Confronting Sexism: The Role of Relationship Orientation and Gender

Sarah J. Gervais · Amy L. Hillard · Theresa K. Vescio

Abstract This study examined whether relationship orientation was associated positively with confronting sexism and whether confronting sexism was associated positively with competence, self-esteem, and empowerment for women but not men in stereotypically masculine domains. Men and women undergraduates from a United States Midwestern university ($n=165$) were exposed to a sexist statement during a staged, online interaction. Relationship orientation, confronting (i.e., publically rating the sexist statement as problematic and inappropriate), competence, self-esteem, and empowerment were assessed. Consistent with hypotheses, relationship orientation was associated positively with confronting. Additionally, confronting was associated positively with competence, self-esteem, and empowerment for women but not men. Implications for interpersonal confrontation, relationship orientation, and gender differences in response to everyday sexism are discussed.

Keywords Everyday sexism · Confronting prejudice · Relationship orientation · Gender

Introduction

Women are entering stereotypically masculine domains (e.g., science, technology, math, and engineering) at higher rates, being compensated more for their work, and acquiring more leadership positions than ever before in the U.S. and around the world (U.N. World Survey on the Role of Women in Development 2009; U.S. Department of Labor and Bureau of Labor Statistics 2006). Yet, women's pay and positions are still unequal to men, and they are more likely to exit these domains than men (Eagly and Carli 2007). Gender differences may remain because women still experience everyday sexism (i.e., the expression of sexism embedded in people's daily lives; Swim et al. 1998). Women in the U.S., for example, report one to two sexist incidents per week, including gender-related verbal and nonverbal behaviors (e.g., stereotypic comments; Swim et al. 2001). Sexism in masculine domains causes women to experience increased thoughts of incompetence (Dardenne et al. 2007) and decreased feelings of control (Gervais and Vescio 2010) compared to men. It also causes more negative emotions for women than men, including increased anxiety (Spencer et al. 1999) as well as increased anger and decreased hope (Vescio et al. 2005). Finally, everyday sexism in stereotypically masculine domains causes decreased performance for women but not men (Dardenne et al. 2007; Logel et al. 2009; Spencer et al. 1999; Vescio et al. 2005). Assertively responding to sexism through interpersonal confrontation may reduce sexism and its consequences (Swim and Hyers 1999; Hyers 2007), but few studies have examined factors that increase confronting and the positive psychological consequences of confronting. Furthermore, only a handful of studies have examined confronting sexism for both women and men.

The purpose of the present work was to examine whether communal relationship orientation predicted confronting sexism and whether confronting sexism predicted competence, self-esteem, and empowerment for women but not men in stereotypically masculine domains. Toward that end,

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we review research on sexism, interpersonal confrontation, and relationship orientation. To test hypotheses, undergraduate women and men from a U.S. Midwestern university were assigned to a high power position in a stereotypically masculine domain and were exposed to a sexist statement directed at a woman from a man during a staged, online interaction. Relationship orientation, confronting (i.e., publically rating the sexist statement as problematic and inappropriate), competence, self-esteem, and empowerment were assessed.

Confronting Sexism

People's behavioral responses to sexism may reduce sexism and its consequences. Behavioral responses to sexism may range from assertive to non-assertive (Hyers 2007; Swim and Hyers 1999). Although one may assertively respond to sexism in multiple ways (e.g., questioning, noting the problematic or inappropriate nature of the comment, using sarcasm or humor, exclaiming surprise, grumbling, and using physical force), assertive responses convey to the perpetrator that the sexist behavior was problematic. In contrast, the meaning of non-assertive responses (e.g., talking with others afterwards) is relatively ambiguous; the perpetrator may or may not infer that the sexist behavior was problematic. For this reason, we define confronting sexism as an assertive response that "express[es] one's dissatisfaction with prejudicial and discriminatory treatment to the person who is responsible for the remark or behavior" (Shelton et al. 2006, p. 67; see also Ashburn-Nardo et al. 2008). Past research represents confronting as a verbal, assertive behavior that is either present or absent, but people may confront in varied ways, including rolling their eyes or labeling the remark or behavior as problematic and inappropriate.

Broadly speaking, research shows that confronting prejudice can reduce prejudice in both perpetrators (Czopp et al. 2006) and observers (Citron et al. 1950; Rasinski and Czopp 2010). Both men and women, therefore, may be able to reduce everyday sexism and its consequences if they confront it. Almost all research on confronting sexism, however, has focused on women. In the only study (to our knowledge) explicitly focused on both genders confronting sexism, researchers found that U.S. elementary girls and boys who practiced (vs. heard about another person) confronting sexism were more likely to confront sexism immediately after the practice and 6 months later (Lamb et al. 2009). The few other studies that have included men focus only on women's and men's perceptions of women who confront sexism perpetrated by men (e.g., Dodd et al. 2001). The focus on women confronters and men perpetrators is somewhat appropriate because it represents the most prototypic instance of sexism (i.e., women as targets and confronters, and men as perpetrators of sexism;

Swim et al. 1998) and is readily perceived as sexism (Inman and Baron 1996). We extended previous work by examining when and with what consequences both women and men actually confronted sexism directed at a woman from a man in a stereotypically masculine domain. This work focuses on both men and women, but the outcomes may be particularly relevant to women because of our focus on prototypic instances of sexism.

Although confronting may reduce sexism and most people believe that they will confront sexism, researchers find that, when presented with actual instances of sexism, less than half of people confront (e.g., Swim and Hyers 1999; Hyers 2007). Swim and Hyers, for example, asked U.S. women to participate in a task with three other people in which a man made either three parallel sexist or nonsexist statements. Only 45% of the women confronted at least one of the sexist statements. When this situation was described to an independent sample of U.S. women who were asked to predict how they would respond to the sexist comments, the majority of the women thought they would have confronted at least once.

