

**Ambivalent Sexism and Women's Reactions to Stranger Harassment:
The Case of *Piropos* in Spain**

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Abstract

Piropos, a form of stranger harassment typical in Spain, consist of appearance-related comments that unknown men direct at women in public spaces, such as on the street. There is some controversy within Spanish society as to whether piropos should be rejected or accepted—at least a certain type of them. In this research, we analyzed how young Spanish women perceive piropos and tested whether women's evaluation and emotional reactions to them depend on the type of piropo ("mild" or "lewd") and participants' ambivalent sexism. Women participants (N = 288) indicated their evaluation and emotional reactions to a mild or lewd piropo (having also a control condition where no piropo was presented) in a between-participants design. Results showed that the lewd piropo elicited lower happiness and feelings of power and greater anger-hostility than the mild piropo and the control condition. Similarly, the mild piropo also generated lower happiness and feelings of power and greater anger-hostility and anxiety than the control condition. We also conducted eight moderated mediation analyses, four each with participants' hostile sexism scores and participants benevolent sexism scores as the predictor variable, using participants' evaluation of the piropo as the mediator and the type of piropo (i.e., lewd or mild) as the moderator. The dependent variable on each analysis constituted the reactions of happiness, feelings of power, anger-hostility, and anxiety. Results revealed that relation between endorsing hostile sexism beliefs, while controlling for benevolent sexism beliefs, and emotional reactions to both types of piropos can be explained through participants' evaluations of the piropos. In contrast, no indirect effect was found between benevolent sexism beliefs, when controlling for hostile sexism beliefs, and emotional

reactions. Our results suggest that educating the public about the negative consequences of both types of piropos on women and reducing hostile sexism beliefs may help to eradicate street piropos. Additional online materials for this article are available on PWQ's website at <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/suppl/10.1177/03616843221115339>.

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Women experience many different forms of violence throughout the world. One of them is stranger harassment (also sometimes called street harassment), which refers to situations in which unknown men sexually harass women in public spaces (Bowman, 1993). Women's experiences of stranger harassment in public places are pervasive. For instance, in a nationally representative sample of Canadian women, over 80% reported experiences of an unknown man harassing them in public (Macmillan et al., 2000), and over 40% of a sample of U.S. college women reported experiencing unwanted sexual attention from strangers at least once a month (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008). Studies about stranger harassment have shown its negative consequences for women, such as making them feel fear and a lower sense of safety (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008; Macmillan et al., 2000), or changing their behavior in at least one way to ensure their personal safety, including avoiding walking alone at night (Johnson & Bennett, 2015). Women experiencing stranger harassment also suffer other consequences related to mental health, such as self-objectification (Davidson et al., 2015; Fairchild & Rudman 2008; Moya-Garófano et al., 2021) or anxiety (Davidson et al., 2016).

Stranger Remarks in Spain: The Case of *Piropos*

A *piropo* is defined as “a short saying that praises a quality of someone, especially a woman's beauty” (Royal Academy of the Spanish language [Real Academia Española], 2014). Although *piropos* can be uttered by people who know each other, this research focuses on street *piropos*, that is, *piropos* that women receive from male strangers in public spaces. Note that these *piropos* occur in public spaces (not limited to the street), unlike other *piropos* that occur in the private sphere. However, we use the term “street *piropo*” (and sometimes “*piropo*” by itself for brevity) because that is their name in Spanish (“*piropo callejero*”). Further, and

importantly, street piropos come from strangers. Street piropos, unlike other forms of verbal harassment against women—for example, whistling—are described as a phenomenon clearly rooted in Spanish culture and Spanish-speaking countries (Diosdado, 1996), as well as other countries in the Mediterranean Basin (Suárez-Orozco & Dundes, 1984). In fact, the term piropo is broadly used in Spain, Portugal, and Latin America, but there does not seem to be an equivalent term in English (Bailey, 2016; Moore, 1996). The use of catcall or compliment does not reflect the concept of piropos either, since the former includes verbal communications ranging from whistles to jeering, and the latter would only fit with the idea of one type of piropo: the mild, gallant, or chivalrous one (Bailey, 2016). There also exist conceptual differentiation between a piropo and a pick-up line, given that a pick-up line is considered as a planned conversation started by a person with sexual or romantic intentions (Slang Dictionary, 2021; Urban Dictionary, 2021), whereas street piropos often take place in situations where the recipient does not even have the time to hear the message (i.e., when stranger men yell things to women from a vehicle in motion).

Unlike other forms of harassment that are clearly rejected—as receiving insults, determined trailing, and pinching and groping—, street piropos, as social phenomena, have generated more ambivalent reactions among the Spanish population in recent years. Whereas some relevant representatives responsible for gender-based violence issues asked for the eradication of the street piropos (La Presidenta, 2015), other public figures considered them as a cultural and inoffensive manifestation (e.g., Sust, 2015).

In Spanish culture, both mild and lewd street piropos are rather frequent in women's everyday life. For example, in a study with Spanish college women who reported the frequency with which they had experienced different behaviors, Moya-Garófano et al. (2016) found nearly half of the participants (41.8%) reported receiving rude street piropos once or

more a month and the 58.2% of participants reported receiving mild street piropos once or more a month. Thus, although “mild” street piropos tend to be more frequent compared to lewd ones, both types are rather common in the everyday lives of young women.

Women’s Emotional Reactions to Stranger Harassment

In this research, we focused on four emotional reactions to street piropos. These responses were previously studied in the context of these types of situations by Moya-Garófano et al. (2021), who found that exposure to lewd piropos increased body surveillance and body shame, but only in women who reacted to the piropo with happiness, feelings of power, or low levels of anger-hostility (they also analyzed anxiety, with no significant effects). Studying anger was important because reacting in this way to a harassing situation reflects awareness of the offensive and unjustified nature of the situation. Anger appears when someone feels the target of a demeaning offense and establishes a clear causal attribution to the perpetrator of the offense (Lazarus, 1993). Anxiety is another potential emotional response to a harassing situation. Davidson et al. (2016) found a clear relation between street harassment and anxiety among undergraduate women. Similarly to anger, anxiety is related to the negative evaluation of the situation; however, it is linked to the appraisal of the threat rather than the offense (Lazarus, 1993). Thus, anger and anxiety are reactions that can lead individuals to cope differently with harassment situations. Anger is likely to lead them to react with the situation, whereas anxiety is likely to lead them to avoid it (Giner-Sorolla & Russell, 2009).

In contrast to anger and anxiety, happiness is a mental or emotional state of well-being defined by positive or pleasant emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy, implying a very positive evaluation of the situation. Happiness is shown when individuals perceive that they are progressing toward a personal goal achievement (Lazarus, 1993). Feeling this way in a situation in which women are objectified could reflect the acceptance of traditional gender

roles that present women as objects for the satisfaction of men's needs (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), although this could also reflect other processes (e.g., an increase in physical self-esteem, a sense of connection with others, appreciation of humorous piropos, etc.).

