*Human Communication Research*, 2025, **00**, 1–20
https://doi.org/10.1093/hcr/hqaf009
**Original Research**



# Implications of gender metastereotypes for addressing sexist behavior

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## Abstract

Women often experience competence questioning communication (CQC), in which their contributions are overlooked or credit is misdirected to a male colleague. We examine whether gender metastereotypes—the stereotypes that women believe men hold of women, and the stereotypes men believe women hold of men—predict responses to sexism in the workplace. Specifically, through vignette-based experiments, we examine whether women's and men's willingness to directly confront male perpetrators of CQC, and men's willingness to amplify the voice of female colleagues is affected by the activation of gender metastereotypes. For both women and men, positive metastereotypes directly predicted willingness to confront sexism, but, as theorized, only when individuals believed that the stereotypes held of their ingroup were held of them *personally*. We also found significant indirect effects of metastereotype activation on willingness to address sexism via felt responsibility for addressing sexism (for women) and concern for the group image (for men).

**Keywords:** amplifying voice; intergroup; metaperception; prejudice; sexism

**Public Significance**

Findings suggest that women's willingness to confront sexism is affected by the stereotypes they believe men hold of women, and that men's willingness to address workplace sexism is affected by the stereotypes they believe women hold of men. Whereas these beliefs affected women's responses to sexism by making them feel more personally responsible for doing so, they affected men's responses by making them more concerned with how men were viewed by women.

Researchers have found that women tend to be stereotyped as "nice but incompetent" (Fiske, 1998, p. 377). This is not a benign stereotype, for it may lead others to underestimate the significance of women's contributions. When Heilman and Haynes (2005), for instance, asked study participants to read an account of a mixed-gender dyad's work and evaluate the contributions made by the man and the woman, they found that female members of the dyad were "devalued" and judged to be less competent and less influential than their male colleagues. From their findings, Heilman and Haynes argued that perceptual distortions result in responsibility for successes being attributed to men rather than women, with the consequence that women are deprived of the credit they deserve.

Although stereotypes are mental representations, they can manifest through communication. Briggs et al. (2023) coined the term *competence questioning communication* (CQC) to capture a "gender-linked" (p. 1) form of behavior in which a person's communication explicitly or implicitly conveys that they doubt, question, or challenge another individual's—usually, a woman's—competence (p. 2). People engaging in CQC may be unaware that they are doing so, but lack of awareness and intentionality do not preclude harmfulness, as is the case with many forms of contemporary sexism (Rowe, 1990; Swim & Cohen, 1997). We focus in this article on two related variants of CQC—*bropriation* and *hepeating*—that implicitly convey doubt regarding the value of women's contributions.

The word *bropriation* derives from the combination of *bro* and *appropriation* (Grau, 2023) and is defined as men (*bros*) appropriating women's ideas (Reeves, 2015). Likewise, *hepeating* occurs when a woman "suggests an idea and it's ignored, but then a guy says the same thing and everyone loves it" (Gugliucci, 2017). The following episode, recounted by a female participant in Briggs et al.'s (2023) study exemplifies bropriation and hepeating, and demonstrates the sexism inherent to such behaviors.

> I made a suggestion … My male supervisor told me I probably have good ideas but this wasn't the time to voice them. I tried again to tell him about my ideas and he gave me the same response. Then I told another male coworker about my ideas and he told the supervisor and the male supervisor listened to him.

The effect of CQC can be to obscure women's workplace contributions (Grau, 2023), deny them "recognition, power,

**Received:** 12 July 2024. **Revised:** 13 March 2025. **Accepted:** 17 March 2025

and voice," (Buchanan, 2019, p. 2), and deter them from contributing to discussions (Briggs et al., 2023; Dorrance-Hall & Gettings, 2020). This form of communicative mistreatment by members of a more dominant social group (Orbe, 1998) reflects what Meares et al. (2004) characterize as "repeated silencing over time" (p. 4). As such, it is a means by which the voices of women—a group that, in Orbe's language, are "persons traditionally marginalized in society" (p. 234)—come to be muted and by which their marginalization is reinforced (Dorrance-Hall & Gettings, 2020). Moreover, when men (deliberately or not) silence women through CQC, they reinforce existing power structures and their position of privilege atop organizational and societal hierarchies (Meares et al., 2004; Orbe & Spellers, 2005).

The studies reported here examine how the activation of *metastereotypes* has the potential to affect both marginalized and more powerful group members' willingness to disrupt CQC. More specifically, we use experimental methods to examine how metastereotyping explains women's (Study 1) and men's (Study 2) willingness to address instances of hepeating or bropriation (thereby "unmuting" women's voices). *Metastereotypes* are the beliefs a person holds "regarding the stereotype that outgroup members hold about his or her own group" (Vorauer et al., 1998, p. 917); when metastereotypes are personalized, a person believes not only that outgroup members hold those stereotypes about their ingroup *in general*, but that outgroup members believe those stereotypes are true of them *specifically*, because they are a member of that group.

Study 1 and Study 2 both explore whether effects of metastereotyping are direct or indirect. In Study 1, we explore whether there are indirect effects of activating metastereotypes on addressing sexism via women's sense of felt responsibility to intervene. In Study 2—which positions men, as members of the non-marginalized majority group as possible *allies*—we examine whether there are indirect effects via (a) men's belief that women hold them responsible for intervening, and (b) men's concern for their group's image.

## Study 1: metastereotyping and women's response to bropriation and hepeating

To confront sexism entails identifying a behavior as sexist (Swim & Hyers, 1999) and communicating disapproval of it (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2014; Chaney and Sanchez, 2021). This confrontation can be considered a means by which women use communication to enact resilience and resist the status quo (Gettings & Dorrance-Hall, 2024; Hintz et al., 2023; Wolfe et al., 2024). Despite being an oft-studied response to sexism—and one that can yield important benefits (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2014; Czopp & Ashburn-Nardo, 2012)—confrontation is *un*commonly employed (Swim & Hyers, 1999). In one diary-based study, for instance, researchers found that following an experience of a sexist incident, women said nothing in almost two-thirds of cases; women respond as fully as they wanted to in only about 15% of instances (Swim et al., 2010). Similarly, a recent investigation by Dorrance-Hall and Gettings (2020) found that the most common response by women who experienced marginalizing communication at work was to take no action.

A good deal of theoretical and empirical scholarship has sought to articulate why people intervene when encountering prejudice and account for why they do not. At a theoretical level, for instance, the *Confronting Prejudiced Responses* (CPR) model (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2008) proposes that for an individual to confront discriminatory or prejudiced behavior and communication, they must (1) recognize that episode as *being* discriminatory, (2) perceive it to be egregious or urgent enough to merit confrontation, (3) decide that they have a responsibility to confront the perpetrator, and (4) determine *how* to confront the perpetrator, and (5) resolve to confront the perpetrator.

Numerous factors may render women reluctant to confront sexism. These include being uncertain as to whether a particular incident was sufficiently discriminatory as to warrant a response (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2008), suspecting that confronting prejudice will result in negative judgment from others (Dodd et al., 2001), recognizing that the seriousness of sexism is often downplayed and efforts to confront it trivialized (Gulker et al., 2013), doubting that confrontation would elicit change (Rattan & Dweck, 2010), and fearing that their lack of power relative to a perpetrator renders them vulnerable to retaliation (Ayres et al., 2009; Dorrance-Hall & Gettings, 2020; Kaiser & Miller, 2004). Simply put, women may decide that the potential benefits of confrontation are too low and the risks too high (Good et al., 2012). Conversely, factors that appear to incline women towards confronting sexism include identifying as a feminist (Ayres et al., 2009), being committed to fighting sexism (Swim & Hyers, 1999), having their gender identity rendered salient (Wang & Dovidio, 2017), and believing sexism to be pervasive (Khan et al., 2016).

According to the CPR model, however, the most critical factor that determines whether a woman will confront sexism is whether she feels a sense of personal responsibility for doing so (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2014). Orbe's (1994) work on co-cultural communication suggests that members of groups who experience marginalization recognize the importance of communicating with other members of the muted group and taking responsibility to help one another address their lack of voice, as well as to make people who belong to dominant social groups more conscious of the daily realities of living as a member of a co-cultural group. As a component of the overall model we propose testing, we therefore offer the following hypothesis (see Figure 1 for a visual depiction of Study 1's hypotheses):

> H1: The degree to which women feel personally responsible for confronting sexism will be positively associated with the direct confrontation of CQC.

### Personal responsibility and metastereotypes

Women's gender-based metastereotypes (the stereotypes they believe men hold about women) may help account for the degree to which women feel duty-bound to confront sexism such as instances of bropriation and hepeating. People are often aware of stereotypes that others hold of them; for example, women recognize that they are stereotyped as being more emotional than men, or as less capable in mathematics (Spencer et al., 1999). And, because individuals have intersecting and multifaceted identities, they may also have correspondingly multifaceted metastereotypes. For a Black lesbian, for instance, metastereotypes concerning her gender identity may be bound up with metastereotypes concerning her

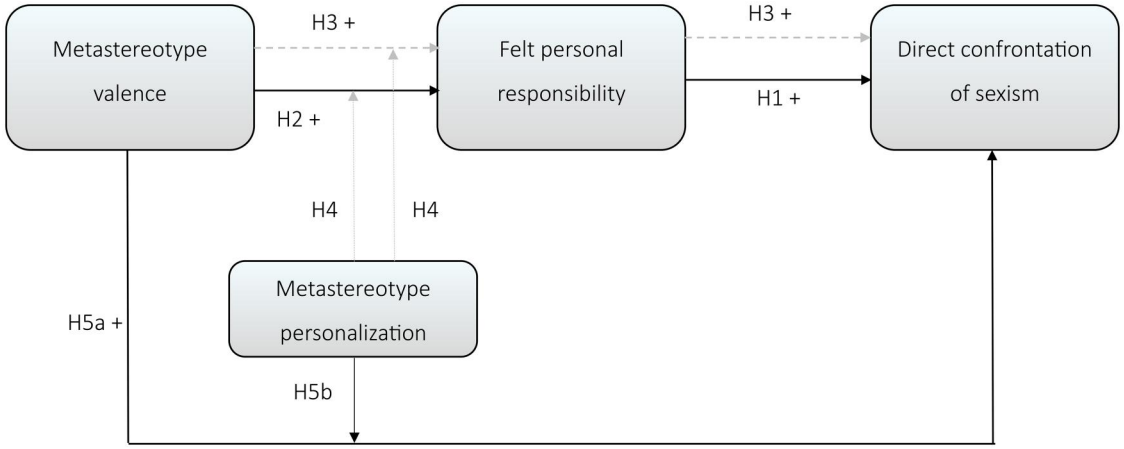


**Figure 1.** Conceptual model of Study 1 hypotheses.

*Note.* The light dashed lines for H3 denote the component paths of an indirect effect; the light dotted line for H4 denotes the expected moderation of the relationship between metastereotype valence and felt personal responsibility and the associated indirect effect on direct confrontation (i.e., moderated mediation).

ethnicity and sexual orientation (e.g., she may expect to be seen and stereotyped as the "angry black woman"; Jones, 2023). Nonetheless, as Turner and Reynolds (2012) point out, "which group becomes salient for people … changes as a function of interactions between individuals and groups" (p. 404), as well as contextual features of those interactions. Thus, while acknowledging the importance of intersectional perspectives, our focus on CQC (which is specifically construed as a form of *gendered* communication; Briggs et al., 2023) means that the present studies address only gender metastereotypes.