Researchers have offered several explanations about why people fail to confront actual incidences of sexism, given that they have the best intentions when thinking about confronting. When people imagine their responses to sexism, the costs of confronting may be less salient (see Swim et al. 2009, for review), and people are less likely to confront as the interpersonal costs to the self increase (Shelton and Richeson 2005). As an example, U.S. women are more likely to privately report that they experienced sexism than to publicly confront it (Stangor et al. 2002; Sechrist et al. 2004; Swim and Hyers 1999). Avoiding confrontation is warranted because confronters are often regarded as complainers (Kaiser and Miller 2001; Kowalski 1996) as well as impolite and aggressive (Swim and Hyers 1999). They are also disliked and disrespected (Dodd et al. 2001). Moreover, the negative evaluations of confronters manifest in retaliation and derogation (Kaiser and Miller 2003). If the interpersonal costs of confronting are high, when might people confront sexism?

Communal and Exchange Relationship Orientation

Factors that increase people's feelings of social responsibility may increase the tendency to confront sexism. When everyday sexism occurs, assertively confronting sexism is a socially responsible action because it conveys to perpetrators, observers, and targets that sexism is problematic and inappropriate. Consistently, people are more likely to confront when they or their social group is the target of prejudice, and they are the only person from their group present. For example, U.S. women were more likely to confront sexism when they were the only woman present

(Swim and Hyers 1999). Solo status may elicit feelings of social responsibility because women think that no one else will confront. Another way to increase social responsibility for confronting maybe through training. Presumably, asking people to practice confronting sexism leads to greater personal responsibility when subsequent instances of sexism occur, as shown in Lamb et al. (2009).

Also consistent with the notion that social responsibility increases the tendency to confront, Hyers (2007) showed that social activism goals were associated positively with confronting prejudice. Furthermore, women's commitment to ending gender discrimination, identification with feminism, and social activism predicted confronting (Ayers et al. 2009; Shelton et al. 2006). Finally and of particular relevance to the present work, communal (vs. exchange) relationship orientation is associated with social responsibility (Berkowitz and Lutterman 1968) and may predict confronting.

Individual differences in relationship orientation underlie the beliefs about the appropriate exchange of benefits in relationships (e.g., Clark and Mills 1979; Clark and Mills 1993; Clark et al. 1987; Mills and Clark 1982; Mills and Clark 1994). On one side of the continuum, communal oriented people tend to focus on and help others, without any expectation of reciprocal benefits. As a result, communal oriented people primarily respond to the needs and interests of other people. When problems arise, communal oriented people behave in socially responsible ways and help others (Berkowitz and Lutterman 1968; Clark et al. 1987). On the other side of the continuum, exchange oriented people tend to keep track of the giving and receiving of benefits. As a result of this tit-for-tat strategy, exchange oriented people primarily respond to the needs and interests of the self. When problems occur, exchange oriented people behave in egoistical ways and help themselves.

If communal oriented people are more likely to behave in socially responsible ways, then they may be more likely to confront sexism than exchange oriented people. Because communal oriented people are focused on helping others, they may be less likely to focus on the costs incurred by confronting. They may also be more likely to focus on how confronting helps others, including women and society (e.g., by reducing sexism), but also perpetrators (e.g., by helping them understand the problematic nature of their sexist responses). Consistent with this notion, Chen et al. (2001) found that communal oriented people from the U.S. reported less racism than did exchange oriented people. Integrating this with our rationale that relationship orientation may be associated positively with confronting, we predicted that people higher in communal (vs. exchange) orientation would be more likely to publically indicate that a sexist statement was problematic and inappropriate, which is an act of confronting.

Psychological Consequences of Confronting

Although previous research has shown the interpersonal costs of confronting (e.g., Kaiser and Miller 2003; Stangor et al. 2002; Sechrist et al. 2004; Shelton and Richeson 2005), targets who confront sexism may experience increased psychological well-being. Confronting is associated with feelings of empowerment (Haslett and Lipman 1997) and closure (Hyers 2007). For example, a qualitative study by Hyers (2007) showed that U.S. women who confronted prejudice were less likely to think about other courses of action after the event and less likely to feel anger or regret.

Furthermore, most scholars have focused on the psychological consequences of sexism and confronting for women but not men (e.g., Hyers 2007; Swim and Hyers 1999). A substantial literature suggests that perceiving oneself or one's group as a target of prejudice is related negatively to psychological well-being (e.g., less self-esteem and emotional well-being; see Major et al. 2002, for review). Consequently, women but not men experience decreased psychological well-being as a result of prototypic instances of sexism in which women are targets and men are perpetrators of sexism (Barreto and Ellemers 2005). Yet, because women experience more adverse consequences of prototypic sexism than men, they may also benefit from confronting sexism more than men. Confronting sexism may restore women's psychological well-being. Specifically, everyday sexism causes women to feel that they cannot successfully pursue their goals, and these feelings of incompetence are distracting and interrupt performance (Dardenne et al. 2007). Everyday sexism also causes decreased self-esteem in women (Major et al. 2002). By confronting, a woman may feel more competent and restore positive evaluations of herself. Finally, everyday sexism causes decreased feelings of personal control (Gervais and Vescio 2010). Confronting may restore control to women and help them to feel empowered. Thus, we predicted that confronting would be associated positively with competence, self-esteem, and empowerment for women. Men, however, do not experience negative psychological consequences from prototypic sexism (i.e., when men perpetrate sexism at women targets), and confronting sexism may not be related to subsequent increases in psychological well-being for men. Thus, we also investigated whether men would show a similar pattern for competence, self-esteem, and empowerment.