Finally, feelings of power are particularly important as a "positive" reaction to harassment and sexual objectification. In the framework of traditional gender roles, some women may experience a boost in their self-esteem or feel empowered when a man feels sexually attracted to them (Liss et al., 2011; Nowatzki & Morry, 2009). As an example, Moffitt and Szymanski (2011) explored women's experiences in sexually objectifying workplaces. Although many women reported negative outcomes derived from that context, some reported an increase in their self-confidence and self-esteem. When a woman feels pleased after being the target of sexual attention due to her appearance, she could experience enjoyment of sexualization that occurs when women find appearance-based sexual attention from men as positive and rewarding (Liss et al., 2011). This experience can lead women to have positive feelings (sense of power), although research has evidenced some subtle risks for them of enjoying sexualization. For example, Liss et al. (2011) found that scores in enjoyment of sexualization positively correlated with endorsing traditional gender norms as well as with hostile and benevolent sexism, and that women who both enjoyed sexualization and engaged in self-objectification reported more negative eating attitudes.

Some Factors Affecting Women's Emotional Reactions to Stranger Harassment

In the present research, we analyzed some factors that may relate to the above-mentioned emotional reactions to street piropos. Those elements are the type of piropo, the evaluation of the piropo that women have, and their endorsement of sexist beliefs.

Moya-Garófano et al. (2021) previously studied women's reactions to lewd street piropos, specifically to the piropos with the numbers 10, 20, and 23 of Table S1 included in the

Online Supplemental Material, although the research aimed to study how such reactions influenced body surveillance and body shame. As we have proposed in the previous section, it is possible that the reactions to more “gallant” or mild piropos imply less anger-hostility or anxiety and entail greater joy and feelings of power.

Second, it is possible that emotional reactions to street piropos depend on the woman’s evaluation or attitude towards piropos. For example, LeMaire et al. (2016) found that women with more accepting attitudes toward sexual harassment (e.g., adherence to rape myths and tolerance for sexual harassment) were less likely to label their sexual assault experiences as rape. In contrast, negative attitudes toward bullying and sexual harassment, along with empathy, are related to increased bystander intervention in cases of bullying and sexual harassment, specifically in the steps of interpreting the event as an emergency, accepting responsibility, and implementing the intervention decision (Nickerson et al., 2014).

Third, women’s emotional reactions to street piropos can relate to their level of adherence to traditional gender-related attitudes (e.g., sexism), which also positively value women’s physical appearance (Fedrickson & Roberts, 1997). For instance, a recent study found that women with a more traditional conception of gender roles believed that harassment was flattering, that it was done with good intentions, or that it was only a joke (Saunders et al., 2017).

According to ambivalent sexism theory (Glick & Fiske, 1996), there are two components to sexism: hostile sexism (i.e., negative attitudes toward women viewed as challenging men or usurping their power) and benevolent sexism (i.e., “a set of interrelated attitudes toward women that are sexist in terms of viewing women stereotypically and in restricted roles but that are subjectively positive in feeling tone”; Glick & Fiske, 1996, p. 491). Benevolent sexism encourages women to adhere to their prescribed gender roles (Glick & Fiske 2001), such as looking attractive (Forbes et al., 2007; Mahalik et al., 2005). This type of

prescription leads many women to self-objectify (Calogero & Jost, 2011). Greater endorsement of benevolent sexism by women has been associated with more appearance-related beliefs and behaviors, such as the use of cosmetics (Forbes et al., 2004; Franzoi, 2001), and with greater internalization of the thin ideal (Forbes et al., 2007). Thus, we hypothesized that having benevolent sexist beliefs may be related to positive attitudes toward street piropos that some people consider flattering (i.e., mild ones). In turn, endorsement of hostile sexism may also be associated with positive attitudes toward piropos, especially the lewd ones. In this line, previous research has shown the link between hostile sexism and different forms of aggressive behaviors against women. For instance, Saunders et al. (2017) found that, among men, hostile sexism positively related to endorsing beliefs that women should make benign attributions, blame themselves, and employ passive coping strategies when strangers harass them. Moreover, in their research about factors associated with tolerating sexual harassment beyond gender, Russell and Trigg (2004) found that hostile sexism played an important role in identifying tolerance to sexual harassment because it accounted for 15% of the variance in both men and women participants. Hence, to the extent that people endorse hostile sexism, it seems likely that they would legitimize lewd piropos directed toward women.

The Present Research

In a previous study (see Online Supplemental Material), we collected a relatively broad and varied repertoire of street piropos and analyzed how women evaluated and perceived them as objectifying behaviors. For the present research, we chose two piropos among those collected previously— one clearly negatively evaluated (lewd) and seen as highly objectifying, and one slightly positively evaluated (mild) and seen as less objectifying. We presented both piropos to two groups of women and asked them to imagine that they had received one or the other (depending on the group) from a male stranger on the street (women in a third—i.e., control— group did not imagine themselves in the scenario of receiving a piropo).

Our research primarily aimed to analyze whether women perceived and reacted differently to two types of street piropos. Thus, we are responding empirically to the existing debate in Spanish society about the different types of piropos and analyzing what perceptions women have of piropos of different natures. No previous research has compared the reactions to different lewd and mild piropos. We expected to find that attitudes toward the mild piropo would be less negative than attitudes toward the lewd one (Hypothesis 1). Furthermore, and in parallel to the first hypothesis, we expected to find that exposure to a lewd piropo would decrease women's happiness (Hypothesis 2a) and feelings of power (Hypothesis 2b) and increase their anger-hostility (Hypothesis 2c) and anxiety (Hypothesis 2d), compared to the control condition and to those exposed to the mild piropo. We did not have clear predictions about whether exposure to a mild piropo would lead women to experience different emotions and feelings of power from those in the control condition. First, there may be no differences between both conditions; as indicated above, some people argue that mild piropos should not be considered as offensive or annoying. However, there may be differences in women's reactions to the mild piropo (vs. no piropo): it may elicit less joy and feelings of power and more anger-hostility and anxiety if it is still perceived as offensive to women; conversely, it may elicit more happiness and feelings of power and less anger-hostility and anxiety, in line with the belief of some people who defend mild piropos claiming that women like to hear piropos if they are kind and complimentary (Venclovská, 2006).

Our research also aimed to analyze the relations between participants' endorsement of ambivalent sexism, their evaluation of the street piropo, and their reactions to it (happiness, anger-hostility, anxiety, and feelings of power). Traditional gender ideology, or sexism, strongly links to the objectification of women. However, we consider important to differentiate between sexist visions in which hostility towards women (such as hostile sexism) operates independently from others that, at least from the social perceiver's point of view, are related to

a “positive” vision of women (benevolent sexism). It is quite possible that both types of sexism relate differently to reactions to different types of piropos. Following a long tradition in social psychology, we have included attitudes toward piropos as the mediating variable that links people’s sexism with their reactions to piropos. As we have indicated, this attitude is the center of the discussion in Spanish society regarding piropos: whether they are something positive and desirable, or in contrast, negative and undesirable.

