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Is It Just Me, Or Was That Sexist? The Role of Sexism Type and Perpetrator Race in Identifying Sexism

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ABSTRACT

Despite sexism occurring frequently, people often do not identify it as such. Using a vignette design, the current project explored whether sexism was identified at a different rate and intensity depending on the specific form of sexism enacted (hostile or benevolently sexist behavior) and race (Black or White) of the man perpetrating sexist behaviors. When a Black man engaged in a benevolently (paternalistic) sexist behavior he was perceived as more sexist than a White man. However, White and Black men were perceived similarly when they engaged in a hostile (overtly negative and derogatory) sexist behavior. Overall, female participants identified sexism more often and viewed it as more sexist than male participants did, especially in the context of benevolent

sexism. These findings suggest there are significant effects of perceiver gender and perpetrator race in the perception of sexism. This demonstrates the importance of examining both race- and gender-based discrimination together.

KEYWORDS:

Prejudice, Sexism, Racism, Women, Men, Young Adult

Experiencing sexism and gender bias is an unfortunate reality for women in the United States; up to 99% of women report experiencing sexist events at some point in their life and 97% of women report experiencing sexism within the last year (Klonoff & Landrine, 1995). This includes experiences like being forced to listen to sexually degrading or sexist jokes (94.1% lifetime, 83.8% past year), facing discrimination from those in service positions (77% lifetime, 61.9% past year), and being treated unfairly by a boss or employer (40.4% lifetime, 32.1% past year). In addition to these experiences affecting most women, research suggests they occur 1–2 times per week; these experiences are associated with negative psychological and physical health outcomes (Becker & Swim, 2011; Borrell et al., 2010; Klonoff, Landrine, & Campbell, 2000; Moradi & Subich, 2004; Swim, Hyers, Cohen, & Ferguson, 2001). Detecting instances of discrimination is necessary for women to be able to effectively interpret, respond to, and cope with these experiences. One factor that may affect the detection of sexism is the perception of the perpetrator. Black men, for example, are perceived to be more masculine and sexual than White men (Bowleg et al., 2017; Slatton & Spates, 2014). This difference in how Black men and White men are perceived could impact the identification of sexism. The goal of the current paper is to better understand the factors that influence the identification of sexist behaviors. Specifically, we are interested in the impact of how sexism is expressed and the race of the perpetrator of sexist behaviors.

Types of sexism and perception

Ambivalent sexism theory proposes that modern day sexism is expressed through hostility and benevolence (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Hostile sexism is characterized by overtly negative and prejudicial beliefs directed toward women, such as the belief that women are “teases,” feminists are unreasonable, and women want more power than men. Benevolent sexism, on the other hand, reflects a seemingly positive reaction to women and is used to reward women who are in stereotypical and gender-restricted roles. This more subtle form of sexism includes beliefs like women need protection from men, women are more nurturing, and men and women “complete” each other. While these attitudes may appear mutually exclusive, they are positively correlated (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Glick et al., 2000). However, the context in which they are expressed is different; hostile sexism functions as a punishment for gender role deviance while benevolent sexism acts as a reward for gender role conformity. Thus, they are two presentations of consistent sexist beliefs about gender. However, they do represent two separate concepts.

Both hostile and benevolent sexism have been linked to gender inequality as well as other negative outcomes (Glick et al., 2000). For example, men’s endorsement of hostile sexism is associated with increased likelihood to engage in sexual harassment, and men and women who endorse hostile sexism are more likely to provide negative evaluations of women who are perceived as threats to the gender status quo (Begany & Milburn, 2002; Masser & Abrams, 2004; Sakalli-Ugurlu & Beydogan, 2002). The effects of benevolent sexism, compared to hostile sexism, tend to be more subtle and insidious. Women exposed to benevolent sexism, for example, tend to experience increased self-doubt and believe they are incompetent (Dumont, Sarlet, & Dardenne, 2010; Oswald, Baalbaki, & Kirkman, 2019). Interestingly, individuals’ endorsement of hostile sexism and benevolent sexism increases as a result of observing the endorsement of hostile sexism among women and benevolent sexism among men, respectively (Davidson, Czopp, & Mark, 2015). Thus, it is particularly important to explore

how hostile sexism and benevolent sexism are perceived in order to better address the negative effects associated with each.

