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Ways to Go: Men's and Women's Support for Aggressive and Nonaggressive Confrontation of Sexism as a Function of Gender Identification

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This research examines male and female perceivers' reactions to a female target who (1) confronted sexism nonaggressively, (2) confronted sexism aggressively (by slapping the perpetrator), or (3) did not confront sexism. Results (N = 152) indicated that, overall, both women and men responded most favorably to the female target who confronted nonaggressively. Nonaggressive confrontation was perceived as relatively unthreatening for women and relatively threatening for men, whereas the remaining responses were all perceived as threatening for women. Results were further moderated by participants' a priori levels of gender identification: women who were weakly identified with their gender and men who were highly identified with their gender were less supportive of aggressive confrontations. Implications regarding the optimal way to confront sexism are discussed.

Women often encounter sexism in their daily lives and have to decide how to react (Swim, Hyers, Cohen, & Ferguson, 2001). One of the possible reactions women can have to sexism is to directly confront the perpetrator by indicating they find their behavior offensive and sexist. A crucial determinant of women's decision to confront or not to confront sexism is the extent to which they expect their reactions to be supported by others or, instead, to be associated with social costs (Ashburn-Nardo, Blanchar, Petersson, Morris, & Goodwin, 2014; Shelton & Stewart, 2004). Indeed, those who claim to be targets of discrimination are not

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always supported: whereas at times they are liked and respected (Dodd, Giuliano, Boutell, & Moran, 2001), they are at other times labeled as "complainers" or "troublemakers" instead (e.g., Kaiser & Miller, 2001). This article focuses on whether the particular way in which women choose to confront sexism affects how it is evaluated both by women and by men.

Support for Confrontation

Various factors have been found to moderate whether or not confronters of sexism incur social costs. One of these factors is the gender of the evaluator: women are more likely than men to report a positive impression of a female confronter (Dodd et al., 2001). However, even women are not always supportive of other women who confront sexism. For example, women who identify weakly with their group are less likely than high identifiers to evaluate a female confronter positively (Kaiser, Hagiwara, Malahy, & Wilkins, 2009). In addition, when women believe that sexism is pervasive they are more likely to support a female confronter of sexism than when they believe that sexism is rare (Garcia, Schmitt, Branscombe, & Ellemers, 2010; Kahn, Barreto, Kaiser, & Rego, 2012). Why is there such variability in the extent to which people support confrontation? When deciding whether or not to support confrontation of sexism, both men and women need to weigh its potential costs against its likely benefits—and these are likely to be different for men and for women. We propose that, for women, confronting sexism has the potential benefit of allowing women to stand up against sexism, addressing injustice, and contributing toward changing the stereotypical views of women expressed in the sexist statement. However, confrontation has the cost of potentially appearing like an overreaction (e.g., Kaiser et al., 2009), which can confirm the negative stereotype of women as overly emotional. Gender stereotypes are multifaceted and include the idea that women are incompetent, submissive, irrational, overly emotional, and whiny (Spence, Helmreich, & Holahan, 1979). For these reasons, while women may be generally more willing to support confrontation of sexism than are men, they are unlikely to be as supportive of confrontation when it seems too extreme, or like an overreaction.

By contrast, men are less likely than women to value the benefits of confronting prejudice, but for them, supporting confrontation might have the benefit of allowing them to be consistent with egalitarian ideals, prescribed and widely endorsed in western societies. Indeed, egalitarianism is highly normative in western societies, even if it often coexists with deeply seated prejudiced beliefs (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986). Individuals are thus motivated to control prejudice and show themselves as egalitarian (Plant & Devine, 1998) and will only license themselves to endorse prejudiced beliefs under specific circumstances (Monin & Miller, 2001), such as when they can find justification for a nonegalitarian course of action (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1977). Men, thus, are less likely than women to support

confrontation of sexism, but they may do so when confrontation does not seem consequential.

Kahn et al. (2012) tested these ideas by examining how perceived pervasiveness of sexism differentially affected men's and women's support for a female confronter of sexism. In line with prior research showing that dominant group members are less likely to support corrective actions than members of subordinate groups (e.g., Lowery, Unzueta, Goff, & Knowles, 2006), the authors expected men to be overall less likely than women to support confrontation of sexism targeting women. However, they also expected, and found, that when sexism was portrayed as rare, men's status protection motives would be dampened, leading men to seize the opportunity to show themselves as egalitarian by supporting confrontation. Women, by contrast, were more supportive of confrontation when sexism was portrayed as pervasive than when it was described as rare because when sexism is portrayed as rare, confrontation appears less necessary and more like an overreaction. In this article, we examine another factor that might determine whether or not confrontation is supported by men and by women, that is, the particular way a woman chooses to confront sexism.

