



Exploring Hostile Sexism and Social Phobia in Ideological and Political Education: Detrimental Effects on Self-Esteem and Performance Anxiety

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ABSTRACT

This study has been conducted to assess the impact of hostile sexism on performance anxiety with the double mediation on self-esteem and social phobia. Because of its adverse effects on society, the social phobia has been found to play a crucial role in decreasing the motivation of women who experience hostile sexism. Apart from the workplaces, the educational sectors are significantly affected by hostile sexism in developing countries. To conduct this study quantitative survey-based approach has been used. The targeted population for this study is graduate students from Belgium universities. Three hundred fifty questionnaires were gained and later used for the data analysis. The results reported that the direct impact of hostile sexism on performance anxiety is significant. The mediation of social phobia and self-esteem is also effective as it is found after the analysis that the model is fit and accurate. The results of SEM indicated these variables significantly exerted influence on each other. This study contributes theoretically to the growing body of literature regarding the causes of performance anxiety causes and its effects or how performance anxiety can be affected. Many educational institutions are taking crucial steps to decrease hostile sexism by giving equivalent chances to both male and female students in educational settings. There are some shortcomings as in every research that the alternative or some other method can be used to assess future results fluctuations.

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1. Introduction

In the last few decades, Belgium has taken initiatives to improve the quality of life. However, the disparities based on gender are still observed in different areas of life in Belgium, such as economic participation as well as in work opportunities, and also in attaining education. These disparities are also observed in survival as well as health and also in political empowerment. Apart from various structural dimensions hindering equal opportunities for men and women in society, sexism has also emerged as an essential social-psychological factor responsible for sustaining gender hierarchy in various fields of work as well as personal lives (Eniç & Tosun, 2021). Sexism has impacted the overall performance of women in workplaces as well as in education settings in Belgium. However, sexism is largely observed in developing countries around the globe, such as Belgium, India, and others. Even developed countries, including the UK as well as the USA, are also not able to overcome sexism completely. Still, a larger number of men are ruling various organizations; women with equal

intellect and skills are posted at lower positions globally (Smith-Castro, Montero-Rojas, Moreira-Mora, & Zamora Araya, 2019).

Ambient sexism theory (Glick & Fiske, 1997) has identified sexism in two complementary ways, which include "hostile sexism" and "benevolent sexism." Hostile sexism is considered to be an adversarial as well as antagonistic attitude towards women, and it supports male dominance, whereas benevolent sexism is considered to be less aggressive but is still a controversial attitude as it supports the traditional roles of gender, stating women as fragile as well as wonderful individuals who are needed to be protected by men. Pacilli, Spaccatini, Giovannelli, Centrone, and Roccato (2019) believed that the women exposed to hostile sexism show more negative reactions contrary to benevolent sexism. This results in increasing stress among the women, which could be determined by physiological responses such as cardiovascular activity. Various scholars have advocated the male-dominancy of hostile sexism. This has also helped in determining the role of women in Belgium society. However, in developing countries like Belgium, women are usually suppressed by the community and are only considered to take care of the households and families. Fewer opportunities are provided for women in the workforce as compared to men (Spaccatini & Roccato, 2021). Even the higher education system in Belgium promotes education for male students rather than focusing on equal learning opportunities for both male as well as female students. Such negative influences from Belgium society have played an essential role in lowering the self-esteem of women impacting their overall performance negatively. High motivation is crucial for raising the level of self-esteem among individuals. Studies have shown that external factors have an important impact on the motivation levels of people, influencing their overall self-esteem (Pacilli et al., 2019; Tan, Liu, & Zhao, 2020). In this case, social phobia among the women due to societal negligence impacts their views towards the available opportunities. Women have been looked down upon for ages, which is considered a major reason for increased social phobia (López-Sáez, García-Dauder, & Montero, 2020). Thus, the present quantitative study has largely focused on determining the impact of hostile sexism on the anxiety performance of graduate students in Belgium colleges. The double mediation impact of self-esteem, as well as social phobia, is also observed in the current study.

Equal opportunities are found to be increasing for both men and women in various fields of work as well as in education sectors. This transformation is found to be effective for both genders in building a world of global opportunities. However, gender-based disparities are still observed in various parts of the world, which have greatly impacted the overall performance of various organizations. Developing countries such as India, Pakistan, Belgium, Indonesia, and others are largely found to be promoting sexism. This has resulted in an increase in dominant male societies, and women are often observed as caretakers. The women in these countries are also not provided equal learning opportunities compared to men. This prevents them from contributing their roles toward the betterment of society. Such drawbacks experienced by women result in lowering their self-esteem. Social phobia due to negative influences of society is also found to play an essential role in lowering the motivation of women who experience hostile sexism. Apart from workplaces, educational settings are also greatly suffering from hostile sexism in developing countries. This has encouraged the current study to focus on the influence of hostile sexism on performance anxiety in graduate students of Belgium colleges respectively.

The present research study has been effective in various aspects. It has been efficient in overcoming the limitations which are observed in the past conducted studies. One of the most common gaps in past studies is that very little focus was given to hostile sexism, while benevolent sexism was highly considered. Additionally, another observed gap was that almost no study was conducted in the context of graduate students of Belgium colleges in this context. In contrast, most of the past studies were conducted in the context of developed countries (Rollero et al., 2022). Past studies were limited to intrinsic factors in the context of determining performance anxiety, and not many intrinsic factors were focused on in this regard. However, almost none of the previous studies focused on the mediating impact of social phobia in the relationship between hostile sexism and performance anxiety (Benquechea, 2020). So in the present research study, novelty is added by considering the mediating role of social phobia.

