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## **NEGATIVE REACTIONS OF MEN TO THE LOSS OF POWER IN GENDER RELATIONS: LILITH VS. EVE**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines the reaction of the man when he sees he is losing power and authority over a woman and its relation with men's sexist ideology. 83 men participated in the study and were led to believe they were interacting via computer with a woman, and answered a decision-making task about family relationships. All of them were assigned the role of someone with authority and power. In half the cases, the woman accepted the man's decisions, and, in the other half, she did not accept. The results showed that when woman did not accept the decisions of the man, she was perceived more negatively. Moreover, the more hostile sexist participants were, the more they rated negatively their female partner, especially when the woman did not accept their decisions. Hostile sexism acts as a corrective tool against those women who defy the traditionally higher status accorded to men. The valuation that woman receive in their interaction with man is determined by what man feel threatened. These results are of great interest in the field of gender violence, since it is one more step towards explaining why some men use violence to attempt to regain their threatened or lost power.

**Keywords:** gender; sexism; power; threat; violence.

### **Resumen**

Este artículo examina la reacción del hombre cuando ve que está perdiendo poder y autoridad sobre la mujer y su relación con la ideología sexista de los hombres. 83 hombres participaron en el estudio y se les hizo creer que estaban interactuando a través del ordenador con una mujer, y respondieron a una tarea de toma de decisiones sobre las relaciones familiares. A todos ellos se les asignó el papel de alguien con autoridad y poder. En la mitad de los casos, la mujer aceptaba las decisiones del hombre, y, en la otra mitad, ella no aceptaba. Los resultados mostraron que cuando la mujer no aceptaba las decisiones del hombre, ella era percibida de forma más negativa. Además, cuanto más sexistas y hostiles eran los participantes, evaluaban más negativamente a su pareja, especialmente cuando la mujer no aceptaba sus decisiones. El sexismo hostil actúa como una herramienta correctiva hacia las mujeres que desafían el tradicionalmente más alto estatus otorgado a los hombres. La valoración que la mujer recibe en su interacción con el hombre está determinada porque el hombre se siente amenazado. Estos resultados son de gran interés en el campo de la violencia de género, ya que es un paso más hacia la explicación de por qué algunos hombres usan la violencia para tratar de recuperar su poder amenazado o perdido.

**Palabras clave:** género; sexismo; poder; amenaza; violencia.

*Lilith is considered the first wife of Adam before Eve. She was created at the same time as Adam and as his equal, but faced with Adam's claim that she should submit to his will, Lilith left her husband and the Garden of Eden on her own initiative, rebelling against the established roles.*

### **Introduction**

Relationships between men and women have been characterized, since their origins, by inequalities. This situation of inferiority in which women find themselves, both in their professional and personal relationships, has resulted in a clear power asymmetry upon which discrimination is built and that, amongst other pernicious effects, gives rise to many forms of gender violence.

### **Ambivalent sexism and gender discrimination**

Whenever there is inequality of power, that is whenever one group dominates another, the first group often generates an ideology that facilitates the perpetuation of the dominant position it holds. For men and women that ideology is sexism. Sexism has been conceived as a negative attitude towards women, based on their supposed inferiority as a group. However, as Glick and Fiske (1996, 2001a) have argued, although men may exclude women from certain activities and roles, keeping them in a subordinate position, they also need women for intimate relationships and sex. According to these authors (Glick & Fiske, 1997, p. 121), "the simultaneous existence of men's structural power and women's dyadic power (based on interdependence in relations) creates ambivalent sexist ideologies, composed of hostile sexism and benevolent sexism". Both components (hostile and benevolent) are the two sides of the same coin: if the woman submits to the prescriptions of the traditional role, she receives benevolent sexism (BS), if she deviates then she receives the hostile (HS). Ambivalent sexism is not generally characterized by the simultaneous experience of both contradictory feelings toward the same person at the same time. While hostile sexism is directed toward women who threaten male power (e.g., feminists, executives, seducers), the benevolent will reward those who conform to traditional roles (subordinate to man) (Glick & Fiske, 2001b). This combination of reward and punishment may be

particularly effective for maintaining and justifying gender inequalities (Glick & Fiske, 2001b).

### **Ambivalent sexism and gender violence**

Various studies on gender violence, one of the most extreme forms of gender discrimination, say that sexism is a factor that best predicts this type of violence and attitudes towards it (Johnson 1995; White & Kowalski, 1998). In the case of ambivalent sexism, both HS and BS have appeared related to gender violence in the research.

In the case of hostile sexism, in a study on the tendency towards rape in males (Abrams, Viki, Masser, & Bohner, 2003) found that the more hostile sexist participants were, the more likely they were to commit rape, but only if the woman strayed from traditional gender roles. Other studies have shown how hostile sexism predicts a more negative opinion of rape victims (Sakalh-Ugurlu, Yalçin, & Glick, 2007), and a greater tolerance for abuse (Sakall, 2001). Forbes, Jobe, White, Bloesch, and Adams-Curtis (2005) found that the perception of a violent act towards an intimate partner triggered by either a sexual betrayal (having had relations with a third person), or a non-sexual betrayal (having revealed secrets to third parties), was also directly related to hostile sexism. Expósito and Moya (2005) and Valor-Segura, Expósito, and Moya (2008) found that hostile sexism was a good predictor of the justification of gender violence and the type of advice that study participants would give the victims of this type of violence (e.g. report it to the police) in the case that they got a call from the victims asking for advice.