Ways to Go: Confronting Aggressively or Nonaggressively

Aggression can be defined as a verbal or physical behavior that aims to harm another living being, whereby the target is motivated to avoid such treatment (Baron & Richardson, 1994). Although women most often do not confront sexism, or confront sexism in nonaggressive ways, women frequently think about aggressive responses when they are exposed to sexism (Swim & Hyers, 1999). It is indeed possible to express displeasure with a sexist remark in various ways, some less aggressive (e.g., by politely addressing the perpetrator) and some more aggressive (e.g., by slapping the perpetrator). However, to date, research on support for confrontation has focused only on nonaggressive forms of confrontation and has neglected more aggressive forms of confrontation. We examine whether men and women differentially support aggressive and nonaggressive confrontation.

We propose that both aggressive confrontation and no confrontation at all are likely to be less supported than nonaggressive confrontation. Women are unlikely to support aggressive confrontation because it portrays women as overly emotional, thereby confirming negative stereotypes about women (Spence et al., 1979). Women are also unlikely to support no confrontation at all both because it does nothing to address sexism (Czopp, Monteith, & Mark, 2006) and because it also confirms negative stereotypes about women by characterizing women as submissive, weak, and unable to speak up for themselves (Spence et al., 1979). In sum, women are likely to express greater support for

nonaggressive confrontation than for aggressive confrontation or for no confrontation at all.

We also expect men to be more supportive of nonaggressive confrontation than of aggressive confrontation. First, while supporting nonaggressive confrontation provides men with the opportunity to be egalitarian, we predict that aggression alleviates the moral imperative to show themselves as supportive of women and provides sufficient justification not to do so. Second, aggressive confrontation mocks men's superiority by challenging their superior physical strength. Indeed, displays of physical strength are a common way for men to assert their manhood (e.g., Bosson, Vandello, Burnaford, Weaver, & Wasti, 2009), underlining the importance of this domain for men's gender identity. Men are also likely to be more supportive of no confrontation than of nonaggressive confrontation, since any type of confrontation (also when it is not aggressive) highlights the existence of bias from men toward women, and calls attention both to men's privileged position and to (some) women's lack of satisfaction with that privilege. Prior research indeed shows that men feel reduced group-based well-being when reminded of their privilege (Branscombe, 1998), and that men who are confronted for behaving in a sexist way feel bad about having done so (Czopp & Monteith, 2003). In sum, we expect men to be most supportive of no confrontation at all, and least supportive of aggressive confrontation.

The Moderating Role of Ingroup Identification

We propose that gender identification further complicates the pattern outlined. We expect that, for women, the potential cost associated with aggressive confrontation is likely to be more keenly felt by low identifiers, since high identifiers are likely to be more committed to social change, and thus to see more benefits in confrontation of any kind. Indeed, prior research has shown that identification is an important moderator of responses to prejudice, so that high identifiers are more psychologically harmed by prejudice (McCoy & Major, 2003), and more supportive of confrontation (Kaiser et al., 2009), than low identifiers.

In the present research, we examined whether the moderating role of ingroup identification is particularly important when ingroup members (women) evaluate the more extreme response of an aggressive versus a nonaggressive confronter. Specifically, we expected that weakly identified women are more likely to see only the potential negative side of aggressive confrontations, and to fear how it might reflect on themselves personally, whereas highly identified women are more likely to see confrontation as both needed and worthy of its costs, even when it is aggressive. As a result, low identifiers are particularly unlikely to support a female target who confronts a male perpetrator aggressively.

Besides expressing less support for aggressive confrontation, we also proposed that women who identify weakly with their gender group would further disidentify with their gender when faced with an ingroup member who confronts aggressively. For low identifiers, costs to the group's reputation are problematic above all because they fear they will be perceived ingroup stereotypical ways (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999). This can be easily solved if low identifiers further distance themselves from the group (Doosje, Spears, & Ellemers, 2002). This is not, however, a response to be expected from high identifiers, who might find such a negative image of the group problematic for the group's sake, rather than merely for the sake of their individual reputation, a motivation which is not accompanied by lowered identification (Barreto & Ellemers, 2003).

For men, the threat to their image as the stronger sex, presented by aggressive confrontation from a female target, is likely to be particularly felt by high identifiers who are both more likely to care about their gender's reputation, and more likely to imagine themselves in the perpetrator's shoes. Weakly identified men, in contrast, may not see the situation as much as "us versus them," or might even empathize with women's need to confront sexist men, so they are expected to find aggressive confrontation less problematic. As such, we expected that, compared to low identifiers, highly identified men would be particularly unsupportive of the target who confronts aggressively.

