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*J Interpers Violence* 2009 24: 1816 originally published online 22 October 2008

DOI: 10.1177/0886260508325496

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# Gender Symmetry, Sexism, and Intimate Partner Violence

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This study of a predominantly Hispanic sample of 92 male and 140 female college students examines both gender symmetry in intimate partner violence (IPV) and inconsistent relationships found in previous studies between sexist attitudes and IPV. Results indicate that although comparable numbers of men and women perpetrate and are victimized in their relationships with intimate partners, the path models suggest that women's violence tends to be in reaction to male violence, whereas men tend to initiate violence and then their partners respond with violence. 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 men's violence but also within a broader sociocultural context.

**Keywords:** *dating violence; gender symmetry; 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; Johnson 2006; Rosen, 2006). Studies examining men's and women's use of physical violence have indicated that the number of women using physical aggression is either comparable to that of men (e.g. Archer, 2000; Bookwala, Frieze, Smith, & Ryan, 1992; Straus, 1999),

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**Authors' Note:** The authors wish to acknowledge and thank the reviewers for their thoughtful comments on this article. Please address correspondence to Christopher T. Allen, Department of Psychology, Barnwell College, Box 41, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC 29208; e-mail: [allenct@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:allenct@mailbox.sc.edu).

or higher (e.g., Gryl, Stith, & Bird, 1991; Magdol et al., 1997). Evidence from a different body of studies, in which data are drawn from crime statistics, indicates that all forms of intimate partner violence (IPV) are overwhelmingly perpetrated by men against women (Dobash, Dobash, Cavanagh, & Lewis, 2004; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998).

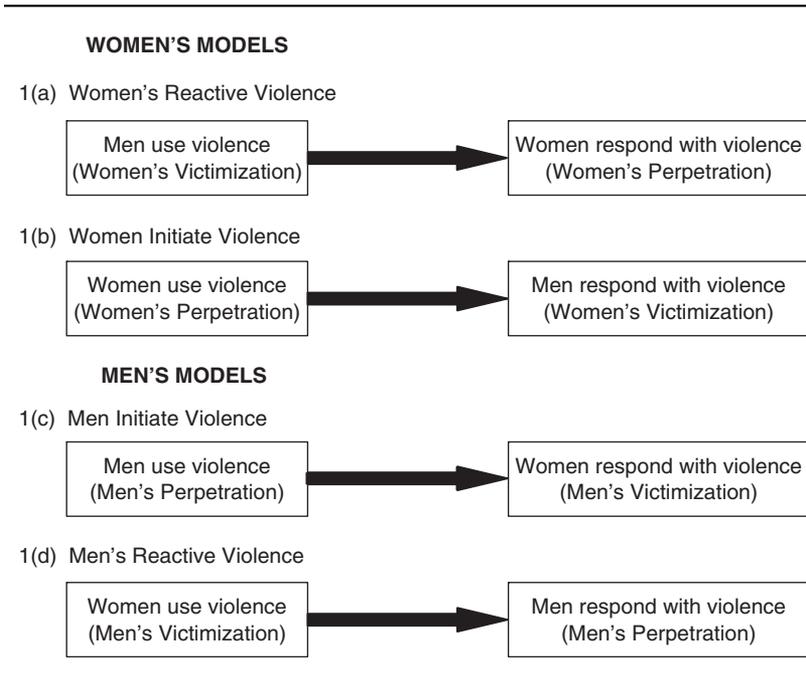
These findings and subsequent interpretations have led to debates regarding the direction of violence between men and women in intimate relationships (Cook & Swan, 2006). Many of the studies reporting comparable rates of violence perpetration by men and women do not examine contextual factors, such as who initiated the violence, who was injured, whether the violence was in self-defense, and the psychological impact of victimization. (Dobash & Dobash, 2004; Saunders, 2002). For example, a meta-analysis by Archer (2000) demonstrated that studies using the Conflict Tactics Scale–2 (CTS2; Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996) and similar act-based measures found women to be slightly more likely than men to use violence against an intimate partner. However, when contextual factors are examined, a complex picture of gender dynamics in IPV 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 (Archer, 2000). Furthermore, studies that have examined mutually violent couples have found that women tend to suffer more ill effects than men in such relationships (Frieze, 2005).

