Was That Sexist?:

Open-Mindedness Predicts Interpretation of Benevolent Sexism in Ambiguous Scenarios

Meagan C. Tanner

Wittenberg University

Author Note

Meagan C. Tanner, Psychology Department, Wittenberg University.

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Correspondence concerning this report should be addressed to Meagan C. Tanner, Wittenberg University Box 3046, PO Box 1600, Springfield, OH, 45501.

Abstract

The Ambivalent Sexism Theory consists of two subdimensions of sexism—hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. Hostile sexism comprises of openly negative attitudes towards women, while benevolent sexism endorses the continuation of traditional paternalistic attitudes towards women. Previous research in the field has found significant associations between both hostilely and benevolently sexist attitudes and the Big Five personality traits of Open-Mindedness and Agreeableness as well as the personality traits of other-oriented empathy. Previous research has also found significant associations between Open-Mindedness, Agreeableness, and empathy and the interpretation of hostile sexism in real-world. The aim of this study was to determine the existence of associations between the aforementioned personality traits and the interpretation of benevolent sexism in real-world scenarios. Participants completed an anonymous online survey that assessed their endorsement of Open-Mindedness and Agreeableness personality traits, their endorsement of empathy, and their interpretation of benevolent sexism in ambiguous scenarios. The scenarios were presented in a series of vignettes created specifically for this study. This study found significant positive associations between Open-Mindedness and the interpretation of benevolent sexism. There were no significant associations between Agreeableness and the interpretation of benevolent sexism or other-oriented empathy and the interpretation of benevolent sexism. However, findings may be limited due to low power as a result of small sample size.

Keywords: ambivalent sexism, open-mindedness, agreeableness, empathy

Was That Sexist?:

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Sexism is no new issue in American society. As allegations of sexual assault continue to make front page news in industries such as music, film, education, and politics, women at home have begun to organize their own movements for justice. The Women's Marches and #MeToo Movement are perhaps the most well-known examples of public demonstration against sexual assault and discrimination in recent memory (White, 2018). With this near-constant focus on sexism in the media, it becomes increasingly important to understand not only what sexism *is,* but also which personality traits are most likely to predict engagement in such behavior.

Though the nuances of sexism have changed and expanded over time, the basic definition has remained relatively constant. In this study, "sexism" refers to an institution which limits a woman's mobility in three main gendered spaces—identity, body, and politics/economy. Sexism prevents a woman from creating and claiming her own identity (e.g., societal role and status), denies her the right to her own body (e.g., rape and sexual violence), and limits her movement in the political and economic spheres (e.g., fair trials and the wage gap) (Ronai, Zsembik, & Feagin, 1997). Limitations in these three fields can severely impact the lives of individual women in the home and in the workplace, while also serving to perpetuate the subordination of women as a whole in American society. Women who experienced one to two incidents of sexism each week reported being more angry, anxious, and depressed, as well as experiencing lower self-esteem (Swim, Hyers, Cohen, & Ferguson, 2001). Women who faced frequent sexist acts in the home were more likely to accept lower paying positions in the workplace (Moya, Glick, Expósito, de Lemus & Hart, 2007).

While these behaviors may seem to be obvious examples of discrimination, sexism may not always be so blatant. Some acts of sexism may even be perceived as prosocial, as the theory of Ambivalent Sexism suggests.

Ambivalent Sexism Theory

The theory of Ambivalent Sexism argues that the overarching concept of sexism can more precisely be broken down into two components—*hostile sexism* and *benevolent sexism*— and that these conflicting components can be held in tandem by the same individual, whose attitudes towards a particular woman may vary based on how closely she conforms to traditional stereotypes of appropriate female behavior (Glick & Fiske, 2001). The theory is predicated on the historical characterizations of women as simultaneously saintly and evil (Glick & Fiske, 2001). The phenomenon is known as the *pedestal-gutter syndrome* or the *Madonna-whore dichotomy* (Tavris & Wade, 1984). The dichotomy holds that men subconsciously place women into one of two categories—women who do not conform to traditional stereotypes are to be scorned and ridiculed in overtly hostile ways (the whore in the gutter); women who *do* fulfill these stereotypes are to be protected, cherished, and adored (the Madonna on a pedestal). Because the latter form of sexism has its roots in cherishing and protecting women, it is often seen as far more positive than the former. However, these attitudes still serve to restrict the movement of women in the home and in society by forcing upon them stereotypical gender roles, such as that of a nurturing housewife who depends on her husband for protection and financial security. Therefore, this form of benevolent sexism can be just as detrimental as more overtly hostile sexism, though its execution may be more subtle. In addition, benevolent sexism can easily be mistaken for prosocial behavior, which legitimizes such actions and perpetuates their use. This strengthens the association of women as the "weaker sex," which serves to make them

easy targets for perpetrators of hostile sexism. The two attitudes work in tandem to perpetuate

the existence of the other, but unfortunately, hostile sexism receives more academic attention

than its benevolent counterpart.

        Hostile sexism. Hostile sexism consists of openly negative attitudes towards women.

Many times, men who engage in this kind of behavior view women as seeking to control men

through their feminist ideology or to manipulate men through their sexuality (Glick & Fiske,

2001). Men who endorse hostile sexism believe that feminists are asking for rights and privileges

that will not only raise women to be equal in status men, but will raise women to a social status

that is *oppressive* to men. If women can't succeed in this endeavor on the merit of their

intelligence and strength alone, they will resort to promising—but never following through

with—sexual favors. While the more dramatic incidents of hostile sexism, such as sexual

harassment and abuse, are already condemned by contemporary American society, hostile

sexism can still be found alive and well in less obvious ways. For instance, in 2004, a study

found that males who strongly agreed with hostilely sexist attitudes tended to give negative

evaluations and lower job recommendations to female candidates applying to positions for which

a male candidate also applied, even if the female candidate was equally or better qualified for

that position (Masser & Abrams, 2004). Broader implications of hostile sexism include the

finding that men who agreed with hostilely sexist attitudes were more likely to accept myths

about rape (e.g., the victim was too drunk, shouldn't have been dressed a certain way) (Chapleau,

Oswald, & Russell, 2007). Acts of hostile sexism such as these are often treated as less severe

than acts which actively cause women harm *in the moment*, even though such discrimination still

has negative long-term effects (Becker & Wright, 2011). However, because these acts are based

in negative attitudes towards women, they cannot be defined as benevolent sexism.

Benevolent sexism. Behaviors that are considered benevolently sexist may come as a surprise to the perpetrator. On the surface, benevolently sexist acts seem to be harmless in their effects on women. These attitudes include the beliefs that women are "purer" than men, that women should be protected and cherished, and that women are necessary to make a man's life complete (Glick & Fiske, 1996). However, these beliefs and the actions that reinforce them are still sexist in that they serve to place women in restricted and stereotypical roles. Benevolent sexism reinforces paternalistic, chivalric, and traditional attitudes towards women that limit their movement within the home, the workplace, and society (Grubbs, Exline, & Twenge, 2014). Though these actions and beliefs may not *seem* to be detrimental, it is more often benevolent sexism than hostile sexism that underlies many of the inequalities women face today.

Unfortunately, one of the difficulties in assessing the negative effects of benevolent sexism is that benevolently sexist attitudes often *appeal* to women on a superficial level. When presented with a series of statements describing benevolently sexist attitudes, women reported that they would actually feel cherished, rather than restricted, if the men in their lives were to endorse similar beliefs (Glick & Fiske, 2001). However, women who strongly agreed with benevolently sexist attitudes still reported being limited, though they may not have been aware that it was the result of sexism. These women were more likely to accept lower paying employment, while experiencing slower career progression and exhibiting fewer ambitions. Rather, these women relied on the men in their lives for financial support (Moya, Glick, Expósito, de Lemus & Hart, 2007).

