| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Exploring Students' Perceptions of Institutional Sexism in Secondary Education

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| **ABSTRACT**

This quantitative study investigates the multi-dimensional nature of institutional sexism, focusing on students' perceptions in an educational context. A self-designed scale is developed to assess the diverse manifestations of institutional sexism, including both its overt and subtle forms. A principal component analysis was conducted on the eight items of the institutional sexism climate scale to determine the latent variables that could be extracted from the perceived institutional sexism measure. Cronbach's coefficient alpha was calculated to measure the scale reliability, and a t-test was run to examine differences in students' perceptions of institutional sexism with respect to gender. Moreover, a correlation analysis was carried out to investigate whether the latent variables of institutional sexism correlate with each other. One intriguing finding of this study is that while no significant gender differences were found in the overall perceptions of institutional sexism, there were notable variations at the level of the parameters of institutional sexism. Female students tended to perceive the overt form of sexism embedded in teacher differential treatment, whereas male students showed greater awareness of its subtle form manifested in the masculine norms that govern the overall institutional climate. In addition, a positive correlation was identified between the two components of institutional sexism, which was consistent with previous research**.** The implications of the findings, as well as the contributions and recommendations for educational practice and future research, were discussed.

| **KEYWORDS**

Differential treatment, implicit biases, gender discrimination, perceived sexism, sexist norms.

1. Introduction

In the realm of societal norms and dynamics, sexism has long prevailed as a cultural tradition, as highlighted by Trudgill (1974). It represents a multifaceted phenomenon perpetuated by men as a means to secure their inherent advantages and assert dominance and power within the social hierarchy, while women have come to embrace it, burdened by their subordinate position in the prevailing social order. This means that women, despite their unique experiences and perspectives, do not possess immunity against the influence of this dominant culture that reinforces inequities and biases within various social institutions. Hence, it is imperative to conduct a thorough investigation into the many ways that sexism manifests itself, paying particular attention to how prevalent it is in educational settings, which act as important social arenas where complex hierarchies come into play.

By exploring this complicated issue in depth, we can unravel the various layers and dimensions of sexism and uncover the subtle dynamics that support gender-based discrimination within educational environments. The given study is based on the notion that gender discrimination persists in education and female students still face gender biases and stereotypes, which significantly limit their educational experiences and opportunities. In addition, this study aims at contributing to the literature on gender discrimination in classrooms by employing a more comprehensive and context-specific measurement tool to quantitatively investigate the different aspects of institutional sexism. By introducing the Perceived Institutional Sexism climate scale, we can more accurately assess the mechanisms through which sexism operates and better comprehend how gender biases and

discriminatory behaviours in the classroom interact with and reinforce pre-existing power structures, cultural norms, and structural inequalities. Such a nuanced examination serves as a foundation for informed action and the development of inclusive educational policies, empowering us to address and dismantle the deeply ingrained structures of sexism that hinder progress and equality in and beyond the confines of educational settings.

2. Literature review

Institutional sexism in education has long been the subject of academic investigation, with numerous studies revealing its prevalence and impact. Notably, Sadker and Sadker (1994) observed and analyzed several schools and found that female students were in a disadvantaged and subordinate position in education because of teachers' tendency to give male students greater attention and opportunity in the classroom, which lowers female students' participation and self-esteem. The authors attributed gender bias in American schools to societal expectations of prescribed gender roles. An additional consideration of boys' domination of classroom talk is the research review of Howe (1997). Based on extensive whole-classroom data drawn from various relevant studies in Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom, Howe reported persistent gender differences and inequalities in classroom interactions that resulted in boys making up the majority of classroom discussions. She asserted that boys were more likely than girls to be the first students to raise their hands in response to a teacher's question and to "chip in" during class discussion, so attracting greater teacher attention. Boys also frequently received more attention from teachers than girls in class because of their movement and misbehaviour, which were viewed as being more restless than girls.

A further reflection on the dominance of boys in classroom discussions is the meta-analysis of 127 empirical studies by Jones and Dindia (2004), who examined the effect of student gender on teacher-initiated interactions and found that both male and female students got an equal number of supportive interactions, such as praise and acceptance. Negative interactions, such as criticism and reprimands, were mostly directed at male pupils. Once again, it was noted that male students were the main recipients of all exchanges started by the teacher. Therefore, these studies consistently demonstrate that boys' domination of classroom talk is attributed to the disproportionate attention they receive from teachers, hence revealing the pervasive manifestation of overt sexism through differential treatment.