## The Present Study

### Contextual Factors

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 IPV 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 partners' 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 women are not typically initiating the violence but

**Figure 1**  
**Theoretical Explanations for Women's and Men's Use**  
**of Violence Against Intimate Partners**



are using it reactively, they are not in control of the situation. Rather, they may be using violence to protect themselves from their partners. Indeed, studies have found that male violence against women is a strong predictor of women's violence (Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2005; Graves, Sechrist, White, & Paradise, 2005; Magdol et al., 1997). A model, 1(a), depicting women's violence and victimization in this direction is shown in Figure 1.

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 model 1(a), in which women use violence reactively, with a competing model, 1(b), in which women's perpetration predicts women's victimization (see Figure 1). The competing model 1(b) suggests that women tend to initiate violence first and then their male partners respond with violence, resulting in women's victimization. The comparison of these two models will allow an examination of directionality (with the

caveat that the data is cross-sectional): Does women's violence tend to be primarily reactive, or do women tend to be the initiators of violence?

This study makes a further contribution toward addressing the "gender symmetry" issue by comparing models between male and female samples with a diverse sample of college students. Straus (2006) points out that to examine the question of gender symmetry, the same behaviors must be examined in both male and female samples. Although being a recipient of violence predicts women's perpetration of violence, it predicts men's perpetration of violence as well (Bookwala et al., 1992; Magdol et al., 1997). The present study examines the hypothesis that women's violence is primarily reactive, whereas men's violence is primarily proactive. Model 1(c), shown in Figure 1, suggests that men tend to initiate violence first and then their female partners respond with violence, resulting in men's victimization.

The competing model, 1(d), shown in Figure 1, 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 and then they perpetrate violence reactively.

## Sexism and IPV

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. Although older writings define sexism as a negative attitude based on the presumed inferiority of women as a group (Cameron, 1977), Swim, Aikin, Hall, and Hunter (1995) note that currently there are strong social pressures against blatant sexism. Ambivalent sexism theory (Glick & Fiske, 2001) posits that sexist attitudes have benevolent as well as hostile components. *Benevolent sexism* is defined as

a set of interrelated attitudes toward 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, p. 491)

The research to date regarding how sexism is related to IPV is mixed. Although feminist theory points to patriarchy and sexism as important determinants of violence, not all research has been supportive of this view. 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 toward women than nonviolent males (Crossman,

Stith, & Bender, 1990; Ryan, 1995; Sigelman, Berry, & Wiles, 1984; Smith, 1990). However, Bookwala et al.'s (1992) study of IPV among college students found that men who scored higher on a "Macho" scale were *less* likely to use violence against their female partners, suggesting 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 (Ryan, 1995; Sigelman et al., 1984) used the Attitudes Toward Women Scale (Spence & Helmreich, 1972) 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. Studies have found that greater endorsement of hostile sexism predicted more positive attitudes toward violence against a female partner (Forbes, Jobe, White, Bloesch, & Adams-Curtis, 2005; Sakalli, 2001). Other studies of IPV among college samples have found that men with more hostile sexist attitudes were more likely to have committed verbal aggression (Forbes et al., 2004) and sexual coercion (Forbes & Adams-Curtis, 2001; Forbes et al., 2004).

The findings from these studies regarding the relationship between benevolent sexism and IPV provide some evidence (albeit mixed) that benevolent sexism may have a protective effect against men's IPV. Sakalli (2001) found that higher levels of benevolent sexism predicted attitudes that men bore greater responsibility for wife beating. However, another study found that benevolent sexism was unrelated to attitudes that legitimize wife abuse (Glick, Sakalli-Ugurlu, Ferreira, & Aguiar de Souza, 2002). Finally, among American college students, no relationship was found between benevolent sexism and verbal aggression (Forbes et al., 2004) or sexual coercion (Forbes & Adams-Curtis, 2001; Forbes et al., 2004).

