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Sexism

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Overview

Recent research has left little doubt that most adolescents in the USA experience sexist acts from peers and adults (American Association of University Women [AAUW] 2011; Leaper and Brown 2014). As subsequently described, these experiences can affect their self-concepts, motivation, adjustment, and achievement. This review is organized into the following sections: First, sexism is defined. Second, factors related to increases in sexism during adolescence are summarized. Third, the prevalence and impact of two main forms of sexism – sexual harassment and gender bias – are discussed. Finally, factors associated with adolescents' awareness of sexism and coping responses are considered.

What Is Sexism?

Sexism is a form of prejudice and discrimination based on a person's gender (see Bigler and Liben 2007, for a developmental model of prejudice). Prejudice refers to biased attitudes, whereas discrimination refers to biased actions. Thus, a person who holds sexist attitudes may manifest those prejudiced beliefs through discriminatory behaviors. For example, a boy who believes girls should not play sports (prejudice) may harass a girl who plays soccer (discrimination). As described below, sexism can take several forms.

Traditional and Modern Sexism. Swim and her colleagues (e.g., Swim et al. 1995, Swim and Cohen 1997) distinguished between traditional ("old-fashioned") and modern sexist attitudes. *Traditional sexism* refers to the endorsement of traditional gender roles and the differential

treatment of females and males. For example, a person who endorses traditional sexism might believe that girls should not be allowed to play sports because doing so is "unfeminine." Conversely, *modern sexism* refers to the professed view that sexism is no longer a problem that needs to be addressed in society. For example, a person who endorses modern sexism might believe that initiatives to bring more girls into sports are unnecessary because gender equality has already been achieved. Although traditional attitudes are not overtly endorsed in modern sexism, ongoing gender inequities are ignored and thereby perpetuated. Hence, modern sexism is viewed as a more covert and subtle form of prejudice compared to traditional sexism.

Researchers have found evidence of traditional sexism in samples of adolescents in the USA and other countries (de Lemus et al. 2010; Galambos et al. 1990; Gibbons et al. 1991; Signorella and Frieze 2008). Traditional attitudes tend to increase during adolescence and are more likely among boys than girls. Research on modern sexism has been limited primarily to undergraduates and other adult samples; however, one recent study measured modern sexism in a sample of adolescents in Spain (Garaigordobil and Aliri 2012). Findings indicated that boys were, on average, higher in modern sexism than were girls, which is a pattern that has also been obtained in adult samples (e.g., Swim et al. 1995).

Hostile and Benevolent Sexism. According to Glick and Fiske's (2001) ambivalent sexism framework, females' and males' interdependence in heterosexual and family relationships contributes to the combination of hostile and benevolent sexism. *Hostile sexism* refers to overt negative attitudes about girls and women who violate traditional gender norms. This might include negative views toward girls who exhibit masculine-stereotyped traits (e.g., assertiveness) or girls who excel in masculine-stereotyped activities (e.g., sports or math). *Benevolent sexism* encompasses paternalistic attitudes as well as the belief that males and females possess attributes that are fundamentally different, yet complementary. For example, benevolent sexism is reflected in the expectation that boys are supposed to open doors

for girls (but not the reverse) and the belief that girls are better than boys in providing emotional support.

Behaviors that align with benevolent sexism (e.g., chivalry) tend to be socially acceptable and may even be encouraged. Accordingly, many people do not view benevolent sexism as a problem even though they disapprove of hostile sexism. However, benevolent sexism perpetuates the belief that girls and women need protection and that they are ill equipped to engage in masculine-stereotyped practices. Therefore, benevolent sexism works in concert with hostile sexism to reinforce girls' and women's lower-status positions in society.

Glick and Hilt (2000) posited that benevolent sexism and hostile sexism emerge during adolescence. Although most research on hostile and benevolent sexism has focused on adults, increasing attention is being paid to these processes during adolescence. Some pertinent studies have been conducted in Spain (e.g., Carrera-Fernández et al. 2013; de Lemus et al. 2010; Ferragut 2014; Garaigordobil and Aliri 2012; Lameiras et al. 2001; Montañés et al. 2013; Silvan-Ferrero and Lopez 2007), the U.S. (Farkas and Leaper 2016; Phillips 2004), Brazil (DeSouza and Ribeiro 2005), and Sweden (Zakrisson et al. 2012). Their findings are generally consistent with Glick and Hilt's (2000) developmental proposals.

