



Sexual Double Standard: a Cross-Cultural Comparison of Young Adults Spanish, Peruvian, and Ecuadorian People

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Abstract

Introduction The sexual double standard (SDS) implies men and women are being evaluated differently as regards sexuality. To date, no cross-cultural comparisons have been made regarding the prevalence of the various forms that adherence to SDS takes. This research work describes differences among Spain, Peru, and Ecuador in the prevalence of three different types of adherence to the SDS (egalitarian, man-favorable, and woman-favorable), which refer to sexual freedom and sexual shyness in 18–25-year-old youths.

Method A sample of 2229 heterosexual adults (34.2% Spanish, 33.7% Peruvian, and 32.1% Ecuadorian) answered the Sexual Double Standard Scale. Participants were collected between September 2019 and March 2021.

Results The results showed differences between countries, both in the total sample and in the sample of men and women separately, and in conducts related to sexual freedom and sexual shyness. The most prevalent typologies were as follows: the egalitarian typology in Spain, the man-favorable typology in Peru and Ecuador, and the woman-favorable typology in Ecuador.

Conclusion These findings conclude that the socio-structural conditions of how resources are distributed between men and women could be related to the prevalence of different gender-related sexual norms. In those contexts in which the gender-egalitarian sexual norm prevailed, resources were more equally distributed between men and women.

Policy Implications It highlights the role of the socio-structural conditions in the distribution of resources between men and women and the differences between men and women, to understand the cross-cultural differences in the prevalence of SDS adherence types.

Keywords Sexual double standard · Cross-cultural · Spain · Peru · Ecuador

Introduction

Cultural norms and social standards still differ about men's and women's sexuality (Klein et al., 2019). The sexual double standard (SDS) regulates heterosexual interactions insofar as men and women are differently evaluated as regards sex and sexuality (Marks & Fraley, 2005).

The majority of studies about the SDS have focused on adhering to the traditional SDS, that is, to maintain an attitude that supports more sexual freedom for men than for women. Moreover, this attitude has been examined in relation to behaviors associated with high sexual activity, and there are few studies on behaviors associated with low sexual activity (Endendijk et al., 2020). Recently, studies report that an attitude favorable to sexual shyness begins to be found in sectors of modern society (Álvarez-Muelas et al., 2019, 2021b; Sierra et al., 2018). Thus, the study of the attitude towards SDS has proposed to examine it in two different sexual behavior areas: sexual freedom and sexual shyness (Sierra et al., 2018). The attitude towards conducts related to the sphere of sexual freedom (SF) is defined as “the recognition and approval of the benefit for men and women, of freely having sex and respecting sexual rights,” while the attitude towards conducts related

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to the sphere of sexual shyness (SS) is defined as “the recognition and approval of men and women’s will to manifest decorum, chastity, and continence in sexual relations” (Álvarez-Muelas et al., 2021b, p. 2). In addition to the traditional SDS supporting more sexual freedom for men than for women, a reverse SDS has been documented to emerge, which is supporting more sexual freedom for women (vs. men) (Álvarez-Muelas et al., 2019; Papp et al., 2015; Sakaluk & Milhausen, 2012; Sánchez-Fuentes et al., 2020; Thompson et al., 2018). Within the framework of this evidence, a self-report evaluation of various types of adherence to the SDS has recently been proposed, both in the sphere of sexual freedom and sexual shyness (Sierra et al., 2018). Thus, three typologies of adhering to the SDS have been described: man-favorable, woman-favorable, and egalitarian, which allow to describe the prevalence of the different forms that the attitude towards gender-based sexual behaviors adopts (Álvarez-Muelas et al., 2021b). Specifically, the man-favorable typology describes people who are in favor of more sexual freedom/less sexual shyness for men than for women; the woman-favorable typology refers to those people who support more sexual freedom/less sexual shyness for women than for men; and finally, the egalitarian typology includes the people who support the same sexual freedom/sexual shyness for both men and women (Álvarez-Muelas et al., 2021b).

