

## Relationship between sexist ambivalence and jealousy in university students' relationships



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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 2 May 2023

Received in revised form

8 September 2023

Accepted 12 November 2023

#### Keywords:

Intimate partner violence

Sexist ambivalence

Jealousy in relationships

University students

Quantitative research

### ABSTRACT

In Peru, the issue of intimate partner violence, which includes physical, sexual, or psychological harm by a current or former partner, is significant. Statistics show that a high percentage of women experience psychological, physical, and sexual violence. The Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations highlights that this violence affects women's mental health, self-worth, and puts them at risk of femicide. This study explores the link between sexist attitudes and jealousy in university students' relationships as potential indicators of violence. It involved 138 undergraduates, selected randomly, and used quantitative methods, including surveys on sexism and jealousy. The findings reveal a statistically significant but low positive correlation between sexist attitudes and jealousy in these relationships.

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### 1. Introduction

According to the World Health Organization, a significant percentage of Latin American women have experienced partner violence, impacting their physical and mental health. [Felmlee et al. \(2020\)](#), referencing [Glick and Fiske \(1996\)](#), discussed ambivalent sexism as a causal factor in such violence. This type of sexism involves stereotypes that assign men a superior role. [Nelson \(2009\)](#) described sexism as a belief system leading to negative, individual, institutional, or cultural behaviors based on sex. [Expósito et al. \(1998\)](#) stated that sexism involves judging someone based on their gender at emotional, cognitive, or behavioral levels.

In Peru, intimate partner violence is a significant issue, encompassing physical, sexual, and psychological harm from current or former partners. According to the National Institute of Statistics and Informatics ([INEI, 2019](#)), a high percentage of women between 15 and 49 have experienced psychological, physical, and sexual violence. The Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations ([MIMP, 2017](#)) highlights that such violence adversely affects women's mental health, self-esteem, and self-perception, and increases their risk of femicide. This

situation demonstrates the role of sexist attitudes and jealousy in fostering violence.

This research focuses on the link between sexist ambivalence and jealousy in romantic relationships among university students, which [Fisher and Hammond \(2019\)](#) suggested may predict violence. It delves into how young adults form emotionally protective romantic relationships, often with the opposite sex. Drawing on [Erikson's \(1971\)](#) and [Bowlby's \(1980\)](#) theories, the study considers the impact of early childhood experiences with primary caregivers on the quality of these romantic bonds. The goal is to understand the formation of young adults' psyche, including how early life and environmental factors influence their sexual relationships, and to identify early indicators of violence, challenging the normalization of jealousy as a sign of care or concern ([Sandoval et al., 2020](#)).

### 2. Literature review

[Felmlee et al. \(2020\)](#), building on ideas from [Glick and Fiske \(2001\)](#), discussed two types of sexism: benevolent and hostile. Hostile sexism views women as seeking dominance over men, often linked to feminist ideologies and focusing on women's own interests and growth, challenging traditional roles. This leads to men's contempt, seeing women as usurpers in the social system. Benevolent sexism, conversely, applies to women who conform to traditional roles as mothers, wives, or romantic partners, meriting appreciation and care. Benevolent sexism upholds traditional behaviors, while hostile

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<https://doi.org/10.21833/ijaas.2023.12.006>

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sexism is punitive, reinforcing gender roles and societal norms. Hostile sexism is characterized by a dominating paternalism, where women are seen as subordinate to men's supremacy. This belief supports the idea that men have greater structural power in society, often holding higher positions than women. According to Glick and Fiske (1996), as referenced by Cruz Torres et al. (2021), this mindset boosts men's self-worth and identity. In contrast, benevolent sexism involves protective paternal behavior, seeing women as vulnerable and in need of care. This leads to stereotypical roles for men and women, with men as protectors and women as dependent for intimacy and affection in heterosexual relationships.

Patriarchy in social structures is marked by beliefs that position men as authoritative and women as subordinate, leading to gender biases and discrimination. This mindset stems from societal constructions based on biological differences. Sexist ambivalence underpins machismo, traditional feminism, and heteronormativity, reinforcing gender supremacy and roles. Despite progress in policies against discrimination and for gender equity, sexism remains prevalent, particularly in young people, and is often linked to relationship violence. The World Health Organization reports high rates of partner violence against women, highlighting the need for transformative approaches in addressing sexism and violence. Madrona-Bonastre et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of considering gender alongside other inequality factors, advocating for comprehensive studies and interventions.

García-Díaz et al. (2017) found that sexism can make it harder for young people, especially males, to recognize when they are victims of partner abuse and to achieve gender equity. Cava et al. (2020) observed that gender differences in socialization can influence beliefs about romantic love and sexism among adolescents. Malonda et al. (2017), as cited by Ramiro-Sánchez et al. (2018), noted that control and aggression in relationships manifest differently in men and women, often bordering on both hostility and benevolence.

