

# Reinforcing the Glass Ceiling: The Consequences of Hostile Sexism for Female Managerial Candidates<sup>1</sup>

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Previous research has established that benevolent sexism is related to the negative evaluation of women who violate specific norms for behavior. Research has yet to document the causal impact of hostile sexism on evaluations of individual targets. Correlational evidence and ambivalent sexism theory led us to predict that hostile sexism would be associated with negative evaluations of a female candidate for a masculine-typed occupational role. Participants completed the ASI (P. Glick & S. T. Fiske, 1996) and evaluated a curriculum vitae from either a male or female candidate. Higher hostile sexism was significantly associated with more negative evaluations of the female candidate and with lower recommendations that she be employed as a manager. Conversely, higher hostile sexism was significantly associated with higher recommendations that a male candidate should be employed as a manager. Benevolent sexism was unrelated to evaluations and recommendations in this context. The findings support the hypothesis that hostile, but not benevolent, sexism results in negativity toward individual women who pose a threat to men's status in the workplace.

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**KEY WORDS:** hostile sexism; glass ceiling; discrimination.

Sexism can take many forms (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995; Tougas, Brown, Beaton, & Joly, 1995), and it is important to understand more about how sexist attitudes may affect reactions to women in different social and organizational contexts. The aim of the current study was to explore the role of two forms of sexism, hostile and benevolent, in judgments and evaluations of an individual female target who may be judged as competitive or threatening to men. In line with Glick, Diebold, Bailey-Werner, and Zhu (1997), we expected that hostile, but not benevolent, sexism would be related to the negative evaluation of, and discrim-

ination against, an individual female candidate for a managerial role.

## Ambivalent Sexism and Evaluations of (Sub)Types of Women

In contrast to the view of sexism as a unitary antipathy or hostility toward women (e.g., Swim et al., 1995), Glick and Fiske (1996) proposed that *hostile sexism* (HS) may coexist with subjectively positive but stereotypical attitudes toward women, that is, *benevolent sexism* (BS). In order to assess this, Glick and Fiske (1996) developed and validated a 22-item Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI), which is comprised of the HS and BS subscales. Preliminary and subsequent work (e.g., Glick et al., 2000; Masser & Abrams, 1999) have found the HS and BS subscales of the ASI to be positively correlated, which suggests the coexistence of these affectively opposed attitudes toward women in some people.

Noting that the simultaneous holding of opposing attitudes toward women may be psychologically

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uncomfortable, Glick et al. (1997) suggested that the positivity of BS and negativity of HS may be targeted toward different (sub)types of women. Specifically, Glick et al. (1997) suggested that BS would be related to the idealization and positive evaluation of women in traditional gender roles (e.g., homemakers), whereas hostile sexism would be related to the negative evaluation of women who violate traditional gender roles (e.g., career women, feminists). On the basis that a woman's acceptance or rejection of traditional power relationships and gender roles would be key in determining an ambivalent sexist's reaction, Glick et al. (1997) conducted two studies to explore the relationship between HS, BS, and reactions to different subtypes of women. In their first study, Glick et al. (1997) found that HS was associated with the generation of more negatively evaluated subtypes and BS associated with the generation of more positively evaluated subtypes. In their second study, Glick et al. (1997) asked participants to generate stereotypes about different subtypes of women and to rate their positivity. Consistent with their hypotheses, they found that on the majority of dimensions HS was negatively associated with evaluations of the nontraditional woman subtype of career women. In their written free responses, sexist participants stated that "they feared, envied, were intimidated by, or felt competitive toward" (Glick et al., 1997, p. 1330) these career women. In contrast, BS was generally unrelated to evaluations of the nontraditional woman subtype of career women, but was positively associated with evaluations of the traditional woman subtype of homemaker. These findings were consistent with Fiske and Glick's (1995) earlier theoretical work on sexual harassment, which suggested that HS might be associated with negative affect toward those women who challenge the traditional feminine gender role.