Overview of the Present Work

In this study, women and men in high power positions engaged in a simulated online interaction in a stereotypically masculine domain. During the interaction, participants were presented with a sexist comment, which appeared to have been directed at a woman by a low power man in the

group. Given that previous studies found that only 40–50% of people confront sexism (Hyers 2007; Swim and Hyers 1999) and our interest in the present study in the predictors of confronting, we provided all participants with the opportunity to publically respond to the statement. Specifically, participants were given the opportunity to confront the statement by publically indicating whether the statement was inappropriate and problematic.

Integrating our suggestion that people will confront when they feel social responsibility and the finding that communal relationship orientation is associated with heightened social responsibility, we hypothesized that communal relationship orientation would significantly predict confronting sexism (Hypothesis 1). We tested this by entering relationship orientation, participant gender, and their interaction as predictors and confronting scores as the outcome in a regression equation. We expected that when participant gender and the interaction were controlled, relationship orientation would be associated positively with confronting scores. Additionally, rather than focusing on the interpersonal costs of confronting as in previous research, we focused on the intrapersonal benefits of confronting. We hypothesized that participant gender would moderate the relationship between confronting sexism and competence, self-esteem, and empowerment (Hypothesis 2). We tested this by entering confronting score, participant gender, and their interaction as predictors and competence, self-esteem, and empowerment as the outcomes in separate regression equations. We expected a significant interaction between confronting scores and participant gender and that confronting scores would be associated positively with competence (Hypothesis 2a), self-esteem (Hypothesis 2b), and empowerment (Hypothesis 2c) for women. We also examined whether men would show a similar pattern for competence, self-esteem, and empowerment. In this way, we extend previous research by examining how both women (i.e., the group targeted by sexism) and men (i.e., the group perpetrating sexism) responded to sexism.

Method

Participants

One hundred and eighty undergraduates (82 women) from a U.S. Midwestern university participated for course credit. Although age and race were not assessed for this study, participants in the pool from which this sample was obtained ranged in age from 18 to 29 years ($M=19.16$, $SD=1.49$) and identified as European American (90%), African American (3%), Latino/a (1%), Asian American (4%), or Multiracial (1%). Participants who expressed suspicion about the cover story during the

debriefing ($n=15$) were omitted from the data set. The final data set had 165 participants (75 women).

Procedure

The Experimental Context

Groups of six to eight participants were brought into a lab with computers that were visibly networked. After giving informed consent, participants learned that we were investigating how online acquaintanceships influence subsequent work between leaders and workers. Participants were told that they would work together with other participants to build a Battle Lego Bot. The Battle Lego Bot was described as a small robot with a Lego exterior, which would "battle" robots constructed in other sessions. The characteristics associated with the Battle Lego Bot task were stereotypically masculine according to pilot testing. Specifically, an independent sample of 49 undergraduates (38 women) rated a series of traits. Half of the participants rated the degree to which each trait was stereotypically associated with men and women (with order counterbalanced; i.e., half rated women first, the other half rated men first), using 9-point scales (1 = not at all, 9 = extremely). The other half of the participants rated the degree to which each trait was positive or negative, using 9-point scales (1 = extremely negative, 9 = extremely positive). We selected attributes that were rated as more masculine (i.e., attributes associated with men more than women) and more positive (i.e., rated above the mid-point on the positivity scale). Specifically, the participants were informed that building the Battle Lego Bot required four phases, including: 1) research and design, 2) construction, 3) performance testing and recalibrating, and 4) strategic planning for competition.

Once the context was introduced, participants were assigned to a high power position and asked to supervise the last phase of Battle Lego Bot building: strategic planning for competition. Participants believed that there were four leaders and four workers. A getting acquainted interview then ensued with participants ostensibly viewing e-mails in which each of the other leaders asked workers questions (in actuality all responses were scripted) and then asking questions themselves. The sexist statement was directed at a woman from a man when the participant was asking questions. After participants were given the opportunity to confront, they completed the remaining measures. No phases of Battle Lego Bot building actually ensued.

Power and Relationship Orientation Assessment

Participants were told that they would take on the role of leaders, who would interview, select two workers, and supervise the task, or workers, who would answer interview questions and complete the task. To further reinforce the

power differences, participants were also told that if their Battle Lego Bot made it to the final round of competition, leaders would receive $50.00 for themselves and an additional $50.00 to distribute as they wished to the workers. (In actuality, the experiment ended after the getting acquainted phase, and $50.00 was given to two randomly selected participants.) As a result, the workers' outcomes were completely dependent on the leaders.

Participants then completed a leadership questionnaire (i.e., a modified Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire; Bass and Avolio 1992; e.g., "I tell others the standards they have to know to carry out their work"). The Relationship Orientation Scale (Chen et al. 2001; Clark et al. 1987; Mills and Clark 1994) was embedded in the leadership questionnaire and consisted of 23 (of 30) items. Sample items for communal orientation include "I believe people should go out of their way to be helpful" and "When making a decision, I take other people's needs and feelings into account." Sample items for exchange orientation include "I'm not the sort of person who often comes to the aid of others" and "People should keep their troubles to themselves." The item content reveals a focus on helping others or not. Participants rated the degree to which each statement sounded like them on 5-point scales (0 = *definitely does not sound like me*, 4 = *definitely sounds like me*). A principle components analysis with an oblique rotation revealed one factor (explained variance = 57.46) for communal and exchange orientation items. Exchange orientation items were reverse coded with higher numbers representing more communal orientation, and a mean relationship orientation score was created (α=.70).

