

Humor vs. Sexism: The Perception of Warmth and Competence in Confronting Sexist

Remarks

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Abstract

In spite of efforts to promote gender equality, sexism remains a prevalent issue for many women. Sexist remarks are one way in which sexism manifests, and there are various approaches to addressing them. Confronting sexism is one such approach, but women must consider its potential consequences. According to the Stereotype Content Model, women are generally perceived as warm but not competent, while women advocating for gender equality, such as feminists, are viewed as competent but less warm. This study aims to examine whether women who use humor to confront sexist remarks can be perceived as both warm and competent. Our sample includes 136 male participants, primarily Dutch and German. We conducted an experimental study where participants watched two videos: one showing the sexist remark and the second one including the response. The response conditions include direct confrontation, humor-based confrontation, and changing the topic, stated by either a man or woman. Contrary to our hypothesis, using humor to confront, compared to direct confrontation or changing topic, did not result in the female responder being perceived as more warm or competent. In line with previous research, women not confronting were seen as more warm, while those confronting directly were seen as more competent. Furthermore, the male responder using direct confrontation was seen as significantly warmer and competent compared to the humorous confrontation. These findings suggest that using humor as a strategy to confront sexism does not preserve the perception of warmth and competence from changing, but decreases both.

Keywords: sexism, humor response, confronting sexism, warmth and competence, Stereotype Content Model, SCM, video study

Humor vs. Sexism: The Perception of Warmth and Competence in Confronting Sexist Remarks

To this day gender inequality remains a prevalent issue in our society. While the degree of sexism women experience varies depending on individual circumstances and location, it is a global issue. Thus, there has been much effort put into creating an equal society, which can be seen in the progress in the past decades. One example here is the year 2023 being the first year where not one functioning parliament in the world consists of men only, as the UN News reported (2023). Yet, not one country in the world has accomplished gender equality (UNDP, 2020), and women encounter sexism in the form of prejudice, stereotyping, or objectification as frequently as once or twice a week (Swim et al., 2001). Furthermore, research has found that experiencing sexist events is a predictor of suffering from psychological distress (Moradi & Subich, 2003) and has a negative effect on mental and physical health (Murphy, 2003). This is why gender inequality and hence sexism need to be challenged more and thus changed for good.

What influences the spread of sexist beliefs in society and how can individuals effectively challenge and counteract these biases? Research has shown that sexist norms spread when they are seen as socially acceptable, which is the case when no one signals that they disagree by disrupting the flow of the conversation (Koudenburg et al., 2021). Otherwise, being accommodating by keeping conversational flow after a sexist statement was made suggests agreement with what was said (Koudenburg et al., 2021). This finding emphasizes the importance of not just going along with sexist statements but disrupting the flow to show disagreement and thus challenge the bias. Another study found that confronting biases can lead to a reduction of stereotypes held by the perpetrator, which has significant implications for promoting greater understanding, equality, and the reduction of discriminatory beliefs and

behaviors (Czopp et al., 2006). It suggests that confronting sexist biases can be an effective strategy for fostering positive change regarding gender equality and stereotypes. Moreover, a study by Woodzicka and colleagues has revealed that when it comes to sexist comments, any type of confrontation is more effective and thus better than not confronting at all (2020). This suggests that even if the chosen confrontation method may not be ideal, taking any action to address sexism is still more beneficial than ignoring or avoiding the issue at hand. Yet, there are aspects that need to be considered when it comes to confronting sexism, such as the social backlash, the social costs experienced when speaking up about sexism (Woodzicka et al., 2020), which is especially experienced by women (Smith et al., 2000). This backlash occurs as a form of resistance toward progressive social change to defend one's privilege, which is demonstrated through an active pushback against emancipatory policies and perspectives (Dragiewicz et al., 2021). While social backlash also entails passively denying problems and blocking methods to sustain the old norms, it also includes active repression and violence as well as harassment towards the minority, in this case, women challenging gender norms (Dragiewicz et al., 2021). Due to the resentment and its consequences in the form of social costs, confronting sexism directly is oftentimes not an option for women.

