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The Influence of Perceiver and Target Race in Hostile and Benevolent Sexist Attitudes

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PERCEIVER AND TARGET RACE IMPACT SEXISM

The Influence of Perceiver and Target Race in Hostile and Benevolent Sexist Attitudes

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Abstract

The present research investigates whether benevolent and hostile sexist attitudes are differentially directed *toward* Black and White women *by* Black and White people. Participants ($N = 2,775$) reported on their sexist attitudes while thinking about Black women, White women, or women in general. Although Black participants reported higher levels of benevolent and hostile sexism overall, participant race and target race interacted to produce unique patterns of sexist attitudes. More specifically, Black perceivers thinking of White women reported higher levels of hostile sexism than those thinking of Black women. White perceivers reported similar amounts of hostile sexism while thinking of White and Black women. Benevolent sexism showed a different pattern, with both Black and White participants reporting higher levels of benevolent sexism toward Black than White women. The results also revealed similar levels of sexism reported while thinking of White women and while thinking of women in general, suggesting that sexism research that does not specifically address target race may reflect an understanding of sexist attitudes about White women that may not generalize to other racial groups.

Keywords: benevolent sexism; hostile sexism; gendered racism; misogynoir; Black women

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Perceiver and target race influence hostile and benevolent sexist attitudes

“Racism has always been a divisive force separating Black men and White men, and sexism has been a force that unites the two groups,” (p. 99) bell hooks, prominent professor, feminist and social activist noted in her 1981 book, *Ain't I a woman?: Black Women and Feminism*.

Sexism is a form of prejudice that impacts women across cultures and racial groups (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 1997); however, the psychological literature has largely focused on sexist attitudes by people (in general) about women (in general), ignoring possible differences in sexist attitudes toward women of various races by people of different races. In the current research, we use ambivalent sexism theory (Glick & Fiske, 1997, 2001) as a framework to examine whether Black and White people differently hold hostile and benevolent sexist attitudes toward Black and White women.

Ambivalent Sexism

Ambivalent sexism theory posits that women face two separate-but-related forms of sexism, particularly in the context of heterosexual relationships: hostile and benevolent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1997, 2001). Hostile and benevolent sexism has been assessed widely using the 22-item ambivalent sexism inventory (ASI; Glick & Fiske, 1996), with 11 items each to measure benevolent and hostile sexist attitudes directed toward women in general. We refer to women in general because the scale does not include any identity qualifiers for the word “women” within each item. Existing research has found that the ASI is cross-culturally relevant and valid, and that hostile and benevolent sexism are positively correlated concepts (Glick et al., 2000).

Hostile sexism consists of overt negativity toward women, who are seen as men’s opponents in a “battle of the sexes” (Glick et al., 2000; Glick & Fiske, 2001). Hostile sexists

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view women as manipulative, power-hungry, and controlling, and believe women utilize affection, sex, and feminism to achieve their goals. A core component of hostile sexism is coercive male power: negative attitudes toward women that help maintain male dominance (Glick & Fiske, 2011). An example of hostile sexism is the belief that women seek to control men in order to gain power. Men consistently endorse more hostile sexism compared to women, and women who endorse non-traditional beliefs (e.g., feminists) are subject to higher rates of hostile sexism relative to women who adhere to traditional feminine roles (e.g., housewives; Glick & Fiske, 1996, 1997; Glick et al., 2000). Indeed, a preference for group hierarchy, and a gender hierarchy specifically, is positively correlated with increased endorsement of hostile sexist views (Sibley et al., 2007).

Benevolent sexism is a complementary form of hostile sexism that consists of positivity toward women who are seen as pure and moral, but largely helpless. Benevolent sexists are outwardly protective and chivalrous; however, the chivalry is rooted in a belief that women are the weaker, less capable sex and thus need to be protected and shielded from harm and hardship. Because benevolent sexism still assumes women's inferiority to men, it is also detrimental to women's personal empowerment and agency, undermining their cognitive performance (Dardenne et al., 2007; Glick & Fiske, 1996, 1997; Vescio et al., 2005). Further, benevolent sexism is generally offered only to those women who behave in ways that align with traditional feminine stereotypes (Becker & Wright, 2011). Thus, the two types of sexism act as a "carrot and stick" mechanism for controlling women within the patriarchy, offering protection and benevolence to women who "deserve it" because they accept their position within society and lashing out against women who buck against it. Both men and women prefer benevolent sexism to hostile sexism, perhaps because benevolent sexism is perceived as far less overtly antagonistic

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than hostile sexism (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005; Bohner et al., 2010). Benevolent sexism may also be understood as both positive and enticing because of the perceived benefits, such as reverence and special care (Hammond et al., 2016), which can make it psychologically easier to ignore the coddling and infantilization that often co-occur.

Race and Ambivalent Sexism

Glick and Fiske (2001) argue that, because power differences and intimate interdependence between men and women are cross-culturally pervasive, so too is ambivalent sexism. Indeed, the ambivalent sexism inventory has been validated across many different cultures (Glick et al., 2000). The original theory is silent, however, on whether women belonging to systematically disadvantaged or minoritized racial groups within the same culture will face sexism of a different kind or amount than White women. To that end, the measure most commonly used to assess ambivalent sexism—the ASI (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Rollero et al., 2014)—asks respondents about beliefs regarding “women” in general, without specifying who those women are. Without explicit framing of the racial or ethnic group in question, it is plausible that respondents might refer to their culturally and socially bound understanding of a woman when generating their ambivalent sexism beliefs. These contextually bound understandings might be rooted in ingroup-outgroup distinctions (i.e., a woman is one that shares my racial category), rooted in prototypicality (i.e., White women are seen as the prototype of a woman within most European settings), and/or rooted in status (i.e., White women are seen to be high status women). While asking about sexism attitudes towards women as a broad category is not *necessarily* a limitation of the original ambivalent sexism theory, or the ASI that is used to measure it, it does beg the question as to whether there are quantifiable differences in the level of hostile and benevolent sexism felt towards women of different racial groups.