There has been almost no discussion of how women's sexism may impact their experiences of IPV. Examining women's sexist notions about their own gender provides a more comprehensive contextual framework by which to understand IPV. 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. Harris, Firestone, and Vega's (2005) study of the relationship between sexism and IPV victimization among Mexican American women supports the prediction that women's benevolent sexism may be a protective factor, at least for women in this ethnic group. Women who indicated *more* benevolent sexism were *less* likely to report abuse from their partners. 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 IPV 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 et al., 1992). However, other studies of female college students found no relationship between either hostile or benevolent sexism and verbal aggression (Forbes et al., 2004) or sexual coercion (Forbes & Adams-Curtis, 2001; Forbes et al., 2004).

## Hypotheses

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

*Hypothesis 1a:* Victimization from male partners will be a strong predictor of women's violence against their male partners (as shown in Figure 1a). 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.

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

*Hypothesis 1c:* Men's perpetration of violence will be a strong predictor of men's victimization by their female partners (see Figure 1c). 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 and then their female partners respond with reactive violence.

*Hypothesis 1d:* A model in which men's victimization from female partners predicts men's violence suggests that women initiate violence first and then men hit back (see Figure 1d). 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 IPV. Although one previous study examined the relationship between ambivalent sexism and sexual and verbal aggression (Forbes & Adams-Curtis, 2001), to our knowledge no studies have explicitly explored the relationship between benevolent sexism, hostile sexism, and physical aggression.

*Hypothesis 2a:* Men with more benevolently sexist beliefs will be less likely to perpetrate violence against women.

*Hypothesis 2b:* Men with more hostile sexist beliefs will be more likely to perpetrate violence against women.

Finally, we expand on previous debates by examining women's hostile and benevolent sexism toward their own sex and how these may relate to violence perpetration and victimization.

*Hypothesis 3:* 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 lower than both their benevolent sexism scores and men's hostile sexism scores (Glick & Fiske, 1996), we 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 a larger study examining risk factors for dating violence in low income immigrant/ethnic minority undergraduates from a large public urban college. The sample was recruited from all entering undergraduates in the first semester of enrollment who were not in either honors-equivalent or remedial programs. The majority of respondents were between 18 and 19 years of age. Fewer than 5% of the potential participants did not participate in the survey. Five participants were below 18 years of age (minimum required age) and 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% of respondents self-identified as Latino/Latina, 19%

as Black, 10% as White, 5% as Asian, 6% as Biracial, 7% as Other, and 1% did not respond. Thirty-four percent of the sample reported having been born outside the United States: Of those, 1% reported living in the United States less than a year, 28% between 1 and 5 years, 25% between 6 and 10 years, 45% 11 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, although 23% 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 (ASI).* The 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. An example of a hostile item is: "Women are too easily offended." An example of a benevolent item is: "Women should be cherished and protected by men." Participants are asked to indicate the extent to which they endorse items on a Likert-type scale (0 = *disagree strongly* to 5 = *agree strongly*), where higher scores indicate higher sexism. The ASI is a widely used measure of sexism, which has been shown to have good reliability and validity in cross-cultural samples (Glick et al., 2004). Glick and Fiske (1996) found reliability of the hostile sexism scale in student samples ranged from .80 to .92, and reliability of the benevolent sexism scale ranged from .75 to .85. Internal consistency of the hostile and benevolent sexism subscales in the present samples were, respectively,  $\alpha = .75$  and  $\alpha = .60$ .