Factors Contributing to Increases in Sexism During Adolescence

From a developmental perspective, several factors contribute to sexism's increase in prevalence during the transition from childhood to adolescence. First, adolescents are beginning to contemplate more seriously the adult occupational and relationship roles that they will soon hold (Kroger 2003). Depending on their gender attitudes, this may lead them to value either conventional or egalitarian roles for women and men (Farkas and Leaper 2016; Galambos et al. 1985). Adolescents with traditional values may negatively evaluate others who violate gender-typed conventions for appearance, behavior, or achievement. Second,

physical and sexual maturation contributes to the increased salience of adolescents' appearance and the potential for sexual harassment (McMaster et al. 2002; Petersen and Hyde 2009). Finally, adolescence typically marks the beginning of sexual attraction and a corresponding emphasis on heterosexual relationships. Because heterosexual dating norms call for the male to exhibit behaviors consistent with benevolent sexism, young women's experiences with benevolent sexism often increase substantially during adolescence (de Lemus et al. 2010; Montañés et al. 2013).

Sexist Discrimination During Adolescence

Two main forms of sexist discrimination are reviewed below. One pervasive form of sexism is sexual harassment. Another common type of sexism is seen in gender-biased treatment in achievement contexts. The latter includes discrimination in academics and athletics.

Sexual Harassment. Sexual harassment during adolescence involves unwanted verbal or physical actions that are sexual in nature (AAUW 2011). Physical sexual harassment may occur through unwanted touching, sexual gestures, and sexual coercion. Verbal sexual harassment includes sexually demeaning comments, homophobic insults, and spreading sexual rumors. In addition, sexual harassment can be expressed electronically through Internet chat rooms, web postings, social media, and text messaging.

Many girls and boys in the USA report experiencing sexual harassment (e.g., AAUW 2011; Bucchianeri et al. 2013; Clear et al. 2014; Espelage and Holt 2012). Sexual harassment is also common in Europe (e.g., Timmerman 2005; Vega-Gea et al. 2016), Latin America (e.g., Merkin 2008), Asia (e.g., Wei and Chen 2012), and Africa (e.g., Austrian and Muthengi 2014). Even relatively gender-egalitarian countries such as Norway and Sweden have problems with sexual harassment (Ottesen Kennair and Bendixen 2012; Witkowska and Kjellberg 2005).

Adolescents experience sexual harassment from peers, teachers, employers, co-workers, and

strangers. However, peers are the most likely sources (AAUW 2011). According to the AAUW (2011) national survey of US adolescents in grades 7–12, 56% of girls and 40% of boys reported having experienced sexual harassment either in person or online from peers. However, grade level moderated these patterns. Among seventh graders, reported rates were 48% for girls as well as boys. Among twelfth graders, rates were 62% among girls and 39% among boys. Hence, the prevalence of sexual harassment increased with age among girls and slightly decreased among boys.

The AAUW (2011) survey also pointed to average gender differences in the types of sexual harassment experienced in person or via electronic media. Across ages, girls were more likely than boys to have experienced unwanted sexual comments and gestures in person (46% vs. 22%), unwanted touching (13% vs. 3%), unwanted sexual comments or pictures online (26% vs. 13%), unwelcome sexual rumors online (17% vs. 8%), and sexual intimidation or sexual coercion (13% vs. 2%). Girls and boys reported similar rates of being called lesbian or gay in pejorative ways in person (18% vs. 19%) or online (12% vs. 12%).

The AAUW survey also assessed students' perceptions of the attributes of students most likely to be sexually harassed. Students believed girls were more prone to being sexually harassed if they were more physically developed, were pretty, were not pretty or were not feminine, or were overweight. Boys were perceived as more likely to be sexually harassed if they were not athletic or not masculine, were overweight, or were good looking. These perceptions suggest that sexual harassment is used to sexually objectify others (who are viewed as sexually attractive) and to enforce gender conformity (in those viewed as not fitting stereotypical gender ideals) (see Murnen and Smolak 2000).

Dating partners are another common source of sexual harassment for many adolescents (Break The Cycle 2008; O'Leary et al. 2008). The prevalence of dating aggression vary on the basis of one's community and background characteristics. For example, one large, statewide survey found that 18.5% of high school students had

experienced unwanted sexual activity during the past year; however, the prevalence rate varied significantly according to adolescents' age, ethnic background, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation (Williams et al. 2014). The findings also indicated that boys were more likely than girls to perpetrate sexual aggression in their romantic relationships, which appears to be a common pattern (e.g., Swahn et al. 2008; Wolitzky-Taylor et al. 2008). This trend may be driven in part by hostile sexist attitudes that encourage boys and men to sexually objectify girls and women (Zurbriggen 2009).