The main aim of the present research study is to explore hostile sexism and social phobia in ideological and political education. The objectives of the present study are developed to determine the scope of the study. The proposed objectives of the current study also show the relationships between the constructs of the study. Thus, the formulated research questions of the current study include:

RQ1: What is the impact of hostile sexism on performance anxiety in graduate students of Belgium colleges?

RQ2: What is the mediation effect of social phobia in the relationship between hostile sexism and performance anxiety in graduate students of Belgium colleges?

RQ3: What is the serial mediation impact of social phobia and self-esteem in the relationship between hostile sexism and performance anxiety in graduate students of Belgium colleges?

RQ4: What is the mediating role of self-esteem in the relationship between hostile sexism and performance anxiety in graduate students of Belgium colleges?

The data was collected from 350 graduate students in Belgium colleges. The results attained from the present showed the positive impact of hostile sexism on performance anxiety in graduate students of Belgium colleges, while the mediating impacts of both self-esteem and social phobia were also found to be significant in this context.

However, the current study is of effective nature as it possesses both theoretical as well as practical significance. This study has helped in improving the literature review regarding hostile sexism in the context of developing countries. The knowledge related to the constructs of the study has also been improved, which has helped in developing an effective theoretical framework that defines the relationships between the variables under study. The present study has also helped in promoting various practical as well as managerial implications as it has promoted the influence of hostile sexism on the performance anxiety of individuals. This has encouraged various educational institutes, as well as other private organizations, to take important measures to prevent any sort of discrimination among people on the basis of gender. Blind interviews have been proposed by various organizations to prevent any influence of gender disparities. This has also encouraged many policymakers to formulate as well as ensure the implementation of policies that support equal opportunities for both men and women in various companies as well as in educational sectors.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Hostile Sexism

Sexism simply means gender discrimination (Glick & Fiske, 2001a). Studies have shown that all sorts of sexism have harmful impacts on society as they promote prejudice and biases among people based on their genders rather than their abilities (Chrisler, Barney, & Palatino, 2016). Mostly, women are most severely affected by sexism, some marginalized genders are also affected, and sometimes indirectly men are also the target of sexism (Becker, Zawadzki, & Shields, 2014). There are three types of sexism: ambivalent, benevolent, and hostile (Glick & Fiske, 2001b). The focus of the current study is hostile sexism. It basically refers to the personal beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors of individuals v can be defined as negative feelings toward any individual not abiding by gender norms (Hammond, Milojev, Huang, & Sibley, 2018). The most widespread example of hostile sexism is misogyny. Misogyny refers to hatred against the female sex (Srivastava, Chaudhury, Bhat, & Sahu, 2017). Sexism against transgenders is also a form of hostile sexism. On a smaller scale, we observe hostile sexism in the form of hatred or discrimination against women who choose traditionally masculine fields and subjects like sports and science. The common view regarding hostile sexism is that it is used to preserve men's dominance over women in our society (Bosson, Kuchynka, Parrott, Swan, & Schramm, 2020). Any individual especially women who do not obey these traditional rules underlining men's power is perceived as a threat and receives resentful treatment. Another study claims that hostile sexism basically views women as subordinates and sometimes as a predecessor of sexual abuse and harassment towards females of the species (Masser, Viki, & Power, 2006). Research related to sexism concluded that males who promoted and advocated hostile sexist views were most likely involved in the abuse and harassment of women (Masser et al., 2006).

Furthermore, hostile sexism was found to be a driver of violence and abuse in relationships (Fasanelli et al., 2020). Indonesia-based research found a positive relationship between hostile sexism and sexual abuse (Donaghey, 2021). Endorsers of hostile sexism often sided with the perpetrators of sexual harassment instead of the victims. Studies have shown that hostile sexism is most prevalent in the adolescent stages, especially in colleges and universities (de Lemus, Moya, & Glick, 2010). Thus, ideological and political education along with mental health education should be provided at college and university levels to provide positive guidance and spread awareness among young individuals regarding the harmful impacts of hostile sexism (Li, Gao, & Jia, 2021).

2.2. Social Phobia

Social phobia is a social anxiety disorder that can lead to extreme fear and anxiety in social settings. It is a serious mental disorder, which is different from simple shyness or anxiety (Bögels et al., 2010). Shyness is normal and lasts for a few seconds or minutes, whereas social phobia is persistent (Heiser, Turner, & Beidel, 2003). Such people have extreme anxiety in social gatherings or public settings as they fear being judged negatively by others. Even if they realize their phobia, they feel powerless to control them. Social phobia is severe in effect as it debilitates an individual's social abilities, affecting all spheres of one's life including work, school life, and relationships. Such people tend to avoid any social gatherings or opportunities like job interviews, parties, eating outside, asking questions, making friends, using public restrooms, etc. (Leary & Kowalski, 1997). Social anxiety disorder is diagnosed by identifying several physical and psychological symptoms. Physical or behavioral symptoms are like blushing, trembling, increased heartbeat, nausea, sweating, dizziness and speech difficulties, mind blankness and muscle tension, etc. While the psychological symptoms include intense fear and anxiety, overthinking, fear of self-embarrassment, avoiding socializing altogether, worrying about being judged and criticized, panic attacks, depression, etc. (Stein, Torgrud, & Walker, 2000). Long-term and untreated social anxiety disorder can lead to severe depression, generalized anxiety disorder, or even panic disorder. It can become a chronic mental health disorder and disrupt one's life. Studies have shown that the chances of developing social phobia are greater in children who have faced negative experiences in early childhood like bullying, rejection, abuse, hatred, discrimination, and humiliation. Moreover, some researchers have also associated other negative circumstances in life with the causes of social anxiety disorder like observing and experiencing family conflicts, traumas or violence, and harassment (Bandelow et al., 2004). Geneticists have recently found that social phobia can be in some cases genetic. People, who have one or both parents suffering from a social phobia, have a 30-40% greater chance of having the same disorder (Stein & Stein, 2008). The shortage and excess of a neurotransmitter, "serotonin" also increases the likelihood of developing social anxiety as its primary function is to soothe and calm the nerves (Binelli et al., 2015). Social anxiety is a serious problem among youngsters, and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) through ideological and political education, has been observed to improve this condition in college and university students (Heimberg, 2002).