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Prototypical sexism becomes problematic when contexts are heterogeneous, raising an additional question of whether assessing sexism using generic labels like “women” adequately capture sexist attitudes towards *all* women. This is especially important in contexts such as the United States, where sexism and racism are deeply intertwined (Sidanius et al., 2018) and White people are seen as the cultural default of a person (i.e., the image brought to mind when thinking of a “person” is a White, middle-class, heterosexual male; Connor & Fiske, 2019), particularly to other White people (Meissner & Brigham, 2001; Slone et al., 2000). Past research has shown Black and White women are subjected to different stereotypes regarding dominance, sexuality, and motherhood (Ghavami & Peplau, 2013; Hudson & Ghani, 2023; Rosenthal & Lobel, 2016; Rosette et al., 2016) and are treated differently based on those stereotypes (Cuddy & Wolf, 2013; Livingston et al., 2012), suggesting that the nature of the sexism they face would also be different.

Further supporting the need for additional research is the fact that, while evidence supporting ambivalent sexism theory has come from a variety of samples (Glick et al., 2000; Glick et al., 2002; Mosso et al., 2019; Zaikman & Marks, 2014), most of these samples consisted of predominantly White participants, including the sample used to develop the original Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske, 1996; between 76% and 86% White across six samples) and the shortened version (Rollero et al., 2014; 100% White). Indeed, Hayes and Swim (2013) found that while both the internal reliability and validity of the aggregated ASI appears to be overall adequate (i.e., Cronbach alphas ranged from .86-.90) for Black, Latinx, White, and Asian participants, reliability was substantially lower for the benevolent sexism subscale in Black U.S. American participants ($\alpha = .67$). The authors note that low sample sizes hindered

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reliable conclusions and make it particularly difficult to use these measures for prediction, highlighting the need for a more intensive and up-to-date examination.

The present work adds to the growing movement to better understand how various identities are impacted by sexism within the scope of ambivalent sexism theory, as several recent studies have assessed the cross-section of race and gender as it relates to sexism, particularly in the context of fears and fear extinction (Navarrete et al., 2009), perceived threat (Plant et al., 2011), and sexist behaviors (Kirkman & Oswald, 2020). However, in all of the aforementioned research, Black *men* were the primary focal target of the research: fear responses to out-group men (based on the largely White sample, the out-group men were primarily Black) were most difficult to extinguish (Navarrete et al., 2009); Black men were subject to the highest shooting bias in a “shoot / don’t shoot” gun computer simulation completed by White participants (Plant et al., 2005; Plant et al., 2011); and Black men were perceived as more sexist with higher frequencies and intensity relative to White men in benevolently sexist and non-sexist situations (Kirkman & Oswald, 2020). Relatively little research exists in assessing the role of race in ambivalent sexism as it relates to the race/ethnicity of the target woman (e.g., White, Black) without men as a comparison group.

Continued research at the intersection of race and gender is essential: while we can observe both overtly negative and subjectively ‘positive’ outcomes associated with sexism (e.g., due to mutual need for pairing including procreation; Glick & Fiske, 1996; Kirkman & Oswald, 2020), racial stereotypes tend to be more hostile in nature, which may be based in a “competition for resources” (Kirkman & Oswald, 2020). This difference in stereotyping may impact the ways in which women of different races / ethnicities are perceived and addressed in different contexts. Indeed, the stereotype content model (SCM; Cuddy et al., 2008) suggests that different types of

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women occupy different identities in the realm of stereotyping (e.g., career women are high in competence and low in warmth; traditional homemaker women are high in warmth and low in competence). Similarly, Cuddy and colleagues (2008) acknowledge in the SCM that minority prosocial behavior is perceived as disingenuous and antisocial behavior as a predisposition. This cross-section of ambivalent stereotyping with subjectively ‘positive’ stereotypes (often associated with women) and ‘negative’ stereotypes (often associated with race) requires further examination to understand the manner in which it is directed toward Black and White women in the United States.

Research Overview

We know of only one study that has directly examined hostile and benevolent sexism toward Black and White women separately (McMahon & Kahn, 2016), highlighting the need for additional research. McMahon and Kahn’s (2016) research illustrated that, among a primarily White sample, participants reported more benevolent sexism toward White women relative to Black women. Their research also demonstrated that, among a second primarily White sample, participants reported more benevolent sexism toward chaste Black women relative to chaste White women, though participants did not evaluate chaste Black women more positively overall. The current research replicates and extends past work by understanding whether the pattern of hostile and benevolent sexist attitudes toward White and Black women differs for Black and White perceivers. We did not undertake this project with clear expectations for what we would find; instead, we fostered confidence in our results through a very high-powered design combined with an *a priori* plan for how we would analyze the resulting data. We did, however, have a series of competing hypotheses for what the pattern of results *might* look like.

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Overall, we contrast whether hostile and benevolent sexism reflects group-based interdependence norms between Black and White people such that people express more hostile and less benevolent sexism towards outgroup women compared to ingroup women (*Outgroup Bias Hypothesis*). Alternatively, hostile and benevolent sexism can reflect shared positive attitudes towards the dominant racial group, i.e., White U.S. Americans, such that both Black and White people express less hostile and more benevolent sexism towards White women compared to Black women (*Prototypicality Bias Hypothesis*). We describe these two hypotheses in greater detail in the sections that follow.

Outgroup Bias Hypothesis

Both White and Black people self-report a preference for their own racial group compared to the racial outgroup (Jiang et al., 2021; Ratliff et al., 2020). People have more negative attitudes toward the outgroup than the ingroup, and more positive attitudes towards the ingroup compared to the outgroup. Hostile sexism represents a negative attitude, while benevolent sexism represents a more nuanced and problematic “positive” attitude. Therefore, the *Outgroup Bias Hypothesis* is that White people will express more hostile and less benevolent sexism toward outgroup Black women than ingroup White women, while Black people will express more hostile and less benevolent sexism toward outgroup White women than ingroup Black women.

