

Understanding Subtle Sexism: Detection and Use of Sexist Language

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In the present research we examined the association between Modern Sexist beliefs and identifying and engaging in subtle sexist behavior. In Study 1, we found that those who endorsed Modern Sexist beliefs were less likely to detect the occurrence of normative sexist behavior (i.e., the use of sexist language), and this oversight was a function of their failure to define such behavior as sexist. In Study 2, we found that those who endorsed Modern Sexist beliefs were more likely to use sexist language and less likely to use nonsexist language. Use of nonsexist language was a function of personal definitions of sexist language. Results are discussed in terms of motivations to self-correct discriminatory behavior and conceptualizations of current forms of sexism.

KEY WORDS: sexist language; modern sexism; subtle sexism.

Sexism comes in many different forms, including blatant, covert, and subtle sexism (Benokraitis & Feagin, 1999). Blatant sexism is defined as obviously unequal and unfair treatment of women relative to men, whereas covert sexism is defined as unequal and unfair treatment of women that is recognized but purposefully hidden from view. Both blatant and covert sexism are intended, but only covert sexism is hidden. In comparison to these two forms, subtle sexism represents unequal and unfair treatment of women that is not recognized by many people because it is perceived to be normative, and therefore does not appear unusual. Thus, like covert sexism, subtle sexism is hidden but unlike covert sexism, subtle sexism is not intentionally harmful. Subtle sexism is particularly interesting from both theoretical and practical perspectives because it may be quite prevalent (Benokraitis & Feagin, 1999), and may have an insidious impact on its victims (Swim, Hyers, Cohen, Fitzgerald, & Bylsma, 2003).

Sexist language is an example of subtle sexism in that it consists of speech that reinforces and perpetuates gender stereotypes and status differences between women and men (Banaji & Hardin, 1996; Crawford, 2001; Gay, 1997; Maass & Arcuri, 1996; McConnell & Fazio, 1996). Sexist language is learned at an early age (Hyde, 1984) and can be considered a linguistic habit (Lips, 1997). People may use sexist language for a variety of reasons. They may do so because it is traditional, it is ingrained in current written and spoken language and can be difficult to change, people lack knowledge about what constitutes sexist language, people do not believe that such language is sexist, or people are attempting to protect established social hierarchies (Parks & Robertson, 1998; Ruscher, 2001).

The purpose of the present research was to understand better people's awareness of and engagement in subtle sexist behavior by way of understanding their awareness of and use of sexist language. We were specifically interested in testing whether Modern Sexist beliefs predicted detection of sexist language. Unlike old-fashioned sexists who explicitly support gender inequality and endorse traditional gender roles, Modern (or Neo) Sexists express beliefs that indirectly condone the unequal treatment

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of women and men (Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995; Tougas, Brown, Beaton, & Joly, 1995). Indirectly condoning unequal treatment of women and men may be a result of people's lack of awareness of subtle sexism.

Subtle sexism might go unnoticed if certain subtle behaviors are not defined as sexist and subtle sexism might not be perceived to be problematic if it is not noticed. There is evidence that Modern Sexist beliefs are associated with a lower likelihood of defining some behaviors as sexist. Endorsement of Modern Sexist beliefs was associated with being less likely to label beliefs from several sexism scales and everyday sexist behaviors as sexist (Swim, Mallett, Russo-Devosa, & Stangor, in press) and with being less likely to label particular types of sexual encounters as sexual harassment (Swim & Cohen, 1997). These findings suggest that Modern Sexists have a relatively restricted definition of what constitutes sexism. In Study 1, we examined individuals' ability to detect the occurrence of subtle sexism in language and tested whether the inability to do so was particularly likely for those who endorse Modern Sexist beliefs.

People who are relatively unaware of subtle sexist behaviors, either because they do not notice them or do not consider them to be sexist, could be the ones who are most likely to engage in such behavior. That is, they may be less concerned about engaging in subtle sexist behaviors because they do not see the behaviors as problematic. Study 2 was designed to test whether Modern Sexism predicts the tendency to engage in a particular type of subtle sexist behavior—the use of sexist language.

STUDY 1

Study 1 tested the hypothesis that Modern Sexists are not sensitive to the presence of subtle sexism. Specifically, we predicted that those who endorse Modern Sexist beliefs would be less likely to detect sexist language than those who did not endorse Modern Sexist beliefs. Furthermore, we expected that this relation would be a function of personal definitions about whether certain types of language were sexist. In other words, we predicted that personal definitions of sexist language would mediate the relation between Modern Sexism and detection of sexist language.

We also tested an alternative explanation for the relation between Modern Sexism and the detec-

tion of sexist language. Prior research indicates that there is a general lack of awareness about what constitutes sexist language and that providing information about what constitutes sexist language can improve the ability to detect sexist language (McMinn, Troyer, Hannum, & Foster, 1991). Thus, we predicted that providing information about what constitutes sexist language would improve detection of sexist language. Furthermore, examining the effect of providing this information in combination with the effect of Modern Sexism on judgments could support an alternative explanation for the effect of Modern Sexism on detection of sexist language.