Navarro-Pérez et al. (2019) highlighted the effectiveness of using psychoeducational interventions with adolescents, utilizing information and communication technologies like video games. These interventions focus on playful activities to combat sexist attitudes. Similarly, Ubillos-Landa et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of sexual health programs based on a gender perspective. They advocate for psychoeducational programs aimed at reducing sexist ambivalence and preventing sexual risk behaviors and violence in relationships, especially those linked to sexist behaviors or attitudes.

Jealousy is an emotion driven by a strong desire for possession and exclusivity in a relationship, often triggered by suspicions of infidelity. This feeling can lead to emotional vulnerability, fear of loss, and adaptive or non-pathological jealousy, which aims to protect the relationship. Buss and Schmitt (1993)

viewed jealousy as a coping mechanism against threats to the relationship. However, jealousy becomes pathological when it disproportionately affects emotions, cognition, and behavior, often based on imagined perceptions of partner infidelity. This can result in mood swings, impulsivity, anger, and even psychological or physical violence (Martínez et al., 2013).

Chávez et al. (2018) and Bolwby (1982) viewed jealousy as a defense mechanism, particularly a response to potential threats to a stable relationship. They suggest that its origins trace back to early childhood experiences where attachment was poorly developed or lacking. Individuals with such experiences may grow up seeking a secure emotional connection, and the absence of such security can lead to jealousy. Freud (1955) categorized jealous behavior into recurrent, projected, or delirious forms, emphasizing its significant impact on personality, behavior, and emotional states.

Recurrent jealousy is considered normal, causing pain and sadness over the loss of the desired object and narcissistic insult. Projected jealousy is rooted in the individual's infidelities, often linked to unconscious repression. Delusional jealousy is based on repressed infidelity, driven by erroneous ideas, intrusive thoughts, or paranoia. Pathological jealousy demands complete exclusivity, reflecting inflexible thinking influenced by patriarchal and hostile sexist beliefs. This rigid thought system leads to anxiety, depression, and aggressive tendencies, sometimes bordering on impulsivity and passive-aggressive behavior.

Machado et al. (2022) explored the challenges in treating delusional jealousy and summarized recent findings in the treatment of this condition. The study presents a case of a 76-year-old man involuntarily admitted due to threats of aggression to his wife stemming from his delusions of her infidelity. The treatment included the use of risperidone and its long-acting injectable formulation, highlighting the complexities and the need for better scientific evidence to treat this condition effectively

### 3. Methodology

This research is descriptive and aims to systematically analyze the relationship between two factors: ambivalent sexism and jealousy in relationships (Hernández et al., 2010). It uses a correlational design to identify connections between these constructs. The sample consists of both male and female students from the first to fourth cycle of the professional school of psychology, totaling 167 participants enrolled in the 2022-01 semester (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Sample characterization

Cycle	Male	Female	Total
1	12	17	29
2	10	20	30
3	8	23	31
4	11	37	48
Total	41	126	138

The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) was used for the first variable, originally in English (Glick and Fiske, 1996). It contains 22 Likert-format items, split into two subscales: hostile sexism and benevolent sexism, each with 11 items. Response options range from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Vavrus (2009) adapted it for Peru, using expert judgment to validate its content. Psychometric evidence supported its properties, with 21 out of 40 items validated. Factor analysis, including the Barlett sphericity test and Cronbach's coefficient (0.81), showed internal consistency with 0.84 in the hostile dimension and 0.77 in the benevolent dimension.

We also utilized the Multidimensional Inventory of Jealousy by Glick and Fiske (1996), which assesses jealousy levels by evaluating five factors: pain, anger, selfishness, trust, and intrigue. Higher scores on the scale indicate greater prejudice towards women. This instrument comprises 40 multiple-choice items.

The collected data was organized in Excel and analyzed using the statistical software SPSS version 26. A normality test was performed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic (Table 2), which is typically used for samples larger than 50 subjects. The results showed p-values below 5%. This indicates that the variables, including sexist ambivalence and jealousy, as well as their dimensions, do not follow a normal distribution and are non-parametric.

