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The Relationship Between Subtle Sexism and Women's Careers Explained by Cognitive Processes and Moderated by Attachment Styles

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SUBTLE SEXISM AND WOMEN'S CAREERS

EXPLAINED BY COGNITIVE PROCESSES AND MODERATED BY

ATTACHMENT STYLES

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A Thesis

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

————————————

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

in

Industrial and Organizational Psychology

————————————

by

Patricia Carolina Rivera

December 2020

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigated how experiences of subtle sexism related to women's career outcomes. Prior research has focused on attitudes and impacts of subtle sexism, whereas this study focused on personal experiences of subtle sexism. Due to its normative nature, subtle sexism occurs often and can be difficult to classify as sexism. The study found that participants who encountered more subtle sexism reported lower levels of advancement perceptions and work engagement was indirectly impacted by subtle sexism. Interestingly, although it was expected that rumination would cause cognitive overload, participants in this study exhibited resilience which indirectly impacted their advancement perceptions. Overall, the findings build on prior research and amplify the need for the denunciation of subtle sexism.

Keywords: Subtle sexism, career progress, occupational self-efficacy, rumination, and attachment styles.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER ONE

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Relationship Between Experiences of Subtle Sexism and Women's Careers

Explained by Cognitive Processes and Moderated by Attachment Styles

Equality between men and women in the workplace continues to drive

organizational diversity research. During the second half of the twentieth century,

female participation in the workforce has been on a steady incline and we've

seen progress in what are considered obvious disparities between the sexes,

such as leadership representation and wages (U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics,

2017). Over the past few decades women-to-men earning ratios have grown

substantially. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2018 women's

earnings were 81% of men's compared to the reported 62% when the data

became available in 1979. (Highlights of women's earnings in 2018). Despite

making real progress, room for improvement is undeniable. Sexism inherently

reflects antagonism towards women and lurks in just about every dark corner of

American society and seeps into our organizations (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Most

individuals are attuned to acts of overt sexism which are manifested in negative

attitudes and expressed through obvious discrimination towards women. One

common form of overt sexism is expressed in terms of sexual harassment, such

as someone making unwanted attempts to touch you (Jones, Peddie, Gilrane,

King, & Gray 2016). Acts of overt sexism demean women in the workplace and are notoriously reprimanded through formal policies (Jones et al., 2016). In contrast, subtle sexism is a discrete form of sexism that often goes undetected because it reflects normative stereotypes of women which often contain positive traits and typify subjectively positive feelings towards women (Glick & Fiske, 1996). This form of benevolent sexism is known to glorify women for being nice but deem them incompetent, forcing them to take on job roles in which they rank below male colleagues. These supportive roles are driven by normative stereotypes and masculine dominance which suggests that women are not fit to handle important tasks and therefore need men to guide and protect them. The effects of subtle sexism have been shown to be just as detrimental to women, if not more than acts of hostile sexism (Jones et al., 2016).

Subtle sexism directly limits opportunities for the advancement of women in the workplace. Due to its foundational ideology in what it means to be male or female, studies have shown that subtle sexism creates barriers of inequality, as women who endorse benevolent sexism are likely to accept male restrictions that inevitably impact their career aspirations (Moya, Glick, Exposito, DeLemus, & Hart, 2007). Experiences of subtle sexism lead to varying levels of occupational self-competence and by accepting their inferior status in the workplace, women are prone to feeling less capable than their male counterparts. Subtle sexism is patronizing discrimination, on the surface it appears benign and polite but in reality, can erode a woman's competence (Glick 2013). Even though praising

women for being nurturing and nice at work may seem harmless, it can lead to expectations that unescapably place women in subordinate roles which prevent them from demonstrating their skills and inhibits career advancement. In addition, self-competence in one's work can have a direct effect on turnover intentions as well as mobility options. Women who embody traditional gender roles are appreciated while those who deviate from the status quo are punished. Therefore, by tolerating the existing structural power held by males in the workplace, females may experience poor performance and as a result face limited advancement opportunity. Arguably, one of the characteristics of subtle sexism that contributes to its harm has to do with the ambiguity of the experience itself. Often victims of subtle sexism are left debating if they were at fault for any inappropriateness they experienced or whether the experience was cause for concern (Jones, Arena, Nittrouer, Alonso, & Lindsey, 2017). Constant contemplation can lead to cognitive overload and this will unavoidably affect important work outcomes.

Efforts to reduce the negative effects of subtle sexism on career outcomes have primarily focused on improving organizational culture by implementing awareness trainings and incorporating policies (Jones et al., 2016). While it is important not to condemn the victim in these situations, it is also important to consider individual characteristics that might explain the differences amongst experiences. One individual level factor that might mitigate the effects of subtle sexism and female career outcomes are attachment styles. Attachment styles

are individual differences that define the extent to which people feel comfortable with intimacy, depend on others and degree to which people worry about rejection (Boatwright, Lopez, Sauer, VanDerWege, & Huber, 2010). Attachment theory poses that individuals are born with an innate need for proximity in times of distress in order to enhance survival. Whether the individual is successful in gaining this security becomes the base of the individuals' adult attachment style (Bowlby, 1982). In the context of the workplace, attachment styles may affect how individuals cope with stressful occupational situations and engage in employee relationships (Richards & Schat, 2011). These styles tell a story of how the individual views their own self-worth as well as their positive or negative view of others.

Given the ubiquity of subtle sexism in the workplace and the potential value of attachment styles in buffering it's effect, the purpose of the present study is to examine how cognitive processes such as occupational self-efficacy and intrusive rumination mediate the relationships between the effects of subtle sexism on career-oriented outcomes for women and the extent to which those effects may be mitigated by adult attachment styles. There is a lack of research identifying potential ways in which to lessen the negative experiences with sexual discrimination in the workplace, therefore, the current study is not only important for the advancement of research, but for the overall career progression of women in the workplace.

Experiences, Reactions and Consequences of Subtle Sexism

Sexism is defined as, "… ascribing superiority or inferiority, unsupported by any evidence, in traits, abilities, social value, personal worth, and other characteristics to males or females as a group" (Albee, 1981 p. 20). Sex based discrimination stems from normative stereotypes that have been historically embedded in the structural relationships between men and women. Sexism is a multidimensional prejudice constructed of two main facets, hostile and benevolent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Hostile sexist acts are explicitly negative behaviors that are consciously enacted towards women based on their social status. For example, one study examined whether implicit leadership prototypes and gender stereotypes contributed to bias against women leaders. Results found that those who held stronger hostile sexist beliefs reported significantly less favorable attitudes and judged women leaders more harshly compared to those who reported less support for hostile sexism (Forsyth, Heiney, & Wright, 1997). Hostile sexist behaviors are easily detected, typically frowned upon by society and often have policies in place to prevent or act appropriately when they occur (Jones et al., 2016). Hostile sexism is the more aggressive side of the sexism coin and serves to justify male structural power and classify women as the weaker sex (Glick, 2013).

Support for discriminatory treatment against women in the workplace may seem outdated, however, it's not that sexism has been abolished but rather alternative forms of sexism are emerging discretely. Some supporters of modern

sexism believe discrimination against women is in the past and therefore resent women who make political and economic demands (Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995). Modern sexists are also believed to endorse acts of subtle sexism because it's a way of expressing prejudice without violating social norms (Jones, et al., 2017). As opposed to the explicit negative treatment of women, benevolent sexism lives incognito. Its enigmatic personality allows for it to appear harmless on the surface but shares the same underpinnings as it's brazen counterpart (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Benevolent sexism is defined as the subjectively positive view of women that simultaneously classifies them as men's subordinates. Unlike hostile sexism, which is a conscious effort, benevolent sexist acts are behaviors that are accepted as socially correct and are often unconsciously enacted towards women based on their minority status (Jones et. al, 2016). Viewing women through a subtly sexist lens is to idealize them as nurturers, fragile, and almost sacred. In addition, advocates of benevolent sexism commended women who have lower career ambitions and are known to venerate men as financial providers (Glick, 2013). Many women would argue that this is not a bad way to be portrayed as it leads to resources, protection and male adoration (Glick 2013). Categorizing women in this seemingly benevolent manner is, however, to concurrently restrict them from ever facing adversity or allowing them the opportunity to demonstrate their worth. The fact that these behaviors may or may not be intentional adds ambiguity to the situation and causes confusion about whether the experience was an act of discrimination at all. For instance,

comments made by a male coworker towards a female coworker regarding how "cute" she looks may be well-intentioned but can undermine a woman's feeling of being taken seriously (Glick & Fiske, 1996). It can be argued that comments such as "cute" are just compliments and have nothing to do with devaluing a woman as a peer, however, it can also be a way to purposefully associate a woman with her looks and not work relevant factors which can ultimately hinder her career progression down the line (Agars & Cazares, 2017).

The societal shift in sexism from overt to subtle can be due to the fact that many organizations are pushing for a more egalitarian workplace. The promotion for a more diverse workforce began with attempts to level the playing field with affirmative action, movements such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the establishment of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The purpose of these efforts was to increase the presence of underrepresented groups in educational and workplace settings (Burke & Cooper, 2005). These societal level changes in legislation have led to behavioral changes that have tried to reduce employment discrimination and from a business standpoint, organizations are keen to employ inclusive practices and manage diversity properly, due to the inevitable reality of the influx of minority groups who are making up organizations today (Burke & Cooper, 2005). Because of these intentions to reduce inequality, overt forms of discrimination such as hostile sexism, have become less common (Jones et al., 2016). Whether it's because companies believe it's the right thing to

do, or they are trying to avoid negative backlash, the normative nature of benevolent sexism allows for subtle acts of sexism to persist.