Specifically, lack of knowledge about what constitutes sexist language may be associated with endorsement of Modern Sexist beliefs such that Modern Sexists do not have much knowledge of what constitutes sexist language. If this were the case, then providing information to Modern Sexists should eliminate or reduce differences in low and high Modern Sexists' ability to detect sexist language. That is, Modern Sexists' inability to detect sexist language may be due to a lack of knowledge about what constitutes sexist language rather than to disagreements about whether such language is sexist (Kennedy, 1993; McMinn et al., 1991; McMinn, Williams, & McMinn, 1994; Stewart, Verstraate, & Fanslow, 1990). If this were the case, there should be an interaction between Modern Sexism and receiving information about what constitutes sexist language on detection of sexist language. When no information is provided about what constitutes sexist language, Modern Sexism should predict detection of sexist language. When information is provided, however, Modern Sexism should not predict the use of sexist language or should at least have a smaller effect on the detection of sexist language. If an effect of Modern Sexism on detection of sexist language is not a result of differences in knowledge about what constitutes sexist language, then we should observe only a main effect for endorsement of Modern Sexist beliefs on detection of sexist language, but no interaction.

Method

Participants

Three-hundred and twenty six female and 145 male participants completed measures for this study as part of a group test that was conducted

in their introductory psychology class. They were given course credit for volunteering to participate in the group test. The sample consisted of 88% White/European Americans, 2.6% Latino/a Americans, 1.8% Black/African Americans, 5.1% Asian Americans, and .3% Native American. Participants were ages 18–42 years with a mean age of 18.65 years.

Procedure

Participants were given a packet of questionnaires to be taken home and completed. These materials also included a number of measures unrelated to the present research. The material for the present study consisted of the Modern Sexism Scale, a measure of participants' personal definitions of what constituted sexist language, and a measure of their ability to detect sexist language. These materials were placed at different locations in the packet, with the restriction that people's responses to the Modern Sexism Scale and assessment of whether certain types of language were sexist came before our assessment of the use of sexist language. There was always a three-page questionnaire on an unrelated topic separating the two.

Materials

Modern Sexism Scale. The Modern Sexism Scale consists of eight items that assess doubts about the current prevalence of sexism (e.g., "Discrimination against women is no longer a problem in the United States"), unfavorable responses to people who complain about sexism and efforts to reduce sexism (e.g., "It is easy to understand the anger of women's groups in America"—reversed scored). The scale had adequate internal reliability in the present sample (Cronbach's $\alpha = .76$).

Personal Definitions of Sexist Language. After indicating their endorsement of sexist beliefs, participants were presented with three items that assessed the extent to which they personally defined three different types of language use as sexist: (1) use of terms such as "he" or "man" to represent both women and men; (2) word choices that assume certain occupations or roles are held by women and not men, or held by men and not women; and (3) use of nonparallel structure such as using "men and ladies" rather than "men and women" or using a husband's name to refer to both the husband and wife.

We averaged responses to these three items to form one scale; higher scores indicate a greater likelihood of defining these three types of language as sexist (Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$).

Detecting Sexist Language. Participants marked 30 sentences for grammatical, sexist, and nonsexist language errors. The sentences were based, in part, on McMinn et al.'s Gender-Specific Language Scale (McMinn et al., 1994). We included several of the sentences used in this scale and added new sentences that contained sexist language and nonsexist errors. Each of the 30 sentences had at least one grammatical error, and 17 sentences also included sexist language (e.g., "The post office advertises that their mailmen aren't never late, no matter how bad the weather"). There were a total of 50 incidents of nonsexist errors and 21 incidents of sexist language. Twelve of the sexist errors used generic terms, six used stereotypic language, and three used nonparallel structure.

The instructions informed participants that writing problems might include problems with grammar, spelling, punctuation, and discriminatory language. In addition, one-half of the participants were given specific examples of discriminatory language. They were told that discriminatory language included (1) use of words such as he, him, his, or man to represent both women and men; (2) word choices that assume or imply that certain occupations or roles are held by women and not men or held by men and not women; and (3) use of nonparallel structure such as using "men and ladies" rather than "men and women." They were also provided with the example of using a husband's name to refer to both the husband and wife.

Participants were asked to mark the sentences for errors as quickly as possible. We asked that they not spend more than 10 min on the entire task, purportedly because we wanted to know how many errors they could find in a short amount of time. Participants were asked to record the time they started and the time they completed the task. There were no effects of instructions about what constitutes sexist language or Modern Sexism on the length of time participants took to complete the task.

Two assistants scored the responses by recording the number of nonsexist grammatical errors and sexist words that participants circled. The assistants scored about one-half of the participants' forms, overlapping on 10 of the forms. There was good agreement on these 10 forms, $r(9) = .96$ for the nonsexist grammatical errors and $r(9) = .99$ for the

sexist words. We summed together the number of sexist words to obtain a measure of the number of sexist words detected (Kuder–Richardson = .91) and summed together the number of grammatical errors they circled to assess their ability to detect nonsexist writing errors (Kuder–Richardson = .85).

