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ANALYSIS OF ATTITUDES TOWARD GENDER IN UNIVERSITY
STUDENTS

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Abstract

Despite feminist advances, gender stereotypes and sexist attitudes are still observed today in society. Taking this as its starting point, this study aims to analyse whether stereotyped beliefs and sexist attitudes exist among the university students of the city of Melilla, and to analyse the beliefs on gender as a function of the variables sex, cultural origin and the degree being studied. A correlational ex post facto study has been undertaken, using the *Ambivalent Sexism Inventory* questionnaire, extended by Expósito, Moya and Glick, for data collection. This was applied to 617 students of the undergraduate degree courses given at the Melilla Campus of the University of Granada. The results obtained indicate that the student profile presenting the most sexist attitudes is found in men of Berber (cultural group belonging to the north of Africa) cultural origin studying for a degree in Business Administration and Management. In contrast, the university student profile with the least sexist attitudes is that of a woman of European cultural origin studying for a degree in Nursing.

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1. Introduction

Independently of the sex we are born with, we are taught and assigned different expectations and roles according to gender, which are learned and assimilated in a cultural context and that will accompany us throughout our lives. One of the main reasons for undertaking this study has been to analyse whether sexist attitudes exist among university students who have been socialized in a multicultural context.

2. Problem Statement

Basing our argument on Rocha Sánchez and Díaz-Loving (2005), it can be stated that the sex with which we are born has an influence on the way we act and on expectations of behaviour. We take on these beliefs as absolute truths and as though natural, because it is a process that is developed in the psychosocial sphere. Because of this, gender does not come imposed as sex does – gender and all that is incumbent on it is learned and can vary as a function of sociocultural variables. From this difference comes the term *gender equality* and not *sex equality* (Sánchez Álvarez, 2008). Thus, gender identity indicates the subjective sense of being a man or a woman (Fernández, Arias, & Alvarado, 2017, p. 86).

Rudman and Glick (2008) have stated that gender stereotypes are related to sexist attitudes. In addition, cases of gender-based violence are more and more numerous, with sexist attitudes being one of the precedents to this (Díaz-Aguado, 2003; Glick and Hilt, 2000), and violent conduct in couple relationships is occurring at ever earlier ages (Lemus, Rodríguez, & Megías, 2007). Expósito, Moya, & Glick (1998) define sexism as an “attitude directed at persons in virtue of their belonging to groups based on biological sex, men or women” (p. 160).

Nobody today admits to being sexist, showing that “classic” sexism is in retreat (Pozo Muñoz, Martos Méndez, & Alonso Morillejo, 2010), giving way to a new form called ambivalent sexism (Glick and Fiske, 1996). This is understood as the coexistence of negative and positive feelings and beliefs towards women, within which hostile sexism and benevolent sexism are distinguished. The former is the most similar to traditional sexism (Pozo Muñoz et al., 2010), which considers that women are inferior beings to men, that they are clearly differentiated from them and thus do not have the same capabilities, nor can they perform the same actions or work as men. Benevolent sexism, on the other hand, is more subconsciously assimilated, given that it is confused with the “need” of the man to protect the woman, in that it is necessary for him to feel complete and that for a home to be correctly looked after depends on her. This type is, according to Sánchez Álvarez (2008) and Rodríguez Otero and Mancinas Espinoza (2016), therefore subtler and more deeply rooted. Both types of sexism form part of what is encompassed within sexist attitudes and are equally harmful, given that they continue to suppose male superiority, and can give rise to different forms of gender violence.

With regard to the sexes, Díaz-Aguado (2003), García Leiva, Palacios, Torrico, & Navarro (2007), Pozo Muñoz et al. (2010) and Rojas and Moreno (2016) show that men present more sexist attitudes of both types, whereas women tend more towards benevolent sexism. This may be due to masculinized societies, in which the roles of men and women are clearly differentiated. For example, whereas in European culture equality between the sexes in performing different daily activities is gaining ground, in the Berber culture women must honour and obey the men in their family and have accepted that the care of home and

children depends upon them, amongst other forms of sexism (El-Hassan, 1992). Therefore, in cultures where greater gender inequality exists, it is observed that benevolent sexism is more frequent in women than in men. Along the same lines, Fernández et al. (2017) consider that in less developed societies and where greater inequality exists, hostile sexist attitudes are more typical in men. This idea is consistent with Moya, Páez, Glick, Fernández, & Poeschl (2002), who show that ambivalent sexist attitudes have cross-cultural validity and are closely related with the degree of a country's human development.

3. Research Questions

Given that sexist attitudes can be a predictor of gender violence, and this being a highly topical issue, this study intends to discover what the attitudes toward gender are among university students in a multicultural context.

For this reason, the questions that we aim to analyse are focused on the following: Do sexist attitudes exist among the university students? Is sex a variable that has a bearing on these attitudes? Are there differences as a function of the cultural origin where the students have been socialized?

