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Gender Symmetry, Sexism, & Intimate Partner Violence

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Abstract

The current study of a diverse sample of 92 male and 140 female college students has two goals: to make an empirical contribution to the debate regarding gender symmetry in intimate partner violence with data from both males and females; and to address inconsistent findings in studies examining the relationship between sexist attitudes and intimate partner violence (IPV; in which some studies find a positive relationship between men's sexism and their IPV, while other studies find protective effects of sexism on IPV). Results indicate that comparable numbers of men and women perpetrate and are victimized in their relationships with intimate partners *but*, path models suggest that women's violence tends to be in reaction to male violence against them; whereas men tend to initiate violence first, and then their partners respond with violence. Additionally, benevolent sexism was shown to have a protective effect against men's violence toward partners. Findings highlight the importance of studying women's violence not only in the context of male violence but also within a broader socio-cultural context.

Keywords: dating violence, ambivalent sexism, college students

Considerable debate continues regarding the prevalence, direction, and meaning of violence between men and women in intimate relationships (e.g., Frieze, 2005). A number of studies examining men's and women's use of physical violence using survey data primarily from U.S. samples have indicated that the number of women using physical aggression is comparable to that of men (e.g. Archer, 2000; Bookwala, Frieze, Smith, & Ryan, 1992; Dutton, 1994; Stets & Straus, 1990; Straus, 1993, 1997, 1999). Some studies have found that women used physical aggression more often than their male partners (e.g., Billingham & Sack, 1986; DeMaris, 1992; Gryl, Stith, & Bird, 1991; Magdol, Moffitt, Caspi, Newman, Fagan, & Silva, 1997; Moffit & Caspi, 1999; Sorenson & Telles, 1991).

Data from international studies regarding the question of gender symmetry are mixed. In a review of intimate partner violence incidence and prevalence rates from studies worldwide, Krahe, Bieneck and Möller (2005) summarized across 12 studies conducted in 9 countries that compared men's and women's physical victimization by intimate partners. Seven studies found higher numbers of women reporting victimization as compared to men; 3 studies found higher numbers of men reporting victimization; and two studies found equivalent numbers. Among 4 studies that compared men's and women's physical perpetration against intimate partners, 2 found a higher number of women perpetrating violence as compared to men; 1 found a higher number of men perpetrating violence; and one found equivalency.

Evidence from a different body of studies, in which evidence is drawn from crime statistics and arrest data, indicate that all forms of intimate partner violence (IPV) are overwhelmingly perpetrated by men against women (Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Daly &

Wilson 1988; Dobash, Dobash, Wilson & Daly 1992; Wilson & Daly 1992; Bourgois, 1995; Nazroo, 1995; Dobash, Dobash, Cavanagh, & Lewis, 2004). For instance, when asked to report lifetime victimization, women report at least two to four times more violence than men and are more likely to report chronic abuse (Gaquin 1977/78; Schwartz, 1987; Sacco and Johnson 1990; Bachman and Saltzman, 1995; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998; Mirrlees-Black, 1999).

These findings and subsequent interpretations have led to considerable debate regarding the direction of violence between men and women in intimate relationships. Many of the studies reporting equal rates of violence perpetration by men and women have relied on the measurement of discrete acts of violence that occurred when the couple was experiencing conflict (Dobash & Dobash, 2004; Saunders, 2002). Contextual factors, such as who initiated the violence; who was injured; whether or not the violence was in self-defense; and the psychological impact of victimization are often not assessed. When these contextual factors are examined, a complex picture of gender dynamics in intimate partner violence begins to emerge.

The data on injury provide a case in point. Although studies indicate that the prevalence of women and men who use violence against intimate partners is about equal, studies consistently indicate greater rates of injury among women. For example, Archer's (2000) meta-analysis found that slightly more women reported perpetrating intimate partner violence, but that women were also more likely to report being injured by an intimate partner as compared to men (see also Morse, 1995). Straus (1993) estimated that women were six to ten times more likely than men to sustain serious injury as a result of violent acts by their partners.

Studies that examine the psychological effects of IPV victimization add to the complexity regarding gender and IPV. For example, studies that have examined mutually violent couples have found that women tend to suffer more ill effects than men in such relationships (Frieze, 2005). Anderson's (2002) examination of 474 couples reporting mutual violence drawn from the National Survey of Families and Households found that being in a mutually violent relationship predicted greater depression among both men and women, but the effect was twice as great for women. A similar pattern was observed for drug and alcohol problems. Similarly, a study examining the development of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in response to victimization from an intimate partner found that women were significantly more likely than men to develop PTSD (Dansky, Byrne, & Brady, 1999). Studies of nationally representative samples have found that, compared to male victims of intimate partner violence, female victims are more likely to take time off from work (Stets & Straus, 1990; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000) and to use mental health and criminal justice system services (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

The preponderance of adverse consequences of victimization for women despite debatably equal perpetration rates across genders indicates that further study of the contextual factors that may differ in men's and women's experiences of intimate partner violence is necessary. One such contextual factor is raised by the following question: is women's violence against male intimate partners primarily in response to their partner's violence against them? If so, this would explain why, despite the equivalent prevalence of men's and women's violence perpetration, women experiencing violence tend to experience more physical injuries and more detrimental psychological outcomes than men experiencing violence. If most women are not typically initiating the violence, but

are using it reactively, they are not in control of the situation. Rather, they may be using violence to protect themselves from their partners.

