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Individual and Situational Factors Related to Young Women's Likelihood of Confronting Sexism in Their Everyday Lives

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Abstract Factors related to young women's reported likelihood of confronting sexism were investigated. Participants were 338 U.S. female undergraduates ($M=19$ years) attending a California university. They were asked to complete questionnaire measures and to write a personal narrative about an experience with sexism. Approximately half (46%) the women reported confronting the perpetrator. Individual factors (prior experience with sexism, feminist identification, collective action) and situational factors (familiarity and status of perpetrator, type of sexism) were tested as predictors in a logistic regression. Women were less likely to report confronting sexism if (1) they did not identify as feminists, (2) the perpetrator was unfamiliar or high-status/familiar (vs. familiar/equal-status), or (3) the type of sexism involved unwanted sexual attention (vs. sexist comments).

Keywords Coping behavior · Discrimination · Feminism · Human females · Narratives · Sexism · Sexual harassment

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Introduction

Young women frequently experience gender discrimination (Klonoff and Landrine 1995; Swim et al. 2001). Sexism can take various forms and can be enacted by different perpetrators in a variety of settings. Moreover, sexist discrimination can lead to increased stress, anxiety, and depression (Foster 2000; Landrine et al. 1995; Swim et al. 2001) and decreased achievement in a variety of domains (see Hyde and Kling 2001; Leaper and Friedman 2007). The impact of gender discrimination on women, however, depends partly on how women *respond* to sexist events. Based on Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) stress and coping model, engagement strategies that are oriented towards the stressor, such as confronting perpetrators of sexism, may buffer young women from the negative effects of discrimination. In the current study, we identified common perpetrators and types of sexism. We also examined factors that predict confrontation. We utilized a mixed-methods approach by examining close-ended surveys as well as coding women's narratives about experiences with sexism.

We built upon recent studies investigating the kinds of coping strategies that may buffer the negative impact of discrimination (e.g., Foster 2000; Scott and House 2005). When examining different forms of coping, researchers distinguish between engagement and disengagement strategies (Compas et al. 2001). Engagement strategies are those

oriented toward the stressor, whereas disengagement strategies are those oriented away from the stressor. Furthermore, engagement coping can be viewed as either primary control, attempting to change the situation; or secondary control, trying to adapt to the situation (Compas et al. 2001). Confrontation, or expressing dissatisfaction with discrimination to the person(s) responsible for the discrimination, is then viewed as a primary control coping strategy (Kaiser and Miller 2004; Miller and Kaiser 2001).

Because confronting discrimination has the potential of decreasing discriminatory behavior, it is important to understand what factors influence the likelihood of confrontation (Czopp and Monteith 2003; Czopp et al. 2006). Research suggests women's experiences with and responses to discrimination are complex. A recent theoretical model of perceptions of discrimination highlighted the importance of considering various individual and situational variables when examining whether discrimination is perceived (Brown and Bigler 2005). We draw on this model to suggest the importance of considering both individual factors (e.g., perceptions of past discrimination) and situational factors (e.g., characteristics of a particular sexist event) in understanding how young women experience and respond to sexist discrimination. First, we examined how three individual variables—past experiences of personal discrimination, feminist identification, and collective action—were related to women's likelihood of confronting gender discrimination. Furthermore, we examined how two situational characteristics of the sexist event—perpetrator and type of discrimination—were related to women's confrontational responses to sexism.

Although confronting the perpetrator of sexism has the potential benefit of ending the discrimination, it poses possible threats as well (Dodd et al. 2001; Shelton and Stewart 2004; Stangor et al. 2002; Swim and Hyers 1999). These threats include negative responses from others such as being perceived as less likeable; continued or increased harassment; losing a job; or receiving a poor grade. Because of these costs and benefits, deciding whether to confront discrimination is a decision that women do not take lightly (Swim and Hyers 1999; Woodzicka and LaFrance 2001).

Kaiser and Miller (2004) carried out one of the only studies examining women's likelihood of confronting sexism in their daily lives. Women's cognitive appraisals of sexist events (e.g., perceptions of interpersonal costs, feelings of anxiety, believing that confronting would reduce sexism) predicted their likelihood of confronting. In addition, Shelton and Stewart (2004) observed that women were less likely to confront in situations where potential costs were high (e.g., a job interview) than in situations where potential costs were low (e.g., a practice interview). These findings highlight the importance of considering which contexts are more risky for confronting discrimination. Women may judge that engage-

ment strategies such as confronting are advantageous in some contexts but not others.