4. Purpose of the Study

The main objective of the study is to analyse whether sexist attitudes exist among university students at the Melilla Campus of the University of Granada. Therefore, they will be assessed as a function of the variables under study: sex, cultural group and degree studied.

5. Research Methods

The purpose of the methodology used is to answer the research questions, for which we take a quantitative approach with a correlational ex post facto study (Rodríguez Gómez and Valdeoriola Roques, 2009).

5.1. Population and sample

The total number of university students in Melilla during the research was 1386. We used non-probability, purposive sampling, ensuring that the sample was heterogeneous and representative.

The data-producing sample was made up of 615 participants, with a reliability level of 95% and a sampling error of 4%. The characteristics of the participants are described in Table 01.

Table 01. Socio-Demographic Data

| Cultural Group | | F. Education | F. Social Sciences | F. Nursing | Total |
|----------------|-------|--------------|--------------------|------------|-------|
| Western | Men | 103 | 37 | 37 | 177 |
| | Women | 132 | 79 | 36 | 247 |
| Berber | Men | 18 | 2 | 39 | 59 |
| | Women | 49 | 18 | 55 | 122 |
| Other | Men | 2 | 1 | 3 | 6 |

| | | | | | |
|-------|-------|-----|----|----|-----|
| | Women | 1 | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| Total | Men | 123 | 40 | 79 | 242 |
| | Women | 192 | 98 | 93 | 373 |

In the table above, the data are organized according to the cultural group the participants belong to and to the faculties in which the relevant degrees are studied. Hence, the Faculty of Education includes the Primary Education, Pre-school Education, and Social Education degrees, and the Double Degree in Primary Education and Sports and Physical Activity Sciences. The Faculty of Social Sciences encompasses the degrees in Business Administration and Management and Labour Relations, and the Double Degree in Business Administration and Management and Law. Lastly, in the Faculty of Nursing are the Nursing and the Physiotherapy degrees.

With regard to the cultural groups, those considered as Western are those born in Melilla with Spanish as their first language, whereas the Berbers are the cultural group born in Melilla whose first language is Tamazight and whose religion is Islam. Within the group *others*, there are gypsy, Indian, Jewish and Latin American participants.

5.2. Data collection methods

In order to collect the data, the Spanish version of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick and Fiske, 1996) questionnaire has been used, which consists of a total of 22 items, of which 11 are statements typical of hostile sexism and 11 of benevolent sexism, with the answer format being a Likert scale of four alternatives that range from “completely disagree” to “completely agree”, with a higher score corresponding to a higher degree of sexism (Expósito et al., 1998).

The internal consistency, measured through Cronbach’s alpha, for the scale total is $\alpha=.938$, the subscale of hostile sexism is $\alpha=.908$ and the benevolent sexism subscale is $\alpha=.899$, these figures being higher than those obtained by the authors.

6. Findings

Firstly, in order to find out the attitudes toward gender, the data show that the men obtain the highest scores – in other words, the men show higher scores in the hostile sexism questionnaire (Table 02).

Table 02. Differences between men and women

| | MEN | | | WOMEN | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|----------------|--------|-------------------|----------------|--------|
| | Benevolent Sexism | Hostile Sexism | SEXISM | Benevolent Sexism | Hostile Sexism | SEXISM |
| N Valid | 242 | 242 | 242 | 373 | 373 | 373 |
| Mean | 22.27 | 24.30 | 46.57 | 19.19 | 19.29 | 38.49 |
| Standard Deviation | 6.51 | 6.69 | 12.15 | 6.56 | 5.964 | 11.60 |

The results obtained after carrying out inferential statistics as a function of the variable *sex*, show that there are significant differences both in the total scale and in the types of sexism, with the men being those who attain the highest scores and, therefore, a higher degree of sexism, as can be seen in Table 03.

Table 03. Types Of Sexism As A Function Of The Variable Sex

| Sexism | Sex (Means) | | | | T | P | Cohen's D | R |
|---------------|------------------------|-------|--------------------------|-------|------|-------|-----------|-----|
| | N _{MEN} = 242 | | N _{WOMEN} = 373 | | | | | |
| | M | SD | M | SD | | | | |
| Benevolent S. | 22.27 | 6.51 | 19.19 | 6.56 | 5.69 | 0,000 | .47 | .22 |
| Hostile S. | 24.30 | 6.69 | 19.29 | 5.96 | 9.68 | 0,000 | .79 | .36 |
| Total Score | 46.57 | 12.15 | 38.49 | 11.06 | 8.28 | 0,000 | .68 | .32 |

Inferential statistics were also applied as a function of the variable *culture*. As shown in Table 04, the data indicate that there are significant differences both in the total scale and in both types of sexism, with the students of Berber origin those that have the highest scores and, therefore, the greater degree of sexist attitudes. Consequently, this group can be considered to have ambivalent attitudes.