Studies have found that male violence against women is a strong predictor of women's violence. For example, Graham-Kevan & Archer (2005) examined predictors of violence among 358 female university students who had used violence against an intimate partner. The largest predictor was their male partner's use of physical aggression against them, which accounted for 23% of the variance in the women's perpetration of minor physical aggression and 39% of the variance in their perpetration of severe physical aggression. Similarly, Graves, Sechrist, White, and Paradise's (2005) study of 1,300 female college students found that physical victimization from a dating partner strongly predicted women's use of violence. Sullivan, Meese, Swan, Mazure, and Snow's (2005) study of 108 community women who used violence against a male partner also found a large correlation between women's victimization and women's violence.

A model depicting women's violence and victimization in this direction is shown below (Figure 1):



Figure 1 – Women Use Violence Reactively

These studies of female violence indicate that women's victimization is a strong predictor of women's perpetration. However, they were not intended to directly compare the above model, in which women use violence reactively, with a competing model in

which women's perpetration predicts women's victimization (see Figure 2). The competing model suggests that women tend to initiate violence first; then their male partners respond with violence, resulting in women's victimization. The comparison of these two models will allow us to examine if women's violence tends to be primarily reactive, or if women tend to be the initiators of violence.



Figure 2– Women Initiate Violence

This study makes a further contribution towards addressing the “gender symmetry” issue by comparing models between male and female samples with a diverse sample of college students. Examining both male and female samples is important because while being a recipient of violence predicts women's perpetration of violence, it predicts men's perpetration of violence as well (Bookwala, Frieze, Smith, & Ryan, 1992). For example, a study of IPV in 941 21-year-olds found that the correlation between perpetration and victimization was $r = .60$ for men and $r = .63$ for women (Magdol, Moffitt, Caspi, & Silva, 1998). Only a comparison of these competing models by gender will allow the examination of the hypothesis that women's violence is primarily reactive, while men's violence is primarily proactive.

The competing models in Figures 1 and 2 are also examined with a male sample. The model shown in Figure 3 suggests that men tend to initiate violence first; then their female partners response with violence, resulting in men's victimization.



Figure 3 – Men Initiate Violence

The competing model (shown in Figure 4) portrays men’s perpetration of violence as occurring in response to women’s violence against them. Thus, according to this model, men are victimized by women; they then perpetrate violence reactively.



Figure 4 – Men Use Violence Reactively

Sexism and Intimate Partner Violence

The second contribution of this study is to consider the utility of sexism in understanding the contexts in which men and women use violence against their partners. Older writings define sexism as a negative attitude or discriminatory behavior based on the presumed inferiority or difference of women as a group (Cameron, 1977). Sexism is the outward manifestation of an inward system of values (patriarchy) deliberately designed to structure privilege by means of an objective, differential, and unequal treatment of women, for the purpose of social advantage.

Swim, Aikin, Hall, and Hunter (1995) note that there are strong social pressures against blatant sexism, just as there are pressures against racist behaviors and attitudes. They suggest that the modern sexist denies the existence of sexual discrimination, is hostile toward demands for equal treatment, and is resentful of affirmative action programs. Due to decreasing social acceptance of overt sexism, Glick and Fiske (1997) argue that the conceptualization of sexism solely as a hostility toward women that motivates a spectrum of prejudicial attitudes and behaviors is much too simple. As Eagly and Mladinic (1993) and Glick and Fiske (1996) have demonstrated, traditional sex role attitudes contain positive as well as negative judgments of women. Ambivalent sexism theory (Glick & Fiske, 2001) posits that traditional attitudes toward both sexes have benevolent as well as hostile components. The term *hostile sexism* needs little explanation—it refers to those attitudes and behaviors that reflect hostility toward women. *Benevolent sexism* is defined as “a set of interrelated attitudes towards women that are sexist in terms of viewing women stereotypically and in restricted roles but that are subjectively positive in feeling (for the perceiver) and also tend to elicit behaviors that are typically categorized as prosocial” (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 491). For example, a man's comment to a female coworker on how "cute" she looks may be perceived by him as a compliment but, may also undermine her feelings of being taken seriously as a professional. Nevertheless, the subjectively positive nature of the perceiver's feelings, the prosocial behaviors, and the attempts to achieve intimacy that benevolent sexism generates do not fit traditional notions of sexism.

The contextual relevance of sexism to intimate partner violence is unclear. Although feminist theory points to patriarchy and sexism as important determinants of

violence, not all research has been supportive of this view. Studies examining men's attitudes toward patriarchal gender roles and violence against women have found mixed results. Some studies have found that men's traditional sex role attitudes were related to more violent behavior (Flynn, 1990), with abusive men having more traditional attitudes towards women than nonviolent males (Crossman, Stith, & Bender, 1990; Ryan, 1995; Sigelman, Berry, & Wiles, 1984; Smith, 1990).

However, Bookwala, Frieze, Smith, & Ryan's (1992) study of IPV among college students found that men who scored higher on a "Macho" scale (including items such as "It is important for a man to be strong" and "There are some jobs that women simply shouldn't have") were *less* likely to use violence against their female partners, indicating that sexist attitudes may contain some protective elements that mitigate violence toward women. Ambivalent Sexism Theory provides an explanation for these inconsistencies by positing that attitudes toward women often have benevolent as well as hostile components. Some of the studies that have found men's more sexist attitudes were predictive of greater violence (Sigelman, Berry, & Wiles, 1984; Ryan, 1995) used the Attitudes Toward Women scale to assess sexism. This measure contains some items that could be classified as hostile sexism and others that could be classified as benevolent sexism. Perhaps the positive relationship between sexism and IPV in these studies is driven by the hostile sexism-like items (Forbes, Adams-Curtis, & White, 2004).