While the aforementioned studies provide compelling evidence of the existence of overt sexism through the differential treatment of students, it is important to note that research that is more recent has acknowledged the prevalence of both overt and subtle forms of institutional sexism within educational environments. One such study is Leaper and Brown (2008), which investigated adolescent female students' perceived experiences of sexism to understand how females interpret and perceive sexism in their school environments. The study revealed that females were subject to unequal treatment and faced gender stereotypes and biases from teachers and peers. Subsequently, Leaper and Brown (2014) contributed to the ongoing dialogue on sexism in education through their comprehensive chapter entitled "Sexism in Schools" in Advances in Child Development and Behaviour, Vol. 47. The chapter considers how the gender biases manifest in a wide variety of aspects of education, including interactions between teachers and students, curricula and teaching materials, and peer relations. It emphasizes that institutional sexism is not limited to overt discriminatory practices but also encompasses more subtle forms of bias that may go unnoticed. Although the authors did not explicitly differentiate between overt and subtle sexism, they provided a comprehensive overview of the manifestation of institutional sexism and its impact on student's academic achievement and social adjustment.

When exploring the concept of institutional sexism, it is crucial to recognize the existence of a parallel form of subtle institutional bias referred to as a "chilly climate". In this context, Hall and Sandler first introduced the notion of the chilly climate in 1982 to describe the subtle gender-based discrimination experienced by female students in the classroom. They argued that although individual instances of biased behaviour and disparities in teacher-student interactions may appear insignificant or go unnoticed when combined, they create an unfavourable and hostile learning environment for female students. This environment undermines their self-efficacy and confidence, ultimately leading to disadvantages in their education, particularly in terms of educational opportunities and academic performance.

One Example of studies that supports the existence of a chilly climate in an educational context is that of Janz and Pyke (2000), who have developed a comprehensive scale to measure the chilly climate using a Canadian sample and discovered that female students perceived the climate to be chillier than men. Another study conducted by Pascarella et al. (1997), using the Perceived Chilly Climate for Women Scale (PCCWS), found that a chilly campus environment would affect the cognitive performance of women during their first year of college. Whitt et al. (1999) expanded on Pascarella et al.'s (1997) work and revealed that undergraduate women encountered a chilly climate that negatively affected their cognitive development in subsequent years of college. Morris and Daniel (2008) examined differences in the perceptions of a chilly climate between students in traditionally female-dominated majors and traditionally male-dominated majors and found that female students reported the climate to be chillier than their male counterparts.

Notwithstanding the predominant focus of existing research on the chilly climate at the university level, it is imperative to recognize the potential applicability of these findings to the high school context. Therefore, this study operates on the assumption that the concept of a chilly climate, understood as a subtle manifestation of institutional sexism, extends to the high school setting as well. The purpose of this study is to respond to the following research inquiries by using a self-designed scale. First, we want to investigate issues related to overt institutional sexism, which takes the form of gender-based differential treatment. We will explore and assess the degree to which this type of sexism is common in educational settings using our own scale.

The second part of our inquiry will focus on the area of subtle institutional sexism, sometimes known as the "chilly climate" in the literature. This phenomenon contributes to a climate that is unwelcoming or unfriendly towards some genders, especially female students. Using our own scale, we want to investigate the existence of subtle sexism within the realm of education. Eventually, the ultimate objective of this study is to contribute to the broader discourse on gender inequalities and biases in education that reproduce and perpetuate gender divisions and hierarchies by either legitimizing them or making them undetected.

3. Methodology

Three hundred and sixty-seven students from different high schools in the region of Fes and its suburbs (Morocco) make up the sample that was randomly selected in accordance with the administrative authorisation given. The participants included 56% female students and 44% male students. They were encouraged to complete the survey during class. In order to ensure understanding of the many items and concepts of the question content and to remove any potential for ambiguity or misinterpretation, the questionnaire was administered in Arabic. The participants were reassured that their responses would be treated confidentially and anonymously, emphasizing the importance of maintaining their privacy throughout the study.

A section of the survey was dedicated to gathering demographic information of the participants, including gender, age, school location, school level, stream and field of specialization, and parental education, as well as occupation. Another section measured students' perceptions of school sexism, including its two parameters: sexist perception of professional behaviour and institutional norms. It includes eight items, four of which measure the extent to which students feel that the school norms and rules are masculine in nature, and the four remaining items measure the sexist behaviour of teachers as well as administrative members, which favours male students at the expense of females from the perspective of students.

4. The research hypotheses

The research hypotheses for the target investigation are the following:

H1: There would be a significant gender difference in the perception of institutional sexism, with female students exhibiting a higher tendency to perceive instances of sexism compared to male students.