*The Conflict Tactics Scale-2 (CTS2).* A total of six items from the "minor" violence scales of the CTS2 (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996) were administered. (The use of the term "minor" here reflects the CTS2 classification of item severity.) Because of time limitations for the administration of the survey instruments, we selected the "minor" aggression items from the CTS2 because these items have a higher prevalence rate than the "severe" items (Straus et al., 1996). In particular, we selected items for inclusion based on their high item-total correlations and high factor loading on either the "minor" physical, psychological, or sexual aggression subscales, respectively (Straus, Hamby, Warren, 2003). The CTS2 instructs participants to indicate how many times they committed a given act of aggression against their partners in the past year, and how many times their partners committed that act toward them. 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.” The minor aggression items were “I twisted my partner’s arm or hair,” “I pushed or shoved my partner,” “I grabbed my partner,” and “I slapped my partner.” The psychological aggression item was “I shouted or yelled at my partner.” The sexual coercion item was “I insisted my partner have oral or anal sex (but did not use physical force).”

The CTS2 is very widely used and has high internal consistency and adequate construct and discriminant validity (Straus et al., 1996). Consistent with the scoring recommendations of Straus et al. (1996), responses were given a point value corresponding to the midpoint of each frequency category. The six items were then summed to provide subscale indices of violence frequency during 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,  $\alpha = .82$ ; and 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-2, reliabilities calculated using Pearson correlations may underestimate the reliability of the scale.

Path analyses using the AMOS program (Arbuckle, 1999) were used to assess these relationships for men and women. A model that is generally interpreted as providing a good fit to the data is one that has a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) value of less than .05 and a non-significant chi-square (Bollen & Long 1993), with a Comparative Fit Index (CFI) value close to 1 (Bentler, 1990; Byrne, 2001). Models meeting these criteria are said to not be contraindicated by the data (Bentler, 2007).

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

Fifty-five percent of the female sample reported using violence against their male partners ( $M = 1.38$ ,  $SD = 2.36$ ), and 47% reported being victimized by their male partners ( $M = 1.12$ ,  $SD = 2.04$ ). 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 and Fiske's (1996) female student and nonstudent samples (Studies 3 and 4, respectively). However, women's hostile sexism did not differ from that found by Glick and Fiske (1996).

Forty-one percent of the male sample reported using violence against their female partners ( $M = .73$ ,  $SD = 1.51$ ), and 37% reported being victimized by their female partners ( $M = 1.00$ ,  $SD = 2.04$ ). 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 and Fiske's (1996) male student and nonstudent samples (Studies 3 and 4, respectively).

Because benevolent and hostile sexism are correlated, Glick and Fiske (1996) recommend using partial correlations between benevolent sexism, hostile sexism, and other variables. In the present study, benevolent and hostile sexism are correlated .40,  $p < .00$ , in the women's sample, and .24,  $p < .05$ , in the men's sample. Table 1 shows partial correlations between hostile sexism, perpetration, and victimization, controlling for the effect of benevolent sexism; likewise, partial correlations between benevolent sexism, perpetration, and victimization are shown, controlling for the effect of hostile sexism.

## 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,  $F(1, 219) = 7.98$ ,  $p < .01$ . 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,  $F(1, 219) = 23.14$ ,  $p < .01$ . The ambivalent sexism results are consistent with the findings of Glick 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

We used four models to test our hypotheses. Hypothesis 1a—victimization from male partners will be a strong predictor of women's violence

**Table 1**  
**Partial Correlations Between Subscales for Women and Men**

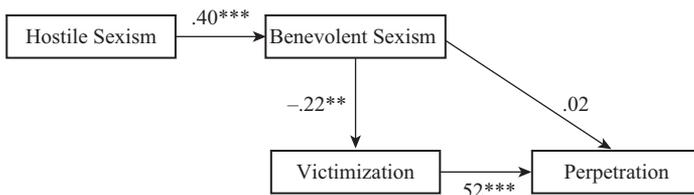
Gender	Subscales	Controlling for Benevolent Sexism		
		Perpetration	Victimization	Hostile Sexism
Women ( <i>n</i> = 140)				
	Perpetration	1.00	–	–
	Victimization	.44***	1.00	–
	Hostile sexism	.16	.13	1.00
Men ( <i>n</i> = 92)				
	Perpetration	1.00	–	–
	Victimization	.78***	1.00	–
	Hostile sexism	.08	.12	1.00
Gender	Subscales	Controlling for Hostile Sexism		
		Perpetration	Victimization	Benevolent Sexism
Women ( <i>n</i> = 140)				
	Perpetration	1.00	–	–
	Victimization	.45***	1.00	–
	Benevolent sexism	–.13	–.24**	1.00
Men ( <i>n</i> = 92)				
	Perpetration	1.00	–	–
	Victimization	.78***	1.00	–
	Benevolent sexism	–.22*	–.18	1.00

