

research article

Ambivalent sexism, mental health and partner violence among opposite-sex and same-sex couples

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Ambivalent sexism has been described as influencing relationships in intimacy and partner abuse. Among 456 Spaniards, this study aimed to explore the association between mental health, ambivalent sexism and violence among opposite-sex and same-sex couples. Results showed that participants in abusive relationships presented higher levels of ambivalent and hostile sexism, regardless of partner's sex. Psychological violence was associated with ambivalent and hostile sexism. Moderate physical violence was linked to hostile sexism. Participants in abusive relationships reported poorer mental health indexes. These findings highlight the need of interventions to focus on dimensions as sexism towards women, even when considering same-sex couples.

Keywords intimate partner violence • opposite-sex couples • same-sex couples • ambivalent sexism • mental health

Key messages:

- People engaged in abusive relationships tend to present higher levels of ambivalent sexism.
- Both psychological and physical violence were associated with different abusive behaviours.
- Being in a violent relationship has a negative impact on one's mental health.
- Ambivalent sexism is a factor that should be considered while designing and implementing prevention and intervention measures to fight same-sex partner violence.

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Ambivalent sexism theory (Glick and Fiske, 1997) argues that sexism can be divided in two categories: hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. On one hand, hostile sexism includes pejorative beliefs about women, dominative paternalism, and heterosexual hostility (tendency to perceive women purely as sexual objects and fear of women using their sexual attractiveness to overpower men). In fact, it seems indisputable that patriarchal control has the ability to influence power attributions in heterosexual

relationships and that consequent male power is based frequently in hostile attitudes toward females. On the other hand, benevolent sexism comprises the idealisation of women, as well as paternalism and desire for intimate relations. Actually, 'benevolent' narratives from an oppressive group regarding the oppressed group has a soothing effect on the oppressor's conscience and results in being seen as a more effective way to coercive cooperation from the oppressed, who receive positive reinforcement for 'knowing their place' (Glick and Fiske, 1997). In this sense, women who fit into traditional gender roles would be the target of benevolent attitudes, while women who deviate from them and who would challenge the power of the male sex would be treated with hostility, thus serving as mechanisms that reinsure traditional gender roles and patriarchy (Glick and Fiske, 1997; 2001). As such, it is important to be aware that hostile and benevolent sexism coexist and are complementary to each other, both promoting gender inequality (Glick and Fiske, 2001). This coexistence and, consequently, ambivalent sexist narratives seem to be a product of female dyadic power and male structural power (Glick and Fisk, 1996, cited in Glick and Fiske, 1997). Nonetheless, both hostile and benevolent sexism share its base on patriarchy and traditional gender roles (Glick and Fiske, 1997).

Considering the sociology of gender theoretical approaches to intimate partner violence (IPV), from an interactional perspective, it is argued that hegemonic masculinity (and hegemonic femininity, in a complementary way) causes and translates power inequalities, as 'doing gender' (that is, enforces traditional gender roles and adopts socially established characteristics for each gender). Hence, violence (strongly associated with hegemonic masculinity) would be only a strategy that could be used to 'do gender'. Nevertheless, it is important to note that both women and men may express masculinity and, thus, they can both perpetrate partner abuse (Cannon et al, 2015). Moreover, as affirmed by Sokoloff and Dupont (2005), it is important to consider that there is not a privileged aspect when it comes to explaining partner abuse, as several systems of oppression and their intersection influence this phenomenon and must be considered. For example, when analysing same-sex partner abuse, heterosexism and homophobia are two dimensions that must be considered. Barros et al (2019) stated that same-sex partner abuse occurred among a population that was already stigmatised, due to not conforming to heteronormative and homophobic norms concerning social expectations for a couple.

Traditional gender roles and ambivalent sexism have been associated with partner violence in several studies, although not in a congruent way throughout the literature. Among opposite-sex couples, Bookwala et al (1992) verified that traditional gender role beliefs were predictive of female physical aggression. Still regarding heterosexual relationships, studies found that hostile sexism would be positively associated with IPV, as men with higher levels would equally present higher odds for IPV perpetration. In fact, this group of men reported higher rates of psychological and physical partner abuse (Renzetti et al, 2018). According to Ibabe et al (2016), both perpetration and victimisation in a dating relationship were positively associated with ambivalent sexism equally for young men and women. However, in the same study, hostile and benevolent sexism were not risk factors. Additionally, also in a sample composed by heterosexuals, Karakurt and Cumbie (2012) reported that, while women with low sexist attitudes would have greater odds of IPV victimisation, men's sexist attitudes would not predict either IPV victimisation or perpetration.