Although there is a sense in which metastereotypes likely reflect quite stable underlying beliefs, they do not always influence cognition or behavior. As with other matters related to social identity (Turner et al., 1987), it is when metastereotypes are activated—and corresponding social identities are made salient—that they are most likely to affect behavior. Previous studies suggest that metastereotypes may be activated when a person faces the prospect of being evaluated by members of another group (Vorauer et al., 1998) or believes their ingroup lacks power relative to an outgroup (Lammers et al., 2008).

Research on metastereotypes has not unequivocally established the mechanisms behind their effects. One possible explanation is that they act through an extension of processes outlined in self-categorization theory (SCT; Turner et al., 1987). In particular, people may implicitly expect others will act in ways consistent with SCT, and these expectations of projected categorization processes may affect the targets of metastereotypes.

According to SCT, people have mental prototypes of different social groups. When they categorize someone as a member of a social group, they mentally activate the corresponding group prototype, and then communicate accordingly (i.e., in ways consistent with the group stereotypes they hold). We propose that when people think that someone else has categorized *them* as a member of a social group, they are likely to "project" these same SCT mental processes onto that person; this is because people implicitly recognize that others engage in similar mental processing to themselves (O'Grady et al., 2015). Consequently, people expect outgroup members to hold particular stereotypes of them, with the nature of these stereotypes likely being context-specific given that different contextual situations activate different dimensions of a group prototype (e.g., Haslam et al., 1992; Palomares, 2008). Following this logic, people who believe they have been categorized are likely to expect that they will be treated in a way consistent with the group-based stereotypes they believe their interlocutor holds of them. Once activated, these expectations and corresponding mental models related to group stereotypes should then affect how people interpret and respond to others' communication; this is the basis for effects of metastereotypes writ large.

Within this framework, effects of metastereotypes should depend not only on people believing that outgroup members have categorized them as a member of a given social group, but also that outgroup members are applying those group-level stereotypes *to them personally* as members of that group. Some empirical work already conducted on metastereotyping processes is consistent with this argument, showing that the effects of metastereotype are contingent on the degree to which metastereotypes are personalized (e.g., Fowler & Gasiorek, 2020, 2021; Vorauer et al., 1998).

In our study, a woman would have highly personalized metastereotypes if she not only believes men hold certain stereotypes about women *generally*, but expects that men believe those stereotypes to be true of *her specifically*, because she is a woman. We propose that the activation of positive metastereotypes (when those metastereotypes are personalized) is likely to not only make women feel more responsible for addressing sexism, but to result in their actually doing so. Should a woman have activated positive metastereotypes that she believes are applied to her *personally*, she may believe that she is in a strong position to confront sexism and that she therefore has a responsibility to do so: Her belief that men hold women in high regard—and that *as* a woman, they hold *her* in high regard—may suggest to her that it is relatively "safe" for her to call out the sexist incident, which may, to some extent, mitigate the fear of retaliation that often deters women from confronting sexism. In contrast, activating a negative metastereotype that is highly personalized might prompt the opposite reaction where she perceives it as

unsafe for women in general—and *particularly* for her—to confront sexism and that she therefore should not be held responsible for doing so. The specific hypotheses that constitute the model to be tested are:

> H2: Metastereotype valence predicts the degree to which women feel personally responsible for addressing sexism such that women who have positive metastereotypes activated will feel a greater sense of personal responsibility for addressing sexism than women who have negative metastereotypes activated.
> H3: Activating positive (vs. negative) metastereotypes will indirectly increase willingness to confront CQC via women's feelings of personal responsibility for addressing sexism.
> H4: The effect of metastereotype valence on felt personal responsibility and associated indirect effect on intention to confront sexism is moderated by metastereotype personalization.

### (Personalized) metastereotypes and the direct confrontation of sexism

As well as affecting women's intention to confront sexism indirectly (by influencing feelings of responsibility), metastereotypes may also affect their intent to confront sexism directly. A handful of studies offer insight into how this may occur.

Wakefield et al. (2012a) found that activating a dependency metastereotype in women rendered them less likely to seek help with a task (vs. women in a control condition), reasoning that this was because they did not want to lend credence to this negative metastereotype. In the context of our investigation, this finding suggests that if women believe (or are, in a given situation, given reason to believe that) they are stereotyped negatively by men—for instance, as being overly emotional or sensitive—they may shy away from confronting sexism so as not to provide "evidence" of their tendency to be oversensitive. Good et al. (2019) point out, for example, that women recognize that they are stereotyped as being unable to take a joke or as being overly sensitive, and "not wanting to … fulfill that stereotype, may choose to ignore sexist statements … rather than confronting" (p. 54). Thus, the activation of negative metastereotypes might *deter* rather than facilitate the confrontation of sexism.

In their theorizing on the impact of metastereotypes, Voyles et al. (2014) note that the entire phenomenon of *stereotype threat* is predicated on the notion that the activation of a negative metastereotype elicits concern that one will fulfill that stereotype. While acknowledging that positive metastereotypes can "produce threat if a person feels pressure to live up to expectations he or she may not believe are achievable" (p. 420), Voyles et al. (2014) also emphasize that "positive outcomes can result from feeling empowered" (p. 420) by positive metastereotypes; moreover Finkelstein et al. (2015) argue that positive metastereotypes—particularly when the holder believes them to be accurate reflections of themselves—may generate "boost" emotions such as "pride … increased confidence that one is being viewed in a positive light … and expectations of positive reactions from others" (p. 35). Following this logic, we generally expect that when positive metastereotypes are activated among women, they would find this empowering and be more apt to stand up to CQC when they witness it.

The notion that activating positive metastereotypes might pave the way for the confrontation of sexism also coheres with Owuamalam and Zagefka's (2011) findings that, relative to women who called to mind negative gender-based metastereotypes, women who called to mind positive metastereotypes felt more identified with the ingroup ("women"). Such ingroup identification is important because it has been found to be an "antecedent of prejudice confrontation" (Wang & Dovidio, 2017, p. 65). As such, women for whom a positive metastereotype is activated may feel more identified with the category "woman," and thus be more inclined to confront instances of hepeating and bropriation (relative to women for whom a negative metastereotype is activated). We therefore predict that:

> H5: (a) The activation of positive metastereotypes should increase women's intent to confront sexism relative to the activation of negative metastereotypes. Moreover, (b) this effect will be stronger when metastereotypes are highly personalized.

## Method

We conducted pilot tests to (1) identify positive and negative metastereotypes held by women that could be used to construct a metastereotype manipulation, (2) test the efficacy of this manipulation, and (3) confirm that a vignette designed to depict CQC as sexist behavior was perceived as doing so. Details of these manipulations and information relating to pilot tests are available in Supplementary Appendix A; what follows pertains specifically to Study 1.

### Participants and procedures

Participants for Study 1 were recruited from MTurk via *CloudResearch*. Screening tools were used to limit the availability of the pilot and main studies to people[1] in the United States with at least a 99% approval rating on MTurk. *CloudResearch's* 'block low quality' participants feature was used to enhance data quality by excluding MTurk workers previously identified as providing poor or fraudulent data. The final sample comprised $N = 246$ women, $M_{age} = 42.01$ years ($SD = 12.90$). They were mostly White (79%), but also identified as Black or African American (10%), Asian or Asian-American (10%), Latino/Hispanic (5%), American Indian or Alaska Native (1%), Middle-Eastern (1%), and Other (0.4%). Details of participants' employment status and educational background appear in Supplementary Appendix C.

#### Metastereotype manipulation

Participants were randomly assigned to a positive or negative metastereotype condition.[2] Following other researchers (e.g., Wakefield et al., 2014), participants read five condition-specific messages from people who had supposedly been asked to write down the stereotypical ideas they held about women. Each message was handwritten in a different script to reinforce the impression that each message had been written by different people and accompanied by typed copy (see Supplementary Appendix A). After reading the series of messages, participants responded to two items: *Men typically see women positively*; and *Men normally hold favorable stereotypes about women* (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly

agree), the average of which formed a *perceived positivity of stereotypes* (PPOS) index and served as a manipulation check. Scores differed as would be expected by condition; $t$ (244) = 9.67, $p < .001$ (negative condition, $M = 2.67$, $SD = 1.25$; positive condition, $M = 4.42$, $SD = 1.57$).

### Sexism scenario

Next, participants read a vignette in which they were asked to imagine attending a meeting in the workplace. We included a diagram of the meeting room (Swim & Hyers, 1999) that used color-coded rectangles (blue for men; pink for women) to indicate where each group member was sitting. The vignette focused on an exchange designed to be interpreted as CQC. Specifically, one of the female group members called *Chloe* gives a well-received presentation. Afterward, a male colleague called *Ben* states that "he'd just like to offer *his* perspective" on what she discussed, then makes *exactly* the same point she did. Subsequently, *James*—who is the team leader—then "thanks [Ben] for his insight," saying "obviously you've already shared your thoughts with Chloe. I think you've hit the nail on the head," before asking Ben to flesh out his ideas. While the behavior of both men could be construed as hepeating and bropriation, we focused on perceptions of James's behavior, because he is the one who explicitly attributes credit for Chloe's ideas to Ben and tasks him with pursuing these ideas. We intended CQC to manifest here in James' apparent belief that ideas of value come from male rather than female colleagues.

To ensure that only data from attentive participants were included in analyses, we reviewed open-ended responses from participants in which they were asked to describe (in one or two sentences) what took place in the scene they had just read, and to recall how many of the six people in the vignette were women.

We had originally intended to explore whether the ratio of female to male group members affected the propensity of women to confront sexism. As such, we created multiple versions of the manipulation so that there was a "balanced" group with equal numbers of women and men (per the pilot), a female-majority group, and a male-majority group. Chloe, Ben, and James featured in each version of the vignette, and each version was identical except for the variation in the gender composition of the group members. However, the gender composition variable did not predict women's sense of responsibility for addressing sexism, nor did it (directly or indirectly) predict their belief that they would confront or challenge the sexist remark. Moreover, there were no significant effects of 2-way (group composition × metastereotype valence) or 3-way (group composition × metastereotype valence × metastereotype personalization) interactions on either personal responsibility for responding, or intention to confront. In the interests of parsimony, we collapsed the group composition conditions and do not address them further.

## Instrumentation

### Metastereotype personalization

After reading each metastereotype message, participants responded to the question: *To what extent do you believe men think like this about you personally because you're a woman?* (Men generally think this is: 1 = not true of me at all; 4 = extremely true of me). This formed our index of metastereotype personalization (positive metastereotypes, $\omega = .70$, $M = 2.99$; $SD = 0.62$; negative metastereotypes, $\omega = .70$, $M = 2.01$; $SD = 0.61$). Bivariate correlations between all continuous variables are reported in Table 1.