Stereotype Content Model

In this thesis, we will examine how individuals respond to sexist remarks by applying the stereotype content model (SCM) introduced by Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, and Xu (2002). The SCM presents the two dimensions of social perception: 'Warmth' and 'competence'. The label 'warmth' entails the traits of being "good-natured, trustworthy, tolerant, friendly, and sincere" (Cuddy, Fiske & Glick., 2008, p. 65), whereas a competent person is characterized as being "capable, skillful, intelligent, and confident" (Cuddy et al., 2008, p. 65). Depending on the levels

of both dimensions, the emotions of pity, envy, admiration, and contempt are produced (Cuddy et al., 2008). It is stated that generally for women only one of the two dimensions is high at a time, thus being perceived as either warm or competent and not the other, which leads to women being “either respected or liked, but not both” (Connor & Fiske, 2018, p. 322). While women might shift from being ‘warm’ to ‘competent’, they automatically decrease in warmth as they cannot sustain both (Connor & Fiske, 2018, p. 322). Fiske and colleagues found that women being career-oriented and identifying as feminists, and thus being more inclined to challenge sexist norms, are perceived as more competent than warm, whereas women taking on traditional roles such as housewives are viewed as more warm than competent (2002). While gender stereotypes show the difference between men and women, they also create expectations of the behavior and attributes a man or woman should have (Burgess & Borgida, 1999). Traits seen as female are being sensitive, warm, cooperating, etc. (Prentice & Carranza, 2002), whereas men are expected to be dominant, in control, intimidating and arrogant (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). According to the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI), women adhering to the norms often elicit benevolent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996). On the other hand, women deviating from those norms are the ones being confronted with hostile sexism the most, which entails prejudice that men deserve a higher status, as well as the want to dominate women (Glick & Fiske, 1996). This includes females showing agency and competing with men at work, which can be considered high in competence, being confronted with hostile behavior at their workplace (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Moreover, they are perceived to be more dominant when compared to men, as well as viewed negatively (Heilman et al., 2004).

The Cost of Confrontation

When women stand up to sexism, they face significant challenges. On the one hand, they might be disregarded and their experiences undermined, as their perception is seen as false due to emotionality and overreaction often associated with women (Heilman et al., 2004). On the other hand, their speaking up can be seen as creating a hostile environment and being too dominant, as this kind of behavior is associated with men and not women (Heilman et al., 2004).

In light of the SCM, women who are generally liked for their warmth may be perceived to be competent when speaking up about sexism by confronting it. However, this means that there is a shift from being warm to competent, so a decrease in their perception of being a warm person (Cikara & Fiske, 2009). Consequently, women who engage in confrontation when faced with sexism may face the cost of not being liked in order to be seen as competent and respected. This can increase their chances of experiencing hostile sexism, including backlash and sexual harassment (Cikara & Fiske, 2009).

So how can one respond to a sexist remark in order to counter the stereotypes and the coinciding discrimination? 16% of women and 4.5% of men stated they would use humor to confront a sexist joke (Woodzicka et al., 2020). This can be particularly useful for women as humor can function as a strategy to manage conflict and thus could have the potential to decrease social backlash when confronting sexism (Smith et al., 2000), such as the resistance of progressive change manifested in negative reactions or even punishment when women challenge traditional gender roles by speaking up (Woodzicka et al., 2020). With the aim of reducing sexism while minimizing social costs, using a humorous confrontation could be a valid option as it has been shown to increase both the liking and respect of women challenging sexist statements (Woodzicka et al., 2020).

The Present Research

This paper examines the role of humor when confronting a sexist remark, which will be compared to direct confrontation and changing the topic. By taking a closer look at the aspects of 'warmth' and 'competence,' we can explore whether using humor as a way to confront others is advantageous for women. This leads to the research question of this paper: How is the perception of warmth and competence of women using humor as a response to a sexist remark?

For this online research, all participants will watch a short video of a group of young adults, two men and two women, having a conversation where one of the men makes a sexist remark. This is when the video cuts off and the participants are asked to answer questions about for example the norms. Next, the same video is displayed again but also the response to the remark which is either direct confrontation, using humor, or laughing along meaning not intervening and then changing the topic (see Appendix for links to the videos). Based on the participants' rating of characteristics of either the female or male responding person, their perceptions of the given person on warmth and competence are being measured. Here, it is asked whether the person in the video came across as warm, likable, trustworthy, and friendly as these are characteristics adhering to warmth according to Susan Fiske, as well as the ones most often used to measure warmth for the SCM (Fiske, 2018; Halkias & Diamantopoulos, 2020). On the other side, the extent of the responding person coming across as competent, independent, assertive, and capable was used to measure competence, due to these traits being used the most as a measurement for competence for the SCM, as well (Fiske, 2018; Halkias & Diamantopoulos, 2020).