Financial dependence is not the only result of female endorsement of benevolent sexism. Women who agreed with these attitudes were also more likely to become dependent on men in other areas of their everyday lives. When placed in a scenario in which they required immediate

help, women who agreed with benevolent sexism were more likely to seek the assistance of a male bystander than to seek out tools which would allow the women to solve the problem on their own (Shnabel, Bar-Anan, Kende, Bareket, & Lazar, 2015). One of the most concerning aspects of benevolent sexism is that women who endorse benevolent sexism were more likely to accept and forgive acts of hostile sexism, which can vary in severity from job discrimination to acts of physical violence, such as rape. These findings were replicated in both stranger and intimate partner scenarios—women who accepted benevolent sexism also accepted hostile sexism from strangers and from intimate partners equally (Glick & Fiske, 2001). This research seems to indicate that as one form of sexism is permitted (typically the more subtle benevolent sexism), tolerance for the other form (typically hostile sexism) is increased (Glick & Raberg, 2018). Because the two forms of sexism are so intricately connected, research that focuses on benevolent sexism is just as important as research that focuses on hostile sexism when it comes to resolving gender-based conflicts (Lee, Fiske, & Glick, 2010).

Big Five Personality Traits

Though American society has taken strides to understand what sexism *is* in an effort to combat such harmful attitudes, we cannot forget that we also need to understand the personality traits of people who may commit such acts. Individuals who engage in sexist behaviors may exhibit similar personality traits. To this end, many researchers have chosen to investigate the relationships between both benevolent and hostile sexism and the Big Five personality traits.

The Big Five theory of personality identifies five basic personality traits: Conscientiousness, Openness, Neuroticism, Agreeableness, and Extraversion (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Conscientiousness measures an individual's level of productiveness and organization; Openness measures an individual's openness to new experiences; Neuroticism measures an

individual's tendency to experience negative emotions; Agreeableness measures an individual's

tendency to agree with their peers; and Extraversion measures an individual's desire to seek out

social interaction (Soto & John, 2017). Openness and Agreeableness are the two personality

traits most commonly investigated in the sexism literature, and therefore will be the two traits

measured in this study (Christopher, Zabel, & Miller, 2013).

      Openness. In terms of the Big Five, *Openness* refers to *Openness to new experiences.*

Many researchers have found it useful to measure Openness, not as an overarching concept, but

as a composite of facets. These facets are specific values or attitudes that fall under the broader

trait. Though the specific facets that make up Openness vary across assessments (intellect,

understanding, aesthetic sensitivity [Goldberg, 1990]), they typically are meant to reflect an

individual's receptivity to beauty and emotion as well as to new experiences, new ideas, and new

values. Researchers interested in the relationship between Openness and benevolent and hostile

sexism have paid particular attention to those facets meant to measure the acceptance of new

ideas and new values. Often, different forms of prejudice (e.g., sexism) are the result of deeply

held attitudes and values (e.g., the traditional gender roles ascribed to women) (Ekehammar &

Akrami, 2003). Individuals who are more open presumably would be more likely to think

critically and to accept critique of their values than individuals who are less open. These

individuals would be better able to take the perspective of a a victim of benevolent sexism and

consider how such an action may negatively affect the victim (Viki, Abrams, & Hutchison,

2003). This claim is supported in previous research, which has investigated the influence of

personality on sexist attitudes and found consistent negative associations between Openness and

generalized sexism as measured by the Swedish Modern Sexism Scale (Ekehammar & Akrami,

2007; Ekehammar et. al. 2004). Generalized sexism, as opposed to ambivalent sexism, does not

break the overall concept down into hostile or benevolent sexism. However, the individual items

of the Swedish Modern Sexism Scale reflect attitudes similar to those defined as hostile sexism

in the Ambivalent Sexism Theory.

Further research has investigated the facets of Openness, rather than as a composite

variable, to determine if sexist attitudes can be predicted by even more specific attitudes or

behaviors. This research found that a generalized *values* facet (as opposed to *religious values* or

political values [Goldberg, 1990; Costa & McCrae, 1992]) of Openness is predictive of weak to

moderate negative associations with both hostile sexism and benevolent sexism towards women

(Ekehammar & Akrami, 2007; Christopher, Zabel, & Miller, 2013). In this instance, the *values*

facet was intended to measure an individual's "willingness to reexamine social, political, and

religious values." These presumably reflect the "proper" place of a woman in the social,

political, and religious spheres. These results are consistent with the assumptions made

concerning individuals with "open" personalities; these individuals would exhibit lower levels of

agreement with sexist beliefs because they would be more willing to entertain the idea that these

beliefs cause harm to others. This research also found strong negative associations between

values and Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) and Social Dominance Orientation (SDO)

(Ekehammar & Akrami, 2007; Christopher, Zabel, & Miller, 2013), two ideologies that are often

measured in congruence with sexism and other forms of prejudice. An individual's score on an

RWA assessment is reflective of their agreement with "traditional" values which often underlie

sexist attitudes. An individual's score on an SDO assessment reflects their agreement with the

belief that some people or groups of people are inherently better than others. The belief that

one's in-group is superior to any number of outgroups is the basis of prejudice.

Agreeableness. As a personality trait, measures of Agreeableness are meant to determine an individual's tendency to, quite literally, agree with those around them in an attempt to maintain social harmony. Facets of Agreeableness measure the level of sincerity an individual assigns to their social partner and their tendency to avoid conflict, to exhibit modesty, and to experience concern for others. Researchers interested in the relationship between Agreeableness and benevolent and hostile sexism have often paid particular attention to facets intended to measure an individual's tendency to experience concern for others as well as to ascribe a high level of sincerity to their social partner. These facets are often studied because an individual's concern for another may allow them to recognize ambiguous behaviors as both positive and negative when looked at from multiple perspectives. Level of sincerity (also measured as *trust*) can be used to determine if an individual believes a harmful (or potentially harmful) act was intended to be so; individuals high in Agreeableness would tend to believe that the perpetrator of a harmful act believed they were acting with good intentions. This claim is also supported by previous research investigating the influence of personality on sexist attitudes which has again found negative associations between Agreeableness and generalized sexism (Ekehammar & Akrami, 2007).

Further research has found that the facets of Agreeableness which measure *tender-mindedness* and *trust* have been found to be predictive of negative associations with both hostile and benevolent sexism toward women, though the relationships for both facets were stronger for hostile sexism (Christopher, Zabel, & Miller, 2013). These results are consistent with the assumptions made concerning individuals with "agreeable" personalities; these individuals would exhibit lower levels of agreement with hostile sexism because they recognize the potential for conflict and disruption of social harmony. The weaker relationships found between

benevolent sexism and *tender-mindedness* and *trust* are explained by the assumption that

agreeable individuals would "trust" that benevolently sexist acts were well-intentioned, even

though their actions may have resulted in conflict or a disruption of social harmony. This

research also found that the relationship between trust and hostile sexism was mediated by SDO.

Interpersonal Reactivity Index

Another approach to investigating the relationships between personality and the

perception of sexism is through empathy. Empathy is an individual's reactions to the observed

experiences of another person. Popular use of the term has often limited these reactions to the

observed *negative* experiences of another, though that is not necessarily the case. Many theories

of empathy fall into one of two forms-- an intellectual reaction (the ability to recognize and

understand another's perspective) and an emotional reaction (Dymond, 1949; Kerr & Speroff,

1954). More recently, researchers have made an attempt to integrate these two perspectives into

one comprehensive evaluation.

One such assessment is the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI). This theory not only

assesses cognitive and emotional reactions to the experiences of others, but also assesses whether

these reactions are "self-oriented" or "other-oriented" (Davis, 1983). The resulting instrument

consists of four subscales which measure intellectual "self-" and "other-oriented" empathy, as

well as emotional "self-" and "other-oriented" empathy.