Support for the first part of this outgroup bias hypothesis—that White people will exhibit more hostile sexism toward Black than White women—comes from the literatures on stereotyping and perceived group threat. Three stereotypes of Black women that may drive higher levels of hostile sexism toward them are the *Jezebel* stereotype, the *Black Superwoman* stereotype, and the *Angry Black Woman* stereotype (Waldron, 2019). The *Jezebel* stereotype

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depicts Black women as promiscuous and immoral, using sexual wiles to dominate men. The *Black Superwoman* stereotype depicts Black women as invulnerable, strong, and emasculating, while the *Angry Black Woman* stereotype depicts Black women as aggressive, bitter, and irate. Each of these stereotypes, in different ways, disrupts the traditional power balance in which women are deemed subordinate and without power (Waldron, 2019).

The *Jezebel*, *Black Superwoman*, and *Angry Black Woman* stereotypes are overtly negative in valence, and both stereotypes run contrary to the traditional gender roles that women are expected to fulfill (i.e., compassionate, warm, nurturing and passive; Prentice & Carranza, 2002). This hypothesis is consistent with McMahon and Kahn's (2016) finding that participants directed more hostile sexism to a promiscuous Black woman than toward a promiscuous White woman. To the extent that White people are more likely than Black people to endorse these negative stereotypes of Black women (implicitly or explicitly), we might expect higher levels of hostile sexism among White than Black people.

Black women may also represent a threat to White people that results in increased hostile sexism toward Black than White women. The U.S. Census projections suggest that by mid-century, the percentage of nonwhite Americans will supersede White Americans (see Alba, 2016; Colby & Ortman, 2015; Craig et al., 2018a). The impending shift threatens the dominance of White U.S. Americans economically, politically, and culturally. Hostile sexism towards Black women may be an effort to maintain status quo and existing "traditional" social roles. White U.S. Americans tend to endorse their racial ingroup, supporting a more assimilative approach to diversity (Craig et al., 2018a, 2018b), perhaps due to Whites' feelings of threat associated with projected increases in racial diversity (Craig et al., 2018b). Subsequently, a reduction in support for racial integration is likely, where White U.S. Americans may instead be resistant to further

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intergroup integration (Craig & Richeson, 2014). A reasonable manifestation of this resistance is higher levels of hostile sexism toward Black than White women.

Support for the latter half of the outgroup bias hypothesis—that Black people will exhibit more hostile sexism toward White than Black women—comes from the power imbalance that exists between Black and White people in the United States. White women are perceived as higher status than Black women in the social hierarchy (Waldron, 2019), a disparity that is the result of past and present racism and White supremacy (Croll, 2013; Lewis, 1977). Thus, Black people may find that the hostile sexism themes of women being power-hungry and manipulative are more applicable to White women than to Black women. Indeed, there is research showing that White women can be particularly invested in upholding racism towards Black people, especially when they feel threatened, suggesting that the hostile sexism themes of desired domination and control can be uniquely applied to White women (Blee, 1992; Craig et al., 2012).

Finally, we expect that White perceivers will exhibit more benevolent sexism toward White women than Black women, and that Black perceivers will exhibit more benevolent sexism toward Black than White women. This is due to the fact that benevolent sexism is often viewed as being a positive attitude toward women, and that attitudes toward outgroups are generally more negative than attitudes toward ingroups.

Prototypicality Bias Hypothesis

While outgroup bias is possible, there is an alternative possibility whereby both White and Black people assume that White women are the prototype of women and thus are more likely to be recipients of positive, and not negative forms of sexism. Black people feeling more hostile sexism towards ingroup Black women reflects tenants of system justification (Jost et al., 2004). System justification refers to supporting the existing status quo within cultures and bolsters the

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social order (Jost & Banaji, 1994). In the context of system justification theory (SJT), individuals from disadvantaged, minoritized groups (e.g., racial groups) are motivated to support the social order as necessary and justifiable to avoid cognitive dissonance, which occurs when perceptions of society are at odds with one's personal beliefs about reality (Festinger, 1962). More specifically, people from disadvantaged, minoritized groups are more likely to experience a sense of cognitive dissonance than privileged groups; while both groups likely feel pressure to maintain existing social structures, disadvantaged groups are also subject to conflict associated with the status of their group and the desire to improve their status, potentially amplifying cognitive dissonance. According to SJT, to resolve cognitive dissonance, people will largely adjust their attitudes to match the social norms of the societies they are embedded in, thus affirming the current social hierarchy, and assuaging inner conflict (Jost et al., 2012).

Subsequently, disadvantaged groups and minorities are encouraged to endorse existing social dynamics that are potentially detrimental to their overall wellbeing (Jost et al., 2003). In accordance with system justification theory, the minority group of Black U.S. Americans may be motivated to endorse contemporary stereotypes that frame Black women as angry, promiscuous, and emasculating (Waldron, 2019), which inadvertently supports hostile sexist perceptions of Black women (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 1997).

By endorsing stereotypes that frame Black women negatively, Black U.S. Americans are reinforcing the social hierarchy in which the majority (White people) maintain social dominance. This social hierarchy reinforcement exists, though people generally understand the issues White privilege imposes on society (Croll, 2013). Further, Black women have historically been blamed for many of the issues that exist for Black U.S. Americans through the use of inaccurate and often aggressive stereotypes (Waldron, 2019). The stereotypes unfairly target Black women for a

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wide variety of social struggles within the Black community, including the oppression of Black men, crime rates, and educational problems amongst Black children (Waldron, 2019). Similarly, several studies have found that Black women's internalization of various negative subtypes of Black women, such as the Jezebel and Sapphire stereotype, impact self-esteem and sexual risk taking (Hall & Witherspoon, 2015; Thomas et al., 2004). Furthermore, Black women note that these stereotypes, perpetuated by social media, increase the sexual violence they experience (Leath et al., 2021). Importantly, Black women do not need to endorse these stereotypes for these stereotypes to harm them (e.g., the existence of the Jezebel stereotypes increases drug use as a coping mechanism, which further supports demonizing Black women; Jerald et al., 2017). Thus, the existence of stereotypes that place Black women on the periphery of femininity might also increase negative sexist attitudes towards them, even within their own racial group. Taken together, this line of thought would lead to the hypothesis that, like White people, Black people will exhibit more hostile sexism toward Black than White women.