Studies using Glick and Fiske's (1996) Ambivalent Sexism Inventory, which contains different subscales for benevolent and hostile sexism, support this idea. Sakalli's (2001) study of Turkish male and female college students found that greater endorsement of hostile sexism predicted more positive attitudes toward wife beating in

men and women. However, men were also found to have more positive attitudes toward wife beating than women. Similarly, Glick, Sakalli-Ugurlu, Ferreira and Aguiar de Souza's (2002) examination of ambivalent sexism and attitudes toward wife abuse among Turkish and Brazilian college and community samples found that, for both male and female participants, hostile sexism predicted greater perceptions that wife abuse is legitimate. Similarly, Forbes, Jobe, White, Bloesch, & Adams-Curtis (2005) found that, for men, hostile sexism was positively correlated with feeling "justified" about slapping a partner (when angry or trying to get even). Other studies of IPV behavior among college samples have found that men with more hostile sexist attitudes were more likely to have committed verbal aggression (Forbes, Adams-Curtis, & White, 2004) and sexual coercion (Forbes & Adams-Curtis, 2001; Forbes, Adams-Curtis, & White, 2004).

The findings from these studies regarding the relationship between benevolent sexism and IPV provide some evidence that benevolent sexism may have a protective effect against men's IPV. Sakalli's (2001) study found that benevolent sexism did not predict men's or women's beliefs regarding: attitudes towards wife beating in general, accepted situations for wife beating, responsibility of women for wife beating, or faults of women which justify wife beating. Benevolent sexism *did* predict men's and women's attitudes about men's responsibility for wife beating, such that higher levels of benevolent sexism predicted greater support for men's responsibility. However, another study found that benevolent sexism was unrelated to attitudes that legitimize wife abuse for men or women in Turkish and Brazilian college and community samples (Glick, Sakalli-Ugurlu, Ferreira, & Aguiar de Souza, 2002). Finally, among male and female college students, no relationship was found between benevolent sexism and verbal

aggression (Forbes, Adams-Curtis, & White, 2004) or sexual coercion (Forbes & Adams-Curtis, 2001; Forbes, Adams-Curtis, & White, 2004).

There has been almost no discussion of how women's sexism may impact the experience of intimate partner violence. Examining women's sexist notions about their own gender provides a more comprehensive contextual framework by which to understand intimate partner violence. A growing body of evidence indicates that women's benevolent sexism, a subjectively favorable view of women, nevertheless can have negative consequences for women if they fail to live up to the standards it sets for them. For example, women's attitudes of benevolent sexism were found to predict victim blame for acquaintance rape scenarios in which the female victim invited the man to her apartment and initiated kissing (Abrams, Viki, Masser, & Bohner, 2003) or was engaged in an extramarital affair (Viki & Abrams, 2002). Among female college students, benevolent sexism also correlated positively with acceptance of rape myths (Forbes, Adams-Curtis, & White, 2004). Such findings indicate that benevolently sexist women believe that failure to adhere to traditional social norms will result in culturally-sanctioned aggression from males. Thus, in order to avoid violence from male partners, such women may engage in behavior that is less likely to be perceived as threatening to male dominance. Consequently, these women may also have a reduced risk of experiencing violence from their male partners.

Harris, Firestone, and Vega's (2005) study of the relationship between sexism and IPV victimization in a sample of 997 Mexican-origin women supports the prediction that women's benevolent sexism may be a protective factor, at least for women in this ethnic group. The sample contained both women born in Mexico and those who were born in

the U.S. The women were asked if they had experienced physical or emotional abuse from their partners. They were also asked their opinions on items that are conceptually related to benevolent sexism (e.g., “It is much better for everyone if the man is the principal income provider and the woman takes care of the home and family”). Both U.S.-born and Mexican-born women who indicated more benevolent sexism were less likely to report abuse from their partners. Mexican-born women who agreed that “my spouse insists on his own way” were also less likely to report abuse (this variable did not affect reports of abuse for the U.S.-born women). These results are consistent with the predictions of ambivalent sexism theory: women who do not challenge traditional gender roles (e.g., “good wives and mothers” who “know their place”) are treated with benevolence, or even revered. Hostile sexism, and perhaps intimate partner violence as well, may be reserved primarily for women who challenge men’s power.

Very little is known concerning women’s sexism toward women and their commission of IPV. One study with a college sample did indicate a small but significant impact of women’s sexist attitudes on their violent behavior, such that greater sexism predicted more violence (Bookwala, Frieze, Smith, & Ryan, 1992). However, studies of female college students found no relationship between either hostile or benevolent sexism and verbal aggression (Forbes, Adams-Curtis, & White, 2004) or sexual coercion (Forbes & Adams-Curtis, 2001; Forbes, Adams-Curtis, & White, 2004).

Hypotheses

The current study examines the following hypotheses regarding gender symmetry and IPV:

1a.) Victimization from male partners will be a strong predictor of women's violence against their male partners. A model with paths in this direction will provide a good fit with the data. If supported, this model suggests that women's violence typically is preceded by violence against them and is reactive in nature.

1b.) A model in which women's perpetration of violence is shown as predicting women's victimization suggests that women initiate aggression first, then their male partners respond with reactive violence. We predict such a model will provide a poor fit with the data.