Subsequent correlational research has provided further support for the link between BS and positive evaluations of women engaged in traditional behaviors and HS and the negative evaluation of women engaged in nontraditional behaviors (e.g., Franzoi, 2001; Glick, Sakalli-Ugurlu, Ferreira, & de Souza, 2002; Sakalli, 2001). Forbes, Adams-Curtis, Hamm, and White (2003) considered HS and BS in relation to the perception of breastfeeding women. Consistent with viewing breastfeeding as a nurturing behavior, Forbes et al. (2003) found a stronger relationship between BS and favorable perceptions of breastfeeding women than between HS and such perceptions. With regard to HS, Sakalli-Ugurlu and

Beydogan (2002) considered the role of patriarchy, HS, and BS in influencing college students' attitudes toward women managers in Turkey. In a questionnaire study, they found that along with patriarchy, HS, but not BS, was significantly associated with their Attitudes to Women as Managers scale, such that those who were higher in HS had significantly less favorable attitudes toward women as managers than did those lower in HS (see also Rudman & Kilianski, 2000).

### **Ambivalent Sexism and Evaluations of Individual Women**

Although the relationship of HS and BS to evaluations of (sub)types of women has now been well established, researchers have just begun to document the effects of HS and BS on reactions to individual female targets. As Glick et al. (1997) noted, individual female targets may defy easy subtype categorization and, in the view of the hostile or benevolent sexist, may combine qualities of both liked and disliked groups (e.g., a mother who works full-time in a nurturing profession). In a series of recent quasi-experimental studies we have begun to consider the relationship of HS and BS to evaluations of individual female targets (Abrams, Viki, Masser, & Bohner, 2003; Viki & Abrams, 2002; Viki, Massey, & Masser, 2003). Within these studies, participants have been either been presented with a scenario in which a woman engages in behavior that violates the traditional gender role norm for appropriate sexual behavior for women (e.g., inviting a man back to her apartment and kissing him first; Abrams et al., 2003) or have been asked to rate a woman whose behavior could be seen as being counter to the traditional woman stereotype (e.g., non-nurturing, Viki et al., 2003). In all of these studies focusing on (specific) violations of the traditional role norm, BS, but not HS, has been found to predict harsher evaluations of the female target. For example, Abrams et al. (2003) found that only BS was associated with increased blame of a female acquaintance rape victim. Similarly, Viki et al. (2003) found that BS, but not HS, was associated with negative judgments of a female child killer (Myra Hindley). In these instances, benevolent sexists' concern with preserving specific aspects of traditional gender roles (Glick et al., 1997) appears to have resulted in negative judgments of an individual female target whose behavior was in violation of that role.

In all of the studies to date that have focused on evaluations of individual female targets, HS has been found to be unrelated to the judgments made. Given Glick et al. (1997) and Sakalli-Ugurlu and Beydogan's (2002) findings of a negative association between HS and (sub)types of women, it appears that the null effect of HS in the existing individual target research may potentially be due to the nature of the targets used in the studies. Specifically, in their correlational studies, Glick et al. (1997) noted the importance of feelings of fear, envy, intimidation, or competition in hostile sexists' negative evaluations of nontraditional (career) women. Given this, for hostile sexists it may very well be a case of Schein's (1973) "think manager, think male" (see also Brenner, Tomkiewicz, & Schein, 1989; Heilman, Block, Martell, & Simon, 1989; Powell, Butterfield, & Parent, 2002) in that the negative impact of HS will only be apparent against individual female targets who violate the traditional (feminine) gender role in a way that threatens men or men's status in positions of economic power.

### The Current Study

In this study we examined whether HS would have a distinct role (relative to BS) in negative evaluations of, and discrimination against, a female candidate who violated the traditional (feminine) gender role and threatened men's status by applying for a masculine-typed managerial role. Participants were asked to consider the curriculum vitae of either a male or female applicant for a management position and to indicate the degree to which a series of traits were descriptive of the candidate and the perceived employability of the candidate in the management position. Given previous correlational research in this area (e.g., Glick et al., 1997; Sakalli-Ugurlu & Beydogan, 2002) and the threat that a female manager may pose to men's status, it was predicted that HS would be related to participants' negative evaluation of the female candidate applying for a masculine-typed managerial role. In this context, and because the fulfilment of a managerial role does not automatically preclude fulfilment of the specific aspects of the traditional gender role norm established to be of importance to benevolent sexists (e.g., sexual conservatism; Abrams et al., 2003; nurturing behavior; Viki et al., 2003), it was predicted that BS would be unrelated to participants' evaluations of the female candidate. Given the focus of the ASI in assess-

ing sexist attitudes toward women, we did not predict that evaluations of the male candidate would be related to HS or BS scale scores.