Table 04. Types of sexism as a function of the variable culture

| Sexism | Culture (Means) | | | | t | P | Cohen's d | r |
|-------------|-----------------------------|-------|---------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-----------|-------|
| | N _{EUROPEAN} = 424 | | N _{BERBER} = 181 | | | | | |
| | M | SD | M | SD | | | | |
| Benevolent | 19.38 | 6.25 | 22.36 | 6.78 | -5.23 | 0.000 | -0.45 | -0.22 |
| Hostile | 20.89 | 6.70 | 21.71 | 6.34 | -1.40 | N.S. | -0.12 | -0.06 |
| Total Score | 40.27 | 12.03 | 44.08 | 12.17 | -3.55 | 0.000 | -0.31 | -0.15 |

As the data in Table 05 show, having carried out the inferential statistics as a function of the variable *degree studied*, significant differences were obtained both in the total scale and in the scores for both types of sexism, with the students of Business Administration and Management (BAM) and the students of Primary Education and Physical Activity and Sports Sciences (PASS) being those who obtained higher scores in the sexist attitudes of both dimensions, revealing ambivalent sexism, while those from Nursing and Pre-School Education scored the least.

Table 05. Types of sexism as a function of the variable of degree studied

| Sexism | Degree Studied | N | M | F | P | η^2_p |
|------------|--|-----|-------|------|-------|------------|
| Benevolent | Primary Education | 88 | 20.44 | 7.43 | 0.000 | 0.089 |
| | Pre-school Education | 54 | 18.74 | | | |
| | Social Education | 67 | 20.05 | | | |
| | Primary Education and PASS | 96 | 21.44 | | | |
| | Nursing | 112 | 17.23 | | | |
| | Physiotherapy | 26 | 19.61 | | | |
| | Business Administration and Management | 91 | 23.65 | | | |
| | Labour relations | 28 | 21.28 | | | |
| | BAM and Law | 53 | 21.64 | | | |
| Hostile | Education Primary | 88 | 21.69 | 6.22 | 0.000 | 0.076 |
| | Education Pre-school | 54 | 20.53 | | | |
| | Education Social | 67 | 19.41 | | | |
| | Primary Education and PASS | 96 | 23.31 | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|-------------|--|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|
| | Nursing | 112 | 18.63 | | | |
| | Physiotherapy | 26 | 20.84 | | | |
| | Business Administration and Management | 91 | 23.80 | | | |
| | Labour relations | 28 | 22.53 | | | |
| | BAM and Law | 53 | 20.67 | | | |
| Total score | Education Primary | 88 | 42.13 | 7.49 | 0.000 | 0.090 |
| | Education Pre-school | 54 | 39.27 | | | |
| | Education Social | 67 | 39.47 | | | |
| | Education Primary and PASS | 96 | 44.76 | | | |
| | Nursing | 112 | 35.86 | | | |
| | Physiotherapy | 26 | 40.46 | | | |
| | Business Administration and Management | 91 | 47.46 | | | |
| | Labour relations | 28 | 43.82 | | | |
| BAM and Law | 53 | 42.32 | | | | |

In terms of sexist attitudes, our results are similar to those obtained by Díaz-Aguado (2003), García Leiva et al. (2007), Sánchez Álvarez (2008), Pozo Muñoz et al. (2010), and Rodríguez Otero and Mancinas Espinoza (2016), and we can therefore state that men show more sexist attitudes than women, specifically those that possess a lower educational level, although in this study all participants are university students. In the previous studies, men show a greater level of hostile sexism and women obtain higher scores in benevolent sexism, but in this study the men have scored higher than women in both types, although benevolent sexism is predominant.

With regard to religion and its practice, our findings agree with Burn and Busso (2005), Maltby, Hall, Anderson, & Edwards (2009), and Moyano, Expósito, & Trujillo (2013): among the Christians, generally less practising than the Muslims, the scores obtained in hostile and benevolent sexism are similar, in contrast to those of the Islamic faith, who show a greater degree of hostile sexism.

Lastly, authors such as Rudman and Glick (2008) obtained similar results to our own in terms of the relation between gender stereotypes and sexist attitudes, given that we have been able to observe that those who obtained high scores in the questionnaire on stereotypes also obtained high scores in the questionnaire on the types of sexism.

7. Conclusion

As a consequence of these results, we can make the following conclusions:

- With regard to sexist attitudes, we find that the most sexist participant profile is male, of Berber origin and studying for a degree in Business Administration and Management.
- In contrast, the participant profile with fewest sexist attitudes is female, of European origin and studying Nursing.
- Between the two types of sexism evaluated, we find that benevolent sexism is the most present among the students.

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