Overview of the Present Research

The present research extends prior work on confronting sexism by examining the extent to which men and women support a female target of sexism as a function of whether she does not confront sexism, confronts sexism nonaggressively, or confronts sexism aggressively. In addition, we test whether these evaluations vary as a function of women's and men's gender identification. To do so, we measured a priori gender identification (time 1) and subsequently asked male and female participants to express their opinion about a scenario in which a female target reacted to a sexist remark from a male perpetrator by either not confronting, confronting nonaggressively, or confronting aggressively. We assessed how the target is evaluated (including one's felt hostility to the target), the perceived threat of the target's response to men and to women, support for confrontation, and gender identification after exposure to the scenario (time 2). To summarize our hypotheses, we expected women to be most supportive of nonaggressive confrontation, compared to aggressive confrontation, or no confrontation at all. Men were expected to be least supportive of aggressive confrontation and most supportive of no confrontation. Moreover, we expected gender identification to moderate these findings, so that these patterns would be most pronounced for weakly identified women and highly identified men.

Method

Design and Participants

The experiment followed a 3 (Target's response: nonaggressive, aggressive, no confrontation) × 2 (Perceiver's sex: men vs. women) between participants factorial design. To examine the moderating role of a priori levels of gender identification (time 1), we measured gender identification before the manipulation. Gender identification was measured again after the manipulation (time 2), as a dependent variable.

A total of 68 female and 84 male participants took part in this web-based experiment. They were recruited via a student email-distribution list at a German university and received credit points for their participation. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 50 years ($M = 22.84$ years, $SD = 5.26$). Most (94%) self-identified as Germans, 6% as other.

Procedure

Participants first indicated demographic information and gender identification. Next, participants read a text (in German, adapted from Kaiser et al., 2009, Study 3) describing a female target who overheard a male acquaintance making sexist comments:

> I was walking down the Ave a couple weeks ago, and a guy I know was walking in front of me chatting with one of his male friends. I overheard him arguing that women should never be allowed to run companies, that they're terrible decision-makers, and that they're just too emotional and unintelligent to have that responsibility. He also complained about female drivers – that they don't know how to drive and shouldn't be allowed to get driving licenses. As he was turning the corner, he realized I was behind him, and he immediately stopped talking. It was awkward. I know the guy fairly well (he lives on my dorm floor) and I ran into him later that evening at a party at our dorm.

The end of the scenario depended on the experimental condition. In the nonaggressive and no confrontation conditions, the endings were similar to the original scenario of Kaiser et al. (2009). Specifically, in the *no confrontation* condition, participants read: "We were talking in the party room and although I wanted to confront him about his sexist comments, I couldn't get myself to do it. I wanted to tactfully tell him that, as a woman, I thought what he said was wrong—that I found his comments offensive and sexist. However, I avoided the issue and said nothing at all about his sexist comments." In the *nonaggressive* confrontation condition, participants read: "We were talking in the party room, and I tactfully confronted him about his sexist comments. I told him that, as a woman, I thought that what he said was wrong—that I found his comments offensive and sexist." In the *aggressive* confrontation condition, the ending of the scenario was newly

developed and it read: "We were talking in the party room, and I clearly confronted him about his sexist comments. I vociferously told him that, as a woman, I thought that what he said was wrong—that I found his comments offensive and sexist. Then, I slapped his face." We decided to use this physical act of aggression (instead of a mere verbal act) to ensure that aggression was unambiguous as well as in line with the definition of aggression as behavior that aims to harm another living being (Baron & Richardson, 1994). After this experimental manipulation, participants answered questions to measure the dependent variables. They were then thanked and fully debriefed.

Dependent Variables

All items were answered on a 7-point rating scale (from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much*). *Gender identification* was assessed before and after the manipulation using three items "It's important for me to belong to the group of women (men)," "Being a woman (man) mirrors an important part of my personality," and "I identify with women (men) as a group." These items formed reliable scales and were averaged for analyses (women: Time 1 $\alpha = .81$, Time 2 $\alpha = .88$; men: Time 1 $\alpha = .88$, Time 2 $\alpha = .90$).

Perceived threat was measured using four items. Two items inquired about the extent to which the target's response was threatening for women and two items asked the extent to which the target's response was threatening for men. All participants, regardless of their gender, answered all 4 items (versions assessing perceived threat for men are in brackets): "To what extent do you think that the woman's reaction hurts the reputation of women (men) in general?", "Do you think that the woman's reaction can harm the image of women (men) as a group?" These items formed reliable scales (threat for women: $r = .73$, $p < .001$; threat for men: $r = .51$, $p < .001$) and were averaged for analyses.

Impression of the female target was assessed by asking participants how much they agree that the woman is friendly, a whiner, problematic, intelligent, nice, quarrelsome, competent, and clever. A factor analysis revealed a one factor solution (Eigenvalues 4.42; 1.33; .94; . . .), which explained 47.36% of the variance (all factor loadings $>.66$). Items were averaged for analyses after recoding the negatively phrased items (whiner, quarrelsome, and problematic) so that higher scores on this measure reflect a more positive impression of the female target ($\alpha = .86$).