2a.) Males' perpetration of violence will be a strong predictor of men's victimization by their female partners. A model with paths in this direction will provide a good fit with the data. If supported, this model suggests that men typically initiate violence first, then their female partners respond with reactive violence.

2b.) A model in which men's victimization from female partners predicts men's violence suggests that women initiate violence first, then men hit back. We predict such a model will provide a poor fit with the data.

The next hypotheses concern the inconsistent findings in studies examining the relationship between men's sexist attitudes and intimate partner violence. While one previous study examined the relationship between ambivalent sexism and sexual aggression (Forbes & Adams-Curtis, 2001), to our knowledge no studies have explicitly explored the relationship between benevolent sexism, hostile sexism and other forms of IPV. Specifically, the authors hypothesize that:

3a.) Men with more benevolently sexist beliefs will be less likely to perpetrate violence against women.

3b.) Men with more hostile sexist beliefs will be more likely to perpetrate violence against women.

Finally, the authors expand upon previous debates by examining women's hostile and benevolent sexism toward their own sex, and how these may relate to violence perpetration and victimization. We hypothesize that:

4.) Women with more benevolently sexist beliefs will be less likely to experience violence from their male partners.

Because so little is known about women's sexism as it relates to IPV and because women's hostile sexism scores are typically both 1) lower than their benevolent sexism scores, and 2) lower than men's hostile sexism scores (Glick & Fiske, 1996), the authors make no prediction about the relationship of women's hostile sexism beliefs and IPV.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Data for this study were obtained in the first phase of a larger study examining risk factors for dating violence in low income immigrant/ethnic minority undergraduates from a large, public, urban college. Students received class credit for participation; students who declined to participate were assigned a paper to read on healthy relationships. A variety of debriefing materials were provided, including facts on sexual assault and dating violence as well as counseling center, university, and community resources. The study sample was recruited from all entering undergraduates in the first semester of enrollment, but students who were enrolled in either the honors-equivalent or the remedial programs were not included in order to create a sample consisting of "average" students. Eligibility criteria for study participation required that students were

18 years or older and enrolled at least part-time. The majority of respondents were between 18 and 19 years of age. Less than 5% of the potential participants did not participate in the survey. Two percent (5 participants) were below 18 years of age (minimum required age) and 3% (8 participants) chose not to fill out the questionnaire resulting in 232 completed questionnaires, of which 92 were male (39.6 %) and 140 were female (60.4).

Ethnic/racial composition of this sample was considerably more diverse than most other published college samples; 52% percent of respondents self-identified as “Latino/Latina;” 19% as “Black;” 10% as “White;” 5% as “Asian;” 6% as “Bi-racial;” 7% as “Other;” 1% did not respond. Thirty-four percent of the sample reported having been born outside the United States. Of those who reported being born outside the United States, 1% reported living in the United States less than a year; 28% reporting living in the United States between one and five years; 25% reported living in the United States between six and ten years; 45% reported living in the United States eleven years or more; and 1% did not respond. Fifteen percent of the sample reported greater reading and speaking proficiency in a language other than English. Twenty-three percent reported primarily speaking a language other than English at home. However, all students had to demonstrate proficiency in English to be admitted to the college.

Measures

Ambivalent Sexism Inventory. The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) is a 22-item measure that was developed to assess individual levels of hostile and benevolent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Each scale is composed of 11 items. Examples of hostile items include “Women are too easily offended” and “Once a woman gets a man to

commit to her, she usually tries to put him on a tight leash”. Examples of benevolent items include “Women should be cherished and protected by men” and “Every man ought to have a woman whom he adores”. It is a widely used measure of sexism which has been shown to have good reliability and validity in cross-cultural samples (Glick, Lameiras, Fiske, Eckes, Masser, & Volpato *et al.*, 2004). Glick & Fiske (1996) found reliability of the hostile sexism scale in student samples to range from .80 to .92 and from .87 to .91 in non-student samples. Glick & Fiske (1996) found reliability of the benevolent sexism scale in student samples to range from .75 to .85 and from .73 to .78 in non-student samples. Participants are asked to indicate the extent to which they endorse items on a scale (0 = disagree strongly to 5 = agree strongly) where higher scores indicate higher sexism. Internal consistency of the hostile and benevolent sexism subscales in the present samples were, respectively, $\alpha = .75$; $\alpha = .60$.

The Conflict Tactics Scale-2 (CTS2). Five items reflecting “minor” aggression and one item reflecting sexual coercion from the CTS—2 revision (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996) were administered as part of the larger survey comprised of varying psychological constructs. The CTS—2 instructs participants to indicate how many times they have experienced a given incident in the past year. Response categories include: “never,” “once,” “twice,” “3-5 times,” “6-10 times,” “11-20 times,” “more than 20 times,” and “not in the past year but it has happened before”. Participants responded to the following items regarding minor aggression: “I twisted my partner’s arm or hair,” “I pushed or shoved my partner,” “I shouted or yelled at my partner,” “I grabbed my partner,” and “I slapped my partner”. Participants responded to the following item regarding sexual coercion: “I insisted my partner have oral or anal sex

(but did not use physical force)”. The CTS-2 is a widely used self-report survey of psychological and physical coercion with high internal consistency and adequate construct and discriminant validity (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). Consistent with the scoring recommendations of Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, and Sugarman (1996), responses were given a point value corresponding to the midpoint of each frequency category and then summed to provide subscale indices of violence severity over the past year. Internal consistency for the physical abuse scales were calculated using polychoric correlations. Polychoric correlations can be used when variables are dichotomous or ordinal but are assumed to reflect underlying continuous variables. That is, polychoric correlation extrapolates what the categorical variables' distributions would be if continuous, adding tails to the distribution (Drasgow, 1988). In this study, internal consistency for the physical abuse scales were: women’s perpetration, $\alpha = .62$; women’s victimization, $\alpha = .69$; men’s perpetration, $\alpha = .82$; men’s victimization, $\alpha = .73$. The internal consistencies calculated using polychoric correlations were higher than when they were calculated using Pearson correlations, indicating that for ordinal data such as the CTS, reliabilities calculated using Pearson correlations may underestimate the reliability of the scale.