Among a sample of gay men, Oringer and Samuelson (2011) reported that physical violence perpetration and victimisation would be predicted by greater conformity

to traditional norms, specifically aggressiveness and the suppression of emotional vulnerability. Therefore, the authors argued that, as happens among heterosexual men, there was a link between masculinity and partner abuse perpetration when also considering gay and bisexual men. Moreover, this study's findings suggested that, despite the different experiences between heterosexual and gay men, conformity to traditional gender roles are distributed normally among the second group.

According to [Hassouneh and Glass \(2008\)](#), traditional gender roles also have a significant impact among females within a same-sex relationship. Several studies suggested that the idea that women cannot be violent hampers the identification of their relationship as abusive (even when physical violence is involved), especially when they had lack of relationship experience, and makes the identification of a primary perpetrator significantly more difficult ([Hassouneh and Glass, 2008](#); [Walters, 2011](#); [Barros et al, 2019](#)). Furthermore, in the same study, findings suggested that law enforcement professionals tended to rely on traditional gender stereotypes when analysing same-sex partner abuse situations, searching for traditionally male characteristics to identify the offender ([Hassouneh and Glass, 2008](#)). Interestingly, [Barros et al \(2019\)](#) mentioned that although traditional gender expectations affect both male and female same-sex couples, it occurred differently for both groups: while females struggle to identify themselves as an offender, males found it difficult to identify themselves as victims.

Violence, either perpetrated or suffered, had an important impact on the development of one's health and could have serious repercussions in the health of those involved. Moreover, according to [Szalacha et al \(2017\)](#), in a female sample, the strongest predictor of mental health was the number of types of violence experienced, regardless of one's sexual identity. Regardless, depressive symptomatology and anxiety were the consequences more frequently cited in the literature (for example, [Brown et al, 2016](#); [Gehring and Vaske, 2017](#); [Ireland et al, 2017](#); [Miller and Irvin, 2017](#); [Reuter et al, 2017](#); [Longares et al, 2018](#)). Physical violence was identified in the literature as a predictor of depression ([Edwards and Neal, 2017](#); [Reuter et al, 2017](#)). In addition, IPV victims have been described as having higher levels of depression, regardless of their partner's sex ([Pantalone et al, 2012](#)), with female victims presenting themselves as more vulnerable ([Cramer et al, 2012](#)). Possibly related, suicidal ideation is frequently mentioned in the literature ([Pantalone et al, 2012](#); [Albright et al, 2019](#)). In addition, victimisation is linked to more angiogenic symptomatology ([Pantalone et al, 2012](#)), and psychological violence was associated with higher levels of anxiety ([Reuter et al, 2017](#)). In fact, even symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder were related to this phenomenon ([Rose et al, 2010](#); [Stewart et al, 2013](#)). Nevertheless, depression among same-sex attracted people could likewise be a consequence of minority stress, which should not be forgotten. LGB victims may have faced isolation, discrimination, and violence due to their status as a sexual minority, which could affect their mental health before and independently of IPV. Therefore, it could be argued that being a sexual minority can contribute to a poorer mental health by itself ([Miller and Irvin, 2017](#)).

Many other consequences of intimate partner violence were stated all over the literature, as negative impact on their work or studies, increased alcohol or drug use, decline in their physical health ([Bacchus et al, 2015](#)), feelings of fear, trauma, distrust, insecurity, isolation, defeat, emotional withdrawal, mental illness ([Woodyat and Stephenson, 2016](#)), lack of self-esteem ([Logie et al, 2014](#); [Woodyat and Stephenson, 2016](#)), higher average scores of suicidality ([Pantalone et al, 2012](#); [Espelage et al, 2018](#);

Albright et al, 2019), among others. Regarding the types of violence, verbal abuse of the couple was associated with higher levels of anxiety symptoms one year after abuse and psychological violence was associated with feeling psychologically unfit (Pepper and Sand, 2015; Reuter et al, 2017), less resilience (Lopez, 2015), feelings of fear, trauma, mistrust, insecurity, isolation, defeat, emotional withdrawal, lack of self-esteem and mental illness (Stanley et al, 2006; Lopez, 2015; Fernandes, 2016; Woodyatt and Stephenson, 2016). Additionally, physical violence was described as a predictor of higher levels of depression one year after abuse (Reuter et al, 2017). When psychological and physical violence coexist, their perpetration was associated with emotional instability (Pepper and Sand, 2015).

The purpose of the present study was to explore the effects of ambivalent sexism on the IPV dynamics. Thus, the primary aim of this research was to understand what is the impact of ambivalent sexism levels on partner abusive relationship dynamics. Specifically, we expected to verify that (1) individuals with higher rates of ambivalent sexism have higher odds of engaging in abusive relationships; (2) individuals who are abusive towards their partners in an opposite-sex relationship will present higher rates of ambivalent sexism, when compared to individuals who are abusive towards their partners in a same-sex relationship; (3) individuals engaged in a violent relationship will present worst rates of mental health, when compared to individuals engaged in a non-violent relationship.

