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Bro, foe, or ally? Measuring ambivalent sexism in political online reporters

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ABSTRACT

The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) measures hostile (overt antagonism towards women) and benevolent (chivalry) sexism. Previous research shows that political ideology contributes to ASI. Yet little attention has been given to increasingly popular political websites in terms of measuring sexism. Furthermore, recent firings of news professionals over accused sexual misconduct reveal the seriousness of sexism in the news industry. This study surveyed political online reporters (N = 210) using ASI and predicting sociodemographic and organizational factors. Results show benevolent sexism levels mostly similar for all factors, but not hostile sexism. Those working for conservative websites had higher levels of hostile sexism, but website partisanship had no significance for benevolent sexism. Men reported higher levels of hostile sexism and protective paternalism, but not complementary gender differentiation. Overall, individual levels of conservatism also predicted hostile sexism, but not benevolence. The pervasiveness of benevolence jeopardizes women's progression in the workplace. High levels of hostility ultimately endanger newsrooms, as well as negatively impact political coverage of gender related issues.

“Can I have some of the queen’s waters? Precious waters? Where’s that Bill Cosby pill I brought with me?” laughed veteran MSNBC host Chris Matthews, moments before interviewing the soon to be first female major party presidential candidate in US history (Noreen Malone 2018). His off-the-cuff remarks (1) belittled the authority of Hillary Clinton (calling her a queen) and (2) included a “joke” about giving her a Quaalude (Cosby has admitted to giving women Quaaludes in order to have sexual intercourse; Graham Bowley and Sydney Ember [2015]). Matthews apologized for the comment after the video of his January 2016 pre-interview went viral in January 2018, but has not faced any professional consequences (Ryan W. Miller 2018). At a time when the Women’s March (www.womensmarch.com) and #metoo and #timesup (www.timesupnow.com) movements have begun to expose workplace inequality and all forms of violence against women, Matthews’ words are a reminder of the problem of sexism in the news industry in the US, particularly political news (e.g., Geri Zeldes and Frederick Fico 2005, 2010). It also indicates the growing importance of digital technologies in the news cycle, since Matthews was exposed online first, then via traditional news media.

Whilst all news media need investigation, this study addresses sexism through investigating political online reporters. Within the last 10 years, political news websites (and blogs) have grown to millions of monthly visitors, garnering attention from the general public, politicians, and traditional news media (e.g., Chung J. Chung, Yonjae Nam, and Michael A. Stefanone 2012; Wilson Lowrey, Scott Parrott, and Tom Meade 2011). This is an emerging area of research, but, alarmingly, Edda Humprecht and Frank Esser (2017) found that political news websites propagate the same under- and misrepresentation of women as found in traditional political news. Furthermore, of the many sexual misconduct cases brought to light recently, some were from those working for online news media (Kelsey Sutton 2017)—showing the need to investigate this under-researched area.

Not only is political news a problematic area of journalism, personal political ideology, namely conservatism, has also been connected to sexism (Andrew N. Christopher and Melinda S. Mull 2006), explicitly so during the rise of Trump (Jarrod Bock, Jennifer Byrd-Craven, and Melissa Burkley 2017). More research is needed to identify if political reporters convey sexist attitudes according to their personal political ideology, or the partisanship of the organizations for which they work. Understanding this gives insight into workplace environments and how gender-related issues are considered. For instance, content

analysis shows that during the Access Hollywood tape scandal, conservative traditional and online news media downplayed the severity of sexual assault in order to defend Trump (Lindsey E. Blumell 2017). This study seeks to dig further into the attitudes behind such political coverage.

Accordingly, this study uses Peter Glick and Susan T. Fiske's (1996) ambivalent sexism inventory (ASI) to investigate sexism levels of political online reporters. There are various scales to measure sexism, such as the modern sexism scale (Janet K. Swim, Kathryn J. Aikin, Wayne S. Hall, and Barbara A. Hunter 1995); however, ASI was used not only because of its reliability (Peter Glick, Susan T. Maria Lameiras, Thomas Eckes Fiske, Barbara Masser, Chiara Volpato, Anna Maria Manganeli, and J. C. Pek 2004), but its identification of benevolent and hostile sexism. Hostile sexism justifies male domination of women, as well as negative stereotypes, violence, and sexual exploitation (Peter Glick and Susan T. Fiske 1997). Benevolent sexism cherishes women and idealizes women's femininity as being complementary to men, but ultimately considers women to be inferior to men in ability and intellect (Jin J. Goh and Judith Hall 2015). ASI has been used to assess voting behaviours and attitudes towards politicians (Sarah J. Gervais and Amy L. Hillard 2011; Jarrod Bock, Jennifer Byrd-Craven, and Melissa Burkley 2017), but critically never applied to political reporters.