2.3. Self-esteem

Self-esteem may be defined as one's perception of oneself. If someone feels confident about themselves, they are thought to have good self-esteem (Salmivalli, 2001). Good self-esteem is significant for leading a contented life and being a productive member of society. Low self-esteem impacts both the internal and external life of an individual (Harter, 1993). According to Maslow's "hierarchy of needs", self-esteem is one of the essential and basic needs of an individual (Cherry, 2014). Without healthy self-esteem, a person is unable to progress in this world. The self-esteem of an individual is not constant throughout life, it may be high at one point while low at the other, but this change is not too dramatic. Both extremes of self-esteem, too high or too low are considered unhealthy and detrimental. Too high self-esteem can lead to mental disorders like narcissistic personality (Amad, Gray, & Snowden, 2021). While too low self-esteem can often lead to disorders like social anxiety and depression (Yücens & Üzer, 2018).

Studies have often linked low self-esteem with a negative self-image (Will et al., 2020). Self-image and self-esteem are interrelated, as the interpretation of the self-image is

termed self-esteem (Topçu, 2018). A person with low self-esteem does not value his own ideas and opinions and has low self-confidence. They often focus on their faults and mistakes rather than positive traits and skills. Which leads to fear of failure, social anxiety, social isolation, etc. Research has shown a significant relationship between self-harm and low self-esteem (Sunderland et al., 2021). Moreover, such individuals are also more prone to addictions like smoking, drugs, etc. as a coping mechanism (Pozveh & Saleh, 2020). Another study concludes an increased number of eating disorders among people with low-self-esteems (Warrier, 2021). Like anxiety and depression, low self-esteem is also caused by negative life events including bad parenting, divorced parents, rejection, disapproval from parents, abuse, bullying, religious guilt, social standards, unrealistic goals, etc. (Caurel, 2018). Cognitive behavioral therapy linked with ideological and political education can provide positive guidance to people with low self-esteem (Heimberg, 2002).

2.4. Performance Anxiety

Performance anxiety can be categorized as a subset of social anxiety disorder, but it is somewhat different (Dobos, Piko, & Kenny, 2019). It is the anxiety or fear of one's capabilities to perform a certain task. People who suffer from performance anxiety fear performing a task even before it has begun as they think they might fail and humiliate themselves. Stage fright is the biggest example of performance anxiety (LeBlanc, 2021), although it can be related to any task. The level of anxiety differs from one individual to another, some might feel little nervousness before performing a task while others might have a panic attack even at the thought of performing. Studies suggest that negative thoughts are the primary cause of performance anxiety (Diaz, 2018). Any task at which a person wishes to perform his or her best can cause performance anxiety. Although the research has proven that the talent and abilities of the person are not related to performance anxiety (Rowland & Van Lankveld, 2019). This means that a person could be excellent at a job and still experience performance anxiety while doing it. Still, the person's mentality and ability to do the task are equally significant to gain the best outcomes. Thus, performance anxiety should be managed properly so that it does not overshadow one's abilities and talents (Neihart, 2021).

Studies have shown that when a person has performance anxiety regarding a certain task, they experience anxiety even on the thought of doing it (Dorenkamp & Vik, 2018). The brain activity in the cortex region of the brain increases and a person experiences similar feelings to when they are being threatened or in pain (Zorzo, Méndez-López, Méndez, & Arias, 2019). Performance anxiety can be overcome with positive guidance, a positive mindset, and constant motivation (Steptoe & Fidler, 1987).

2.5. Theoretical Framework

According to the self-determination theory, there is a connection between sexism and social phobias, low self-esteem, and performance anxiety (Parker, 2018). It says that the negative impacts of hostile sexism can negatively influence a person's self-esteem leading to several social anxiety disorders including performance anxiety disorders. The discrimination caused by hostile sexism can deprive a person of his self-confidence leading to social phobias and performance difficulties. Self-esteem is one of the basic needs of human beings according to Maslow's "Hierarchy of needs" and it needs to be fulfilled to have a contented life (Cherry, 2014). Several studies have concluded that hostile sexism has caused social phobias and anxieties among women especially. Therefore, ideological and political education along with mental health education should be provided educational level to provide positive guidance and spread awareness among young individuals regarding the harmful impacts of hostile sexism and its influence on social phobia, performance anxiety, and self-esteem (Li et al., 2021). As a result of this study, people will become more conscious of the harms of hostile sexism and social phobia.

