

Sexism Online - Emotional Responses to Ambivalent Sexism on Instagram

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Social media has become more and more prevalent in the lives of especially younger generations (mpfs, 2020). Even though social media platforms as well as countries have certain regulations against a variety of harmful and discriminating content, sexism in social media contexts is not a rare occurrence (Felmlee et al., 2020). Considering the plethora of studies indicating a number of adverse effects of sexism online and offline (e.g., Adams et al., 2006; Fox et al., 2015) this is an important concern to be addressed. However, sexism can take many forms and is not always limited to hostile sexism that is easily recognizable, but can also occur in the form of benevolent sexism, including online contexts (Jha & Mamidi, 2017). This form of sexism can be perceived a lot more ambivalently and thus be significantly harder to identify; it may even be interpreted in a positive manner (Hopkins-Doyle et al., 2019). Studies however show that this form of sexism can be harmful as well (e.g., Dardenne et al., 2007; Viki & Abrams, 2002). Women are more often recipients of both forms of sexism than men and women can react with significant negative emotions to both hostile and benevolent sexism and may be more able to recognize both forms of sexism (Bosson et al., 2010). Given this, it is hardly surprising that research also finds that men and women react differently to hostile and benevolent sexism (Greenwood & Isbell, 2002). As social media has become such a relevant context for sexism to occur, the aim of this study is to investigate whether these findings apply to sexism in social media contexts. Since sexist attitudes can significantly influence reactions to sexism (e.g., Thomas & Esses, 2004), this study also investigates the influence benevolent and hostile sexist attitudes have on the reactions to sexist social media posts.

Following this, our main research questions are:

1. A) *How do people of different genders react emotionally to hostile and benevolent sexism in social media contexts?*
1. B) *Do hostile and benevolent sexist attitudes moderate these reactions?*

2. A) *How reliably do people of different genders recognize hostile and benevolent sexism in social media contexts?*
2. B) *Do hostile and benevolent sexist attitudes moderate how sexist the posts are perceived?*

497 participants (regular social media users, at least 18 years of age) were recruited for an online questionnaire and were randomly assigned to either a neutral, hostile sexist or benevolent sexist content group. Each group was shown five supposed Instagram posts with content corresponding to the assigned group. Emotional reactions to the posts were measured using the *Positive and Negative Affect Schedule* (PANAS, Watson et al., 1988) before and after the exposure to the social media posts. A visual analogue scale from “not at all sexist” to “very sexist” was presented with every post in order to measure to which extent the post was perceived as sexist.

Hostile and benevolent sexist attitudes were recorded using the *Ambivalent Sexism Inventory* (ASI, Glick & Fiske, 1996).

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