H2: Female students are more likely to perceive the school climate as being biased against them based on gender, as opposed to male students.

H3: Female students are more likely to perceive a teacher's behaviour as sexist compared to male students.

H4: There would be a positive correlation between the parameters of perceived institutional sexism.

5. Analysis and Discussion

The analysis section of this article focuses on the examination of the collected questionnaires from a sample of 367 students. After the questionnaires were collected, the data was entered into the SPSS software. The main analysis technique employed was principal component analysis (PCA), which aimed to explore the potential grouping of the scale items into a limited number of latent variables. A histogram was utilized to examine the distribution of students' perceptions of institutional sexism as a dependent variable, providing a visual representation of the data distribution. This analysis aids in understanding the central tendencies and variability of students' perceptions within the studied context.

To further investigate the topic, t-tests were conducted to test for possible gender differences in the perceived institutional sexism climate scale, including its parameters. Additionally, a correlation analysis was performed to explore potential relationships between the two components of institutional sexism. These additional analyses contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the data and provide insights into potential patterns and associations within the variables under investigation.

5.1 Principal Component Analysis of institutional sexism climate scale

The scale provides students' perceptions of institutional sexism. It contains eight items that examine how male and female students feel that the overall school climate is biased in favour of boys. A principal component analysis with varimax rotation was performed on the item scale to see if the various items could be reduced into a limited and small number of variables. Accordingly, the analysis

yielded two components. The first factor was named "sexist perceptions of school norms" and mainly addressed items related to how students consider the norms that govern the classroom and the school climate as masculine. The variance explained by this factor was 40%. The second component, which was labelled as "sexist perceptions of professional behaviour", included items regarding students' feelings about the gendered behaviour of teachers and administrative members, which favour boys at the expense of girls. It explained 20% of the total variance. Table 1 presents the rotated component matrix and all the factors loadings for individual items with the varimax rotation and their placement under components 1 and 2:

Table 1
Component Loadings for Principal Components Analysis of Perceptions of Institutional Sexism

| Scale items	Components	
	Sexist Perceptions of school norms	**Sexist Perceptions of professional behaviour**
I feel the rules governing the classroom are masculine	,850	
I feel that the rules governing the school are masculine	,846	
It can be said that the classroom climate is in favour of males more than females.	,801	
It can be said that the overall school climate is in favour of males more than females.	,770	
As a male, the classroom climate helps me feel confident and assertive.	,586	
Teachers and administrative staff prefer veiled, disciplined, and cute school girls more than others.		,758
I believe that teachers and administrative staff encourage the commitment to the moral standards that raise the value and chastity of a female.		,754
Teachers and administrative staff deal with female students, unlike male students, with decency and dignity		,743
% of variance	40%	20%
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.		
a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.		

Note. Prepared by the Author Using SPSS

The grouping of the eight items into two main sub-constructs gave directions to label them as new or latent variables regarding students' perceptions of institutional climate. The first latent variable accounts for as much of the variability in the data as possible, and the second latent variable represents the remaining portion of the variance.

Cronbach's alpha was used to determine if the data from the eight items used to represent students' perceptions of institutional sexism created a reliable scale. In this perspective, the overall reliability of the total scale was 0.74, which indicates a sufficient score of reliability. Given this, it can be reported that the multiple items in the given scale are consistent with each other and measure the same construct. Therefore, the scale can be said to be reliable and can be used as a valid measurement tool to assess institutional sexism from students' perspectives in the Moroccan context.

5.2 Normality of Data

The following figure is a histogram that displays the distribution of students' perceptions of institutional sexism as a dependent variable, which also includes the normality curve, the group mean (0, 47) and the standard deviation (0, 174).