Despite the negative consequences of experiencing both hostile and benevolent sexism, women do not identify sexism as such every time it occurs, which is especially true for the more subtle form of benevolent sexism (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005; Oswald et al., 2019; Swim, Mallett, Russo-Devosa, & Stangor, 2005). In fact, Kilianski and Rudman (1998) found that women had positive impressions of men expressing benevolent sexism. This perception is likely because benevolent sexism, on a superficial level, aligns with what is often considered chivalrous, gentlemanly behavior (Viki, Abrams, & Hutchison, 2003). Similar findings related to the likability of men expressing benevolent sexism have been found in Zimbabwe (Chisango & Javangwe, 2012) and Germany (Bohner, Ahlborn, & Steiner, 2010). However, one limitation of these studies is that they have largely focused on the perception of sexist *beliefs* rather than the perception of sexist *behavior*. Because real world interactions involve behaviors that may contain sexist acts rather than descriptions of beliefs, it is important to examine behavior to better understand how these findings apply more generally.

Sexist event characteristics and identification

There are also situational characteristics that influence the identification of sexist behavior or attitudes. Simple factors like instructing women to attend to sexist experiences increase identification (Swim et al., 2001). Further, identification depends on the people involved in sexist interactions. For example, the perception of sexism depends in part on whether it comes from a man or a woman (Baron, Burgess, & Kao, 1991). In a key study on the identification of sexism, Baron and colleagues (1991) had participants read a series of vignettes depicting sexist behaviors directed at women. Regardless of the gender of the participant, scenarios of sexist behavior (such as questioning a woman's qualifications for a male-dominated job) were more likely to be labeled as sexist when the perpetrator was a man expressing gender biased attitudes rather than a woman. Further, female participants rated the behaviors as more sexist than male participants did overall, though both rated male perpetrators as more sexist than female perpetrators. This highlights that sexism directed at women is recognized more when it comes from men than when it comes from women, presumably because of the stereotypic assumption of who engages in sexism. Unfortunately, this study predated ambivalent sexism theory, and the behaviors were all overtly sexist. Thus, it is unclear if a similar finding would be found for the more subtle form of benevolent sexism.

A more recent study conducted by Riemer, Chaudoir, and Earnshaw (2014) examined whether hostile sexist, benevolent sexist, and objectification behaviors were perceived differently depending on whether the person making the comment was a boyfriend, a male boss, or a male stranger. Overall, the authors found that benevolent sexism and objectification were perceived as similarly sexist but less sexist than hostile sexism. Additionally, comments from a boss or stranger were viewed as similarly sexist, but more sexist than comments from a boyfriend. Thus, these authors further confirm that the characteristics of the perpetrator and the type of sexism (i.e., hostile or benevolent) influence individuals' perceptions of sexism, illustrating the importance of exploring other factors impacting the perception of hostile sexism and benevolent sexism (Riemer et al., 2014).

We propose that an important factor impacting the identification of sexism is the race or ethnicity of the person expressing sexist attitudes. In general, research indicates that White Americans often feel anxious or demonstrate a threat response during interracial interactions (Avery, Richeson, Hebl, & Ambady, 2009). This heightened threat response in interracial interactions may increase situational awareness, especially in the context of threats like sexist behaviors, such that sexist comments or interactions may not be noticed if the commenter were White. This increased response to sexism may be further exacerbated by the perception of Black men as more rigid in their gender role attitudes, consistent with the subordinate male target hypothesis (Sidanius & Veniegas, 2000). This hypothesis proposed that arbitrary-set hierarchies (e.g., race) differ from