Not only hostile sexism predicts negative attitudes toward different types of violence (e.g. attitudes toward rape), benevolent sexism also predicts negative attitudes (Sakalh-Ugurlu, Yalçin, & Glick, 2007). Thus, several studies have shown how BS relates to the prejudice against women who have premarital sex (Sakalh-Ugurlu & Glick, 2003), with tolerance for sexual abuse (Russell & Trigg, 2004) or with blame for the victim in cases of rape (Abrams et al., 2003). For example, Sakalh-Ugurlu and Glick (2003) conducted a study in Turkey on attitudes about women who have premarital sex. Specifically, they measured male and female participants' attitudes toward women who have premarital sex and the willingness of men to marry a woman who was not a virgin. They found that only the benevolent sexism (not hostile) of men and women predicted a negative attitude towards women who have maintained these relationships. Moreover,

in the case of men, both components of ambivalent sexism, but above all the benevolent, predicted the desire not to marry a woman who had maintained such relationships. In turn, in the research mentioned above Abrams et al. (2003, Studies 1 and 2) found that individuals who sustain benevolent sexist ideas attribute more responsibility to female victims of rape when it is perceived that these women do not meet the expectations of traditional gender roles (in this case, a woman would invite a man she had just met to her apartment). In study 3 of this same research, it is noted that the relationship between the participants' benevolent sexism and the blame assigned to the victim was mediated by perception of the victim's behaviour as inappropriate (she invited him home, which transgresses traditional gender roles).

Expósito, Herrera, Moya, and Glick (2010) found that benevolent sexist beliefs in women predicted an increased likelihood of aggression towards a woman who transgresses her traditional role or incorporates new roles (in this case, a job promotion), this effect was partially mediated by the belief that the women have that men would feel threatened by this situation.

As can be seen, although both the HS and BS have appeared related to gender violence, there is no known research that has directly studied the relationship between the two types of sexism and men's reaction to a clear challenge by women to their position of power or dominance.

### **Power differences, threat perception and gender discrimination**

That the patriarchal and sexist ideology has considerable influence on gender violence is beyond doubt. Nevertheless, sexism is not sufficient to predict or explain negative reactions towards women. Taking this as true leads to stating that all sexist men assault their partners, which is not correct. Sexism is a necessary factor but not sufficient to explain gender violence. Thus, various studies have indicated the importance of power in gender relations, hence the effects of sexism can appear to be magnified when men see their power challenged or threatened.

In this sense, a determining factor of the utmost importance related to gender violence has to do with power differences between men and women, and the need that the former have to dominate and control the latter (Mahlstedt & Welsh, 2005). Since power has been described as a basic force in social relations and the dynamics and structure of personality, Fiske, Morling, and Stevens (1996) state that when a threat to

basic human needs is perceived, people enter states of anxiety and agitation and try to regain lost power.

In this sense, some explanations for the phenomenon of gender violence suggest that the aggression of a man towards a woman (with whom he maintains or has maintained a relationship) could be motivated by the loss of control or power (or the mere perception of this loss) of those men who legitimately believe (because their culture affirms it) that they are the ones who must hold the reins in intimate relationships (Dutton, 1988). The perceived loss of power will make some men react negatively and with strong resistance, and they will try to maintain and/or regain power through the use of violence (Babcock, Waltz, Jacobson, & Gottman, 1993, Dutton, 1988). Thus, men with an economic, educational or occupational status lower than that of their wives (Hornung, McCullough, & Sugimoto, 1981) and those who perceive themselves with less decision making power than their women (Babcock et al., 1993) are more likely to use violence as a tool to regain power in the relationship. Hotelling and Sugarman (1986) concluded that if the wife had more education or higher income than her husband, the probability of intimate partner violence increased. In turn, Hornung et al. (1981) found that women with higher status jobs than their husbands were more likely to experience violence, compared with women with professions of similar status to that of their husbands. Similarly, battered women themselves report that their husbands have more power than they perceive themselves to have (Babcock et al., 1993) while the abusive husbands feel less powerful than their wives (Sagrestano, Heavey, & Christensen, 1999).

In those relationships in which partners share power and decision making, levels of violence are lower (Mahalik, Aldarondo, Gilbert-Gokhale, & Shore, 2005). Similarly, when power and decision making are not shared, there are significantly higher levels of violence (Felson & Messner, 2000; Frieze & McHugh, 1992)

Such an imbalance of power between men and women has contributed not only to inequality and gender discrimination, but also to many of the situations of abuse occurring in the privacy of male-female relations, especially in intimate and family relationships (Lenton, 1995). Therefore, dissatisfaction with the power in the relationship is an important predictor of violence (Kaura & Allen, 2004).

Thus, both the theory of ambivalent sexism and the research on power differences can predict negative reactions of men when women do not accept their

dominant position, as well as the mediating role that the perception of threat has between the non-acceptance of the man's dominant position and these negative reactions. Moreover, when a woman does not accept the male's decisions these negative reactions will be more intense as the men take on a more hostile sexist ideology. As indicated, numerous comparative studies have confirmed the relationship between hostile sexism and negative reactions toward women who challenge men's power or who stray from their traditional role. However, there are as yet no experimental studies that clearly show that these negative reactions are due to non-acceptance by women of the dominant position occupied by men (i.e. it is assumed that if women excel in the business world, for example, they are challenging male power, but there is no direct evidence that the negative reactions towards these women is due to them challenging male power and not due to any other reasons).

