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Working Women's Cognitive Attributions and Self-Perceptions After Experiences of Subtle Sexism and Internalized Sexism

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WORKING WOMEN'S COGNITIVE ATTRIBUTIONS AND SELF-

PERCEPTIONS AFTER EXPERIENCES OF SUBTLE SEXISM AND

INTERNALIZED SEXISM

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A Thesis

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by

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ABSTRACT

Subtle sexism is a pervasive problem for working women due to the normative, unequal and ambiguous treatment they experience. The ambiguous nature further exacerbates the experience because women are unsure where to place causal attribution and often times are left blaming themselves. Similarly, internalized sexism is rooted in the same limiting beliefs of traditional female stereotypes as subtle sexism. Both experiences and internalized sexism hinder working women's cognitive internal attributions and their self-perceptions of value and competence. Subtle sexism and internalized sexism can be particularly damaging because they are hard to recognize as negative and thus, when never remedied, can be cumulative in nature. Resulting in small but frequent interactions that consistently hinder women's professional and personal success. This may be due to the additional cognitive effort women expend to cope as subtle sexism is rooted in benevolent stereotypes which are not innately negative but belittle women's value. These stereotypes are sexist and embedded in traditional gender roles, often internalized from young ages, making experienced and internalized sexism a complex but imperative factor to address for working women. In the present study we examine the relationships between working women's' experienced subtle sexism as well as their internalized sexism on self-perceptions of self-liking and self-competence and the impact both have on causal attributions of blame. Our results shed light on the negative impact of these phenomena and add to the limited research on working women's

experiences of subtle sexism and their internalized sexism. The present study

suggests that women's cognitive processing of attributions is essential to how

women interpret and are impacted by subtle sexism. This study signifies the

importance and responsibility of the workplace and its leaders to address the

unseen discrimination and provides implications for the workplace with emphasis

on unveiling the normative and benevolent stereotypes both experienced and

internalized sexism operate through.

ACKNOLWEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

For my mother and brother. You are the greatest loss of all time.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Although gender stereotypes have changed over time, these changes have been relatively small, and societal beliefs about men and women remain far from egalitarian (Czopp, Kay, & Cheryan, 2015). The patriarchy of traditional gender roles is grounded in women's prior consistent and lawful oppression, and they remain as norms of society (Lewis, 2018). Today, both laws and social expectations generally protect women from explicit forms of sexism. Despite these protections, social norms and gendered beliefs influence gender bias (Handley, Brown, Moss-Racusin, & Smith, 2015), and continue to impact how women are perceived and treated. Thus, although less often through explicit means, traditional gender roles continue to impact and oppress women (Szymanski & Henrichs-Beck, 2014).

Gender discrimination is present in the workplace and negatively impacts women's health and job-related outcomes (Manuel, Howansky, Chaney, & Sanchez, 2017). What is now a less common form of gender discrimination, overt sexism, often known as hostile sexism, consists of sexist hostile behaviors, beliefs and actions which are clear and easy to comprehend because they are malicious, intentional and explicit (Jones, Peddie, Gilrane, King, & Gray, 2016). Although today, it is more often that women experience discrimination in more subtle forms, which consist of sexist behaviors and beliefs that lack clear intent

and are often difficult to identify as negative or discriminatory. This lack of clear intent makes subtle sexism a particularly dangerous form of discrimination because it thrives unchallenged (Barreto & Elermers, 2005; Dardenne, Dumont, & Boiler, 2007; Jones et al., 2016; Lindsey, King, Cheung, Hebl, Lynch, & Mancini, 2015). Thus, the experience of subtle sexism is psychologically, physically and materially damaging to women (Cundiff, Zawadzki, & Danube, 2014), hiding behind normalcy whilst oppressing women (Wakefiled, Hopkins, & Greenwood, 2012).

Subtle sexism is discrete because it operates through societal norms and beliefs in women's' traditional gender stereotypes (Oswald, Baalbaki, & Kirkman, 2019) which, for example, imply that women are warm but not competent (Ramos, Barreto, Ellemers, Moya, & Ferreira, 2018). This implication may result in women being liked but not viewed as reliable and competent in a work role. Societies' conception of what constitutes the ideal worker leaves women facing gender stigma in the working world and their fit in the workplace is incongruous with the traditional gender role/social norms (e.g., women's duty to family, caregiving, childbirth, etc.) (Leskinen & Cortina, 2014). Although traditional female stereotypes are not inherently negative (caregiver, warm, kind, communal, accommodating, emotional, etc.) they convey stereotypic gender roles which are especially problematic in the workplace (Leskinen & Cortina 2014) creating a subordination of women to men (Jones, Stewart, King, Botsford Morgan, Gilrane & Hylton, 2014). Therefore, these stereotypes play a major role

2

in how women are perceived (Glicke & Fiske, 1997) and impact their behaviors (Wakefield, et al., 2012). Conclusively, traditional gender roles and the stereotypes regarding women divide the ideas and expectations on what it means to be a woman or a man, and often leaves women in the lesser category (Biernat & Vescio, 2002).

Subtle sexism is easy to engage in because the behaviors are embedded in social gender norms. This embeddedness makes the recognition of subtle sexism often limited (Becker & Swim, 2011). Despite the inconspicuous behaviors, the experience remains negative and creates ambiguity, making it difficult to identify or detect as negative and discriminatory and thus ultimately address (Lindsey et al, 2015). Further, the ambiguity may exacerbate much of the consequence's women experience when dealing with subtle sexism (Bain & Agars, 2017). For example, subtle sexism has shown to have detrimental effects on women's cognitive performance and working memory (Dardenne et al., 2007; Sarlet, Dumont, Delacollette, & Dardenne, 2012) possibly due to women expending cognitive effort due to the ambiguity of subtle sexism (Dardenne et al., 2013). Therefore, the ambiguous nature may explain women's barrier to appropriately process the experience (Salvatore & Shelton, 2007).

Subtle sexisms ambiguous nature has shown to effect women's' cognitive processing (Dardenne et al., 2013) causing women struggle to discern cause to the incident (Mendes, Major, McCoy, & Blascovich, 2008), thus making correct attributions challenging (Jones et al, 2016). Causal attributions are the cognitive

mechanisms used to explain or place cause to behaviors that individuals have experienced (Weiner, Perry, & Magnusson, 1988). Women are more likely to make an internal causal attribution onto themselves due to the ambiguous nature of subtle sexism (Jones et al., 2016) and consequences are made worse when women internalize and attribute this cause onto themselves (Bain & Agars, 2017). Therefore, how women cognitively process through the ambiguity and ultimately attribute cause after subtle sexism is particularly important and may impact the severity of negative consequences (Bain & Agars, 2017).

Women cope with the ambiguity they face from incidents of subtle sexism through a lens of attributional ambiguity (Hoyt, Aguilar, Kaiser, Blascovich, & Lee, 2007). Attributional ambiguity is a psychological process with which stigmatized individuals have difficulty interpreting the cause of interactions or events with others (Hoyt et al., 2007). Consequently, ambiguous experiences are not easily interpreted thus, impacting how they understand the feedback they are receiving (Crocker, Voelkl, Testa, & Major, 1991). In the context of subtle sexism and attributional ambiguity, working women are victim to an incident which is naturally ambiguous and psychologically difficult to discern and additionally they struggle to make an accurate causal attribution of the experience. Thus, women face two invisible cognitive barriers to process and understand incidents of subtle sexism.

Despite advances in equality for women, experiences of sexism remain (Fischer & Holz, 2010; Szymanski & Henrichs-Beck, 2014), particularly for working women (Chui & Dietz, 2014). Working women's experience with subtle

sexism is a convoluted experience; not only is subtle sexism hard to identify as sexist for victim, bystander and perpetrator (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005; Becker & Swim, 2011) but the eventual attribution process for the victim impairs and prolongs cognitive processing more so than instances which are explicitly sexist. Women are often left placing the cause of the ambiguous event onto themselves instead of correctly attributing the cause as an act of sexism (Jones et al., 2016) or expending cognitive effort on processing the ambiguous and negative event (Dardenne et al., 2013). Thus, understanding how women process experiences of sexist events is a critical step in understanding the negative impact of subtle sexism (Fischer & Holz, 2010). Therefore, our study is an effort to assess working women's experience of subtle sexism and the impact those experiences have on the cognitive attributions process and their self-perceptions.

<div style="text-align:center">

Subtle Sexism Background

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Subtle sexism is characterized through gender roles which seem positive at face value (e.g., protective, helpful, cherished) but actually discretely diminish women and gender equality. Conversely, hostile sexism diminishes women blatantly and maliciously (Benokaitis, 1997; Hammond, Milojev, Huang, & Sibley, 2018). Although, both are rooted in female stereotyping (Barreto & Elermers, 2005), subtle sexism perpetuates more so than hostile by discretely operating through benevolent stereotypes (Oswald et al., 2019) making the incidents difficult to recognize as negative due to the good-natured appearance (Wakefield

<div style="text-align:center">5</div>

et al., 2012). Thus, subtle sexism is detrimental and pervasive (Swim, Mallett, Stangor, 2004) as it functions under societal norms (e.g., protect, cherish and help women, etc.) and the stereotypes which parallel (e.g., in need of protection, incompetent, fragile, etc.) making the experience of subtle sexism just as harmful, if not more so than hostile sexism (Jones et al, 2016). Consequently, subtle sexism is a complicated experience. This is in part due to the distinct feature of a benevolent manifestation originating from stereotypical social gender norms (e.g., protect, cherish, help women) and because the stereotypes have been socially accepted, reinforced and often lack clear mal intent (Glick & Fiske, 2001).