Both benevolent and hostile sexism are important to measure because of how women are portrayed in political news coverage, especially politicians who are women. This is what Kathleen Hall Jamieson 1995 described as a double bind: if women display stereotypical feminine traits (those valued in benevolent sexism), they are considered too soft and incompetent for politics. But, if they are stereotypically unfeminine, they are highly scrutinized and portrayed as unlikable (consequences of hostile sexism). This double bind has been consistently found in political news coverage (Donatella Campus 2013). ASI can lend further insight into this double bind since benevolent sexism posits women as worthy of cherishing but ultimately incapable of fully participating in politics (Peter Glick and Susan T. Fiske 1996, 1997), whilst hostile sexism justifies punishing women for competing with men (Franciska Krings and Stephanie Facchin 2009). Thus ASI is a useful measure of the bias against women in politics and political news.

Sexism in the workplace

Scholars and advocates have spent years classifying sexism, the different forms it takes, and its negative consequences. Besides workplace inequality (Dana Schowalter 2012), women and allies have and continue to fight for basic rights like voting (Jad Adams 2014), owning property (Eugen A. Hecker 2005), fair pay (Hilary Lips 2013), and education (Alfredo M. Garcia 2014), to name a few. Although progress is being made, sexism can still permeate women's public and private lives (e.g., Sabrina Koepke, Friederike Eyssel, and Gerd Bohner 2014; Annemarie Vaccaro 2010; Dana Schowalter 2012). Regarding media industries, sexism has been found in advertising (Jean Kilbourne 1999), film and television (Pamela H. Nettleton 2016), public relations (Linda Aldoory and Elizabeth Toth 2002), sports journalism (Terry Adams and Charles A. Tuggle 2004), and, of course, the news (Lynn M. Zoch and Judy VanSlyke Turk 1998).

Sexism in journalism

News organizations can embody sexism through the hiring and protecting of sexist personnel, in the process of content creation, and poor reporting of stories on sexism (Frederick T. Attenborough 2013).

Firstly, hiring and protecting sexist personnel is a problem. Several women and some men have recently come forward to uncover the abuse within the news industry. The list is long, and will undoubtedly grow. It includes former MSNBC and NBC television reporter Mark Halperin, who is accused by five women of trying to fondle them in his office (Claire Atkinson 2017). NBC's Matt Lauer was also fired for "inappropriate sexual behaviour" (Ellen Gabler, Jim Rutenberg, Michael Grynbaum, and Rachel Abrams 2017). The Fox News Network has been involved with several cases of sexual misconduct including the accused Roger Ailes (Emily Steel 2017) and Bill O'Reilly (Margaret Sullivan 2017). Its parent company Twenty-First Century Fox reached a \$90 million settlement at the end of 2017 for various claims against officers and directors, including Rupert Murdoch (Jonathan Stempel 2017). The New York Times' White House correspondent Glenn Thrush was suspended but never fired, after several women cited his sexual misconduct against them (Laura McGann 2017). Eight women have come forward against the now fired television host veteran Charlie Rose, describing unwanted sexual advancements, such as groping, explicit phone calls, and indecent exposure (Carmon Irin and Amy Brittain 2017). NPR's news chief, Michael Oreskes, was fired after sexual misconduct allegations (David Bauder 2017). Sexual harassment allegations at the New Republic led to publisher Hamilton Fish's and long-time editor Leon Wieseltier's resignations (Doug Criss 2017). Media editorial director Lockhart Steele was fired from Vox and freelancer Sam Kriss from Vice following sexual allegations (Kelsey Sutton 2017). This long list reveals the institutionalized sexism, which exists across all news media.