patriarchal hierarchies. Racial prejudices consist of more overt hostility based in competition for resources while gender prejudice involves hostile and benevolent components because of mutual need. Therefore, women are regarded with the paternalistic protection that aligns with ambivalent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Sidanius & Veniegas, 2000). Because this mutual need is not the case in racial prejudice, overt hostility is more likely than the ambivalence seen in sexism. This hypothesis has been supported in research demonstrating that intergroup race bias is stronger in and towards men, though the threat of sexual coercion increased women's race bias (Navarrete, McDonald, Molina, & Sidanius, 2010). Overall, this suggests examining how gender and race bias may interact is necessary.

The subordinate male target hypothesis (Sidanius & Veniegas, 2000) relates first to intersectional theory and second to historical contexts related to Black men's sexuality. In a review of extant literature, Bowleg and colleagues (2017) focus on the intersectionality of Black men's identities to understand research on Black men's sexuality. For example, they note that research on Black men's sexuality has been contrasted to norms of White, middle or upper class, cisgendered, and Western individuals (Bowleg et al., 2017; McGruder, 2009). This context positions Black men's sexuality as deviant, which is reinforced by the historical context stereotyping Black men as rapists, particularly of White women (Bowleg et al., 2017). These two factors together underly Black men's heterosexual interactions. Because one component of benevolent sexism is heterosexual intimacy (Glick & Fiske, 1996), these stereotypes may bolster differences in perception of sexism between Black and White men.

The connection between this process of racial bias and gender bias has been examined in only one study. Using a sample of Swiss men and women, Gianettoni and Roux (2010), using a vignette design describing a forced marriage, found that a North African family was viewed as more sexist than a Swiss family when they forced their daughter into marriage. This effect was moderated by feminist and racist beliefs. The difference in sexism ratings of the North African family and Swiss family was greatest among those endorsing both feminist and racist beliefs. There was no difference in sexism ratings between the two families among those who endorsed feminist beliefs but did not endorse racist beliefs. This suggests that the perception of sexism is partially dependent on the race of the perpetrator. However, there were some methodological limitations of this study. First, the vignettes described a wealthy family of either Swiss or North African origin that forced their daughter into marriage, which the authors recognized may have been confounded by cultural expectations that North African families are generally more involved in the marriages of their children. Second, the behavior may have been considered unusual and beyond the scope of everyday sexism making it difficult to apply to more common experiences. Finally, the study included brief, explicit questions regarding the family's sexism. This direct approach has some benefits; however, it constricts the responses of participants and may result in the identification of sexism when they had not independently recognized the behavior as such. Therefore, allowing for more open responses in how people perceive sexism would be more useful in understanding how these dynamics play out in everyday situations.

Current study

In the current study, we sought to better understand how the race of a perpetrator of hostile or benevolent sexist behavior influences how people identify those behaviors. We tested four hypotheses. First, it was hypothesized that hostile sexist behaviors will be perceived as sexist more frequently and with greater intensity than benevolent sexist behaviors (i.e., a main effect of sexism type). Second, we hypothesized that Black men would be perceived as sexist more frequently and with greater intensity than White men (i.e., a main effect of perpetrator race). Third, we hypothesized that women would more readily identify benevolent sexism compared to men, while men and women would identify hostile sexism at similar rates (i.e., an interaction between participant gender and sexism type). Fourth, we hypothesized that Black men would be perceived as more sexist in the hostile sexism condition, but not in the benevolent sexism condition (i.e., an interaction between sexism type and race of perpetrator).

Methods

Pilot testing

Fourteen vignettes were developed where there was an interaction between a man and woman. The behavior was always initiated by the man and directed toward the woman. Four vignettes described an interaction that was a benevolent sexist behavior, four vignettes were a hostile sexist interaction, and six vignettes included interactions that were not sexist. Of those non-sexist interactions, two were written to be rude or negative in tone, two were written to reflect a more friendly and positive interaction, and two were written to be more neutral in tone. The hostile and benevolent interactions were based on the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske, 1996), a study by Becker and Swim (2011) incorporating diaries cataloguing experiences with sexism, and modified using an existing study in our laboratory asking women about their experiences with sexism.