Although studies exist on the relation between sexism and other forms of harassment, no research has linked sexism to street piropos. To achieve this second goal, we tested the following model separately for participants’ hostile and benevolent sexist beliefs. In general, we expected to find that participants’ sexist beliefs would predict their emotional reactions (to feel more happiness and power and to feel less anger-hostility and anxiety) through the piropo evaluation—the more sexist participants were, the better they would evaluate the piropo. We expected, however, that this mediation differed depending on the type of sexism (hostile or benevolent) and the type of piropo. Specifically, we expected that participants’ endorsement of hostile sexism would be positively related to piropo evaluation and reactions of happiness (Hypothesis 3a) and feelings of power (Hypothesis 3b), and that it would be negatively related with anger-hostility (Hypothesis 3c) and anxiety (Hypothesis 3d), when the piropo was lewd but not when the piropo was mild. We based these hypotheses on the fact that people high in hostile sexism would be more willing to accept hostility towards women, and the lewd piropo reflects more hostility toward women than the mild one. Concerning benevolent sexism, we expected that participants’ benevolent sexism would be positively related to piropo evaluation and reactions of happiness (Hypothesis 4a) and feelings of power (Hypothesis 4b), and that it would be negatively related with anger-hostility (Hypothesis 4c) and anxiety (Hypothesis 4d), when the piropo was mild but not when the piropo was lewd. We based these hypotheses on the fact that people high on benevolent sexism would be more willing to accept behaviors that

involve apparently positive behaviors toward women (mild piropos), seeing them as compliments.

Method

From a previous study (see online Supplemental Material), we selected one street piropo that was perceived negatively and as objectifying: “I better not find out that that ass goes hungry!”, and another piropo that was perceived positively and as less objectifying by women: “Giiiiirl, be careful because chocolates melt in the sun” (piropo number 1 and piropo number 5 in Table S1). Regarding objectification, women rated piropo 1 (in the online Supplemental Material) as more objectifying ($M = 5.9$, $SD = 0.97$) relative to their ratings of piropo 5 ($M = 3.2$, $SD = 1.16$), $t(28) = 11.34$, $p < .001$. Women also rated piropo 1 more negatively ($M = 2.48$, $SD = 1.26$) than piropo 5 ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 1.3$), $t(28) = -7.67$, $p < .00$. Thus, both piropos differed from each other in the objectification and valence dimensions. Moreover, they differed in relation to the theoretical mid-point of the scales (all $ps < .001$): the lewd one was perceived as objectifying and negative whereas the mild one was perceived as not objectifying and positive.

In this study, we used a scenario methodology: we asked women to respond to some questions after imagining that they had received one of the two street piropos. We also included a control group, which answered the questionnaires without being exposed to any type of piropos. The study was introduced to the participants as an investigation to learn more about the attitudes that people have towards themselves and others. The data file is publicly available at <https://osf.io/mq56v/>.

Participants

A total of 288 women under the age of 25 participated with a mean age of 21.20 years ($SD = 2.18$). All participants were currently or recently college students and they attended at a

wide range of schools. In an open-format response, when asked about their sexual orientation, 82.3% of participants indicated they were heterosexual, 14.6% were bisexual, and 2.8% were lesbian. To date, college students in Spain are quite homogeneous in terms of race/ethnicity. For example, approximately 1% of Roma—the main ethnic minority in Spain— reach university, although official statistics are lacking. For this reason, unlike other countries, in most surveys and research carried out in Spain with university students it is not common to ask about ethnicity. Based on this sample size, the sensitivity analysis indicated a sensitivity to detect an effect size of $\eta_p^2 = .026$ with 80% power and α equal to .05.

Procedure

With the support of the School of Psychology at a university in southern Spain, a message was sent on social media to ask for women volunteers to participate in an online study on interpersonal relations. Those who were interested in participating in the study were linked to Qualtrics' Survey Software, which randomly assigned participants to one of two conditions. People who answered the questionnaire were included in a raffle for three prizes of 20 Euros (USD \$21.04). The instructions informed participants that they could leave the survey whenever they wished and that this would not bring them any negative consequences. They were also assured of anonymity and confidentiality. The present study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the University of Granada Ethics Committee for studies involving human participants. Participants also gave consent to participate voluntarily in the study, and they received the contact details of the lead investigator in case they wished to request more information on its objectives and results.

Measures

Street Piropo Situations. We conducted an experimental study using a hypothetical scenario methodology with a single independent variable (i.e., exposure to a lewd piropo vs. a mild

piropo vs. control). A total of 100 participants were randomly assigned to the control group, 93 were assigned to the mild piropo, and 95 were assigned to the lewd piropo group.

In the lewd and mild piropo conditions, following the scenario methodology Moya-Garófano et al. (2021) used, each participant was asked to imagine that she was walking down the street and passing by a group of young lads, one of whom addressed her saying a lewd compliment or a mild compliment. The mild piropo was “Giiiiirl, be careful because chocolates melt in the sun!”; the lewd piropo was “I better not find out that that ass goes hungry!” Subsequently, participants answered the dependent measures, which appeared in the order in which they are listed below. It is important to note that participants completed the mood measures immediately following the exposure to the experimental condition, before responding to any attitudinal measures. In the control group, participants answered the measures directly without being previously exposed to any scenario.

Mood and Emotions. Participants in the experimental conditions answered 12 items of the Scale for Mood Assessment (Escala de Valoración del Estado de Ánimo—EVEA; Sanz, 2001) immediately after reading the scenario. We intended to determine the mood that they thought they would experience if they underwent a situation like that described; control participants were asked to report how they felt at that time. Specifically, instructions (originally presented in Spanish but translated into English here) were: “Below you will find a series of feelings and moods along with a 10-point scale. Please read each one and choose the value from 0 to 10 that best indicates how you feel right now. Do not spend too much time responding to each item. Choose an answer for each of them.” The EVEA subscales selected assess three moods, each of which is measured with four items: anxiety (nervous, tense, anxious, and restless); happiness (happy, optimistic, joyful, and cheerful); and anger-hostility (irritated, angry, annoyed, and displeased). The response format ranges from 0 (not at all) to 10 (very much). Mean scores were used with higher scores representing greater levels of anxiety, happiness, and

anger- hostility. After analyzing the results of 27 studies that have used the EVEA to measure transitory moods, Sanz et al. (2014) concluded that scores on EVEA yielded good or excellent psychometric properties with respect to internal consistency reliability, convergent validity with other instruments, discriminant validity to distinguish among different negative moods and between these moods and positive moods, and factorial validity. In our study, the reliability coefficients obtained were .88 for scores on anxiety, .97 for anger-hostility, and .93 for happiness.

