Review of Grawitch et al. (2025)

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The authors note that human decision making is influenced by expectations/priors which are then tested against reality, which subsequent updating. The expectations themselves come from cues in the environment and previous experiences. For example, a person may have noticed that certain bawdy jokes are funnier to men than to women and might therefore expect women not to laugh at them.

When the cues that elicit expectations are vague or ambiguous, they provoke further cognition. Thus ambiguous situations (those with vague cues) are different from non-ambiguous ones because they often compel more speculation and less confidence. According to the authors, personal factors such as "biases" might play a larger role in attributions in such ambiguous situations. This seems quite plausible, of course, though it's important to insist that bias here is not necessarily pejorative. Humans may have a bias against entering a dark and unknown forest and most would consider such a bias healthy.

Some relevant examples for sex-perception from the paper. Previous researchers have found that women thought that comments from their boyfriends were less sexist than the same comments "attributed to managers and strangers." Male bankers interacting with females were viewed as the most sexist in another line of research. Thus, perceptions of sexism depend upon more than the substance of the interaction (the text, as it were). They depend on the sex and relational status of the participants of the interaction.

When assessing sexism in an ambiguous interaction, the beliefs of the assessor matter, e.g., how much sexism he or she thinks is in the world. Previous research by Grawitch et al. examined scores on a "neosexism" scale and related them to attirbutions of sexism. They found that those who scored lower on neosexism were more likely to perceive "a message sender's behavior as sexist when the message sender was male and the receiver was female."

I'd note here that "neosexism" is a misnamed/polemical construct and claiming that neosexism is sexism or even a bias is not founded, i.e., the face validity of the scale is low. Still, I don't doubt that it predicts various assessments of ambiguous interactions. Thus, it has some informational

value—though it should be renamed if used in the future. I understand this is beyond the control of the authors; just something worth contemplating. (The example item the authors provide is a telling example: "In order not to appear sexist, many men are inclined to overcompensate for women." I have no idea which answer (1) or (7) is supposed to be sexist nor why.)

The authors tested a variety of hypotheses about attributions of sexism in hypothetical interactions in a banking or a daycare situation, finding higher sexism attributions in a banking scenario with a male sender a female receiver. What is more, the authors found that "When it comes to assumptions that lead to inferences about sexist behavior, the sex of interactants appears to play a prominent role in some contexts, but that role is not context invariant based on the results reported here."

These results seem plausible to me and I commend their judicious prose. But this raises my chief concern with this paper: It is very difficult to follow because it is all very abstract and perhaps poorly organized. There are hundreds of thousands of articles to read today, and I doubt anybody will read this from top-to-bottom without a significant restructuring. The theoretical claims that guide the authors is, as far as I can tell, unassailable. And interpersonal judgements can be intriguing and are undoubtedly important, as are attributions of bias and sexism (or racism or other isms). But the here is why you should read this and care message is not in this paper. And it should be. I should know why this matters.

My best guess, for what it's worth, is that neosexism scores are related to political beliefs (i.e., progressives are more like to score lower on neosexism) and those are related to beliefs about the pervasiveness of sexism. Those who think sexism is widespread, as the authors note, are more likely to see an ambiguous interaction as sexist. That would be worth discussing. (I know the authors measured prior beliefs about sexism, but I do not see anything in the paper about the relation of these to political beliefs.)

So, to repeat, the theory here is sound. Some of the scales are suspect. And the organization is weak. Try to make the reader care. Set up the theory and its relation to the hypotheses in the paper immediately. Perhaps add some evolutionary analysis. That is always useful because it compels one to think about the nature of human cognitive assessments. Also, think about and measure political ideology, which would be useful to know.