Gender norms describe behavior that is appropriate for women and men and accordingly society expects one to fulfil their gender role based on those expectations (Salvati, Pistella, & Baiocco, 2018). These societal norms also influence gender bias (Handley et al., 2015) and consequently, may add to women staying underrepresented in the workplace. Acts of subtle sexism are based on these gendered norms, and manifest as attitudes, beliefs, actions and cultural practices that perpetuate the idea that women are less deserving, less competent, and of lesser status than men (Zawadzki, Shields, Danube, & Swim, 2014). In the workplace in particular, women's stereotyped gender roles do not represent the "ideal worker" (e.g., caretaking of home and kids, emotional, fragile, etc.) and have impacted women since they were able to work (Leskinen & Cortina 2014). Additionally, perceptions of traditional gender roles influence

6

judgements and decisions about women and this results in psychological consequences such as feelings of self-doubt and lowered feelings of self-worth and competence (Oswald, et al., 2019), further advancing the inequality between men and women (Barreto & Ellermers, 2005). Thus, subtle sexism is important to understand because it is discrimination which is disguised in the norms of society but manifests through stereotypes that restrict and oppress women (Connelly & Heesacker, 2008; Jost & Kay, 2005).

But What is Subtle Sexism?

Subtle sexism is harmful sex-based unequal and unfair treatment against women which is normative in nature and therefore hard to recognize as sexist (Swim et al., 2004). Benokraitis (1997) developed several terms which identify common types of subtle discrimination in the workplace. The behaviors associated with these terms are hard to recognize as blatantly sexist and oftentimes internalized as the normal standard for many interactions. The forms identified by Benokraitis (1997) include: Condescending Chivalry, Supportive Discouragement, Friendly Harassment, Subjective Objectification, Radiant Devaluation, Liberated Sexism, Considerate Domination and Collegial Exclusion.

Radiant Devaluation is when women are devalued in subtle but glowing terms. For example, when Carla is evaluated for a promotion for a District Supervisor position and her letter of recommendation evokes gender stereotypes such as nurturing and mother like to her peers, dresses professional

when meeting clients, and provides kind feedback to her subordinates. This is not applicable or appropriate given the letter of recommendation does not speak to her ability, achievements or competence but rather complements her on her unrelated feminine characteristics.

Condescending Chivalry is polite behaviors that are protective in nature but treat women as "in need of help or protection". For example, during Carla's performance management meeting the supervisor does not give useful or constructive feedback as to protect her feelings during the meeting. However, it also may be that her supervisor has an unintentional bias of which impacts his impression of Carla. For example, Carla's project feedback stated she is slow to perform the tasks and thus, seems confused with the data analysis assignment. Whereas, Thomas a fellow male colleague, of whom is on a similar skill level as Carla, has the same feedback but a different reasoning from the same supervisor. His feedback states that Thomas is slow to perform the task but that he is consciousness and careful with detail in data analysis assignments. Carla and Thomas perform the same, but their performance is interpreted in a bias manner due to stereotypes.

Supportive Discouragement is treatment in which women receive confusing and indistinct feedback regarding their abilities, success, competence, etc. For instance, Carla is a working mother and is advocated by her supervisor to attend a non-mandatory meeting that would advance her knowledge on a new upcoming software the office is integrating. Although, the meeting is

8

inconveniently scheduled after work hours, thus, she has no access to attend

given there is no daycare offered and she has to pick up her children after work.

Friendly Harassment is a playful and sexually oriented behavior which

creates discomfort or embarrassment. An example of this is when Carla asks her

male colleagues for advice on her upcoming interview for promotion and they

respond by saying, make sure you wear a nice dress and fix your hair. This

comment has nothing to do with her competence or ability in the interview and

only refers to the idea that her looks matter in the interview which leaves Carla in

an uncomfortable position.

Lastly, Collegial Exclusion isolates and separates women, making them

and their ideas appear to be less important. For example, Carla attends a board

meeting with her peers at the end of the day where she is the only woman sitting

at a table with all male colleagues. Although they are all equals, as they go

around the table contributing ideas to the project, Carla's turn arrives and a male

colleague interrupts her before she can finish. When she finally does finish it is

ignored and passed off. When she argues her point, a male colleague attempts

to explain and help her understand a procedure she already understands as to

diminish her ability and intelligence.

These examples help illustrate why subtle sexism is pervasive and

uniquely problematic. The incidents oftentimes present benevolently (e.g.,

helpful, protective, complementary) and the discrimination is concealed under the

normative nature, which results in women facing ambiguity of the incident and

oftentimes produces cognitive psychological strain for women (Agars, 2004; Dumont, Sarlet & Dardenne, 2010; King & Jones, 2016; Oswald, et al., 2019). For example, Carla's day described above, was full of experiences of subtle sexism, all of which hard to distinguish as blatant discrimination. Each experience convoluted with repetitious and varying degrees of inappropriateness, all the while, operating under societal norms which convey female stereotypes. These stereotypes imply that women need to look "appropriate", be protected, pick between family and work to fit in, act "well-mannered" and not speak up or out of turn. Consequently, women are not viewed as being equally competent as their male counterparts. Beyond the impact of a specific incidence of subtle sexism, additional damage stems from the ambiguity and effect how women understand and cope with the incident.

The Ambiguity of Subtle Sexism

Much of the research on women and subtle discrimination has been focused on the attitudes and beliefs regarding subtle discrimination behaviors but less has focused on the actual experience of the event (Bain & Agars, 2017; Leskinen & Cortina, 2014). Experiencing subtle sexism is not easily recognizable as such because the inherent benevolent and protective nature produces ambiguity which appears to be "good treatment" at face value but instead withholds women's from advancement and ultimately, success and equality (Dumont, et al., 2010; Hammond & Overall, 2015; Jones, et al., 2014). Therefore,

it is subtle sexisms' ambiguous nature which intensifies harm for women (Jones et al., 2016) and this harm may be in part due to how it impacts women's ability to cope with the ambiguity (Bain & Agars, 2017; Jones, et al, 2016).

The ambiguity originates from the experience which is masked by stereotypical female norms regarding beliefs about gender. Moreover, the ambiguity interferes with coping mechanisms around the experience by making attributions of causality unclear, often impacting feelings of competence and self-construal (Dumont, et al., 2010). The situational ambiguity produces uncertainty creating a cognitive dilemma (i.e., around causality), which has an impact on women's thoughts and feelings, oftentimes without any conscious awareness of experiencing subtle sexism (Dardenne et al., 2013). For example, Dardenne and colleagues (2013) found that women's cognitive functioning was impaired after experiencing subtle sexism but not hostile sexism and that the individuals exposed to subtle sexism reported "intrusive thoughts" and negative self-perceptions of competence. Women who experienced subtle sexism also reported feelings of anxiety about professional identities and ability, self-doubt, and low performance self-esteem. Therefore, it may be that ambiguity separates subtle sexism from other forms of sexism and that this very distinction results in a unique experience. An experience in which the dilemma in cognitive processing around causality negatively impacts feelings of the self.

Therefore, how women cognitively process the ambiguity of subtle sexism is important to understanding the experience and impact of subtle sexism

incidents (Dardenne et al, 2013). In fact, the underlying ambiguity in subtle

sexism may be where much of the harm and consequences originate for women

because ambiguity produces uncertainty and difficulty attributing cause, which is

important because women's self-perceptions are diminished. (Bain & Agars,

2017; Crocker et al, 1991). These self-perceptions impact women's thoughts,

behaviors, goals. Thus, women's cognitive attribution process in response to

incidents of subtle sexism is important to further understand.

Cognitive Attribution Process

Although much of the challenge with subtle sexism lies in the difficulty to

identify the phenomena as negative in the moment, a particularly critical piece of

the detriment to women occurs after the experience of subtle sexism (Cundiff, et

al., 2014). The ambiguity of the experience negatively impacts how women

understand and correctly attribute incidents (Jones et al., 2016). Attribution

theory states that individuals associate a cause to why particular events occur in

an environment (Kelley, 1973; Kelley & Michela, 1980). Specifically, individuals

attribute the cause of actions as based on individual factors (i.e., internal) or

situational/environmental factors (i.e., external) (Calhoun, Peirce & Dawes,

1973). Women's cognitive attribution process may be a contributing factor to how

women cope with subtle sexism. Coping is a cognitive process in which

individual's thoughts and actions help to guide them through the negative event

of which has occurred (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Subtle sexism is an

ambiguously negative event whereby women may be coping by attributing cause in order to manage and process the incident (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004).