The main objective of this research is to try to fill this gap by analyzing the reaction of men when they perceive they are losing power and authority over a woman, in a situation in which the male position of power is socially legitimate. To do this, male participants perform a task in which they have been assigned the dominant role or power, while the subordinate person is a woman. In half the cases, the woman accepts the proposals and decisions of the man and in the other half she does not. The influence of the man's sexist ideology in his responses to the perception of threat and loss of power is also studied, and the mediating role of perceived threat to such responses.

The negative reactions of men towards women who do not accept their subordinate position may be manifested directly (for example, appreciating them less) or indirectly (e.g., perceiving the women in stereotypical or counter stereotypic terms). Research in this field has shown that gender stereotypes attribute the characteristics of agency, ambition and power to men (aspects called "agentic", instrumental or competence) and the characteristics of nurturing, empathy and concern for others to women (aspects called communal, expressive and sociability) (Rudman & Glick, 2008, p. 86). Furthermore, these two dimensions are usually the same ones that are linked to people with high and low status or power, that is, people tend to assume that people of high status or power are agentic or competent while low-status or powerless people are affectionate and expressive, although this effect disappears when the low-status group is seen as dangerous or uncooperative (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). Research on what is known as the "backlash effect" (Rudman & Glick, 1999) shows that in western



countries the tendency is to accept more and more that women are competent, in theory, but that attitudes toward women who actually do behave agentially is not so very positive, but rather they are punished for not being sufficiently feminine.

In line with previously discussed, three hypotheses will be contrasted:

Hypothesis 1. There will be greater perception of threat, more negative feelings and a more negative assessment of the woman in the situation in which the woman does not accept the decisions of the man (vs. when the woman accepts the man's decisions). Additionally, it is considered that the woman who does not accept the decisions of the man (vs. when she does accept) is straying from their traditional role, which will manifest itself in attributing more instrumental, less expressive traits, surmising that she does not fit the role of wife/mother and that she behaves in this manner to provoke the man.

Hypothesis 2. Given that an essential part of sexist ideology (especially hostile) is the belief that women must obey the man and be kept in a subordinate role, it is expected that the more hostile sexist participants are, the more threat they will perceive and the more negative their reactions will be towards the woman when she does not accept their decisions (more negative feelings, more negative assessment of the partner, women will be perceived as more instrumental and less expressive, adjusting less to the role of wife and mother and that the women are engaged in this behaviour to provoke the men).

Hypothesis 3. Finally, it is expected that the perception of threat plays a mediating role between the woman's behaviour (accepting the man's decisions or not) and the man's negative response to the situation described above.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

This study was conducted with 83 participants, all male students at the University of Granada, aged between 17 and 42 years ( $M = 21.51$ ,  $SD = 4.54$ ). All participated in the study voluntarily and in exchange for their participation they received credits in some subjects.

## Procedure

A list was circulated in class where interested parties enrolled voluntarily and then later came to the laboratory on the corresponding day. Once there, the participants were each seated in front of a computer on which they were informed of what their task would be, and they were presented with the various actions they had to perform. Their responses were always made on the computer and were recorded. To measure the perception of threat as well as variables related with the interaction and assessment of their partner, a task was developed on the program E-Prime1.1 (Schneider, Escaman, & Zuccolotto, 2002). This task was used with the intention of reproducing the traditional family model, so an interaction was simulated between each male participant and a hypothetical woman, in a decision making task. Each participant was led to believe that they were to interact via computer with a woman, and was given the following information: *A research group at the University of Granada is conducting a collaborative study with a juvenile reception centre, the centre offers a summer internship for students and we have to manage the selection of candidates. For such practices, it is necessary to work in pairs, male and female, as the study's principal objective is to familiarize these children with the family model they have never known. We will start by testing the compatibility between the possible pairs of candidates, for that you will interact via computer with a woman, with whom you will form a couple. We wish to reproduce the common daily life situations of a family, so a number of issues will be raised that you must resolve as a real couple. We are also studying how the way couples make decisions affects both their relationship and the child.*

To give more realism to the experiment, each participant answered a series of questions relative to the performance of the role related with the tasks that they would allegedly have to carry out later if selected for the study (experience with children, conflict resolution strategies, etc.). This phase served to give "legitimacy" to each participant in the role he should play in the relationship. Once the participants answered the questions, they were led to believe that depending on their answers, they would be the person responsible for making the decisions in the various situations that would be presented to do with the family life of a couple (all participants were assigned the role of the person with authority and power). It was emphasized that the researcher had given each participant absolute legitimacy to make decisions, and therefore their partner should accept and comply. Later the decision making task began, and the participant

was informed that different family situations would successively appear on the screen in which they would have to make decisions that would concern and affect them both as a couple. On the computer screen they were given two alternatives, between which they would have to choose, and immediately after their partner's response was shown. This is where the experimental manipulation was introduced, with participants randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions: 1) The female partner accepts the decision taken by the participant ( $n = 42$ ), or 2) She questioned or does not accept the decision ( $n = 41$ ).

An example of a situation in which the man must make a decision is: "Imagine you have a young son and you both think it would be good to complete his education with an extra-curricular school activity, but you have a doubt about which would be the most appropriate for your child:

- a) You decide he will attend English classes.
- b) You decide he will attend karate classes.

