Examining Sexism and Feminist Self-Identification in Young Indian Adolescents and Adults: Females are Less Sexist but Not Feminists

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Abstract: Sexism is not just a problem of the past; it is still pervasive and perpetuated in everyday life. Feminism is an ideology that aims to tackle sexism and provide equality between men and women in its roots. By straitjacketing men and women into a pattern of behavior pre-approved by society, sexism dehumanizes both men and women. The present study examined gender differences in sexism and feminist self-identification for young adolescents and adults (40 males and 40 females). In line with our expectations, results revealed that males reported significantly higher on ambivalent sexism (hostile and benevolent sexism) relative to females, but there were no differences in feminist self-identification. That is, while young Indian adolescent and adult women endorse sexist statements significantly lesser than man, but they do not endorse the philosophy of feminism which aims to reduce sexism, any more than men. The findings have been studied in context of the potential 'stigma' of the feminist label.

Introduction

Sexism is defined as an "individual's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, and organizational, institutional, and cultural practices that either reflect negative evaluations of individuals based on their gender or support unequal status of women and men" (Swim & Hyers 2009). It is closely tied to gender stereotypes, defined as social consensus regarding the attributes of men and women (Crawford & Unger 2000). Gendered expectations prove to be a

hurdle for any woman or man whose preferences do not neatly align with the stereotypes. By straitjacketing men and women into a pattern of behavior pre-approved by society, sexism dehumanizes both men and women (Bhasin 2004; Horowitz 1997). However, psychologists have studied harmful effects of sexism on the well-being of women. Accordingly, sexism has focused on stereotypes that harm women.

According to Glick and Fiske (1996) stereotypes about women appear to contain both negative as well as positive judgments. Direct negative evaluations include statements such as, "women are less competent than men", "women should know their place", "women push themselves in places where they are not wanted" etc. This refers to Hostile Sexism (HS) or the antagonistic attitude of people towards women and feminist ideologies. Individuals who score high on HS are more likely to deny that women possess positive, uniquely human, secondary emotions (e.g., compassion, hopefulness, and nostalgia) (Viki & Abrams 2003). Evaluations of women also include statements such as, "women need taking care of", "women should be protected", "women should be cherished" etc. may appear to be positive but are in fact subtly sexist in nature. These evaluations are referred to as Benevolent Sexism, a more subtle form of sexism i.e. sexist ideologies that may be passed off, as tradition and may even be perceived as flattering by women (Jackman 1994). Individuals usually endorse these beliefs because they do not define them as sexist (Barreto & Ellemers 2005; Swim, Ferguson, Hyers & Cohen 2005). For instance, the chivalrous attitude men have towards women may be reinforced and appreciated in society, however, is actually sexist because activities such as "opening the door for women", "paying for women", "protecting women" cast women in a weaker role, as 'something' to be cherished and protected by men. Based on this understanding, Glick and Fiske (1996) conceptualized sexisms as fundamentally ambivalent, encompassing both subjectively benevolent and hostile feelings toward women.

Both aspects of ambivalent sexism, hostile and benevolent sexism are related to negative outcomes for women. For instance, high hostility towards women (HS) was related to men's verbal aggression against their dating partners; these results are consistent with the generally accepted view that all of these variables foster and justify men's aggression against women. (Forbes, Adam-Curtis & White 2004). In support, another study found that men with higher scores on HS were more likely to report the proclivity to commit an acquaintance rape (Abrams,Viki, Masser & Bohner 2003). With respect to benevolent sexism, a study found that female undergraduate volunteers rated profiles of a hostile sexist and benevolent sexist men; relative to hostile sexist benevolent sexist men was rated as most likeable but least typical (Bohner, Ahlborn, & Steiner 2010). Benevolent sexism in this way helps in maintaining the gender inequality where men play the role of protectors and women "damsel-in-distress".

Feminism is an ideology that aims to provide equality between men and women in its roots. It is grounded in the belief that women are oppressed or disadvantaged in comparison to men, and that their oppression is unjustified (Ellis & Carlson 2008). It places a high value on women, and considered to be important and worthwhile human beings (Crawford & Unger 2000). One of the simplest definitions is proposed by bell hooks (1984); it is a movement to end sexism and sexist oppression. This is an important feature; feminism fights the harmful effects of patriarchy on women as well as men (e.g. Bhasin 2004; Brittan 1989; Kupers 2005; Messerschimdt & Connel 2005). Further, feminist scholars have noted that men and women are situated within several different but related systems of domination and oppression (e.g. Bhasin 2004; Collins 1990). Yet, there is a dangerous silence generated around sexism world over.

