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Attitudes Toward Cultural Diversity in Spanish and Portuguese Adolescents of Secondary Education: The Influence of Heteronormativity and Moral Disengagement in School Bullying[☆]

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ABSTRACT

The purpose was to analyze the joint influence of sexism, homophobia and moral disengagement on attitudes toward cultural diversity. A total of 1245 adolescents aged from 14 to 19 years old participated in the study. Of these, 57% were Spanish and 43% were Portuguese (54.9% were female and 45.1% were male). Structural equation modeling confirmed that hostile sexism, homophobia against gay men, moral disengagement in bullying and benevolent sexism to a lesser extent explained 53% of the variance of negative attitudes toward cultural diversity. Structural relationships among the assessed constructs were equivalent for girls and boys, and for Spain and Portugal. These findings highlight the close relationship between heteronormative and ethnocentric variables as well as the relationship between such values and moral disengagement in school bullying. We discuss the implications for critical and queer intercultural education.

Actitudes hacia la diversidad cultural de adolescentes de secundaria españoles y portugueses: influencia de la heteronormatividad y la desconexión moral hacia el *bullying*

RESUMEN

El objetivo del estudio es analizar la influencia conjunta del sexismo, la homofobia y la desconexión moral en las actitudes hacia la diversidad cultural. Participan 1245 estudiantes de entre 14 y 19 años. De ellos, el 57% son españoles y el 43% portugueses (54.9% chicas y 45.1% chicos). El modelo de ecuaciones estructurales, equivalente por sexo y país, confirma que el sexismo hostil, la homofobia hacia gays, la desconexión moral hacia el *bullying* y, en menor medida, el sexismo benevolente explican el 53% de la varianza de las actitudes negativas hacia la diversidad cultural. Estos resultados ponen de relieve la estrecha relación entre las variables heteronormativas y etnocentristas, así como su vinculación con la desconexión moral en relación al *bullying* escolar. Se destacan las implicaciones para una práctica educativa intercultural crítica y *queer*.

Introduction

More than 15 years after the celebration of the international year of Mobilization against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and other related Forms of Intolerance (2001), the fight against this scourge is one of the most urgent and sensitive tasks in the area of human rights. These phenomena refer to any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the goal of or results in annulling or impairing the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise of the fundamental human rights and liberties in conditions of equality (United Nations Organization, 1965). For a better understanding and prevention of racist/xenophobic attitudes, it is necessary to identify the variables related to the phenomenon.

Attitudes toward cultural diversity

Two types of racism can be differentiated (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995): blatant racism, stemming from the belief in the genetic inferiority of the outgroup, perceived as a threat, openly rejecting direct contact; and subtle racism, which defends the traditional values of the ingroup, exaggerating the cultural differences and denying positive emotions toward the outgroup. Some studies highlight that racism has evolved into more subtle expressions, to the detriment of more open expressions that are incompatible with the values of democratic societies (Redlawsk, Tolbert, & McNeely, 2014), thereby, producing a shift from the centrality of race to the centrality of culture, so that the other's culture is perceived as threatening to one's own cultural identity (Stolcke, 2000).

In any event, positive attitudes toward cultural diversity do not enjoy good health, and racial discrimination seems more the norm than the exception, as underscored in extensive reports and surveys that call attention to the policies of preventive detention of immigrants in Alien Internment Centers, police checks based on ethnic or racial traits, or the tendency to concentrate people of mostly immigrant and Romani origin in a single school (Rights International Spain, 2016). According to a survey from the European Commission (2015) on discrimination in the area of the Union, 64% of the Spanish people interviewed and 63% of the Portuguese think that discrimination of ethnic origin is widespread in their respective countries; it is also observed that almost one half perceive that ethnicity or skin color is a disadvantage when trying to get a job. In relation to how comfortable they would feel working with someone of another ethnicity/race, the most rejected ethnic is the Romani (7% and 19%, respectively, for Spain and Portugal). In the same vein, the general opinion poll of the European Commission (2016) shows that, for 46% of the Portuguese interviewees and 39% of the Spaniards, immigration from outside the European Union evokes a negative feeling; and that, according to 24 and 14%, respectively, his/her country should not help refugees.