Attributional Ambiguity Theory

One way to understand how women understand or cope with the ambiguity of subtle sexism is through attributional ambiguity theory, which may, in part, explain why the victim of an ambiguous situation struggles to attribute blame correctly (Bain & Agars, 2017; Jones et al., 2016). Attributional ambiguity is a psychological state of uncertainty for stigmatized individuals when they are dealing with negative interactions with others (Crocker et al., 1991). Furthermore, negative experiences, such as subtle sexism, are unique due to their innate ambiguity and in turn this ambiguity has shown to create a barrier in the attempt to cope with and understand these incidents (Salvatore & Shelton, 2007). Jones and colleagues (2016) argued that attributional ambiguity theory helps explain the experience of the phenomena of subtle discrimination. Stating that, according to attributional ambiguity, individuals will attribute externally onto the perpetrator when situations are clear and easy to identify as negative and discriminatory but when the situation is unclear and ambiguous, they will attribute blame internally onto themselves. Therefore, women's experience with subtle sexism is uniquely difficult to cope with, in part due to women's experience with the ambiguity of subtle sexism which can be hard to discern as negative in the moment and additionally through the self-perspective view of attributional

ambiguity which can result in a cognitive impairment and incorrect attribution of blame (Dardenne et al., 2013; Jones et al. 2016).

Summary

Subtle sexism is a malicious experience, plagued with ambiguity for its victims resulting in a negative impact on women's cognition, and the experience is made worse because women are likely to cope with the ambiguity by attributing the cause incorrectly onto themselves (Bain & Agars, 2017). Much of the complexity of the experience derives from the additive nature of the self-perspective lens of attributional ambiguity (Jones et al., 2016) coupled with the ambiguity of the experience, due to the stereotypical normative nature of subtle sexism operating under socially accepted gender roles (Leskinen & Cortina 2014). Although reactions to subtle sexism vary and are not entirely understood, it may be that internal characteristics play a part in the perception and ultimately the consequences of the experience of subtle sexism (Daniels, Perrewé, & Ferris, 2017). It is important, therefore, to delve further into factors that may impact attributions, particularly the formation of internal attributions, in response to subtle sexism. Given that women's internal beliefs regarding norms, roles and stigma impact women's cognition (Schmader, Johns, & Barquissau, 2004). It may be beneficial to address internalized oppression as it is an internal cognitive mechanism which is learned oppression from societal stereotypes and given that subtle sexism operates through benevolent stereotypes against women

internalized oppression would be a critical and complex factor since the stigma isn't inherently or blatantly negative or demeaning.

Internalized Sexism and Social Dominance Theory

Social dominance theory (SDT) proposes that people are organized into groups representing social hierarchies (Sidanius & Pratto, 2004). SDT also suggests that the group-based social hierarchies' resources and roles correspond with the status within the hierarchy (Vargas-Salfate, Paez, Liu, Pratto, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2018). This social hierarchy is due to the belief of inequality between the social groups (Batalha, Reynolds, & Newbigin, 2011). For example, in the workplace, a man would be more likely to hold the power as a supervisor or boss and additionally be more likely to have more resources and responsibilities than a woman would. Both the patriarchal hierarchy and traditional gender roles keep men in a position over women for power, resources and positive challenging opportunities.

The social norms and gender roles, in which subtle sexism operates through, impact women's self-perceptions through learned behaviors and the belief in female stereotypes' (Bearman, Korobov, & Thorne, 2009). These norms leave an impression on young girls and women that lower women's expectation of themselves unintentionally diminishing their true worth; in part due to benevolent but stereotypical roles of women (Bearman et al., 2009). Conclusively, the social norms leave women believing and inadvertently

15

validating the stereotypes (Bearman et al., 2009). Thus, the validation of the stereotypes may develop into a learned oppression which is then internalized by women.

Examining the consequences of subtle sexism among working women is particularly important because of the gendered nature of work (Zawadske et al., 2014). For example, women are viewed as not taking their job as seriously given their female duties (e.g., caregiving) or abilities (e.g., warm but not competent) (Leskinen & Cortina, 2014). Subtle sexism's incessant and prominent role in the workplace (Leskinen & Cortina, 2014) is likely to harm women's self-perceptions of value and fit in the workplace (Agars & Cazares, 2017). Specifically, women who have reported experiencing sexism in the workplace have also reported lower perceptions of many aspects of their job and lower health related outcomes (Manuel et al., 2017).

Internalized oppression is the oppression inflicted upon oneself due to learning, from young ages, of social categories and stereotypes (Bearman et al., 2009). With regard to women, internalized oppression is based on stereotypes which place women in lower social groups, hindering women and ensuring consequences for women's advancement in the workforce (Zurbrugg & Miner, 2016). Internalized stigma, a subcategory of internalized oppression, is the adoption of negative attitudes of one's group and develops from external oppression in society (Puckett & Levitt, 2015; Symanski, Kashubeck-West & Meyer, 2008). Women's experience of discrimination is made worse through

internalized stigma which has been shown to increase negative feelings and decrease positive feelings (Pérez-Garín, Molero, & Bos, 2017).

Internalized sexism, a specific from of internalized stigma, is the belief in negative and limiting attitudes about women that follow stereotypical gender beliefs in society (Symanski et al., 2008). Additionally, the normative and cultural acceptance of subtle sexism strengthens beliefs in the patriarchy discretely and cordially (Glick & Fiske, 1997) thus fueling internalized sexism. Experiences of subtle sexism include benevolent behavior operating through the benevolent and stereotypical beliefs about women, making internalized sexism particularly important to understand. Specifically, because the stigma associated with internalized sexism is not innately negative (e.g., women should be warm, caring, kind, quiet, and pretty).

Internalization of a stigma is often followed by self-blame (Else-Quest, LoConte, Schiller, & Hyde, 2009) both of which predict additional negative psychological outcomes (Phelan et al., 2013). Women who exhibit high levels of internalized stigma are likely to turn to a maladaptive coping strategy often leading to psychological distress (Szymanski & Henrichs-Beck, 2014). Additionally, maladaptive coping is usually an outcome of stigma-based stressors (Wei, Alvarez, Ku, Russell, & Bonett, 2010) which are often ambiguous, such as subtle sexism. Internal attributions, such as self-blame, may serve as a maladaptive coping mechanism. Therefore, when women experience subtle sexism and have high internalized sexism, it may lead to higher instances of

blaming oneself instead of blaming the perpetrator to cope with the ambiguous incident.

Subtle sexisms seemingly positive demeanor (e.g., helpful, protective, complementary) and the gendered norms rooted in society (e.g., warm, kind, caregiver) may promote motivation to believe in stereotypes and thus beliefs in gendered social hierarchies. Men occupy more power in society, supporting the social hierarchy, and subtle sexism benevolently assigns women to a lesser role in society based off the traditional gender roles society has created for women (warm, kind, in need of help, etc.) thus, reinforcing the social hierarchy further (Malatyalı, Kaynak & Hasta, 2017). Therefore, social dominance theory may explain why women internalize these sexist stereotypes (Schmader et al., 2004) and beliefs in stereotypes impact women's behaviors and cognitive ability (Bonnot & Croizet, 2007).

Present Study

In the present study, we consider the impact of subtle sexism on working women's cognitive attribution process. Specifically, we examine the effects of experiences of subtle sexism on the attribution process (e.g., blame myself, blame perpetrator) and the potential indirect effect of internalized sexism. Attribution theory is how a person understands and attributes events that occur in their lives, how they "make causal explanations" (Kelley, 1973). Furthermore, Attributional Ambiguity theory is how a person understands ambiguous situations

that occur and then makes an attribution for that incident (Jones et al, 2016). For example, women may attribute the causal explanation as to their own doing or alternatively to the offender after experiencing the ambiguity of subtle sexism (Jones et al., 2016). While researchers have explored beliefs and attitudes regarding subtle sexism, there has been minimal focus on women's experiences and exposure to subtle sexism (Leskinen & Cortina, 2014). Additionally, there has been little research using internalized sexism with regard to gender stereotypes to understand subtle sexism. This study is an attempt to bring awareness to a subtle but destructive phenomenon from an experienced and internalized understanding. Specifically, our study explores the impact of experiences of subtle sexism and internalized sexism on working women's self-perceptions and the indirect effects of internal cognitive attributions. See Figure 1 for the proposed model.
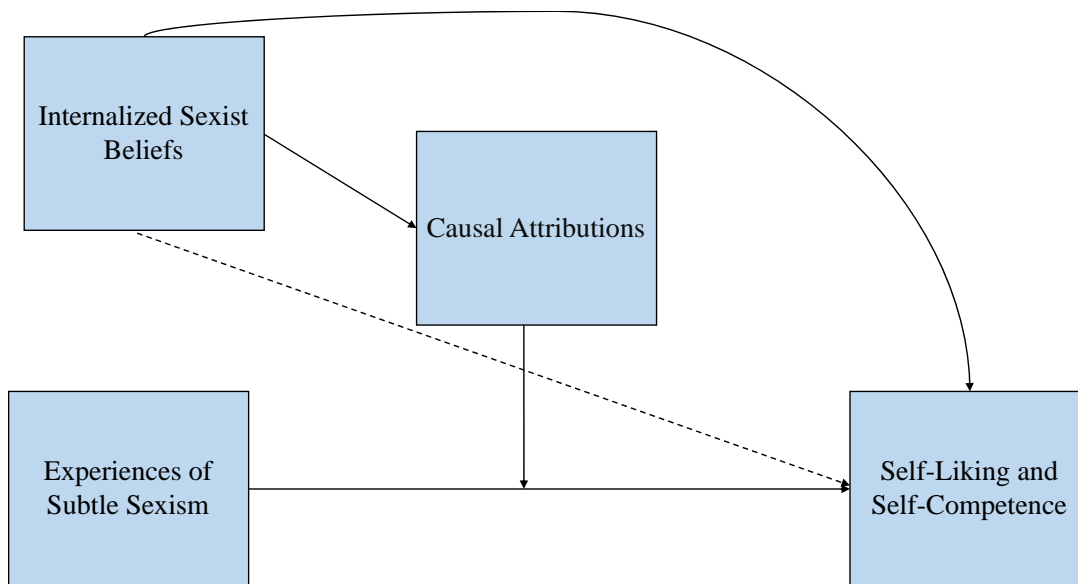
Figure 1. The Proposed Model of Experienced and Internalized Subtle Sexism Impact on Self-Perceptions of Self-Liking and Self-Competence and the Mediating and Moderating Role of Causal Attributions.