The participant had to choose one of two options using the computer keyboard, and then later their partner's response appeared on the screen (these responses were manipulated by the researchers). That response was one of the following alternatives depending on the two experimental conditions: a) condition accepted: *I think it's a good idea, I agree with you, I think it would be for the best, I think the same as you, Fair enough*, b) condition not accepted: *It doesn't seem like a good idea, I don't agree with you, I don't think it's for the best, I don't think the same, It doesn't seem right*.

Once the decision making task was completed (there were 14 situations in total, listed in Appendix), dependent measures were introduced: feelings of the participant, evaluation of the female partner, the threat perceived from her responses to his decisions, perception of the woman in instrumental and expressive terms, how well the woman adapts to the role of wife/mother and consideration of her behaviour as provocative, and a measure of the sexism of the participant.

## **Instruments**

After the decision making in the 14 presented situations, with the corresponding feedback, the participants responded to the following measurements:

1. *Emotional state*. A scale was designed and used, consisting of 4 items of semantic differential type with a 7 point range (*comfortable-uncomfortable, respected-*

*challenged, happy-angry and calm-restless*) to measure the subjects' emotional states after the interaction with their partner. The results of a factor analysis indicated that the 4 items saturated on a single factor. The coefficient alpha of the scale was .82. Higher scores indicate feelings that are more negative.

2. *General assessment of the interaction with partners*, was measured via the item *How would you rate the interaction you had with your partner*" with a response format of 7 points (1 - *conflictive relationship*, 7 - *harmonious relationship*).

3. *Perception of threat*, measured with the item "To what extent do you consider your position of authority threatened?" The response format was 7 points from 1 (*no threat at all*) to 7 (*extremely threatened*).

4. *Gender stereotypes*. A scale was designed and used, consisting of 26 items to measure the perception of the women in masculine (instrumental) or feminine (expressive) terms. Nine of these items were collected from the Personal Attributes Questionnaire by Spence, Helmreich and Stapp (1974) and remaining from a scale developed by Expósito (1997). Examples of the instrumental items are: ambitious, independent, sure of himself or herself, individualistic, with leadership abilities, strong, and expressive items: dedicated to others, friendly, warm, sensitive to flattery, emotional, able to discern the feelings of others. Each participant had to indicate to what extent each item was applicable, to a greater or lesser extent, to their partner with a response format of 7 points (1-*not at all* to 7- *a lot*). The alpha coefficient for the instrumental subscale was .89 and for the expressive subscale it was also .89.

5. *Evaluation of the partner in the role of mother and wife*, with the item "To what extent does your partner fit your ideal of wife and mother?" The response format was 7 points (1 = *does not fit at all*, 7 = *totally fits*).

6. *Assessment of the partner's behaviour as provocative*, with the item "I think my partner has given such responses to provoke me". The response format was 7 points (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

Participants also answered the Spanish language version of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) (Expósito, Moya, & Glick, 1998). This scale consists of 22 items, with a response format of 6 points (from 0-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree). Higher scores indicated attitudes that are more sexist. Half of the items were related to hostile sexism (e.g., Women are offended very easily, Women exaggerate problems they have at work) and the other half with to benevolent sexism (e.g., Many women are

characterized by a purity that few men possess, Man is incomplete without women). The Cronbach alpha coefficient obtained in the hostile subscale was .87 and .87 for the benevolent subscale. The scores on both scales were related,  $r = .56, p < .001$ .

To test the effectiveness of the experimental manipulation (accepts vs. does not accept the decisions of the partner), participants were asked to answer in a Likert scale of 7 points (1 = *does not accept them at all*, 7 = *totally accepts them*) to the item "To what extent do you think your partner respects and accepts your decisions?"

## Results

### Testing of the experimental manipulation

The results of the ANOVA, in which the variable about women's acceptance / non acceptance of the man's decision was considered independent, showed a significant main effect,  $F(1,82) = 38.63, p < .001$ , in the item about the extent to which the participant considered their partner respected and accepted their decisions. The participants who were presented with the condition in which the woman accepted the decisions obtained an average of 5.98 ( $SD = 1.39$ ), while those who were presented with a woman who did not accept the decisions had a score of 4.24 ( $SD = 1.39$ ).

### Effects of acceptance / non acceptance of the decision

In order to ascertain how the participants would feel and react according to whether the women accepted or questioned their decisions as well as the role of the participant's sexist ideology in these reactions, multiple hierarchical regression analyses were conducted, in which the dependent variables were 1) the average score of items measuring the participant's feelings, 2) the item *How would you rate the interaction you had with your partner?*, 3) the item *To what extent do you consider your position of authority threatened?*, 4) scores on *instrumentality*, 5) *expression*, 6) *ideal of wife and mother*, and 7) *assessment of women's behaviour as provocative*. To analyze the impact of the women's behaviour (accepts / declines) and the HS of the participant, hierarchical regression analyses were conducted. In the first step the women's behaviour (accepts vs. does not accept) and HS scores for the participant were introduced and in the second step, the interaction between HS and the experimental manipulation (accepts / declines). Since the independent variables included both categorical variables (accepts / declines)

and continuous (HS scores), in the multiple regression analysis a dummy variable for behaviour of women (does not accept = 0, accepts = 1) was coded and HS scores were centred (Aiken & West, 1991). The results obtained with respect to the first three dependent variables considered are listed in Table 1 and those relative to the following 4 in Table 2.