## METHOD

### Participants and Procedure

Three hundred and seven participants (144 men, 137 women, and 26 unspecified) completed the measures. The mean age of the sample was 24 years ( $SD = 7.77$ ), and all participants had English as a first language or were proficient in English. The majority of participants (72%) were employed; the remainder were unemployed, students or people engaged in full-time care of another. Participants in this study were obtained through contacts in a number of organizations in southeast England.<sup>5</sup> Seven hundred and fifty-six questionnaire packs that included the measures for the current study embedded in other unrelated measures were distributed. Of those who received questionnaires, 40.6% completed and returned them.

### Materials

#### *The Curriculum Vitae*

Participants were presented with a curriculum vitae that they were told had been sent to a large retail company that advertised a managerial position.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Specifically, a number of employees of organizations in southeast England were approached and asked if they would be willing to assist in the administration of a questionnaire. These employees were acquaintances of the first author, but were unaware as to the purpose of the study. These assistants were given packs of questionnaire booklets that contained the measures for the current study (embedded in other measures), debriefing sheets, and stamped, addressed envelopes. The assistants were asked to recruit as many participants as possible. Each participant was initially given a booklet of measures and a stamped, addressed envelope. Between 2 and 3 weeks later, each participant was given a debriefing sheet to explain the purpose of the study. In addition, names, addresses, and telephone numbers of the University administrators were provided to enable participants to contact us. A small number of participants (approximately 8%) did, primarily to obtain feedback information.

<sup>6</sup>Pilot testing conducted prior to the main study indicated that a management position within a retail company was viewed as a masculine-typed position. At the time the data for the current study were collected (mid-late 1990s) this perception is likely to have reflected the reality of women's representation in retail management positions. Despite the disproportional

The curriculum vitae detailed the candidate's educational qualifications and his or her prior relevant experience. The candidates were portrayed as moderately qualified for the position with the necessary educational qualifications and some relevant workplace experience. The gender of the applicant was varied by altering the name of the applicant ("Christine" or "Christopher"). Participants were told that the study concerned the presentation of information within the curriculum vitae and were requested to read the vitae and rate the candidate on 12 traits (e.g., friendly, helpful, conceited, arrogant<sup>7</sup>) using a 1 (*not characteristic*) to 7 (*highly characteristic*) scale. The trait measure was based on those used by Spence, Helmreich, and Holahan (1979), Bem (1981), and Martin (1987) and was comprised of a number of stereotypically feminine, masculine, and neutral traits. In addition, participants were asked to rate how suitable the candidate was for the position and how likely they would be to employ the candidate in the managerial position using a 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very likely*) scale.<sup>8</sup>

#### *Ambivalent Sexism Inventory*

The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI; Glick & Fiske, 1996) is a 22-item inventory comprised of two 11-item scales (HS and BS). The ASI is made up mainly of statements concerning relationships between men and women, to which participants indicate their level of agreement using a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). Higher scores indicate more sexist attitudes. Examples of items are "Women seek to gain power by getting control over men" (HS) and "Women should be cherished and protected by men" (BS).

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representation of women in the junior levels of retail organizations, women in the UK are still not equally represented at the management level within these organizations. As of 2001, women only made up 35% of retail managers in the UK (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2002).

<sup>7</sup>The 12 traits used were arrogant, insensitive, moody, conceited, careless, aggressive, dictatorial, sincere, superior, friendly, helpful, and submissive.

<sup>8</sup>As noted in the procedure, participants were given questionnaire packs that contained both the CV and associated measures and the ASI. As noted by an anonymous reviewer it is possible that completion of the ASI may have unduly influenced the assessment of the CV (for those who chose to complete the ASI prior to the CV measure). We believe that this is unlikely to have occurred, as previous research (that has systematically varied the order of administration of the ASI with the dependent measures) has not documented any effect of order of administration (e.g., Abrams et al., 2003).