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth are especially at risk for sexual harassment (Mitchell et al. 2014; Williams et al. 2005). The emphasis on heterosexual dating as the norm likely contributes to the high frequency of sexual harassment for LGBT youth (Poteat 2007). That is, LGBT youth may be the targets of sexual harassment because they do not adhere to widespread norms regarding sexuality and, further, may challenge other gender roles as well (e.g., appearance, interests, expressiveness). Sexual harassment puts gender nonconforming youth at a higher risk of experiencing psychosocial challenges such as depression, substance abuse, and reduced academic performance (e.g., Poteat and Espelage 2007).

Consequences of Sexual Harassment. Sexual harassment can negatively impact girls' and boys' subsequent adjustment. For example, sexual harassment predicts later increases in emotional distress, suicidal thoughts, substance abuse, and externalizing behaviors in both girls and boys as well as increases in negative body image and self-harm in girls (Chiodo et al. 2009; Goldstein et al. 2007). Sexual harassment also can lead to academic problems and disengagement from activities (AAUW 2011; Gruber and Fineran 2016; Poteat and Espelage 2007). Furthermore, girls who are sexually harassed within the context of a romantic relationship are at risk for lower self-esteem and dating violence (Chiodo et al. 2009; Goldstein et al. 2007). Finally, the negative impact of sexual harassment on adjustment appears to be compounded when students belong to more than one social group that is subject to discrimination,

such as being LGBT and a racial-ethnic minority (AAUW 2011; Mitchell et al. 2014).

Gender Bias in Academics and Athletics.

Some people believe that girls are not well suited to excel in particular domains simply because of their gender. This prejudice originates from stereotypes regarding girls' and boys' inherent capabilities. For example, some people believe boys are naturally better at science and math than are girls. Gender-biased beliefs about girls' abilities also may stem from traditional attitudes regarding gender roles. For example, people with more traditional gender-role attitudes may believe that rough sports are appropriate for boys but not girls (Heinze et al. 2014). When parents, teachers, or peers hold gender-biased expectations, they may treat girls and boys differently regarding their achievement in particular domains. These forms of discrimination create different opportunities for girls and boys; in turn, they foster gender inequalities in adult roles and status (see Leaper 2015a; Leaper and Brown 2014).

Girls' Experiences with Academic Sexism.

Although there has been a gender gap in achievement in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), differences have dramatically narrowed over the years as equal opportunities have increased (Halpern et al. 2007). For example, girls and boys now demonstrate comparable rates of achievement in high school math and life sciences; and the gap in physical sciences and computers has become smaller. Nonetheless, many people continue to hold the prejudiced belief that girls and women are not capable of performing well in STEM fields.

Several studies point to ways in which academic sexism has contributed to the gender gap in STEM achievement. This work indicates that many US girls experience sexist comments about their potential to succeed in STEM fields. For instance, Leaper and Brown (2008) found that about half of the adolescent girls in their sample had heard at least one disparaging comment about girls' abilities in math, science, or computers. Girls who heard these comments indicated that they typically originated from male peers – followed by female peers, teachers/coaches, and parents and other family members.

A more recent study of high school girls in the USA indicated similar patterns in high school girls' experiences of science- and math-related gender bias (Robnett 2016). Regularly experiencing gender bias in these subjects likely has negative implications such as reduced achievement motivation and self-concepts (Leaper et al. 2012; Robnett 2016).

Academic sexism from male and female peers is significant given that many heterosexual adolescent girls want to appear attractive to boys and to be accepted by other girls (see Leaper 2015b). In some peer group cultures, girls may view excelling in math and science as incompatible with popularity and attractiveness, which may detract from their interest in these subjects. Conversely, when girls belong to a peer group that supports math and science achievement, they may be more likely to maintain their achievement in these domains (e.g., Crosnoe et al. 2008; Robnett 2013; Robnett and Leaper 2013; Stake and Nickens 2005). However, boys may be more likely than girls to have friendship networks that are perceived as supportive of math and science (Robnett and Leaper 2013).

Teachers' sexist comments about girls' abilities are also problematic given that teachers can play a critical role in shaping students' interest, efficacy, and success. Research suggests that negative comments about girls' and women's capabilities in math, science, or computers may have detrimental effects on their performance in these domains (e.g., Flore and Wicherts 2015; Huguet and Regner 2007).