These incidences and other factors contribute to hostile work environments in the newsroom, which previous research indicates has various gendered effects. In the Australian context, Louise North's extensive work found more than half of surveyed female journalists' have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace—mostly not reporting out of fear of retaliation (Louise North 2016a). When Louise North (2009) interviewed Australian journalists, feminist journalists were viewed with hostility and described with various pejoratives such as "aggressive" or "demanding" (747). In a survey of journalists in conflict zones from various geographical regions, 68% of women and 8% of men reported experiencing sexual harassment (Janet Harris, Nick Mosdell, and James Griffiths 2016). Once again the majority do not report out of fear of losing future assignments (Harris, Mosdell, and Griffiths 2016). These findings coincide with a joint study from the International Women's Media Foundation and the International News Safety Institute, which found nearly two-thirds of women journalists have experienced abuse or harassment at work (IWMF 2013).

Other forms of sexism occur in newsrooms, such as a so-called "good ole boys club" where men socialize and promote each other over women (Cindy Elmore 2007). Newsroom gendered hierarchies, which advantage men (Monica L. Nilsson 2010), are particularly acute in regulatory environments where women make up only a small percentage of people in news ownership positions (Carolyn Byerly 2011). Men owning and dominating upper levels of the news industry have effects on women's progression, how news organizations are run, and specifically how news is created (Carolyn Byerly 2013; Suzanne Franks 2013), which is a second major way newsrooms are sexist. Women are traditionally more likely to be assigned human interest stories, rather than hard news beats like politics (Stephanie Craft and Wayne Wanta 2004). News coverage also often ignores women's perspectives (Cory Armstrong 2004). Indeed, women's voices are overlooked in traditional news (Karen Ross 2007) and in social media (Claudette Artwick 2014; Hyun Jung Yun, Monica Postenicer, Nadia Ramoutar, and Lynda Kaid 2007).

Thirdly, news coverage of sexism and sexual misconduct is problematic. For example, news coverage usually downplays the seriousness of sexism and sexual assault (Shannon

O'Hara 2012). News media also hesitate to concretely discuss sexism until it can no longer be ignored (Tanya Romaniuk 2015), and then it presents cases like sexual assault as shocking and rare (Rosemary Pennington and Jessica Birthisel 2016). Important to note, however, is the considerable news coverage surrounding the Harvey Weinstein case—the former Hollywood producer accused by many of sexual assault (Ronan Farrow 2017)—and other high profile cases, which followed under the label of #metoo. Specifically, Jodi Kantor, Megan Twohey, and Ronan Farrow all received the Pulitzer Prize for their reporting efforts on Weinstein (Pulitzer.org). This may be signalling a needed change in how sexual misconduct is considered in the news. Nevertheless, overall, these factors combined call for the need to examine sexism in news organizations. To assist in identifying sexism, the ambivalent sexism inventory was used.

Ambivalent sexism inventory

Over 20 years ago, Peter Glick and Susan T. Fiske (1996) developed a scale to measure hostile and benevolent sexism, which has since been found reliable in multiple countries (Peter Glick et al. 2004). The hostile scale includes 11 items with statements like: women exaggerate problems at work, women are too easily offended, women seek power over men, etc.; whereas the benevolent scale is an 11-item scale subdivided into protective paternalism (women should be cherished), complementary gender differentiation (women have purity men don't), and heterosexual intimacy (every man ought to have a woman). For a full list of each item, see Peter Glick and Susan T. Fiske (1996, 500). In differentiating between hostile and benevolent sexism, Peter Glick and Susan T. Fiske (1996) were able to identify patterns of overt aggression against women and chivalry. Benevolent sexism, for instance, has discriminatory consequences to women like reinforcing gendered roles (Allison L. Skinner, Margaret C. Stevenson, and John C. Camillus 2015). Through benevolent sexism, women may be loved, but they are also dominated (Jin J. Goh and Judith Hall 2015). Women and men benevolent sexists have been linked to believing that the status quo is fair (Kathleen Connelly and Martin Heesacker 2012).

Benevolence has been found in newsrooms in regard to women's work-life balance (Gertrude Robinson 2008; Karen Ross 2001), especially for mothers (Louise North 2016b). Several studies also show that women lack the same authority as men in the newsroom (Cory Armstrong 2004; Carolyn Byerly 2013; Suzanne Franks 2013; Joan Woodruff 1997; Lynn Zoch and Judy VanSlyke Turk 1998).

