). Simple slope analyses revealed male participants scoring low on hostility towards men rated female targets with 12 partners higher on EP than male targets with 12 partners, whereas those scoring high on hostility towards men displayed the reverse pattern, \( t=-7.37, p<0.001 \) (see Figs. 1 and 2). Hypothesis 4a was not supported, while 4b was partially supported. Other findings revealed that male participants scoring low on hostility towards men rated female targets with 12 partners higher on EP than female targets with one partner (\( t=-4.49, p<0.001 \)) and zero partners (\( t=-5.92, p<0.001 \)), whereas those scoring high on hostility towards men displayed the reverse pattern. There were no other three way interactions.

**Benevolent Sexism Towards Men**

We predicted that participants high on benevolence towards men would rate more sexually active female targets higher on TP than more sexually active males targets (H5). In the domain of TP, the model in step 3 was significant for 12 vs. one partners, \( \Delta R^2=.04, F (7,85) = 3.54, p=.002 \). There was a three way interaction between target partners, target gender and women’s benevolence towards men, \( b=-.88, p=.049 \) (see Table 6). Simple slope analyses revealed that female participants scoring high on benevolence towards men rated male targets with 12 partners higher on TP than female targets with 12 partners, \( t=-3.58, p=0.001 \) (see Fig. 3). Hypothesis 5 was not supported. Other findings revealed that female participants scoring high on benevolence towards men rated female targets with one partner higher on TP than female targets with 12 partners.

### Table 4 Hierarchical linear regression: predicted evaluative scores on the external positivity domain as a function of condition and male participants’ hostility towards men score (one partner vs. 12 partners analysis)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>( \Delta R^2 )</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>95 % CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target gender</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td></td>
<td>[−3.48, 4.07]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target partner</td>
<td>−.56</td>
<td></td>
<td>[−4.32, 3.20]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostility to men</td>
<td>−.46</td>
<td></td>
<td>[−3.12, 2.21]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target gender x target partner</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td></td>
<td>[−4.22, 11.79]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target gender x hostility to men</td>
<td>−.64*</td>
<td></td>
<td>[−11.82, −.99]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target partner x hostility to men</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td></td>
<td>[−4.94, 10.78]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target gender x target partner x hostility to men</td>
<td>−22.16**</td>
<td></td>
<td>[−38.42, −5.90]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total ( R^2 )</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( N=50, \text{CI}, \text{Confidence interval} \)

\* \( p<.05 \), ** \( p<.01 \)

\( t=-4.30, p<0.001 \). There were no other three way interactions.

### Discussion

The goal of this research was to examine the relationship between sexist attitudes and the exhibition of the sexual double standard. We studied this relationship by examining
participants’ hostile and benevolent attitudes towards men and women and their evaluations of hypothetical target individuals. Hypothesis 1 was partially supported; male participants, compared to female participants, had more benevolent attitudes towards men. Although gender differences were seen in only one sexism scale, this is consistent with previous research (Glick and Fiske 1999). The primary purpose of this hypothesis was to determine whether separate analyses for male and female participants were needed.

Hypothesis 2 was also partially supported; female participants high on hostility towards women rated more sexually active male targets higher on TP than more sexually active female targets. Indicating that individuals who think that women use their sexuality to manipulate men and gain power evaluate highly sexually active women more negatively than highly sexually active men. In addition, female participants’ hostile attitudes towards women align with stereotypical evaluations of men and women. Women, who display more hostility towards other women, do so primarily against norm-deviant women (German sample, Becker 2010), and, accordingly, female participants rated more sexually active female targets lower on TP than more sexually active male targets.

Hypothesis 3 was partially supported; male participants who were low on benevolence towards women exhibited a reverse double standard (Milhausen and Herold 1999), whereby they rated female targets with 12 partners higher on EP than male targets with 12 partners. One possible explanation for this effect is that men who do not hold traditional gender roles do not perceive anything negative about women having a high number of sexual partners; they may even view more sexually active women as potential mates, and more sexually active men as competition for those mates. Furthermore, male participants with low scores on benevolence towards women also rated more sexually active women higher on EP than less sexually active women. A possible explanation for this is that men high on benevolence towards women view them as less intelligent than men and less likely to be able to take care of themselves, whereas those low on benevolence towards women do not.

Hypothesis 4 was partially supported; we predicted that individuals high on hostility towards men would rate more sexually active male targets higher on TP and EP than more sexually active female targets. Our results only showed this predicted pattern for the EP domain. Men who score high on hostility towards men believe in the societal power men have in patriarchal society, and that men are more intelligent than women. These attitudes may explain why, male participants rated more sexually active male targets higher on EP than more sexually active female targets. In contrast, men who score low on hostility towards men do not believe men have more social power, which explain why male participants low on hostility towards men rated more sexually active female targets higher on EP than more sexually active male targets.

Hypothesis 5 was not supported. We hypothesized that individuals high on benevolence towards men would rate more sexually active female targets higher on TP than more sexually active male targets, because individuals high on benevolence towards men believe that men should protect women, and thus view more sexually active men as failing in that duty. Our results showed that female participants with high scores on benevolence towards men rated male targets with 12 partners higher on TP than female targets with 12 partners. A possible explanation for this result is that women who are high on benevolence towards men perceive themselves as “less ambitious, intelligent, and competent” (Glick and Fiske 1999, p. 521) than men.