Results

We tested participants' ability to identify sexist language in a 3 (tertiary split on Modern Sexism) \times 2 (participant gender) \times 2 (instruction condition) ANCOVA with detection of nonsexist grammatical errors included as a covariate to control for general ability or motivation to detect grammatical errors. There was a main effect for Modern Sexism, $F(1, 488) = 3.24$, $p = .04$, on detecting sexist language, which confirmed our predictions. The more participants endorsed Modern Sexist beliefs, the less sexist language they identified. Specifically, those who were lowest on the Modern Sexism Scale detected an average of 7.93 ($SD = 6.93$) incidents of sexist language, those in the middle range detected an average of 7.01 ($SD = 6.37$) incidents of sexist language, and who were highest detected 6.69 ($SD = 6.77$) incidents of sexist language. Planned comparisons indicated that the lowest one-third and the highest one-third differed from each other, $p = .01$, but the middle one-third did not differ from either the lowest, $p = .16$, or highest one-third, $p = .27$. There was also a main effect for instruction condition, $F(1, 488) = 162.00$, $p < .001$. Those who were given instructions found an average of 11.15 ($SD = 6.15$) incidents of sexist language, and those who were not given instructions found an average of 3.80 ($SD = 5.20$) incidents of sexist language. There was no interaction between Modern Sexism and instructions.

The next set of analyses tested whether personal definitions of sexist language mediated the relation between Modern Sexism and the detection of sexist language. We used procedures outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986) and MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, and Sheets (2002) to test for mediation. We included participant gender, instruction condition, and detection of nonsexist grammatical errors in the regression analyses as covariates. Analyses revealed that Modern Sexism was a significant predictor of personal definitions of sexist language and, as noted above, a significant predictor of detection of sexist language (see Fig. 1).

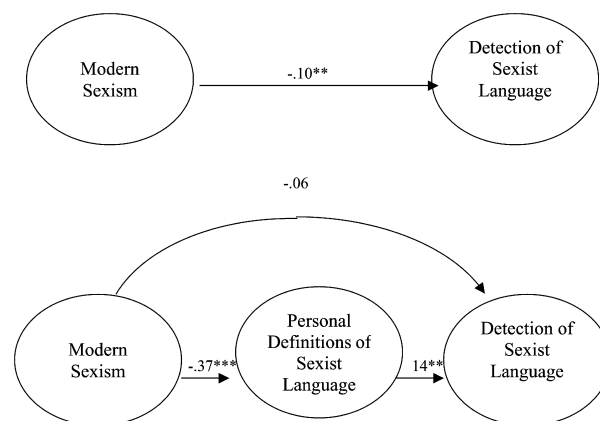


Fig. 1. Test of personal definitions of sexist language as a mediator between Modern Sexism and detection of sexist language (Study 1).

Further, when personal definitions and Modern Sexism were included as predictors in the regression equation, personal definitions predicted detection of sexist language, and Modern Sexism did not predict detection of sexist language. A Sobel test confirmed that the direct and indirect paths from Modern Sexism to detection of sexist language were significantly different from each other, $\chi^2 = 2.97$, $p < .003$, which confirmed the prediction that personal definitions of sexist language would mediate the relation between Modern Sexism and detection of sexist language.

Discussion

The results from Study 1 indicate that endorsement of Modern Sexist beliefs has implications for the likelihood that people will detect sexism in their everyday environments. People who endorse Modern Sexist beliefs have more restricted personal definitions of what constitutes sexist language. That is, those who endorse Modern Sexist beliefs are less likely to agree that types of language that have been identified as sexist in the research literature are sexist. These more restricted definitions reduce the likelihood that Modern Sexists will detect this form of subtle sexism.

Differences between high and low Modern Sexists on detection of sexist language are not likely to be due to differences in knowledge about what constitutes sexist language. When participants were provided with explicit instructions that illustrated sexist language, participants' ability to detect sexist language was greatly improved. However, levels

of Modern Sexism did not interact with instructions for detection of sexist language. Rather it is Modern Sexists' beliefs that such language is not sexist that explains their lesser ability to detect sexist language, compared to those who do not endorse Modern Sexist beliefs.

One might argue that high and low Modern Sexists were equally sensitive to sexist language but perhaps high Modern Sexists decided that they would not report its presence (Stangor et al., 2003). The findings, however, do not support this interpretation. The instruction manipulation equally increased both high and low Modern Sexists' ability to detect sexist language. If high Modern Sexists had detected, but consciously chose not to report the sexist language, the instruction manipulation should have had less impact on their judgments than on those of low Modern Sexists. This would have been demonstrated by an interaction between Modern Sexism and instruction, as high Modern Sexists would still presumably choose not to report the sexist language.

