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The Relationship Between Sexism, Feminism, and Attitudes Toward Premarital Sex

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### Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between gender, sexism, attitudes toward feminism, and the sexual double standard. Students at a university (138 female and 58 male) participated in a survey study, which included six items measuring a sexual double standard, the Neosexism scale, the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory, and the Attitudes toward Feminism scale. Results show a double standard that is endorsed more by male participants than by female participants. Correlations were found between attitudes endorsing the sexual double standard and high levels of sexism, as well as negative attitudes toward feminism.

The Relationship Between Sexism, Feminism, and Attitudes Toward Premarital Sex  
*Social Significance of Sex Differences*

Humans are social creatures. Some of the most basic human behaviors, like smiling, arise not from instinct, but are learned through social interaction (Millar, 1988). Behaviors such as this serve mainly social functions in order to communicate thoughts and ideas from one person to another. One person exhibits a socially validated symbol, like the aforementioned smiling, and other individuals know to interpret it as happiness or agreement due to their shared understanding of that symbol (Millar, 1988). Society shapes people's thoughts, behaviors, and attitudes in this way. Social psychology measures attitudes and behaviors in order to outline the relationships between individuals and their social environments. Individual attitudes are deeply rooted in the values of the society in which they live, and it is this interaction between the individual actor and their social setting that shapes both the individual and the society in which they live.

In many cases the interaction between people and society serves to better all involved. For example, it was individual reaction that ended the anti-miscegenation laws (Jacobs, 2004). In other cases there are many aspects of societies which are harmful to some or all of its inhabitants. Specifically, most societies exhibit patriarchal sexism in multiple forms. Sexism is harmful because it not only restricts women's options and abilities, but also because it confines them to narrow definitions of femininity and sexuality.

Rigid role restrictions come with sex specific expectations as to attitudes and behaviors. One example is in expectations regarding women's sexuality. The divergence of expectations that allows men to have sexual desire but denies women the same

emotions forms a sexual double standard. Women often feel ashamed to admit they desire sex, and have a scripted response to initially refuse sex, when in fact they may want to engage in it (Muehlenhard & Hollabaugh, 1988). This is harmful in an interaction because women are frequently misunderstood and misinterpreted, and men can become confused and frustrated (Kanin, 1967). On a broader level the sexual double standard is also harmful for society because it creates societal standards which are assumed to be the natural way of things, but are in fact social constructions (Ferrell, Tolone & Walsh, 1977). Though there are role restrictions and guidelines, these do not lessen the confusion. For this reason it is important to determine the roots and effects of the sexual double standard.

### *Women's Sexuality*

Patriarchy has traditionally dealt with women's sexuality by confining it to marriage and emotion. In many societies, women are only allowed to desire sex when they are in love and married to the person they are in love with. One way society shows this attitude is by stereotyping women to be virgins (non-sexual) before marriage, and faithful to their husbands (dutifully sexual) in marriage (Clifton, McGrath & Wick, 1976). The dutifully sexual wife role is still devoid of the unbridled kind of sexuality men are thought to possess. It is also for this reason that women are expected to only desire sex for emotionally intimate reasons (i.e. being in love) rather than physical ones (Lamanna & Riedmann, 1997). Men, however, are expected to desire sex for mostly physical reasons (Lamanna & Riedmann, 1997). Both of these social norms are sexist and do not include a balanced view of female desire. While society has become more liberal in its views of women's premarital and non-emotional sexual behavior, the sexual

double standard has not disappeared (Milhausen & Herold, 1999). This attitude is important to observe because it reflects today's still sexist society exhibited in attitudes toward the sexual behavior of men and women.

Social stigmas and stereotyping enforce sexist societal norms and dictate what is acceptable and what is not. Stigmas against women are particularly dangerous in today's society because they are often not recognized as being harmful or not recognized at all. For example, restricting women's sexual behavior may be interpreted as looking out for women or protecting them, rather than seen as a sexual double standard. However, to promote this idea is to insinuate that women are either not willing or not able to look out for themselves. If this is the case, it is sexist to say women are in need of men to look out for them. When society is sexist, that attitude is observable in both men and women, in subtle as well as striking ways.

People's attitudes are in flux as contemporary society redefines its attitudes toward women. Feminism has brought about this change and is still changing attitudes and behaviors both on the individual level and the societal level. For example, it is no longer socially acceptable to deny a woman a job due to the belief that women should be home raising children. Overt sexism seems to have diminished (Mason & Lu, 1988, Haemmerlie & Montgomery, 1991) because it is no longer acceptable within larger society. Likewise, the sexual double standard has arguably been on the decline (Gentry, 1998). However, with the weakened role of overt sexism there comes a tension between what people are reporting their attitudes to be and what their actions are showing their attitudes to be (Shore, 1992). This is also observable in a subtler sexual double standard (Gentry, 1998).