Sexism is not just a problem of the past; it is still pervasive and perpetuated in everyday life (Ronai, Zsembik, Feagin 2013). The purpose of the study was to examine gender differences in endorsement of ambivalent sexism (hostile and benevolent sexism) and in feminist self-identification. It

was hypothesized that (One) females will report lower ambivalent sexism (hostile and benevolent sexism) relative to males and (Two) females will report higher self-identification relative to males.

Method

Participants

Eighty students (40 males and 40 females) aged 16–20 years from different schools and colleges in Delhi (NCR) were selected for the study through convenience sampling. As can be seen in Table 1, the gender groups were matched for age and education in order to minimize the influences of these variables. Participant's ages ranged from 16 to 20 years and the mean age of male participants was 17.63 years whereas, the mean age of female participants was 17.55. Participant characteristics have been provided in Table 1.

Table 1 *Demographic Characteristics of the Participants*

	Males		Females			
	M	SD	M	SD	*T*	p
Age[a]	17.63	1.44	17.55	1.36	.24	.812
Education[a]	12.78	1.29	12.70	1.04	.29	.776

Note. [a] In years α= .05

Design and Procedure

The participants were divided into two groups: males (N=40) or female (N=40) based on their gender. All participants completed measures of sexism (hostile and benevolent sexism) and a oneitem feminist identification scale.

Participants completed identical questionnaires with demographic questions that were emailed to them in a Google form. (The link for the form is https://goo.gl/forms/CUGflTpCFRA7bSMW2)

Measures

Gender differences were examined on endorsement of sexist attitudes and identification with feminist ideology. The measures used have been described below.

Ambivalent sexism inventory. The Ambivalent Sexism Scale (ASI; Glick & Fiske 1996) is a 22 item self-report measure composed of two item subscales that measure hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. Each of the subscales contains items designed to measure attitudes relevant to power (dominative or protective paternalism) and gender differentiation (competitive or complementary). The inventory uses a six-point Likert scale with scores ranging from 0-5. Examples of items from the scale include, "women are too easily offended" (hostile sexism) or "women should be cherished and protected by men" (benevolent sexism). Strong agreement with the statements is given a score of five and a strong disagreement with the statement is accorded a score of zero. A few items are reverse scored for example, Feminists are not seeking for women to have more power than men or men are complete without women, for these items a strong agreement will be awarded zero points, and a strong disagreement will be given five points. Overall, higher scores on this inventory imply greater (hostile and benevolent) sexism. The reliability of the inventory was verified by the researchers by conducting six studies with over 2000 respondents, it was found to be overall ASI score (an index of ambivalent sexism), as well as the Hostile Sexism and Benevolent Sexism subscale scores, each have acceptable internal consistency reliability (with alphas averaging in the .8 to .9 range).

Hostile Sexism (HS). Hostile Sexism in the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory aims to measure the antagonistic attitude of people towards women and

feminist ideologies. This ideology asserts that women are often trying to control men through their relationships or sexual seduction. The scale consists of 11 items that assess direct and transparent aspects of sexism, hence has been named hostile sexism scale. Items include: "women seek to gain power by getting control over men", "women exaggerate problems they have at work" etc.

Benevolent Sexism (BS). This subscale of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory assesses more subtle form of sexism i.e. sexist ideologies that may be passed off, as tradition. For instance, it measures the chivalrous attitude towards women, which may be appreciated in society, however is actually sexist because it casts women in a weaker role and as 'something' to be cherished and protected by men. This scale assesses the extent to which an individual endorses the view of women as something to 'have' rather than be seen as actual human beings. The sub-scale also includes 11 items, namely, "Men are complete without women(R)" "a good woman should be set on a pedestal by her man" etc.

Feminist Self Identification

A single item "I identify myself as a feminist" asked participants to indicate how strongly they self-identified with the feminist ideology: The measure uses a 6-point Likert scale with scores ranging from 0–5 where 5 indicated strong agreement of self-identification with the label of feminist and 0 indicated strong disagreement. The item has been used in previous studies to examine identification with the ideology of feminism (e.g. Leaper & Arias, 2011; Case, 2014; McCabe, 2005).