### Felt personal responsibility

Participants responded to three items adapted from Ashburn-Nardo et al. (2014; 1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree; all scales used in Study 1 can be found in full in Supplementary Appendix A): A sample item is, *I would personally feel responsible for addressing James' behavior*. The scale was moderately reliable ($\omega = .66$; $M = 4.51$; $SD = 1.19$).

### Intention to confront sexism

Three items assessed the degree to which participants envisioned confronting James about his behavior (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). A sample item is, *I would explicitly point out to James that he praised Ben for Chloe's idea*. The scale was reliable ($\omega = .88$; $M = 4.50$; $SD = 1.51$).

### Perceived sexism of scenario

Because feeling perceived responsibility for confronting sexism and taking steps to confront it rely on identifying behavior as sexist (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2014), we measured perceived sexism to account for variation in these perceptions. Participants rated the team leader's behavior from 1 = Not at all sexist; to 7 = Extremely sexist; $M = 6.25$, $SD = 1.11$.

## Results

We conducted a moderated mediation model (Model 8) using PROCESS (Hayes, 2022). Metastereotype valence was the predictor, personal responsibility for confronting sexism was the mediator, propensity to directly confront sexism was the outcome, and metastereotype personalization was the moderator of the *a* (predictor to mediator) and *c* (predictor to outcome) paths. Perceived sexism was included as a covariate. All continuous predictors were centered, and all regression coefficients reported are unstandardized.

The degree to which women feel personally responsible for confronting sexism positively predicted direct confrontation of sexism, $B = 0.73$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < .001$ (H1 supported). The interaction between metastereotype valence and personalization predicting personal responsibility was statistically significant ($B = 0.52$, $SE = 0.15$, $p = .001$), indicating that the effect of metastereotype valence was moderated by metastereotype personalization (H2; H4); see Figure 2. When personalization was low (−1 *SD*), there was a negative relationship between exposure to positive metastereotypes (relative to negative metastereotypes) and feeling responsible for addressing sexism, $B = -0.65$, $SE = 0.29$, $p = .03$. However, when personalization was high (+1 *SD*), there was a positive relationship between exposure to positive metastereotypes (relative to negative metastereotypes) and feeling personally responsible for addressing sexism, $B = 0.70$, $SE = 0.25$, $p = .005$. At moderate levels of personalization (i.e., the mean), there was not a significant relationship between exposure to positive metastereotypes (relative to negative metastereotypes) and feeling personally responsible for addressing sexism, $B = 0.03$, $SE = 0.19$, $p = .89$.

When metastereotype personalization was low (−1 *SD*), activating positive metastereotypes (vs. negative metastereotypes) exerted an inverse direct effect ($B = -0.77$, $SE = 0.29$, $p = .009$, 95% CI [−1.35, −0.20]) and an inverse indirect effect (H3; H4: $B = -0.47$, $SE = 0.20$, 95% CI [−0.88, −0.10])

**Table 1.** Bivariate correlations for Study 1 and Study 2 continuous variables.

| | Responsibility[a] | Concern group image | Direct confront | Amplify voice | Personalization | Incident sexism |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Responsibility[a] | | | 0.664** | | −0.060 | 0.321** |
| Concern grp image | 0.212** | | | | | |
| Direct confrontation | 0.362** | 0.336** | | | 0.029 | 0.061 |
| Amplify voice | 0.313** | 0.315** | 0.682** | | | 0.343** |
| Personalization | 0.078 | 0.113* | 0.011 | 0.041 | | |
| Incident sexism | 0.152** | 0.201** | 0.364** | 0.320** | −0.062 | |
| Modern sexism | −0.121* | −0.114* | −0.276** | −0.298** | 0.216** | −0.367** |

*Note:* Study 1 appears in the upper triangle; Study 2 appears in the lower triangle.
[a] For Study 1, "Responsibility" is women's perceived responsibility; for Study 2, it is men's perceptions of attributed responsibility.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.

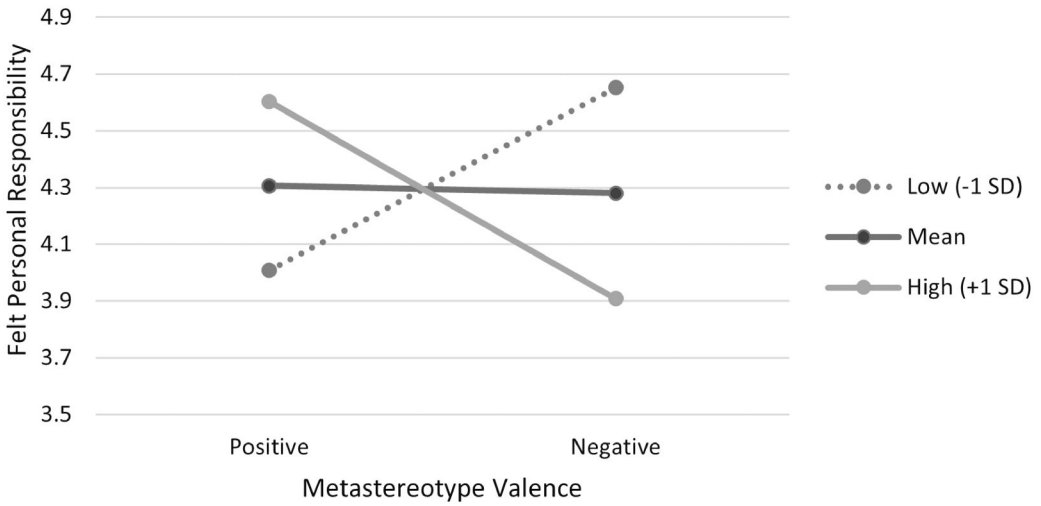


**Figure 2** Women's felt personal responsibility for addressing sexism by metastereotype condition, moderated by metastereotype personalization (Study 1).

on the propensity to confront sexism. When personalization was high (+1 *SD*), there was a positive direct effect of positive metastereotypes (vs. negative metastereotypes) (H5; H4; $B = 0.66$, $SE = 0.25$, $p = .009$, 95% CI [0.17, 1.14]) and a positive indirect effect on the propensity to confront sexism via feeling personally responsible (H3; H4: $B = 0.51$, $SE = 0.20$, 95% CI [0.13, 0.91]). At moderate (i.e., mean) levels of personalization, there were no significant direct or indirect effects of positive metastereotypes relative to negative metastereotypes. This conditional indirect effect was significant, IMM [index of moderated mediation] = 0.38, CI [0.16, 0.60].

## Study 1 discussion

Consistent with Ashburn-Nardo et al.'s (2014) theorizing, the more women felt they had a personal responsibility to address sexism, the more they believed they would confront sexist behavior. Of greater theoretical importance, however, were findings concerning the effects of metastereotyping: We detected both significant direct and indirect (via felt responsibility) effects of the metastereotype manipulation on women's willingness to confront sexism. However, these effects were qualified by metastereotype personalization.

Activating positive (vs. negative) metastereotypes directly and indirectly increased women's willingness to confront sexism only when personalization was high. That is, merely reading information suggesting men perceive women *as a group* positively did not cause our female participants to believe they would confront sexism; it only did so when women believed that men thought they *personally* possessed these positive characteristics. Conversely, when women read positive (vs. negative) metastereotype information but did *not* believe that men thought that they personally had these qualities, they were less inclined to confront sexism, in part because they felt less responsible for doing so. We suspect that a woman who witnesses a female colleague being treated dismissively by a man may feel conflicted if she has recently been exposed to information suggesting that men attribute positive qualities to women as a collective yet believes that they do not extend these views to her *specifically*. She may recognize that a sexist incident has occurred and believe that a response is warranted. However, feeling that she is perceived as a "bad" (ie, non-prototypical) member of her ingroup may undermine her sense that she ought to respond, because she believes other members of the group (who *are* perceived in a way consistent with the positive group-level stereotypes she thinks men hold of women) could do so from a stronger position.

In sum, when positive metastereotypes are highly personalized, they may motivate confrontation of sexism both directly and by increasing women's sense of responsibility for doing

so. However, our results also suggest that group-level and individual-level meta-perceptions interact to shape intergroup behavior.

## Study 2: metastereotyping and men's response to bropriation and hepeating

Having found that gender metastereotypes help account for *women*'s inclination to confront sexism, we next explore whether they might also account for variations in men's willingness to confront sexist behavior. In their *dominant group theory* (DGT), Razzante and Orbe (2018) acknowledge that while some members of dominant groups choose to act in ways that reinforce their dominant status, other dominant group members may attempt to "dismantle" oppressive structures at an institutional or structural level or to "impede" oppression by using "interpersonal messages … to interrupt manifestations of oppression in everyday interactions" (p. 367). It is this latter strategy that is of most interest to us here.

### Allyship and confronting sexism

Arguably, men are in a relatively strong position to address sexism because they have social capital they can spend in service of this goal by virtue of belonging to a relatively privileged group (Madsen et al., 2020). Moreover, men incur fewer costs (and earn greater esteem) as a result of confronting sexism than do women (Drury & Kaiser, 2014), and men's criticism of sexism is accorded greater legitimacy than is similar criticism by women (Czopp & Monteith, 2003; DeTurk, 2011, Good et al., 2018), as they do not belong to the group being discriminated against (and so are arguing against self-interest).

To be an *ally* entails aligning oneself with members of a disadvantaged group and using one's privilege to support that group's pursuit of justice and mitigate the impact of bias (De Souza & Schmader, 2022; Drury & Kaiser, 2014; Madsen et al., 2020). One way in which men can do this is by ensuring that women receive credit for their work and ideas, especially when such credit is lacking or misattributed (Warren & Bordoloi, 2021)—such as when women are subjected to CQC via behaviors such as hepeating and bropriation.

Shows of allyship can help women feel supported and empowered and provide much-valued confirmation that problematic behavior was, in fact, discriminatory (Estevan-Reiner et al., 2021). More generally, they can also provide encouragement to members of minority groups that they are not "alone" and show that there may be more people in their community than they realize who do not condone their marginalization (Ramasubramanian et al., 2017). When men confront sexism, this also helps change the behavior of men who display sexism and establishes "norms of non-prejudice and egalitarianism" (Czopp & Monteith, 2003, p. 533) that may not only facilitate similar behavior by *other* men, but—by conveying positive regard for members of a marginalized group and recognition of their contributions—may actually soften the prejudiced stereotypes held by other members of the dominant group (Tan et al., 2001). Further, because the communication and actions of members of one's peer group contribute to both the establishment and challenging of norms, one man's demonstration of allyship may have "ripple effects" that have an impact beyond the immediate situation in which he attempts to intervene (see Tan et al., 2001). As DeTurk explains, when male allies seek to promote social change by "assert[ing] their identities as allies," this serves to "discursively (re)produce their values at the cultural level" (p. 579).

Should men decide to "impede" CQC and other forms of sexist mistreatment, one possibility is that they will opt to do so in what Razzante and Orbe (2018) characterize as an *aggressive* manner that is not much concerned with the perceptions or feelings of fellow dominant group members. Such communication may directly "confront oppressive rhetoric" in a manner that does not shy away from explicitly characterizing another dominant group member's communication as "ignorant, hurtful, and/or discriminatory" (p. 367). Studies have shown, however, that *direct* modes of confrontation in which a person is called for being prejudiced have the potential to generate negative responses (Woodzicka & Good, 2021). Moreover, research also suggests that men may not take confrontations about sexism very seriously, particularly when the manifestation of sexism in question is relatively subtle (Gulker et al., 2013).