Therefore, the data seem to be most consistent with the argument that high Modern Sexists are less sensitive to the occurrence of sexist language, and this is a function of their tendency not to define the incidents as sexist. In contrast, low Modern Sexists are more likely to detect sexist language. The tendency for those low in Modern Sexism to perceive sexist language to be sexist could be because this language represents a negative stimulus for them and people tend to attend to negative information (Keogh, Ellery, Hunt, & Hannent, 2001; Segerstrom, 2001); this negativity may be the reason that they appear to pay more attention this form of sexism.

STUDY 2

The purpose of Study 2 was to test whether endorsement of Modern Sexist beliefs is associated with engaging in subtle sexist behavior in the form of using sexist language. In addition, we also assessed the extent to which participants explicitly used *nonsexist language*. Nonsexist language includes use of alternatives to potentially sexist constructions (e.g. "he or she" rather than just "he"). The use of sexist language represents subtle sexism because it is a behavior that is likely done more out of habit than intent (Lips, 1997). In contrast, the use of *nonsexist language* (e.g., "he or she") represents an explicit and unambiguous indication that one wants to avoid a sexist construction. A negative correlation between

use of sexist language and use of nonsexist language is likely because nonsexist language is used to replace sexist language. However, the two variables need not be perfectly correlated as people may use a mixture of both types of language, and it may therefore be useful to examine the effects for both types of language use. For instance, Cronin and Jreisat (1995) found that modeling the use of nonsexist language increased the use of nonsexist language but had no effect on the use of sexist language, relative to a group with no modeling and a group with modeling of the use of sexist language. Therefore we tested for differences in the use of both sexist and nonsexist language.

People may wish to use nonsexist language because they believe they should or because they wish to appear nonsexist (Devine, Plant, Amodio, Harmon-Jones, & Vance, 2002). In either case, we predicted that Modern Sexists would be more likely to use sexist language and less likely to use nonsexist language because they would be less sensitive to the potentially sexist nature of these words and less likely to notice when they used them. Modern Sexists would be more likely to use sexist language habitually, without thinking about its sexist nature, whereas those who are not Modern Sexists would avoid such language and purposefully use nonsexist language.

Alternatively, people may intentionally use sexist language and avoid nonsexist language in an attempt to maintain traditional gender roles. If this were the case, the use of sexist language and the lack of use of nonsexist language could be an example of blatant sexism and should be associated with a preference for traditional gender roles. Consistent with this interpretation, McMinn, Lindsay, Hannum, and Troyer (1990) found that traditional gender role beliefs predicted the use of sexist language. Therefore, we tested whether Modern Sexist beliefs predicted the use of sexist and nonsexist language in these analyses after we controlled for participants' tendency to endorse traditional gender role beliefs as measured by the Attitudes Toward Women Scale.

We also tested whether Modern Sexism predicted the use of sexist and nonsexist language after we controlled for Benevolent Sexist beliefs and Hostile Sexist beliefs (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Benevolent Sexist beliefs represent stereotypic beliefs about women and the prescription of restricted roles that are framed in such a way that they can appear to represent positive beliefs or evaluations of women. For instance, they include endorsement of

complementary gender differentiation, heterosexual intimacy, and paternalism. Hostile Sexist beliefs complement Benevolent Sexist beliefs in that they are positively correlated with each other and represent justifications for men's social power over women, men fearing the dependency that they might have on women, and perceptions of women as incompetent adults. Both Hostile and Benevolent Sexist beliefs, therefore, represent an alternative to the Attitudes Toward Women Scale for assessing preference for gender inequality.

Finally, we were interested in whether the relation between Modern Sexism and use of sexist and nonsexist language was a result of differences in definitions of what constituted sexist language. As Study 1 indicated, personal definitions of what constitutes sexist language can affect whether one notices the occurrence of such language. If people do not notice the occurrence of sexist language, they may habitually use it and not make efforts to replace it with nonsexist language.

We gave participants three moral dilemmas with gender-neutral language that McMinn et al. (1990) used to assess the use of sexist language. They were gender neutral in that the characters in the vignettes had no names or gender cues associated with them. Participants were told that we were interested in how they might respond to three moral dilemmas, such as the discovery that a long-time employee had been stealing from the company. When answering the question they indicated, for instance, how they thought a business executive should respond to this situation. We assessed the number of times people used *sexist language*, which we defined in the present context as the use of pronouns in a way that suggested they might be relying on the use of stereotypes about occupations, and nonsexist language, which we defined as using some version of "he or she" to refer to all the characters in the dilemmas.

We hypothesized that Modern Sexism scores would predict the use of sexist and nonsexist language. More specifically, we predicted that Modern Sexism would be positively related to the use of sexist language because of differences in the tendency to define and attend to language and not simply because of differences in explicit preference for gender inequality. As such, the relation between Modern Sexism and the use of sexist language should be present after we controlled for the endorsement of traditional gender roles and endorsement of Benevolent and Hostile Sexist beliefs. We predicted that Mod-

ern Sexism would be negatively related to the use of nonsexist language because low Modern Sexists should be most attentive to finding replacements for sexist language. We predicted that personal definitions about what constituted sexism (i.e., their agreement that different forms of sexist language were sexist) might account for the effect of Modern Sexism on use of sexist and nonsexist language. Therefore, we tested whether personal definitions of sexist language mediated the relation between endorsement of Modern Sexist beliefs and use of sexist and nonsexist language.