One distinctive feature of our study was to assess women's personal narratives regarding a salient experience with sexism. Much of the prior research examining women's responses to sexism has been conducted either using experimental methods that subjected women to a discriminatory event in a laboratory or survey methods that asked women to report what they would do in a hypothetical situation (e.g., Swim and Hyers 1999; Woodzicka and LaFrance 2001). Few studies have examined women's personal accounts of how they responded to sexism in their everyday lives (see Gruber and Smith 1995; Kaiser and Miller 2004, for exceptions). Research that asks women to make assumptions about their likelihood of confrontational responses and research in which women respond to an act of discrimination in an experimental setting may not apply to women's actual experiences. Even in a laboratory setting, women anticipate they will confront sexism more than they actually do (Shelton and Stewart 2004; Swim and Hyers 1999; Woodzicka and LaFrance 2001). Because the costs of discrimination are higher in everyday settings than in the laboratory, we might expect women to confront discrimination even less in their own lives. On the other hand, women may believe it is not worth it to confront someone they only see once in a laboratory study, yet would confront someone they may see on a regular basis in their personal lives. In other words, what influences whether women confront discrimination in their everyday lives may be different than what influences hypothetical situations or a one-time event in a laboratory setting. Therefore, it is important to ask women about their own experiences confronting discrimination.

To focus on young women's real-life experiences with sexism, we employed a narrative approach. By asking the participants to recount a salient instance of sexism, we allowed young women to identify sexist discrimination as they experienced it rather than relying on a limited number of a priori definitions. Asking women to narrate an experience of sexism provided women a sense of agency in describing and making sense of their experiences.

Individual Influences on Women's Responses to Sexism

Previous research has examined some of the individual and situational factors that may influence whether women confront sexist discrimination (e.g. Adams-Roy and Barling 1998; Kaiser and Miller 2004; Shelton and Stewart 2004). We built upon this work by considering three individual factors: prior experiences with sexism, feminist identification, and involvement in collective action. After reviewing each of these, we will also address the situational variables that we investigated.

Women's prior experiences with sexism may influence whether they choose to confront the perpetrator. To our knowledge, previous research has not examined this relation. Women who report more personal discrimination may be more likely to confront the perpetrator because repeated experiences may make them less tolerant and/or more skilled at confrontation. Conversely, women who have perceived few past experiences with discrimination may have little practice confronting the perpetrator; not knowing what to expect, they may be more concerned about the possible consequences. Foster (2000) found that women who reported more past experiences with gender discrimination were more likely to use social support coping (an engagement strategy) and were less likely to use avoidance coping (a disengagement strategy). Thus, we hypothesized that women would be more likely to confront sexism (an engagement strategy) if they have had more experiences with sexism.

We also examined whether or not women who considered themselves feminists would be more likely to confront discrimination than those who did not. Prior research indicates that women who hold egalitarian attitudes or show an awareness of sexism do not necessarily identify as feminists (see Williams and Wittig 1997; Zucker 2004). Self-identification as a feminist likely suggests a deeper commitment to overcoming sexism (e.g., Liss et al. 2004; McCabe 2005; Zucker 2004). Therefore, we expected feminist self-identification would be positively related to confronting discrimination.

A third individual factor that we considered is women's past involvement in collective action. Collective action refers to efforts aimed at enhancing group status. In the present investigation, we examined women's reported commitment to actions aimed at improving women's status (i.e., feminist activism). Commitment to feminist collective action is correlated with prior experiences with sexism (Foster 2000) and reflects advanced feminist identity development (see Downing and Roush 1985; Fischer et al. 2000). In addition, research has found that women with an activist orientation are more likely to publicly confront sexist remarks (Swim and Hyers 1999). Therefore, we expected a positive relationship between collective action and women's confrontational responses. For example, confronting perpetrators may propel women into organizing around issues of sexism. These activities also may lead women to feel more empowered to confront discrimination in their own lives. Thus, we hypothesized that women who reported more past involvement in collective action would be more likely to report confronting sexism in their personal narrative.

Situational Influences on Women's Responses to Sexism

In addition to individual factors, we considered situational factors as possible influences on women's likelihood of confronting responses. Some women may not confront under threatening or unpredictable circumstances despite either having previously experienced sexism, identifying as feminists, or having participated in collective action. In other words, there may be some situations in which confronting is determined more by situational factors rather than women's beliefs or previous experiences. We expected situational factors would predict confronting after controlling for individual factors.

The perpetrators of sexism can include a variety of people—such as teachers, peers, parents, bosses, and strangers—who vary in familiarity and status to the victim (Fineran 2002; Leaper and Brown 2008; Swim et al. 2001). Familiarity is whether the perpetrator was a stranger or known to the woman, whereas status refers to whether the perpetrator was someone higher in status/power (e.g., boss, teacher, parent) or relatively equal in status (e.g., friend, classmate, co-worker) to the woman. In our study, we compared women's reported responses to familiar/equal-status, familiar/higher-status, and unfamiliar perpetrators. Research indicates that concerns about self-presentation are generally greater in unfamiliar situations such as interactions with strangers (Deaux and Major 1987). Women may feel that they can predict how familiar people will react, but may be uncertain and afraid about strangers' reactions. In addition, interactions with strangers typically occur in public settings that may lead women to feel especially hesitant to confront. Therefore, we predicted that participants would be less likely to report confronting unfamiliar perpetrators than they would familiar/equal-status perpetrators.