**Table 1.** Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis predicting acceptance or rejection of the woman and sexism of the participant with emotional state, perception of threat and partner interaction.

Predictor	Emotional state		Threat		Partner interaction	
	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1		.301***		.289***		.277***
Agree/Disagree	-.54***		-.53***		.52	
HS	-.03		-.08		.11	
BS	-.06		-.06		.29*	
Step 2		.047		.006		.020
Agree/Disagree x HS	-.34*		-.10		.23	
Agree/Disagree x BS	.05		.06		-.21	
HS x BS	-.04		-.05		-.04	
Total R <sup>2</sup>		.348		.295		.298

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

As shown in Table 1, confirming hypothesis 1, when the woman does not accept the decisions of the man (vs. when she does accept), participants felt more threatened,  $\beta = -.53$ ,  $p < .001$ , had more negative feelings,  $\beta = -.54$ ,  $p < .001$ , and valued the interaction with their partner more negatively,  $\beta = .52$ ,  $p < .001$ . The results also showed (see Table 2) that when women questioned or did not accept the decision taken by the man, the participants felt that women were higher in instrumentality,  $\beta = -.53$ ,  $p < .001$ , lower in expressiveness,  $\beta = .46$ ,  $p < .001$ , and behaved in a manner more likely to provoke the man,  $\beta = -.22$ ,  $p < .05$ . The only measure in which there were no effects of experimental manipulation was when considering whether or not women conformed to the ideal of wife and mother. All these effects remained significant when the effects of BS were statistically controlled.

**Table 2.** Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis predicting acceptance or rejection of the woman and sexism of the participant with participant's evaluation of the partner.

Predictor	Instrumentality		Expressive		Ideal of Wife/Mother		Provocative behaviour	
	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1		.297***		.255***		.070		.098*
Agree/Disagree	-.53***		.46***		.17		-.22*	
HS	.03		-.11		.10		-.24	
BS	.09		.21		.13		.11	
Step 2		.051		.038		.078		.134**
Agree/Disagree x HS	.34*		.32		.46*		.33	
Agree/Disagree x BS	-.07		-.17		-.16		.09	
HS x BS	.12		.08		-.01		-.19	
Total		.348		.293		.148		.232

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

In relation to hypothesis 2 (the men's reactions would be more negative the more hostile sexist they are and woman questioned them and did not accept their decision), the results showed support for the hypothesis in three of the measures, with significant interaction between the experimental manipulation and the HS of the participant in the feelings experienced,  $\beta = -.34$ ,  $p < .05$ , the woman's adaptation to the ideal of wife and mother,  $\beta = .46$ ,  $p < .05$ , and perception of the woman's instrumentality,  $\beta = .34$ ,  $p < .05$ . The analysis of the significant interaction between experimental manipulation and the level of participant's HS in the measure of feelings showed that the more hostile sexist the participant was the feelings were less negative if the woman accepted his decision,  $\beta = -.32$ ,  $p < .05$ , and more negative if she did not accept,  $\beta = .19$ , although in this case the trend was not significant. In the case of women's consistency with the ideal of wife/mother, the more hostile participants were, the more they considered the women to be conforming to his ideal of wife and mother if she accepted his decisions,  $\beta = .4$ ,  $p < .01$ , and there was no relationship between the HS of the participant and his opinion of the woman when she did not accept them,  $\beta = -.13$ . Finally, in the case of perceived instrumentality in women, the result was contrary to the predictions: the more hostile men were, the more instrumental women were perceived to be if they accepted the men's decisions,  $\beta = .32$ ,  $p < .05$ , and the relationship was not significant when they did not accept the decisions,  $\beta = -.14$ . All these effects remained significant when the effects of BS were statistically controlled.

Only in one of all the dependent measures considered, the participant's BS had a significant influence: in the assessment of the interaction with the partner,  $\beta = .29, p < .05$ , so the more benevolent sexist the participant was, the better the participant evaluated the interaction with the woman. The interaction between the BS of the participant and the fact that women agreed or disagreed with him was not significant in any dependent measure.

### **The mediating role of threat perception**

To test the third hypothesis, that is, the mediating role of perceived threat between the behaviour of women "accepts vs. does not accept the man's decisions" and the participants' negative reactions, several mediation analyses were performed. In this case, only the dependent variables "feelings provoked by the woman", "the assessment of the interaction with the partner" and "the consideration that behaviour had been intended to provoke" were included. The opinion of women in instrumental and expressive terms was not included as a dependent variable because, as noted, there was a greater interest in analyzing the strongly negative reactions towards women which could arise from the interaction with her and that could provoke some type of behavioural consequences, such as aggressive or violent behaviour. The item about whether women are suited to the role of wife and mother was not analyzed because, as was recorded when analyzing the first hypothesis, the fact that women accept or do not accept the boy's decision did not affect this dependent measure (for mediation analysis the first condition is that the independent variable (IV) and the dependant variable (DV) must be related).