Many parents also hold gender-stereotyped expectations regarding their daughters' academic abilities and potential in math, science, and computers (Eccles et al. 2000; Tenenbaum and Leaper 2003). In their longitudinal research, Eccles and her colleagues (2000 and Simpkins et al. (2015) found that parents' attitudes and beliefs predicted later gender-related variations in their children's academic self-concepts and achievement. For instance, when parents held low expectations for their daughters, the girls increasingly lost confidence in their mathematics skills; also, these girls subsequently spent less time studying mathematics in high school. Thus, parents' expectations

may affect their daughters' motivation to succeed in particular domains such as math.

Girls' Experiences with Athletic Sexism. Athletics is another achievement domain in which many adolescent girls continue to experience sexism. Girls' participation in sports has changed over time and varies across cultures. In the USA, the passage of Title IX in 1972 had a significant impact on the number of girls and women involved with sports. Title IX prohibits gender discrimination in public education and mandates that males and females have equal opportunities to participate in athletics. Before Title IX passed, girls constituted only 7% of high school athletes; by 2011, this percentage had risen to 41% (National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education [NCWGE] 2012). However, there are still a number of high schools that are not in full compliance with Title IX, and it is not uncommon for males' athletic teams to receive more funding, better facilities, and more publicity than females' athletic teams (Messner et al. 2006; NCWGE 2012).

Despite increases in adolescent girls' participation in athletics, sexist attitudes persist. Some of these negative attitudes may have their basis in benevolent sexism (e.g., "Girls should be protected from the rough-and-tumble, competitive nature of sports"), but they can also be more overt and hostile in nature (e.g., "Girls are bad at basketball" or "You throw like a girl!"). In fact, overt sexism may be more prevalent in domains related to athletics than it is in other domains. In a survey of adolescent girls' experiences with sexism, Leaper and Brown (2008) found that over three-quarters of their participants reported hearing at least one sexist comment about their athletic abilities (versus approximately one-half who heard a sexist comment about academic abilities).

As seen with other forms of sexism, male peers play an especially prominent role in girls' experiences with athletic sexism (Leaper and Brown 2008). However, both boys and girls are complicit in establishing norms for heterosexual attractiveness and femininity that may undermine girls' participation in athletics (Carr 2007; Guillet et al. 2006; Schmalz and Kerstetter 2006; Slater

and Tiggemann 2011). Thus, many girls must overcome traditional gender stereotypes and homophobia if they pursue athletic participation into adolescence; however, these challenges are less pervasive than they were a few decades ago.

Parents can also play a role in girls' continued sport participation during adolescence (e.g., Atkins et al. 2013; Fredricks and Eccles 2002). Despite the advances in girls' sports over the decades, some parents may continue to believe that certain sports are too rough for their daughters (Heinze et al. 2014). Fredricks and Eccles (2002) found that parents' expectations can affect their children's subsequent self-concepts and motivation in sports. They observed that many parents were more likely to consider their sons than their daughters as competent at sports; however, when parents positively evaluated their daughters' athletic ability, girls were more likely to develop positive sports-related self-concepts and motivation in adolescence (controlling for their earlier athletic competence). Thus, parents' expectations may become self-fulfilling prophecies.

Consequences of Academic and Athletic Sexism for Boys. The foregoing review of academic and athletic sexism has focused on discrimination against girls. Although traditional gender roles generally benefit boys and men by conferring them with higher status and power, conforming to traditional masculinity norms can lead to costs for many boys (Levant 2005). For example, boys' notions of masculinity in some cultural contexts may include opposition to teacher authority and opposition to being a good student (Kiefer and Ryan 2008; Van Houtte 2004; Vantieghem and Van Houtte 2015). In these regards, sexism can negatively affect boys' academic achievement and opportunities.

Sexism in sports may negatively affect boys' psychosocial development. The traditional macho sports culture in many high schools can foster misogyny and homophobia (Messner 2007). Boys who do not adhere to these social norms can be subject to ridicule from coaches and teammates (Messner 2007; Schissel 2000). In addition, the acceptance of violence in the masculine sports culture may extend to sexual violence. For

instance, one study illustrated that tolerance for sexual violence was more likely among young men who had participated in high school sports than those who had not (Forbes et al. 2006).

Awareness of Sexism and Coping Responses

Given the potentially negative impact of sexism on adolescents' development, it behooves researchers to identify factors that may help them cope effectively with sexist events. Effective coping begins with identifying the source of the stressor. Accordingly, factors related to adolescents' awareness of sexism are reviewed first.