On the other hand, culture has a role in sexuality which may imply differences in sexual attitudes between different cultural groups (Blanc, 2021). Considering people’s cultural origin in studies about the SDS allows the degree to which culture is related to gender inequalities in the sexuality area to be described and understood (Guo, 2019). Previous studies have also suggested the need to compare adherence to the SDS in different cultures (Álvarez-Muelas et al., 2020; Guo, 2019). Some studies have described the differences between countries in scores of adherence to SDS that favors men. For instance, differences in attitude towards the SDS have been described among the USA, Japan, and Russia (Sprecher & Hatfield, 1996), among countries from northern Europe (Haavio-Mannila & Kontula, 2003), and also between Spain and Colombia (Sánchez-Fuentes et al., 2020). Only one study has compared the prevalence of adherence to the SDS that favors men between El Salvador and Spain (Gutiérrez-Quintanilla et al., 2010). As studies about the prevalence of SDS adherence types have provided the percentage of people who support each type, they allow the gender’s majority sexual norm to be described, that is, the norm that obtains the most consensus in the population. As far as we know, no works have examined cross-cultural comparisons of the prevalence of different adherence to the SDS typologies. The importance of investigating SDS adherence typologies in different societies is that it allows us to describe the cross-cultural differences that exist in gender sexual norms.

It is found that cultural differences among Hispanics (Hernandez & Curiel, 2012) could influence the expression of sexuality (Ruvalcaba et al., 2021). The individualism/collectivism (I/C) construct has been traditionally employed to distinguish cultures from one another (Hofstede, 1980; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). I/C differences have been found among Spanish-speaking countries. Latin American countries take a more collectivistic orientation (Furman et al., 2009), whereas Spain approaches individualistic societies more (Hofstede, 1999). Spain also obtains higher individualism scores compared to South American countries like Peru or Ecuador (Kyriacou, 2016). According to Insights data (2020), the individualism construct score is 51 points for Spain, 16 points for Peru, and 8 points for Ecuador.

For this study objective, the masculinity-femininity concept is very interesting. It is understood as one of the dimensions that differentiate collectivistic societies from individualistic ones. The masculinity-femininity dimension refers to the meaning that each culture confers to differences between men and women (Hofstede, 1980). Apart from more collectivistic societies also obtaining higher scores in traditionalism for gender, they have higher inequality indices between men and women (Archer, 2006; Cuddy et al., 2015; Williams & Best, 1990). To evaluate gender inequality among countries, the United Nations Development Program (2017) takes two indices: the Gender Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Inequality Index (GII). The GDI evaluates longevity, education, and income dimensions, while the GII focuses on reproductive health, empowerment, and labor market components. For both these indices, Spain obtains higher gender equality levels than Peru and Ecuador, and in this order. For the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI), a narrower gender gap appears for Spain in health, education, economy, and politics areas, followed by Ecuador and Peru (World Economic Forum, 2017). The countries with a higher gender equality level have been observed to adhere less to SDS that favors men (Endendijk et al., 2020).

Finally, employing the university context to select samples allows people of the same age group and who experience similar development to be selected, which is very useful when attempting to control the effect of age and evolutionary development on cross-cultural response patterns (Donnelly & Twenge, 2017). In recent decades, access to university education has increased, and family life, marriage, and having children have been postponed (Siyez et al., 2020). These socio-cultural changes have been associated with a development period (ages 18–25 years), the so-called emerging adulthood, characterized by seeking one’s identity, instability, optimism, self-focusing, and a feeling of transition from adolescence to adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Arnett & Mitra, 2020). During this development period, sexual scripts particularly stand out (Arnett, 2000; Thompson et al., 2020). The university setting offers an excellent opportunity to

apply to many facets of this developmental framework (McMahan & Olmstead, 2021), such as the role that norms play in sexual attitudes (Emmerink et al., 2016). Indeed, we chose university students in an attempt to maximize the probability of the country of origin determining possible cross-cultural differences, and not evolutionary processes.

The overall objective of the present study is to describe the differences in three countries (Spain, Peru, and Ecuador) in the prevalence of the adherence to SDS typologies as regards the sexual freedom and sexual shyness areas of 18–25-year-old youths. In line with the differences among these three countries in the scores of some socio-structural inequality indicators between men and women (e.g., GII, GDI; United Nations Development Program, 2017) and the gender gap (World Economic Forum, 2017), we put forward general hypothesis to find country differences in the prevalence of adhering to SDS typologies. Spain would present a higher prevalence for the egalitarian typology, while Peru and Ecuador would do so for the man-favorable typology.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 2229 participants (44.4% men and 55.6% women), of whom 762 (34.2%) were Spanish, 751 (33.7%) were Peruvian, and 716 (32.1%) were Ecuadorian. The inclusion criteria included the following: (a) having Spanish, Peruvian, and Ecuadorian nationality for each country in which the sample was collected; (b) aged 18–25 years; (c) having a heterosexual orientation; and (d) being undergraduate students. The participants’ socio-demographic characteristics are shown in Table 1.