Women may also be reluctant to confront familiar/high-status perpetrators. Gruber and Smith (1995) conducted a relevant study in which they asked women to describe an incident of workplace sexual harassment that upset them the most, as well as how they dealt with it. Women were less likely to confront supervisors than coworkers or clients/customers. When the perpetrator is someone high in status, confronting a sexist act may be especially risky because of the perpetrator's power. Therefore, we expected that women would be less likely to confront familiar/high-status perpetrators than to confront familiar/equal-status perpetrators.

Finally, the type of sexism may also influence women's decision to confront perpetrators. Types of sexism include unfair treatment (e.g., gender bias in school), sexist statements (e.g., degrading jokes about women), or unwanted sexual attention (Klonoff and Landrine 1995; Swim et al. 2001). Although we assume that confronting any form of sexism is difficult for most women, it may be relatively easier to confront sexual comments and jokes than the other forms. Confronting unfair treatment may pose risks because this form of sexism likely occurs with powerful figures such as teachers. Similarly, unwanted

sexual attention often may be perceived as frightening because it can involve violence or the threat of violence. Sexual harassment and assault are real threats for college women (Gross et al. 2006). Thus, in situations involving unfair treatment and unwanted sexual attention, women may choose to escape these situations rather than confront the perpetrator. We therefore hypothesized that sexist comments or jokes would be more commonly confronted than unwanted sexual attention or unfair treatment. To our knowledge, no study has tested whether women's confrontational responses to sexism vary depending on the type of discrimination.

The Current Study

In summary, our study investigated U.S. undergraduate women's reported experiences with sexism in their everyday lives. In addition, we sought to identify individual and situational factors that promote or inhibit women confronting discrimination in their own lives. The current study took a mixed-method approach to understanding sexist discrimination. We focused on young women's narratives of a personal sexist event in an attempt to better understand how women are experiencing sexism. This is a departure from prior studies investigating women's experiences with sexism that have either relied solely on close-ended questionnaires or conducted laboratory experiments (e.g., Klonoff and Landrine 1995; Swim and Hyers 1999). While these research methods have their own merits, a narrative approach provides a closer look at how women describe their own experiences of and responses to sexism without applying a priori definitions of what constitutes an experience with sexism. From women's narratives, we coded the situational features of the sexist event and whether they confronted the perpetrator. In addition, we employed questionnaire measures to assess individual measures, including women's frequency of past gender discrimination, feminist identification, and commitment to collective action.

Our study had two aims. Our first goal was to describe the characteristics of women's reported experiences with sexist discrimination. The women's narratives were coded to identify features of the perpetrators as well as the types of sexism. Our second goal was to test two sets of factors as predictors of confronting sexism. First, we hypothesized that the following individual factors would be positively related to women's likelihood of confronting: previous experiences with sexist discrimination, feminist self-identification, and participation in collective action. Second, after controlling for the individual factors, we hypothesized that the following situational factors would increase the likelihood of confronting: the perpetrator was familiar/equal-status (vs. unfamiliar or familiar/higher-status) or the

type of sexism involved sexist comments or jokes (vs. unfair treatment or unwanted sexual attention). To test these hypotheses, we conducted a logistic regression with the individual predictors in the first step and the situational predictors in the second step.

Method

Participants

The sample included 338 women ages 18 to 23 years ($M=$ 19.3 years, $SD=1.38$). (As explained later, only 309 women provided narratives that could be used in the present study.) The participants reflected a range of ethnic backgrounds, including 61% White European American, 14% Asian, 12% Latino, 1% African American, 1% Middle Eastern, and 10% mixed ethnicity; two participants did not report their ethnicity. In terms of self-reported socioeconomic backgrounds, 41% were from upper-middle or upper income families, 37% were from middle income families, and 22% were from families characterized as either low income, working poor, or on welfare. The sample was predominantly heterosexual (83%) with others self-identifying as either bisexual (10%), lesbian (6%), or other (1%).

The majority of women (95%) were recruited through undergraduate psychology classes at a public California university to partially satisfy a course requirement. Students received course credit for their participation. In addition, participants were encouraged to alert other women to the research opportunity; 5% of participants were recruited in this way. There was one measure on which the two sets of participants differed. Those recruited from psychology classes reported engaging in proportionally less collective action ($M=.53$, $SD=.24$) than did other participants ($M=.31$, $SD=.19$), $t(307)=-5.77$, $p<.01$.

Procedure

The study was described as a survey aimed at assessing young women's attitudes, opinions, and experiences. Participants completed a survey including demographic information and questionnaire measures of past experiences of gender discrimination, coping strategies, and participation in collective action. They also responded to an open-ended question concerning whether they identified as feminist. In order to assess women's personal experiences and responses to sexism in their everyday life in more detail, participants were asked to respond to several questions about a personal experience with sexism. Each of these sections is described more fully below. Participants were debriefed after completing the survey.