After an apparent scoring of leadership questionnaires, participants learned that the four highest scoring participants became leaders, whereas the others became workers (see Vescio et al. 2003, for similar inductions of power). In reality, all participants were assigned to leader roles. Participants then selected a gendered icon and a personalized user name. Icons and user names, along with the label "leader" or "worker," were attached to all correspondences during the getting acquainted interview. Finally, all participants were assigned to the final phase of strategic planning for competition.

Getting Acquainted Interview

The getting acquainted interview then ensued with each leader ostensibly asking each worker questions to choose workers to help with their assigned phase. Participants observed as the leaders of the first three phases asked questions. In other words, participants saw the leader of the first phase ask each worker one question, the worker's answer, and the leader's response. Participants then saw this process completed for the leaders in charge of the second

and third phases. Participants interviewed the workers last, so that we could establish a variety of question asking and responding norms (e.g., some responses were positive, negative, and/or mixed). All questions and responses were scripted, and there were no prejudiced responses until the final phase.

When it was the participant's turn to interview the workers, the participant was instructed to select a worker's icon, after which an e-mail message-like form appeared. The name and icon of the chosen worker appeared in the "To" header, and the name and icon of the leader appeared in the "From" header. After the worker was selected, a list of four potential questions became available (e.g., How well do you perform problems involving strategic planning?). Participants selected one question for the worker and pressed a key that appeared to send the question to the worker. A few moments later, everyone received an e-mail with the worker's response.

The Sexist Statement

During the participant's interview, a man worker ("J-dog") received a question and provided a sexist response. To create the sexist response, we asked an independent sample of 43 undergraduates (gender not specified) to rate 14 statements on believability, hostility, inappropriateness, sexism, and worthiness of reprimand on 5-point scales (e.g., 1 = *extremely unbelievable*, 5 = *extremely believable*). From these ratings, two statements emerged that were rated significantly above the mid-point on each dimension (i.e., more believable, more hostile, more inappropriate, more sexist, and more worthy of reprimand). The final statement read, "Should I really be compared to people like [target's icon name]? It's pretty obvious that any man would be better than her." Participants were also randomly assigned to view the sexist comment directed toward a low power woman, a high power woman, or the self (also a high power woman for women participants). We included various targets because it was possible that people who feel more social responsibility would be more likely to confront on behalf of a low power woman. However, target and the interactions with other predictors were not significant. Thus, we collapsed across target for all analyses in the results section.

Confronting

After participants received the worker's response, they rated how problematic, how informative, and how inappropriate the statement was. Specifically, they were asked to complete the following sentence stems: "J-Dog's answer was a(n) (*extremely nice, very nice, somewhat nice, somewhat problematic, very problematic,* or *extremely problematic*)

response." "J-Dog's answer was also (*extremely informative, very informative, somewhat informative, somewhat uninformative, very uninformative,* or *extremely uninformative*)." Finally, "J-Dog's answer was (*extremely appropriate, very appropriate, somewhat appropriate, somewhat inappropriate, very inappropriate,* or *extremely inappropriate*)." Participants then pressed a button that appeared to send their response to the others. Responses to the first and third sentence stems were coded such that higher numbers reflected more problematic and more inappropriate ratings. A mean confronting score was created by averaging both ratings (α=.90).

Competence, Self-Esteem, and Empowerment

Participants rated the extent to which they felt competent (*competent, confident*) on 9-point scales (1 = *not at all,* 9 = *extremely*), and we created mean ratings of competence (α=.67). Participants then completed the 14-item State Self-esteem Scale (e.g., "I feel as smart as others;" Heatherton and Polivy 1991) on 5-point scales (1 = *not at all,* 5 = *extremely*). Finally, participants completed the 15-item Empowerment Scale (e.g., "I have the capabilities required to do my job well;" Menon 2001) on 6-point scales (1 = *strongly disagree,* 6 = *strongly agree*). Items were reverse coded and mean ratings of self-esteem (α=.92) and empowerment (α=.72) were calculated.

After the online getting acquainted interview, participants privately rated how respectful, fair, logical, sincere, appropriate, and prejudiced each worker seemed on 7-point scales (1 = *not at all,* 7 = *extremely*). We assessed private prejudice ratings to determine whether participants noticed the sexist statement. Finally, participants were probed for suspicion and debriefed.

Results

As Table 1 shows, relationship orientation scores fell on the mid-point of the scale and were variable, indicating that some participants were more communal oriented, whereas others were more exchange oriented. Confronting scores were slightly above the mid-point on the scale. Finally, participants reported moderate levels of competence and empowerment and high levels of self-esteem. We submitted relationship orientation, confronting, competence, self-esteem, and empowerment to a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), and there was a significant effect of participant gender, $F(5, 159)=5.39$, $p<.0001$; Wilk's $\Lambda = .85$, $\eta_p^2 = .15$. As Table 1 shows, women were higher on relationship orientation (i.e., more communal oriented) than men, $F(1, 163)=12.82$, $p<.0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$. Also, men reported more competence than women, $F(1, 163)=6.94$, $p<.01$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. As Table 2

shows confronting was correlated with relationship orientation, competence, self-esteem, and empowerment for women; however, confronting was only correlated with relationship orientation for men.

In addition to our pilot test, which indicated that the sexist statement was perceived as sexist, we examined whether the participants in this study viewed the perpetrator as more prejudiced than the other workers. Specifically, we submitted private prejudice ratings to a mixed model analysis of variance (ANOVA) with participant gender as the between participants variable and worker as the within participants variable to test whether participants noticed the sexist statement. An effect of worker emerged, $F(1, 163)= 439.39$, $p<.0001$; private prejudice was significantly higher for the perpetrator ($M=5.52$) than the other workers ($M=2.23$, $M=2.61$, $M=2.60$), ps<.05. No effects emerged on participant gender. Importantly, private prejudice did not vary by relationship orientation or participant gender. Analyses regressing private prejudice on relationship orientation, participant gender, and their interaction did not yield any significant effects, ps>.15.