Instruments

Socio-demographic questionnaire includes questions about nationality, gender, age, sexual orientation, level of education, age of the first sexual experience, number of sexual partners, and partner relationship.

The Spanish version of the Sexual Double Standard Scale (SDSS; Muehlenhard & Quackenbush, 2011; Sierra et al., 2018). The scale is answered on a 4-point Likert-type scale from 0 (strongly disagree) to 3 (strongly agree). It consists of 16 items that are distributed in two factors: acceptance of sexual freedom and acceptance of sexual shyness. Each factor is composed of parallel items, four pairs, of which one refers to men and the other to women. The responses to acceptance of sexual freedom allow the Index of Double Standard for Sexual Freedom (IDS-SF) to be calculated, while the responses to the acceptance of sexual shyness items allow the Index of Double Standard for Sexual

Table 1 Sociodemographic characteristics of the participants

	Total sample						
	Men			Women			
	Spain (n = 762)	Peru (n = 715)	Ecuador (n = 716)	Spain (n = 435)	Peru (n = 368)	Ecuador (n = 436)	
Age	M (SD) 21.38 (2.02) _a	M (SD) 20.65 (1.97) _{a,b}	M (SD) 21.39 (1.74) _b	M (SD) 21.56 (2) _a	M (SD) 20.8 (1.98) _{a,b}	M (SD) 21.57 (1.85) _b	F 36.9***
Age of the first sexual experience	16.26 (2.45) _{a,b,c}	14.63 (5.91) _{a,b,c}	17.11 (2.77) _{a,b,c}	16.49 (2.46) _a	15.27 (4.3) _{a,b}	16.77 (2.62) _b	F 64.67***
Number of sexual partners	4.55 (5.06) _{a,b,c}	2.70 (3.09) _{a,b,c}	3.32 (4.41) _{a,b,c}	4.57 (5.27)	3.67 (5.23)	4.22 (6.03)	F 34***
Having a partner	56.2%	53.9%	53.4%	50.3%	54.6%	57%	χ^2 1.33
				60.6% _a	53.3%	51% _a	χ^2 2.84
							χ^2 8.65*

The same subscript letter denotes significant difference between these groups ($p < .05$)

M mean, SD standard deviation, χ^2 Chi-square

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

Shyness (IDS-SS) to be calculated. Indices were represented with a bipolar measurement (between -12 and $+12$). In each index, the man-favorable typology was represented by positive scores for the index (between $+1$ and $+12$), while the woman-favorable typology was represented by negative scores (between -1 and -12). Finally, the egalitarian typology was represented by scores equaling zero in either index and obtaining a zero result in the subtractions between the pairs of parallel items of the index. The scale evidenced internal consistency, with Cronbach's ordinal alpha .84 for the acceptance of sexual freedom factor and .87 for the acceptance of sexual shyness factor (Sierra et al., 2018), and is invariant by gender and age (Álvarez-Muelas et al., 2019). For the acceptance of sexual freedom, the ordinal alpha values were .81 for men and .84 for women in Spain; .80 for men and .87 for women in Peru; .81 for men and .82 for women in Ecuador. For the acceptance of sexual shyness, the ordinal alpha values were .86 for men and .89 for women in Spain; .66 for men and .75 for women in Peru; .76 for men and .79 for women in Ecuador.

Procedure

Participants were recruited from the university context using the paper-and-pencil format between September 2019 and March 2021. The evaluation made with this format was done in university classrooms of the different Social Sciences and Health Sciences faculties of the University of Granada (Spain), University of Guayaquil (Ecuador), and University César Vallejo (Peru). Questionnaires were managed by a trained evaluator, and participants completed questionnaires in small groups and returned them in a sealed envelope. Participants accepted an informed consent form that described the purpose of the study and included an explanation of what their participation entailed. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed. The participation was voluntary without compensation. The study was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Granada.