"Self-oriented" empathy measures consist of the fantasy and personal distress subscales.

The fantasy subscale assesses an individual's tendency to imagine themselves in the place of

fictional characters (often the protagonist) in films, books, and theatre (Davis, 1983). The

personal distress subscale assesses an individual's feeling of personal distress when witnessing

negative social interactions (Davis, 1983). Because these measures look inwards at an

individual's imagined personal reactions, they will not be included in hypotheses in the current

study, as I am interested in assessing participants' concern *for the distress of others*. This goal

can be achieved by focusing on the "other-oriented" subscales of the IRI: the intellectual

component of perspective-taking and the emotional component of empathic concern.

      Perspective Taking. The perspective taking subscale of the IRI measures the tendency of

an individual to adopt the psychological viewpoint of someone else. Adopting another's

perspective is helpful when determining the identification of sexism in the real world because it

shows an understanding of the detriments of sexist behavior even when the effects are not

directly felt by the individual themselves. An individual who is skilled at taking the perspective

of another should more readily perceive the potential for distress in a variety of scenarios—even

those in which the perpetrator may not believe they are actively causing harm (i.e., benevolently

sexist acts). Research has found strong negative associations between perspective taking and

both hostilely and benevolently sexist attitudes (Hellmer, Stenson, & Jylhä, 2018). Participants

were less likely to endorse hostilely or benevolently sexist beliefs if they could explicitly

imagine how the victim of such an attitude would feel. Further research has shown that in real-

world scenarios illustrating hostile sexism, perceived intent plays a moderating role in the

attribution of the label "sexist" to a sexist act (Riemer, Chaudoir, & Earnshaw, 2014).

Participants who believed that the intent of a sexist comment was to get attention were less likely

to label the comment as sexist than if they believed the comment was meant explicitly to harm or

to make the victim feel uncomfortable. This can also be seen as a form of perspective taking

from the viewpoint of the perpetrator, rather than from that of the victim, despite not being

overtly labeled as such . Though perspective taking has similar relationships with a participant's

level of agreement with both hostilely and benevolently sexist attitudes, only the relationship between perspective taking and hostile sexism has been investigated in real-world scenarios.

Empathic Concern. The emotional counterpart of perspective taking is empathic concern. Empathic concern is the degree to which an individual experiences "other-oriented" feelings of sympathy and concern for the well-being of another who is currently having a negative experience (Davis, 1983). This scale is useful in research meant to determine the perception of sexism because it shows an understanding of the emotional and psychological consequences of sexist behavior on others, even with the effects are not directly felt by an individual who witnesses the sexist act. Research has found strong negative correlations between empathic concern and both hostilely and benevolently sexist attitudes (Hellmer, Stenson, & Jylhä, 2018). These results indicate that individuals who express less empathic concern are those most likely to agree with both hostilely and benevolently sexist attitudes and behaviors. From this information, it can be implied that those individuals who express higher levels of empathic concern are the least likely to agree with benevolently and hostilely sexist attitudes and behaviors, as well as the least likely to engage in such actions. In evaluations of real-world scenarios, interpreted levels of sexism were moderated by the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim-- either as their boyfriend, their boss, or a stranger. Women receiving the sexist comments were less likely to define them as hostilely sexist if the comments came from their boyfriend, though objective viewers did not make such a distinction (Riemer, Chaudoir, & Earnshaw, 2014). This could be indicative of an understanding that sexist comments made by males in close relationships with women still have negative consequences for the woman in the scenario, even if it is something she is willing to forgive or overlook. These findings have interesting implications in the study of sexism because they provide another clue as to how

benevolent sexism is perpetuated, which again leads to the perpetuation and continuation of

hostile sexism.

        In addition, most of the research meant to assess the relationship between empathy and

the identification of sexism in the real world focuses on scenarios that illustrate incidents of

hostile sexism or sexual objectification (Riemer, Chaudoir, & Earnshaw, 2014). While this

research is certainly beneficial to the study of sexism, it only addresses one hostile component of

the sexism problem. Because research has shown that benevolent sexism often underlies hostile

sexism, benevolent sexism must be recognized as equally detrimental as its hostile counterpart. It

follows that benevolent sexism should then be just as reprehensible to the general population as

hostile sexism. However, because benevolent sexism is often subjectively positive to the

perpetrator, it is easily mistaken for prosocial behavior (behavior meant to facilitate social

harmony) and often difficult to identify. This, in turn, makes benevolent sexism difficult to

correct. Incidents of benevolent sexism are then forgiven or overlooked and continue to be

engaged in. This engagement normalizes benevolent sexism and its effects, which can contribute

to the normalization of hostile sexism. Research into the identification of benevolent sexism in

the real world is necessary as a step to reducing these incidents, which in turn may lead to the

reduction of incidents of hostile sexism. The reduction of benevolent sexism in and of itself is

also a worthwhile endeavor because benevolent sexism contributes to attitudes and practices that

serve to keep women in restricted roles within the home, workplace, and economy.

The Present Research

        Hostile sexism and benevolent sexism work hand in hand— they contribute to each other

and to the negative effects each has on the lives of women. Long-term prevention and correction

of sexist acts and behaviors must include research into the identification of benevolent sexism in

the real world. However, this real-world research has focused almost exclusively on the identification of hostile sexism. Such an inquiry is necessary because the acceptance and perpetuation of benevolent sexism is a contributing factor to the acceptance and perpetuation of hostile sexism. Attitudes and behaviors that treat women as the "weaker sex" prime both men and women to accept behaviors that victimize and actively—often physically as in cases of harassment and assault—harm women. As long as benevolent sexism continues to exist unchecked, hostile sexism will continue to be subtly legitimized.

The present research addresses this lack of investigation into the identification of benevolent sexism in the real-world. Participants in this study completed measures of personality, empathy, and sexist attitude agreement. These measures were intended to determine how easily an individual may recognize acts of benevolent sexism in real-world scenarios which take place both in the workplace and in a nonworkplace environment. These scenarios are illustrated in a series of vignettes written specifically for this study and based on the lived experiences of real women (Everyday Sexism Project, 2019). Because the words *sexist* and *sexism* may have primed participants to respond with higher levels of sexism recognition than they actually perceived in each scenario, participants were asked to determine how much of a violation of respect each vignette illustrated. The phrase "violation of respect" was chosen because was a neutral phrase that allowed for maximum variability in responses. These violation ratings were then used as an indicator of the level of perceived benevolent sexism in each scenario. This research attempted to resolve multiple hypotheses in three categories.

Correlational Hypotheses. Five specific correlations were investigated in this study. First, I expected to find that empathic concern, as measured by the IRI, would be positively associated with violation ratings of the vignettes. Individuals who express more empathic

concern seem to be perfectly poised to recognize the detriments of the "sweet nothings" or

chivalric tendencies that characterize benevolent sexism because these individuals likely to

attempt to understand the emotional consequences of an action.

Second, I expected to find that perspective taking, as measure by the IRI, would also be

positively associated with violation ratings of the vignettes. Individuals who express high rates of

perspective taking are more likely to imagine themselves as the victim in a given scenario; it

should follow that these individuals would recognize the negative effects of benevolent sexism

based on how they would react if they themselves were the victim. If an individual can imagine

the reaction of a victim to an act of benevolent sexism and recognize the action's negative

effects, the particpant will identify it as "wrong," in this case, sexist.

Third, I expected Openness, as measured by the Big Five Inventory 2 (BFI-2) (Soto &

John, 2017), to be positively associated with violation ratings of the vignettes. Individuals who

are more open are more likely to entertain new ideas, new attitudes, and new values, and

presumably would be more likely to recognize traditional acts of gender roles as sexist.