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

against their male partners—and Hypothesis 3—women with more benevolently sexist beliefs will be less likely to experience violence from their male partners—were supported by a model (Figure 2) 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 endorsed benevolently sexist attitudes were less likely to report victimization. As predicted, the model provided an excellent fit with the data;  $\chi^2(3, N = 140) = 3.80, p = .29$ ; CFI = .99; chi-square/ $df = 1.25$ ; RMSEA = .04, with a 90% confidence interval from 0.00 to 0.16.

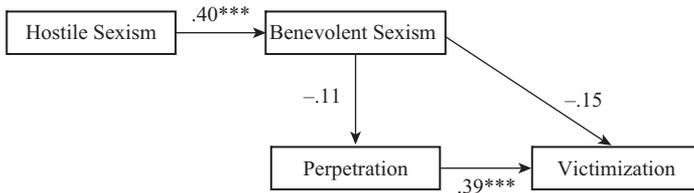
Hypothesis 1b—a model in which women's perpetration of violence predicts their victimization from male partners (Figure 3)—provided a poor fit with the data, as predicted;  $\chi^2(3, N = 140) = 16.57, p < .01$ ; CFI = .78; chi-square/ $df = 5.52$ ; RMSEA = .18, with a 90% confidence interval from 0.10 to 0.27.

**Figure 2**  
**Women Use Violence in Response to Partner's Violence**



\*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Figure 3**  
**Women Initiate Violence**

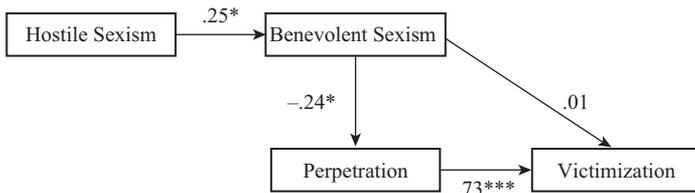


\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Hypothesis 1c—men's perpetration of violence will be a strong predictor of men's victimization by their female partners—and Hypothesis 2a—men with more benevolently sexist beliefs will be less likely to perpetrate “minor” violence against women—were supported by a model (Figure 4) 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;  $\chi^2(3, N = 92) = 2.26, p = .52$ ; CFI = 1.00; chi-square/df = 0.75; RMSEA = .00, with a 90% confidence interval from 0.00 to 0.16.

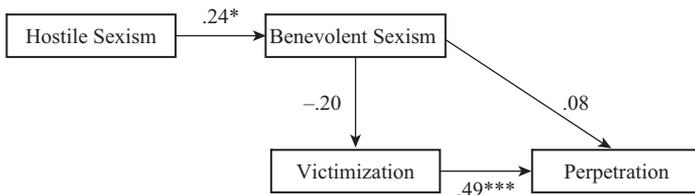
Hypothesis 1d—men's victimization predicts men's violence against female partners—was supported by a poor-fitting model (Figure 5)

**Figure 4**  
**Men Initiate Violence**



\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Figure 5**  
**Men Use Violence in Response to Partner's Violence**



\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

portraying men’s violence as in response to violence received from their female partners;  $\chi^2(3, N = 92) = 44.65, p < .00$ ; CFI = 0.45; chi-square/ $df = 14.88$ ; RMSEA = .39, with a 90% confidence interval from 0.29 to 0.49.

