

ABSTRACT

SEXISM AND PTSD SYMPTOM SEVERITY: EXAMINING THE SOCIAL CONTEXTS OF WOMEN'S TRAUMA DISCLOSURE

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Women have consistently been found to be at twice the risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than men. Despite this, the factors contributing to women's elevated risk remain underexamined. Existing research indicates a positive association between sexist experiences and PTSD symptomatology, suggesting that women's experiences with sexism may play an important role in explaining the gender disparity in PTSD prevalence. Understanding the role of sexism may be of particular importance given that sexism has direct implications on the support offered to women by functioning as a social mechanism of punishment and reward.

The current study aimed to examine whether women's experiences with two types of sexism (lifetime experiences with sexism and benevolent sexism) predict the types of social reactions women receive when disclosing their experience with trauma. Additionally, this study investigated whether social reactions moderate the association between trauma history and PTSD symptom severity in women, while accounting for both lifetime and benevolent sexism.

Linear multiple regression analyses found lifetime experiences with sexism and experiences with benevolent sexism to be significant predictors of negative social reactions to women's disclosure of trauma, including turning against and unsupportive acknowledgment. However, social reactions did not moderate the relationship between trauma history and PTSD symptom severity. Notably, lifetime experiences with sexism consistently accounted for more variance in PTSD symptom severity than women's reported trauma history.

Together, these findings demonstrate that sexism plays a central role in shaping the social environment of women who have experienced trauma and may be a key factor in understanding gender disparities in PTSD.