Confronting

We hypothesized that relationship orientation would predict confronting (i.e., publically regarding the statement as problematic and inappropriate, Hypothesis 1). To test this prediction, we used hierarchical multiple regression. Specifically, the relationship orientation (centered) and participant gender (dummy coded: 0 = women, 1 = men) main effects were entered on Step 1, and their interaction was entered on Step 2 (Aiken and West 1991). Multicollinearity was not a problem (tolerance = .93, variation inflation factor = 1.08). Consistent with Hypothesis 1, relationship orientation predicted confronting, Step 1: $F(2, 161)=4.22$, $p<.05$, $R^2=.05$; relationship orientation (with higher scores indicating more communal orientation) was associated positively with

Table 1 Means and standard deviations of all factors by participant gender.

	Women	Men
Relationship Orientation*	2.58 (.33)	2.39 (.37)
Confronting	4.24 (1.21)	3.94 (1.38)
Competence*	5.64 (1.83)	6.32 (1.47)
Self-Esteem	3.94 (.72)	4.11 (.58)
Empowerment	3.89 (1.05)	4.11 (.83)

*p<.05, df= 163. Relationship orientation (0 = *definitely does not sound like me*, 4 = *definitely sounds like me*); Confronting (1 = *extremely appropriate*, 6 = *extremely inappropriate*); Competence (1 = *not at all*, 9 = *extremely*); Self-esteem (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *extremely*); Empowerment (1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*)

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Table 2 Inter-correlations of all factors by participant gender.

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Relationship Orientation	–	.20+	.32**	.22*	.06
2. Confronting	.19+	–	.24*	.20+	.29*
3. Competence	.01	.06	–	.50***	.16
4. Self-Esteem	.13	−.08	.31**	–	.04
5. Empowerment	−.09	−.08	.02	.16	–

+*p*<.10, **p*<.05, ***p*<.01, ****p*<.0001. Correlations for women are reported above the diagonal and correlations for men are reported below the diagonal. Relationship orientation (0 = *definitely does not sound like me*, 4 = *definitely sounds like me*); Confronting (1 = *extremely appropriate*, 6 = *extremely inappropriate*); Competence (1 = *not at all*, 9 = *extremely*); Self-esteem (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *extremely*); Empowerment (1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*)

confronting (see Table 3). Participant gender and the interaction did not predict confronting. When women and men were considered separately, relationship orientation marginally predicted confronting for women, $F(1, 74)=$ 3.11, *p*<.08, R^2=.04, *B*=.74, *SE*=.42, β=.20, *t*(74)=1.76, *p*<.08, and for men, *F*(1, 86)=3.12, *p*<.08, R^2=.04, *B*=.70, *SE*=.39, β=.19, *t*(86)=1.76, *p*<.08. Given that the confronting and the private prejudice results differ, relationship orientation is related to confronting sexism rather than simply perceptions of sexism, and perceptions of sexism cannot explain the confronting results.

Competence, Self-Esteem and Empowerment

We also hypothesized that confronting would be associated positively with competence (Hypothesis 2a), self-esteem (Hypothesis 2b), and empowerment (Hypothesis 2c) particularly for women. To test these hypotheses, we conducted hierarchical multiple regression. Specifically, in three separate hierarchical regression analyses, the confronting score (centered) and participant gender (dummy coded: 0 = women, 1 = men) main effects were entered on Step 1, and their interaction was entered on Step 2. Hypothesis 2 was tested with analyses examining whether confronting predicted competence, self-esteem, and empowerment for women and

Table 3 Hierarchical regression analysis of confronting (*M*=4.09, *SD*=1.30) as a function of relationship orientation and participant gender.

Predictor variable	B	SE B	β	df	t
Relationship orientation	.71	.29	.20	161	2.49*
Participant gender	−.16	.21	−.06	161	−.77
Interaction	−.40	.58	−.01	160	−.07

*p<.05. Relationship orientation (0 = *definitely does not sound like me*, 4 = *definitely sounds like me, M*=2.48, *SD*=.35)

men. Multicollinearity was not a problem (tolerance = .99, variation inflation factor = 1.01).

Competence

As Table 4 shows, confronting significantly predicted competence. Confronting was associated positively with competence, and participant gender significantly predicted competence with men reporting more competence than women, Step 1: *F*(2, 161)=5.29, *p*<.01, R^2=.06. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, the Confronting X Participant Gender interaction also significantly predicted competence, Step 2: *F*(1, 160)=4.32, *p*<.01, R^2=.08, indicating that participant gender moderated the relationship between confronting and competence. To probe the interaction, we examined competence for participants with higher confronting scores (1 *SD* above the confronting score mean) and lower confronting scores (1 *SD* below the confronting score mean). As Fig. 1 shows, women reported less competence than men when confronting was low, *B*=1.15, *SE*=.37, β=.34, *t*(160)=3.07, *p*<.01. Participant gender did not predict competence when confronting was high, *B*=.35, *SE*=.36, β=.11, *t*(160)=.97, *p*=.33. To further explore the interaction, the simple slopes for confronting within participant gender were probed. For women, confronting was associated positively with competence, *B*=.37, *SE*=.16, β=.29, *t*(160)=2.37, *p*=.02. For men, confronting did not predict competence, *B*=.06, *SE*=.13, β=.05, *t*(160)=.51, *p*=.61. Providing converging evidence that confronting is associated positively with competence for women, we estimated regressions for women and men separately with confronting predicting competence. Confronting was associated positively

Table 4 Hierarchical regression analysis of competence, self-esteem, and empowerment as a function of confronting and participant gender.