Survey Measures

Prior Experiences with Sexism

Participants' prior experience with sexism was assessed with the Schedule of Sexist Events (Klonoff and Landrine 1995). Respondents were asked to indicate how often they have experienced different forms of sexism within the last 12 months using a 6-point rating scale (1=*Never during the past year* to 6=*Almost every week*). The scale consists of 20 items in four areas: sexism in distant relationships, sexism in close relationships, sexist discrimination in the workplace, and sexist degradation. The mean rating across all 20 items was used as an index of personal experiences with sexism score. The scale had good internal reliability (α=.90).

Feminist Self-Identification

At the end of the survey, respondents were asked to respond to the question, "Do you consider yourself a feminist?" (Four participants did not provide an answer to the question.) Open-ended responses were coded into one of three categories (*No*, *Ambivalent*, and *Yes*) and acceptable inter-rater reliability was achieved (κ=.88). We created a separate coding category for ambivalent responses (e.g., "not exactly," "not really," "somewhat," "in some ways") in case they responded differently from those who either did or did not identify as feminist.

Collective Action

Women's participation in collective action was assessed using The Measure of Collective Action (Foster and Matheson 1995). This scale includes 25 types of collective action such as "correcting self and others' use of sexist language," "volunteering for women's organizations," and "participating in protests regarding women's issues." For each item, respondents were asked if they had previously participated in the activity. The total number of items checked was converted to a proportion score (out of 25). The scale had high internal consistency (α=.88).

Personal Narrative Regarding an Experience with Sexism

In a series of open-ended questions, participants were asked to describe one personal experience with sexism in as much detail as possible, including who was involved and where it took place. If they had not experienced a sexist event, they could indicate this and skip the associated questions about the experience. Almost all (*n*=320 or 91%) of the participants provided a usable written description of a personal experience with sexism. Of the 18 cases that were not included, eight left the question blank, five reported never having experienced sexism, three reported not being able to think of any personal experiences of sexism, and two were vague or otherwise uncodeable. Following their description of the sexist event, they were also asked whether they confronted the person(s) responsible for the sexist event. There were 11 participants who did not clearly indicate whether or not they confronted the perpetrator. Hence, the later analyses testing for predictors of confronting were based on 309 participants.

Coding Narratives of Sexist Experiences

Each narrative was coded for perpetrator and type of discrimination. Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) was used to code the narratives. All responses were reviewed multiple times by the first author and the specific coding categories were developed inductively. Once the categories were established, coding was performed by the first author and a female research assistant. In order to establish reliability, 107 narratives (33%) were coded by both the first author and a female research assistant. The remaining narratives were coded by the research assistant. An acceptable reliability was achieved for each coding category. Disagreements were resolved by consensus. Kappa (κ) coefficients for intercoder reliability appear in parentheses next to each factor's name.

Perpetrator (κ=.94)

The perpetrator's gender was coded as male, female, or both (κ=.96). The perpetrator of the sexist event described was further coded into one of 15 categories (see Table 1). If there was more than one person involved and they did not fall into the same category, the person who took the primary role was coded. To reduce the number of categories, familiarity and status were created as two superordinate variables. For *familiarity*, unfamiliar perpetrators (strangers and people in service professions) were contrasted with familiar perpetrators (parents, other family member, professor/teacher, counselor, teaching assistant, coach, peer, boss, co-worker, friend, and romantic partner). People in helping professions were excluded when testing familiarity because they conceivably could be familiar (e.g., a family doctor) or a stranger (e.g., a salesperson). For *status*, a distinction was made between equal-status perpetrators (sibling, peer, co-worker, friend, and romantic partner) and higher-status perpetrators (parent, professor/teacher, teaching assistant, counselor, coach, and boss). Three categories were excluded because of the ambiguity of their status relative to the individual (other family member, stranger and service/helping professional).

Table 1 Reported sources of sexism.

Perpetrator's relationship	N	%
Stranger	61	19.7%
Peer	58	18.8%
Boss	34	11.0%
Friend	33	10.7%
Teacher	25	8.0%
Parent	22	7.1%
Co-Worker	21	6.8%
Helping/Service employee	18	5.8%
Boyfriend	11	3.6%
Other family	10	3.2%
Other school personnel	7	2.2%
Sibling	5	1.6%
Other relationship	4	1.3%
Total	309	100%

Eleven participants referred to ambiguous perpetrators that could not be coded. Teacher includes teacher/professor and teaching assistant. Other school personnel includes coach and counselor

Type of Discrimination (κ=.74)

The type of discrimination was coded into one of three categories: unwanted sexual attention, unfair treatment, or sexist jokes/comments. *Unwanted sexual attention* included verbal and physical sexual harassment. Examples included sexual comments or teasing; being stared at or receiving cat calls; obscene sexual gestures; unwanted physical contact; rape or attempted rape; and other threats regarding sexual behavior. The following example written by a 21-year-old, mixed-ethnic woman exemplifies this theme:

> "A lot of the time I'll walk downtown alone and I get catcalls from men. Some of them dare to grab or touch me, but not very often."