Hypotheses

It is hypothesized that women who change the topic and thus do not confront the sexist remark are seen as warm but not competent, while being perceived to be competent but not warm when confronting directly. Secondly, women using humor as their confrontation are hypothesized to be viewed as both competent and warm.

Method

Participants

The participants we recruited for this study were all men above the age of sixteen. The nationality of the participants was predominantly Dutch ($n=139$) and German ($n=36$) with a mean age of $M = 26$. A total of 179 participants were recruited through SONA, an online platform of the University of Groningen for studies in the field of psychology, and snowballing via social media, platforms, and our personal network. However, only 130 of the participants finished the survey until the measurement of warmth and competence, thus an attrition rate of 29 percent. All participants provided informed consent prior to participation in the study. We compensated the participants with 0.5 sona credits for the completion of the survey, or with the possibility of winning a 15 Euro bol.com voucher.

Measures

We conducted a study with a between-subject design as the participants were only tested once, with the two factors gender (with two categories: male, female) and confrontation (with three categories: direct confrontation, humorous confrontation, changing topic). The dependent variables measured in the study are warmth and competence. Participants' perceptions of the responding person were assessed using a 7-point Likert scale (ranging from 'not at all' to 'very much') about four different personality traits describing/related to each warmth and competence,

such as “friendliness” and “capability”. They were selected based on the SCM (Fiske et al., 2007) as well as findings from a meta-analysis on the SCM indicating the most frequently used measures for both warmth and competence (Halkias & Diamantopoulos, 2020).

The values for Cronbach’s alpha being higher than $\alpha=.7$ for warmth for women ($\alpha=.86$) and men ($\alpha=.91$), as well as competence for women ($\alpha=.75$) and men ($\alpha=.86$), indicate that there is internal consistency within the dependent variables. Another scale checked if our manipulation worked. To test the manipulation of the confrontation being seen as such we asked “Tom/Lucy confronted/objected to the remark made by Paul”. For humor there were two questions, once directly asking whether the responding person has used humor, and once if sarcasm was used. For the third manipulation, it was asked if the responding person changed the topic after the remark by Paul was made. Additionally, it was assessed if subgroups emerged between the two men and two women. Participants rated the items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Procedure

Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that their responses would be kept confidential. They were asked to complete the study online on their device of choice, in their own personal setting (not in a lab). The study was in English and it was recommended to use headphones for optimal sound. In the study, they were asked to watch a video (lasting 22 seconds) of a group of four young adults, two males and two females, having a conversation about their holidays. Then, one of the two men makes a sexist remark after one of the women mentioned having had a female pilot: “A woman? Most women can’t even drive a car, why is she allowed to fly a plane?”. They were instructed to imagine they were the person making that comment.

Next, the participants were randomly assigned to one of six experimental conditions depending on which they watched the same video with the following different responses: (1) a man confronted the sexist comment with humor, (2) a man confronted the sexist comment more directly, (3) a man did not confront the sexist comment but changed the topic, (4) a woman confronted the sexist comment with humor, (5) a woman confronted the sexist comment more directly, or (6) a woman did not confront the sexist comment but change the topic, thus a 2x3 design. This was followed by a series of questions about their approval, norms, feminism, personality traits, recognition of sexism, and plausible deniability. This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the RUG.

Analysis Plan

We used a two-way ANOVA to assess the effect of the response condition the participant was assigned to (humor, direct confrontation, control) and secondly the effect of the gender of the responding person on the perception of warmth and competence. The main effects of the factors and interaction effects between factors are assessed. Additionally, we performed pairwise comparisons to compare the conditions of the variables. The program we used to analyze our data is IBM SPSS Statistics 28. Data preprocessing included anonymizing the data, as well as excluding the participants who did not get to the questions about warmth and competence. The significance level used to determine statistical significance is $\alpha=.05$.