Because overt confrontation (e.g., by calling out another man's behavior as problematic) has the potential to be dismissed or counterproductive, such direct messages may not be constructive means of advocating for women who are subject to prejudice (see Gulker et al., 2013, p. 282). Indeed, Monteith et al. (2019) recommended avoiding "hostile and aggressive confrontations" of prejudice (p. 230): Their suggestion is supported by findings that "indirect" confrontations or "prods" can be effective ways of addressing sexism (Woodzicka & Good, 2021), and that "amicable" efforts at confrontation produce the best outcomes (Burns & Granz, 2021).

Among the "rhetorical options" (DeTurk, 2011, p. 578) men have when it comes to confronting sexism, one particularly effective tactic appears to be *amplifying voice*. Amplifying voice is a form of indirect confrontation and an expression of allyship that occurs when somebody (a) publicly ensures credit is attributed to the person who first suggested an idea and (b) endorses that idea (Bain et al., 2021). In the context of Razzante and Orbe's DGT, amplifying voice (like direct confrontation) reflects the overarching goal of impeding oppression. However, it reflects a more "subtle and delicate" means of doing so and may serve as an example for other men. As such, it might be considered (in the language of DGT) either a *non-assertive* or *assertive* way of impeding oppression.

Amplifying voice has several strengths as a confrontation strategy. First, it appears to enhance assessments of the original idea and the status who the person who proposed it, as well as enhancing the *amplifier's* status (Bain et al., 2021). Second, it circumvents much of the face threat that can be generated through more direct forms of confrontation, and which can undermine efforts to get people to avoid acting in discriminatory ways. Valde and Miller Henningsen (2015) point out that when a person is confronted about some kind of ethical transgression in the workplace (e.g., discriminatory communication), there are threats to both negative and positive face: the implication that an actor should not continue to behave in this way threatens negative face, and indications that their behavior "has violated … a rule or expectation for appropriate conduct" (p. 371) threatens positive face. The result of such face-threatening communication can be to induce

defensiveness rather than the reflectiveness and self-awareness that is more likely to result in behavioral change (Lewis & Yoshimura, 2017).

Amplifying voice may be easier to accept and easier to enact compared to more direct modes of confrontation: A man who attributes credit that belongs to a female colleague to a male colleague might be receptive to a bystander's amplification of the woman's voice even if he would dismiss that same bystander's accusation of sexism. Likewise, a man who would balk at the prospect of criticizing a male colleague for being sexist might have fewer qualms about taking subtler action to help a female colleague receive appropriate credit for her work and ideas. We therefore propose:

*H1*: Men will be more willing to amplify voice than to directly confront sexism.

## Metastereotypes, Felt responsibility, and men's confrontation of sexism

While women may feel responsibility to confront sexism as a member of the affected group, men may feel that women attribute responsibility for addressing sexism to them as members of a dominant group with greater social capital (Estevan-Reiner et al., 2020; Good et al., 2018). Therefore, whereas Study 1 examined feeling personally responsible for addressing sexism as a mediator, Study 2 considers believing that *other* people hold one responsible for addressing sexism as a potential mediator.

If a man thinks—or is, in a given situation *prompted* to think—that women tend to perceive men (and him in particular) through the lens of positive stereotypes, he may also be inclined to think that women think that possessing these qualities equips—or even obligates—him to address sexist behavior that he sees occurring. The potential for positive metastereotypes to enhance men's feeling that others hold them responsible for confronting prejudice is consistent with scholarship suggesting that men may speak out on behalf of women experiencing sexism because they feel a moral compunction to do so (DeTurk, 2011). That is, if a man believes that women tend to view men (and him in particular) positively, he may also be inclined to think that women would expect him to "do right" by them by using his social capital to challenge sexist behavior that could adversely affect them. Accordingly, we predict:

*H2*: Activating positive (vs. neutral or negative) metastereotypes will increase men's belief that women hold them responsible for confronting sexism.
*H3*: Men's sense of attributed responsibility will be positively associated both with intent to confront sexism and intent to amplify women's voice.
*H4*: Activating positive (vs. negative or neutral) metastereotypes will positively and indirectly affect men's intentions to (a) directly confront sexism or (b) amplify women's voice via their perceptions of attributed responsibility.

## Metastereotypes, concern for group image, and men's confrontation of sexism

Men may confront sexism for other reasons as well (e.g., DeTurk, 2011; Good et al., 2018), and an aim of this second study was to examine additional potential explanations for outgroup members' willingness to address sexism. Individually, a man might confront sexism because he *personally* wishes to avoid seeming to condone sexist behavior (Czopp & Ashburn-Nardo, 2012), However, their confrontation of sexism may also reflect a desire to prevent men *collectively* being tarred by the brush of a specific man's behavior. As Owuamalam and Zagefka (2011) point out, members of a given social group may repudiate the behavior of—and seek to distance and differentiate themselves from—members of that group whose actions "put the image of their social group at risk" (p. 528). Importantly, given our focus, research suggests not only that concern for the group image shapes behaviour, but that concern for the group image is made salient by metastereotype activation. Arguably, then, activating gender-based metastereotypes may affect men's willingness to confront sexism (directly, or by amplifying voice) by first influencing their concern for how men, as a group, are perceived by women. We therefore predict:

*H5*: Men's concern for group image will positively predict their intent to confront sexism and amplify voice when witnessing sexism.

Raising awareness of *negative* metastereotypes could elicit behavior intended to disconfirm that metastereotype by making concern for the group image salient. For example, Hopkins et al. (2007) found that when Scottish participants read material indicating that English people view them as stingy, they were motivated to (and did, in fact) show generosity to the English researchers to refute the metastereotype. Likewise, research by van Leeuwen and Täuber (2012) also showed that behaviors benefitting members of an outgroup were more apt to be triggered when negative (rather than positive) metastereotypes were activated. The logic of refutation implies that activating negative metastereotypes should induce men who witness sexism to protect the collective group image by addressing the sexist behavior, whereas activating positive metastereotypes could obviate the need to confront sexism as a means of protecting the group image. We therefore predict:

*H6*: Men's concern for the group image will be higher when negative (versus neutral or positive) metastereotypes are activated.
*H7*: Activating negative (versus neutral or positive) metastereotypes will indirectly increase men's intentions to (a) directly confront sexism and (b) amplify voice via their concern for the group image.

As we argued in Study 1, the effects of activated metastereotypes ought to be stronger when metastereotypes are highly personalized (Kamans et al., 2009). Thus, we predict:

*H8*: The direct and indirect effects of metastereotype activation will be stronger as perceptions of metastereotype personalization increase.

The preceding hypotheses (depicted in Figure 3) have outlined two indirect routes by which metastereotype activation might influence men's intention to speak out when they witness women being subject to CQC. It is not clear, however, whether metastereotypes will exert a *direct* effect men's willingness to confront sexism. In Study 1, activating positive

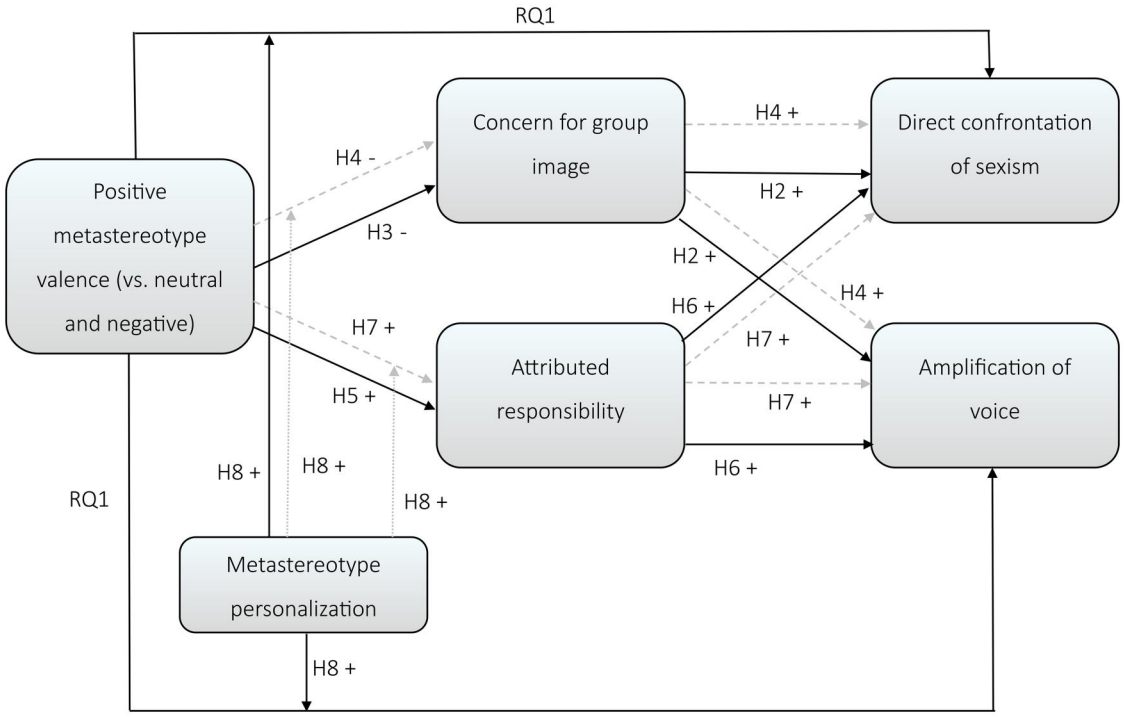


**Figure 3.** Conceptual model of Study 2 hypotheses and research questions.

*Note.* The light dashed lines for H4 and H7 denote the component paths of indirect effects; the light dotted lines for H8 denote the expected moderation of these indirect paths (i.e., moderated mediation).

metastereotypes directly and positively predicted women's intent to confront sexism. However, this is not sufficient grounds for expecting the activation of positive metastereotypes to directly and positively predict *men's* intent to confront sexism. Research by intergroup scholars shows that processes can operate differently for members of minority versus majority groups. Dovidio et al. (2008), for instance, found that majority and minority groups have different feelings concerning common ingroup identities, and Tropp and Pettigrew (2005) determined that the beneficial effects of intergroup contact for reducing prejudice were stronger for members of majority-status than minority-status groups. In light of our uncertainty as to whether the direct effects of activating positive metastereotypes for men will parallel those obtained for women, we ask:

> RQ1: Will activating positive (vs. neutral or negative) metastereotypes exert a direct effect on the degree to which men are willing to directly confront sexism and amplify voice?

## Method

We again carried out preliminary research to develop metastereotype messages, gauge their effectiveness, and establish that men perceived the vignette as depicting sexist behavior. For details of pilot tests, materials, and instruments relating to Study 2, see Supplementary Appendix B.