Support for the target's reaction was assessed with three items "How appropriate was the reaction of the woman?", "How much do you agree with the woman's reaction?", and "How likely is it that you would react the same way?" These three items formed a reliable scale ($\alpha = .89$) and were averaged for analyses.

Hostility toward the target is a third indicator of support. Instead of looking only at reported support and impression, we also looked at feelings of hostility as the direct emotional reaction toward the target. We assessed hostility by asking

participants how strongly they felt anger, hostility, contempt, and disgust toward the female target ($\alpha = .86$). A factor analysis with promax rotation including the hostility items and threat perceptions (which could be seen as closely related to the hostility items) resulted in three factors with Eigenvalues >1 (3.16; 1.48; 1.30; .66; . . .). These three factors (hostility, threat perceptions women, and threat perceptions men) accounted for 74.27% of the variance (all factor loadings >.66).

Results

Mean Differences

We conducted a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with all six measures as dependent variables and type of confrontation and participant sex as between participant factors (see Table 1 for all relevant means and standard deviations). Results revealed significant multivariate effects of type of confrontation and of participant sex, and a reliable multivariate interaction between the two factors (Wilks Lambda: $F(12,282) = 12.40$, $p < .001$, *partial* $\eta^2 = .35$; $F(6,141) = 5.15$, $p < .001$, *partial* $\eta^2 = .18$; $F(12,282) = 1.98$, $p = .03$, *partial* $\eta^2 = .08$, respectively). At the univariate level, sex differences were only apparent for gender identification at time 2, with women scoring higher on gender identification than men, $F(1,146) = 25.49$, $p < .001$, *partial* $\eta^2 = .15$. Moreover, all main effects of type of confrontation were significant (F's$(2,146) = 38.35$ (threat women), 13.32 (threat men), 8.63 (impression of the target), 35.32 (support of reaction), 14.51 (hostility), p's $< .001$) except for gender identification (time 2). All main effects, except for positive impression, were qualified by at least marginally significant interactions between type of confrontation and participant sex, $F(2,146) = 4.84$, $p = .01$ (treat women), $F(2,146) = 2.61$, $p = .08$ (threat men), $F(2,146) = 3.24$, $p = .04$ (support of reaction), $F(2,146) = 2.45$, $p = .09$ (hostility).

The (unqualified) main effect on *positive impression*, $F(2,146) = 8.63$, $p < .001$, *partial* $\eta^2 = .11$, showed that both male and female participants had a less positive impression of the female target when she confronted aggressively compared to when she confronted nonaggressively or did not confront (for all mean differences see Table 1).

As to the interactions, simple effect analyses indicated that, for *perceived threat for women*, both female and male participants perceived nonaggressive confrontation as the least threatening response for women as a whole. However, women showed a tendency to see aggressive confrontation as less threatening for women than no confrontation at all, whereas men did not show such a tendency (see Table 1).

With regard to the extent to which the target's response was seen as a *threat to men as a whole*, men and women agreed that no confrontation at all was less threatening for men than aggressive confrontation. However, whereas women

Table 1. Means (and Standard Deviations) of All Dependent Variables as a Function of Type of Confrontation and Participant Sex

	Female			Male		
	Nonaggressive	Aggressive	No confront	Nonaggressive	Aggressive	No confront
Threat for women	1.50_{a} (0.72)	$3.80_{(b)}$ (1.90)	$4.61_{(b)}$ (1.05)	2.08_{a} (1.02)	3.13_{b} (1.64)	3.58_{b} (1.59)
Threat for men	2.67_{a} (1.41)	3.64_{b} (1.40)	1.71_{c} (0.71)	$2.42_{(a)b}$ (1.08)	$2.95_{(a)}$ (1.41)	2.21_{b} (1.25)
Hostility	1.05_{a} (0.14)	1.66_{b} (0.93)	1.75_{b} (0.91)	1.08_{a} (0.20)	1.92_{b} (1.07)	1.35_{a} (0.57)
Positive impression	5.37_{a} (0.77)	4.63_{b} (1.16)	4.97_{ab} (0.64)	4.93_{a} (0.66)	4.29_{b} (1.07)	5.07_{a} (0.95)
Support for reaction	5.94_{a} (1.09)	3.38_{b} (1.81)	3.09_{b} (1.26)	4.97_{a} (1.19)	3.33_{b} (1.81)	3.61_{b} (1.26)
Gender identification time 2	5.80_{a} (0.74)	5.27_{a} (1.30)	5.33_{a} (1.09)	4.38_{a} (1.63)	4.21_{a} (1.49)	4.35_{a} (1.60)

Note. Within rows, separately for female and male respondents, means not sharing subscripts differ at $p < .05$. Means sharing subscripts in parenthesis differ at $p <= .10$

perceived aggressive confrontation as most threatening for men, there was only a tendency for men to perceive aggressive as more threatening than nonaggressive confrontation. Thus, women saw aggressive confrontation as more threatening to men than men perceived it to be to their group. Comparing whether each of the three responses were perceived to be more threatening for women or for men, t-tests within the conditions show that participants saw no confrontation to be threatening to women but not to men, $t(42) = 6.89$, $p < .001$, while aggressive confrontation was seen as threatening to both men and women, $t(51) < 1$, $p = .54$. By contrast, nonaggressive confrontation was seen as not threatening to women, but relatively threatening to men, $t(56) = -3.96$, $p < .001$.