Results

We conducted two separate analyses for the dependent variable of the perception of warmth and secondly competence of the responding person. Means, standard deviations, and the sample size of each category are displayed in Table 1 for warmth, and in Table 2 for competence.

Table 1*Descriptive Statistics: Warmth*

Gender	Response	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Male	Humor confrontation	3.10	1.58	20
	Direct confrontation	4.15	1.66	21
	Change topic	3.51	1.33	22
	Total	3.60	1.56	63
Female	Humor confrontation	3.45	1.28	24
	Direct confrontation	3.44	1.20	21
	Change topic	4.90	1.19	22
	Total	3.92	1.39	67
Total	Humor confrontation	3.29	1.42	44
	Direct confrontation	3.80	1.48	42
	Change topic	4.20	1.43	44
	Total	376	1.48	130

Table 2*Descriptive Statistics: Competence*

Gender	Response	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Male	Humor confrontation	3.5	1.29	20
	Direct confrontation	4.62	1.42	21
	Change topic	3.81	1.56	22
	Total	3.98	1.49	63

Female	Humor confrontation	3.99	0.98	24
	Direct confrontation	4.96	1.23	21
	Change topic	4.44	1.03	22
	Total	4.44	1.14	67
Total	Humor confrontation	3.77	1.14	44
	Direct confrontation	4.79	1.32	42
	Change topic	4.12	1.35	44
	Total	4.22	1.33	130

Manipulation Check

The manipulation check shows that the manipulations of all three conditions of the independent variable were effective, for both male and female conditions. This can be seen as the means of the responses tested through questions were significantly higher in the condition we tested. For the female responder, the humor confrontation was seen as humorous ($M = 5.17$) and sarcastic ($M = 5.39$), both $p < .001$. For the condition of direct confrontation, the response was seen as confrontational ($M = 6.05$, $p < .001$). Next, for the control group, it was recognized that Lucy changed the topic ($M = 5.62$, $p < .001$).

Similarly, for the male responder, the direct confrontation was seen as confrontational ($M = 5.10$, $p < .001$), and the control condition was perceived as changing the topic ($M = 5.33$, $p < .001$). For the humorous confrontation, it was recognized that Tom used humor ($M = 4.50$, $p = .009$), and sarcasm ($M = 4.15$, $p = .023$). Yet, the manipulation of humor confrontation for men has not worked as well as for women. While it was recognized that he used humor, the mean of the response being confrontational is low ($M = 2.80$). This was not the case for the female humor condition, which was seen as moderately confrontational ($M = 4.35$). Additionally, the male

humor condition had the highest score for the emergence of male and female subgroups compared to other categories ($M = 4.25, p = .003$).

Assumptions

We tested the assumptions of independence, homogeneity, and normality. While the first two assumptions were met for each of the variables, the assumption of normality was only partly met. Having a sample size of 130 participants could be one of the reasons for this, as this led to group sizes of 20 to 24 participants in each condition, making it less reliable. This may affect the precision of estimates as well as the accuracy of the results. Despite the violation of normality, we proceeded with the analysis, considering the robustness of the two-way ANOVA, in order to explore potential effects while accounting for the violation.

Main Effects and Pairwise Comparisons

There is a significant main effect of the response condition on both warmth, $F(2,124) = 5.01, p = .008$, and competence, $F(2,124) = 7.52, p = .001$. This means that the different three conditions have a significant impact on both dependent variables. In support of the first hypothesis, pairwise comparisons revealed that women in the control condition, who did not confront the sexist remark but instead changed the topic of conversation, scored significantly higher on warmth ($M = 4.9$) compared to those who used either direct confrontation ($M = 3.44, p = .002$), or confrontation using humor ($M = 3.45, p = .002$). While perceptions of competence for women engaging in direct confrontation ($M = 4.96$) are significantly higher than those who engage in humorous confrontation ($M = 3.99, p = .033$), they are not significantly different from the control condition ($M = 4.44, p = .535$). The score for humor confrontation regarding competence is significantly lower compared to direct confrontation ($M = 3.99, p = .033$), and non-significantly lower compared to changing the topic ($M = 4.44, p = .677$). Further, the score

for the perception of warmth for humor confrontation ($M = 3.45$) is similar to the direct confrontation condition ($M = 3.44, p = 1.000$). Thus, the findings do not support the second hypothesis of a woman using humor to confront being viewed as competent and warm.