Similarly, White women are presumed to be the prototype of women's gentle characteristics of kindness, passiveness, and nurturing, traits that underlie increased feelings of benevolent sexism. In contrast, depictions of Black women as the *Angry Black Woman* stereotype places Black women as antithetical to the portrait of a woman deserving of benevolent sexism. In the only study that we know of that directly addresses our research question, McMahon and Kahn (2016) found that (predominantly White) participants expressed more benevolent sexism toward White women than Black women when given no information other than race. These authors argue that White women are afforded more benevolent sexism than Black women because White women are more closely associated with the benevolent sexist ideal: women are pure, fragile, and in need of protection; Black female stereotypes (e.g., the

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Jezebel, *Angry Black Woman*, and *Black Superwoman* stereotypes described previously) violate this ideal. Further, these same authors argue in a later paper (McMahon & Kahn, 2018) that increased benevolent sexism toward White women stems from a combination of protective paternalism toward White women (i.e., an ingroup) and negative attitudes toward Black women (i.e., an outgroup).

Although, as described above, many stereotypes of Black women run counter to the benevolent ideal, there are others that align well with benevolent attitudes toward women. For example, the *Black Matriarch* and *Mammy* stereotypes within the U.S. American Black community portray Black women as nurturing caretakers who are loyal and submissive (Waldron, 2019). To the extent that perceivers draw on these stereotypes when considering benevolent sexism, we might expect that both Black perceivers will exhibit more benevolent sexism toward Black than White women, offering support to the prototypicality bias hypothesis, though in this case nuanced by unique stereotypes (e.g., submissive, nurturing, and asexual) associated with Black women. While Black women have a diverse set of stereotypes, the U.S. American prototype of a woman aligns closest to White women, whereas the prototype of a Black woman is more similar to a Black man than a White woman (Coles & Pasek, 2020). These sets of prototypes amplify the likelihood that stereotypical sexist beliefs associated with Black women on a global scale will be more negative relative to their White counterparts. The overarching theme in both cases, however, is a strong predisposition toward minimizing the characteristics and identities of women and instead ascribing their individual personalities to a set of race-stratified, gender-based roles within the context of a particular set of societal norms and expectations.

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The Current Study

The present study provides a high-power test of the following research question: will Black and White people differentially direct hostile and benevolent sexism toward Black and White women? Black and White participants were directed to think about Black women, White women, or women in general while completing the short form of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI; Rollero et al., 2014). This allows us to compare the degree of hostile and benevolent sexism elicited by Black women, White women, and women in general (i.e., without a racial or ethnic identity). Prior to data collection, the present research was approved by the IRB at the University of Florida.

Method

Participants

Participants were U.S. American citizen volunteers at the Project Implicit research website (<https://implicit.harvard.edu>; Nosek et al., 2002). We obtained ethics approval for this research from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Florida. A total of 1084 White participants and 1691 Black participants reached the end of the study and were included in the analysis (total $N = 2775$; see Table 1 for participant demographics).

Data from 1261 participants were collected between January 24, 2019 and January 31, 2019 based on an a priori decision to collect data from 1200 participants. During data cleaning, we learned that only 176 Black participants had completed the study; thus, we put the study back online between March 19, 2019 and June 18, 2019, but limited participation for this second data collection period to Black participants only. We made an a priori decision to collect additional data from Black participants for three months. A post-hoc power analysis with G*Power version

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3.1.9.6 (Faul et al., 2007) indicates that our sample size provided greater than 90% statistical power to detect small effects (i.e., $d = .20$) for a 2 (Perceiver Race: Black, White) x 3 (Sexism Target Race: Black, White, Control) between-subjects ANOVA. Interaction effects were lower but still adequately powered ($> 70\%$).

Procedure

Participants completed demographic information upon registration at the Project Implicit site. After giving consent, participants were asked to type in the sentence "I will complete this study with my full attention." Those who did so were then randomly assigned to complete one of the three versions of the ASI (Black women, White women, or the control: women in general). After the manipulated ASI, participants responded to thermometer ratings of Black and White women, two items assessing perceived discrimination against Black and White women, and a novel Black Women-White Women/Good-Bad Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald et al., 1998). The thermometer ratings, perceived discrimination items, and IAT were included for exploratory purposes. Results from the exploratory items are not presented in the primary results section; however, they are included in the datasets posted in the supplementary materials on OSF. Descriptive statistics for these measures are available on the project page on the Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/xva8z/>).

Manipulation and Measures

Manipulation of Sexism Target Race

Participants read one of three sets of instructions for the ASI that directed them to a racial group to keep in mind while completing the measure. The instructions were as follows (manipulation in brackets):

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You will be presented with a series of statements concerning men and [Black women / White women / women] and their relationships in contemporary society. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement.

At the top of the screen for each question, instructions were re-stated:

Think about [Black women / White women / women] when you respond to the following questions and indicate how much you disagree or agree with the statement below.

Benevolent and Hostile Sexism

Participants completed the short version of the ASI (Rollero et al., 2014). Participants responded on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 = *Disagree strongly* to 6 = *Agree strongly*; the scales are scored such that higher scores indicate greater sexism. Six items measure benevolent sexism (e.g., Women should be cherished and protected by men; $\alpha = .79$; $M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.18$) and six items measure hostile sexism (e.g., Women seek to gain power by getting control over men; $\alpha = .83$; $M = 2.64$, $SD = 1.15$). The correlation between hostile and benevolent sexism was positive, $r = .50$, $p < .001$.

Results

See Table 2 for hostile and benevolent sexism by participant and target race.