With regard to perceived *hostility*, both men and women expressed less hostility toward the nonaggressive than toward the aggressive confronter. However, whereas women expressed as much hostility toward the nonconfronter as toward the aggressive confronter, men expressed more hostility toward the aggressive confronter ($p = .005$).

With regard to *support for the target's reaction*, both women and men expressed greater support for nonaggressive confrontation than for aggressive confrontation or for no confrontation at all. The interaction simply reflects the finding that women were more supportive than men of the nonaggressive reaction.

The Moderating Role of A Priori Gender Identification

The a priori level of gender identification for the overall sample was $M = 4.91$ ($SD = 1.40$). Moderated regression analyses tested the hypotheses that weakly identified women and highly identified men evaluated the female target who confronted aggressively less favorably compared to the target who confronted nonaggressively. For this analysis, two dummy codes were created. One compared aggressive confrontation to the remaining responses (aggressive confrontation = 1, others = 0) and the other compared no confrontation to the remaining responses (no confrontation = 1; others = 0). When entering both dummy variables simultaneously into the regression equation both dummy variables are compared to the zero-coded group (nonaggressive confrontation, see Aiken & West, 1991). In all analyses, we tested for a three-way interaction first by entering the two dummy variables, participant sex, gender identification and their two-way and three-way interaction terms. To probe reliable three-way interactions, we subsequently examined the two-way interactions separately for female and male participants (entering the two dummy variables, centered scores of a priori gender identification, and the two interaction terms: aggressive confronting $\times$ gender identification and no confronting $\times$ gender identification). Reliable two-way interactions were probed through simple slope analyses comparing participants one *SD* below and one *SD* above the mean.

Perceived threat. The effects of the experimental conditions on the extent to which the target's reaction was perceived as threatening for women or for men as a whole were not moderated by gender identification (p's $> .43$).

Hostility toward the target. A three-way interaction between aggressive confrontation, sex, and gender identification was significant ($B = –.77$, $SE = .22$, $p = .001$). Gender identification moderated the effect of aggressive confrontation on hostility toward the target, both for female and for male participants, but, with quite different patterns (interaction terms: $B = –.44$, $SE = .19$, $p = .02$, for women; $B = .33$, $SE = .11$, $p = .004$, for men). Simple slope analyses (see Figures 1a and 1b) indicated that, as expected, weakly identified women responded with more hostility toward the female target when she confronted aggressively compared to nonaggressively ($B = 1.13$, $SE = .32$, $p < .001$). By contrast, highly identified women did not differ in their level of hostility depending on the type of confrontation ($B = .15$, $SE = .26$, $p = .56$). For male participants, men highly identified with their gender responded with more hostility toward the female target who confronted aggressively compared to nonaggressively ($B = 1.43$, $SE = .25$, $p < .001$). For weakly identified men, there was a slight tendency in the same direction ($B = .41$, $SE = .23$, $p = .08$).

Impression of the target. A three-way interaction between aggressive confrontation, sex, and gender identification was significant ($B = –1.02$, $SE = .29$, $p < .001$). Separate analyses for women and men revealed that gender identification moderated the effect of aggressive confrontation on impression of the confronter for women and men, but again with quite different patterns (interaction terms: $B = .65$, $SE = .24$, $p = .009$ for women; $B = –.37$, $SE = .15$, $p = .01$, for men). Simple slope analyses (see Figures 1c and 1d) indicated that, as expected and in line with the pattern obtained for hostility toward the target, weakly identified women responded with a less positive impression of the female target when she confronted aggressively compared to nonaggressively ($B = –1.56$, $SE = .46$, $p = .001$). By contrast, highly identified women were equally positive about both types of confrontation ($B = –.12$, $SE = .25$, $p = .63$). Conversely, highly identified men indicated a less positive impression of the female target who confronted aggressively compared to nonaggressively ($B = 1.27$, $SE = .26$, $p < .001$). Weakly identified men did not differ in their evaluation of the female target depending on the type of confrontation ($B = –.15$, $SE = .38$, $p = .69$).

