

Background

- **Microaggressions:** interactions that implicitly convey to a marginalized group that they are unwelcome, unqualified, or otherwise inferior. [1-2]
- One issue with both studies and policies is that microaggressions are **ambiguous**: one person can interpret an interaction as sexist or discriminatory, while another can perceive it as neutral.
- **Grice (1975) Conversational implicature:** (1) "You're good at math for a woman" or (2) "You're actually good at math." When these modifiers are not **informative** in the given context → implicate "...and I didn't expect this about someone like you."

Exp1: Do explicit beliefs about gender predict interpretations of microaggressions?

Exp2: Do different implicatures underlie the alternate interpretations?

Exp1 Methods

- Sentences in the frame: [Male Name/Female Name] said to [Female Name], "You're X."
- 18 critical trials with compliments on gender-stereotyped traits:
 - Neutral:** You're good at math.
 - Actually:** You're actually good at math.
 - For a Woman:** You're good at math for a woman.
- 18 filler trials with neutral compliments ("Your new shirt looks great!")
- Rated Politeness on 7-point scale (1=extremely impolite, 7=extremely polite)
- **N=203** from MTurk

Modern Sexism Scale

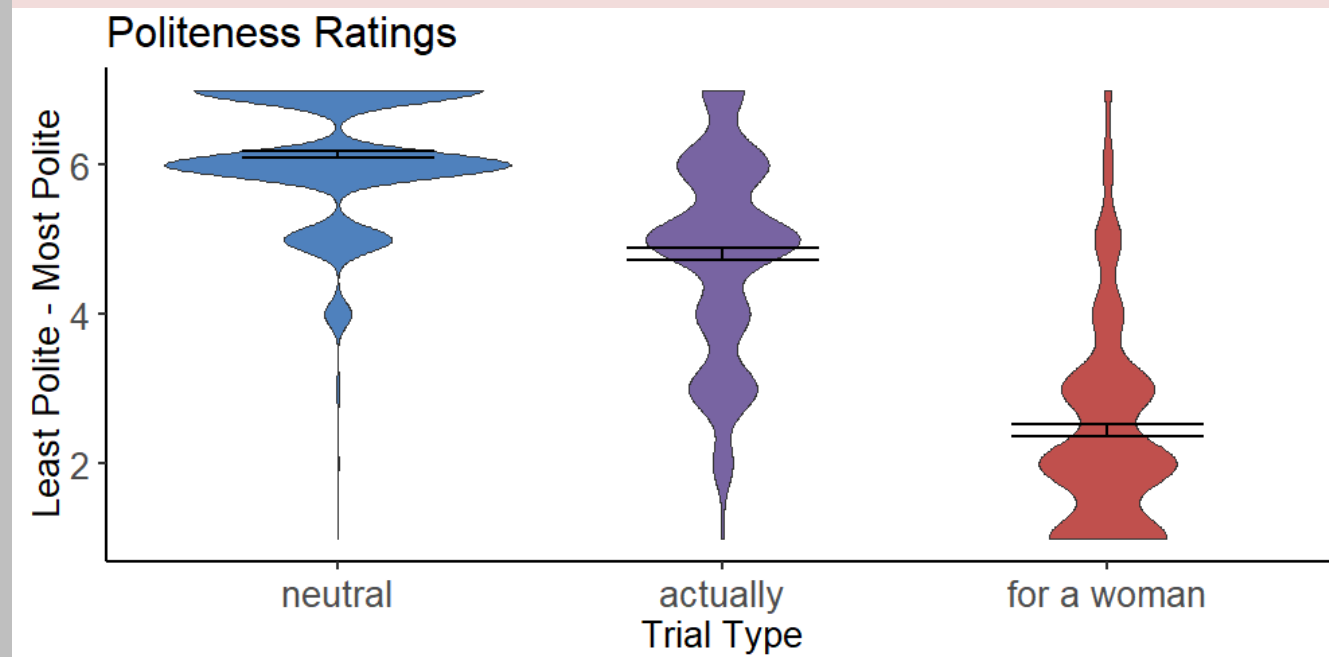
Beliefs about prevalence of implicit sexism, e.g. equal job opportunities, media representation [3]