As policies and laws are in place to control and stop overt sexism, avenues in which to report subtle sexism are murky or non-existent. The difficulty in clearly defining benevolent discrimination impedes organizational regulation and prevention. In addition, some argue that the lack of consistency surrounding the agreement that subtly sexist acts are in fact sexism, may be the reason why subtle sexism can be just as detrimental if not worse on women's career advancement than hostile sexism (Jones et al., 2017).

Overall, the damaging effects of subtle sexism have been related to a wide range of target reactions that are linked to health, cognitive and emotional resources, and career aspirations (Jones et al., 2016). It has been found that challenging acts of discrimination is one way of managing a stressful situation (Kaiser & Miller, 2001). Due to women being the prime targets of sexism, one study examined whether confronting sexism would lead to positive psychological outcomes (Gervais, Hillard, & Vescio, 2010). Women who perceived sexist comments as problematic, non-informative, and inappropriate were more likely to confront the preparator and benefit from positive psychological outcomes. Results demonstrate that women who spoke against the sexist comments reported higher levels of competence, self-esteem, and empowerment (Gervais et al., 2010). A key factor to being able to confront sexism is to identify sexist acts when they occur. When women experience overt sexism, they are more

likely to address or confront the perpetrator due to the conspicuous nature of the situation. In turn, women may cope better with the acute stress that develops from overt acts of sexism (Jones et al., 2016). In contrast, confrontation is less clear of an option when experiencing subtle sexism because it is hard for women to decipher that behaviors are actually sexist.

Van Laer and Janssens (2011) examined ethnic minority experiences with subtle discrimination in the workplace, focusing on the consequences that result from the ambiguity of subtle discrimination (2011). They found that the uncertainty felt by minority group members came from the seemingly benign actions that were approved and tolerated by the majority group, and that this ambiguity manifested itself within the minority group as a feeling of disempowerment (Van Laer & Janssens, 2011). In addition, encounters with subtle sexism may generate vagueness which increases the rate of occurrence and creates chronic stress which can be more detrimental as it can induce depressive symptoms (Jones et al., 2016). Additionally, the ambiguity that remains after repeated exposure to subtle sexism reduces a woman's available cognitive and emotional resources (Jones et al., 2017). For instance, whether a woman recognizes an act as sexist or not, the occurrence will likely leave her wondering about the encounter which requires cognitive and emotional efforts to disengage with the incident (Compas, Connor-Smith, Saltzman, Thomsen, & Wadsworth, 2001). One study tested to see how conditions of sexism (hostile, benevolent, or non-existent) impacted a woman's cognitive performance. Results

found that benevolent conditions significantly diminished cognitive performance compared to hostile conditions or conditions where no sexism was expressed (Dardenne, Dumont, & Bollier 2007). The researchers argued that the hostile context might have motivated the victims to perform better based on a revenge-based action, however, no such variable was measured, and the data could not speak to this point. More importantly, the researchers said that despite the fact that the women may or may not have identified benevolent sexism as a form of prejudice, it did not imply that the women enjoyed the experience or deemed it to be similar to the non-existent condition (Dardenne et al., 2007). This is important because regardless of the ability to clearly identify acts of benevolent sexism as sexism, the participants were still consciously aware that the situation was unwarranted and uncomfortable compared to conditions where no acts of sexism took place. Therefore, these findings suggest that experiences of subtle sexism can have severely demanding effects on cognitive resources which can depreciate attention to other areas of importance, such as job tasks.

The current study focuses on how subtle sexism may impact a woman's career over time. Projected career progress refers to how strongly an individual feels they can advance in their careers. Career growth opportunities refer to "the degree to which employees experience career growth within their current organization" (Wang, Weng, McElroy, Ashkanasy, & Livens 2014, p. 432). Growth opportunities have been linked positively to job satisfaction and organizational commitment, as well as negatively with turnover intentions. It is

possible that career growth opportunities may be important factors in determining whether employees feel as though they can move up within the company and in turn respond more positively on behalf of their organization (Wang et al., 2014). Career progression for women, for instance leadership opportunities, may appear non-existent through the lens of ambivalent sexism because hostile sexism is meant to punish women who challenge the status quo and benevolent sexism rewards women who fall in line (Glick, 2013). According to role congruity theory, prejudice is projected towards female leaders who express leader like qualities such as agentic behaviors, competitiveness and authority (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Such qualities are also ascribed to males and advocate traditional gender roles. Therefore, women in leadership positions who are recognized to display these behaviors are considered to deviate from the assumption of what it means to be a woman and are more likely to be perceived as less qualified compared to a male leader (Garcia-Retamero & Lopez-Zafra, 2006). Consequentially, stereotypes that depict leadership positions as masculine, hinder a woman's chance of attaining and remaining in a fruitful position in the workplace.

In addition, it may be that career-oriented women who perceive a lack of career progression are then feeling less engaged with their work. Experiences with discrimination also influence the physical, cognitive, and emotional connection employees express during job performance, also known as engagement (Kahn, 1990). Employee engagement refers to individuals who feel appreciated physically and emotionally by their organization. Engaged

11

employees also feel safe within their job role and sense support or trust from their organization (Shuck, 2011). Employees who are engaged are also committed to their role in the organization (O'Connor & Crowley-Henry, 2019). This is important because engaged employees are not only motivated to achieve organizational goals, but they attain a sense of satisfaction and feeling of self-worth when goals are met (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995). For instance, one study argued that in order for employees to be engaged, the organization had to instill proper reward systems, unbiased procedures and respectful attitudes displayed by superiors (Aslam, Muqadas, Imran, & Rahman, 2018). Often, organizations will invest less developmental resources to minority groups which is an obvious sign of distributive injustice (Malik & Singh, 2014). When women are exposed to a constant barrage of subtly sexist acts that go unquestioned, it becomes easier for management to agree with the backlash projected towards the female targets. With lack of resources and no organizational accountability to reprimand sexist acts, women may perceive the organization to partake in unfair practices leading to disengagement with their work and place their careers in jeopardy (O'Connor & Crowley-Henry, 2019). Similarly, another study found that perceived trust in top management was a major deciding factor on employee turnover intention. They explained that when an organization is lacking trust, employees are subject to feel negatively towards their employer and such emotions can cause them to seek alternative employment (Molders, Brosi, Sporrle, Welpe, 2019). The results showed that employees demonstrated unfavorable emotions towards their

managers when credibility was at stake. Furthermore, the negative emotions evoked higher turnover intentions in employees (Molders et al., 2019). Correspondingly, if women feel as though their organization is implicitly implying that they cannot perform a job based on their gender, they may feel as though this treatment is unjust which can prompt greater willingness to leave the organization. In sum, discriminatory experiences, such as experiences with subtle sexism, can cause women to feel as though they are not able to advance in their careers, which may cause engagement levels to drop and ultimately lead women to seek employment elsewhere.

Internalizations of Experiences with Subtle Sexism and Cognitive Processes

According to attributional ambiguity theory, members of stigmatized groups struggle with making attributions for others' appraisal of their performance (Crocker & Major, 1989). This uncertainty can occur for both negative and positive feedback and can impact the group members psychological well-being (Crocker & Major, 1989). Attributional ambiguity theory can be applied to experiences with sexism where women who experience overt sexism know exactly who to blame, the perpetrator (Jones et al., 2016). In contrast, when they experience subtle sexism in the workplace, assigning blame is less clear and women might internalize the discrimination by blaming themselves rather than the perpetrator (Jones et al., 2016). One theory that helps explain why women might attribute fault to themselves is minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003), which

states that individuals from oppressed social groups experience excess stress due to their minority status and these stressors are manifested in external and internalized forms (Meyer, 2003). For example, women may find themselves asking if perhaps they had been too nice to their male colleague and result in justifying the inappropriate comments. These internalizations can create issues with performance motivation, task performance and employee engagement because they create doubt and anxiety about one's performance (Dardenne, et al., 2007). One study found that mental intrusions brought on by benevolent sexism significantly decreased women's performance by interfering with their ability to concentrate on the task (Dardenne et al., 2007). Thus, internalizations can lead to negative attitudes and beliefs about one's identity (Szymanski, Dunn, & Ikizler, 2014). Likewise, discriminatory acts can have deleterious effects on a person's self-efficacy, specifically occupational self-efficacy which refers to one's perceived competence concerning their ability to successfully fulfill their job requirements (Rigotti, Schyns, & Mohr, 2008). As targets of subtle sexism are consistently receiving latent messages about their inherent incompetence, these messages are internalized, leading to the development of lower occupational self-efficacy and, ultimately, lower efficacy paves the way for inadequate performance (Eden, Ganzach, & Zigman, 2010). Individuals who hold sexist ideologies believe women cannot execute important tasks as well as men, by internalizing these beliefs, women then expect to perform worse than others and this anticipation leads them to behave in the prophesied manner (Szymanski et

al., 2014). Thus, subtle sexism creates a self-fulfilling prophecy where women place themselves in subordinate positions unconsciously and further cements men's traditional power in the workplace. Given that experiences of subtle sexism influences cognitive responses negatively, such as diminished cognitive performance and self-efficacy, it is important to consider cognition when it comes to understanding occurrences of subtle sexism.