Narratives were coded as *unfair treatment* if they described an experience in which the participant was treated unfairly because she was a woman. This category included general unfair treatment (e.g., excluded from or discouraged in an activity) and being treated in a paternalistic way. The following narrative from an 18-year-old, White European American woman highlights an experience of unfair treatment in the workplace:

> When I was working at a clothing store as a sales associate, I asked one of my co-workers to give me a handful of clothes to carry to put back on the racks because I was too short to reach them. He took a handful but then decided there was no way I could carry it all because I was a girl and was too weak and small.

The third type of discrimination was *sexist statements*, which referred to comments based on negative gender stereotypes or sexist beliefs. Examples included degrading jokes about women or statements about women not being capable of doing certain activities. The following is an example of prejudiced comments from a 21-year old, White European American woman: "I had a professor of sociology at the junior college I attended last semester that would constantly make sexist remarks and jokes in class. None of these remarks were aimed directly at me, but they were very discouraging."

Confronting Sexism (κ=.91)

Participants' narratives were classified dichotomously (yes or no) depending on whether or not they reported confronting the perpetrator. There were 309 women who provided sufficient detail in their responses to code for confronting. Eleven responses for those who reported a sexist experience were left blank or were uncodeable, and therefore could not be included in the analyses.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Our first research goal was aimed at identifying the characteristics of young women's experiences with sexism. With regards to the gender of the perpetrator or source of sexist discrimination, 80% were male, 4% were female, 6% were both male and female (usually mother and father), and 10% were indeterminate. The most commonly reported perpetrators were strangers, peers, friends, and bosses (see Table 1 for details). Although strangers were the most common single group of perpetrators, overall most of the perpetrators (70%) were familiar to the women. Also, among those who were familiar, most were equal-status (59%). When different types of discrimination were tallied, unwanted sexual attention (38%) and unfair treatment (37%) were most common, followed by sexist comments (25%).

The second aim of our study was to test situational and individual predictors of women's reported confronting of sexism. Descriptive statistics for all of the predictor variables are presented in Table 2. Before testing the predictor variables, we conducted preliminary analyses to examine the extent that our hypothesized predictors might be associated with one another. First, we examined the associations between the situational aspects of sexism. The type of discrimination was significantly related to the perpetrator's familiarity, χ^2 (2, $N=$ 226)$=$ 44.86, $p<.001$, $\phi=.39$; and status, χ^2 (2, $N=128$)$=$ 42.62, $p<.001$, $\phi=.44$. Almost all (87%) of unfair treatment and almost all (90%) of sexist comments/jokes were

Table 2 Frequencies for categorical variables and means and standard deviations for continuous variables.

	M	SD	%
Prior experiences with sexism	2.08	.64	
Collective action	.33	.20	
Feminist identification			
No			28%
Yes			47%
Ambivalent			25%
Familiarity & status of perpetrator			
Familiar/Equal-Status			44%
Familiar/Higher-status			30%
Unfamiliar			26%
Type of discrimination			
Unfair treatment			37%
Unwanted sexual attention			38%
Sexist comments			25%

Prior experiences with sexism: scale ranged from 1 (*never in the past year*) to 6 (*almost every week*). Collective action: Proportion of 25 activist behaviors reported

perpetrated by familiar persons. In contrast, approximately half (54%) of unwanted sexual attention came from familiar persons. Most of unwanted sexual attention (73%) and sexist comments (83%) were perpetrated by equal-status individuals. Conversely, the majority of unfair treatment (66%) came from higher-status persons.

Next, we assessed possible associations among the three individual factors that we later tested as predictors of confronting. Feminist identification was a categorical variable (yes, ambivalent, no), whereas prior experiences with sexism and involvement in collective action were continuous variables. The latter two measures were positively correlated ($r=.30$, $p<.001$). One-way ANOVAs were performed to test if there were differences based on feminist identification in either experiences with sexism or collective action. Feminist identification was significantly related to past experiences of sexism, $F(1, 329)=8.74$, $p=.001$, $\eta^2=.05$, and collective action, $F(1, 331)=42.09$, $p<.001$, $\eta^2=.20$. Follow-up Tukey comparison tests indicated a significant difference in reported sexism between women who identified as feminists ($M=2.23$, $SD=.70$) and women who did not identify as feminists ($M=1.88$, $SD=.55$). Women who were unsure ($M=2.06$, $SD=.55$) did not significantly differ from the other two groups. Comparison tests also revealed self-reported collective action was significantly greater among women who identified as feminists ($M=.43$, $SD=.21$) than either women who did not identify as feminists ($M=.22$, $SD=.15$) or women who were unsure ($M=.28$, $SD=.15$); also, women who were unsure reported significantly more collective action than did women who did not identify as feminists.