Fourth, I expected agreeableness, as measured by the BFI-2, to be negatively associated

with violation ratings of the vignettes. Individuals who exhibit high levels of agreeableness often

seek to avoid conflict. Because benevolent sexism is often the basis of traditional gender roles,

paternalism, and chivalry (Viki, Abrams, & Hutchison, 2003), these individuals would tend to

find these behaviors acceptable in order to avoid "rocking the boat."

Finally, I expected political conservativism to be negatively associated with violation

ratings of the vignettes. I expected this result because benevolent sexism is often supported by

traditional gender roles, paternalism, and chivalry—all of which are traits frequently associated

with conservative ideology. (Viki, Abrams, & Hutchison, 2003; Hellmer, Stenson, & Jylhä, 2018; Riemer, Chaudoir, & Earnshaw, 2014).

Experimental Hypotheses. In addition to the five correlational hypotheses detailed above, I also investigated three experimental hypotheses. The first of these hypotheses was that vignettes that are set in the workplace would receive lower violation ratings that vignettes that are set in a nonworkplace environment. Women who feel as if their job or financial security are dependent upon their acceptance of benevolently sexist behaviors have been found to more easily forgive such behaviors (Moya, Glick, Expósito, de Lemus & Hart, 2007).

Second, I believed that men would give vignettes set in the workplace lower violation ratings than women. This is supported by research which shows that men typically do not recognize benevolent sexism as often as women (Glick & Fiske, 1996, Hellmer, Stenson, & Jylhä, 2018; Riemer, Chaudoir, & Earnshaw, 2014). In conjunction, I believed that men would give vignettes set in a nonworkplace environment lower violation ratings than women, also because research shows that men typically do not recognize benevolent sexism as often as women (Glick & Fiske, 1996, Hellmer, Stenson, & Jylhä, 2018; Riemer, Chaudoir, & Earnshaw, 2014).

Replication Hypotheses. The final set of hypotheses in this study are confirmatory hypotheses meant to replicate previous findings. First, I expected RWA to be positively associated with benevolent sexism and I expected SDO to be positively associated with hostile sexism (Hellmer, Stenson, & Jylhä, 2018; Christopher, Zabel, & Miller, 2013).I also expected Agreeableness to be negatively associated with SDO and Openness to be negatively associated with RWA (Christopher, Zabel, & Miller, 2013).

Method

Participants

Participants consisted of 144 undergraduate students at Wittenberg University (77.1% female, 22.2% male). Participants were recruited from the Wittenberg University campus through flyers, social media posts, and the psychology department's Open Studies List. Age of participants ranged between 18 and 24. These respondents self-identified race/ethnicity as 87.5% Caucasian/White, 4.9% African American/Black, 4.9% as multiracial, 1.4% Latinx/Hispanic, and 1.4% Asian. Class year results consisted of 27.8% juniors, 26.4 % seniors, 25.7% freshmen, and 16.7% sophomores. Participants were also given the choice to identify themselves as a "Fifth year senior" or "other" Wittenberg affiliation, and these responses accounted for 3.5% of the total. In exchange for participating, students currently enrolled in introductory psychology received two research participation credits.

Materials

Data for this preregistered study were collected through a survey created and hosted on SurveyMonkey.com. The survey consisted of a series of assessments, presented in the following order. Alpha coefficients, means, and standard deviations of all scales are reported in Table 1.

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Alpha Coefficient
IRI Perspective Taking	2.59	0.610	0.714
IRI Empathic Concern	2.86	0.633	0.663
IRI Fantasy	2.65	0.790	0.780
IRI Personal Distress	1.85	0.673	0.738
BFI Open-Mindedness	3.97	0.683	0.857
BFI OM; Intelligence	4.11	0.734	0.689
BFI OM; Aesthetics	3.96	0.923	0.779
BFI OM; Imagination	3.84	0.809	0.750
BFI Agreeableness	3.74	0.512	0.694
BFI A; Compassion	3.89	0.677	0.416
BFI A; Respectfulness	4.01	0.621	0.547
BFI A; Trust	3.31	0.680	0.459
BFI-2-XS; Conscientiousness	3.53	0.916	0.626
BFI-2-XS; Extraversion	3.21	0.930	0.635
BFI-2-XS; Negative Emotionality	3.32	1.07	0.741

Workplace Violations	56.9	17.1	0.819
Nonworkplace Violations	44.8	17.3	0.844
ASI Benevolent Sexism	1.63	0.890	0.832
ASI Hostile Sexism	1.28	0.900	0.881
ASI Total Sexism	1.46	0.833	0.911
Right Wing Authoritarianism	2.92	1.42	0.725
Social Dominance Orientation	2.33	0.973	0.798
Sense of Power	4.55	0.935	0.825

Table 1: Means, standard deviations, and alpha coefficients of scales used in this study.

Main measures. The Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) was used to determine an individual's level of empathy (Davis, 1980). This is a 28-item scale consisting of four subscales with seven items each. The subscales measured perspective taking, empathic concern, fantasy, and personal distress. Nine items are reverse scored. Participants responded on a five-point Likert Scale ranging from 0 (Does Not Describe Me Well) to 4 (Describes Me Very Well). An example item from the perspective taking subscale is: "I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision."

The Big Five Inventory (BFI-2) was used to measure the personality variables of openness, agreeableness, negative emotionality, conscientiousness, and extraversion (Soto & John, 2017). This is a 60-item scale consisting of five subscales with 12 items each. The subscales measured each of the above-mentioned personality variables by breaking each variable into three facet variables. 30 items are reverse scored. Participants responded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Disagree Strongly) to 5 (Agree Strongly). An example item from the agreeableness subscale, compassion facet is: "I am someone who is compassionate, has a soft heart." The full agreeableness and openness subscales were used in this survey, while an extra short form of the BFI-2 (BFI-2-XS) was used to measure negative emotionality, conscientiousness, and extraversion (Soto & John, 2017). The key difference between the BFI-2

and the BFI-2-XS is that the latter form removes the subscales for each personality trait and

measures only a composite variable.

A series of 24 vignettes were created specifically for this study. Four of these vignettes,

depicted incidents of prosocial behavior and were considered control items. The remaining 20

vignettes were based on the lived experiences of real women as shared with the Everyday

Sexism Project (Everyday Sexism Project, 2019). Each vignette illustrates a scenario of

benevolent sexism that was reported to the Project at least five times in the six-month period of

July 2018- December 2018. The vignettes are divided into two subscales— vignettes set in the

workplace and in a nonworkplace setting. All scenarios consisted of an active male character (the

one committing the sexist/prosocial act) and a female target (the person for which the

sexist/prosocial act was intended).

Participants were asked to respond to each scenario by indicating on a slider how much

of a "violation of respect" each vignette illustrated. The slider included the labels "no violation

of respect has occurred" on one end and "an extreme violation of respect has occurred" on the

other. In analyses, these labels were given the numeric values of zero and 100, respectively.

There were many potential ways of evaluating a participants' perception of sexism in the

ambiguous vignettes. One possibility was to simply ask the participants if they found the action

in each scenario to be sexist. A drawback to this approach is that such a question allows for

minimal variability. Participants could indicate that they did or did not find a scenario sexist, but

they would be unable to indicate if they found an individual scenario to be more or less sexist

than any other. Furthermore, using language such as the word *sexist* tends to be polarizing. It

either primes participants to see sexism where they would not normally see it, or to deny

"smaller" acts of sexism in an attempt to avoid seeming too politically correct. Replacing the

word *sexist* with the word *harmful* presents similar limitations. Ultimately, I chose to ask

participants to what extent they perceived each scenario as violating a "community of respect." I

chose this phrasing because it framed the question of sexism perception as neutrally as I saw

possible. It also allowed for variability in responses beyond a simple *yes* or *no* answer.