Initial pilot testing was conducted to ensure the vignettes within each condition (i.e., hostile, benevolent, or neutral) received similar ratings of sexism before introducing perpetrator race as a variable. A sample of 38 undergraduate participants (31 female; $M_{age} = 18.45$; 28 Caucasian, 2 African American, 4 Asian/Pacific Islander, 3 Hispanic/Latino, 1 Middle Eastern, 1 Biracial or Multiracial) were asked to read the entire set of developed vignettes and rate the male actor for sexism where 1 indicates “Does Not Describe” and 7 indicates “Very Strongly Describes.”

Comparing the 4 hostile vignettes, there were no significant differences in the degree to which the vignettes were rated as sexist ($F(3, 34) = 1.07, p = .37, \text{Partial } \eta^2 = .09$). The neutral vignettes ($F(5, 32) = 2.04, p = .10, \text{Partial } \eta^2 = .24$) were also all rated as equally (non)sexist. However, there was a significant difference in the degree to which the benevolent sexist vignettes were rated as sexist ($F(5, 33) = 30.08, p < .01, \text{Partial } \eta^2 = .82$)

As the benevolently sexist vignettes were not all rated as equivalent, one vignette was deleted, two were modified to fit more closely with theoretical depictions of benevolent sexism, and one additional vignette was written. For the second test of benevolent vignettes, 34 undergraduates (27 female; $M_{age} = 19.24$; 26 Caucasian, 6 Asian/Pacific Islander, 3 Hispanic/Latino) read the vignettes and again rated the level of sexism. With the new set of vignettes there were no significant differences in the benevolent vignettes ($F(3,31) = 1.76, p = .18, \text{Partial } \eta^2 = .15$). Therefore, the vignettes were used for the primary study.

Primary study

Participants

One hundred and twenty-six undergraduate students were recruited from a private, Catholic, Midwestern University and participated for course credit. Three participants were excluded from analyses due to incomplete data. Of the retained 123 participants ($M_{age} = 19.41, SD = 1.38$), 71 identified as women, 51 as men, and one identified as a gender not listed. Regarding ethnicity, 93 (75.6%) identified as White, five (4.1%) as Black, 17 (13.8%) as Asian or Pacific Islander, nine (7.3%) as Hispanic or Latino/a, and five (4.1%) identified with another race or ethnicity. On a Likert scale measuring sexual orientation, the majority ($N = 109, 88.6\%$) identified as completely heterosexual, two (1.6%) as completely homosexual, and 12 (9.7%) identified in between completely heterosexual and completely homosexual.

Procedure

Participants were recruited using the psychology department recruitment pool and received partial credit for their undergraduate courses. Participants were informed that the purpose of the study was to examine how interpersonal interactions are perceived. Following informed consent, the 14 vignettes were randomly presented on a computer. All participants read four vignettes depicting benevolent sexism (two with a White man and two with a Black man), four vignettes depicting hostile sexism (two with a Black man and two with a White man), and six non-sexist vignettes (controlling for neutral, positive, and negative interactions across

White and Black men). After reading each vignette participants completed a free response to these vignettes in which they described the male actor. After reading all 14 vignettes participants were then asked to read the vignettes again and asked to rate the male actor on their level of sexism as well as other filler traits (e.g., intelligence). A demographics questionnaire was completed last.

Materials

Vignettes

To manipulate the race of the man in the vignette we included a picture (manipulated by race) and we used stereotypically White names (Joseph, Henry, Owen, Jacob, Adam, Sam, and Ethan; Data.cityofnewyork.us, 2016) and Black names (Jamal, Tyrone, Darnell, Kareem, Tremayne, Jermaine, and Leroy; Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). After reading each scenario participants, were asked, "Please list 2–3 traits that describe [the male actor] portrayed in the vignette you just read." Responses were coded as identifying sexism if they used descriptors such as sexist, chauvinistic, misogynistic, stereotypical, and traditional (Baron et al., 1991). Everything else was coded as non-sexist. The interrater reliability was calculated for each vignette and ranged from $\kappa = .82$ to $\kappa = .98$.