Missing Data.

Because hostile and benevolent sexism as well as violence scores are calculated by averaging across items, missing data for either of these variables is due to a missing value for one or more scale items. Because missing data was due to a non-response on a minority of scale items rather than an absence of scale responses, it was assumed that that the missing value mechanism could be expressed solely in terms of observed values.

Thus, as the mechanism of missing data was not assumed to depend on unobserved data, it was theorized that the missing data were most likely missing at random.

Missing values were imputed using full information maximum likelihood (FIML) estimates (Andersen, 1957). The FIML approach has been found to yield parameter estimates that are both consistent and efficient. Furthermore several researchers have recommended its use over more traditional methods such as multiple imputation, pairwise deletion or listwise deletion (Little & Rubin, 1989; Schafer, 1997; Muthén, Kaplan, and Hollis, 1987).

Statistical Analysis

As we are interested in examining the relationship between minor violence perpetration and victimization accounting for the role of sexism, path analyses using the AMOS program (Arbuckle & Wothke, 1999) were used to assess these relationships for men and women. Models which fit the data well will be found to have non-significant chi-square statistics and root mean square errors of approximation $\leq .05$. (Bollen & Long, 1993).

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Women's Experience of Violence. To determine the prevalence of perpetration and victimization, the researchers divided the number of women who reported using violence (N=77) and having violence used against them (N=66) by the total number of women in the sample (N=140). 55% of the female sample reported using violence against their male partner (M=1.38, SD=2.36) whereas 47% of the female sample reported being victimized by their male partner (M=1.12, SD=2.04).

Women's Sexism. Women's average level of benevolent sexism was found to be 2.89 (SD=.69). Women's average level of hostile sexism was found to be 2.30 (SD=.76). One-sample t-tests indicated that the female sample was significantly higher in benevolent sexism than Glick & Fiske's (1996) student and non-student samples (Studies 3 and 4, respectively). However, hostile sexism did not differ from that found by Glick & Fiske (1996). Following Glick & Fiske's (1996) recommendations, partial correlations between hostile sexism and other variables were correlated, controlling for the effect of benevolent sexism; likewise, partial correlations between benevolent sexism and other variables were calculated, controlling for the effect of hostile sexism. Correlations between perpetration, victimization, benevolent sexism, and hostile sexism are shown in Table 1 for women (N=140).

Men's Experience of Violence. To determine the prevalence of perpetration and victimization, the researchers divided the number of men who reported using violence (N=38) and having violence used against them (N=34) by the total number of men in the sample (N=92). 41% of the male sample reported using violence against their female partner (M=.73, SD=1.51). 37% of the male sample reported being victimized by their female partner (M=1.00, SD=2.04).

Men's Sexism. Men's average level of benevolent sexism was found to be 2.89 (SD=.59). Men's average level of hostile sexism was found to be 2.79 (SD=.65). One-sample t-tests indicated that the male sample was significantly higher in benevolent and hostile sexism than Glick & Fiske's (1996) male student and non-student samples (Studies 3 and 4, respectively). Correlations between perpetration, victimization, benevolent sexism, and hostile sexism are shown in Table 2 for men (N=92).

Table 1

Women's Partial Correlations

	Perp.	Vic.	BS	HS
1. Perpetration	1.00	.45**** ^a	-.13 ^a	--- ^a
2. Victimization	.44**** ^b	1.00	-.24** ^a	--- ^a
3. Benevolent Sexism	--- ^b	--- ^b	1.00	--- ^a
4. Hostile Sexism	.16 ^b	.13 ^b	--- ^b	1.00

a = controlling for hostile sexism

b = controlling for benevolent sexism

** = Significant at $p \leq .01$

*** = Significant at $p \leq .001$

Table 2

Men's Partial Correlations

	Perp.	Vic.	BS	HS
1. Perpetration	1.00	.78*** ^a	-.22* ^a	--- ^a
2. Victimization	.78*** ^b	1.00	-.18 ^a	--- ^a
3. Benevolent Sexism	--- ^b	--- ^b	1.00	--- ^a
4. Hostile Sexism	.08 ^b	.12 ^b	--- ^b	1.00