Method

Procedure and participants

To address these research aims, the instrument selected for data collection was inserted in an online survey platform, so that it could be easily disseminated. Before filling the online survey, a brief description of the present study's aim and participation conditions (for example, participant's inclusion criteria) was presented. It was explained that participants would not receive any incentive to collaborate in this study and they were assured of its voluntary nature, their right to refuse to answer and the privacy of their answers, as all responses were anonymous. Giving consent was mandatory before answering any item of the survey.

The recruitment of participants was carried out with the collaboration of different Spanish associations in support of the LGB community and through social networks (for example, Twitter, Facebook). An email was sent to several associations, where the aims of the research were presented, as well as the way they were asked to collaborate (namely, spreading the survey's link through their clients, members and so on). The inclusion criteria were to be over 18 years of age, to be Spanish, to be cisgender and to have had a partner in the last year, even if not currently in a relationship. Furthermore, it was emphasised that the participation in the survey was anonymous and that participants should be aged 18 or over, as well as cisgender. All procedures performed in this study were in accordance with the ethical standards of the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Finally, the recruit sample for this study consisted of 458 individuals. The participants were 28.4 per cent male and 71.6 per cent women, with 75.1 per cent of the sample being between 18 and 40 years old. Regarding sexual orientation, 48.7 per cent

reported being heterosexual, 15.1 per cent reported being gay, 14.8 per cent reported being lesbian, 19.2 per cent reported being bisexual, and 2.2 per cent reported being other. Moreover, 39.7 per cent of the present sample was involved in a same-sex relationship, while 60.3 per cent were not. Of the general sample, 4.6 per cent presented a low socioeconomic status, while 18.8 per cent medium-low status, 56.6 per cent medium status, 19 per cent medium-high status and 1.1 per cent high status. Concerning schooling level, 0.9 per cent of the participants did not progress beyond primary education, while 22.7 per cent finished secondary education and 76.4 per cent finished university studies. Finally, regarding professional status, 20.3 per cent of our participants were students, 12.4 per cent was studying and employed at the same time, 9 per cent was employed part-time, 49.1 per cent was employed full-time and 9.2 per cent was unemployed at the time of the present study. Information concerning violence rates and types of violence present in our sample can be assessed through [Table 1](#).

Instruments

A questionnaire was designed for this study and divided into five different sections: sociodemographic information (for example, sex, age, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and employment status), experiences of IPV victimisation and perpetration, help-seeking experiences, attitudes regarding ambivalent sexism and, finally, mental health.

IPV experiences were assessed through the Modified Conflicts Tactics Scale (M-CTS) (Straus, 1979), validated for the Spanish population (Muñoz-Rivas et al, 2007). Through 18 items, it aims to identify violent psychological and physical behaviours in intimate partner relationships. Psychological violence represents both verbal and nonverbal behaviours that translate generally into being controlling or critical towards the partner (for example, saying something to annoy the partner). Physical violence, however, was defined as acts that correspond to physical assault (for example, pushing or grabbing the partner, hitting, kicking or throwing an object). In the present study, a participant was considered to be engaged in an abusive relationship when they suffered or perpetrated one of the behaviours operationalised on M-CTS with a frequency equal or higher than 'Sometimes'. Previous factor analytics procedures suggested four different factors: negotiation, psychological aggression (for example, insulting or cursing the partner), minor/moderate physical aggression (for example, hitting, kicking, or throwing an object at the partner) and severe physical aggression (for example, trying to drown the partner). In the present study, data collected from the negotiation scale was not taken into account. Reliability coefficients for each subscale in the present sample were similar to other studies (Muñoz-Rivas et al, 2007): a) Reasoning (0.39 for perpetrators; 0.23 for victims); b) Psychological Violence (0.73 for perpetrators; 0.72 for victims); c) Mild Physical Violence (0.94 for perpetrators; 0.93 for victims); d) Severe Physical Violence (0.96 for perpetrators; 0.99 for victims).

Help-seeking experiences were evaluated in the third section, as participants were asked if they reached out to someone when they faced problems within their relationship and those who did were questioned about whom the receptors of their call for help were. Finally, these participants were also inquired about their satisfaction

Table 1: Frequencies and percentages for sex, age, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, ambivalent sexism, benevolent sexism, hostile sexism and GHQ-12 index according to partner's sex and if the relationship presents violent dynamics or not