Hostile Sexism

See Figure 1 for hostile sexism results by perceiver and target race. A 2 (Perceiver Race: Black, White) x 3 (Sexism Target Race: Black, White, Control) between-subjects ANOVA predicting levels of hostile sexism revealed a significant main effect of perceiver race on hostile sexism such that Black perceivers reported higher levels of hostile sexism ($M = 2.75$, $SD = 1.18$) than did White perceivers ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 1.09$), $F(1, 2690) = 36.74$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .013$. There was also a significant main effect of target race, $F(2, 2690) = 13.66$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .010$. Post-hoc tests (Tukey's HSD) revealed that participants thinking of White women reported higher

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levels of hostile sexism ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 1.12$) than did those thinking of Black women ($M = 2.66$, $SD = 1.14$), $p = .05$; Cohen's $d = 0.11$ or women in general ($M = 2.46$, $SD = 1.12$), $p < .001$, $d = 0.29$. Participants thinking of Black women ($M = 2.66$, $SD = 1.14$) reported higher levels of hostile sexism than did those thinking of women in general ($M = 2.46$, $SD = 1.12$), $p < .001$, $d = 0.18$.

These results were qualified by a significant interaction between perceiver race and sexism target race, $F(2, 2690) = 12.30$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .009$. To understand the interaction, we separately examined the influence of sexism target race for White and Black perceivers.

Black Perceivers' Hostile Sexist Attitudes

Sexism Target Race (i.e., Black, White, Control) was a significant predictor of hostile sexism among Black participants, $F(2, 1641) = 26.96$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .032$. Post-hoc tests (Tukey's HSD) revealed that Black perceivers thinking of White women ($M = 3.01$, $SD = 1.09$) reported higher levels of hostile sexism than did Black perceivers thinking of Black women ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 1.15$), $p < .001$, $d = 0.26$, or women in general ($M = 2.50$, $SD = 1.15$), $p = .01$, $d = 0.43$.

White Perceivers' Hostile Sexist Attitudes

Sexism Target Race (i.e., Black, White, Control) was a significant predictor of hostile sexism among Black participants, $F(2, 1049) = 3.59$, $p = .031$, $\eta_p^2 = .007$. Post-hoc tests (Tukey's HSD) revealed that White perceivers thinking of Black women ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 1.12$) reported significantly higher levels of hostile sexism than did White perceivers thinking of women in general ($M = 2.39$, $SD = 1.06$), $p = .03$, $d = 0.42$. The difference in levels of hostile sexism among White women thinking of Black women compared to White women thinking of White women ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 1.09$) was not significant, $p = .105$, though with an effect size that

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may still have meaningful effects in the aggregate (Funder & Ozer, 2019). The difference in White women's reported hostile sexism between White women and women and general was not significant, $p = .868$, $d = 0.04$.

Benevolent Sexism

See Figure 2 for hostile sexism results by perceiver and target race. A 2 (Perceiver Race: Black, White) x 3 (Sexism Target Race: Black, White, Control) between-subjects ANOVA predicting levels of benevolent sexism revealed a significant main effect of perceiver race such that Black perceivers reported higher levels of benevolent sexism ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 1.13$) than did White perceivers ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 1.07$), $F(1, 2673) = 380.31$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .125$. There was also a significant main effect of target race, $F(2, 2673) = 13.09$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .010$. Post-hoc analyses (Tukey HSD) revealed that participants thinking of Black women reported higher levels of benevolent sexism ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 1.12$) than did those thinking of White women ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 1.23$), $p < .001$, $d = 0.18$, or women in general ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 1.17$), $p < .001$, $d = 0.21$. There was no difference in benevolent sexism between those thinking of White women and women in general, $p = .875$, $d = 0.02$. There was no significant interaction between perceiver race and sexism target race, $F(2, 2673) = 1.13$, $p = .265$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$.

Exploratory Analyses

As described in the Method section, we included a number of exploratory variables. None of the results obtained through confirmatory results changed when controlling for these attitudinal and demographic characteristics; we have included a full analysis in the supplementary material on the project page on the Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/xva8z/>). One finding that may be of particular interest is that all the results we

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present previously remained unchanged when statistically controlling for participant gender. See Table 3 for the correlations between hostile and benevolent sexism by participant and target race.

Discussion

Review of the Present Study

Sexism is a pervasive force for women in society and cross-culturally. However, how sexism manifests along intergroup lines is not well understood. The present work adds to the existing literature on the intersectional nature of ambivalent sexism by assessing sexist attitudes *towards* Black and White women *by* Black and White perceivers. The results from a high-powered ($N = 2775$) study showed that Black perceivers reported higher levels of hostile sexism and benevolent sexism than did White perceivers, but the race of the target influenced levels of sexism. With regards to hostile sexism, White perceivers directed higher levels of hostile sexism toward Black than women in general, while Black perceivers directed higher levels of hostile sexism toward White than Black women. In contrast regarding benevolent sexism, participants thinking of Black women reported higher levels of benevolent sexism than did those thinking of White women or women in general. There were no differences in reported benevolent sexism between those thinking of White women or women in general, which may suggest that the participants perceived ‘White women’ as similar to ‘women in general’ – which offers support for White women being the prototype in U.S. American culture. Finally, there were no significant interactions between perceiver race and target race.

Thus, the Outgroup Bias hypothesis – reserving positive forms of sexism for the ingroup and negative forms for the outgroup – but not the Prototypical Bias – in which both the positive and negative forms of sexist attitudes were directed towards White, prototypical women – was partially supported for hostile sexism, as the increase in hostile sexism from White perceivers

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towards Black targets fell below significance once controlling for multiple comparisons.

However, the results are in line with the Outgroup Bias hypothesis. In contrast, *neither*

hypothesis was supported for benevolent sexism. However, there was evidence of a Eurocentric

bias (Devos & Banaji, 2005) in people's benevolently sexist attitudes, as the attitudes towards

"White women" were indistinguishable from those of "women" with no racial category label.

This suggests there are different intergroup dynamics at play in terms of the harmful and helpful

dimensions of sexism and adds a layer of nuance to how the ambivalent sexism theory and

subsequent ASI (Glick and Fiske, 1996) may function, particularly within the domain of specific

social and cultural confines (i.e., the United States of America).