Method

Participants

One-hundred and forty seven female and 60 male participants completed measures for this study as part of a group test that was conducted in their introductory psychology class. They were given course credit for participating in the group test. The sample consisted of 92% White/European Americans, 1.3% Latino/a Americans, 1.9% Black/African Americans, and 4.4% Asian Americans. Participants were ages 18–22 with a mean age of 18.48 years.

Procedures

As in Study 1, participants took home a packet of questionnaires that consisted of several measures for a variety of studies being conducted by the psychology department. The materials were placed at different locations in the packet, with the restriction that people's responses to the sexism scales came before our assessment of the use of sexist language. As in Study 1, there was a three-page questionnaire on a different topic separating the two packets.

Materials

Sexism Scales and Personal Definitions of Sexist Language. The measures of interest in the packet of questionnaires for this study were endorsement of Modern Sexist beliefs (Cronbach's $\alpha = .74$), Spence, Helmreich, and Stapp's shortened version of the Attitudes Toward Women Scale (Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1973; Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$), Glick and Fiske's

Benevolent Sexism Scale (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Cronbach $\alpha = .77$) and Hostile Sexism Scale (Cronbach $\alpha = .76$), and the personal definition of sexist language scale used in Study 1 (Cronbach's $\alpha = .72$).

Sexist Language Usage Task. We asked each participant to write a short answer to indicate how he or she would respond to three moral dilemmas if she or he were the main character in the story. The first dilemma described a business executive who discovered that a long-time employee had been stealing from the company. The second dilemma depicted a nurse who discovered that a hospital patient had been given blood contaminated with HIV. The third presented the case of a professor who discovered that a student had cheated on an exam.

To create measures of the use of sexist and nonsexist language we first had two assistants record whether participants used sexist pronouns (i.e., used "she" to refer to the nurse and "he" to refer to all the other characters) and nonsexist pronouns (i.e., used some version of "he or she" to refer to all the characters) in response to each dilemma.⁴ The assistants overlapped on recording data from about 20% of participants ($n = 42$). Within these 42 cases, the reliability of the two assistants' scoring of the sexist and nonsexist pronoun usage were $r(41) = .99$ and $r(41) = 1.00$, respectively. Next, we calculated whether participants used sexist and nonsexist language at least once in response to each dilemma, and then summed these codes together. This resulted in a 0 to 3 scale where 0 equals never using sexist pronouns and 3 equals using *sexist* pronouns to using sexist language in all three dilemmas (Cronbach's $\alpha = .53$) and a second 0–3 scale where 0 equals never using *nonsexist* pronouns and 3 equals using nonsexist pronouns in all three dilemmas (Cronbach's $\alpha = .57$). We used the sum scores in ANOVAs in order to obtain mean scores for each measure that would indicate the extent to which participants used sexist and nonsexist language. However, because the reliabilities for the 0–3 scales that measured use of sexist and nonsexist language were not ideal, we used Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test our mediation models so that use of sexist language and non-

sexist variables could be measured as latent rather than manifest constructs.

Results

Table I presents the correlations among the variables used in the present study. As anticipated, use of sexist and nonsexist language were negatively correlated, $r(206) = -.31$, $p < .001$, but the correlation was relatively small and represents a medium effect size (Cohen, 1988), which suggests that there may be different reasons for using these two types of pronouns.

We used a 3 (tertiary split on Modern Sexism) \times 2 (participant gender) \times 2 (type of pronouns used: sexist, nonsexist) ANOVA with repeated measures on the second factor. The results revealed a main effect for type of pronouns used, $F(1, 185) = 16.20$, $p < .001$, and an interaction between Modern Sexism and types of pronouns used, $F(2, 201) = 5.42$, $p = .005$. When we included participants' scores on the Attitudes Toward Women Scale, the Benevolent Sexism Scale, and the Hostile Sexism Scale as covariates in the analyses this interaction remained significant, $F(2, 185) = 4.66$, $p = .01$. The degrees of freedom are reduced because of the covariates and because two men and 11 women did not complete all the sexism scales. Planned comparisons indicated that high Modern Sexists were more likely than low Modern Sexists to use sexist language; the lowest one-third and the highest one-third differed from each other, $p < .01$, but the middle one-third did not differ from either the lowest, $p = .28$, or highest one-third, $p = .08$, although the latter is marginally significant (see Fig. 2). Planned comparisons also indicated that high Modern Sexists were less likely to use nonsexist language than were low Modern Sexists; the lowest and highest one-third differed from each other, $p < .01$, and the middle one-third differed from the lowest, $p = .02$, but not the highest one-third, $p = .83$. Finally, the middle and upper one-third were more likely to use sexist than nonsexist language, whereas the lower one-third were about as likely to use sexist and nonsexist pronouns.