Implications of the Current Study

Our results revealed that sexist attitudes influence people’s evaluations of others based on sexual behavior. This suggests that people’s attitudes towards men and women affect whether or not they endorse the sexual double standard, and that the mechanisms that perpetuate the sexual double standard partially stem from people’s general views of traditional gender roles. Future studies should explore whether the expression of the sexual double standard can be altered by manipulating sexist attitudes.

The results also revealed a trend whereby women’s sexist attitudes were related to the manifestation of a traditional double standard, whereas men’s sexist attitudes were found to relate to both the traditional and a reversed double standard. Moreover, hostile attitudes towards the same gender and benevolent attitudes towards the opposite gender were found to relate to the manifestation of the double standard. These findings can be explained in part by the competition hypothesis (Clayton and Trafimow 2007), which suggests that women evaluate highly sexually active women more negatively, because they represent competition for a mate. Moreover, more sexually active women behave in a way that contradicts traditional gender roles, and they are therefore evaluated in a negative way. In a similar manner, men might view more sexually active men as competition for mates, and therefore exhibit a reversed double standard whereby they evaluate more sexually active men in negative and derogatory ways. This is in line with evolutionary theory, which suggests individuals compete for mates with the same gender but value the opposite gender for their sexual and reproductive capabilities.

Furthermore, the results of this study suggest sexual behavior (number of sexual partners) influences perceptions of women more so than perceptions of men. The majority of our results indicate that those individuals high on either type of sexism evaluate female targets with one partner or zero partners more positively than female targets with 12 partners, while evaluating male targets with one partner or zero partners similarly to male targets with 12 partners. These findings
suggest that even when taking into account men’s and women’s sexist attitudes, patriarchal societies still tend to derogate the sexual behavior of women more so than men. This supports traditional gender roles and evolutionary perspectives by which men have more sexual freedom than women.

Limitations

There are several limitations to the present research. First, past research has revealed that sexist attitudes are somewhat experience dependent (Glick and Fiske 1996), in that sexist attitudes can change as individuals gain more experience with different types of relationships. For example, if individuals experience divorce in their lives, they may be more likely to develop more hostile attitudes towards the other gender (Glick and Fiske 1996). Therefore, our results may not generalize to a broader population because our sample consisted primarily of college age men and women who still may be in a transitional period of sexist attitudes or have limited relational experience (Glick and Fiske 1996). Examination of a more general population that includes a larger range of ages can provide more definitive evidence on the relationship between sexism and the double standard.

In addition, the vignettes that were used in this study may not mirror real life evaluation of individuals. It is uncommon for individuals to evaluate others based solely on several written paragraphs. It is also possible that some participants in our study did not believe the vignette was real, which could have influenced their evaluation. Therefore, future studies should attempt to make the vignettes to be more believable and representative of real life scenarios.

Finally, the fact that the participants were presented with the ASI and AMI prior to viewing the vignettes might have influenced their evaluation of target individuals. The ASI and AMI include several statements that may have primed some of the participants to hold certain views about male and female relationships, which, in turn, could have influenced participants’ evaluative scores. However, because all of the participants were presented with the same sexist statements prior to their evaluation of a target person, there should be no
systematic variation in such a process. Furthermore, collecting participants’ sexist attitudes after they evaluated a target person could have resulted in priming by the vignettes they saw, and because participants saw different vignettes, their attitudes could have been influenced in different ways, which would have undermined our experiment.

Conclusions

The present research suggests that sexist attitudes can influence the exhibition of the sexual double standard. Hostile and benevolent attitudes towards men and women affected participants’ perceptions of the target individuals’ sexual behavior. This study furthered our understanding of the double standard by offering an explanation as to why the double standard appears in some cases but not in others. Future research should continue exploring the different contextual settings that may result in the manifestation of the sexual double standard.

Acknowledgments

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Appendix A

Traditional Positivity Domain:
Values Subscale
This person is trustworthy.
This person is respectful.
This person would make someone a good boyfriend/girlfriend.
This person would make someone a good husband/wife.
#This person is immoral.
#This person is dishonest.
#This person is careless.
I could be friends with this person.
#I would not like to know this person.

Success Subscale
This person makes a lot of money.
This person will hold a job with lots of power.
This person is in charge of many people.
This person has a good job.
This person would make a good leader.
This person performs well in everything he/she does.
*This person enjoys luxurious lifestyle.
This person is successful.

External Positivity Domain:
Popularity Subscale
This person is popular.
This person has lots of friends.
This person is fun at parties.
People like this person.
This person would be fun to hang out with.
This person is physically attractive.
People listen to this person.
#No one likes this person.
*Others emulate this person.

Intelligence Subscale
This person is intelligent.
#This person is a failure.
This person performs well in everything he/she does.
#*This person makes a lot of mistakes.
This person did well in school.
#*This person has a low IQ.
This person is good at analyzing situations.
This person has an ability to grasp concepts quickly.
# Item was reversed coded.
*Item was dropped in order to increase cronbach’s alphas of the subscales.

References