Demographic Characteristics	Individuals engaged in a violent same-sex relationship (n = 100) number (%)	Individuals engaged in a non-violent same-sex relationship (n = 82) number (%)	Individuals engaged in a violent opposite-sex relationship (n = 148) number (%)	Individuals engaged in a non-violent opposite-sex relationship (n = 128) number (%)
Sex				
Male	38 (38)	40 (48.8)	27 (18.2)	25 (19.5)
Female	62 (62)	42 (51.2)	121 (81.8)	103 (80.5)
Age				
Between 18 and 25	23 (23)	18 (22)	50 (33.8)	60 (46.9)
Between 26 and 30	20 (20)	22 (26.8)	22 (14.9)	22 (17.2)
Between 31 and 35	17 (17)	11 (13.4)	19 (12.8)	10 (7.8)
Between 36 and 40	12 (12)	11 (13.4)	21 (14.2)	6 (4.7)
Between 41 and 45	12 (12)	10 (12.2)	11 (7.4)	7 (5.5)
Between 46 and 50	11 (11)	3 (3.7)	8 (5.4)	11 (8.6)
Between 51 and 55	3 (3)	4 (4.9)	12 (8.1)	8 (6.3)
Between 56 and 60	2 (2)	2 (2.4)	4 (2.7)	2 (1.6)
Between 61 and 65	0 (0)	1 (1.2)	1 (0.7)	1(0.8)
Between 65 and 70	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1(0.8)
Sexual orientation				
Heterosexual	2 (2)	3 (3.7)	116 (78.4)	102 (79.7)
Gay	34 (34)	35 (42.7)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Lesbian	39 (39)	29 (35.4)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Bisexual	22 (22)	15 (18.3)	29 (19.6)	22 (17.2)
Other	3 (3)	0 (0)	3 (2)	4 (3.1)
Education level completed				
Primary studies	0(0)	2 (2.4)	1 (.7)	1 (.8)
Secondary studies	25 (25)	19 (23.2)	36 (24.3)	24 (18.8)
University studies	75 (75)	61 (74.4)	111 (75)	103 (80.5)

(Continued)

Table 1: Continued

Demographic Characteristics	Individuals engaged in a violent same-sex relationship (n =100) number (%)	Individuals engaged in a non-violent same-sex relationship (n = 82) number (%)	Individuals engaged in a violent opposite-sex relationship (n =148) number (%)	Individuals engaged in a non-violent opposite-sex relationship (n = 128) number (%)
Socioeconomic status				
Low	4 (4)	5 (6.1)	6 (4.1)	6 (4.7)
Medium-low	18 (18)	15 (18.3)	31 (20.9)	22 (17.2)
Medium	54 (54)	45 (54.9)	78 (52.7)	82 (64.1)
Medium-high	24 (24)	17 (20.7)	29 (19.6)	17 (13.3)
High	0 (0)	0 (0)	4 (2.7)	1 (0.8)
Ambivalent Sexism				
Mean	1.624	1.520	1.775	1.573
Standard deviation	.808	.809	.839	.702
Benevolent sexism				
Mean	1.62	1.530	1.81	1.560
Standard deviation	.970	.923	1.012	.833
Hostile sexism				
Mean	1.588	1.500	1.735	1.593
Standard deviation	.750	.788	.792	.695
GHQ-12 Index				
Mean	2.510	2.620	2.520	2.620
Standard deviation	.295	.247	.258	.241
Victimisation by type of violence				
Psychological	100 (100)	82 (100)	148 (100)	128 (100)
Minor/moderate physical aggression	8 (8)	0 (0)	6 (4.1)	0 (0)
Severa physical aggression	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Perpetration by type of violence				
Psychological	45 (45)	2 (2.4)	62 (41.9)	3 (2.3)
Minor/moderate physical aggression	3 (3)	0 (0)	6 (4.1)	1 (0.8)

(Continued)

Table 1: Continued

Demographic Characteristics	Individuals engaged in a violent same-sex relationship (n =100) number (%)	Individuals engaged in a non-violent same-sex relationship (n = 82) number (%)	Individuals engaged in a violent opposite-sex relationship (n =148) number (%)	Individuals engaged in a non-violent opposite-sex relationship (n = 128) number (%)
Severa physical aggression	3 (3)	0 (0)	3 (2)	1 (0.8)

with the help they received. Nonetheless, data collected in this section was not taken into consideration in the present study.

The fourth section contained the Spanish version of Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick and Fiske, 1997), developed by Expósito et al (1998) and validated for the Spanish population (León-Ramírez and Piera, 2014). The aim is to accurately assess stereotyped positions regarding differences and resemblances between women and men, in which women are considered as inferior. Several sentences were presented (for example, ‘under the pretext of asking for “equality”, many women seek special privileges, such as working conditions that favour them over men’) and participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with each one of them (‘strongly disagree’, ‘moderately disagree’, ‘slightly disagree’, ‘slightly agree’, ‘moderately agree’, and ‘strongly agree’). Through their results, the scale provides both a score concerning the levels of ambivalent sexism as a whole and separated scores for both levels of hostile sexism and levels of benevolent sexism. Reliability coefficients in this study’s sample for the total scale (0.94) and for the hostile (0.94) and benevolent (0.85) subscales were similar to those found by León-Ramírez and Piera (2014).