Notably, rumination is defined as, "…A maladaptive emotional regulation style characterized by passive self-focused reflection on one's distress and circumstances surrounding the distress" (Szymanski, et al., 2014, p. 413). Research has identified a positive correlation between the psychological process of rumination and depression and anxiety (Timmins, Rimes, & Rahman, 2017). In addition, women have been found to ruminate over stressful events more so than men (Szymanski, et al., 2014). Gender differences in rumination can be explained through minority stress theory which states that individuals from oppressed groups are susceptible to greater experiences of stress and negative life events due to their marginalized group status (Meyer, 2003). Furthermore, when faced with stressful situations, minorities tend to internalize the negative attitudes and beliefs about their minority identities. For example, one study found that women experienced greater depressive, anxious, and somatic symptoms compared to men due to sexist treatment (Klonoff, Landrine, & Campbell, 2000). Specifically, 78% of the variance in symptoms was explained by sexist discrimination. Based on these results, if benevolent sexism is frequent, women

are likely to internalize stereotypes of incompetence which may lead them to accept their subordinate positions and not question the severity of their experiences with subtle sexism. Rumination can also be considered a multidimensional construct that can be both purposeful and implicit (Kramer, Silverstein, Witte, & Weathers 2019). Deliberate rumination is the conscious component of rumination and refers to the explicit cognitive process in which an individual purposefully thinks about the traumatic experience in attempt to understand the effects of the situation (Cann, Calhoun, Tedeschi, Triplett, Vishnevsky, & Lindstrom, 2011). Intrusive rumination is considered the unconscious component of rumination and is defined as unsolicited and irrepressible thoughts that cause individuals to think about past traumatic events.

Most relevant to the current focus, it is important to investigate effects of subtle sexism through the lens of intrusive rumination as opposed to deliberate rumination. The reason being, in order to deliberately ruminate about a problematic situation, individuals must first accurately identify the experience as problematic (Cann et al., 2011). As we know, there is ambiguity surrounding subtle sexism, therefore, this dimension of ambivalent sexism couples well with the implicit preoccupation that occurs when one intrusively ruminates as both situations are occurring outside of the individual's explicit awareness. The sheer randomness of a remark is likely to linger and cause targets to experience anxiety and ruminate over potential future experiences (Meyer, 2003). Therefore, when a woman receives unwarranted comments about being attractive with no

16

situational relation to her work, she may be left wondering why her looks were even mentioned, or worse, if somehow, she was responsible for the impropriety. Problematically, because these comments are not inherently "bad", she's likely to brush it off and accept the statement which increases the frequency of unsuitable comments and continues the toxic cycle of sexism (Jones et al., 2017). Seeing as the current study focuses on career-oriented women, forms of subtle sexism may impact them differently than women who associate work as a means to an end. As Dardenne et al. mentioned, despite the situation being identified as benevolent sexism, it was still found to be unpleasant and less enjoyable compared to situations where no sexism was present (2007). Therefore, one can argue that rumination will be triggered in career-oriented women who experience forms of subtle sexism because these remarks or gestures create obstacles between their current reality and future prospects.

<div align="center">Attachment Styles</div>

It is important to understand how individual differences affect the experiences of benevolent sexism because they may serve as buffers that mitigate some of the negative effects brought on by the discrimination. One approach is to consider adult attachment theory, specifically attachment styles. Attachment theory is based on Mary Ainsworth's security theory, and poses that infants need to develop a secure foundation with caregivers in order to explore unfamiliar situations (Bretherton 1992). John Bowlby further described this need

of dependence as an evolutionary drive to survive. He stated that infants innately seek proximity of more capable caregivers when facing distressful situations in order to enhance chances of survival (Boatright et al., 2010). From an evolutionary perspective, those who are successful in attracting and maintaining proximity are then more likely to endure problematic situations that call for safety in numbers. During the early 1970's, Bowlby and others began to explore the idea of examining attachment within adult relationships, specifically studies surrounding bereavement and marital separation (Bowlby & Parkes, 1970; Weiss, 1977). For instance, researchers found applicability in the research about mourning infants and decided to employ the findings of childhood studies in attempts to gain insight on the process of adult grief (Bretherton, 1992). Shaver and Hazan translated Ainsworth's infant attachment styles to adults in romantic relationships (1988). Based on their work, the target attachment figure shifted from parent to partner and adult attachment theory was born. Subsequent studies found that like infants, differing styles of adult romantic attachment influenced how partners coped with stress (Meyers & Vetere, 2002). For example, individuals with secure attachment styles reported more coping resources than individuals with insecure attachment styles (Meyers & Vetere, 2002).

Research using adult attachment theory in the context of the workplace was found paramount when it was identified that infant attachment patterns were also displayed in adult relationships with similar attachment scripts, such as

leader-follower dyads (Kahn & Kram, 1994; Keller 2003; Troth & Miller, 2000).

Due to the noticeable parallels between dyads, attachment theory in combination

with leadership research has suggested there to be predictive value in

attachment styles on follower expectations, behaviors towards leaders and

support seeking (Yip, Ehrhardt, Black, & Walker, 2017).

Furthermore, the foundation of adult attachment theory revolves around

the activation of the attachment behavioral system (ABS). This behavioral system

becomes stimulated when an individual is exposed to physical or psychological

threat. For example, from an organizational setting, the ABS is likely to be

activated with experiences of downsizing, discrimination or diversity management

(Albert, Allen, Biggane & Ma, 2015). When encountering stressful organizational

situations, the ABS is activated which drives individuals to seek security provided

by their attachment figure. Based on the positive or negative interactions and

overall availability of the attachment figure, working models of relationships are

formed which create the base for individual attachment styles (Yip et al., 2017).

Attachment styles are made up of two distinct frames for thinking about

relationships, one related to the self and one related to others. These frames

represent an individual's belief of self-worth in receiving support, trust in

accessibility of attachment figures in times of threat and are the foundation to the

development of attachment styles (Yip et al., 2017). Individuals who have been

supported and made to feel safe by prior attachment figures develop a secure

attachment style which allows them to feel worthy of receiving support and can

easily count on others for assistance and peace of mind, in addition, they develop a positive view of themselves and others (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2015). However, when an individual has experienced constant rejection, they develop a diminished sense of self-worth which manifests insecurity as an adult. These individuals tend to worry about the availability of others in a time of need and anxiously seek their attachment figure, this is considered a preoccupied attachment style (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2015). Conversely, a dismissive attachment style is evidenced by individuals who hold a high sense of self-worth but ultimately distrust others' good will and strive to maintain behavioral and emotional independence during times of stress (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2015). The fourth and final style has been examined less frequently but has proven to add value to how we understand individual differences (Yip et al., 2017). Fearfully attached individuals have a negative model of the self and others (Schmidt, 2016). They depend on others to confirm their sense of self-worth, however, they expect rejection and therefore refuse intimacy in order to evade the pain of rejection (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). These styles have been shown to effect how people behave in the workplace and how they form and maintain employment relationships (Richard & Schat, 2011). Attachment styles are therefore important because they build certain self-beliefs that shape how women are likely to interpret and react to acts of subtle sexism.

According to the research, individuals with either secure, preoccupied, dismissive, or fearful styles express different coping strategies toward relational

and occupational stressors. A meta-analysis examining the relationship between romantic attachment and ambivalent sexism found that an individual's relational needs are one factor which motivates people's support for sexism (Fisher & Hammond, 2019). They found a link between relational needs and the adoption of traditional roles and acceptance of gender inequality. Specifically, participants with preoccupied attachment styles were found to support both benevolent and hostile sexism (Fisher & Hammond, 2019). Men with preoccupied attachment styles reported higher support for benevolent sexism, their need for closeness and affection from a romantic partner was coupled with the belief that men are complete when they are loved by a woman (Fisher & Hammond, 2019). Implications suggested that endorsement for both dimensions of ambivalent sexism predict traditional relationship roles in which there is a gendered division of effort where men are to have careers and women should maintain domestic responsibilities (Fisher & Hammond, 2019). Therefore, these attachment orientations shape the attitudes about how men and women should act in romantic relationships. This is important because attachment styles can guide social beliefs beyond the individual's immediate relationships.

Based on the ties between attachment orientations and prejudicial views in romantic settings, one might expect to find these same affinities between insecure styles and traditional gender roles in an organizational setting. According to research on attachment styles in the workplace, styles impact people's orientation toward their work (Hazan & Shaver, 1990). Specifically,

securely attached individuals have reported higher levels of job satisfaction and well-being compared to insecurely attached individuals (Hazan & Shaver, 1990). Individuals with preoccupied attachment styles have been found to report higher levels of fear for failure and dismissively attached individuals have reported working long hours in detriment to their personal well-being (Hazan & Shaver, 1990). Similarly, Summer and Knight (2001) found that individuals with preoccupied attachment styles had more negative spillover from home to work compared to securely attached individuals. Attachment research in organizations has also focused on subordinate reactions to stress in the workplace. For example, one study found that subordinates who have experienced inconsistent support from their leaders in times of distress developed insecure attachment styles (Hudson 2013). As a result, followers acted in manners that served their own attachment needs, such as preoccupied attached individuals engaging in attention seeking behavior or workers with dismissively attachment styles distancing themselves from others in the organization, both of which are counterproductive in a work setting (Hudson 2013). Relevant studies have examined how styles affect leadership. Another study found that individuals who reported secure attachment viewed their ideal leaders as more considerate and relational compared to insecurely attached individuals (Berson, Dan, & Yammarino, 2006). On the other hand, dismissive and fearfully attached individuals have been found to prefer less of a relational bond with leaders, which ultimately reduces trust and concern between employee and leader (Boatwright

et al., 2010). These studies are particularly important because they demonstrate that the two internal frameworks of relationships, which differ depending on style, may be applied to understanding leadership relationships (Berson et al., 2006). Considering the negative impact insecure attachment styles have on workplace outcomes, one might expect insecure attachment styles to have a negative moderating effect on the relationship between workplace outcomes and career advancement of women. For if insecurely attached people feel less job satisfaction, create distance and lack trust in their leaders and peers (Boatwright et al., 2010, Hazan & Shaver, 1990, & Hudson, 2013) their chances for career development appear scarce compared to securely attached individuals who experience greater satisfaction and develop relationships and trust.