*Sexism*

Sexism can be defined as discrimination based on gender or as a set of attitudes, conditions, or behaviors that promote stereotyping of social roles based on gender (Swim, 2004). Everyone is affected by sexism, but it is women who bear the brunt of the consequences. Before the feminist movements of the last century, sexism was condoned and propagated with little organized resistance. When researchers began measuring sexism the items were fairly straightforward. One of the more common measures of sexism was Spence, Helmreich and Stapp's (1973) Attitudes toward Women scale. This measure included items such as "women should worry less about their rights and more about becoming good wives and mothers" which were not covert about measuring sexism. The danger is that as sexism becomes a less socially desirable trait people become less likely to admit their attitudes. They are also less likely to believe they are sexist if their sexism usually manifests itself subtly. For example, a person may not agree to the above statement, however they may behave in such a way in their personal lives as to promote such an attitude.

To account for the effect of social desirability in expressing sexist attitudes, new measures have been developed similar to research done on symbolic racism (Swim & Cohen, 1997). The Modern Sexism scale and the Neosexism scale (NEO) "measure whether respondents tend to (a) deny the existence of discrimination against women, (b) resent complaints about discrimination, and (c) resent special 'favors' for women" (Swim & Cohen, 1997: 105). By looking at how people feel about feminist changes, we can extrapolate how they are feeling regarding sexism. Changes in sexism affect us all on a daily basis, as well as having far reaching implications in today's society.

The changes that are taking place regarding sexism are akin to the changes taking place regarding racism. Before the civil rights movement, racism was an accepted part of society. Presently social norms dictate that overt racism is not acceptable and as a result, people are less likely to endorse racist attitudes (Swim et al., 1995). Similar to this, few people in today's society are willing to outright endorse attitudes known to be sexist. However, there is an underlying discrimination that is both sexist and racist, which come out of the belief that sexism and racism are no longer problems in society (Swim et al., 1995). For example, rather than showing racism by attitudes such as approval of racial segregation (Morrison et al., 1998), an individual may show racist attitudes by holding the belief that African Americans are making unfounded demands for greater social power (Duckitt, 1993). The attitude that sexism is no longer a problem is also harmful to women and shows sexist underpinnings.

Covert sexism is most easily and frequently measured in places that have previously been heavily male-dominated settings, such as politics, certain work environments, and some educational tracks such as mathematics and sciences (Lyness & Judiesch, 1999, Gutek & Morasch, 1982). In these settings, overt sexism is still a problem, though it may be harder to measure due to issues of social desirability. Many positions are filled through a personal decision, which can be swayed by subtle gender bias (Shore, 1992). This opens up avenues for discrimination. Women are now able to make a place for themselves in these areas despite discrimination; consequently, there is a lessening of overt sexism in these areas. However, covert sexism frequently causes a glass ceiling effect which prevents women from excelling as fast or as far as their male counterparts (Masser & Abrams, 2004), as well as other gender differentiated

consequences such as harassment and belittling in the work environment (Gutek & Morasch, 1982). The sexual double standard can be seen in the workplace not only in the glass ceiling effect, but also in glass escalator effect which is described as being a set of favorable promotions and benefits that allow men to excel much faster than women (Masser & Abrams, 2004). The combination of society favoring men and discriminating against women shows the double standard in that it encourages dichotomous traditional gender roles and punishes violations of these roles.

The discrepancy between overt and covert sexism shows that contemporary society as a whole no longer accepts overt demonstrations of sexism, such as banning women from the military and the saying that ‘a woman’s place is in the kitchen.’ However, contemporary society does condone both subtle acts of sexism, such as the glass ceiling preventing women’s employment in certain jobs, as well as attitudes of benevolent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Benevolent sexism is defined by Glick and Fiske (1996) as

a set of interrelated attitudes toward women that are sexist in terms of viewing women stereotypically and in restricted roles but that are subjectively positive in tone (for the perceiver) and also tend to elicit behaviors typically categorized as prosocial (e.g., helping) or intimacy seeking (e.g., self-disclosure) (Glick & Fiske, 1996, p.491).

Benevolent sexism is frequently looked upon as harmless or even good for society in general. An example of benevolent sexism is the belief that women are the weaker sex, in need of protection and that women are naturally familial nurturers. The harmfulness of patriarchal sexism is that, while restricting women to a particular role, men are banned from it exhibiting characteristics unique to that role.