Hypothesis 1. There will be a direct negative relationship between experiences of subtle sexism and perceptions of self-liking and self-competence (SLSC).

Hypothesis 2. Causal attributions will moderate the relationship between experience of subtle sexism and SLSC. Specifically, the relationship between subtle sexism and SLSC will be stronger for women who internalized incidents of subtle sexism than women who externalized.

Hypothesis 3. There will be a direct effect of internalized sexism on causal attributions. Specifically, internalized sexism will be positively related to internal causal attributions.

Hypothesis 4. There will be a direct negative effect of internalized sexism on SLSC.

Hypothesis 5. Internal Causal attributions will partially mediate the relationship between internalized sexism and SLSC.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODS

Participants

Any analysis using mediation and or moderation requires at least 200

participants (Fritz & Mackinnon, 2007). Participants are working women who

work at least 20 hours a week and have a minimum of one-year work experience

at their current organization. Women who did not interact with other colleagues

were excluded from the sample. The mean age was 40, predominantly white

(69%) and highly trained with either vocational/trade training or a higher degree

(77%). The majority of participants' job level was reported as anywhere between

intermediate/experienced to middle level management (80%) with very little in

entry level (14%) and senior level (5%). See Table 4 for categorical demographic

variables.

Procedure

Participants were recruited using Mturk with the survey design platform of

Qualtrics to participate in a 15-minute survey, "Women's Experience in the

Workplace." Participants from Mturk were compensated $.50. The survey

required participants to answer questions regarding their demographics,

employment status, subtle sexism experiences, attributions of those experiences,

self-liking and self-competence and questions asking them about their level

internalized stigma based on gender-based stereotypes. Participants completed the survey on their own time.

Measures

See Appendix A for all scales used in study.

<u>Workplace Benevolent Sexism Experiences Scale (WBSE).</u>

Benevolent sexism are acts which seem protective and nice but are devaluing and demeaning in nature thus implicating working women's career (Agars, 2020). The author created this scale to directly reflect frequency of interpersonal subtle sexism experiences with coworkers. The 12 items were measured using a 5 point Likert scale, 1 (never) through 5 (almost all the time). The reliability for this study was $\alpha = .93$.

<u>Women's Impressions on Gender and Self Scale (WIGSS).</u>

Internalized sexism is a specific oppression in which women internalize traditional female stereotypes which confine and limit them. Costanzo (2018) developed this scale to better understand internalized oppression in women as no scale existed measuring gender based internalized oppression. The finalized scale, The Women's Impressions on Gender and Self Scale (WIGSS), includes 124 items rated on a 5 point Likert-type scale and consists of 5 factors; Factor I: Stereotypical Gender Role Attitudes (40 items): $\alpha = .96$, Factor II: Devaluing/Dismissing Women (27 items): $\alpha = .94$, Factor III: Objectification, Social Comparison, and Low Self-Worth (21 items): $\alpha = .93$, Factor IV: Gender

Equality (21 items): α = .91, Factor V: Degrading of Women (15 items): α = .90.

Given the large number of items and high possibility of survey fatigue for our

study we have adapted the WIGGS to three items from each factor with factor

loadings above .50 in an attempt to measure internalized gender related

oppression. The adapted scale used in this study was 15 items, rated on a 5

point Likert-type scale, 1 (strongly disagree) through 5 (strongly agree) and had

strong reliability (α =.80).

<u>Attributions Scale.</u>

Attributions are how one understands and places cause to situations.

When situations are negative and clear often the cause is easily attributable but

when situations are ambiguous (i.e., not distinctly positive or negative) causal

attributions become difficult to identify (Jones et al., 2016; Kelley & Michaela,

1980). Internal attributions are attributions that are placed onto oneself as their

own fault or doing (i.e. often leading to negative outcomes for the individual)

whereas, external attributions are placed onto the other person or environment of

the experience (i.e., often leading to positive consequences for the individual)

(Bain & Agars, 2017; Jones et al., 2016). Attributions scale items were created by

current authors using a two-item scale to assess internal attributions and two

items to assess external attributions. The items were rated on a 5 point Likert

scale, 1 (none at all) through 5 (a great deal). After responding to the items

describing subtle sexism experiences, participants were asked to answer the

amount to which they attributed internally and externally based on the experiences they had described above (subtle sexism experiences).

Self-Liking/Self-Competence Scale-Revised Version (SLCS-R).

Self-liking and self-competence are two sources of the broad perception of the self-esteem construct and how one defines themselves in the broad sense of self liking which is represented by acceptability (acceptable vs unacceptable) and self-competence which is represented by power (weak vs strong). Self-liking is largely dependent on ones internalized social values and how one views themselves as acceptable or unacceptable as related to those values whereas, self-competence is the overall sense of one's effective, capableness and sense of control (Tafarodi & Swann, 1995; Tafarodi & Swann Jr., 2000). The Self-Liking and Self-Competence Scale Revised Version (Tafarodi & Swann Jr., 2000) includes 15 items rated on a 5 point Likert-type scale, 1 (strongly disagree) through 5 (strongly agree). Items measured participant beliefs in their personal competence and self-worth. Coefficient alpha in the present study was $\alpha = .88$.

Demographics

A 10-item questionnaire was used to identify demographics for the participants. Questions regarding age, ethnicity, marital status, income, number of children and education were asked. Additionally, some of the questions address participants' work-related factors such as working environment, years worked, and number of hours spent working per week.

CHAPTER THREE

RESULTS

Data Screening

Participants were recruited via Mturk utilizing Qualtrics as the survey

platform where the participants completed the survey. There were initially 354

participants which were downloaded from Qualtrics upon completion via Mturk. A

total of 24 cases were removed for failing to meet study criteria. Specifically, four

never started the survey, eight reported as male, one had a time duration which

was unacceptably quick, eight reported being unemployed and three reported

having no contact with other colleagues. Considering the data was collected

during the first month of the COVID-19 quarantine, and the survey was based on

workplace experiences, the data received on employment was screened and

carefully assessed. The beginning of the survey requested participants answer

all work-related questions with regard to their current or prior work experience

during the past 6 months. This statement was added prior to the launch of the

survey in response to the global pandemic and quarantine, whereby most

employed individuals started working in their home rather than the usual office

environment, per the mandated stay at home order issued by the government.

Due to the current state of employment in the world being predominantly

unorthodox and limited, we only removed people who reported that they were

unemployed and did not consider or attempt to separate if their current or prior job was or is an in-office job, telecommute, or remote. As a best effort to capture a population that interacted with others in the workplace and best assess working women's experiences, we used a question in the survey which assessed the frequency of interaction with other colleagues. Experiences with subtle sexism cannot be assessed by individuals who do not interact with other colleagues; thus, this question was used as a criterion for the removal of three participants. There was no missing data and the final sample was (n=330).

Assumptions

All variables were analyzed for violations of normality, using the cut of score of ($Z=\pm3.30$) (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013), linearity and homoscedasticity. Workplace Benevolent Sexism Experiences (WBSE) and Internal attribution were positively skewed ($Z=8.30$) and ($Z=8.55$), respectively. External attribution was kurtotic ($Z=-3.97$). For the demographic variables, Tenure was positively skewed ($Z=10.57$) and kurtotic ($Z=8.91$) and Age was positively skewed ($Z=4.24$). Workplace Benevolent Sexism Experiences (WBSE) had one outlier ($Z= 3.40$) and Tenure had two outliers ($Z=3.75$) and ($Z=5.03$). For the purposes of interpretability, we elected to not transform.