Figure 1
Histogram for Perceptions of Institutional Sexism
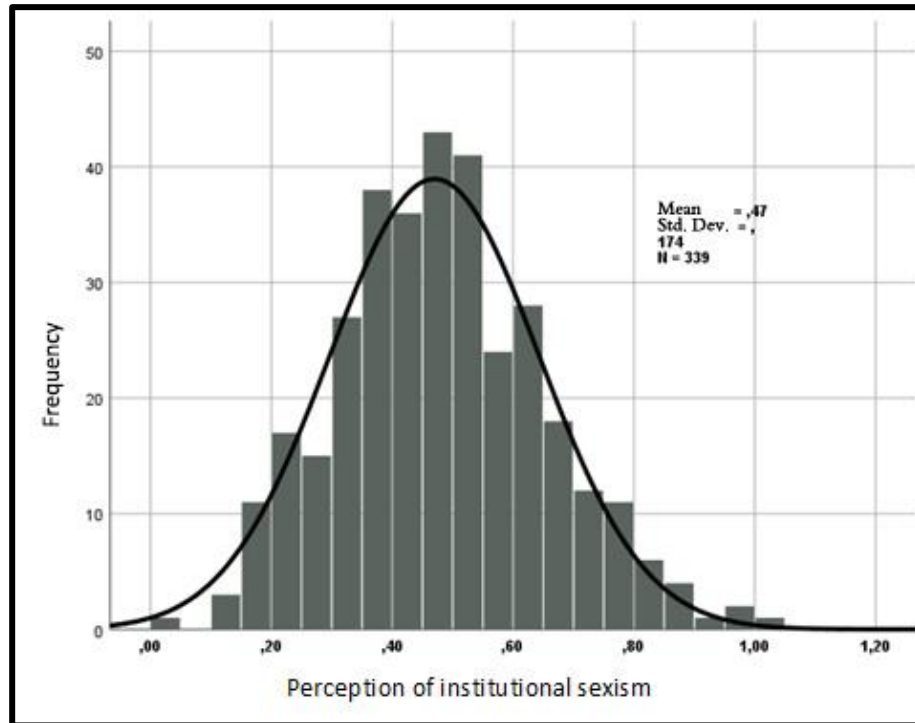
Note. Prepared by the Author Using SPSS

A visual inspection of the histogram shows that the data maintain a normal distribution pattern since the curve is bell-shaped and symmetric about the mean. This reveals that most respondents feel that the school environment is relatively sexist. The given finding could assert that the chilly climate construct and the institutional sexism phenomenon are not uncommon to male and female students in this investigation. In other words, the sexist perceived institutional climate is an indicator of the gender bias that characterizes the teaching practices and the explicit gendered rules that govern Moroccan educational institutions. The result of this quantitative analysis reveals to some extent that the chilly climate model does not only concern undergraduate female students in higher education, but it can also apply to female students in secondary schools. Moreover, the finding confirms Hall and Sandler's (1984) claim that the chilly climate exists in classrooms and non-classroom settings. In addition, the given results raise the awareness that sexism persists in Moroccan educational institutions despite claims and recommendations to make education equal to all, particularly to both genders.

It is also significant to mention that no gender differences in the perception of institutional sexism were depicted. This means that both groups of male and female students were equal in their feelings about the gendered school climate, which discriminates against girls and puts them at an educational disadvantage (t-test is not significant). Accordingly, this finding is inconsistent with the past research literature, which reported a greater gender difference in the perception of institutional sexism, with more female students describing the overall institutional climate as sexist than males. For instance, Blodorn et al. (2012) investigated gender differences in the perceived individual and institutional forms of sexism. They designed a multi-item scale to assess perceived sexism and found that perceptions of both types of sexism (individual and institutional) were higher among women than men at an institutionalized level. Similarly, Janz and Pyke (2000) developed a scale to assess students' perceptions of the chilly climate in a Canadian sample and found that female students were more likely to perceive the institutional climate to be chillier than male students. Morris and Daniel (2008) examined differences in the perceptions of a chilly climate between students in traditionally female-dominated majors and traditionally male-dominated majors and found that female students reported the climate to be chillier than their male counterparts.

5.2 Sexist Perceptions of school norms

As mentioned previously, sexist perceptions of school norms were the first latent variable that resulted from the principal component analysis with a varimax rotation that accounted for 40% of the total variance. Figure 2 is a histogram that describes the distribution of the dependent variable of sexist perception of school norms, highlighting the sample size, the normative curve, the group mean, and the standard deviation.