Sexism is unique from other stigmas in its ambivalence towards the stigmatized group (Fiske & Stevens, 1993). Only with sexism is there an intimate attachment between the stigmatized group and the non-stigmatized group. Both sides of the ambivalent attitudes work to further the stigma towards women (Glick et al., 1997). The intimate attachment is shown in benevolent sexism, and the aggressive stigmatization is shown in hostile sexism. Benevolent sexism has been found to correlate with hostile sexism in most groups (Glick & Fiske, 1996). For example a person who agrees with the measure of benevolent sexism that “a good woman should be set on a pedestal by her man” is more likely to agree with the measure of hostile sexism that “most women fail to appreciate fully all that men do for them” (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 512).

Benevolent sexism measures more dimensions of sexism than most other scales. Benevolent sexism is not socially stigmatized as being overtly sexist, and so individuals are more likely to hold these attitudes and more likely to report they do so (Glick et al., 1997). Sexism is socially looked down upon, not necessarily the traditional gender roles that cause sexism. The sexual double standard may be more likely to be seen in benevolent sexism rather than hostile sexism because people tend to believe that protecting women’s virginity and sexual behavior is not overtly sexist. Rather, many feel it is chivalrous and respectful to expect women to behave ‘better’ than men.

Another way to measure sexism is to measure attitudes toward feminism. As stated earlier, people easily recognize unfavorable attitudes toward women as a group as being sexist, however they may not recognize attitudes toward feminism as a movement as being sexist. Designed to do this is the Attitudes toward Feminism (ATF) scale developed by Smith, Ferree, and Miller (1975). Though partially out-dated, this scale contains items that measure both overt and covert sexist attitudes. Items omitted from this study include statements such as “a woman should not expect to go to the same places or have the same freedom of action as a man” because they are straightforward measures which might induce participants to answer in a non-sexist way, regardless of their actual attitudes. Items included, such as “profanity sounds worse generally coming from a woman,” are less direct in measuring sexism; therefore participants are less likely to answer artificially.

#### *Premarital Sex and the Sexual Double Standard*

Sexism divides men and women in many ways but one of the most pronounced is that it holds them to different sexual standards. This sexual double standard was much more observable before the feminist movement when it was accepted as part of women and men’s nature (Ferrell, Tolone & Walsh, 1977). The previous double standard was characterized by restriction of premarital sex to the male gender (Gentry, 1998). Men enjoyed greater sexual freedom than women, with fewer societal remonstrations because it was women’s sexuality in need of controlling rather than men’s (Reiss, 1960).

Presently the sexual double standard has changed to include many other sexual behaviors, not just premarital sex. Now women are “permitted to engage in sexual relations only within a committed love relationship” (Milhausen & Herold, 1999:361).

While this does show a lessening of the double standard, men still have much more freedom over their sexual lives in regard to social norms. Women are stigmatized for being sexually permissive, while their male counterparts are socially rewarded through admiration and esteem for their behaviors (Oliver & Hyde, 1993). While the definition of what is expected of each gender has changed, the sexual double standard persists.

With the feminist movement in the United States came the liberalization of attitudes toward sexuality and a more moderate view of extra-marital activity in general (Scott, 1998). The double standard has lessened in its overt aspects because of the decreased rigidity in both men's and women's gender roles. This liberalization has relaxed a lot of the rules which previously threatened women's autonomy, while at the same time changing laws to protect women's sexuality. Previous to 1993, in America it was impossible for a man to rape his wife because the legal definition of rape was to have "sexual intercourse with a female not his wife without her consent" (Barshis, 1983). This protection is a hallmark of the change in attitude made by the feminist movement. Previous to the feminist movement, women's sexuality, or the right to her body, was not seen as her own, but was seen as belonging to her father or husband (Baumeister & Twenge, 2002). By protecting women's sexuality and women's bodies, society acknowledges that women have sexuality separate from men's and worth protecting. This has led to a change in how society regards women's sexual behavior.

Changes in attitudes toward premarital sex have been one of the most notable alterations to occur in overt sexism and the sexual double standard over the past half century. Both societal and individual attitudes toward premarital sex are measures of the sexual double standard and sexism in general. In many cultures where premarital sex is

not only discouraged for women, but heavily stigmatized and punished, sexism is stronger than in countries where premarital sex is either accepted or only mildly discouraged. Glick and Sakalli-Ugurlu (2003) confirmed the correlation between sexism and negative attitudes toward women in Turkey who engage in premarital sex. More so than the United States, the social organization of Turkey promotes higher gender role differentiation, which in turn dictates behavior. However, in the United States gender role differentiation still supports the sexual double standard (Oliver & Hyde, 1993).

