Effects of Benevolent Sexism on Women's Psychological Needs and Work Motivation

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Abstract

Benevolent sexism (BS) is a set of stereotypes that are both patronizing and positive in tone and is a rather accepted form of sexism despite its well-established detrimental effects on women (Glick & Fiske, 1996). The current research aims to extend the knowledge of the detrimental effects of BS on women by considering the self-determination theory (SDT) to assess how men's BS attitudes toward women influence intrinsic motivation in the workplace. Furthermore, the protective factors of feminist attitudes and self-esteem are discussed. The SDT poses that intrinsic motivation is fostered by meeting the three psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In this research, 167 female participants filled out an online questionnaire where they were asked to imagine themselves encountering a BS (vs. neutral) boss at work and being assigned to an important task. After reading the scenario, their perceived intrinsic motivation, competence, autonomy, and relatedness were assessed. Unexpectedly, encountering the BS boss did not influence their reported intrinsic motivation. Nevertheless, when considering the protective factors of feminist attitudes and self-esteem, the moderation analysis showed that women scoring low in self-esteem showed a decrease in intrinsic motivation, indicating that self-esteem might act as a protective factor.

Keywords: benevolent sexism, self-determination theory, intrinsic motivation, self-esteem

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Changes in laws and norms made sexism toward women unacceptable in legal and social arenas (Swim et al., 1995; Tougas et al., 1995) and led to a considerable decrease in apparent sexism in the past decades (Klonis et al., 2005; Swim et al., 1995). Nevertheless, women still experience sexism in their daily lives. So reported U.S. college-aged women in a daily diary study that they experienced sexist incidents like traditional gender-role stereotyping, sexual objectification, and degrading comments (Swim et al., 2001).

Women also experience sexism in the workplace. Especially those who violate traditional gender roles, like feminists or those pursuing a career (e.g., Eagly & Wood, 1991; Fiske et al., 2002; Heilman, 2001) experience both derogation and backlash at work (Rudman & Glick, 2001; Rudman et al., 2012). While the old-fashioned sexist attitudes are declining (Swim et al., 1995), like hostile sexism (seeing women as inferior to men) women still experience more subtle forms of sexism, so-called benevolent sexism stating that women should be protected and revered (Hebl et al., 2007). Despite its positive tone, benevolent sexism impacts women negatively (Becker & Wright, 2011; King et al., 2012; Moya et al., 2007) like decreasing their competence and autonomy (Dardenne et al., 2007; Shnabel et al., 2016).

In this research, I examine whether benevolent sexism also impacts intrinsic motivation and whether that effect is mediated by the psychological needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. According to the self-determination theory, intrinsic motivation is forestalled when the basic psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness are thwarted (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Moreover, I aim to shed light on possible protective factors: self-esteem and feminist attitudes, which could diminish the negative effects of benevolent sexism on women's intrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic motivation is strongly related to learning, creativity (Ryan & Deci, 2000), and well-being (Ryan et al., 1995). Discovering and understanding the effects of BS on women's motivation and well-being can help to make the work experience of female workers more pleasurable and efficient, as well as positively contributes to the company's and the person's success.

Literature Review

Sexism and Motivation

There are different forms of sexism and how it is expressed (for an overview, see Barreto & Ellemers, 2013). According to the *ambivalent sexism theory* (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001), there are two types of sexism, namely *hostile sexism* (HS) and *benevolent sexism* (BS). HS involves attitudes that women are incompetent and seek power over men. It is directed towards women who question traditional beliefs (e.g., by expressing feminist attitudes), seek higher positions (e.g., high-status jobs), or use sexual attraction to gain influence over men (e.g., by being a temptress). BS involves attitudes that are subjectively positive but are patronizing over women and encompasses protective paternalism (e.g., women should be cherished and protected by men), complementary gender differentiation (e.g., women have qualities, that few men possess), and heterosexual intimacy (e.g., to believe that only women can fulfil the romantic needs of a man) and perceives women as nice but incompetent at many important tasks (Glick & Fiske, 1996). It relies like HS on gender stereotypes (i.e., women are the weaker sex and dependent on men) but conveys it in a positive tone and hence is a more socially accepted form of sexism because it is perceived as less sexist, more flattering of women, and more justified (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005; Glick & Fiske, 1996).

Nevertheless, just like HS, BS also has detrimental effects, for example by increasing women's approval of protective restrictions imposed by a husband (Moya et al., 2007) and undermining support for collective action against gender inequality (Becker & Wright, 2011).

Also, a growing body of research examines the detrimental effects of BS on women's

competence (Dardenne et al., 2007) and their perceived dependency on men (Shnabel et al.,

2016).

Since BS is not perceived as sexist as HS and therefore more socially accepted

(Barreto & Ellemers, 2005) it is also common in the workplace. For example, Hideg and

Ferris (2016) found BS attitudes toward women undermine gender equality by contributing to

occupational gender segregation by hiring women in rather feminine, and not masculine,

positions and inaction when promoting women in positions in which they are

underrepresented. Furthermore, BS attitudes of men towards women are negatively related to

men's assignment of challenging tasks to women at work (King et al., 2012). Treating women

differently than men in the workplace, not only makes it harder for women to pursue a

fulfilling career and therefore enhances female workers' well-being, but it also impedes

organizational growth by taking away their motivation to pursue a career and to contribute to

the organizational success (Doolard et al., 2021; Cornejo, 2007; Van Laar et al., 2010;

Zafarullah, 2000).