Additionally, this phrasing is beneficial because it applies the same standards for interpersonal

interaction in both the workplace and nonworkplace environments. The full scenario assessment

can be found in the Appendix.

The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory was used to determine the degree to which

participants agreed with hostilely and benevolently sexist attitudes towards women (Glick &

Fiske, 1996). This is a 22-iten scale consisting of two subscales which 11 items each. These

subscales measure hostile sexism and benevolent sexism, respectively. Six items are reverse

scored. Participants responded on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (Disagree Strongly) to

5 (Agree Strongly). An example item from the benevolent sexism subscale is: "Women should

be cherished and protected by men."

Exploratory measures. The Sense of Power Scale was used to assess participants'

perceptions of their power in a variety of situations (e.g., specific interactions, multiple

interactions, multiple relationships, etc.) (Anderson, John, & Keltner, 2010). This scale consists

of eight items which were rated on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Disagree Strongly)

to 7 (Agree Strongly). Four items were reverse scored. An example item from this scale is: "I can

get others to listen to do what I want."

The Very Short Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale measures participants attitudes

toward obedience to authority and social norms (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2018). This scale consists

of six items broken into three subscales—conservatism or authoritarian submission,

traditionalism or conventionalism, and authoritarianism or authoritarian aggression. Three of the items, one from each subscale, were reverse scored. These items were rated on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (Very Strongly Disagree) to 8 (Strongly Agree). An example item from this scale is: "It's great that many young people today are prepared to defy authority."

The 8-Item Social Dominance Orientation Scale (SDO-7) was used to determine the degree to which participants agree with traditional hierarchy and group inequality (Ho et. al, 2015). These items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Oppose) to 7 (Strongly Favor). The scale consists of two subscales (dominance and egalitarianism) with four items each. Two items in each subscale measured pro-trait facets of the subscale variable (e.g., pro-trait dominance), while the other two items measured con-trait facets of the subscale variable. These con-trait items were reverse scored. An example item from the dominance subscale (pro-trait) is: "An ideal society requires some groups to be on top and others to be on the bottom."

The Socioeconomic Status (SES) ladder task is a visual tool used to help participants convey what they believe to be their socioeconomic status. Participants are presented with an image of a ladder and asked to approximate where they would fall in regard to SES in a given context. In this study, participants were asked to respond to two ladders—one for the context of Wittenberg University, and one for the context of the United States as a whole.

The survey concluded with a series of demographic questions (e.g., sex, age, race/ethnicity, class year, etc.).

Procedure

Participants were recruited through a variety of means. The study was advertised on social media and through flyers posted in the academic and residence buildings at Wittenberg

University. These social media posts and flyers included information about the study, the contact information of the researcher, and a link to the anonymous SurveyMonkey survey. Psychology students in particular received an email from the department chair with a link to the survey. The survey was also listed on the psychology department's Active Studies List (an Excel document available to psychology students that lists all current open studies offering research credit).

The researcher in this study did not directly interact with participants. Instead, participants followed a link to SurveyMonkey.com where they were presented with an online consent form. In order to move forward with the study, participants were required to give consent before answering any of the survey's questions. Once consent was obtained, participants were prompted to answer the questions that followed, in the order described above. Participants were encouraged to answer as best as they could. Because there was no direct interaction with the researcher, participants were able to respond to the survey wherever they chose, most likely on the Wittenberg University campus. Data collection was open from 20 February 2019 to 20 March 2019.

Once the initial survey was concluded, before debriefing, participants were given the opportunity to request research credit. To do so, participants were given a link to a separate survey where they listed their name and the class for which they wished to receive credit. It was not possible to trace this identifiable information back to the participants' main survey responses. After those participants who chose registered for research credit, they were redirected back to the main survey where they were debriefed and thanked for participating.

After data collection concluded, professors within the psychology department were presented with the names of students who requested research credit for participation in this study. Once credit was assigned, this information was permanently deleted.

Results

Correlational Hypotheses

Several bivariate correlations were conducted with these data to examine the

relationships between violation ratings of the vignettes and empathy, Openness, and

Agreeableness. The first correlation assessed the relationship between perspective taking and

empathic concern and violation ratings for vignettes set in both the workplace and in a

nonworkplace environment. These correlations are presented in Table 2. Contrary to my

hypotheses, neither the perspective taking nor empathic concern subscale scores were associated

with either workplace or nonworkplace vignette violation ratings. However, exploratory analyses

showed that vignettes set in the workplace were positively associated with fantasy subscale

scores, and vignettes set in a nonworkplace environment were positively associated with

personal distress subscale scores.

	Perspective Taking	Empathic Concern	Fantasy	Personal Distress
Nonworkplace	-.006	.048	.156	.179*
Workplace	.126	.104	.176*	.124

Table 2: Correlations between IRI and vignette violations
Note: * $p < .05$

A second correlation assessed the relationships between violation ratings of vignettes set

in both the workplace and nonworkplace environments to an overall Open-Mindedness score, as

well as to scores of three Open-Mindedness facets—intellectual curiosity, aesthetic sensitivity,

and creative imagination. Presented in Table 3, overall Open-Mindedness scores were positively

associated with violation ratings of vignettes set both in the workplace and nonworkplace

environments. Further, intellectual curiosity and aesthetic sensitivity showed positive

associations with both measures of violation ratings, while creative imagination showed no

association with either measure of violation ratings.

	Open-Mindedness	Intelligence	Aesthetics	Imagination
Nonworkplace	.175*	.189*	.217**	.024
Workplace	.285***	.270**	.310***	.123

Table 3: Correlations between Open-Mindedness and vignette violations
Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

The relationships between violation ratings of both workplace and nonworkplace

vignettes and an overall Agreeableness score, as well as scores of its three facets (compassion,

respectfulness, and trust), were assessed in a third correlation. As shown in Table 3, neither

Agreeableness as a whole or any of its facets were significantly associated with violation ratings

of vignettes set either in the workplace or in a nonworkplace environment.

	Agreeableness	Compassion	Respectfulness	Trust
Nonworkplace	.010	.102	.047	-.121
Workplace	.065	.087	.073	-.008

Table 4: Correlations between Agreeableness and vignette violations
Note: $p > .05$

Finally, Table 5 shows the results of a correlation between political conservativism and

violation ratings of vignettes set in the workplace and nonworkplace environments. Results

showed that political conservatism was negatively associated with both sets of violation ratings.

	Political conservativism
Nonworkplace	-.344***
Workplace	-.321***

Table 5: Correlations between political conservativism and vignette violations
Note: *** $p < .001$

Experimental Hypotheses

To test for significant group differences in particaptn rating of vignettes in each setting, two independent samples t-tests and one paired samples t-test were conducted. The first independent samples Welch's *t*-test was conducted to determine if men (*M* = 52.3, *SD* = 15.0) gave lower violation ratings to vignettes set in the workplace than women (*M* = 58.1, *SD* = 17.5). There were no significant gender differences in violation ratings of vignettes set in the workplace $t(57.7) = -1.83$, $p = .072$. The results of this test are illustrated in Panel A of Figure 1.