Feelings of Power. We subsequently included 10 items used by Moya-Garófano et al. (2021) to measure the feelings of power (i.e., I would feel “powerful,” “full of energy,” “stimulated,” “independent,” “in control of the situation”) and helplessness (I would feel “weak,” “humiliated,” “inferior,” “not in control of the situation,” “defenseless”) experienced by women when faced with the situation described above in the street piropos conditions (or simply describing how participants felt at that time in the control group). Responses ranged from 0 (not at all) to 10 (very much). Scores on the items designed to measure helplessness were reversed and a total score was calculated; higher scores indicated higher feelings of power ($\alpha = .89$ for this study’s sample). In previous studies with Spanish young women (Moya-Garófano et al., 2021), scores on this measure showed a similar reliability ($\alpha = .77$), and the same pattern of correlations with the scores on EVEA subscales. We conducted a parallel analysis before applying exploratory factor analysis (EFA). Results recommended extracting two factors. Therefore, we subjected item scores of the feelings of power scale to a principal axis factoring with an oblique (direct oblimin) rotation. This analysis identified two factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 (5.0 and 1.87), accounting for 50.2% and 18.7% of the variance, respectively. Considering the second factor was composed entirely of items reverse scored, the two-factor structure was interpreted as an artifact of item wording. Indeed, when a single factor was

requested, all items loaded greater than .54 on that latent factor. This latter finding fits well with our measure's proposed unidimensional structure.

Attitude Toward Piropos (Evaluation). Seven items were used to assess participants' attitude toward the mild or the lewd street piropo, depending on the condition. Only women who were exposed to one of the two piropos—and not the control group—answered this measure. The response format was a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much). Items were as follows: fun, pleasant, flattering, chauvinistic, offensive, unpleasant, and (induces) disgust. Once the scores were inverted for the last four items, an index averaging the score for all items was calculated ($\alpha = .93$ for this study's sample). Higher scores indicated a more positive attitude toward the piropo. These seven items were created by the authors trying to reflect the two different positions that we explain in the introduction that people have towards piropos: three items reflecting a positive evaluation and four items reflecting a negative evaluation of the piropos. Experts in gender studies (note, piropos is an emerging area of inquiry and lacks established experts) reviewed the suggested measure and provided feedback to improve it. Based on their feedback, we changed the wording of some items. We also conducted a parallel analysis before conducting the EFA including the seven items to assess attitudes toward piropos, which recommended extracting only one factor. An EFA showed the existence of a single factor, which explained 73.2% of the variance (other eigenvalues were <1). All items loaded greater than .70 in this factor.

Ambivalent Sexism Inventory. (ASI; Glick & Fiske, 1996— Spanish-language version by Expósito et al., 1998). The ASI comprises two 11-item subscales that measure hostile sexism (e.g., “Women are too easily offended”) and benevolent sexism (e.g., “No matter how accomplished he is, a man is not truly complete as a person unless he has the love of a woman”). This instrument uses a 6-point Likert-type rating scale from 0 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly

agree). Cronbach's alphas were .91 for scores on hostile sexism and .87 for scores on benevolent sexism. We used mean scores with higher scores representing greater levels of sexism. Structural validity of scores on the Spanish version of the ASI was supported via both exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses (Expósito et al., 1998; Glick et al., 2000).

Results

All analyses presented below were also performed using sexual orientation as a covariate, and the results remained the same. The type of street piropos that we have studied concerns fundamentally heterosexual relationships between men and women. Although we have no evidence in this regard, it could be that lesbian women may experience these situations differently. Therefore, we think it would be helpful to include sexual orientation as a covariate to test this possibility. The data presented correspond to the analyzes without this variable included.

Evaluation and Reactions to Mild and Lewd Street Piropos

For the study, we only used the answers of women under the age of 25 who were university students or had been in the previous two years. We used these inclusion criteria to ensure the sample was as similar as possible to that of the pilot study reported in our Online Supplemental Material. We also eliminated non-Spanish participants, those who spent plus/minus three standard deviations of the average time (19:52) in answering the survey, and those (15 participants) with an excessive number of missing values. Specifically, 335 women completed the survey but only 288 remained after applying such criteria.

We analyzed patterns of missing data for each variable. There were no missing values for any variable concerning emotional reactions (happiness, anger-hostility, anxiety, and feelings of power), and there were no missing values in the scale about piropo's evaluation or

ASI. There was one missing value for the item about participants' sexual orientation and two missing values for age, representing 0.3% and 0.7% of the cases, respectively.

The formal assumptions for the generalized linear model (GLM) were also satisfied (Pituch & Stevens, 2015). Firstly, the study design did not suggest any violations of the independence assumption. Following our design, we had a considerable number of participants in each experimental condition (near 100) and the number of cases per group was approximately the same. Based on the values for skewness and kurtosis obtained across all the levels of our independent variable (coefficients $< |2|$), we assumed there were no substantial departures from univariate normality. Regarding group variability, the Box's M test yielded an alpha level that exceeded the p -value = .001 (adjustment for our relatively large sample sizes for each experimental condition). Further, the significance of the multivariate F test did not differ considering different statistics, such as Pillai–Bartlett trace, Wilks' Λ , and the Hotelling–Lawley. Altogether, it suggests that there is no reason to believe that the equal variance-covariance matrices assumption was violated.

We looked for the existence of outliers in the measures used. In each case, the cut-off for inclusion in analyses was set at a greater or lower than three standard deviations from the mean score on each scale. Outliers only appeared in the scores in hostile sexism (one participant) and benevolent sexism (four participants), and in all cases, these scores were above the mean.

Regarding attitudes toward street piropos (Hypothesis 1), results from a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicate that the mild piropo was perceived more positively than the lewd one, $F(1, 186) = 20.18, p < .001, \eta^2 = .10$, confirming this hypothesis (see Table 1); as the midpoint of the scale was 4, it can also be said that both the lewd piropo, $t(94) = -9.93, p < .001$, and the mild piropo were evaluated negatively, $t(92) = -2.09, p = .04$.

In Table 2, correlations among variables show that emotional reactions of happiness and feelings of power positively correlated and that anger-hostility also positively correlated with anxiety. Logically, the first two variables describing positive affect were inversely related to the later indicators of negative affect. Besides, the more positive the attitude toward the street piropos, the more happiness and feelings of power the participants reported, and the less anger-hostility and anxiety. The scores on hostile and benevolent sexism appeared highly correlated to each other and showed a similar pattern of correlations with the emotional reactions: The more sexist the participants were, the more happiness and feelings of power they experienced, and the less anger-hostility and anxiety they felt (only the relationship between benevolent sexism and anxiety was not significant).

Regarding attitudes toward street piropos (Hypothesis 1), results from a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicate that the mild piropo was perceived more positively than the lewd one, $F(1, 186) = 20.18, p < .001, \eta^2 = .10$, confirming this hypothesis (see Table 1); as the midpoint of the scale was 4, it can also be said that both the lewd piropo, $t(94) = -9.93, p < .001$, and the mild piropo were evaluated negatively, $t(92) = -2.09, p = .04$.