People are motivated for different reasons. On the one hand, they act because they

value an activity, are interested in it, or have a sense of personal commitment to excel. On the

other hand, they can be motivated because there is strong external coercion, a bribe, or fear of

being surveyed. When the motivation is authentic and internal, people have more interest,

excitement, and confidence compared to being externally controlled (Ryan & Deci, 2000)

which can lead to heightened vitality, more self-esteem, and general wellbeing (Deci & Ryan,

1995; Nix et al., 1999; Ryan et al., 1995).

Why people are intrinsically motivated to do something, just out of interest and

enjoyment, is explained by the *self-determination theory* (SDT; Gagné & Deci, 2005). The

SDT poses that humans have three basic needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness

which, when satisfied, enhance satisfaction in life, intrinsic motivation, and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT has been found to be effective in organisational research when explaining why workers become intrinsically motivated (Meyer, 2014). I propose that men's BS attitudes toward women lead to a decrease in intrinsic motivation in the workplace because their basic needs of competence and autonomy are not met (Dardenne et al., 2007; Hammond & Overall, 2015; Ramos et al., 2016; Shnabel et al., 2016), whereas there might be no effect on the basic need of relatedness (Gul & Kupfer, 2018).

Hypothesis 1. Experiencing benevolent sexism in the workplace is negatively correlated with intrinsic motivation.

The Effects of Benevolent Sexism on the Psychological Needs of Competence, Autonomy, and Relatedness

People experience motivation and flourish if their basic psychological needs are met (Deci & Ryan, 2000). According to the SDT, human basic needs satisfaction of competence (i.e., being effective with required tasks), autonomy (i.e., perceiving to be the source of one's behaviour), and relatedness (i.e., forming personal connections with others), can enhance the intrinsic motivation of individuals (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2002). Meeting people's basic needs promotes favourable work-related behaviours and attitudes resulting in persistence, job satisfaction, effective performance, as well as psychological wellbeing (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Gagné & Deci, 2005). In contrast, an unfulfillment of basic psychological needs leads to negative outcomes, like reduced intrinsic motivation, a loss of health, and well-being, and decreased performance at work (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Based on past research I assume that BS thwarts people's innate psychological needs for competence and autonomy (Dardenne et al., 2007; Hammond & Overall, 2015; Ramos et al., 2016; Shnabel et al., 2016) and most likely does not affect relatedness (Gul & Kupfer, 2018). The next sections will elaborate on the reasoning.

The first psychological need for competence is the feeling of effectiveness and the experience to exercise and express one's capacities to a level of mastery (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Warmth and competence are viewed as compensatory, if a person is perceived as high in one dimension, it tends to be perceived as low in the other (Kervyn et al., 2010). Past research has shown that, by conveying a particularly warm and cooperative image, BS communicates that women lack competence and that they should be less competent than men (Dardenne et al., 2007; Ramos et al., 2016). One mechanism here could be that BS activates a group stereotype, which leads to behaviour that conforms to these expectations. For example, previous research has shown that professors that think of themselves as professors lead them to become contextually smarter, whereas the activation of the stereotype of being elderly led people to become forgetful (see e.g., Bargh, 1997; Chen & Bargh, 1997; Dijksterhuis et al., 2000; Dijksterhuis & van Knippenberg, 1998; Dijksterhuis & Bargh, 2001). As mentioned before, warmth implicitly suggests that women are incompetent, which in turn could lead to the activation of the stereotype and followed by an automated behaviour where women perform poorly as expected from them.

Furthermore, the intrusive thoughts induced by men's BS attitudes activate the idea that women are incompetent (Dardenne et al., 2007). BS attitudes implicitly suggest that women cannot perform well, they start to doubt their capabilities as well as experiencing a decrease in self-esteem and feeling preoccupied during a task (Dardenne et al., 2007). Also, women who encounter BS comments access autobiographical memories of being incompetent easier compared to neutral or HS comments (Dardenne et al., 2007; Dumont et al., 2010). Thereby, the BS attitudes towards women negatively influence their perceived and actual competence and therefore do not fulfil their basic need for competence.

The second psychological need for autonomy is a person's desire to self-regulate one's experiences and actions congruent with their authentic interests and values (Ryan & Deci,

2017). According to SDT, people cannot experience intrinsic motivation by competence

unless they also experience autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Thus, perceiving themselves as

autonomous in their decisions and behaviour is essential for intrinsic motivation. Findings of

previous studies suggest that BS thwarts women's psychological need for autonomy. For

instance, BS portrays women as wonderful and childlike such that they need men to protect

and provide for them and they cannot protect and provide for themselves (Glick & Fiske,

1996).

       Furthermore, BS attitudes towards women strive to make women dependent, no matter

whether they are endorsed by a man or a woman. Women high in BS attitudes prefer to ask

for dependency-oriented help rather than using strategies that would help them to cope with a

problem independently. Also, men high in BS attitudes toward women had stronger intentions

to provide dependency-oriented help to women rather than autonomy-oriented help. The

effect applies only in cross-gender, but not same-gender interactions (Shnabel et al., 2016).

Dependency-oriented behaviours include telling women what to do by directing or dictating

their behaviour (Hammond & Overall, 2015). The preference for dependency-oriented help in

both sexes can stem from the belief that the recipient, the woman, lacks the autonomy to help

herself (Brickman et al., 1982) and therefore might not experience to be the origin of their

behaviour.

       The third psychological need for relatedness is a sense of a secure relational base

(Ryan & Deci, 2000). People do not experience relatedness if others are cold and uncaring.