For the WBSE scale there was one outlier ($Z=3.39$). This particular outlier was not removed because this scale was measured using a 5-point Likert scale and we would not want to remove individuals who do report more severe

experiences of sexist events. Additionally, regarding tenure, we did not remove any outliers given that the spread of tenure ranged from 1 month to 35 years which is to be expected and not considered non-normal. Multivariate outliers were assessed through Mahlanobis Distance (df=5, $\chi2$ =20.05, p < .01). There were no multivariate outliers.

Assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity were met by assessing the plots of standardized residuals against standardized predicted residuals, all of which revealed no visible systematic relationship between the predicted values and the errors in the model. Multicollinearity was assessed by looking at the correlation between variables. There were significant, moderate to high correlations between three variables. Workplace Benevolent Sexism Experiences (WBSE) was positively correlated with Internalized Sexism (IS) r =.64, and positively correlated with Internal Attribution r =.72 and Internal Attribution was correlated with Internalized Sexism r =.57. Small to moderate significant correlations also existed between External Attribution and WBSE r =.29 as well as External Attribution and Internal Attribution r =.14. Additionally, Self-liking and Self-Competence (SLSC) was significantly correlated with the following: WBSE r = -.15, Internalized Sexism r =-.12 and External Attribution r= -.17. See Table 1 for descriptives and bivariate correlations between all study variables. Multicollinearity was also assessed by looking at the VIF values for each variable whereby each variable was well under the value of 10 and the average VIF value was 1.9 thus, no cause for concern (Field, 2018).

Analysis

SPSS and PRCOESSS by Andrew F. Hayes was utilized to test study hypotheses. PROCESS was utilized to examine the indirect effects of cognitive causal attributions for the predictors WBSE and Internalized Sexism. SPSS was utilized to conduct linear regressions to examine the direct effects of the predictors, WBSE and Internalized Sexism, on the cognitive causal attribution, and lastly the criterion SLSC. See Table 2 for unstandardized and standardized coefficients, t-statistic and significance levels for all study variables.

For Hypothesis 1, a simple linear regression was performed to determine if there was a direct negative relationship between experiences of subtle sexism (WBSE) and perceptions of self-liking and self-competence (SLSC). Hypothesis 1 was supported as a significant negative relationship was found ($F(1,331)=7.48$, $p < .05$) and accounted for 2% of the variance ($R^2=.02$). For every single unit increase in the experience of subtle sexism there was a -.15 decrease in self liking and self-competence (B = -.15, $p < .05$).

For Hypothesis 2, SPSS PROCESS by Andrew F. Hayes was utilized to asses if internal causal attributions would moderate the relationship between experiences of subtle sexism (WBSE) and SLSC. Specifically, the relationship between subtle sexism and SLSC will be stronger for women who internalized incidents of subtle sexism. Hypothesis 2 was not supported. Unexpectedly internal attributions (B=-.01, p=.79, 95% BCa CI [-.10,-.08] did not significantly

moderate the relationship between experiences of benevolent sexism in the workplace and self-liking and self-competence. As expected, external attributions were not a significant moderator for the relationship between subtle sexism and SLSC B=.043, p=.377, 95% BCa CI [-.05,.14]

For Hypothesis 3, a linear regression was performed to test if there was a direct effect of internalized sexism on attributions. Specifically, that internalized sexism was positively related to internal causal attributions. Hypothesis 3 was supported as results showed a significant relationship ($F(1,331)=156.62$, $p < .01$) and accounted for 32% of the variance ($R^2=.32$). For a single unit increase in internalized sexism there was a 1.03 increase in internal attributions (b = 1.03, p < .01).

For Hypothesis 4 a simple linear regression was utilized to test if there was a direct negative effect of internalized sexism on SLSC. Hypothesis 4 was supported as results showed a significant relationship ($F(1,331)=5.02$, $p < .05$) and accounted for 1.5% of the variance ($R^2=.15$). For every single unit increase in the internalized sexism there was a -.17 decrease in self-liking and self-competence (B = -.17, p < .05).

For Hypothesis 5, SPSS PROCESS by Andrew F. Hayes was utilized to assess if internal causal attributions would partially mediate the relationship between internalized sexism and SLSC. A mediation analysis was conducted and Hypothesis 5 was supported in that there was a significant indirect effect and partial mediation of internalized sexism on SLSC through the relationship of

30

internal attributions, B=-.11, 95% BCa CI [-.23,-.01]. See Figure 2 for the estimated model with standardized coefficients.

Additional Findings

It was predicted in hypothesis 2 that internal attributions would moderate the relationship between experiences of subtle sexism in the workplace and self-perceptions of self-liking and self-competence. Although there was not a full moderation found, regression analyses resulted in significant and important findings for the relationship between experiences of subtle sexism, internal attributions and self-perceptions of self-liking and self-competence. Regression analyses were conducted because prior research indicates that subtle sexism experiences impact cognitive processing negatively (Bain & Agars, 2018; Dardenne et al., 2013) and that there is a negative relationship between experiences of subtle sexism, cognitive processing and self-perceptions of self-concept (Dardenne et al., 2013; Oswald, Baalbaki, & Kirkman, 2019). Thus, we wanted to examine these relationships to explore how women's experiences of subtle sexism in the workplace impact cognitive attributions' and attributions' impact on women's self-perceptions of their value and competence.

A simple linear regression was conducted to assess the relationship between subtle sexism and internal attributions. A significant regression equation was found. Higher reports of experiences of subtle sexism led to higher reports of internal attributions ($F(1, 328) = 356.68$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .52$) and accounted for 52%

of the variance. Indicating women who had encountered more experiences with subtle sexism placed blame and responsibility onto themselves.

Another simple linear regression was conducted to assess the relationship between internal attributions and self-perceptions of self-liking and self-competence. This analyses also yielded significant results in that higher reports of internal attributions lead to lower self-perceptions of self-liking and self-competence ($F_{(1, 328)} = 9.19$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = .03$) and accounted for 3% of the variance. This indicates that women who had felt high amounts of blame and responsibility following experiences of subtle sexism had lower reported feelings of competence and value. Therefore, although internal attributions did not function as a moderator these findings suggest internal attributions are important to consider for working women, both in terms of psychological health and professional growth. See Table 3 for standardized and unstandardized coefficients and Figure 2 for estimated model with additional findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION

Subtle sexism and internalized sexism both stem from a long-rooted foundation in gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles which appear as norms in our society (Lewis, 2018). Working women's exposure to subtle sexism and their internalized sexism initiate barriers for how women cognitively process and attribute cause after experiences of subtle sexism. Although benevolent in nature, both are limiting to women's psychological processing and their self-perceptions (Bearman et al., 2009). The normative and benevolent nature of the beliefs and experiences regarding subtle sexism and internalized sexism are important to understand as both are often unclear to individuals as negative and limiting for working women. Working women's experience of subtle sexism and their internalized beliefs are particularly important to understand as they are ambiguous and normative, thus, pervasive.

Research on the impact of subtle sexism experiences on women's day-to-day in their place of work has been lacking (Basford, Offermann, & Behrend, 2014; Leskinen & Cortina 2014; Oswald et al., 2019). The present findings provide additional evidence of the negative impact of subtle sexism experiences in the workplace. Specifically, our results show that experiences of subtle sexism and internalized sexism are related to women's self-perceptions of value and self-competence. Additionally, our study explores a richer conceptualization of

subtle sexism and internalized sexism by examining the impact both have on women's cognitive internal attributions.

Prior research has shown that subtle sexism has a negative impact on women's psychological health (Fischer & Holz, 2010) but there is little research for the deeper understanding of women's cognitive processing of those experiences and their impact on women's self-concept (Bain & Agars, 2018; Oswald et al., 2019). Subtle sexism's benevolent foundation conceals the negative event because it is ambiguous, which makes cognitively processing the experience not quick and easy, as it is with overt sexism. Subtle sexism is ambiguous and therefore cognitively processing and attributing blame is more complex and oftentimes unconscious. Although, since the event is unclear as positive or negative, experiences of subtle sexism are associated with attributing blame inward. Research on subtle sexisms' impact on working women's cognitive processing is needed because women's experiences with subtle sexism have demonstrated to not only impact their feelings of competence but also their cognitive performance (Dardenne et al., 2013; Dumont et al., 2010). Therefore, subtle sexisms' concealed persistence in our culture today remains a barrier for working women's personal and professional success.

Subtle sexism in the workplace has a negative impact on cognitive processing and ultimately women's self-perceptions (Bain & Agars, 2017; Cortina, 2008; Dardenne et al., 2013). The present study suggests that higher reports of subtle sexism experiences in the workplace had a direct and negative

34

relationship with working women's self-perceptions of self-liking and self-competence. Thus, greater experiences with subtle sexism predicted lower levels of perceived self-competence and self-value. This finding is meaningful because women's self-perceptions of their competence and value may be hindered by frequent occurrence's without resolve as subtle sexism may be occurring in such a normative and benevolent manner, oftentimes without notice. Additionally, our results suggest that women's cognitive attributions after experiences of workplace subtle sexism are also essential to examine because they may be impacted from the ambiguity of subtle sexism experiences (Bain & Agars, 2017; Jones et al., 2016).