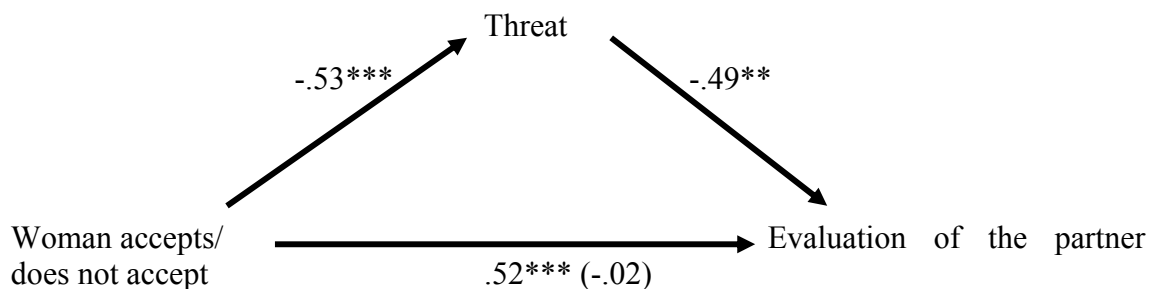
In a first regression analysis the independent variable was "accepts the man's decisions/does not accept these decisions" (coded as a dummy variable, 0 = *does not agree*, 1 = *agrees*) and the potential mediator "perceived threat"; the IV should be related to the mediator, which was confirmed,  $\beta = -.53, p < .001$ . In the second equation the IV and DV were introduced ("women accepts / does not accept" and the "evaluation of the interaction with the partner"), the IV had to affect de DV and this also happened,  $\beta = .52, p < .001$ . In the third equation both the IV and the mediator were introduced as predictors, and so there would be mediation, the mediator "perceived threat" should continue to affect the DV, which did occur,  $\beta = -.49, p < .001$ . The final step in testing the mediation involved comparing the effect of the IV on the DV in equations 2 and 3;



the effect should be smaller in 3 than in 2. The perfect mediation occurs if the IV has no effect when the mediator is controlled. In this case the mediation is perfect, since the relationship between the variables "accepts/does not accept" and "evaluation of the interaction", decreases from .52 to -.02 and the relationship ceases to be significant, *Sobel test* = 3.44,  $p < .001$ .

Thus (see Figure 1), when the woman does not agree with the man's decisions, the men perceive their position of dominance threatened and that makes them evaluate the interaction with the partner negatively.

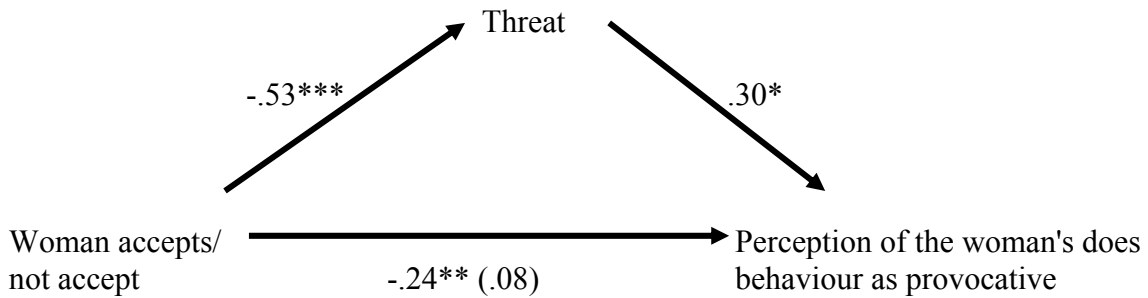
**Figure 1.** Effect of female behaviour on their evaluation mediated by the perception of threat.



The same mediation analysis was conducted with the dependent measure "perception of women's behaviour as provocative". The independent variable "accepts the man's decisions / does not accept" appeared related to the potential mediator (perceived threat),  $\beta = -.53$ ,  $p < .001$ . The independent variable "accepts/does not accept" also appeared related to the perception of women's behaviour as provocative,  $\beta = -.24$ ,  $p < .05$ . In the third equation both the IV and the mediator are introduced as predictors; for there to be mediation, the mediator (perceived threat) should continue to affect the DV, this condition is fulfilled:  $\beta = .30$ ,  $p < .05$ . The final step in testing mediation involved comparing the effect of the IV on the DV in equations 2 and 3, the effect should be smaller in 3 than in 2. The perfect mediation occurs if the IV has no effect when the mediator is controlled. In this case there is mediation, but it is not perfect, as the relationship between the independent variable "accepts / does not accept" and the perception of women's behaviour as provocative, descends from -.24 to -.08 and the relationship ceases to be significant, *Sobel test* = 2.78,  $p < .01$ .

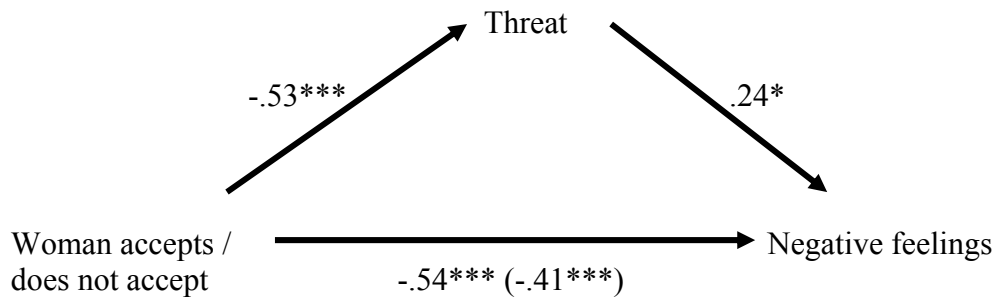
As shown in Figure 2, when the woman questioned or does not accept the man's decisions, their behaviour is perceived as a provocation because the man feels threatened.