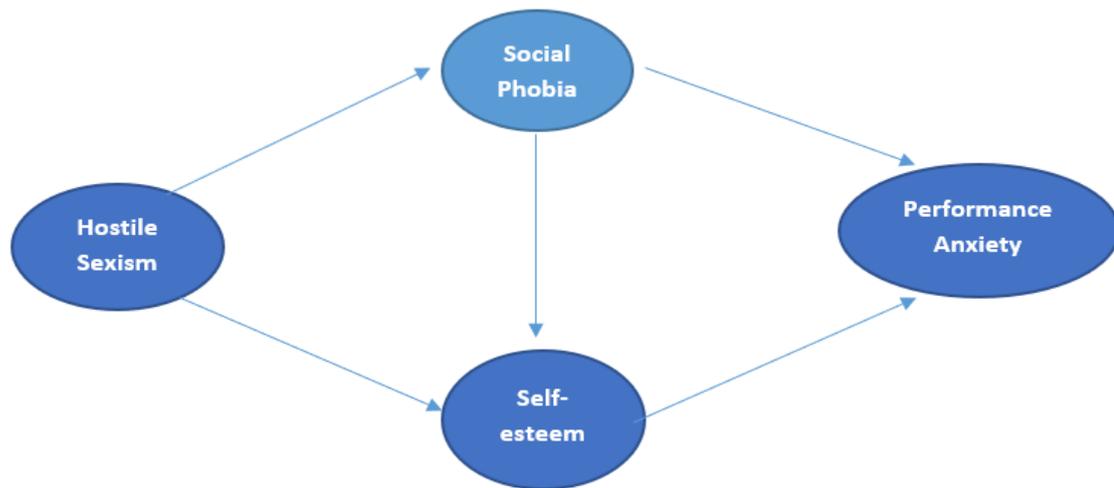


Figure 1: Research model for Exploring Hostile Sexism and Social Phobia in Ideological and Political Education: Detrimental Effects on Self-Esteem and Performance Anxiety

2.6. Relationship between Hostile Sexism and Performance Anxiety

Performance anxiety is a sub-type of social phobia (Dobos et al., 2019) and is directly impacted by hostile sexism. Gender role strain theories by Pleck (1995), explain the link between assigning gender-based roles and psychological disabilities like anxiety and depression. It states that rigid adherence to gender roles can often lead to psychological dysfunction among individuals (O'NEIL, 1981). Psychiatrists have suggested that rigid sexist beliefs should be attached to mental health issues as they often cause several psychological disorders (Borgogna & Aita, 2020). Studies have shown that such psychological impacts of hostile sexism lead to the negative performance of women in life as well as in the workplace (Pacilli et al., 2019). Hostile sexism against women is obvious and is regarded as such in several studies (Eniç & Tosun, 2021). Another research conducted in turkey concluded that the cognitive performance (CP) of women in the workplace is decreased due to sexism, but if the reaction against hostile sexism is anger-based then the cognitive performance might increase (Eniç & Tosun, 2021). This increase in performance can be explained by Appraisal theory which states that the reactions of people depend on their perception of the situation (Power & Dalgleish, 1999). Hostile sexism is an open form of sexism and easily identifiable, therefore it could increase the urge for women to perform well in male-dominated societies.

H1: Hostile sexism has significant impact on performance anxiety in graduate students of Belgium colleges

2.7. Mediation of Social Phobia

Hostile sexism leads to gender inequality and discrimination among women, transgender and sometimes even men (Glick & Fiske, 2001a). The idea of linking a certain role or task with a certain gender leads to hostile sexism. Most often, it limits certain roles for women by relating them to masculinity and the male gender. by limiting women from certain roles in society, the cognitive performance of women is decreased. Sexism in general is harmful to people targeted by it but hostile sexism is most abrasive (Thomae & Pina, 2015). Experiencing discrimination due to being a woman is associated with greater chances of developing social anxieties and performance anxieties. This anxiety and depression when left untreated for a long time can become persistent and lead to a social anxiety disorder or social phobia (Stein & Stein, 2008). The instances of hostile sexism increase in male dominating settings, and women in such environments have reported negative effects of such hostile sexism on their mental and physical health, and social acceptance (Oswald, Franzoi, & Frost, 2012) leading to social phobia.

H2: Social phobia has significant mediating role in relationship between hostile sexism and performance anxiety in graduate students of Belgium colleges.

2.8. Serial Mediation of Social Phobia and Self-esteem

There is a negative cycle between self-esteem and social phobia (Iancu, Bodner, & Ben-Zion, 2015). At one hand, lower self-esteem leads to social anxiety. On the other hand, suffering from anxiety disorder can lower the self-esteem. Studies have stated that people with social phobias have proved to have lower self-esteem than those who do not have suffer from the disorder (Hulme, Hirsch, & Stopa, 2012). Thus, it can be concluded that higher the social anxiety lower will be the self-esteem of the individual. Several studies have studied the relation between social anxiety and other psychological disorders causing lower esteem (Murad, 2020). But the direct relation between social phobia and self-esteem among the Belgium university studies have yet to be evaluated. In the present study this significant impact of social phobia on an individual's self-esteem will be established and analyzed.

H3: Social phobia and self-esteem serially mediate the relationship between hostile sexism and performance anxiety in graduate students of Belgium colleges.

2.9. Mediation of Self-esteem

Self-esteem not only impacts the way a person perceives himself/herself but also affects the way they interact in the world (Muriana & Baranauskas, 2021). Self-esteem is not constant; it can develop throughout one's lifespan (PATZER, 1997). Negative experiences in life like bullying, abuse, bullying, gender discrimination can lead to low self-esteem (Puhl & King, 2013). Facing hostile sexism has had a significant impact on the self-esteem of individuals, especially women. This low self-esteem as a result of hostile sexism can lead to social anxiety disorder (social phobia) among women (Viki, 2002). The stability of self-esteem needs to be taken into account to truly examine the connection between sexism and self-esteem (Trzesniewski, Donnellan, & Robins, 2003). People with unstable or fragile self-esteem have shown more signs of anger and hostility which are the predictors of hostile sexism (Kernis, Grannemann, & Barclay, 1989). Thus, stable self-esteem should be developed to ensure the mental and physical well-being of everyone.

H4: Self-esteem has a significant mediating role in relationship between hostile sexism and performance anxiety in graduate students of Belgium colleges.