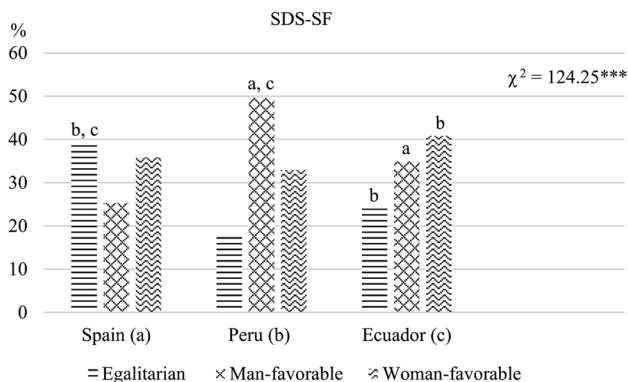


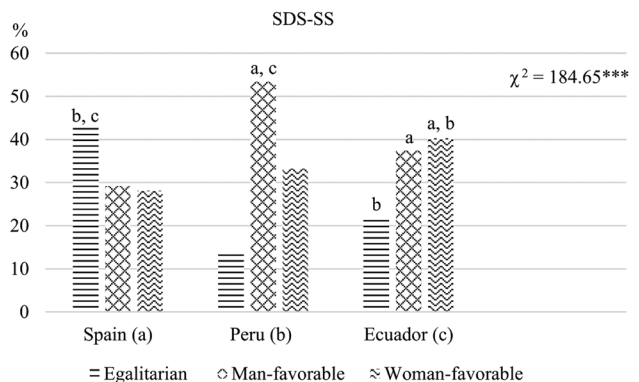
Fig. 1 Differences between countries among the percentages of people supporting each typology of adherence to the Sexual Double Standard Sexual Freedom (SDS-SF) and the Sexual Double Standard-

Data Analyses

First of all, it only included participants who had completed all the sociodemographic variables and at least 75% of the items of the Sexual Double Standard Scale. It was replaced missing values using the “median of nearby points” method with the total amplitude of the points for men items and the women items separately. Secondly, for each country (Spain, Peru, and Ecuador), the prevalence of the adherence to SDS typologies was examined in both indices, the Index of Double Standard for Sexual Freedom and Index of Double Standard for Sexual Shyness. Those participants obtained a zero score in IDS-SF or IDS-SS, and no zero results in some of the items making up either of these indices was not contemplated because it represents an ambivalent response. These participants were not included in the sample (9.1% men and 8.3% women). Due to gender differences in both indices, the IDS-SF ($t=9.6$; $p<.001$) and the IDS-SS ($t=9.45$; $p<.001$), the sample was divided into men and women separately. Thus, for the present research work, the percentage of people who supported the egalitarian, man-favorable, and woman-favorable typologies was calculated. Next, the differences for the three nationalities in the percentages of the subjects supporting these three SDS adherence types in both the sexual freedom and sexual shyness areas were examined by the chi-square test in the whole sample, and also for men and women separately. These differences were calculated by comparing the column proportions and adjusting p values by Bonferroni correction.

Results

In Fig. 1, for the total sample, significant differences appeared in the percentages of people in the comparison made of countries (Spain, Peru, and Ecuador). In both the sexual freedom and sexual shyness areas, for the egalitarian typology, the highest prevalence was observed in Spain (vs. Peru and Ecuador). Ecuador obtained a higher prevalence



Sexual Shyness (SDS-SS). Note. *** $p<.001$. The letter over each bar denotes significant differences between groups, with higher scores for the group which is represented with letter over the bar