Competence					
Predictor variable	B	SE B	β	df	t
Confronting	.75	.26	.22	161	2.92**
Participant gender	.37	.16	.29	161	2.37*
Interaction	−.30	.20	−.18	160	−1.51+
Self-Esteem					
Predictor variable	B	SE B	β	df	t
Confronting	.12	.06	.24	161	1.94*
Participant gender	.19	.10	.15	161	1.88+
Interaction	−.15	.08	−.23	160	−1.91*
Empowerment					
Predictor variable	B	SE B	β	df	t
Confronting	.25	.09	.35	161	2.84**
Participant gender	1.47	.49	.79	161	2.98**
Interaction	−.30	.11	−.70	160	−2.61**

+*p*<.10, **p*<.05, ***p*<.01. Competence (*M*=5.98, *SD*=1.65), Self-Esteem (*M*=4.03, *SD*=.65), Empowerment *(M*=4.00, *SD*=.94)
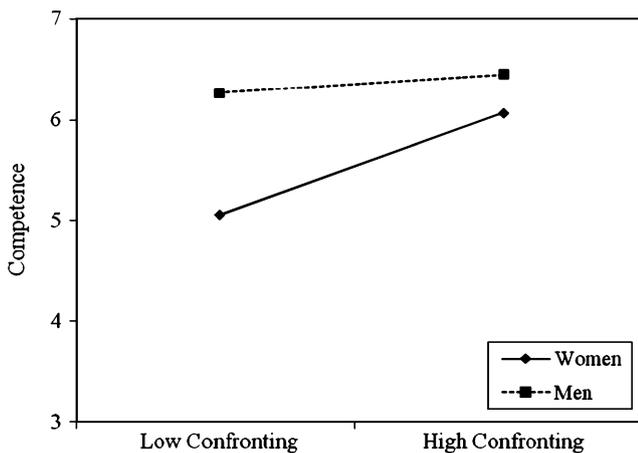
Fig. 1 Competence (1 = *not at all*, 9 = *extremely*; *M*=5.98, *SD*=1.65) as a function of confronting (1 *SD* above and below the mean) and participant gender.

with competence for women, $F(1, 74)=4.62$, $p<.04$, $R^2=.06$; $B=.37$, $SE=.17$, $\beta=.24$, $t(74)=2.15$, $p<.04$, whereas confronting did not predict competence for men, $F(1, 86)=.32$, $p=.58$, $R^2=.00$; $B=.06$, $SE=.12$, $\beta=.06$, $t(86)=5.62$, $p=.58$.

Self-Esteem

Consistent with Hypothesis 2b, the Confronting X Participant Gender interaction significantly predicted self-esteem, Step 2: $F(1, 160)=2.41$, $p<.05$, $R^2=.04$ (see Table 4), indicating that participant gender moderated the relationship between confronting and self-esteem. Women reported less self-esteem than men when confronting was low, $B=.39$, $SE=.15$, $\beta=.30$, $t(160)=2.64$, $p<.01$ (see Fig. 2). No gender difference on self-esteem emerged when confronting was high, $B=-.01$, $SE=.14$, $\beta=.01$, $t(160)=-.05$, $p=.96$. The simple slopes further revealed that confronting was associated positively with self-esteem for women, $B=.12$, $SE=.06$, $\beta=.24$, $t(160)=1.94$, $p=.05$. However, confronting did not predict self-esteem for men, $B=-.03$, $SE=.05$, $\beta=-.06$, $t(160)=-.64$, $p=.52$. Further, when men and women were considered separately, confronting marginally predicted self-esteem for women, $F(1, 74)=3.12$, $p<.08$, $R^2=.04$; $B=.11$, $SE=.07$, $\beta=.20$, $t(74)=1.76$, $p<.08$, with confronting associated positively with self-esteem. Confronting did not predict self-esteem for men, $F(1, 86)=.50$, $p=.48$, $R^2=.01$; $B=-.03$, $SE=.05$, $\beta=-.08$, $t(86)=-.71$, $p=.48$.