### Participants

Men living in the United States were recruited via *CloudResearch's Connect* panel. The final sample comprised $N = 359$ men, $M_{age} = 37.32$ years ($SD = 11.25$). In descending order of frequency, the ethnic groups with which participants identified were White (75.5%), Asian or Asian-American (11.7%), Latino/Hispanic (11.1%), Black or African American (9.2%), American Indian or Alaska Native (1.1%), Middle Eastern (1.1%), Other (0.6%), and Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (0.3%) (participants could select multiple options).

### Procedures

Participants were randomly assigned to a negative, neutral, or positive metastereotype condition. After reading each metastereotype message, participants indicated the degree to which they believed women thought each metastereotype was true of them *personally*, because they were a man (1 = not at all; 4 = extremely); as in Study 1, these were combined to form a *personalization* index: positive condition, $\omega = .77$, $M = 2.59$, $SD = 0.70$; neutral condition, $\omega = .57$, $M = 2.71$, $SD = 0.61$; negative condition, $\omega = .62$, $M = 1.60$, $SD = 0.54$. After they had read all four messages, participants completed the PPOS items as a manipulation check (see Study 1); scores on this measure differed as expected by condition, $F(2,379) = 22.57$, $p < .001$ (negative condition, $M = 3.39$, $SD = 1.37$; neutral condition, $M = 4.07$, $SD = 1.28$; positive condition, $M = 4.53$, $SD = 1.32$; all means different from each other $p \leq .008$). Participants were then shown a slightly modified version of the vignette used Study 1. To ensure they had it carefully, they wrote a short summary of what had occurred, and reported how many of the people in the meeting (including themselves) had been

men.[3] They completed the dependent measures and provided demographic information.

## Measures

### Perception of attributed responsibility

One item adapted from Ashburn-Nardo et al. (2014) indexed men's view that women in the vignette would expect them to address the leader's behavior: *I believe the women at the meeting would think that I had some degree of responsibility for doing something about James' behavior*. Responses ranged from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree); $M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.54$.

### Concern for group image

Three items from van Leeuwen and Täuber (2012) were adapted to gauge concern for how men are perceived by women. A sample item is *I care about what women think of men* (1 = not at all, 7 = very much); $M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.43$, $\omega = .82$.

### Direct confrontation of sexism

Six items gauged participants' willingness to directly confront the team leader. A sample item is *I would tell James that his behavior seemed sexist* (1 = Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree); $M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.54$, $\omega = .92$.

### Amplifying voice

We developed four items based on Bain et al. (2021). A sample item is *I would state that although Ben had been praised for his ideas, Chloe deserved the credit because she came up with them* (1 = Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree); $M = 5.43$, $SD = 1.22$, $\omega = .83$.

### Perceived sexism of scenario

For the same reasons as in Study 1, we controlled for perceived sexism. To assess how sexist participants perceived the scenario to be, they rated the team leader's behavio.r on a 7-point scale (1 = Not at all sexist; 7 = Extremely sexist); $M = 5.31$, $SD = 1.61$.

### Modern sexism

Modern sexism beliefs entail not only the denial that discrimination toward women on the basis of their sex still occurs, but also "antagonism toward women's demands, and lack of support for policies designed to help women" (Swim et al., 1995, p. 199). Because men more strongly endorse such beliefs than do women (Swim et al., 1995, Study 1 and Study 2), and they seem likely to influence the extent to which they would speak up in response to the scenarios presented here, we also included the extent to which the men in our study hold modern sexist beliefs as a covariate. To measure endorsement of such beliefs, we used Swim et al.'s (1995) 8-item instrument. A sample item is *Discrimination against women is no longer a problem in the United States* (1 = Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree); $M = 3.17$, $SD = 1.39$, $\omega = .92$.

# Results

To test our prediction that men would report greater willingness to amplify voice than to directly confront sexism (H1), we ran a paired samples *t*-test. Consistent with H1, self-reports of willingness to amplify voice ($M = 5.43$, $SD = 1.22$) were higher than those of willingness to directly confront sexism ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.45$), $t(356) = 21.81$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.15$.

To test other hypotheses and research questions, we ran moderated mediation models in PROCESS (Model 8). Metastereotype condition was the multi-categorical predictor (X); concern for group image and perceptions of attributed responsibility were parallel mediators (M); and the outcome (Y) was either intent to (a) amplify voice or (b) directly confront sexism. Metastereotype personalization (W) moderated X to M and X to Y paths; all continuous predictors were centered. Modern sexism and incident sexism were included as covariates. Separate sets of models were run for each outcome; in each set, one model was run with neutral metastereotypes as the reference group, and another with negative metastereotypes as the reference group. Results appear in Table 2 (amplifying voice) and Table 3 (direct confrontation).

## Effects via attributed responsibility

Perceptions of attributed responsibility for confronting sexism were positively associated with both intent to directly confront sexism ($B = 0.26$, $p < .001$) and intent to amplify women's voice ($B = 0.17$, $p < .001$; H3 supported). However, activating positive (vs. neutral or negative) metastereotypes did not increase men's perceptions that women attribute responsibility to them for confronting sexism (H2 not supported). There were no significant indirect effects of any metastereotype condition on either confrontation of sexism or amplifying voice via attributed responsibility at any level of personalization (with all indices of moderated mediation for indirect effects nonsignificant). H4 was not supported.

## Effects via concern for group image

Men's concern for group image positively predicted both intent to confront sexism ($B = 0.21$, $p < .001$) and intent to amplify women's voice ($B = 0.16$, $p < .001$; H5 supported). Activating negative metastereotypes (vs. neutral) did not affect concern for group image (H6 not supported). However, activating *positive* metastereotypes did and this was moderated by metastereotype personalization (per H8). When personalization was high (i.e., 1 SD above the mean), activating positive metastereotypes prompted higher concern for group image than activating neutral or negative metastereotypes ($F(2,341) = 3.94$, $p = .02$) (see Figure 4).

There were no significant indirect effects of activating negative (vs. neutral) metastereotypes on either outcome at any level of personalization (H7 not supported). However, contrary to H7, there were some effects of activating *positive* metastereotypes: At high levels of personalization (1 SD above the mean), activating positive (vs. neutral) metastereotypes positively affected men's intentions to directly confront sexism via concern for group image, $B = 0.13$, 95% CI [0.03, 0.27], IMM = .15, 95% CI [0.01, 0.32]. However, there were no significant indirect effects on intent to directly confront sexism at lower levels of personalization. Likewise, at high levels of personalization (1 SD above the mean), activating positive (vs. neutral) metastereotypes affected men's intentions to amplify voice via concern for group image, $B = 0.10$, 95% CI [0.02, 0.21], IMM = 0.11, 95% CI [0.01, 0.25], but there were no significant indirect effects on intent to amplify voice at lower levels of personalization.

**Table 2.** Results of moderated mediation analysis predicting men's intentions to amplify voice (Study 2).

| **Reference group: negative** | | | | **Reference group: neutral** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Outcome: attributed responsibility ($R^2 = .06$) | | | | | | | |
| | *B* | *SE* | *p* | | *B* | *SE* | *p* |
| Constant | 4.26 | 0.48 | <.001 | Constant | 3.62 | 0.45 | <.001 |
| **Neutral MS (vs. negative)** | **−0.64** | **0.28** | **.025** | **Negative MS (vs. neutral)** | **0.64** | **0.28** | **.025** |
| Positive MS (vs. negative) | −0.44 | 0.28 | .117 | Positive MS (vs. neutral) | 0.20 | 0.23 | .384 |
| Personalization | 0.51 | 0.26 | .050 | Personalization | 0.39 | 0.23 | .093 |
| Neut MS × personalization | −0.12 | 0.35 | .725 | Neg MS × personalization | 0.12 | 0.35 | .725 |
| Pos MS × personalization | −0.19 | 0.34 | .566 | Pos MS × personalization | −0.07 | 0.32 | .822 |
| **Modern sexism** | **−0.13** | **0.07** | **.045** | **Modern sexism** | **−0.13** | **0.07** | **.045** |
| **Incident sexism** | **0.12** | **0.06** | **.024** | **Incident sexism** | **0.12** | **0.06** | **.024** |
| Outcome: concern for group image ($R^2 = .09$) | | | | | | | |
| | *B* | *SE* | *p* | | *B* | *SE* | *p* |
| Constant | 3.77 | 0.44 | < .001 | Constant | 3.79 | 0.41 | < .001 |
| Neutral MS (vs. negative) | 0.01 | 0.26 | .956 | Negative MS (vs. neutral) | −0.01 | 0.26 | .956 |
| Positive MS (vs. negative) | 0.07 | 0.26 | .773 | Positive MS (vs. neutral) | 0.06 | 0.21 | .781 |
| Personalization | 0.05 | 0.24 | .845 | Personalization | 0.05 | 0.21 | .799 |
| Neut MS × personalization | 0.01 | 0.32 | .981 | Neg MS × personalization | −0.01 | 0.32 | .981 |
| **Pos MS × personalization** | **0.69** | **0.31** | **.026** | **Pos MS × personalization** | **0.68** | **0.29** | **.020** |
| Modern sexism | −0.10 | 0.06 | .087 | Modern sexism | −0.10 | 0.06 | .087 |
| **Incident sexism** | **0.15** | **0.05** | **.004** | **Incident sexism** | **0.15** | **0.05** | **.004** |
| Outcome: amplifying voice ($R^2 = .26$) | | | | | | | |
| | *B* | *SE* | *p* | | *B* | *SE* | *p* |
| Constant | 3.67 | 0.40 | < .001 | Constant | 3.88 | 0.37 | < .001 |
| Neutral MS (vs. negative) | 0.21 | 0.20 | .305 | Negative MS (vs. neutral) | −0.21 | 0.20 | .305 |
| Positive MS (vs. negative) | 0.25 | 0.20 | .210 | Positive MS (vs. neutral) | 0.04 | 0.16 | .809 |
| **Attributed responsibility** | **0.17** | **0.04** | **< .001** | **Attributed responsibility** | **0.17** | **0.04** | **< .001** |
| **Concern for group image** | **0.16** | **0.04** | **< .001** | **Concern for group image** | **0.16** | **0.04** | **< .001** |
| Personalization | −0.19 | 0.18 | .314 | Personalization | −0.01 | 0.16 | .962 |
| Neut MS × personalization | 0.18 | 0.24 | .466 | Neg MS × personalization | −0.18 | 0.24 | .466 |
| Pos MS × personalization | 0.43 | 0.24 | .069 | Pos MS × personalization | 0.26 | 0.22 | .252 |
| **Modern sexism** | **−0.18** | **0.05** | **< .001** | **Modern sexism** | **−0.18** | **0.05** | **< .001** |
| **Incident sexism** | **0.13** | **0.04** | **.001** | **Incident sexism** | **0.13** | **0.04** | **.001** |

*Note*. Bold indicates a statistically significant focal variable. MS = metastereotypes; Neg = negative; Neut = neutral; Pos = positive. B denotes the unstandardized regression coefficient.

### Direct effects of metastereotype activation

Finally, RQ1 asked if activating positive or negative (relative to neutral) metastereotypes would exert a direct effect on the degree to which men are willing to directly confront sexism or amplify voice, while H8 predicted that the effects of metastereotype activation would be stronger as perceptions of metastereotype personalization increase. As described above, H8 was generally supported for the relationship between activating positive (vs. neutral) metastereotypes and concern for group image.