Statistical Analysis

First, preliminary information regarding age and education of the male and female participants were compared to make sure that there were no significant differences across the participants. Second, descriptive statistics

i.e. means and standard deviations for the ambivalent sexism inventory (hostile and benevolent sexism) and feminist-identification scale were obtained. After which the data were screened for normality, outliers, fit between distribution and assumptions of parametric statistics. Gender differences in endorsement of sexist attitudes and feminist ideology were examined using independent samples t tests on the measures of the study. Cohen's d was assessed for independent t tests.

Results

Gender differences in endorsement of sexist attitudes and feminism were examined using independent samples t tests on the measures of the study. Table 2 shows independent samples t tests in endorsement of sexist attitudes (Hostile and Benevolent Sexism) and feminist identification of males and females. Effect sizes (ES) for paired t tests can be studied with the help of Cohen's d and r. Cohen's d were calculated using Cohen's (1988) formula: ES = d/2, where d = M1 − M2. 'Small' effect size is 0.10, 'medium' is 0.25, and 'large' is 0.40 (Cohen, 1988).

As can be seen in Table 2, male participants (M=28.52, SD=7.79) reported significantly higher scores relative to female participants (M=17.75, SD=9.56) on hostile sexism; t (78) =5.53, p = .000 with a large effect size. Male participants (M=30.12, SD=7.13) also scored significantly higher than female participants (M=24.30, SD=10.50) on benevolent sexism scale t (78) =2.90, p =.005 with a large effect size. However, contrary to our expectations, differences between means of female participants (M= 3.35, SD= 1.58) and male participants (M= 2.70, SD= 1.47) on feminist self-identification approached significance, but fell short t (78) =-1.90, p = .060.

Table 2. *Independent samples t tests for Males and Females on Hostile Sexism, Benevolent Sexism and Feminist Self-Identification Measures.*

Measure	Male		Female				
	M	SD	M	SD	*T*	P	Cohen's d
ASI	58.65	11.75	41.57	16.24	5.39	.000***	1.20
HS	28.52	7.79	17.75	9.56	5.53	.000***	1.23
BS	30.12	7.13	24.30	10.50	2.90	.005**	0.65
Feminist Self-Identification	2.70	1.47	3.35	1.58	-1.90	.060	0.42

Note. ASI= Ambivalent Sexism Inventory; HS= Hostile Sexism, BS= Benevolent Sexism. ***p < .001 **p<.01

Discussion

The objective of the study was to investigate the gender differences in endorsement of sexism (hostile sexism and benevolent sexism) as well as feminist self-identification. The results of the study were in line with our hypothesis, i.e. women had scored significantly lower than men on (ambivalent) sexism. This was true for both hostile and benevolent sexism. However, contrary to our expectations, women did not report higher feminist self-identification than men.

Hostile Sexism (HS) refers to the antagonistic attitude of people towards women and feminist ideologies. It asserts that women are often trying to control men through their relationships or sexual seduction (Glick & Fiske 2001). Findings are consistent with past researches that have found that males report greater hostile sexism than females (e.g. Case 2007; Glick & Fiske 1996; Swim et al. 2001). One of the explanations for the significant gender differences on hostile sexism is that endorsement of hostile sexism in men seeks to justify their experience of higher status in society (Glick & Fiske 2001; Schmitt, Branscombe, & Kappen 2003). In addition, men may wish to believe that their higher status is justly obtained, and they have earned it, which could prevent them from acknowledging sexism (Jost & Kay 2005). It can also be argued that women experience more sexist attitudes and identify sexist experiences more than men (e.g. Drury & Kaiser 2014; Kohn, Lafreniere, & Gurevich 1990; Osman, Barrios, Langnecker, & Osman 1994; Swim, Hyers, Cohen & Ferguson 2005;); for example in spite of being a country of diverse cultures, the problems women face at home or within their families in India are uniform regardless of religion, caste, or community (Pande 2015). Women are thus likely to score less on any measure aimed to test sexist beliefs, especially one as direct and blatant as hostile sexism. In support, in an interesting online project, Laura Bates (2016) encouraged women to catalogue instances of sexism experienced on a day-to-day basis. Consequently, thousands of women from different ages, backgrounds, races, and nationalities wrote about their harrowing experiences of harassment on street, at work, in clubs, and at homes. Furthermore, in a study, empathy along with knowledge towards sexist attitudes towards women was found to reduce hostile sexism in men as well as women (Zawadzki et al. 2014). Therefore, men's desire to maintain current gender inequality and women's ability to empathize with their own gender as a result of greater experience of sexism in everyday life can help explain significantly lower hostile sexism in women relative to men.