The last section was composed by the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12), equally validated for the Spanish population (Rocha et al, 2011). It represents a self-administrated instrument, composed of 12 items that aim to detect possible cases of mental health disorders. Participants were asked to answer several questions regarding the frequency of several possible symptoms (for example, ‘Have you been able to concentrate well on what you were doing?’ ‘Have you been able to enjoy your normal activities each day?’). Although the present study will analyse solely the general mental health index provided by this particular scale and, therefore, use it as a one-dimensional instrument, it should be noted that previous studies report the existence of possible factors (for example, Depression/Anxiety versus Social Dysfunction; Coping Strategies, Self-esteem and Stress) (Rocha et al, 2011).

Data analysis

Quantitative data were analysed through the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences software (IBM SPSS for Windows, version 22.0 (IBM, Madrid, Spain)). Aiming to describe and characterise the sample, univariate descriptive statistics were computed for all variables (that is, sociodemographic data, partner’s sex, victimisation and perpetration experiences, ambivalent sexism, mental health index). In addition, in order to identify potential associations between partner’s sex, experiences of partner violence, ambivalent sexism and mental health, bivariate inferential statistical analyses

were performed (*t* tests for independent samples, ANOVA between-groups). In order to verify the three main objectives of this research, *t* tests for independent samples were performed. Finally, aiming to assess important differences between people engaged in violent same-sex relationships, in nonviolent same-sex relationships, in violent opposite-sex relationships, in nonviolent opposite-sex relationships, the test ANOVA between-groups was calculated.

Results

Sociodemographic data of the different groups

According to the criteria described earlier, in the present sample, 248 individuals were identified as being in a violent relationship, while 210 were in a non-violent relationship. Participants who reported being engaged in an abusive relationship tend to be older and had a better socioeconomic status.

For further analysis, a grouping variable was created, originating four groups: individuals engaged in a violent same-sex relationship, individuals engaged in a non-violent same-sex relationship, individuals engaged in a violent opposite-sex relationship and individuals engaged in a non-violent opposite-sex relationship. Demographics data is reported in [Table 1](#).

Ambivalent sexism and IPV

To analyse the relationship between being involved in a violent relationship and ambivalent sexism, participants were compared through a *t*-test for independent samples and Cohen's *d* was calculated in order to assess the effect size (see [Table 2](#)). Participants who engage in a violent relationship presented significantly higher rates of ambivalent sexism [$t(454.390) = 2.212, p = .027; d = .206$]. When analysing the two subscales of hostile and benevolent sexism, participants who engage in a violent relationship were significantly more likely to present higher rates of hostile sexism only [$t(455.685) = 685, p = .030; d = .202$]. No differences were found regarding benevolent sexism between the two groups [$t(456) = 1.674, p = .095, d = .157$].

To assess if the type of violence would have a different impact on ambivalent sexism, and its hostile and benevolent subscales, *t* test comparing individuals in violent relationships and individuals in non-violent relationships were conducted (see [Table 3](#)). Participants who engaged in a psychologically violent relationship presented higher rates of ambivalent and hostile sexism [$t(454.390) = 2.212, p = .027, d = .206; t(455.685), p = .030, d = .202$], when compared to participants in non-violent relationships. Participants who engaged in a physically violent relationship, with moderated aggressions, presented significantly higher rates of hostile sexism [$t(13.521) = 1.324, p = .039, d = .563$]. Finally, participants who engaged in a physically violent relationship, with severe aggressions, did not present significant differences in sexism rates when compared to participants in non-violent relationships.

Considering that both victims and perpetrators were included in each sample concerning violent relationships, an independent-sample *t* test was performed in order to compare means regarding ambivalent sexism and its subscales between perpetrators in a same-sex relationship ($n = 48$) and in an opposite-sex relationship ($n = 68$).

Table 2: Independent sample *t* test for comparing means for ambivalent sexism, hostile sexism, benevolent sexism and GHQ-12 index among participants involved in violent relationships and participants involved in non-violent relationships

		Mean	Std. deviation	95% Confidence interval of the difference		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
				Lower	Upper			
Ambivalent sexism inventory	Violent relationship (n = 248)	1.715	.829	.018	.307	2.212	454.390	.027
	Non-violent relationship (n = 210)	1.552	.744					
Hostile sexism	Violent relationship (n = 248)	1.74	.998	.019	.361	2.182	455.685	.030
	Non-violent relationship (n = 210)	1.55	.867					
Benevolent sexism	Violent relationship (n = 248)	1.675	.778	-.021	.258	1.674	456	.095
	Non-violent relationship (n = 210)	1.557	.732					
GHQ-12	Violent relationship (n = 248)	2.52	.273	-.149	-.053	-4.150	456	<.001
	Non-violent relationship (n = 210)	2.62	.243					

No statistically significant differences were found either regarding ambivalent sexism [$t(114) = -.440, p = .661$] and regarding its benevolent and hostile subscales [$t(114) = -5.19, p = .605$ and $t(114) = -.490, p = .625$, respectively].