a = controlling for hostile sexism

b = controlling for benevolent sexism

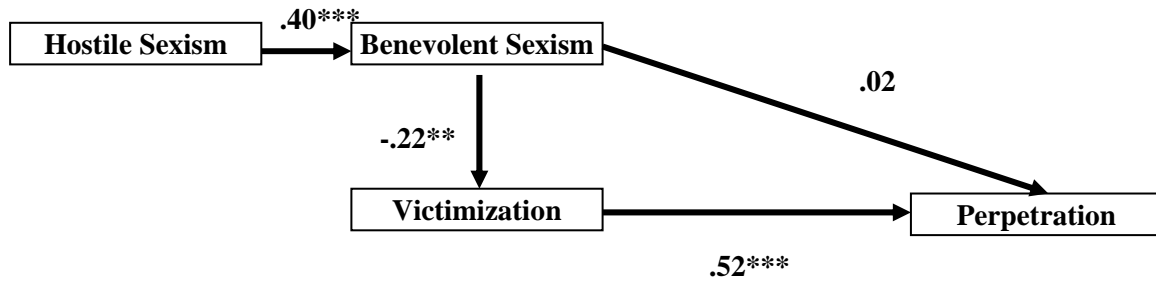
* = Significant at $p \leq .05$

*** = Significant at $p \leq .001$

Comparing Women's and Men's Experience of IPV and Sexism. An ANOVA was conducted to test for differences in levels of perpetration, victimization, benevolent sexism, and hostile sexism between women and men. Women were found to have a significantly higher level of perpetration than men; $F(1,219) = 7.98, p \leq .01$. Victimization did not differ by gender; $F(1,219) = 1.29, p = .26$. Benevolent sexism did not differ by gender; $F(1,219) = .00, p = .99$. Men were found to have a significantly higher level of hostile sexism than women; $F(1,219) = 23.14, p \leq .01$. The ambivalent sexism results are consistent with the findings of Glick, Fiske, Mladinic, Saiz, Abrams, Masser *et al.* (2000) who found that women, in comparison to men, reject hostile sexism but accept benevolent sexism as much as or more than men.

Path Analyses

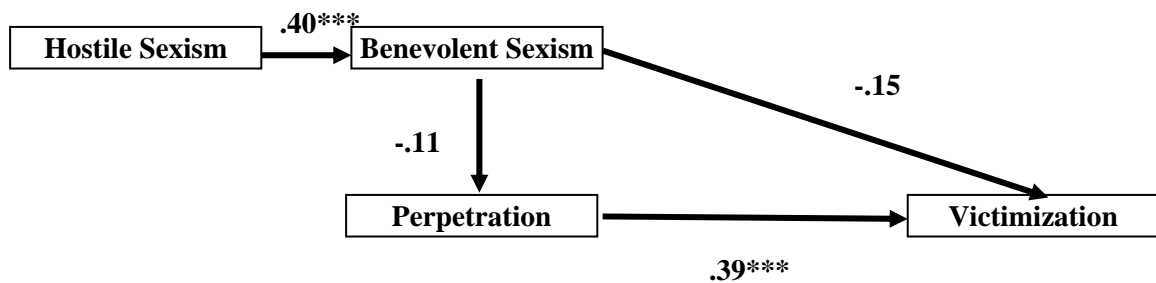
To test our hypotheses, four models (Figures 5 through 8) were tested.



** = Significant at $p \leq .01$; *** = Significant at $p \leq .001$.

Figure 5 – Women Use Violence in Response to Partner’s Violence

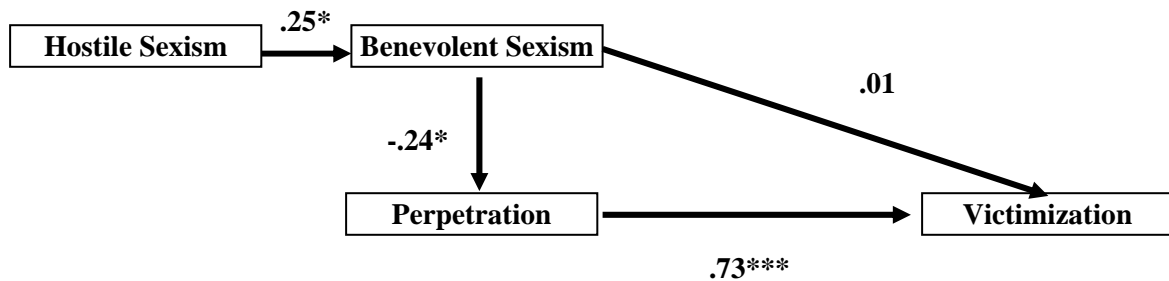
Hypotheses 1a –victimization from male partners will be a strong predictor of women’s violence against their male partners—and 4—women with more benevolently sexist beliefs will be less likely to experience violence from their male partners—were supported by a model (Figure 5) in which victimization from male partners strongly predicted women’s perpetration. A significant and negative path from benevolent sexism to victimization indicates that women who endorse benevolently sexist attitudes are less likely to report victimization. As predicted, the model provided a good fit with the data; $\chi^2(3, N = 140) = 3.80, p = .29$; root mean square error of approximation (*RMSEA*) = .04.



*** = Significant at $p \leq .001$.

Figure 6 –Women Initiate Violence

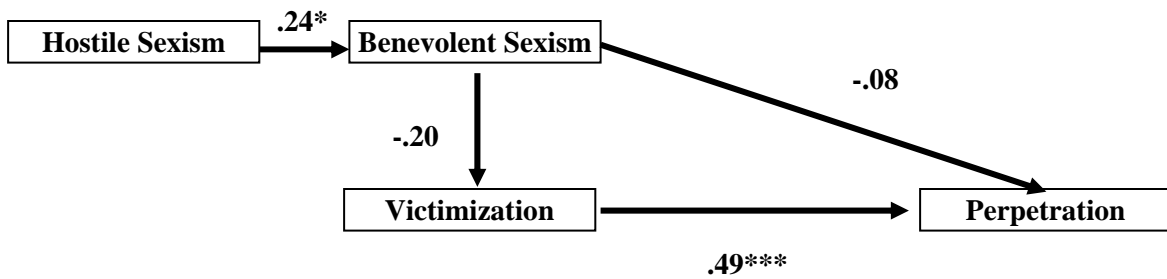
Hypothesis 1b—a model in which women’s perpetration of violence predicts their victimization from male partners (Figure 6)— provided a poor fit with the data, as predicted; $\chi^2(3, N = 140) = 16.57, p \leq .01$; $RMSEA = .18$. Thus, a model in which perpetration by females predicts their victimization from male partners was not supported by the data.