Based on the attachment research, attachment behaviors are in the forefront during stress induced situations (Yip et al, 2017). In turn, for insecurely attached individuals who are seeking to advance their careers, these attachment behaviors may reduce promotional opportunities. Ultimately, attachment styles are individual differences that may matter in the context of encounters with subtle sexism and can help researchers gain a richer understanding of the barriers surrounding women's progression in the workplace.

Current Study

The purpose of the current study is to examine the impact of subtle sexism experiences on career outcomes for women as defined by engagement, turnover

intentions, and advancement perceptions. Specifically, the present study will investigate how sexist discrimination relates to career progression and how that relationship might be explained by cognitive processes, such as, occupational self-efficacy and intrusive rumination. In addition, it is believed that attachment styles are individual differences that can moderate some of those effects. Subtle sexism is known to affect career outcomes in women, but the current study can advance the research by viewing the adverse effects through the lens of secure and insecure attachment styles. For a model of the relationships please see below.
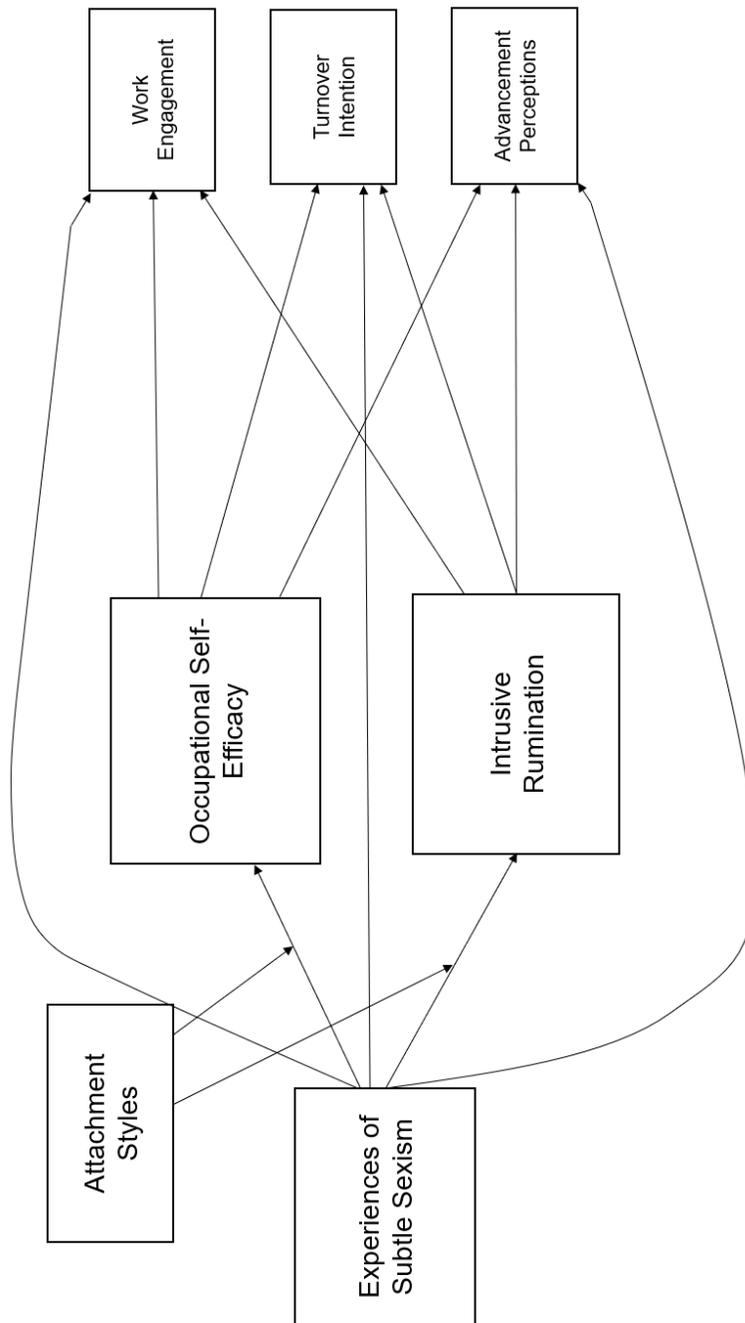
Figure 1: Path model of the Relationship between Experiences of Subtle Sexism and Career Outcomes.

According to the model, it is predicted that experiences of subtle sexism will negatively impact career outcomes for women. Moreover, occupational self-efficacy and intrusive rumination will mediate the experiences of subtle sexism and participant job outcomes. Given the research, targets of discrimination receive a barrage of messages insinuating their inherent incompetence (Szymanski et al., 2014) and therefore it is expected that those who experienced subtly sexists acts in the workplace will report lower occupational self-efficacy. Lower levels of occupational self-efficacy will then correlate positively with turnover intentions and negatively with work engagement and advancement perceptions. In addition, intrusive rumination causes individuals to unconsciously think about past traumatic events (Cann et al., 2011), thus it is believed that experiences of subtle sexism would likely increase irrepressible thoughts. Consequently, it is predicted that higher levels of intrusive rumination will be positively correlated with turnover intentions, but negatively correlated with engagement and advancement perceptions. Moreover, research shows that attachment styles have specific implications on social beliefs, interpersonal relationships quality, and psychological well-being (Harms, 2011). Therefore, it is predicted that attachment styles would change the relationship between experiences of subtle sexism and career outcomes, as mediated by cognitive processes. Specifically, securely attached participants compared to insecurely attached participants who experienced discrimination will report higher rates of occupational-self efficacy and lower rates of intrusive rumination. As a result,

26

securely attached individuals will report higher rates work-engagement and advancement perceptions, and report lower turnover intentions compared to insecurely attached individuals.

Hypothesis 1:

A) There will be a main effect between experiences of subtle sexism and work engagement.

B) There will be a main effect between experiences of subtle sexism and turnover intentions.

C) There will be a main effect between experiences of subtle sexism and advancement perceptions.

Hypothesis 2:

A) Occupational self-efficacy will mediate the relationship between experiences of subtle sexism and work engagement.

B) Occupational self-efficacy will mediate the relationship between experiences of subtle sexism and turnover intentions.

C) Occupational self-efficacy will mediate the relationship between experiences of subtle sexism and advancement perceptions.

Hypothesis 3:

A) Intrusive rumination will mediate the relationship between experiences of subtle sexism and work engagement.

B) Intrusive rumination will mediate the relationship between experiences of subtle sexism and turnover intentions.

C) Intrusive rumination will mediate the relationship between experiences of subtle sexism and advancement perceptions.

Hypothesis 4:

A) Attachment styles will moderate the relationship between experiences of subtle sexism and occupational self-efficacy.

B) Attachment styles will moderate the relationship between experiences of subtle sexism and intrusive rumination.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODS

Participants

A total of 199 participants were recruited for the present study. A power

level of .80 is the typical criterion to detect an effect in behavioral science

(Cohen, 1988). According to the research, a median sample size of 187 is

required to attain a desired power level of .80 (Fritz & MacKinnon, 2007). The

current study attempted to capture organizational level experiences at the

individual level. Specifically, the current study was designed to measure career

outcomes and the barriers surrounding advancement as a result of sexism.

Therefore, inclusion criteria were meant to restrict the sample to a germane

population for whom career matters. For this reason, the sample contained all

female participants with a professional background defined as professional

career-oriented women who were in phases of their careers where they would

have interest in employee development and growth. The mean age for the

sample was 37 years, with a range varying from 20 years to 64 years. The

objective of studying career-oriented women was to capture experiences of

women who were invested in their organization and career. Additionally,

participants were full time employees because this population was more likely to

be devoted and hold positions for which there are career possibilities compared

to part-time employees. Also, to ensure temporal stability, participants were required to have been with their current employer for at least 1 year. This allowed enough time for individuals to form meaningful perceptions of their organization that are consistent of who the organization is.

Procedures

Recruitment of the professional female participants was conducted via a convenient sample and a snowball sample of working women. Convenient sample recruitment of the participants was conducted via social media websites, such as Facebook, in addition, the survey was sent via email. Additionally, recruitment of working women was conducted through the online survey platform, Amazon Mechanical Turk. Once recruited, participants were sent a link that directed them to an online Qualtrics survey. Upon opening the link, participants encountered an informed consent and were screened for eligibility. Next, participants were presented with a series of statements regarding demographics, experiences with subtle sexism, individual characteristics, cognitive processes and career outcomes. They were assured that their participation was voluntary, and that any information obtained will not be disclosed. Anonymity was ensured by presenting results in an aggregate form which was not identifiable, and data was maintained in safe, password protected computer. Expected duration of participation was dependent on the participant, however, it should have taken approximately 25-40 minutes. The study did not involve risks beyond those

routinely encountered in daily life. Mturk participants received monetary gain in return for their participation.

Measures

Experiences of Subtle Sexism. This scale was developed based on Glick and Fisk's definition of ambivalent sexism which is defined as a multidimensional construct that is comprised of two main facets: hostile and benevolent sexism (1996). The subdimensions of the scale were intended to measure experiences of both hostile and benevolent sexism in the workplace. Subdimensions measuring benevolent sexism include protective paternalism, complementary gender differentiation and heterosexual intimacy. Subdimensions measuring hostile sexism include dominative paternalism, competitive gender differentiation and heterosexual hostility. This scale was comprised of 24 items and was scored using a 6-point Likert scale were 1 was "Never" and 6 was "Almost all of the time". The Cronbach's Alpha for this scale was .96.