Metastereotype personalization also moderated the direct relationship between metastereotype condition and intent to confront sexist behavior (see Figure 5), although it did not do so for intent to amplify women's voice in sexist situations. Due to the interaction between metastereotype activation and personalization, it is more informative to address RQ1 in conjunction with H8 by reviewing the simple slopes analysis. Consistent with H8, the effect of positive (vs. negative) metastereotype activation on direct confrontation of sexism was positive and strongest ($B = 1.16$, $p = .003$) at high levels of personalization (i.e., +1 SD). A similar effect was observed for negative (vs. neutral) metastereotype activation, although (as would be expected) the valence of the effect was in the opposite direction ($B = -0.83$, $p = .029$): the general pattern of results was that negative (vs. neutral) metastereotype activation had a stronger inverse effect on intent to directly confront sexism at higher levels of personalization. Thus, there was generally support for H8 in the relationships between positive (vs. negative) and negative (vs. neutral) metastereotype activation intent to directly confront sexism. However, there was not support for H8 in relationships between metastereotype activation condition and (a) perceptions of attributed responsibility for confronting sexism, or (b) intent to amplify women's voices in a sexist situation.

## Study 2 discussion

In Study 1, activating positive (vs. negative) gender-based metastereotypes directly predicted women's belief that they would directly confront sexism, although this was contingent on high levels of metastereotype personalization. The same finding emerged in Study 2: Activating positive (vs. negative) metastereotypes predicted men's belief that they would directly confront sexist behavior, but only when personalization was high—that is, when participants encountered information suggesting that women held positive stereotypes about men in general *and* believed that women held these views about them *specifically*.

**Table 3.** Results of moderated mediation analysis predicting men's intentions to directly confront sexist behavior (Study 2).

| **Reference group: negative** | | | | **Reference group: neutral** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Outcome: Attributed Responsibility ($R^2 = .06$) | | | | | | | |
| | *B* | *SE* | *p* | | *B* | *SE* | *p* |
| (Constant) | 4.24 | 0.48 | < .001 | (Constant) | 3.60 | 0.44 | < .001 |
| **Neutral MS (vs. negative)** | **−0.64** | **0.28** | **.025** | **Negative MS (vs. neutral)** | **0.64** | **0.28** | **.025** |
| Positive MS (vs. negative) | −0.44 | 0.28 | .112 | Positive MS (vs. neutral) | 0.20 | 0.23 | .393 |
| **Personalization** | **0.51** | **0.26** | **.049** | Personalization | 0.39 | 0.23 | .092 |
| Neut MS × personalization | −0.12 | 0.34 | .722 | Neg MS × personalization | 0.12 | 0.34 | .722 |
| Pos MS × personalization | −0.20 | 0.33 | .547 | Pos MS × personalization | −0.08 | 0.32 | .802 |
| **Modern sexism** | **−0.13** | **0.07** | **.047** | **Modern sexism** | **−0.13** | **0.07** | **.047** |
| **Incident sexism** | **0.13** | **0.05** | **.019** | **Incident sexism** | **0.13** | **0.05** | **.019** |
| Outcome: concern for group image ($R^2 = .09$) | | | | | | | |
| | *B* | *SE* | *p* | | *B* | *SE* | *p* |
| (Constant) | 3.77 | 0.54 | < .001 | (Constant) | 3.78 | 0.41 | < .001 |
| Neutral MS (vs. negative) | 0.01 | 0.26 | .961 | Negative MS (vs. neutral) | −0.01 | 0.21 | .961 |
| Positive MS (vs. negative) | 0.07 | 0.29 | .771 | Positive MS (vs. neutral) | 0.06 | 0.21 | .773 |
| Personalization | 0.05 | 0.24 | .843 | Personalization | 0.05 | 0.21 | .799 |
| Neut MS × personalization | 0.01 | 0.32 | .982 | Neg MS × personalization | −0.01 | 0.32 | .982 |
| **Pos MS × personalization** | **0.69** | **0.31** | **.026** | **Pos MS × personalization** | 0.68 | 0.29 | .020 |
| Modern sexism | −0.10 | 0.06 | .087 | Modern sexism | −0.10 | 0.06 | .087 |
| **Incident sexism** | **0.15** | **0.05** | **.003** | **Incident sexism** | **0.15** | **0.05** | **.003** |
| Outcome: direct confrontation ($R^2 = .32$) | | | | | | | |
| | *B* | *SE* | *p* | | *B* | *SE* | *p* |
| (Constant) | 0.99 | 0.48 | <.001 | (Constant) | 1.28 | 0.45 | .004 |
| Neutral MS (vs. negative) | 0.28 | 0.24 | .248 | Negative MS (vs. neutral) | −0.28 | 0.24 | .248 |
| Positive MS (vs. negative) | 0.42 | 0.24 | .081 | Positive MS (vs. neutral) | 0.13 | 0.20 | .498 |
| **Attributed responsibility** | **0.26** | **0.05** | **<.001** | **Attributed responsibility** | **0.26** | **0.05** | **<.001** |
| **Concern for group image** | **0.21** | **0.05** | **<.001** | **Concern for group image** | **0.21** | **0.05** | **<.001** |
| **Personalization** | **−0.58** | **0.22** | **.009** | Personalization | 0.10 | 0.20 | .601 |
| **Neut MS × personalization** | **0.69** | **0.29** | **.020** | **Neg MS × personalization** | **−0.69** | **0.29** | **.020** |
| **Pos MS × personalization** | **0.94** | **0.29** | **.001** | Pos MS × personalization | 0.25 | 0.27 | .363 |
| **Modern sexism** | **−0.15** | **0.06** | **.006** | **Modern sexism** | **−0.15** | **0.06** | **.006** |
| **Incident sexism** | **0.23** | **0.05** | **<.001** | **Incident sexism** | **0.23** | **0.05** | **<.001** |

*Note*. Bold indicates a statistically significant focal variable. MS = metastereotypes; Neg = negative; Neut = neutral; Pos = positive. B denotes the unstandardized regression coefficient.

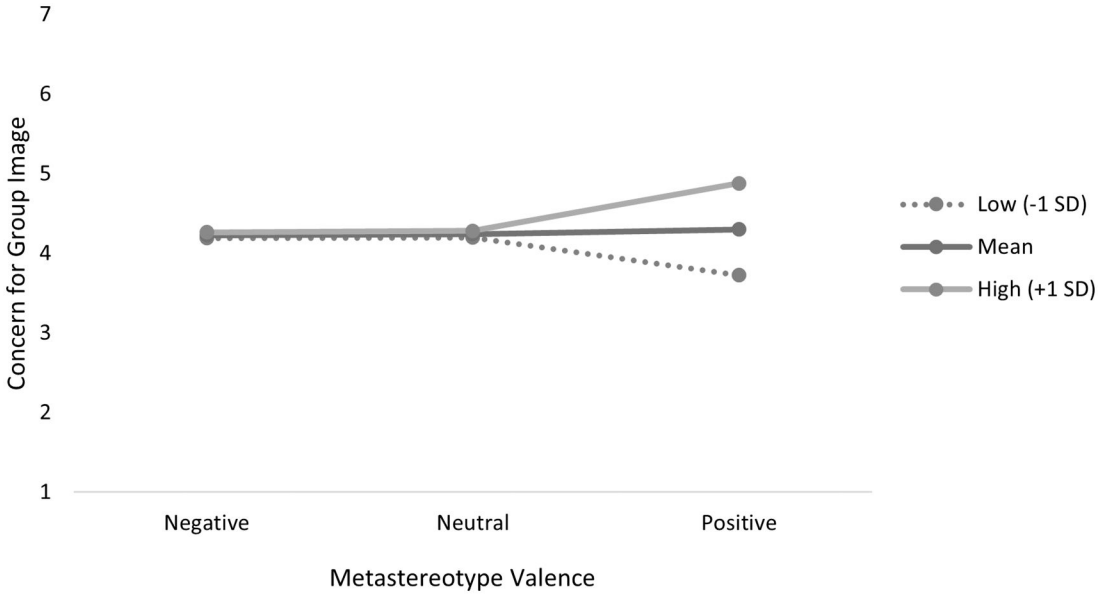


**Figure 4.** Men's concern for group image by metastereotype condition, moderated by metastereotype personalization (Study 2).

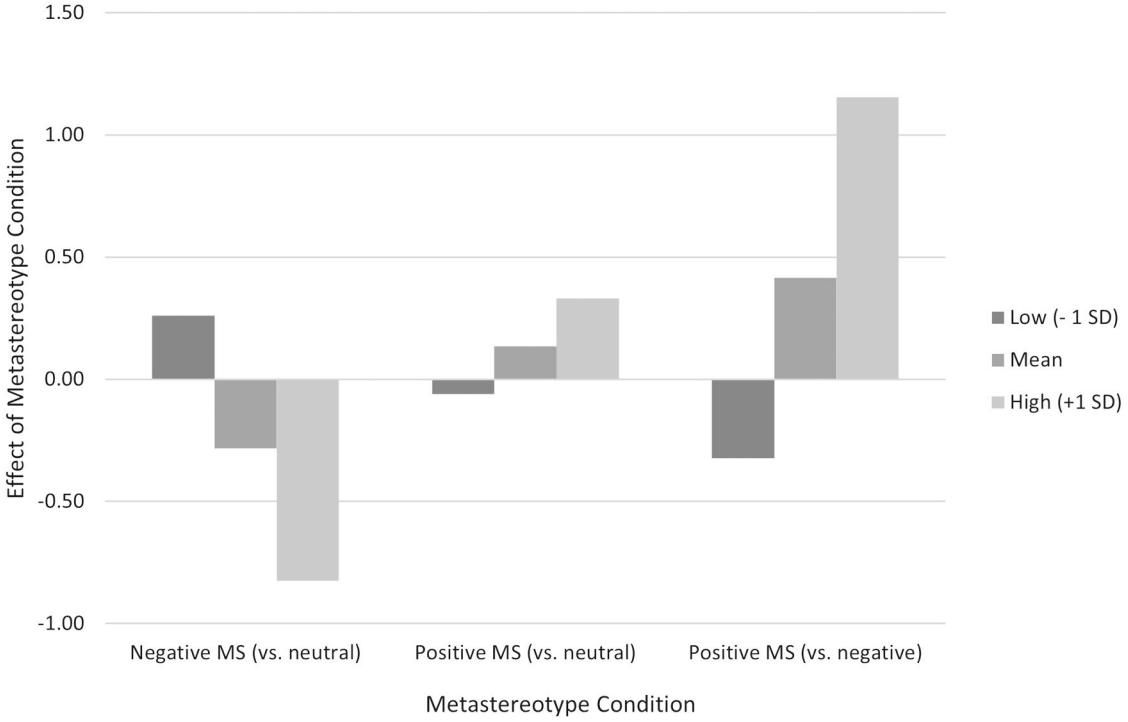


**Figure 5.** Unstandardized direct effect of metastereotype condition on men's intent to directly confront sexism, moderated by metastereotype personalization (Study 2).