Ambivalent sexism, IPV and partner's sex

In order to compare ambivalent sexism rates taking in consideration the sex of one's partner and the eventual presence of violent dynamics in one's relationship, an ANOVA *between-subjects* was conducted (see Table 4). Results showed that there were no statistically significant differences between the four groups either regarding ambivalent sexism inventory or its subscales. In fact, results were narrowly not significant in the case of both ambivalent sexism ($p = .067$) and hostile sexism ($p = .069$). Analysing descriptive statistics (see Table 1), it is possible to observe that means were higher in the groups where violence was present. If groups were compared taking into account partner's sex, same-sex couples presented lower means.

Table 3: Independent sample *t* test for comparing means for ambivalent sexism, hostile sexism, benevolent sexism and GHQ-12 index among participants involved in violent relationships and participants involved in non-violent relationships, by type of violence

			Mean	Std. deviation	95% Confidence interval of the difference		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
					Lower	Upper			
Psychological violence	Ambivalent sexism inventory	Violent relationship (n = 248)	1.714	.829	.018	.307	2.212	454.390	.027
		Non-violent relationship (n = 210)	1.552	.744					
	Hostile sexism	Violent relationship (n = 248)	1.74	.998	.019	.361	2.182	455.685	.030
		Non-violent relationship (n = 210)	1.55	.867					
	Benevolent sexism	Violent relationship (n = 248)	1.676	.778	-.021	.258	1.674	456	.095
		Non-violent relationship (n = 210)	1.557	.732					
	GHQ-12	Violent relationship (n = 248)	2.52	.273	-.149	-.053	-4.150	456	<.001
		Non-violent relationship (n = 210)	2.62	.243					
Moderate physical violence	Ambivalent sexism inventory	Violent relationship (n = 14)	1.984	.991	-.221	.930	1.324	13.521	.207
		Non-violent relationship (n = 444)	1.629	.786					
	Hostile sexism	Violent relationship (n = 14)	2.16	1.240	.028	1.031	2.073	456	.039
		Non-violent relationship (n = 444)	1.63	.930					
	Benevolent sexism	Violent relationship (n = 14)	1.831	.963	-.188	.621	1.052	456	.293
		Non-violent relationship (n = 444)	1.615	.752					
	GHQ-12	Violent relationship (n = 14)	2.29	.345	-.425	-.148	-4.057	456	<.001
		Non-violent relationship (n = 444)	2.57	.257					

(Continued)

Table 3: Continued

			Mean	Std. deviation	95% Confidence interval of the difference		t	df	Sig.
					Lower	Upper			
Severe physical violence	Ambivalent sexism inventory	Violent relationship (n = 4)	2.193	1.163	-.225	1.341	1.400	456	.162
		Non-violent relationship (n = 454)	1.635	.790					
	Hostile sexism	Violent relationship (n = 4)	2.07	.879	-.509	1.354	.891	456	.373
		Non-violent relationship (n = 454)	1.65	.944					
	Benevolent sexism	Violent relationship (n = 4)	2.318	1.538	-1.741	3.148	.913	3.013	.428
		Non-violent relationship (n = 454)	1.615	.749					
	GHQ-12	Violent relationship (n = 4)	2.27	.583	-1.221	.632	-1.011	3.011	.386
		Non-violent relationship (n = 454)	2.57	.260					

Mental health and IPV

Aiming to understand if there were differences related to the mental health index between individuals who were involved in a violent relationship and those who were involved in a non-violent relationship, a t test for independent samples was performed (see Table 2). Participants engaged in a violent relationship significantly differ from participants engaged in a non-violent relationship, regarding mental health index [$t(456) = -4.150, p < .001$; see Table 2], with the first group reporting lower rates comparing to the second one ($M = 2.52; SD = 2.73$ vs $M = 2.62; SD = .243$). When analysing the impact of each type of violence, it was possible to verify that people involved in non-violent relationships presented a higher mental health index compared to people involved in violent relationships regarding either psychological violence [$t(456) = -4.150, p < .001$], moderated physical violence [$t(456) = -4.057, p < .001$] and severe physical violence [$t(3.011) = -1.011, p = .386$] (see Table 1).