On the one hand side, it could be assumed that this need is satisfied if a woman is treated in a

BS way. BS attitudes hold a positive view of women and admires them (e.g., women are the

better "sex" and have better special qualities, like higher moral sensibility; Glick & Fiske,

1996). So do men that endorse BS behave more caring when discussing relationship problems

with their female partners (Overall et al., 2011) and highly anxious women perceive their

partner as somebody that could be relied upon to remain personally invested in fulfilling their

relationship obligations even in difficult times (Cross et al., 2016). Thereby, BS attitudes offer

incentives (affection, resources, protection) to the women (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Hence, BS

attitudes are generally perceived as warm and caring and might satisfy the need for

relatedness.

   Furthermore, BS highlights that men are only 'complete' when they have the love of a

woman and should prioritize their relationship and duty to their partner even in times of

hardship and dissatisfaction (Glick & Fiske, 1996). The permanence of men's admiration,

protection, and provision should give women a feeling of security. Therefore, women

perceive the men as personally invested (Gul & Kupfer, 2018) and therefore might experience

relatedness.

   On the other hand, Gul and Kupfer (2018) also found in their research that women

prefer a BS man only if he is a potential romantic partner but found no effect for a colleague.

The researchers propose that the preference for BS men is only relevant when mating

motivations come into play and the man is a potential breadwinner. Hence, the effect of BS

attitudes towards women on their relatedness most likely has no effect on their relatedness at

the workplace because colleagues are not perceived as potential partners. Although past

research does not indicate that BS attitudes decrease intrinsic motivation through relatedness,

I want to explore whether there are any effects.

   Hypothesis 2. The detrimental effect of BS attitudes toward women in the workplace

on intrinsic motivation is mediated by basic psychological needs.

   Furthermore, certain protective factors could be helpful for women to flourish and

experience intrinsic motivation despite the presence of benevolent sexist men. First, self-

esteem could moderate the detrimental effects of BS attitudes on women's intrinsic

motivation. The ideology of BS states that women are inferior to men and need to be

protected and helped (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005). Women experiencing protective paternalism, a form of BS, indicated higher levels of self-doubt and decreased self-esteem (Oswald et al., 2019). Also, Corning 2002 found a relationship between discrimination and distress for individuals with lower levels of self-esteem. Hence, I assume that self-esteem might buffer the negative effects. Furthermore, I assume that women with high self-esteem, that believe in themselves, are less prone to accept the sexist beliefs, and hence are less affected by the benevolent sexist attitudes towards them. Therefore, they will be motivated to perform well on a task that they would enjoy despite having a sexist boss.

Also, I expect that women scoring high in feminist attitudes notice BS statements (Gul & Kupfer, 2018) and don't accept the implicit message about traditional gender roles that come with them. Namely, women are less competent at tasks at the workplace and are rather suited for nurturing roles which are less relevant at the workplace. Also, women with high feminist attitudes see men and women as equal and so it can be assumed that they are motivated at work because they disregard the gender roles that sexism implicitly put on them.

Hypothesis 3. Feminist attitudes and self-esteem function as protective factors that moderate the negative relationship between BS and intrinsic motivation.

Overview of the Study

In the present study, the female participants filled out an online questionnaire where they were asked to imagine themselves encountering a BS (vs. neutral) boss at work, and then they were assigned a task that they would consider important for their career. After reading the scenario, their perceived competence, autonomy, relatedness, as well as intrinsic motivation was assessed. The contextual framework of the paper is represented in Figure 1.

Methods

Participants and Setting

According to the software G*Power, the required number of participants for the study was 165 at 80% power, using a medium interaction effect size (f = .22). The study was approved by the Ethics Committee and used a female convenience sample (N =192), of 128 first-year undergraduate psychology students enrolled in a SONA pool at the University of Groningen, as well as 64 participants recruited through the researchers' social networks, comprising both students and non-students. All participated voluntarily, and no compensation was received other than 0.6 SONA credits for those participants recruited from the SONA pool. In total 25 responses were excluded from analysis because they did not finish the study, failed to pass the attention checks, or were not female, rendering the final dataset of 167 participants (M age = 21.9, SD = 5.9). One hundred sixteen participants were Dutch, 37 were German, and 14 participants had other nationalities. Furthermore, variables from negatively worded items were recoded and the reliability of the construct scales was established. Then, descriptive and frequencies of the demographic characteristics were determined (Table 1).

Design and Procedure

Data was collected through an online English questionnaire, created using Qualtrics®. Before filling in the questionnaire, participants were presented with an informed consent form (Appendix A) and permitted to process their data. Subsequently, personal data and demographics were gathered, including age, gender, nationality, current country of residence, ethnicity, highest educational degree, current job status, and years of work experience.

All participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (BS attitudes vs. neutral attitudes) in which they were presented with a short scenario where they were asked to imagine that they work at a new company. At lunch, they talk to their boss and during the

conversation they hear different statements from him (see paragraph below). In the BS condition, the boss is presented as having BS attitudes and in the neutral condition as having neutral attitudes. Then the participants were asked to imagine that they walk back to the office with their new boss, and he gives them the task to lead a project in the department that the participants consider important for their career and which they are asked to start immediately.

The scenario in the BS attitudes condition included six items taken from the Ambivalent Sexism Scale (AIS; Glick & Fiske, 1996) and the manipulation of BS attitudes were based on a manipulation by Schuessler (2009) that was previously used by Shnabel et al. (2016). The six items for the BS condition were presented in three sentences: "He tells you that he thinks that women should be cherished and protected by men and that women have a way of caring that men are not capable of in the same way," "Furthermore, he explains to you that women, compared to men, tend to have a superior moral sensibility and that no matter how accomplished he is, a man is not truly complete as a person unless he has the love of a woman," and "He also mentions that secretly, most women yearn for a man whose arms they can find protection and security in and that many women would like a man who conquers their heart."