The sexual double standard is an important part of sexism because it is born from the idea that men and women form an opposing dyad. The differentiation of roles and expectations puts a stress on men and women who are forced into these arbitrary roles. Changes in sexism are related to these changes in role expectations, both of which exhibit themselves in a lessening double standard.

### *Research Hypothesis*

Contemporary society is rapidly changing; a phenomenon easily observed in institutions wherein the exchange and development of ideas, beliefs and self are encouraged to manifest. Universities are hotbeds of social change in the United States. The current study draws upon students of a university because of this fact, in order to gain an understanding of new social directions. By measuring students' attitudes toward premarital sex when they are in the university environment, we hope to gauge these changing attitudes. Specifically, I hypothesized the following:

1. There will be an observable double standard, such that questions regarding premarital sex will have a higher mean when in reference to women's behavior (e.g. "at what age is it okay for a girl to lose her virginity) than

men's behavior (e.g. "at what age is it okay for a boy to lose his virginity). A discrepancy score will be calculated such that a larger discrepancy indicates a greater double standard.

2. The mean scores for double standard will be greater for male participants than for female participants.
3. Measures of sexism and negative attitudes toward feminism will correlate with the double standard. As sexist attitudes increase, so should endorsement of the sexual double standard.
4. The relationship between sexism and endorsement of the sexual double standard will show a higher correlation for male participants than for female participants.

To measure certain specific attitudes a variety of scales were used in this study. The Neosexism scale (Tougas et al., 1995) was developed to measure sexist attitudes that are subtler than attitudes measured by previous scales. More specifically, it was designed to decipher hidden attitudes regarding Affirmative Action. This measure is covert because it is measuring attitudes toward feminist changes in society, and not direct attitudes toward women. The danger of using overt measures of sexism is that they prove to be ineffective due to their directness. It is important that the participants not be directly aware that items are measuring sexism because if they knew this they may exhibit social desirability in their responses.

The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) is used to measure both hostile and benevolent sexism in participants. Glick and Fiske (1996) developed the scale to demonstrate the dangers of benevolent sexism. They further divided sexism into three

subcategories: Paternalism, Gender Differentiation, and Heterosexuality, all of which have aspects in both hostile and benevolent sexism. Dividing women into favored groups and disliked groups, the measures show the true ambivalence men feel towards women. Glick and Fiske go on to demonstrate how this ambivalent sexism is different than ambivalent racism due to genuineness of the feelings of intimacy and benevolence towards women (1996). Many men who are benevolently sexist really do love women; however, the question is not what they are feeling, it is whether those feelings are sexist or not.

To measure attitudes toward feminism and feminist changes in society, certain questions from the Attitudes toward Feminism (ATF) scale were used (Smith, Ferree, and Miller, 1975). Ten items of the twenty item scale were used because the omitted ten items were considered to be too direct and might raise suspicion towards the more covert questions. The measure of feminism used should show negative correlation to the measure of sexism, therefore this study seeks to ensure that both measures are covert.

Some questions regarding attitudes toward premarital sex from the General Sociological Survey (Davis & Smith, 1998) were used. These questions are to measure basic attitudes toward sex. New items were added to measure gender differentiated attitudes toward premarital sex. Such questions were asked with no wording change excepting the gender of the pronoun. For example, “what would you consider to be the ideal number of partners for a woman of 25?” was also asked as “what would you consider to be the ideal number of partners for a man of 25?” In addition to the ideal number of partners, questions were asked regarding the circumstances under which premarital sex is acceptable for a man or woman (in a committed relationship or not) and

at what age is sex acceptable. These questions are at the crux of the sexual double standard.

The correlates between sexism, feminism and attitudes toward premarital sex will indicate the presence of a double standard in these attitudes. The purpose of the current study was to explore attitudes toward premarital sex in the society of the United States and replicate the previously noted relationship between high levels of sexism and negative attitudes toward women who engage in premarital sex. Sexism and the sexual double standard are said to come from traditional gender role segregation. Feminism is said to combat sexism, so it follows it would combat the sexual double standard as well. A relationship is further sought between feminism and the lack of gender-differentiated attitudes toward premarital sex.

### Method

#### *Participants*

Participants were 138 female and 58 male students enrolled in undergraduate psychology courses at the University of Connecticut, who were asked to participate in exchange for course credit. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 23, with more than 91% being between 18 and 20. 5% were African American, less than 1% were American Indian, 2.5% were Asian American, 80% were European-American, 2.5% were Latin American, less than 1% were Pacific Islander, 3.6% selected "Other," and 5% declined to state ethnicity. Participants were 73% Christian, 7% Jewish, less than 1% Muslim, 2.5% Agnostic, 5% Atheist, and 12% declined to state religious preference. 50% of participants identified as Democrats, 17% as Republicans, 20% as Independents, and 13% declined to answer or were non-political.