## RESULTS

### Preliminary Analyses

Following recoding of the negative traits, principal-component analysis with a varimax rotation was used to assess the structure of the trait measure. The 12 positive trait items loaded onto one factor (loadings ranged from .41 to .81) and formed a reliable scale (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .84$ ).

Consistent with previous research (e.g., Glick et al., 1997; Glick & Fiske, 1996; Masser & Abrams, 1999), the ASI subscales were reliable (HS Cronbach's  $\alpha = .80$ , BS Cronbach's  $\alpha = .70$ ) and positively correlated ( $r = .50$ ). A MANOVA was carried out to test for gender differences in HS and BS. The main effect for gender was not significant,  $F(1, 261) = 0.34$ , *ns*, nor was the interaction between gender and scale,  $F(1, 261) = 0.04$ , *ns*. The mean score on the HS scale was 3.42 ( $SD = 1.05$ ), and the mean score on the BS scale was 3.50 ( $SD = 0.90$ ). Preliminary analyses also showed that participant gender did not have any significant main or interaction effects (with HS, BS, or candidate gender) on the dependent variable (all  $p$ 's > .34). Therefore participants' gender is not discussed in further analyses.

### Main Analyses

To analyze the impact of candidate gender and hostile sexism, we used hierarchical regression. As recommended by Jaccard, Turrisi, and Wan (1990), all variables were centered prior to analysis. On the first step, candidate gender, BS, and HS were entered. On the second step the two-way interaction terms between HS, BS, and candidate gender were entered.

#### *Judgments of the Candidate's Traits*

Analysis of the candidate's traits revealed no significant effects for HS, BS, or candidate gender (all  $\beta$ 's < .10; all  $p$ 's > .14), but there was a significant two-way interaction between candidate gender and hostile sexism,  $\beta = -.23$ ,  $t = -3.60$ ,  $p < .001$ . Simple slopes analysis revealed that for the female candidates increases in hostile sexism were associated with less positive trait evaluations,  $b = -.23$ ,  $t(303) = -3.61$ ,  $p < .001$ , whereas for the male candidates there was no such relationship,  $b = .08$ ,  $t(303) = 1.35$ , *ns*. None of the other two-way interaction terms were significant (all  $\beta$ 's < .07; all  $p$ 's > .34).

*Judgments of the Candidate's Employability*

Analysis of the employability of the candidates revealed no significant effects for HS, BS, or candidate gender (all  $\beta$ 's < .12; all  $p$ 's > .11), but there was a significant two-way interaction between candidate gender and hostile sexism,  $\beta = -.23$ ,  $t = -3.40$ ,  $p < .001$ . Simple slopes analysis revealed that for the female candidates increases in hostile sexism were associated with lower employment recommendations,  $b = -.25$ ,  $t(254) = -2.62$ ,  $p < .01$ , whereas for the male candidates increases in hostile sexism were associated with higher employment recommendations,  $b = .20$ ,  $t(254) = 2.18$ ,  $p < .05$ . None of the other two-way interaction terms were significant (all  $\beta$ 's < .05; all  $p$ 's > .57).

**DISCUSSION**

The results of the current study are consistent with our main hypotheses. In line with Glick et al. (1997) and Sakalli-Ugurlu and Beydogan (2002), HS was found to be related to the negative evaluation of, and lower employment recommendations of, a female candidate for a masculine-typed position. In contrast, for the male candidate, HS was associated with the higher recommendation of employment. BS was unrelated to evaluations and recommendations in this context. The current study extends the results of Glick et al. (1997), Sakalli-Ugurlu and Beydogan (2002), and Abrams et al. (2003) by demonstrating the circumstances under which HS will be related to negative outcomes for an individual female target.