**Figure 2.** Effect of female behaviour on their evaluation as provocative mediated by the perception of threat.



Finally, a third mediation analysis was conducted with the dependent measure "negative feelings toward women". The independent variable "accepts the man's decisions / does not accept" appeared related to the potential mediator (perceived threat),  $\beta = -.53$ ,  $p < .001$ . The independent variable "accepts / does not accept" also appeared related to negative feelings towards women,  $\beta = -.54$ ,  $p < .05$ . In the third equation both the IV and the mediator are introduced as predictors; for there to be mediation, the mediator (perceived threat) should continue to affect the DV, this condition is fulfilled,  $\beta = .24$ ,  $p < .05$ . The final step in mediation analysis involved comparing the effect of the IV on the DV in equations 2 and 3, the effect should be smaller in 3 than in 2. Perfect mediation occurs if the IV has no effect when the mediator is controlled. In this case, there is mediation, but it is not perfect, as the relationship between the independent variable "accepts / does not accept" and "negative feelings toward the woman" descends from  $-.54$  to  $-.41$  (and in both cases significant at  $p < .001$ ), *Sobel test* =  $-2.08$ ,  $p < .051$ . As shown in Figure 3, when the woman questioned or does not accept the man's decisions, negative feelings toward her are higher because men feel threatened.

**Figure 3.** Effect of female behaviour on the man's feelings mediated by the perception of threat.



### Discussion

The main objective of this research was to ascertain the extent to which participants would feel threatened when a woman does not accept their decisions and how they respond to this threat or perceived loss of power over a woman, and the role played by sexist ideology. There was a fundamental effect of the independent variable (accepts vs. declines): the reactions were more negative in almost all dependent variables (including the perception of threat) when a woman does not accept the decisions that the man took. In this sense, the evaluation of the woman by the man depends on her willingness to adopt and accept his decisions. These results are consistent with several studies in the literature in which a woman who transgresses traditional gender roles is valued more negatively by men (e.g., Sakalh-Ugurly & Glick, 2003). There were no effects of the variable "accepts vs. does not accept" on the evaluation of the woman in her role as wife and mother. This result, although not what was expected, could be due to the participants not establishing a parallel between the task being undertaken and the fact that the woman may not be a good or bad wife and mother, roles that are sufficiently idealized and difficult to separate from the women.

Moreover, the relationships between men and women have been characterized in part by sexist ideology (hostile), which represents a negative view of women. This trend has been reflected in the results, especially when women do not accept or show disagreement with the men's decisions. The reactions were more negative when the male participants scored high in hostile sexism. In these cases, hostile sexism acts as a corrective tool against those women who defy the traditionally higher status accorded to men. Participants who scored high in hostile sexism showed less negative feelings when the woman accepted their decisions, as well as when conforming to their ideal role as

mother and wife ("obedient woman"). A result contrary to the hypothesis was that hostile sexist men gave the woman more instrumental traits when she accepted his decisions. Two possible explanations for this result would be: that this was perhaps a way of acknowledging that she has behaved properly abiding by his opinion, as most instrumental traits have positive connotations (strong, bold.); or when showing agreement, the women were perceived as more similar to the men themselves and therefore described in instrumental terms, i.e. in the same terms the men would describe themselves.

As well as the interesting aspect concerning the findings in relation to the independent variable, it is very revealing that the effect of the perception of threat to power or control explains a good deal of male behaviour towards or against women.

As seen above, the perceived threat has a direct influence on attitudes, social beliefs and behaviour, leading people to assume defensive or aggressive postures, depending on the case, in an attempt to regain that threatened or lost power (Crowson, Debacker, & Thoma, 2006). Thus, the threat becomes a key element in the process of violence (gender). As shown by the results of the mediation analysis, the tendency to negatively evaluate the companion, the man's feelings of discomfort after interacting with the woman, and the tendency to regard her behaviour as provocative, is mediated by the fact that the men feel threatened in their role. This result is of great interest in the field of gender violence, since it is one more step towards explaining why some men use violence to attempt to regain their threatened or lost power.

The assessment that women receive after their interaction with the man is determined by the fact that he feels threatened. In relation to gender violence, women may learn that if they want to be accepted and positively evaluated by men they must obey and show agreement with their decisions. Previous studies (Expósito et al., 2010; Moya, Glick, Expósito, De Lemus, & Hart, 2007), have shown evidence that many women may limit their ambitions or change their behaviour to avoid potential conflicts with their partner, consequently sacrificing equality in exchange for safety.

Women who do not accept the men's decisions are seen as provocative by those men who feel threatened. In the field of gender violence many women are being battered because men believe they are being provoked, an argument that is often used as a defence in court. With this attribution, men could justify their right to make use of

negative behaviours against women as a way to regain lost or threatened power, in some way instructing other women so they know how they should behave.

Power stands as an essential element in the study of gender violence (Expósito & Herrera, 2009). The research of influence strategies, a broader category than aggression itself, suggests that people behave differently in function of on the amount of power they have in each situation and on whom they are interacting with (Duncan & Owen-Smith, 2006). Although this experimental design cannot state what the explanatory factors are for violence against women, promising results for a better understanding of the phenomenon have been found and could be extrapolated to the field.