For the neutral control condition, I used six statements in three sentences: "He tells you that he thinks that sport is healthy for the body and that noise causes stress. Furthermore, he explains to you that tea is healthier than coffee and that biking is better for the environment than driving a car. He also mentions that plastic pollutes the ocean, and he says that elephants are the only animals that cannot jump." After reading the scenario, participants indicated to what degree certain statements regarding their perceived competence, autonomy, relatedness, and intrinsic motivation apply to them on a 7-point scale ranging from (1) *not at all* true to (7) *very true*, and (4) *somewhat true*.

Measures

The Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (IMI)

The Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (IMI; Ryan, 1982) assessed intrinsic motivation, competence, autonomy, and relatedness. The statements were slightly adapted to the study's purpose because the original version of the IMI was designed to measure the constructs after they perform a certain task and hence the statements are phrased in a particular way, e.g., "I enjoyed doing…". In this study, the participants were presented with statements about how they would feel or what they would think if they led a project, for example, "I would enjoy doing…". Furthermore, intrinsic motivation was measured by asking participants how much interest and enjoyment they would experience during the task e.g., "When I am working on this task, I would think about how much I enjoy it"; competence was measured with items asking what they think how good they would do at the task e.g., "After working at this task for a while, I would feel pretty competent."; autonomy was assessed with items asking how they perceived the task to be their choice e.g. "I would feel that it was my choice to do the task"; and relatedness was measured with items asking how close they felt to their new boss e.g., "I felt like I could really trust my new boss" (see Appendix B for all measures). Cronbach's alpha was .91 for interest, .82 for competence, .80 for autonomy, and .93 for relatedness. The items were averaged to create the respective scales.

Feminist Beliefs

Participants rated an 11-item short form of the Feminist Attitudes and Ideology Questions (Morgan, 1996) on a (1) *strongly disagree* to (7) *strongly agree scale*. The questionnaire included items such as "A woman should have the same job opportunities as a man" and "men should respect women more than they currently do" The Cronbach's alpha in the current study was .82 and past research found a Cronbach's alpha of .81 (Morgan, 1996). The items were averaged to create the respective scales.

Self-Esteem

Participants rated the 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) on a (1)

strongly disagree to (4) *strongly agree*. The scale consisted of ten items such as: "On the

whole, I am satisfied with myself" and "at times I think I am not good at all". Past research

found that Cronbach's alpha for this scale is generally above .80 (Donnellan et al. 2015 for a

review), in the current study it was .89. The items were averaged to create the respective

scales.

Results

To test the effect of men's BS statements on women's intrinsic motivation (Hypothesis

1) participant's scores were submitted to a between-subjects one-way Analysis of Variance

(ANOVA) using IBM SPSS 26, with condition (BS statements vs. neutral statements) as the

independent variable (Table 2). For exploratory reasons, the same procedure was conducted

for the basic needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness. The effect of BS (vs. neutral)

statements towards women did not show a significant effect on intrinsic motivation; hence,

Hypotheses 1 was not supported. Furthermore, data indicated that BS attitudes towards

women decreased the participants' relatedness significantly but not competence and

autonomy (Table 2).

It was not possible to test whether the effect of BS on intrinsic motivation is mediated

by competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Hypothesis 2) because the results of the between-

subjects one-way ANOVA showed no significant relation between BS (vs. neutral) and

intrinsic motivation (Baron & Kenny 1986; Frazier et al., 2004). Hence, no mediation analysis

was conducted.

To test the moderation of the protective factors of self-esteem and feminist attitudes

(Hypothesis 3) on BS (vs. neutral) and intrinsic motivation, a moderation analysis (Model 1;

Process analysis, Hayes, 2013) was conducted with condition (effect-coded 1: BS, 2: neutral)

as the independent variable, the protective factors, feminist attitudes and self-esteem as the moderator, and intrinsic motivation as the dependent variable. The overall model of intrinsic motivation with feminist attitudes as a moderator was not statistically significant, $R^2 = .01$, $F(3, 163) = .49$, $p = .68$. Also, the interaction of condition and feminist attitudes was not found to be statistically significant $b = - .08$, 95% CI [-.53, .37], p = .73 as well as the conditional effect when feminist attitudes were one SD below the mean $b = .25$, 95% CI [-.23, .72], p = .31, at the mean $b = .19$, 95% CI [-.15, .52], p = .27, and one SD above the mean $b = .13$, 95% CI [-.34, .60], p = .59. These findings provide no support for my Hypothesis 3 because encountering an BS (vs. neutral) boss had no influence on the women's intrinsic motivation, no matter their feminist attitudes.

For self-esteem as the moderator the overall model was statistically significant, $R^2 = .15$, $F(3, 163) = .38$, $p < .001$ as well as the interaction of condition and self-esteem $b = - .70$, 95% CI [-1.29, -.11], p = .02. The conditional effect of condition on intrinsic motivation showed corresponding results when self-esteem was one SD below the mean $b = .57$, 95% CI [.14, 1.10], p = .01, but no significant results when self-esteem was at the mean $b = .21$, 95% CI [-.10, .52], p = .19 and one SD above the mean $b = -.16$, 95% CI [-.59, .28], p = .48 (Figure 2). So, participants that scored low in self-esteem encountering a BS (vs. neutral) boss showed a significant decrease in intrinsic motivation compared to the women that had high self-esteem. Hence, these findings provide partial support for Hypothesis 3 that self-esteem can function as a protective factor against the detrimental effects of BS on women.

Discussion

Based on SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000), the present research aimed to understand what effect men's BS attitudes towards women have on their intrinsic motivation at the workplace and whether that effect is mediated by competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Furthermore, I

examined whether the negative correlation between BS attitudes and intrinsic motivation can

be attenuated by self-esteem and feminism.