Attachment Styles. Griffin and Bartholomew's (1994) Relationship Scales Questionnaire (RSQ) was used in this study to measure participants' adult attachment styles and the extent to which participants feel comfortable with intimacy and dependency, and how much they worry about rejection. This scale was comprised of items from both Hazan and Shaver's (1987) and Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) categorical measures, as well as three items from Collins and Read (1990). This scale was designed as a continuous measure of adult

31

attachment style which contained 30 items measuring four dimensions of attachment: secure, preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful. The scale was scored on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 is "Not at all like me" and 5 is "Very much like me". The RSQ asked participants to rate the extent to which each statement best describes their characteristic style in close relationships. For example, an item used to measure secure styles is, "I find it easy to get emotionally close to others". The RSQ was worded in terms of general orientations to close relationships, orientations to romantic relationships, or orientations to a specific adult, peer relationships (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). The Cronbach's Alpha for this scale was .79.

Occupational Self-Efficacy. Rigotti, Mohr, and Schyns' (2008) Short Version of the Occupational Self-Efficacy Scale was used in this study to measure the participants' belief in their ability to do their job. The scale consisted of 6-items ranging from 1 "Not at all true" and 6 "Completely true", and high values reflected high occupational self-efficacy. The scale asked participants to report perceived ability to complete a job task, for example, "I feel prepared for most of the demands in my job". Cronbach's Alpha for this scale was .85.

Intrusive Rumination. Cann et al.'s (2011), Event Related Rumination Inventory was used in this study to specifically measure the subdimension of intrusive rumination and not deliberate rumination. This subdimension measured participants' implicit thoughts about their experiences. The scale consisted of 10 items and was scored using a 4-point scale, where 0 equals "Not at all" and 3

equals "Often". For example, one item will be, "I thought about the event when I did not mean to". Cronbach's Alpha for intrusive rumination was .95.

Work Engagement. May, Gilson, and Harter's (2004), Engagement Scale was used in this study to identify participant's cognitive, emotional, and physical engagement with their current organization. This scale consisted of 13 items using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "Strongly disagree" and 5 "Strongly agree" (Olivier & Rothmann, 2007). An example of cognitive engagement is, "I am rarely distracted when performing my job". This scale was proven to be psychometrically reliable with alpha of .74.

Turnover Intentions. Colarelli's (1984) Employee Turnover Intention was used for this study to identify participants' willingness to find alternative employment. This was a 3-item scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A sample item is, "I frequently think of quitting my job". Reliability coefficient for this scale was .52.

Advancement Perceptions. Heilman, Block, and Lucas' (1992) Projected Career Progress Scale was used to measures participants' perception of career progress. This 2-item scale ranged from 1 (Completely) and 9 (Not at all). One example from the scale is, "How likely is it that I will move up on the organization". Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for this scale was .86.

CHAPTER THREE

RESULTS

Data Screening

Prior to testing study hypotheses, data were reviewed for violations of assumptions, errors, and missing cases. Results of evaluation of assumptions indicated that all assumptions were met. The assumption of independence was met, meaning participant responses were independent of each other. The residual scatterplots were homoscedastic for all variables. According to the normal P-Plots, the assumption of linearity was met for all variables. However, turnover intentions and perceptions of career progress were linear but not normal. Also, the assumption of collinearity was met after running a bivariate correlation and none of the correlations exceeded .9. In addition, subtle sexism was positively skewed and kurtotic with Z-scores exceeding the cutoff of +/- 3.3, $p <.001$. Occupational self-efficacy was also negatively skewed ($Z = -5.21$) and slightly kurtotic ($Z = 3.46$), refer to Table 1 for the raw scores.

Due to the skewness and kurtosis violations, the assumption of normality was not met. No transformations were made to adjust for skewness and kurtosis because a bootstrap analysis was conducted as a resampling technique. Also, sexism had two potential univariate outliers and occupational self-efficacy had one, with most extreme scores of $Z = 3.66$ and $Z = -4.33$ respectively. However, after analyzing the frequency table, we can see the scores are steadily

increasing by one and these were not considered true univariate outliers. With

the use of a *p* < .001 criterion for Mahalanobis distance and a critical value of

22.485, there were no multivariate outliers identified in the analysis. Lastly, a

missing value analysis was conducted test whether missing values were

systematically different from cases without missing values. No missing data was

found, and all complete cases were used in the analysis. For Bivariate

Correlations between the main scales and subscales, see Table. 2.

Table 1: *Descriptive Statistics*

Variable	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Sexism	2.27	0.97	1.44*	1.94*
Subtle Sexism	2.52	0.96	1.15*	1.26*
Attachment Styles	2.98	0.46	0.44	0.04
Secure Attachment	3.16	0.64	0.08	0.04
Preoccupied Attachment	2.66	0.90	0.23	-0.33
Dismissive Attachment	3.66	0.71	-0.39	0.03
Fearful Attachment	3.09	-1.03	-0.26	-0.85
Occupational Self-Efficacy	5.02	0.73	-0.90	1.19*
Intrusive Rumination	2.06	0.82	0.24	-0.99
Work Engagement	3.58	0.58	-0.33	0.11
Cognitive Engagement	3.30	0.77	-0.15	-0.36
Emotional Engagement	3.86	0.69	-0.36	-0.45
Physical Engagement	3.58	0.70	-0.15	-0.12
Turnover Intentions	2.29	1.02	0.52	-0.17
Career Progress	4.30	2.05	0.50	-0.50

Note: * Test Statistics significant at *$p < .05$

Table 2. Bivariate Correlations for Main Scales and Subscales

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Sexism	0.96														
2. Benevolent Sexism	.96**	0.91													
3. Attachment Styles	.50**	.47**	0.79												
4. Secure Attachment	-0.06	-0.05	-0.20**	0.41											
5. Preoccupied Attachment	.45**	.40**	.78**	-0.15*	0.56										
6. Dismissive Attachment	.20**	.20**	.48**	-0.33	.16*	0.65									
7. Fearful Attachment	.30**	.26**	.70**	-0.51	-.35**	.53**	0.82								
8. Occupational Self-Efficacy	-0.19**	.17*	-0.16*	-.18*	0.18*	0.06	-0.13	0.85							
9. Intrusive Rumination	.65**	.61**	.42**	0.17*	.41**	.21**	.31**	-0.23**	0.95						
10. Work Engagement	0.07	0.08	0.07	.14*	0.05	.15*	0	-.32**	0.06	0.74					
11. Cognitive Engagement	.20**	.20**	0.13	0.13	0.11	0.08	0.03	-.22**	.14*	.79**	0.56				
12. Emotional Engagement	0.01	0.04	0.06	.14*	0.04	0.12	0.002	-.26**	-0.02	.80**	.51**	0.46			
13. Physical Engagement	-0.04	-0.04	-0.01	0.08	-0.02	.15*	-0.04	-0.27**	0.02	-.82**	.41**	.49**	0.49		
14. Turnover Intentions	0.03	0.03	-0.01	0.17*	0.07	0.01	-0.02	-0.2*	.14*	-0.29**	0.31**	0.24**	-0.15*	0.52	
15. Career Progress	-0.11	-0.2**	-0.17*	-0.16*	0.15*	0.02	-0.02	-0.12	0.06	-0.21*	-0.19**	-0.17*	-0.16*	.17*	0.86

Note: Correlation is significant at
** $p < .01$ (2-tailed).

Model Fit

In order to test study hypotheses, a model of predicted relationships (Figure 1) was tested using Mplus Version 8.4. A path analysis based on 5,000 bootstrapped samples using Mplus tested whether there would be a main effect between experiences of subtle sexism and engagement, turnover intention and advancement perceptions. The model had a sample size of 199 and the data fit the model well. The comparative fit index of the model (CFI = .994) was greater than .95, indicating a good-fitting model (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Also, the root mean square error of approximation was less than .06 and this further indicated a good-fitting model relative to the model degrees of freedom, $RMSEA$ = .034, 90% CI [.000, .117]. In addition, the model explained 6% of occupational self-efficacy (R^2 = .06, p =.08) and 39% of intrusive rumination (R^2 = .39, p <.001). Moreover, the model explained 14% of work engagement (R^2 = .14, p = .01)., 7% of turnover intention (R^2 = .07, p = .03). and 12% of advancement perceptions (R^2 = .12, p = .01).

Hypothesis Testing

Partial support was found for Hypothesis 1. There was a significant relationship between subtle sexism and women's perceptions of career progress (H1C) (b = -.38, p < .001). No significant relationship was found, however, between subtle sexism and engagement (H1A) (b= .08, p = .26) nor between

subtle sexism and turnover intentions (H1B) (b= -.09, p = .27), see Figure 2 for path diagram.

Partial support was also found for Hypothesis 2 which stated self-efficacy would mediate the relationship between subtle sexism and the outcome variables. There was a significant direct effect between subtle sexism and self-efficacy (b= -.16, p = .04), self-efficacy and engagement (b= .33, p < .001), self-efficacy and turnover (b= -.16, p = .02), but not between efficacy and advancement perceptions (b= -.11, p = .10). Based on the indirect effects, results indicated that occupational self-efficacy served as a significant mediator in the relationship between experiences of subtle sexism and work engagement (H2A) (b= -.05, p = .04). No support was found indicating that self-efficacy served as a mediator between subtle sexism and turnover (H2B) (b= .03, p = .11) nor between sexism and perceptions of career progress (H2C) (b= .02, p = .19), please see Figure 2 for path diagram of direct and indirect effects.