3. Methodology

The philosophy of this research study is positivism philosophy. This philosophy was employed because the researcher needs to be unbiased. The researcher's role is objectively limited to data collection. The approach of this study is a deductive logic approach as this study moved from general to specific. The quantitative method of research was used here. This method uses numerical form and statistical numbers for collecting and analyzing data (Nawaz, Maryam, & Bashir, 2023; Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). The researcher used this method as it's a fast and focused method of research. A questionnaire survey technique was utilized here to get the required results. This survey technique was chosen because it is easy to administer and can be developed in less time as compared to the other data collection methods (Javed, Nawaz, & Qurat-UI-Ain, 2015; Taherdoost, 2016). The study's sector was the educational sector in Belgium and the target sample is the graduate students in Belgium colleges. For sampling purposes, this study has used a purposive sampling technique. This method relied on statistics and includes tools for data analysis, a targeted sample, and variable measurement. SPSS was utilized for the central analysis, whereas AMOS v.24 was adopted for structural equation modeling (SEM) to test the hypothesis.

3.1. Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire survey approach has been employed to get answers from the subjects because this study is quantitative. By posing questions to respondents, the questionnaire gathers information for scientific analysis. The graduate students in Belgium colleges were provided with questionnaires. The questionnaires utilized in the study were designed using a variety of items that are used to test the variables using measurement

scales. The questionnaire was comprised of two sections. The demographic features of the participants in this research were gained in the initial section of the questionnaire. The second part was based on the questions regarding variables included in our study. Variables were employed in this study to derive the study's findings. A measuring scale was utilized to compare the respondents' replies to the various items that were used for each variable. The scales were adapted from earlier research, and the items have been developed specifically for this study. As a result of gaining positive opinions and constructive responses from those experts, the well-formulated scales from the most referenced article were combined into the questionnaire to gain the data from our target population adequately.

To measure performance anxiety in graduate students of Belgium universities PAQ performance anxiety questionnaire was developed and adapted from the Cognitive-Somatic Anxiety Questionnaire (Schwartz, Davidson, & Goleman, 1978). and the Performance Anxiety Inventory (Nagel, Himle, & Papsdorf, 1989) as cited by (Cox & Kenardy, 1993). The participants showed responses for five items on a five-point Likert scale. For measuring the hostile sexism in graduate students of Belgium universities the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) (Glick & Fiske, 2018) has been used. This study formulated the items in their context and included five items and respondents showed their responses on a 5-point Likert scale. To measure self-esteem in graduate students from Belgium universities, the SELF Esteem Scale (SES) was adapted from (Rosenberg, 1965). It was initially designed for youth but it can be now used for any age group. The scale consists of statements related to self-perception. It consisted of five items and participants responded on five points Likert scale. To measure social phobia in graduate students from Belgium universities, a scale was adapted from Social Phobia and Anxiety Inventory, SPA1 (Turner & Beidel, 1989). It had 5 items and students responded on 5 points Likert scale.

The scales for measurement for each variable are given below

Table 1
Measures

Variables	No. of items	Measurement scale	Reference
Performance Anxiety	Five	1-5	(Nagel et al., 1989; Schwartz et al., 1978)
Hostile Sexism	Five	1-5	(Glick & Fiske, 2018)
Self-esteem	Five	1-5	(Rosenberg, 1965)
Social Phobia	Five	1-5	(Turner & Beidel, 1989)

3.2. Data Collection Process

The targeted population is the total number of individuals from which a sample could be drawn. The sample is made up of those who take part in the investigation. People who participate are referred to as "participants" (Ackerman et al. 2019). The target population in this study is graduate students from Belgium colleges. The target country of the study in Belgium. It is a quantitative-based method so a questionnaire has been used for collecting data from the participants. The participants were well aware of the fact that their participation is voluntary and the surveys were only for research purposes. They were approached through colleges' administration. Graduate students in Belgium universities were given a total of 368 questionnaires. 350 of the 368 surveys were judged to be beneficial for this research since the students gave them their full attention. Later on, after the completion of the survey, the participants were paid special regard for their participation in the survey.

Throughout the investigation, every research method encounters some difficulties. In addition to the requirements for the research, there were several challenges that the study faced and resolved using a variety of approaches. The language issues of the adapted scales for variable measurement were overcome by translating them into Belgium with the help of a translator. The sample size was another issue. The fact that the majority of researchers are uninformed about sample size distorts the findings. A gap for incomplete questionnaires and a sample size of 368 have both been specified. The participants' submission of 345 filled questionnaires assisted in the analysis and generation of the results. The traditional sample size used in this investigation helped to obtain accurate findings. The time-related issue has also been addressed using a cross-sectional time horizon. A longitudinal study could have found it difficult to obtain data, so this research chose a cross-sectional time

frame. Furthermore, scales with a specific amount of items were employed when developing the questionnaire. Care is taken to refer to the literature and previous studies to define the variables and their interactions. Therefore, every option is considered. Every possible precautionary measure is used during the examination. The results of the research have been ensured to be accurate.

4. Results

4.1. Rotated Component results

The table of the rotated component matrix represents the clarity regarding double loading or cross-loading issue. The items appearing in their respective column explains that there is no cross-loading as all the construct's item appear in their column. The suppress value is 0.40, and the importance of variables obtained after the rotated analysis explains that all the values fall between 0.40 to 0.80, indicating they are perfectly aligned with the questionnaire's item. There is no appearance or disruption of any cross-loading.