Figure 2

Histogram of Sexist Perceptions of Institutional Norms


Mean = ,40
Std. Dev. = ,22
N = 348
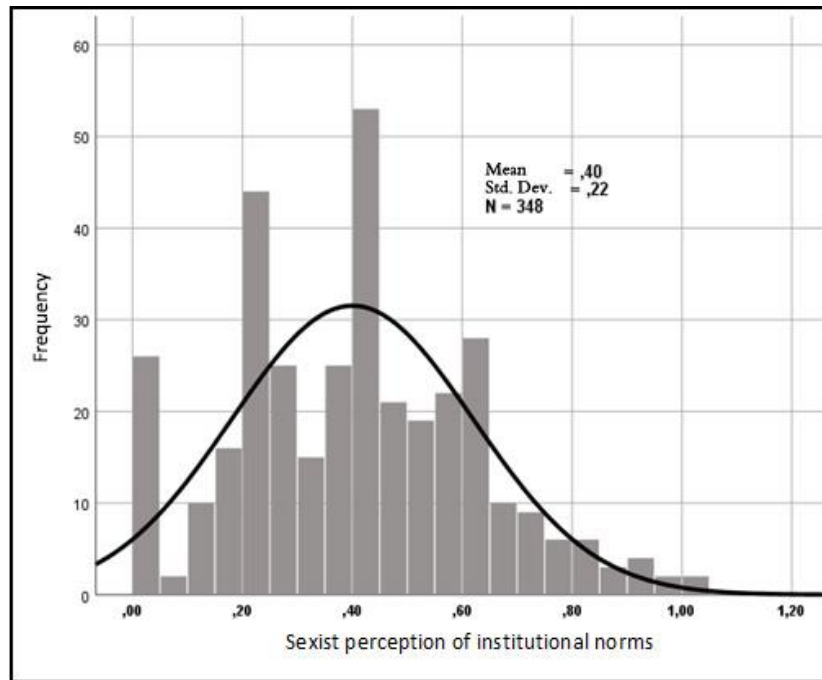
Note. Prepared by the Author Using SPSS

The histogram of sexist perceptions of institutional norms appears to be relatively situated at the level of the strong values since the distribution has an asymmetric tail stretching to the right side of the histogram. This implies that students are somehow incapable of understanding the sexist cleavages of an institutional nature. This suggests that the factor of age may account for these results, which depend on biological maturity. It is also worth adding that the effect of conventional knowledge that ensures the reproduction of evidence (Bordieu and Passeron, 1977) may, to some extent, explain students' relative unawareness of gender inequalities. Indeed, the school has always been considered a favourable environment for the reproduction of social divisions and inequalities that serve the dominant social class (ibid). Actually, gender, just like social class, seems to be another form of inequality that education is still reproducing and legitimating. One important point to mention is that Cronbach's alpha for the given sub-construct was found to be .82, which is a highly reliable score for measuring the perceived sexist institutional norms of high school students.

Nevertheless, male students were slightly more aware of gendered institutional norms than female students, as shown in the following figure:

Figure 3

Mean Scores of Sexist Perceptions of Institutional Norms with Respect to Gender
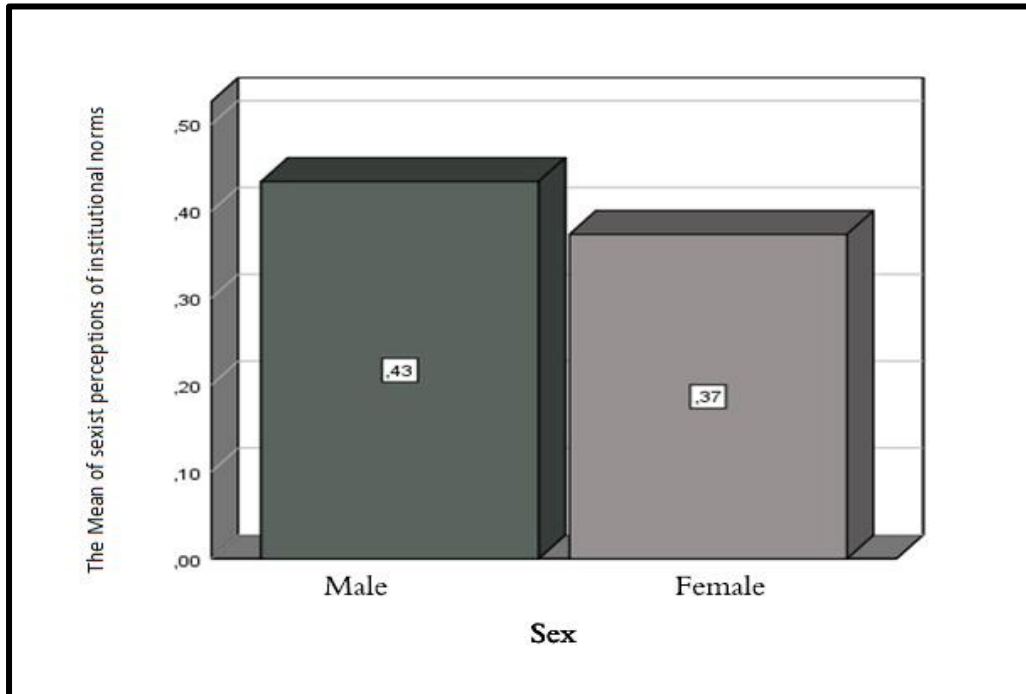
Note. Prepared by the Author Using SPSS