Empowerment

Consistent with Hypothesis 2c, the Confronting X Participant Gender interaction also predicted empowerment, Step 2: $F(1, 160)=3.58$, $p<.02$, $R^2=.06$ (see Table 4), indicating that participant gender moderated the relationship between confronting and empowerment. Women reported less
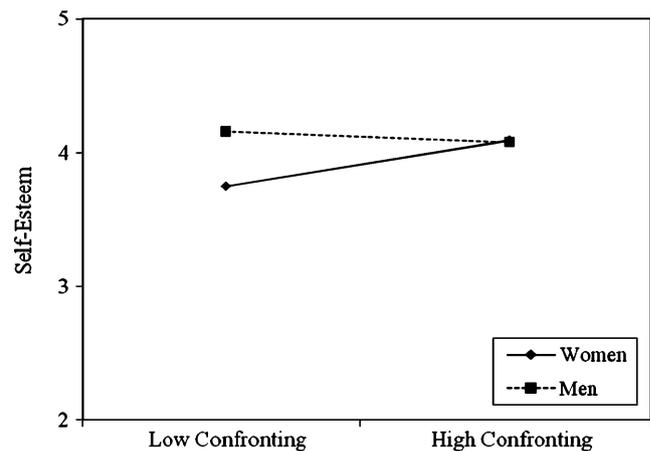
empowerment than men when confronting was low, $B=.64$, $SE=.21$, $\beta=.34$, $t(160)=3.04$, $p<.01$ (see Fig. 3). A gender difference did not emerge when confronting was high, $B=-.13$, $SE=.20$, $\beta=-.07$, $t(160)=-.63$, $p=.53$. The simple slopes further revealed that confronting was associated positively with empowerment for women, $B=.25$, $SE=.09$, $\beta=.34$, $t(160)=2.83$, $p<.01$. However, confronting did not predict empowerment for men, $B=-.24$, $SE=.15$, $\beta=-.13$, $t(160)=-1.64$, $p=.10$. Further, when men and women were considered separately, confronting significantly predicted empowerment for women, $F(1, 74)=6.55$, $p<.02$, $R^2=.08$; $B=.25$, $SE=.10$, $\beta=.29$, $t(74)=2.56$, $p<.02$, with confronting associated positively with empowerment. Confronting did not predict empowerment for men, $F(1, 86)=.50$, $p=.48$, $R^2=.01$; $B=-.05$, $SE=.65$, $\beta=-.08$, $t(86)=-.71$, $p=.48$.
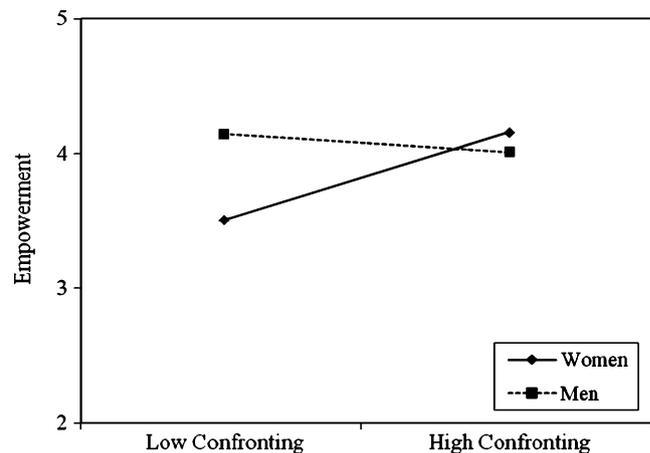

Fig. 2 Self-esteem (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *extremely*; *M*=4.03, *SD*=.65) as a function of confronting (1 *SD* above and below the mean) and participant gender.

Fig. 3 Empowerment (1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*; *M*=4.00, *SD*=.94) as a function of confronting (1 *SD* above and below the mean) and participant gender.

Mediation

Our findings showed that relationship orientation was associated positively with confronting, and confronting was associated positively with competence for women. Therefore, we considered whether confronting mediated the link between relationship orientation and competence for women. Following the procedures of Baron and Kenny (1986) and Preacher and Hayes (2008), relationship orientation predicted competence, $B=1.80$, $SE=.61$, $t(74)=2.95$, $p<.01$, relationship orientation marginally predicted confronting, $B=.74$, $SE=.42$, $t(74)=1.76$, $p<.08$, and confronting predicted competence, $B=.37$, $SE=.17$, $t(74)=2.15$, $p<.05$. The direct link between relationship orientation and competence was reduced but remained significant when confronting was controlled, $B=1.60$, $SE=.62$, $t(74)=2.59$, $p<.02$. We bootstrapped (1,000 samples) the confronting indirect effect of relationship orientation on competence, and confronting did not significantly mediate the link between relationship orientation and competence (i.e., the indirect effects indicated that their 95% confidence interval, bias corrected and accelerated, contained zero, $B=.20$, $SE=.19$, $p=.29$, Lower = -.29, Upper = .69). Self-esteem and empowerment also were not significant mediators.

Discussion

Our findings extend research on confronting and relationship orientation. First, to our knowledge, this is the first work to examine the link between relationship orientation and confronting prejudice. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, we found that relationship orientation predicted confronting. Specifically, as communal orientation increased, confronting also increased for both women and men. Consistent with previous confronting research (e.g., Swim and Hyers 1999) and our hypothesis, this study provides evidence that social responsibility factors are related positively to confronting. Our study also extends previous considerations of relationship orientation, showing that it not only predicts a focus on helping others, but it also predicts intergroup actions that help people from negatively stereotyped groups. Finally, although we predicted and found that both communal oriented women and men were more likely to confront sexism, these results may be particularly important for women. Confronting is inconsistent with the female gender role (Hyers 2007), but communal relationship orientation is consistent with the female gender role because it focuses on the needs of others (Eagly and Wood 1991). As a result, communal relationship orientation might allow women to perceive themselves as consistent with their female gender role when confronting prejudice.

Second, consistent with Hypothesis 2, we found that confronting sexism predicted positive psychological outcomes, but this effect was moderated by gender. Specifically, confronting was associated positively with competence, self-esteem, and empowerment for women but not men. As targets of sexism, women experience adverse psychological outcomes, but confronting can foster positive psychological outcomes; in other words, confronting may serve as antidote for some of the adverse psychological outcomes that women experience as targets of sexism. Specifically, gender differences emerged in competence, self-esteem, and empowerment when confronting was low but were eliminated when confronting was high. However, it does not appear that confronting mediates the relationship between relationship orientation and competence, self-esteem, and empowerment for women. Although this is somewhat unexpected, it is possible that women who are focused on others may experience less adverse responses to sexism and be both more likely to confront and more likely to feel competent and empowered.