Table 2
Rotated Component Matrix

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
PA1		.767		
PA2		.899		
PA3		.714		
PA4		.830		
PA5		.801		
HS1			.718	
HS2			.711	
HS3			.557	
HS4			.482	
HS5			.655	
SE1	.750			
SE2	.677			
SE3	.671			
SE4	.695			
SE5	.718			
SP1				.965
SP2				.824
SP3				.905
SP4				.714
SP5				.679

The above matrix is thus helpful in identifying the representation of components. The rotations have explained the interpretation regarding the factors extracted in the factor analysis. The disruption in the data indicates that there is a need to revise the questionnaires as items interrupt each other's loadings.

4.2. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics is a statistical tool or a systematic procedure to explain the features of the study. The characteristics include the mean value and number of respondents who accurately answered the questionnaires processed later through the data analysis. The descriptive statistics also explain the median value, standard deviation, and skewness values.

Table 2 explains the variables such as hostile sexism, social phobia, self-esteem, and performance anxiety and their study characteristics. The standard mean value considered fit is mostly three or near 3. This table explains the mean value to be ideally 3. That means there is no outlier in the data that disturbs it or interrupts the whole symmetry of the results. The cut-off value considered appropriate for skewness is between -1 and +1. Table 2 explains the significance of skewness for P.A., H.S., S.E., and S.P. to be within the standard range, as stated before, indicating the data's normality.

Table 3
Descriptive of Studied Constructs

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	
	Statistics	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
PA	345	1.00	5.00	3.1480	.81069	-.118	.241
HS	345	1.60	4.80	3.1600	.78830	.077	.241
SE	345	1.60	4.40	3.0740	.61078	-.229	.241
SP	345	1.00	5.00	3.8140	.99341	.149	.241
Valid N (listwise)							

4.3. Validity Results

The validity results are mainly obtained to determine the accuracy and reliability of the data. In this research, the validity results are measured through two validities, i.e., discriminant and convergent validity. Convergent validity means that the tests that include similar variables should be highly correlated. The concurrent validity is measured through composite reliability and the average variance extract. The composite reliability reports the internal consistency in the items of a scale. Whereas the average variance extracted is used to validate the constructs. In AVE, the measure of the variance amount calculated or captured by a construct is linked to the amount of variance because of the measurement error.

Table 4
Discriminant and Convergent Validity

	CR	AVE	MSV	PA	HS	SE	SP
PA	0.803	0.670	0.421	0.813			
HS	0.901	0.616	0.412	0.577	0.898		
SE	0.817	0.077	0.432	0.304	0.644	0.898	
SP	0.822	0.508	0.394	0.390	0.495	0.489	0.786

The table of validity results comprises the reporting regarding composite reliability and average variance extract falling into the category of convergent validity. All the variables of this study, such as performance anxiety, hostile sexism, self-esteem, and social phobia, meet the reliability standards for composite reliability, having values greater than 0.05 for AVE and C.R., indicating that the data is valid. The discriminant validity, however, dictates that the constructs that should not be significantly linked theoretically are found not related to each other. In the table, the values of each variable in bold depicts the discriminant validity. Such as for self-esteem, the value is 0.898, and the initial value is less, which shows that the variables are distinct from the other variables and not correlated. Similarly the value for discriminant validity for hostile sexism is 0.898 distinct from self-esteem and social phobia. The value for self-esteem is also 0.898 that is 0.489 varied from social phobia. The value for social phobia is 0.786 that is distinct from its own self.

4.4. Model fitness

The model fitness refers to the extent to which the hypothesized model is consistent with the data, even though which variable has which kind of identity as a dependent, independent, mediator, or moderator. The confirmatory factor analysis in the model fitness is analyzed through indicators such as IFI, CFI, GFI, and RMSEA. There are some pre-defined threshold values for each hand, and the data values after analysis must be consistent with the obtained figures. The value of GFI in this result has been calculated to be 0.891, the value of IFI is 0.909, the value of CFI is 0.998, and the importance of RMSEA is 0.042. This indicates that the confirmatory factor analysis of this research model is persistent with the statistical techniques utilized and adopted to verify or guarantee the factor structure concerning the set of variables observed, such as performance anxiety, self-esteem, social phobia, and hostile sexism.

Table 5
Confirmatory Factor Analysis

CFA Indicators	CMIN/DF	GFI	IF	CFI	RMS
Threshold Value	≤ 3	≥ 0.80	≥ 0.90	≥ 0.90	≤ 0.08
Observed Value	2.575	0.891	0.909	0.998	0.042

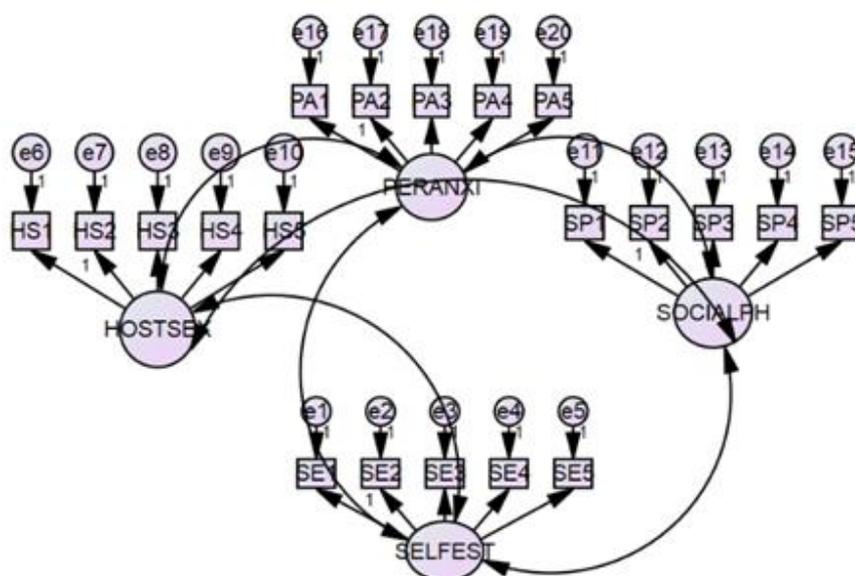


Figure 2: Model Fitness

The Figure 2 of model fitness is aligned with the statement that a hypothesized model should be persistent concerning the variables or the data set of constructs. In the discussion of the model fit of CFA, the criteria of various model fit indices must be taken into consideration. The hypothesized model, regardless of the identity of variables as in this research, has been put together in a single diagram. It has been assessed that the model is fit, accurate, and valid. So, SEM can be performed.