Partial support was found for Hypothesis 3 and intrusive rumination did mediate the relationship between subtle sexism and some of the outcome variables. Based on the direct effects, there was a significant relationship between subtle sexism and intrusive rumination (b= .61, p < .001) and between rumination and advancement perceptions (b= .24, p =.01). No significant relationship was found, however, between rumination and work engagement (b= .10, p = .23) nor between rumination and turnover (b= .14, p = .14). Support was found for Hypothesis 3-C and rumination served as a significant mediator in the

relationship between subtle sexism and advancement perceptions, b= .15, p = .01. No support was found demonstrating rumination mediated the relationship between sexism and work engagement (H3A) (b= .06, p = .27) nor sexism and turnover (H3B) (b= .08, p = .15). See Figure 2 for the path diagram of direct and indirect effects.

Furthermore, no support was found for Hypothesis 4. Secure attachment was significantly related to self-efficacy (b= .17, p = .02) and rumination (b= -.13, p = .04). However, attachment styles did not moderate the relationship between experiences of subtle sexism and occupational self-efficacy(H4A), b= -.01, p = .92, nor did styles moderate the relationship between sexism and rumination (H4B) (b= .08, p = .08), please see Figure 2 for the full path diagram.

Exploratory Analysis

To further explore attachment styles as a moderating variable, an exploratory analysis was tested using SPSS v. 26. The purpose of this analysis was to identify if there was a meaningful difference between the presence or absence of a secure attachment that would alleviate negative effects between subtle sexism and self-efficacy or sexism and intrusive rumination. In order to compare individuals who identified as secure with individuals who identified in any one of the insecure attachment styles (preoccupied, dismissive or fearful), the attachment scale was broken down into each individual subscale, or attachment style, and mean scores were calculated for each attachment style.

The highest mean scores for each style were standardized and this was used to interpret whether the participant identified as secure or insecure. A new categorical variable was created to represent secure or insecure attachment and the moderator was then looked at dichotomously. Out of a total of 199 participants, 143 identified with one of the three insecure attachment styles and were coded as (0) and 56 individuals identified with a secure attachment, they were coded as (1).

A multiple regression was ran to test whether the interaction between insecure or secure attachment (IVS) and subtle sexism predicted self-efficacy. The overall model was not significant, Multiple R= .18, R²= .03, F(1, 195)= 1.01, p = .32 and 3% of the variance in self-efficacy was explained by the variables in the model. A significant but small effect of subtle sexism on self-efficacy was found t(195)= -2.43, b= -.17, p = .02 but no additive value was found by adding IVS to the model (IVS) t(195)= -.17, b= -.01, p = .86, nor the interaction between IVS and subtle sexism on self-efficacy t(195)= -1.01, b= -.08, p = .32.

Similarly, partial support was found in a model including intrusive rumination as the outcome variable. The overall model was not significant, Multiple R= .61, R²= .38, F(1, 195)= 2.13, p = .15 and 38% of the variance in rumination was explained by the variables in the model. A significant effect of subtle sexism on rumination was found t(195)= 10.65, b= .61, p < .001. However, the model did not significantly improve by adding IVS t(195)= -.57, b= -.03, p = .57 nor was there support found between the interaction of IVS and subtle

41

sexism on rumination $t(195)= 1.46$, $b= .09$, $p = .15$. Therefore, the presence or

absence of a secure attachment did not moderate the relationship between

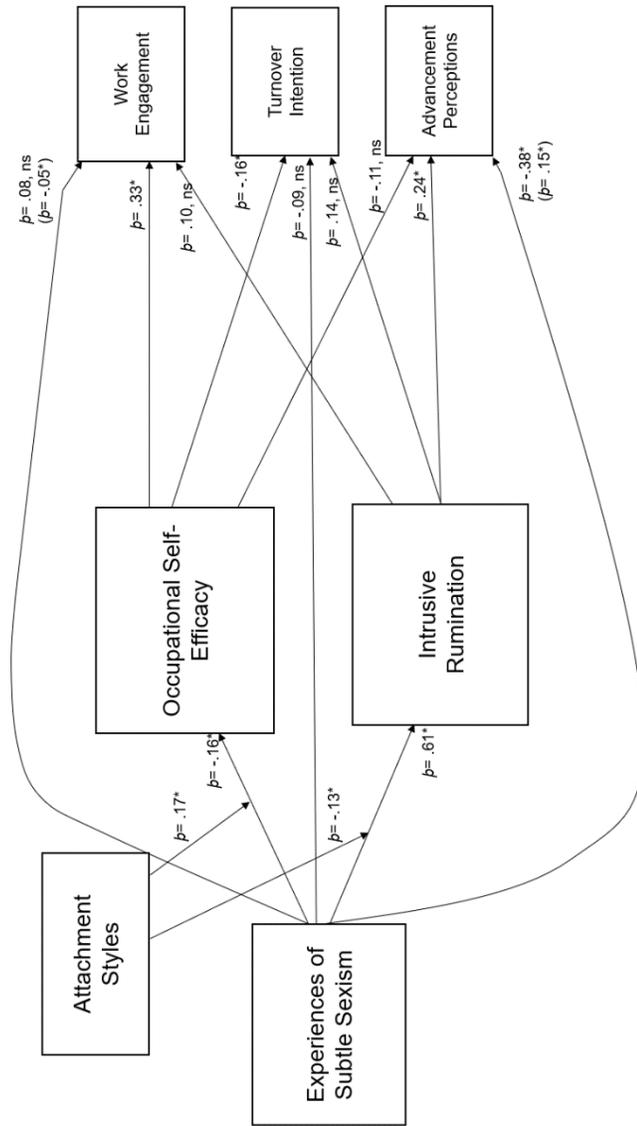sexism and self-efficacy or rumination, see Table 3 and 4.

Figure 2: Full Path Diagram.

Note: Indirect effects are shown in parentheses and non-significant indirect effects were eliminated from the figure for clarity. Test Statistics significant at *p<.05.

Table 3: Exploratory Analysis of Insecure Attachment versus Secure Attachment as a Moderator Between Subtle Sexism and Occupational Self-Efficacy

Results of Multiple Regression by Model of Predictors

Predictors	β	SE	b	t	Sig.
Model 1					
Experiences of Subtle Sexism	-0.13	0.05	-0.17	-2.43	0.02
Model 2					
Experiences of Subtle Sexism	-0.12	0.05	-0.17	-2.37	0.02
IVS	0.01	0.12	0.01	0.08	0.94
Model 3					
Experiences of Subtle Sexism	-0.10	0.06	-0.14	-1.77	0.08
IVS	-0.02	0.12	-0.01	-0.17	0.86
Interaction Between Subtle Sexism and IVS	-0.14	0.14	-0.08	-1.01	0.32

Note: Dependent Variable Occupational Self-Efficacy

Table 4: Exploratory Analysis of Insecure Attachment versus Secure Attachment as a Moderator Between Subtle Sexism and Intrusive Rumination

Results of Multiple Regression by Model of Predictors

Predictors	β	SE	b	t	Sig.
Model 1					
Experiences of Subtle Sexism	0.49	0.05	0.61	10.65	.00
Model 2					
Experiences of Subtle Sexism	0.47	0.05	0.6	10.33	.00
IVS	-0.10	0.10	-0.06	-0.96	0.34
Model 3					
Experiences of Subtle Sexism	0.46	0.05	0.56	8.92	.00
IVS	-0.06	0.11	-0.03	-0.57	0.57
Interaction Between Subtle Sexism and IVS	0.19	0.13	0.09	1.46	0.15

Note: Dependent Variable Intrusive Rumination

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION

Given the normative nature of subtle sexism, it can occur frequently and without condemnation, and therefore can be detrimental to women's career progression. The aim of this study was to investigate how experiences of subtle sexism related to women's career outcomes and how those relationships might be explained by cognitive processes around experiences of subtle sexism. We further examined, how individual attachment styles may moderate these relationships. In line with prior research, the present study results confirmed that experiences of subtle sexism predict women's advancement perceptions (Glick, 2013) and cognitive processes did mediate some of those relationships. Overall, partial support for the study hypotheses were found.

General Discussion

The results for Hypothesis 1 provided partial support in the idea that experiences of subtle sexism can have a harmful impact on women's career progress (Glick, 2013). Consistent with idea that subtle sexism can be just as detrimental as hostile sexism on occupational advancement (Jones et al., 2016), the data showed a negative relationship between sexism and career progress. Specifically, as more women reported experiencing subtle sexism at work, the less they reported advancing in their careers. This is consistent with prior

research which states that experiences of benevolent sexism can have demanding effects on cognitive resources which can ultimately denigrate work performance (Dardenne, et al., 2007). Also, stereotypes which depict leadership positions as masculine can impede a woman's chance of attaining advancement opportunities (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Therefore, previous research provides supporting evidence that women who experience subtle sexism are less likely to believe they can attain and remain in fruitful positions in the workplace. The negative relationship between subtle sexism and career progress found in this study contributes to existing research surrounding subtle sexism in the workplace in that it echoes the need to further promote diversification in the workplace and bridge the gap of inequality that continues to affect working women today. However, the results of the present study did not show that experiences of subtle sexism predicted work engagement or turnover intentions. Considering the findings of the present study and the overall resilience showcased, it might be that this perseverance allowed for participants to remain engaged and satisfied with their current work environment.