In Table 2, correlations among variables show that emotional reactions of happiness and feelings of power positively correlated and that anger-hostility also positively correlated with anxiety. Logically, the first two variables describing positive affect were inversely related to the later indicators of negative affect. Besides, the more positive the attitude toward the street piropos, the more happiness and feelings of power the participants reported, and the less anger-hostility and anxiety. The scores on hostile and benevolent sexism appeared highly correlated to each other and showed a similar pattern of correlations with the emotional reactions: The more sexist the participants were, the more happiness and feelings of power they experienced, and the less anger-hostility and anxiety they felt (only the relationship between benevolent sexism and anxiety was not significant).

To test Hypothesis 2, we conducted a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) on participants' reactions (anger-hostility, happiness, anxiety, and feelings of power) to the street piropo, with the piropo condition (mild vs. lewd vs. control) as a between subject factor. Wilks's lambda = .71, $F(8, 564) = 13.1$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .16$) revealed that the manipulation had a significant multivariate effect. As expected, we observed main effects of the piropo condition on happiness, $F(2, 285) = 45.74$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .24$, feelings of power, $F(2, 285) = 35.62$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .20$, anger-hostility, $F(2, 285) = 38.07$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .21$, and anxiety, $F(2, 285) = 20.83$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .13$. Post-hoc Bonferroni tests revealed that women in the lewd piropo condition reported significantly less happiness than women in the control and in the mild piropo condition, confirming Hypothesis 2a; women in the mild piropo condition also reported less happiness than those in the control condition. Women in the lewd piropo condition reported significantly lower feelings of power than women in the control condition and in the mild piropo condition, confirming Hypothesis 2b; women in the mild piropo condition also reported lower feelings of power than those in the control condition. The lewd piropo increased anger-hostility compared to the control condition, and to the mild piropo, confirming Hypothesis 2c; women in the mild piropo condition reported more anger-hostility than those in the control condition. Finally, women in the lewd piropo condition reported significantly more anxiety than women in the control condition but not than those in the mild piropo condition, confirming partially Hypothesis 2d; women in the mild piropo condition also reported more anxiety than those in the control condition. Thus, in general Hypothesis 2 was confirmed.

Ambivalent Sexism and Reactions to the Street Piropos

To test hypotheses 3a, 3b, 3c, and 3d, we conducted four moderated mediation analyses, one for each emotional reaction (i.e., happiness, anger-hostility, anxiety, and feelings of power) using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013, Model 8). We used 5,000 bootstrap samples to

estimate bias-corrected standard errors and 95% percentile confidence intervals for the indirect effects. We used participants' hostile sexism scores as the predictor variable and participants' benevolent sexism scores as a covariate. We based this decision on a few factors: it was a recommendation from the authors of the theory of ambivalent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996), the scores on the hostile and benevolent sexism scales ($r = .72$) showed a high correlation, and we were interested in knowing the specific effects of each type of sexism. We used attitude toward the street piropo as a mediator in the four the analyses and included type of piropo (mild vs. lewd) as a moderator. Results showed that indirect effects were significant in the four dependent variables considered (see Table 3; see also Figure 1). Moreover, indirect effects were significant both in case of lewd and mild piropos, and differences between both indirect effects were non-significant: contrast for happiness 0.01, $SE = .19$, $CI = [-0.36, 0.38]$; anger-hostility -0.03, $SE = .36$, $CI = [-0.72, 0.70]$; anxiety -0.01, $SE = .21$, $CI = [-0.42, 0.41]$; and feelings of power 0.01, $SE = .19$, $CI = [-0.36, 0.38]$. Thus, as Figure 1 shows, women higher in hostile sexism, after controlling for benevolent sexism, showed more positive attitudes toward both kinds of piropos, and this positive evaluation of both kind of piropos lead to greater happiness and feelings of power when receiving any of the piropos, as well as lower anger-hostility and anxiety. Direct effects (see Table 3 and Figure 1) indicated that there was no evidence that hostile sexism related to emotional reactions independently of its relation with piropo evaluations when controlling for endorsement of benevolent sexism.

We proceeded in a similar way to test hypotheses 4a, 4b, 4c, and 4d, concerning the relation of benevolent sexism with the emotional reactions through evaluation of street piropos. In this case, we used participants' benevolent sexism scores as the predictor variable and participants' hostile sexism scores as a covariate; we included attitudes toward the piropo as a mediator and type of piropo (mild vs. lewd) as a moderator. Results showed that indirect effects were not significant in any of the four variables considered (see Table 4; see also Figure 2).

Differences between both indirect effects were non-significant, indicating that the absence of mediation occurred both in the lewd and mild piropo conditions: contrast for happiness 0.057, $SE = .23$, $CI = [-0.40, 0.53]$; anger-hostility -0.06, $SE = .25$, $CI = [-0.58, 0.41]$; anxiety -0.01, $SE = .21$, $CI = [-0.42, 0.41]$; and feelings of power 0.06, $SE = .23$, $CI = [-0.40, 0.51]$. Thus, as shows Figure 2, women high in benevolent sexism, after controlling for endorsement of hostile sexism, did not show more positive attitudes toward neither the lewd nor the mild piropo than their counterparts low in benevolent sexism beliefs, and although the positive evaluation of both kind of piropos lead to more intense emotional reactions, the indirect effects were non-significant. Direct effects (see Table 4 and Figure 2) showed that there was also no evidence that benevolent sexism related to emotional reactions independently of piropo evaluation when controlling for endorsement of hostile sexism.

Discussion

Stranger harassment is a form of sexual harassment that women receive from male strangers in public spaces with negative consequences for them (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008; Moya-Garófano et al., 2021). Women continue to receive objectifying and harassing comments from strangers—known as street piropos—in Spain (the country in which this research was conducted; Moya-Garófano et al., 2016). However, although some types of piropos seem to be rejected by most of the population, others are often seen as harmless and even flattering. One goal of the current research was to explore whether women clearly perceive and react to these two types of piropos (lewd and mild) differently.

Results of our study showed that women clearly have different attitudes towards these two types of street piropos: the lewd one was considered more negatively than the mild one, although both types of piropos were evaluated negatively (in comparison to the mid-point of the response scale). This view expressed by our participants partially mirrors the debate in Spanish society: some piropos are more rejected than others. But our results reject the view that

some piropos (mild) are accepted and viewed favorably by women. Our data indicate that even the piropo that in a previous study was evaluated as little objectifying and in a positive way (see online Supplemental Material), in this case was evaluated negatively.

A more nuanced view occurs with participants' emotional reactions to street piropos. Women clearly reacted with more anger-hostility and with less happiness and feelings of power when exposed to the lewd than to the mild piropo. That young Spanish women clearly reacted against the lewd piropo could have significant consequences for women because the opposite, that is, feeling happy and empowered when they are objectified, could relate with detrimental consequences for them (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Liss et al., 2011). For instance, as reported by Moya-Garófano et al. (2021), reacting with anger-hostility and lower happiness and feelings of power to a lewd piropo reduces self-objectification in women, which is consistent with other studies that have shown that active coping strategies regarding stranger harassment reduce its negative effects (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008). The fact that women clearly reacted with more anger-hostility and anxiety, and with less happiness and feelings of power when exposed to both piropos in comparison to women in the control condition, show that young Spanish women who participated in our research clearly reacted against both type of piropos. However, the fact that participants reacted to the mild piropo with less intensity than to the lewd one can be considered as a less effective result for women, to the extent that research has shown that women with a positive view of appearance compliments show increased levels of body surveillance, body shame, and body dissatisfaction when receiving these types of compliments (Calogero et al., 2009; Tiggemann & Boundy, 2008). However, future research could explore other explanations for this result: Women finding mild piropos less offensive may imply social conformity to norms that dictate how women "should" react to such comments and may not necessarily indicate personal "enjoyment" of mild piropos.