**Table 2: Normality test (Kolmogorov-Smirnov<sup>a</sup>)**

	Statistic	N	Sig.
Hostile sexism	0.111	138	0.000
Benevolent sexism	0.126	138	0.000
Ambivalence sexist	0.121	138	0.000
Emotional/pain	0.192	138	0.000
Anger	0.190	138	0.000
Selfishness	0.159	138	0.000
Confidence	0.138	138	0.000
Intrigue	0.159	138	0.000
Celotype	0.138	138	0.000

a: Lilliefors significance correction

#### 4. Results

Table 3 presents the distribution of students' levels of ambivalent sexism. It indicates that 60.1% have a low average level, 29% have a low level, 4.3% are average, 3.6% have a high average, and 2.9% have a high level. In terms of Hostile Sexism, 49.3% of students are at a low average level, 29.7% have a low level, 14.5% are average, 5.1% have a high level, and 1.4% have a high average level. Lastly, in benevolent sexism, 56.5% of students exhibit a low average level, 27.5% are low, 10.1% are average, 3.6% have a high level, and 2.9% have a high average level. Table 4 presents the distribution of students' levels of jealousy and its dimensions. It shows that 58% of students have a low level of jealousy, 38.4% are average, and 3.6% have a high level. In the Emotional/pain dimension, 55.1% have a low level, 29.7% are average, and 15.2% have a high level. In the anger dimension, 60% of students have a low level, 25.4% are average, and 13.8% have a high level. The selfishness dimension shows that 56.5%

have a low level, 33.3% are average, and 10.1% have a high level. In the confidence dimension, 64.5% have a low level, 33.3% are average, and 2.2% have a high level. Finally, in the intrigue dimension, 46.4% have a low level, 39.1% are average, and 14.5% have a high level.

**Table 3: Level of sexist ambivalence in university students**

Variable/dimensions		N	%
Hostile sexism	Low	41	29.7%
	Low average	68	49.3%
	Average	20	14.5%
	High average	2	1.4%
	High	7	5.1%
Benevolent sexism	Low	38	27.5%
	Average low	78	56.5%
	Average	14	10.1%
	High average	3	2.2%
	High	5	3.6%
Sexist ambivalence	Low	40	29.0%
	Low average	83	60.1%
	Average	6	4.3%
	High average	5	3.6%
	High	4	2.9%
Total		138	100%

**Table 4: Level of jealousy in the relationships of university students**

Variable/dimensions		N	%
Emotional/pain	Low	76	55.1%
	Average	41	29.7%
	High	21	15.2%
Anger	Low	84	60.9%
	Average	35	25.4%
	High	19	13.8%
Selfishness	Low	78	56.5%
	Average	46	33.3%
	High	14	10.1%
Confidence	Low	89	64.5%
	Average	46	33.3%
	High	3	2.2%
Intrigue	Low	64	46.4%
	Average	54	39.1%
	High	20	14.5%
Celotype	Low	80	58.0%
	Average	53	38.4%
	High	5	3.6%
Total		138	100%

Table 5 reveals the correlation between hostile sexism and various factors of jealousy. The findings indicate that there is a positive, low, and direct correlation between hostile sexism and each of the jealousy factors: jealousy pain, jealousy anger, jealousy selfishness, and jealousy intrigue. However, these correlations are not statistically significant as the p-values are greater than 5%. Additionally, there is a positive, low, and inverse correlation between hostile sexism and the jealousy confidence factor, but this correlation is also not statistically significant. Therefore, there is no strong evidence of a significant relationship between hostile sexism and these jealousy factors.

Table 5 reveals the correlation between benevolent sexism and various factors of jealousy. The results indicate that there is no statistically significant evidence of a strong relationship between benevolent sexism and these jealousy factors. Specifically, there is no significant relationship between benevolent sexism and jealousy pain, jealousy anger, jealousy selfishness, jealousy trust, or jealousy intrigue, as the p-values are all greater than

5%. These findings suggest that benevolent sexism does not have a significant impact on these aspects of jealousy in the studied population.

### 5. Discussion

In this study, it was found that a significant portion of the surveyed students exhibited low to average levels of sexist ambivalence, including both hostile and benevolent sexism. These findings are in contrast to a previous study by Janos Uribe and Espinosa Pezzia (2018), which indicated that men, especially those with lower education levels, tended to score higher in both hostile and benevolent sexism. This suggests that the current study's results challenge the previous understanding of sexism among this population.

In this study, the majority of students (58%) displayed a low level of jealousy. Examining the dimensions of jealousy, the emotional/pain dimension was most prevalent (55.1%), followed by anger (60.9%), selfishness (56.5%), trust (64.5%), and intrigue (46.4%). These findings contrast with previous research by Potyszová and Bártoová (2021), who reported higher means for the pain dimension in both homosexual and heterosexual relationships. Similarly, they differ from Dainton and Stokes (2015), whose sample exhibited predominantly low levels of jealousy, and Granados (2016), who found moderate levels of jealousy, particularly in the emotional dimensions, following breakups.