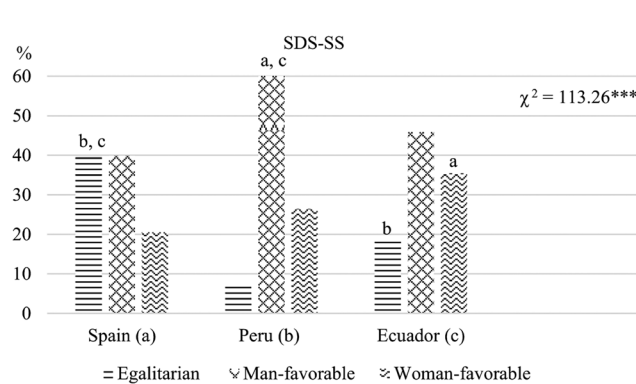
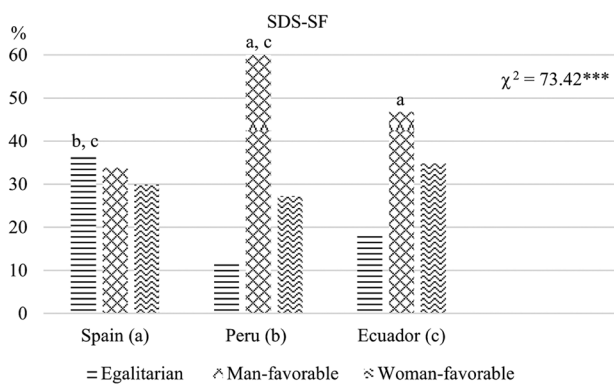


Fig. 2 Differences between countries among the percentages of men supporting each typology of adherence to the Sexual Double Standard Sexual Freedom (SDS-SF) and the Sexual Double Standard-Sexual

Shyness (SDS-SS). *Note.* *** $p < .001$. The letter over each bar denotes significant differences between groups, with higher scores for the group which is represented with letter over the bar

than Peru. In both the sexual freedom and sexual shyness areas, for the man-favorable typology, the highest prevalence was for Peru (vs. Spain and Ecuador), and Ecuador had a higher prevalence than Spain. For the woman-favorable typology, Ecuador showed a higher prevalence than Peru in the sexual freedom area and a higher prevalence than Peru and Spain in the sexual shyness area.

typology, the highest prevalence went to Peru (vs. Ecuador and Spain). Lastly, for the woman-favorable typology, Ecuador showed a higher prevalence than Spain (see Fig. 2).

For men, significant differences appeared in the percentages of the adherence to SDS typologies. In the sexual freedom area, for the egalitarian typology, Spain showed a higher prevalence than Peru and Ecuador. For the man-favorable typology, the highest prevalence was for Peru (vs. Ecuador and Spain), and Ecuador had a higher prevalence than Spain. No significant country differences were found in the woman-typology. In the sexual shyness area, for the egalitarian typology, the highest prevalence was observed in Spain (vs. Peru and Ecuador), and Ecuador obtained more percentages of people who supported this typology than Peru. For the man-favorable

For women, significant differences emerged in the percentages of the adherence to SDS typologies. In the sexual freedom area, the highest prevalence was observed in Spain (vs. Peru and Ecuador) for the egalitarian typology. For the man-favorable typology, the highest prevalence was for Peru (vs. Ecuador and Spain), and Ecuador showed a higher prevalence than Spain. No significant country differences were found in the woman-typology. Likewise, in the sexual shyness area, for the egalitarian typology, the highest prevalence was for Spain (vs. Peru and Ecuador). For the man-favorable typology, Peru and Ecuador showed a higher prevalence than Spain. Finally, for the woman-favorable typology, Ecuador obtained more percentages of people who supported this typology than Spain (see Fig. 3).

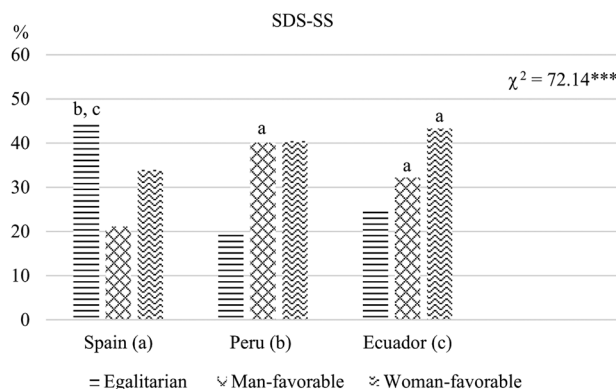
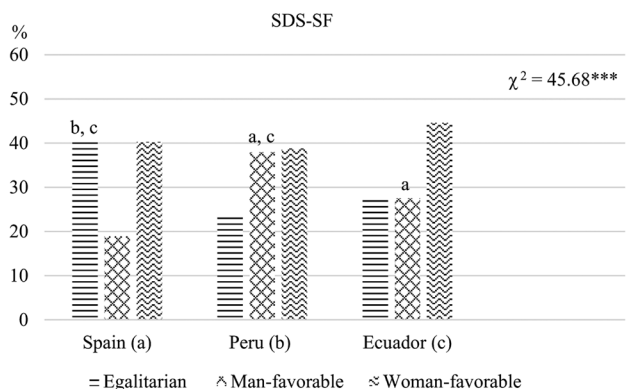