It seems that male students in this investigation were somehow more conscious of the subtle form of sexism embedded in the implicit sexist norms and rules that govern Moroccan educational institutions. This outcome reflects that the unequal status and power relations of a patriarchal nature are deeply ingrained in students' gender schemas to the extent that they have become legitimized and taken for granted, even by members of the disadvantaged group, that is, female students. In this context, the perception of subtle sexism by male students might suggest that they are in a position of power and that they are aware of the "gender privilege" (Allan and Madden, 2006) that society, historically and culturally speaking, has assigned to them. Consequently, perceptions of sexism or gender discrimination may serve different ideological functions for members of advantaged and disadvantaged social groups from the perspective of social identity theory. To illustrate, male students' awareness of the subtle form of sexism may reflect their motivation and tendency to maintain their privilege and dominant status in an institutional social setting by conforming to masculine norms that the school, as an agent of society, has rendered legitimate. In this sense, Cameron (2001) proposed that higher levels of sexism would be perceived by men who endorse modern sexist beliefs and by women who reject modern sexist beliefs, thus perceiving gender-related inequality as illegitimate. Nevertheless, female students in this sample were relatively unable to perceive the implicit form of institutional sexism, may be because of their internalization of modern sexist beliefs and their compliance with the social norms that serve the dominant group.

In the literature, perceptions of subtle gender discrimination were explained by many concepts by different scholars. For instance, Virginia Valian (1998) drew upon the concept of gender schemas to account for gender inequalities that continue to persist in different spheres. She defined gender schemas as "unconscious hypotheses about sex differences that guide people's perceptions and behaviours, leading men and women alike to overvalue men and undervalue women" (Valian, 2002, p.2). Allan and Madden (2006) used the term gender privilege to account for the invisible ways in which gender inequalities embedded in differential treatment in an institutional context can operate to advantage men and disadvantage women. Mary Rowe (1990) employed the concept of micro-inequities to refer to the subtle behaviours and discriminatory events that are often unintentional, a fact that makes them difficult to detect and recognize.

5.3 Sexist Perceptions of professional behaviour

As mentioned previously, sexist perceptions of professional behaviour were found to be the second factor extracted from the principal component analysis with varimax rotation. The Cronbach reliability coefficient of this sub-construct was found as .62, which demonstrated moderate internal reliability for the items measuring the perceived gender biased behaviour of teachers and administrative staff. The observed frequency distribution of this variable is similar to a normal distribution. This implies that the general perception of high school students regarding the overall sexist behaviour of school professionals appears to be positive,

as a large number of the students were relatively conscious of the gendered school climate embedded in the differential treatment of teachers and administrative members. However, female students reported a stronger perception of the gendered biased treatment of teachers and administrators when compared to male students. This fact is well illustrated in Figure 4:

Figure 4

Histogram of Sexist Perception of Professional Behavior
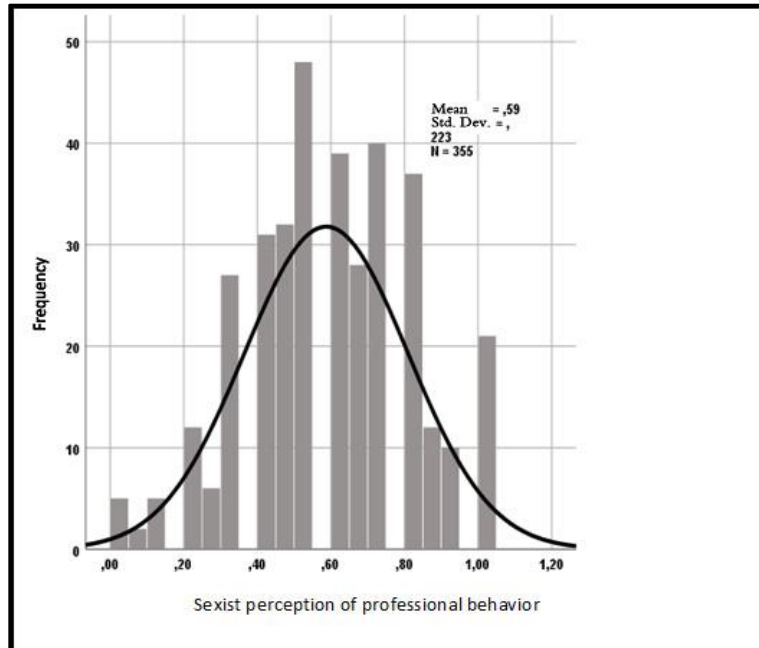
Note. Prepared by the Author Using SPSS