### *Measures*

Sexism Scales. Three Scales were used to assess participants' sexist attitudes.

*The Neosexism scale.* The Neosexism (NEO) scale (Tougas et al., 1995) is an 11 item scale designed to measure subtle sexist attitudes. Questions were presented on a 7 point scale ranging from 1 "Strongly Disagree" to 7 "Strongly Agree". Example items include, "It is difficult to work for a female boss" and "Women should not hold jobs ranking higher than men." The Neosexism scale has a previously reported internal reliability of .76, (Tougas et al., 1995). In this study, the Chronbach's alpha is .83, indicating good scale reliability.

*The Ambivalent Sexism scale.* To measure sexist attitudes in participants, both overt and covert, we used the Ambivalent Sexism scale. This scale has two, 11 item subscales; one measuring hostile (HSI) sexism (e.g. "Women are too easily offended"), and one measuring benevolent (BSI) sexism (e.g. "No matter how accomplished he is, a man is not truly complete as a person unless he has the love of a woman"). Additionally, the measure of benevolent sexism is further broken down into three types: protective paternalism, complementary gender differentiation, and heterosexual intimacy. These scales have a previously reported reliability of between .80 and .94 (Glick and Fiske, 1996). In this study, the Benevolent Sexism scale has an alpha of .78 and the Hostile Sexism scale has an alpha of .84.

*The Attitudes toward Feminism scale:* Developed by Smith, Ferree, and Miller (1975), the Attitudes toward Feminism (ATF) scale is used here to measure feminism in participants. However, only 10 items of the 20 item scale were used in this survey for reasons concerning social desirability. Measures such as "A woman should not expect to

go to the same places or have the same freedom of action as men” and “One should never trust a woman’s account of another woman” are very direct and reflect the age of the scale. The points that were used, measures such as “Profanity sounds worse generally coming from a woman” and “A women should be expected to change her name when she marries” are more subtle. The Attitudes toward Feminism scale has a previously recorded internal reliability of .91 (Singleton & Christiansen, 1976). The current study measured an alpha of .72. The questions included are provided in the appendix.

*Attitudes toward Premarital Sex.* The three measures used are; “It is wrong for an engaged couple to engage in sexual acts previous to their wedding,” “It is wrong to engage in sexual intercourse before marriage,” and “Teenage sexuality is immoral.” These questions were taken from the book, *General Social Surveys: Cumulative Codebook* (Davis & Smith, 1998). The measures were used because they measure direct opinions, rather than feelings, as they relate to society.

Appearing with the General Sociological Survey are six questions to measure attitudes toward pre-marital sex, more specifically the sexual double standard. These were developed using rather direct questions of opinion, such as “at what age is it okay for a boy to loose his virginity?” as well as “what would you consider to be ideal number of partners for a woman of 25?” If the participant is disapproving of pre-marital sex we expect them to choose a higher age for the former question and a lower amount for the latter. Also, these questions are asked twice, once for each gender. This difference is important because it could be used to uncover a double-standard regarding gender as it relates to pre-marital sex. Chronbach’s alpha for the questions regarding attitudes toward premarital sex is .75.

*Demographics.* The demographic questionnaire was made up of standard questions such as age, sex and economic status. The questions are included in the appendix. Ethnicity, religiosity and political preference were asked in order to ascertain their relationship with the measures used. These questions were placed on the last page in order to assure they would not interfere with the answering of the former questions.

### *Procedure*

Participants were given the introduction and consent form to read, sign, and return to the administrator before beginning the survey. The survey was introduced as “Attitudes toward premarital sex” and instructions were read aloud before the survey began. Participants were seated at a large table, spaced out for privacy, and given ample time to complete the survey. Following the completion of the survey, participants were debriefed as to the purpose of the study and thanked for their participation.

The three sexism scales, the General Sociological Survey questions, and the measures of attitudes toward pre-marital sex were arranged in two different ways on two versions of the survey handed out. On the first version of the survey the order was the General Sociological Survey, measures of attitudes toward pre-marital sex, Neosexism, Ambivalent Sexism, and finally the Attitudes toward Feminism scales. On the second version of the survey the order was the Attitudes toward Feminism, Ambivalent Sexism, and Neosexism scales followed by the General Sociological Survey and attitudes toward pre-marital sex questions.