Mental health, IPV and partner's sex

When comparing participants engaged in an opposite-sex violent relationship, in a same-sex violent relationship, in an opposite-sex non-violent relationship and in a same-sex non-violent relationship regarding the mental health index, through an

ANOVA *between-subjects* (see Table 4), it was observed that there were statistically significant differences between the four groups [$F(3,454) = 5.739, p = .001$]. Both participants in an opposite-sex non-violent relationship ($M = 2.62; SD = .241$) and in a same-sex non-violent relationship ($M = 2.63; SD = .247$) presented higher mental health indexes, when compared to participants engaged in an opposite-sex violent relationship ($M = 2.52; SD = .258$) and in a same-sex violent relationship ($M = 2.51; SD = .295$). Indeed, post-hoc Tukey tests reported that statistically significant differences were only found between the groups with violence and the groups without violence, that is, people in non-violent relationships reported higher mental health indexes than people in violent relationships, regardless of the partner's sex. However, when considering only violent relationships, it can be concluded that there are no significant differences between participants engaged in an opposite-sex violent relationship and in a same-sex violent relationship.

Discussion

One of the main aims of the present study was to explore how ambivalent sexism influences intimate relationships with people of the opposite sex and with people of the same sex. Analysing the whole sample, it is noticeable that the levels of ambivalent sexism are low, as well as the average values obtained in the subscales of hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. Compared to people involved in relationships without

Table 4: Differences between individuals involved in same-sex violent relationships, opposite-sex violent relationships, same-sex nonviolent relationships and opposite-sex nonviolent relationships, concerning ambivalent sexism, hostile sexism, benevolent sexism and mental health index

		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.	Eta squared
Ambivalent sexism inventory	Between groups	4.513	3	1.504	2.409	.067	.016
	Within groups	283.842	454	.625			
	Total	288.355	457				
Hostile sexism	Between groups	6.300	3	2.100	2.379	.069	.015
	Within groups	400.722	454	.883			
	Total	407.023	457				
Benevolent sexism	Between groups	3.320	3	1.107	1.934	.123	.013
	Within groups	259.805	454	.572			
	Total	263.124	457				
GHQ-12	Between groups	1.166	3	.389	5.739	.001	.037
	Within groups	30.738	454	.068			
	Total	31.903	457				

violent dynamics, it is possible to observe higher values of ambivalent sexism and hostile sexism in people who are involved in violent relationships. As such, the first hypothesis of this study was confirmed, despite the absence of differences between these two groups regarding benevolent sexism. This finding was expected, since greater levels of conforming to traditional gender roles are related to violence perpetration either between opposite-sex couples (Bookwala et al, 1992; Renzetti et al, 2018) and same-sex couples (Hassouneh and Glass, 2008; Oringher and Samuelson, 2011). Also, it should be noted that the fact that benevolent sexism is not related to IPV (and psychological abuse and physical abuse in particular) is not an odd result. The same was observed in other research (Ibabe et al, 2016; Renzetti et al, 2018); nonetheless, the measuring of IPV experiences was done through different instruments, while the population in the compared studies was not quite the same. However, it should be taken into consideration while analysing this finding that the effect size of such a test was especially low.

Analysing the obtained results, some positive associations between the different types of violence assessed and ambivalent sexism were also noticeable. According to them, the higher the levels of ambivalent sexism, the greater the likelihood of episodes of psychological violence in the couple. These findings could be congruent with Renzetti et al (2018), who reported that hostile sexism was positively associated with psychological partner abuse perpetration, together with alcohol use. Additionally, the higher the levels of hostile sexism, the greater the likelihood of episodes of both psychological and moderate physical violence. This particular result is in line with the research carried out by Renzetti et al (2018), even though their sample only consisted of heterosexual men. Nonetheless, while analysing these results, it should be taken into consideration that, in the case of psychological violence, the effect size was, in both cases of ambivalent sexism and hostile sexism, low. Finally, the absence of differences between participants who did and who did not engage in a physically violent relationship, with severe aggressions, concerning ambivalent sexism must be mentioned. Despite this result being not coherent with the literature, it could be due to the fact that the two compared groups are from very different sizes (the group with no severe violence being the one with the highest number of participants), which could have influenced the result.

When analysing the relationship between ambivalent sexism and violence in intimate relationships, the present study also compared people with an opposite sex partner and people with a same-sex partner. Dividing the sample into four different groups based on experiencing violence and partner's sex, no differences were found regarding ambivalent sexism and its subscales. Moreover, when considering solely perpetrators, no differences were found between same-sex and opposite-sex couples concerning ambivalent sexism; thus, the second hypothesis of this study was not confirmed. In fact, this result was not expected as, although traditional gender roles also impact same-sex couples and they may even feel the pressure to fit into a heteronormative relationship model, opposite-sex couples are frequently linked to IPV when conforming with traditional gender roles and/or presenting high levels of sexism. However, in addition to the fact that this particular result is possibly a product of the low levels of ambivalent sexism throughout the sample, it should be noticed that, as already mentioned, most studies based on this concept are carried out with participants engaged in an opposite-sex relationship or who identify themselves as heterosexual.