The research findings indicate that there is no direct effect of BS attitudes towards

women on their intrinsic motivation (Hypothesis 1) and hence no mediation analysis of

competence, autonomy, and relatedness could be conducted to test Hypothesis 2 (Baron &

Kenny, 1986). When assigned to a task, the participant's responses indicated intrinsic

motivation would not be influenced by their supervisors' attitudes, meaning the BS attitudes

of a boss do not directly influence the extent to which participants would enjoy doing the task.

My finding that benevolent sexism has no effect on intrinsic motivation at work contradicts

past findings that discrimination can negatively affect motivation (Doolard, 2022; Van Laar et

al., 2010).

Possible reasons, that I did not find a significant result, could be that the women had

coping mechanisms to deal with the BS boss. So could the participants just deny the negative

effects of the sexist boss on their motivation. Past research provided some empirical evidence

that members of a discriminated group feel better when they deny the discrimination towards

them because it gives them the feeling of a just world (Bahamondes et al., 2019; Napier et al.,

2020).

Also, the sample was on average around 21 years old and might not have had so many

BS encounters in their lives and were less triggered by the BS boss. Research has provided

evidence that discriminating information against individuals was disregarded by them when

they were personally less affected by discrimination in the past (Barreto & Ellemers, 2015;

Stroebe et al., 2010). So have women attended less to sexism when they did not expect

discrimination towards them (Kaiser et al., 2006). Whereas women who experienced sexism

frequently in their lives experience a range of negative outcomes when encountering

discrimination (Branscombe, 1998; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002). Hence, age could play an

important role for women with a long history of discrimination towards them, and BS could

indeed elicit strong emotions and lead to significant effects. Future research could replicate

the present study with a sample of women of higher age.

Nevertheless, when taking self-esteem into account, there was indeed a significant

negative effect between BS and intrinsic motivation. Women that had low self-esteem

experienced decreased intrinsic motivation when they encountered BS attitudes from their

boss.

Hence, self-esteem could act as a protective factor. Women with high self-esteem

encountering BS attitudes did not experience a decrease in intrinsic motivation, contrary to

women with low self-esteem. The present findings add to the research by Dardenne et al.

(2007) that there is a relationship between BS and self-esteem and that individuals with low

self-esteem are most vulnerable to discrimination (Corning, 2002). Furthermore, it aligns with

Oswald et al. (2019) finding that BS attitudes can lead to poor psychological well-being and

might hinder flourishing which is closely related to the concept of intrinsic motivation (Ryan

& Deci, 2000).

In my study, the relationship between BS and intrinsic motivation was not apparent

until I took self-esteem into account. Providing evidence that self-esteem can buffer the

detrimental effects for women when encountering a boss with BS attitudes. A possible

explanation is that the BS statements trigged self-doubt in women (Dumont et al., 2010;

Hammond & Overall, 2015). Women that already had low self-esteem might have been more

vulnerable to those effects. The message BS conveyed of women being in certain domains

inferior to men could have confirmed their already low self-esteem, further decreasing self-

confidence and motivation to perform a task.

Furthermore, I tested whether feminist attitudes would function as a protective factor

of BS attitudes towards women on intrinsic motivation. Adding to past research that women

with high feminist attitudes would notice the BS statements (Gul & Kupfer, 2018) I assumed that they reject the implicit message about traditional gender roles and hence be less influenced by the detrimental effects.

I could not find a significant effect of BS attitudes toward women and feminist attitudes on intrinsic motivation. A possible explanation might be that the women indeed noticed the discrimination, but it did not influence their intrinsic motivation. So found Gul and Kupfer (2018) that women scoring high in feminist attitudes notice the BS attitudes in men but still prefer them as a romantic partner compared to a non-BS person. So, for high-feminist women, I assume that merely noticing the sexist attitudes might not influence the effect on intrinsic motivation despite finding BS men more patronizing and agency restricting compared to low-feminist women (Gul & Kupfer, 2018).

Furthermore, past research found that women often do not recognize BS as a form of prejudice because of its subtle nature and hence does not trigger negative emotions (Barreto & Elmers, 2005; Fedi & Rollero, 2016; Rolero & Fedi, 2012). The women in my study with high feminist attitudes were most likely aware of the sexist attitudes (Gul & Kupfer, 2018) but did not mention an effect on their intrinsic motivation. Future research should verify whether the BS influences intrinsic motivation in women with high feminist attitudes in a setting where they might need to perform a task. Maybe they did notice the sexism, but they might have underestimated the amount of distress that resulted from the BS attitudes (Bosson et al., 2010).

Additionally, I explored the effect of BS attitudes towards women on their perceived competence and autonomy, as well as relatedness. The results showed that neither competence nor autonomy decreased significantly, contrary to relatedness, which did decrease. Despite having a boss with BS (vs. neutral) attitudes, the participants still felt autonomous, perceiving their behaviour as self-endorsed and congruent with their authentic

interests. Past research indicated that BS attitudes toward women thwart their perceived autonomy by portraying them as wonderful and childlike, communicating that they need men to be protected and provided for (Glick & Fiske, 1996). I assumed that those beliefs convey a sense of dependence and hence violate the need for autonomy. Furthermore, I expected that autonomy would decrease because men endorsing BS provide women dependency-oriented help rather than autonomy-related help (Shnabel et al., 2016) and so diminishes the experience of being the origin of their behaviour.

Besides autonomy, it would have been possible that the basic need of competence would be violated because BS conveys a picture of women being warm and hence should be incompetent. Those attitudes can lead to stereotype activation (women are incompetent) and preoccupation through accessing autobiographical memory for being incompetent and therefore influencing their perceived and actual performance (Dardenne et al., 2007; Ramos et al., 2016).