The present study suggest that women's cognitive processing of attributions is essential to how women interpret and are impacted by subtle sexism. Although attributions did not moderate the relationship between experiences of subtle sexism and SLSC, our findings suggest higher reports of subtle sexism were significantly related to higher reports of internal attributions of blame and responsibility. Consistent with prior literature and the theory of Attributional Ambiguity, women are likely to internalize and attribute blame onto themselves rather than the perpetrator in ambiguous events such as subtle sexism (Bain & Agars, 2017; Mendes et al., 2008). Additionally, internal causal attributions of blame may occur without conscious awareness and thus may be more prominent then our results are capturing. As Hamilton and DeHart (2020) stated, subtle sexisms' negative outcome is not always explained by the

conscious decision to respond maladaptively to experiences of subtle sexism but rather the behavior which follows subtle sexism may be operating largely unconsciously. Cognitive attributions of subtle sexism experiences may be occurring unconsciously. Thus, women may experience varying levels of subtle sexism in the workplace, unbeknownst to them, and may also be unknowingly blaming themselves instead of the perpetrator. Additionally, our results suggest that women's internal attributions of blame are associated with lower self-perceptions of value and competence. If subtle sexism events are misconstrued as the victim's fault then they are never remedied, resulting in a continuous and pervasive impact on women (Agars, 2004; Becker & Swim, 2011).

Internalized sexism operates from the same benevolent stereotypical norms, potentially creating more complexity for processing and correctly attributing cause to the experience. Bearman et al., (2009) indicated the importance and pervasiveness of women's internalized sexism by analyzing the frequency which women using sexist language. They discovered that, like experienced sexism, internalized sexism occurs repetitively and cumulatively throughout the day. Our findings suggest that experiences of subtle sexism in the workplace and internalized sexism result in higher self-blame and lower self-perceptions of value and competence. The ambiguous experience of subtle sexism and women's internalized traditional female stereotypical beliefs negatively impact cognitive processing of attributions, as the blame is directed inward when the experiences of subtle sexism or internalized sexist beliefs are

36

high. Additionally, more internal blame is related to lower feelings of competence and value. Therefore, it may be that these experiences of subtle sexism or beliefs of internalized sexism are difficult to perceive as negative and oftentimes are left misunderstood and unaddressed. If these experiences are not identified as the perpetrators fault and sexism, attributions of blame and responsibility are left on women's conscious and never remedied. These experiences become pervasive, consistently hindering working women's cognitive processing of causal attributions and their self-perceptions of value and competence, which is critical to their personal and professional well-being.

There has been little research regarding working women's internalized sexism (Bearman et al., 2009; Szymanski & Henrichs-Beck, 2014). Costanzo's (2018) research addressed women's internalized traditional female stereotypical beliefs, finding that internalized sexism had a negative effect on student's mental health. Less is known about how internalized sexism impact women's internal cognitive attributions and their self-concept; however, the present findings help fill this gap by demonstrating the negative relationship between internalized sexism and working women's internal attributions of subtle sexism experiences. Our results suggest that women with higher reported traditional female stereotypical beliefs had higher reports of attributing internally and placing the blame and responsibility onto themselves, following subtle sexism experiences. Furthermore, internal attributions partially mediated the relationship between internalized sexism and self-perceptions of self-liking and self-competence. Thus,

women who reported higher internalized sexist beliefs had higher reports of attributing blame onto themselves and with that had lower reports of self-perceptions of self-liking and self-competence. The present findings are particularly important because internalized sexism is the belief in limiting attitudes about women, which seem benevolent but are based on traditional gender roles and norms which separate women as being less than men.

The benevolent stereotypes and stigma associated with subtle sexism and internalized sexism start developing from youth, embedded in the societal norms and thus have a consistent impact for working women day to day (Manuel et al., 2017; Tobin, Menon, Menon, Spatta, Hodges, & Perry, 2010). The present study is one of the first to assess working women's internalized traditional female stereotypical beliefs. These results do however follow former literature on internalized oppression and stigma, finding that individuals high in internalized stigma often blame themselves following negative events. Specifically, Else-Quest and colleagues (2009), found that individuals with higher internalized stigma, related to lung cancer, had higher attributions of self-blame for what caused their cancer. Additionally, Szymanski and Henrichs-Beck (2014) found that sexual minorities internalized gender-based stigma was related to psychological distress through coping strategies that are suppressive and reactive and thus, hinder the resolution of negative experiences. Internal attributions may also act as a coping strategy, which hinders the resolution of

subtle sexism experiences, because internal causal blame does not resolve the negative experience.

Our results also suggest that women who report higher internalized traditional female stereotypical beliefs, report lower self-perception of one's value and competence. Szymanski and Kashubeck-West (2008) had similar findings for internalized sexism, finding that women who had higher internalized sexism had lower self-esteem. Additionally, the present study demonstrated that internalized sexism had a direct negative impact leading to internal attributions. Furthermore, internal attributions help explain the relationship between internalized sexism and self-perceptions of self-liking and self-competence as internal attributions partially mediated this relationship.

Our results provide further understanding of the cognitive processing that occurs after working women's experiences with subtle sexism and the negative impact internal attributions have on self-perceptions of value and competence. Internalized sexism and subtle sexism are complex for women's internal attributions because both operate and function through traditional gender norms, stigmas and stereotypes that are not innately negative and are often not perceived as a negative experience (Chawla, Wong, & Gabriel, 2019). Thus, internalized sexism, similar to subtle sexism, discretely limit and hinder women's equality and growth. The ambiguous and benevolent thoughts and behaviors are what make these phenomena complex to recognize as harmful and thus, often repeated, generating a problem for women at work without them knowing that a

problem exists. Although the behaviors and thoughts may appear beneficial and helpful in the workplace, the norms, traditional gender roles and stereotypes actually strengthen inequality between working women and men (Hideg & Ferris, 2016).

Future Research Directions

Women's experiences with subtle sexism is a pervasive experience in the workplace, but unfortunately not well understood. Our study assessed working women's experiences with subtle sexism and asked women to recall prior events and not an immediate current experience for which they could more easily and accurately reflect upon. This is important when considering women's capacity to reflect on their attributions of those events. Hamilton & DeHart (2020) note the importance of an increased understanding of the impact on women's internal thoughts after events of subtle sexism, which can then impact women's behaviors in a negative and unconscious manner. Thus, future research should address women's experiences of subtle sexism and their immediate and real-time attributions to those events in a more direct and concurrent manner. This may prove to be more beneficial in trying to understand the impact subtle sexism has on working women. Because, subtle sexism is discrete and ambiguous, it is difficult to detect in real time. Therefore, recalling past events may not provide the most accurate replication of feelings and emotions as it would in real-time settings.

Additionally, scales which assess working women's experiences of subtle sexism should be created as many of the most widely used subtle sexism scales do not address women's experiences from their self-perspective view. Oswald and colleagues (2019) created one of the more recent scales addressing subtle sexism experiences but they do not address workplace experiences of subtle sexism explicitly. Moreover, many of the current scales are not addressing subtle sexism events that would more likely occur in the workplace. Or the items may be considered as more hostile events or behaviors, thus, fail to capture the more subtle experiences that are occurring in the workplace day to day.

Future research should also explore women's cognitive attributions in the moment and concurrently with subtle sexism. Dardenne and colleagues (2013) used functional MRI (FMRI) to measure brain activity after events of subtle sexism, hostile sexism and no sexism and discovered women exhibited changes in brain activity and lower task performance when exposed to subtle sexism. In their study, women reported having feelings of "intrusive thoughts" and feelings of incompetence after experiencing subtle sexism and during their assigned working memory task. Our results align with theirs in that women's internal cognitive attributions were associated with higher reports of subtle sexism and that those internal attributions negatively impacted their self-concept. Additionally, experiences of subtle sexism and women's cognitive attribution process is often not a conscious experience which makes understanding both complex and necessary. This information indicates the necessity for research to

focus women's immediate cognitive processing and how they cope with the subtle sexism occurrence.

Lastly, subtle sexism's ambiguous manner and norm-based interactions make the experience difficult to categorize as sexism and negative. The stigma is not innately negative, interactions are imbedded as normal in society, and often, not addressed as discriminatory by the victim or perpetrator. Thus, the consequence to this unseen and unacknowledged discrimination is cumulative, as events repeatedly occur in women's everyday interactions (Agars, 2004; Agars & Cazares, 2017). As our study demonstrated, increased experiences of subtle sexism were related to more negative consequences for working women's personal and professional well-being. Future research should consider measuring the impact of the cumulative events of subtle sexism on women's cognitive processing, professional growth and personal health.