Prior research has shown that discriminatory and traumatic experiences can have nocent effects on psychological processes (Rigotti et al., 2008; Klonoff et al., 2000), therefore Hypothesis 2 proposed that occupational self-efficacy may serve as mediator in the relationship between experiences of subtle sexism and career outcomes. Partial support was found for Hypothesis 2 as occupational self-efficacy did serve as a significant intervening variable in the relationship

47

between sexism and work engagement. Specifically, work engagement was indirectly affected by sexism through the individual's belief in their ability to do their job. Women who experienced higher levels of subtle sexism also reported lower levels of occupational self-efficacy which implicitly impacted work engagement negatively. These findings are consistent with past research which has found that acts of discrimination can negatively impact a person's self-efficacy (Rigotti et al., 2008), and obscure messages about inherent incompetence can be internalized by the targets of subtle sexism (Eden, et al., 2010). The results of the present study are also consistent with minority stress theory which argues that oppressed social groups are more likely to experience stress and manifest stressors internally (Meyer, 2003), as the stress brought on by acts of sexism are perhaps internalized and leading to feelings of disengagement. The adverse effects subtle sexism can have on work engagement is an important finding because, as research has shown, engagement is a top priority for many organizations due to the influence engagement has on both organizational and employee outcomes (O'Connor & Crowley-Henry, 2019). Research has linked engagement to important employee goals such as work performance and engagement is ultimately regarded as central for the success of an organization (Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010). Therefore, organizations value engaged employees and with the present results showing that subtle sexism can impact women from being cognitively,

48

emotionally, or physically immersed in their work, it may help create larger scale change.

Partial support was found for Hypothesis 3 as women who reported encounters of sexism, also reported more rumination which indirectly influenced advancement perceptions. Although, it was expected that intrusive rumination would cause cognitive overload and impact perceptions of advancement negatively, the data confirmed the opposite. Perhaps those who ruminated more, saw more opportunities for advancement and asserted more resilience than those who ruminated less. Conceivably, through constant contemplation some of the women in this study were able to identify the detriment subtle sexism can have on their careers and despite the stress of the situation, persisted with progressing their career. Afterall, rumination has been found to be a useful technique in understanding and prevailing from traumatic situations (Cann et al., 2011). This is important for women invested in their careers because if purposefully ruminating on experiences with sexism can galvanize women to advance, it may be a helpful tool in alleviating some of the hinderances that women face when exposed to discrimination. Lastly, intrusive rumination did not serve as mediator between sexism and work engagement or turnover intentions.

No support was found for Hypothesis 4 as varying levels of secure attachment did not moderate the relationship between experiences of subtle sexism and self-efficacy, or sexism and rumination. Despite prior research stating that secure attachment styles report greater levels of coping resources compared

49

to insecurely attached individuals (Meyers & Vetere, 2002), the present study found no evidence that secure attachment mitigated the negative effects brought on by discrimination. Perhaps one explanation for lack of support in the results could be that the experiences themselves, being normative in nature, did not activate the individual's ABS. With no psychological threat identified, the securely attached women in this study were not able to use some of their coping advantages, such as their ability to develop relational trust (Boatwright et al., 2010). The inability to activate the ABS when experiencing subtle sexism is important to the research on attachment behaviors and styles in the workplace because research shows that secure behaviors can be advantageous during promotional opportunities (Yip et al., 2017), however, even participants with varying levels of secure attachment were not ultimately able to lessen some of the negative effects of sexism. Despite individual characteristics that are known to help individuals surpass adversity, something as problematic as subtle sexism, can still impede even the securest of individuals.

Despite lack of support for some of the relationships in the model, the current study was widely consistent with prior research and subtle sexism was hazardously related to women's professions (Jones et al., 2016). For instance, participants who encountered more subtle sexism reported lower levels of advancement perceptions and work engagement was indirectly impacted by subtle sexism. Moreover, although it was expected that rumination would cause cognitive overload, participants in this study exhibited resilience which indirectly

impacted their advancement perceptions. Overall, the findings build on prior research and amplify the need for the denunciation of subtle sexism.

Future Research Directions

Due to the current study finding partial evidence that self-efficacy mediated the relationship between sexism and career outcomes, future research should explore what other cognitive processes, such as a growth mindset, could possibly indirectly impact career opportunities for women. According to researchers, individuals are known to have ability mindsets that have been found to be related to performance and achievement (Dweck, 2006). Those who posses a growth mindset believe that their abilities can be developed and are ever changing (Robins & Pals, 2002). The current study found that women who reported higher levels of sexism also reported lower levels of efficacy, however there was no evidence of this impacting career progression. It would be interesting to see how a growth mindset can counterbalance between the negative effects of sexism and women's advancement perceptions. As those with a growth mindset are less likely to internalize messages of incompetence (Dweck, 2006), future studies should explore the explanatory factors this psychological process may have on the negative impacts of subtle sexism.

Also, the current study found no support that turnover was indirectly impacted by subtle sexism and future research should explore this avenue further. Perhaps lack of support was due to a measurement issue, after all, the

alpha for turnover was below the desired level and this may have impacted the results. Subsequent studies should continue to focus on how subtle sexism relates to turnover intentions as negative emotions brought on by experiences of subtle sexism can have major implications on justice perceptions (Molders et al., 2019) which can lead women to seek employment elsewhere. Lastly, intrusive rumination was found to be a significant mediator in the relationship between sexism and advancement perceptions and future research should explore this relationship further. It was initially predicted that the more a woman ruminated over the discrimination the more she'd experience cognitive burden, and this would deplete career progress. The fact that the current study found the opposite relationship, and intrusive rumination was positively correlated with perceptions of career progress is interesting. Intrusive rumination is considered unconscious and consisting of irrepressible thoughts (Cann et al., 2011) and can be beneficial to the research on benevolent sexism in many ways. For instance, one of the major hurdles of subtle sexism is identification (Jones et al., 2016) and even though impossible to tell if the participants identified the situation as sexist or not, they were still able to combat one of the negative effects of sexism. Something about the relentless reflection is related to optimism and motivation to advance despite experiences acts of discrimination. Additionally, this finding can further expand on minority stress theory as it relates to the workplace, because women are more likely than men to experience stress due to their social status (Meyer, 2003) and intrusive rumination can perhaps lead to resiliency in targets of

sexism. Exploration of the positive impact that intrusive rumination may have on sexism and discrimination should be investigated further.

Applied Implications

From an applied standpoint, the findings in this study help us to further understand the detriment and possible coping strategies to overcome experiences of subtle sexism. First, the results of this study are consistent with theory and point out a clear negative relationship between sexism and perceptions of career progress (Glick, 2013). It is important that women are not only aware of what subtle sexism is but also how it can impact their overall career projection down the line. Second, the present study showed that engagement is indirectly influenced by experiences of subtle sexism and therefore organizations should make leader awareness a priority so they can help prevent subtle sexism from happening and interfere when it does emerge. As research has shown, subtle sexism can be just as harmful, if not more, than hostile sexism (Jones et al., 2016) and leaders should be trained on how to detect subtle forms of discrimination and educate them on how these seemingly innocent gestures can create major obstacles, such as disengagement, not only for women in their work unit but for the organization. Third, results in this study reveal that participants who ruminated more reported higher advancement perceptions. By reflecting more on negative experiences women in this study were more resilient and motivated to advance in their careers, organizations

should consider using these coping tools to help empower and drive targets of subtle sexism. For instance, organizations can implement rumination trainings where targets of subtle sexism can reflect on their personal experiences in order to properly address the debilitating harm those situations may have caused. This sort of training may help targets assign proper fault and perhaps reduce the internalizations victims of subtle sexism often experience. Finally, appropriate avenues for reporting experiences of subtle sexism are scarce mainly because individuals struggle defining benevolent sexism (Jones et al., 2017). By educating and clearly defining subtle sexism, policies can be made like those adjacent with hostile sexism. Such policies can help to reprimand acts of subtle sexism and more importantly, help prevent subtle discrimination from occurring in the first place.

Limitations

This research study had several limitations that may have threatened the internal and external validity of the results. First, the reliability for turnover intentions was well below the desired alpha level. This is a limitation because it is unsure if the measure used in this study was truly grasping the construct of turnover and may have limited the ability to test relationships that included the variable. Second, the data was acquired during a nationwide health pandemic and while it is unclear how COVID-19 affects research, the pandemic is most likely to diminish external validity. For instance, the results found no significant

direct effect between experiences of subtle sexism and turnover intentions which could have been a direct impact of COVID-19. It is possible that the pandemic has caused job security to become scarce or non-existent and participants may have felt they had no other choice but to stay with their current employer despite experiencing discrimination. More importantly, the participants in this study may have inflated feelings of gratitude which ultimately blocked the ABS from activating and not allowing attachment behaviors, good or bad, come to fruition.

Lastly, the sample was obtained from an online survey platform, Mturk, that incentivized individuals by providing monetary gain in return for participation. Response times recorded varied with some completing the survey in less than five minutes. Although these responses were still utilized in the data, some have argued that Mturk workers will work as quickly as possible in order to increase their hourly income (Obal, 2014). This is a limitation because it may have increased careless responding which created a measurement issue. The current study did include attention checks in order to help prevent careless responding, however, participants in this study are considered expert survey takers who may have strategies to pass attention checks without reviewing the survey details aptly. The possible lack of meaning in the data points may have increased inaccuracy and heightened random error ultimately limiting the ability to find meaningful effects in the data.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study found that experiences of subtle sexism related negatively to women's advancement perceptions. Even though subtle sexism can be considered socially acceptable, the study found that these subjectively benign discriminatory experiences decreased work engagement as described by reduced levels of self-efficacy. In addition, advancement perceptions increased due to participants' intrusive rumination which can be an important coping mechanism for targets of subtle sexism. In sum, this study advances the research by further educating on the detriment that experiences of subtle sexism can have on women's careers and urges for larger scale change in order to make subtle sexism a thing of the past.