After participants completed the free response, the vignettes were randomly presented a second time. This time, participants were presented with a list of traits (funny, aggressive, sexist, warm, fair, intelligent, boring, and racist) and asked to rate the man on a scale of 1 (*Does Not Describe*) to 7 (*Very Strongly Describes*). Analyses focused on the participants' responses for the "sexist" trait; for the purposes of this study, the other descriptors were filler items and not analyzed.

Demographics

Demographics included age, gender identity, sexual orientation (7-point Likert scale where 1 is completely heterosexual and 7 is completely homosexual), race and ethnicity, and college class standing.

Results

Identification frequency

The frequency of identifying sexism across type and race of perpetrator from participants free response was coded and analyzed based on the methodology used by Baron and colleagues (1991). Frequencies for each condition (e.g. White man exhibiting hostile sexism) could range from 0 (sexism not identified in any vignettes) to 2 (sexism identified in both vignettes) for the benevolent sexism and hostile sexism conditions and 0 to 3 for the neutral conditions. The percentages of participants who identified sexism in each condition are included in Table 1. A 2 (participant gender) x 2 (sexism type: hostile or benevolent) x 2 (perpetrator ethnicity: Black or White) mixed model ANOVA was performed to compare the frequency with which participants identified sexism by the race of the perpetrator and the sexism type. Because the frequencies with which sexism was identified in the neutral conditions was nearly zero and the different range (six neutral vignettes total rather than four hostile or benevolent), these vignettes were excluded from the ANOVA.

Table 1. Percentage of participants identifying vignettes as sexist by perpetrator race and sexism type.

	White Perpetrator			Black Perpetrator		
	Hostile Sexism	Benevolent Sexism	Neutral	Hostile Sexism	Benevolent Sexism	Neutral
0 Vignettes Identified	20.5%	45.9%	100%	21.3%	32.8%	99.2%

1 Vignette Identified	54.1%	39.3%	0	25.4%	49.2%	0
2 Vignettes Identified	25.4%	14.8%	0	53.3%	18.0%	.8%
3 Vignettes Identified	-	-	0	-	-	0

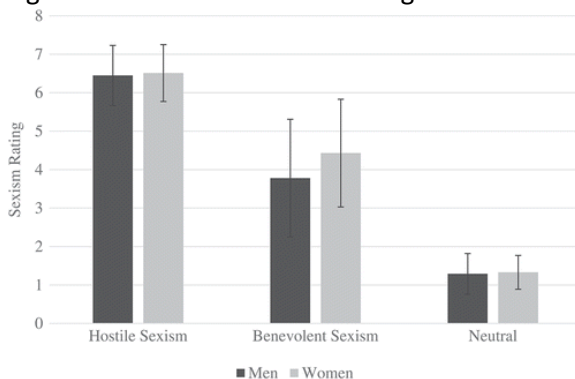
There was a main effect of sexism type ($F(1, 120) = 52.06, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .30$) such that hostile sexism ($M = 1.18, SD = .65$) was identified as sexist more often than benevolent sexism ($M = .75, SD = .58$). There was also a main effect of perpetrator race ($F(1, 120) = 16.66, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .12$) such that sexism was identified more often when the perpetrator was Black ($M = 1.06, SD = .61$) than when the perpetrator was White ($M = .86, SD = .56$). Finally, there was a main effect of participant gender ($F(1, 120) = 4.00, p = .05, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .03$) such that sexism was identified more often by women ($M = 1.06, SD = .47$) than by men ($M = .87, SD = .57$). There were no significant interactions between sexism type and participant gender ($F(1, 120) = 3.24, p = .07, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .03$), perpetrator race and participant gender ($F(1, 120) = 2.37, p = .13, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .02$), sexism type and perpetrator race ($F(1, 120) = 1.02, p = .32, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .01$), or between all three variables ($F(1, 120) = .17, p = .68, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .001$).

