

Reducing Sexism among Teenagers through a Gender-Sensitization Module

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ABSTRACT

The present study studying the effectiveness of a gender-sensitization module aimed at reducing the sexist concepts and thoughts of teenage male and female college students. A pre-test-post-test control group design was used for this purpose with a sample of 85 junior college students from Pune city. Ambivalent Sexism Inventory by Glick and Fiske (1996) was used to measure sexism. Data was analyzed using non-parametric tests, which showed a significant decrement in the scores of the experimental group, establishing the effectiveness of the program.

Keywords: *Sexism, Gender-Sensitization Module, Teenagers.*

Sexism or gender discrimination is a prejudice based on a person's sex or gender. The evolutionary approach argues that the gender role division appears as an adaptation to the challenges faced by our ancestral humans in the environment of evolutionary adaptation.

This bias or discrimination has been linked by cognitive theorists to stereotypes and gender roles, which include the belief that one sex is intrinsically superior to the other. These gender stereotypes may be in the context of the abilities, personality traits, and social behavior of the genders.

Sexism affects both men and women, but it's mostly the women who are the victims of sexism, especially in a patriarchal society like ours in India. India's Sex ratio in 2015 was 933 females: 1000 males, with a literacy rate of 53.7 percent for women as against 75.3 percent for males (Census India, 2011). In 2012 24,923 and in 2013 33,707 rape cases were reported in India (National Crime Records Bureau, 2013). The capital recorded the highest cases of rapes, with 1,636 rapes reported in India in the year of 2013 (India Today News, 2013). According to a

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National Family and Health Survey in 2005, total lifetime prevalence of domestic violence was 67 percent and 9 percent for sexual violence among women aged 15-49 years. Even with such alarming statistics rates of sexism are yet stagnant. A research by Rolleroy and Fedi (2012) explored the possibility of recognizing ambivalent, hostile and benevolent attitudes toward women and men as prejudiced and their effects on women's and men's self-perception. Results showed that benevolent sexism towards women are not recognized as sexist, while men seem more sensitive in recognizing sexist ideologies about their group, and that people evaluated benevolent source of sexism as more negative and more prejudiced than the hostile source. Sen, Kandapal and Tinani (2014) investigated the perception held by women respondents regarding various gender issues in the workplace, and whether there is an association between the comfort level among employees- working under male or female supervisors and that of supervisors supervising male or female employees. Results showed that issues wherein women female feel discriminated or given unequal treatment remains the same apart from which sector it is. Findings also showed that comfort levels of employees change while working with male and female supervisors and also while supervising male or female employees. Thus it is imperative that a module of gender-sensitization be designed and implemented.

Adolescence or teenage is the period when values and attitudes acquired since childhood are challenged in the face of those held by peers, society and role models. Also, it is the phase when most students have their first formal interaction with members of the opposite gender through college activities. An attempt to instill gender sensitivity at this age through a module developed by the researcher was thus considered appropriate for the present study. Possible gender-differences in the effectiveness of the module too were investigated. Sexism was assessed on the basis of the model of ambivalent sexism given by Glick and Fiske (1996) which comprises of benevolent sexism (the evaluations of gender that may subjectively appear rather positive, but are actually damaging to people and gender equity) and hostile sexism (overtly negative evaluation and stereotypes about a gender).

Hypothesis

The following hypothesis was framed for the present study

H₁ : After the intervention, decrement in sexism will be higher in the experimental group than in the control group.

METHOD

Sample

The data was collected from the junior-college wing of reputed colleges in Pune city. At the onset, 171 students aged between 15 – 17 years (Mean Age – 16 years) were included in the study. After eliminating those who were not regular throughout the intervention period however, 85 participants were retained for the final analysis. Of these 46 comprised the experimental

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group (17 male participants and 29 female participants), while 39 comprised the control group (19 male participants and 20 female participants).