A second independent samples *t*-test was conducted to determine if men (*M* = 40.3, *SD* = 14.9) gave lower violation ratings to vignettes set in a nonworkplace environment than women (*M* = 46.0, *SD* = 17.8). Again, there were no significant gender differences in violation ratings of the vignettes set in a nonworkplace environment $t(58.9) = -1.81$, $p = .075$. The results of this test are illustrated in Panel B of Figure 1.
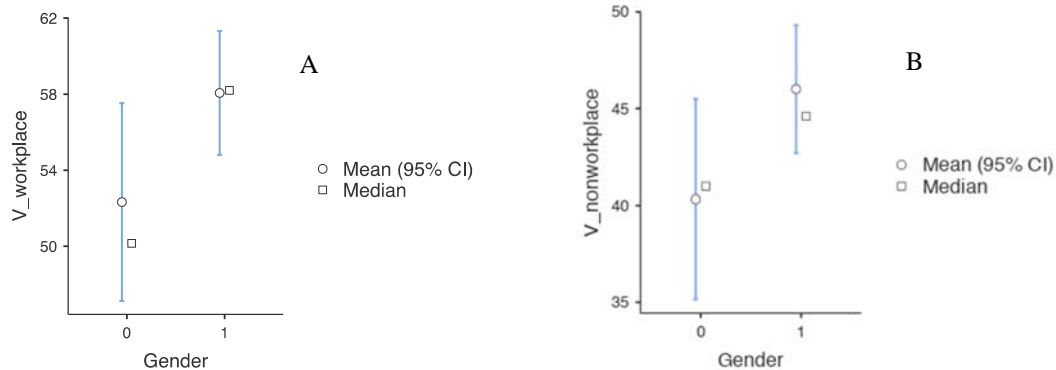

Figure 1, Panel A: Results of an independent samples t-test comparing violation ratings in the workplace across gender.

Figure 1, Panel B: Results of an independent samples t-test comparing violation ratings in a nonworkplace environment across gender.

Finally, a paired samples t-test was conducted to determine if vignettes set in the workplace received lower ratings that vignettes set in a nonworkplace environment. Results showed that vignettes set in the workplace (*M* = 56.9, *SD*= 17.1) received significantly higher

violation ratings than vignettes set in a nonworkplace environment (M= 44.8, SD= 17.3); t (143)

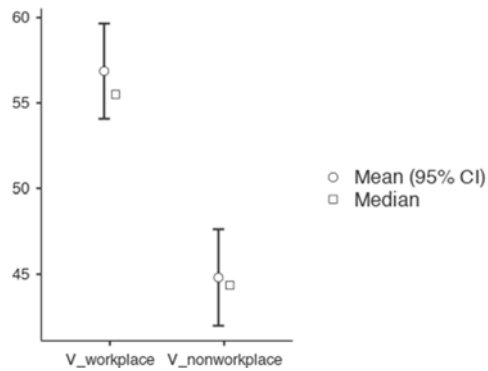= 11.8, $p < .001$. This result is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Results of a paired samples t-test
comparing ratings of violations set in the
workplace to ratings of violations set in a
nonworkplace environment.

Replication Hypotheses

A bivariate correlation was conducted between RWA, SDO, Agreeableness, Openness,

Benevolent Sexism, and Hostile Sexism. These analyses were intended to replicate findings in

previous research. Consistent with previous research, Right Wing Authoritarianism was

positively associated with both benevolent sexism $r = .489$, $p < .001$, and hostile sexism $r = .503$,

$p < .001$. Also in line with previous research, Social Dominance Orientation was positively

associated with both benevolent $r = .441$, $p < .001$, and hostile sexism $r = .479$, $p < .001$. In

terms of personality, overall Open-Mindedness, as shown in previous research, was negatively

associated with RWA $r = -.306$, $p < .001$ and SDO $r = -.426$, $p < .001$.

Contrary to previous research, there were no associations between overall Agreeableness

and RWA $r = .074$, $p = .382$, or SDO $r = -.130$, $p = .121$.

Discussion

In this study, I examined if empathy, Open-Mindedness, and Agreeableness were associated with the perception of benevolent sexism in ambiguous real-world scenarios. Of the five correlational hypotheses I tested, only two were confirmed by the data. Of three experimental hypotheses, tested using independent samples and paired samples t-tests, only one was confirmed by the data.

Correlational Hypotheses

Results indicated no significant associations between the perspective taking subscale of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index and violation ratings of vignettes either in the workplace or in a nonworkplace environment. This finding fails to support my hypothesis that there would be positive associations between perspective taking and violation ratings in both settings. I anticipated that I would find significant positive associations between perspective taking and violation ratings of the vignettes because it would indicate that participants were imagining how acts of benevolent sexism would negatively affect victims. One possible explanation for this finding is that participants may have been taking multiple perspectives while reacting to the vignettes. In some scenarios, participants may have been placing themselves in the victims' shoes; in other scenarios, participants may have been taking the perspective of the perpetrator and including such mediating factors as perceived intent in their evaluations. The potential combination of taking both the victims' and perpetrators' perspectives may have "cancelled out" any significant relationships that might have been obtained had participants taken the perspective of only the victim or only the perpetrator. Future research should explore the possibility of explicitly instructing participants to take the perspective of either the victim or the perpetrator.

Analyses found that scores on the empathic concern subscale also had no significant associations with the perception of benevolent sexism in either the workplace or in a

nonworkplace environment. This finding also fails to support my hypothesis that empathic

concern would be positively associated with violation ratings of vignettes in both settings. I had

anticipated that I would find significant positive associations between empathic concern and

violation ratings of the vignettes because it would indicate that participants were emotionally

reacting to incidents of benevolent sexism and the negative affect on the victim. One possible

explanation for this finding is the amount of variance in violation ratings. Some participants

found vignettes both in the workplace and in a nonworkplace environment to be extreme

violations of respect for the victim; other participants saw the same interactions as no violation

of respect at all. Reactions at either extreme may have averaged out in composite scores, leaving

only a neutral, middle score to be entered into the correlation. The result of such an analysis is an

association that is neither positive nor negative. Another possible explanation is variance *within*

subjects. Though variability in response from one scenario to another is to be expected and even

hoped for, too much or too little variability may be an indication that participants are not fully

considering the implications of each scenario, *or* that they are not making any distinctions

between the vignettes. When averaged together to form a composite score for each participant,

some scores may be unusually low, while others are unusually high. Again, these extreme

composite scores may average each other and leave only a more neutral score to be entered into

the correlation—resulting in an association that is neither positive nor negative.

Exploratory analyses found that the fantasy subscale of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index

showed a small positive association with violation ratings of vignettes set in the workplace. As

this is a measure of "self-oriented" empathy (empathy that indicates awareness of others and

their negative experiences *only in relation to the self and the feelings of personal distress it may*

cause (Davis, 1983)), this indicates that participants might have made an attempt to associate

with the "characters" of the vignettes and imagine how they would react in such a situation.

Because of the positive association found between scores on the fantasy subscale and violation

ratings of the vignettes, it is likely that participants identified with the victim "character" in each

vignette. Exploratory analyses also found that the personal distress subscale of the IRI showed a

small positive association with violation ratings of vignettes set in a nonworkplace environment.

This is also a measure of "self-oriented" empathy and indicates that participants were making an

attempt to reflect in their responses how they would have felt if they witnessed such an incident

in real life, since personal distress measures feelings of personal anxiety in tense social settings

(Davis, 1983).

Taken in conjunction, one possible explanation for the findings regarding all four

subscales of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index is that participants reacted to vignettes more

strongly in terms of "self-oriented" feelings of empathy than in terms of "other-oriented"

feelings of empathy. Positive associations between violation ratings and scores on the fantasy

and personal distress subscales indicate that participants most likely assessed violation ratings of

the vignettes in response to their own imagined reactions *as the victim*. This is supported by the

lack of association between the perspective taking and empathic concern subscales and violation

ratings, which, if significant, would have indicated participants' imagined responses *to the

written victim*. Future research should explicitly indicate that participants' main objective is to

react to the vignettes as if they were witnessing the scenario as a third-party observer and not as

an active participant.

Significant positive associations were found between Open-Mindedness and the violation

ratings of both vignette types. This indicates that participants who are more open-minded may be

more likely to consider how incidents of benevolent sexism may have negative consequences for

the victim, even if harm was not the perpetrator's intent. This is consistent with previous

literature, which has found that open-minded individuals are less likely to agree with

benevolently sexist attitudes (Viki, Abrams, & Hutchison, 2003).