Political Party Affiliation

• Demographic Info

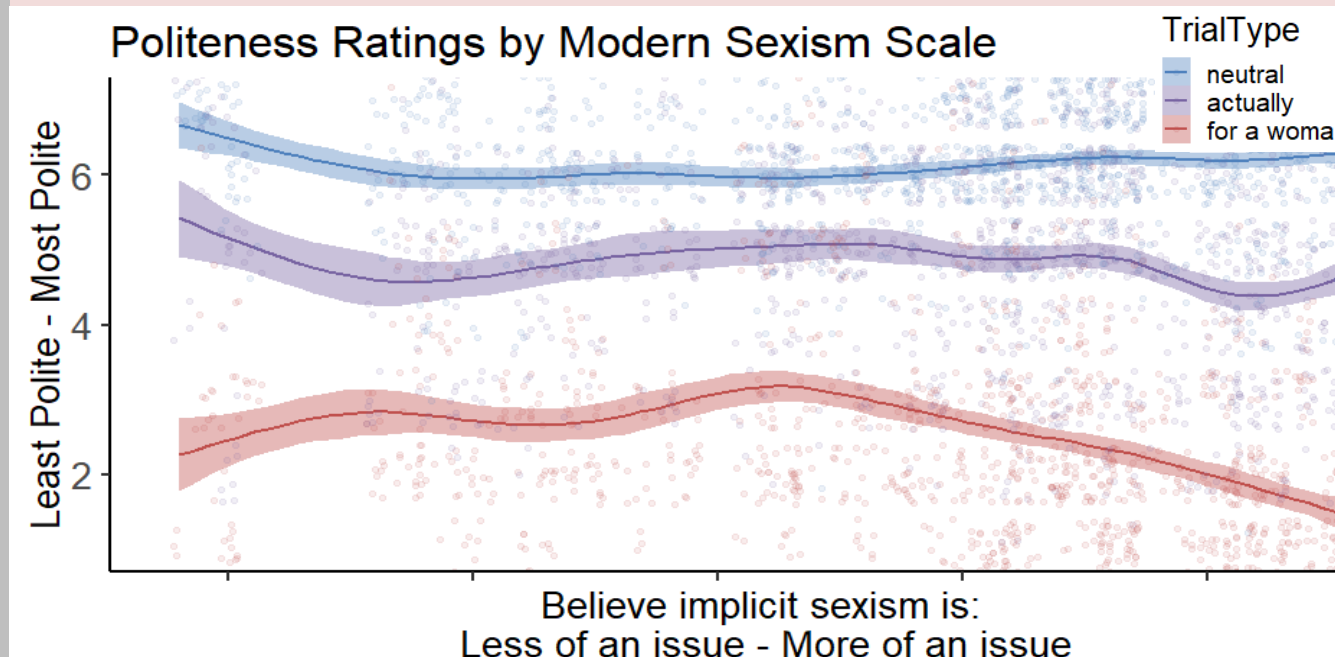
Exp1 Results

Do "actually" and "for a woman" elicit microaggression interpretations?