Tools

Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske, 1996)

The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory includes 22 items covering two dimensions, that is, hostile sexism and benevolent sexism with a six-point Likert-type scale. Authors have reported internal consistency coefficients lying between .80s to .92, and the test-retest reliability coefficient of .87. Concurrent validity coefficients were reported to be lying between .40s and .80s, divergent validity coefficients were .20s to .30s, construct validity coefficients were .40s to .90s, while predictive validity coefficients ranged from .10s to .50s for different groups.

A personal data sheet was also included to obtain necessary demographic details of the participants like age, gender, class, number of siblings, parent's education, occupation and hobbies.

Procedure

Colleges were approached in order to get permission to conduct the research. Classes of 11th and 12th from all three faculties - arts, science and commerce were allotted by the colleges and were randomly assigned to the experimental and control group. The two groups were tested for equivalence on level of sexism to confirm non-significant difference on the variable at the onset itself. Mann-Whitney U statistics confirmed this equivalence across ambivalent sexism ($U = 849.00$, $p > .05$), hostile sexism ($U = 877.00$, $p > .05$), and benevolent sexism ($U = 874.00$, $p > .05$).

The research commenced with a pre-test for the experimental and the control group. The Pre-test was followed by a self made gender-sensitization module after a week. The intervention lasted for nearly two weeks with 50 minutes session alternate days for two weeks. The module was designed considering the participants age. The sessions were elaborated with activities with subtle messages about the topic to be discussed and were followed by a little homework which privileged the participants to observe themselves as well as others around them regarding different experiences or instances which exemplify the prevalence of sexism. The module included topics related to sexism, its different types, history about efforts done in the society to bring equality among the genders, gender roles, gender expectations, evolutionary process of gender role formation, difference between sex and gender, nature and nurture of sex differences, the 21st century need to change or alter gender roles or concept of gender roles.

During the intervention of the experimental group a two day session for the control group was conducted which included ice breaking and an interactive session on the exposure of media available today. After a week of the intervention the post-test was conducted on both the groups.

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Statistical analyses

The obtained data was analyzed using SPSS version 22. Owing to the small and dissimilar sample sizes and non-conformity to assumptions of parametric statistical testing, non-parametric statistical tests were used. Mann-Whitney U was used to assess differences in decrement scores (difference between pre-test scores and post-test scores) across the experimental and control groups. Similar analysis was performed to test possible gender-differences in the effectiveness of the intervention.

RESULTS

Table 1 Summary of Mann-Whitney U Test for Differences in Decrement Scores between the Experimental and Control Groups

Variable	Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney U
Ambivalent Sexism	Experimental	46	55.39	2603.50	310.500**
	Control	39	27.67	1051.50	
Hostile Sexism	Experimental	46	43.14	2027.50	886.500 (NS)
	Control	39	42.83	1627.50	
Benevolent Sexism	Experimental	46	57.19	2688.00	226.000**
	Control	39	25.45	967.00	

** = $p < .01$, NS (Not significant) = $p > .05$

Table 1 shows a significantly higher decrement in ambivalent and benevolent sexism scores in the post-test for the experimental group as compared to the control group ($U = 310.500$, $p < .01$; $U = 226.00$, $p < .01$ respectively). This effectiveness of the program in reducing the sexism was thus supported, except in the case of hostile sexism. Thus the hypothesis for the present study was partially supported.

To test any possible gender-differences in the effectiveness of the module, Mann-Whitney U statistics was first used to confirm equivalence on pre-test sexism across the experimental and control groups in both the genders, and then sexism decrement scores across the experimental and control group were compared among the male and female participants separately.

Table 2 Summary of Mann-Whitney U Test for Differences in Decrement Scores between the Experimental and Control Groups among Males

Variable	Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney U
Ambivalent Sexism	Experimental	18	28.50	513.00	0.000**
	Control	19	10.00	190.00	
Hostile Sexism	Experimental	18	24.31	437.50	75.500**
	Control	19	13.97	265.50	
Benevolent Sexism	Experimental	18	27.33	492.00	21.000**
	Control	19	11.11	211.00	

** = $p < .01$

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Table 2 shows a significantly higher decrement in ambivalent, hostile and benevolent sexism scores in the post-test for the experimental group as compared to the control group ($U = 0.000$, $p < .01$; $U = 75.500$, $p < .01$ and $U = 21.000$, $p < .01$ respectively). This demonstrates the effectiveness of the program in reducing the sexism among male participants.