The gravity of hostile sexism in the workplace can lead to many forms of sexual misconduct (Peter Glick and Susan T. Fiske 1996, 1997). For instance, hostile sexism, rape myth acceptance, and authoritarianism predict men's self-reported likelihood to commit sexual harassment at work (Joseph J. Begany and Michael A. Milburn 2002). In general, hostile sexism predicts self-reported rape proclivity (Barbara Masser, G. Tendayi Viki, and Clair Power 2006). It also affects other aspects of the workplace. Barbara M. Masser and Dominic Abrams (2004) found that higher levels of hostile sexism were significantly correlated with low evaluations of women in managerial roles, and higher than average evaluations of men. Given previous research that shows a connection to hostile sexism and aggression in men, but not for benevolent sexism, the first hypothesis predicts:

H1: Men will have significantly higher levels of hostile sexism but not benevolent sexism.

Another reason for using the ambivalent sexism inventory is because benevolent and hostile sexism emerge in politics. Conservative ideology, for instance, is rooted in maintaining traditional gendered roles (John T. Jost, Jack Glasser, Arie W. Kruglanski, and

Frank J. Sulloway 2003), which is encapsulated in benevolent sexism. Though not directly measuring conservative ideology, but overlapping with it, right-wing authoritarianism has been found to predict hostile and benevolent sexism in men and women (Jesus Canto, Fabiola Perles, and Jesus San Martin 2014; Chris Sibley, Nickola Overall, and John Duckitt 2007). Furthermore, in the 2016 US presidential election, voting for Donald Trump was predicted by hostile and benevolent sexism (Jarrod Bock, Jennifer Byrd-Craven, and Melissa Burkley 2017). Since conservatism has been directly linked with ambivalent sexism, this study accounts for both the partisanship of the website and individual levels of conservatism by hypothesizing the following:

H2a: Reporters working for conservative websites will have higher levels of hostile sexism than reporters working for moderate or liberal websites.

H2b: Reporters working for conservative websites will have higher levels of benevolent sexism than reporters working for moderate or liberal websites.

H3a: Overall levels of conservatism will predict hostile sexism.

H3b: Overall levels of conservatism will predict benevolent sexism.

Method

An online survey administered by Qualtrics was used for this study (N = 210). After potential participants were identified through Qualtrics, they were sent a pre-approved email asking for their participation. Two filtering questions were also asked of participants to ensure the correct target sample. All participants were actively working for political news websites as reporters. Demographic questions were then asked, followed by questions relating to attitudes on sexism. In terms of sex, 52.9% identified as male, 46.8% as female. When asked about race, 70% classified themselves as white non-Hispanic, 15.7% as Black/African American non-Hispanic, 8.6% as Latinx/Hispanic, 4.8% as Asian, and 1.4% as Indigenous.

Participants also varied in work experience and education. Only 7.6% answered they had less than a year of relevant working experience, 27.6% had 2–4 years, 25.3% had 5–7 years, and 39.6% had 8 or more years. In relation to education obtained, 1.4% reported less than high school diploma, 12.4% had a high school diploma, 18.6% had some college but no degree, 16.2% had a two-year degree, 38.2% reported a bachelor's degree, 10% had a master's degree, and 2.9% had obtained a Ph.D. Personal level of conservatism was measured on a 7-point scale (1 = totally liberal to 7 = totally conservative). Finally, participants were asked to categorize the partisanship of the website they work for, ranging from somewhat to very conservative (37.1%), moderate (31%), to somewhat to very liberal (31.9%).

The ambivalent sexism inventory

Participants were asked questions from the 11-item hostile sexism scale and the 11-item benevolent sexism scale (Peter Glick and Susan T. Fiske 1996). A 7-point Likert scale was used ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. Six of the items were reverse coded: feminists are making reasonable demands; feminists are not seeking more power than men; few women tease men sexually; people are often happy without heterosexual romance; in a disaster, women need not be rescued first; and men are complete without women.

A factor analysis with Promax rotation was then run. Results show a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of .88, above the recommended value of .6, and significant Bartlett's test of

sphericity ($\chi^2(231) = 2578.10, p < .001$). Factor loadings were then examined, grouping scores of .40 or higher together (see Table 1).