Finally, we performed exploratory analyses to test ethnicity and social class as predictors of confronting sexism. Ethnic-minority participants ($n=118$) were compared with those who were European-American ($n=189$). A chi-square analysis found no difference between European-American and ethnic-minority women in confronting sexism, χ^2 (1, $N=307$)$= .97$, *n.s.* In addition, we tested to determine whether social class was related to confronting sexism. We compared upper, middle, and lower income and found no significant differences in regards to confronting sexism, χ^2 (2, $N=309$)$= 1.55$, *n.s.* Due to the absence of any significant associations, ethnicity and social class were not included in subsequent tests.

Predicting Women's Likelihood of Confronting Sexism

Overall, 46% of the participants reported confronting the perpetrator of sexism. We conducted a logistic regression to test our hypotheses that individual and situational factors would predict women's reported likelihood of confronting sexism. Logistic regression was used because our confronting outcome measure was dichotomous.

First, we tested the hypothesis that individual factors would predict women's confronting. In the first block of the logistic regression, the following variables were entered: prior experiences with sexism, collective action, and feminist-identification status (1=no, 0=yes/ambivalent). In addition, we hypothesized that situational factors would prove significant predictors after controlling for individual factors. Accordingly, the following situational variables were entered in the second block of the logistic regression: perpetrator status (1=familiar/higher-status, 0=familiar/equal-status), perpetrator familiarity (1=unfamiliar, 0=familiar/equal-status), unwanted sexual attention (1=unwanted sexual attention, 0=sexist comments), and unfair treatment (1=unfair treatment, 0=sexist comments).

When the individual predictors were entered into the first block, the model was significant, Wald $\chi^2=12.43$, $p=.006$. Furthermore, entering the situational variables in the second block significantly added to the model, Wald $\chi^2=29.50$, $p<.001$. Four factors were significant in the final model, Wald $\chi^2=41.92$, $p<.001$ (see Table 3). In support of our first hypotheses, feminist identification was a significant individual predictor of confronting sexism. However, collective action only appeared as a nonsignificant trend ($p<.10$); also, prior experiences with sexism was not associated with confronting. Consistent with our second hypotheses, perpetrator status and type of sexism are situational factors that significantly added to the model. Specifically, women were less likely to have confronted familiar/higher-status than familiar/equal-status perpetrators, and were less likely to have confronted unfamiliar than familiar/equal-status perpetrators. Furthermore, wom-

Table 3 Logistic regression analyses for confronting sexism.

	B	SE	Wald χ²	Odds ratio
Block 1: individual factors			12.43**	
Prior experiences with sexism	−.16	.21	.58	.85
Collective action	1.17	.68	2.95+	3.23
Feminist identification	−.72	.31	5.48*	.49
Block 2: individual and situational factors			41.92***	
Prior experiences with sexism	−.14	.22	.37	.87
Collective action	1.37	.73	3.53+	3.92
Feminist identification	−.72	.32	5.00*	.49
Familiar/Higher-status perpetrators	−.79	.34	5.58*	.45
Unfamiliar perpetrators	−1.09	.35	9.79**	.34
Unfair treatment	−.37	.37	1.03	.69
Unwanted sexual attention	−1.03	.36	8.44**	.36

N=273. Prior experiences with sexism: scale ranged from 1 (*never in the past year*) to 6 (*almost every week*). Collective action: Proportion of 25 activist behaviors reported. Feminist identification: 1=*no*. 0=*yes, and ambivalent*. Familiar/higher-status perpetrators: 1=*familiar/higher-status*. 0=*familiar/equal-status*. Unfamiliar perpetrators: 1=*unfamiliar*. 0=*familiar/equal-status*. Unfair Treatment: 1=*unfair treatment*. 0=*sexist comments*. Unwanted Sexual Attention: 1=*unwanted sexual attention*. 0=*sexist comments*

+ $p<.10$
* $p<.05$
** $p<.01$
*** $p<.001$

en were less likely to confront unwanted sexual attention than sexist comments. There was no difference, however, in confronting unfair treatment versus sexist comments.

Discussion

We examined women's experiences with sexism using a combination of personal narratives and questionnaire measures. Women's narratives of a personal experience with sexism were coded to assess situational features of the incident as well as whether they confronted the perpetrator. Nearly every woman in the sample was able to recount a salient incident of sexism. The widespread incidence of sexism in these women's lives was also documented in the survey results indicating an average incidence of each type of sexism (e.g., sexist jokes, unwanted sexual advances) occurred at least once or twice during the past year. Thus, our study indicates sexism had touched virtually every woman in our sample. As others have noted, some people believe that sexism is no longer a problem in our society (Swim et al. 1995). These findings clearly demonstrate that sexism remains a common occurrence.