Fig. 3 Differences between countries among the percentages of women supporting each typology of adherence to the Sexual Double Standard Sexual Freedom (SDS-SF) and the Sexual Double Standard-

Sexual Shyness (SDS-SS). *Note.* *** $p < .001$. The letter over each bar denotes significant differences between groups, with higher scores for the group which is represented with letter over the bar

Discussion

The present research examines the differences among Spain, Peru, and Ecuador for the prevalence of the adherence to SDS typologies about both the sexual freedom and sexual shyness areas in the whole sample, and for men and women separately due to differences in the Index of Double Standard for Sexual Freedom (IDS-SF) and the Index of Double Standard for Sexual Shyness (IDS-SS).

From a cross-cultural approach focused on minimizing the effect of other individual variables, such as age and evolutionary development, on the attitude towards SDS of the participants, we had chosen a university population that had the same age and the same stage of evolutionary development as coincides with emerging adulthood.

The results of this study indicated cross-cultural differences among Spain, Peru, and Ecuador in the prevalence of the three adherence to SDS typologies. The highest percentage of people who supported the egalitarian typology was for Spain in both the sexual freedom and sexual shyness areas, exactly as the hypothesis of the present research predicted. As Spain presented less gender inequality according to indicators GII, GDI (United Nations Development Program, 2017), and the gender gap evaluation index (World Economic Forum, 2017). The results support the assumption that the objective socio-structural conditions that determine access to resources, for both men and women, could be a determinant of the form that attitude towards SDS takes.

In turn, and in line with the hypothesis, a higher prevalence was evidenced for the man-favorable typology in Peru, and a higher prevalence in Ecuador compared to Spain for both sexual behavior areas (sexual freedom and sexual shyness). These results support a higher prevalence for the man-favorable typology in Peru and Ecuador, which could be due to real differences in distributing resources and in access to health, education, economy, and politics, which are more marked in these countries than in Spain (United Nations Development Program, 2017; World Economic Forum, 2017). The findings coincide with previous studies that compared the prevalence of and adherence to the SDS of the man-favorable typology between Latin American countries and Spain and also showed a higher prevalence in supporting this sexual norm in El Salvador (Gutiérrez-Quintanilla et al., 2010), and higher scores for adhering to the SDS for the man-favorable typology in Colombia (Sánchez-Fuentes et al., 2020). Peru stood out for having a higher score than Ecuador for the gender gap indicator (World Economic Forum, 2017). So perhaps, this index could be related to the prevalence of the sexual norm for the man-favorable typology.

For the woman-favorable typology, no research hypothesis has been established because the prevalence of this typology

has been examined only in Spain to date (Álvarez-Muelas et al., 2021b). The present research indicated a higher prevalence for this typology in Ecuador for both sexual freedom and sexual shyness areas. Prior works have evidenced that the stance backing a SDS to favor women emerges as a reaction to women's disempowerment (Kettrey, 2016; Milhausen & Herold, 2002). This typology would appear to a greater extent if a significant power difference was perceived (Howell et al., 2011), such as gender inequality in the Ecuadorian society. Ecuador is also the country with a higher score for the gender gap indicator of the United Nations Development Program (2017). Thus, evidence for a gender gap existing in a society could be related to a higher percentage of people supporting the woman-favorable typology.