APPENDIX A

EXPERIENCES OF SUBTLE SEXISM SCALE

Below is a list of statements describing experiences that women sometimes go through in the workplace. Please read each statement and mark the circle that represents the frequency with which you have had these experiences in your workplace.

1 - If the event has NEVER happened to you
2 - If the event happened ONCE IN A WHILE (less than 10% of the time)
3 - If the event happened SOMETIMES (10-25% of the time)
4 - If the event happened A LOT (26-49% of the time)
5 - If the event happened MOST OF THE TIME (50-70% of the time)
6 - If the event happened ALMOST ALL OF THE TIME (more than 70% of the time)

Benevolent Sexism
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?

Hostile Sexism
Dominative Paternalism (DP)
13. How often has a coworker insisted the task was difficult and therefore needed to be completed by a man?
14. How often has a coworker taken over for you when a task became difficult?
15. How often have you been told a task is too difficult for a woman?
16. How often has a coworker insisted they take a job responsibility from you that you are capable of performing?
Heterosexual Hostility (HH)
17. How often have you gotten unwanted sexual comments or compliments at work?

18. How often have male coworkers made comments about your body?
19. How often has a male coworker inappropriately touched you during work?
20. How often have male coworkers used words to tell you how "sexy" you look?
    Competitive Gender Differentiation (CGD)
21. How often in your organization has it been endorsed that men should be in leadership positions?
22. How often is it made clear that only men should serve in leadership roles?
23. How often has a male coworker been given a promotion or raise over a qualified female coworker?
24. How often have you been told you do not have the necessary skills for the job because you are a woman?

APPENDIX B

RELATIONSHIP SCALES QUESTIONNAIRE

Please read each of the following statements and choose the statement that best describes your feelings about close relationships.

1- Not at all like me
2- Rarely like me
3- Somewhat like me
4- Mostly like me
5- Very much like me
1. I find it difficult to depend on other people.
2. It is very important to me to feel independent.
3. I find it easy to get emotionally close to others.
4. I want to merge completely with another person.
5. I worry that I will be hurt if I allow myself to become too close to others.
6. I am comfortable without close emotional relationships.
7. I am not sure that I can always depend on others to be there when I need them.
8. I want to be completely emotionally intimate with others.
9. I worry about being alone.
10. I am comfortable depending on other people.
11. I often worry that romantic partners don't really love me.
12. I find it difficult to trust others completely.
13. I worry about others getting too close to me.
14. I worry about others getting too close to me.
15. I am comfortable having other people depend on me.
16. I worry that others don't value me as much as I value them.
17.People are never there when you need them.
18. My desire to merge completely sometimes scares people away.
19. It is very important to me to feel self-sufficient.
20. I am nervous when anyone gets too close to me.
21. I often worry that romantic partners won't want to stay with me.
22. I prefer not to have other people depend on me.
23. I worry about being abandoned.
24. I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others.
25. I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like.
26. I prefer not to depend on others.
27. I know that others will be there when I need them.
28. I worry about having others not accept me.
29. Romantic partners often want to be closer than I feel comfortable being.
30. I find it relatively easy to get close to others.

Griffin, D., & Bartholomew, K. (1994). Models of the self and other: Fundamental dimensions underlying measure of adult attachment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 67*, 430-445.

APPENDIX C

EVENT RELATED RUMINATION SCALE

After experiences like the ones you just reported, people sometimes, but not always, find themselves having thoughts about their experiences even though they don't try to think about them. For the following items, indicate how often, it at all, you thought about the experiences weeks immediately after the event.

0- Not at all
1- Rarely
2- Sometimes
3- Often

1. I thought about the event when I did not mean to.
2. Thoughts about the event came to mind and I could not stop thinking about them.
3. Thoughts about the event distracted me or kept me from being able to concentrate.
4. I could not keep images or thoughts about the event from entering my mind.
5. Thoughts, memories, or images of the event came to mind even when I did not want them to.
6. Thoughts about the event caused me to relive my experience.
7. Reminders of the event brought back thoughts about my experience.
8. I found myself automatically thinking about what had happened.
9. Other things kept leading me to think about my experience.
10. I tried not to think about the event but could not keep the thoughts from my mind.

Cann, A., Calhoun, L. G., Tedeschi, R. G., Triplett, K. N., Vishnevsky, T., & Lindstrom, C. M. (2011). Assessing posttraumatic cognitive processes: The event related rumination inventory. *Anxiety, Stress, & Coping, 24*(2), 137-156.

APPENDIX D

OCCUPATIONAL SELF-EFFICACY SCALE

In the next section, please read each statement and rate your belief in your ability to do your job.

1- Not at all true
2- Rarely true
3- Occasionally true
4- Moderately true
5- Mostly true
6- Completely true

1. I can remain clam when facing difficulties in my job because I can rely on my abilities.
2. When I am confronted with a problem in my job, I can usually find several solutions.
3. Whatever comes my way in my job, I can usually handle it.
4. My past experiences in my job have prepared me well for my occupational future.
5. I meet the goals that I set for myself in my job.
6. I feel prepared for most of the demands in my job.

Rigotti, T., Schyns, B., & Mohr, G. (2008). A short version of the occupational self-efficacy scale: Structural and construct validity across five countries. *Journal of Career Assessment, 16*, 238-255.

APPENDIX E

TURNOVER INTENTION SCALE

In this next section, please rate the degree to which you agree with the statement.

1- Strongly disagree
2- Somewhat disagree
3- Neither agree nor disagree
4- Somewhat agree
5- Strongly agree

1. I frequently think of quitting my job.
2. I am planning to search for a new job during the next 12 months.
3. If I have my own way, I will be working for my current employer one year from now.

Colarelli, S. M. (1984). Methods of communication and mediating processes in realistic job previews. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 69*, 633-642.

APPENDIX F

COGNITIVE ENGAGEMENT SCALE

In this next section, please rate the degree to which you agree with the statement.

1- Strongly disagree
2- Somewhat disagree
3- Neither agree nor disagree
4- Somewhat agree
5- Strongly agree

1. Performing my job is so absorbing that I forget about everything else.
2. I often think about other things when performing my job.
3. I am rarely distracted when performing my job.
4. Time passes quickly when I perform my job.
5. I really put my heart into my job.
6. I get excited when I perform well on my job.
7. I often feel emotionally detached from my job.
8. My own feelings are affected by how well I perform my job.
9. I exert a lot of energy performing my job.
10. I stay until the job is done.
11. I avoid working overtime whenever possible.
12. I take work home to do.
13. I avoid working too hard.

May, D. R., Gilson, R. L., & Harter, L. M. (2004). The psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability and the engagement of the human spirit at work. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 77*(1), 11-37.

APPENDIX G

ADVANCEMENT PERCEPTIONS SCALE

Please answer the following questions based on your feelings towards advancement.
1- Completely
2- Very likely
3- Likely
4- Somewhat likely
5- Neither likely or unlikely
6- Somewhat unlikely
7- Unlikely
8- Very unlikely
9- Not at all

1. How likely do you think you will move up in your organization?
2. How quickly do you believe a promotion will occur?

Heilman, M. E., Block, C. J., & Lucas, J. A. (1992). Presumed incompetence? Stigmatization and affirmative action efforts. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 77*(4), 536-544.

APPENDIX H

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

mgillesp@csusb.edu   Fri, Apr 17,
                                                          11:21 AM
to me, MAgars

April 17, 2020

CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Administrative/Exempt Review Determination
Status: Determined Exempt
IRB-FY2020-299

and
Department of CSBS - Psychology
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear :

Your application to use human subjects, titled "The Relationship Between Subtle
Sexism and Women's Careers Explained by Cognitive Processes and Moderated
by Attachment Styles " has been reviewed and approved by the Chair of
the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of California State University, San
Bernardino has determined that your application meets the requirements for
exemption from IRB review Federal requirements under 45 CFR 46. As the
researcher under the exempt category you do not have to follow the
requirements under 45 CFR 46 which requires annual renewal and
documentation of written informed consent which are not required for the exempt
category. However, exempt status still requires you to attain consent from
participants before conducting your research as needed. Please ensure your
CITI Human Subjects Training is kept up-to-date and current throughout the
study.

Your IRB proposal (**FY2020-299**) is approved. You are permitted to collect
information from **[200]** participants for **[No Compensation]**from **[SONA/social
media]**. This approval is valid from **[4/17/2020]**.

Note: a modification will be required if there is a change in compensation and if flyers/announcements are used to recruit individuals via social media sites.

The CSUSB IRB has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional approvals which may be required.

Your responsibilities as the researcher/investigator include reporting to the IRB Committee the following three requirements highlighted below. Please note failure of the investigator to notify the IRB of the below requirements may result in disciplinary action.

- Submit a protocol modification (change) form if any changes (no matter how minor) are proposed in your study for review and approval by the IRB before implemented in your study to ensure the risk level to participants has not increased,
- If any unanticipated/adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research, and
- Submit a study closure through the Cayuse IRB submission system when your study has ended.
  The protocol modification, adverse/unanticipated event, and closure forms are located in the Cayuse IRB System. If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, the Research Compliance Officer. Mr. Michael Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at mgillesp@csusb.edu. Please include your application approval identification number (listed at the top) in all correspondence.

If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Dr. Jacob Jones, Assistant Professor of Psychology. Dr. Jones can be reached by email at Jacob.Jones@csusb.edu. Please include your application approval identification number (listed at the top) in all correspondence.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Donna Garcia

Donna Garcia, Ph.D., IRB Chair
CSUSB Institutional Review Board

DG/MG

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