Support for the target's reaction. A three-way interaction between aggressive confrontation, sex, and gender identification on support for the target's reaction was significant ($B = –1.06$, $SE = .48$, $p = .03$). Separate analyses for women and men revealed that an interaction between gender identification and aggressive confrontation approached significance for female participants

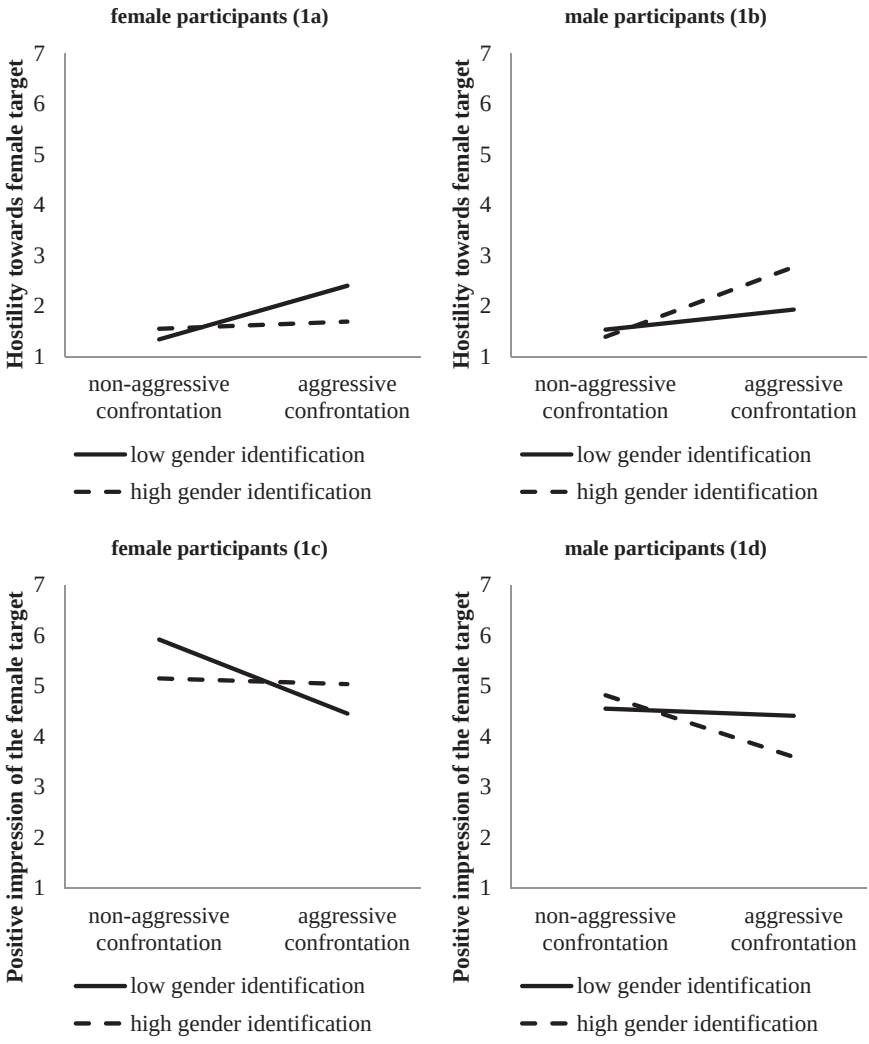

Fig. 1. Panel 1: Hostility toward the female target as a function of her behavior among female (a) and male participants (b). Panel 2: Positive impression of the target as a function of her behavior among female (c) and male participants (d).

($B = .72$, $SE = .40$, $p = .08$), but not for male participants ($B = –.34$, $SE = .25$, $p = .18$). Simple slopes (see Figures 2a and 2b) illustrate that both weakly and highly identified women were less supportive of the target's reaction when the target confronted aggressively compared to nonaggressively, but this effect was