Another finding of our research is that attitudes toward or the evaluation of both types of street piropos were correlated with the reactions they triggered (i.e., anger-hostility, anxiety, happiness, and feelings of power). Our results showed that the more positively evaluated piropos were, the greater happiness and feelings of power and less anger-hostility and anxiety they produced, and that this relation was independent of the type of piropo. Thus, according to these results, proponents of gender equality should fight against the positive vision of the piropos that some people (including women) maintain. The more positive that view was in the women who participated in our study, the lower their anger-hostility and the greater their feelings of power and happiness; and, as reported in prior studies (Moya-Garófano et al., 2021), reacting in this way to an objectifying situation may have negative consequences.

Finally, it is important to note the relation between hostile sexism and emotional reactions that street piropos elicit may be explained through women's attitude towards the piropos, even after controlling for benevolent sexism. As hypothesized, in the case of lewd piropo, the more a respondent endorsed hostile sexism, the better she evaluated this type of piropo and the more happiness and feelings of power she felt and less anger-hostility and anxiety. In the lewd piropo scenario, this relation between hostile sexism and attitudes toward the piropo seems logical because this type of sexism reflects negative attitudes towards women and includes the belief that women use their sexual allure to gain dominance over men (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Previous research has clearly shown that hostile sexism (and not benevolent sexism) relates to different ideologies against women, such as the rape myth, adversarial beliefs, hostility toward women (Chapleau et al., 2007; Forbes et al., 2007), and with behaviors related to aggression toward women such as stalking (Becker et al., 2021).

Contrary to our expectations, participants' hostile sexism also related to emotional reactions through participants' evaluation of mild piropos, even when controlling for benevolent sexism, whereas benevolent sexism was not related to emotional reactions when

exposed to a mild piropo after controlling for hostile sexism. One possible explanation for this result is that, for the women who participated in our research, both the lewd and the mild piropo—as we found in the case of the attitude and the reactions they provoked—although different in some way, may reflect similar phenomena from our participants' perspectives. Thus, the women in our study may perceive that both lewd and mild piropo reflect forms of hostility toward women, despite the positive appearance (positive according to some people; Ferreras, 2015; Sust, 2015) of the second type of piropo. A second explanation would be that the benevolent sexism ideology is strongly rooted in men's and women's intimate interdependence and that it is applicable within heterosexual romantic relationships. As its name suggests (street piropos), both the lewd and the mild piropo take place in public spaces and the man involved is a stranger. A different situation in which social perceivers' benevolent sexism might relate to their reactions would be one in which the mild piropo takes place in an intimate relationship. Thus, Moya et al. (2007) found that benevolently sexist women accepted and reacted positively to a protectively justified (hypothetical) prohibition from a man, but only when a husband (not a coworker) imposed the prohibition. Similarly, Abrams et al. (2003) found that the perceiver's benevolent sexism positively related to blaming a rape victim only when the rapist was an acquaintance (but not when he was a stranger). Consequently, although scores on hostile sexism are usually lower than on benevolent sexism, especially among women (Glick et al., 2000), our findings illustrate some of its negative consequences. Striving to decrease hostile sexism beliefs in women may have positive consequences for them.

Limitations and Future Directions

Our research had several limitations. The first type of limitation has to do with our samples. Participants in our studies were women who, at the time of the study, were or had been university students and may have been more sensitive to gender discrimination, because

previous studies have shown that younger and more educated people are less sexist and more sensitive to gender discrimination (e.g., Moya et al., 2006). In future research, we must broaden the current study to include more diverse samples of women, especially if we hope to understand women's reactions to and assessments of street piropos. Moreover, although piropos are found in several countries, all participants in our study were from Spain, and so we cannot directly generalize the findings to other countries; thus, conducting studies in different countries where piropos are also frequent (e.g., Latin America), could enrich our understanding of this phenomenon.

The second type of limitation concerns our procedures and measures. We used a scenario methodology, which cannot replace the real-world piropo situations that women experience in public spaces every day. Despite the sensitive nature of more realistic studies on this behavior, it would be interesting to explore new approaches and determine whether the results can be replicated in the future. Besides that, we only analyzed the effects of two specific piropos, although there was information from previous studies (see Online Supplemental Material) about how these two piropos were evaluated in several dimensions and how they were related to other specific piropos; however, replicating our findings with other specific piropos would increase the validity of our research. Moreover, in the current research, the control condition was not a scenario condition; thus, it is not a truly parallel experimental control, leaving open possibility that another scenario with a stranger making any comment specifically about a person (but not a piropo) could have produced some of the patterns found with our participants. Therefore, future research may use a different control condition. Finally, we developed for this study the measure of the attitudes toward piropos, and although its scores showed good psychometric properties (reliability, factor analysis),

more research is needed on its validity. From a more general perspective, it is also important that future lines of research explore not only the perception of the piropos or the

reactions to them but also to investigate other consequences of exposure to this type of harassing behavior (e.g., women's self-objectification, identity, goals).

Practice Implications

Our research showed that women who participated in our study reject all types of street piropos, including those with a “flattering” appearance. Moreover, both types of piropos disturb women, producing emotional reactions related to discomfort. Thus, based on empirical data, raising awareness of the potential negative consequences of any type of piropos could be one step on the road to eradicating this still existing practice in Spain. Educators, policymakers, media, and activists should be concerned not only about hostile forms of stranger harassment, but also about subtler ones that may have a “nice” appearance but can still damage women. Research can be used as a tool to reinforce the fight against any form of discrimination and aggression toward women.

Despite women's suffering from hostile sexism worldwide, some women may also endorse this type of behavior. After all, women have also been socialized in the same (sexist) social system as have men, and those who endorse sexist beliefs are rewarded. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that endorsing hostile sexist beliefs may be a way women cope with strangers' comments in the street. At some point, this attitude could act as a barrier to protect the targets, but, as the literature and the present research show, it ultimately has plenty of negative consequences for women. Scholars and practitioners have the responsibility to strengthen pedagogies to achieve a nonsexist society where women do not need to conform to traditional gender roles to survive in society given that, in the end, traditional gender roles limit and can harm women as well as other genders.