Benevolent Sexism (BS) refers to a more subtle form of sexism that might be disregarded because of its ostensibly positive qualities (Glick &

Fiske 1996). Previous studies examining gender differences in benevolent sexism report mixed findings; gender differences were either smaller in magnitude or even reversed (e.g. Glick et al., 2001; Glick & Fiske, 1996; Masser & Abrams, 1999). This is because, unlike hostile sexism, benevolent sexist attitudes are seen as socially acceptable endorsement of conventional gender roles due to the seemingly positive and chivalrous nature of the construct. Individuals usually endorse these beliefs because they do not define them as sexist (Barreto & Ellemers 2005; Bohner, Ahlborn & Steiner 2010; Glick et al. 2000; Swim, Ferguson, Hyers & Cohen 2005; Swim, Mallett, Russo-Devosa & Stangor 2005). BS is fostered by men's intimate interdependence on women and includes protective paternalism (e.g., "Women ought to be protected and provided for by men"), idealization of women (e.g., as "pure" and delicate), and celebration of heterosexual intimacy (e.g., "Every man needs a woman he adores") (Hebl & O'Brian 2009). In the present study, men reported significantly higher on benevolent sexism relative to women. In support, a study found that men who endorsed benevolent sexism did not realize that these behaviors can potentially be harmful for women (Swim et al. 2011). While, men may find these attributes to be "chivalrous" and "flattering" for women, women are likely to reject these seemingly positive attitudes that put women on a pedestal but reinforce their subordination (Glick et al. 2000).

However, contrary to our expectations, gender differences in feminist self-identification were not significant. This implies that, although there is gender difference between endorsements of "sexist" attitudes i.e. women endorse hostile and benevolent sexism significantly lesser than men; there was no significant gender difference in feminist self-identification. This seems paradoxical considering that feminism in its essence is dedicated to end sexism and sexist oppression (hooks 1984). However, research suggests that this discrepancy between pro-feminist orientation and feminist identity ("I'm not a feminist but….") is not very uncommon (e.g. Aronson 2003; Burn, Aboud & Moyles 2000; Williams & Wittig 1997). This is true in spite of increased awareness of gender-based discrimination amongst women (e.g.

Crosby 1984; Siegal 1996). One of the reasons for this could be that the participants had little knowledge about the ideology of feminism. People are likely to be misinformed about feminism by its portrayal in media. Reliance on mass media for main source of information on feminism and feminists is likely to be related to low levels of commitment to feminist identity (Zucker 2004). The lack of positive portrayal of feminism in media ("feminists are men haters") may make both males as well as females reluctant to identify with feminists (Douglas 1994). Internalizing negative stereotypes about feminists may be an impediment against adopting a feminist identity for men as well as women. Particularly, for men, the potential stigma of feminism may also be strong. It has been suggested that feminist men may be seen as feminine men because the feminist label is strongly associated with women (Anderson 2009). Patriarchy in general criticizes men who are not "masculine", for men "femininity" is degrading and insulting, and to be associated with a movement which has this notion becomes stigmatizing. Overall, the findings of the study reveal that men endorse sexism significantly more than women. This was true for hostile as well as benevolent sexism. However, there was no significant difference between men relative to women on feminist self-identification.

The study, despite being comprehensive, has certain limitations which may be addressed in follow-up researches. Firstly, a sample of 80 urban students (males and females) aged 16–20 years was taken through convenience sampling. Subsequent studies should use a larger stratified sample. Secondly, the survey used was standardized in the west. Thirdly, only ambivalent sexism as a form of sexism was examined in the study. Future researches can assess other forms of sexism such as modern Sexism (Swim, Aikin, Hall & Hunter 1995) and Neo Sexism (Tougas, Brown, Beaton, & Joly 1995) for more comprehensive understanding of sexism. Also even though there was no significant difference between the demographics of the participants college and school students were clubbed. In conclusion, the study aimed to understand gender differences in sexism and feminist self-identification. Results demonstrated that women scored significantly lower

than men on ambivalent sexism (hostile and benevolent sexism). However, there were no gender-differences in feminist self-identification. Therefore, findings of this study suggest that although women display lower endorsement of sexist attitudes than men, they do not significantly differ on feminist self-identification relative to men.

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