Sexism ratings

A 2 (participant gender) x 3 (sexism type: hostile, benevolent, or neutral) x 2 (male ethnicity: White or Black) mixed model ANOVA was used to compare the Likert ratings of sexism. There was a main effect of sexism type ($F(2,119) = 2019.16, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .97$) and post hoc tests indicate that hostile sexism vignettes ($M = 6.48, SD = .75$) were perceived as significantly more sexist than benevolent sexism vignettes ($M = 4.11, SD = 1.49, p < .001$) and neutral vignettes ($M = 1.31, SD = .48, p < .001$). Additionally, benevolent vignettes were perceived as significantly more sexist than neutral vignettes ($p < .001$). There was a main effect of perpetrator race ($F(1,120) = 38.81, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .24$); Black men ($M = 4.13, SD = .81$) were perceived as more sexist than White men ($M = 3.81, SD = .70$). Finally, there was a main effect of participant gender ($F(1,120) = 4.00, p = .05, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .03$) such that women rated the vignettes higher in sexism than did men ($M_{\text{women}} = 4.09, SD_{\text{women}} = .67, M_{\text{men}} = 3.84, SD_{\text{men}} = .72$).

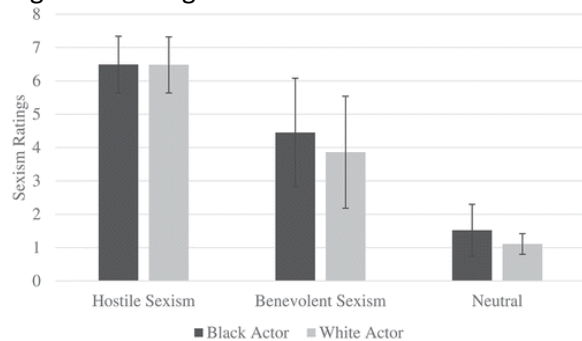
However, these were qualified by a significant interaction between participant gender and sexism type, $F(2,119) = 3.23, p = .04, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .05$. For hostile and neutral vignettes, men and women did not differ in the intensity of perceived sexism, $F(1,120) = .21, p = .65$, and $F(1,120) = .27, p = .60$, respectively. For benevolent vignettes, however, women rated benevolent sexism as more sexist than did men, $F(1,120) = 5.98, p = .02$; see Figure 1.

Figure 1. Men and women's ratings of sexism across types of sexism.



There was also a significant interaction between sexism type and the race of the male actor, $F(2,119) = .11.09, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .16$. For hostile vignettes, Black and White men are perceived as similarly sexist, $F(1,121) = .01, p = .91, \text{partial } \eta^2 < .01$; $M_{\text{Black Men}} = 6.49, SD_{\text{Black Men}} = .85, M_{\text{White Men}} = 6.48, SD_{\text{White Men}} = .84$. However, in the case of benevolent and neutral vignettes, Black men are perceived as significantly more sexist than White men, $F(1,121) = 20.16, p < .01, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .14, M_{\text{Black Men}} = 4.45, SD_{\text{Black Men}} = 1.63, M_{\text{White Men}} = 3.86, SD_{\text{White Men}} = 1.68$ and $F(1,121) = 43.18, p < .01, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .26, M_{\text{Black Men}} = 1.52, SD_{\text{Black Men}} = .77, M_{\text{White Men}} = 1.11, SD_{\text{White Men}} = .31$, respectively; see Figure 2.

Figure 2. Ratings of sexism for Black actors and White actors across types of sexism.