Gender significantly affects competence $F(1,124) = 4.89, p = .029$, but not warmth $F(1,124) = 1.97, p = .163$. Specifically, the female responder, on average, scores higher in competence compared to the male responder. Furthermore, there is a significant interaction effect between both independent variables for warmth, $F(2,124) = 6.23, p = .003$. This indicates that the interaction between the response condition and gender significantly influences the perceived warmth of the responder. However, for competence the interaction effect is not significant, $F(2,124) = .14, p = .87$. Thus, the combined effect of these two factors does not have a significant impact on the perceived competence of the responder.

Exploratory Results

Furthermore, in order to provide a comprehensive analysis, we also conducted an exploratory examination of the perceptions of the male responder. The results indicate that men using direct confrontation are perceived as significantly higher in both warmth ($M = 4.15, p = .047$) and competence ($M = 4.63, p = .016$) when compared to the humor response. While the score was higher for direct confrontation when comparing the results to the control response, the difference is non-significant for warmth ($M = 3.51, p = .387$), as well as for competence ($M = 3.81, p = .111$). The male humor and control condition, on the other hand, were non-significantly different for neither warmth ($p = 1.000$) nor competence ($p = 1.000$), meaning there is no evidence to support a meaningful or statistically significant difference between the control and humor group for the male responder.

Discussion

Nowadays, during a time of progressive social change regarding gender norms (UNPD, 2020), people who are aware of the discrimination might feel inclined to speak up when faced with sexism. However, there are risks in doing so, such as experiencing social backlash (Woodzicka et al., 2020), which is especially critical for women speaking up about it (Dragiewicz et al., 2021). In this research, we studied the effects of three different ways to respond in a situation where a man made a sexist comment, namely using direct confrontation, using humor to confront, or not confronting but changing the topic.

Our first finding was that a woman using direct confrontation is perceived as more competent, however, the effect was only significant when comparing it to using humor. The finding is consistent with previous research by Fiske et al. (2002) indicating that women who identify as feminists and thus are more likely to challenge sexist norms with confrontation are seen as less warm, but competent. This has the implication that the likelihood of the women using direct confrontation and thus seemingly competent women experiencing hostile sexism increases (Glick & Fiske, 1996).

Moreover, we found that a woman who does not confront the sexist comment is perceived to be significantly warmer than the ones confronting it, either directly or with humor, which supports part of our first hypothesis. This is in accordance with previous research by Cikara and Fiske, in the way that women are generally perceived to be warm when they adhere to traditional gender norms, such as being friendly, accommodating, and non-confrontational (2009). A woman being perceived as warm has a higher chance of encountering benevolent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996), which consequently can lead to women feeling incompetent (Dumont et al., 2010).

Further, the finding that women are perceived as more competent when engaging in direct confrontation partially supports the first hypothesis. While the score for the perception of competence for women using direct confrontation is higher compared to the two other conditions, this difference in perceived competence is not statistically significant when compared to the control condition. On the other hand, when comparing direct confrontation to humorous confrontation, a significant difference in perceived competence emerges.

Additionally, the second hypothesis, stating that making use of humor in one's confrontation leads to being viewed positively regarding warmth and competence in such a situation as a woman, is not supported. This result contradicts recent research by Woodzicka and colleagues which has found that both men and women using humor while confronting sexism were rated to be more likable compared to others not using humor (2020). One possible explanation for this could be the differences in the humorous response used in the studies and differences in perception of what is funny. Another explanation could be the difference in samples used in this study, as we only used male participants while the previous research by Woodzicka et al. also included female participants. This can explain a difference in results, as women were found to be over three times more likely to use humor to confront sexism (Woodzicka et al., 2020), and thus might rate someone else doing so more favorably as well. Moreover, the participants were supposed to imagine being a bystander of a sexist comment being made, as well as imagining how they would respond to the sexist remark, compared to our study having the participants imagine they are the person making the sexist statement. This could significantly alter the perception one has of the person responding due to a different mindset and perspective due to identification.