Next we used SEM to test whether personal definitions of sexist language mediated the relation between Modern Sexism and the use of sexist and nonsexist language. In these analyses, Modern Sexism and personal definitions of sexist language were manifest variables. The latent construct of use of nonsexist language was indicated by three variables that

⁴We also coded whether participants used "they" as a pronoun because it is sometimes used as a gender-neutral pronoun. However, including both use of "he or she" and use of "they" in our measure of use of nonsexist language reduced the reliability of the scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .41$). The unreliability may be because people are not consistently using these terms to be nonsexist. The use of these terms was excluded from our measures of sexist and nonsexist language.

Table I. Relationship Between Measures Used in Study 2

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Nonsexist language	1.00						
2. Sexist language	-.31***	1.00					
3. Participant gender	.09	.02	1.00				
4. MS	-.23***	.15*	-.21**	1.00			
5. Personal definition of sexist language	.19**	-.11	.23***	-.43***	1.00		
6. AWS	-.15*	-.001	-.38***	.39***	-.46***	1.00	
7. BS	.03	.005	-.15*	-.03	-.06	.17*	1.00
8. HS	-.17*	.05	-.34***	.34***	-.41***	.47***	.20**

N = 192 with listwise deletion. Higher numbers equal more use of sexist and nonsexist language, more endorsement of Modern Sexist beliefs (MS), less agreement that language defined as sexist in the literature is sexist, more endorsement of traditional gender roles (AWS), more endorsement of Benevolent Sexist beliefs (BS), and more endorsement of Hostile Sexist beliefs (HS). For sex 0 = female and 1 = male.

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. $p \leq .001$.

represented whether participants used nonsexist language at least once in response to each of the three dilemmas. Similarly, the latent construct of the use of sexist language was indicated by three variables that represented whether participants used sexist language at least once in response to each of the three dilemmas. We controlled for the impact of participant gender in the analyses by having a path from participant gender to Modern Sexism, personal definitions of sexist language, and the use of sexist and nonsexist language. For simplicity, we did not include them in the Fig. 3.⁵

Model fit was assessed via inspection of various fit indices, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and the confidence intervals around the RMSEA. The indices range from 0 to 1, and those with values above .95 represent a good fitting model (Hu & Bentler, 1999). RMSEA values below .10 represent adequate fit. Large confidence intervals around the RMSEA indicate that this value is imprecise, which makes inferences about the model's fit to the population difficult, whereas a narrow confidence interval around the RMSEA indicates a good deal of precision in determining the model's fit in the population (MacCallum, Browne, & Sugawara, 1996). The fit indices indicated good fit for all of the models. The fit indices were identical across models with the Normed Fit Index, the Tucker–Lewis Index, and the Comparative Fit Index; all equalled 1.00 and the RMSEA was .00, with a lower bound of .00 and an upper

⁵As shown in Table I, participant gender was associated with Modern Sexist beliefs and personal definitions of sexist language such that men were more likely to endorse Modern Sexist beliefs and less likely to agree that sexist language was sexist. Participant gender was not associated with use of sexist and nonsexist language.

bound of .04. Chi-squares are reported in the figure captions.

The results revealed that personal definitions of sexist language mediated the relationship between Modern Sexism and use of nonsexist language but not between Modern Sexism and use of sexist language. The direct path from Modern Sexism was significant for both sexist and nonsexist language. In the model that included personal definitions of sexist language, Modern Sexism predicted personal definitions of sexist language, and personal definition of sexist language predicted use of nonsexist language (albeit marginally significant). Definitions of sexist language did not predict use of sexist language. Moreover, the Sobel test, which we used to test the indirect path

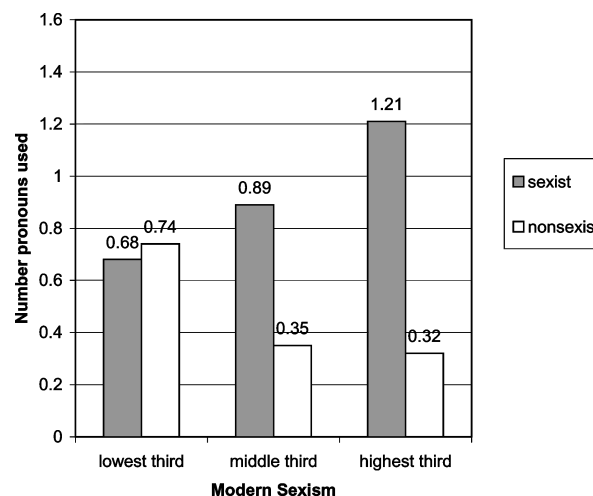


Fig. 2. Relation between Modern Sexism and number of sexist and nonsexist pronouns used (Study 2).