Discussion

Overall, participants identified hostile sexism more often and rated it as more sexist than benevolent sexism, supporting the first hypothesis of a main effect of sexism type. The second hypothesis was also supported; Black men were perceived as sexist more frequently and with greater intensity than White men. Finally, women perceived sexism more frequently and with greater intensity than men. These findings, though, are further complicated by their interaction effects. Gender differences are seen only in the perception of benevolent sexism. Additionally, Black men are perceived as more sexist than White men in the case of benevolent sexism and, interestingly, non-sexist interactions; however, no differences arose in the case of hostile sexism. The difference in the non-sexist interactions is an area of particular importance for further research, particularly in the context of the perception of Black men's masculinity (Mincey, Alfonso, Hackney, & Luque, 2014). Overall, this suggests that the perception of hostile sexism does not vary based on the perpetrator or who is perceiving the behavior. Because hostile sexism fits with the assumption of how sexism looks, other factors appear to matter less in this perception.

In contrast, women view benevolent sexism as more sexist than men do. Women's life experiences likely allow for a more nuanced perception of sexism in its different forms. For example, women who attend to sexist experiences view benevolent sexism as less favorable and more sexist, which does not occur for men (Becker & Swim, 2011). This suggests that, as the targets of sexism, women are more likely to view benevolent sexism as sexist. Therefore, when asked to rate benevolently sexist behaviors, women likely can reflect on their own experiences to inform the ratings of sexist behaviors. The perception of benevolent sexism also varies depending on the race of the man engaging in these behaviors. Specifically, Black men are perceived as more sexist than White men when engaging in benevolently sexist behaviors and when sexism is not present. This could indicate that White men are given the benefit of the doubt when subjective interpretation plays a larger role in perception, particularly in the context of a predominantly White sample. Previous research has indicated benevolent sexism is often insidious; it is difficult to identify, yet is associated with negative outcomes (Dardenne, Dumont, & Bollier, 2007; Dumont et al., 2010; Kilianski & Rudman, 1998; Oswald et al., 2019). However, when Black men engage in this behavior, people appear to notice benevolent sexism as such. Further, when Black men are *not* engaging in sexism, underlying stereotypes about Black men and sexist ideology may create the perception of sexism when it is not there.

Identifying benevolent sexism

We found benevolently sexist behaviors are less likely to be recognized as sexist than hostile sexist behaviors. Though some research indicates that active efforts to track sexist experiences reduces endorsement of sexism and that it is possible to increase attention to and identification of sexism (Becker & Swim, 2011), more research is needed in this area. The findings indicate that benevolent sexism remains an insidious occurrence due to the decreased likelihood that it will be identified as sexism. Because of the numerous negative effects of benevolent sexism, extending the research on the identification of sexism is extremely important. In addition, these findings have important implications for systemic sexism. Previous research has indicated that both hostile and benevolent sexism are associated with gender inequality, but exposure to hostile sexism motivates support of social change while exposure to benevolent sexism makes women less likely to support social change (Becker & Wright, 2011). Hostile sexism increases feelings of anger and frustration, which may motivate women to engage in social action (Lemonaki, Manstead, & Maio, 2015). Additionally, experimental research has demonstrated that men and women's exposure to benevolent sexism increases gender system justification, or the belief that unfair systems involving gender can be justified and should be maintained (Jost & Kay, 2005). Thus, benevolent sexism has negative personal and systemic consequences, possibly due to the difficulty in labeling benevolent sexism. The current findings support the importance of identifying benevolent sexism across situations in order to better address the negative effects associated with the experience of benevolent sexism.