Conclusion

Our research adds to the extant knowledge of street piropos, a common phenomenon in certain countries that we still know very little about. In addition, it helps us to understand stranger harassment in general and the important role of attitudes toward stranger harassment and sexism in the reaction to this form of violence against women. The main message of our results is that young Spanish women reject all types of street piropos, including those with a “flattering” appearance, because they disturb them and produced emotional reactions of discomfort. Thus, people should be concerned not only about hostile forms of stranger harassment, but also about subtler ones that may have a “nice” appearance. In turn, hostile sexism, although accepted to a lesser extent by women than other softer forms of sexism, continues to be an obstacle to confronting both lewd and mild forms of street harassment.

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Supplemental Material

Supplement material for this article is available online.

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Table 1

Means (and Standard Deviations) for Measures in Each Experimental Condition

Variable	Possible Range	Lewd Piropo (<i>n</i> = 100)	Mild Piropo (<i>n</i> = 93)	Control (<i>n</i> = 95)
Happiness	0-10	1.85 (2.16) ^a	3.13 (2.45) ^b	4.99 (2.31) ^c
Anger-hostility	0-10	6.02 (3.20) ^a	4.87 (3.35) ^b	2.30 (2.59) ^c

Anxiety	0-10	6.03 (2.61) ^a	5.18 (2.76) ^a	3.64 (2.51) ^b
Feelings of power	0-10	3.83 (2.06) ^a	4.79 (2.15) ^b	6.18 (1.64) ^c
Attitude towards piropos	1-7	2.51 (1.46) ^a	3.60 (1.84) ^b	
Benevolent sexism	0-5	0.83 (0.87) ^a	0.95 (0.84) ^a	0.92 (0.88) ^a
Hostile sexism	0-5	1.06 (0.96) ^a	1.33 (1.03) ^a	1.28 (1.09) ^a

Note. Means with different superscripts across rows differ significantly at $p < .05$.

Table 2*Correlations Among Variables*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Happiness						
2. Anger-hostility	-.65**					
3. Anxiety	-.37**	.70**				
4. Feelings of power	.70**	-.72**	-.65**			
5. Attitude towards piropos	.70**	-.83**	-.59**	.74**		
6. Benevolent sexism	.22**	-.20**	-.10	.20**	.34**	
7. Hostile sexism	.23**	-.23**	-.14*	.23**	.47**	.72**

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 3

Direct and Indirect Effects for Emotional Reactions Using Participants' Hostile Sexism as Predictor (Controlling for Participant's Scores in Benevolent Sexism)

DV	Lewd Piropo		Mild Piropo	
	Direct Effect 1	Indirect Effect 1	Direct Effect 2	Indirect Effect 2
Happiness	-0.12 [-0.61, 0.36]	0.73 [0.38, 1.10]	0.15 [-0.31, 0.61]	0.72 [0.34, 1.15]
Feelings of power	0.04 [-0.39, 0.46]	0.74 [0.42, 1.08]	-0.09 [-0.50, 0.31]	0.73 [0.36, 1.13]
Anger-hostility	0.12 [-0.41, 0.65]	-1.39 [-1.98, -0.83]	0.09 [-0.41, 0.60]	-1.37 [-2.06, -0.70]
Anxiety	0.08 [-0.56, 0.71]	-0.80 [-1.19, -0.45]	-0.02 [-0.62, 0.58]	-0.79 [-1.25, -0.38]

Note. DV = dependent variable. Unstandardized indirect effect estimates are presented (Hayes, 2013). Brackets show 95% confidence intervals for each estimate; confidence intervals that do not include zero represent a significant effect. Direct and Indirect Effects 1 = direct and indirect effect of participants' hostile sexism on the DVs through evaluation of the lewd piropo. Direct and Indirect Effects 2 = direct and indirect effect of participants' hostile sexism on the DVs through evaluation of the mild piropo.

Table 4

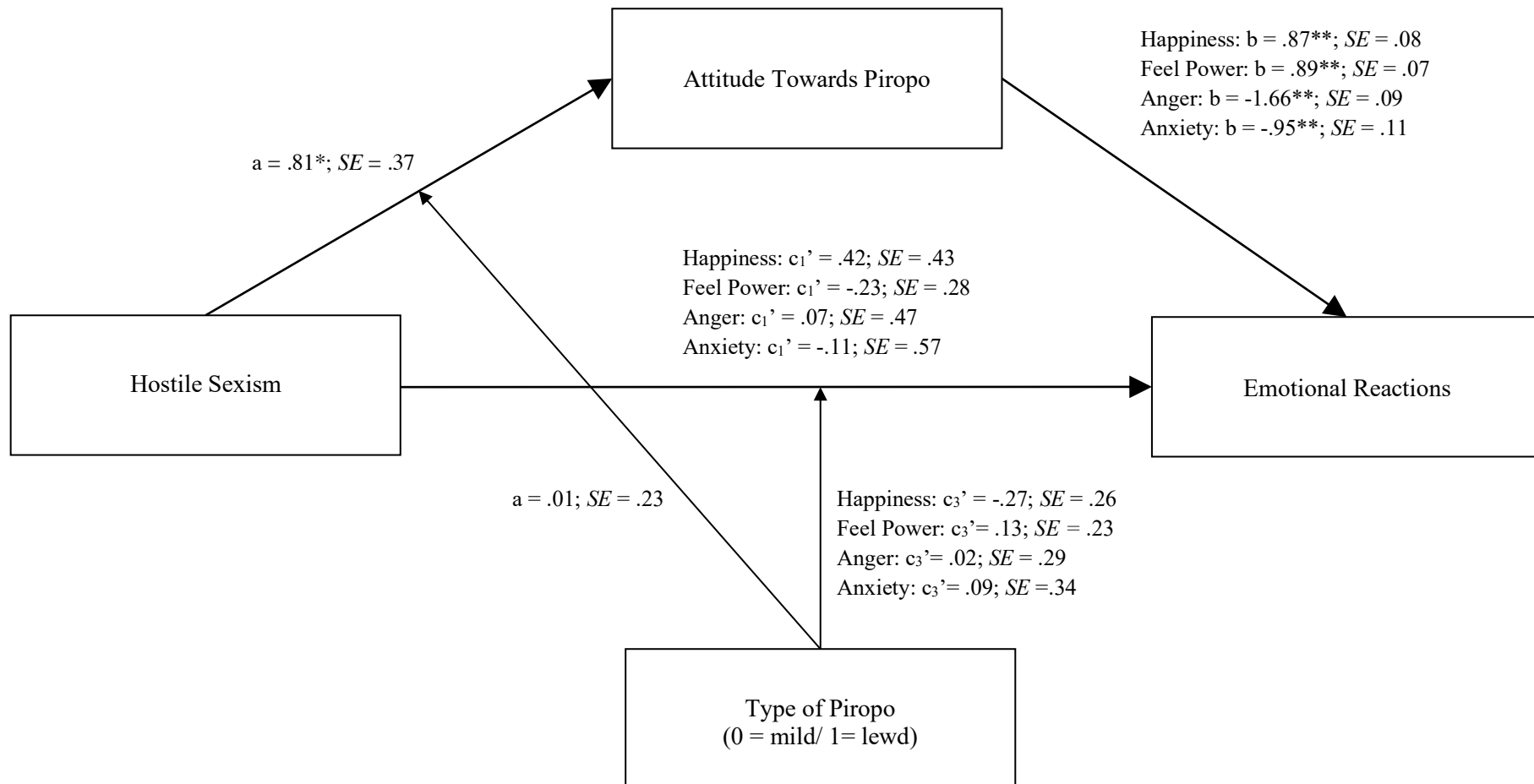
Direct and Indirect Effects for Emotional Reactions Using Participants' Benevolent Sexism as Predictor (Controlling for Participants' Score in Hostile Sexism)