Hostile Sexism and the Outgroup Bias Hypothesis

Our findings reflect unique stereotypes of Black and White women that might be causing

the differential expressions of hostile and benevolent sexism. More specifically, higher hostile

sexism reported towards outgroup women is consistent with the idea that, unlike benevolent

sexism, hostile sexism reflects a negative attitude toward women. That is, people have more

negative attitudes toward the outgroup than the ingroup (e.g., both White and Black people self-

report a preference for their own racial group compared to the racial outgroup; Jiang et al., 2021;

Ratliff et al., 2020)—this is reflected in their hostile sexist attitudes. White participants directing

more hostile sexism towards outgroup Black women is in line with several stereotypes about

Black women overall, including dynamics that depict Black women as being promiscuous and

dominating (*Jezebel*), angry and pushy (*Angry Black Woman*), or invulnerable and emasculating

(*Black Superwoman*). Black participants directing more hostile sexism towards White women is

also in line with negative stereotypes of White women, including the *Karen* stereotype (Negra &

Leyda, 2021) where White women are seen as entitled, obnoxious, and privileged women who

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often use their femininity to police the behaviors of others, especially racialized others. In both these cases, the specific, racialized stereotype of women overlaps with the general stereotypes of feminists, the prototypical group towards whom hostile sexism is expressed, suggesting that both Black and White U.S. Americans likely construct stereotypical renditions of outgroup women to justify expressing more hostility towards them.

Benevolent Sexism and Eurocentrism

In contrast, more positive attitudes towards women, i.e., benevolent sexism, were not dispersed based along group lines. Instead, both Black and White participants reported more benevolent sexism towards the group lowest in the racial and gender hierarchy: Black women. This is consistent with related work by McMahon and Kahn's (2016) showing that, among a predominantly White sample, Black women were afforded more benevolent sexism when they were presented as 'chaste,' specifically when compared to chaste White women. Our work suggests that Black perceivers also afford Black women more benevolent sexism.

What remains unclear is whether Black and White perceivers extended more benevolent sexism to Black versus White women for similar reasons. Participants could be expressing more benevolent sexism as an antidote to the *Strong Black Woman* stereotype so many Black women face, seeing benevolent sexism primarily positively and perhaps deserved. Perceivers could also see benevolent sexism as a gendered version of the white savior complex, especially if the sexist attitudes are primarily directed towards Black women. The infantilizing nature of benevolent sexism is a complement to the white savior narrative that Black people need to be guided and protected due to their diminished cognitive abilities. Indeed, feeling increased levels of benevolent sexism towards Black women leads to greater justification of increased hostile sexism when they move outside of the hegemonic confines of femininity. Additional research is

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necessary to further understand the motivations for increased benevolent sexism towards Black women specifically, while considering the role of chastity in ambivalent sexism (McMahon & Kahn, 2016).

The fact that group membership had a greater influence on hostile versus benevolent sexism suggests that the true function of sexism is coercive and harmful. The carrot (i.e., benevolent sexism) exists to justify the stick (i.e., hostile sexism) that keeps women in subordinate positions, but the nature of the carrot is more flexible than the nature of the stick. This finding also aligns with cross-cultural work on gender and hostile and benevolent sexism. The ASI is robust across cultures and men always score higher than women on hostile sexism. However, the degree to which men and women differ in their endorsement of benevolent sexism varies by culture, dependent on expectations of egalitarianism and fairness (Glick et al., 2000, 2002). We are finding a similar pattern here with race, such that racial differences (instead of gender differences) on hostile sexism seem to follow an ingroup-outgroup dynamic but benevolent sexism is more nuanced.

While benevolent sexism did not show evidence of Prototypicality Bias, meaning more benevolent sexism towards White women compared to Black women, we did see evidence of Eurocentrism overall, which is a form of prototypicality bias. Consistent with previous research, the present work identifies a positive correlation between benevolent and hostile sexism, which supports the notion that regardless of race, men and women are socially interdependent (see supplemental materials for complete correlations; Glick & Fiske, 2011). However, the pattern of benevolent sexism results in the current research suggests that when not specifying racial identity regarding targets, perceivers appear to think more about White women rather than Black women. With this possibility in mind, and without listing a race to consider, the ambivalent sexism theory

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may be most appropriate in the context of *White* women rather than women in general, particularly within the confines of the United States of America. Perhaps this can be explained further through the lens of Eurocentrism, an offshoot of prototypicality bias: in the context of the United States, benevolent sexism seems to cater to the “traditional” stereotypes surrounding White women (e.g., being warm, chaste, and pure; Glick & Fiske, 1996, 1997) in particular, while women of other races and ethnicities who deviate from this prototype are not afforded the same treatment (Ghavami & Peplau, 2013).

Perceiver Race, Sexist Attitudes, and System Justification

Black perceivers held overall greater sexist attitudes, regardless of the target, suggesting that Black U.S. Americans’ support for hierarchy-enhancing sexism ideology might be tied to their relatively lower racial status. Indeed, system justification posits that it is those groups who would most benefit from a system change that can be the most resistant to it (Jost et al., 2004). Black U.S. American’s greater levels of sexist attitudes also might reflect a greater importance of respectability politics to the behaviors and attitudes of Black U.S. Americans by other Black U.S. Americans. Respectability politics is the act of engaging in “respectable behaviors” by Black people in the hopes of being treated with respect by White people (Harris, 2003; Jefferson, 2023), differentiating themselves from the negative caricatures of enslaved Black people. Part of endorsing these politics include within-group policing of behaviors, especially ones that deviate from more traditional masculine and feminine behaviors, with the policing of Black women’s hair and dress playing a large role (Harris, 2003). In this way, greater support for sexism found in the current research by Black U.S. Americans, which includes support for traditionally feminine women as well as the punishment of nontraditionally feminine women, might be a remnant of attitudes that developed (by necessity) in the Reconstruction era.

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Further, other work shows a positive correlation between gender inequality and endorsement; here we might be seeing a negative correlation with any form of perceived inequality and sexism endorsement (Glick et al., 2000, 2004). Thus, ambivalent sexism theory might also be most appropriate to understand attitudes of White people, rather than people in general. The addition of a marginalized identity might change the meaning of endorsing sexist attitudes, making interpretations more complicated. As we stated above, the higher levels of sexist attitudes among Black U.S. Americans might be reflective of their lower social status and reflect a compensatory mechanism to avoid experiencing or perceiving racism. That is qualitatively different from endorsement of sexist attitudes divorced from such considerations. Further research is needed to understand if the *consequences* of holding benevolent and hostile sexist attitudes are the same across race.