### Results

Before any hypotheses were tested, scale averages were computed for neosexism, benevolent sexism, hostile sexism, attitudes toward feminism, and attitudes toward

premarital sex. Appropriate items were reverse-scored, such that higher numbers on all scales indicate more endorsement of that construct (i.e., greater belief in sexism, more negative attitudes toward feminism and premarital sex).

As found in previous research, there was a difference in sexism and attitudes toward feminism such that male participants tended to score higher than female participants. Correlations were performed between male and female participants and the BSI, HSI, NEO, and ATF measures. Male participants scored higher on the BSI, (Male:  $M = 4.37$ ,  $SD = .86$ , Female:  $M = 3.89$ ,  $SD = .82$ ;  $p < .001$ ), the NEO scale (Male:  $M = 2.95$ ,  $SD = .73$ , Female:  $M = 2.31$ ,  $SD = .72$ ;  $p < .001$ ), and the ATF scale (Male:  $M = 3.41$ ,  $SD = .81$ , Female:  $M = 2.83$ ,  $SD = .77$ ;  $p < .001$ ), but especially so in the measure of hostile sexism (Male:  $M = 4.13$ ,  $SD = .80$ , Female:  $M = 3.25$ ,  $SD = .83$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

*Hypothesis 1:* We hypothesized that there would be an observable double standard, such that questions regarding premarital sex will have a higher mean when in reference to women's behavior than men's behavior. Specifically, this means that people would be expected to have less tolerant views of premarital sex for women than for men. Three paired t-tests were done to compare the means of the items measuring the double standard (see table 1). The first set shows a higher expected number of sexual partners for men ( $M = 3.09$ ,  $SD = .99$ ) than for women ( $M = 2.75$ ,  $SD = .78$ ), and these show a significant difference from each other ( $t = -8.138$ ,  $p < .001$ ). More specifically, men are expected to have about 7 sexual partners by the time they are 25, and women are expected to have about 5 or 6 sexual partners by the time they are 25. The second set shows a higher expectation for women to stay virgins until they are in a committed relationship ( $M = 3.82$ ,  $SD = 1.89$ ), as opposed to their male counterparts ( $M = 3.52$ ,  $SD =$

1.86), which also shows a significant difference ( $t = 5.060, p < .001$ ). The third set shows that women are expected to lose their virginity at an older age ( $M = 2.90, SD = .57$ ) than men ( $M = 2.85, SD = .57$ , which shows a significant difference ( $t = -2.43, p < .01$ ).

Overall, participants believed that ideally men have more sexual partners than women; they had a slight tendency to believe that women, more so than men, should stay virgins until they are in a committed relationship; and that it is acceptable for men to lose their virginity at a younger age than women. Although these differences of opinion are slight, they are still significant (see table 2). The double standard is observable, and the first hypothesis is supported.

*Hypothesis 2:* We hypothesized that the mean scores for endorsement of double standard would be greater for male participants than for female participants. The double standard can be seen in the two items which measure the ideal number of partners for men and the ideal number of partners for women. A discrepancy score, created by subtracting the answer for the ideal number of partners for a woman from the ideal number of partners for a man, was computed. A t-test (see table 3) shows a greater discrepancy between what male participants believe is ideal number of partners for men versus women (see table 3,  $M = .50, SD = .71$ ), and a lesser discrepancy between what female participants believe is the ideal number of partners for men versus women ( $M = .28, SD = .51; t = 2.435, p < .05$ , equal variances assumed).

A more sensitive measure of the double standard was created by standardizing the six items that measured attitudes towards men's and women's sexual behavior, and then creating a discrepancy score by summing the three items that condoned a more permissive attitude towards men's sexuality and then subtracting the sum of the three

matching items about women's sexuality. Higher discrepancy scores mean more endorsement of a double-standard. A t-test (see table 3) of the double standard measure shows that male participants endorse a greater double standard ( $M = .34$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ) than female participants ( $M = -.12$ ,  $SD = .90$ ;  $t=2.741$   $p < .01$ ).

*Hypotheses 3:* We hypothesized that measures of sexism and negative attitudes toward feminism would correlate with the double standard. According to this, as sexist attitudes increase so should endorsement of the sexual double standard. As seen in table 4, the more sensitive six item measure of the sexual double standard shows significant positive Pearson correlations with measures of the three measures of sexism (BSI  $r = .204$ ,  $p < .01$ , HSI  $r = .176$ ,  $p < .05$ , NEO  $r = .180$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and the negative attitudes toward feminism measure (ATF  $r = .158$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Thus, participants with more sexist attitudes were also more likely to endorse the double standard. This likelihood shows that hypothesis 3 is supported.