Consistent with prior survey studies (e.g., Kaiser and Miller 2004; Leaper and Brown 2008; Swim et al. 2001), general characteristics of the sexist events described in the women's narratives included unwanted sexual attention, sexist comments, or unfair treatment. Also similar to prior

reports (Leaper and Brown 2008; Swim et al. 2001), the perpetrators were overwhelmingly male. Overall, there were many more perpetrators that were familiar (e.g., peers, friends, parents, and bosses) than strangers. Sexism from familiar perpetrators such as friends and parents may be particularly hurtful given these relationships are usually characterized by a high level of trust and intimacy. We additionally observed that perpetrators of unfair treatment and sexist comments were almost always familiar to the women in the study; in contrast, perpetrators of unwanted sexual attention were a mixture of familiar and unfamiliar persons. Also, whereas unfair treatment was generally carried out by higher-status individuals, unwanted sexual attention and sexist comments were typically committed by equal-status persons. As discussed later, these patterns have implications for women's responses to sexism.

Almost half (46%) of the women in the sample reported having confronted the perpetrator. This percentage is consistent with previous survey research on women's likelihood of confronting sexist remarks and sexual harassment (Gruber and Smith 1995; Swim and Hyers 1999). Confronting perpetrators of discrimination is often threatening and has social costs (Dodd et al. 2001). The results of this study and previous research suggest that many women consider the perceived benefits of confronting to be substantial. Many women can and do overcome situational barriers to stand up to the perpetrators of sexist discrimination.

Individual Influences on Confronting

In the next part of our study, we tested individual factors as predictors of women's reported confronting. These variables included feminist identification, previous experiences with sexism, and involvement in collective action. In support of our hypothesis, feminist identification was a significant predictor while taking the other factors into account. Women who did not identify as feminists were less likely to confront than were women who identified as feminists or were ambivalent. This finding lends support to the notion that a feminist identity can be empowering for women (Duncan 1999). Perhaps it leads both to an increased awareness of sexist acts (Moradi and Subich 2002) as well as to a belief that they should not be tolerated. Conversely, women who do not identify as feminists may be especially reluctant to confront sexism. It may be that these women have the same concerns about confronting sexism as they do about identifying as feminist. Due to stereotypes about feminists, women may worry confronting discrimination will make them appear angry, unfeminine, or "bitchy." However, it is important to note that our results are correlational. It may be that confronting sexism leads women to identify as a feminist.

Contrary to our expectations, the other two individual factors were not significant predictors of confronting. One of these was collective action. Although there was a nonsignificant trend ($p < .10$) associated with collective action, it may not have attained statistical significance due to its overlap with feminist identification. As noted in the preliminary analyses, the two factors were correlated. Thus, feminist identification may have accounted for any variance related to collective action.

Prior experience with sexism was the other individual factor that was not significant. Perhaps the frequency that women experience discrimination is less important than their emotional responses to sexism. Consistent with this idea, some researchers have found that distress and anger may serve to either motivate or inhibit collective action (Foster and Matheson 1995; Hercus 1999). We recommend further study into the role of emotions in women's responses to sexism.

Situational Influences on Confronting

As expected, we found that situational factors predicted women's likelihood of confronting after controlling for the individual influences. Although some personal factors may influence women's willingness to confront, this decision largely depends on the situation. Some situations may be more dangerous, intimidating, or uncomfortable; or the possible consequences of confronting may be more serious. As seen in our study, characteristics of the perpetrator and the type of sexism were significant considerations that affect women's cognitive appraisal when evaluating their response to sexism. The perpetrator characteristics that we considered were the person's familiarity and status. As hypothesized, women were more apt to confront familiar, equal-status perpetrators than either familiar, higher-status perpetrators or unfamiliar perpetrators. This pattern is consistent with research suggesting that people tend to have more concerns about violating gender-stereotypical norms with strangers than familiar persons (Deaux and Major 1987; Gruber and Smith 1995; Leaper and Ayres 2007). Confronting unfamiliar perpetrators may have been less frequent due to the reduced opportunity to confront a stranger after the sexist event. In future research, it would be informative to survey how often women confront familiar perpetrators immediately or at a later time. In addition, women may feel afraid of confronting discrimination from strangers because they do not know what to expect. A 21-year mixed-ethnic woman in our study described her experience of unwanted sexual attention from a stranger:

> A lot of the time I'll walk downtown alone and I get catcalls from men. Some of them dare to grab or touch me,… No I didn't [confront],… I'm afraid to confront them because it could get worse and I could get hurt.

This narrative illustrates that confronting unfamiliar perpetrators may be uncommon because of their unpredictable nature and the very real threat of danger, which is likely to elicit fear.