Conversely, no significant associations were found in correlations between

Agreeableness and either type of vignette. I expected Agreeableness to negatively predict

violation ratings of the vignettes because benevolent sexism is so often mistaken for prosocial

behavior. Agreeable people tend to believe that others are sincere in their actions and don't

intentionally try to cause harm. An agreeable person would likely excuse benevolently sexist

attitudes and actions because they believed that the perpetrator didn't mean to cause any harm. A

possible explanation of this finding is simply that this study had limited statistical power to

detect small relationships and effects. It is possible that in a more highly powered study with

more participants there may be small, but significant, relationships between Agreeableness and

the perception of benevolent sexism. However, given the results of the present study, it seems

unlikely that any strong relationship would be found. Further exploratory analyses broke the

overall trait of Agreeableness down into its respective facets and searched for associations with

vignette ratings. No factor showed a significant relationship with violation ratings of either type

of vignette.

Exploratory analyses regarding Open-Mindedness also broke the trait down into its

separate facets to determine if there were any specific concepts that were stronger predictors of

violation ratings than others. These analyses found that the Open-Mindedness facets of

intellectual curiosity and aesthetic sensitivity each showed significant positive relationships with

violation ratings of vignettes set both in the workplace and in a nonworkplace environment.

Given that intellectual curiosity is associated with an individual's tendency to think critically

about their environment and to adjust their beliefs accordingly, it is unsurprising that more intellectually curious people were more likely to perceive benevolent sexism in the vignettes (Soto & John, 2017; Ekehammar & Akrami, 2003; Viki, Abrams, & Hutchison, 2003). This ability may have contributed to the participants' tendency to perceive the behaviors illustrated in the vignettes as inappropriate or harmful towards the victim, even if the perpetrator did not believe or intend for this to be the case.

The relationship between aesthetic sensitivity and violation ratings of the vignettes set in a nonworkplace environment is quite puzzling. Aesthetic sensitivity is intended to measure an individual's appreciation of beauty and the arts. The vignettes set in a nonworkplace environment did not illustrate such scenarios or concepts. However, previous literature has found relationships between ambivalent sexism and other facets of Open-Mindedness (Ekehammar & Akrami, 2003; Viki, Abrams, & Hutchison, 2003), and because all facets of Open-Mindedness are related to some extent, it is possible that the real explanation for this relationship was simply not assessed in this study.

Results show that political conservativism has a negative association with violation ratings of both types of vignettes. This is consistent with previous research that indicates that participants who value the traditionalism typically associated with political conservativism are more likely to agree with benevolently sexist attitudes (Hellmer, Stenson & Jylhä, 2018). This suggests that sexism, including benevolent sexism, does not exist in isolation, and that there are other factors which may contribute to an individual's perception of such behavior in the real world. Further research may use results of this assessment to contribute to our understanding of the underlying ideology of sexism. Researchers interested in exploring the relationships between

the perception of benevolent sexism and political conservativism should search for common underlying ideologies, such as paternalism, chivalry, or adherence to tradition.

Experimental Hypotheses

Results of the independent t-tests found no significant gender differences in violation ratings of vignettes set in either the workplace or in a nonworkplace environment. However, there were trends in the data which suggested that men typically gave lower violation ratings than women to vignettes of both types. This is also consistent with previous research that found that men typically do not perceive benevolent sexism as often as women, possibly because they do not recognize such attitudes or acts as harmful. The lack of significance in the current study is most likely the result of the low number of men in the sample (32 men to 111 women). It is likely that if more men had participated, this test would have shown significant gender differences.

However, results of the paired samples t-test *did* find a significant difference in violation ratings of workplace vignettes in relation to violations of vignettes set in a nonworkplace environment. This fails to support my hypothesis that workplace vignettes would receive lower violation ratings than vignettes set in a nonworkplace environment. This finding indicates that participants may be more aware of the potentially harmful effects their actions and the actions of others may have on female coworkers, which illustrtates one limitation of the vignettes used in this study.

Vignette Limitations

In interpreting the results of my experimental hypotheses, it is important to consider the implications of the language used to assess the perception of benevolent sexism. Participants were asked to indicate if each scenario was a "violation of respect." *Respect* is a subjective term,

and participants may have different definitions of respect for different settings. In this study,

incidents of benevolent sexism that were set in the workplace may have received higher violation

ratings than incidents set in a nonworkplace environment because participants may have different

standards of respect for each setting. It is possible that violation ratings of vignettes set in the

workplace are a reflection of the participants' beliefs regarding the appropriate ways to interact

with coworkers in general, rather than a true reflection of their disagreement with the sexist act

as an act of sexism. In the future, research should adjust the language of the instrument to

account for this possibility. One possible way of doing this would simply be to ask if participants

found the scenario illustrated by the vignettes to be sexist. While this would limit the amount of

variability in responses, it may reflect a more accurate assessment of what participants perceive

as sexist behavior. Another interesting possibility would be to divide participants into two

experimental groups—one that assess the vignettes as a violation of respect and one that assesses

the same vignettes as sexist or not sexist. Results could then be compared to see if the phrasing

"violation of respect" truly reflects participants' perceptions of sexism in ambiguous scenarios.

Other Limitations

One major limitation of this study is that the focus was solely on incidents of benevolent

sexism perpetrated by males towards female victims. In reality, both men and women are capable

of belief and engagement in benevolent sexism. Additionally, both men and women can be the

victims of such acts (Glick & Fiske, 2001; Lee, Fiske, & Glick, 2010). Further research should

include a variety of perpetrator/victim conditions, in which both males and females act as victims

and perpetrators. One potential study could consist of four experimental groups—male

perpetrator/female victim, male perpetrator/male victim, female perpetrator/female victim, and

female perpetrator/male victim. In each group, actors or characters could perform the same script

describing an act of benevolent sexism. Participants would then be asked to determine how sexist they found their given scenario. Results across groups could be compared to investigate if the gender of the perpetrator and/or the victim mediated the participants' perception of sexism.

Victim/perpetrator relationships and perceived intent may be viewed as a second limitation in this study. Previous research has found that participants considered the victim/perpetrator relationship and what they believed to be the intent of a sexist comment in their evaluations of the situation as more or less sexist (Riemer, Chaudoir, & Earnshaw, 2014). Though the scenarios in Reimer et. al's study also portrayed only male perpetrator/female victim pairings, the degree of intimacy between the two was varied in three separate conditions. The male perpetrator was either the female victim's boyfriend, boss, or a stranger. Participants rated the same comments from different perpetrator "types" as less sexist when they were spoken by a boyfriend, and more sexist when spoken by a stranger. They also found that when participants believed a comment was meant to get the woman's attention or make her laugh, it was considered to be less sexist than when the same comment was intended to harm the female victim. Participants in the current study may have made similar considerations in their evaluations of the vignettes as "violations of respect." Such considerations may have affected the results if participants found some acts of benevolent sexism to be acceptable if committed by a close acquaintance of the victim as opposed to a stranger. Future research should include multiple experimental conditions in which perpetrators with varying degrees of acquaintanceship with the victim commit the same benevolently sexist acts for participants to evaluate.

A final limitation is the sample itself. 77.6% of the sample were female respondents, while 88.1% of the sample identified as Caucasian. All participants were between the ages of 18 and 24. This is not proportionately representative of the Wittenberg University population, nor is

it representative of any larger population, such as that of the United States. These results are not generalizable beyond the confines of Wittenberg University or perhaps another, similarly sized liberal arts institution. Further research should include a more varied participant pool, including a higher number of male and non-White participants and a wider age range.