Table 3 Summary of Mann-Whitney U Test for Differences in Decrement Scores between the Experimental and Control Groups among Females

Variable	Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney U
Ambivalent Sexism	Experimental	29	28.48	826.00	160.000**
	Control	19	18.42	350.00	
Hostile Sexism	Experimental	29	21.33	618.50	183.500 (NS)
	Control	19	29.34	557.50	
Benevolent Sexism	Experimental	29	30.67	889.50	96.500**
	Control	19	15.08	286.50	

** = $p < .01$, NS (Not significant) = $p > .05$

As seen in table 3, among the female participants decrement scores of the experimental group were significantly higher than those of the control group for ambivalent and benevolent sexism ($U = 160.000$, $p < .01$ and $U = 96.500$, $p < .01$ respectively) but not for hostile sexism ($U = 183.500$, $p > .05$). Unlike in the male participants, hostile sexism wasn't seen to reduce in the female participants owing to the intervention.

DISCUSSION

The study demonstrates that carefully designed interventions may help to reduce sexism among teenagers. A majority of the biases emerge from observational learning, conditioning and modeling. However, if considered as cognitive schemas, like all biases, gender biases too can be challenged and thus eradicated. The composition of the intervention participants comprising of both male and female students appears to have helped the participants reflect upon the fact that the biases that they hold against the opposite gender are rather common, and moreover, that the opposite gender too garners several biases against them. Through confronting, challenging, and identifying sexism in their day-to-day lives, and through practicing gender-sensitive acts, sexist attitudes and acts can be altered.

With reference to the slight gender differences observed in the effectiveness of the module, one reason may be that India is predominantly still a patriarchal society. A majority of the times, the perpetrators of sexism are males rather than females. Thus hostile sexism seems to be deeply rooted more among males in the society. Moreover, females probably consider the same too, and thus believe that hostile sexism is a characteristic attribute of males rather than females. Thus, while the module was successful in reducing ambivalent and benevolent sexism among males in the experimental group, it did not reduce significantly among their female counterparts.

CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the findings of the study, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The module developed by the researcher significantly reduced levels of ambivalent, hostile and benevolent sexism among the male participants of the experimental group, as against in the control group, thus establishing the effectiveness of the program.
2. The effectiveness of the module was found to differ across gender of participants. The module developed by the researcher significantly reduced levels of ambivalent and benevolent sexism among the females of the experimental group, as against in the control group, but not in the case of hostile sexism.

IMPLICATIONS

The study demonstrates that sexist thoughts and attitudes of the participants were significantly reduced owing to the intervention on gender-sensitization. The study thus has significant implications for individual families, educational institutes and organizations and the society at large. Similar modules with necessary need-based alterations can be implemented with other age groups. For instance, similar modules may be incorporated in the curriculum in schools. In organizations as well, such modules will help promote and increase gender-sensitization, thus improving interpersonal relationships among team members and organizational climate and productivity in the long run. Even parents can benefit from such interventions as they will alter the germination of ideas of gender-bias in the first place. Components of this module can be incorporated in pre-marital counseling too, in order to ensure realistic expectations from the spouse and healthy un-biased communication between the partners.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While the present study demonstrated that sexist attitudes and beliefs can be altered successfully through well designed interventions, it had its set of limitations that may be considered in similar studies in future. The fact that gender-differences were observed in the effectiveness of the intervention, there may be two possibilities to begin with. Firstly, gender-specific interventions need to be designed along with some common modules. While the present study with a heterosexual composition of experimental group had the benefit of challenging long-held gender-biases in the presence of the opposite gender while being in the comfort of the class premises, it probably limited the scope of challenging gender-specific biases. Secondly, the gender of the intervention facilitator too could influence its effectiveness. This aspect too may be investigated in future studies. Moreover, the effectiveness across different age group of participants too may be studied.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declared no conflict of interests.

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