Relatedly, what encompasses hostile and benevolent sexist attitudes towards ingroup women might also differ by race. Here we asked whether the ASI had equivalence by target and holder race but did not interrogate the items themselves. The qualities associated with Black women who are the target of benevolent or hostile sexist attitudes are likely different from the qualities of White women who are the target of benevolent or hostile sexist attitudes, making even the ASI an imprecise tool to understand sexism towards Black women. As an example, research finds that a good White mother refrains from working while a good Black mother goes to work, suggesting drastically different norms that underlie “good” and “bad” women by race (Cuddy & Wolf, 2013).

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The present research sheds light on the role of perceiver race (e.g., Black or White U.S. Americans) on sexist attitudes toward Black and White women, meaningfully broadening the

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body of research associated with ambivalent sexism and how it functions in contemporary contexts. However, the present work is not without some limitations. Foremost, our research relied on self-report data that was collected from volunteer participants who come to Project Implicit to learn about their biases and attitudes. This sample might be unique in that the Black and White men and women who took this survey are open to sharing and discussing social topics. Thus, the results found here might be a more conservative measure of racial differences in ambivalent sexist attitudes. Foremost, our research focuses on Black and White women targets and Black and White perceivers. It is unknown if the present results would generalize to other racial or ethnic targets; thus, additional research should explore sexist attitudes and behaviors directed toward women from other racial and ethnic identities. This is especially important for testing the prototypicality hypothesis, as other racial groups, such as Asian women, are seen as especially feminine, even compared to White women (Galinsky et al., 2013; Lei et al., 2023). Further, the research focused exclusively on U.S. American participants. The racial and gender stereotypes explored within the scope of the present research cannot be generalized beyond the scope of the United States of America - a country that is primarily viewed as advantageous for White people and harmful for the progress of people of color (i.e., Black and Hispanic people; (Menasce Horowitz et al., 2019). While ambivalent sexism withstands cross-cultural influence, the nuance of race / ethnicity needs to be addressed within the context of the specific social and cultural norms of the sample in question.

Future research should work to uncover the specific factors associated with Black and White perceivers' sexist attitudes. One possible avenue for exploration is to separate examine the three components of benevolent sexism: protective paternalism (i.e., affection and protection), complementary gender differentiation (i.e., women have traits that complement men), and

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heterosexual intimacy (i.e., men's sexual motivation for partnering with women may be influenced by a desire for psychological closeness; Glick & Fiske, 1996, 1997). It may also benefit future researchers to specify who they are referring to when they discuss sexism, perhaps by considering race and ethnicity, to ensure that the results reflect the group in question directly. Such careful treatment of group identity can help to further elucidate the experiences of sexism beyond the scope of culturally and socially bound prototypes that may be limiting the understanding of differences, impact, and downstream consequences of both benevolent and hostile sexism on women of different identities.

Practice Implications

The current research highlights nuances associated with ambivalent sexism previously unexplored, particularly in the context of sexist attitudes directed toward U.S. American Black and White women. At a basic level, the current research addresses topics that have largely been unaddressed in research science. Specifically, several recent studies have examined ambivalent sexism at the cross-section of race and gender, though most (barring McMahon & Kahn's 2016 and 2018 work) focus on how Black *men* are perceived and rated in the context of sexism (e.g., Navarrete et al., 2009; Plant et al., 2011; Kirkman & Oswald, 2020). The representation of Black women in the realm of ambivalent sexism research is necessary for a comprehensive understanding of how sexism functions in contemporary society, which is a benefit of the current work.

Additionally, the present research highlights and confirms a pattern of experiences displayed in contemporary Western culture: in 2023, U.S. American Black women make \$0.64 for every dollar made by White men (Carrazana & Mithani, 2023). Women of color are egregiously underrepresented in leadership positions, in spite of a stronger interest in being in

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executive roles compared to White women (41% vs. 27%, respectively; Krivkovich et al., 2022), Black women are less likely to have strong allies on their professional teams (e.g., colleagues, superiors; Krivkovich et al., 2022), and feminist movements frequently minimize the experiences of Black women by prioritizing White women's experiences (Coles & Pasek, 2020; Grzanka, 2020). Our results suggest that perceiver's race is critical to directing perceptions of sexism, and that regardless of race Black women are attributed higher levels of benevolent sexism relative to White women - or the category of 'women in general'. This outcome offers space for a broad range of applied interventions in addressing sexist beliefs, and perceptions of Black women in an array of contexts. Specifically, the current results can inform workplace anti-sexism and harassment training, offering preventative and remedial programs in support of racial minority women.

Further, U.S. American activists and policymakers should prioritize and heed the needs of Black women in the realm of feminist movements and movements against anti-Black racism - a space of empowerment that must extend more intentionally to non-White perspectives and experiences. In both regards, the unique needs of Black women are currently underprioritized and perpetuate patterns of intersectional invisibility, sexist attitudes, and perhaps sexist behaviors directed toward U.S. American Black women specifically (Coles & Pasek, 2020).

Conclusion

Using a large online sample, the current research generated insight into the role of ambivalent sexism among Black and White U.S. Americans based on both the race of the perceiver (i.e., participant) and target (i.e., woman). The present results suggest three patterns: (1) Black participants reported higher levels of both benevolent and hostile sexism in general compared to White participants; (2) White perceivers directed more hostile sexism toward Black

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women and Black perceivers directed more hostile sexism toward White women; and (3) participants directed more benevolent sexism toward Black women compared to White women and women in general. These findings suggest special attention should be directed toward the support of Black women in a wide array of contexts to help mitigate the impact of ambivalent sexism and associated sexist attitudes, including in personal relationships, in the workplace, and regarding the management of social justice movements .

Declarations

Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate

Consent from participants was obtained from Project Implicit upon collection of the current data.

Human and Animal Ethics

The IRB at the University of Florida approved this study.

Consent for Publication

The publication of this manuscript has been approved by all co-authors.