The study found a statistically significant relationship between sexist ambivalence and jealousy in university students' romantic

relationships. This aligns with previous research by Rodríguez-Burbano et al. (2021), which observed that individuals with higher levels of sexism, both hostile and benevolent, tend to experience more jealousy, particularly in the pain dimension. It also corresponds to findings by Fernández-Antelo et al. (2020) and Arbinaga et al. (2021) on the association between sexist beliefs, jealousy, and violence. Cava et al. (2021) further supported the idea that sexist beliefs can lead to the expression of jealousy, which can be an early indicator of violence.

### 6. Conclusions

This study found a positive, yet weak, correlation ( $r = 0.285$ ) between ambivalent sexism and jealousy. Ambivalent sexism, which can be either benevolent or hostile, was associated with the presence of jealous behaviors in romantic relationships. This suggests that individuals who hold sexist attitudes, especially towards women, may exhibit jealousy when they perceive a threat to their relationship, leading to conflicts and emotional distress.

In terms of sexist ambivalence, the study found that 60.1% of the students had a moderate level of sexist attitudes. Given that the majority of the participants were women, this suggests that their levels of jealousy might be relatively lower compared to men. It's possible that certain benevolent or hostile behaviors have become normalized in their relationships, leading to a reduced perception of these behaviors as potential precursors to overt violence.

**Table 5:** Relationship between ambivalent sexism and jealousy of university students

Spearman correlation		Hostile sexism	benevolent sexism
Emotional/pain factor	correlation coefficient	0.086	-0.032
	Sig. (bilateral)	0.313	0.711
	N	138	138
Anger factor	correlation coefficient	0.054	-0.113
	Sig. (bilateral)	0.532	0.187
	N	138	138
Selfishness factor	correlation coefficient	0.125	0.009
	Sig. (bilateral)	0.145	0.920
	N	138	138
Confidence factor	correlation coefficient	-0.026	0.005
	Sig. (bilateral)	0.766	0.957
	N	138	138
Intrigue factor	correlation coefficient	0.059	-0.030
	Sig. (bilateral)	0.489	0.726
	N	138	138

In terms of jealousy, the study found that 58% of the students reported having a low level of jealousy. It's worth noting that the majority of the participants were women. This observation suggests that women may either experience less jealousy or may not readily recognize it in themselves. Alternatively, they might perceive their jealousy as being less significant compared to men. Jealousy in this context is characterized by behaviors such as making claims, conflicts, legal disputes, or temporarily distancing oneself from the partner.

The study found that in the dimension of hostile sexism, there is a positive but low correlation ( $r = 0.086$ ) between sexist ambivalence and the

emotional pain factor of jealousy. This suggests that more reactive or violent behaviors in jealousy can lead to greater emotional pain in the couple. On the other hand, in the case of benevolent sexism, there is a positive but low inverse correlation ( $r = -0.032$ ) with the emotional pain factor. This implies that when there is greater care or concern in not causing harm to the partner with jealous behaviors, there is a lower psychological impact, particularly among women who prioritize their partner's well-being.

The study found that in the dimension of hostile sexism, there is a positive but low correlation ( $r = 0.054$ ) between sexist ambivalence and the factor of jealous anger. This suggests that hostile behaviors



tend to worsen the situation in a relationship, leading to greater distance between the couple. On the contrary, in the case of benevolent sexism, there is a positive but low inverse correlation ( $r = -0.113$ ) with the jealous anger factor. This implies that benevolent behaviors are associated with tenderness and charm, reducing hostility and conflict and creating a more positive environment for reconciliation in the couple.

The study found that there is a positive but low correlation ( $r = 0.125$ ) between sexist ambivalence, particularly in the dimension of hostile sexism, and the factor of jealous selfishness. This indicates that both hostile and non-hostile claims tend to be perceived as selfish behaviors within the couple, with an emphasis on prioritizing one's own needs over the partner's. This may lead to a lack of balance in the relationship, as both partners should maintain their individuality while also fulfilling their commitments and responsibilities to maintain a healthy partnership.

In terms of trust within relationships, the study found that in the dimension of hostile sexism, there is a negative correlation between conflict and trust. When couples experience more conflict, it often leads to a lack of trust, especially when men display distrust towards their partners. On the other hand, benevolent sexism showed a positive correlation with trust, meaning that when partners display care and protective behavior, it strengthens the sense of trust and belonging in the relationship.

In relation to the intrigue factor, hostile sexism was found to have a positive correlation with it. This means that when provocative situations or jealousy pretenses arise, individuals with hostile sexism may exhibit aggressive or even violent behavior, leading to conflicts and potential harm. Conversely, benevolent sexism showed a negative correlation with intrigue, indicating that when partners demonstrate care and reliability, doubts and intrigue have less impact on the relationship. This fosters a sense of security and trust in the partner's intentions.

## Compliance with ethical standards

## Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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