Implications

Prior research demonstrates the detriment subtle sexism has on women's personal and professional wellbeing and psychological health (Cundiff et al., 2014; Manuel et al., 2017) and the difficulty individuals have in recognizing and addressing events of subtle sexism (Lindsey et al, 2015). Although recent research is exploring the complexity in subtle sexism experiences and how the benevolent and traditional gender roles impact women's professional and personal equality to men (Hideg & Ferris, 2016), little research has addressed

how experiencing subtle sexism impacts working women and their cognitive processing. Our research shows that working women who experience subtle sexism often attribute those experiences inaccurately, and as their own fault. Additionally, those internal attributions where blame and responsibility are placed onto themselves, relate to lower self-perceptions of value and competence. Thus, resulting in a negative impact on working women's personal and professional success and growth in the workplace. Workplaces need to address their culture and awareness standards and policies to recognize and understand subtle sexism as a form of discrimination which often goes unseen and is pervasive.

Workplaces could institute higher level training on what constitutes an experience of subtle sexism and how the act or behavior is often carried out or displayed. This approach may help enlighten and clarify subtle sexism in the workplace, given subtle sexism experiences are difficult to recognize as sexism and often perpetrators and victims do not know discriminatory behaviors or actions are occurring. Because subtle sexism operates on gender stereotypes and benevolent behaviors, the events often go unnoticed and thus, are not easily remedied. Leaders need to bring in an awareness-based training on the negative impact of traditional norms and stereotypes and particularly how these norms and stereotypes can display in the workplace. Additionally, policy implementation which introduce interventions and mentoring by trained colleagues who understand and can recognize subtle sexism behaviors or events may be beneficial. This mentoring/intervention would help women build awareness,

43

openly discuss, and ultimately reframe attributions of blame and responsibility.

This would help women attribute or cope in a healthy way that does not result in

a consequence of internal self-blame. These policies could be behavioral in

which clear standards are created for what subtle sexism actions and behaviors

are and display in order to help employees recognize occurrences of subtle

sexism and thus, assist in the reduction of subtle sexism in the workplace.

Ultimately, slowly changing the workplace environment and decreasing the

limiting sexist behaviors and attitudes. Since these behaviors are often

unintentional and non-malicious, leaders should implement non-judgmental

policies to report and resolve occurrences. Subtle sexism is a form of

discrimination that likely contributes to disparate and unfair treatment of women,

including pay and professional growth disparities which are all part of our past

and current societal climate. Therefore, an organization that helps both men and

women's awareness of female based stereotypes may help them understand that

although this stigma is not negative in nature it is negative for equality in the

workplace. Awareness by all parties of the start-to-end consequences of subtle

sexism as a form of consistent and hidden discrimination is a strong starting point

for many companies.

Internalized sexist beliefs have negative consequences which hinder

working women and impact cognitive attributions and self-concept, similar to that

of subtle sexism. Internalized sexism and subtle sexism are important predictors

by themselves and the foundation of each are concerning for working women's

growth and development. Working women's beliefs in traditional gender roles and gender stereotyped norms have potential to impact her beliefs in her cognitive processing and perceptions of competence and value in the workplace. These beliefs are impactful in the workplace as they often align with roles and beliefs that are less to that of her equal male counterparts. Pérez-Garín, Molero, and Bos (2017) found that collective action reduced internalized stigma for mental illness. Although there is little research on working women's internalized sexism, it may be beneficial to produce collective action efforts in the workplace in support of eliminating subtle sexism behaviors and stereotypes.

The behaviors and thoughts related to both subtle sexism and internalized sexism may seem kind, helpful or benevolent but are discriminatory and based on sex. This awareness is beneficial for all employees because the foundation of subtle sexism and internalized sexism comes from the societal norms and old ways of thinking about gender. Our study demonstrates the negative cognitive and personal impact of this form of discrimination and thus the need for organizations to be responsible in bringing awareness to their employees and enhancing their culture with new ways of breeding gender equality. Organizations need to be able to talk about and show how sexism is still embedded in our thoughts and behaviors oftentimes without intent. The current study adds to the body of literature on subtle sexism experiences and supports the need for further understanding women's cognitive processing and self-perceptions of those experiences. Additionally, our results add to the limited research on working

women's experiences with subtle sexism while also exploring the impact of internalized sexism. The lack of women in higher up and control/power positions is reason enough to start changing workplace culture perspectives and understanding of what sexism is and how the face of sexism has changed but the impact has not.

Limitations

One potential limitation of our study is that the results were gathered during the COVID-19 global pandemic. Unfortunately, job loss during this time was vast and inevitable for a most individuals with the stay at home orders being in effect. This is important to note for our study because we were attempting to capture results from working women. Given the national job loss was rapidly increasing by each day we find that there were two concepts that stood out as problematic with regard to data analysis and validity of the data gathered. First was gathering data on people that were still working and having contact with other colleagues. We asked individuals about their status as full-time workers in attempt to gather data on workers that were in office settings and in contact with colleagues on a regular basis. This goal proved difficult given many were not "in office" per stay at home order and thus, contact with colleagues face to face was minimal or limited to virtual interactions. Given that the concept of being a full-time worker had changed for many we attempted to alleviate the confusion of the question regarding full time work. This was done by adding a line to the

beginning of the survey, and in parenthesis by the workplace and attribution

survey items, that stated, "think about your current or prior workplace within the

past 6 months when answering this question". This was done as we wanted to

ensure we collected data on participants who were working currently, whether it

be from home or in the office before being laid off from COVID-19. Additionally,

we removed anyone that reported having zero contact with colleagues due to the

mere fact that one cannot experience sexism with zero contact from others.

A second potential limitation is the fact that most people may have

possessed bias given the current state of the world and how the pandemic had

impacted nearly everyone's job in some way. Specifically, our sample may have

been biased toward positive responses that were in favor of their organization

and colleagues. We asked the participants questions about prior experiences of

subtle sexism and although subtle, these questions could be construed as

negatively directed to their place of work, peers and supervisors, which they may

have experienced these events from. Therefore, if we did accurately capture a

population that was still currently and actively working, they may have just been

thankful to be employed. For example, an individual may just feel lucky they still

have their job and thus, responded to the subtle sexism items with bias because

they are grateful for their employment and would not feel or want to report

anything seemingly negative towards their place of work.

Another limitation is in our sampling technique. We used a convenience

sampling technique whereby data was collected from Mturk. Though this proved

beneficial for collecting data from women from different populations and backgrounds within the United States, it is not entirely representative of all working women. This may be due to Mturk being an online platform which is mostly utilized by younger individuals and oftentimes students who hold a higher degree or part time workers. Our sample of working women with trade/vocation training or those who held a degree was 80% with only 14% identifying as entry level. Thus, our sample held higher levels of training and expertise with degrees and certifications and consequently, we did not fully capture working women in lower level positions with no specialized training. Additionally, our sample was 68% white, thus, we have limited data on minorities and their experiences and self-perceptions. Lastly, it could be that working women perceive or experience subtle sexism differently than others at varying age groups, job levels and specialized training.

Lastly, there are some concerns about our measurement of attributions. While attributions were a statistically significant predictor for our study, asking women to recall how they attributed prior events and the extent to which they attributed that prior event is difficult to capture retroactively. Cognitive attributions may be better assessed with more than two items to better evaluate women's level of internal and external attribution following those experiences. More items may prove beneficial since asking an individual to remember how they attributed a past experience, which is oftentimes unconscious, may be difficult to recollect. Thus, more items may strengthen the validity. Furthermore, subtle sexism is

difficult to recognize and thus, it may be that past events of subtle sexism are not being recalled and the attributions are not being reflected upon accurately.

Internalized Sexist Beliefs

Causal Attributions

Experiences of Subtle Sexism

Self-Liking and Self-Competence

.57**

-.12*

.72**

-.08*

-.17**

-.01

-.15*
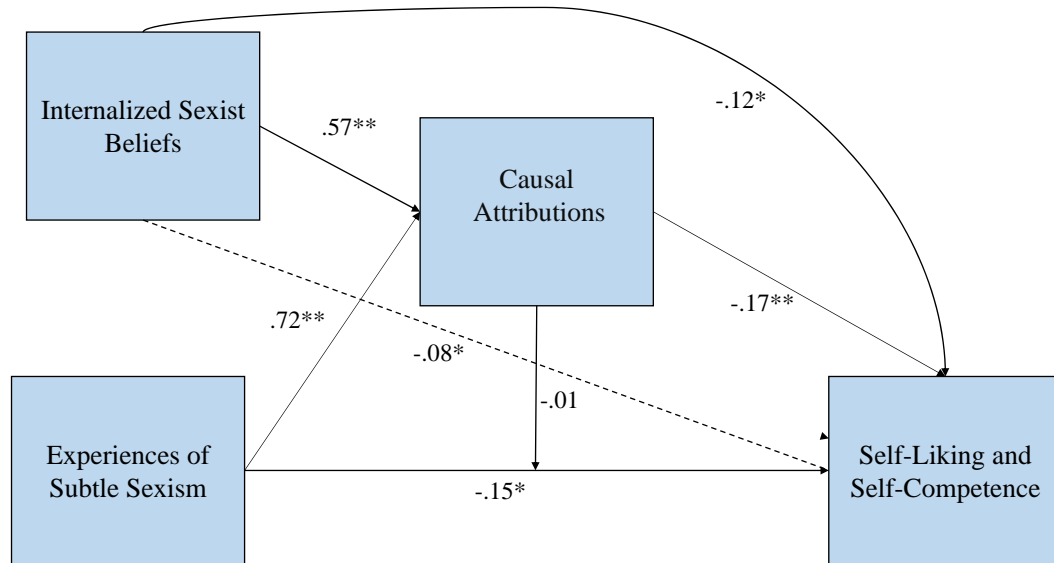
Figure 2. Estimated Model and Additional Analyses with Standardized Coefficients