Perceiving Sexist Discrimination. As research with adults has highlighted, individuals do not necessarily recognize when discrimination is directed at them (Crosby 1984). Brown and Bigler (2005) identified a combination of cognitive-developmental, individual, and situational factors that influence children's awareness of sexism (as well as other forms of discrimination). The cognitive prerequisites for perceiving discrimination (e.g., abilities to make social comparisons, moral judgments about fairness and equity) are typically achieved by middle childhood. Therefore, it is mainly individual and social factors that affect adolescents' awareness of sexism. Some individual moderators that increase the likelihood of recognizing sexism include holding gender-egalitarian attitudes or being aware of feminism (Leaper and Brown 2008). Some examples of situational moderators that can aide sensitivity to gender discrimination include a perpetrator who is known to be prejudiced or the discrimination occurring in a situation where gender is salient (Brown and Bigler 2004).

Coping with Sexism. Research on stress and coping distinguishes between approach and avoidance coping strategies (Compas et al. 2001; Roth and Cohen 1986). Approach strategies are oriented toward addressing the threat (e.g., confronting, seeking social support); in contrast, avoidance strategies are oriented away from the threat (e.g., downplaying the event, avoiding the

perpetrator). In general, research indicates that approach coping helps individuals cope more effectively with stress. With regard to coping responses to sexism, the AAUW (2011) survey indicated that students' most common responses to sexual harassment reflected avoidance strategies: About half of girls and boys stated they ignored the incident and did nothing afterward. Approach strategies were less common; approximately one-third of girls and one-sixth of boys reported confronting the perpetrator or talking to a family member or a friend. Even fewer reported the incident to a school official (12% of girls, 5% of boys). In another US study (Leaper et al. 2013), adolescent girls' endorsement of approach responses to sexual harassment was positively related to perceived social support from peers and mothers as well as their self-identification as feminists.

Possible Interventions to Reduce Sexism and to Promote Effective Coping. Researchers have identified successful strategies for reducing gender-based prejudice in schools (see Bigler and Wright 2014; Leaper and Brown 2014). First, it is important to minimize gender labeling and gender stereotyping in classrooms and playgrounds (see Bigler and Liben 2007). Second, teachers can teach students about gender discrimination (see Bigler and Wright 2014). Third, increasing cross-gender contact in cooperative group activities can reduce prejudice (see Paluck and Green 2009). Fourth, intervention programs in schools can foster children's and adolescents' use of approach coping responses to sexist events (see Bigler and Wright 2014). Finally, interventions that target the school climate (e.g., classroom practices, peer cultures, and teacher attitudes) may help to reduce peer victimization (e.g., Rinehart and Espelage 2016).

Summary and Conclusions

Sexism includes holding prejudiced gender attitudes as well as gender-based discriminatory behaviors. Although most of the research on sexism has focused on adult samples, there has been

increasing attention during the last two decades to sexism among adolescents. This research indicates that many adolescents hold sexist attitudes. In addition, gender-based discrimination is common among adolescents in the forms of sexual harassment as well as gender-biased treatment in academics and athletics. Experiencing sexism can negatively affect adolescents' adjustment, relationships, and achievement. Researchers are beginning to address factors that might help adolescents to effectively cope with these obstacles.

Definitions and Key Concepts

Sexism	A form of prejudice and discrimination based on a person's gender
Traditional sexism	The endorsement of traditional gender roles and the differential treatment of females and males
Modern sexism	A covert form of sexism whereby it is professed that sexism is no longer a problem that needs to be addressed in society
Hostile sexism	Overt negative attitudes about girls or women who violate traditional gender norms
Benevolent sexism	Paternalistic attitudes that men should protect and cherish women as well as traditional beliefs that females possess particular qualities (e.g., nurturance) that complement males
Sexual harassment	Unwanted verbal or physical actions that are sexual in nature
Gender bias	Discrimination based on person's gender, included differential encouragement of girls and boys in particular academic subjects and athletics
Approach coping	Strategies oriented toward addressing the threat (e.g., confronting, seeking social support)
Avoidance coping	Strategies oriented away from the threat (e.g., downplaying the event, avoiding perpetrator)

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Sexual Abstinence

► Abstinence

Sexual Addiction

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Overview

Sexual addiction is a concept that has many synonyms and that remains controversial. At its core, it is a condition that involves compulsive behaviors related to seeking new sexual partners, having frequent sexual encounters, engaging in masturbation, visiting strip clubs, seeking cybersex, and using pornography. This essay examines how this condition relates to adolescents. It explores what differentiates normative adolescent sexual behavior from what is increasingly being viewed as addiction, including what some view as hypersexual disorder. The literature reveals that viewing adolescents' sexual behavior as addictive remains problematic, but it also suggests the importance of continued investigations given the developmental roots of sexual compulsions and their negative outcomes.