We hypothesized two indirect routes by which metastereotyping might shape men's willingness to address sexism. The first indirect route was via attributed responsibility. However, metastereotype activation did not affect men's belief that women held them responsible for addressing sexist behavior, so there were minimal indirect effects of metastereotype activation (via attributed responsibility) on direct confrontation or voice amplification. These findings contrast somewhat with the results of Study 1, wherein positive metastereotypes, when highly personalized, motivated the confrontation of sexism by increasing women's felt responsibility for doing so. Our findings suggest that a member of a privileged group can believe that outgroup members view their ingroup (and them specifically, as a member of that group) positively without also believing that this means that outgroup members hold them responsible for addressing discriminatory treatment.

Second, we argued that activating negative metastereotypes might influence men's concern for the group's image, which would in turn affect men's willingness to engage in direct confrontation of sexism or amplifying voice. Our results indicate—contrary to expectations—that when *positive* (vs. neutral) metastereotypes are activated and highly personalized, men experienced greater concern for the group image of men, which subsequently increased greater endorsement of both direct confrontation and amplifying voice as responses to sexism.

## General discussion

The findings of our studies have theoretical significance for scholars studying metastereotypes and practical implications for those who study the confrontation of prejudice.

### Women's versus men's metastereotypes

Our findings highlight ways in which activating gender metastereotypes in the context of CQC produces similar and contrasting effects for men versus women. Activating positive metastereotypes increased women's willingness to confront sexism when metastereotypes were highly personalized. In such circumstances, a woman may judge that it is relatively safe for her to call out sexism: Activating the belief that men view women (collectively) and her (as a specific member of that collective) positively may blunt concerns that she would be judged negatively for protesting against sexist behavior, reduce fear of retaliation, and/or increase her expectation that men will modify their behavior to avoid hurting women. Further, when positive metastereotypes were personalized, women felt more responsible for addressing sexism, which was also associated with greater willingness to confront it.

Overall, we found similar effects for activating positive stereotypes for men: activation of positive gender-based metastereotypes—when highly personalized—increased men's willingness to confront sexism. However, these effects were not mediated by the perception that women hold them responsible for addressing sexism (a conceptual analogue to women's own feelings of responsibility). Rather, men's concern for group image mediated these effects: at high levels of metastereotype personalization, activating positive metastereotypes prompted greater concern for group image which was, in turn, associated with greater intentions to both directly confront sexism and amplify voice. These findings (for men) are inconsistent with past research suggesting that people are apt to act in ways that benefit an outgroup when *negative* metastereotypes are activated because they wish to disconfirm the metastereotype (Hopkins et al. 2007; van Leeuwen & Täuber, 2012). It is worth noting, however, that

in studies finding that negative metastereotype activation prompts positive behavior, the content of the metastereotype manipulations was highly specific, and the content was directly relevant to a measured behavioral outcome (e.g., Scots were given the chance to counter a metastereotype of stinginess through displaying generosity; Hopkins et al, 2007). In contrast, our manipulation of metastereotypes was relatively broad in terms of content (i.e., comprising multiple, different traits) and we measured only behavioral *intentions* as an outcome. Thus, choices relating to experimental design may partially account for what could appear to be discrepant results across studies.

There were also other ways in which men and women's responses to metastereotype activation differed. At low levels of personalization, activating positive (compared to negative) metastereotypes actually appeared to *inhibit* women's intentions to confront sexism. In contrast, for men, metastereotypes (regardless of valence) simply had no discernable effects at low levels of personalization. It is possible that seeing a fellow ingroup member be a target of discriminatory behavior results in metastereotype activation functioning differently than it does for seeing a fellow ingroup member engaging in discrimination (and witnessing an outgroup member experience discrimination).

## Theoretical implications

### Face, communication, and confrontation

When metastereotypes are activated by the communicative context, issues pertaining to the relative status of groups and the face needs of individuals must be considered. CQC is an inherently identity-threatening mode of talk that carries obvious negative implications for the face of women who experience it. At the same time, being accused of engaging in sexist talk can also be face-threatening for men. As such, care may be needed in finding ways to challenge men's sexist communication without threatening their face to the degree that the challenge backfires or is met with defensiveness. Research in other contexts that invokes communication and notions of face (see Goldsmith, 2007 for a review and discussion of practical applications of face theories) may help us better understand and articulate the challenges of responding to CQC.

Studies on older adults' responses to patronizing talk (e.g., Hummert & Ryan, 2001) address similar issues in a different domain. Patronizing talk is a form of communication grounded in the presumption that older adults lack competence; as such it could be viewed as a form of CQC. Research on this topic found that responses that ignore the occurrence of patronizing communication are often viewed favorably by those doing the patronizing, but do nothing to challenge their presumption of older adults' incompetence, and therefore do little to prevent the recurrence of this kind of communication. Conversely, direct challenges to patronizing talk (even when voiced calmly) may mitigate judgments of incompetence and succeed in halting further patronizing talk, but they *also* elicit negative judgments of the older adult who speaks up (such as being lacking in warmth or as being aggressive; Harwood et al., 1997; Ryan et al., 2006[4]).

Our findings suggest women are more inclined to respond to CQC in ways risk harming men's face (ie, by directly confronting CQC) – and thus potentially put evaluations of women's own warmth at risk—when they feel they are on the strongest possible footing to do so: that is, when positive metastereotypes are activated and these are highly personalized. When this is *not* the case, however, challenging CQC by engaging in potentially face threatening communication may be perceived as too risky.

Men also appear to be taking calculated communicative risks with respect to face. Indirectly addressing the sexist behavior of other men (by amplifying women's voice) circumvents the risk to their own positive face that might derive from appearing overtly critical of a colleague. It also protects the face of the person who engaged in the CQC, preserving both their positive face (ie, that individual is not identified as a sexist), and their negative face (i.e., that person is not explicitly directed to change their mode of behavior). Notably, when a negative metastereotype was activated, men were less apt to risk threatening the face of fellow group members. As members of a dominant group, they have the luxury of not having to care too much if they are prompted to believe that a less powerful group (here, women) thinks poorly of them. This allows them to make more conservative communication choices in terms of face threat (i.e., to refrain from communicating in ways that may threaten the face of fellow group members). That men were most likely to amplify the voice of a female colleague and directly confront sexism following the activation of positive (and personalized) metastereotypes, via increased concern for the group image suggests an interesting counterpoint to some previous research: as well as communication being a way to refute negative stereotypes, it may also be a means by which individuals work to sustain positive group stereotypes and protect the collective face of the ingroup.

### Theorizing metastereotype effects

Given its focus on group-based perceptions, much research on metastereotypes is implicitly grounded in a social identity perspective (Hornsey, 2008). Yet there is not, to date, an overarching theory of metastereotype functioning. As a result, few examinations of metastereotyping processes have a firm theoretical foundation; compared to the stereotyping literature, which features several heuristic theories and models (e.g., Fiske et al., 2002; Hummert, 1994; Jussim et al., 1987), theorizing concerning metastereotypes is in its infancy. While the results of our studies are not sufficient to construct an overarching theory of metastereotyping, they can help researchers think more theoretically not only about why and when metastereotypes may predict efforts to address prejudice and bias.

Our results highlight that the explanatory mechanisms by which metastereotype effects operate can differ by group membership and/or situational role. We found that activating positive metastereotypes caused women to feel more inclined to confront sexism in part by first making them feel responsible for doing so, whereas activating positive metastereotypes made men feel more inclined to confront sexism by increasing their concern for the group image. Given our research design, we cannot determine whether these differences in effects are due to dominant/marginalized group status (which affects other intergroup processes, such as engaging in intergroup contact or the operation of superordinate group identities; Dovidio et al. 2008; Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005) or due to each group's role in the specific scenario we presented (i.e., as a member of the social group receiving versus perpetrating discrimination). Still, the identification of distinct mediators for effects in each group underscores the importance of theoretical work that examines underlying mechanisms and is

sensitive to context (rather than insisting on a single, one-size-fits-all explanation).

Further, in line with other work in this area (e.g., Fowler & Gasiorek, 2020), our findings suggest that metastereotyping effects are strongest when metastereotypes are highly personalized. This is consistent with the "projected" SCT explanation outlined at the outset, which argues that people expect others to engage in social categorization processes when social identity is salient: The expectation that others engage in these processes forms the foundation for metastereotyping. In particular, when social identity is salient, SCT posits that people view targets of social categorization as "prototypical representatives of their ingroup category" (Turner & Onorato, 1999, p. 21), which—in the language of SCT—constitutes *depersonalization*. At the *meta* level, depersonalization of self is equivalent to the *personalization* of metastereotypes; it entails an individual believing that outgroup members consider them to closely match the group prototype and see them "as embodiments of the attributes of their group" (Hogg & Reid, 2006, p. 11). Under such conditions, it is likely that the interactional context is one that is intergroup rather than interpersonal in nature, and that a person will, therefore, relate to outgroup members not as an individual but as a representative of their group (Hornsey, 2008). And, per SCT, it is in precisely such circumstances that a person may be motivated to engage in the sort of collective action (Turner & Onorato, 1999) that may render moot the fears of *personally*-focused reprisals that so often inhibit the confrontation of prejudice (e.g., Good et al., 2012).

## Practical implications

As well as having implications for theorizing concerning metastereotyping processes, our findings have practical implications relating to how people address sexist behaviour.

### Talking about—and talking to—sexism

It may be tempting to dismiss terms like *bropriation* and *hepeating* as cutesy phrases popularized on social media, but they provide a vocabulary for characterizing a specific form of CQC to which women are subject and clarify that this treatment is rooted in gender-based prejudice (Joyce et al., 2021). This alone is a worthy goal, for research suggests men are less likely than are women to notice sexism (Swim et al., 2001), to recognize a particular behavior as sexist (Basford et al., 2014), or to acknowledge the severity of a sexist behavior (Becker & Swim, 2011[5]). Such vocabulary may therefore help identify specific behaviors as discriminatory, which is a pre-requisite for addressing sexism (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2008).

Just as importantly, efforts to label manifestations of sexism may shape thinking about how they can be addressed: When a label identifies as problematic the tendency for men to diminish the importance of what women have to say (or to claim credit for their ideas), it implicitly lends credence to a communicative solution focused on *amplifying voice* that helps "unmute" a muted group. Indeed, this strategy resonated with many men who took part in Study 2, who were more apt to see themselves amplifying the voice of a female colleague than to see themselves directly confronting a male boss.

There are other reasons to think interventions like amplifying voice could be helpful: To the extent that men's sexist behavior is unintentional or runs counter to their espoused ideologies (Swim & Cohen, 1997), they may be amenable to correction—particularly if this correction is offered indirectly. According to other studies, "amicable" efforts to address sexism such as amplifying voice can be very effective (e.g., Woodzicka & Good, 2021). This approach is also face-saving, as it can be enacted in a way that the perpetrator of sexism is not the focus of the corrective remark: strictly speaking, amplifying voice requires only the explicit identification of the original source of an idea and endorsement of that idea. As such, amplifying voice may not generate the same negative or defensive responses that might result from more aggressive modes of confrontation (Monteith et al., 2019).