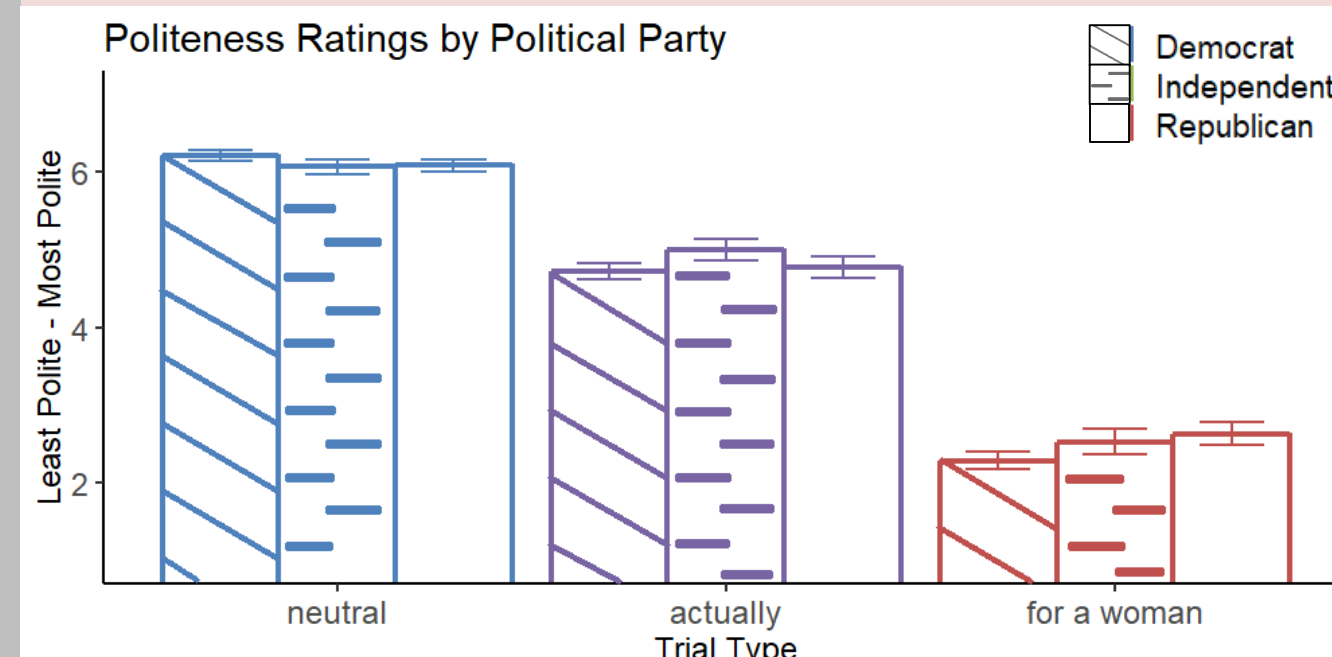
Participants rate Neutral trials near ceiling, For a Woman trials near floor, and Actually trials in the middle. Actually trials vary more. TT: $p < .001$

Does the Modern Sexism Scale predict politeness ratings?



Political party affiliation predicts politeness ratings most strongly in For a Woman trials, also in Actually trials, but not in Neutral trials. TT*MSS: $p < .001$

Does political party affiliation predict politeness ratings?

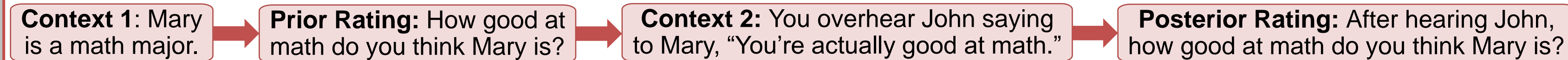


Political party affiliation predicts politeness ratings most strongly in For a Woman trials, also in Actually trials, but not in Neutral trials TT*Party: $p < .05$, TT*Party*MSS: $p < .001$

- Actually and For a Woman were interpreted as less informative than Neutral trials ($p < .001$), suggesting that listeners are deriving the conversational implicature, but varying in how polite it is (Interpretation 2).
- Independents and Democrats increased their ratings Prior→Post more than Republicans ($p < .05$), but the interaction with Trial Type was not significant. This suggests that the differences in ratings in Exp1 come more from the politeness judgement than from the underlying implicature (Interpretation 2).
- Participants with more liberal scores on the MSS had larger differences between the 3 trial types ($p < .001$).
- Gender of the speaker (i.e., the grammatical subject) did not have an effect in either Exp1 or Exp2.