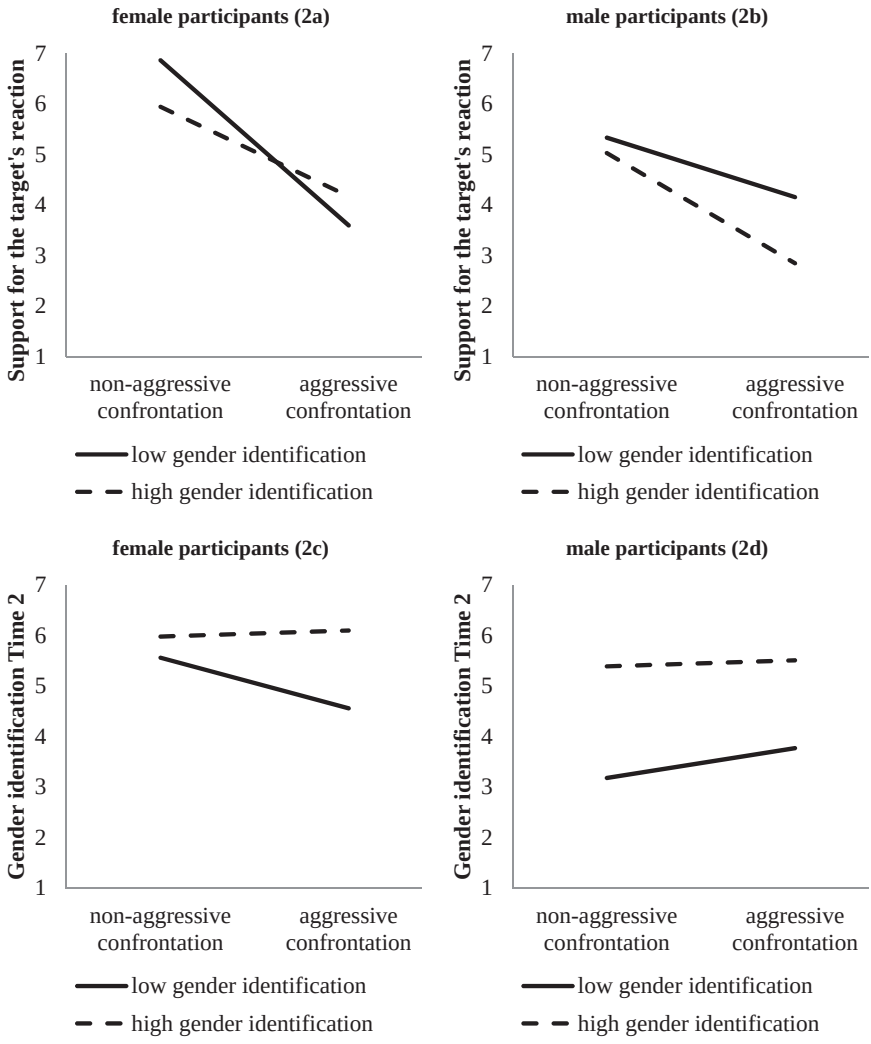

Fig. 2. Panel 1: Support of the target's reaction as a function of her behavior among female (a) and male participants (b). Panel 2: Gender identification time 2 as a function of the target's behavior among female (c) and male participants (d).

more pronounced for weakly identified women ($B = –3.48$, $SE = .66$, $p < .001$) compared to highly identified women ($B = –1.88$, $SE = .54$, $p < .001$).

Gender identification as a function of target's behavior (time 2). A three-way interaction between aggressive confrontation, participant sex, and a priori

gender identification on posttest gender identification was significant ($B = –.76$, $SE = .30$, $p = .01$). Separate analyses for women and men revealed that the interaction between a priori gender identification and aggressive confrontation was significant for women ($B = .54$, $SE = .23$, $p = .03$), but not for men ($B = –.22$, $SE = .16$, $p = .16$). Simple slope analyses (see Figures 2c and 2d) indicated that weakly identified women reported lower levels of gender identification when the target confronted aggressively compared to nonaggressively ($B = 1.13$, $SE = .32$, $p < .001$). By contrast, highly identified women did not differ in their level of posttest gender identification depending on the type of confrontation ($B = .15$, $SE = .26$, $p = .56$).

Discussion

This research extends prior knowledge in several ways. The results show that, as expected, nonaggressive confrontations were seen by men and by women as the least threatening responses to sexism for women as a whole—notably, also less threatening than no confrontation at all (see also Gervais & Hillard, 2014). As expected, aggressive confrontation was perceived as more threatening for men than nonaggressive confrontation. However, while women perceived nonaggressive confrontation to be more threatening for men than no confrontation, men saw nonaggressive and no confrontation as equally (non) threatening for men as a whole. Importantly, men and women agreed that nonaggressive confrontation was the only response that combined a low threat for women and a reasonable amount of threat for men, offering the best approach if one desires to promote change with the least costs for the disadvantaged group. Overall, across three measures, men and women were more supportive of nonaggressive confrontation than of aggressive and no confrontation. Women expressed particularly high support, compared to men, for nonaggressive confrontation and were rather unsupportive of no confrontation at all. These results suggest that men and women concur in finding nonaggressive confrontation to be a well-balanced response to sexism.

However, importantly, support for confrontation was additionally affected by participant's a priori gender identification. Women's and men's lack of support for aggressive compared to nonaggressive confrontation was particularly visible for weakly identified women and highly identified men. We expected that the extent to which the target's response would be seen as problematic to the ingroup would correspond to the amount of support participants would express for each response. Our results support this idea for women: women reported that nonaggressive confrontation was the least threatening response for women and correspondingly indicated greater support for this than for any other response. However, men indicated that nonaggressive and no confrontation were equally (non)threatening for men, but expressed more support for nonaggressive confrontation than for any

other response. It is possible that men supported the nonaggressive confrontation more than the nonresponse because supporting confrontation allows men to be consistent with egalitarian ideals, prescribed and widely endorsed in western societies (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986).