Hypothesis 2b—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 result is comparable to findings from other

samples of young adult/college populations (Bookwala et al., 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 (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: Women's victimization from male partners was 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 their 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 and 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. Of course, 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, on average, in Latinos compared to European Americans; in this study, the large proportion of Latino participants, some of whom were immigrants, may have increased the sample mean. Glick et al.'s (2000) multinational study of ambivalent sexism offers support for such an explanation—Latin American countries were among the nations with the highest hostile sexism scores. The current 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 attitudes perpetrated less violence against their partners than men with less benevolently sexist attitudes. Ambivalent sexism theory posits that women who conform to benevolently sexist expectations are "rewarded" with revered status, whereas those who challenge patriarchy are demeaned and punished by

men's hostility. The study also found a complementary effect for women: Women's benevolent sexism reduced 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 et al. (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 IPV further supports the notion that IPV must be understood within a contextual framework.

It must be noted that although findings of this study suggest a protective effect of benevolent sexism against male perpetration, we **DO NOT** promote women's acceptance of traditional gender roles as a means for reducing violence against them and we do not believe that women who challenge such roles should be blamed for their partner's violence. In contrast, this finding suggests that it is often unsafe for women to transcend traditional gender roles. These results also suggest that men's attitudes toward, adherence to, and enforcement of rigid gender roles must be targeted for change 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 IPV. This may especially be an issue for Latina participants. Harris et al. (2005) speculated that women with more benevolent sexism attitudes may be less likely to define a situation as abuse. Torres (1991) found that, although Latina and Anglo women did not differ in the severity and frequency of victimization, Latinas were less likely to label the behavior as abuse. Though a low number of non-Latino/Latina racial groups in the present study prohibited testing for significant differences in sexism across racial groups, we encourage future studies to examine this alternative explanation.

Results regarding the role of benevolent sexism are particularly intriguing because in other recent studies, no relationship was found between benevolent sexism and verbal aggression (Forbes et al., 2004) or sexual coercion (Forbes & Adams-Curtis, 2001; Forbes et al., 2004). 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, in our

urban sample, only 10% of the sample are White; 52% are Latino/Latina; and 19% are Black. There may be cultural effects, particularly among the Latinos/Latinas in the sample, that could account for the effect of benevolent sexism on violence found in the study. Latin American societies are characterized by traditional gender roles, strong familism, and patriarchy (Delgado, Prieto, & Bond, 1997). 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 that of Forbes and colleagues, 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 et al., 2004). (Both studies found no relationship for women.) Perhaps hostile sexism operates differently in Latino/Latina and other cultures than it does for European Americans. Another speculation is that the present study assessed "minor" physical violence, whereas the studies by Forbes and colleagues examined verbal and sexual aggression. Perhaps hostile sexism operates differently with different forms of aggression. Clearly this is an area in need of further study.

Results of the current study are limited in the following regards. Debate in the extant literature has focused on understanding comparable rates of men's and women's use of physical violence against intimate partners. Although the current article has offered empirical support for the broader contextualization of women's use of violence, more work lies ahead. Specifically, future studies should examine the role of other forms of psychological and sexual abuse in women's use of violence against partners, such as more severe forms of aggression. The findings presented here regarding the context of women's and men's use of physical violence are based on less severe forms of aggression and may not generalize to other forms. Second, the experience of violence was assessed through self-report of both violence perpetration and victimization; data was not collected from couples. Although most survey studies of IPV 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. Third, 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.

In addition, the perpetration and victimization scales had low scale reliability in the women's sample. Low reliability of the hostile and benevolent sexism scales could be related to language issues; 15% of the sample reported reading and speaking more proficiently in a language other than English. Finally, though the use of college samples is common in IPV research, the current findings may not generalize to community samples.

This article highlights the importance of studying IPV within a broader sociocultural context. By examining how social factors such as patriarchy and sexism affect the experience of IPV for individuals, we are better able to target our efforts at prevention.

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