Another observation made while conducting our research was that the male response of confronting with humor while being perceived as humorous, was not seen as confrontational. This means that it could have seemed like the responder makes another joke about women instead of disagreeing, which thus alters the perception of the man responding greatly. This could explain the low result of the perception of especially warmth, but also competence, in case the participants disagree with the sexist statement made or sexism in general and thus dislike someone having sexist views. On the other hand, for the female humor condition, the results indicate that the response was both humorous and confrontational. Above that, the emergence of subgroups was perceived for the male humor confrontation, which supports the observation that participants have not seen the condition as confrontational, leading to the emergence of male versus female subgroups. Taking this into account, the findings for the condition of confrontation with humor cannot be generalized across genders, and the results get a different meaning when considering this discrepancy. When women use humor to confront, they may not be seen as warm or competent, however, this perception is influenced by their specific way of confrontation. On the other hand, for men, the results suggest that it's not necessarily the use of humor to confront that affects the perceptions of warmth and competence, but rather the perception of them aligning with the other man in the group by joking together and thus agreeing with the sexist remark.

Moreover, the results are partially in accordance with previous findings of men being perceived as high in both warmth and competence (Connor & Fiske, 2018), however, this is only the case for the condition of direct confrontation. In comparison, men using humor to address sexism has led to them being perceived to be less warm and less competent, again opposing the previous findings by Woodzicka et al. (2020). Consequently, our findings indicate that men can

stand up for gender equality and do not have to fear their perception of being warm or competent worsening when calling out sexism in a direct manner. As the two values are even higher compared to not speaking up, men are both liked and respected more when doing so.

Another finding is that women, on average, score significantly higher on competence compared to men. One possible explanation for this disparity in the confronting conditions is the defying of stereotypes held by male participants, as the female responder deviates from traditional social norms by not adhering to accommodating and warm behaviors (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). Additionally, confidence may play a crucial role, as women who address sexism with confidence or also change the topic are perceived as being in control and capable of handling the situation, thus demonstrating agency. Furthermore, it is worth noting that two of the responses made by women were rated as highly confrontational, while only direct confrontation was seen as confrontational for the male group. This discrepancy could account for the higher competence scores for women using humor to confront, compared to their male counterparts.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

As research shows, women who choose not to confront a sexist remark are perceived as warmer compared to those confronting it directly or with humor. This implies that women may consider the trade-off between being seen as warm and addressing the sexism they encounter. When they choose to confront in a direct manner, they are perceived as more competent, meaning that this approach can enhance their credibility and assertiveness in challenging sexist behavior. Men on the other hand can confront sexism without compromising their likability or competence, as direct confrontation led to them being seen as warmer and more competent. These findings can function as a guide for interventions with the aim to reduce gender stereotypes and sexism while considering the perception of the people standing up for it. More

awareness can be promoted of men not having to trade off between being perceived as warm or competent when addressing sexism, which highlights the importance of allyship.

The finding that women who identify as feminists and confront sexism are perceived as less warm aligns with previous research (Fiske, 2002), suggesting that there may be a stereotype or bias against feminist women in general. This finding highlights the need for continued examination of the intersection between gender, feminism, and perceptions of warmth and competence. Further, the discrepancy in how humor is perceived when used by a man versus a woman suggests that gender dynamics and stereotypes influence the interpretation of humorous responses to sexism. This observation points to the importance of considering gender-specific expectations and norms when examining the use of humor in confrontational situations. It should be made clear what the intention of the humorous response is to avoid the ambiguity of whether the responder agrees or disagrees with the sexist remark, while taking the gender-based stereotypes into account, such as men having a more aggressive style of humor than women (Sillars et al., 2020). Also, men being more likely to joke about women and use sexist humor should be considered when looking at the humorous response (Romero-Sánchez et al., 2021). What's more, examining whether there is a different effect when using a different humorous confrontation can be beneficial in terms of finding out if the findings are actually based on the response being humorous, or just due to one specific response. This could vary greatly across the participants based on individual humor preferences, which would be avoided by using multiple types of humor to confront. It could also be useful in terms of getting more precise findings regarding what type of humor leads to the perception of the confronter being most warm and competent.