DV	Lewd Piropo		Mild Piropo	
	Direct Effect 1	Indirect Effect 1	Direct Effect 2	Indirect Effect 2
Happiness	0.05 [-0.52, 0.63]	-0.09 [-0.47, 0.29]	0.46 [-0.13, 1.06]	-0.14 [-0.58, 0.3]
Feelings of power	0.38 [-0.12, 0.89]	-0.09 [-0.46, 0.29]	0.04 [-0.48, 0.55]	-0.15 [-0.57, 0.29]
Anger-hostility	-0.07 [-0.70, 0.57]	0.17 [-0.57, 0.85]	0.04 [-0.60, 0.69]	0.28 [-0.55, 1.06]
Anxiety	-0.08 [-0.85, 0.68]	0.10 [-0.32, 0.49]	0.25 [-0.53, 1.03]	0.16 [-0.29, 0.63]

Note. DV = dependent variable. Unstandardized indirect effect estimates are presented (Hayes, 2013). Brackets show 95% confidence intervals for each estimate; confidence intervals that do not include zero represent a significant effect. Direct and Indirect Effects 1 = direct and indirect effect of participants' benevolent sexism on the DVs evaluation of the lewd piropo. Direct and Indirect Effects 2 = direct and indirect effect of participants' benevolent sexism on the DVs through evaluation of the mild piropo.

Figure 1

Standardized Direct Effects in Which the Relationship Between Participants Endorsement of Hostile Sexism with Emotional Reactions to the Piropo was Mediated by the Evaluation of the Piropo and Moderated by the Type of Piropo. Scores on Benevolent Sexism were Included as Covariate.

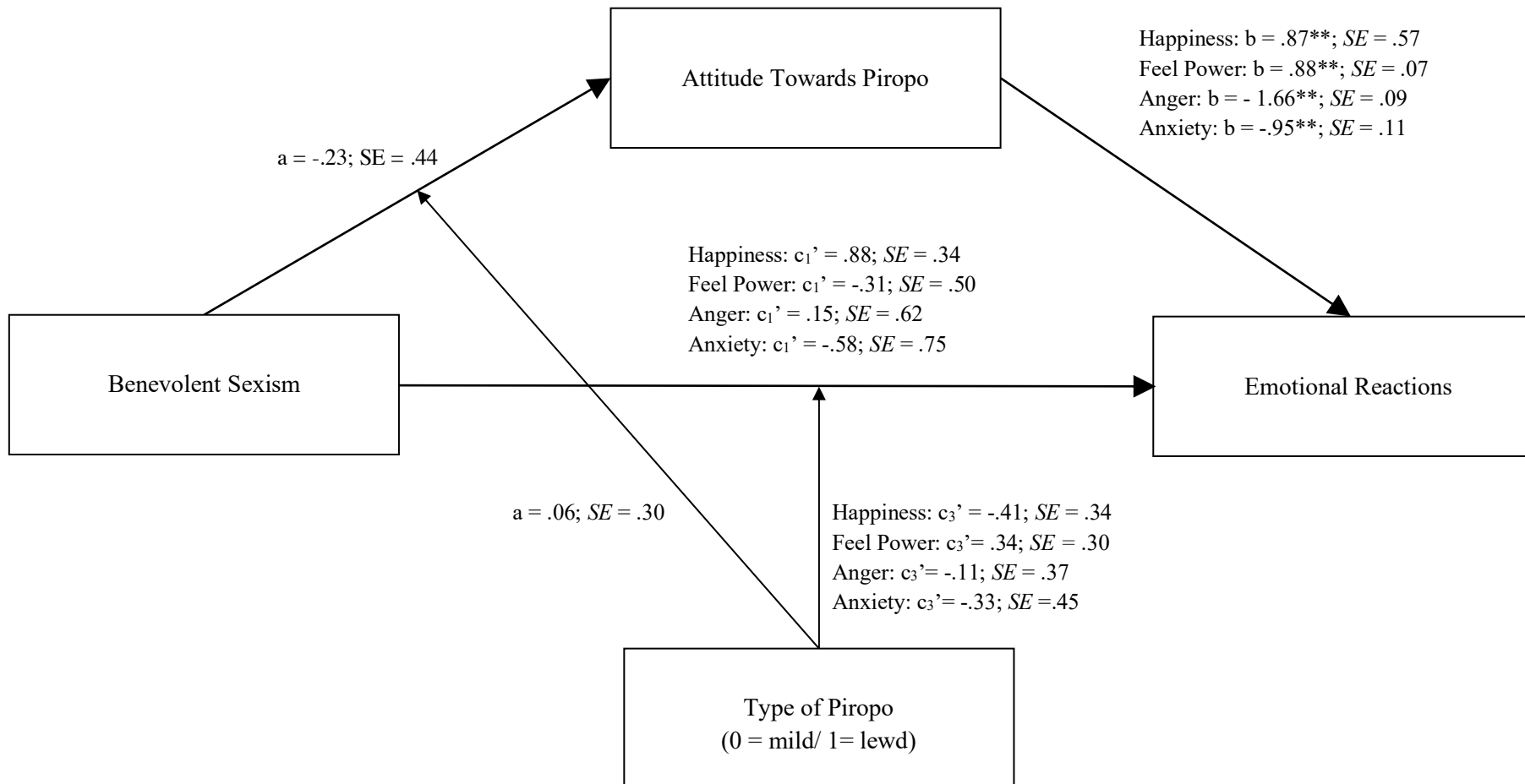


Note. $N = 183$. There were outliers in the scores on the hostile and benevolent (± 3 SD) scales who were excluded from the analyses. c_1' = direct effect of X (sexism) on Y (emotional reactions); c_3' = direct effect of the interaction XW (sexism x type of piropo) on Y (emotional reactions).

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

Figure 2

Standardized Direct Effects in Which the Relationship Between Participants Endorsement of Benevolent Sexism with Emotional Reactions to the Piropo was Mediated by the Evaluation of the Piropo and Moderated by the Type of Piropo. Scores on Hostile Sexism were Included as Covariate.



Note. $N = 183$. There were outliers in the scores on the hostile and benevolent sexism (± 3 SD) scales who were excluded from the analyses. c_1' = direct effect of X (sexism) on Y (emotional reactions); c_3' = direct effect of the interaction XW (sexism x type of piropo) on Y (emotional reactions).

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