      The present study serves as a promising starting point for the research into the perception of real-world benevolent sexism. Open-minded individuals were found to be more perceptive of benevolent sexism in ambiguous scenarios, and benevolent sexism in the workplace was found to be considered a much higher violation of respect than incidents of benevolent sexism in a nonworkplace environment. For those hypotheses that were not supported, it is possible that a larger, more varied sample would show significant associations and results, whether or not they support my original hypotheses.

      Future efforts to combat sexist activity should make a concerted effort to distinguish between acts of benevolent sexism and acts of prosocial behavior. Results of this study indicated that participants were less likely to identify benevolent sexism in a nonworkplace environment. One possible explanation for this is that professional settings often have more rigorous guidelines for appropriate topics of conversation. When those guidelines are removed, benevolently sexist comments that may be considered inappropriate in the workplace may be considered more acceptable in a nonworkplace environment such as the home.

      Future efforts to combat sexist activity should also place a special focus on educating individuals with more agreeable personalities. In the current study, these individuals were less likely to interpret benevolent sexism in ambiguous scenarios. One possible explanation is that agreeable individuals tend to trust that other social actors have good intentions and don't mean to

cause harm with their actions. Therefore, agreeable individuals would presumably tend to

overlook or forgive benevolently sexist acts. However, this only serves to perpetuate and

legitimize benevolent sexism, perpetuates and legitimizes the restrictions such attitudes place on

women in the social and economic spheres. If we are to truly overcome sexism, we as a society

must make a conscious effort to address the harmful effects acts of benevolent (and hostile)

sexism, regardless of what we believe to be the intentions of the perpetrator.

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Appendix

You live in a community which places a high value on respect both in the workplace and in everyday life. Respectful interactions are an expectation in this community. Please read the following scenarios and determine if this expectation of respect has been violated. Use the slider to determine the severity of the violation (if one has occured).

1. During an important staff meeting, Becky spoke up about an idea she had for increasing sales for the company, but no one seemed to hear her. A few minutes later, Jacob repeated Becky's idea and several coworkers congratulated Jacob on his ingenuity. After the staff meeting, Becky was visibly upset, even though her coworkers clearly liked her idea.

2. Adam was raised to be a gentleman. One way he expresses this is by holding the door for any woman he sees coming after him. Adam always insists that the woman be able to go through the door first.

3. Matthew has an important email to write that will go out to everyone in the office. After he drafts a copy of the email, he asks his coworker, Rachel, to proofread it because "women are such natural communicators. They always know the right thing to say."

4. Whenever Max sees a woman carrying something bulky, he always offer to carry it for her because it won't be as heavy for him to carry.

5. Marcy is the CEO of a very successful company. She often meets with teams of employees in her office. On several occasions, members of these teams have mistaken Marcy for the CEO's secretary when they arrive for their appointments.

6. John is an elementary school teacher. When he is on recess duty, John is expected to comfort children who play too roughly and get hurt. Often in these situations, John will

ask another teacher, Rebecca, to comfort the child because "women are just so much more compassionate."

7. Sarah is very proud of her workspace and always keeps her desk tidy. Mark often tells Sarah that he wishes he were as neat as the women he knows, but it's just too hard for men to focus on such little details.

8. Jessica and her fiancé were out to dinner with her parents when a young couple with a baby passed by the table. Jessica's father nudged her arm and said "I bet you can't wait to have one of those."

9. Julia and Richard are both heads of a project team. They both email their team members every week as a way to keep the project on schedule. Julia has recently been asked by her team members to "stop nagging" them with her weekly emails.

10. Melissa's friends have asked her to go out to a nightclub with them to celebrate a birthday. Melissa was excited about the celebration, but she turned down the invitation because her boyfriend didn't like the idea of her being in that part of town without him to keep her safe.

11. Angela's husband works part time so that he can pick his kids up from school each day because Angela works full time. Angela's coworker, David, thinks it's great that her husband is so understanding of Angela's desire to be a "career woman."

12. Anna's boyfriend always asks her to call off work when he is sick because he appreciates how good she is at taking care of him.

13. Melanie is an accountant. She has been complimented on her work more than once and takes pride in her performance. Each week when Melanie turns in her report, her boss asks Jeremy to check Melanie's work.

14. Jennifer is going away on a trip for a few days. Her husband has asked her to cook and freeze a few meals for her him to eat while she is gone, because his cooking "just doesn't taste the same."

15. Elizabeth often tries to speak up during staff meetings, but she is frequently spoken over by others with louder voices. One day, Elizabeth became so frustrated because of this that she had to leave the room for a few minutes. While she was gone, James, a coworker, asked the room if Elizabeth was capable of handling the stress of her job.

16. When Sue moved out, she taught herself how to do small home repairs, like fixing a leaky faucet or replacing the filter in the air conditioner. Every time Sue's dad comes to visit, he double checks her handiwork, "just in case."

17. On Thursday, Bethany was moved from a phone sales position to working the front desk of her office. Her manager, Jackson, offered Bethany the position because her friendly, pretty face was sure to make more customers feel at home.

18. Hannah was at the park with her children when she saw a young father changing his baby's diaper. Without being asked, Hannah approached the father and offered to change the baby's diaper for him.

19. Emily left her job as a traveling sales representative to go on maternity leave. When she returned, her manager, Jeff, had reassigned Emily to fewer clients, all of whom were more local, which meant less traveling. When Emily asked about her reassignment, Jeff told her "I didn't think you'd want to be away from your baby for so long. Besides, I bet you're dealing with a lot of sleepless nights."

20. Whenever Alice does her laundry, her brother, Nick, asks her to do his too, because he can never remember the right water temperatures for whites and colors.

21. Alyssa and Brandon run together every morning. On Tuesday, Alyssa forgot her water bottle, so Brandon offered to let her drink some of his water.

22. Sierra was at the supermarket when her bags broke and her groceries spilled all over the ground. Her neighbor, Kyle, happened to be passing by and offered to help Sierra clean up.

23. Kerry was hosting a dinner party with her family when her baby spit up on Kerry's shirt. Kerry's husband, Glenn, offered to go get her a clean shirt while she cleaned up the baby.

24. Melissa was the head of a very lucrative marketing campaign for the town's travel agency. Because of her success, George offered her a promotion to VP of Marketing with a significant salary raise.

	Setting	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Vignette 1	Workplace	79.2	21.4	9	100
Vignette 15	Workplace	72.4	23.8	0	100
Vignette 5	Workplace	64.0	28.0	0	100
Vignette 9	Workplace	61.4	24.8	0	100
Vignette 6	Nonworkplace	60.8	25.9	0	100
Vignette 13	Workplace	58.7	27.8	0	100
Vignette 18	Nonworkplace	58.0	29.4	0	100
Vignette 10	Nonworkplace	57.8	28.1	0	100
Vignette 12	Nonworkplace	57.7	26.7	0	100
Vignette 7	Workplace	51.0	29.9	0	100
Vignette 17	Workplace	48.8	28.6	0	100
Vignette 19	Workplace	46.8	27.6	0	100
Vignette 3	Workplace	45.4	27.1	0	100
Vignette 16	Nonworkplace	42.5	26.2	0	100
Vignette 8	Nonworkplace	41.1	27.8	0	100
Vignette 11	Workplace	39.8	29.1	0	100
Vignette 4	Nonworkplace	36.1	27.1	0	98
Vignette 20	Nonworkplace	34.7	24.8	0	99
Vignette 14	Nonworkplace	31.9	25.5	0	100
Vignette 2	Nonworkplace	20.2	24.3	0	88

Table A1: Descriptives for vignette scenarios ranked by magnitude of mean

	Mean	*Standard Deviation*	*Minimum*	*Maximum*
Vignette 23	19.0	22.8	0	91
Vignette 21	9.28	17.5	0	71
Vignette 24	8.41	15.2	0	58
Vignette 22	5.77	14.7	0	69

Table A2: Descriptives for control vignettes ranked by magnitude