Limitations

A limitation of our research is that it is slightly underpowered due to the small sample size. This could affect our results in that smaller or more subtle effects could have been missed, as well as the precision of the estimates being impacted negatively. Thus, it is important to interpret the findings with caution and recognize the need for larger, more representative samples in future research in order to enhance the reliability and generalizability of the results. Moreover, the grand majority of participants are students and are in their twenties, which also is a limitation of the generalizability of the findings, as attitudes towards sexism differ across ages (Fernández et al., 2004). However, we purposely made the decision to recruit those participants, as the relevance of the video used in the study is larger for students than for people from all different age groups. We ask the participants to take the perspective of one of the young men in the video. For this manipulation to work best, we chose to have participants who can identify with him and are thus male and student-age, too. Another limitation of our study is the manipulations of the three conditions we chose, especially the humor one, as there are substantial differences in what people find funny while recognizing it as confrontational. This could be a potential explanation for the findings on using humor to confront sexism being opposite from previous research (Wodzicka et al., 2020). Another potential explanation was already mentioned above, as the humor response from the male confronter scored low on confrontation and high on the emergence of subgroups, meaning that the humorous confrontation was not perceived to be very confrontational but rather two men joking together. The limitation here is that we used irony as the humorous response, which might not be understood by all participants. Yet, we made the decision to use this scenario as it seemed realistic as to what would be said in a conversation between friends. Plus, it shows that the same comment can lead to very different interpretations

depending on the responder and their gender. Lastly, the study did not investigate the long-term consequences of different response strategies or examine the impact of contextual factors on the perceptions of warmth and competence, which would have led to a more comprehensive understanding, also with regard to possible future challenges the confronters could face.

Future Research

While our study has important theoretical and practical implications, there can be great benefits from future research, such as getting a more nuanced understanding of the perception of warmth and competence in relation to different ways to address sexism. This would lead to a deeper understanding of effective strategies for confronting sexism and promoting gender equality.

One way of doing so is to use a wider range of responses and thus confrontation styles, including various humor conditions such as irony, jokes, and sarcasm. This could contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how warmth and competence are perceived among both genders and give more nuanced implications on what response is best to confront while still being perceived as warm and competent and therefore avoiding social backlash. Additionally, conducting the study in diverse populations would provide valuable insights into potential variations in the perception of warmth and competence in relation to the different responses. Examining demographic factors such as age, gender, and cultural backgrounds could show off variances within these perceptions, and thus tell which types of responses are more likely to lead to the responder being viewed as warm and competent. Comparing the findings from multiple cultures and age groups would increase the generalizability of the study, as there are significant differences in what is perceived as sexist depending on cultures (Fiske, 2017), but also age (Fernández et al., 2004). Moreover, the study's focus on a single scenario (a sexist comment

made by a man) limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research could explore different contexts, such as sexist comments made by women, or having the sexist remark being directed specifically to one of the female participants in the conversation. This could yield more insights regarding potential differences in perception and response dynamics and gender differences. What's more, incorporating multiple contexts in the research design could show greater insight and lead to better generalizability. For instance, comparing the effects of different group compositions, such as the group of students consisting of two men and two women as used in this study, with other configurations, like a group consisting of only men, could show the influence of contextual factors on the participant perceptions of the confronter. Altering the setting, such as shifting the focus to a workplace environment, could offer insights into how the surrounding environment impacts the perception of warmth and competence, too.

Conclusion

While gender inequality is still a prevalent issue of our times, a growing number of individuals are actively combating this issue by taking a stand. Research has found that any type of confrontation is more effective than staying silent and saying nothing at all (Woodzick et al., 2020). The findings of this research show that men using direct confrontation do not have to worry about how they will be perceived, as both warmth and competence were rated higher compared to confronting using humor or changing the topic. Women, on the other hand, risk having to deal with social backlash and trade-off their perception of being warm, which is low when confronting, compared to women changing the topic. Different from what was hypothesized, using humor did not serve as an effective strategy for evading the negative consequences while confronting sexism, as it has not led to the responder being perceived as

warm and competent. All in all, this stresses the importance of gender inequality not only being a women's problem but that everyone is needed to stand up and challenge sexism.

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Appendix

Links to the Videos:

Male humor confrontation:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3SFpOrhFWSE&feature=youtu.be>

Male direct confrontation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iLZbmC-iJnM>

Male changing topic: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2X4X2EnkHv0>

Female humor confrontation: <https://youtu.be/uohxdl-k91g>

Female direct confrontation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjumQM2ZUnI>

Female changing topic: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MqiqWKgJ04o>