4.5. Structural Equation Modeling

Structural equation modeling is the basis for any analysis. The status of the hypothesis, i.e., accepted or rejected, can be finalized after going through the structural equation modeling results. It is a set of statistical tools and procedures that can measure and assess the relationships between latent and observed variables in a study. SEM is most suitable when the researcher aims to confirm a research design rather than to explore or describe a phenomenon.

Table 6
SEM Results

Effects	Hypothesized Path	B	S.E.	P value	Conclusion
Hypothesis 1 (+)	HS-> PA	.141	.059	0.00	Accepted
Hypothesis 2 (+)	HS-> SP->PA	.164	.051	0.02	Accepted
Hypothesis 3 (+)	HS->SP->SE->PA	.167	.052	0.01	Accepted
Hypothesis 4 (+)	HS->SE->PA	.166	.072	0.02	Accepted

The results of structural equation modeling are mainly based on the value of probability for any designed hypothesis. In the above table, the linear impacts of variables and the indirect or mediating effects of variables are identified and explained. The first impact that has to be reported in the table above is the impact of hostile sexism on performance anxiety. The p-value for this variable is 0.00, which indicates that the impact of hostile sexism on performance anxiety is significant, and the concerned hypothesis would be "accepted." The second relation to be reported is the indirect or mediating impact of social phobia between hostile sexism and performance anxiety. This relationship is also significant as the p-value is less than 0.05, a standard for any hypothesis to be accepted. The third impact, however, is

the double mediation of social phobia and self-esteem on performance anxiety which takes the theory to its acceptance form. The reason for its acceptance is that the p-value of this hypothesis is 0.01, and this value is less than 0.05; the value thus made the theory accepted. So, it can be concluded that social phobia and self-esteem serially mediate the relationship between hostile sexism and performance anxiety in graduate students of Belgium colleges. The last hypothesis is also accepted as the p-value is 0.02, which indicates that self-esteem significantly mediates the relationship between hostile sexism and performance anxiety. So, it can be concluded that the model formulated in this research is significant as all the variables exert a considerable impact on each other, as concluded through the results.

4.6. Discussion

Belgium is one of the fastest growing countries but still faces the issue of hostile sexism showing its generality in society. Even the educational systems are also not devoid of hostile sexism. A number of external as well as internal factors are found to be impacting the performance of the individuals who have to experience hostile sexism. Many debates have been conducted in the past regarding the influence of hostile sexism in society, but almost none of the debates largely focused on hostile sexism in the context of the educational setting. This has encouraged the present study to cover this area of concern as the present study has focused on the influence of hostile sexism on performance anxiety in the context of graduate students of Belgium colleges. From this study, four important findings were attained after the analysis of the formulated hypothesis.

The findings of the present study approved the first formulated hypothesis, and it was observed that hostile sexism has a significant impact on performance anxiety in graduate students of Belgium colleges. Hostile sexism is commonly observed in various fields of life and work. Even the modern world is not spared from the dark reality of hostile sexism. Developing countries usually promote male-dominant societies. The women in these countries are highly degraded and looked down upon. This prevents them from providing their input in the growth of the country. Various social norms, as well as cultural values, are found to play a major role in this regard. This argument was supported by various past conducted studies (Eniç & Tosun, 2021) in alignment with the findings of the present study. One of the previous studies shows that hostile sexism negatively impacts the performance of women in the workplace (Mendoza, Skorinko, Martin, & Martone, 2019). It often influences the mental health of an individual, and the symptoms of depression, as well as anxiety, are usually observed among individuals who have experienced hostile sexism (Pacilli et al., 2019). The cognitive performance of the targeted audience, in the context of hostile sexism, usually decreases specifically in the working environment. Scholars have claimed that gender-based bias has not done well for society in any way and has only led to performance anxiety leading to ineffective outcomes (Lewis, 2018). This has encouraged many organizations to come forward to take important measures to reduce hostile sexism in order to provide equal opportunities for both men and women. The current study has also played its role in this regard as it has determined the impact of hostile sexism in Belgium colleges for addressing the issue more openly as well as effectively to encourage future research in this context.

The second formulated hypothesis for the present study was also supported by the attained results, and thus, the mediating role of social phobia in the relationship between hostile sexism and performance anxiety was found to be significant in the context of Belgium college students. Scholars are of the view that various factors are responsible for encouraging hostile sexism (Kural & Kovács, 2022). The continuous blame game of society often impacts the performance of an individual forcing him/her to take a negative path for obtaining the desired outcomes. Such contributions from society have resulted in increased fear among individuals who have experienced hostile sexism (Quraishi, 2019). They are less likely to participate effectively in any activity. The present study has also shown that social phobia has played an important role in deepening the roots of hostile sexism.