One possible explanation that there was no significant direct effect of BS attitudes towards women's competence and autonomy might be that the participants took past experiences of former jobs into account. They could have imagined a working environment that could give them a satisfying sense of autonomy and competence, which can come from job control and social support. Past research found evidence for the effect of a positive work environment on the need satisfaction of employees. So, factors like quality of relationships, job control and role ambiguity play an important role to satisfy the needs of autonomy and competence (Fernet et al., 2013). Future research might replicate this study controlling for environmental factors like social support, role ambiguity, and job control.

A second possible explanation could be that they were aware of the subtle but undermining attributes and consciously or unconsciously want to prove the BS boss wrong. Fritzsche et al. (2009) reported that people exposed to stereotypes showed an increase in

performance when they thought poor performance would confirm their stereotype. The participants in the current study might have rated their performance higher to disconfirm the expectation towards them after the stereotypes were introduced. Future research could investigate the effect by explicitly asking the participants whether the statements influenced their rating of how much they would enjoy the task.

Also, I explored whether the BS attitudes of the boss toward women influence their perceived relatedness, meaning that they experience a secure relational base. I interpreted past research in a way that BS has no or a positive effect on their relatedness because on the one hand, BS conveys a picture that women need to be admired and that men are personally invested in their partners (Cross et al., 2016; Glick & Fiske, 1996; Gul & Kupfer, 2018; Overall et al., 2011) what could have increased their relatedness. On the other hand, Gul & Kupfer (2018) found no preference for a man endorsing BS attitudes when it was a colleague. Contradicting past findings, the women indicated in the present research that they felt less relatedness towards the boss endorsing BS attitudes. So, communicating personal investment and admiring women had a repelling effect, the women were less interested to spend time with the BS boss in the future.

A possible explanation might be that the women felt judged only by their gender and not valued as a worker, which could have decreased relatedness. Also, the present research confirms the reasoning from Gul & Kupfer (2018) that women prefer a BS-endorsing man if he is a potential romantic partner and a person at work is most likely not. Hence, the desirable trait of being personally invested and a supporter of a family is not relevant in the work context.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The present research aimed to combine the two concepts of BS (Glick & Fiske, 1996) and the SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000) to illuminate the effects of sexism on the concept of

intrinsic motivation at work. First, my research provides some support that when considering self-esteem, BS attitudes might have negative effects on women (Oswald, 2019) and hinders them to flourish. Highlighting the moderating role of self-esteem in the relationship between BS (vs. neutral) and intrinsic motivation. Indicating that self-esteem might act as a protective factor. Nevertheless, findings need to be replicated to consolidate the results.

Secondly, the results of my additional analysis extend the body of knowledge of the perception of women towards BS men in the work context. Past research found that women perceive BS men in the workplace as rather neutral (Gul & Kupfer, 2018), whereas in my research women felt low relatedness towards the BS (vs. neutral) boss, indicating that they do not want to spend more time with that person in the future.

The exploratory analysis of the effects of BS attitudes on the mediators also showed that my findings are different from other studies regarding the perceived competence and autonomy of women exposed to a BS (vs. neutral) boss. The results of my analysis do not align with past findings that BS attitudes negatively impact competence and autonomy (Dardenne et al., 2007; Hammond & Overall, 2015; Ramos et al., 2016; Shnabel et al., 2016). Possible explanations are that the participants satisfied those needs of competence and autonomy through other channels like social support from co-workers (Fernet et al., 2013) or they wanted to disconfirm communicated stereotypes (Fritzsche et al., 2009).

As far as the practical implications are concerned, are the results of the present research especially important for women with low self-esteem. They are vulnerable to the detrimental effects of men's BS attitudes towards women, which decreases their intrinsic motivation and hence can hinder them to enjoy their work and flourish. Companies need to make sure that they create an environment in which their employees can acquire a sense of self-esteem and equality between men and women.

Limitations and Future Research Suggestions

The present study is not without limitations. So did the convenience sample consist mostly of young undergraduate psychology students that had little work experience. That point needs to be considered when interpreting the data because a student sample most likely is different from a working sample (Li-Ping Tang et al., 2002). Hence, they might not have experienced BS towards them in the workplace and could have difficulties imagining the scenario as vividly as a woman with many years of work experience. Future research should consider using a more age-diverse sample with a certain amount of work experience and a more heterogeneous ethnical background to make the findings more generalizable.

Also, the study was entirely hypothetical. The questionnaire provided by Ryan (1982) asks the participants how they experienced performing the task. In my online study, participants only imagined the assignment and were asked how they would feel if they had to perform it. That might reduce the reliability of the findings and might not make them applicable to a real-world work setting. In future research, participants could be invited into the lab where they encounter a supervisor holding BS (vs. neutral) attitudes towards women and be asked to perform a task. Additionally, the study was conducted entirely online. Participants might be distracted during the study and be less concentrated compared to a lab experiment. Again, it would be beneficial to conduct the study in a lab with a controlled environment to diminish confounding factors like external distractions.

Future research might also investigate the long-term consequences of BS for women with low self-esteem. So could a longitudinal diary study investigate whether the detrimental effects accumulate over time and impact women's self-esteem and their motivation at work.

Lastly, BS consist of different facets, namely protective paternalism, complementary gender differentiation, and heterosexual intimacy (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Past research uncovered that especially protective paternalism decreased self-esteem (Oswald et al., 2019).

Future research could investigate which facet leads women with low self-esteem to experience lower intrinsic motivation when encountering BS attitudes. That could be done by creating different subsamples of participants and presenting them with each of the facets of BS isolated before assessing their perceived intrinsic motivation. Also, directly asking the participants to elaborate on their responses why they feel low motivation to perform a task could illuminate the findings further.