Figure 5

The Mean of Sexist Perception of Professional Behavior by Gender
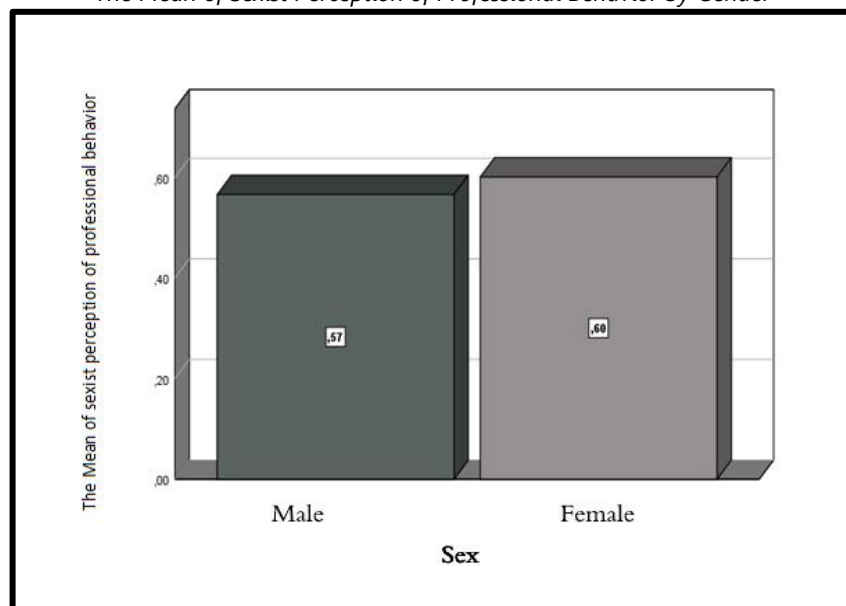
Note. Prepared by the Author Using SPSS

While male students in this investigation were relatively more conscious of the subtle form of institutional sexism, female students, on the other hand, were capable of perceiving the overt form of institutional gender discrimination manifested in the sexist

behaviour of school professionals. Swim, Mallet, and Stagnor (2004) defined blatant or overt sexism as "obviously unequal and unfair treatment of women relative to men" (p. 117). One interpretation of female students' sensitivity to explicit gender-biased treatment may stem from personal experiences with sexism they might have encountered in their everyday social interaction. Another justification for gender differences in the perception of overt forms of institutional sexism can be attributed to female students' endorsement of traditional gender role beliefs, the fact that enables them to easily detect hostile behaviours, which are visible and conscious in nature. In this context, Swim and Cohen (1997) suggested that the distinction between traditional and modern forms of sexism could be theorized and conceived within the framework of overt versus subtle forms of sexism in its broader sense. To account for their claim, the authors used the Attitudes toward Women Scale, which relies on the endorsement of traditional gender roles to measure overt sexism and the Modern Sexism Scale to measure covert or subtle forms of sexism.

The analysis revealed that both scales measure different but related constructs. In fact, these findings imply a societal shift in sexism from overt to more subtle due to intentions and recommendations to reduce gender inequality in institutions and organizations, including the educational setting. A finding seems to be consistent with prior research that states that overt or blatant sexism against women within institutions and organizations has not been diminished but rather replaced by an alternative form of gender discrimination, which is more subtle and ambiguous in nature (Campbell, Schellenberg, and Senn; 1997; Dipboye and Colelle, 2005). In line with this belief, one can conclude that subtle sexism is another form of benevolent sexism, which reflects a subjectively positive attitude towards women who comply with traditional gender roles (Glick and Fiske, 1996). Although benevolent or subtle sexism might appear harmless on the surface, it can be just as damaging, if not more, than hostile sexism (Glick and Fiske, 1996). In brief, the presence of institutional sexism is undeniable, yet it has evolved to adopt more subtle forms, conveying hidden messages that have the potential to undermine women's social status and cognitive competence.

5.4 Correlations between the parameters of institutional sexism

In this section of the analysis, the Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was computed to find out if any relationship existed between the two components of the sexist perception of the school climate and then between this latter and students' demographic variables. First, we are going to study the association between the parameters of institutional sexism, which are the sexist perception of institutional norms and the sexist perception of professional behaviour. The following figure illustrates this link:

Table 2
Correlations between the Parameters of Institutional Sexism

		Sexist Perceptions of institutional norms
Sexist Perceptions of institutional norms	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	348
Sexist Perceptions of professional behaviour	Pearson Correlation	,172**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,001
	N	339

Note. Prepared by the Author Using SPSS

The examination of the correlations between the two components of institutional sexism indicates that the perceptions within these two variables are associated with each other. The table above illustrates that the sexist perception of institutional norms is associated with the sexist perception of professional behaviour. The Pearson correlation coefficient reaches 0,172. It is statistically significant at the level of 0.01. This means that there is a significant substantial positive correlation between the two variables. To put it differently, variations in the sexist perception of institutional norms are proportionally associated with variations in the sexist perception of professional behaviour. That is, overt or hostile sexism significantly correlates with subtle or benevolent sexism, which aligns with previous research that has consistently discovered a positive correlation between the endorsement of hostile and benevolent sexism beliefs (Glick and Fiske, 1996; 2001).