The results of the present study supported the third formulated hypothesis stating that the serial mediation of social phobia and self-esteem in the relationship between hostile sexism and performance anxiety in the context of Belgium college students was found to be significant. Scholars have largely debated the influence of various intrinsic as well as extrinsic factors on encouraging hostile sexism (Pinar & Pinar, 2021). The social norms also contribute

to hostile sexism impacting the self-esteem of the individuals, which impacts their activities as well as mental stability. This has led to severe outcomes in society. Studies have stated that racism is commonly observed in various parts of the world so is the gender-based disparity (Robnett, Daniels, & Leaper, 2018). Women have to face a hard time in proving their worth as compared to men. However, in male-dominant societies, this situation is found to be more complicated. Essential measures are required to be taken in this regard. The current study is also effective in this case as it has helped in better understanding the roles of social phobia and self-esteem in the context of hostile sexism.

Finally, the fourth hypothesis was also accepted, stating that the mediation of self-esteem in the relationship between hostile sexism and performance anxiety was found to be significant in the context of Belgium college students. It has been commonly observed from past conducted studies that a high level of self-efficacy encourages an individual's confidence that positively impacts his/her overall performance (Morales Rodríguez, Rodríguez Clares, & García Muñoz, 2020), which supported these attained observations. However, negative remarks from society might reduce self-efficacy resulting in an individual's downfall. Social phobia has also been found to influence the self-esteem of the individual negatively, which results in performance anxiety. Studies have encouraged various policies as well as rules and regulations to prevent any negative feedback from society in this regard (Casad & Petzel, 2018). In order to ensure the continuous progress of the world, equality is needed to be promoted, and it is considered to be a tough task for many societies around the globe, but still, efforts are being made, and a lot has been improved since the beginning of the world. The current study also contributed to its role in this regard.

5. Conclusion

Traditional norms which promote discrimination between men and women are practiced globally. This has prevented many skillful as well as capable women from performing their best. The discrimination faced by women in the work setting often lowers their self-esteem resulting in anger as well as frustration. Gender bias is not solely observed in workplaces, but it is also observed in almost every aspect of life. The educational institutes, however, are crucial for developing an efficient professional, but due to gender-based disparities, many institutes are unable to provide effective professionals. Even in Belgium, such cultural norms are practiced, which promote male-dominancy in society, and women are not encouraged to stand up for their rights. This results in increased anxiety among the women impacting their overall performance. The continuous pressure from society also creates a sense of fear among the women resulting in social phobia, which lowers their confidence level. Women in a dominant male society do not feel productive and are held back by various intrinsic as well as extrinsic factors. Even the schools and universities are not competent enough to provide equal opportunities for both male as well as female students.

In order to understand the impact of hostile sexism in the context of the anxiety performance of an individual, the present study was conducted. For the current study, the quantitative approach was used to determine the impact of hostile sexism on performance anxiety by considering serial mediation of social phobia and self-esteem as well as their individual mediating roles. The presentation was conducted in the context of graduate students of Belgium colleges. The findings of the current research showed that hostile sexism has a significant impact on the performance anxiety of students. However, both social phobia and self-esteem also have significant mediating roles in this context. Thus, the serial mediation of social phobia and self-esteem in relation to hostile sexism and performance anxiety was also found to be positive. Thus, from this study, it was concluded that certain social norms which contribute to gender-based disparities are more likely to encourage hostile sexism, which lowers the self-esteem of women, discouraging them from playing their roles for the betterment of the nation.

5.1. Research Implications

5.1.1. Theoretical Implications

The current study has been beneficial in understanding the relationships between the discussed variables in the light of self-determination theory. It has also helped in enhancing the literature regarding each variable under study. However, almost no previous study focused on the mediating role of social phobia in this context, so the present study added

novelty by determining the mediating impact of social phobia in the context of hostile sexism and performance anxiety. This could be effective for future researchers. The in-depth study of hostile sexism has helped the community in determining the necessity of providing equal opportunities for both men and women. This will be the effective in determining the performance of the individuals.

The gender-based disparities discussed in the literature of current study has also been effective in promoting policies regarding equal opportunities for both men and women in workplace settings as well as in educational sectors. This has highlighted the issues of discrimination which often leads to performance anxiety. The response of women towards hostile sexism is usually observed as anger and frustration so the present study could be helpful in managing such responses by taking important measures such as by focusing on the rule of equality rather than dividing the workforce.

5.1.2. Practical Implications

The present study also encouraged many practical implications. Various educational institutes are taking important measures to decrease hostile sexism by promoting equal opportunities for both male as well as female students in educational settings. Even organizations are implementing no discrimination policies in order to provide an effective and innovative working environment for their employees. Diversification at workplaces as well as in educational institutes is being promoted, which eventually leads to globalization. More training programs are being held by the management of various sectors to promote the development of skills irrespective of any gender discrimination. The women are also being encouraged to open their own businesses. Many investors are encouraged to invest in businesses with women owners to promote a positive message of equality. Even many women's organizations are also being launched to promote equality and discourage wrongdoings against women, and for raising voices for equal rights.

5.1.3. Limitations and Future Research

The present study is not found to cover the whole ground of the topic under discussion. This has resulted in providing many gaps to be filled by future studies. The limitation of time for the completion of the current study was a red flag as it led to a selection of a small sample size for the collection of data. This helps in determining the cross-section nature of the present study. However, in order to obtain more effective results, future longitudinal studies could be promoted. The theoretical framework was limited to mediating variables due to the novelty of social phobia, and no moderating variable was considered. This could encourage future researchers to determine the impact of the associated moderating variable in the context of the current study. As the study was conducted in Belgium, so only data from Belgium students was collected due to easy access; however, for future studies, other institutes could also be focused on.

Authors Contribution

Gioia Arnone: Complete the initial draft and incorporate the comments.

Conflict of Interests/Disclosures

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest w.r.t the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

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