### Bropriation in the context of modern sexism

A notable result from Study 2—albeit one that was not the focus of our investigation—was that the more men held beliefs reflecting modern sexism (i.e., the view that women no longer face discrimination), the *less* they would directly confront a male colleague's sexism or amplify voice. In light of this, it is worth reflecting on the sociopolitical context in the United States (where our study participants were located). On the one hand, there have been mixed findings with respect to whether conservatism influences judgments about displays of discrimination (see DeAndrea & Bullock, 2022, studies 1 and 2). On the other, nationally representative data suggests that political orientation is tied to perceptions of discriminatory treatment. A Pew survey (Fingerhut, 2016), for example, found that whereas 39% of Democrat-leaning men in the U.S. agreed that "Obstacles that made it harder for women to get ahead are largely gone," fully 75% of Republican-men endorsed this belief.

Regardless of where individuals fall on the political spectrum, there is growing concern about the influence wielded by figures such as Andrew Tate. Recently, for instance, teachers in the United Kingdom (Fazackerley, 2023) and New Zealand (Walls & Dahmen, 2023) have warned that students are internalizing messages distributed by the self-described "king of toxic masculinity" and express dismay that students "gather at lunchtime to watch his content" which they regurgitate in assignments. Similarly, Eddington (2020) notes that online communities such as *The Red Pill* provide spaces for men to engage in "hypercritical" discussions of "political, legal, and social institutions … [they] believe are used to discriminate against and oppress men" (p. 2). Although members of this particular community seek to challenge these institutions through sexual activity (Eddington, 2020), other similar groups use language and communication in ways that "activate fear, anger, and resentment toward minoritized groups (mainly women)" (Eddington et al., 2023, p. 117).

Ultimately, efforts to address gender discrimination occur in a context, and despite suggestions that "old-fashioned sexism" underpinned by hostility towards women is now scarce and socially unacceptable (Hebl et al., 2020; Swim & Cohen, 1997), there are groups for whom overtly misogynistic views are coming back into fashion, fueled at least in part by social media content. Our findings suggest these views are consequential for men's willingness to address sexism, and so this deserves consideration.

### Reconsidering diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training is contentious in certain parts of the United States, with lawmakers introducing anti-DEI legislation in at least thirty states (Adams & Chiwaya, 2024). Moreover, it is not always effective, particularly when training is perceived as accusatory (e.g., when it emphasizes individuals' potential to be unconsciously prejudiced and implicitly biased; Kim & Roberson, 2022) or unrealistic (e.g., framing diversity as "unequivocally, universally beneficial" rather than being beneficial when its challenges are overcome," Leslie et al., 2024, p. 595). Our findings align with recent arguments that there are more constructive ways of discussing diversity and promoting inclusivity.

That men were more willing to amplify voice than confront sexism directly speaks to the value of encouraging and training people to act as allies. Kossek et al. (2024), for example, developed workshops that sought to increase participants' awareness of the value and necessity of diversity, sensitize them to the nature and impact of microaggressions, and offer opportunities to practice using strategies to intervene when witnessing microaggressions. At a three-week follow-up, the workshop yielded encouraging results with respect to participants' practice of allyship behaviors. Similarly, Gardner and Alanis (2020) argue that allyship training is effective at building inclusive organizations because it does not merely provide a list of "'do's' and 'don'ts'" (p. 197), but instills in participants the *identity* of being an ally.

Participants in both our studies were more likely to report being willing to address sexism when positive (vs. negative) metastereotypes were activated. However, past research indicates that people tend, by default, to hold negative rather than positive metastereotypes (e.g., Finkelstein et al., 2013). As such, we argue that DEI training should encourage and equip people to question the negative assumptions they believe are held about them by people belonging to other social groups, while inculcating more positive metastereotypes. This is consistent with recent suggestions that trying to correct *meta*stereotypes may be a more effective way of improving group relations than is trying to challenge stereotypes or force individuals to confront implicit bias (which they may not, in any case, acknowledge). For instance, Moore-Berg and Hameiri (2024) argue that "informing people that they are wrong about what others think may be easier than convincing them that what they think is wrong" (p. 1) and note the potency of interventions that counter negative metastereotypes.

## Limitations

Our vignette-based approach permitted a high degree of control over manipulated variables, potentially at the expense of ecological validity given that what people *say* they will do in response to a hypothetical scenario does not always align with what they would *actually* do. Studies suggest, for instance, that "women anticipate they will confront sexism more than they actually do" (Ayres et al., 2009, p. 450; see also Goodwin et al. 2020). Thus, although women and men reported being quite willing to confront sexism directly or amplify voice, our data may present an overly-rosy picture of what people would actually do when witnessing sexism. It would be helpful for future research to employ more naturalistic methods.

It is also possible that our results are culture bound. In the U.S., 27% of women and 44% of men agree that "men are … expected to do too much to support women's equality" (Ipsos, 2019). Had we conducted our studies in France (where the figures are 14% and 29%, respectively) or Serbia (77% and 82%, respectively), we may have found different results. Seeing whether our findings replicate elsewhere (and within the United States) would be valuable.

Additionally, the scenario used in our studies was worded such that participants likely presumed that all characters were cisgender. Varying the scenario to overtly reflect the possibility that the perpetrators, victims, or witnesses of/to sexism were gender diverse would have required a far larger sample and increased the complexity of our analyses. Nonetheless, we recognize the need to ensure research reflects the presence, perspectives, and experiences, of transgender persons, and note this as an area for future research: People may belong to more than one community that has historically been muted, and accounting for these layers of marginalization and examining how they are challenged is important.

Finally, our vignette focused on just one manifestation of sexism. Had we examined a different form of sexist behavior (e.g., one that was overtly hostile or less ambiguous), we may have found different results. Future studies could explore this possibility.

## Directions for future scholarship

This study, in the context of the broader literature on both metastereotyping and social identity processes, highlights at least three overarching theoretical areas for attention. First, we believe the distinction between metastereotype valence and metastereotype content warrants careful examination. Numerous studies on metastereotyping focus on *valence* (as we do), whether by asking respondents to generate and report their own positive or negative metastereotypes (Fowler & Gasiorek, 2020; Fowler & Gasiorek, 2021; Owuamalam & Zagefka, 2011; Vázquez et al., 2017) or providing traits usually construed as positive or negative (Vezzali, 2017; Yzerbyt et al., 2009). Other researchers, however, focus on activating what we would term a *metaprototype*, or set of cohesive features that constitute a group prototype. For instance, to see whether Dutch persons would be willing to help Belgians to dispel a stereotype, van Leeuwen and Täuber (2012) presented the Dutch participants with an article explaining that Belgians viewed the Dutch as "somewhat self-centered, individualistic, stingy, and with little attention for the needs of others" (p. 774). While these are mostly negative traits, they form a cohesive prototype in a way that valence-focused manipulations (such as those in our studies) do not necessarily, and they also present targets with a depiction of themselves that can be dispelled through specific course of action.[6] Whether and when valenced metastereotypes function similarly or differently to metaprototypes is one direction for theoretical development in this area. To the extent that valence is the focus, more attention to the real-world circumstances under which positive (compared to negative) metastereotypes may be activated would be beneficial, given that previous consistently suggests that people tend to default to negative metastereotypes (e.g., Finkelstein et al., 2013; Frey & Tropp, 2006; Yzerbyt et al., 2009), but in the present studies we see important effects for *positive* metastereotypes.

Second, Voyles et al. (2014) argued that the consequences of a positive or negative metastereotype being activated depend on whether that metastereotype is cognitively appraised as threatening or empowering. Scholarship in this area would

benefit from theoretical models identifying factors that determine which of these targets feel. We suggest that personalization is likely to contribute to this assessment, for if an individual holds a (negative) group-level metastereotype and believes members of the outgroup view them in a manner consistent with that metastereotype (i.e., high personalization), they are much more likely to experience it as threatening or as something they fear 'living down to.' In contrast, if they do not believe it applies to them personally (i.e., low personalization), it is less likely to have such effects. An individual's resources (psychological and material) are also likely to be contributors; when people have resources to either live up to a positive stereotype or address a negative stereotype held by others, they are likely to feel empowered; in contrast, when resources are insufficient, those same (meta)stereotypes are likely to be experienced as potential threats.

Finally, future work should consider the role of communication in activating metastereotypes in interaction. SCT suggests that contextual features of social situations can make group memberships salient, which may also heighten awareness of and attention to metastereotypes (Frey & Tropp, 2006). This idea has broad support in the literature, and several researchers hold that situational cues—especially those that make it "relevant to determine how one is seen by the outgroup" (Lammers et al., 2008, p. 1229)—contribute to metastereotype activation (Owuamalam & Zagefka, 2011; Vorauer et al., 1998). It seems likely that just as certain stereotype-consistent communication behaviors may activate an associated stereotype (e.g., Hummert, 2023), *meta*stereotype-consistent communication might do likewise.

## Conclusion

Researchers have argued that displays of sexism have evolved to take more subtle forms. Amidst this evolution, however, sexism is still underpinned by presumptions of incompetence that result in the diminishment of women's contributions. Contemporary thinking and research have yielded both a new vocabulary with which to discuss and new ideas for redressing sexism. Our findings show that (a) the willingness of women and men to address sexism is enhanced when positive metastereotypes are made salient and are highly personalized, and (b) that as well as directly affecting willingness to confront sexism, metastereotypes also do this indirectly, by affecting women's feelings of responsibility for addressing sexism, and men's concern for how men (as a collective) are perceived by women.

## Supplementary material

Supplementary material is available at *Human Communication Research* online.

## Data availability

The data underlying this article will be shared on reasonable request to the corresponding author.

## Funding

The study was funded by internal monies received by the first author from the Massey University Research Fund.

Conflicts of interest: None declared.

## Notes

1. For the initial metastereotype elicitation task, no demographic screener for sex or gender was used. However, only women were able to participate in the two pilot tests and in the main study.
2. Some participants were also assigned to a true control condition (ie, they received no metastereotype messages and proceeded directly to the vignette). Because this study focuses on comparing positive versus negative metastereotype activation, and because participants in the control condition could and did not complete a metastereotype personalization measure, analyses reported here concern only the two experimental conditions.
3. Checking these responses resulted in the removal of data from 23 participants (6%) from the original sample of $N = 382$.
4. We are reminded of Afifi and Lee's (2000) findings concerning the delicate management of women's rejection of sexual advances, which must accomplish the instrumental goal while avoiding risk of negative retaliation that might result from communication that threatens the face of the individual making the sexual advance.
5. In this vein, it is worth pointing out that, when asked to rate the degree to which they perceived the incident in the vignette as sexist, women in Study 1 reported judging it to be almost a full point higher on a seven-point scale than did men in Study 2 ($M_{\text{women}} = 6.25$ vs $M_{\text{men}} = 5.31$).
6. Hopkins et al. (2007) and Wakefield et al. (2012b) took a similar approach as they gauged whether and when Scots might act in such a way as to dispel the negative stereotype English people hold of them as "always taking but never giving" (Wakefield et al., 2012b, p. 365) or as *mean*, and Wakefield et al. (2012a) likewise manipulated a specific gender-metastereotype of *dependency* that women had an opportunity to disprove.

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Human Communication Research, 2025, 00, 1–20
https://doi.org/10.1093/hcr/hqaf009
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