Limitations

Although this work extends relationship orientation and confronting research in important ways, there are a few limitations. Participants' confronting options were somewhat restricted. Participants were simply given the option to publically label the sexist statement as problematic and inappropriate. People in the real world, however, could confront in varied ways (Swim and Hyers 1999; Hyers 2007) or may not have a confronting response readily available. Notably, our measure of confronting did provide participants with the opportunity to convey the inappropriateness of the sexist statement to the perpetrator, which is central to conceptualizations of confronting (Shelton et al. 2006). Furthermore, our public confronting and private prejudice measures showed markedly different patterns of results, indicating that public confronting is different than privately regarding a statement as prejudiced. In our study, confronting may have been inflated. Indeed, 56% of participants rated the sexist statement as somewhat, very, or extremely inappropriate and problematic, whereas between 40 and 50% of participants confronted in previous studies (Hyers 2007; Swim and Hyers 1999). Unlike previous research, however, the participants in this study were in high power positions, which may have increased confronting because people in powerful positions may be less worried about the costs of confronting prejudice. Confronting in this study was also online, which may have decreased the salience of negative interpersonal consequences associated with face-to-face confrontations, leading to a higher rate of confronting. Still, our predictions were about factors positively related to confronting rather than the rate of confronting. This focus allowed us to compare the tendency of people higher in communal orientation to confront (as well as their positive psychological outcomes) rather than absolute levels of

confronting. Future research, however, should compare how people who differ in power and/or communal and exchange orientation confront if left to their own devices in actual and online exchanges.

Additionally, to increase statistical power, our measure of confronting was continuous. This differs from previous confronting measures that consider confronting as an either-or behavior, where one either confronts or does not confront. Although researchers often think of confronting as an either-or behavior, representing confronting as a continuum probably parallels actual confrontations in the real world, where people can confront prejudice in more or less hostile ways (Czopp et al. 2006). For example, when someone makes a sexist statement, people may respond with less hostility (e.g., "you probably don't realize this, but that sounds a bit biased") or more hostility (e.g., "I can't believe you said that; you sound really sexist"). Although both confrontations may reduce stereotyping and prejudice, more hostile confrontations cause more negative evaluations of the confronter (Czopp et al. 2006).

Moreover, our measure of relationship orientation was embedded in the leadership questionnaire that participants completed at the beginning of the study. It is possible that completing the measure made participants aware of our hypothesis or even primed participants to think that effective leadership involved being more communal. Although we cannot rule out this possibility definitively, no participants questioned the validity of the leadership questionnaire or linked relationship orientation to leadership in the debriefing. Additionally, there were positively worded communal and exchange orientation items, which makes it unlikely that participants believed that communal orientation was more important to leadership than exchange orientation.

Finally, this research focused on prototypic instances of sexism (Inman and Baron 1996) in which a man was the perpetrator of sexism and a woman was the target of sexism. As a result, it remains unclear whether the gender differences would hold for less prototypic instances of sexism (e.g., when sexism is directed at a man from a woman). When men are targets of sexism, they also experience decreased psychological well-being (Swim et al. 2001) and, like women, confronting may reduce men's negative psychological consequences.

Implications and Future Research

This work has many implications and provides several avenues for future research. First, we considered relationship orientation from an individual difference perspective, but future research may examine how different situations and relationships may influence relationship orientation. For example, enhancing communal norms at work (e.g., by providing incentives to help others) may lead to more

confronting in the work place. Second, other factors besides relationship orientation are associated with a focus on other people (e.g., interdependent self-construals, Gardner and Seeley 2001; collectivism, Vandello and Cohen 1999). Any factors related to focusing on others and increased social responsibility (e.g., altruism, prosocial behavior, or collective action; Snyder and Omoto 2001) may be associated positively with confronting, whereas factors related to focusing on the self (e.g., independent self-construals, Gardner & Seeley; or individualism, Vandello & Cohen) may be associated negatively with confronting. Although this work focused on a U.S. sample, future research may also test whether confronting behaviors differ in collectivist cultures with more communal norms (Triandis and Gelfand 1998).

We also showed that relationship orientation is associated with intergroup behaviors that reduce prejudice. Although communal orientation has been associated with helping and socially responsible behaviors (Chen et al. 2001), it has not been associated with confronting prejudice. Because relationship orientation is linked to confronting, it may also be related to other positive intergroup behaviors (e.g., collective action).

Furthermore, this study suggests that communal oriented people are perhaps not equally concerned with the needs of all others. In the current work, for example, if the communal oriented people were concerned about the needs of everyone else, they may not have confronted the sexist man in an effort to let him save face. Instead, it seems that communal oriented people were more concerned about the needs of women in the group and the importance of responding in a socially responsible way. Even if they were concerned about the needs of the sexist man, he was perpetrating sexism. Communal oriented people may believe that the socially responsible action was to confront him and help him correct his false beliefs about women.

Although we did not manipulate power or domain in the current work, a next step in this research would be to examine whether power, domain, and relationship orientation have an interactive influence on confronting. One might speculate that even powerless people who are communal oriented will confront, but power should make confronting more likely. (See Simon and Oakes 2006, for a consideration of identity and socially responsible uses of power.)

Additionally, it seems that confronting prejudice is particularly important for people from groups that are targets of prejudice. Although people from groups that are targets and non-targets of prejudice may confront and reduce prejudice, our work suggests that confronting may be particularly beneficial for targets of prejudice (e.g., women, Blacks, gay men, and lesbian women). When teaching targets how to deal with prejudice, this research

suggests that confronting maybe an important tool to reduce the negative consequences of prejudice. Although employers and policy-makers may have shied away from this approach because of concerns about the costs of confronting (e.g., being regarded as complainers by their employees or co-workers), this research suggests that confronting is also associated with several benefits for targets. If employers and policy-makers focus on the benefits of confronting for targets of prejudice, confronting may become a more widely used strategy for dealing with prejudice.

Concluding Remarks

As women break through institutional barriers and move into leadership positions in stereotypically masculine domains, it is important to understand the interpersonal barriers, such as everyday sexism, that women may still face (Eagly and Carli 2007). Understanding the factors that lead women to flourish and thrive in these domains, despite dealing with everyday sexism, is an important challenge for researchers, policymakers, and women themselves. Creating more communal norms may increase confronting prejudice for both women and men. Although confronting may be associated with some costs, this research suggests that confronting may also serve as an antidote for targets of everyday sexism.

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