For the most part, the variables loaded as previously identified by Peter Glick and Susan T. Fiske (1996) into one category for hostile sexism and three sub-categories for benevolent sexism: protective paternalism, complementary gender differentiation, and heterosexual intimacy. All the variables assigned to hostile sexism strongly loaded with the exception of the variable “few women tease men sexually.” That variable was removed and the remaining variables were combined into a ratio level scale ($\alpha = .93$).

All four expected variables loaded with protective paternalism, with the addition of “Every man ought to have a woman he adores.” Although this variable was originally intended for heterosexual intimacy, it makes sense it loaded with protective paternalism since it is referring to a man adoring a woman, and thus expected to protect said loved woman. The five variables were combined ($\alpha = .70$). The three variables for complementary gender differentiation also loaded as expected ($\alpha = .80$). On the other hand, the heterosexual intimacy variables did not fully load as expected (see Table 1) and did not have strong reliability ($\alpha = .47$). Heterosexual intimacy was consequently eliminated from the analysis.

Table 1. Summary of exploratory factor analysis results for hostile and benevolent sexism (protective paternalism, complementary gender differentiation, and heterosexual intimacy).

Item	Hostile Sexism	Benevolent Sexism		
		Protective Paternalism	Complementary Gender Differentiation	Heterosexual Intimacy
A good woman should be on a pedestal	.66			
Women should be cherished	.86			
Men should sacrifice to provide	.70			
Women need not be rescued first (r)	.53			
Women have a superior moral sensibility			.78	
Women have a purity few men possess			.74	
Women have a more refined sense of taste			.70	
Every man ought to have a women	.65			.12
Men are incomplete without women				.80
Men are complete without women (r)				.42
People are often happy without heterosexual romance (r)				.76
Women exaggerate problems at work	.85			
Women are too easily offended	.90			
Most women interpret innocent remarks as sexist	.91			
When women lose fairly, they claim discrimination	.91			
Women seek special favours	.86			

Feminists are making reasonable demands (r)	.54			
Women seek power over men	.79			
Feminists are not seeking power over men (r)	.53			
Few women tease men sexually	.03			
Men are put on tight leashes	.73			
Women fail to appreciate men	.74			
Eigenvalues	6.82	1.75	4.07	1.12
% of variance	31	7.96	18.50	5.09

Note: Factor loadings over .40 appear in bold. (r) = reversed coded.

Results

In order to answer H1, which stated that men will have significantly higher levels of hostile sexism but not benevolent sexism, independent t-tests were run between sex and the three sexism scales. There was significance for hostile sexism, $t(208) = -3.36, p \leq .001$. Women ($M = 3.37, SD = 1.51$) had lower levels than men ($M = 4.04, SD = 1.39$). There was also significance for protective paternalism, $t(208) = -3.04, p \leq .001$. Women ($M = 4.31, SD = 1.14$) again had lower levels than men ($M = 4.78, SD = 1.13$). However, there was no significance for complementary gender differentiation, $t(208) = .52, p > .05$. Women ($M = 4.31, SD = 1.14$) scored only slightly lower than men ($M = 4.78, SD = 1.13$). Since men had significantly higher levels of hostile sexism, as well as benevolence for protective paternalism, H1 is consequently only partially supported.

Next, a one-way ANOVA was run to compare levels of hostile sexism and partisanship of website (H2a), with significant results, $F(2, 207) = 16.94, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .14$. Bonferroni post-hoc comparisons revealed that those working for conservative websites ($M = 4.39, SD = 1.38$) had significantly higher levels of hostile sexism than those working for moderate ($M = 3.39, SD = 1.48$) and liberal ($M = 3.16, SD = 1.28$) websites. There was no significance between moderate and liberal websites. H2a is supported.

Two one-way ANOVAs were then run between the benevolent sexism scales and website partisanship to answer H2b. There was no significant differences between the website partisanship and protective paternalism, $F(2, 207) = .154, p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$, or complementary gender differences, $F(2, 207) = .84, p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$. H2b is not supported.