*Hypotheses 4:* We hypothesized that the relationship between sexism and endorsement of a sexual double standard would show a higher correlation for male participants than for female participants. However the correlations were not significantly different from each other. When analyzed separately (see table 5), the male participant Pearson correlations (BSI  $r = .167$ , (*ns*), HSI  $r = .002$ , (*ns*), NEO  $r = .169$ , (*ns*), ATF  $r = .226$ , (*ns*)) showed no significant difference from the female participant correlations (BSI  $r = .172$ , (*ns*), HSI  $r = .166$ , (*ns*), NEO  $r = .089$ , (*ns*), ATF  $r = .027$ , (*ns*)). Because of the lack of significance, hypothesis 4 is not supported.

## Discussion

Overall, the results show that there is an observable sexual double standard. Unlike men, women are expected to have fewer sexual partners than men, lose their virginity later than men, and lose it in a serious relationship. The double standard is endorsed more greatly by men than by women. Men generally have less to lose from participating in the double standard, which holds both sexes to expectations; it is more restrictive as a whole to women. However, there was not a greater correlation between sexism and endorsement of the double standard by men. The correlation between sexism and endorsement of the double standard was comparable between male and female participants which shows that sexism and promoting traditional gender roles has more to do with the sexual double standard than gender itself does.

The double standard is related to sexism in this way: both are born from, and maintained by, a patriarchal society. The relationship between sexism and the endorsement of a sexual double standard was supported by the current study. Overall, the more participants endorsed sexist attitudes, the more they supported the double standard. This shows a loyalty to the idea that there are gender roles which should be guidelines for behaviors. We did not, however, find that this relationship was stronger for male participants than for female participants. Perhaps this is because women also were shown to be sexist on the more sensitive measures of sexism, specifically the BSI, because it endorses traditional gender roles but doesn't necessarily show them in a negative light.

The endorsement of the double standard shows that sexism is still a problem today. Many people may feel that the double standard is a protection of women's sexuality, that it holds it as "purer" than a man's. But the idea that women's sexuality is different than men's is damaging to both men and women because it belies an expectation

that they will not be able to fully relate to each other regarding their sexuality. The data supports that there are different expectations of female sexuality than male sexuality.

The different expectations necessitate unequal opinions regarding the same behavior.

The measures used do show that more subtle measures of sexism, the Benevolent Sexism inventory and the Attitudes toward Feminism scale, did a better job of measuring sexism than their overt counterparts. This supports the idea that people do not want to appear sexist, even if they are, because they recognize that overt sexism is not something society condones. However, it also shows that some forms of sexism are still accepted. Many women endorsed the double standard, not knowing that these role restrictions are really harmful to them. The stigma attached to women's sexuality places unfair expectations of their behavior.

This illustrates the permeation of gender roles in today's society. Many people view gender roles as either natural (in the biological sense) or acceptable, even beneficial. Many roles were created to ease social interactions. This is especially the case in families where parents have a role which is, ideally, supportive, nurturing, and helpful. A parent who is not sure how to behave towards a child may refer back to these ideas for guidance. However, while serving a helpful function in cases such as these, roles always have the potential of going too far. For example, it is socially acceptable that the role of the father to be disciplinarian and not the mother. This may cause the mother to not behave disciplinarily when she should, or may cause the father to feel that his role does not encompass any other responsibilities. Having gender roles in our society is harmful because they are not guides which can be followed or not, they are expectations. These roles effect people's behavior and can alter behavior from what it would normally be.

While there were many hypotheses supported by the current study, there are infinitely more to investigate. For example, further analysis of the data show that while a greater number of partners had by males increased their endorsement of the double standard, a fewer number of partners had by women increased their endorsement of the double standard. This shows that the more a person fits into the double standard, the more likely they are to endorse it. However, the less someone fits into the double standard the less likely they are to endorse it. As society becomes more liberal in its behaviors it will become more liberal in its attitudes. When people's behaviors change so will societal attitudes regarding the sexual double standard.

The breakdown of the sexual double standard can only happen when gender roles are dismantled. This has already happened on a large scale. It was previously not acceptable for women to wear pants, now it is more common that they do. Men previously were looked on as being abnormal if they wanted to stay at home and raise children, now men are able to make this choice with the support of their communities. While there have been these advances, there is much more that needs to be done, such as breaking down expectations of sexuality, both men's and women's.

Breaking down subtle sexism is more difficult than fighting overt sexism because it is harder to recognize. Many people are sexist and do not realize it. This kind of sexism affects us all because it is woven into society. Government policies, for example are written mostly by men, even policies regarding women's sexuality. This is another result of proscribed gender roles being dichotomous; until this past century women have not been allowed to participate in government in the United States. With the change of gender roles, policies will change as well. This is not only because women are making

their way into policy-making offices, it is also because societal opinions of women's sexuality are changing.