This study adds to a growing body of recent literature that demonstrates the "problem" of HS and BS at an individual target level. Whereas Glick and Fiske (2001) suggested that BS and HS can be viewed as complementary "carrot and stick" ideologies that serve to maintain the paternalistic oppression of women, the results of the current study, in conjunction with the research of Abrams et al. (2003), suggest that the negative consequences of both HS and BS at the individual target level may be determined by specific aspects of a woman's character (in terms of traits) or behavior and the (lack of) threat that they pose to men's status. Abrams et al. (2003) and Viki et al. (2003) have demonstrated that the negative consequences of BS are directed toward women who violate (key) components of the traditional stereotype of women's behavior. The results of the current study, in conjunction with

those of Glick et al. (1997) and Sakalli-Ugurlu and Beydogan (2002), suggest that those who endorse benevolent sexism are unconcerned with violations of the traditional stereotype that potentially pose a threat to men's status in terms of (implicit) competition for masculine-typed jobs. Rather, it seems that the negative reactions of benevolent sexists are limited to violations of specific prescriptive elements of the traditional feminine stereotype (e.g., sexual conservative, nurturing behavior). This suggestion is consistent with the results of some preliminary research that we have conducted to investigate this issue. Specifically Masser, Brands, Viki, and Abrams (2003) found that the negative reactions of a benevolent sexist were limited to women who violated a specific aspect of the gender norm for behavior (i.e., sexual conservatism) rather than those who violated a more general gender norm for behavior (e.g., employment in a masculine-typed occupation).

In relation to hostile sexism, the results of the current study suggest that the conclusion of Glick et al. (1997) that "HS (will be) directed at nontraditional women" (p. 1331) is too simplistic. Rather, congruent with the findings of Glick et al. (1997), the results of the current study suggest that, for the negative consequences of HS to be elicited, it may be critical that the woman poses a threat to men's status or position in society. The threat of the female candidate to men's status or position in society was implicit in the current study, therefore future researchers should explore this suggestion explicitly to determine precisely what characteristics of a woman and/or a situation result in the "wrath" of hostile sexists being unleashed. Future researchers could also use mediational analyses to explore precisely why or when the wrath of hostile sexists will be unleashed. Drawing on the written responses of Glick et al.'s (1997) participants, we suspect that the effect may not be limited to "competitive" women. Rather women who provoke envy and/or are intimidating (without being competitive) may also be evaluated negatively by hostile sexists.

An unexpected finding of the current study was the positive relationship between hostile sexism and employment recommendations for the male candidate. This finding adds to a growing literature that has documented the impact of HS and BS on judgments or evaluations of men. For example, Abrams et al. (2003) found that amongst male students hostile sexism was positively associated with a self-confessed increased proclivity to engage in acquaintance rape. In addition Glick et al. (2002) found a

positive association between hostile sexism and attitude statements about wife abuse, many of which involved the evaluation of the male protagonist. These relationships between ASI scores and evaluations of men's behavior are not inconsistent with the theoretical underpinnings of the ASI as a measure of sexism and most likely relate to the unique intergroup relationship that exists between women and men. Specifically (and arguably) by focusing on relationships between men and women (as the ASI does), judgments of one gender imply judgments of the other, especially among those people who believe that men and women are "opposites."

Although the results of the current study have demonstrated the relationship of HS to the negative evaluation of female candidates for a masculine-typed job, two possible limitations should be noted. First, the current study used only a single (management) position. Theoretically, HS should only be related to negative evaluations of, and lower employment recommendations for, a female candidate who poses a threat to men's status in position of economic power (i.e., by applying for a masculine-typed position). HS should be unrelated to evaluations of, and employment recommendations for, a female candidate for a (lower status) feminine-typed position. A study that includes job-type as a further independent variable would allow for a more complete exploration of the link between HS and individual female targets (see also Rudman & Glick, 1999, 2001). A second possible limitation concerns the generalizability of our results. Following Glick and Fiske (1996), future researchers should explore the relationship of HS to evaluations of female candidates for masculine-typed job with an older and/or more managerially experienced sample. It is possible that extensive workplace or managerial experience may moderate the observed link between hostile sexism and negative evaluations of female managerial candidates.

## CONCLUSION

The results of the current study have demonstrated that hostile, but not benevolent, sexism is associated with negative evaluation of an individual female target competing for a masculine-typed organizational role. Those who endorse hostile sexism appear to be "gender vigilant," that is, they allow a seemingly irrelevant characteristic to play a significant role in their employment decision-making

processes. This study adds to a body of literature that has begun to document the distinctive impacts of hostile and benevolent sexism for individual female targets. The results of the study suggest that, to the extent that a woman poses a threat (in an employment context), hostile sexism will serve to reinforce the glass ceiling to keep women in their (so-called) rightful place.

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