We derive the following conclusions. First, nonaggressive confrontation of sexism seems to be more supported than no confrontation at all, particularly by women. Second, although aggressive confrontation attracts little support both from women and from men, no confrontation incurs many of the same costs. Women, in particular, seemed to recognize the costs of not responding to sexism, but were also concerned with the costs of acting in ways that might further damage their group, such as aggressive confrontations. Polite, nonaggressive, confrontations were seen by men and women as offering the compromise between such costs and benefits. Third, the present research revealed that ingroup identification is an important determinant of support for aggressive confrontation. Weakly identified women and highly identified men indicated less support for aggressive than for nonaggressive confrontation while this differential support was weaker (for support for the target's reaction), or even disappeared (for hostility toward and impression of the target) for highly identified women and weakly identified men. Indeed weakly identified women were the most concerned about the costs of ingroup actions, such as aggressive confrontation, since they did not identify with the goals that these actions may favor. For men, it was high identifiers who are most likely to identify with the perpetrator and thus reject aggressive actions. Finally, we found that, in the nonaggressive confrontation condition, weakly and highly identified women did not differ in their gender identification at time 2. This finding suggests that weakly identified women increased group identification when they observed nonaggressive confrontation—a response that can be useful to themselves individually (by addressing gender-based injustices they also wish to avoid) and which does not carry the social costs from which they wish to distance themselves (Doosje et al., 2002). Men's degree of gender identification was not affected by the manipulations, which is understandable if we think that for men the manipulations varied the outgroup member's response, rather than the behavior of their ingroup member. In sum, responses to demeaning group-based treatment that appear reasonable in terms of the balance of costs and benefits they bring to ingroup and outgroup may at times help direct even low identifiers toward the group.

Limitations and Future Directions

We acknowledge the following limitations of the present research. First, we only examined one form of aggressive and one form of nonaggressive confrontation. It is possible that less severe forms of aggression (such as yelling) are perceived more similarly to nonaggressive confrontation, whereas more severe

forms of aggression than examined here may reveal stronger differences. In addition, it is not absolutely clear what it is about the aggressive response we examined (i.e., hitting) that leads to the effects found: is it the aggressiveness, is it the physical attack, or is it the mere fact that it is a less usual (or nonnormative) form of response? This is a question that further research will need to address. It is also possible that the fact that, in the scenario we used, the nonaggressive confronter qualified her actions as "tactful" led to more positive evaluations of those actions than if this qualification had not been used. We believe that the fact that nonaggressive confrontation is believed to be tactful, while aggressive confrontation is not, is a difference inherent to the distinction between these two forms of action. However, future research might avoid using such qualifiers. Second, the sexist incident used in this research was not intentionally directed at the confronter, who instead overheard the comment by accident. Although disparaging views of women target all women, future research could examine whether different results are obtained when the confronter is a more direct target of the sexist statement. In addition, the use of the scenario methodology is a limitation of our study. An examination of responses to confrontation in more immersive contexts might reveal quite different effects, particularly if participants are allowed to respond freely, since men can use that opportunity to display protective behavior toward the target, and resort to humor to deal with aggression. Moreover, in more immersive contexts, the evaluation of the confronter also depends on many other factors that were not considered in our vignette study (e.g., how the man reacts toward the confronter or the presence of other people). Thus, our research presents a first step that needs to be validated in more immersive contexts. Finally, it may be that the pattern found in this study is moderated by perceiver culture. One study found that while Black women were more likely than Asian women to directly confront racism, Black and Asian women were equally likely to confront in a more indirect way (Lee, Soto, Swim, & Bernstein, 2012). Indeed, Asians are particularly likely to be motivated to maintain interpersonal harmony (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) and thus dislike confrontation. It is thus possible that different results would be obtained among female Asians, who might perceive the aggressive confrontation as most threatening and no confrontation as least threatening for women. Future research should examine how different forms of confrontation are perceived in different cultures.

Conclusion

There are a myriad of ways targets can respond to prejudice as well as a range of other classifications of these actions that are not examined in this article. It is important to note that our goal in this article was *not* to contribute to a classification of such actions. Instead, our goal was to demonstrate how different actions can be perceived differently by members of advantaged and disadvantaged

groups. The finding that women and men expressed more support for nonaggressive confrontation than for any other response has important implications for social policy, for instance, in terms of what messages organizations can provide to employees to create an environment that encourages confronting and reporting of sexism (e.g., Buchanan, Settles, Hall, & O'Connor, 2014). Given that nonaggressive confrontation is accepted, organizations could introduce social competence trainings to practice this type of confrontation with employees in order to heighten the likelihood that employees confront in tactful ways. Moreover, providing employees with information that men also support nonaggressive confrontation may encourage men to become allies in addressing sexism (e.g., Drury & Kaiser, 2014).

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