Multiple regression was used to answer H3, which predicted that overall conservatism would predict hostile and benevolent sexism. Other predictors were included: sex, race, education, and years of experience. Firstly, hostile sexism was significant, for conservative, $F(8, 69) = 2.84, p \leq .001$, moderate, $F(7, 57) = 3.61, p \leq .001$, and liberal, $F(8, 58) = 3.27, p \leq .001$, websites. Table 2 illustrates the breakdown of each predictor. As shown above, sex was a significant predictor, but only for conservative and liberal websites. The only other significant predictor was level of conservatism, regardless of website partisanship. H3a is supported.

Next, protective paternalism was measured by website partisanship, with significant results for conservative $F(8, 69) = 2.12, p \leq .05$, and liberal $F(8, 58) = 4.48, p \leq .001$, websites but not for moderate websites, $F(7, 57) = 1.13, p > .05$. Table 3 shows that once

again sex was a predictor for conservative and liberal websites. Level of conservatism was significant for liberal websites only. Interestingly, race was a predictor for liberal websites, but for self-identified Black/African American reporters only.

Table 2. Levels of hostile sexism by website partisanship.

Variable	Conservative			Moderate			Liberal		
	<i>B</i> (SE)	$\square$	<i>t</i>	<i>B</i> (SE)	$\square$	<i>t</i>	<i>B</i> (SE)	$\square$	<i>t</i>
Sex+	.83(.29)	.30	2.85***	.10(.34)	.03	.29	.75(.30)	.29	2.52**
Black/African American++	.19(.48)	.04	2.36	-.53(.51)	-.12	-1.05	-.38(.34)	-.13	-1.11
Latinx	.67(.55)	.13	1.23	.40(.70)	.07	.58	-.04(.47)	-.01	-.08
Asian	-1.08(.69)	-.17	-1.56	.85(.71)	.14	1.20	-.12(.84)	-.02	-.14
Indigenous	-1.05(.94)	-.12	-1.11	N/A			-1.0(1.12)	-.10	-.85
Education	.04(.11)	.04	.34	-.13(.14)	-.11	-.90	-.14(.11)	-.15	-1.29
Experience	-.07(.12)	-.07	-.59	-.21 (.12)	-.19	-1.65	.08(.11)	.09	.72
Level of Conservatism	.26(.11)	.27	2.36*	.47(.12)	.44	3.79***	.23(.09)	.29	2.43**
R	.50			.55			.56		
ΔR^2	.16			.22			.22		

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

+ Referent = male

++ Referent = white non-Hispanic

Table 3. Levels of protective paternalism (benevolent sexism) by website partisanship.

Variable	Conservative			Moderate			Liberal		
	<i>B</i> (SE)	$\square$	<i>t</i>	<i>B</i> (SE)	$\square$	<i>t</i>	<i>B</i> (SE)	$\square$	<i>t</i>
Sex	.53(.24)	.25	2.23*	.16(.31)	.07	.52	.65(.27)	.27	2.43**
Black/African American	.58(.39)	.16	1.49	.09(.46)	.03	.19	1.24(.30)	.45	4.07***
Latinx	-.19(.44)	-.05	-.42	-.96(.63)	-.20	-1.52	.04(.42)	.01	.09
Asian	-.47(.57)	-.10	-.82	-.22 (.64)	-.20	-1.52	.92(.76)	.13	1.21
Indigenous	-1.39(.77)	-.20	1.81	N/A			.37(1.07)	.04	.35
Education	-.15(.09)	-.19	-1.63	-.11(.13)	-.12	-.87	-.06(.10)	-.07	-.58
Experience	-.07(.10)	-.09	-.73	.03(.11)	.03	.24	.15(.10)	.17	1.49
Level of Conservatism	.02(.03)	.02	.19	.14(.11)	.16	1.21	.19(.08)	.25	2.24*
R	.45			.30			.62		
ΔR^2	.11			-.02			.30		

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

+ Referent = male

++ Referent = white non-Hispanic

Finally, complementary gender differentiation was run, with no significance for conservative, $F(8, 69) = 1.06$, $p > .05$, $R = .33$, adj $R^2 = .01$, moderate $F(7,57) = 2.29$, $p > .05$, $R = .24$, adj $R^2 = -.06$, or liberal $F(8, 58) = 2.73$, $p > .05$, $R = .41$, adj $R^2 = .05$, websites. H3b is consequently not supported, with the exception of level of conservatism predicting protective paternalism for liberal websites.