Table 1. Descriptives and Bivariate Correlations

Variables	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5
WBSE	1.97	0.84	1				
Internalized Sexism	2.75	0.63	.64**	1			
Internal Attribution	1.87	1.14	.72**	.57**	1		
External Attribution	2.96	1.3	.29**	0.07	.14*	1	
SLSC	3.62	0.84	-.15**	-.12*	-.17**	0.03	1

** *p<.01*, * p<.05, N=330

Table 2. Unstandardized and Standardized Coefficients

Hypotheses	*B*	Beta	t
Hypothesis 1	-0.12	-0.15	-2.74*
Hypothesis 2	-0.01	-0.01	-0.27
Hypothesis 3	1.03	0.57	12.50**
Hypothesis 4	-0.17	-0.12	-2.24*
Hypothesis 5	-0.11	-0.08	-2.24*

** *p <.01*, * p<.05 , N=330

Table 3. Additional Findings Unstandardized and Standardized Coefficients

Additional Analyses	*B*	Beta	t
WBSE on Internal Attributions	0.97	0.72	18.89**
Internal Attributions on SLSC	-0.12	-0.17	-3.03**

** *p <.01*, * p<.05 , N=330

Table 4. Categorical Demographic Variables

Race/Ethnicity	N	%
African-American/Black	21	6.4
Asian-American	46	13.9
Caucasian/White	226	68.5
Hispanic/Latino/Latina	13	3.9
Middle Eastern	1	0.3
Native American/American Indian	5	1.5
Pacific Islander	5	1.5
Other (please specify):	13	3.9
Total	330	100%

Job Level	N	%
Entry level	45	13.6
Experienced/Intermediate Level	150	45.5
First Level Management	59	17.9
Middle Level Management	57	17.3
Senior/Executive Level Management	18	5.5
Missing	1	0.2
Total	330	100%

Highest Degree Earned	N	%
Some high school, no diploma	2	0.6
High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent	19	5.8
Some college credit, no degree	43	13
Trade/technical/vocational training	11	3.3
Associate degree	35	10.6
Bachelor's degree	146	44.2
Master's degree	64	19.4
Professional degree	6	1.8
Doctorate degree	4	1.2
Total	330	100%

APPENDIX A

SCALES

Workplace Benevolent Sexism Experiences Scale (WBSE)

(Agars, 2020)

All items measured on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 6 (Almost all the time).

Protective Paternalism (PP)

1. How often has a coworker suggested they will take care of a difficult task for you?

2. How often has a coworker offered to complete a task in order to protect you?

3. How often have you been protected from certain job assignments because the clients or tasks were difficult?

4. How often has a coworker suggested that you are being motherly?

Heterosexual Intimacy (HI)

5. How often have you received compliments about your looks in the workplace?

6. How often has a male coworker made friendly remarks about your appearance?

7. How often have you been asked to "hang out" by a male coworker?

8. How often has a male coworker commented on what you are wearing?

Complementary Gender Differentiation (COMP)

9. How often have you been asked to take on less critical responsibilities in order to be supportive of your male coworkers?

10. How often have you been asked to serve in a role to support a male coworker?

11. How often have you been asked to be less assertive in the workplace?

12. How often have your coworkers valued you for being friendly rather than competent?

Women's Impressions on Gender and Self Scale (WIGSS)

(Costanzo 2018)

(Adapted to 15 items by Bain & Agars 2020)

All items measured on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).

Factor 1: Stereotypical Gender Role Attitudes

1) People of my gender should put care into their appearance

2) Women should be cherished and protected by men

3) Women should help with other's feelings

Factor 2: Devaluing/Dismissing Women

4) I tend to agree with men over people of my gender

5) My values and beliefs match those of men more than they do women

6) When women lose to men in fair competition, they typically complain about being discriminated against.

Factor 3: Objectification, Social Comparison, and Low Self-Worth

7) I am more aware of my appearance

8) I am aware of others judging at my body

9) I often think "My ideas are not as good as others"

Factor 4: Gender Equality

10) Women often miss out on good jobs due to sexism

11) Society has reached the point where women and men have equal opportunities for achievement

12) On average people in our society treat men and women equally

Factor 5: Degrading of Women

13) Women are not as valuable as men

14) Women cannot be leaders as well as men

15) Women cannot contribute as much to society as men

Self-Attribution Scale

(Bain & Agars, 2020)

All items measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (none at all) to 5 (a great deal).

Based on the experiences you just described, please answer the following question:

1. Specifically, when thinking about the experiences mentioned above....... To what extent did YOU feel responsible for what happened?

2. Specifically, when thinking about the experiences mentioned above....... To what extent did you blame YOURSELF for interactions?

Based on the experiences you just described, please answer the following question:

3. Specifically, when thinking about the experiences mentioned above .... To what extent did you feel the OTHER person was responsible?

4. Specifically, when thinking about the experiences mentioned above....... To what extent did you blame the OTHER person for interactions?

Self-Liking/Self-Competence Scale-Revised Version (SLCS-R)

(Tafarodi & Swann Jr., 2000)

All items measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Please rate the extent to which you agree with the following…

1. I tend to devalue myself. (L-) R

2. I am highly effective at the things I do. (C+)

3. I am very comfortable with myself. (L+)

4. I am almost always able to accomplish what I try for. (C+)

5. I am secure in my sense of self-worth. (L+)

6. It is sometimes unpleasant for me to think about myself. (L-) R

7. I have a negative attitude toward myself. (L-) R

8. At times, I find it difficult to achieve the things that are important to me. (C-) R

9. I feel great about who I am. (L+)

10. I sometimes deal poorly with challenges. (C-) R

11. I never doubt my personal worth. (L+)

12. I perform very well at many things. (C+)

13. I sometimes fail to fufill my goals. (C-) R

14. I am very talented. (C+)

15. I do not have enough respect for myself. (L-) R

16. I wish I were more skillful in my activities. (C-) R

Demographics

What is your age (in years)?

What is your gender?

What is your ethnicity?

- Hispanic or Latino

- Black or African American

- Native American or American Indian

- Asian / Pacific Islander

- White

- Other

Do you work (Please choose one)

- Yes, I work full time

- Yes, I work part-time

- No, I currently don't work

On average, how many hours per week do you work?

How long have you worked in your current organization?

What is your marital status?

- Single, never married

- Married or domestic partnership

- Widowed

- Divorced

- Separated

What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, highest degree received.

- Some high school, no diploma

- High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED)

- Some college credit, no degree

- Trade/technical/vocational training

- Associate degree

- Bachelor's degree

- Master's degree

- Professional degree

- Doctorate degree

What is your household income?

- Less than $25,000

- $25,000 - $50,000

- $50,000 - $100,000

- $100,000 - $200,000

- More than $200,000

- Prefer not to say

Do you have children?

    If so how many?

Do you work from home?

    If so how many hours per week?

- 0 – 10

- 11-20

- 21 plus

How would you describe your work environment and how much you interact with

others?

- None at all

- A little

- A Moderate amount

- A lot

- A great deal

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

You are invited to participate in a study designed to examine behaviors in the workplace. The study is being conducted by Amanda Bain under the supervision of Dr. Mark Agars, Professor of Psychology, California State University of San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of California State University, San Bernardino. The University requires that you give your consent BEFORE participating in the study.

This study is for participants who are 18 years of age or older, who are currently employed or have been employed in the last 6 months. If you consent to participate, you will be administered a survey that will ask questions about your personal experiences with others in the workplace. You will also be asked to provide some demographic information (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity, ect.). Altogether the study should take about 15 minutes.

This study involves no risks beyond those routinely encountered in daily life, nor any direct benefits to you as a participant. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw your participation at any time during the study or refuse to answer any question without penalty. As no identifying information will be collected, your name cannot be connected with your responses. Hence your data will remain completely anonymous. Your responses will NOT be shared with your organization of employment. All responses will be protected by the researcher on password protected computers. The results from this study will be reported in a Masters' thesis and may be submitted for publication to a scientific Journal. Although, any results shared will be described at the group level only. Summary results of this study will be available from Mark Agars(magars@csusb.edu) after March 2021.

APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

IRB #: IRB-FY2020-216
Title: Women's Experiences in the Workplace
Creation Date: 2-14-2020
End Date:
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Amanda Bain
Review Board: Main IRB Designated Reviewers for Department of Psychology
Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Exempt	Decision	Exempt

Key Study Contacts

Member	Mark Agars	Role	Co-Principal Investigator	Contact	MAgars@csusb.edu
Member	Amanda Bain	Role	Principal Investigator	Contact	Amanda.Bain@csusb.edu
Member	Amanda Bain	Role	Primary Contact	Contact	Amanda.Bain@csusb.edu

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