* = Significant at $p \leq .05$; *** = Significant at $p \leq .001$.

Figure 7 –Men Initiate Violence

Hypotheses 2a – males’ perpetration of violence will be a strong predictor of men’s victimization by their female partners —and 3a— men with more benevolently sexist beliefs will be less likely to perpetrate “minor” violence against women—were supported by a model (Figure 7) in which perpetration by male partners strongly predicted men’s victimization. A significant and negative path from benevolent sexism to perpetration indicates that men who endorsed benevolently sexist attitudes were less likely to report perpetration. As predicted, the model provided an excellent fit with the data; $\chi^2(3, N = 92) = 2.29, p = .52$; $RMSEA = .00$.



* = Significant at $p \leq .05$; *** = Significant at $p \leq .001$.

Figure 8 –Men Use Violence in Response to Partner’s Violence

Hypothesis 2b—men’s victimization does not predict men’s violence against female partners—was supported by a poor-fitting model (Figure 8) portraying men’s violence as in response to violence received from their female partners; $\chi^2(3, N = 92) = 44.65, p \leq .01$; $RMSEA = .39$. Thus, a model in which males’ victimization from female partners predicts males’ perpetration was not supported by the data.

Hypothesis 3b –men with more hostile sexist beliefs will be more likely to perpetrate violence against women—was not supported. As there was no significant correlation between hostile sexism and perpetration, this path was not included in the models.

Discussion

Women in this sample, on average, perpetrated more “minor” violent acts than their male partners. This rate is comparable to findings from other samples of young adult/college populations (Bookwala, Frieze, Smith, & Ryan, 1992; White & Koss, 1991). The mean number of times women and men were victimized by their partners did not differ. However, as has been suggested by others (Swan & Snow, 2002), results indicate women’s use of violence occurs in a context that differs from men’s violence. As

hypothesized, the current study found that: women's victimization from male partners was found to be a strong predictor of women's perpetration, as demonstrated by a path model that fit the data well; and women's perpetration was not shown to predict women's victimization by male partners, as demonstrated by a model that fit the data poorly. Thus, this data suggests that women's violence in this sample appears to be primarily a reaction to male violence against them. Furthermore, men's perpetration was found to be a strong predictor of men's victimization by their female partners, as demonstrated by a path model that fit the data well; and men's victimization by their female partners was not shown to predict men's perpetration, as demonstrated by a poor-fitting model. These results support the argument that women's violence is often reactive (Moffit, Caspi, Rutter, & Silva, 2001). That is, the data presented here suggest the typical pattern of IPV in this sample is that men hit women first, then women hit back. As women are often at a physical disadvantage in confrontations with males, the doubled rate of perpetration seen in women may indicate that more violence is needed to repel an attack. Given the disproportionate number of women who suffer serious physical injury from male partners, it is reasonable to suspect that a single reactive act of violence may be insufficient in fending off an attack by a male partner. However, because the models presented here are cross-sectional, causality is unknown. Longitudinal models are required to provide a true test of whether men's violence tends to precede women's or vice-versa.

This study's findings concerning the relationship between benevolent sexism and IPV are consistent with ambivalent sexism theory. In this sample, benevolent sexism was higher than in Glick and Fiske's (1996) normative samples, for both men and women; for

men, hostile sexism was also higher than in the normative samples. One possible explanation may be that hostile sexism is higher in Latinos compared to European-Americans; in this study, the large proportion of Latino participants may have increased the sample mean. Glick et al.'s (2001) cross-cultural study of ambivalent sexism offers support for such an explanation—they found that several samples with the highest hostile sexism scores were collected in Latin American countries. The study found that men's benevolent sexism protected against their self-reported use of violence against their female partners. That is, men with more benevolently sexist feelings perpetrated less "minor" violence against their partners than men with less benevolently sexist beliefs. Ambivalent sexism theory, posits that women who conform to benevolently sexist expectations are "rewarded" with revered status, while those who challenge patriarchy are demeaned and punished by men's hostility. According to the theory, men who are 'benevolent sexists' only commit hostile acts toward women when they fail to conform to the 'feminine' gender role. The study also found a complementary effect for women: women's benevolent sexism reduces their risk of victimization from their male partners. This finding suggests that benevolent sexism in women placates male partners. In conjunction with the finding that women's violence is in reaction to men's violence against them, this suggests that the risk of women's victimization may be reduced to the extent to which they accept a subordinate status relative to their male partners. This interpretation is consistent with that of Glick, Sakalli-Ugurlu, Ferreira and Aguiar de Souza (2002, p. 296) who suggested that, "women's endorsement of benevolent sexism only serves to reinforce gender inequality while offering a highly contingent (and ultimately hollow) promise of protection that is enacted only when women behave in line

with sexist expectations and prescriptions.” The complementary role of benevolent sexism in women’s and men’s experience of intimate partner violence further supports the notion that intimate partner violence must be understood within a contextual framework.