Discussion

This study conducted a survey of political online reporters to explore attitudes of ASI. Sexism is commonplace in American politics, and political news coverage reflects that (Donatella Campus 2013). Some examples in news include a TV host “joking” about giving then presidential candidate Hillary Clinton a Quaalude (Noreen Malone 2018), objectifying former vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin (Diana B. Carlin and Kelly L. Winfrey 2009), normalizing Senator Warren being called Pocahontas (Jonathan Allen 2018), and slut shaming and exploiting Monica Lewinsky (Tracy Everbach 2017).

ASI was chosen because of its delineation between hostile and benevolent sexism (Peter Glick and Susan T. Fiske 1996, 1997), both of which serve to subjugate women professionally. Hostile sexism position women as a threat to men in the workplace. For example, hostile sexism has been correlated with negative evaluations of female job candidates (Barbara M. Masser and Dominic Abrams 2004), a proclivity to sexually harass co-workers (Joseph J. Begany and Michael A. Milburn 2002), retaliation if feeling unjustly treated at work (Franciska Krings and Stephanie Facchin 2009), and a higher tolerance of sexual harassment of others (Brenda L. Russell and Kristin Y. Trigg 2004). Benevolent sexism manifests by failing to promote women to higher managerial roles (Ivona Hideg and D. Lance Ferris 2016), expecting women work colleagues to exhibit traditional gendered norms (Gloria Fraser, Danny Osborne, and Chris G. Sibley 2015), enforcing workplace restrictions on women in the name of safety (Miguel Moya, Peter Glick, Francisca Exposito, Soledad De Lemus, and Joshua Hart 2007), and only offering women “chivalry” if they don’t challenge men’s dominance (Jessica Good and Laurie Rudman 2010).

Political online reporters were surveyed because of previous research, which shows that individual political ideology influences ASI (e.g., Jarrod Bock, Jennifer Byrd-Craven, and Melissa Burkley 2017; Jesus Canto, Fabiola Perles, and Jesus San Martin 2014; Chris G. Sibley, Nickola Overall, and John Duckitt 2007), coupled with gender imbalance found in traditional political news (e.g., Geri Zeldes and Frederick Fico 2005), and now political news websites (Edda Humprecht and Frank Esser 2017). As in other media industries, newsrooms are starting to fire or suspend several men in prominent positions accused of sexual misconduct (Doug Criss 2017). Nevertheless, the industry is not purged of sexism or its effects (Frederick T. Attenborough 2013).

Firstly, it was found that men had significantly higher levels of hostile sexism than women. Table 1 outlines the specific variables of hostile sexism. To be perceived as exaggerating problems at work, being easily offended, or unjustly declaring discrimination or sexism, creates significant problems for women. Furthermore, understanding that hostile sexism leads to several negative consequences in the workplace, including sexual harassment (Joseph J. Begany and Michael A. Milburn 2002) and retaliation (Franciska Krings and Stephanie Facchin 2009), these results add insight into why the majority of journalists fear reporting sexual harassment (Janet Harris, Nick Mosdell, and James Griffiths 2016; IWFMF 2013; Louise North 2016a).

Since benevolent sexism is often disguised as positive (Peter Glick and Susan T. Fiske 1996, 1997), it was predicted that for the benevolent sexism scores, women and men would score similarly. This was true for complementary gender differentiation, but men had significantly higher levels of protective paternalism. In other words, men had a higher need of “protecting” women than women had of men “protecting” them. Eden B. King, Michelle R. Whitney Botsford, Stephanie Kazama Hebl, Jeremy F. Dawson, and Andrew Perkins (2012) found that this sense of protection of women can lead to assigning women less challenging work assignments. Conversely, women and men both perceived women to have a higher sense of morality and taste than men.

Besides sex, the two measures of conservatism were also significant. Firstly, those working for conservative websites had higher levels of hostile sexism, but not benevolent sexism. Regardless, of website partisanship, individual levels of conservatism predicted hostile sexism, but not benevolent sexism. Also, those working for conservative websites had higher levels of hostile sexism, but that sex and level of conservatism predicted hostile sexism despite website partisanship.