Competing Interests

The authors have no conflicts of interest, competing interests, and/or financial or non-financial interests to declare.

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Table 1*Participant Demographics*

	Black Participants (<i>n</i> = 1691)	White Participants (<i>n</i> = 1084)	All Participants (<i>N</i> = 2775)
Age (Years)			
Mean (<i>SD</i>)	37.3 (14.7)	34.43 (15.2)	36.2 (15.0)
Political ID (7-point; higher = more liberal)			
Mean (<i>SD</i>)	4.9 (1.4)	4.6 (1.7)	4.8 (1.6)
Religion ID (4-point; higher = more religious)			
Mean (<i>SD</i>)	2.5 (1.0)	2.1 (1.0)	2.4 (1.0)
Ethnicity			
Hispanic or Latino	2.9%	8.1%	4.9%
Not Hispanic or Latino	83.3%	82.8%	83.1%
Unknown	6.2%	4.2%	5.4%
Missing Data	7.6%	4.9%	6.6%
Highest Education Attained			
Elementary School	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Junior High	0.3%	0.0%	0.2%
Some High School	2.4%	1.4%	2.0%
High School Graduate	6.1%	4.0%	5.2%
Some College	27.1%	30.0%	28.2%
Associate Degree	9.3%	10.1%	9.6%
Bachelor's Degree	18.0%	17.4%	17.8%
Some Graduate School	6.7%	12.6%	9.0%
Master's Degree/MBA	21.9%	16.2%	19.7%
Advanced Degree (PhD, JD, MD)	7.3%	7.4%	7.3%
Missing Data	0.9%	0.9%	0.9%
Sex			
Female	70.5%	71.5%	70.9%
Male	29.5%	28.5%	29.1%

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Table 2*Hostile and Benevolent Sexism by Perceiver and Target Race*

Variable	Black Target <i>M(SD)</i>	White Target <i>M(SD)</i>	Race-Unspecified Target <i>M(SD)</i>
Hostile Sexism			
Black Perceivers	2.71 (1.15)	3.01 (1.18)	2.50 (1.15)
White Perceivers	2.60 (1.12)	2.43 (1.09)	2.39 (1.06)
Benevolent Sexism			
Black Perceivers	3.92 (1.07)	3.76 (1.18)	3.67 (1.12)
White Perceivers	3.13 (1.04)	2.81 (1.07)	2.88 (1.08)

Note. Scales range from 1-6; higher scores indicate more sexism.

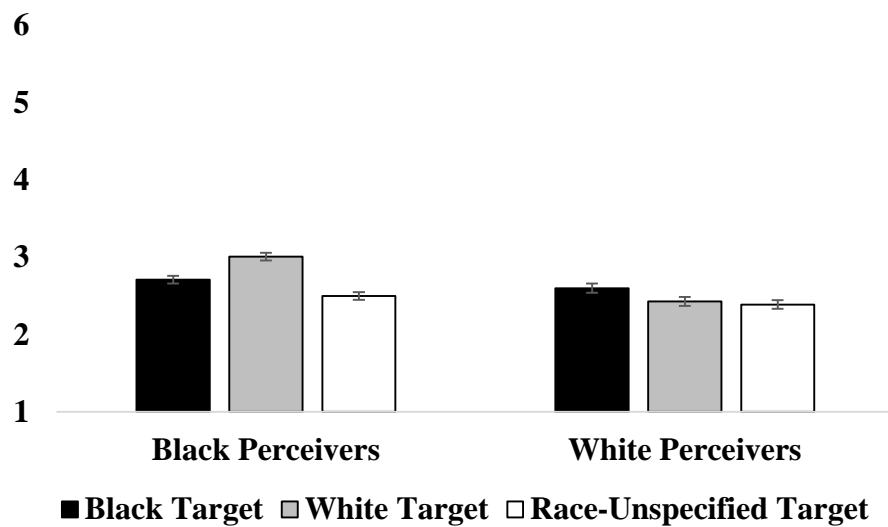
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Table 3*Correlations (r) Between Hostile and Benevolent Sexism by Participant and Target Race*

	Black Target	White Target	Race-Unspecified Target
Black Perceivers	.40 [.32, .47]	.46 [.39, .52]	.53 [.47, .59]
White Perceivers	.51 [.43, .59]	.54 [.46, .61]	.65 [.58, .71]

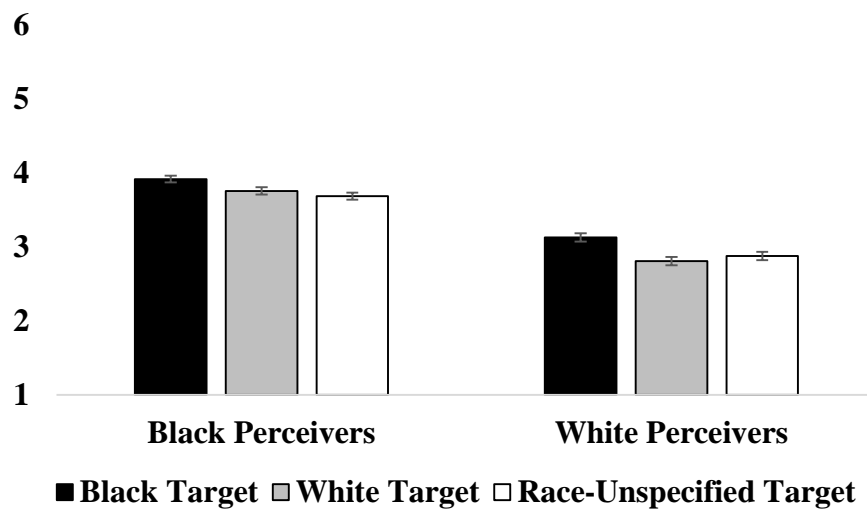
Note. 95% Confidence intervals are in brackets. All p -values are $< .001$.

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Figure 1*Hostile Sexism by Perceiver and Target Race*

Note. Scale ranges from 1-6; higher scores indicate more sexism.

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Figure 2*Benevolent Sexism by Perceiver and Target Race*

Note. Scale ranges from 1-6; higher scores indicate more sexism.