This social climate is also reflected at school, with essentially assimilationist integration policies (Priegue, 2008), where the phenomena of discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity/race are a part of the day-to-day routine in the classroom (Jiménez-Sedano, 2012).

Heteronormativity: sexism and homophobia

Heteronormativity refers to the norms and social discourses concerning gender and sexual orientation that draw on a concept of complementary binary, opposite and hierarchical, necessarily heterosexual gender identities (Berlant & Warner, 1998). In this way, women and people who transgress the gender rules of femininity and masculinity, consistent with the "sexual body mark" and compulsory heterosexuality, suffer exclusion and violence (Butler, 2001; Sharma, 2009).

In its most traditional sense, sexism can be defined as an attitude of hostility and aversion to women (Allport, 1954). It is a widespread phenomenon of prejudice and discrimination based on gender, which occurs, in varying degrees, in all societies and has repercussions in the domestic, work including the wage gap or glass ceilings—or broader social areas—including harassment and sexual violence (Zell, Strickhouser, Lane, & Teeter, 2016). Sexism has also been evolving toward covert expressions. In this line, the ambivalent sexism theory of Glick and Fiske (1996), which identifies two types of interrelated sexist attitudes—hostile and benevolent—is noteworthy. Hostile sexism shares the negative affective tone with traditional sexism, considering women as a subordinated group and attributing to them characteristics that raise criticism, thereby legitimizing the social control exercised by men. In contrast, benevolent sexism presents a positive affective tone directed toward women who assume traditional roles, idealizing them as good wives, mothers, and romantic objects, even favoring prosocial behaviors of protection. Both types offer a stereotyped view of women, assessing them negatively as inferior or positively as different, but subject to certain socially less-valued functions.

Together with sexism, homophobia is one of the pillars on which the patriarchy rests (Lameiras, Carrera, & Rodríguez, 2013). The term homophobia was coined by Smith (1971), who defined it as an attitude of fear and aversion to homosexuality, which therefore implies a discriminatory attitude toward people on the basis of their homosexual identity. In a less restrictive sense, homophobia is also aimed at all men—gay or not—who transgress the traditionally male stereotypes (Guasch, 2006), and at lesbian women, a phenomenon which is also known as lesbophobia (Viñuales, 2002). The term itself highlights the double discrimination to which lesbian women are exposed and which is an added prejudice. Homophobia has also evolved, adopting a more subtle and benevolent tone that coexists with another more hostile one, causing false illusions of tolerance and equality (Rodríguez, Lameiras, & Carrera, 2009).

Some studies have identified significant and strong relations between sexism and homophobia (Aosved & Long, 2006; Rodríguez, Lameiras, Carrera, & Vallejo, 2013); sexism and racism/xenophobia (Garaigordobil & Aliri, 2011); homophobia and racism/xenophobia (Daley, Solomon, Newman, & Mishna, 2008), and even between all three variables—racism, sexism, and homophobia (Aosved & Long, 2006; Morrison & Morrison, 2011).

In this line, and as stressed from a feminist perspective, in all three cases (racism/xenophobia, homophobia, and sexism), there is a hierarchy of identities configured around the self and those who are like me (the ingroup) and against "the other" (outgroup) (Butler, 2001; Lameiras et al., 2013).

Moral disengagement: the dehumanization of the other

Moral disengagement is a sociocognitive process by which people who do not suffer from a mental disorder or imbalance can commit harmful acts against others. According to Bandura (1986), it consists of a cognitive restructuring of abusive behavior that allows breaking the nexus between what a person believes he should do (his theoretical moral judgment) and what he actually does (his harmful behavior). He argues that moral disengagement occurs due to: (1) justification of the behavior, which is presented as socially acceptable, serving laudable interests; (2) advantageous comparison, which presents the behavior as less serious than other behaviors; (3) euphemistic categorization, which disguises the perverse nature of the behavior; (4) distorting the consequences, which are minimized, ignored, or wrongly interpreted; (5) displacement or diffusion of responsibilities, which are diluted in the group; and (6) dehumanizing or blaming the victim. These mechanisms have a powerful disinhibitory effect by releasing the person from