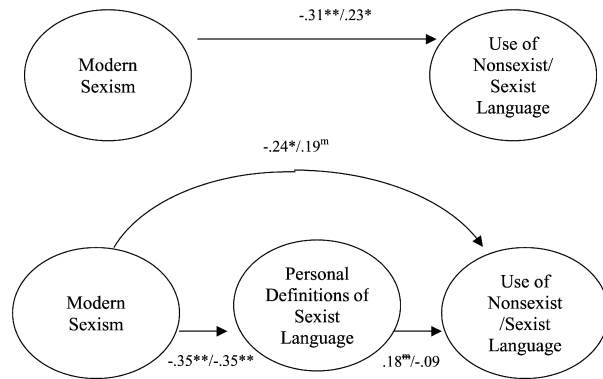


Fig. 3. Testing personal definitions of sexist language as a mediator between Modern Sexism and use of nonsexist language (first number) and sexist language (second number; Study 2 nonsexist language: direct path, chi-square (4) = 4.12, $p = .38$, indirect path, chi-square (6) = 5.23, $p = .5$; Sexist language: direct path, chi-square (4) = 3.97, $p = .41$; indirect path, chi-square (6) = 5.51, $p = .48$).

from Modern Sexism to use of nonsexist language was significant, $\chi^2 = 1.97$, $p = .05$, but it was not significant for the indirect path from Modern Sexism to the use of sexist language, $\chi^2 = .50$, $p = .62$.

Discussion

The results indicated that Modern Sexism predicted engaging in subtle sexist behavior in the form of using sexist language and failing to use nonsexist language. The use of sexist and nonsexist language was independent of traditional gender role beliefs. Thus, the effect of Modern Sexism on use of sexist and nonsexist language was not a result of its association with traditional gender roles, Benevolent Sexism, or Hostile Sexism, and, therefore, not a result of preferences for traditional gender roles.

It is possible that the design of the study did not give high Modern Sexists sufficient external motivation to hide their sexist beliefs, and, in a different context (e.g., one where they might need to make their beliefs public to a feminist) they might increase their use of nonsexist language. However, it seems likely that a situational cue that increased the use of nonsexist pronouns in high Modern Sexists would do the same for low Modern Sexists, given the lack of a ceiling effect on high Modern Sexists' use of nonsexist language and that low Modern Sexists used sexist language that could be replaced by nonsexist pronouns. Thus, an increase in use of nonsexist language due to circumstances that highlighted the social

desirability of equality might not be indicative of a desire to hide one's sexism but indicative of a more general tendency to heighten one's attention to such behavior.

The mediation analyses indicated that personal definitions of sexist language explained the use of nonsexist language but not the use of sexist language. This is consistent with our arguments that the use of nonsexist language is more purposeful than the use of sexist language and the use of sexist language is habitual. As in Study 1, people who scored low on Modern Sexism were more likely than those who scored high on the measure to define sexist language as sexist, as indicated by their agreement that various types of language identified in the literature as sexist were indeed sexist. This may lead those who scored low on Modern Sexism to be more attentive to sexist language and to be careful about using it.

However, the lack of mediation of personal definitions of sexist language on the use of sexist language suggests that there remains a habitual component to the use of sexist language that is unrelated to personal definitions about sexist language. The habitual component may instead be related to unconscious or automatic processing. Explicit measures of sexism do not tend to be related to implicit measures of gender stereotypes or to evaluations of women and men (e.g., Rudman & Kilianski, 2000). This disjuncture between implicit and explicit associations could explain why even those low in Modern Sexism used a fair number of sexist words in their responses to the dilemmas. However, the lesser overall use of sexist language by low Modern Sexists may have been indirectly due to their conscious replacement of sexist words with nonsexist words. In this way, low Modern Sexists could reduce the total number of sexist words that they used yet still end up including some sexist language in their writing. This interpretation is consistent with findings from Cronin and Jreisat (1995) where modeling of nonsexist language use increased the use of nonsexist language but had no effect on the use of sexist language. Thus, the finding in the present study may have been a result of participants who were low in Modern Sexism purposefully altering their use of nonsexist language but still habitually using sexist language.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The results of these studies illustrate the association between Modern Sexism and subtle sexist

behavior. Greater endorsement of Modern Sexist beliefs was associated with less detection of subtle sexism, an effect that was mediated by personal definitions of sexist language. The process of detecting sexism and endorsing Modern Sexist beliefs is likely to be self-reinforcing. Those who endorse Modern Sexist beliefs are less sensitive to particular examples of sexism, and this decreased sensitivity would then result in fewer perceptions of sexism, which is a central component of Modern Sexist beliefs.

Endorsement of Modern Sexist beliefs also had implications for engaging in subtle sexist behavior. Endorsement of Modern Sexist beliefs was associated with more use of sexist language and less use of nonsexist language, which indicates that Modern Sexists were more likely to engage in everyday sexist behaviors in the form of the use of sexist language than were those who did not endorse Modern Sexist beliefs. The effect for nonsexist language was mediated by personal definitions of sexist language, which suggests that having more inclusive definitions of what is sexist motivates people to use nonsexist language purposefully and potentially alter their behavior in other ways to reduce sexist behavior.