Just as Bock, Byrd-Craven, and Burkley (2017) found that ASI predicted support for Trump in the 2016 US presidential election—signifying the impact attitudes towards women had on the election’s voter outcome, this study confirms hostility also exists with conservative political online reporters. This is of particular importance when considering the myriad of gendered related issues that have arisen in US politics recently, not to mention the dominance of white men in the Trump administration (Annie Lowrey and Steven Johnson 2018). Some of the developments include changing health care policies to adversely target women (Janel George 2018); proposing a gag rule on abortions of Title X family planning sites like Planned Parenthood (Jessica Ravitz 2018); overturning guidance on Title IX (Maria Danilova 2017); stating that domestic abuse is not cause for immigration status (Katie Brenner and Caitlin Dickerson 2018); enforcing and proposing restrictions on reproductive rights (Francoise Girard 2017); Trump’s public aggression against women, self-confessed sexual assault, and accused sexual misconduct (Claire Cohen 2017); overturning equal pay measures (Clair O’Connor 2017); SCOTUS ruling that pregnancy centres can withhold reproductive information from women (Arianne De Vogue and Clare Foran 2018); Trump publicly dismissing the importance of the #metoo movement (Margaret Hartmann 2018); and the list goes on.

Political reporters with potentially high levels of ASI are covering these political issues. More is needed to understand the full consequences of this, but previous research shows that gendered related issues in political news are undervalued (Eric Freedman and Frederick Fico 2005; Eric Freedman, Frederick Fico, and Megan Durisin 2010; Karen Ross 2001), fraught with gender stereotypes (Cory Armstrong, Michael Boyle, and McLeod Douglas 2012), and lack women’s perspectives (Cory Armstrong 2004)—to which sexism contributes. For example, one perennial gender-related political issue in the US is reproductive rights. This issue is often covered in news as a moral debate and lacks medical foundations (Richard M. Brown 1979). In the final 2016 presidential debate, then candidate Trump went as far as to state: “you can take the baby and rip the baby out of the womb of the mother just prior to the birth of the baby” (Danielle Paquette 2016). This false narrative made headline news. Since previous research connects sexism to being anti-abortion (Gordon Hodson and Cara C. MacInnis 2017), those with higher ASI are less likely to challenge this false narrative. Subsequently, the effects of sexism on how political issues are covered are important. It is also important to note the potential impact of ASI when covering female politicians—as news coverage is often sexist (Donatella Campus 2013; Sarah J. Gervais and Amy L. Hillard 2011; Kathleen Hall Jamieson 1995).

Limitations and future research

This study is not without limitations and is one step towards better understanding how sexism manifests in political online news. This was a study within the US context only. More research is needed beyond one country. This was a quantitative study designed to identify levels of ASI and its predicting factors. Qualitative research such as in-depth interviews or ethnographic observations could give further insight into the motivation and impact of high levels of ASI. Content and textual analyses of political online news coverage could also measure the impact of sexism on content. Previous research into partisanship news

consumption has largely focused on audience effects in regard to the hostile media effect (Robert P. Vallone, Lee Ross, and Mark R. Lepper 1985) and polarization (Ariel Hasell and Brian E. Weeks 2016; Natalie J. Stroud 2010). The results here call for the need to understand partisanship news consumption on sexist attitudes and reaction to gender-related political issues.

Conclusion

The results of this study highlight the importance of not only gender, but also political partisanship of the news organization, and individual political ideology when considering sexism in news. By using ASI, it also establishes that different types of sexism manifest in different ways. Noting that hostile sexism was predicted by gender, website partisanship, and political ideology demonstrates the challenge of eradicating sexism from the newsroom and in news coverage. This study thus adds to previous research on the influence of gender on political news (e.g., Cory Armstrong 2004; Eric Freedman and Frederick Fico 2005; Eric Freedman, Frederick Fico, and Megan Durisin 2010), by adding the findings that hostility is higher in men and conservative journalists, but benevolence seems to be more ubiquitous regardless of gender and political ideology.

Overcoming sexism means to recognize that it exists. News media play an important role in this since they can inform the public of inequalities, or maintain power structures by either ignoring inequalities, or reinforcing them within their newsroom and content. Online news media like political websites have grown in professionalism and influence in the last decade. It is, therefore, important to understand their contribution to the overall news ecology in order to hold them accountable for their contribution to sexism in the news industry.

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