Role of race in identifying sexism

When hostile sexism occurred in the vignettes, participants clearly identified the behavior as sexist, and the race of the male perpetrator was not an important factor in that identification process. However, in the more subtle benevolent sexist vignettes, we see that race becomes an important factor in identifying the behavior as sexist. This may indicate that benevolent sexism provides a unique opportunity to express underlying stereotypes about Black men without appearing overtly racist. Perceivers may even be inclined to see sexism that is not there, as in the case of the non-sexist interactions, because it fits with stereotypes about Black men and masculinity (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Mincey et al., 2014). Therefore, racist beliefs can be obscured under the guise of identifying sexism. Further, White individuals have been shown to experience physiological arousal in interracial interactions related to fear of appearing prejudiced (Richeson & Shelton, 2007). This heightened arousal may result in increased attention to potential threat (e.g., sexism) which has been shown to be key in identifying sexism (Swim et al., 2001). It is possible that people who identify more strongly as feminists may view the identification of benevolent sexism in Black men as an inherently feminist act, in line with Gianettoni and Roux (2010) findings. However, because sexism ratings differed based on race, sexism and racism appear to interact and allow for biased ideologies to be maintained in a way that does not superficially appear biased. Furthermore, White men's identification of sexism coming from Black men may also reinforce protective and paternalistic beliefs about women while simultaneously engaging in the competition with and domination of Black men (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Sidanius & Veniegas, 2000). Overall, a nuanced approach to race- and gender-based bias is necessary.

Limitations and future directions

There are several important limitations to consider in the interpretation of these findings. First, the current study was focused exclusively on how perpetrator race impacts perception of sexism. Examining the perception of intra- and interracial sexism is an important area for future study. While this was not the focus of the current study, it would be interesting for future research. Furthermore, only Black and White men were examined in this study. Stereotypes about men of different racial groups vary and it is unknown if these results would generalize to men of other ethnicities. Additionally, the sample was predominantly White and there was insufficient power for a more nuanced exploration of participant characteristics related to race and ethnicity. Finally, the findings of this study must be interpreted with some caution given the small effect sizes. In particular, the effect sizes

related to participant gender were quite small. However, this is also consistent with some research suggesting men and women are more similar than different and exaggerated gender differences could be a result of alpha bias (Hyde, 2005). In contrast the effect sizes of the main effect analyses related to race and sexism type were larger suggesting that these factors were more important for the identification of sexism.

There are a number of areas future research can expand the findings of the current study. First, other perpetrator and victim characteristics should be explored. Because previous research established that the perception of perpetrators of sexism differs based on perpetrator gender, the continued study of these factors is warranted (Baron et al., 1991). Research centered on intersectional approaches in particular would present a key opportunity for continued research. For example, among Hispanic and Latinx individuals, ambivalent sexism, machismo (men as dominant), and marianismo (women as subordinate) relate to dating and family roles (Bermúdez, Sharp, & Taniguchi, 2015). Intersectional understandings of the characteristics of the perpetrator of sexism would bolster the existing literature. Further, the interaction between perpetrator and victim characteristics likely affect perception. Finally, future research should also examine how other participant characteristics like race may play a role in perception of sexism when race of the perpetrator is varied. In particular, the role of stereotype internalization may be particularly interesting to explore in this context.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that benevolent sexism is particularly insidious due to its subtler presentation. Further, racial bias impacts the perception of sexism. This lends support for the theory that different forms of prejudice are related and can be better understood by studying them in conjunction rather than in isolation (Zick et al., 2008). A more nuanced understanding of the perception of sexism in general, and benevolent sexism specifically, in the context of race can inform future research seeking to study the identification, confrontation, and reduction of sexist behaviors. This study also provides evidence for an interrelated approach to understanding prejudice. Race- and gender-based stereotypes impact one another, as demonstrated by these findings. Thus, future research should emphasize the multifaceted role of different prejudices and biases. Within the context of social movements like Black Lives Matter and #MeToo, the intersection of different forms of bias must be considered. More nuanced consideration of the impact of intersecting prejudice is needed. Although certain prejudicial behaviors are, on their face, perceived similarly, the perception of the individual engaging in that behavior impacts that perception. Moving forward, research on bias and prejudice should be contextualized within the identities of the perpetrator, the identities of the victim, and the interaction between these individuals.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Data availability statement

The data described in this article are openly available in the Open Science Framework at <https://osf.io/3a56j/>

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