Exp2 Methods

Added task (N=100 from MTurk), with ratings from 1-7 (1=very bad, 7=very good)



Two possible interpretations of "actually" and "for a woman" (A/FW) leading to Exp1 results:



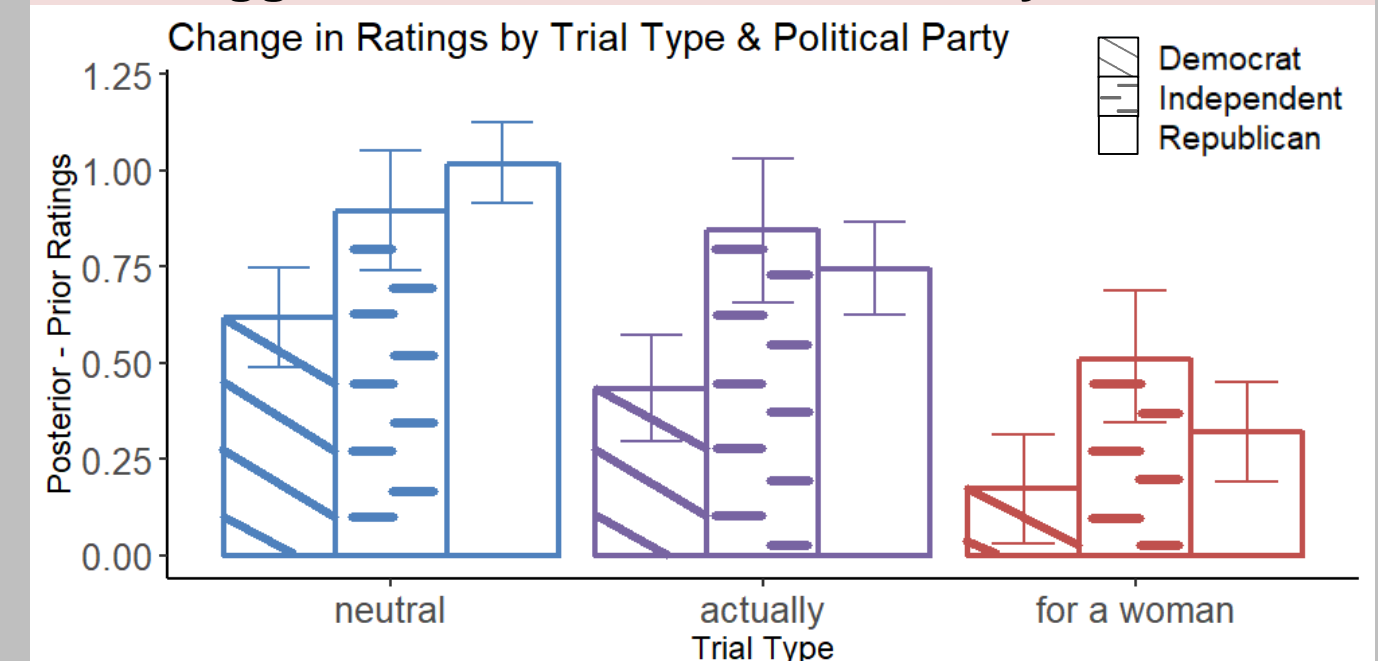
Discussion

Importance of accounting for individual variations in pragmatic inferences: Linguistic (modifiers, sentence structure) and non-linguistic (party, MSS) factors combine to predict how listeners vary in their interpretations of the same utterance.

These types of gender-based microaggressions likely arise through implicatures about the speaker's prior expectations: Future directions: speaker context (audio/visual stimuli), prosody, prior experiences.

Exp2 Results

Do listeners weight the informativity of microaggression statements differently?



[1] Sue, D. W., et al. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life: Implications for clinical practice. *Am Psych*. [2] Basford, T. E., et al. (2014). Do you see what I see? Perceptions of gender microaggressions in the workplace. *Psych of Women Q*. [3] Swim, J. K., et al. (1995). Sexism and racism: Old-fashioned and modern prejudices. *J. of Personality & Social Psych*.