The results from Study 1 suggest that Modern Sexists are unlikely to notice when they use sexist language. However, the data from both studies suggest that individuals who are low in Modern Sexism can also fail to detect, and may still use, sexist language. First, across instructional conditions in Study 1, those low in Modern Sexism only detected on average of 37% of the sexist language in the sentences provided to them. When their experience was prototypical of everyday behavior (i.e., they were not given instructions about what to look for), those low in Modern Sexism detected only 22% of the uses of sexist language. Even with the instructions, they detected only 58% of the incidents. Second, Study 2 illustrates that those low in Modern Sexism were equally like to use sexist and nonsexist language. Third, the results from Study 2 suggest that, although those low in Modern Sexism may purposefully replace sexist language with nonsexist language, they may still have automatic associations that lead them to use sexist language. That is, the lack of mediation effects for use of sexist language suggest that something else besides personal definitions of sexist language explains the relationship between Modern Sexism and the use of sexist language. High and low Modern Sexists may be equally likely to have sexist language automatically activated, but low Modern Sexists may be more likely to self-correct when they

notice it (cf., Kawakami, Dovidio, Moll, Hermsen, & Russin, 2000).

A limitation of the present studies is that we only examined the detection and use of sexist language; therefore the findings may not generalize to other types of subtle sexist behaviors. Other types of subtle sexist behavior could include paternalistic behaviors, sexually objectifying comments, or ambiguous behaviors that could be based upon a target person's gender. However, given that Modern Sexism is associated with perceptions of the extent to which a wide range of beliefs and behaviors are sexist (Swim et al., in press), the tendency for Modern Sexist beliefs to predict the detection and use of sexist language may generalize to other everyday sexist behaviors as well. Moreover, the effect of Modern Sexism on the detection and use of sexist language illustrates that it is important for researchers to consider the role of modern prejudice on a wide range of behaviors. Most studies of attributions about discrimination (e.g., Crocker, Voelkl, Testa, & Major, 1991) or the tendency to engage in discriminatory behavior (cf. Swim & Campbell, 2001) tend to use negative evaluations of women, relative to men, as the prototypical sexist behavior. Greater insights into sexist behavior may be gained by broadening the scope of behaviors examined (e.g., Swim, Hyers, Cohen, & Ferguson, 2001). Moreover, an emphasis on subtle sexism highlights that the sexist behaviors researchers examine need not be limited to those where individuals intended to be sexist (Swim, Scott, Sechrist, Campbell, & Stangor, 2003).

The present results also have implications for the characterization of Modern Sexism. Contrary to characterizations of modern prejudice as a tendency to hide negative attitudes (e.g., Sears, 1988; Tougas et al., 1995), the results from the present studies suggest that differences in endorsement of Modern Sexist beliefs may be a result of differences in sensitivity to sexism. Central components of Modern Sexism, including expressions of disbelief about the extent to which sexism is a problem and resentment about attempts to address sexism, may not exclusively represent attempts to hide sexist preferences and beliefs. Although Modern Sexists may still purposefully hide sexist beliefs, the results of Study 1 show that they also differentially detect sexist behaviors, and the results of Study 2 suggest that everyday sexist behaviors are at least partially driven by habit. That is, there may be circumstances where Modern Sexists knowingly hide sexist beliefs, but the present

studies indicate that Modern Sexism should not be limited to this conceptualization as an alternative to blatant sexism. The same may be true for Modern Racism, given the conceptual similarities between Modern Racism and Modern Sexism (Swim et al., 1995). Those who are low in Modern Racism may be more likely to define different types of everyday racist behaviors as racist (Swim et al., 2003) and may, therefore, be more likely to monitor and avoid such behavior.

This analysis has implications for attempts to address the occurrence of subtle sexism. Rather than assuming that certain people are hiding negative beliefs, we might wish to heighten people's sensitivity to sexism by helping them to understand why certain beliefs and behaviors could be considered sexist, increase their attention to behaviors that could be considered sexist, and increase their motivation not to engage in such behaviors. The routine nature of some forms of everyday sexist behavior could make it difficult for individuals to alter their actions, unless they make the effort to monitor and proactively counteract them (Blair, 2001). Although monitoring could have a rebound effect, such that attempts to monitor one's behavior may result in increases rather than decreases in sexist behavior (Bodenhausen & Macrae, 1996), practice in the suppression of sexism should change behaviors over time (Monteith, 1993; Monteith & Voils, 2001).

In sum, the results of the present studies illustrate that individual differences in endorsement of Modern Sexist beliefs are associated with detecting and engaging in subtle sexist behavior. The findings indicate that detecting sexist behavior and engaging in nonsexist behavior are a function of one's personal agreement about whether such behavior should be defined as sexist. Thus, the more one is critical of normative sexist behavior, the more one notices it and attempts to use alternative nonsexist behavior. However, the normative and likely habitual nature of using sexist language may account for even low Modern Sexists' tendency not to notice and to engage in sexist behavior, albeit to a lower extent than those high in Modern Sexism.

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