Conclusion

Taken together, BS seems to have only influenced women's intrinsic motivation when they have low self-esteem. Indicating that self-esteem might act as a protective factor from the detrimental effects of BS on intrinsic motivation. If a woman with high self-esteem encounters a boss with BS attitudes intrinsic motivation should not be influenced. Furthermore, women that encounter a BS (vs. neutral) boss experience low relatedness and do not think that they will enjoy spending time with him in the future.

BS is still a part of women's lives and uncovering the potentially harmful effects it can have on their motivation and wellbeing can hinder especially women with low self-esteem to flourish and thrive at work. Developing awareness of these detrimental effects is the first step to reducing sexism at work and creating more equality to pursue a fulfilling career.

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Table 1

Demographic characteristics of the respondents (N=167)

		Frequency	Percent
Nationality	Dutch	116	69.5
	German	37	22.2
	Other	14	8.4
Ethnicity	White	153	91.6
	Other	14	8.4
Education	Below high school	2	1.2
	High school	118	70.7
	Apprenticeship	10	6.0
	Bachelor	27	16.2
	Master	10	6.0
Job status	Employed full time	18	10.8
	Employed part time	33	19.8
	Unemployed	6	3.6
	Student	110	65.9
Work experience	Less than one year	22	13.2
	1-2 years	42	25.1
	2-5 years	67	40.1
	5-10 years	16	9.6
	10 + years	9	5.4
	Not applicable	1	.6
	None	10	6.0

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations, and One-Way ANOVA in Basic Psychological Needs and

Intrinsic Motivation

Measure	BS		Control		F(1,165)	η2	p
	M	SD	M	SD			
Competence	4.51	1.06	4,45	0.89	.17	0.00	.680
Autonomy	3.74	1.15	3,77	1.06	.05	0.00	.819
Relatedness	**3.52**	**1.42**	**4,42**	**1.08**	**20.99**	**0.11**	**.001**
Intrinsic Motivation	4.23	1.19	4,41	0.95	1.19	0.01	.278

Notes. All variables were measured on a 7-point scale ranging from (1) not at all true to (7)

very true, and 4 somewhat true. *BS* Benevolent sexism, *η2* Partial eta squared

Figure 1

Statistical Diagram of the Effect of male BS (vs. Non-BS) statements and the Protective

factors (Feminism and Self-Esteem) on Participants Intrinsic Motivation mediated by the

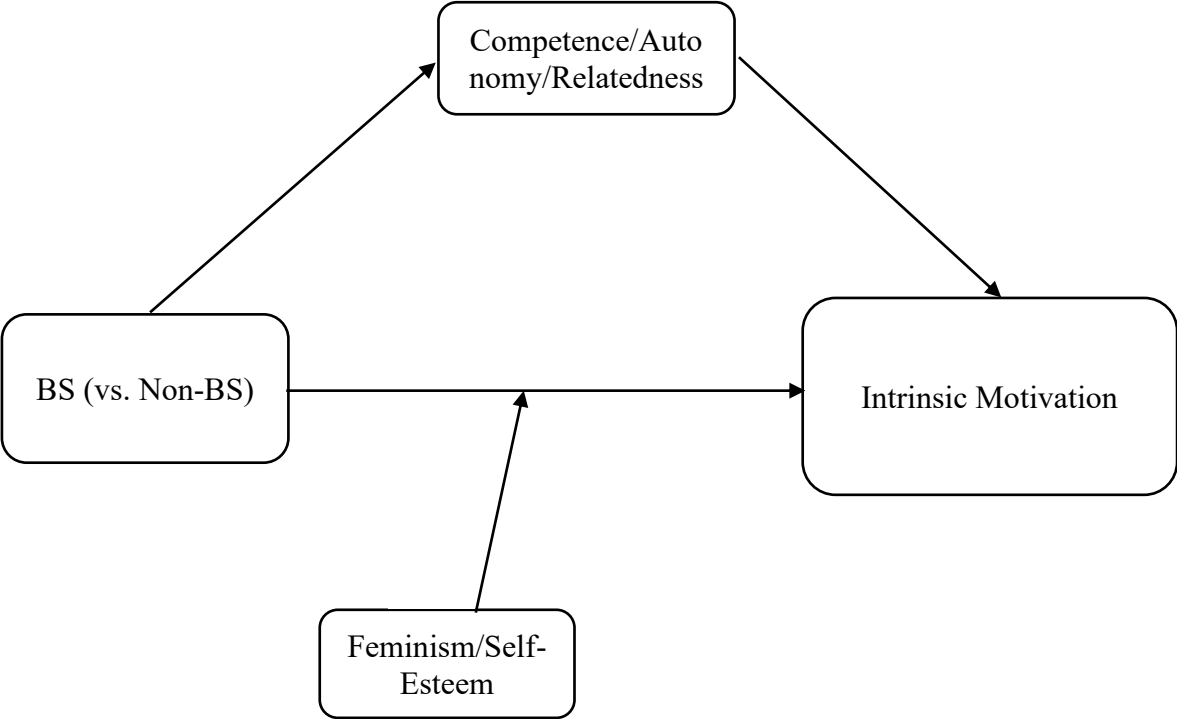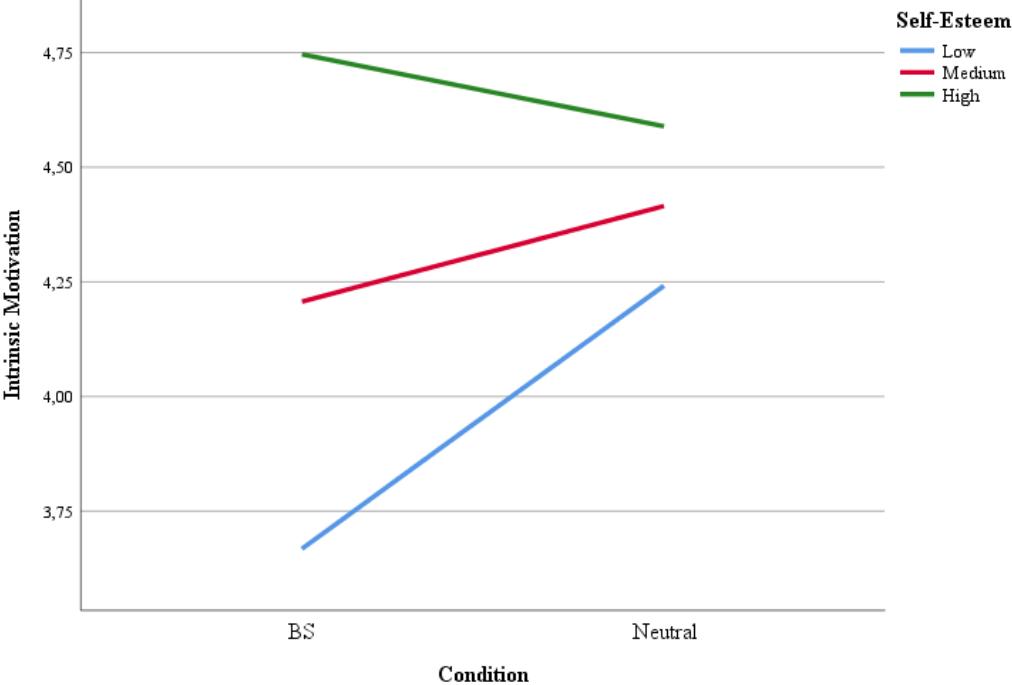*Three Basic Needs Competence, Autonomy, and Relatedness.*