However, the results presented here are considered encouraging and very relevant in their application for better understanding the phenomenon of gender violence. Although this study has not directly measured aggression toward the partner, (the ethical constraints are obvious), there are multiple ways of doing violence to others, beyond physical or verbal abuse. Indirect aggression is defined as conduct intended to harm anyone, in a non direct way (Green, Richardson, & Lago, 1996). People who feel they have little power use indirect aggression strategies (Duncan & Owen-Smith, 2006). The *Declaration on Elimination of Violence against Women* (United Nations, 1993) should be particularly noted which defines violence against women (also known as gender violence and gender-based violence) as *any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. And it includes Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation; Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution; and Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs.*

Most everyday experiences that are hurtful, harmful or detrimental to people, probably occur indirectly (Richardson & Green, 1997), as in this day and age physical

aggression is considered taboo in most social situations, especially in the workplace or in our social relations (Baron & Neuman, 1996) where they are openly rejected. However, there is literature that presents actions such as ignoring, insulting, disqualify, present almost in 90% of abuse situations described by female victims of domestic violence as examples of indirect or subtle aggression. Some of these indirect forms of aggression have been examined in this study and the tendency of the male participants to use them has been noted (negative evaluation, underestimation, considering the woman provocative, etc.) especially if the partner does not accept the decisions taken by the participants. Therefore, these subtle forms of action have been considered as indicators of the tendency to use violence against women in situations that could threaten the interests of the men, subject to the correct conditions.

One limitation of this study is the fact that the situations presented are not real, that is, it was a simulated situation. However, it is a good approach to try to understand the intricacies of the mechanisms that trigger violence. The limitations of this type of studies are known, but perhaps this approach is probably the closest one can be to a real situation without crossing ethical boundaries. Moreover, these methods also have consistency, because people project their own beliefs in these situations. No doubt, an interesting line of investigation has been opened, that while seeming to offer answers, also raises questions. The perception of threat is important, but further progress is required in detecting potentially threatening situations, especially taking in to account that society is changing, the roles are blurring and that people have more resources to tackle aversive situations without opting for the use of violence.

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## **Appendix**

1 - Imagine you have a young son and you both think it would be good to complete his education with an extra-curricular school activity, but you have a doubt about which would be the most appropriate for your child:

- a) You decide he will attend English classes
- b) You decide he will attend karate classes

2 - Imagine that your car has been damaged. In the garage, they have informed you that the repair will cost a great deal, which you did not expect, so you consider the idea of buying a new one:

- a) You decide to fix it
- b) You decide to buy a new one

3 - It's your anniversary and you want to celebrate in a special way. You think of two options, either organizing a dinner that will involve preparing everything and then cleaning up or dining in a restaurant, which would be a greater economic burden:

- a) You decide to dine at home
- b) You decide to dine in a restaurant

4 - You have received your bonus and you must decide how to spend it. You have been wishing to give yourselves a present for some time but now the washing machine has broken down:

- a) You decide to buy a home theatre
- b) You decide to buy a washing machine

5 - You want to join a social club together, but you're not sure whether to choose a country club or a sports club:

- a) You choose the country club
- b) You choose the sport club

6 - Both of you work outside the home, you have well-paid and high status jobs, but things do are not going quite right at home as it is a bit neglected, the laundry and ironing are building up, you're not organizing your schedules well and sometimes you cannot look after your son as well as you'd like, and for this reason you suggest the possibility of hiring a housekeeper or that one of you leaves your job:

- a) You decide that one of you reduces your time away from home
- b) You decide to hire a housekeeper

7 - Your son has had a problem at school and they call you to go and talk to the teacher. Both of you are very busy and it is very inconvenient to keep the appointment:

- a) You decide that you go together
- b) You decide that your partner goes

8 - You have been thinking of selling some land that you have in the outskirts because you don't use it and you need the money for other matters. Various buyers have come forward and you have to do a lot of paperwork and admin:

- a) You decide that it is better that both of you handle the admin together
- b) You decide to take care of it yourself

9 - There was a short circuit in your house due to a problem with the wiring, as a result, some plug sockets were damaged, but apparently, it is not too serious a problem:

- a) You try to solve the problem yourself
- b) You call an electrician

10 - For reasons of work, you have to move out of the neighbourhood, and therefore your home. You have always lived in rented apartments and you want to have your own house. However, housing prices are out of your budget:

- a) You decide you are going to rent
  - b) You decide to buy a new home
- 11 - The bank has called because there is a problem with your credit and they need you to go and speak to the manager to sort it out:
- a) You decide to go together to speak with the bank manager
  - b) You decide to go to the bank alone
- 12 - Your son gets up sick one morning, and one of you has to miss work that day to take him to the doctor. Both of you have jobs with responsibilities and it will be almost impossible for either of you to miss work:
- a) You decide that you will miss work
  - b) You decide that your partner will miss work
- 13 - Your mother is very old and has been sick, so she needs constant care and attention:
- a) You decide she will live with you
  - b) You decide to put her in a residence
- 14 - It is almost your son's birthday and you want to give him a good present, but you don't have much free time due to your respective jobs:
- a) You decide to take care of it yourself
  - b) You instruct your partner to do it

## Instructions

### Presentation

The *European Journal of Psychology Applied to Legal Context*, the Official Journal of the Sociedad Española de Psicología Jurídica y Forense, publishes empirical articles, theoretical studies and focused reviews of topics dealing with psychology and law (e.g., legal decision making, eyewitness). Only original papers (not published or submitted elsewhere) will be published. Papers driven to both legal systems, inquisitorial and adversarial, will be welcome as well as papers based in concrete laws of a European country. Neither the Editors nor Publishers accept responsibility for the views or statements expressed by the authors.

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