6. Summary of results and Implications

The purpose of this article was to investigate students' perceptions of institutional sexism using the perceived institutional sexism climate scale. The results of the principal component analysis conducted on the given scale yielded two latent variables, namely

sexist perceptions of institutional norms and sexist perceptions of professional behaviour. This revealed that institutional sexism, along with the chilly climate constructs, are not uncommon phenomena among Moroccan high school students in this sample. Moreover, no gender differences were observed in the perception of institutional sexism among students in this investigation. This finding suggests that both male and female students exhibited sensitivity and a common awareness towards the pervasive sexist divisions and discriminatory practices that exist within their educational environment. Such shared recognition highlights the importance of addressing and mitigating these sexist cleavages to create a more inclusive and equitable educational space for all students, irrespective of their gender.

However, significant gender differences were depicted at the level of the two latent variables extracted from the principal component analysis. In particular, male students were aware of the subtle form of institutional sexism manifested in the sexist norms prevailing in Moroccan educational institutions, whereas female students were relatively more conscious of the overt form of institutional sexism embedded in the differential treatment of the behaviour of teachers as well as administrative members in favour of male students. This particular finding implies that female students have unconsciously internalized modern sexist beliefs, and they tend to comply with the prevailing social norms and rules that serve the privileged social group, while male students function as guardians of these norms and rules that serve their dominant position in society. Consequently, one can infer that institutional sexism is undeniable but has become more subtle to the extent that it has turned out to be legitimate and taken for granted even by the disadvantaged gender.

In addition, a positive relationship was found between the two components of institutional sexism, which was consistent with previous research, which indicated that overt or hostile sexism significantly correlates with subtle or benevolent sexism (Glick and Fiske, 1996; 2001). The given finding highlights the need to address the ambivalent nature of sexism in education as it can manifest in both overt and subtle ways. Overt manifestations encompass explicit gender-based discrimination, while subtler forms include implicit biases, gender stereotypes, and sexist norms. Therefore, addressing these underlying forms of sexism is an important step toward achieving equity and inclusion of all students in an educational environment.

7. Contributions and recommendations

This study significantly contributes to the interdisciplinary field of gender and education studies by examining the multi-dimensional nature of institutional sexism and introducing a novel measurement scale. These contributions enhance our understanding of sexism within institutions and offer practical insights for addressing this pervasive issue. Notably, this investigation develops a comprehensive measurement scale that covers both overt and subtle forms of sexism. It incorporates items that not only capture teachers' differential behaviour perpetuating gender discrimination but also encompass items reflecting implicit biases and systemic barriers that may hinder equal opportunities and gender equality within the educational context.

Another pertinent contribution of this inquiry is that it provides empirical evidence that highlights the prevalence of institutional sexism, especially its subtle nature in Moroccan secondary education. The statistical data obtained across different public schools, along with the statistical analyses performed, serve as a foundational basis for comprehending the scope of the issue and its underlying long-term effects on students. In addition, this investigation paves the way for future research on the subtle aspect of institutional sexism because of the inherent challenges associated with its detection. Indeed, the examination of less overt forms of gender discrimination can indeed contribute to the development of new methodologies and strategies for addressing all forms of inequalities and implicit biases within institutions.

Individuals' perceptions of gender issues can be influenced by the educational system. This means that there is gender structuring in the school system, which is strongly associated with early childhood socialization. The reproduction of social inequities based on gender is reinforced in the school setting in which explicit and implicit gender divisions are at play. Therefore, it is essential to develop anti-sexism policies that explicitly address overt and covert forms of gender discrimination within educational institutions. Additionally, offering ongoing training programmes and workshops for educators and all school staff on gender equality and unconscious bias would be an important strategy to raise awareness and challenge stereotypes. Finally, institutions should encourage research initiatives that investigate all kinds of discrimination based on gender at all levels to eliminate sexist explicit practices and sexist implicit rules that might exist in an educational environment.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.
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