It must be noted that while findings of this study suggest a protective effect of benevolent sexism against male perpetration, the authors *DO NOT* promote women’s acceptance of traditional gender roles as a means for reducing violence against them, nor do we believe that women who challenge such roles should be blamed for their partner’s violence. In contrast, this finding underscores the manner in which patriarchal beliefs constrain society and social relationships. The finding that women are less likely to be victimized when they conform to traditional gender roles suggests that it is often unsafe for women to transcend traditional gender roles. This finding echoes that of Coleman and Straus (1986), who found that consensus about the legitimacy of the power structure within a relationship reduced the overall chance of violence, even if there is a power imbalance between partners. In other words, agreement between partners regarding who is “in charge” in the relationship reduces the couples’ overall chance of violence. These results also suggest that men’s attitudes toward, adherence to, and enforcement of rigid gender roles must be targeted for change in order to eliminate violence against women.

An alternative interpretation of the finding that benevolent sexism predicts less IPV is that participants who report greater benevolent sexist beliefs are also more likely to underreport inflicting or experiencing IPV. This may especially be an issue for Latina participants. Harris, Firestone, & Vega (2005) speculated that women with more benevolent sexism attitudes may be less likely to define a situation as abuse. For

example, Torres (1991) found no differences in the severity and frequency of abuse among Hispanic and Anglo women, but compared to Anglo women, Latinas did not label the behavior as abuse until it occurred more frequently.

Results regarding the role of benevolent sexism are particularly intriguing because several recent studies have failed to find relationships between benevolent sexism and constructs theoretically related to violence perpetration. For example, among male and female college students, no relationship was found between benevolent sexism and verbal aggression (Forbes, Adams-Curtis, & White, 2004) or sexual coercion (Forbes & Adams-Curtis, 2001; Forbes, Adams-Curtis, & White, 2004). We speculate that perhaps the difference between our findings and the latter studies is that the Forbes et al. samples were composed exclusively of White Midwestern students. In contrast, our urban sample is quite diverse; only 10% of the sample identified as “White”; 52% of participants are Latino/a and 19% are “Black”. There may be cultural effects, particularly among the Latinos in the sample, that could account for the effect of benevolent sexism on violence found in the study. Latin American societies are characterized normatively by traditional gender roles, strong familism, and patriarchy (Delgado, Prieto, & Bond, 1997; Triandis, Lisansky, Marin, & Betancourt, 1984; Vazquez-Nuttall, Romero-Garcia, & de Leon, 1987; Youssef, 1973) with emphasis on male *machismo* (De La Cencela, 1986; Lara-Cantú, 1989, Mirandé, 1997; Peñalosa, 1968). Such cultural values may reduce the likelihood of violence by supporting women’s acceptance of patriarchy and discouraging their adoption of less traditional gender roles.

According to Ambivalent Sexism Theory, men’s violence against women is condoned as a way of reinforcing male social dominance. Thus, the finding that men’s

hostile sexism was not related to perpetration of violence is curious, given that the levels of hostility reported were higher than in other samples. Again, this finding differs from Forbes et al., who found that for men, hostile sexism was positively correlated with self-reports of verbal aggression (Forbes & Adams-Curtis, 2001) and sexual coercion perpetration (Forbes & Adams-Curtis, 2001; Forbes, Adams-Curtis & White, 2004. (Both studies found no relationship for women). Perhaps hostile sexism operates differently in Latino and other cultures than it does for European-Americans. Another speculation is that the present study assessed “minor” physical violence, whereas the Forbes et al. studies examined verbal and sexual aggression. Perhaps hostile sexism operates differently with different forms of aggression. Clearly this is an area in much need of further study.

Results of the current study are limited in the following regards. First, the experience of violence was assessed through self-report of both violence perpetration and victimization; data was not collected from couples. While most survey studies of intimate partner violence utilize self-report data, we think it particularly important to note this limitation given the use of complementary models of women’s and men’s violence. Second, this study used cross-sectional data. Because causality cannot be known from a cross-sectional design, the models suggesting that women’s violence occurs in reaction to male violence against them, whereas men tend to initiate violence, need to be examined longitudinally. Third, the six items composing the perpetration and victimization scales had low scale reliability in the women’s sample. According to Cohen, Cohen, West & Aiken (2003), measurement error in dependent variables produces increased variability of the residuals around the regression line—resulting in decreased power to reject a false

null hypothesis. While the models presented fit the data in a manner that were consistent with the authors' hypotheses, suggesting adequate power, these models should be replicated in future studies.

Low reliability of the hostile and benevolent sexism scales could be related to language issues; recall that 15% of the sample reported reading and speaking more proficiently in a language other than English. This explanation is supported by Glick & Fiske (2001a) who found that the integrity of the factor structure of the hostile and benevolent sexism scales was compromised by negatively worded items when administered to non-American samples. In the current study, when negatively worded items were removed, alphas for both scales improved. Alpha for the hostile sexism scale increased from .75 to .85. Alpha for the benevolent sexism scale increased from .60 to .69. These adjusted alphas are comparable to those reported for Glick, Lameiras, Fiske, Eckes, Masser, Volpato et al.'s (2004) Cuban sample. Future studies should examine the effect of these items on scale reliability and subsequent analyses.

This article highlights the importance of studying IPV within a broader socio-cultural context. The complexity of intimate partner violence demands that research address factors that may contribute to and sustain the problem of intimate partner violence in society. By examining how social factors such as patriarchy and sexism affect the experience of intimate partner violence for individuals, we are better able to target our efforts at prevention.

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