Further research into the sexual double standard is needed. The six items used in this study are not exhaustive. Other dimensions of the double standard might be measured with questions which address feelings towards one's own previous sexual partners, feelings toward one's partner's previous partners. Also the sexual double standard could be applied not only to acts of intercourse and the circumstances under which they happen, but to participation in other sexual acts. If it is the case that it is more socially acceptable for men, to have casual sex or sex with more than one partner at a time, than it is a further indication of the sexual double standard.

Additional research might also be done in the area of stereotyping women's sexual selves. Women who are expected to have sex for certain reasons (such as love or duty) could have a variety of other reasons for doing so. Likewise, men may have many different reasons for having sex, not just physical drive. By surveying the reasons men and women believe they have sex, we could learn more about the stereotypes and the reality of the situation. Also, we could learn more about the stereotype of the "temptress" as being out to dominate man, and why this image has been stigmatized as dangerous and tempting. This image violates the ideals of sexual double standard and it would be interesting to see how this image relates to sexism and negative attitudes toward feminism.

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Table 1

*T-test comparing the Means of Items Measuring the Sexual Double Standard*

	Question	Mean	N	Std. deviation	Std. error mean
Pair 1.	What would you consider to be the ideal number of partners for a woman of 25?	2.75	193	.777	.056
	What would you consider to be the ideal number of partners for a man of 25?	3.09	193	.990	.071
Pair 2.	Girls should be expected to remain virgins until they are in a committed relationship.	3.82	196	1.890	.135
	Boys should be expected to remain virgins until they are in a committed relationship.	3.52	196	1.858	.133
Pair 3.	At what age is it okay for a boy to lose his virginity?	2.85	196	.570	.041
	At what age is it okay for a girl to lose her virginity?	2.90	196	.569	.041

Table 2

*Significance of the Difference between Matched Double Standard Items*

Pair	Question	Mean	T	Sig. (2-tailed)
1	What would you consider to be the ideal number of partners for a (man/woman) of 25?	-.342	-8.138	.000
2	(Girls/boys) should be expected to remain virgins until they are in a committed relationship.	.301	5.060	.000
3	At that age is it okay for a (boy/girl) to lose (his/her) virginity.	-.056	-2.430	.016

Table 3

*Mean Scores of Double Standard Items Reported by Gender*

Questions	Gender	N	Mean Difference	Std. deviation	Std. Error mean
Double Standard 1	Male	56	.5000	.71351	.09535
	Female	137	.2774	.51062	.04363
Double Standard 2	Male	56	.3359	1.35840	.18152
	Female	137	-.1225	.90278	.07713

*Note:*

Double Standard 1 uses two items:

“What would you consider to be the ideal number of partners for a man of 25” and “What would you consider to be the ideal number of partners for a woman of 25?”

Double Standard 2 uses six items:

“What would you consider to be the ideal number of partners for a man of 25,” “what would you consider to be the ideal number of partners for a woman of 25,” “girls should be expected to remain virgins until they are in a committed relationship,” “boys should be expected to remain virgins until they are in a committed relationship,” “at what age is it okay for a girl to lose her virginity,” and “at what age is it okay for a boy to lose his virginity?”

Table 4

*Correlations between Measures of the Double Standard and Measures of Sexism/Attitudes toward Feminism*

		Double Standard 1	Double Standard 2
BSI Mean	Pearson Correlation	.115	.204
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.112	.004
	N	193	193
HSI Mean	Pearson Correlation	.150	.176
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.038	.015
	N	193	193
NEO Mean	Pearson Correlation	.170	.180
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.018	.012
	N	193	193
ATF Mean	Pearson Correlation	.050	.158
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.486	.028
	N	193	193

Table 5

*Correlations Reported by Gender between Measures of the Double Standard and*

*Measures of Sexism/Attitudes toward Feminism*

		Double Standard 1		Double Standard 2	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
BSI Mean	Pearson Correlation	.163	.030	.167	.172
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.231	.725	.218	.045
	N	56	137	56	137
HSI Mean	Pearson Correlation	.188	.027	.002	.166
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.165	.753	.991	.052
	N	56	137	56	137
NEO Mean	Pearson Correlation	.237	.049	.169	.089
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.078	.569	.213	.300
	N	56	137	56	137
ATF Mean	Pearson Correlation	.160	-.105	.226	.027
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.240	.222	.094	.758
	N	56	137	56	137