Figure 2 *Simple Slopes for women's and intrinsic motivation who have high levels (M +*

1SD), medium (M) and low levels (M-1 SD) of self-esteem when encountering BS vs. neutral

statements

Appendix A

Informed consent

Please read the information on this page carefully.

Consent to Participate in Research:

You are invited to participate in a research study. You will be asked to imagine starting a job at a new company and we would like you to indicate how you experience an imagined task. It is important to mention that we are only interested in your own personal opinion and that the data will be kept anonymous and confidential.

Please complete the survey in one go, without any distractions or breaks.

Duration: The study should last approximately 10 to 15 minutes.

Risks: There are no or minimal foreseeable physical or emotional risks involved. We will ask you some questions about your workplace and your own and other people's behaviour at work.

Confidentiality: Your data will be recorded, analysed, and kept on file for the sake of future research and analyses, but they will be kept completely confidential at all times. We will maintain confidentiality by keeping your data under lock, and by storing, coding, analysing, and reporting them anonymously so that others will not be able to connect you with your data.

Your rights: Your participation is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions or perform any task. In addition, your privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from this study.

Questions or concerns: If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact Pelin Gül at p.gul@rug.nl or Eric Moser at e.moser@student.rug.nl.

Do you have questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant? For this, you may also contact the Ethics Committee of Psychology of the University of Groningen: ecp@rug.nl.

If you have read the information provided above, please indicate your agreement in the

following.

° I agree.

° I don't agree.

Appendix B

Measures

Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (IMI)

Indicate to what degree the following statements apply to you.

When I am working on this task, I would think about how much I enjoy it.

I would not feel at all nervous about doing the task.

I would feel that it was my choice to do the task.

I would think I am pretty good at this task.

I would find the task very interesting.

I would feel tense while doing the task.

I think I would do pretty well at this activity, compared to other colleagues.

Doing the task would be fun.

I would feel relaxed while doing the task.

I would enjoy doing the task very much.

I wouldn't really have a choice about doing the task.

I would be satisfied with my performance at this task.

I would feel anxious while doing the task.

I would feel like I was doing what I wanted to do while I am working on the task.

I would feel pretty skilled at this task.

I would think the task is very interesting.

I would feel pressured while doing the task.

I would feel like I had to do the task.

I would describe the task as very enjoyable.

I would do the task because I had no choice.

After working at this task for a while, I would feel pretty competent.

I felt really distant from my new boss.

I really doubt that my new boss and I would ever be friends.

I felt like I could really trust my new boss.

I'd really prefer not to interact with my new boss in the future.

I don't feel like I could really trust my new boss.

It is likely that my new boss and I could become friends if we interacted a lot.

I feel close to my new boss.

Feminist beliefs

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Women should be considered as seriously as men as candidates for the Presidency of the

United States

Although women can be good leaders, men make better leaders.

A woman should have the same job opportunities as a man.

Men should respect women more than they currently do.

Many women in the work force are taking jobs away from men who need the jobs more.

Doctors need to take women's health concerns more seriously.

America should pass the Equal Rights Amendment in the United States. (seeks to end the

legal distinctions between men and women in matters of divorce, property, employment, and

other matters)

Women have been treated unfairly on the basis of their gender throughout most of human

history.

Women are already given equal opportunities with men in all important sectors of their lives.

Women in my country are treated as second-class citizens.

Women can best overcome discrimination by doing the best that they can at their jobs, not by wasting time with political activity.

Self-Esteem

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.

At times I think I am no good at all.

I feel that I have a number of good qualities.

I am able to do things as well as most other people.

I feel I do not have much to be proud of.

I certainly feel useless at times.

I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.

I wish I could have more respect for myself.

All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.

I take a positive attitude toward myself.