Confronting familiar perpetrators with higher status also presents significant challenges for women. In contrast to confronting strangers, confronting bosses or teachers may lead women to lose their job, receive a poor grade, or be forced to continue working or learning in a sexist environment. An 18-year-old mixed-ethnic woman describes her experience with sexism perpetrated by her manager:

> Last year, I had two very sexist employers. One, my manager, repeatedly hit on me….Daily he would make jokes, or suggestive comments. I cried once after he insulted me and after that he would treat me differently than the other employees.… It was very frustrating. No [I did not confront him]. I didn't want to jeopardize my job because I badly needed the money.

The power dynamic between employee and employer may cause women to consider disengagement strategies the more logical choice when faced with sexism in the workplace.

The type of discrimination was another situational factor expected to influence confronting. Women were less likely

to confront unwanted sexual attention in comparison to sexist comments. For example, in describing her experience, a 19-year-old White European-American woman in our study explained why she did not confront the perpetrator of unwanted sexual behavior:

> When I was about 14 years old, I was almost raped at a party I attended. The young man involved, whom I had not met before, took advantage of my naïveté and vulnerability, and after persuading me to get very drunk, lured me into a bedroom with the lie that he was helping me locate my friend…. I did not confront the person responsible. At the time, I felt too threatened. Although he did not attend my school, many of his friends did, and they created an atmosphere where I was ridiculed, and afraid to speak up for myself.

This narrative suggests that confronting unwanted sexual attention may be very difficult for girls and young women due to emotional distress and possible humiliation. Unwanted sexual attention also involves more risk to women's physical safety than unfair treatment or sexist comments.

Our findings highlight that confronting sexism is not always the best or most adaptive coping response. On the contrary, although confronting prejudice may be an ideal response in some ways (e.g., help educate the perpetrator and hopefully prevent them from being sexist towards other women), there are often risky consequences for women (Dodd et al. 2001; Kaiser and Miller 2004; Shelton and Stewart 2004). Results suggested that women were more likely to avoid confronting unfamiliar or high-status perpetrators. Women were also less likely to confront unfair treatment or unwanted sexual attention. Women may perceive that confronting would compromise their jobs, grades, or physical safety in these situations. Confronting sexism may be most adaptive when women feel supported and believe that confronting will be effective in creating change, such as in interactions with equal-status friends (Buchanan et al. 2007).

Limitations and Future Directions

One of the limitations of the study was that our sample reflects a relatively narrow segment of the population. Participants were college students attending a university with a predominantly liberal student body. Furthermore, participants were from a particular region of the United States. Although we did not find any differences when examining ethnicity or social class, these results may be due in part because our participants were predominantly middle-class and mostly White European American. Demographic characteristics may moderate the patterns observed in our study. For example, factors related to marriage, having children, and employment may affect older women's feminist attitudes and coping strategies (e.g., Cunningham and Antill 1984; Kaufman 2000). Ethnic-minority or sexual-minority women's experiences of discrimination may be qualitatively different than those of white or heterosexual women (Buchanan and Ormerod 2002; Friedman et al. 2008; Yoder and Aniakudo 1997). Also, being a member of another stigmatized group— such as an ethnic/racial minority or a sexual minority— may heighten women's awareness of discrimination (Swim et al. 2000; Wasti and Cortina 2002). Future research should examine experiences with discrimination among women who are diverse in age, country, region, and ethnicity.

A second limitation is that our findings were based on participants' memories of prior experiences. As with any retrospective account, we cannot ensure the accuracy of participants' narratives. However, the ways in which women remember and make sense of their experiences, regardless of their accuracy, are likely to be meaningful. Personal memories, and especially ones that are told to others, as these often were, influence one's personal and social identity (Thorne 2000). In addition, prior research has found self-reported experiences with discrimination predict adjustment and other outcomes (Klonoff and Landrine 1995; Swim et al. 2001).

Another consideration is that many women may have reported confronting because of social desirability, or feeling that confronting is the "correct" way to respond. It could also be that confronting a sexist event makes the event more memorable and thus the salient events tended to be events in which women confronted the perpetrator. Future research should examine women's reasons for why they choose to (or not to) confront sexism. This will shed light on women's perceptions of the consequences of confronting sexist discrimination. Lastly, it is important to note that we cannot generalize about women's likelihood of confronting sexism from their response to the one sexist event they described.

Although sexism has become less blatant in the U.S. and other Western societies, many women continue to experience gender discrimination in everyday contexts. These experiences can serve as a source of stress and anxiety (Klonoff and Landrine 1995; Swim et al. 2001). Coping strategies such as confronting the perpetrator can alleviate these negative effects. Our study suggests that both individual and situational factors may influence the likelihood of confronting sexism. In addition, this research may prove useful for programs aimed at counseling women who have experienced sexism (e.g., Luft and Cairns 1999; Moradi and Funderburk 2006) as well as interventions aimed at reducing sexism (e.g., Huerta et al. 2006; Richman et al. 2004).

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