Ambivalent sexism has been related to IPV in several studies (for example, [Karakurt and Cumbie, 2012](#); [Renzetti et al, 2018](#)). In this sample, it does not have, indeed, a significant effect in most of the comparisons. Nonetheless, the low levels of sexism in the overall sample may be playing a part in this. Furthermore, the fact that most participants have completed an education level of university studies may have had an important impact on their responses, as sexism and gender equality are, nowadays, a frequent discussion topic in that context. Therefore, participants can be more educated and sensitive regarding sexism; thus, it can have a less of an important role concerning relationship dynamics. Moreover, most studies using the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory are based on samples consisting of opposite-sex couples, while almost half of the participants on this study are engaged in a same-sex couple.

The second principal aim of the present study was to assess the impact of partner abuse on mental health, as well as verify the existence of significant differences among people who were involved in an abusive relationship. The present data points out that, in the present sample, people who are involved in an abusive relationship significantly differ from people involved in a non-abusive relationship. Likewise, comparing the mental health index in participants who had same sex and opposite sex partners, with and without violence dynamics, it was found that couples with violent dynamics have poorer mental health, with no significant differences between participants with partners of the same sex and with partners of the opposite sex. Thus, the third hypothesis was confirmed. Such finding was expected, as partner abuse is known for its harmful impact among all parties involved, especially when it comes to one's mental health (for example, [Woodyat and Stephenson, 2016](#); [Albright et al, 2019](#)). Concerning the absence of differences regarding participants with a different-sex and a same-sex partner, it could be because violence rates among the present sample is higher and, as reported by [Szalacha et al \(2017\)](#), mental health would be predicted mainly by the numbers of types of violence experienced, irrespective of sexual identity.

Limitations and future research

The present study is an important contribution to raising awareness regarding the influence of sexism not only in the context of partner abuse, but specifically in the context of same-sex partner abuse. Nevertheless, there are some limitations that should be acknowledged and taken into consideration while analysing the present data.

Although the sample size is considerable, the number of participants in this study is not enough to make it possible for conclusions to be generalised for the rest of the Spanish population. Moreover, even though the principal aim of this research was to explore how sexism would impact partner abuse, participants overall did not report high levels of partner abuse and the criteria used to group participants in alleged violent relationships could be considered liberal. Therefore, future research should explore the influence of sexism in a bigger sample, composed by participants who report higher levels of violence in their relationships.

Through the instruments used in the present research, only psychological and physical violence were assessed. However, several relationships that display violent dynamics may be composed equally by other types of violence than psychological and physical. Thus, future research could also consider other types of violence that were not considered in the present study, such as sexual and financial violence.

Regarding ambivalent sexism and the low rates found among this study's participants, it could be wondered if social desirability influenced the collected data. As, nowadays, blatantly hostile sexism is condemned in several countries (Renzetti et al, 2018), it is possible that several responses do not reflect the true attitudes and beliefs of the participants, for fear of being judged or the pressure to respond to what is socially desirable regarding the present topic.

Throughout this study, and considering previous research, it is possible to recognise the important role that gender (and the respective social attributions) assumes in influencing couple dynamics and, more precisely, violence in this context. So in future research, the inclusion of measures regarding traditional gender roles, would be important to better understand the impact of sexism and gender roles not only on IPV but specifically in same-sex couples. Also, future research is needed based on LGB relationships and the impact of sexism on its dynamics. More precisely, future qualitative research is needed to better understand how ambivalent sexism impacts same-sex couples. Furthermore, it could be suggested that both quantitative and qualitative future research focus on how ambivalent sexism targeted on men influences couple dynamics, especially violent ones, in both opposite-sex and same-sex couples.

Conclusion

Addressing partner violence – and, especially, same-sex partner violence – is definitely a challenge that requires a sensitive and comprehensive approach. Thus, social services personnel should provide tailored interventions, with adequate resources, while being aware of the social surrounding and its influence on each and every situation.

While intervening, a non-heteronormative approach is essential in order to ensure inclusivity and respect for non-heterosexual identities. Moreover, taking into account that the lack of social support for same-sex relationships may further isolate LGBT+ victims, being open to collaboration with other organisations specialised in LGBTQIA+ rights is crucial in promoting the impact of our intervention and, consequently, its success.

Social services personnel should be aware that ambivalent sexism can play a detrimental part on partner abuse dynamics, regardless of the sexual orientation of those involved. Therefore, it is a factor that should be taken into consideration while planning interventions, both at an individual and at a societal level.

When considering the present results, as well as the literature that covers the influence of ambivalent sexism and traditional gender roles on partner abuse either on different-sex and same-sex couples, it is important to consider prevention and intervention programmes that focus on this matter. By deconstructing myths related to traditional and socially established gender roles, one will also be contributing to the fight against violence in intimate relationships and facilitating the correct identification by the victims regarding the abusive relationship in which they find themselves.

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Conflict of interests

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