Finally, the hypothesis was confirmed by differences appearing among the three countries in the men and women samples. In both the sexual freedom and sexual shyness areas, there was a higher percentage of men and women in Spain than in Ecuador and Peru who supported the egalitarian typology of adherence to the SDS, and a higher percentage of men and women who favored the man-favorable typology in Peru (vs. Spain and Ecuador) and in Ecuador than in Spain. These results support the assumption of a possible association between the socio-structural conditions that regulate differences between men and women in power, status, and access to resources, and the prevalence of the various ways of supporting the SDS. Hence the socio-structural conditions that favor traditional gender inequality, that is, which confer men an advantage over women, could be related to the prevalence of the man-favorable typology, which is the case of Peru and Ecuador compared to Spain. In the sexual freedom area for the woman-favorable typology, no country differences were found in the prevalence of this typology. Nevertheless, in the sexual shyness area, cross-cultural differences in men and women were observed, which agreed with the results of the whole sample: there were more men and women in Ecuador than in Spain who supported the woman-favorable typology. Further research that focuses on the role played by the perceived deprivation for the endogroup and the exogroup about an attitude towards the SDS is proposed. Likewise, future research must continue to analyze the role played by the area (i.e., sexual freedom and sexual shyness) as regards sexual conduct in personal adherence to the SDS and the prevalence of the different gender sexual norms.

This study has its limitations and they should be taken into account when interpreting the generalization of the results. One that stands out is that sample selection was performed by non-probabilistic sampling and the sample was made up of heterosexual university students. Moreover, the emerging adults that are involved in higher education, such as university studies, could be lower and not

be representative of the rest of the population in Peru and Ecuador. Similarly, to obtain more heterogeneous samples, the research should examine samples with diverse gender identities and orientations (Calvillo et al., 2020; Sánchez-Fuentes et al., 2021). Finally, it could be also required to understand the endorsement of sexism attitudes, such as sexual double standard, longitudinal research (Lachance-Grzela et al., 2021), and implicit measuring (Endendijk et al., 2020; Thompson et al., 2020).

Conclusions

This study provided evidence for cross-cultural comparisons in the prevalence of the SDS sexual norm, specifically among Spanish-speaking countries such as Spain, Peru, and Ecuador. It basically evidenced differences among these Spanish-speaking nations for the prevalence of different gender sexual norms. Spain had a higher prevalence for the egalitarian typology, while the prevalence of Peru and Ecuador was higher for the man-favorable typology. Moreover, a higher prevalence was found for the woman-favorable typology in Ecuador. In this line, Ecuador and Peru present more gender inequality in comparison with Spain so these results suggest the possible relationship between the socio-structural inequality between men and women and the support for gender norms regulating sexual behaviors, such as the expression of the man-favorable and woman-favorable typologies.

Social Policy Implication

These results highlight the importance of the different standards for men and women as well as the role of the socio-structural in the distribution of resources between men and women. Some implications may emerge due to the relationship between SDS and sexual health. The adherence of SDS that favors men is related to sexual risk behavior (Srijaiwong et al., 2017; Teitelman et al., 2013), men sexual aggression against women (Jamshed & Kamal, 2019; Moyano et al., 2017), and women sexual victimization (Endendijk et al., 2020; Sierra et al., 2010). Also, the SDS man-favorable harms sexual functioning; it has been associated negatively with sexual desire, orgasm experience in women (Jackson & Cram, 2003; Kelly et al., 2017), and sexual satisfaction in men and women (Haavio-Mannila & Kontula, 2003; Santos-Iglesias et al., 2009). Specifically, in the comparison between SDS typologies, men with egalitarian typology for sexual freedom feel more sexually satisfied than men with a man-favorable typology (Álvarez-Muelas et al., 2021a). For this reason, policy should consider including in sexual health programs and sexual aggression prevention programs the

perspective of gender equality in sexual behavior through the prevalence of SDS adherence typologies and also each society's own socio-structural conditions between men and women.

Author Contribution Conceptualization, JCS and CG-B; methodology, JCS, AÁ-M, and CG-B; formal analysis, JCS, AÁ-M, and CG-B; investigation, JCS, AÁ-M, CG-B, DO, and HMN-G writing—original draft preparation, JCS, AÁ-M, and CG-B; writing—review and editing, JCS, AÁ-M, CG-B, DO, and HMN-G; and funding acquisition, JCS. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Availability of Data and Material The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

Declarations

Ethics Approval The study was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Granada.

Consent to Participate Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Consent for Publish The authors affirm that the participants in this research gave their informed consent for the statistical treatment of their answers, as well as for the publication and scientific dissemination of the results.

Conflict of Interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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